



7 PM COMPILATION

3rd and 4th week October, 2025

Features of 7 PM compilation

- ❖ Comprehensive coverage of a given current topic
- ❖ Provide you all the information you need to frame a good answer
- ❖ Critical analysis, comparative analysis, legal/constitutional provisions, current issues and challenges and best practices around the world
- ❖ Written in lucid language and point format
- ❖ Wide use of charts, diagrams and info graphics
- ❖ Best-in class coverage, critically acclaimed by aspirants
- ❖ Out of the box thinking for value edition
- ❖ Best cost-benefit ratio according to successful aspirants

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India-Israel Relations – Significance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise

India-Israel relations are characterized by a strong, multi-dimensional strategic partnership that prioritizes defense, security, technology, agriculture, and innovation while showing remarkable political alignment on key global and regional issues.



Source: ORF

Historical development:

Distant and Hesitant (1948 – 1992)

- **Initial Recognition (1950):** India formally recognized Israel in 1950 but, due to Cold War dynamics, the large Muslim population in India, and a commitment to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), it **did not establish full diplomatic relations**. Israel was only permitted to open a consulate in Mumbai.
- **Pro-Palestinian Stance:** India's foreign policy strongly supported the **Palestinian cause** and the Arab world, opposing Israel in international forums like the UN.
- **Covert Cooperation:** Despite the diplomatic freeze, contacts existed, especially after India's defeat in the 1962 Sino-Indian War. Israel reportedly provided limited, discreet military aid to India in the 1965 and 1971 wars against Pakistan, laying the groundwork for future defense ties.

Full Normalization and the Defense Pivot (1992 – 2014)	• The Breakthrough (1992): India established full diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992. The geopolitical landscape shifted with the collapse of the Soviet Union, end of the Cold War and India's economic liberalization. • Defense Imperative: The relationship quickly pivoted to defense and security. The Kargil War in 1999 proved to be a critical moment, as Israel provided India with crucial laser-guided missile kits and UAVs, often supplying spare parts and equipment faster than traditional Russian or Western suppliers.
Deepening, De-Hyphenation, and Strategic Alignment (2014 – Present)	• De-hyphenation Policy: India explicitly adopted a “de-hyphenation” policy, asserting that its relationship with Israel is independent of its historical relationship with the Palestinians. This allows India to maintain ties with both without the former constraining the latter. • Multilateral Groupings: The partnership has expanded into the emerging regional structure, I2U2 (India, Israel, US, UAE), focusing on joint investments in water, energy, transport, space, and food security.

Significance of India-Israel Bilateral Relations:

1. **Political Convergence:** Both countries support each other's positions on critical issues—India has backed Israel's right to self-defence, and Israel supports India's stance against cross-border terrorism. This convergence raises each nation's diplomatic profile and provides reliable allies in volatile regions.
2. **Defense and Security:**
 - Israel is one of India's top defense suppliers, providing advanced technologies in drones, air defense, missiles, and intelligence—enhancing India's military readiness and anti-terror capabilities.
 - Joint R&D and co-production in areas like electronic warfare and missile defense directly strengthen India's self-reliance and modernization.
3. **Intelligence and Counterterrorism:** Robust intelligence-sharing and operational cooperation have helped India counter terrorism and address emerging hybrid threats, with both countries facing similar security challenges in their regions.
4. **Trade and Investment:**
 - Bilateral trade—now touching \$7–8 billion—spans agriculture, high-tech, defense, and pharmaceuticals.
 - The 2025 Bilateral Investment Treaty is expected to boost two-way FDI, fintech, and start-up collaborations, setting the stage for a future free trade pact.
5. **Agriculture and Water Management:** Israeli innovation in drip irrigation, water conservation, and precision agriculture has been scaled across India, improving Indian farmers' efficiency, raising rural incomes, and addressing chronic water scarcity.

6. **Innovation Ecosystem:** India benefits from Israeli expertise in start-up incubation, cyber security, AI, and “smart city” technologies, and the I4F fund fosters joint research and product development for global markets.

Challenges in India-Israel Bilateral Relations:

1. **The Palestine Issue:** While India has successfully employed a policy of “de-hyphenation” (treating ties with Israel and Palestine separately), India remains a traditional supporter of the Palestinian cause in multilateral forums like the UN. This diplomatic position is sometimes at odds with Israel’s global interests.
2. **Energy and Diaspora:** India relies heavily on the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) for a substantial portion of its **crude oil and natural gas** supplies. Furthermore, over **9 million Indian expatriates** reside in the Gulf, contributing critical remittances to the Indian economy. Any perceived over-alignment with Israel risks jeopardizing these vital economic and energy lifelines.
3. **Iran & China Factors:** India’s ties with Iran (for Chabahar port, regional strategy, energy) and Israel’s very close relationship with China in high technology (Israel-China trade: \$22 billion+) produce diverging priorities, and India is concerned about technology transfers from Israel to China and Chinese FDI in Israel.
4. **Limited Technology Transfer:** India’s priority under its “**Aatmanirbhar Bharat**” initiative is to acquire technology for domestic manufacturing. While Israel is generally more willing to share defense technology than other nations, it still places restrictions on the full transfer of proprietary or sensitive systems, especially those containing **US components** (which are subject to US export control laws).
5. **Non-Defense Trade Plateau:** Despite ambitious targets, non-defense trade has generally plateaued between \$6 billion and \$8 billion, highlighting challenges in market access and scaling commercial engagement beyond established sectors.
6. **Intellectual Property Rights (IPR):** Israel, a high-tech exporter, shares concerns with other Western nations regarding India’s relatively lenient IPR regime, particularly concerning the protection of software and digital innovation.
7. **Public Opinion in India:** Despite the government’s strong public embrace, a significant segment of the Indian public and political opposition maintains traditional sympathy for the Palestinian cause, requiring the ruling party to occasionally temper its rhetoric and maintain a semblance of balance on the issue.

Areas of cooperation between India & Israel:

1. **Defence & Security:**
 - **Arms Trade:** Israel is consistently one of India’s top three defense suppliers. India procures critical systems like radar, missile defense shields (e.g., the **Barak 8** system developed jointly), drones, and sophisticated surveillance equipment.
 - **Joint Research and Development (R&D):** The focus has shifted from a buyer-seller relationship to joint development and co-production, aligning with India’s “Aatmanirbhar Bharat” initiative.
 - **Counter-Terrorism:** Extensive intelligence sharing and training cooperation, particularly relevant due to shared security threats.
2. **Water & Agriculture:**
 - **Drip Irrigation and Micro-Irrigation:** Israel has implemented the **Indo-Israel Agricultural Project (IIAP)**, establishing dozens of “Centres of Excellence” across various Indian states. These centres train Indian farmers on high-tech techniques, primarily focused on micro-irrigation, protected cultivation (greenhouses), and maximizing yield with minimal water use.

- **Water Management and Recycling:** Cooperation in water treatment, desalination, and recycling technology to help India address its growing urban water scarcity.
- 3. **Cybersecurity and R&D:** Deep cooperation in cybersecurity, and joint research and funding in high-tech areas through the **India-Israel Industrial R&D and Technological Innovation Fund (I4F)**.
- 4. **I2U2 Grouping:** India and Israel are core members of the I2U2 initiative, along with the **US and UAE**. This group focuses on promoting joint investments in key sectors like food security, water, energy, and transportation infrastructure, demonstrating Israel's role in India's regional economic strategy.

Way Forward:

1. **Deepen Strategic and Defense Cooperation:**
 - Strengthen defense ties by accelerating joint R&D, co-production of advanced military technologies (drones, missile defense, cyber security), and institutionalizing regular high-level dialogues.
 - Expand intelligence and counter-terrorism cooperation, leveraging Israel's expertise and India's regional security needs.
2. **Expand Economic and Investment Collaboration:** Fully implement the 2025 Bilateral Investment Treaty to boost two-way FDI, remove barriers, and scaffold a future Free Trade Agreement to increase trade volumes beyond the current \$7–8 billion.
3. **Enhance Innovation and Technology Exchange:** Foster shared innovation in AI, biotech, cybersecurity, and smart infrastructure utilizing the India-Israel Industrial R&D and Innovation Fund (I4F).
4. **De-Hyphenation through Integration:** By channeling joint investments and projects through the I2U2 framework, India demonstrates that its partnership with Israel is **not exclusive** but is actively beneficial to the Arab world. This provides a diplomatic shield for India's ties to Israel.
5. **Knowledge Corridors:** Establish structured "Knowledge Corridors" linking major Indian R&D institutions (like the IITs and IISc) with top Israeli universities and research centers to ensure a steady flow of research talent and joint discovery.

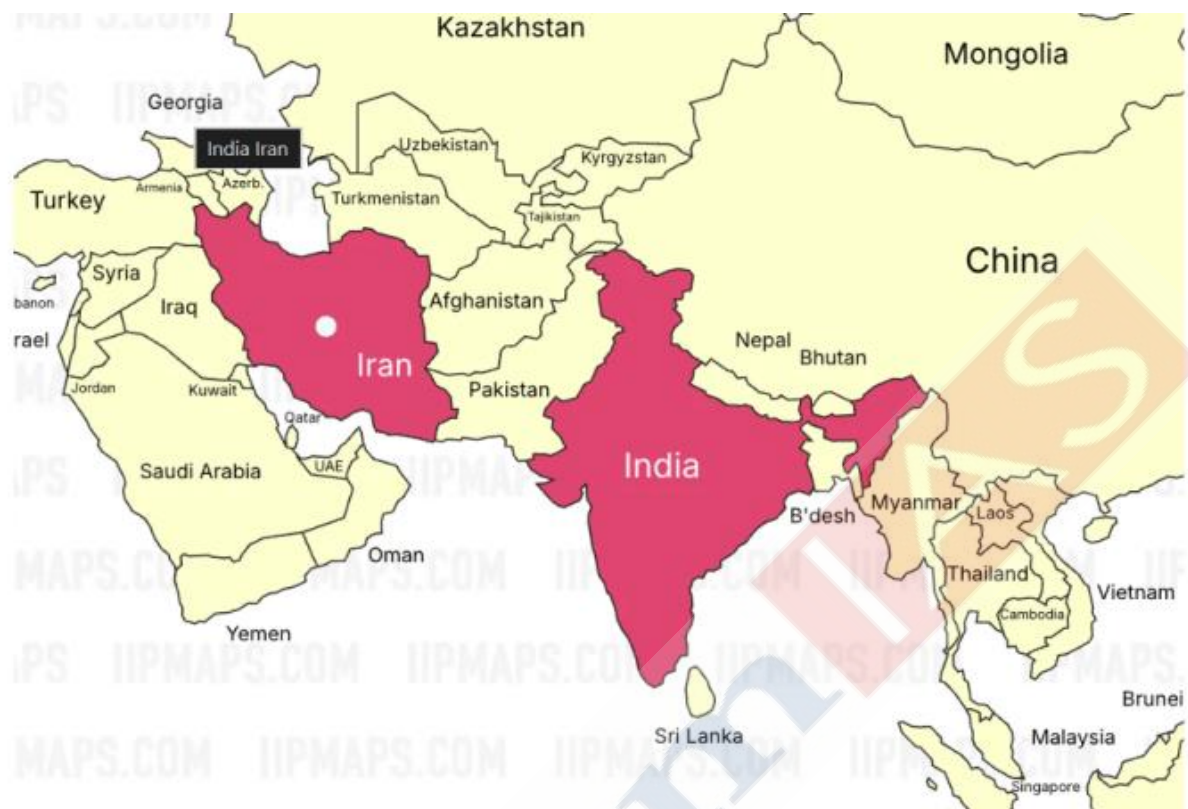
Conclusion: A pragmatic, multi-sectoral, and balanced approach respecting geopolitical sensitivities and focusing on enhanced cooperation will cement India-Israel relations as a cornerstone of India's strategic and innovation-driven growth trajectory.

UPSC GS-2: International Relations

Read More: [Embassy of India](#)

India-Iran Relations – Significance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise

The India-Iran bilateral relationship is a deeply **historical, civilizational, and strategically complex** partnership. It is characterized by India's enduring need for **energy security and regional connectivity** balanced against the immense pressure of **US sanctions** and the need to maintain strong ties with Israel and the Gulf states.



Source: Politics for India

Historical development of India-Iran Relations:

Ancient & Medieval Period	• Cultural and Trade Links: ◦ Interaction between the civilizations of the Indus Valley and Mesopotamia, as well as later spread of Persian culture and language into India, laid an early foundation of cultural and economic exchange. ◦ Artifacts such as Indus seals have been found in Iran, and Persian influence is evident in Indian languages, architecture, and cuisine. • Shared Heritage: The Persian language and Islamic culture strongly influenced North-West India over centuries, with historical ties reinforced by migration, religious scholarship, and trade routes linking both regions.
20th Century – Foundation of Modern Diplomatic Relations	• Official Diplomatic Ties (1950): India and Iran formally established diplomatic relations in 1950. Early political visits included the Shah of Iran's visit to India in 1956 and Prime Minister Nehru's to Iran in 1959, laying a framework for cooperation. • Changing International Alignments: During the Cold War, India adopted non-alignment and had close ties with the Soviet Union, while Iran was

	allied with the West under the Shah's regime, leading to a complex but largely cordial relationship.
Post-1979 Era	• Islamic Revolution Impact: After the 1979 Iranian Revolution, India maintained relations while navigating the shift from the Shah's monarchy to the theocratic republic. Despite differences, both sustained diplomatic and economic ties. • 1990s Cooperation: Both supported the Northern Alliance against the Taliban in Afghanistan, contrasting with Pakistan's support of the Taliban. This alignment fostered closer strategic cooperation. • 2000s Deepening Ties: India engaged actively with Iran on energy imports, petrochemicals, and infrastructural projects such as Chabahar Port, alongside increasing trade and cultural exchanges.
Contemporary Period	• Chabahar Port & INSTC: These projects symbolize India's strategic interest in Iran as a gateway to Central Asia and Europe, bypassing Pakistan and enhancing trade connectivity. • Energy Challenges: US sanctions on Iran compelled India to halt crude oil imports in 2019, but India continues exploring alternative payment mechanisms and investments. • Strategic and Regional Diplomacy: Both countries cooperate on Afghanistan, counter-terrorism, and participate in multilateral forums (NAM, SCO), advocating sovereignty and multipolarity.

Significance of India-Iran Bilateral Relations:

1. **Energy Security:** Iran was one of India's most reliable and crucial suppliers of crude oil, often providing favorable credit terms. Cooperation in petrochemicals, urea plants, and energy transit remains important for India's long-term needs.
2. **Gateway to Eurasia (Chabahar Port):** The port of **Chabahar** on Iran's southeastern coast is India's most critical strategic asset in the country. It provides a reliable sea-land route that allows India to **bypass Pakistan** entirely to reach Afghanistan and the resource-rich **Central Asian Republics (CARs)**. This port ensures humanitarian and trade access to landlocked Afghanistan.
3. **Regional Stability:** India and Iran share a common interest in a stable Afghanistan, free from extremism and drug trafficking. This convergence of security concerns allows for crucial dialogue and cooperation on regional security challenges.
4. **Economic Complementarity:** Iran has abundant natural resources (oil, gas, fertilizers), which India requires, while India can supply engineering goods, pharmaceuticals, and agricultural products. This economic complementarity ensures a natural basis for trade, provided the financial transfer mechanisms can be secured.

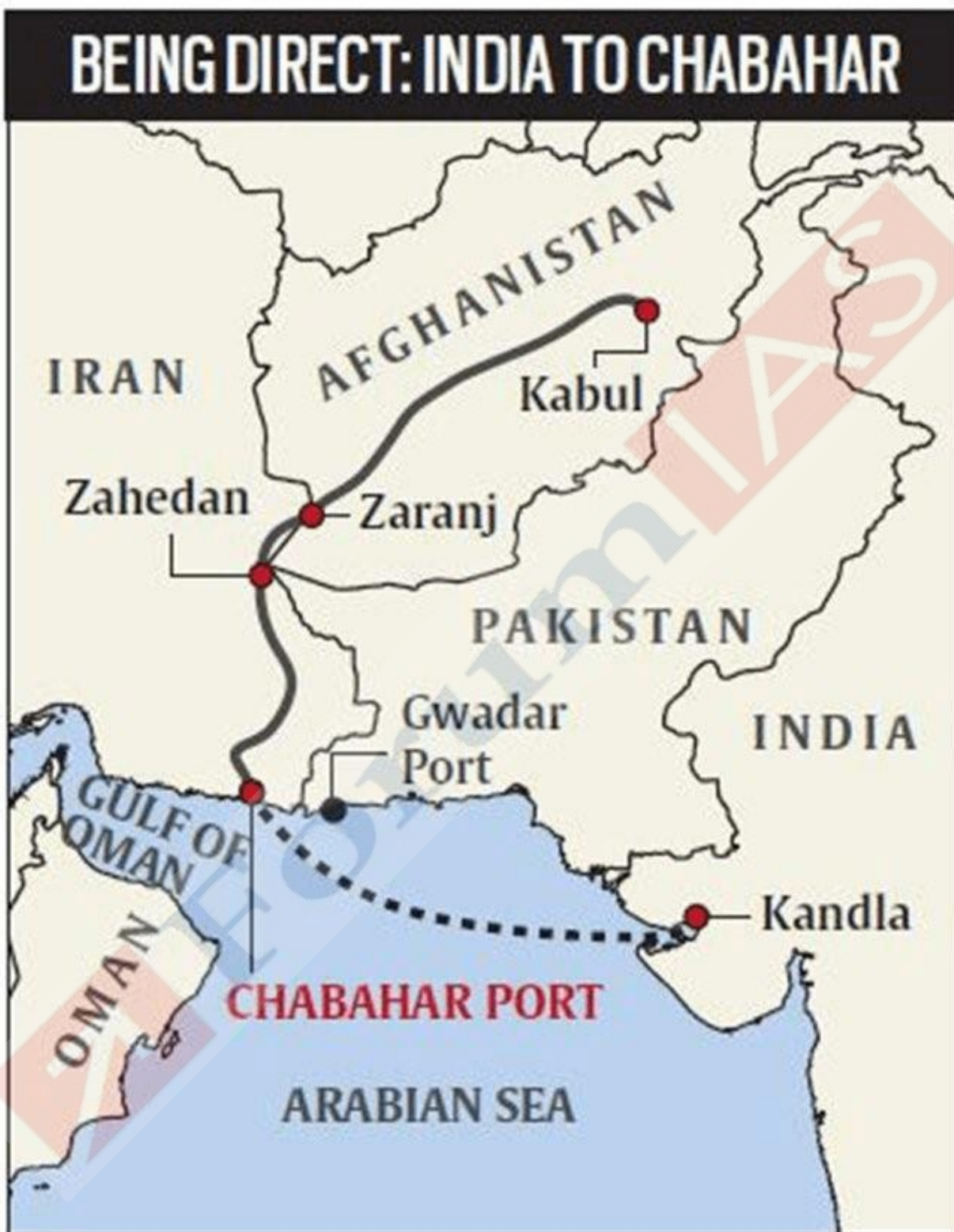
5. **Historical Ties:** India and Iran share millennia of cultural, linguistic (Persian), and intellectual links, creating a foundation of trust and people-to-people bonds. This “civilizational partnership” adds legitimacy and public support to current diplomacy.
6. **People-to-People:** There are strong academic and religious links, with India being home to large Shia and Zoroastrian communities. This shared history provides a foundation of goodwill even when diplomatic ties are stressed.

Challenges in India-Iran Bilateral Relations:

1. **Oil Imports Halt (2019):** Under immense pressure from the Trump administration’s “maximum pressure” campaign, India was forced to **halt all oil imports from Iran** in 2019. This eliminated the historical economic foundation of the relationship and cost India a reliable supplier that offered favorable payment terms (like rupee payments).
2. **Delayed Execution of Projects:** Delays in operationalizing the Shahid Beheshti terminal at Chabahar Port and related railway/INSTC projects, caused by sanctions, bureaucratic inertia, and lack of commercial certainty, have limited the transformative impact of India-Iran connectivity.
3. **Rail Link Abandonment:** The crucial Chabahar-Zahedan railway link, intended to connect the port to Afghanistan and the INSTC, saw India withdraw from a major financing role due to the sanctions risk, severely undermining the port’s long-term utility for regional connectivity.
4. **Geopolitical Rivalries & Balancing Act:**
 - India’s warming relations with the US, Saudi Arabia, and especially Israel (Iran’s regional foes) have made it harder to pursue a robust Iran partnership.
 - Iran’s increasing engagement with China and Pakistan (including strategic and infrastructure projects) creates additional friction and limits India’s influence in West Asia and Central Asia.
5. **Economic & Trade Constraints:** With oil trade diminished, India’s exports (pharmaceuticals, food products) have also stalled, and Rupee-Rial payment mechanisms remain vulnerable to external disruptions.
6. **Divergences on Regional Security & Terrorism:** Conflicting approaches on Afghanistan, Iran’s support for non-state actors (Hezbollah, Hamas), and periodic statements by Iranian leaders on Indian domestic issues (e.g., Kashmir, treatment of Muslims) cause diplomatic discomfort.
7. **Religious & Societal Sensitivities:** India’s Sunni-majority Muslim community and Iran’s Shia leadership sometimes lead to divergent positions and occasional rhetorical friction, especially on issues like the status of Indian Muslims and Kashmir.

Areas of Cooperation:

1. **Strategic Connectivity:**
 - **Chabahar Port:** Joint development and operationalization of the Shahid Beheshti terminal at Chabahar provides India critical access to Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Europe. This investment is a geopolitical imperative for India because it:
 - Bypasses Pakistan for trade and humanitarian aid access to **Afghanistan**.
 - Secures a foothold on the Gulf of Oman, enhancing India’s maritime reach.



- **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC):** Iran is a vital transit country for the INSTC, a multi-modal network designed to connect India to **Russia and Europe** via sea, rail, and road. Cooperation here aims to reduce freight transit time and costs by up to 40%.

2. Energy Partnership:

- **Oil and Gas Trade (Historical):** Before US sanctions forced a halt in 2019, Iran was one of India's most reliable and crucial suppliers of **crude oil**, often offering favorable terms and payment arrangements (including rupee payments).
- **Natural Gas and Fertilizers:** India continues to explore long-term deals for natural gas and has a strong interest in procuring **urea and other fertilizers** from Iran, which are critical inputs for Indian agriculture.
- Collaboration includes oil field exploration, development of LNG infrastructure, and power transit.

3. Trade & Economic Engagement:

- **Non-Oil Trade:** India exports essential commodities like **rice, tea, pharmaceuticals, and engineering goods** to Iran, while importing chemicals, raw materials, and fruits. Efforts are ongoing to find viable, non-sanctioned payment mechanisms to sustain this commerce.
- Newer engagements include cooperation in petrochemicals, renewable energy, machinery, and the auto sector.

4. Shared Interests in Multilateral Forums:

Both nations cooperate in multilateral organizations (e.g., NAM, SCO) on sovereignty, regional security, and rule-based order, supporting India's profile as an independent, pluralistic voice.

5. Science, Technology & Education:

- MoUs on cooperation in science, technology (including pharmaceuticals, biotech, nanotechnology, water management), academic exchange, and joint research.
- Student and researcher exchanges, government scholarships, and scientific workshops deepen educational ties.

6. Cultural & People-to-People Ties:

- Longstanding civilizational bonds, including shared Persian heritage, language, and cultural exchanges are fostered through cultural centres, tourism, and artistic collaborations.
- India hosts a vibrant Iranian diaspora and continues to promote cross-cultural understanding.

7. Healthcare & Pharmaceuticals:

Enhanced collaboration on pharmaceutical exports and regulatory standards, especially after 2025, and joint initiatives in healthcare supply chains.

Way Forward:

1. Prioritize Chabahar Port and Connectivity Projects:

- Ensure timely completion and expansion of Chabahar Port and associated infrastructure (Zahedan rail link, integration with INSTC), positioning India as a reliable connector to Central Asia and Afghanistan.
- India must finalize the long-pending **long-term lease agreement** for the Shahid Beheshti terminal at Chabahar. This provides stability, confidence to operators, and secures India's presence.
- Use Iran's full membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and regional trilaterals (e.g., with Armenia) to advance connectivity and trade.

2. Establishing Sustainable Financial Mechanisms:

- **Rupee-Rial Mechanism:** India should explore reviving and formalizing a **rupee-rial payment mechanism** for non-oil trade, focusing on essential Indian exports like pharmaceuticals, tea, and rice. This mechanism avoids the US dollar system entirely and is crucial for sustaining commercial ties.

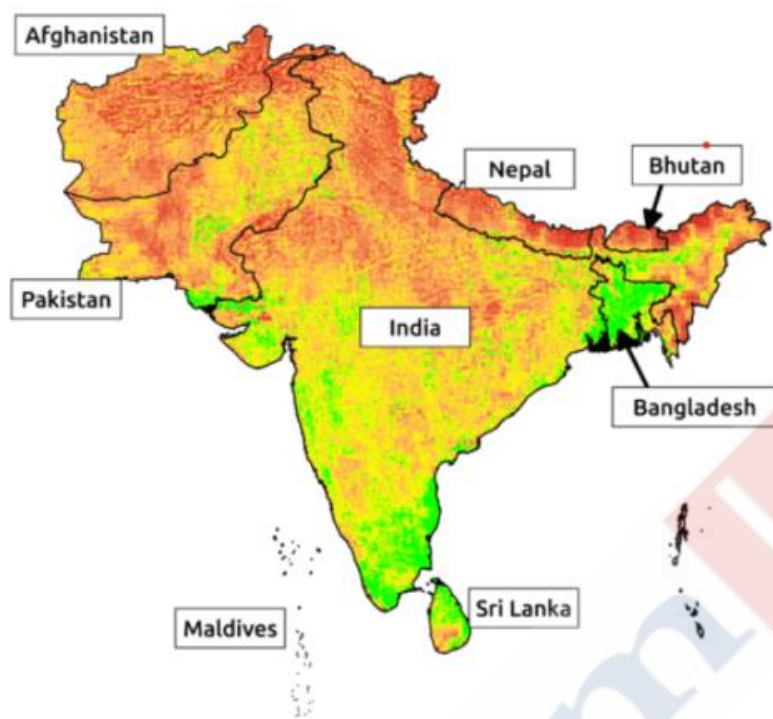
- **Barter Arrangements:** Encourage structured **barter arrangements** where India can receive Iranian fertilizers or raw materials in exchange for Indian finished goods, bypassing cash transactions that trigger sanctions flags.
- 3. Expand Trade & Investment:**
 - Conclude trade agreements and bilateral investment treaties to diversify the trade basket—pharmaceuticals, agriculture, engineering goods, and new services—with a special focus on MSMEs.
 - Promote mutual FDI and joint ventures, modernize customs cooperation, and reduce red tape for smoother bilateral commerce.
- 4. Strengthen Counterterrorism & Security Collaboration:** Institutionalize intelligence sharing, joint military exercises, and crisis management, addressing mutual concerns in Afghanistan and broader regional instability.
- 5. Maintain Strategic Autonomy & Balance Geopolitics:**
 - Sustain India's de-hyphenated approach—robust ties with both Iran and Israel/US/Arab Gulf—while asserting independence in foreign policy decisions and regional engagement.
 - Engage in dialogue with the US/EU to mitigate the impact of sanctions on vital connectivity and energy projects for regional stability.
- 6. Leverage Cultural & People-to-People Bonds:** Strengthen educational, cultural, artistic, and diasporic engagement, capitalizing on shared historical ties to build goodwill and resilience.
- 7. Utilise Multilateral Forums:** Advocate for common interests in SCO, BRICS, UN, and regional platforms to promote a multipolar order, support rule-based engagement, and coordinate on Afghanistan and counter-terrorism.

Conclusion: By prioritizing the physical connectivity through Chabahar and securing innovative financial channels, India can ensure the relationship survives the current geopolitical winter and is positioned to flourish when external conditions change.

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South Asian Region – Significance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise

South Asia is one of the most culturally diverse, densely populated, and geopolitically critical regions in the world. It is a region defined by its immense scale, shared history, and complex political geography.



Geographic Boundaries and Features:

- **North:** Dominated by the **Himalayan mountain range**, which includes the world's highest peaks, acting as a massive barrier separating the subcontinent from East and Central Asia.
- **West:** Borders Iran.
- **East:** Borders Southeast Asia (Myanmar).
- **South:** Defined by the **Indian Ocean**, the Bay of Bengal, and the Arabian Sea.

Significance of the region:

1. Demographic Significance:

- **Population Scale:** South Asia is home to nearly 2 billion people—about 25% of the global population—making it the world's most densely populated region.
- **The Demographic Dividend:** The region possesses a massive **youth bulge**, with a large proportion of its population under the age of 30. This presents a huge potential for global economic growth, provided the region can successfully educate, train, and employ this working-age population.
- **Poverty and Development:** Despite recent economic growth, the region still houses a significant portion of the world's extreme poor. Progress in meeting the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**—especially those related to poverty, sanitation, and health—depends heavily on success in South Asia.

2. Geopolitical & Security Significance:

- **Regional Security Dynamics:** Conflicts over Kashmir, Afghanistan, and terrorism, as well as maritime chokepoints, affect global peace and energy routes.

- **Nuclear Flashpoint:** The **India-Pakistan rivalry** is a core global security concern. As two nuclear-armed states with a long, disputed border and a history of conventional conflict, any escalation poses a catastrophic risk to regional and global stability.
- **Maritime Chokepoints:** The Indian Ocean, which borders South Asia, is the world's third-largest body of water and contains vital **Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs)**. Oil and trade routes pass through chokepoints near the region (like the Straits of Malacca and Hormuz), making the security of this maritime space critical for global energy supply and commerce.
- **The China Factor:** South Asia has become the primary zone for the strategic competition between **India and China**. China's massive investment and infrastructure projects (like the Belt and Road Initiative) across countries like Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Nepal have deepened its presence, making the region central to the balance of power in Asia.

3. Economic & Trade Significance:

- **Global Growth Engine:** India is one of the fastest-growing major economies in the world. Its sheer size means its continued economic expansion contributes significantly to overall global GDP growth and investment cycles.
- **Trade and Resources:** The region produces textiles, IT services, pharmaceuticals, and agricultural goods vital for global supply chains, and has major reserves of coal, iron, rare minerals, and hydropower potential.
- **Technology Hub:** India is a global leader in Information Technology (IT) services, software development, and digital innovation. Its skilled labor force and expanding tech ecosystem are integral to the operations of multinational corporations worldwide.
- **Manufacturing and Supply Chains:** As global supply chains seek to diversify away from China (the "China Plus One" strategy), countries like India and Bangladesh are becoming increasingly important manufacturing hubs for textiles, pharmaceuticals, and electronics.

4. Environmental & Climate Significance:

- **Biodiversity:** The region's diverse landscapes—ranging from Himalayas to rainforests and coral atolls—are ecological hotspots of global significance.
- **Himalayan Water Towers:** The **Himalayan mountain ranges** are the source of major river systems (Indus, Ganges, Brahmaputra) that sustain nearly two billion people across South Asia and parts of Southeast Asia. Glacial melt and changes in monsoon patterns due to global warming pose an existential threat to water security in the entire region.
- **Monsoon Dynamics:** The South Asian monsoon is a complex weather system that influences global climate patterns. Changes in its predictability and intensity affect agricultural productivity across the subcontinent.
- **Vulnerability to Sea Level Rise:** Low-lying and densely populated coastal areas, particularly in **Bangladesh and the Maldives**, are critically vulnerable to rising sea levels and intense cyclones, raising the specter of massive climate-induced migration and displacement.

5. Civilizational Heritage:

Birthplace of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, South Asia houses UNESCO World Heritage sites, vibrant art, literature, and culinary traditions.

Challenges faced by the region:

1. Geopolitical & Security Challenges:

- **Territorial Disputes and Military Tensions:** Prolonged conflict over Kashmir between India and Pakistan, unresolved borders with China, and maritime disputes remain flashpoints that periodically erupt into violence and stymie regional cooperation.

- **Terrorism and Extremism:** Terrorist networks, religious extremism, and insurgency movements threaten stability and development across the region, with notable impacts in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka.
- **The India-Pakistan Rivalry:** This remains the single most important and **destabilizing factor**. As two nuclear-armed states, their perennial conflict leads to military standoffs, cross-border terrorism, and the freezing of diplomatic ties. This rivalry effectively **paralyzes regional bodies** like the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), preventing meaningful collective action.
- **External Power Competition:** South Asia is a primary theater for the strategic rivalry between **India and China**. China's massive infrastructure and debt-fueled projects (like the Belt and Road Initiative – **BRI**) in countries like Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives are viewed by India as strategic encirclement. This competition forces smaller South Asian nations into difficult balancing acts.
- **Border Management and Insurgency:** The region is characterized by long, often porous, and poorly demarcated borders. This contributes to issues like cross-border insurgency, illegal immigration, and the trafficking of arms and drugs, creating persistent internal security challenges for countries like India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.
- **Instability in Afghanistan:** The situation in Afghanistan, particularly the lack of international recognition for the current regime, creates a security vacuum that risks the spillover of extremism and instability into neighboring countries.

2. Economic Challenges:

- **Low Intra-Regional Trade:** South Asia is one of the least economically integrated regions globally. Less than 5% of its total trade occurs between the SAARC members. This is primarily due to high political friction (trade restrictions between India and Pakistan) and poor infrastructure, which forces nations to trade inefficiently with distant partners.
- **Infrastructure Deficit:** The region lacks adequate cross-border infrastructure, including integrated road networks, rail links, and energy grids. This failure to connect limits the movement of goods and people, artificially inflating the cost of doing business.

3. Social Challenges:

- **Poverty and Inequality:** While income levels are rising, the region is home to a substantial portion of the world's poor. Massive economic inequality, coupled with rapid urbanization, strains public services (healthcare, education) and creates social unrest.
- **Rapid Population Growth and Urbanization:** The region's population pressure, coupled with inadequate urban planning and service provision, fuels slum proliferation, pollution, and social unrest.
- **Gender Inequality and Human Rights:** South Asia struggles with gender gap in education, health, employment, and political representation, exacerbating social tensions and limiting inclusive growth.

4. Environmental & Climate Challenges:

- **Climate Change Vulnerability:** South Asia is one of the world's most vulnerable regions to climate change.
- **Water Stress:** The reliance on the Himalayan glaciers and the monsoon for water makes the region susceptible to both severe flooding and acute drought. Changes in the **monsoon** pattern threaten the agricultural livelihood of hundreds of millions.
- **Sea Level Rise:** Low-lying nations and coastal areas, particularly in **Bangladesh and the Maldives**, face existential threats from rising sea levels and increasingly powerful cyclones, raising the specter of massive climate migration.

- **Water Sharing Disputes:** Disputes over shared river waters (e.g., the Indus, Ganges, Brahmaputra) are a persistent source of friction, particularly between India and Pakistan, and India and Bangladesh. Climate change exacerbates these conflicts by reducing water availability.

5. Political Challenges:

- **Fragile Democracies:** Military coups and democratic reversals (as seen in Pakistan and, intermittently, Bangladesh and Nepal) impede institutional development, accountability, and human rights.
- **Governance and Corruption:** Many countries in the region face significant challenges related to corruption, bureaucratic red tape, and political instability. Weak governance structures often impede foreign investment, complicate economic reforms, and slow down the implementation of essential development projects.

Various initiatives for cooperation in the region:

1. South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC):

- SAARC is the primary regional body which was established in 1985.
- SAARC brings together Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.
- SAARC summits have been suspended since 2014 due to geopolitical tensions, primarily between India and Pakistan. This has severely limited high-level political cooperation.

2. South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA):

Aims to establish a free trade area among the SAARC member states to reduce tariffs and promote intra-regional commerce. While SAFTA is technically operational (tariffs have been reduced), its potential is drastically undermined by **non-tariff barriers**, political trade restrictions (e.g., restricted movement of goods), and a lack of mutual trust, resulting in extremely low levels of intra-regional trade.

3. Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC):

BIMSTEC is highly active and avoids the political baggage of the India-Pakistan rivalry. It focuses on countries bordering or relying on the **Bay of Bengal**. It is seen by India as the primary vehicle for regional integration and Act East policy implementation.

4. South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC):

- Brings together Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, coordinated by the Asian Development Bank.
- Focuses on cross-border transport corridors, trade facilitation, energy security, ICT infrastructure, and tourism.

5. Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal Initiative (BBIN):

Aims to promote deeper integration and connectivity within the Eastern Sub-region of South Asia. **BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA)** is designed to facilitate the smooth movement of passenger and cargo vehicles across the borders of the member states. This aims to reduce transit time and boost intra-sub-regional trade.

6. Energy Cooperation:

- **Cross-Border Grid Interconnection:** Initiatives to connect national electricity grids (e.g., between India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan). This allows countries with surplus hydropower (like Bhutan and Nepal) to export energy and boosts regional energy security.
- **Oil and Gas Pipelines:** Projects like the India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline for diesel transport are crucial steps toward energy integration.

7. Health & Disaster Management:

- **COVID-19 Response:** During the pandemic, SAARC nations utilized specialized funds and virtual meetings to coordinate health responses, demonstrating the potential for cooperation during shared crises.
- **Disaster Management:** The region cooperates on sharing early warnings for cyclones, earthquakes, and tsunamis, recognizing that natural disasters often transcend national borders.

Way Forward:

1. Deepen Regional Economic Cooperation:

- Reform and robustly implement existing platforms like SAFTA, SASEC, and BIMSTEC; reduce trade barriers, harmonize standards, and develop regional value chains focused on innovation and employment.
- Develop and modernize trade infrastructure, cross-border corridors, transport logistics, and multimodal connectivity.
- Member states should agree on a principle that allows economic and connectivity projects to proceed even when high-level political dialogue is strained.

2. Address Political & Security Issues:

- Separate economic and developmental cooperation from political disputes, building mechanisms for conflict resolution, sustained diplomacy, and trust-building—drawing lessons from the EU and ASEAN models.
- Promote Track 1.5 and Track 2 dialogues (government plus civil society/research) to address historic rivalries, terrorism, and strategic mistrust.

3. Cooperation of Environment, Climate & Disaster Management:

- Establish regional climate task forces, shared disaster early warning systems, and a joint carbon market for clean development.
- Launch cross-border renewable energy corridors (solar/wind/hydro), shared climate-resilient agriculture projects, and “Green Buffer Zones” for joint forest management.

4. Energy Security & Connectivity:

- Pursue a regional electricity market (e.g., BBIN, India-Sri Lanka interconnector), allowing countries to trade real-time power, leverage hydropower, and increase low-cost access—reducing CO2 emissions and yielding billions in economic benefits.
- Accelerate joint ventures in information technology, manufacturing, and digital commerce, mirroring successes of integrated regional platforms elsewhere.

5. Human Development & Social Protection:

- Launch regional skill development initiatives, mutual recognition of professional qualifications, and expanded scholarships for youth and women.
- Invest jointly in health cooperation, pandemic response, and shared human capital priorities.

6. Strengthen Regional Institutions:

Strengthen SAARC, BIMSTEC, subregional groupings (BBIN), and cross-border city partnerships and development councils, encouraging coordinated planning and cultural exchange.

7. People-to-People Ties:

Harness shared languages, heritage, and civilizational links to build trust and bottom-up cooperation.

Conclusion: South Asia is significant not just because of its scale, but because its future trajectory—whether it achieves stability, manages its growth, or succumbs to climate and conflict risks—will determine a substantial portion of the world's economy, population, and security environment.

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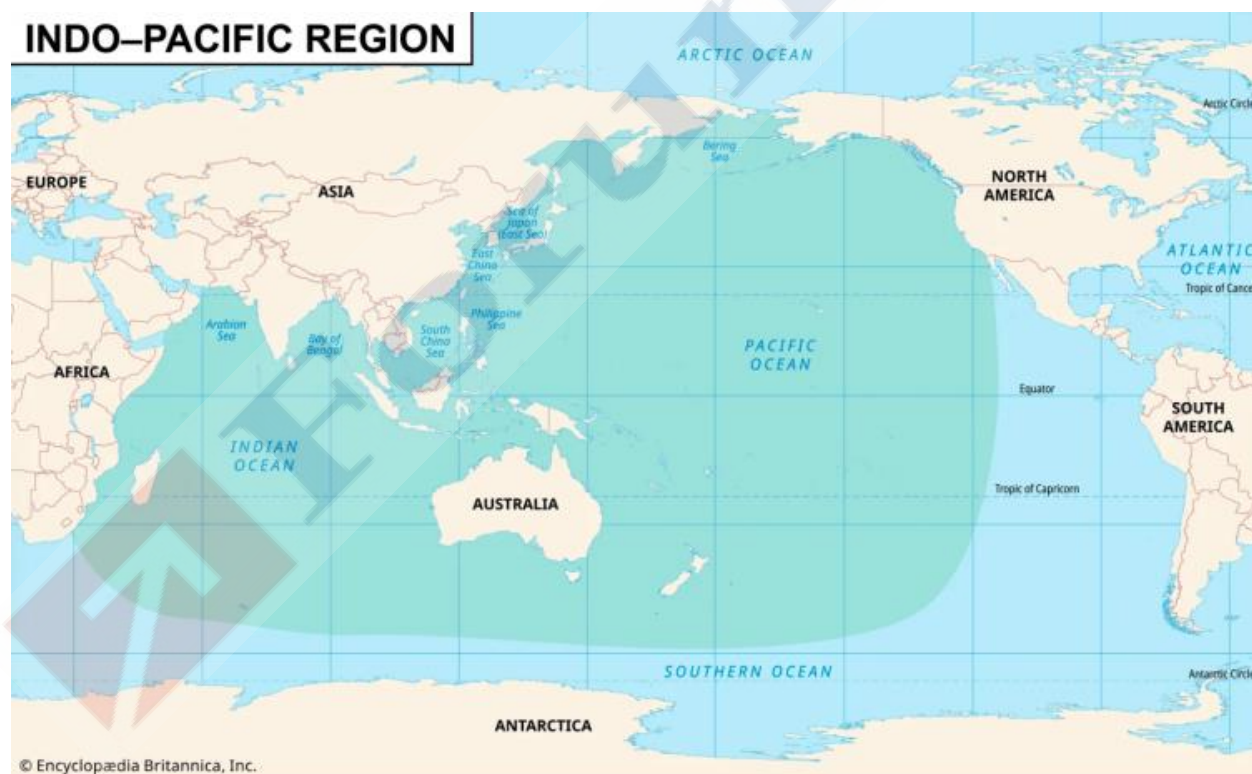
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Indo-Pacific Region – Significance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise

The Indo-Pacific is the most important concept in 21st-century geopolitics and strategy. It is a modern term that defines a unified, interconnected, and dynamic super-region that stretches across two oceans.

What is the Indo-Pacific Region?

- The Indo-Pacific region refers to the vast, interconnected maritime area that spans the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, including the seas and straits that link them.
- Geographically, it extends roughly from the eastern coast of Africa to the western coast of the Americas, encompassing South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia, Australia, and Pacific island nations.
- The Southeast Asian seas, especially the South China Sea and the Strait of Malacca, form the crucial geographical and economic nexus connecting the two oceans.



Significance of Indo-Pacific Region:

Economic Significance	● Global GDP and Population: ○ The region encompasses countries that account for over 60% of the world's population and generate over 60% of the global GDP. ○ It includes four of the world's largest economies: the United States, China, India, and Japan, along with the dynamic ASEAN bloc. ● Maritime Trade Routes: ○ Essential sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) pass through the region, including the Strait of Malacca, Lombok Strait, and South China Sea. ○ Approximately 32.2 million barrels of crude oil pass through annually, with 40% of global exports originating from the region. Natural Resources: ○ The region contains vast offshore oil and gas reserves, with the South China Sea estimated to hold 11 billion barrels of oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of gas. ○ It holds significant mineral resources and fisheries, including 10% of the global fish catch. ○ The oceans in the Indo-Pacific contain immense biodiversity and are crucial for global fish stocks. Sustainable management of these resources is vital for the food security of billions of people in the region.
Geopolitical Significance	● Centre of Great Power Competition: ○ The region has become the primary theater of US-China strategic competition, with both powers vying for influence and control. ○ China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) represents focused efforts to extend Chinese economic and strategic influence, with investments exceeding \$1 trillion as of 2023. ● The Rise of India: The concept of the Indo-Pacific itself highlights the crucial role of India as a rising democratic power. India's vast geography, massive population, and growing naval capacity are seen by many Western and regional powers as essential for upholding a rules-based international order. ● Security Dynamics: ○ The Indo-Pacific faces complex security challenges including territorial disputes in the South China Sea, tensions on the Korean peninsula, across the Taiwan Strait, and various regional conflicts. ○ The region is home to 7 of the world's largest militaries, making it a critical area for global security.

Environmental Significance	• The region faces severe climate-related challenges, including sea-level rise, natural disasters, and environmental degradation. • It is the most natural disaster-prone region globally, requiring coordinated responses to climate change impacts.
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India's interests in Indo-Pacific:

1. Security & Strategic Interests:

- **Maritime Security and Freedom of Navigation:** India depends heavily on the Indian Ocean for nearly 95% of its trade, including vital energy imports, making secure sea lanes and freedom of navigation crucial.
- **Countering Chinese Influence:** India aims to counterbalance China's growing presence and assertiveness in the region, particularly through China's Belt and Road Initiative and militarization of the South China Sea.
- **Net Security Provider:** India seeks to position itself as the dominant "net security provider" in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). This involves working with regional partners (like Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius, and Seychelles) to boost their maritime security capabilities and ensure that no single power dominates the area.

2. Economic Interests:

- **Trade and Investment:** The Indo-Pacific is central to India's ambitions to become a \$10 trillion economy. India seeks to expand trade, maritime connectivity, and economic integration within the region.
- **Act East Policy Integration:** The Indo-Pacific vision is the logical extension of India's "Act East Policy." India aims to better integrate its North-Eastern states with the dynamic economies of Southeast Asia through connectivity projects like the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway.
- **Supply Chain Resilience:** Following the disruptions of the pandemic, India's interest lies in diversifying its supply chains away from a heavy reliance on a single nation. Cooperating with Quad partners on supply chain resilience in critical technologies (like semiconductors and pharmaceuticals) is a core economic goal.

3. Environmental & Resource Security:

- **Sustainable Use of Marine Resources:** India aims to promote sustainable management of fisheries, offshore energy resources, and maritime ecosystems to support long-term regional prosperity.
- **Climate Change and Disaster Resilience:** Addressing environmental degradation and natural disaster risks tied to the fragile Indo-Pacific ecosystems is a key concern for India's regional engagement.

4. Regional Leadership & Diplomacy:

- **Promoting a Rules-Based Order:** India advocates for a rules-based order that respects international law, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). This is a subtle way of countering unilateral territorial claims in the South China Sea and ensuring freedom of navigation.
- **Strategic Autonomy:** India uses the concept of the Indo-Pacific to reinforce its commitment to strategic autonomy. India insists that the framework must be "inclusive" (not directed against any single country) and stresses the importance of ASEAN's centrality. This allows

India to maintain strong ties with Russia and Iran while participating in Western-led groupings.

- Engagement with Regional Bodies: Active engagement with ASEAN, BIMSTEC, IORA, and other regional organizations helps India strengthen diplomatic ties and regional cooperation.

5. Cultural & Historical Links: India has longstanding civilizational, cultural, and diaspora ties across the Indo-Pacific, which underpin its soft power and influence within the region.

Various initiatives in the Indo-Pacific Region:

1. ASEAN Centrality:

- The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is the geographic and institutional core of the Indo-Pacific. All major powers (US, China, Japan, India) explicitly support ASEAN's centrality.
- ASEAN promotes dialogue through forums like the East Asia Summit (EAS) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ensuring that regional cooperation remains dialogue-based.

2. Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad):

- A strategic security forum involving India, US, Japan, and Australia.
- Focuses on regional security challenges, maritime cooperation, infrastructure development, and humanitarian assistance.
- Key areas of cooperation include:
 - a. Maritime Domain Awareness: Sharing information and working to ensure freedom of navigation.
 - b. Critical and Emerging Technologies: Collaborating on 5G technology, semiconductors, and supply chain resilience.
 - c. Health and Climate: Joint initiatives on vaccine production and distribution, and climate change adaptation.

3. AUKUS:

- Members: Australia, United Kingdom, and United States.
- A security partnership designed for deeper defense integration and technological sharing. Its most publicized feature is the agreement to help Australia acquire nuclear-powered submarines.

4. Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI):

- Launched by India in 2019 at the East Asia Summit.
- It is a voluntary, non-treaty arrangement focusing on practical cooperation in: maritime security, ecology, resource management, capacity building, disaster risk reduction, science and technology, trade and connectivity.
- Builds upon India's SAGAR vision for inclusive and sustainable maritime growth.

5. SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region):

- India's flagship vision launched in 2015 aiming to strengthen maritime security, economic development, and cooperative relations among Indian Ocean littorals and beyond.
- Focuses on freedom of navigation, anti-piracy, disaster management, and blue economy development.

6. Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF):

- Initiated in 2022, enhancing economic cooperation among Indo-Pacific partners.
- Emphasizes resilient supply chains, clean energy transitions, fair trade, digital economy cooperation, and sustainable growth.
- Partners include India, US, Australia, Japan and 10 other countries.

7. Act East Policy:

- India's diplomatic and economic outreach to engage ASEAN and East Asian nations.
- Aims to deepen connectivity, trade, cultural ties, and regional integration.

8. Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI):

- Members: India, Japan, Australia.
- To establish resilient and diversified supply chains to mitigate the risks of geopolitical shocks and reliance on single-country sources, especially in essential goods and raw materials.

9. Regional Cooperation Platforms:

- India engages actively in regional groupings like the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and others.
- These platforms address issues like maritime security, climate resilience, and economic cooperation.

Challenges of Indo-Pacific Region:**1. Geopolitical Rivalries & Security Concerns:**

- Intense strategic competition mainly between India, China, and the United States results in overlapping claims, territorial disputes (notably in the South China Sea and Indian Ocean), and military build-ups.
- The rise of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its territorial assertiveness challenge existing regional balances, leading to tensions among regional and extra-regional powers.
- The risk of conflict escalation in flashpoints such as Taiwan, the South China Sea, Korean Peninsula, India-Pakistan war remains high.
- The region is undergoing rapid military modernization. Increased naval deployments, the development of long-range missile capabilities, and the formation of new security pacts (like AUKUS) escalate tensions.

2. Economic & Development Challenges:

- **Infrastructure Debt Traps:** China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) offers much-needed infrastructure financing but has often resulted in unsustainable debt for smaller nations (like Sri Lanka and some Pacific Island countries), compromising their economic sovereignty and stability.
- **Supply Chain Vulnerability:** The heavy concentration of global manufacturing in East and Southeast Asia creates a single point of failure. Geopolitical tensions or natural disasters can—and have—led to significant global supply chain shocks. Initiatives to diversify supply chains are still in their early stages.
- **Development Gaps:** The region features immense economic disparity, stretching from highly developed nations (Japan, Australia) to developing economies (Bangladesh, Cambodia). Closing these gaps requires significant, sustainable investment and cooperation on trade facilitation.
- **Lack of Regional Integration:** While trade within the wider Indo-Pacific is high, intra-regional trade within South Asia remains low due to political disputes and poor infrastructure. This failure to integrate economically limits collective growth potential.

3. Non-Traditional Security Threats:

- **Climate Change and Environmental Degradation:** This is an existential threat for many parts of the region. Low-lying island nations and coastal areas (e.g., Maldives, Bangladesh) face

rising sea levels and intense, frequent cyclones. Coastal erosion and changes in the monsoon system threaten food security for hundreds of millions.

- **Maritime Security Challenges:** Non-state threats such as piracy, illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and maritime drug smuggling persist, requiring coordinated naval and coast guard cooperation across numerous jurisdictions.
- **Cyber and Information Warfare:** The rapid adoption of digital technology, often without adequate cybersecurity protocols, leaves the region vulnerable to state-sponsored hacking, data theft, and sophisticated disinformation campaigns aimed at undermining democratic processes and national infrastructure.

4. Maritime Security & Piracy:

- The region's vital sea lanes are vulnerable to piracy, smuggling, and illegal fishing, threatening safe maritime trade and fishery sustainability.
- Disputes over maritime boundaries and exclusive economic zones (EEZs) pose ongoing risks for peaceful navigation.

Way forward:

1. Strengthening Multilateralism & Regional Cooperation:

- Promote inclusive regional frameworks such as ASEAN-led mechanisms, Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), and enhanced cooperation among Quad countries.
- Encourage dialogue, conflict resolution, and confidence-building measures to reduce unilateral attempts and tension hotspots like the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait.

2. Upholding a Free, Open, Rules-based Order:

Adherence to international law, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), to ensure freedom of navigation, overflight, and peaceful dispute settlement.

3. Enhancing Maritime Security & Safety:

- Joint exercises, information sharing, and coordinated response to piracy, terrorism, and natural disasters across the Indo-Pacific.
- Capacity building for smaller and vulnerable coastal states to strengthen their maritime domain awareness.

4. Promoting Sustainable Economic Growth & Connectivity:

- Develop resilient, interconnected infrastructure in transport, digital, and energy sectors to integrate regional markets inclusively.
- Support supply chain diversification and green technologies via initiatives like the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF).

5. Addressing Environmental Challenges Collectively:

- Coordinate climate change mitigation, marine ecosystem conservation, disaster risk reduction, and pollution control efforts.
- Share scientific research and best practices for adaptation to rising sea levels and ecosystem preservation.
- Formalize and strengthen mechanisms for joint military and civilian responses to Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations, recognizing that cyclones, tsunamis, and earthquakes often require seamless regional cooperation.

6. High-Quality Infrastructure Investment:

Ensure that infrastructure projects funded through initiatives like the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) offer transparent, high-

standard, and sustainable alternatives to debt-trap financing. The focus should be on building connectivity that benefits the host nation, not just the donor nation.

Conclusion: The Indo-Pacific region thus represents the epicenter of 21st-century geopolitics, where economic prosperity, security challenges, and strategic competition converge to shape the future global order.

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BIMSTEC – Significance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is a regional organization that was established on 06 June 1997 with the signing of the Bangkok Declaration.

Introduction:

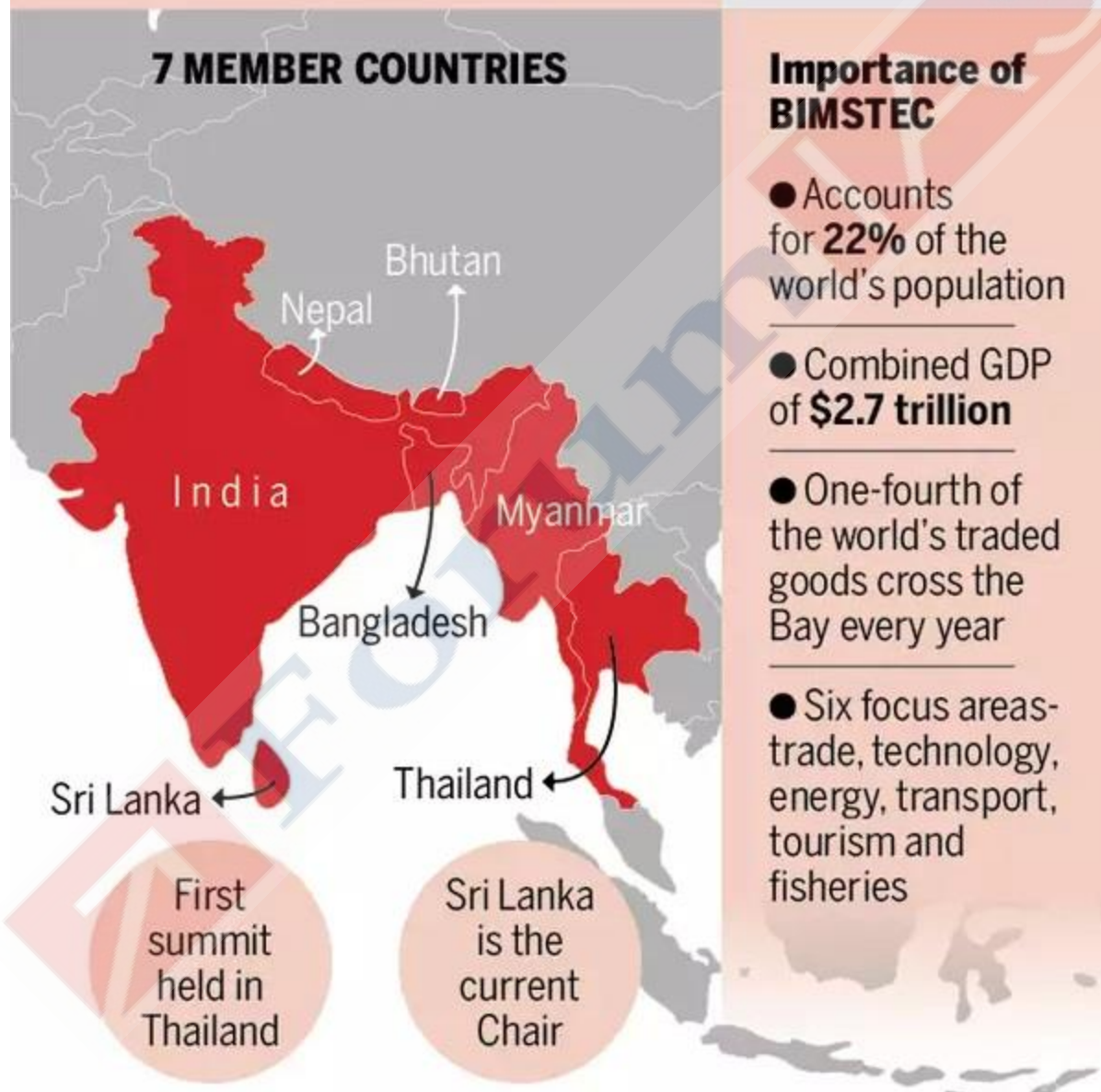
- Initially known as BIST-EC (Bangladesh-India-Sri Lanka-Thailand Economic Cooperation), the organization is now known as BIMSTEC.
- It comprises seven Member States with the admission of Myanmar on 22 December 1997, and Bhutan and Nepal in February 2004. It is headquartered at Dhaka, Bangladesh.
- It not only connects South and Southeast Asia, but also the ecologies of the Great Himalayas and the Bay of Bengal. It aims to create an enabling environment for economic development; accelerate social progress and promote collaboration on matters of common interest in the region.
- **Aim:** To create an enabling environment for economic development; accelerate social progress and promote collaboration on matters of common interest in the region.
- **Significance:** Nearly 1.5 billion people or 22% of the global population comes under the BIMSTEC. Together, it has a combined gross domestic product (GDP) of \$2.7 trillion.



Stands for **The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation**

Founded in 1997 through **Bangkok Declaration**

7 MEMBER COUNTRIES



Importance of BIMSTEC

- Accounts for **22%** of the world's population
- Combined GDP of **\$2.7 trillion**
- One-fourth of the world's traded goods cross the Bay every year
- Six focus areas- trade, technology, energy, transport, tourism and fisheries

First summit held in Thailand

Sri Lanka is the current Chair

Key Organs of BIMSTEC:

1. **BIMSTEC Summit:** The highest decision-making body, comprising heads of state or government from member countries.

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2. **Ministerial Meetings:** Focused on specific sectors such as trade, energy, and transportation.
3. **Senior Officials' Meetings (SOM):** Prepare agendas and facilitate coordination.
4. **BIMSTEC Secretariat:** Located in Dhaka, Bangladesh, the Secretariat oversees day-to-day activities and implements decisions.

Achievements of BIMSTEC:

1. **BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate:** The Memorandum of Association (MoA) on the establishment of this centre was signed in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar on 4 March 2014 at the Third BIMSTEC Summit. Currently the BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate Change functions from the National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF), Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India.
2. **BIMSTEC Energy Centre (BEC):** The First BIMSTEC Energy Ministers Conference held on 04 October 2005, agreed to the setting up of a BIMSTEC Energy Centre (BEC). It aims to share experience in reforms, restructuring, regulation and best practice in the energy sector.
3. The BIMSTEC Permanent Secretariat was opened in 2014 at Dhaka. It helps in better management of regional issues.
4. BIMSTEC Permanent Working Committee (BPWC) to deal with administrative and financial matters of the Secretariat was set up post the 4th Kathmandu summit of 2018.
5. BIMSTEC convention on cooperation in combating international terrorism, transnational organised crime and illicit drug trafficking has come into force in March 2021. It encourages data sharing and intelligence gathering on criminal activities.

Significance of BIMSTEC:

1. **Huge untapped potential:** A study by the Asian Development Bank has identified 167 projects within the BIMSTEC region that can boost connectivity. However, the grouping has to date only focused on 66 of them. The remaining have not yet received enough attention.
2. **Alternative to SAARC:** South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has largely become defunct because of differences between New Delhi and Islamabad.
3. **Strategic Location:** The Bay region is a key transit route between the Indian and the Pacific Oceans. Therefore BIMSTEC as a grouping can help in ensuring freedom of navigation in the waters. It can also help in harnessing and sharing the Bay's natural wealth.
4. **Combating the web of uncertainties:** The institution can help member states tackle future uncertainties that will arise due to climate change, COVID – 19 pandemic and Russia-Ukraine conflict.
5. **Tackling Security Challenges:** Members of the grouping face several traditional and non-traditional security challenges that can be duly addressed with enhanced cooperation.
6. **Development of North East:** BIMSTEC can boost the development of the northeast region by providing greater interaction with Bangladesh and Myanmar. For instance, the master plan of connectivity includes the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway and Kolkata-Siliguri-Guwahati-Imphal link.
7. **Better cooperation with ASEAN:** India has already come out of RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership) agreement that may hinder its trade potential. Therefore a more robust cooperation with Thailand and Myanmar can help in resolving India – ASEAN differences and ensure better implementation of 'Act East Policy'. For instance, the BIMSTEC master plan will also promote synergy with other connectivity frameworks such as the ASEAN master plan on connectivity 2025.
8. **Countering China:** BIMSTEC can help in countering China's Cheque Book diplomacy. Further, it can strengthen India's position as a responsible regional power in the Indo-Pacific.

Challenges faced by BIMSTEC:

1. **Stalemate on Agreements:** The Free Trade Agreement (FTA), coastal shipping agreement and motor vehicles agreement have undergone numerous negotiations but no consensus is developed over them.
2. **Priority to Bilateralism:** The focus remains primarily on enhancing bilateral ties, with multilateralism yet to gain ground despite common ecological concerns and a shared past.
3. **Big brother attitude:** Allegations are made on India for playing a dominant role in the organization and neglecting the agendas of small states.
4. **Irregularity in working:** The summits are not held on regular intervals and slow pace is observed in working. For instance, it took almost 17 years to establish a permanent secretariat.
5. **Preference to other organizations:** Countries like Myanmar and Thailand show more enthusiasm towards ASEAN and neglects the vision of BIMSTEC.
6. **Resource Deficit:** Lack of adequate financial and manpower resources is impairing the performance of the body. Although, India is the largest contributor and contributes annually about 32% of the budget.

Way forward:

1. **Economic development:** The members must accelerate our efforts to boost intra BIMSTEC trade and economic ties. They should focus on developing a network of regional supply chains that will reduce our vulnerability to external shocks and give their economies greater resilience and transparency.
2. **Disaster resilience:** India must encourage other member states to consider joining the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI). This will enhance disaster cooperation as all the BIMSTEC members live in one of the most disaster prone regions of the world.
3. **Controlling Transnational Organised Crime:** The member states cannot ignore the challenges that transnational crime, terrorism, violent extremism or indeed new challenges such as cyber-attacks, pose to them. Considering this, they need to put in place the remaining elements of the legal architecture that will enable their law enforcement agencies to collaborate more closely and more effectively.
4. **Institutional Hedging:** the group should move forward by doing 'institutional hedging'. This means focus should be on developing collective soft as well as hard power for the group. Thereby protecting individual interests and shaping up a regional order that works for all the members involved.
5. **India's Role:** India should project itself as a compatriot and an equal partner to other BIMSTEC member-countries. This will help reduce its trust deficit and ensure better integration in the region.

Conclusion: BIMSTEC over the years has emerged as a promising sub-regional grouping with growing strategic and economic interests of the member states as well as of the international community in the Bay of Bengal region. India remains committed to further building the momentum of regional cooperation under the BIMSTEC framework and make the organization stronger, vibrant, more effective and result-oriented.

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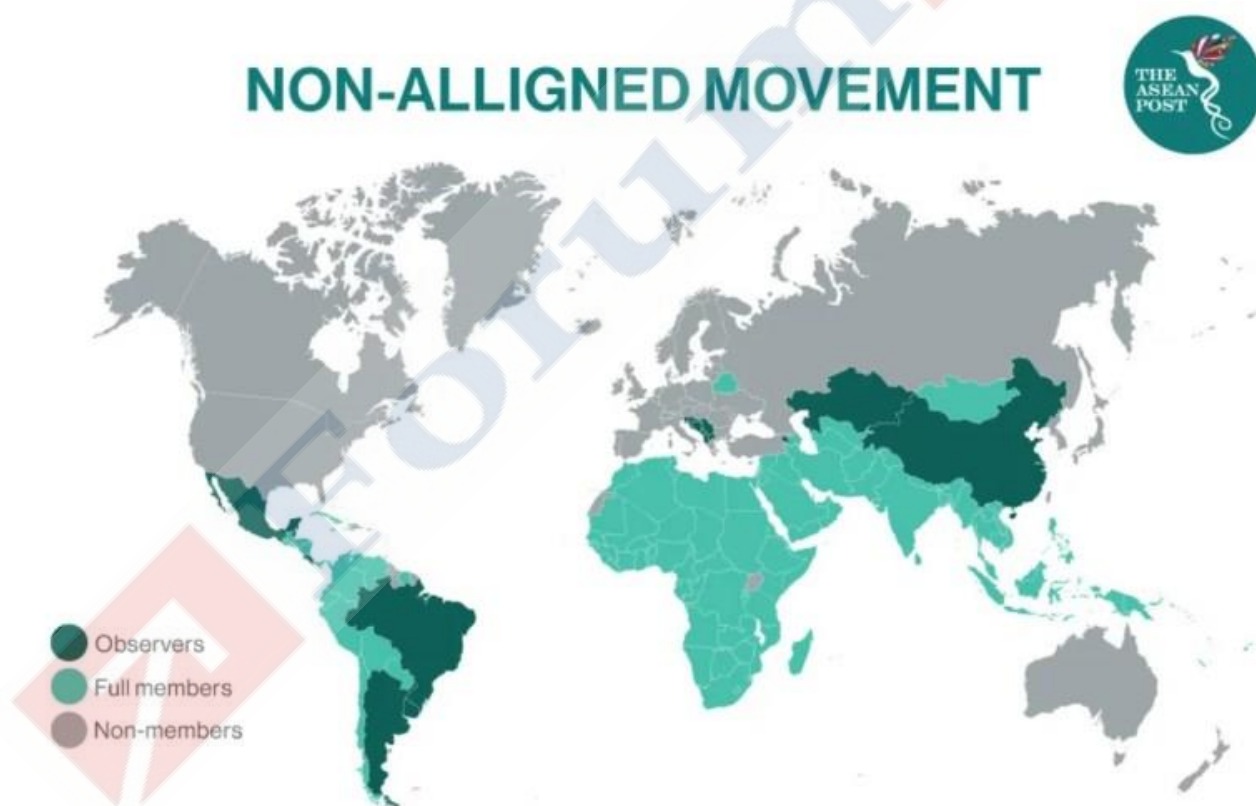
Non-Aligned Movement – Challenges & Relevance – Explained Pointwise

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) is a significant international forum of 121 countries. It represents a collective effort by developing nations, primarily from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, to assert their independence in global politics.

2025 marks the 70th anniversary of 1st Asia-Africa Summit, popularly called as Bandung Conference, which laid the foundation of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). The Asia-Africa Summit gave birth to a new paradigm of South-South Cooperation. It demonstrated the need for the Global South to work together to champion its collective aspirations on the world stage. However, due to shifting global landscape, divergent national interests, rise of alternative platforms, lack of leadership & inaction – questions have been raised about whether NAM is still relevant today or not.

Introduction:

- NAM was started during the cold war as an organization of States which got recently liberated & that didn't seek to formally align themselves with either USA (representing capitalist bloc) or USSR (representing socialist bloc) or their ideologies, but sought to remain independent or neutral.
- However, it doesn't mean that the countries committing to NAM will not take any advantages from either the USA or USSR but means that they will not have any ideological commitments.
- The movement originated in 1955 during **ASIA-AFRICA CONFERENCE** in Bandung – where 29 newly independent Asian & African countries met – which led to the development of a Global South.
- The Organization came into existence in 1961 with **BELGRADE CONFERENCE** under the leadership of India, Yugoslavia, Egypt, Ghana & Indonesia.



Core Philosophy: Policy of non-alignment was based on 5 principles called **PANCHSHEEL**:

1. Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity & sovereignty.
2. Non-interference in each other's military & internal affairs.
3. Mutual non-aggression

4. Equality & mutual benefit
5. Peaceful coexistence & economic cooperation

Objectives of NAM:

1. **Multilateralism:** Advocating for the democratization of global institutions, particularly reforming the United Nations Security Council to give developing nations a stronger voice.
2. **South-South Cooperation:** Promoting technical, economic, and cultural cooperation among member states.
3. **Sovereignty and Non-Interference:** Strongly opposing unilateral sanctions, external intervention, and any form of economic coercion by powerful states.
4. **Global Challenges:** Addressing issues like climate change, poverty eradication, and countering terrorism.
5. It acts as a collective voice for developing nations on the global stage, advocating for economic cooperation, disarmament, and fair international relations.
6. The movement was instrumental historically in supporting national liberation movements and resisting pressures to join military alliances during the Cold War.

Membership criteria:

1. The Country should have adopted an independent policy based on the coexistence of States with different political and social systems and on nonalignment, or it should have shown a tendency to favor such a policy.
2. The Country in question should support national independence movements in a consistent manner.
3. The Country should not be a member of a multilateral military alliance concluded in the context of great power conflicts.
4. If the Country has a bilateral military agreement with a great power or it is a member of a regional defense pact, the agreement or pact should have not been concluded deliberately in the context of great power conflicts.
5. If the Country has granted military bases to a foreign power, the concession should not have been made in the context of great power conflicts.

Achievement of NAM:

1. **The Voice for Independence:** NAM served as the most powerful diplomatic and moral platform for nations seeking self-determination. By bringing together over 100 member states, it isolated colonial powers like Britain, France, and Portugal, creating overwhelming international pressure at the United Nations.
2. **Support for Liberation Movements:** NAM actively supported national liberation movements across Africa and Asia, notably advocating for the end of apartheid in South Africa and the establishment of an independent Palestine. The movement was instrumental in getting UN resolutions passed against racial discrimination and colonial rule.
3. **De-escalation of Conflict:** By refusing to join either the US-led or the USSR-led military blocs, NAM reduced the geographical scope of the Cold War. The movement ensured that regional conflicts in Asia and Africa did not automatically escalate into direct superpower confrontations.
4. **Nuclear Disarmament Advocacy:** NAM consistently and vocally pushed the superpowers toward disarmament, demanding that resources be shifted from military expenditure to development aid.

5. **The NIEO Demand:** NAM was the driving force behind the demand for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) in the 1970s. This initiative sought to reform the existing global economic institutions (like the World Bank and IMF) to make them more equitable.

Challenges faced by NAM:

1. **Losing relevance:** NAM is based on the philosophy of non-alignment which is rooted in the legacy of colonialism & ideology of cold war. With the end of the cold war & changing world order- NAM seems to be losing its relevance.
2. **Internal Cohesion and Divergent Agendas:**
 - NAM's membership is large and diverse, encompassing countries with vastly different political systems, economic interests, and foreign policy priorities. This diversity leads to difficulties in achieving unity and taking decisive action on global issues.
 - While agreement on broad principles is common, consensus on specific international issues is rare, often resulting in only general statements rather than concrete resolutions or collective action.
3. **Fragmentation and Leadership Vacuum:**
 - The breakup of key founding states (e.g., Yugoslavia) and the lack of strong, natural leaders today have weakened NAM's influence. Some major members have shifted their focus to other alliances or regional groupings.
 - The movement lacks charismatic or widely accepted leaders who can steer its agenda in the current multipolar world.
4. **Perceived Lack of Impact and Action:**
 - NAM is often seen as reactive rather than proactive, preferring criticism or support over hardline resolutions or interventions. Its impact on pressing global issues, such as conflicts, nuclear disarmament, and economic reform, is perceived as limited.
 - The movement's calls for nuclear disarmament and equitable international economic structures have not yielded substantial results, leading to questions about its effectiveness.
5. **Emergence of alternative platforms:** Alternative platforms like BRICS, SCO, G20 etc have emerged with overlapping agendas- reducing the need & scope for NAM.

Contemporary relevance of NAM:

1. **NAM Principles:**
 - The core principles that catalyzed the coming together of leaders of developing world in 1955, i.e. Panchsheel, are equally relevant even today.
 - These principles are required to uphold & defend the rules-based global multilateral system which is under siege today & UN in its present form – has become highly inadequate to address the global challenges.
2. **Representation and Voice for the Global South:** NAM is the second largest grouping of states after the United Nations, comprising 120 member countries and representing nearly two-thirds of UN members and over half of the world's population. It continues to serve as a collective voice for developing nations, advocating for their interests in global forums, especially at the United Nations.
3. **Advocacy Against Neo-Colonialism and Western Hegemony:** In the post-Cold War era, NAM has repositioned itself to confront what it perceives as Western dominance and neo-colonialism, focusing on the marginalization and exploitation of poorer nations in a unipolar world. The movement opposes foreign occupation, interference in internal affairs, and aggressive unilateral measures by powerful states.

4. **Focus on Socio-Economic Challenges:** NAM has shifted its agenda toward addressing economic underdevelopment, poverty, and social injustices, which it identifies as major threats to peace and security for its members. It plays a role in promoting economic cooperation, equitable development, and the reduction of global inequalities, particularly those exacerbated by globalization and neo-liberal policies.
5. **Promotion of Multilateralism and Peace:** The movement remains committed to principles of peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, non-interference, and disarmament. NAM actively supports multilateral approaches to global challenges, including nuclear disarmament, regional security, and the strengthening of international law.
6. **Platform for Unity and Coordination:** NAM provides a forum for developing countries to coordinate their positions on major international issues, enhancing their bargaining power in negotiations with developed nations. It is especially active within the UN system, where NAM countries often debate and advance common positions on issues like development, climate change, and reform of international institutions.

Way Forward:

1. **Permanent Secretariat:** Establishing a central secretariat or headquarters is crucial to ensure continuous coordination, documentation, and implementation of decisions made during NAM summits.
2. **Periodic Review Mechanism:** Introducing mechanisms for regular evaluation of goals and outcomes would enhance organizational accountability and coherence.
3. **Reinterpret Non-Alignment:** NAM should redefine non-alignment as “strategic autonomy” rather than neutrality, focusing on independence in decision-making and balanced relations among major powers.
4. **Partnership Building:** Collaborations with regional blocs such as ASEAN, the African Union, and the G77 can help NAM expand its policy influence beyond traditional alliances.
5. **Symbolic & Structural Renewal:** Proposals have been made to rename or rebrand NAM (for instance, as the “Southern Solidarity Organisation”), revitalizing its identity for modern diplomacy.

Conclusion: The Global South has to be at the forefront of shaping the evolving multipolar world to ensure it is focused on a fair, just, inclusive & equitable global community. In this scenario, NAM remains relevant in the present world as a vital platform for the Global South, championing multilateralism, socio-economic justice, and resistance to global power imbalances.

Read More: [Indian Express](#)

UPSC Syllabus GS2: Important international institutions, agencies & fora.

Global Financial Institutions – Significance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise

Global Financial Institutions are pivotal in shaping the global economic landscape. They play a crucial role in fostering global economic stability, facilitating trade, and promoting development in the present increasingly interconnected world. This article aims to study in detail International Economic Organizations, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank Group, and others such as the New Development Bank (NDB), etc.

Introduction:

- Global financial institutions (GFIs) are organizations established by international treaties to provide financial assistance, stability, and cooperation among member nations.
- They form the backbone of the international financial system, playing critical roles in development, crisis management, and promoting free trade.
- The institutions can be broadly categorized into those focused on **Global Stabilization and Regulation** and those focused on **Development Banking**.

Major global financial institutions:

International Monetary Fund (IMF)	● Established: 1944 (Bretton Woods Conference) ● Objective: To ensure the stability of the international monetary system through exchange rate surveillance, lending to countries in crises, and capacity development. ● Key Functions: ○ Provides short- and medium-term loans to member countries facing balance of payment difficulties. ○ Monitors global economic trends and provides policy advice. ○ Facilitates international trade by maintaining exchange rate stability.
World Bank Group	● Established: 1944 alongside IMF. ● Objective: Long-term poverty reduction and economic development by financing infrastructure, education, and governance programs. ● Components: 1. International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) 2. International Development Association (IDA) 3. International Finance Corporation (IFC) 4. Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) 5. International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID)

	 Fig. 4.1 The World Bank Group • Key Role: Provides long-term development loans, grants, and technical assistance to developing countries
World Trade Organization (WTO)	• Established: 1995 (replacing GATT). • Objective: To promote free and fair international trade through the reduction of tariffs and removal of trade barriers. • Functions: ○ Serves as a forum for trade negotiations. ○ Resolves trade disputes among member nations. ○ Oversees implementation of global trade agreements.
Regional Development Banks	• Asian Development Bank (ADB): Promotes economic growth and regional cooperation in Asia-Pacific. • African Development Bank (AfDB): Finances sustainable economic projects in Africa. • Inter-American Development Bank (IDB): Focuses on Latin America and the Caribbean. • European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD): Supports transition economies toward market-based policies.
New Development Bank (NDB)	• Role: Established by the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) as an alternative MDB. • Significance: Focuses on funding infrastructure and sustainable development projects within BRICS countries and other emerging

	economies, aiming to reduce dependence on Western-dominated institutions.
Bank for International Settlements (BIS)	- Established: 1930. Role: Known as the “bank for central banks.” The BIS is the world’s oldest GFI, serving as a forum for monetary cooperation and a central bank for central banks. Objective: Acts as a bank for central banks, fostering monetary and financial cooperation. Significance: It is crucial for financial stability as its standards ensure that banks worldwide maintain enough capital to withstand financial shocks.

Significance of global financial institutions:

- Global Economic Stability:** GFIs maintain stability in the world economy by:
 - Providing emergency financial assistance:** The IMF supports countries facing balance of payments crises, currency collapses, or inflationary shocks, as seen during the global financial crisis and COVID-19 pandemic.
 - Ensuring exchange rate stability:** Through surveillance and consultation, the IMF promotes stable exchange systems and coordinated monetary policies across nations.
- Development Finance and Poverty Reduction:** Institutions such as the World Bank Group, Asian Development Bank (ADB), and African Development Bank (AfDB) provide long-term financial and technical assistance for poverty alleviation and infrastructure development.
- Promotion of International Trade and Investment:** Global financial institutions foster an enabling environment for trade by:
 - Financing trade-related infrastructure and facilitating foreign direct investment (FDI) through entities like the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA).
 - Supporting open and transparent market systems through policy advice and reform frameworks.
- Crisis Management and Reconstruction:** The IMF and World Bank spearheaded financial recovery mechanisms after major crises, such as the Asian financial crisis (1997) and Global financial crisis (2008–09), by providing liquidity, policy guidance, and reform programs.
- Support for Sustainable and Inclusive Growth:** GFIs fund renewable and climate-resilient projects, supporting the global transition toward low-carbon economies. They promote financial inclusion, ensuring access to credit for small enterprises and vulnerable populations.

Challenges associated with global financial initiatives:

- Resource and Funding Constraints:**
 - Many global financial institutions struggle with inadequate capital resources compared to the growing demand for development finance worldwide.
 - The financing gap for sustainable development and climate resilience is estimated in trillions of dollars annually, far exceeding the capacity of current international financial systems.

- This limitation reduces their ability to respond effectively to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic or natural disasters.
- 2. Debt Sustainability Issues:**
 - Several developing countries face unsustainable debt burdens, making it difficult to participate in global financial initiatives.
 - Institutions like the IMF and World Bank are often criticized for offering loans instead of grants, leading to debt cycles in vulnerable economies.
- 3. Conditionality and Sovereignty Concerns:**
 - Lending programs by the IMF and World Bank often come with policy conditionalities, such as structural adjustment reforms demanding fiscal austerity or privatization.
 - These conditionalities sometimes undermine national sovereignty and local policy flexibility, particularly in low-income countries.
- 4. Inequality and Unequal Representation:**
 - Decision-making within institutions like the IMF remains skewed toward developed nations, especially the US and European countries, which hold disproportionate voting power.
 - Developing nations often lack a strong voice in framing global financial governance and reform agendas.
- 5. Geopolitical Tensions and Fragmentation:**
 - Rising geopolitical competition between major powers (like the US, China, and Russia) has fragmented consensus on global economic coordination.
 - Sanctions, trade wars, and foreign policy rivalries disrupt cooperation in financial and trade frameworks.
- 6. Climate Change and Sustainability Challenges:**
 - Current financial frameworks inadequately address environmental sustainability.
 - Global financial institutions need to balance profit motives with financing green transitions under the Paris Agreement.

Way forward:

- 1. Democratizing Institutional Governance:**
 - **Greater Voice for Developing Countries:** Reform quota and voting systems at the IMF and World Bank to reflect the growing economic and demographic weight of the Global South. This includes introducing population and vulnerability criteria in quota formulas and expanding board representation.
 - **Double-Majority Decision-Making:** Introduce systems requiring both a majority of voting shares and a majority of member states to ensure fairer outcomes.
 - **Gender and Geographic Balance:** Promote inclusive leadership with equitable regional and gender representation at decision-making levels.
- 2. Debt Reform and Financial Resilience:**
 - **Comprehensive Debt Resolution Mechanism:** Establish a permanent, fair, and transparent sovereign debt restructuring framework involving multilateral, bilateral, and private creditors, especially for debt-distressed nations.
 - **Debt Cancellation and Relief:** Provide targeted debt cancellation or restructuring for low-income and climate-vulnerable states to avoid recurrent crises.
- 3. Enhancing Development Finance:**

- **Rebalancing Priorities of the World Bank:** Redirect focus to affordable energy, poverty reduction, and infrastructure development, particularly in least-developed and small island countries.
- **Expand Concessional and Green Finance:** Increase concessional lending and establish green financing windows through institutions like IDA and the Loss and Damage Fund to address climate adaptation needs.
- **Encourage Regional Collaboration:** Strengthen coordination among multilateral development banks (MDBs) and regional financial institutions to avoid duplication and ensure efficient resource utilization.

4. Promoting Transparency, Accountability, and Anti-corruption:

- Implement rigorous anti-corruption safeguards and governance standards in all financial assistance programs to build trust and ensure efficient use of public funds.
- Increase transparency in policy conditionalities to ensure that reforms support national ownership rather than impose external models.

5. Integrating Climate and Sustainability Goals:

- **Climate-linked Financing:** Institutionalize debt-for-climate swaps and integrate sustainability metrics into lending frameworks.
- **Green Transitions:** Lead global financing for renewable energy, resilient infrastructure, and sustainable agriculture, aligning objectives with the Paris Agreement.

Conclusion: Global financial institutions serve as the pillars of international economic order, providing monetary stability, developmental finance, and crisis recovery mechanisms. However, they need to focus on equal representation, sustainable financing, and transparent governance to make global financing democratic, resilient & inclusive.

UPSC GS-2: International Relations

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Protectionism – Significance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise

The rise of economic nationalism and geopolitical tensions has led to a recent resurgence of protectionist sentiment globally, often referred to as **de-globalization** or **slowbalisation**.

Introduction:

Protectionism refers to a set of government policies and measures designed to restrict international trade to help domestic industries and workers against foreign competition. It is the opposite of free trade, where goods and services can flow across borders without artificial barriers.

Key Tools & Methods of Protectionism:

Tariffs (Customs Duties)	● Definition: A tax or duty placed on imported goods or services. ● Mechanism: This is the most common and visible form of protectionism. A tariff directly increases the price of the imported product, making the domestic equivalent more competitive. Tariffs also generate revenue for the government.
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	Example: Imposing a 25% tariff on imported steel makes domestically produced steel cheaper for manufacturers.
Quotas (Import Restrictions)	- Definition: A limit placed on the quantity or monetary value of a specific good that can be imported over a defined period. - Mechanism: Unlike tariffs, quotas restrict supply regardless of price. By artificially limiting the volume of imports, quotas ensure that domestic producers retain a specific share of the local market. - Example: Allowing only 5,00,000 foreign cars to be imported annually.
Subsidies	- Definition: Direct or indirect financial assistance provided by the government to domestic producers. - Mechanism: Subsidies lower the production costs for domestic companies, allowing them to sell their goods at a lower price and compete more effectively against cheaper imports, often without directly taxing the foreign goods. - Example: Giving tax breaks or cash grants to local farmers or renewable energy companies.
Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs)	- Strict Quality Standards: Imposing overly strict or complex health, safety, or environmental standards that foreign companies find difficult or expensive to meet. - Complex Customs Procedures: Using bureaucratic red tape and lengthy inspection processes to delay the entry of foreign goods. - Local Content Requirements: Mandating that a certain percentage of a product's components must be sourced domestically.

Protectionism in Present Context:

- US Tariffs and "America First" Policies:** Trump administration has increased tariffs to 125% on Chinese goods, 25% on Indian imports (for importing Russian oil), 25% on Canadian imports in 2025, emphasizing economic security, reshoring, and leveraging trade barriers as geopolitical tools.
- EU Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM):** EU levies carbon-based tariffs on imports of carbon-intensive goods (e.g., steel, aluminum, cement, fertilizers) from countries with weaker climate regulations. This is designed to protect EU industries and incentivize global climate action but effectively acts as a new non-tariff barrier.
- In 2024, India raised import duties on edible oils from 5.5% to 27.5% to protect domestic farmers, and has also imposed higher tariffs on electronic goods and select machinery to promote "Aatmanirbhar Bharat".

Arguments in favour of Protectionism:

1. **Protecting Infant or Emerging industries:** New industries may struggle to compete against established foreign producers. Temporary protection (tariffs, quotas or subsidies) gives them time to mature, develop technologies, achieve economies of scale, and become globally competitive.
2. **Safeguarding Jobs & Wages:** By limiting imports that threaten domestic industries, protectionism can help preserve jobs, reduce unemployment, and stabilize sectors sensitive to foreign competition (e.g., manufacturing, agriculture).
3. **Maintaining National Security:** Certain industries (e.g., defense, telecom, pharmaceuticals, food) are vital for national security. Protectionist measures ensure reliable domestic supply chains and reduce dependence on potentially hostile nations.
4. **Correcting Trade Imbalances:** Imposing tariffs or quotas on imports can help reduce persistent trade deficits, bolster the balance of payments, and support currency stability—especially for countries suffering from massive import bills.
5. **Preventing Dumping & Unfair Competition:** Anti-dumping duties and other protectionist tools are used to stop foreign firms from selling below-cost to gain market share, which damages domestic producers and may create monopolies once local competitors are eliminated.
6. **Preserving Cultural & Social Values:** Limits on foreign goods and investments can protect traditional industries, cultural heritage, and national identity from being overwhelmed by global brands and standards.

Arguments against Protectionism:

1. **Higher Prices for Consumers (Taxes on Consumers):** Tariffs, quotas, and other barriers raise the cost of imported goods, leading to higher prices for consumers. This reduces consumer purchasing power and overall welfare.
2. **Reduced Consumer Choice:** Protectionism limits the range and quality of goods available in the market. Consumers have fewer options, particularly for innovative or specialized products that may only be available from foreign producers.
3. **Inefficiency & Lack of Innovation:** Protecting industries from competition discourages them from innovating, adopting new technologies, or improving productivity. Inefficient “zombie” companies can survive, consuming resources better used elsewhere.
4. **Retaliation & Trade Wars:** The most destructive consequence of protectionism is the risk of triggering retaliatory actions, leading to damaging trade wars. This retaliation severely harms the domestic industries that are successful exporters.
5. **Global Supply Chain Disruption:** Modern economies are highly interdependent through global supply chains. Protectionist policies break these connections, causing delays, shortages, and increased production costs.
6. **Erosion of Multilateralism and Rule-Based Order:** Protectionism fundamentally challenges the WTO's core purpose—reducing barriers and ensuring predictable, multilateral rules for trade.

Major Impacts of Rising Protectionism on India:

1. **Reduced Export Competitiveness & Market Access:**
 - **US and EU Tariffs:** Additional tariffs (e.g., US tariffs up to 50% on Indian goods, EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism on steel, aluminium) have sharply raised costs for Indian exporters, making products less competitive abroad.
 - **Decline in Exports:** India's exports, especially in textiles, steel, chemicals, and engineering, have contracted. Merchandise exports in 2023 dropped by 5% over 2022, with non-gems-and-jewelry exports hit especially hard.

- **MSME Impact:** Small businesses, which rely heavily on export markets, have faced order declines, compliance costs, and job losses due to new import restrictions and subsidies favoring local companies in destination markets.
- 2. **Supply Chain Disruptions:** Protectionist measures, especially around semiconductors and EVs, have disrupted supply chains. India imports key components from China, and global trade tensions slow or raise the cost of these imports, threatening “Make in India” and the \$10 billion semiconductor mission.
- 3. **Impact on IT Sector & Services Exports:**
 - **Visa and Digital Restrictions:** Stricter immigration (H-1B) policies, onshoring requirements, and data localization by developed nations threaten India’s IT and professional services sector, which is a primary foreign exchange earner.
 - **Regulatory Barriers:** New rules (data protection, digital sovereignty) in US/Europe increase compliance costs and erode competitiveness for Indian IT firms.
- 4. **Stalled Negotiations:** Persistent protectionist disputes have complicated progress in India’s trade talks with the US and EU, slowing down access to new markets and affecting strategic alliances.
- 5. **Strategic Fallout:** High-profile trade rows have affected India’s ability to sustain balanced relations with both the US/EU and Russia/China, impacting diplomacy and investor confidence.

Conclusion: Indian policies should focus on strengthening bilateral trade agreements, diversifying export markets, and championing reforms in multilateral institutions. India’s geoeconomic success will depend on its ability to balance collaboration with strategic autonomy in a rapidly changing global landscape.

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Hard Power & Soft Power – Significance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise

Hard power and soft power are two contrasting forms of influence used by countries in international relations to achieve their objectives.

Introduction:

- Hard Power and Soft Power are foundational concepts in international relations, used to describe the different ways nations exert influence over others to achieve their foreign policy objectives. They were popularized by political scientist **Joseph Nye** in the late 1980s.
- Soft power and hard power are public diplomacy tools that communicate the nation’s competitive identity and advantage to the world.

Hard Power:

- Hard power is the use of coercive means—primarily military force, economic sanctions, or direct threats—to influence or control the behavior of other countries.
- Hard power is linked with the possession of certain tangible resources, including population, territory, natural resources, economic and military strength, among others.
- Hard power is time-effective and generating hard power requires much less time as its resources are tangible.
- **Key Tools of Hard Power:**

1. **Military Force (The Stick):** The threat or actual use of violence, intervention, or overwhelming military capability e.g. Deploying troops to a border; imposing a naval blockade; invasion.
 2. **Economic Sanctions (The Stick):** Restricting trade, freezing assets, or imposing financial penalties to cause economic pain e.g. Cutting off access to global financial systems (SWIFT); tariffs; banning exports of critical technology.
 3. **Economic Aid (The Carrot):** Offering large monetary incentives, loans, or favorable trade deals conditional on a country adopting certain policies e.g. Offering a developing nation billions in aid in exchange for military basing rights.
- **Examples:**
 1. The US returned to military action in Iraq and direct intervention in Syria.
 2. Russia's annexation of Crimea and destabilization of eastern Ukraine.
 3. China's assertion of its territorial claims in East and South China.
 - **Importance of Hard Power:**
 1. **Immediate Results:** Hard power can bring about swift, decisive outcomes, such as rapid defeat of enemy forces, territorial gains, or enforcement of international law e.g. 1991 Gulf War.
 2. **Deterrence:** The visible strength of a nation's armed forces or economy can prevent aggression or hostile actions by adversaries, protecting sovereignty and allies through deterrent capability.
 3. **Crisis Response:** Hard power enables a nation to respond to immediate threats or crises—such as terrorism, invasions, or nuclear proliferation—when negotiation or persuasion fails.
 4. **Enforces International Norms:** Military action or sanctions can be used against violators of international law (e.g., peacekeeping, anti-terrorism operations), helping maintain global order.
 5. **Strengthens Bargaining Position:** The credible threat of force or economic pressure can enhance a country's leverage in negotiations, compelling concessions from other actors.
 - **Limitations of Hard Power:**
 1. **Breeds Resentment:** Use of force or sanctions often creates deep-seated resentment and backlash, fueling nationalism or radicalism and sometimes prolonging conflicts e.g. anti-American sentiment after the Iraq War.
 2. **Damages Relationships:** Frequent reliance on coercion can strain alliances, isolate states diplomatically, and encourage counter-alliances among rivals.
 3. **High Economic and Human Costs:** Military interventions or large-scale sanctions are expensive, can lead to casualties, infrastructure destruction, humanitarian crises, and years of economic burden.
 4. **Limited Effectiveness for Complex Problems:** Hard power alone cannot solve transnational or long-term challenges (e.g. terrorism, climate change, global pandemics) which require cooperation and shared solutions.
 5. **Legal and Ethical Issues:** Military and economic coercion can violate international law, cause civilian harm, or contravene human rights, damaging legitimacy and leading to global condemnation.

Soft Power:

- Soft power is the ability to shape the preferences and actions of others through attraction and persuasion, rather than coercion. It works through cultural appeal, diplomatic engagement, ideals, and positive international reputation.
- Soft power is persuasive power deriving from attraction and emulation and grounded on intangible resources like tourism, culture, and heritage.
- It is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion, as used in hard power.
- The importance and relevance of soft power is growing as more of humanity becomes connected. This dramatically enhanced presence everywhere on the globe has the potential to generate a surge of global opinion.
- Soft power is useful in complex situations and helps a nation to achieve difficult outcomes. India received a nuclear waiver in 2008 despite not being a member of NSG because of its history of non-alignment and strong political ideals.
- **Key Tools of Soft Power:**
 1. **Culture and Arts:** The global appeal and dissemination of a country's popular culture, intellectual property, and values e.g. The global appeal of Hollywood, K-Pop, Bollywood, American universities, or international restaurant chains.
 2. **Political Values:** The attraction of a nation's political ideals, such as democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and civil liberties e.g. A country becoming a model for democratic transitions in its region.
 3. **Foreign Policy:** The moral authority and perceived legitimacy of a nation's actions on the world stage e.g. Providing humanitarian aid during a disaster; spearheading global health initiatives; mediating peace talks.
 4. **Public Diplomacy:** Directly communicating with foreign publics through exchanges, broadcasting, and social media e.g. Educational exchange programs like the Fulbright scholarship; state-funded news agencies.
- **Examples of Soft Power:**
 1. **Incredible India Campaign:** It is an international tourism campaign initiated by the government to promote India as a popular tourist destination using India's heritage like images of the Himalayas, the TajMahal, yoga and multiplicity of colorful religious and cultural traditions etc.
 2. **International Day of Yoga:** Prime Minister Modi's effort to have the United Nations declare the International Day of Yoga on June 21 each year is a major step in the right direction.
- **Importance of Soft Power:**
 1. **Long-term Influence:** Soft power builds relationships and global influence that endure beyond immediate crises. It creates networks of friendship, trust, and cooperation that are less likely to be undermined by shifts in government or policy.
 2. **Reduces Backlash:** Relying on attraction and co-option, rather than coercion, soft power can avoid resistance and resentment, making international partnerships more resilient and sustainable.
 3. **Builds Moral Leadership and Legitimacy:** By projecting values like democracy, human rights, scientific achievement, or cultural richness, states can inspire voluntary alignment and standard-setting e.g. US influence in the postwar period; India's use of yoga and Gandhi as global icons.

4. **Enables Multilateral Cooperation:** Soft power facilitates multilateralism, coalition-building, international aid, and climate or peace initiatives by creating positive-sum dynamics, rather than zero-sum rivalries.
 5. **Supports Economic and Security Interests:** A positive international image and relationships built on attraction can indirectly support a nation's economic and security interests by opening markets, ensuring stable alliances, and shaping agendas e.g. Japan's global reputation for quality and reliability; EU's standards-setting power.
- **Limitations of Soft Power:**
 1. **Limited Direct Leverage:** Soft power alone is often insufficient in emergencies or conflicts where hard security, coercion, or immediate compliance are required e.g. deterrence of aggression.
 2. **Vulnerability to Credibility Crises:** Perceived hypocrisy—such as promoting democracy while violating it domestically or abroad—can erode soft power quickly. Reputational damage is hard to repair.
 3. **Cultural or Value Misalignments:** Cultural exports or values that seem attractive in one society may be irrelevant, misunderstood, or seen as imperialistic in another, limiting the universality of soft power.
 4. **Slow Impact:** Soft power operates gradually, often over years or decades, whereas global challenges (wars, pandemics, terror) may demand immediate response.
 5. **Difficult to Measure and Control:** The effects of soft power are indirect, intangible, and often hard to predict or quantify. Shaping foreign perceptions requires consistent effort and favorable global context.

Features	Hard Power	Soft Power
Methods	Coercion, Command, and Payment	Attraction, Persuasion, and Co-option
Basis	Military strength and Economic Size	Culture, Values, and Foreign Policy Legitimacy
Tools	Sanctions, Military Aid, Tariffs, Force	Diplomacy, Educational Exchanges, Cultural Exports, Aid
Timeframe	Short-term, Immediate Results	Long-term, Sustainable Influence
Risk	High risk of resentment, backlash, and costly retaliation.	Low risk; builds mutual understanding and legitimacy.

Ideal Use	Crisis, conflict, national security	Long-term influence, global leadership
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The Rise of Smart Power:

In modern international relations, few nations rely exclusively on one form of power. Instead, the concept of Smart Power has emerged.

- Smart power is defined as the capacity of an actor to combine elements of hard power and soft power in ways that are mutually reinforcing such that the actor's purposes are advanced effectively and efficiently.
- Smart power draws from both hard and soft power resources. It is an approach that underscores the necessity of a strong military, but also invests heavily in alliances, partnerships, and institutions.

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Nuclear Disarmament & India's Stance – Explained Pointwise

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) has released its yearbook. The Report has highlighted some worrying trends in international security in the past year. The expected rise of the global nuclear arsenal was the chief cause of concern among SIPRI experts.

The data, primarily compiled in the *SIPRI Yearbook 2025*, highlights a significant and dangerous shift: **the post-Cold War trend of nuclear disarmament has stopped, replaced by a new era of modernization and transparency collapse**. Considering this scenario, it is imperative countries come forward and take prudent steps in order to move towards Nuclear Disarmament.

About Nuclear Weapons:

- A nuclear weapon is a device designed to release energy in an explosive manner as a result of nuclear fission, nuclear fusion, or a combination of the two processes.
- Fission weapons are commonly referred to as atomic bombs. Fusion weapons are also referred to as thermonuclear bombs or, more commonly, hydrogen bombs. Nuclear weapons produce enormous explosive energy. For example, the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, Japan, in 1945, contained only about 64 kg (140 pounds) of highly enriched uranium. However, it released energy equaling about 15 kilotons (1000 tons) of chemical explosive.

What are the key findings of the SIPRI Report 2025?

- The total estimated global nuclear warheads as of January 2025 stands at 12,241, with 9,614 warheads in military stockpiles and 3,912 deployed.
- India's arsenal has grown from 172 (2024) to 180 warheads, which now surpasses Pakistan's 170. China's stockpile expanded fastest, reaching 600 warheads, with around 24 deployed.
- All nine nuclear-armed states—US, Russia, France, UK, China, India, Pakistan, Israel, North Korea—continued modernization and expansion of their nuclear delivery systems and warheads in 2024.
- The report highlights a "crisis" in global arms control regimes: New START—the last major US-Russia nuclear treaty—remains in force only until 2026, with no sign of renewal.

- SIPRI warns of increased instability due to rapid advances in AI, cyber capabilities, space assets, missile defense, and quantum technologies. These technologies create new domains of arms races and complicate traditional arms control mechanisms.



Note: The boundaries used in this map do not imply any endorsement or acceptance by SIPRI.

Source: SIPRI

Why do countries value Nuclear Weapons?

1. **Symbol of modernization:** Adding nuclear weapons to the arsenal shows that the military is getting prepared for future emergencies and attaining modern capabilities. Countries are focusing on development of newer and more efficient nuclear submarines, aircraft carriers, fighter jets, manned and unmanned aerial vehicles etc.
2. **Deterrence Effect:** Nuclear weapons create a deterrence effect even on strong military powers. For instance, many experts are saying that Russia wouldn't have invaded Ukraine if the latter hadn't given up nuclear weapons in early 1990s.
3. **Regional Superiority:** Any country which desires to establish a steady control over its region wishes to obtain/retain control of nuclear weapons. For instance, the U.S exercises substantial control over the American continent due to its huge arsenal of nuclear weapons.
4. **Permanent Membership of UNSC:** Permanent members enjoy veto over the decisions of the UN and in a way controls the world affairs. All of them possess a huge arsenal of nuclear weapons which was a crucial factor kept in mind while offering them a permanent seat in UNSC.

What is the need for Nuclear Disarmament?

1. **Huge Magnitude of Destruction:** The Nuclear Explosion at Hiroshima released energy equaling about 15 kilotons of chemical explosive. The blast immediately produced a **strong shock wave, enormous amounts of heat, and lethal ionizing radiation**. The enormous toll in destruction, death, injury, and

sickness produced by the explosions at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was on a scale never before produced by any single weapon.

2. **Against the Rules of War:** Nuclear Weapons can't strictly obey the rule of differentiating between combatants and civilians. Even if it is used over the military, then also radiation can impact nearby civilian populations.
3. **Sovereign Equality:** The destruction of nuclear weapons is imperative to truly realize the principle of sovereign equality of nations. Otherwise the world would remain divided between nuclear haves and have nots.
4. **Fake Triggers:** As per recent reports, the U.S and Russia have a sufficient nuclear arsenal to completely destroy the earth. In such a scenario, any fake trigger using misinformation or fake news can destroy the very existence of human beings from earth.
5. **Non state Actors:** The growing recruitment of educated youth in terrorist organizations raises a fear that they may attain nuclear prowess in future. This situation can be disastrous and bring a state of anarchy as terrorists have no regard to international law.

What steps have been taken to prevent Nuclear Proliferation?

1. Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), 1968:

- It was put forward by the USA, UK and USSR. It was signed in 1968 and came into force in 1970.
- The treaty has 3 pillars:
 - a. **Non-proliferation:** Nuclear Weapon States (NWS) pledge not to transfer nuclear weapons and technology and Non-nuclear Weapon States pledge not to acquire nuclear weapons.
 - b. **Disarmament:** All parties to pursue good-faith negotiations on effective measures to control nuclear arms race, and to general and complete disarmament.
 - c. **Peaceful Use of Nuclear Energy:** The Treaty recognizes the right of all Parties to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.
- India considers the treaty discriminatory as it creates a club of 'nuclear haves' and a larger group of 'nuclear have-nots' by restricting the legal possession of nuclear weapons to those states that tested them before 1967. India hasn't signed the treaty. Pakistan, Israel and South Sudan are other non-signatory countries.

2. Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, 2017: It prohibits and makes it illegal to possess, use, produce, transfer, acquire, stockpile or deploy nuclear weapons. States are also prohibited from using or threatening to use nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices. It came into force in 2021.

3. Export Control Groupings: Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and the Missile Technology Control Regimes (MTCR) are some of the nuclear export control groupings. These ensure that nuclear fuel export doesn't result in nuclear weapons development.

4. Conference on Disarmament (CD):

- It is a multilateral disarmament forum established by the international community to negotiate arms control and disarmament agreements based at Geneva.
- The Conference was first established in 1979 as the Committee on Disarmament.
- It was renamed as the Conference on Disarmament in 1984.
- The Conference succeeded three other disarmament-related bodies:
 - a. Ten-Nation Committee on Disarmament (1960)
 - b. Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament (1962–68)

C. Conference of the Committee on Disarmament (1969–78)

What is India's Nuclear Doctrine?

1. Building and maintaining a credible minimum deterrence.
2. A 'No First Use' policy i.e. nuclear weapons to be used only in case of any nuclear attack on Indian territory or on Indian forces anywhere.
3. Non use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states.
4. Nuclear retaliatory attacks to be authorised only by civilian political leadership through the Nuclear Command Authority.
5. Nuclear retaliation to a first strike will be massive and designed to inflict unacceptable damage.
6. India may retaliate with nuclear weapons to retaliate against attacks with biological or chemical weapons.
7. Strict controls on export of nuclear and missile related materials and technologies.
8. A commitment to the goal of a nuclear weapon free world.

What is India's Stance on Nuclear Disarmament?

- India is fully committed to complete Nuclear Disarmament. India supports complete disarmament within a specified timeframe which distinguishes its stance from Nuclear Weapon States (NWS) which have an ambiguous stand regarding timeline for disarmament.
- India also insists that disarmament must be 'non-discriminatory' and pursued 'on the basis of equality' i.e., there must be no discriminatory provisions in favor of NWS as is the case with the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The NPT calls for ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons but hasn't put a timeframe for the same. India calls for complete disarmament despite being a non-signatory of the NPT.

What lies ahead?

1. The recent geopolitical events transpiring around the world in practically all regions have made the global security climate more unstable. It is further aided by actions of authoritarian leaders of not just non-democratic systems but also of strongmen leaders of democratic systems.
2. The two largest nuclear weapons holding states need to take on a more engaging role in the international arena. SIPRI's yearbook should force the Governments to look critically at how the global disarmament project seems to be going.
3. Apart from this, clear and constant communication between Nuclear weapon states is desired in order to avoid the usage of a nuclear weapon based on fake news or misinformation.

Conclusion: The nations must come forward and prepare a road map for a gradual phase down of nuclear weapons. It is sine qua non for long term well being of humankind keeping in mind the saying of **Albert Einstein** – *"I do not know with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones"*.

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Read More: [SIPRI](#)

Global Governance – Significance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise

India, as the current president of the International Institute of Administrative Sciences (IIAS), has proposed the development of a new International Governance Index. In this regard, let us comprehensively understand what global governance actually stands for.



What is Global Governance?

- Global governance refers to the system of institutions, rules, norms, and processes that enable international cooperation and collective decision-making on issues that cross national borders and affect multiple countries or humanity as a whole.
- Unlike national governance, global governance operates without a single world government, relying instead on a web of international organizations, agreements, and both formal and informal mechanisms to address global challenges.

Key Features of Global Governance:

1. **Multilevel and Multiactor:** Involves states, intergovernmental organizations (like the UN, WTO, IMF), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), businesses, and civil society. Cooperation happens across local, national, regional, and global levels.
2. **Rules and Norms:** Establishes shared standards, norms, and rules (e.g., treaties, conventions, codes of conduct) to manage global problems such as climate change, human rights, trade, and health.
3. **Consensus and Collaboration:** Lacks an overarching authority, so emphasis is on consensus-building, negotiation, and voluntary compliance.
4. **Adaptability:** Evolves to address emerging issues—such as pandemics, cyber security, or environmental degradation—by developing new frameworks or institutions.
5. **Shared Responsibility:** Aims to manage risks (e.g., war, disease, financial crises) that individual states cannot address alone.

Examples of Global Governance:

- **United Nations (UN):** Coordinates on peace, security, development, and human rights.
- **World Trade Organization (WTO):** Sets rules for international trade and resolves disputes.
- **Paris Agreement:** International climate accord for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- **World Health Organization (WHO):** Manages global health concerns like pandemics.
- **International Monetary Fund (IMF):** Provides financial stability and assistance to economies in crisis.
- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights:** Articulates shared basic rights and freedoms protected globally.

Need for Global Governance:

1. **Rising volatility and harmful “isms”:** Unilateralism, protectionism, isolationism, separatism, terrorism, extremism, and hegemonism threaten order. **Without joint rules and coordination, the risk of “jungle law” grows.**
2. **Shared health risks:** COVID-19 showed why **coordinated action, information-sharing, and equitable access** matter. **Strengthening global health governance** prevents future crises and saves lives.
3. **Climate action and sustainability:** The world needs joint effort to **cut emissions** and protect **global public goods** such as oceans, climate, and forests. No country can protect them alone. Common rules and joint action help reduce emissions, manage resources, and address cross-border environmental harm.
4. **Agenda 2030 implementation:** The Sustainable Development Goals are universal. Progress needs cooperation across economic, social, and environmental areas. **Global governance keeps focus on the goals, aligns actions, and supports countries to localise targets.**
5. **Financing for development:** Delivering the SDGs needs predictable finance and capacity. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda offers a framework. Global governance helps mobilise resources, guide investments, and support countries that need assistance.
6. **Peace, security, and stability:** Conflicts and tensions spill across regions. Shared mechanisms for peacekeeping, dialogue, and dispute resolution lower the risk of escalation. **Cooperation protects people and upholds basic rights.**
7. **Inclusive voice and fairness:** Many countries seek a stronger role in decisions that affect them. Global governance can **increase participation of developing countries** and make processes more fair, transparent, and trusted.
8. **Integrated and long-term coordination:** Problems are interconnected, but institutions often work in silos. A coordinated system helps actors work together, review progress, and adjust course based on trends and evidence. **This improves results and reduces duplication.**

Challenges in Global Governance:

1. **National interests and fragmentation.** Countries often prioritize national interests over collective action, making it difficult to reach consensus on global issues.
2. **Lack of Accountability and Representation:** Global governance institutions are often criticized for lacking transparency and failing to represent the voices of developing countries and marginalized communities.
3. **Limited Enforcement Mechanisms:** Unlike national governments, global governance bodies lack the authority to enforce decisions. They rely on cooperation and voluntary commitments from member states.

4. Institutional misalignment:

- Existing structures are not designed for problems that span multiple sectors. Mandates and workflows do not match integrated goals.
- Many global regimes cover overlapping areas. Links among them are unclear, which creates gaps and friction.

5. Localisation gap: Global targets often do not translate smoothly into national and sub-national plans. Ground-level adaptation remains uneven.**6. Financing gap:** Financing frameworks exist on paper, yet policies and resources do not consistently align with agreed priorities. This slows delivery on commitments.**7. Short-term focus:** Immediate shocks dominate attention. Trend tracking and timely course correction receive less sustained focus, which affects steady progress toward Agenda 2030.**Reforms required in the present global governance structure:****1. Democratization and Representation:**

- **UN Security Council Reform:** Expand permanent and non-permanent seats to include emerging economies and underrepresented regions like Africa, Latin America, and South Asia. This would make the Council more representative and better equipped to address contemporary geopolitical realities.
- **Voting Power in Bretton Woods Institutions:** Adjust decision-making and voting rights in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank to reflect the economic weight and needs of rapidly growing economies, not just legacy powers.

2. Strengthening & Modernising of Global Governance Institutions:

- **Enforcement Mechanisms:** Enhance the ability of institutions to enforce international law, human rights, and treaty obligations, closing the gap between resolutions and real-world impact (e.g., in responses to conflicts, sanctions, or climate commitments).
- **Multilateralism Renewal:** Bolster multilateral cooperation (especially in the United Nations, G20, WTO, WHO, and other platforms) to handle issues such as global pandemics, cross-border terrorism, and financial crises through collective action, not just bilateral or regional clubs.

3. Inclusivity, Equity & Capacity Building:

- **Greater Voice for the Global South:** Ensure developing countries play a central role in crafting global rules—thereby improving legitimacy and addressing power imbalances dating from the colonial era.
- **Financial Architecture Overhaul:** Reform global financial systems (e.g., debt relief, climate finance, SDR allocation) to assist the poorest and most vulnerable countries in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and dealing with external shocks.

4. Transparency, Accountability & Participation:

- **Transparent Decision-Making:** Revamp processes in international bodies to prevent closed-door decisions by a few powerful actors. Open up space for meaningful participation by civil society, women, youth, and marginalized communities.
- **Technological Integration:** Utilize AI, big data, and digital tools for transparent governance, public monitoring, and early crisis detection.

5. Flexible Structures: Create new, adaptive governance bodies and treaties to address emerging threats (like cyber-security, biotechnology, misinformation, and planetary health) that existing institutions struggle to govern.

6. **Supranational and Localized Approaches:** Integrate supranational policy frameworks with strong local engagement for more holistic global solutions to crises (like pandemics and climate change).

Conclusion: A successful reform agenda requires not just technical fixes, but a renewed commitment from the most powerful states to prioritize collective global stability over short-term national gain.

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Read More: [The Indian Express](#)

Air Pollution In Delhi- Reasons and Solutions- Explained Pointwise



The air pollution in Delhi is again in the news, with the **worsening of Delhi's air quality**. The AQI in certain areas of Delhi has been recorded at its worst in the last 3 years. The choking air pollution has led to the invocation of **Graded Response Action Plan** (GRAP) in Delhi-NCR region. In fact, the Delhi government, in partnership with IIT Kanpur, has recently **implemented artificial rain experiments (cloud seeding)** as an emergency measure to combat its chronic air pollution crisis.

In this article we will look into the reasons for air pollution in Delhi. We will also look at the possible solutions to combat this climate health emergency.



Source- The Indian Express

What is air Pollution and how is it measured in India?

Air Pollution: Air pollution is the introduction of chemicals, particulates or biological materials into the atmosphere that cause discomfort, disease, or death to humans.

Measurement of Air Pollution In India:

- In India, air pollution is measured according to the National Air Quality Index developed by Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) in 2014.
- The measurement of air quality in the NAQI framework is based on **eight pollutants**, namely- **Particulate Matter (PM₁₀)**, **Particulate Matter (PM_{2.5})**, **Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂)**, **Sulphur Dioxide (SO₂)**, **Carbon Monoxide (CO)**, **Ozone (O₃)**, **Ammonia (NH₃)** and **Lead (Pb)**.

Categorization of Air Quality under AQI:

AQI	Remark	Colour Code	Possible Health Impacts
0-50	Good		Minimal Impact
51-100	Satisfactory		Minor breathing discomfort in sensitive people
101-200	Moderate		Breathing discomfort to people with asthma and heart disease.
201-300	Poor		Breathing discomfort to most people on prolonged exposure.
301-400	Very Poor		Respiratory illness on prolonged exposure
401-500	Severe		Affects healthy people and seriously impacts those with existing diseases.

Source- CPCB

Read More- [Air Quality Standard of India](#)**What are the reasons for the rise in air pollution in Delhi?**

1. **Stubble Burning:** Stubble burning in Punjab, Rajasthan, and Haryana emits large amounts of toxic pollutants in the atmosphere. These pollutants contain **harmful gases** like methane (CH₄), carbon monoxide (CO), volatile organic compounds (VOC) and carcinogenic polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons. The **IIT consortium report** have estimated that stubble burning contributed up to **35% of Delhi's PM 2.5 levels** during the peak October-November season.
2. **Reduced Wind Speed:** Low-speed winds in winters are unable to disperse these pollutants effectively. Further, Delhi lies in a **landlocked region** and does not have the geographical advantage of sea breeze to disperse the suspended pollutants.

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3. **Effect of Northwesterly winds:** After the withdrawal of monsoons, the predominant direction of winds in northern India is northwesterly. These northwesterly winds bring the **dust from the gulf region**, northern Pakistan and Afghanistan.
4. **Dip in Temperatures lowers the inversion height:** With the decrease in temperature, **inversion height lowers down, leading to concentration of pollutants in the lower atmosphere**. (Inversion height is the layer beyond which pollutants cannot disperse into the upper layer of the atmosphere).
5. **Vehicular Pollution:** Delhi has one of the **highest number of registered private vehicles** in India. Official emissions inventories of 2018 show that vehicles emit about 40 per cent of the particulate load in the city of Delhi.
6. **Construction Activities and Open Waste Burning:** Pollution due to **landfill burning and construction debris** enhances the pollution levels in the Delhi NCR region.
7. **Firecrackers:** Firecrackers burning during Diwali further adds to the increase in air pollution levels.
8. **Urban development strategy in India:** The current strategy focuses on real estate development, a widening of roads and allowing large fuel guzzling vehicles which are major reasons for increased pollution.
9. **Expansion of 'Grey' infrastructure:** Water bodies, urban forests, green cover, and urban agriculture have all reported shrinkage, and "grey" infrastructure has seen rapid expansion.
10. **Land use change:** The handing over of open spaces to real estate developers and lack of any meaningful afforestation affects the city's ecology.
11. **Promotion of car sales:** Widening roads induces people to buy more cars, thus leading to more pollution levels.
12. **Construction activities:** It contributes roughly 10% of air pollution in Delhi-NCR. There are hardly any steps being taken to monitor construction activities.

What are the harmful effects of air pollution?

The harmful effects of air pollution have been tabulated below:

Economic effects	(1) Leads to loss of labour productivity, GDP and per capita income levels. (The Confederation of Indian Industry estimates that air pollution costs Indian businesses \$95 billion, or 3 per cent of India's GDP every year). (Poor air amounts to about Rs 7 lakh crore of annual economic loss, which is more than a third of our annual GST collection) (2) Air pollution reduces agricultural crop yields and commercial forest yields.
Human Health Effects	(1) Air pollution leads to multiple health conditions including respiratory infections, heart disease and lung cancer. (2) As per the Global Burden of Disease comparative risk assessment for 2015, air pollution exposure contributes to approximately 1.8 million premature deaths and loss of 49 million disability adjusted life-years (DALYs) in India.

Environment	(1) Acid Rain: Damages crops, natural vegetation, soil chemistry and leads to damage to ancient monuments (Taj Mahal Yellowing). (2) Eutrophication of water bodies: Increases nitrogen intake of freshwater bodies leading to Eutrophication.
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What Govt initiatives have been taken to reduce air pollution in Delhi?

- Cloud Seeding (Artificial Rain):** Piloted with IIT Kanpur, three rounds were conducted in 2025 to temporarily reduce airborne particulate matter, although results were mixed due to weather constraints. The key reason for limited results was **insufficient cloud moisture (only 15–20%)**, while successful cloud seeding typically requires 50% or more. High cloud bases (near 10,000 feet) also reduced effectiveness.
- Crop Residue Management Scheme:** Crop Residue Management (CRM) scheme which provides subsidy to farmers for buying '**Turbo Happy Seeder**', '**Super SMS attachment**', '**rotavators**' and '**superseeder**'.
- Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM):** CAQM is a statutory body formed under the Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas, Act 2021. CAQM has provided a framework to tackle the problem of air pollution due to stubble burning.
- Initiatives to reduce Vehicular Pollution:** The **shift from BS-IV to BS-VI**, push for **Electric Vehicles (EVs)**, **Odd-even Policy** have all been implemented to reduce Vehicular pollution.
- Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP):** GRAP measures like shutting down thermal power plants and a ban on construction activities are implemented to curb air pollution.
- Dust and construction controls:** Mandatory deployment of anti-smog guns and water sprinklers at large buildings, construction sites, and hotspots; mist sprayers installed on electric poles at 13 major air pollution hotspots.

What should be the way ahead?

A start has been made to recognise the severity of air pollution on the health of the population and the economy. Delhi and Mumbai are the two financial backbones of our country. The following measures need to be undertaken to curb air pollution in Delhi and Mumbai:

- Increase the AQI monitoring stations:** The adequate numbers of AQI monitoring stations as mandated by the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) must be installed. Also, **sensor based AQI monitoring units** that give hyperlocal data must be set up.
- Enhanced powers to the authorities to take action according to the hyperlocal data:** It will help the authorities take **pre-emptive actions** and allow **denser monitoring**. For example, if it is found that construction is taking place in a certain pocket without following norms, the authorities can identify the location and immediately penalise the violators.
- National Nodal Authority for Air pollution:** India needs a **nodal authority with constitutional powers** to ensure collaborative pre-emptive action on air pollution with timelines for all stakeholders.
- Setting up Independent commissions for management of AQI:** Independent commissions like the **Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) for NCR and adjoining regions**, should be set up in other major cities like Mumbai and Chennai. It will help in taking actions against the violators irrespective of the geographical region. **Regional or airshed approach** must be used to counter the

geographical challenge to air pollution management as done in Los Angeles, Mexico City and many mega-urban regions in China.

5. **Stricter guidelines for industrial emissions:** SEBI's Business Responsibility and Sustainability Report (BRSR) framework can lay down tighter guidelines to ensure uniformity in the unit of reporting pollutant emissions, declaration of air pollution mitigation targets (like companies do for carbon emissions), and reporting of disaggregated emissions data. We must reduce exposure across the value chain from production to consumption to recycling of goods and delivery of services.
6. **Making 'Clean air' an investment sector:** The push for substitution of fossil fuels will increase investment opportunities in clean energy transition sector like green mobility, clean cooking. This will open up a new sector for investment and will help in reducing the air pollution simultaneously.
7. **Funds and Manpower Training to combat pollution:** The Sixteenth Finance commission should provide finance to urban local bodies for climate change and air pollution reduction interventions. The urban local bodies manpower must be properly trained and the dysfunctional State pollution Control Boards must be empowered to take punitive actions.
8. **Increased awareness and incentive for civil society:** Different stakeholders need to know why cleaning the air will benefit their livelihoods and businesses. For instance, farmers will not curb stubble burning until a viable circular economy for alternative uses of biomass emerges. We must adopt sustainable lifestyles which are in line with government's LiFE initiative.
9. **Increased use of Public transport and reduced dependence on private vehicles:** The Delhi Master Plan target of 80 per cent of motorised trips by public transport by 2020 has not been met yet. The deadline has been shifted to 2041. This deadline needs to be met by augmenting the public transport system. The private vehicles use must be disincentivized by introducing ward-wise parking management area plans and parking tax.
10. **Limit crop residue burning:** We must implement known solutions like shifting to less water-intensive crops, altering irrigation arrangements, timing, harvesting, baling practices and building a wider year-round market for straw.
11. **End-to-end construction and waste management:** It is pivotal to reducing tonnes of dust and waste released in the air and water bodies.
12. **Learnings from London, China, Singapore, Hong Kong must be incorporated:** London does not allow private vehicles in areas well-connected by public transport. China uses 'fixed number of car sales per year' in Beijing. We must improve the public transport like London, China, Singapore and Hong-Kong.

Read More- [The Indian Express](#)

UPSC Syllabus- GS 3- Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment.