

THEIAS AKADEMIA PRESENTS

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The Topper's Last Read. Every Morning.

PART I · HEADLINES TO ECONOMY

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— *The Topper's Last Read* —

IN THIS EDITION

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| § Top Headlines | § Polity & Governance |
| § International Relations | § Defence & Security |
| § Science & Technology | § Economy |
| § Proof of Precision | |

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- 1 **GS2** Supreme Court's seven-judge Constitution Bench closes its 23-year-old reference on legislative privilege (Art. 194) versus free speech (Art. 19), after finding the 2003 Tamil Nadu Assembly resolution that triggered it had itself been withdrawn in 2004 (full card below).
- 2 **GS2** The GST Appellate Tribunal (GSTAT) is now fully rolled out with 31 State Benches at 45 locations nationwide, nine years after Parliament created it under the CGST Act, 2017 (full card below).
- 3 **GS2** Canadian Foreign Minister Anita Anand meets EAM S. Jaishankar and PM Modi in New Delhi, days after the fifth India-Canada CEPA negotiating round in Ottawa, with both governments targeting a doubling of bilateral trade by 2030 (full card below).
- 4 **GS2** EAM Jaishankar begins a three-day UAE visit (14-16 October) to review the India-UAE Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and attend the 2nd Raisina Middle East dialogue in Abu Dhabi (full card below).
- 5 **GS3** Trade data shows the UAE reclaimed its position as India's top LPG supplier in September 2026 (39% share, up from 13%), as Strait of Hormuz tensions cut US shipments by 58% (full card below).
- 6 **GS3** Indian Air Force concludes Exercise Tarang Shakti 2026 at Air Force Station Jodhpur — seven nations flew alongside the IAF and 32 more observed, India's broadest multinational air exercise to date (full card below).
- 7 **GS3** Ministry of Agriculture marks PM Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana's first anniversary and launches the nationwide 'Khet Bachao Abhiyan' (22 Oct-30 Nov) to correct India's skewed urea-versus-balanced-fertiliser usage (full card below).
- 8 **GS3** PIB review of PM GatiShakti-enabled projects details the 13-GW Ladakh-Haryana Green Energy Corridor and Assam's Jogighopa Multimodal Logistics Park with the Dhubri-Phulbari bridge (full card below).
- 9 **GS3** Down To Earth reports the Centre's seventh Western Ghats Ecologically Sensitive Area draft (56,825.7 sq km across six states) remains contested, with Karnataka's legislature unanimously rejecting it (full card below).
- 10 **GS1** Gati Shakti Vishwavidyalaya, Vadodara — India's first university dedicated solely to transport and logistics — reports having trained over 2.4 lakh officers in PM GatiShakti/National Logistics Policy courses by July 2026.
- 11 **GS3** The Indian Air Force completes 94 years since its 8 October 1932 constitution under the Indian Air Force Act, 1932, operating today through seven commands — five operational, plus Training and Maintenance.
- 12 **GS3** ISRO's cryogenic-engine indigenisation programme (CE-7.5/CE-20) continues to anchor both the LVM3 heavy-lift vehicle and the upcoming Gaganyaan crew-escape test flights (full explainer card below).

THEIAS AKADEMIA With eight substantive stories and two constitutional/institutional deep-dives in today's edition, aspirants juggling multiple sources may want structured, one-on-one doubt resolution — that is exactly what TheIAS Akademia's **Sahyog Mentorship** programme is built for. Learn more at theiasakademia.com.

Disposed 6 October 2026 (referred 2003) · Source: Supreme Court of India order; Supreme Court Observer; LiveLaw

Supreme Court Closes the 23-Year-Old Legislative-Privilege-vs-Free-Speech Reference — But Leaves the Real Question Open

Why in News: On 6 October 2026, a seven-judge Constitution Bench led by Chief Justice Surya Kant closed a reference pending since December 2003 on whether a legislature's privilege under Article 194 can override the fundamental right to free speech under Article 19(1)(a). The Bench acted after Tamil Nadu's counsel, Raju Ramachandran, disclosed — via an affidavit — that the 2003 Assembly resolution which triggered the case had itself been withdrawn in 2004, a fact missed when the reference was first framed. The CJI held the Court would not undertake “a mere academic exercise,” closed the reference as infructuous, and released the seven judges to other part-heard matters, while explicitly leaving the underlying constitutional question open for a future case with live facts.

Background: The dispute began in April 2003 when *The Hindu* published an editorial, “Rising Intolerance,” criticising then Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J. Jayalalithaa's governance. Speaker K. Kalimuthu treated it as a breach of the House's privilege under Article 194, and on 7 November 2003 the Assembly authorised the arrest of the paper's editorial staff; police arrested Editor N. Ravi and four colleagues. The Supreme Court stayed the arrests and flagged two conflicting precedents — *Pandit M.S.M. Sharma v Shri Krishna Sinha* (1958), which read legislative privilege as unaffected by free speech, and the Keshav Singh reference, *In re Under Article 143* (1965), which read it the other way — and in December 2003 a five-judge bench referred the conflict to a larger seven-judge bench to settle it conclusively.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- Case: N. Ravi & Ors v Speaker, Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly, arising from *The Hindu*'s April 2003 editorial “Rising Intolerance.”
- TN Assembly privilege resolution against the paper's staff: 7 November 2003, under Article 194 (State Legislatures' privileges; Article 105 is Parliament's analogue).
- Five arrested: Editor N. Ravi, Executive Editor Malini Parthasarathy, Bureau Chief V. Jayant, Special Correspondent Radha Venkatesan, Publisher S. Rangarajan.
- Conflicting precedents the reference tried to reconcile: *M.S.M. Sharma v Shri Krishna Sinha* (1958) vs the Keshav Singh reference, *In re Under Article 143* (1965).
- Reference to a seven-judge bench: December 2003 — disposed nearly 23 years later, on 6 October 2026.
- Ground for disposal: the triggering 2003 TN Assembly resolution was found to have been withdrawn in 2004, removing any live cause of action.
- Bench: CJI Surya Kant with Justices Aravind Kumar, P.K. Mishra, Joymalya Bagchi, Vipul Pancholi, Shree Chandrashekhar and V. Mohana.
- Outcome: reference closed as infructuous; the Article 194-vs-Article 19(1)(a) question remains open for the next live case — one of five seven-judge references then pending per the National Judicial Data Grid.

🎯 MAINS DIMENSIONS / ANALYSIS

- Significance: reaffirms that Indian constitutional courts decide even referred constitutional questions only on live facts, not in the abstract.
- Criticism: a 23-year pendency for a reference of this constitutional weight (press freedom vs legislative privilege) exposes systemic delay even at the apex constitutional-bench level.
- Recurring tension: whether a legislature's privilege to punish “breach of privilege” can checkmate a journalist's or citizen's Article 19(1)(a) rights resurfaces regularly (e.g., privilege notices to journalists/cartoonists) without a settled doctrine.
- Federal angle: Article 194 (States) mirrors Article 105 (Parliament); India has never codified legislative privileges by statute, unlike the UK's codified parliamentary privilege, leaving courts to improvise case-by-case.
- Way forward: press and legal bodies continue to press for codifying legislative privileges under Article 194(3)/105(3) so the conflict is resolved by law rather than recurring litigation.

🔄 MEMORY TECHNIQUE — RETURNING TOPIC

Previously covered:

~30 September/6 October 2026, when the matter was listed and the seven-judge reference framed for hearing.

What's new today:

The Bench has now actually **disposed of** the reference as infructuous — a resolution, not merely a hearing date — because the 2003 resolution that triggered it was found withdrawn in 2004.

UPSC relevance shift:

Shifts the exam-relevant story from “a bench has been constituted” (procedural) to “how courts handle a mooted constitutional reference and what doctrine remains unsettled” (substantive) — a sharper Mains hook.

PYQ LINKAGE

Legislative/parliamentary privileges vs. Fundamental Rights is squarely within the GS2 syllabus head “Parliament and State Legislatures — structure, functioning, powers & privileges”; revise it alongside *Raja Ram Pal v Hon'ble Speaker* (2007, privilege actions are judicially reviewable) and *P.V. Narasimha Rao v State* (1998, legislator-bribery immunity), the latter partly overturned by the 2024 seven-judge *Sita Soren* verdict.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ (STATEMENT-BASED)

Q. Consider the following statements regarding legislative privileges in India:

- Articles 105 and 194 confer privileges on Parliament and State Legislatures respectively, including freedom of speech within the House.
- Legislative privileges in India have been codified by a specific Act of Parliament.
- The Supreme Court has held that a legislature's exercise of privilege to punish for its breach is wholly immune from judicial review.

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

Answer: a. Statement 2 is wrong — privileges remain uncoded in India, unlike the UK. Statement 3 is wrong — *Raja Ram Pal* (2007) and later rulings hold privilege actions are subject to judicial review, especially where fundamental rights are implicated.

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION

Legislative privilege and the freedom of speech under Article 19(1)(a) often appear to be in tension. Examine this tension with reference to the Supreme Court's 2026 disposal of the 23-year-old *N. Ravi* reference, and discuss whether codifying legislative privileges would help resolve it. (250 words)

#LegislativePrivilege

#Article194

#Article19

#SupremeCourt

#FreedomOfPress

GS2

Statutory & Quasi-Judicial Bodies • Tribunalisation

Operational since 16 Feb 2026; fully rolled out by Oct 2026 — Static/Institutional Explainer, not tied to a single day's news • Source: GSTAT e-Courts Portal; CBIC circulars;

GST Appellate Tribunal Finally Fully Operational — Nine Years After Parliament Created It

Why in News: Nearly nine years after Parliament provided for it under the GST laws of 2017, the GST Appellate Tribunal (GSTAT) is now functionally operational nationwide. Its Principal Bench in New Delhi has been hearing matters since 16 February 2026, and by October 2026 the tribunal's footprint has grown to 31 State Benches across 45 locations. This closes a long appellate vacuum in which GST litigants, lacking a working tribunal, had to approach High Courts directly via costly writ petitions.

Background: The Central GST Act, 2017 created GSTAT under Section 109, drawing on the tribunalisation model Parliament has used since the 42nd Constitutional Amendment (1976) inserted Articles 323A and 323B enabling specialised tribunals outside the ordinary court hierarchy. Repeated litigation over tribunal-member qualifications and independence — the Madras Bar Association line of cases and the Tribunals Reforms Act, 2021 — delayed GSTAT's actual functioning even after its statutory birth, so the tribunal existed on paper from 2017 but heard no case until 2026.

KEY FACTS

- Statutory basis: Section 109, CGST Act 2017; enabled by Parliament's Article 323A/323B tribunalisation power (post-42nd Amendment, 1976).
- Principal Bench: New Delhi; began adjudicating matters on 16 February 2026.
- Current footprint: 31 State Benches across 45 locations nationwide.
- Pre-deposit for appeal: 20% of the disputed tax amount, in addition to any sum already deposited at the first-appeal stage (subject to a prescribed cap).
- Limitation period: appeals within 3 months of the first appellate order, with up to 1 additional month condonable for sufficient cause; the same window applies to government appeals.

- Jurisdictional split: 'place of supply' disputes go only to the Principal Bench irrespective of the taxpayer's registration State; all other disputes go to the State Bench of registration.
- Constitutional-validity challenges to GST provisions remain outside GSTAT's remit — they stay with the High Courts under Article 226.
- Filing is predominantly electronic, through the GSTAT e-Courts Portal.

📌 MAINS DIMENSIONS / ANALYSIS

- Significance: ends a near-decade "appellate vacuum" in indirect-tax litigation, expected to reduce the GST-writ-petition backlog before High Courts.
- Criticism: revives the *L. Chandra Kumar v Union of India* (1997) concern that tribunalisation, while constitutionally permissible, must not oust High Courts' judicial-review jurisdiction — a balance GSTAT's design (keeping constitutional challenges with High Courts) tries to respect.
- Implementation challenge: a tribunal operational nine years after its statutory creation renews scrutiny of why India's tribunal-member appointments chronically lag, a theme recurring across the Madras Bar Association cases (2010, 2014, 2020).
- Comparative angle: unlike many quasi-judicial bodies that sit only in New Delhi, GSTAT's 45-location footprint is a rare example of a national tribunal decentralised to the state level, improving access to justice for smaller taxpayers.
- Way forward: commentators expect an early surge of appeals as taxpayers whose earlier claims had effectively become time-barred find them newly appealable under GSTAT's limitation window.

🧠 LET'S REMEMBER THIS THROUGH A TRICK

Remember the GST appeal ladder with 'A-F-T-H-S': Assessing officer → First appellate authority (Commissioner Appeals) → Tribunal (GSTAT) → High Court (only for constitutional validity, Art. 226) → Supreme Court (Art. 136/132).

📄 PYQ LINKAGE

Tribunalisation and the Articles 323A/323B framework are a recurring GS2 theme (last tested around the Tribunals Reforms Act, 2021, and NCLAT); revise *L. Chandra Kumar v Union of India* (1997) and the Madras Bar Association cases alongside GSTAT's own design.

📌 PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ (STATEMENT-BASED)

Q. Consider the following statements about the GST Appellate Tribunal (GSTAT):

1. It was created directly by Article 323B of the Constitution.
2. Appeals involving a dispute on 'place of supply' can be filed only before its Principal Bench, regardless of the taxpayer's State of registration.
3. Appeals challenging the constitutional validity of a GST provision can be filed before GSTAT.

(a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 only (c) 1 and 3 only (d) 2 and 3 only

Answer: b. Statement 1 is wrong — GSTAT is a statutory tribunal created under Section 109 of the CGST Act, 2017 (Parliament exercised its Article 323B rule-making power to enable it, but GSTAT itself is a creature of the Act, not the Article directly). Statement 3 is wrong — constitutional-validity challenges remain with the High Courts.

📌 PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION

Tribunalisation has been Parliament's preferred route to decongest regular courts of specialised disputes, yet tribunals in India have frequently suffered appointment and functional delays. Discuss, with reference to the GST Appellate Tribunal's near decade-long gap between statutory creation and operationalisation. (250 words)

#GSTAT

#Tribunalisation

#Article323B

#GSTAppeals

#EaseOfDoingBusiness

3 INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

2 CARDS

GS2

Bilateral Relations • India's Economic Diplomacy (FTAs/CEPAs)

14 October 2026 • Source: Ministry of External Affairs briefing; Government of Canada statement

India-Canada Ties Thaw: Fifth CEPA Round Done, Modi-Carney Call, Anand's Delhi Visit

Why in News: Canadian Foreign Minister Anita Anand held talks with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar in New Delhi on 14 October 2026, with both sides “appreciating the progress” toward an early conclusion of the India-Canada Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), days after the fifth formal negotiating round concluded in Ottawa. Prime Minister Narendra Modi met Anand separately and called the talks productive, a day after he and Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney spoke by phone and reaffirmed a shared goal of doubling bilateral trade by 2030.

Background: India-Canada ties cooled sharply after 2023 allegations in the Hardeep Singh Nijjar case strained relations, including reciprocal expulsion of diplomats; CEPA negotiations — first launched in 2010 and pursued in part via an interim Early Progress Trade Agreement track from 2022-23 — largely stalled through that period. The resumption of ministerial-level CEPA engagement in 2026, alongside renewed security, energy, science & technology, and people-to-people dialogue, signals a broader normalisation track between the two Commonwealth democracies, each home to significant diaspora links.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- Fifth CEPA negotiating round: concluded in Ottawa roughly a week before the 14 October 2026 ministerial meeting in New Delhi.
- Shared trade target: doubling of two-way trade by 2030, endorsed by PM Modi and PM Carney in their phone call.
- Leaders' phone call: 13 October 2026, Modi-Carney.
- Ministerial visit: Canadian FM Anita Anand's working visit to India included talks with Jaishankar on 14 October 2026.
- Agenda beyond trade: security and defence cooperation, energy cooperation, education, science and technology, and people-to-people ties.
- Diplomatic context: relations had been strained since 2023 over the Nijjar-killing allegations in Canada; this round marks a visible thaw.
- CEPA's origin: negotiations trace to 2010, making this one of India's longest-running bilateral trade-agreement tracks.
- Instrument type: a CEPA (unlike a narrower trade agreement) bundles goods, services, investment and regulatory cooperation into one comprehensive instrument.

🎯 MAINS DIMENSIONS / ANALYSIS

- Significance: a Canada CEPA would extend India's widening FTA portfolio (UAE CEPA 2022, Australia ECTA 2022, EFTA TEPA 2024, UK FTA 2025) amid India's “China+1” supply-chain diversification push.
- Criticism/trade-off: agricultural market access and labour-mobility/visa commitments — a long-standing Indian ask in FTAs with developed economies — remain the hardest chapters, and diplomatic trust remains fragile given the unresolved Nijjar matter.
- Comparative angle: unlike the UK FTA (2025) and EFTA TEPA, Canada CEPA talks have run for 16 years and counting — illustrating how political relations, not economics alone, pace trade diplomacy.
- Strategic angle: Canada's critical-minerals and LNG potential dovetails with India's energy-diversification push, visible elsewhere in this edition's UAE-LPG story.
- Way forward: neither side has committed to a firm conclusion date, suggesting a “political reconciliation first, agreement second” sequencing distinct from India's recently concluded FTAs.

🧠 LET'S REMEMBER THIS THROUGH A TRICK

Track India's FTA wave with 'U-A-E-U-C': UAE CEPA (2022) → Australia ECTA (2022) → EFTA TEPA (2024) → UK FTA (2025) → Canada CEPA (ongoing, 5th round Oct 2026).

📄 PYQ LINKAGE

India's bilateral/regional trade agreements (FTAs/CEPAs/ECTAs) are a recurring GS2/GS3 Mains theme under “economic diplomacy as an instrument of foreign policy”; revise alongside the UK FTA (2025) and the long-running India-EU BTIA negotiations.

🎯 PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ (STATEMENT-BASED)

Q. Consider the following statements:

1. India has concluded a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with the UAE.
2. A Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) is narrower in scope than a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) as it covers only trade in goods.
3. India and Canada's CEPA negotiations resumed at the ministerial level in October 2026 after a period of diplomatic strain.

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

Answer: a. Statement 2 is wrong — a CEPA is typically broader than a standard FTA, bundling goods, services, investment and regulatory cooperation, not narrower.

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION

India's recent wave of bilateral trade agreements (UAE, Australia, EFTA, UK) reflects a shift toward pragmatic economic diplomacy even amid political friction, as seen in the resumption of India-Canada CEPA talks. Discuss the strategic rationale and the key sticking points in India's FTA negotiations with developed economies. (250 words)

#IndiaCanada

#CEPA

#TradeDiplomacy

#FTA

#EconomicDiplomacy

GS2

India & the Gulf · Energy Security

14-16 October 2026 · Source: Ministry of External Affairs; Indian Consulate General, Dubai; Kpler trade-flow data

Jaishankar's UAE Visit and the Hormuz-Driven Swing in India's LPG Supply Chain

Why in News: External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar undertook an official visit to the UAE from 14 to 16 October 2026 to review progress on the India-UAE Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and to join the second edition of the Raisina Middle East dialogue in Abu Dhabi, even as the wider Gulf stayed tense over the Iran standoff and a sharp Saudi Arabia-Houthi escalation in Yemen. The visit coincided with fresh trade data showing the UAE had reclaimed its position as India's largest LPG supplier after a brief US surge — a shift traced directly to Strait of Hormuz disruption risk.

Background: The India-UAE Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, upgraded from a bilateral strategic partnership in 2017, anchors India's expanding Gulf engagement, including the 2022 India-UAE CEPA (India's first major post-pandemic FTA) and deep energy and remittance linkages via one of the world's largest overseas Indian populations. India imports roughly 60% of its LPG requirement, historically sourcing about 90% of those imports from Gulf suppliers routed through the Strait of Hormuz — a single chokepoint whose disruption risk repeatedly becomes a live energy-security variable whenever Middle East tensions spike.

KEY FACTS

- Visit dates: 14-16 October 2026; bilateral meeting with the UAE counterpart plus participation in Raisina Middle East (2nd edition), Abu Dhabi.
- UAE's September 2026 share of India's LPG imports: 39%, sharply up from 13% in August 2026 (Kpler data).
- Volume shift: UAE shipments rose to about 547,000 tonnes in September 2026 (≈182% up from 193,000 tonnes in August).
- US shipments fell 58% over the same period; the US share of India's LPG imports dropped from 53% (August) to 23% (September).
- Structural dependence: India imports about 60% of its LPG needs; historically ≈90% of those imports moved via Gulf suppliers through the Strait of Hormuz.
- Parallel maritime-security episode: all 22 Indian crew members were rescued from the crude tanker MT Gem No. 2 off Ras Al Khaimah, coordinated by India's Consulate General in Dubai with UAE authorities.
- Policy anchor: the 2022 India-UAE CEPA remains the base economic instrument the visit sought to "review progress" on.
- Raisina Middle East (2nd edition) is the regional offshoot of India's flagship Raisina Dialogue (hosted with the Observer Research Foundation), extending India's convening power into West Asia.

MAINS DIMENSIONS / ANALYSIS

- Significance: shows how a single geopolitical chokepoint (Strait of Hormuz) can reshape India's energy-import basket within one month, exposing energy-security vulnerability despite diversification efforts.
- Risk: reliance on a narrow set of Gulf suppliers for "swing" supply exposes India's LPG-subsidy architecture (PMUY beneficiaries) and industry to geopolitical risk outside India's control.
- Strategic angle: regionalising "Raisina" into West Asia reflects a deliberate strategy of positioning India as a convening power in Gulf security conversations, not merely an energy consumer.
- Comparative angle: the India-UAE template (CEPA, strategic partnership, large expatriate base) is increasingly one India seeks to replicate with other Gulf states (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman).
- Way forward: energy-security analysts favour durable diversification — long-term US/African LPG contracts, strategic reserve expansion, and alternate shipping routes bypassing Hormuz — over reactive month-to-month supplier shifts.

 LET'S REMEMBER THIS THROUGH A TRICK

Remember India's '60-90' LPG-dependency rule: $\approx 60\%$ of LPG is imported, and historically $\approx 90\%$ of that transits the Strait of Hormuz — which is why Gulf tension shows up almost instantly in import-source data.

PYQ LINKAGE

India's energy security and chokepoint-dependency (Strait of Hormuz, Strait of Malacca) is a recurring GS3 theme, often paired with the Gulf/"Think West" policy and the India-UAE CEPA (2022) in Mains answers on diversification of energy sources.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ (STATEMENT-BASED)

Q. Consider the following statements:

1. India's Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with the UAE was upgraded from a strategic partnership in 2017.
2. The Strait of Hormuz lies between Iran and Oman and is a key route for India's crude oil and LPG imports.
3. India sources a majority of its total primary energy requirement from Gulf countries.

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

Answer: a. Statement 3 overstates the case — while India sources a large share of its crude oil and LPG from the Gulf, this is not true of India's total primary energy requirement, of which domestic coal remains the largest component.

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION

India's energy-import basket can shift significantly within weeks owing to geopolitical chokepoint risk, as seen in the 2026 Strait of Hormuz-driven swing in LPG sourcing. Critically examine India's energy-diversification strategy and the role of Gulf partnerships such as the India-UAE Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in managing this vulnerability. (250 words)

#IndiaUAE

#RaisinaDialogue

#EnergySecurity

#StraitOfHormuz

#GulfPolicy

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4

DEFENCE & SECURITY

1 CARD

GS3

Defence & Security · Joint/Multinational Military Exercises

26 September – 12 October 2026 (concluded) · Source: PIB, Ministry of Defence

Exercise Tarang Shakti 2026 Concludes: India's Broadest Multinational Air Exercise Yet

Why in News: The Indian Air Force concluded the second edition of Exercise Tarang Shakti at Air Force Station Jodhpur on 12 October 2026, under the theme "Power in Partnership." Seven nations — Australia, Bangladesh, France, Germany, Sri Lanka, the UAE and the USA — flew alongside the IAF, while 32 further nations sent observers, making it one of the broadest airpower-diplomacy platforms India has hosted.

Background: The inaugural Tarang Shakti was held in 2024 across two phases (Sulur and Jodhpur) with a smaller participant list; the 2026 edition consolidated into a single Jodhpur-based phase while scaling up both flying participants and observer nations. The exercise forms part of India's post-Operation Sindoor push to demonstrate and refine military "jointness" and interoperability — pooling combat, transport, surveillance and air-to-air refuelling assets with foreign air forces — alongside platform diplomacy that showcases indigenous systems to potential export customers.

KEY FACTS

- Duration: 26 September – 12 October 2026 (about 17 days), Air Force Station Jodhpur, Rajasthan.
- Theme: "Power in Partnership" — 2nd edition (1st edition: 2024, across Sulur and Jodhpur).
- Flying participants (7 nations): Australia, Bangladesh, France, Germany, Sri Lanka, UAE, USA.
- Observer nations: 32 — reflecting broad international interest in India's airpower-diplomacy platform.

- Capability areas pooled: combat aviation, air transport, airborne surveillance, and air-to-air refuelling.
- Indigenous platforms showcased: LCA Tejas (light combat aircraft) and LCH Prachand (light combat helicopter).
- Institutional host: Indian Air Force, under the Ministry of Defence.
- Strategic signalling: the exercise doubles as an export-diplomacy platform for Tejas/Prachand amid India's wider defence-export ambitions.

📌 MAINS DIMENSIONS / ANALYSIS

- Significance: multinational exercises like Tarang Shakti build real-time interoperability (common tactics, communication protocols) relevant to any future coalition or UN-mandated operation, beyond narrower bilateral drills (Garuda with France, Cope India with the USA).
- Criticism: large multinational drills raise cost and logistics questions, and genuine interoperability needs years of repeated exercises — a single large show should not be mistaken for sustained jointness.
- Strategic-diplomacy angle: showcasing Tejas/Prachand before 39 total participating/observing nations directly supports India's defence-export targets and the Atmanirbhar Bharat defence-manufacturing push.
- Comparative angle: contrasts with China's more bilateral-focused drills (Shaheen, Peace Mission series) — India's approach leans toward broad multilateral coalition-building.
- Organisational angle: hosting the entire 2026 edition at one base (versus 2024's two-phase format) reflects growing IAF basing capacity in the western sector, relevant to India's western-front force posture.

🧠 LET'S REMEMBER THIS THROUGH A TRICK

Remember Tarang Shakti's '7-32' signature: 7 nations flew with the IAF, 32 nations observed — India converting a bilateral-heavy defence-diplomacy style into a genuinely multilateral one.

📌 PYQ LINKAGE

Joint/multinational military exercises (Malabar, Garuda, Cope India, Tarang Shakti) are a recurring GS3 theme under "bilateral and multilateral defence cooperation"; revise alongside India's defence-export policy and indigenisation (Tejas, Prachand, Make in India).

📌 PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ (STATEMENT-BASED)

Q. Consider the following statements regarding Exercise Tarang Shakti 2026:

1. It is a multinational naval exercise hosted by India.
2. Its second edition was conducted entirely at Air Force Station Jodhpur.
3. The United States and France were among the nations that flew alongside the Indian Air Force in this edition.

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

Answer: b. Statement 1 is wrong — Tarang Shakti is a multinational *air* exercise hosted by the Indian Air Force, not a naval exercise.

📌 PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION

India's growing portfolio of multinational military exercises reflects a deliberate shift from bilateral to multilateral defence diplomacy. Discuss this shift with reference to Exercise Tarang Shakti 2026, and evaluate its significance for India's defence-indigenisation and export goals. (250 words)

#TarangShakti2026 #IAF #DefenceDiplomacy #Tejas #Prachand

THEIAS AKADEMIA Today's Ethics section in Part II pairs real governance dilemmas — from scheme-ranking incentives to dual loyalty in negotiation — with the frameworks taught in TheIAS Akademia's **EMP (Ethics & Moral Philosophy)** programme. theiasakademia.com.

5 SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

1 CARD

GS3

Science & Technology · Space Launch Vehicle Propulsion

Cryogenic Engines: The Technology Denial That Became India's Space Self-Reliance Story

Why in News: With ISRO's human-spaceflight campaign (Gaganyaan) and LVM3 heavy-lift launches keeping cryogenic propulsion in the news cycle through 2026, this edition revisits the cryogenic engine itself — the most technically demanding stage of India's launch-vehicle self-reliance journey, and a textbook case of a technology-denial episode turning into a two-decade indigenisation success.

Background: A cryogenic engine burns liquid hydrogen and liquid oxygen, stored at extremely low temperatures, to deliver the high specific impulse needed in a launch vehicle's upper stage. In 1992, the USA invoked the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) to block the planned transfer of Russian (Glavkosmos) cryogenic engines and technology to India, forcing ISRO's Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre (LPSC) to develop the technology indigenously from scratch — a project that took roughly two decades to mature into an operational engine.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- Propellants: liquid hydrogen (LH₂, ≈-253°C) and liquid oxygen (LOX, ≈-183°C), stored at cryogenic temperatures.
- Denial episode: 1992 US invocation of the MTCR blocked Russia's Glavkosmos cryogenic-engine transfer to India.
- Indigenous engines: CE-7.5 (India's first indigenous cryogenic engine, used on GSLV Mk-II) and the more powerful CE-20 (used on LVM3/GSLV Mk-III, including the Chandrayaan-2 and Chandrayaan-3 missions, and planned for Gaganyaan's crewed LVM3 flights).
- Developing centre: ISRO's Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre (LPSC), headquartered at Thiruvananthapuram, with a major test facility at Mahendragiri, Tamil Nadu.
- First successful indigenous cryogenic-stage flight: GSLV-D5, January 2014 — about 22 years after the MTCR denial.
- Relevance to Gaganyaan: LVM3's cryogenic upper stage (C25, using CE-20) is central to placing the crew module into orbit; human-rating adds redundancy and abort-capability requirements beyond a standard commercial cryogenic stage.
- India's own MTCR membership: India joined the MTCR in 2016 — going from “denied technology recipient” to “regime member” within about 24 years.
- Next frontier: a semi-cryogenic engine (SCE-200) is under development to further cut launch costs beyond the current cryogenic-stage generation.

🎯 MAINS DIMENSIONS / ANALYSIS

- Significance: a textbook case of “denial-driven indigenisation” — technology-control regimes can backfire strategically by forcing durable self-reliance rather than permanent dependence.
- Analytical angle: cryogenic technology sits at the intersection of civilian space capability and dual-use missile technology, explaining why it specifically (rather than solid-fuel boosters) triggered MTCR action.
- Comparative angle: only a handful of nations (USA, Russia, France/ESA, China, Japan, India) independently operate cryogenic upper-stage engines — a genuine marker of advanced aerospace capability.
- Economic/strategic angle: indigenous CE-20 production now supports both ISRO's launch cadence and India's commercial launch-services ambitions (NSIL), reducing foreign-exchange outflow on heavy-lift launches.
- Way forward: continued investment in semi-cryogenic and reusable-stage technology aims to cut launch costs further beyond today's cryogenic-stage baseline.

🧠 LET'S REMEMBER THIS THROUGH A TRICK

Remember the arc with ‘1992 → 2014 → 2016’: MTCR denial in 1992, first successful indigenous cryogenic flight in 2014, India joins the MTCR itself in 2016.

📄 PYQ LINKAGE

ISRO's launch-vehicle propulsion systems (solid, liquid, cryogenic, semi-cryogenic) and technology-denial regimes (MTCR, Wassenaar Arrangement) are a recurring GS3 theme, last tested around Chandrayaan-3's LVM3 vehicle and India's membership of export-control regimes (MTCR 2016, Wassenaar Arrangement 2017, Australia Group 2018).

🎯 PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ (STATEMENT-BASED)

Q. Consider the following statements:

1. A cryogenic rocket engine uses liquid hydrogen and liquid oxygen as propellants.
2. India's first successful flight with an indigenously developed cryogenic upper stage was achieved aboard GSLV-D5 in 2014.
3. India became a member of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) before it achieved an indigenous cryogenic engine.

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

Answer: a. Statement 3 is wrong — India achieved indigenous cryogenic-engine success in 2014, two years *before* it joined the MTCR as a member in 2016.

 PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION

The 1992 MTCR-driven denial of cryogenic technology to India is often cited as an example of 'denial breeding self-reliance.' Discuss this with reference to ISRO's cryogenic-engine indigenisation journey, and assess its relevance to India's current human-spaceflight (Gaganyaan) and semi-cryogenic propulsion programmes. (250 words)

#CryogenicEngine #ISRO #MTCR #Gaganyaan #LVM3

THEIAS AKADEMIYA India's cryogenic-engine indigenisation story is a classic **LAKSHYAM AIR1** case study — TheIAS Akademia's programme for aspirants building an Economy/Science & Technology-strong Prelims-and-Mains strategy. theiasakademia.com.

6

ECONOMY

2 CARDS

GS3

Economy · Agriculture & Fertiliser Policy

11–12 October 2026 (Year-One review); Khet Bachao Abhiyan runs 22 Oct–30 Nov 2026 · Source: PIB, Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare

PM Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana Turns One — and Launches a Nationwide Fertiliser-Balance Campaign

Why in News: The Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare marked the first anniversary of the PM Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana (PMDDKY) on 11 October 2026 with a review showing convergence gains across 100 low-productivity districts, and simultaneously announced the “Khet Bachao Abhiyan” (Soil Health Campaign), to run nationwide from 22 October to 30 November 2026, targeting India's chronic over-use of urea relative to phosphatic and potassic fertilisers.

Background: Launched in 2025 with a ₹24,000-crore-a-year, six-year outlay, PMDDKY is modelled on the Aspirational Districts Programme's convergence logic: rather than creating a new scheme, it converges 36 existing Central schemes from 11 Ministries/Departments into 100 identified low-agricultural-productivity districts, tracked through 121 indicators with monthly district rankings to drive inter-district competition. The urea-versus-balanced-fertiliser problem it now tackles is decades old: urea's farm-gate price has been kept administratively low and stable, while phosphatic and potassic fertilisers have sat under a market-linked Nutrient-Based Subsidy (NBS) regime since April 2010 — systematically skewing farmer usage away from the ideal N:P:K ratio of 4:2:1.

 KEY FACTS

- PMDDKY outlay: ₹24,000 crore per year for six years, across 100 identified districts.
- Convergence architecture: 36 Central schemes from 11 Ministries/Departments, tracked via 121 indicators with monthly rankings.
- Best-performing districts (Year One): Nagaur (Rajasthan), Gaya (Bihar), Umari (Madhya Pradesh); 18 further districts recognised (3 under each of 6 objective categories).
- Field models showcased: Gadchiroli (Maharashtra), Alluri Sitharama Raju (Andhra Pradesh), Banka (Bihar).
- Khet Bachao Abhiyan duration: 22 October – 30 November 2026, nationwide.
- Ideal fertiliser-balance benchmark: N:P:K = 4:2:1, routinely skewed because urea is priced far below phosphatic/potassic fertilisers.
- Reinforced existing schemes: Soil Health Card Scheme (2015) and PM-PRANAM (2023) — the latter lets States keep 50% of the fertiliser subsidy they save as a grant for alternate-fertiliser promotion.
- Design logic: modelled on the Aspirational Districts Programme (2018)'s convergence-and-ranking method rather than a fresh standalone outlay.

 MAINS DIMENSIONS / ANALYSIS

- Significance: signals a shift from “scheme proliferation” to “convergence of existing schemes with real-time district ranking” as the preferred instrument for closing India's agricultural productivity gaps.

- Criticism: a year is too short to judge genuine farm-outcome change (yield, farmer income) — the Ministry's own framing of Year Two as "the real test" implicitly concedes Year One measured process/convergence rather than output.
- Federal angle: district-level competitive ranking (rather than state-level) is a deliberate design choice to bypass state-political friction and target implementation directly at district administrations.
- Economic-distortion angle: the urea/DAP price-skew Khet Bachao Abhiyan addresses is a textbook input-subsidy distortion, directly testable against the Economic Survey's repeated recommendation to bring urea under NBS.
- Way forward: the real test is whether PM-PRANAM's 50%-subsidy-saving-as-grant incentive is large enough to move State-level fertiliser-promotion behaviour, given urea's politically sensitive low price.

🧠 LET'S REMEMBER THIS THROUGH A TRICK

Remember PMDDKY's architecture with '100-36-121': 100 districts, 36 converged Central schemes, 121 tracked indicators.

📄 PYQ LINKAGE

Agricultural input-subsidy design (urea vs Nutrient-Based Subsidy) and district-convergence models (Aspirational Districts Programme) are recurring GS3 themes; revise alongside the Economic Survey's repeated call to bring urea under NBS to correct the N:P:K imbalance.

🎯 PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ (STATEMENT-BASED)

Q. Consider the following statements:

1. Phosphatic and potassic fertilisers in India have been covered under the Nutrient-Based Subsidy (NBS) scheme since 2010.
2. Urea's farm-gate price in India is fixed by the government and has remained outside the NBS regime.
3. Under PM-PRANAM, States are allowed to retain the entire fertiliser subsidy they save as a grant.

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

Answer: a. Statement 3 is wrong — under PM-PRANAM, States retain only 50% of the fertiliser subsidy saved as a grant, not the entire amount.

🔥 PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION

India's chronic over-use of urea relative to phosphatic and potassic fertilisers is a long-standing policy-design problem rather than a recent crisis. Discuss the causes of this imbalance and evaluate the adequacy of interventions such as PM-PRANAM and the Khet Bachao Abhiyan in correcting it. (250 words)

#PMDhanDhaanya

#KhetBachaoAbhiyan

#FertiliserSubsidy

#PMPRANAM

#SoilHealth

GS3

Economy/Infrastructure · Energy Transmission & Multimodal Logistics

12 October 2026 (PIB review); CCEA approval October 2023 · Source: PIB; Ministry of Commerce & Industry (PM GatiShakti/NPG); POWERGRID

Ladakh's 13 GW Problem and Assam's Last-Mile Bridge: What PM GatiShakti Is Actually Sequencing

Why in News: A PIB review of PM GatiShakti-enabled infrastructure, released 12 October 2026, detailed progress on two connectivity projects the Network Planning Group (NPG) has screened under the National Master Plan: the Ladakh-Haryana Green Energy Corridor, designed to evacuate 13 GW of Ladakh's renewable-energy potential via a 480-km HVDC transmission line, and the Jogighopa Multimodal Logistics Park (MMLP) in Assam together with the under-construction Dhubri-Phulbari bridge linking Assam and Meghalaya.

Background: The Green Energy Corridor programme — a series of transmission projects absorbing India's renewable-capacity build-out without grid-stability loss — saw the Ladakh-Haryana link approved by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) in October 2023, with POWERGRID as implementing agency. High-Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) technology, rather than conventional AC transmission, is used specifically because it suffers far lower losses over very long distances, making a nearly 500-km Himalayan-to-plains link viable. Separately, the Jogighopa MMLP and Dhubri-Phulbari bridge exemplify PM GatiShakti's purpose of layering road, rail and inland-waterway data to plan multimodal connectivity in the Northeast.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- Ladakh-Haryana Green Energy Corridor: evacuates and integrates 13 GW of Ladakh renewable energy via a 5 GW-capacity transmission system.

- Spine of the corridor: a 480-km HVDC line from Pang (Ladakh) to Kaithal (Haryana), transiting Himachal Pradesh and Punjab.
- Approval and cost: CCEA approval, October 2023; cost about ₹20,773.70 crore, with 40% Central Financial Assistance; POWERGRID is the implementing agency.
- Target completion: FY 2029-30.
- Jogighopa MMLP: on the Brahmaputra's northern bank in Assam, integrating road, rail and inland-waterway transport, planned using PM GatiShakti's layered data model.
- Dhubri-Phulbari bridge: a four-lane bridge under construction linking Dhubri (Assam) and Phulbari (Meghalaya), projected to cut the road distance between the two banks from 205 km to about 20 km.
- Inland-waterway link: the Sadiya-Dhubri stretch of the Brahmaputra (891 km) constitutes National Waterway-2, which the Jogighopa MMLP is designed to plug into.
- Both projects were screened/sequenced by the Network Planning Group (NPG) under the National Master Plan rather than planned by a single ministry in isolation.

🎯 MAINS DIMENSIONS / ANALYSIS

- Significance: demonstrates PM GatiShakti's practical value beyond a planning dashboard — cross-ministerial sequencing (power transmission plus multimodal logistics) that would otherwise risk siloed execution.
- Criticism: a near seven-year gap between CCEA approval (2023) and targeted completion (2029-30) for the Green Energy Corridor shows "approval" and "execution" remain distinct milestones — planning coordination alone does not solve high-altitude land-acquisition or contracting delays.
- Strategic/federal angle: a 480-km HVDC line through Ladakh-Himachal-Punjab-Haryana, and a bridge cutting Assam-Meghalaya transit from 205 km to 20 km, both serve India's wider strategic-connectivity goals in sensitive border regions.
- Technical/conceptual angle: HVDC's lower long-distance transmission losses versus AC is a classic "science behind the scheme" concept, relevant wherever renewable-rich but grid-remote regions need evacuation infrastructure.
- Way forward: India's wider renewable-integration targets depend on a pipeline of such evacuation corridors keeping pace with generation-capacity addition, not lagging behind it.

🧠 LET'S REMEMBER THIS THROUGH A TRICK

Remember the Green Energy Corridor's numbers as '13-5-480-2029': 13 GW evacuated, 5 GW transmission capacity, 480 km HVDC line, targeted for FY2029-30.

📅 PYQ LINKAGE

Transmission/evacuation infrastructure for renewable energy (Green Energy Corridors) and multimodal logistics parks under PM GatiShakti are recurring GS3 themes; revise alongside India's renewable-capacity targets and the Network Planning Group's project-appraisal mechanism.

🎯 PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ (STATEMENT-BASED)

Q. Consider the following statements:

1. High-Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) transmission is generally preferred over conventional AC transmission for very long-distance power transmission because of lower transmission losses.
2. The Ladakh-Haryana Green Energy Corridor's transmission line passes through Himachal Pradesh and Punjab.
3. The Jogighopa Multimodal Logistics Park is linked to National Waterway-1.

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

Answer: a. Statement 3 is wrong — Jogighopa is linked to National Waterway-2 (the Sadiya-Dhubri stretch of the Brahmaputra), not National Waterway-1 (the Ganga, Haldia-Allahabad/Varanasi stretch).

📌 PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION

PM GatiShakti's value lies in sequencing cross-ministerial infrastructure rather than funding it directly. Evaluate this claim with reference to the Ladakh-Haryana Green Energy Corridor and the Jogighopa Multimodal Logistics Park, and discuss the gap between project-approval and execution timelines in Himalayan and Northeast-region infrastructure. (250 words)

#PMGatiShakti

#GreenEnergyCorridor

#HVDC

#Jogighopa

#NortheastConnectivity

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