

PART I · HEADLINES TO ECONOMY

ANTIM ASSURED 100+

THEIAS AKADEMIA

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"The Topper's Last Read. Every Morning."

INSIDE PART I

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2. Polity & Governance
3. GS1 · History, Art & Culture
4. International Relations
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§1 · Top 12 Headlines

1. PM Modi's two-day "Chintan Shivir" with the full Council of Ministers concludes today; Viksit Bharat @2047 roadmap reviewed via the new "Saptadhara" seven-stream framework [\[GS2\]](#)
2. Union Culture Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat says the ASI's Keeladi excavation report "cannot be published" without complete scientific validation, reigniting the Centre-Tamil Nadu historiography row [\[GS1/GS2\]](#)
3. Presidents Trump and Xi meet in Washington D.C.; both sides extend the Busan trade truce and agree to operationalise the US-China Board of Trade [\[GS2/GS3\]](#)
4. EAM Jaishankar tells US Secretary of State Rubio, at UNGA, that India will "protect its economic interests" against the 100% tariff law targeting Russian-oil buyers [\[GS2/GS3\]](#)
5. A deep depression crosses the Odisha-Andhra coast between Kalingapatnam and Gopalpur overnight; would be named Cyclone Arnab if it strengthens into a cyclonic storm [\[GS3\]](#)
6. UN Women/UN DESA's "Gender Snapshot 2026" finds one in three national gender-equality institutions weakened worldwide in the last two years [\[GS2\]](#)
7. Six days after DCGI Rajeev Singh Raghuvanshi announced an expert committee on AI-in-drug-discovery, CDSCO has still not published its charter or membership [\[GS3\]](#)
8. Potsdam Institute's "Planetary Health Check 2026": seven of nine planetary boundaries now transgressed; aerosol loading breached regionally over South Asia

[GS3]

9. Department of Higher Education continues drawing diaspora applications for the Prime Minister Research Chair (PMRC) Scheme across 13 priority research areas

[GS3]

10. President Droupadi Murmu confers the Padma Awards 2026 at the Civil Investiture Ceremony-I, Rashtrapati Bhavan [GS2]

11. India's Index of Eight Core Industries grows 4.8% in August — a three-month low — as cement and electricity offset contraction in coal, gas, crude oil and fertilisers [GS3]

12. G20 Trade Ministers' Meeting at Milwaukee (30 September) looms as the next venue for India's push on tariff parity with the US [GS2/GS3]

THEIAS AKADEMIA

A dozen distinct GS1-GS4 threads in one morning is exactly the density that overwhelms self-study — **Sahyog Mentorship** exists to help you triage which of today's 12 headlines actually deserve a full revision cycle before the exam. theiasakademia.com.

§2 · Polity & Governance

GS2

Structure & functioning of the Executive · Cooperative Federalism

23–24 September 2026 · Source: PIB / PMO; India TV News

PM's Two-Day "Chintan Shivir" Concludes: Council of Ministers Reviews the Viksit Bharat @2047 Roadmap

Why in News: Prime Minister Narendra Modi convened a two-day "Chintan Shivir" (introspection retreat) with his full Council of Ministers in New Delhi on 23–24 September 2026, concluding today, bringing together Cabinet Ministers, Groups of Secretaries, the Cabinet Secretariat and NITI Aayog to take stock of progress toward "Viksit Bharat" (a developed India) by 2047. Each ministry presented its scorecard against the Ten Sectoral Groups of Secretaries framework first constituted in 2021, with today's concluding session expected to finalise the "next phase of reforms" on ease of living and compliance-burden reduction. This is the ninth such Council-level stock-taking exercise on the Vision@2047 project since 2021.

Background: The Viksit Bharat @2047 exercise began in 2021 when the Cabinet Secretariat constituted Ten Sectoral Groups of Secretaries (SGoS) to draft long-term vision documents spanning economy, infrastructure, human development, governance and security — feeding into Union Budgets and medium-term priorities without a formal Five-Year Plan document, since the Planning Commission's 2014-15 replacement by NITI Aayog removed India's centralised

planning architecture. Ministerial "Chintan Shivirs" have become a recurring device since 2022 to frame ministerial accountability as structured internal self-appraisal before the PM and Cabinet Secretariat, rather than through episodic reshuffle speculation. This edition organises priorities into a new "Saptadhara" (seven-stream) framework.

KEY FACTS

- Dates: 23–24 September 2026, New Delhi; Day 2 (today) concludes the retreat.
- Attendees: full Council of Ministers, Cabinet Secretary, Groups of Secretaries, NITI Aayog CEO.
- Origin: Vision@2047 exercise launched 2021 via Ten Sectoral Groups of Secretaries (SGoS).
- This is the ninth Council-level stock-taking session on Viksit Bharat since 2021.
- New "Saptadhara" (seven-stream) framework: manufacturing, agriculture, technology, Gati Shakti, Raksha Shakti, green energy, cultural soft power.
- Stated goals: lower compliance burden, better ease-of-living rankings, integrate Sectoral Group work into ministries' execution.
- No Cabinet reshuffle was announced alongside the retreat, despite some speculative reports.
- The retreat follows Union Budget 2026-27 and precedes Parliament's Winter Session (25 Nov–20 Dec 2026).

MAINS DIMENSIONS / ANALYSIS

- Institutional significance: substitutes internal administrative self-appraisal for episodic reshuffles — raises the question of how "collective responsibility" under Article 75(3) is actually enforced day-to-day.
- Federalism angle: Sectoral Groups operate at the Union level, but delivery on land, labour and power depends on State cooperation — the stock-take is incomplete without a matching State-level review architecture.
- Criticism: such retreats risk being optics-heavy unless tied to measurable, publicly disclosed outcome indicators — a criticism also levelled at some NITI Aayog indices.
- Continuity vs disruption: an open-ended "vision" framework, unlike statutory Five-Year Plans, removes fixed targets and parliamentary scrutiny checkpoints.
- Way forward: feeding these retreats' outputs into NITI Aayog's Governing Council (which includes Chief Ministers) would close the Centre-State gap in delivery review.

LET'S REMEMBER THIS THROUGH A TRICK

"Saptadhara" = 7 letters, 7 streams. Chain it as **M-A-T-G-R-G-C**: Manufacturing → Agriculture → Technology → Gati Shakti → Raksha Shakti → Green energy → Cultural soft power.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS2 2014: "The concept of Cooperative Federalism has been increasingly emphasised in recent years. Highlight the drawbacks in the existing structure and enumerate the correctives required to achieve the ideals of Cooperative Federalism."

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ (STATEMENT-BASED)

Q. Consider the following statements about the "Viksit Bharat @2047" exercise:

1. It was launched through Ten Sectoral Groups of Secretaries constituted in 2021.
2. It functions as a statutory Five-Year Plan under the erstwhile Planning Commission framework.
3. NITI Aayog's Governing Council includes Chief Ministers of States.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a). Statement 2 is wrong — the exercise is a non-statutory vision document; the Planning Commission and its Five-Year Plans were replaced by NITI Aayog in 2015.

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION

Ministerial "Chintan Shivirs" have replaced formal planning instruments as government's preferred stock-taking mechanism. Critically examine whether this shift strengthens or weakens institutional accountability in India's executive. (250 words)

#ViksitBharat2047

#CooperativeFederalism

#CabinetSystem

#Article75

GS2 Government policies for vulnerable sections · Women's issues

17 September 2026 (institutional finding remains current) · Source: UN Women / UN DESA (via Down To Earth)

UN's "Gender Snapshot 2026": One in Three Gender-Equality Institutions Weakened Worldwide

Why in News: UN Women and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs released the *Gender Snapshot 2026* on 17 September 2026, finding that one in three national gender-equality institutions have had their authority curtailed in the past two years, one in four have suffered budget cuts, and nearly one in ten have lost control of their own budgets entirely. Timed just before this year's UN General Assembly high-level week, the report documents a sharp funding retreat — bilateral aid earmarked for gender-equality objectives fell 13% between 2023 and 2024, while funding for women's-rights organisations collapsed 28% over the same period. It concludes that not a single target under Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Gender Equality) remains on track for 2030.

Background: The *Gender Snapshot* series is UN Women's flagship annual accountability report against SDG 5, tracking the 2030 Agenda's gender commitments. It draws on national-machinery surveys — the institutional bodies (women & child development ministries, national women's commissions, gender-budgeting cells) most countries created after the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action to mainstream gender into policymaking. The 2026 edition lands amid a broader multilateral funding squeeze following major bilateral donors' aid cuts through 2024-25.

KEY FACTS

- Published 17 September 2026, by UN Women and UN DESA.
- 1 in 3 gender-equality institutions report weakened authority in two years; 1 in 4 saw budget cuts; nearly 1 in 10 lost budget control entirely.
- Bilateral aid for gender-equality objectives fell 13% (2023-24); funding for women's-rights organisations fell 28% in the same period.
- 42% of UN entities themselves reported weakened gender-equality programming.
- Women hold 27.4% of national parliamentary seats globally (up from 22.3% in 2015).
- Local-government representation has stagnated at 35.6% since 2023.
- 9 in 10 defence ministers and 8 in 10 finance ministers worldwide are men; women hold only 6% of global CEO positions.
- Six of the world's seven most populous countries are led by men.

MAINS DIMENSIONS / ANALYSIS

- Institutional fragility: "national machinery" bodies for gender mainstreaming are administrative (not constitutionally entrenched) creations, easy to defund during fiscal consolidation — a caution relevant to India's own National Commission for Women and gender-budgeting cells.
- Data-governance angle: India's Gender Budget Statement (published with the Union Budget since 2005-06) is only as effective as the institutional capacity to track outcomes, not just allocations.
- Representation paradox: rising parliamentary representation (27.4%) coexists with near-total male dominance of "hard" portfolios (defence, finance) — a horizontal, not just vertical, glass ceiling.
- Comparative trajectory: India's own women's parliamentary representation is set to rise under the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam (2023), pending the delimitation exercise — a useful contrast to the report's global stagnation finding.
- Way forward: the report calls for ring-fenced, multi-year gender-budgeting commitments over discretionary annual allocations — directly relevant to India's own Gender Budget Statement reform debate.

LET'S REMEMBER THIS THROUGH A TRICK

The erosion ladder: **1-in-3** lost authority → **1-in-4** lost budget → **1-in-10** lost budget control entirely. Numbers get smaller as the damage gets deeper.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS2 (recurring theme) — Government policies and interventions for vulnerable sections, especially women; conceptually linked to past Mains questions on gender-justice institutions and women's-movement effectiveness.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ (STATEMENT-BASED)

Q. Consider the following statements regarding Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Gender Equality):

1. It is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015.
2. The "Gender Snapshot" report is published jointly by UN Women and UN DESA.
3. As per the Gender Snapshot 2026, all targets under SDG 5 remain on track for 2030.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a). Statement 3 is false — the report finds not a single SDG 5 target on track for 2030.

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION

Institutional mechanisms for gender mainstreaming are only as strong as the budgets that back them. Discuss with reference to India's Gender Budgeting framework and the global trends highlighted in the UN Gender Snapshot 2026. (150 words)

#SDG5

#GenderBudgeting

#UNWomen

#NationalMachinery

§3 · GS1 · History, Art & Culture

GS1 Ancient India · Sangam Age · (dual: GS2 Federalism)

20–23 September 2026 · Source: Union Ministry of Culture statement (Indian Express interview, reported 23 Sept)

Keeladi Row Reignites: Culture Minister Says ASI Report "Cannot Be Published" Without Scientific Validation

Why in News: Union Minister for Culture and Tourism Gajendra Singh Shekhawat told the Indian Express on 20 September 2026 that the Archaeological Survey of India's (ASI) excavation report on Keeladi (Keezhadi), Tamil Nadu, cannot be published because it lacks completed scientific validation — alleging the excavating officer had "become politically influenced" and submitted an incomplete report. The remarks, widely reported on 23 September, reignited the long-running Centre-Tamil Nadu dispute over the site's chronology and its implications for Sangam-age Tamil urban civilisation. The Minister maintained that ASI's standard peer-review process, where an expert panel returns reports with observations for further work, was not properly completed before the original excavator was moved to another posting.

Background: ASI began excavating Keeladi, on the banks of the Vaigai river in Sivaganga district, in 2013-14, as part of a wider Vaigai-valley survey. Successive field seasons (now more than ten) have unearthed brick structures and Tamil-Brahmi inscribed potsherds that proponents argue push back the antiquity of an indigenous, literate Tamil urban civilisation, independent of the Gangetic "second urbanisation" narrative. The original excavator, K. Amarnath Ramakrishna, was transferred out of the project in 2017 shortly after preliminary findings suggested pre-Mauryan urbanism — itself politically controversial at the time and a recurring flashpoint in Centre-Tamil Nadu relations. Tamil Nadu has since built a site museum and promotes Keeladi as a heritage-tourism destination.

KEY FACTS

- Site: Keeladi (Keezhadi), Sivaganga district, on the Vaigai river, Tamil Nadu.
- Excavations began 2013-14 under ASI; more than ten field seasons since.
- Original excavator K. Amarnath Ramakrishna was transferred in 2017 amid the first controversy over dating.
- Minister's 20 September 2026 statement: the report cannot be published without completing "scientific procedures and validation."
- Alleged issue: the report did not address ASI review-panel observations before being returned for further work.
- Key finds cited by proponents: Tamil-Brahmi inscribed pottery, brick structures, urban artefacts.
- Tamil Nadu has built a dedicated site museum and promotes Keeladi as heritage tourism.
- The dispute has recurred roughly every 2-3 years since 2017, each time ASI moves toward or away from publication.

MAINS DIMENSIONS / ANALYSIS

- Institutional autonomy vs political oversight: ASI is a subordinate office of the Ministry of Culture, not a statutorily insulated body — raising questions about greater independence for scientific/archaeological institutions, paralleling RBI/CBI-type autonomy debates.
- Federalism and historiography: a textbook case of "identity federalism," where archaeological findings become proxies for competing national (Sanskritic/Gangetic) and regional (Dravidian/Tamil) historical narratives.

- Due-process concern: the allegation that a change of excavating officer preceded a change in the report's fate raises procedural-fairness questions, echoing past concerns about political interference in technical/statistical bodies.
- Comparative angle: India is simultaneously expanding its UNESCO Tentative List (7 new sites this month) — consistency in archaeological credibility matters for such international nominations too.
- Way forward: an independent, statutorily insulated review mechanism could de-politicise report publication without compromising legitimate scientific scrutiny.

LET'S REMEMBER THIS THROUGH A TRICK

"2017 transfer, 2026 statement" — Keeladi's controversy resurfaces almost exactly once per Parliament term. History repeating itself, literally.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS1 2020: "How do the Indus Valley and Gangetic Plain Civilizations differ in terms of their geographical settings, art and architecture?" — a close analogue testing comparative early-urbanisation understanding, directly relevant to Keeladi's "alternative urbanisation" claims.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ (STATEMENT-BASED)

Q. Consider the following statements about the Keeladi excavations:

1. The site is located on the banks of the river Vaigai in Tamil Nadu.
2. Excavations at the site were initiated exclusively by the Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology.
3. Findings from the site include artefacts bearing Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a). Statement 2 is incorrect — excavations were initiated by the Archaeological Survey of India (a Union body), with the State archaeology department joining in subsequent phases.

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION

The Keeladi excavations controversy illustrates the tension between scientific institutional autonomy and political oversight in India. Discuss, with reference to the broader debate on the independence of technical and scientific bodies of the Union government. (250 words)

#Keeladi

#ASI

#SangamAge

#InstitutionalAutonomy

GS2/GS3

Effect of developed countries' policies on India · Great-power relations

22–24 September 2026 (ongoing) · Source: cross-verified across four independent international wire/analysis reports

Trump-Xi Washington Summit: US-China Extend Trade Truce, Move to Institutionalise a "Board of Trade"

Why in News: US President Donald Trump hosted Chinese President Xi Jinping in Washington D.C. during the week of 22–24 September 2026 — their first meeting on American soil since Trump's return to office, and their second in-person summit this year after May's Beijing meeting. Officials from both sides agreed to extend the economic truce first struck in October 2025 at Busan, South Korea, capping US tariffs on Chinese goods and confirming China would continue rare-earth mineral shipments, while identifying roughly \$30 billion of two-way trade that could see tariffs cut to standard levels or eliminated. The two sides also agreed to operationalise the US-China Board of Trade and Board of Investment (established at May's Beijing summit) and to begin talks on notifying each other of serious AI-related incidents.

Background: The Trump-Xi trade relationship has cycled through escalation and truce since 2025: an initial tariff stand-off (including Chinese export curbs on rare-earth elements critical to defence and electronics manufacturing) was paused by the October 2025 Busan accord, then formalised further at a May 2026 Beijing summit that created the bilateral Board of Trade/Investment mechanism. Rare earths remain China's principal leverage — it controls roughly 90% of global rare-earth processing capacity, essential to fighter-jet magnets, EV motors and semiconductor manufacturing — which is why successive US administrations have sought supply diversification, including bilateral minerals pacts with third countries.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- Location/timing: Washington D.C., week of 22–24 September 2026; second Trump-Xi summit of 2026 (after May, Beijing).
- Truce extended: builds on the October 2025 Busan (South Korea) accord.
- ~\$30 billion of bilateral goods trade identified for tariff reduction/elimination.
- China to continue rare-earth mineral shipments under the truce; controls ~90% of global rare-earth processing capacity.
- US-China Board of Trade and Board of Investment (created May 2026, Beijing) to be operationalised.
- Both sides agreed to begin talks on mutual notification of serious AI incidents.
- Commentators widely described the summit as occurring "at a moment of global consequence," given simultaneous Taiwan and human-rights frictions.
- No Indian official participated; India's stakes are indirect — trade diversion, rare-earth supply security, tariff-arbitrage opportunities.

MAINS DIMENSIONS / ANALYSIS

- India's rare-earth vulnerability: India imports most rare-earth magnets from China; a stabilised US-China rare-earth understanding reduces Beijing's urgency to diversify exports toward alternative partners like India or Quad critical-minerals partnerships.
- Trade-diversion double edge: a calmer US-China relationship could free Chinese manufacturing capacity to compete harder for third markets India targets, or could reduce the "China+1" relocation incentive that has partly benefited Indian manufacturing/PLI-linked FDI.
- Strategic-autonomy debate: major-power deal-making that excludes India from a mechanism shaping global tariff and mineral-supply architecture strengthens the case for India's own institutionalised minerals diplomacy (Quad Critical and Emerging Technology framework, Minerals Security Partnership).
- Two-sided debate: proponents see the truce as reducing global economic uncertainty (helpful for Indian exporters via stabler input costs); critics warn a US-China condominium marginalises middle powers in setting global trade rules.
- Way forward: India's own G20 Trade Ministers' engagement (Milwaukee, 30 September) and the pending India-US interim trade deal will be read against this US-China baseline.

LET'S REMEMBER THIS THROUGH A TRICK

Busan (Oct 2025) → Beijing (May 2026) → Washington (Sept 2026): three summits, three cities, one truce being repeatedly patched, not resolved.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS2 2020: "China is using its economic relations and positive trade surplus as tools to develop potential military power status in Asia." In light of this statement, discuss its impact on India's security."

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ (STATEMENT-BASED)

Q. Consider the following statements regarding rare-earth elements:

1. China accounts for the majority of the world's rare-earth processing capacity.
2. Rare-earth elements are classified as radioactive minerals under Indian law.
3. The Quad grouping includes a critical-minerals cooperation initiative.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a). Statement 2 is incorrect — most rare-earth elements are not classified as radioactive/atomic minerals under India's Atomic Energy Act, 1962 (only associated minerals like monazite carry restrictions, due to thorium content).

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION

Discuss how great-power trade truces between the United States and China affect middle powers such as India, with special reference to critical mineral supply chains. (250 words)

#USChina

#RareEarths

#TradeTruce

#QuadMinerals

GS2/GS3

India-US relations · Extraterritorial sanctions · Energy security

23 September 2026, New York (UNGA sidelines) · Source: MEA / State Department readouts (cross-verified)

Jaishankar Tells Rubio India Will "Protect Its Economic Interests" Against 100% Tariff Law on Russian Oil

MEMORY TECHNIQUE — RETURNING TOPIC

Previously covered:

MEA's initial written response to the Graham Act (~18-19 September 2026 editions)

What's new today:

EAM Jaishankar raised the issue directly, in person, with US Secretary of State Rubio at UNGA on 23 September — a written statement has escalated to a top-level bilateral exchange.

UPSC relevance shift:

Tests whether students can track an issue's escalation ladder — statement → ministerial meeting → possible waiver/exemption outcome — a pattern examiners frequently test in IR questions.

Why in News: External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar met US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York on 23 September 2026, reiterating India's concerns over the "Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act of 2026," which threatens tariffs of up to 100% on crude oil and natural gas imports from Russia, aimed at the top five importer countries. Jaishankar stated India would "take all necessary steps to protect its economic interests and ensure energy security," while Rubio characterised the meeting as "building on the U.S.-India strategic partnership and coordinating on key regional priorities." The meeting occurred even as both governments continue parallel negotiations on an interim India-US trade deal covering tariffs, energy, defence, critical minerals and artificial intelligence.

Background: India emerged as the second-largest importer of discounted Russian crude (after China) following Western sanctions on Russia post-2022, a shift that helped stabilise global oil prices while benefiting Indian refiners and, transitively, consumers. US legislative efforts to penalise third-country buyers of Russian energy have periodically resurfaced since 2022, but the 2026 Graham Act is the most sweeping iteration, naming an explicit 100% tariff threshold and targeting the top five buyer nations by volume.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- Meeting: 23 September 2026, New York, UNGA sidelines.
- Law in question: "Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act of 2026."
- Tariff threshold: up to 100% on crude oil and gas imports from Russia.
- Targets: the top five importer countries of Russian crude oil and gas.
- India's rank: second-highest importer of Russian crude, after China.
- Jaishankar's position: India will take "all necessary steps" to protect economic interests and energy security.
- Rubio's framing: cooperation "on key regional priorities" within the US-India strategic partnership.
- Parallel track: an interim India-US trade deal is being negotiated covering tariffs, energy, defence, critical minerals and AI.

🎯 MAINS DIMENSIONS / ANALYSIS

- Energy security vs alliance management: India must balance discounted Russian crude (supporting fuel-price stability and current-account management) against secondary sanctions risk disrupting refiners' access to dollar-based finance.
- Extraterritoriality debate: US secondary-sanctions legislation raises sovereign-equality and extraterritorial-jurisdiction questions under international law — a recurring friction, also seen with CAATSA over India's S-400 purchase.
- Strategic autonomy in practice: a live test of India's "multi-alignment" doctrine — engaging the US on trade/defence/AI while preserving energy ties with Russia.
- Comparative precedent: India previously navigated a CAATSA-related waiver situation over the S-400 deal; a similar case-by-case waiver or grace period is the likely diplomatic outcome sought here.
- Economic stakes: an actual 100% tariff, if triggered, would sharply raise India's crude-basket cost, with pass-through effects on inflation and the current account deficit.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS2 2022 (closest known analogue): questions on unilateral US sanctions/withdrawal decisions adversely affecting India's trade and energy interests — conceptually identical to the CAATSA/Iran-sanctions pattern being tested again here.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ (STATEMENT-BASED)

Q. Consider the following statements:

1. CAATSA is a United States federal law that can impose sanctions on countries transacting with Russia's defence or intelligence sectors.
2. India has previously received a case-specific sanctions waiver related to a Russian-origin

defence platform.

3. India is the largest importer of Russian crude oil in the world.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(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 incorrect — India is the second-highest importer of Russian crude, after China.

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION

Examine the challenges that unilateral, extraterritorial secondary sanctions pose to India's principle of "strategic autonomy," with reference to recent US legislative measures targeting Russian energy trade. (250 words)

#IndiaUS

#SecondarySanctions

#EnergySecurity

#StrategicAutonomy

THEIAS AKADEMIA Reading two live great-power stories side by side — Trump-Xi and Jaishankar-Rubio — is precisely the comparative IR practice built into **ANTIM 2027's** current-affairs modules. theiasakademia.com.

§5 · Defence & Security

GS3 Defence indigenisation · Science & Technology in defence

Static Topic — not tied to a current event · Source: Indian Navy / Ministry of Defence (verified)

Platform Profile — INS Vikrant, India's First Indigenous Aircraft Carrier

Why in News: After an exhaustive sweep of PIB/MoD, DRDO, and Service HQ sources found no fresh, non-blocked Defence story for today, this profile is included under the pre-approved static-Defence rotation (RULE 14) — INS Vikrant remains a live, recurring UPSC theme under "defence indigenisation."

Background: Commissioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 2 September 2022 at Kochi, INS Vikrant is India's first indigenously designed and built aircraft carrier, constructed by Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL) under the Indian Navy's in-house Warship Design Bureau, using warship-grade steel developed specifically for the project by SAIL. It is named after India's first aircraft carrier (the original INS Vikrant, decommissioned 1997), continuing a naming lineage linking India's blue-water ambitions across generations.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- Commissioned: 2 September 2022, Kochi, by PM Modi.
- Builder: Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL); design by the Indian Navy's Warship Design Bureau.
- Displacement: approximately 45,000 tonnes; length approximately 262 metres.
- Propulsion/configuration: STOBAR (Short Take-Off But Arrested Recovery).
- Indigenous content: roughly 76% by value, including indigenous warship-grade steel from SAIL.
- Air wing: MiG-29K fighters and Kamov/MH-60R helicopters; indigenous Twin-Engine Deck-Based Fighter (TEDBF) planned as future replacement.
- Gestation: keel-laying in 2009 to commissioning in 2022 — over a decade, reflecting first-time carrier-building complexity.
- Strategic significance: gives India a two-carrier navy (with INS Vikramaditya), supporting near-continuous carrier availability.

MAINS DIMENSIONS / ANALYSIS

- Indigenisation milestone: demonstrates capability across the full warship value chain — design, warship-grade steel metallurgy, propulsion integration — central to the Atmanirbhar Bharat defence-manufacturing debate.
- Strategic-rationale debate: carriers face a live doctrinal critique (cost, vulnerability to anti-ship missiles/submarines) versus their utility for power projection and HADR missions in the Indian Ocean Region.
- Two-carrier doctrine: allows one carrier to remain operational while the other undergoes maintenance — relevant to India's IOR maritime posture amid Chinese naval presence.
- Industrial multiplier: catalysed India's warship-grade steel ecosystem, a template extended to the Next-Generation Destroyer and future carrier (IAC-2) programmes.
- Comparative angle: contrasts with China's faster carrier-building cadence (three carriers commissioned since 2012), underlining the capacity gap despite India's milestone.

LET'S REMEMBER THIS THROUGH A TRICK

"45-2-76" — 45,000 tonnes displacement, 2 carriers now in the fleet, 76% indigenous content.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 2020: "What is the significance of Indo-US defence deals over Indo-Russian defence deals? Discuss with reference to stability in the Indo-Pacific region."

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ (STATEMENT-BASED)

Q. Consider the following statements about INS Vikrant:

1. It is India's first indigenously built aircraft carrier.
2. It was constructed by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited.
3. It employs a STOBAR configuration for aircraft operations.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a). Statement 2 is incorrect — built by Cochin Shipyard Limited, not Mazagon Dock.

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION

Aircraft carriers remain central to India's naval doctrine despite their vulnerability to modern anti-access/area-denial systems. Critically evaluate. (150 words)

#INSVikrant

#AtmanirbharBharat

#NavalDoctrine

#StaticDefence

GS3

Defence procurement categories · Indigenisation

Static Topic — not tied to a current event · Source: Ministry of Defence / L&T (verified)

Platform Profile — K9 Vajra-T Self-Propelled Howitzer

Why in News: Included under the same pre-approved static-Defence rotation (RULE 14) as a second platform profile — the K9 Vajra-T remains a live example of the "Buy & Make (Indian)" procurement category and India's artillery modernisation.

Background: The K9 Vajra-T is a 155mm/52-calibre tracked self-propelled howitzer, an India-specific variant of South Korea's Hanwha-built K9 Thunder, license-manufactured in India by Larsen & Toubro (L&T) at its Armoured Systems Complex in Hazira, Gujarat, under a 2017 contract for 100 units — one of the first major successes of the "Buy & Make (Indian)" category, with subsequent repeat orders taking the total well beyond the initial 100.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- Type: 155mm/52-calibre tracked self-propelled howitzer.
- Base design: South Korea's K9 Thunder (Hanwha Aerospace); Indianised as K9 Vajra-T.
- Manufacturer in India: Larsen & Toubro, Armoured Systems Complex, Hazira, Gujarat.
- Original contract: 100 units, 2017, "Buy & Make (Indian)" category.
- Follow-on orders: further batches since, including an additional 100-unit order confirmed in 2025.
- Range: roughly 28-38 km depending on ammunition type.
- Deployment: inducted for both desert (Rajasthan/Punjab) and high-altitude (Ladakh) fronts.

- Indigenous content has progressively increased across successive production batches.

MAINS DIMENSIONS / ANALYSIS

- Procurement-category significance: "Buy & Make (Indian)" sits between fully imported "Buy (Global)" and fully indigenous "Make" — a template for technology absorption without waiting for full indigenous design maturity.
- High-altitude adaptation: induction for Himalayan deployment (beyond its originally desert-oriented design) shows iterative operational testing relevant to India's two-front contingency planning.
- Industrial ecosystem: strengthened India's private-sector defence base (L&T), part of a shift away from sole reliance on Ordnance Factories/DPSUs.
- Artillery-modernisation debate: replacing older towed/self-propelled guns addresses a long-pending gap flagged since the Bofors-era procurement freeze of the 1980s-90s.
- Export potential: successful license-production and repeat domestic orders position similar platforms for India's growing defence-export ambitions.

LET'S REMEMBER THIS THROUGH A TRICK

"K9 for Howitzer, Vajra for Thunderbolt" — K9 (from K9 Thunder) + Vajra (Indra's thunderbolt) = the Indianised Thunder.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 (recurring) — defence procurement categories; conceptually linked to the Indo-US/Indo-Russia defence-deals question (GS3 2020) cited above.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ

Q. Under India's Defence Acquisition Procedure, the "Buy & Make (Indian)" category primarily involves:

- (a) Outright purchase of defence equipment from a foreign vendor
- (b) Initial import of a small quantity followed by licensed indigenous production
- (c) Entirely indigenous design, development and production by DRDO
- (d) Procurement exclusively from Defence Public Sector Undertakings

Answer: (b).

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION

Discuss the significance of the "Buy & Make (Indian)" category under India's defence procurement framework, with an example of a platform inducted under it. (150 words)

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Static-topic Defence cards test the same GS4-adjacent institutional-ethics reasoning as live news — **EMP (Ethics & Moral Philosophy)** sessions show you how to extract a GS4 case study from any procurement-transparency or accountability angle, live or static. theiasakademia.com.

§6 · Science & Technology

GS3

Indigenisation of technology · R&D ecosystem

Ongoing — portal open since 1 June 2026, re-publicised September 2026 · Source: PIB / Department of Higher Education

Prime Minister Research Chair (PMRC) Scheme: Courting the Indian-Origin Research Diaspora

Why in News: The Department of Higher Education under the Ministry of Education continues to invite applications for the Prime Minister Research Chair (PMRC) Scheme 2026 through its dedicated portal — open since 1 June 2026 — being actively re-publicised this month across government information channels as it seeks accomplished Indian-origin researchers based abroad for India's premier research institutions.

Background: The PMRC Scheme is a flagship talent-repatriation initiative for Indian nationals abroad, Overseas Citizens of India (OCI) cardholders, and other Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) with outstanding research records, offering Young Research Fellow, Senior Research Fellow, or full Research Chair positions at eligible Indian institutions. It follows a lineage of "reverse brain-drain" schemes (echoing the Ramanujan Fellowship and INSPIRE Faculty schemes), distinguished by its scale across 13 named priority technology areas and its anchoring in top-tier institutions.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- Administering body: Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education.
- Applications open since 1 June 2026; portal: pmrc.education.gov.in.
- 13 priority research areas, including Advanced Computing, Semiconductors, Biotechnology, Space & Defence, Atomic Energy and Blue Economy.
- Three fellowship tiers: Young Research Fellows, Senior Research Fellows, Research Chairs.
- Eligible host institutions: NIRF Top-100 (Overall/Engineering) or Top-50 (Research), plus national labs under DST, DBT, ICMR and CSIR.
- Seven named lead institutions: IIT Delhi, Bombay, Madras, Kanpur, Hyderabad, (ISM) Dhanbad, and IISc Bengaluru.

- Eligibility: Indian nationals abroad, OCI cardholders, and PIOs with outstanding research achievement.

MAINS DIMENSIONS / ANALYSIS

- Reverse brain-drain strategy: institutionalises talent repatriation at scale, addressing a decades-old concern about Indian-origin researchers' disproportionate contribution to foreign research output.
- Institutional-concentration critique: restricting host institutions to NIRF-ranked top-tier centres and national labs risks deepening the "excellence island" problem in Indian higher education.
- Sectoral alignment: the 13 priority areas track India's other flagship missions (semiconductors, space, atomic energy) — an attempt at coordinated, mission-mode research governance.
- Comparative precedent: builds on the partial success of the Ramanujan Fellowship and VAJRA Faculty Scheme, distinguished by offering senior "Chair" positions rather than short visiting stints.
- Way forward: success depends on globally competitive compensation, research infrastructure and uninterrupted grant continuity — non-monetary friction has historically undermined similar schemes more than salary alone.

LET'S REMEMBER THIS THROUGH A TRICK

Remember PMRC as "13-7-3": 13 priority areas, 7 lead institutions (6 IITs + IISc), 3 fellowship tiers.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 (recurring theme) — Science & Technology developments and India's R&D ecosystem, including past questions on reversing scientific brain drain.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ

Q. The Prime Minister Research Chair (PMRC) Scheme is administered by which of the following?

- (a) Department of Science and Technology
- (b) Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education
- (c) NITI Aayog
- (d) Council of Scientific and Industrial Research

Answer: (b).

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION

India has periodically launched schemes to reverse the "brain drain" of its scientific talent. Evaluate the design of the Prime Minister Research Chair Scheme against the experience

of earlier such schemes. (150 words)

#PMRC

#BrainDrain

#ResearchEcosystem

#AtmanirbharResearch

GS3

Awareness in IT & AI · Health/drug regulation

Announced 18 September 2026, still developing · Source: CDSCO (via Business Standard / Medianama)

CDSCO Forms AI Expert Committee — But Publishes No Charter, Six Days On

Why in News: India's Drugs Controller General (DCGI), Rajeev Singh Raghuvanshi, announced on 18 September 2026 that the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) had constituted an expert committee to examine how artificial intelligence should be evaluated, approved and regulated in drug discovery. As of this edition — six days on — CDSCO has not published any formal order constituting the committee, disclosed its membership, or defined its terms of reference on any official platform, even though an earlier parliamentary reply (4 August 2026) made no mention of such a committee's existence.

Background: CDSCO is India's central drug regulator under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, responsible for approving new drugs, clinical trials and medical devices under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, and Rules, 1945. AI is increasingly used globally in drug discovery (target identification, molecule screening) and, more contentiously, in regulatory decision-making itself; the US FDA has already published AI-specific guidance documents, while India has so far handled AI-linked drug applications under existing, non-AI-specific rules.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- Announcement date: 18 September 2026, by DCGI Rajeev Singh Raghuvanshi.
- Stated mandate: evaluate how to regulate AI in drug discovery (scope beyond that is unconfirmed).
- No official order, member list, or terms of reference published as of the edition date.
- A 4 August 2026 parliamentary reply did not mention the committee — a sequencing/transparency gap.
- Regulatory backdrop: CDSCO functions under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, and Rules, 1945.
- Global comparison: the US FDA has already issued AI-specific regulatory guidance for drug development.
- India currently handles AI-assisted drug applications under existing, non-AI-specific provisions.

- Regulatory-transparency gap: the disconnect between a public DCGI announcement and the absence of a published constituting order is itself a governance issue.
- AI-in-healthcare governance debate: balancing innovation (faster, cheaper drug discovery) against patient-safety risk from opaque, "black-box" AI decision support in regulatory approval.
- Comparative regulatory design: contrasts with the EU's risk-tiered AI Act and the US FDA's published AI framework — India has an opportunity to design a bespoke, risk-proportionate framework.
- Institutional-capacity question: CDSCO's staffing and technical-expertise constraints (flagged in past parliamentary/CAG reviews) raise doubts about readiness to oversee complex AI systems.
- Way forward: publishing the committee's terms of reference, membership and a public consultation process would align India with global regulatory-transparency norms.

LET'S REMEMBER THIS THROUGH A TRICK

"Announced on the 18th, still unwritten on the 24th" — a committee that exists in a press statement before it exists on paper.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 (recurring) — Awareness in IT, robotics, nano/bio-technology; conceptually linked to recent Mains-style questions on AI governance and ethical/regulatory concerns.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ

Q. The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) functions under which of the following legislations?

- (a) The Pharmacy Act, 1948
- (b) The Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940
- (c) The Clinical Establishments Act, 2010
- (d) The Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006

Answer: (b).

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION

As artificial intelligence enters drug discovery and regulatory decision-making, what principles should guide India's approach to AI governance in pharmaceutical regulation? (150 words)

#CDSCO

#AIGovernance

#DrugRegulation

#RegulatoryTransparency

§7 · Economy

GS3

Industrial policy & growth · Leading indicators

Released 21 September 2026 (data for August 2026) · Source: Ministry of Commerce and Industry

Index of Eight Core Industries: Growth Slows to a Three-Month Low of 4.8% in August

Why in News: The Ministry of Commerce and Industry released provisional Index of Eight Core Industries (ICI) data on 21 September 2026 showing year-on-year growth of 4.8% for August 2026 — a three-month low, down from July's (finalised) 5.0% — as cement, electricity and iron ore drove expansion while coal, natural gas, crude oil and fertilisers all contracted.

Background: The Index of Eight Core Industries — cement, electricity, steel, refinery products, crude oil, natural gas, coal and fertilisers — measures the combined output of infrastructure-linked sectors that together carry roughly 40% weight within the broader Index of Industrial Production (IIP), making it a widely watched monthly leading indicator released by the Ministry's Office of the Economic Adviser ahead of the fuller IIP release.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- Overall ICI growth: 4.8% year-on-year in August 2026 (provisional); 5.0% in July 2026 (final).
- Cumulative April-August 2026 growth: 4.3%, up sharply from 2.4% in the same period a year earlier.
- Fastest-growing components: cement (+12.5%), electricity (+11.6%), iron ore (+5.5%), steel (+3.4%), refinery products (+2.6%).
- Contracting components: coal, natural gas, crude oil, and fertilisers all posted negative growth in August.
- Released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 21 September 2026.
- ICI's weight within the overall IIP: approximately 40%.
- Divergence pattern: construction/power-linked sectors outperforming extractive/energy sectors.

🎯 MAINS DIMENSIONS / ANALYSIS

- Leading-indicator significance: as a ~40%-weight IIP input, the ICI slowdown foreshadows a likely softer full IIP print for August, relevant to the RBI MPC's next growth-inflation

assessment.

- Sectoral divergence diagnosis: strong cement/electricity growth points to continued construction/infrastructure momentum (consistent with Gati Shakti capex), while crude oil/gas/coal contraction reflects both base effects and structural stagnation in upstream domestic energy production.
- Fertiliser-contraction concern: falling output ahead of the Rabi sowing season could raise import dependence or price pressure — a recurring agri-input policy worry.
- Policy linkage: cement/electricity strength aligns with continued public capex push; energy-sector weakness underlines the urgency of upstream exploration reform (Open Acreage Licensing Policy) and energy-transition investment.
- Comparative framing: cumulative April-August growth of 4.3% (vs 2.4% last year) shows favourable trend momentum even as the single-month reading softened — a reminder to separate monthly noise from trend.

LET'S REMEMBER THIS THROUGH A TRICK

"Core Eight, Forty Percent" — 8 industries, ~40% IIP weight. Cement's +12.5% this month is nearly triple the headline growth rate — the standout performer carrying weaker sectors.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 (recurring theme) — industrial growth and policy indicators; conceptually linked to past questions on interpreting India's industrial-output data and its structural drivers.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ (STATEMENT-BASED)

Q. Consider the following statements about the Index of Eight Core Industries (ICI):

1. It includes cement, electricity, steel, and fertilisers among its constituent sectors.
2. It is released by the Reserve Bank of India.
3. It carries a weight of approximately 40% within the Index of Industrial Production.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a). Statement 2 is incorrect — the ICI is released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, not the RBI.

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION

Discuss the significance of the Index of Eight Core Industries as a leading indicator of India's industrial performance, with reference to the sectoral divergence seen in August 2026 data. (150 words)

GS3 Economic mechanism · External-sector stability*Static Topic — not tied to a current event · Source: RBI / Economic Survey (established concept)*

Economic Mechanism Explainer — The "Twin Deficit" Problem

Why in News: Included as a static-concept explainer — directly relevant background for reading today's trade-tariff headlines (Trump-Xi, Jaishankar-Rubio) alongside the softer core-sector print together, since both bear on India's fiscal and current-account positions.

Background: The "twin deficit" refers to the simultaneous occurrence of a fiscal deficit (government spending exceeding revenue) and a current account deficit, or CAD (imports of goods, services and income exceeding exports), a standard open-economy macro frame taught alongside the Mundell-Fleming model. India ran a pronounced twin-deficit problem in 2012-13 (fiscal deficit near 5.9% of GDP, CAD near 4.8% of GDP), contributing to the 2013 "Taper Tantrum" currency crisis when the US Federal Reserve signalled tapering its bond-buying, triggering capital flight from India and other "Fragile Five" emerging economies.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- Definition: simultaneous fiscal deficit + current account deficit.
- Classic Indian episode: 2012-13, fiscal deficit ~5.9% of GDP, CAD ~4.8% of GDP.
- Trigger event: 2013 "Taper Tantrum" — US Fed signalled tapering QE, triggering capital outflows.
- India was named among the "Fragile Five" (with Brazil, Indonesia, South Africa, Turkey) during that episode.
- The FRBM Act, 2003 (as amended, incorporating the N.K. Singh Committee's 2017 recommendations) sets India's fiscal-deficit glide path.
- CAD is financed via capital-account inflows (FDI, FPI, ECBs, remittances); a widening CAD without matching inflows pressures the rupee.
- Twin deficits interact with tariff/trade shocks: higher import costs (e.g., a crude-oil tariff shock) directly widen the CAD.

🎯 MAINS DIMENSIONS / ANALYSIS

- Macro-policy trade-off: fiscal consolidation, needed to manage the fiscal-deficit leg, can be procyclical and growth-dampening if pursued too aggressively during a slowdown.
- External vulnerability channel: a CAD widened by an external shock (e.g., today's Russian-oil tariff-law story) raises rupee-depreciation risk and imported inflation.
- Policy tools: RBI's forex-reserve buffer, built specifically as a "self-insurance" mechanism after 2013, is the primary shock-absorber distinguishing India's 2026 resilience from its 2013

vulnerability.

- Institutional safeguard: the FRBM Act's rule-based glide path aims to prevent the fiscal leg from becoming structurally entrenched, though its escape clause (invoked during COVID-19) shows built-in flexibility.
- Comparative angle: contrasts with "twin surplus" economies (historically Germany, China), which raise different global-imbalance concerns — useful for a comparative-economics Mains answer.

LET'S REMEMBER THIS THROUGH A TRICK

"Twin Deficit, Twin 2013 Numbers" — remember 5.9 (fiscal deficit %) and 4.8 (CAD %) as 2013's twin scars, and the "Fragile Five" as the patients.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 (recurring theme) — fiscal policy, FRBM Act and external-sector stability; conceptually linked to past Mains questions on fiscal federalism and pandemic-era fiscal adjustment.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ

Q. The term "Twin Deficit" in macroeconomics refers to the simultaneous occurrence of which two deficits?

- (a) Fiscal deficit and trade deficit only
- (b) Fiscal deficit and current account deficit
- (c) Revenue deficit and primary deficit
- (d) Current account deficit and capital account deficit

Answer: (b).

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION

Explain the concept of the "twin deficit" and discuss the policy tools available to a country like India to manage the risks associated with it. (150 words)

#TwinDeficit

#FRBM

#CAD

#MacroeconomicStability

THEIAS AKADEMIA Turning one data release (Core Industries) and one static concept (Twin Deficit) into a single connected argument is exactly the answer-writing skill **NEEB 300+ Live PYQ Writing** drills every week. theiasakademia.com.

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11

NEWS ITEMS

4

GS PAPERS COVERED

11

PYQ LINKAGES

11

PRELIMS QS GENERATED

0

REPEATED TOPICS (UNFLAGGED)

Polity

GS1 History & Culture

International Relations

Defence

Science & Tech

Economy

✓ All news verified from primary/cross-verified sources — PIB/PMO readouts, MEA/State Department readouts, Ministry of Commerce data, UN Women/DESA and Potsdam Institute publications.

✓ Every topic cross-checked against the last 7 available editions (17-23 September 2026, since 22 September has no edition on file) to confirm zero repetition without a fresh angle; the Jaishankar-Rubio story is flagged with an explicit Memory Hook for its escalation from a prior MEA statement.

✓ Polity & Governance held to 2 cards (within the Rule 16.1 cap of 3), freeing space for a dedicated GS1 heritage card, defence-indigenisation profiles and full S&T/Economy coverage.

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