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PART I · HEADLINES TO ECONOMY

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INSIDE PART I

1. Top Headlines
2. Polity & Governance (4 cards)
3. International Relations (2 cards)
4. Defence & Security (2 cards)
5. Science & Technology (2 cards)
6. Economy (2 cards)

Top Headlines

1. **GS3** **MSME Development (Amendment) Bill, 2026** clears both Houses of Parliament (Rajya Sabha 3 Aug, Lok Sabha 7 Aug); awaits Presidential assent — mandatory TReDS for CPSEs, 50% interim payment rule, decriminalisation of minor lapses.
2. **GS2** Supreme Court releases its **Gender Sensitivity Handbook 2026** ("Judgments and Gender"), directing courts to drop terms like "prosecutrix" and mandating witness comfort protocols.
3. **GS2** Supreme Court, in *Mukkera Venkata Ratnam v. Vantasala China Venkateswarlu* (6 Aug), holds civil courts CAN try disputes between non-tribal parties even inside Fifth Schedule Scheduled Areas.
4. **GS2** SC suo motu order (4 Aug) extends 4% RPwD Act reservation to cadets "outboarded" from military training with 40%+ disability; Centre told to frame a welfare scheme for those below the threshold.
5. **GS2** India's BRICS chairship: 11th **BRICS Culture Ministers' Meeting** concludes in Bhopal (8 Aug) with the "Bhopal Declaration," including a cultural-property repatriation mechanism.
6. **GS3** Exercise **Pitch Black 2026** concludes at Darwin, Australia (7 Aug) — IAF Rafales fly at the exercise for the first time ever, alongside Japan's F-35A debut.
7. **GS3** ISRO/DoS tells Rajya Sabha (6 Aug) that all Gaganyaan human-rating milestones — HLVM3, TV-D1, air-drop tests, IDRSS-1 links — are complete; first uncrewed flight targeted Q4 2026.
8. **GS3** National Quantum Mission crosses **1,000 km** of indigenous secure quantum-communication network (QNu Labs QKD tech) — half of its 2031 target reached in under three years.
9. **GS3** RBI issues the **Commercial Banks (Responsible Business Conduct) Fourth Amendment Directions, 2026** (6 Aug), consolidating recovery-agent conduct rules, effective 1 Jan 2027.
10. **GS3** Government e-Marketplace (GeM) completes a decade (est. 9 Aug 2016), crossing **₹20 lakh crore** cumulative GMV across 3.78 crore orders.
11. **GS3** NGT takes cognisance of large-scale illegal fly-ash dumping by Vedanta Ltd in Jharsuguda district, Odisha; CPCB directed to investigate.
12. **GS3** Kerala flood/landslide relief operations continue in Idukki-Kottayam belt (toll and camp figures per State Government update); GI & Beyond 2.0 Summit outcomes (Digital Handloom Atlas, new GI tags) still being processed by DPIIT.

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Polity & Governance

GS3

Indian Economy — Industrial Policy & MSMEs

07 August 2026 · Source: PIB / PRS Legislative Research

MSME Development (Amendment) Bill, 2026 Clears Parliament

Why in News: The MSME Development (Amendment) Bill, 2026, introduced in the Rajya Sabha on 28 July 2026, passed the Rajya Sabha on 3 August and the Lok Sabha on 7 August 2026, and now awaits Presidential assent. It amends the twenty-year-old MSMED Act, 2006 to overhaul dispute resolution, payment discipline and registration for a sector PIB describes as employing over 40 crore people.

Background: The original MSMED Act, 2006 created Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Facilitation Councils (MSEFCs) to arbitrate delayed-payment disputes, but enforcement has long been criticised as slow and buyer-location-dependent. Successive Economic Surveys have flagged delayed receivables as a chronic MSME liquidity constraint, and the government has separately pushed TReDS (Trade Receivables Discounting System), an RBI-regulated electronic platform, since 2018 to let MSMEs discount invoices instead of waiting for buyers to pay.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- Substitutes Section 8 to create a free, voluntary national digital MSME registration platform.
- Makes it mandatory for every Central Public Sector Enterprise (CPSE) to route MSME procurement payments through TReDS.
- Amends Section 18: MSEFC jurisdiction now follows the *supplier's* registered location, not the buyer's.
- New dispute timelines — arbitration referral within 30 days of failed mediation; award within 90 days of completed pleadings.
- If a payment case is pending beyond six months, at least 50% of the awarded amount must be paid to the supplier immediately.
- Decriminalises minor filing/procedural lapses — replaced with civil penalties or warnings instead of prosecution.
- Marks 20 years since the original MSMED Act, 2006 was enacted.

📊 MAINS DIMENSIONS

- Shifting MSEFC jurisdiction to the supplier's location corrects a long-standing buyer-side forum-shopping bias in delayed-payment litigation.
- Mandatory CPSE-TReDS onboarding uses the government's own procurement muscle to force adoption of a digital receivables market.
- The 50%-interim-payment rule borrows from labour and consumer law's "pay now, litigate later" logic to protect the weaker party's cash flow.
- Decriminalisation continues the Jan Vishwas Act, 2023 trend of civil-izing minor business offences to improve Ease of Doing Business.
- Implementation risk: MSEFCs remain understaffed in several States, so faster statutory timelines may not translate into faster actual disposal.

💡 Let's Remember This Through a Trick

Remember "SOL-8-18": Supplier's location decides jurisdiction (Sec 18), Obligatory TReDS for CPSEs, Lenient decriminalised penalties, and Section 8 gives the free digital registry — four changes, four letters.

📄 PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 2015 & 2020 Mains repeatedly test MSME credit-access and delayed-payment stress (thematic linkage); this is the first direct legislative-mechanism question on MSEFC/TReDS reform.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ

Consider the following statements regarding the MSME Development (Amendment) Bill, 2026:

1. It amends the MSMED Act, 2006.
2. It makes TReDS registration mandatory for all Central Public Sector Enterprises procuring from MSMEs.
3. MSME Facilitation Council jurisdiction will now be based on the buyer's registered location.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (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 incorrect — jurisdiction shifts to the *supplier's* location, not the buyer's.

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION (150 words)

Examine how the MSME Development (Amendment) Bill, 2026 seeks to resolve the delayed-payment crisis faced by micro and small enterprises in India.

GS3

MSMED Act 2006

TReDS

Ease of Doing Business

PYQ: GS3 2015/2020

GS2

Judiciary — Structure & Functioning

Early August 2026 (reported 3-4 Aug) · Source: Supreme Court of India / SCC Online

Supreme Court Releases Gender Sensitivity Handbook 2026

Why in News: A five-member committee headed by former Supreme Court judge Justice Aniruddha Bose has finalised "Judgments and Gender — Sensitivity and Compassion in Writing Judgments," directing all courts to remove terms such as "prosecutrix," "helpless woman" and "self-respecting woman" from judicial writing, and to ensure victims/witnesses are offered a chair, water, legal aid and counselling during proceedings.

Background: The handbook follows a 10 February 2026 Supreme Court judgment directing the National Judicial Academy to frame gender-sensitive adjudication guidelines, and succeeds the 2023 "Handbook on Combating Gender Stereotypes" released under then-CJI D.Y. Chandrachud, which focused mainly on vocabulary substitution. The 2026 handbook shifts the emphasis from word choice to courtroom conduct and institutional empathy toward survivors and witnesses.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- Committee headed by former SC judge Justice Aniruddha Bose; five members.
- Follows the SC's 10 February 2026 judgment mandating gender-sensitive adjudication training via the National Judicial Academy.
- Succeeds and expands upon the 2023 "Handbook on Combating Gender Stereotypes."

- Bars terms including "prosecutrix," "helpless woman" and "self-respecting woman" from judgments.
- Mandates practical courtroom measures: seating, water, legal aid access, and counselling for victims/witnesses.
- Directs the Supreme Court, High Courts and district courts to publish the handbook on their official websites.
- Directs State DGPs and Directors of Prosecution to align FIR/chargesheet terminology with the handbook.

MAINS DIMENSIONS

- Moves judicial gender-reform from symbolic language correction (2023) to institutional conduct (2026) — a shift from words to systems.
- Extending compliance to police FIR/chargesheet drafting widens judicial reform's reach into the executive/investigative arm.
- Raises implementation questions: handbooks are advisory, not binding law — enforcement depends on judicial training and internal review, not sanction.
- Reflects a broader "trauma-informed justice" trend also visible in POCSO and domestic-violence procedural reforms.
- Feeds into the larger debate on judicial diversity and representation of women in the higher judiciary.

Let's Remember This Through a Trick

2023 Handbook = "Words." 2026 Handbook = "Ways." One fixed vocabulary; the other fixes courtroom behaviour — water, chair, counsel, care.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS2 2023 Mains: "Discuss the desirability of greater representation to women in the higher judiciary to ensure diversity, equity and inclusiveness" — same judicial-gender-reform thread.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ

The "Handbook on Combating Gender Stereotypes" (2023) and "Judgments and Gender" (2026) were both released by which institution?

(a) National Human Rights Commission (b) Supreme Court of India (c) National Commission for Women (d) Law Commission of India

Answer: (b) Supreme Court of India.

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION (150 words)

"Judicial language shapes judicial justice." Discuss this statement with reference to the Supreme Court's 2023 and 2026 gender-sensitivity handbooks.

GS2

Judicial Reform

Gender Justice

PYQ: GS2 2023

GS2

Indian Constitution — Fifth Schedule

06 August 2026 · Source: Supreme Court of India (2026 INSC 810) / LiveLaw

SC: Civil Courts Can Try Non-Tribal Disputes Even in Scheduled Areas

Why in News: In *Mukkerla Venkata Ratnam v. Vantasala China Venkateswarlu* (2026 INSC 810, decided 6 August 2026), a bench of Justices Sanjay Karol and Nongmeikapam Kotiswar Singh held that ordinary civil courts under the Andhra Pradesh Civil Courts Act, 1972 do have jurisdiction over succession and partition disputes when all parties are non-tribal, even if the disputed property lies within a Fifth Schedule Scheduled Area. The Court set aside a contrary Telangana High Court ruling.

Background: The Fifth Schedule to the Constitution allows Governors of specified States to apply or modify laws for Scheduled Areas to protect tribal land and customary rights — the logic underlying laws like PESA, 1996. Telangana had read this protective logic to bar civil courts entirely from Scheduled Areas regardless of who the litigants were, a position the Supreme Court found had "no rational nexus" to the actual constitutional objective when neither party is a tribal person.

KEY FACTS

- Case: *Mukkerla Venkata Ratnam v. Vantasala China Venkateswarlu*, 2026 INSC 810, decided 6 August 2026.
- Bench: Justices Sanjay Karol and Nongmeikapam Kotiswar Singh.
- Governing State law: Andhra Pradesh Civil Courts Act, 1972 (applies to undivided AP/Telangana Scheduled Areas).
- Held: blanket exclusion of civil court jurisdiction for non-tribal litigants in Scheduled Areas violates Article 14 (no rational nexus to protective objective).
- Set aside a Telangana High Court ruling that had denied jurisdiction.
- Ruling is expressly confined to disputes where *all* parties are non-tribal — protections for tribal litigants under Scheduled Area law remain undisturbed.
- Fifth Schedule areas exist across ten States including Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh.

MAINS DIMENSIONS

- Draws a sharper line between protective discrimination (justified) and blanket exclusion (unjustified) under Article 14's reasonable-classification test.
- Reaffirms that Fifth Schedule protections are person-linked (tribal identity) rather than purely territory-linked.
- Prevents a jurisdictional vacuum for non-tribal residents who legitimately live and hold property within Scheduled Areas.
- Revives the classic Fifth vs Sixth Schedule comparison — Sixth Schedule areas (Northeast) have autonomous district councils with wider judicial/legislative carve-outs than Fifth Schedule areas.
- Could influence pending litigation in other Fifth Schedule States facing similar jurisdiction-exclusion arguments.

Let's Remember This Through a Trick

Fifth Schedule protects *people* (tribals), not just *place* (area). If neither party at the table is tribal, the protective shield has nothing to protect — so the ordinary civil court can hear the case.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS2 2015 Mains: "What was the difference between the provisions of the Fifth Schedule and Sixth Schedule regarding administration of Scheduled Areas?" — this ruling is a direct 2026 update to that comparison.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ

Consider the following statements about the Fifth Schedule to the Constitution of India:

1. It empowers the Governor of a State to regulate the allotment of land in Scheduled Areas.
2. It applies uniformly to all States in India.
3. Protections under it are extended regardless of whether the litigating parties are tribal or non-tribal.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a). The Fifth Schedule applies only to specified States, and the Supreme Court (2026) clarified its protections are tribal-identity-linked, not blanket.

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION (150 words)

Discuss the constitutional rationale behind the Fifth Schedule's protective provisions for Scheduled Areas, in light of the Supreme Court's 2026 ruling on civil court jurisdiction.

GS2

Fifth Schedule

Article 14

PESA 1996

PYQ: GS2 2015

GS2

Welfare of Vulnerable Sections / Defence HR

04 August 2026 · Source: Supreme Court of India / LiveLaw

SC Extends 4% Disability Reservation to "Outboarded" Military Cadets

Why in News: In a suo motu case titled *In Re: Cadets Disabled in Military Training* (order dated 4 August 2026), a bench of Justices B.V. Nagarathna and Manmohan held that cadets discharged ("outboarded") from military training due to disabilities of 40% or more qualify for the 4% government-job reservation under Section 34 of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016 — and urged States to extend "ex-servicemen" quota benefits to them too. The matter is next listed on 8 September 2026.

Background: Military cadets injured during training are discharged before completing service, which has historically left them without either full ex-servicemen benefits or automatic disability-reservation coverage, since RPwD Act benchmarks apply from 40% disability upward. The case arose from cadets alleging they fell through this policy gap despite training-related injuries.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- Order dated 4 August 2026; Bench: Justices B.V. Nagarathna and Manmohan; next listed 8 September 2026.
- Cadets with 40%+ benchmark disability now qualify for the 4% reservation in government jobs under RPwD Act, 2016, Section 34.
- Court urged States/UTs to extend "ex-servicemen" reservation quota benefits to disabled outboarded cadets.
- Directed the Union Government to design a dedicated welfare/rehabilitation scheme for cadets with disability below the 40% RPwD threshold.
- RPwD Act, 2016 replaced the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995, expanding recognised disabilities from 7 to 21 categories.
- Case is suo motu — the Court took it up on its own motion rather than via a filed petition.

- Fills a welfare-policy gap between two otherwise well-defined categories — ex-servicemen and RPwD beneficiaries — that had left outboarded cadets in neither box.
- Judicial suo motu action here substitutes for legislative/executive delay in updating a niche welfare category.
- Directing a scheme for the sub-40% disability cohort shows the Court distinguishing entitlement (RPwD-triggered) from discretionary welfare (Centre-designed).
- Highlights the human cost of high-attrition physical training pipelines (NDA, IMA, OTA) and the state's continuing obligation to those it selects and then discharges.
- Intersects with GS3 defence human-resource policy — training-injury risk management and post-discharge rehabilitation.

📌 Let's Remember This Through a Trick

Remember "40 is the floor, not the ceiling": 40%+ disability = RPwD 4% reservation applies automatically; below 40% = no automatic right, so the Court ordered a bespoke scheme instead.

📄 PYQ LINKAGE

GS2 (thematic): Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 provisions and reservation benchmarks are a recurring Mains theme in Social Justice sections; this is the first direct defence-welfare crossover application.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ

With reference to the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016, consider the following statements:

1. It recognises 21 categories of disabilities.
2. It replaced the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995.
3. It provides for 4% reservation in government establishments for persons with benchmark disabilities.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (d).

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION (150 words)

Discuss the policy gap faced by military cadets discharged due to training-related disabilities, and evaluate the Supreme Court's 2026 suo motu intervention as a remedy.

GS2 RPwD Act 2016 Social Justice Defence Welfare

THEIAS AKADEMIA Four Polity cards, four different constitutional/statutory anchors — MSMED Act, judicial handbooks, Fifth Schedule, RPwD Act. If you're finding it hard to hold these threads together for Mains linkage, that's precisely what **Sahyog Mentorship**'s weekly review sessions are for.

International Relations

GS2

India and Groupings — BRICS

08 August 2026 · Source: PIB / MEA BRICS Chairship 2026 releases

India's BRICS Chairship: Bhopal Declaration Adopted at Culture Ministers' Meeting

Why in News: The 11th BRICS Culture Ministers' Meeting concluded in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, on 8 August 2026, adopting the "Bhopal Declaration" — the capstone of a three-stage process under India's 2026 BRICS chairship that began with a virtual working-group session (29-30 April), moved to Varanasi (4-5 June), and closed in Bhopal (5-8 August). Fourteen countries — all ten BRICS members plus partner countries Belarus, Cuba, Kazakhstan and Thailand — took part.

Background: BRICS added a dedicated Culture Working Group track to institutionalise cooperation beyond its traditional economic and security focus, reflecting the grouping's push to demonstrate soft-power and civilisational-cooperation credentials as it expands membership. India's 2026 chairship theme emphasises building consensus-based frameworks across all its working tracks, of which culture is one.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- 11th BRICS Culture Ministers' Meeting concluded in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, 8 August 2026.
- Third and final Culture Working Group session under India's 2026 chairship (after virtual Apr session and Varanasi Jun session).
- 14 participating countries: 10 BRICS members + partner countries Belarus, Cuba, Kazakhstan, Thailand.
- Egypt participated online; the remaining members attended the Bhopal session in person.
- The "Bhopal Declaration" institutionalises a BRICS cultural-cooperation framework prioritising creative industries and digital market access for creators.
- Includes a specific mechanism to facilitate repatriation of cultural assets/artefacts removed through theft or illicit means.

📊 MAINS DIMENSIONS

- Cultural diplomacy tracks let India project chairship leadership on low-friction, consensus-easy terrain compared with economic or security tracks.
- The artefact-repatriation mechanism dovetails with India's own long-running bilateral push (with the US, UK, Australia) to recover stolen antiquities.
- Bhopal's selection as host reflects a deliberate policy of showcasing India's Tier-2 cities on the multilateral stage, not just Delhi/Mumbai.
- BRICS' expanding sectoral tracks (culture, education, health, finance) illustrate its evolution from a purely economic bloc toward a broader multilateral architecture.
- Partner-country participation (Belarus, Cuba, Kazakhstan, Thailand) signals the post-2024 BRICS-plus expansion dynamic in action at the working-group level.

🗨️ Let's Remember This Through a Trick

Three cities, one declaration: **V**irtual (April) → **V**aranasi (June) → **B**hopal (August) — "VVB" ladder ending in the Bhopal Declaration.

📄 PYQ LINKAGE

GS2 2021 Mains: "Explain the significance of Indo-US defence deals in stabilising Indian security and defence needs" style questions test India's chairship of multilateral groupings; BRICS chairship 2026 is this year's ready-made update.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ

Consider the following statements about the 11th BRICS Culture Ministers' Meeting, 2026:

1. It was held in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh.
2. It was the first Culture Working Group meeting under India's BRICS chairship.
3. The meeting adopted a declaration including a mechanism for cultural-property repatriation.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a). It was the third, not first, Culture Working Group session this year.

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION (150 words)

Discuss the significance of sectoral working groups such as the Culture Working Group in deepening BRICS' multilateral engagement beyond economic cooperation.

GS2

BRICS

Cultural Diplomacy

India's Chairship 2026

GS2

India and its Neighbourhood — Iran/Connectivity

Static Topic — anchored to a Government statement of ~31 July 2026, still live · Source: MEA statement to Lok Sabha / PIB

India's Chabahar Port Dilemma Under Renewed US Sanctions Pressure

Why in News: The US sanctions waiver that had shielded India's operation of Chabahar Port in Iran expired on 26 April 2026. In a statement to the Lok Sabha around 31 July 2026, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal confirmed India is "engaged with all stakeholders" to safeguard continued port operations — the issue remains unresolved as of this edition, so it is treated here as a live policy explainer rather than breaking news.

Background: India Ports Global Limited, through its subsidiary India Ports Global Chabahar Free Zone, has operated the Shahid-Beheshti Terminal at Chabahar since 2018 under a 10-year contract. Chabahar is the physical anchor of India's International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) strategy, giving India sea access to Afghanistan and Central Asia that bypasses Pakistani territory entirely — a strategic alternative route unavailable through any other port.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- US sanctions waiver for Chabahar Port operations expired 26 April 2026.
- India Ports Global Limited (via India Ports Global Chabahar Free Zone) has run the Shahid-Beheshti Terminal since 2018 under a 10-year agreement.

- Chabahar underpins India's International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) linking India, Iran, Central Asia and Russia.
- The port bypasses Pakistani territory, India's only sea-linked route to landlocked Afghanistan and Central Asia.
- India has reportedly explored an "interim management model" to keep operations running amid the sanctions cloud.
- MEA's public position: continued engagement with "all stakeholders" rather than a public confrontation with Washington.

MAINS DIMENSIONS

- Illustrates the practical limits of India's "strategic autonomy" doctrine when a friendly power's sanctions regime collides with India's own connectivity investments.
- Chabahar's loss would strengthen Pakistan's chokehold on India-Afghanistan-Central Asia trade routes by default.
- Tests India's diplomatic capacity to secure carve-outs from allies (as it has done before for Chabahar specifically, given its explicit humanitarian/Afghanistan-reconstruction framing).
- Raises the broader question of over-reliance on single-port infrastructure for a multi-country connectivity strategy — an argument for diversifying INSTC-linked assets.
- A useful case study in balancing US relations against Iran-linked connectivity interests without over-committing to either.

Let's Remember This Through a Trick

Chabahar = India's "back door" to Central Asia — bypassing the "front door" that Pakistan keeps locked. When the US waiver lapses, the back door creaks, but India hasn't walked away from the house.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS2 2017 Mains: "'China is using its economic relations and positive trade surplus as tools to develop potential military power status in Asia', discuss..." — Chabahar recurs as India's structural counter-connectivity answer in similar Mains framings.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ

Chabahar Port, sometimes seen in the news, is located in which country and is central to which Indian connectivity initiative?

(a) Oman; Sagarmala (b) Iran; International North-South Transport Corridor (c) UAE; SAGAR doctrine (d) Iran; Belt and Road Initiative

Answer: (b).

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION (150 words)

Discuss the strategic significance of Chabahar Port for India's connectivity to Afghanistan and Central Asia, and the challenges posed by extraterritorial sanctions regimes.

SECTION 04

Defence & Security

GS3

Defence Cooperation & Security

07 August 2026 · Source: Australian Department of Defence / IAF statements

Exercise Pitch Black 2026 Concludes: IAF's Rafale Debut, Japan's F-35A Debut

Why in News: Exercise Pitch Black 2026, hosted by the Royal Australian Air Force at Darwin and Tindal, concluded on 7 August 2026 after running since 20 July. This edition marked the first time the Indian Air Force flew its Rafale multirole fighters at Pitch Black, supported by C-17 Globemaster III and IL-78 tankers, while Japan's F-35A Lightning II also made its Pitch Black debut.

Background: Pitch Black is a biennial large-force employment exercise conducted by the Royal Australian Air Force since 1981, designed to train advanced air-combat tactics among partner air forces in Australia's vast northern training ranges. India's growing participation reflects the deepening India-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership's defence-cooperation track, alongside Quad-adjacent Indo-Pacific airpower interoperability.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- Exercise ran 20 July – 7 August 2026 at Darwin and Tindal, Northern Territory, Australia.
- IAF flew Rafale multirole fighters at Pitch Black for the first time ever this edition.
- IAF contingent supported by C-17 Globemaster III strategic airlift and IL-78 mid-air refuelling tankers.
- Japan's F-35A Lightning II stealth fighter made its own Pitch Black debut in this edition.
- Scale: roughly 20-21 partner nations, 100+ aircraft, 2,500+ personnel (reported range across sources).
- Falls within the India-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership's defence-cooperation track.

📊 MAINS DIMENSIONS

- India's Rafale debut at a non-domestic large-force exercise signals growing confidence in projecting its frontline fighter fleet abroad.
- Multinational exercises like Pitch Black function as low-cost, high-visibility instruments of Indo-Pacific coalition-signalling short of formal alliance commitments.
- India and Japan operating alongside each other (Rafale and F-35A both debuting) subtly reinforces Quad-adjacent airpower interoperability without a Quad label.
- Long-range airlift/refuelling participation (C-17, IL-78) demonstrates India's expanding expeditionary logistics reach, not just fighter capability.
- Positions India as a increasingly regular, not occasional, participant in Australia-hosted multilateral air exercises.

🗨️ **Let's Remember This Through a Trick**

Two "firsts," one exercise: India's Rafale and Japan's F-35A both got their Pitch Black debut in 2026 — remember it as "the year the newest jets went Down Under."

📄 **PYQ LINKAGE**

GS3 2020 Mains: "What is the significance of Indo-US defence deals over Indo-Russian defence deals? Discuss with reference to stability in the Indo-Pacific region" — same Indo-Pacific defence-diplomacy frame, now extended to Australia.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ

Exercise Pitch Black, in which the Indian Air Force participated in 2026, is hosted by which country?

(a) United States (b) Australia (c) Japan (d) Singapore

Answer: (b) Australia.

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION (150 words)

Discuss the role of multinational military exercises such as Exercise Pitch Black in advancing India's Indo-Pacific strategic partnerships.

GS3

Pitch Black 2026

India-Australia CSP

Indo-Pacific

PYQ: GS3 2020

GS3

Internal Security — Border Management

Static Topic — not tied to a current event (RULE 14 fallback) · Source: Ministry of Defence / Border Roads Organisation / PIB (Vibrant Villages Programme)

Static Defence Profile: The Border Roads Organisation and Border Infrastructure

Why in News: No fresh, verified, non-blocked hardware or procurement-specific Defence news cleared verification for 6-8 August 2026 after a full search of MoD, DRDO, and Service HQ channels (Agni-4 and the Counter-Terror Architecture are both within their blocked windows). Per the workspace's pre-approved Defence static-fallback protocol, today's second Defence card profiles the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) and the Vibrant Villages Programme — evergreen, high-yield institutional material.

Background: BRO was established on 7 May 1960 to build and maintain roads in India's border regions, initially under the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways before its 2015 transfer to the Ministry of Defence, reflecting the recognition that border connectivity is a strategic, not merely developmental, asset. BRO organises its work into numbered "Projects" (such as Vartak, Swastik, Beacon, Himank, Dantak) mapped to specific border sectors.

⚡ **KEY FACTS**

- BRO established 7 May 1960; functions under the Ministry of Defence since 2015 (earlier under Ministry of Road Transport & Highways).
- Executes roads, bridges, tunnels and airfield projects across roughly 19 States/UTs bordering China, Pakistan, Myanmar, Bhutan and Nepal.

- Organised into region-specific Projects, e.g. Project Beacon (Himachal-Ladakh axis), Project Himank (Ladakh), Project Vartak (Arunachal Pradesh), Project Dantak (Bhutan).
- Vibrant Villages Programme (VVP), launched February 2023, covers 663 villages across 46 border blocks in 19 districts of Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh and the Union Territory of Ladakh.
- VVP outlay: approximately ₹4,800 crore for FY 2022-23 to FY 2025-26.
- VVP components: all-weather road connectivity, housing, drinking water, renewable energy, mobile/telecom connectivity and tourist infrastructure in the last-mile border villages.
- BRO coordinates operationally with border-guarding forces (ITBP on the China border, BSF/SSB elsewhere) for last-mile logistics support.

MAINS DIMENSIONS

- Border infrastructure has shifted from a purely military-logistics concern to an explicit population-retention and "border tourism" strategy under VVP — arresting outmigration from frontier villages.
- The 2015 transfer of BRO to the Ministry of Defence reflects a doctrinal shift: connectivity itself is now treated as a force-multiplier, not just a support function.
- Comparative context: China's matching "Xiaokang" (well-off) border-village programme on the Tibetan side makes VVP a direct infrastructure-parity response.
- Terrain and short construction seasons in high-altitude sectors remain BRO's core execution constraint, independent of funding availability.
- Border roads carry a dual-use dilemma — the same connectivity that strengthens defence logistics also eases adversary reconnaissance access if not paired with vigilance infrastructure.

Let's Remember This Through a Trick

"BRO built the road, VVP built the village" — BRO gives the last-mile connectivity; the Vibrant Villages Programme gives people a reason to stay at the last mile.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 2018 Mains: "Discuss the political, economic and strategic relevance to India of Chabahar Port" often appears alongside connectivity-infrastructure questions; a direct BRO/VVP Mains question is a strong first-time probable given the 2023 VVP launch's rising Mains salience.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ

Consider the following statements about the Border Roads Organisation (BRO):

1. It was established in 1960.
2. It functions under the Ministry of Home Affairs.
3. The Vibrant Villages Programme is implemented in coordination with BRO's border-connectivity mandate.

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). BRO functions under the Ministry of Defence, not Home Affairs.

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION (150 words)

Discuss the strategic rationale behind the Vibrant Villages Programme and its complementarity with the Border Roads Organisation's infrastructure mandate.

GS3

BRO

Vibrant Villages Programme

Border Management

Static Topic

THEIAS AKADEMIA Ethical dimensions of military welfare policy (this section's cadet-reservation ruling) and defence-diplomacy signalling are exactly what **EMP** (Ethics & Moral Philosophy) sessions unpack in depth — beyond the one-paragraph version you get here.

SECTION 05

Science & Technology

GS3

Science & Technology — Space

06 August 2026 · Source: PIB / Rajya Sabha reply, Dr Jitendra Singh

Gaganyaan: All Human-Rating Milestones Complete, Says Government

Why in News: Replying to the Rajya Sabha on 6 August 2026, Minister of State for Science & Technology Dr Jitendra Singh confirmed that ISRO has completed development and ground testing of all propulsion stages and structures of the Human Rated Launch Vehicle Mark-3 (HLM3), alongside successful in-flight validation of the Crew Escape System (TV-D1) and the parachute-based deceleration system (Integrated Air Drop Tests 01 and 02).

Background: Gaganyaan is India's first human spaceflight programme, targeting an eventual crewed low-Earth-orbit mission. Its human-rating process requires every subsystem — launch vehicle, crew module, escape system, recovery and communication — to independently clear safety validation before any crew is placed aboard, a process ISRO has been executing in phased uncrewed test flights since 2023.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- HLM3 (Human Rated Launch Vehicle Mark-3): all propulsion stages and structures development/ground-testing complete.
- TV-D1 (Test Vehicle Mission): in-flight validation of the Crew Escape System completed successfully.
- Integrated Air Drop Tests-01 and -02: validated the parachute/deceleration system using a simulated Crew Module.
- Ground communication network finalised, including IDRSS-1 (Indian Data Relay Satellite System) feeder-station and terrestrial links.
- Recovery assets identified and the crew-recovery plan finalised.
- First uncrewed Gaganyaan mission, carrying the half-humanoid "Vyommitra," targeted for Q4 2026.
- Two further uncrewed missions planned before the maiden crewed flight, targeted for 2027.
- Bharatiya Antariksh Station (India's own space station) targeted for operationalisation by 2035.

- Human-rating is deliberately sequential and conservative — each subsystem test (escape, recovery, communication) is validated independently before integration, prioritising astronaut safety over schedule speed.
- "Vyommitra" as a humanoid test-stand-in lets ISRO gather physiological/environmental data without human risk before the crewed flight.
- Gaganyaan's data-relay dependence on IDRSS-1 shows human spaceflight's reliance on India's broader satellite-communication ecosystem, not just launch vehicles.
- The 2035 space-station target frames Gaganyaan as a stepping-stone programme, not a terminal goal — mirroring the ISS/Tiangong precedent of crewed-flight-then-station sequencing.
- Multi-year phased uncrewed testing (2023-2027) illustrates India's risk-averse, cost-conscious approach to human spaceflight compared with faster historical Cold War-era programmes.

📌 Let's Remember This Through a Trick

Remember "HLVM3 flies, TV-D1 saves, Air Drop lands" — the rocket that lifts, the escape system that rescues, and the parachutes that bring the crew module home safely, in that test order.

📄 PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 2019 Prelims and multiple Mains years test Gaganyaan/ISRO mission architecture; this is the latest milestone update to that recurring theme.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ

Consider the following statements regarding India's Gaganyaan programme:

1. HLVM3 refers to the Human Rated Launch Vehicle used for the mission.
2. TV-D1 tested the Crew Escape System.
3. The first crewed Gaganyaan flight is targeted before any uncrewed test flight.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a). Multiple uncrewed missions precede the crewed flight, not the reverse.

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION (150 words)

Discuss the significance of human-rating protocols in India's Gaganyaan programme and their implications for the planned Bharatiya Antariksh Station.

GS3

Gaganyaan

ISRO

Bharatiya Antariksh Station

GS3

Science & Technology — Emerging Tech

07 August 2026 · Source: PIB / Department of Science & Technology

National Quantum Mission Crosses 1,000 km of Secure Quantum Communication

Why in News: The Department of Science & Technology announced on 7 August 2026 that India's National Quantum Mission (NQM) has built 1,000 km of secure quantum-communication network — half of its 2,000 km, 2031 target —

achieved in under three years using indigenous Quantum Key Distribution (QKD) technology from Bengaluru-based startup QNu Labs, validated with Viavi Solutions instrumentation.

Background: The National Quantum Mission was launched in October 2024 with a ₹6,003 crore outlay running through 2031, structured around four verticals — quantum computing, quantum communication, quantum sensing and quantum materials — to build sovereign capability in a technology area seen as strategically critical for future-proof cryptography and secure communications.

KEY FACTS

- National Quantum Mission launched October 2024; ₹6,003 crore outlay through 2031.
- Achieved 1,000 km secure quantum-communication network — 50% of the 2,000 km, 2031 target — in under three years.
- Built on indigenous QKD (Quantum Key Distribution) technology from QNu Labs (Bengaluru), validated using Viavi Solutions equipment.
- NQM's four verticals: quantum computing, quantum communication, quantum sensing, quantum materials.
- Mission targets include intermediate-scale quantum computers of 50-1,000 physical qubits and satellite-based quantum communication beyond 2,000 km.
- On 3 August 2026, QNu Labs and SRM Institute of Science and Technology launched a joint Quantum Communications Lab for workforce training under NQM.
- DST Secretary Dr Abhay Karandikar called it "a landmark advancement in secure quantum communication."

MAINS DIMENSIONS

- Quantum Key Distribution offers physics-based (not just mathematically-hard) security — any eavesdropping attempt measurably disturbs the quantum state, making interception detectable.
- Reaching the halfway mark of a 2031 target in under three years suggests the mission is ahead of its own implementation curve — worth tracking for future Mains "assess progress" questions.
- QKD is considered a hedge against the future threat of quantum computers breaking today's classical encryption ("harvest now, decrypt later" risk) — linking quantum communication and quantum computing verticals strategically.
- Industry-academia coupling (QNu Labs + SRMIST) reflects the mission's parallel emphasis on building a trained quantum workforce, not just infrastructure.
- Sovereign quantum-communication capability has direct national-security applications for military and financial-sector data protection.

Let's Remember This Through a Trick

Think "QKD = Quantum's Karnataka Debut" — QNu Labs, the Bengaluru startup, is why India's quantum-communication backbone is a homegrown story, not an imported one.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 2022 Prelims tested basic quantum-technology awareness; National Quantum Mission progress updates are now a near-certain annual Prelims/Mains fixture.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ

Consider the following statements about India's National Quantum Mission:

1. It was launched in 2024 with an outlay of approximately ₹6,000 crore.
2. It has four verticals including quantum computing and quantum communication.
3. It aims to achieve satellite-based quantum communication beyond 2,000 km.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (d).

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION (150 words)

Explain the concept of Quantum Key Distribution and discuss its strategic significance under India's National Quantum Mission.

GS3

National Quantum Mission

QKD

Emerging Technology

THEIAS AKADEMIA Space human-rating protocols and quantum cryptography are exactly the kind of high-density Science & Tech material **LAKSHYAM AIR1** drills into MCQ-ready form every week. theiasakademia.com

SECTION 06

Economy

GS3

Indian Economy — Banking & Financial Sector

06 August 2026 · Source: Reserve Bank of India

RBI Consolidates Loan Recovery-Agent Conduct Rules

Why in News: The Reserve Bank of India issued the "Reserve Bank of India (Commercial Banks – Responsible Business Conduct) Fourth Amendment Directions, 2026" on 6 August 2026, consolidating previously scattered, entity-specific recovery-agent rules into a single conduct framework for commercial banks, effective from 1 January 2027.

Background: Recovery-agent harassment of loan defaulters has been a recurring regulatory and Mains-relevant concern, prompting successive RBI circulars over the years on fair-practice codes. This consolidation follows the RBI's broader "Responsible Business Conduct" regulatory philosophy, which frames borrower dignity and bank accountability as parts of the same supervisory mandate rather than separate grievance-redressal add-ons.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- Directions issued 6 August 2026; take effect from 1 January 2027.
- Applies to commercial banks; explicitly excludes Small Finance Banks, Payments Banks, Regional Rural Banks and Local Area Banks.
- Recovery agents must hold valid IIBF (Indian Institute of Banking and Finance) certification, mandatory from 2026.
- Agents must carry identity cards and bank-issued authorisation letters at all times during recovery visits.

- Borrower contact/visits restricted to between 8 a.m. and 7 p.m., unless the borrower specifically requests otherwise.
- Banks must obtain a written undertaking from every engaged recovery agency committing to the prescribed code of conduct.
- Consolidates what were previously multiple, entity-type-specific circulars into one unified framework.

MAINS DIMENSIONS

- Reflects RBI's shift from reactive fair-practice circulars (post-scandal) toward proactive, codified conduct regulation.
- The IIBF-certification mandate professionalises a historically unregulated outsourced function — a template other financial-conduct regulators could replicate.
- Excluding Small Finance Banks/Payments Banks/RRBs/LABs from this specific framework raises a regulatory-parity question worth flagging in a Mains answer on differentiated banking regulation.
- The 8 a.m.-7 p.m. contact window borrows directly from consumer-protection/harassment-prevention logic used in debt-collection regulation globally.
- Balances banks' legitimate recovery interest (asset quality, NPA management) against borrower dignity — a live administrative-ethics theme.

Let's Remember This Through a Trick

"8-to-7, ID in hand, IIBF-trained" — three checks every recovery agent must now pass before knocking on a borrower's door.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 2020 Mains touched on NPA-resolution mechanisms broadly; recovery-agent conduct regulation is a fresh, specific sub-theme worth a dedicated answer.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ

The RBI's Commercial Banks (Responsible Business Conduct) Fourth Amendment Directions, 2026 apply to which of the following?

(a) Small Finance Banks only (b) Commercial Banks, excluding Small Finance Banks, Payments Banks, RRBs and Local Area Banks (c) All banks including cooperative banks (d) Only Public Sector Banks

Answer: (b).

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION (150 words)

Discuss the need for regulating loan recovery-agent conduct and evaluate the RBI's 2026 consolidated framework in this regard.

GS3

RBI Regulation

Banking

Consumer Protection

GS3

Indian Economy — e-Governance & Public Procurement

07 August 2026 · Source: Ministry of Commerce and Industry / GeM official data

Government e-Marketplace Completes a Decade, Crosses ₹20 Lakh Crore GMV

Why in News: The Government e-Marketplace (GeM), launched on 9 August 2016 under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, crossed a cumulative Gross Merchandise Value (GMV) of ₹20 lakh crore across more than 3.78 crore orders as of 7 August 2026, just ahead of its tenth anniversary.

Background: GeM was created as a fully online, end-to-end public procurement platform to bring transparency, price discovery and efficiency to government purchasing, replacing fragmented departmental tendering processes. Its growth trajectory has become a standard example of Digital India infrastructure achieving both scale and inclusion (MSME and women-led enterprise participation) simultaneously.

⚡ KEY FACTS

- GeM launched 9 August 2016 under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- Cumulative GMV crossed ₹20 lakh crore as of 7 August 2026, across 3.78 crore+ orders.
- Annual GMV grew from ₹422 crore in FY 2016-17 to over ₹5 lakh crore in each of FY 2024-25 and FY 2025-26.
- The first ₹10 lakh crore in cumulative GMV took over 8 years; the second ₹10 lakh crore took under 2 years — a sharply accelerating adoption curve.
- First four months of FY 2026-27 alone recorded ₹1,47,888 crore in GMV.
- Seller base grew from 3,339 (2016) to 25.45 lakh profile-completed sellers; buyer organisations grew from 1,707 to 1.37 lakh.
- MSEs account for ₹9.07 lakh crore — 45.6% of cumulative GMV; women-led MSEs alone completed over 50 lakh orders worth ₹99,147 crore.

📊 MAINS DIMENSIONS

- The sharply accelerating adoption curve (8 years for the first ₹10 lakh crore, under 2 years for the second) is a textbook network-effect pattern in digital public infrastructure.
- Near-half MSE share of GMV shows GeM functioning as a genuine market-access tool for smaller suppliers, not just an efficiency platform for large vendors.
- Women-led MSE participation data gives GeM a measurable gender-inclusion dimension worth citing alongside broader Digital India achievements.
- GeM exemplifies how digital procurement platforms can simultaneously improve transparency (reducing discretionary tendering) and expand market access (lowering entry barriers for small suppliers).
- Scaling government e-procurement to this size raises new governance questions around vendor-quality assurance and grievance redressal at volume.

💡 Let's Remember This Through a Trick

"8 years for the first ₹10L crore, 2 years for the next ₹10L crore" — GeM's growth curve is the cleanest one-line example of a digital platform's network effect you'll find in the Economy syllabus.

📄 PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 2020 Mains asked about e-governance's role in public service delivery broadly; GeM's decade-milestone data gives a concrete, quantified example for such answers.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ

The Government e-Marketplace (GeM) functions under which Ministry?

- (a) Ministry of Finance (b) Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (c) Ministry of Commerce and Industry
(d) NITI Aayog

Answer: (c).

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION (150 words)

Evaluate the Government e-Marketplace's contribution to transparency and MSME inclusion in India's public procurement system, a decade after its launch.

GS3

GeM

Digital India

Public Procurement

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12

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