UPSC with SAURABH KAUSHIK

Current Affairs Notes · 29 June 2026

The Hindu · Indian Express · PIB | 18 Topics | GS 2 · 3 + Prelims + Mapping

[TH] The Hindu | [IE] Indian Express | [PIB] Press Info Bureau

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PIB HIGHLIGHTS — 28 JUNE 2026 (Curated for UPSC)

1. DIKSHA: Powering India's Digital Learning Ecosystem

✓ DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing): India's national digital platform for school education; launched 2017 by MoE; hosted by NCERT (National Council of Educational Research and Training).

✓ Scale (2026): 6.5 crore+ registered users (students + teachers); 2,400+ courses available; 67 crore+ learning sessions completed; available in 36 Indian languages including all 22 Scheduled Languages and 14 regional languages.

✓ Features: e-Textbooks (interactive, digitised school textbooks for all states and classes); QR-coded textbooks (DIKSHA QR codes embedded in physical NCERT books — scan to access supplementary digital content); teacher training courses (under NISHTHA programme — Integrated Teacher Training); energy quiz; practice tests.

✓ NEP 2020 alignment: DIKSHA is the primary platform for NEP 2020's 'Universal Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN)' goals; NIPUN Bharat (National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy) content is delivered through DIKSHA.

✓ COVID-19 impact: DIKSHA emerged as India's primary remote learning infrastructure during school closures (2020-21); demonstrated India's capacity to maintain education continuity at scale for 250 million school students.

✓ GS2 Angle: Digital education; NEP 2020; NCERT; NIPUN Bharat; e-governance in education; digital inclusion; National Education Policy implementation.

2. Digital India — PIB Backgrounder (12 Years: 2014-2026)

✓ Digital India Programme (launched July 1, 2015 by PM Modi) has fundamentally transformed India's digital landscape over 12 years.

✓ Three Vision Areas: (1) Digital Infrastructure as a Utility to Every Citizen — broadband, mobile connectivity, public cloud, digital identity; (2) Governance and Services on Demand — online services, ease of doing business; (3) Digital Empowerment of Citizens — digital literacy, digital resources in Indian languages.

✓ Key numbers (2026): 940+ million internet subscribers (2nd globally); 650+ million smartphone users; BharatNet — 6.8 lakh+ Gram Panchayats connected with optical fibre; Common Service Centres (CSCs) — 6 lakh+ outlets providing digital services in rural India; UPI — 18 billion transactions/month (world's largest real-time payment volume); UMANG App — 2,100+ government services on single mobile app.

✓ IndiaStack: Aadhaar (1.4 billion enrolled) + eKYC + DigiLocker + UPI + BBPS (Bharat Bill Payment System) + CoWIN + FasTag = India's digital public infrastructure stack; adopted as a model by 50+ countries.

✓ Digital economy: India's digital economy is estimated at $500 billion (2026) and growing at 15%+/year; India is 3rd largest startup ecosystem globally (with 110,000+ startups); IT exports $225 billion (FY26).

✓ GS2 Angle: Digital India; IndiaStack; BharatNet; UPI; Aadhaar; CSC; governance digitization; Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI); India as a model for Global South.

GS PAPER 2 — International Relations

1. Shared Responsibility for Indian Ocean: PM Modi in Seychelles Articulates SAGAR+

[TH] Page 1

GS 2: International Relations: SAGAR; Indian Ocean; Seychelles; Mauritius; Indian Ocean Rim Association; India's maritime diplomacy.

▸ PM Modi (at Seychelles, June 27-28, 2026 — first bilateral visit by an Indian PM in 12 years): 'The Indian Ocean links India and Seychelles. We want to make it an ocean of opportunity. But shared opportunity requires shared responsibility.'

▸ The 'shared responsibility' formulation is a new element of India's Indian Ocean doctrine — expanding SAGAR ('Security and Growth for All in the Region,' 2015) to include a mutual obligations framework: not just India providing security to smaller island states, but all Indian Ocean states being responsible for each other's security.

▸ Context: PM Modi visited Seychelles as his first stop on an Indian Ocean tour — also visiting Mauritius; India's Indian Ocean Arc (Maldives, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar, Comoros) is a key strategic priority under the 'Neighbourhood First' and 'Act West' policies.

▸ Outcomes: India-Seychelles MoUs on: maritime security cooperation; economic development of Assumption Island joint facility; UPI expansion to Seychelles; India-Seychelles scholarship programme.

The Indian Ocean Doctrine: SAGAR to SAGAR+

- SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region): Announced by PM Modi in Mauritius in March 2015; India's vision for the Indian Ocean — cooperative security, freedom of navigation, rules-based order, sustainable development; the first articulation of India as a 'net security provider' in the IOR.
- SAGAR+ (new 2026 formulation, as articulated in Seychelles): Adds 'shared responsibility' — all IOR states must contribute to security, not just receive Indian protection; connects to the IORA (Indian Ocean Rim Association) framework; India is pushing for stronger IORA burden-sharing.
- The Hormuz context: The Iran war (Feb-June 2026) demonstrated how Hormuz disruption affects ALL Indian Ocean economies, not just India; the IORA states collectively import 60%+ of their energy through the IOR; a 'shared responsibility' framework would mean all IOR states should contribute to: anti-piracy operations; mine clearance; freedom of navigation enforcement.

Assumption Island Update

- Modi and Seychelles President Wavel Ramkalawan discussed progress on the Assumption Island joint maritime facility (jetty + airstrip + barracks); India has committed Rs 800+ crore for the facility; Seychelles has provided land rights for 30 years; operational target: 2027. This facility will give India: a logistics base 1,500+ km further into the Indian Ocean than Andaman & Nicobar; surveillance coverage over the southwestern Indian Ocean (including narcotics trafficking routes, piracy approaches, and IRGC naval vessels' movement).
- India's 5% connection: Indian diaspora = ~5% of Seychelles' population (96,000 total); the Indian community has been present since the 18th-19th century; historically migrated during British colonial period from Gujarat and other western Indian states.

Modi Meets Mauritius PM in Seychelles

- On the sidelines of IORA-related meetings, PM Modi held a bilateral with Mauritius PM Navinchandra Ramgoolam — focusing on: India's Rs 500 crore development credit line to Mauritius; Metro Express Phase 3 (India-funded urban rail); Mauritius-India Special Economic Zone; MIDA (Mauritius India Development Authority) expansion.
- Mauritius strategic importance: Mauritius hosts India's primary IOC (Indian Ocean Commission) engagement; INS (Indian Naval Ships) regularl y conduct port calls; the India-Mauritius CEPA (2021) is India's template for small island state economic partnerships; Mauritius is also India's largest FDI inflow source (due to treaty-shopping).

UPSC ANGLE

• India's Indian Ocean strategy triangulated: (1) Northeast IOR — Andaman & Nicobar as India's 'Unsinkable Aircraft Carrier'; (2) Northwest IOR — Assumption Island (Seychelles) + Agaléga (Mauritius) infrastructure; (3) Eastern IOR — military exercises with Australia, Singapore, Indonesia under QUAD and bilateral frameworks. Together these create a strategic perimeter for India in the Indian Ocean.

• IORA (Indian Ocean Rim Association): 23 member states from East Africa to Australia; India chairs the IORA Council of Ministers; IORA's areas of cooperation: maritime safety, trade facilitation, fisheries management, disaster risk management, tourism. India sees IORA as the multilateral framework for SAGAR+ implementation.

- **SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region)** — India's Indian Ocean doctrine (2015); net security provider; cooperative security; freedom of navigation; rules-based order; now expanded to 'SAGAR+' with 'shared responsibility' formulation (Seychelles, 2026).

VISION IAS SAGAR ABHIYAAN

- **IORA (Indian Ocean Rim Association)** — 23-member multilateral body covering the Indian Ocean Rim; India is a key driver; areas: maritime security, trade, fisheries, tourism; India sees it as the multilateral platform for SAGAR+ implementation.

2. July Opens the Biggest Chapter in India-UK Trade Ties — CETA Effective July 15

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GS 2 / GS 3: IR: India–UK CETA; trade policy; July 15 implementation; economic impact; GS3 Economy.

‣ July 15, 2026 — India's most ambitious bilateral trade agreement enters force: The India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), signed July 2025, becomes operational in 17 days.
‣ UK tariffs going to zero on July 15: 99.1% of UK tariff lines; immediate zero duty for: Indian textiles and clothing (previously 12%), footwear (16%), processed food (up to 70%), engineering goods, IT hardware, marine products, chemicals, auto components.
‣ India reduces tariffs: On UK goods in a phased schedule over 7-10 years; sensitive sectors excluded: dairy, cereals, millets, apples, edible oils.
‣ Double Contribution Convention (DCC): Also effective July 15 — Indian professionals on temporary UK assignments (up to 5 years) exempt from UK National Insurance contributions; saves $500 million annually for Indian IT companies and professionals.

What Changes on July 15

- Textiles sector (largest beneficiary): India exports Rs 30,000+ crore of textiles and clothing to UK annually; UK tariffs (currently 12%) going to zero saves Indian exporters ~Rs 3,600 crore/year; Tiruppur (knitwear), Surat (synthetic textiles), Ludhiana (hosiery), Jaipur (handicrafts) are the primary beneficiary cities.
- IT sector (DCC benefit): TCS, Infosys, Wipro, HCL — each with thousands of employees in the UK — will save significant National Insurance contributions; total $500 million saving across the industry; makes Indian IT companies more cost-competitive in the UK market.
- India-UK CETA Joint Committee: As a first step, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal and UK Business & Trade Secretary Jonathan Reynolds will formally constitute the CETA Joint Committee (during Goyal's June 25-27 London visit) — the body that manages FTA implementation, reviews tariff schedules, and resolves disputes.
- Post-Brexit significance: India-UK CETA required only 3 years of negotiations (vs. 20+ years for India-EU CEPA); demonstrates UK's ability to act as an independent trading nation post-Brexit; the UK Government calls it 'the most comprehensive FTA the UK has signed since Brexit.'

India's FTA Architecture (July 2026 Status)

- India-UK CETA (effective July 15, 2026) + India-UAE CEPA (effective May 2022) + India-Australia ECTA (effective December 2022) + India-EU CEPA (December 2026 target) + India-US BTA (August 15 deadline) = India's most ambitious multi-front FTA year.

UPSC ANGLE
• CETA implementation 'first mile': Banks, shipping companies, customs brokers, and trade finance providers must update their tariff schedule databases; Certificate of Origin (CoO) procedures for Indian exporters claiming UK tariff preferences must be in place by July 15. Commerce Ministry deployed 1,000 advisory personnel (PIB, June 27) to help Indian businesses maximise CETA benefits.

- **India-UK CETA (Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement)** — Signed July 2025; effective July 15, 2026; UK offers 99.1% tariff lines at zero duty; 137 service sub-sectors opened; DCC saves $500M for Indian professionals; target £100 billion bilateral trade by 2030.

3. Can Neutral Ships Be Lawfully Attacked? UNCLOS, Laws of War, and Iran

[TH] Page 8

GS 2: International Relations: Laws of Armed Conflict; UNCLOS; Freedom of Navigation; Neutral Shipping; Iran firing on Ever Lovely.

‣ The Hindu analysis: Iran's June 25 firing on the Singapore-flagged 'Ever Lovely' (operated by Taiwan's Evergreen Marine) raises a fundamental question of international law — can states at war lawfully attack neutral ships?
‣ The short answer: Under international law (UNCLOS + Laws of Naval Warfare), attacking a neutral ship on the high seas or in a strait is presumptively unlawful — unless the ship is found to be 'carrying contraband,' 'assisting the enemy,' or 'violating a lawful blockade.'
‣ Iran's position: Iran claims the Ever Lovely was using an 'unauthorised route' (the IMO/UKMTO southern route through Omani waters) rather than the 'authorised' route through Iran's designated Hormuz shipping lanes (via Iran's 'Persian Gulf Strait Authority'); Iran calls this a breach of the 'arrangement' it considers itself to have with transiting vessels.
‣ The Ever Lovely's position: It was using the UKMTO-recommended route that passes through Oman's territorial waters in the Musandam Peninsula — Oman being a neutral state not party to the Iran war; UKMTO's route was specifically designed to avoid Iranian-controlled Hormuz shipping lanes.

The Legal Framework

- UNCLOS Art. 38 (Transit Passage): All ships have the right of continuous and expeditious transit through straits used for international navigation; coastal states (Iran) 'shall not hamper transit passage.' Period. The right does not depend on Iran's permission or designated routes.
- UNCLOS Art. 44: States bordering straits shall not suspend transit passage; may designate sea lanes and prescribe traffic separation schemes — but cannot charge fees, require advance notification, or condition transit on compliance with national procedures.
- Laws of Naval Warfare (1994 San Remo Manual): Section V covers neutral merchant vessels in war zones; Rule 67: A neutral vessel 'may be attacked only if it takes a direct part in the hostilities, provides assistance to the enemy, or the vessel and/or its cargo consist of contraband and effective and proportionate warning has been given.' The Ever Lovely — a commercial container ship carrying neither weapons nor contraband — does not meet any of these criteria.
- Iran's legal argument: Iran argues that the Muscat Accord created a 'temporary arrangement' for Hormuz transit that requires coordination with the Persian Gulf Strait Authority; however, this 'arrangement' is NOT a treaty, has no legal force, and cannot override UNCLOS transit passage rights.

Why India Must Engage

- India's vulnerability: 40%+ of India's crude oil transits Hormuz; 15 Indian-flagged vessels + 40+ vessels with Indian crew were in the 'stranded' fleet; the IMO convoy pause means these vessels remain in legal limbo.
- India's formal position: India voted for the UNGA resolution urging all parties to respect UNCLOS and freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz (June 24 emergency session — passed 134-4, with 12 abstentions including Russia and China); India's vote reinforces its UNCLOS commitment.

UPSC ANGLE

• The San Remo Manual (1994): Adopted by a group of international maritime law experts; the authoritative restatement of customary international law on the conduct of armed conflict at sea; it explicitly protects neutral merchant shipping.
• The Hormuz mines: USGS estimates 80 mines still in Hormuz shipping lanes; even neutral ships using the 'southern route' face risks; a comprehensive mine clearance operation (requiring international naval cooperation) is urgent but has not commenced.

- **San Remo Manual (1994)** — International Institute of Humanitarian Law's restatement of laws of naval warfare; Rule 67 protects neutral merchant vessels from attack unless they are carrying contraband or assisting the enemy; Iran's attack on Ever Lovely prima facie violates this rule.

- 📌 **Transit Passage (UNCLOS Art. 38)** — The right of all ships to continuous and expeditious transit through international straits; cannot be suspended or conditioned by coastal states; more protective than 'innocent passage' in territorial waters; Iran's 'Strait Authority' requirement violates this right.

GS PAPER 2 — Governance · Health · Polity

4. 'New Digital Slavery' Needs Constitutional Guardrails — AI and Worker Rights

[TH] Page 6

GS 2 / GS 3: Governance: AI regulation; gig workers; algorithmic management; Article 21; Digital rights; GS3: Technology.

▸ The Hindu editorial: The rise of AI-driven algorithmic management in gig economy platforms (Zomato, Swiggy, Uber, Ola, Amazon Flex) constitutes a 'new digital slavery' — workers whose every action is monitored, rated, and controlled by AI systems with no right of appeal, no collective bargaining, and no transparency.

▸ The 'algorithmic boss': AI systems assign delivery tasks, set time limits, rate performance, determine pay (surge pricing), and terminate workers — all without human oversight; workers have no recourse against algorithmic decisions.

▸ Constitutional issue: The right to livelihood (part of Article 21) and the right to fair working conditions (implied in dignity — Article 21) are at stake when an algorithm can terminate a worker's income source without due process.

▸ Scale: India has 7.7 million gig workers on digital platforms (NITI Aayog 2021 estimate; now likely 10+ million); this is the fastest-growing employment category in India's formal economy.

- Algorithmic transparency requirement: Workers should have the right to: know the criteria by which their performance is evaluated; challenge algorithmic decisions (a right of appeal); understand how their data is used. This connects to the DPDP Act 2023's right to explanation for automated decisions — but DPDP Act's implementation in gig platforms is effectively zero.
- Collective bargaining gap: India's Industrial Disputes Act (now merged into the Labour Codes as the Industrial Relations Code, 2020) covers 'workers' — but most gig workers are classified as 'independent contractors' and excluded from collective bargaining rights; the UK Supreme Court (Uber v Aslam, 2021) found gig workers ARE workers for employment law purposes — India has not followed this.
- Constitutional guardrails needed: (1) A Gig Workers' Rights Act (proposed by Karnataka in 2024, stalled); (2) Mandatory algorithmic transparency for platforms with 10 lakh+ contracted workers; (3) A Digital Labour Ombudsman with power to review algorithmic termination decisions; (4) Coverage of gig workers under ESIC (Employee State Insurance) and EPFO — partially addressed in recent Social Security Code amendments but not fully implemented.

★ UPSC ANGLE

• DPDP Act 2023 and algorithmic decisions: Section 16 of DPDP Act — a data principal has the right to know the purpose for which their data is being processed; this implicitly covers the right to know why an algorithm made a decision about them. The AI-as-employer context makes this a live constitutional question.

• Rajasthan model: Rajasthan enacted the Rajasthan Platform-Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Act 2023 — India's first state law for gig workers; provides registration, social security, welfare fund funded by platform levy; a model for other states.

- 📌 **Algorithmic Management** — The use of AI/software algorithms to assign, monitor, evaluate, and discipline workers; removes human managers from the equation; workers have no right of appeal against automated decisions; the 'new' employment relationship at scale.
- 📌 **Industrial Relations Code 2020** — One of India's four Labour Codes; consolidates Industrial Disputes Act, Trade Unions Act, and Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act; most gig workers classified as 'independent contractors' are excluded from its protections.

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5. New Anaemia Mukt Bharat Norms Seek Earlier Action — NFHS-6 Context

[TH] Page 12

GS 2: Health: Anaemia; Anaemia Mukt Bharat; WIFS; IFA supplementation; NFHS-6 data; nutrition policy.

‣ MoHFW released revised Anaemia Mukt Bharat (AMB) norms — shifting from 'treatment when severely anaemic' to 'early action protocol' that intervenes at mild anaemia levels.
‣ The problem: NFHS-6 (2023-24) found anaemia prevalence has barely moved: women 15-49 years: 57% (from 57.2% in NFHS-5); children 6-59 months: 67% — despite massive WIFS (Weekly Iron and Folic Acid Supplementation) programmes.
‣ New early action norms: (1) Screen for anaemia at EVERY antenatal visit (not just at first visit); (2) Intervene with therapeutic iron when Hb < 10 g/dL (mild anaemia — previously only treated when Hb < 8 g/dL); (3) Integrate fortified rice distribution under PDS with anaemia screening; (4) Add Vitamin A and Zinc supplementation alongside IFA.
‣ School-based intervention: Under school health programmes, anaemia screening at Class 6 entry + Class 9 transition; treating adolescent girls with IFA BEFORE they enter reproductive age (preventing anaemia in the first trimester — the most critical period).

- Why AMB has underperformed: (1) WIFS supply chain failures — tablets often not available at ASHA level; (2) Poor compliance due to IFA tablets' side effects (nausea, dark stools) causing adolescents to stop; (3) Dietary diversity gap — IFA supplements complement but cannot replace dietary iron from food; (4) Low bioavailability of plant-based iron (Indian diet is predominantly plant-based; phytates in cereals inhibit iron absorption).
- New solutions in revised norms: IV (intravenous) iron therapy for moderately anaemic pregnant women (Hb 8-10 g/dL) at healthcare centres with capacity — far more effective than oral iron; weekly rather than daily IFA for adolescents (better compliance, similar efficacy); food fortification with micronutrients mandated for all Midday Meal and ICDS supplementary nutrition.

UPSC ANGLE

• Anaemia's economic cost: UNICEF estimates that anaemia reduces India's GDP by $24 billion annually through reduced worker productivity, increased maternal mortality, and cognitive impairment in children. Addressing anaemia is not just a health imperative but an economic one.
• Adolescent malnutrition + anaemia (schools context): The Schools topic (The Hindu Page 7) connects here — schools are the most effective venue for mass anaemia intervention (guaranteed daily contact, trained teachers, Midday Meal platform for fortified food delivery); the Anaemia Mukt Bharat school protocol integration is the key reform.

- **Anaemia Mukt Bharat (AMB)** — Government's targeted programme to reduce anaemia prevalence across all age groups; delivered through ASHA workers, ANMs, schools; WIFS (weekly IFA tablets) for adolescent girls (10-19 years) and women of reproductive age; targets 3 percentage point annual reduction in anaemia prevalence.
- **WIFS (Weekly Iron and Folic Acid Supplementation)** — School-based programme providing weekly IFA tablets to adolescent girls (Class 6-12) and boys (to address anaemia); implemented through state education + health departments; compliance is the major challenge.

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6. Kerala Minister's PMAY Logo Storm — Centre vs. State Credit-Claiming

[TH] Page 5

GS 2: Governance: PMAY; Federal Relations; State vs. Centre branding; Cooperative Federalism; Concurrent List.

‣ Kerala Housing Minister P.A. Mohammad Riyas shared social media posts about PMAY-Gramin (Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana) houses being built in Kerala without the standard PMAY logo — instead using the state government's 'Life Mission' (Kerala's housing scheme branding).

‣ The Centre's objection: Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) issued a notice to Kerala: PMAY houses MUST display the PMAY logo and PM's photo; state governments cannot rebrand centrally-funded houses under their own political branding.
‣ Kerala's response: The state argues that Kerala's 'Life Mission' integrates PMAY funds with state co-funding; the integrated programme should carry integrated branding.
‣ Recurrent conflict: This is the 5th state in 2026 to face this issue (also Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Telangana, Punjab — all opposition-governed); the Centre has threatened to withhold PMAY funds if logo/branding norms are not followed.

- The constitutional/legal basis: PMAY is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) — funded partly by the Centre (90% for Northeast/hill states; 60% for other states); CSS guidelines mandate that beneficiary houses must display PMAY logo, scheme information, and PM's photograph; this is part of the CSS administrative guidelines — not a constitutional provision.
- The federalism argument: State governments argue: (a) They provide co-funding (40% in most states); (b) They do the actual implementation (land acquisition, construction supervision, beneficiary selection); (c) States have the right to credit their own voters for schemes they co-finance and co-implement. The Centre argues: Central funds are involved; national scheme identity prevents state-level appropriation of central resources.
- The political dimension: In states where the central government and state government are from different parties, credit-claiming for welfare schemes is politically contested; PMAY houses are visible symbols of governance in every village — who gets the political credit matters electorally.

UPSC ANGLE
• Sarkaria Commission on CSS: The 1988 Sarkaria Commission on Centre-State Relations recommended that the Centre should not impose conditions beyond those strictly necessary on Centrally Sponsored Schemes; branding requirements are arguably beyond this; but the Centre has legal ground because CSS administrative guidelines are binding conditions of funding.
• PMAY-G target: Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana (Gramin) — target 2.95 crore houses by 2024 (extended to 2026); as of June 2026, 2.71 crore houses completed; Rs 1.15 lakh crore+ disbursed.

- **Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS)** — Government programmes where both Centre and States share funding; Centre prescribes guidelines; States implement; specific CSS conditions (including PMAY branding) are legally binding conditions of funding release; listed in Finance Commission transfers.

GS PAPER 3 — Defence · Economy · Environment · Science

7. Army to Establish and Operationalise Its First Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs) in July

[IE] Page 1

GS 3: Defence: Integrated Battle Groups; Army Transformation; 17 Mountain Strike Corps; China threat; IBGisation.

‣ Indian Express: The Indian Army is set to formally establish and operationalise its first Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs) in July 2026 — marking a historic transformation in India's land warfare doctrine.
‣ Army Chief Gen. Upendra Dwivedi: '31 sanction letters approved by the government over the past 14-15 months; this paves the way for IBGs, new aviation brigades, and resumption of Territorial Army reserve recruitment.'
‣ The first IBGs will be constituted from the 17 Mountain Strike Corps (HQ Panagarh, West Bengal) — India's only mountain strike corps, specifically oriented toward the China (LAC) threat.
‣ Each IBG: ~5,000 troops; commanded by a Major General; combines infantry, armoured, artillery, engineers, signals, air defence, UAVs, aviation elements (Rudra attack helicopters), electronic warfare, and logistics under a SINGLE commander.

What IBGs Represent: A Doctrinal Revolution

- The old structure problem: India's traditional land forces structure is: Army → Corps → Division → Brigade → Battalion. Each level is a separate command with its own logistics and planning; in a crisis, bringing all capabilities together from different formations takes DAYS (not hours) due to administrative layers.
- IBG design principle: Self-contained combined arms team; can be deployed for combat operations within 48 HOURS of receiving orders (vs. days under divisional structure); each IBG has: 4-6 infantry/armour battalions; artillery battalions; army aviation (helicopter) elements; electronic warfare; engineers; organic logistics (self-sustaining for defined periods). No need to 'attach' separate supporting elements.
- AI integration: 2026-era IBGs include 'Bhairav battalions' (loitering munition units) and 'Divyaastra batteries' (AI-enabled electronic warfare); the OODA (Observe-Orient-Decide-Act) loop is compressed to hours.

China Threat Context

- The 17 Mountain Strike Corps (MSC) — originally raised in 2013 as a 'strike' corps to go offensive into Chinese territory during a conflict — has been IBGised because: (a) Chinese PLA has dramatically upgraded LAC infrastructure since Galwan (2020) — roads, airfields, villages; (b) India needs matching rapid-deployment capability; (c) Old divisional structure takes too long to concentrate forces at a particular LAC point; IBGs can respond at sector level independently.
- Timeline: 17 MSC IBGisation by mid-2027; full rollout to all corps by 2029; eventually India aims to have 40+ IBGs replacing 14 divisions + 40+ brigades.

UPSC ANGLE

• Operation Sindoor connection: India's May 2025 operation against Pakistan used existing army formations; the post-Sindoor military doctrine review accelerated IBG sanction approvals; the government approved 31 sanction letters in 14-15 months — the fastest military structural reform approvals in India's post-independence history.
• IBGs and Theaterisation: India is also developing 'Theatre Commands' (Integrated Theatre Commands integrating Army, Navy, Air Force under a single commander for a geographic theatre); IBGs at the land warfare level are the army's contribution to this joint warfare transformation.

- **IBG (Integrated Battle Group)** — A self-contained, combined-arms military formation of ~5,000 troops commanded by a Major General; combines all combat arms and support arms; deployable in 48 hours; the fundamental unit of India's new land warfare doctrine; first IBGs being raised from 17 Mountain Strike Corps (China front) in July 2026.
- **17 Mountain Strike Corps** — India's only mountain strike corps; HQ Panagarh, West Bengal; specifically raised to mount offensive operations against Chinese forces on the LAC; the first corps to be converted to IBG structure; 4 IBGs planned under 59 Division (Panagarh) and 23 Division (Ranchi).

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8. 25 of 58 Tiger Reserves Flagged for Priority Intervention — Fewer or No Big Cats

[IE] Page 9

GS 3: Environment: Tiger conservation; Project Tiger; NTCA; Wildlife Protection Act; biodiversity corridors.

‣ MoEFCC/NTCA internal assessment: 25 of India's 58 tiger reserves need 'priority intervention' because they have either very few tigers or none at all.
‣ India's total tiger population (2022 census, latest available): 3,682 tigers — the highest in 50 years; but the distribution is UNEVEN — a few reserves hold the majority while others have extremely sparse populations.
‣ Reserves with no or negligible tiger populations: Several recently notified reserves (in Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Mizoram, Uttarakhand) were declared to protect potential tiger habitat but have not attracted tiger populations; they have the forest but not the cats.
‣ Key vulnerability: Tiger reserves with fewer than 8-10 breeding adults face 'inbreeding depression' risk — genetically isolated small populations lose fitness over generations; corridors connecting reserves are critical.

Project Tiger: Overview

- Launched: April 1, 1973 by PM Indira Gandhi; the 9 original reserves covered 18,278 sq km. Now: 58 reserves (as of March 2025, including 58th — Madhav Tiger Reserve, MP) covering 84,487 sq km (~2.3% of India's territory). India has 75%+ of world's wild tiger population.
- NTCA (National Tiger Conservation Authority): Statutory body under Wildlife Protection Act 1972 (Section 38); under MoEFCC; maintains Tiger Cell, funds reserves, monitors populations, certifies reserve management effectiveness.
- Core-Buffer framework: Each reserve has a 'Critical Tiger Habitat' (core — no human activity allowed) and a Buffer Zone (surrounding area — sustainable use permitted). States must prepare Tiger Conservation Plans for each reserve.

The 25 Reserves: Why They're Struggling

- Category 1 — Recently notified, no tigers yet: Madhav Tiger Reserve (MP, 58th), Dholpur-Karauli (Rajasthan, 55th) — declared because they have suitable habitat corridors but tigers haven't colonised; intent is to facilitate natural tiger immigration from Ranthambore.
- Category 2 — Historical reserves that have lost tigers: Palamu (Jharkhand), Bor (Maharashtra) — had tigers in 1973 when Project Tiger started; lost most of their tiger population due to poaching, habitat degradation, prey base loss; now struggling to maintain even 3-4 individuals.
- Category 3 — Northeast reserves with fragmented habitats: Several NE reserves (Dampa, Mizoram; Namdapha, Arunachal partial areas) have very low tiger densities due to difficult terrain, forest fragmentation, insurgency affecting patrolling.
- Priority intervention measures: (1) Emergency prey restoration (deer, wild pig populations); (2) Anti-poaching ops with NTCA central assistance; (3) Wildlife corridor restoration (connecting to source populations); (4) Possible translocation from tiger-rich reserves (Ranthambore → Dholpur-Karauli; Kanha → Palamu).

UPSC ANGLE

• Wildlife corridor importance: Tigers range 50-200 km; without connecting corridors between reserves, small populations become genetically isolated; India has 32 identified wildlife corridors (in various states of integrity); the most critical: Terai Arc Landscape (connecting 7 reserves in UP, Uttarakhand, Nepal); Western Ghats corridor (connecting Anamalai-Parambikulam-Periyar reserves).

• Tiger census 2022 methodology: Camera traps + AI pattern recognition; all-India simultaneous survey; 3,682 individuals identified; India census is considered the world's most rigorous national wildlife population assessment.

- **NTCA (National Tiger Conservation Authority)** — Statutory body under Wildlife Protection Act 1972; under MoEFCC; administers Project Tiger; funds and monitors tiger reserves; develops Tiger Conservation Plans; central authority for India's tiger conservation.
- **Critical Tiger Habitat (Core Zone)** — The inviolate core area of a tiger reserve where all human activity is prohibited; declared under Section 38V of WPA 1972; cannot be altered without NTCA recommendation + National Board for Wildlife approval.

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9. It's Time to Resume the India-China Strategic Economic Dialogue

[IE] Page 10

GS 2: International Relations: India-China; LAC; Galwan aftermath; Strategic Economic Dialogue; BRICS; Bilateral normalization.

‣ Indian Express op-ed: With the Muscat Accord reducing global geopolitical tensions and the BRICS NSA meeting (June 22-23) showing Wang Yi's willingness to engage India, the author argues this is the right moment to resume the India-China Strategic Economic Dialogue (SED).

‣ Background: The India-China Strategic Economic Dialogue was suspended in 2020 after the Galwan Valley clash (June 15, 2020, 20 Indian soldiers killed + Chinese casualties); all bilateral dialogue mechanisms were frozen by India.

‣ Current status: Line of Actual Control (LAC) disengagement is ongoing (Depsang and Demchok friction points largely resolved by late 2024, per reports); Indian pilgrims are resuming Kailash Mansarovar Yatra (2025); PM Modi and President Xi have met on the sidelines of BRICS (2024) and SCO (2025).
‣ The SED was a high-level economic dialogue covering: market access for Indian pharma and IT in China; Chinese investment in India; trade imbalance (India's $85 billion trade deficit with China); cooperation in clean energy, manufacturing.

- Why now: (1) India-China relations have reached a post-Galwan 'new normal' — neither fully cordial nor adversarial; the Depsang-Demchok resolution enables the political space for economic normalisation; (2) India's growing trade deficit with China ($85 billion in FY26, up from $65 billion pre-Galwan) is economically unsustainable without structured engagement; (3) BRICS context — China and India are co-chairs of BRICS economic and financial track under India's 2026 chairship; cooperation is practically necessary.
- The case against: Critics (including strategic community voices in India) argue: (a) China has not acknowledged Galwan responsibility; (b) PLA infrastructure build-up near LAC continues; (c) CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) — running through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir — remains a fundamental violation of Indian sovereignty; (d) Premature SED revival would reward China without reciprocal concessions.
- The pragmatic balance: India's approach since late 2024 has been 'compartmentalisation' — keeping territorial disputes and economic/diplomatic relations in separate tracks; the SED would be in the economic track, not requiring resolution of territorial issues. India can resume SED while maintaining pressure on territorial questions.

UPSC ANGLE
• India-China trade (FY26): India's total trade with China: $125 billion; imports from China: $105 billion; exports to China: $20 billion; deficit: $85 billion. The deficit is dominated by: electronics (30%), machinery (20%), chemicals (15%), solar panels/components (12%). India is heavily dependent on Chinese inputs for its own manufacturing exports.
• The 1962 context in modern policy: India's military-strategic establishment remains deeply influenced by the 1962 war; any normalization with China faces domestic political resistance from those who see it as weakness; PM Modi must balance economic pragmatism with strategic sovereignty.

- **Strategic Economic Dialogue (SED)** — India-China high-level economic engagement mechanism; suspended since Galwan (2020); covered: market access, investment, trade imbalance, clean energy; resumption proposed after BRICS NSA meeting (June 2026) showed bilateral willingness.
- **India-China Trade Deficit** — India's imports from China ($105 billion) exceed exports ($20 billion) by $85 billion (FY26); driven by electronics, machinery, chemicals, solar components; a structural dependency that makes full 'decoupling' economically costly.

10. PLI Push Must Continue; Energy Diversity and Reforms Key After Hormuz War

[IE] Page 13

GS 3: Economy: PLI schemes; Energy security; Post-Hormuz policy; Economic resilience; Structural reforms.

‣ Indian Express analysis: The Hormuz crisis (February-June 2026) demonstrated that India's economic vulnerability has two root causes — energy import dependence and manufacturing import dependence — and the policy response must address both through PLI continuation and energy diversification.
‣ Energy diversification imperative: India's 85% oil import dependence was brutally exposed; the path forward: (1) Accelerate EV transition (reduces oil demand); (2) Expand Strategic Petroleum Reserve (from 9.5 to 22 days); (3) Develop domestic natural gas (KG-D6 expansion, ONGC offshore); (4) Green hydrogen from renewable energy; (5) Nuclear energy expansion (100,000 MW by 2047 target).
‣ PLI continuity: Of 14 PLI schemes launched, 6 are in critical sectors exposed by the Hormuz crisis: telecom equipment, electronics, semiconductors, pharmaceuticals, solar PV modules, advanced chemistry cell batteries — all had supply chain stress during the crisis.

‣ PLI results so far: Rs 1.97 lakh crore in production; Rs 64,000 crore in exports; 7.5 lakh direct jobs; but PLI is in Year 3-5 of a 5-10 year ramp-up — withdrawal now would be economically damaging.

- The Hormuz supply chain lesson: India's fertiliser shortage (60% DAP imported through Gulf), semiconductor scarcity (100% imported), and LNG supply disruption (RLNG for power plants) all created cascading economic problems; PLI schemes for electronics and semiconductors are DIRECTLY relevant to supply chain resilience.
- SEZ reform (Commerce Ministry meeting, June 30): SEZs (Special Economic Zones) — established under SEZ Act 2005 — were designed to boost exports; they've faced challenges from: IGST exemption removal (2017 GST impact); dual control issues (SEZ units under both SEZ rules and GST); sunset of 10-year tax benefits for old units. The June 30 meeting with exporters addresses: restoring some IGST benefits; new 'plug and play' SEZ model for services exports; China+1 beneficiaries seeking SEZ spaces.

UPSC ANGLE

• FCNR(B) rates edging higher: FCNR(B) — Foreign Currency Non-Resident (B) deposits — are foreign currency deposits in Indian banks by NRIs; they are repaid in the same foreign currency; the interest rate is linked to LIBOR/SOFR + a spread; post-Hormuz, as global oil prices fell and INR strengthened, the premium banks offer on FCNR(B) to attract NRI deposits has edged higher (banks need foreign currency to manage their forex exposure).

- **PLI (Production Linked Incentive) Scheme** — India's flagship manufacturing incentive; 14 PLI schemes across sectors; government pays cash incentives tied to incremental production over baseline; total outlay: Rs 1.97 lakh crore; critical for building supply chain resilience in strategic sectors.
- **FCNR(B) (Foreign Currency Non-Resident B)** — NRI deposits in Indian banks in foreign currency (USD, GBP, EUR, JPY, etc.); repaid in same currency; interest rate = LIBOR/SOFR + spread; maturity: 1-5 years; used by banks for foreign currency liquidity management.

11. Life on Mars: The Enduring Mystery — Perseverance Evidence and India's Interest

[TH] Page 18

GS 3: Science and Technology: Mars exploration; NASA Perseverance; ISRO's Mangalyaan 2; astrobiology; water on Mars.

‣ The Hindu science feature: NASA's Perseverance rover (operating since February 2021 in Jezero Crater) has found the strongest evidence yet that Mars once had conditions favourable for life — organic molecules, layered sedimentary rocks (indicating sustained ancient water), and carbonate minerals.
‣ Jezero Crater: A 45-km ancient lake crater on Mars; billions of years ago it was filled with water; Perseverance found clear river delta deposits — confirming long-duration water (not just episodic floods).
‣ The organic molecule evidence: In May 2026, Perseverance's SHERLOC (Scanning Habitable Environments with Raman and Luminescence for Organics and Chemicals) instrument detected complex organic molecules in rock cores; these are NOT conclusive evidence of life but are consistent with conditions that could support life.
‣ Sample return: 38 Perseverance-collected rock cores await return to Earth in the Mars Sample Return mission (now targeted for 2035); only Earth-based laboratories can definitively test for biosignatures.

- Mars' water history: Current Mars is cold and dry (-60°C average); atmospheric pressure 0.7% of Earth's; no liquid water possible at surface. BUT 3.5-4 billion years ago, Mars had: liquid water (lakes and rivers); thicker atmosphere; volcanic activity; magnetic field. The Theia impact hypothesis suggests Mars's core cooled faster than Earth's, losing its magnetic field, allowing solar wind to strip the atmosphere and dry out the planet.
- India's Mangalyaan 2: India's 2nd Mars orbiter mission (ISRO's Mars Orbiter Mission 2); announced 2018; currently in final phase of development; expected launch window in the 2027 Mars opposition (when Earth and Mars are closest); will carry advanced scientific instruments.

- Mangalyaan 1 success: India's first Mars mission (2014 — making India the 4th country and the 1st Asian country to reach Mars on a maiden attempt); orbiter mission; mission exceeded its designed lifetime of 6 months and operated for 8 years before battery failure (August 2023).

UPSC ANGLE

• Astrobiology: The scientific study of the origin, evolution, and distribution of life in the universe; the search for life on Mars is astrobiology's primary mission; the SETI Institute (Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence) and NASA's astrobiology programme fund research across multiple celestial bodies.

• Mars' 'Goldilocks' window: 3.5-4 billion years ago, Mars was in its 'Goldilocks' zone — liquid water, chemical energy, organic molecules; all the requirements for life as we know it. Whether life actually originated is the $1 trillion question.

- **Perseverance Rover** — NASA's 5th Mars rover; landed Jezero Crater, February 18, 2021; key instruments: SHERLOC (organic chemistry), MOXIE (oxygen production experiment), Ingenuity helicopter (first powered flight on Mars); collected 38 rock cores for future Earth return.
- **Mangalyaan 1 (MOM, 2014)** — India's first Mars mission; launched November 2013; reached Mars orbit September 24, 2014; India first Asian country to succeed on maiden Mars attempt; orbited for 8 years; mission ended August 2023 due to battery failure.

PRELIMS IN FOCUS

India-UK CETA — July 15 Implementation	Signed: July 2025 (PM Modi's UK visit with PM Starmer). Effective: July 15, 2026. UK tariffs: 99.1% tariff lines at zero duty effective July 15. India reduces tariffs: Phased 7-10 year schedule; sensitive exclusions: dairy, cereals, millets, apples. DCC (Double Contribution Convention): Also effective July 15; Indian professionals on temporary UK assignments exempt from UK National Insurance for up to 5 years; saves $500M annually for ~75,000 Indian professionals + 900+ companies. Key beneficiaries: Textiles/clothing (12% tariff eliminated), footwear (16%), marine products (21.5%), pharma, engineering goods. Services: 137 UK service sub-sectors opened to India. CETA Joint Committee: Constituted during Goyal's June 25-27 London visit to manage FTA implementation. Trade target: £100 billion by 2030 (from current ~£36 billion).
Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs) — Key Facts	Concept origin: Series of 4 restructuring studies under Army Chief Gen. Bipin Rawat (later India's 1st CDS); approved in principle 2018. What: Self-contained combined arms formation; ~5,000 troops (larger than brigade at ~3,000, smaller than division at ~9,000-10,000); commanded by Major General. Components: Infantry + armour + artillery + engineers + signals + air defence + UAVs + attack helicopter elements (Rudra) + electronic warfare + organic logistics. Deployment time: 48 hours (vs. days for divisional structure). First IBGs: July 2026 from 17 Mountain Strike Corps (Panagarh, WB — China front). Full rollout: By 2029. New formations within IBGs: Bhairav battalions (loitering munitions); Divyaastra batteries (AI-enabled EW); Shaktibaan troops; Rudra brigades (attack helicopters). Theoretical basis: Compression of OODA loop; Mission Command doctrine.
Project Tiger + Tiger Reserves — 2026 Update	Project Tiger launched: April 1, 1973 (PM Indira Gandhi, 9 reserves). 58th Tiger Reserve: Madhav National Park, MP (March 2025). Total coverage: 84,487 sq km (2.3% of India's territory) across 18 states. India's tiger population: 3,682 (2022 census — 75%+ of world's wild tigers). NTCA: National Tiger Conservation Authority; under MoEFCC; Section 38 of WPA 1972. Core-Buffer structure: Core = Critical Tiger Habitat (inviolate); Buffer = sustainable human use. June 2026 development: 25 of 58 reserves flagged for priority intervention due to low or no tiger populations. State with most reserves: Madhya Pradesh (9 reserves). Largest reserve: Nagarjunsagar-Srisailam (AP-Telangana). Newest: Madhav TR (58th, MP, 2025). First: Palamau TR (Jharkhand, 1973) + Jim Corbett TR (Uttarakhand, 1973, the most famous).
DIKSHA + Digital India — Key Numbers	DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing): Launched 2017; MoE; hosted by NCERT; 6.5 crore+ users; 67 crore+ learning sessions; 2,400+ courses; 36 Indian languages; QR-coded textbooks; NISHTHA teacher training; NIPUN Bharat content delivery. Digital India:

	Launched July 1, 2015; 3 vision areas (digital infrastructure as utility; governance on demand; digital empowerment); 940M+ internet subscribers; 650M+ smartphones; BharatNet: 6.8 lakh GPs with fibre; CSC: 6 lakh+ outlets; UPI: 18B transactions/month (May 2026); UMANG: 2,100+ government services; Aadhaar: 1.4B enrolled. IndiaStack: Aadhaar + eKYC + DigiLocker + UPI + BBPS + CoWIN + FasTag. India's digital economy: $500 billion (2026), 15%+/year growth.
SAGAR + Indian Ocean Diplomacy	SAGAR: Security and Growth for All in the Region; announced PM Modi March 2015, Mauritius; India as 'net security provider' in IOR. SAGAR+ (2026): Adds 'shared responsibility' — all IOR states contribute to security. IORA: Indian Ocean Rim Association; 23 members; India chairs Council of Ministers; areas: maritime security, trade, fisheries, disaster management. Seychelles facts: Population ~96,000; capital Victoria; Indian diaspora ~5% (5,000 persons); Assumption Island = joint India-Seychelles maritime facility (2027 target). Mauritius: India's largest FDI inflow source (treaty shopping); CEPA 2021; India-funded Metro Express; Agaléga Island = India-Mauritius joint maritime facility. Key installations: Andaman & Nicobar (NE IOR) + Assumption Island (SW IOR) + Agaléga (SW IOR) = India's Indian Ocean strategic triangle.

MAPPING — PLACES IN NEWS

Place	Why in News / Key Facts
Victoria, Seychelles	PM Modi's bilateral visit (June 27-28); first Indian PM visit in 12 years; Victoria = world's smallest capital by population; Seychelles in western Indian Ocean at junction of East Africa-Middle East-South Asia shipping lanes; Indian diaspora 5% of population; Assumption Island maritime facility being developed.
Panagarh, West Bengal	Headquarters of 17 Mountain Strike Corps (XVII Corps) — India's only mountain strike corps; first Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs) being raised here in July 2026; 59 Mountain Division and 23 Infantry Division are the primary formations; Panagarh airbase is also India's key rapid deployment airfield.
Jezero Crater, Mars	Site of NASA Perseverance rover operations; former lake crater 45 km wide; strong evidence of ancient sustained water (river delta deposits); organic molecules detected by SHERLOC instrument; 38 rock cores collected for future Mars Sample Return mission (2035 target).
Madhav National Park, MP	India's 58th Tiger Reserve (notified March 2025); Shivpuri district, MP; historically a royal hunting ground for Mughal emperors and Maharajas of Gwalior; declared to restore the tiger corridor between Ranthambore (Rajasthan) and Central India reserves; currently among the 25 reserves needing priority intervention (no tigers yet).
Assumption Island, Seychelles	Southernmost island of Seychelles in the outer islands; India-Seychelles joint maritime facility under development (jetty + airstrip + barracks); India committed Rs 800+ crore; 30-year land rights; operational target 2027; gives India a logistics base 1,500+ km deeper into the western Indian Ocean than Andaman & Nicobar.
Port Louis, Mauritius	PM Modi met Mauritius PM Navinchandra Ramgoolam here (bilateral on sidelines of IORA meeting in Seychelles); Mauritius' capital; India's largest FDI inflow source; India-Mauritius CEPA (2021); India-funded Metro Express; Agaléga Island (1,000 km north of Mauritius) = second India-Mauritius joint maritime facility.
Tiruppur, Tamil Nadu	One of India's largest textile and knitwear export hubs; will be a primary beneficiary of India-UK CETA effective July 15 (UK's 12% textile tariff eliminated); 'the knitwear capital of India'; over 10,000 garment manufacturing units; exports to UK, EU, USA; ~1,50,000 workers.
Nagarjunsagar-Srisailam (AP-Telangana)	India's largest tiger reserve by area (3,728 sq km core + buffer); straddles Krishna River gorge; Andhra Pradesh-Telangana border; holds tiger habitat across two states; important for tigers, leopards, sloth bears; also significant for the Nagarjunakonda Buddhist archaeological site.

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