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Two Editorials, Two Frontiers

A Himalayan Tunnel & a Himalayan Neighbour — Connectivity, Security & Diplomacy

CHAPTER 1 Why is the Zojila Tunnel a Game Changer?

Peerzada Ashiq • The Hindu (Explained) — GS-III Infrastructure & Security / GS-I Geography

CHAPTER 2 New and Raw: On Nepal–India Ties

Editorial • The Hindu, 10 June 2026 — GS-II International Relations (Neighbourhood)

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Prepared for current-affairs & answer-writing practice. The Zojila article is reproduced from the newspaper as uploaded, for classroom study and discussion; the Nepal–India editorial is analysed in our own words.

1 | THE ARTICLES, AS PUBLISHED

Why is the Zojila tunnel a game changer?

Why is the tunnel an engineering marvel and what were the challenges in building it? How does it improve connectivity and ensure travellers' safety? How does it provide strategic access in the border region? When will it open for civilian traffic?

Peerzada Ashiq

The story so far:

The world's longest high-altitude tunnel, spanning 13.14 kilometres at an altitude of 11,578 feet, achieved a breakthrough on June 9, 2026. Built at a cost of ₹6,800 crore, the Zojila tunnel will provide all-weather connectivity between the Kashmir Valley and Ladakh, traversing a region that was long considered to be formidable in the Himalayas. Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari, who pressed the blast button for the 2.5 metre-long last leg, termed the breakthrough "a historic day for India's infrastructure development and a milestone in India's technical expertise, engineering prowess, and indomitable resolve".

What makes the Zojila tunnel an engineering marvel?

Zojila tunnel is India's first longest single-tube bi-directional tunnel and an engineering marvel for several reasons. The underground works were highly challenging due to the difficult terrain. The western Himalayan range around the Zojila Pass has been daunting for engineers

The Zojila tunnel is expected to provide year-long transportation access to the Indian forces stationed in Ladakh

and planners, with the fragile geology, sensitive rock formations, avalanche-prone terrain, and harsh winter conditions all complicating the execution of the project.

The Zojila tunnel connects Sonamarg's Baltal in central Kashmir's Ganderbal district with Meenamarg in Ladakh's Drass district. To ensure safe passage up to the mouth of the Zojila tunnel at Baltal, additional roadways, three bridges, and two tunnels were constructed over a stretch of 31 km in Sonamarg. These were designed to withstand the vagaries of winter, as avalanches and snow slides are often reported in the area.

It is a combined system of tunnels and roadways that forms a comprehensive corridor between the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. The tunnel is equipped with catch dams, protection walls, and deflector dams over a 6-km stretch for protection from snowstorms. It will have automatic and emergency lighting, emergency phone, message signalling, and radio to ensure travellers' safety.

Why is this a memorable project for engineers?

The tunnel was dug in extreme weather conditions, with temperatures dropping to minus 20 degrees Celsius on the Kashmir side and minus 30 degrees Celsius on the Drass side. Official estimates suggested that extreme weather conditions were prevalent for nearly 100 days a year. Then, there were avalanche risks: five major avalanches left two workers dead and over 172 workers stranded and later rescued. Snow accumulation was dealt with by a fleet of small and large snow blowers. Officials said the rock classification also changed 67 times across the 13-km stretch, "shifting constantly between good and poor formations."

Why is the tunnel significant for strategic connectivity?

India has witnessed repeated military confrontations with China and Pakistan since 1947, particularly in the regions of Ladakh and Kashmir, most notably in 1962 and 1999. India's full-scale military response was always

hampered by lack of connectivity and poor mobility of men and material in the region, both along the Line of Control in the west and the Line of Actual Control in the east. Officials believe that restricted movement of military vehicles led to delays. The Zojila tunnel is now expected to provide year-long transportation access to the Indian forces stationed in Ladakh, significantly improving mobility, logistics reliability, and strategic access in the border region. This is why Mr. Gadkari described it as "a game changer from a security perspective and the perspective of national integration".

What does it mean for locals?

Ladakh has always been cut off from the Kashmir Valley during winters. Heavy snow and landslides would often close the Zojila Pass for 4-6 months. There have also been frequent reports of commuter deaths on the Zojila Pass due to landslides triggered by rains and avalanches occurring during sunny winters. All this resulted in severe hardships for patients and students in the Kargil-Drass range. Stocks would deplete, but the problem could not be attended to because of road closure. Locals relied on sun-dried vegetables and cereals during winters. Now, the is expected to be movement of people and goods and no more weather-related isolation for the region. Additionally, the tunnel will put a spotlight on activities such as adventure tourism and skiing in Drass, which will contribute to the economy.

When will the tunnel open for civilians?

In spite of the breakthrough, the tunnel is likely to take two years to be fully functional. Water seepage, benching, and electronic layouts are still being worked out. However, officials said the tunnel could be thrown open in case of emergencies, especially to security forces.

The tunnel will also help pilgrims on the Amarnath Yatra, whose base camp is in Baltal. Officials said vehicles can travel at a speed of 80 km per hour through the tunnel. Earlier, drivers could not drive more than 30-40 km per hour on the Zojila Pass, because of steep roads and hair-pin curves.

Officials said the project is moving closer to its long-envisioned goal of seamless all-weather connectivity that will spur long-term benefits in terms of mobility, economic integration, and strategic resilience.



(R-L): J&K LG Manoj Sinha with Union Minister Nitin Gadkari and Chief Minister Omar Abdullah at the breakthrough ceremony of Zojila tunnel, in Ladakh. PTI

Editorial I, reproduced as uploaded. Source: Peerzada Ashiq, "Why is the Zojila tunnel a game changer?", *The Hindu (Explained)*.

Editorial II (link-based): "New and raw: On Nepal-India ties", *The Hindu* editorial, 10 June 2026.

Theme: Nepal's new leadership visits New Delhi to stabilise ties and break "cycles of mistrust" on territory and third-country engagement.

Syllabus: GS-II — India & its Neighbourhood; Bilateral Agreements; Effect of policies of countries on India's interests | GS-III — Border-area security.

2 Editorial I — Zojila Tunnel: Context & Why in News

On 9 June 2026, the final 2.5-metre leg of the Zojila tunnel was blasted through, achieving a structural breakthrough. At 13.14 km and an altitude of 11,578 ft, it is being described as the world's longest high-altitude tunnel, built at a cost of about ₹6,800 crore. Union Minister Nitin Gadkari, who triggered the final blast, called it a milestone in India's engineering capability and "a game changer from a security perspective and the perspective of national integration."

Geographically, the tunnel pierces the **Zojila Pass** on the western Himalayan range, linking **Baltal (Sonamarg, Ganderbal district, central Kashmir)** with **Meenamarg (Drass, Ladakh)**. It promises **year-round, all-weather connectivity** between the Kashmir Valley and Ladakh — a corridor that was previously cut off for 4–6 months every winter.

3 Editorial I — Decoding the Argument

A. Why it is an engineering marvel

- It is **India’s first and longest single-tube, bi-directional tunnel**, dug through fragile, avalanche-prone Himalayan geology.
- Extreme weather prevailed for nearly **100 days a year**; temperatures fell to **–20°C on the Kashmir side** and **–30°C on the Drass side**.
- **Five major avalanches** struck — two workers died and 172+ were stranded and later rescued; rock classification **changed 67 times** across the 13-km stretch, shifting between good and poor formations.
- A combined system of **tunnels + roadways** forms the corridor: over Sonamarg’s 31-km approach, additional roadways, **three bridges and two tunnels** were built; **catch dams, protection walls and deflector dams** guard a 6-km stretch against snowstorms.

B. Why it matters — three lenses

Lens	What the tunnel delivers
Strategic / Security	Year-round military mobility to Ladakh along both the LoC (west) and LAC (east). Restricted movement earlier caused logistics delays; the tunnel improves reliability and rapid troop/material movement in a theatre of repeated confrontations with China & Pakistan (notably 1962, 1999).
Connectivity / Safety	Vehicles can move at up to 80 km/h through the tunnel versus 30–40 km/h on the old pass with hair-pin curves. Equipped with automatic & emergency lighting, emergency phones, message signalling and radio.
Socio-economic	Ends seasonal isolation of Ladakh; reduces commuter deaths on the Zojila Pass; helps Amarnath Yatra pilgrims (base camp at Baltal); spotlights adventure tourism and skiing at Drass.

C. The caveat the editorial flags

The breakthrough is structural, not operational. Officials expect the tunnel to take about **two more years** to be fully functional — water seepage, benching and electronic layouts are still being worked out. It could, however, be opened in emergencies, especially for security forces.

4 Editorial I — Key Facts, Data & Static Linkages

Parameter	Detail
Length / Altitude	13.14 km; 11,578 ft — “world’s longest high-altitude tunnel”
Cost / Breakthrough	≈ ■ 6,800 crore; final leg blasted 9 June 2026
Type	India’s first & longest single-tube bi-directional tunnel
Alignment	Baltal (Sonamarg, Ganderbal) ↔ Meenamarg (Drass, Ladakh)
Connects	UT of Jammu & Kashmir ↔ UT of Ladakh
Speed	Up to 80 km/h (vs 30–40 km/h on Zojila Pass earlier)

Static / value-addition hooks (GS-I & GS-III)

- **Himalayan geography:** Zoji La is a high pass on the Great Himalayan range connecting Kashmir Valley with the Drass–Kargil belt; locate it alongside other key passes (e.g., relevance to the Srinagar–Leh axis).
- **Border infrastructure:** link to BRO works, the Atal Tunnel (Rohtang) and the broader push for all-weather access to Ladakh post-2020 LAC tensions.
- **Disaster angle:** avalanche/snow-slide management, catch & deflector dams — usable in GS-III disaster-management answers.
- **Tourism & economy:** Amarnath Yatra logistics; winter sports at Drass; the “remoteness penalty” that connectivity reduces.

5 Editorial II — Nepal–India Ties: Context & Why in News

Nepal’s new leadership has travelled to New Delhi to **stabilise bilateral relations** and move past recurring “cycles of mistrust” — chiefly over territorial disputes and Kathmandu’s engagement with third parties such as China. The editorial argues the relationship is “new and raw”: full of fresh promise but still scarred by old friction. The two sides are prioritising practical cooperation on **energy, trade, infrastructure and border management** to rebuild trust. The challenge is to shift from reactive, event-driven diplomacy to durable, institutional partnership.

6 Editorial II — Convergence, Divergence & Way Forward

A. Areas of convergence (the foundation)

Domain	Anchor facts
Energy / Hydropower	Long-term pact to export ~10,000 MW from Nepal to India over a decade; Arun-III (900 MW) & Lower Arun under way — Nepal’s water meets India’s clean-energy/net-zero needs.
Digital / Finance	UPI–NPI linkage launched (June 2026) for real-time, low-cost P2P remittances — vital for Nepal’s remittance economy; Bhashini–Kathmandu University MoU for a Nepali voice/AI platform.
Connectivity	Jayanagar (Bihar)–Kurtha rail; Integrated Check Posts at Raxaul–Birgunj and Jogbani–Biratnagar speed up trade for landlocked Nepal.
Security / Defence	Bilateral Consultative Group on security; annual ‘Surya Kiran’ exercise; reciprocal honorary Army Chief tradition.
Culture / Trade	“Roti-Beti” kinship; Ramayana Circuit (Ayodhya–Janakpur); India = Nepal’s largest trading partner (60%+ of its trade).

B. Areas of divergence (the friction)

Issue	Crux
Territory	Kalapani–Limpiyadhura–Lipulekh trijunction dispute — rival readings of the 1816 Treaty of Sugauli on the Kali River’s source; Nepal’s 2020 political map deepened the rift.
‘Interference’	Recurring perception of Indian meddling; the 2015 unofficial blockade left lasting resentment, often fuelling anti-India rhetoric.
China factor	Nepal’s BRI membership, Pokhara airport and the proposed trans-Himalayan railway create strategic unease in New Delhi.
1950 Treaty	Seen in Nepal as “unequal” — objections to Article 5 (arms imports) and Articles 6–7 (residence/property).
Water / Trade	Kosi Barrage flooding grievances; stalled Pancheshwar DPR; non-tariff barriers (e.g., the mango ban) and open-border (1,751 km) security management.

C. Way forward (the editorial's prescription)

- **Smart-border intelligence** — biometric kiosks & joint coordination centres that keep the open border open for locals while flagging high-risk movement, instead of “hardening” it.
- **Regional economic corridor** — integrated value chains and border industrial corridors that “lock in” the two economies and reduce scope for political decoupling.
- **Depoliticise the boundary** — a permanent technical Boundary Commission (cartographers, historians, hydrographers) working year-round.
- **Modernise the 1950 Treaty** — a supplementary protocol preserving open-border access while updating clauses to reflect sovereign equality.
- **Track-III diplomacy** — a bilateral youth council and joint TVET academy to build resilience beyond transient politics.

7 Answer-Writing Toolkit (Both Editorials)

Crisp lines you can deploy

- **Zojila:** “Connectivity is the quiet multiplier of national integration — a tunnel through Zoji La converts seasonal isolation into year-round access for soldiers, citizens and pilgrims alike.”
- **Nepal:** “Geography made India and Nepal neighbours; history made them kin — the task of diplomacy is to keep raw friction from eroding a relationship built on Roti-Beti.”
- **Linking theme:** both editorials are about the *Himalayan frontier* — one about hard infrastructure for security, the other about soft infrastructure of trust. Strong answers connect **connectivity, security and neighbourhood diplomacy**.

Keywords & terms to recall

Zojila: single-tube bi-directional tunnel • LoC/LAC • all-weather connectivity • catch/deflector dams • Baltal–Meenamarg • Amarnath Yatra.

Nepal: Treaty of Sugauli (1816) • 1950 Treaty of Peace & Friendship • Kalapani–Limpiyadhura–Lipulekh • Mahakali Treaty (1996) • Pancheshwar • UPI–NPI • BBIN/BIMSTEC • Roti-Beti • open border (1,751 km).

8 Practice Zone — Mains, Prelims MCQs & Essay

Mains (GS)

Q1. “All-weather connectivity in the high Himalayas is as much a strategic imperative as an engineering achievement.” Discuss in the light of the Zojila tunnel. (GS-III, 150 words)

Q2. Despite deep historical, cultural and people-to-people ties, India–Nepal relations face periodic strain. Examine the key issues and suggest measures to strengthen cooperation. (GS-II, 250 words)

Prelims MCQs

Q1. With reference to the Zojila tunnel, consider the following:

1. It connects the Kashmir Valley with Ladakh.
2. It is a twin-tube tunnel.
3. Its eastern portal lies near Drass.

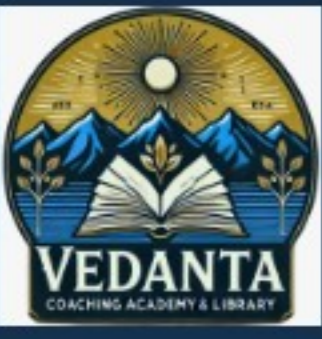
Which are correct?

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

Ans (b). It is a **single-tube bi-directional** tunnel (statement 2 wrong); it links Baltal in Kashmir with Meenamarg near Drass, Ladakh.

Q2. The Kalapani–Limpiyadhura–Lipulekh dispute between India and Nepal arises from differing interpretations of which treaty?

- (a) Treaty of Sugauli, 1816 (b) Mahakali Treaty, 1996 (c) Treaty of Peace & Friendship, 1950 (d) Gandak Treaty, 1959



Ans (a). The dispute turns on the source of the **Kali (Mahakali) River** under the **1816 Treaty of Sugauli**.

Essay hook

“Bridges of steel, bridges of trust: how nations integrate their frontiers and their friendships.”

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