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THE HINDU ANALYSIS

Current Affairs & Editorial

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POLITY • PARLIAMENT • TENTH SCHEDULE

1 SC Declines Stay on 6 MPs' 'Merger' with Shinde Camp — The Anti-Defection Law

GS 2

► WHY IN NEWS

The **Supreme Court** refused to grant an **interim stay** on Lok Sabha Speaker **Om Birla's** decision recognising the "**merger**" of six **Shiv Sena (UBT) MPs** with the rival faction led by Maharashtra Deputy CM **Eknath Shinde**. However, the apex court agreed to hear the challenge to the Speaker's decision after two weeks.

- ◆ A Bench of Justices **P.S. Narasimha and Alok Aradhe** sought the Speaker's response on a petition by Shiv Sena (UBT) leader **Arvind Sawant**.
- ◆ The petition challenged as "**ex facie unconstitutional, illegal and perverse**" the July 18 circular of the Lok Sabha Secretariat recognising the purported merger.

SC declines stay on 6 MPs' 'merger' with Shinde camp

Aaratrika Bhaumik
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday refused to grant interim stay on Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla's decision to recognise the "merger" of six Shiv Sena (UBT) MPs with the rival Shiv Sena faction led by Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde.

However, the apex court agreed to hear the chal-

lenge to the Speaker's decision after two weeks.

A Bench of Justices P.S. Narasimha and Alok Aradhe sought Mr. Birla's response on a petition filed by Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Arvind Sawant, who challenged as "*ex facie* unconstitutional, illegal and perverse" the July 18 circular issued by the Joint Secretary of the Lok Sabha Secretariat recognising the purported merger.

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◆ STATIC CORE — WHAT IS THE ANTI-DEFECTION LAW?

- ◆ A set of rules in the Constitution to prevent elected legislators (MPs/MLAs) from **switching parties for personal gain** or political manoeuvring.
- ◆ Introduced to end the "**Aaya Ram, Gaya Ram**" culture of the 1960s–70s — between **1967 and 1972, nearly 2,000 defection cases** occurred, with about 50% of legislators switching parties, some multiple times.
- ◆ Added by the **52nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1985**, which created the **Tenth Schedule**.
- ◆ Strengthened by the **91st Amendment Act, 2003** — **omitted the "split" provision** (1/3rd members) and retained only the "**merger**" provision (2/3rd members of the legislature party must agree to merge).

TOPIC 1 (contd.) Grounds for Disqualification under the Tenth Schedule

- ♦ **Voluntarily giving up membership:** If an elected member formally resigns from the party on whose ticket they were elected. The **Supreme Court has ruled** that "voluntarily giving up" can be **inferred from a member's conduct**, even without a formal resignation.
- ♦ **Defying the Party Whip:** If a member votes, or abstains from voting, contrary to the party's direction without **prior permission** (and the act is not condoned within 15 days).
- ♦ **Independent members:** Disqualified if they **join any political party after** the election.
- ♦ **Nominated members:** Disqualified if they join a political party **after six months** of taking their seat.
- ♦ **Exception — Presiding Officers:** A member elected Speaker/Chairman may resign from their party to maintain **neutrality** and rejoin after the tenure ends — no disqualification.
- ♦ **Deciding authority:** The question of defection is decided **exclusively by the Presiding Officer** of the House — Speaker (Lok Sabha/Assemblies) or Chairman (Rajya Sabha/Councils).

◆ PRELIMS POINTERS — TENTH SCHEDULE QUICK RECALL

- ♦ **Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu (1992):** Speaker's decision on defection is subject to **judicial review**; the law does not violate free speech of legislators.
- ♦ **Merger rule (Para 4):** No disqualification if the **original party merges** with another and at least **2/3rd** of the legislature party agree to the merger.
- ♦ There is **no time limit** in the Schedule for the Speaker to decide a defection plea — SC in **Keisham Meghachandra (2020)** suggested a **3-month** outer limit.
- ♦ Disqualification under the Schedule is distinct from disqualification under **Articles 102/191** (office of profit, unsound mind, etc.).

► MAINS LINKAGE

Critics argue the merger exception rewards **wholesale defection** while punishing individual dissent, and that vesting adjudication in the **Speaker** — a party functionary — creates a conflict of interest. Reform ideas: transfer the power to the **President/Governor on ECI advice**, or to an independent tribunal.

ECONOMY • EXTERNAL SECTOR • PHARMA

2 Trump's 200% Generic Tariff Threat Would Imperil Americans: Indian Pharma

GS 3

► WHY IN NEWS

U.S. President **Donald Trump** has given generic pharmaceutical companies a **two-year window** to establish manufacturing in the U.S., warning that products imported after **August 2028** could face tariffs of up to **200%**. The announcement has major implications for India, which sends **more than a third** of its pharma exports to the U.S.

- ◆ **Tariff schedule announced:** zero tariff for two years from **August 1, 2026**, then **100%** for one year, and **200% thereafter**.
- ◆ The measure aims to **encourage generic drug production in the U.S.** and reduce dependence on overseas supply chains.
- ◆ Markets reacted sharply — the **Nifty Pharma index fell 1.31%**, with 18 of its 20 constituents closing lower.
- ◆ Dr. Reddy's CEO Erez Israeli: "It's not practical to move operations like that to the U.S. overnight. If tariffs are imposed, **we will have to raise prices.**"
- ◆ Indian drugmakers warned higher tariffs would ultimately **increase medicine costs for American consumers**.

Trump's 200% generic tariff threat would imperil Americans: Indian pharma

N. Ravi Kumar
HYDERABAD

U.S. President Donald Trump has given generic pharmaceutical companies a two-year window to establish manufacturing facilities in the United States, warning that products imported after August 2028 could face tariffs of up to 200%.

The announcement, made on Wednesday through a social media post, has significant implications for India, which sends more than a third of its pharmaceutical exports to the U.S. While Indian drugmakers sought to strike a cautious note, they warned that higher tariffs would ultimately increase medicine costs for American consumers.

Mr. Trump said the measure is intended to encourage generic drug production in the U.S. and reduce dependence on overseas supply chains.

"Effective August 1, 2026, all generic drugs being brought into the United States will continue to have a tariff of zero per cent for a two-year period of time, after which the tariff will be raised to 100% for a one-year period of time, and 200% thereafter," he said. The announcement rattled pharmaceutical stocks. The Nifty Pharma index fell 1.31%, with 18 of its 20 constituent companies closing lower.

"It's not practical to move operations like that to the U.S. overnight. If ta-

Indian companies account for nearly 47% of all generic prescriptions dispensed in the U.S.

riffs are imposed, we will have to raise prices," said Dr. Reddy's Laboratories CEO Erez Israeli. He added that the company was not planning any immediate changes and noted that policy positions could evolve over time.

'India most exposed'

According to the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), India is among the countries most exposed to the proposed measure. India exported pharmaceutical products worth \$25.8 billion in 2025, of which \$9.7 billion, or 37.7%, went to the U.S. its largest overseas market.

Indian firms account for nearly 47% of all generic prescriptions dispensed in the U.S., making India the largest supplier of affordable generic medicines.

Despite this dominance, generics' low pricing means India's share of the value of U.S. generic imports is estimated at only about 30%.

The U.S. imported pharmaceutical products worth \$213 billion in 2025, including \$94.1 billion worth of finished medicines sold in retail packs. GTRI founder Ajay Srivastava said many Indian generics could remain competitive despite the tariffs because they are

significantly cheaper than branded alternatives. However, large-scale relocation of generic drug manufacturing to the U.S. would be challenging, given the industry's reliance on global supply chains and imported active pharmaceutical ingredients.

Granules India Executive Director Priyanka Chigurupati said the company's three U.S. facilities position it well to support increased local manufacturing. However, she cautioned that higher generic drug prices could ripple across the healthcare system and affect patient affordability.

Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance Secretary General Sudarshan Jain said Indian companies already have a substantial U.S. presence, with more than 40 facilities supporting jobs, manufacturing and research. India, he said, remains a trusted partner in supplying affordable, quality medicines to American patients. GTRI added that building a fully domestic pharmaceutical supply chain in the U.S. would require significant investment and would almost certainly lead to higher medicine prices.

"The zero-tariff window gives the industry a meaningful runway, and we see this as time we can use productively — to keep strengthening our position across multiple markets rather than relying on any single one," said Pharmexcil Chairman Namit Joshi.

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TOPIC 2 (contd.) 'India Most Exposed' — The Data Picture

- ◆ Per the **Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI)**, India is among the countries **most exposed** to the proposed measure.
- ◆ India exported pharma products worth **\$25.8 billion in 2025**, of which **\$9.7 billion (37.7%)** went to the U.S. — its **largest overseas market**.
- ◆ Indian firms account for nearly **47% of all generic prescriptions dispensed in the U.S.** — India is the largest supplier of affordable generics.
- ◆ Yet, because of generics' low pricing, India's share of the **value** of U.S. generic imports is only about **30%**.
- ◆ The U.S. imported pharma products worth **\$213 billion in 2025**, including **\$94.1 billion** of finished retail-pack medicines.
- ◆ GTRI's Ajay Srivastava: many Indian generics could **remain competitive despite tariffs** as they are far cheaper than branded alternatives; but relocating manufacturing is hard given reliance on **global supply chains and imported APIs**.
- ◆ **Industry voices:** Granules India cautioned higher generic prices could ripple across the U.S. healthcare system; the Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance noted Indian companies already run **40+ U.S. facilities**; Pharmexcil called the zero-tariff window a "meaningful runway" to diversify across **multiple markets**.

◆ STATIC LINKAGE — INDIAN PHARMA QUICK FACTS

- ◆ India is called the **"Pharmacy of the World"** — ~20% of global generic supply by volume; a leading vaccine producer.
- ◆ **API dependence:** India imports a large share of Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (bulk drugs), chiefly from China — addressed via the **PLI Scheme for Bulk Drugs and Bulk Drug Parks**.
- ◆ Key institutions: **CDSCO** (national drug regulator), **Pharmexcil** (export promotion, under Ministry of Commerce).

◆ KEY NUMBERS AT A GLANCE

- ◆ **\$25.8 bn** — India's pharma exports (2025) | **\$9.7 bn (37.7%)** — share to the U.S.
- ◆ **47%** — U.S. generic prescriptions filled by Indian firms | **~30%** — India's share by value.
- ◆ **0% → 100% → 200%** — tariff path from Aug 1, 2026 | **\$213 bn** — total U.S. pharma imports (2025).

ART & CULTURE · HERITAGE · JUDICIARY

3 Comply with Bhojshala Order, SC Tells Centre & Madhya Pradesh

GS 1

► WHY IN NEWS

The **Supreme Court** directed the Union and Madhya Pradesh governments to comply "**in letter and spirit**" with its **July 14 order** requiring authorities to identify a separate open space **near** the disputed **Bhojshala-Kamal Maula Mosque complex** where the Muslim community could offer Friday namaz between **1 p.m. and 3 p.m.** as an interim arrangement.

- ◆ The direction came after the court learnt that the site identified by the administration was nearly **two kilometres away**; the Solicitor-General said the earmarked space was about **900 m** from the disputed site.
- ◆ A Bench of **CJI Surya Kant** and Justices **Joymalya Bagchi and V. Mohana** held the authorities were obliged to carry out its directions **in their entirety**.
- ◆ **Background:** The **MP High Court declared** the disputed complex in **Dhar district** a temple dedicated to **Goddess Vagdevi (Saraswati)**, quashing a **2003 ASI order** that had allowed **shared worship** by Hindus and Muslims.
- ◆ The HC held that the **Places of Worship Act, 1991 does not apply** because the site is a protected monument under the **AMASR Act, 1958 — Section 4(3)** of the 1991 Act excludes such monuments from the freeze on religious character.

Comply with Bhojshala order, SC tells Centre, M.P.

Aaratrika Bhaumik
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the Union and Madhya Pradesh governments to comply "in letter and spirit" with its July 14 order requiring the authorities to identify a separate open space near the disputed Bhojshala-Kamal Maula Mosque complex where members of the Muslim community could offer Friday namaz between 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. as an interim arrangement. The direction came after the court was informed that the site identified by the administration was nearly two kilometres away.

A Bench comprising Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V. Mohana said the authorities were under an obligation to carry out its earlier directions in their entirety.

Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre and the Madhya Pradesh government noted that the space earmarked for offering namaz was about 900 m away from the disputed site.

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TOPIC 3 (contd.) Bhojshala — Heritage & the Two Claims

- ◆ **Parmar dynasty & Raja Bhoj (1010-1055 CE):** The site is associated with Raja Bhoj, a great patron of art, literature and education, who established the complex as a prominent centre of **Sanskrit learning** housing a temple of **Goddess Saraswati (Vagdevi)**.
- ◆ **Sarpabandha pillar inscriptions:** Two unique serpentine-chart inscriptions serve as **educational tools** — charting the Sanskrit alphabet, noun/verb terminations, and the ten tenses and moods of Sanskrit grammar.
- ◆ **Prakrit odes:** Wall slabs carry two odes to the **Kurma-Avatara** (tortoise incarnation of Vishnu) composed in ancient **Prakrit**.
- ◆ **Classical Sanskrit drama:** Slabs lining the **mihrab** contain a theatrical composition by Royal Tutor **Madana**, disciple of Jain scholar **Ashadhara**, from the reign of King **Arjunavarma**.
- ◆ **Idol of Vagdevi:** An intricately carved Saraswati idol excavated in the early 20th century is now housed in the **British Museum, London**.
- ◆ **Kamal Maula Mosque claim:** The Muslim community holds the site is a mosque whose foundation was laid by **Hazrat Maulana Kamaluddin Chishti** around **1306-07 AD**.

◆ STATIC CORE — PLACES OF WORSHIP ACT, 1991 & AMASR ACT, 1958

- ◆ **PoW Act, 1991:** Freezes the **religious character** of places of worship as it existed on **15 August 1947** and bars conversion; the **Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid** site was exempted.
- ◆ **Section 4(3):** Exempts **ancient/historical monuments** covered by the AMASR Act, 1958 — the basis of the Bhojshala ruling.
- ◆ **AMASR Act, 1958:** Protects monuments >100 years old; administered by the **ASI** (Ministry of Culture); prohibits construction in **prohibited (100 m)** and regulates **regulated (200 m)** zones.

◆ PRELIMS SNAPSHOT — ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA (ASI)

- ◆ Founded **1861** by **Alexander Cunningham**; attached office of the **Ministry of Culture**.
- ◆ Custodian of **3,600+ centrally protected monuments** under the AMASR Act, 1958; its 2003 order on Bhojshala allowed time-shared worship (Hindus on Tuesdays/

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS • INDIA & NEIGHBOURHOOD

4 'Stable India-China Ties Will Help Build Multi-polar Asia'

GS 2

► WHY IN NEWS

External Affairs Minister **S. Jaishankar**, meeting Chinese counterpart **Wang Yi** in **Manila**, said stable India-China relations will help foster a **"multi-polar Asia"** and a **"multi-polar world"** — stressing that **"peace and tranquillity in the border areas is obviously the pre-requisite for normal ties."**

- ◆ The meeting preceded the **Quad Foreign Ministers'** meeting (Australia, India, Japan, U.S.) on the sidelines of the **59th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting** in the Philippine capital, which reiterated support for a **free and open Indo-Pacific** and **ASEAN unity and centrality**.
- ◆ Backdrop of renewed engagement: resumption of **direct flights**, visa-regime updates, restart of the **Kailash Manasarovar Yatra**, and resumption of **border trade**.
- ◆ Jaishankar recalled the **Modi-Xi meeting in Kazan (October 2024)** where both agreed that **"differences should not become disputes"**; he also flagged **predictability of supply chains** and **fair market access**.
- ◆ In a separate meeting with Russia's **Sergey Lavrov** — days after **four Indian seafarers were killed** in a Russian projectile strike in the Black Sea — he expressed **"strong concern"** over the safety of Indian seafarers, alongside talks on trade, energy, connectivity, S&T and mobility.

'Stable India-China ties will help build multi-polar Asia'

Peace and tranquillity in the border areas is pre-requisite for normal ties, says Jaishankar during talks with Wang Yi; Minister raises safety of Indian seafarers during discussion with Sergey Lavrov

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

Stable India-China relations will help foster a "multi-polar Asia" and a "multi-polar world", External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said during a meeting with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi in Manila.

The meeting took place before the Foreign Ministers of the Quad countries, Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S., met on the sidelines of the 59th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting in the Philippine capital and reiterated their support for stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

In a separate meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, held days after four Indian seafarers were killed in a Russian projectile strike in the Black Sea, Mr. Jaishankar expressed "strong concern" regarding the safety of Indian seafarers.

"We believe that a stable and cooperative relationship can best be developed on the basis of mutual respect, mutual interest and mutual sensitivity. Such a relationship can make a valuable contribution to a multi-polar world," Mr. Jaishankar said in his remarks, highlighting that "peace and tranquillity in the border areas is obviously the pre-requisite for normal ties".



External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar meets Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Manila on Wednesday. PTI

Jaishankar said, "... the steps in normalisation taken over the last few months must be welcomed." He referred to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping's meeting in Kazan in October 2024 and recalled that the two leaders had "agreed that differences should not become disputes". He also raised the importance of "predictability of supply chains" and "fair market access", which need to be addressed.

The India-China ministerial discussion was followed by the meeting of Foreign Ministers of the

Quad countries that reiterated their support for stability in the Indo-Pacific region. The External Affairs Ministry issued a joint press release on cooperation between the Quad members and the ASEAN countries, stating, "As ASEAN Comprehensive Strategic Partners we, the Secretary of State of the United States and the Foreign Ministers of Australia, India and Japan met today in Manila to reaffirm our commitment to strengthening a free and open Indo-Pacific and our unwavering support for ASEAN unity and centrality."

"Discussed various aspects of our partnership including trade and investment, energy and connectivity, science and technology and mobility," said Mr. Jaishankar about his meeting with Mr. Lavrov.

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TOPIC 4 (contd.) ASEAN & Quad — Static Linkage

◆ ASEAN — ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS

- ◆ Regional grouping promoting **economic, political and security cooperation**.
- ◆ Established **1967 in Bangkok** via the **ASEAN (Bangkok) Declaration**; Secretariat at **Jakarta, Indonesia**.
- ◆ **11 members**: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, and **Timor-Leste** (newest member).
- ◆ **India is NOT a member** — it is an ASEAN **Comprehensive Strategic Partner** and participates in the East Asia Summit, ARF and ADMM+.

◆ QUAD — QUADRILATERAL SECURITY DIALOGUE

- ◆ **Members**: India, U.S., Japan, Australia — an informal strategic forum, **not a military alliance**.
- ◆ Origins in the **2004 tsunami "Core Group"**; first proposed 2007, revived 2017; first Leaders' Summit **2021**.
- ◆ Agenda: free and open Indo-Pacific, maritime security, resilient supply chains, critical technologies, health and climate cooperation.

► MAINS LINKAGE — 'MULTI-POLAR ASIA'

India's simultaneous engagement — **normalising with China**, deepening the **Quad**, backing **ASEAN centrality**, and maintaining ties with **Russia** — illustrates **strategic autonomy / multi-alignment**. A "multi-polar world requires a multi-polar Asia": stable India-China ties reduce the risk of Asia hardening into blocs, while border peace remains the non-negotiable foundation.

◆ INDIA-CHINA NORMALISATION TRACKER — QUICK RECALL

- ◆ **Kazan, Oct 2024**: Modi-Xi meeting on BRICS sidelines — patrolling/disengagement understanding; "differences should not become disputes."
- ◆ **Kailash Manasarovar Yatra routes**: Lipulekh Pass (Uttarakhand) & Nathu La (Sikkim); **border trade points**: Nathu La, Shipki La (H.P.), Lipulekh.
- ◆ Other steps: resumption of **direct flights**, easier **visas**, revival of **border trade** — border peace remains the stated pre-requisite.

EDITORIAL ANALYSIS · GOVERNANCE · CIVIL SOCIETY

5 'All Is Not Well' — The Violent Incidents Following Youth Protests in Delhi

GS 2

► THE EDITORIAL'S CORE ARGUMENT

Issue-driven mobilisation by civil society stays orderly so long as the government **signals willingness to listen**. The scenes of July 20 — young demonstrators tear-gassed and baton-charged near the new Parliament, internet shutdowns and closed Metro stations — were **entirely avoidable**.

- ◆ The march escalated **only after police resorted to force**; earlier engagement — including with activist **Sonam Wangchuk**, forcibly hospitalised while on an indefinite fast — could have averted the confrontation. A meeting via Union Minister J.P. Nadda **came too late**.
- ◆ **Grievance base**: recurring **paper leaks**, the re-conducting of **NEET**, and friction over the **three-language formula** — deep concerns that higher education is administered **without accountability**.
- ◆ The anger is not about exams alone — protests have crystallised wider discontent over **joblessness, stagnant wages and rising prices** weighing on the young.
- ◆ Drawing support beyond Delhi, they are reminiscent of Sri Lanka's **Aragalaya**, Nepal's **Gen Z revolt** and Bangladesh's student uprising — though far narrower in scale and demands.
- ◆ Reducing the protests to a **political duel** with the Opposition, or deflecting through proxies, is **self-defeating** — it deepens youth disillusionment with the democratic system itself. The editorial demands the Union Education Minister **own the failures and resign**.

All is not well

The violent incidents following youth protests in Delhi were entirely avoidable

Issue-driven mobilisation by civil society groups tends to remain orderly so long as the government of the day signals that it is willing to listen and engage with genuine concerns. The scenes from Delhi on July 20, when mostly young demonstrators were chased, tear-gassed, and baton-charged within sight of the new Parliament building, with some allegedly struck by pellet guns, while mobile Internet was switched off and Metro stations were shut across the area, were avoidable. The Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) march escalated only after the police resorted to force. Had the Union government engaged with the protesters earlier, including activist Sonam Wangchuk, who was on an indefinite fast and forcibly hospitalised two days earlier, the confrontation could have been avoided. A meeting was eventually conceded through Union Minister J.P. Nadda, but only after thousands had reached Parliament's doorstep. It came too late. That a movement born as online satire could gather millions of digital followers and bring thousands to the street says a great deal about the government's own record, which has become the source of a litany of grievances. Recurring paper leaks in entrance examinations, the re-conducting of NEET, and the friction over the three-language formula have led to deep concerns that higher education is being administered without accountability by the government.

Yet, it would be a mistake to read the anger as being about examinations alone. Increasingly, the protests have crystallised into a wider discontent over joblessness, stagnant wages and rising prices that weigh on the young across the country. The intensity of the protests also owes much to the Narendra Modi-led BJP government's disinclination to address genuine civil society concerns except when an election is in view. Course corrections over the last 12-plus years have tended to be timed to the ballot rather than parliamentary sessions or to public disquiet, even as narrow electoral wins in Assembly and parliamentary elections are read as expansive mandates and a licence for an increasingly authoritarian style of rule. The protests, which have drawn support beyond Delhi, are reminiscent of Sri Lanka's Aragalaya, Nepal's Gen Z revolt and Bangladesh's student uprising against authoritarian rule, though their scale and demands remain far narrower in comparison. That should not tempt the government to wait them out. Instead of correcting course, it has sought to reduce the protests to a political duel with the Congress-led Opposition, and to deflect attention from its failures through proxies in civil society and the media. This is self-defeating as it will only deepen youth disillusionment with the democratic system itself. An immediate step is in order. The Union Education Minister, Dharmendra Pradhan, must own the failures on his watch and resign. The alternative is an unceremonious dismissal.

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◆ VALUE ADDITION

- ◆ **Art. 19(1)(a)&(b)**: speech and peaceful assembly — restrictions must be reasonable (Art. 19(2)-(3)).
- ◆ **Anuradha Bhasin (2020)**: internet shutdowns must satisfy necessity & proportionality.
- ◆ Responsive grievance redressal is the first line of **protest management**.

EDITORIAL ANALYSIS · DISASTER MANAGEMENT · ENVIRONMENT

6 'Buried Questions' — The Costs of Projects in Environmentally Fragile Zones

GS 3

► THE EDITORIAL'S CORE ARGUMENT

Workers in an under-construction tunnel at the **Teesta Stage-VI hydroelectric project of NHPC** in Sikkim's **Namchi district** struck a pocket of suspected **trapped methane**; the burst partially damaged the tunnel, killing at least **15 of an estimated 25 workers**.

- ◆ The Teesta basin sits in a **seismically active zone** with young, heavily fractured rock where compressed gas pockets can lie hidden — the gas is unsurprising; what matters is whether its risk was **assessed and modelled**, and whether **gas-detection and ventilation safeguards** were in place and functioning.
- ◆ **Pattern of peril**: a February explosion at an illegal Meghalaya coal mine killed ~30; in 2023 a Uttarakhand road tunnel collapse trapped **41 workers for 17 days**.
- ◆ Hydropower projects along the **400-km Teesta stretch** (Sikkim–West Bengal–Bangladesh) share one feature — location in the **fragile Himalayan belt**.
- ◆ **October 2023**: a glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) from **South Lhonak lake** destroyed the **Teesta-III dam**, killing 100+ downstream. Teesta-VI was absorbed by **NHPC** after its private developers went insolvent.
- ◆ After rescue, the government must order an **independent review** of whether the project's **environmental clearance conditions** were strictly met in practice.

Buried questions

Costs of projects in environmentally fragile zones are many

India is grappling with another Himalayan tragedy. Workers in an under-construction tunnel at the Teesta Stage-VI hydroelectric project of NHPC Limited (formerly National Hydroelectric Power Corporation Private Ltd.), in Sikkim's Namchi district, struck a pocket of suspected trapped methane. The resulting burst partially damaged the tunnel, killing at least 15 of an estimated 25 workers, with rescue operations still under way. The NHPC has announced a detailed investigation. Methane is a well-recognised hazard in underground excavation, and the geology of the Teesta basin makes it a likely one. The basin sits in a seismically active zone, with young and heavily fractured rock, and where compressed pockets of gas laid down long ago can lie hidden until an excavation breaks into them. The presence of the gas, in that sense, is not in itself surprising. What remains unclear is far more consequential: the precise circumstances in which the pocket was breached, whether its risk was assessed and modelled during project planning, and whether the gas-detection and ventilation safeguards that such conditions demand were in place and functioning.

Underground work in India's difficult terrain has always been perilous. In February this year, an explosion at an illegal coal mine in Meghalaya killed about 30 workers, and in 2023, a stretch of a road tunnel under construction in Uttarakhand collapsed, trapping 41 workers for 17 days before they were pulled out. The circumstances vary, but together they underscore how lethal underground and tunnelling work remains across the country. A series of hydropower projects along the 400-kilometre stretch of the Teesta that links Sikkim, West Bengal, and Bangladesh have varied histories with environmental clearances but share a common feature — their location in the fragile Himalayan belt. That vulnerability was demonstrated tragically in October 2023, when a glacial lake outburst flood from the South Lhonak lake destroyed the Teesta-III dam and killed more than 100 people downstream. Teesta-VI was absorbed by the public-sector NHPC Limited after its private developers, unable to afford escalating costs, went into insolvency. Relief and rescue must remain the immediate priority, and every effort to reach those still trapped is warranted. But once the emergency has passed, the government cannot treat the disaster as an isolated misfortune. It must order a thorough, independent review of whether the conditions attached to the project's environmental clearance were, in practice, strictly met.

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◆ STATIC LINKAGE — TEESTA & GLOF

- ◆ **Teesta**: rises from Tso Lhamo/ Zemu glacier region (Sikkim); tributary of the **Brahmaputra (Jamuna)**; flows Sikkim → W. Bengal → Bangladesh.
- ◆ **GLOF**: sudden release of water from a moraine-dammed glacial lake — risk rising with Himalayan warming.
- ◆ **EIA Notification, 2006** governs environmental clearances; monitoring of clearance conditions remains a weak link.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS • MARITIME SECURITY

7 India Must Lead in Securing the Strait of Bab el-Mandeb

GS 2/3

► WHY IN NEWS

On the heels of the Strait of Hormuz crisis comes a looming **Bab el-Mandeb crisis**: on July 16, Reuters reported that **Iran had instructed the Houthis to close the Strait** (between Yemen and the Horn of Africa) if the U.S. attacked Iran's power plants. Whatever the Houthis' actual capacity, this represents a risk to **one-third of India's entire trade**.

- ◆ **Revisiting 2024:** from November 2023 to March 2024 the Houthis (Ansarallah) targeted at least **40 vessels** in the Red Sea, claiming links to Israel.
- ◆ Responses: U.S.-led **Operation Prosperity Guardian** (Dec 2023, with allies incl. Singapore & Sri Lanka), **UNSC Resolution 2722 (Jan 2024)**, Israeli strikes; the **Indian Navy rescued a British tanker's crew** set on fire (Jan 26-27, 2024).
- ◆ With >90% of world shipping insured by 12 P&I clubs, **~2,000 ships avoided the Suez Canal** (Nov 2023-Mar 2024) and sailed around the Cape of Good Hope — reverting global routes 170 years. Egypt lost a quarter of Suez revenue; Israel's Eilat port **filed for bankruptcy** by July 2024.
- ◆ By the U.S. ceasefire of May 2025 the Houthis were weakened — but much damage was done. This time the U.S. focus on Iran makes its role **unpredictable**; the UNSC is more divided, and China may again act unilaterally for its own shipping.
- ◆ If attacks resume, the impact on India — already reeling from the Hormuz crisis — **would be dire**; barring Indian mariners from a busy route like Bab el-Mandeb is impractical and would hurt **thousands of Indian seafarers**.

India must lead in securing the Strait of Bab el-Mandeb

In the heels of the Strait of Hormuz crisis comes the new threat — a Strait of Bab el-Mandeb crisis. On July 16, Reuters reported that Iran had instructed the Houthis to close the Strait (which is between Yemen and the Horn of Africa) if the United States attacked Iran's power plants.

Whether the Houthis have the capacity to threaten the Strait or whether this is part of Iran's signalling to the U.S. is secondary. What is important is that this represents a risk to one-third of India's entire trade.

Revisiting 2024
We have been here before. When the Gaza war started in October 2023, the Ansarallah group in Yemen, also known as the Houthis, claimed solidarity with the Palestinians and launched drones and missiles at Israel. From November 2023 to March 2024, the Houthis targeted at least 40 vessels in the Red Sea, claiming that the vessels were linked to or bound for Israel.

In response, the U.S., together with allies including Singapore and Sri Lanka, launched Operation Prosperity Guardian (December 2023) to ensure "freedom of navigation" in the Red Sea. This was followed by United Nations Security Council Resolution 2722 (2024), which was adopted in January 2024. Israel also carried out unilateral strikes against the Houthis. The Indian Navy rescued the crew of a British tanker after it was set on fire (January 26-27, 2024). By the time the U.S. declared a ceasefire in May 2025, the Houthis had been weakened, but much of the damage had already been done.

Marine insurance companies tend to be highly risk-averse. With over 90% of the world's shipping insured by just 12 protection and indemnity (P&I) clubs, shipowners have limited room to negotiate. Between November 2023 and March 2024, at least 2,000 ships avoided the Suez Canal and instead sailed around the Cape of Good



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Hope. This delayed critical imports to India. Global shipping routes effectively reverted to what was being done 170 years ago. Egypt lost a quarter of the Suez Canal's revenue. By July 2024, Israel's Red Sea port of Eilat had filed for bankruptcy.

This time around, the situation is more unpredictable. With U.S. forces in the region focused on Iran, it is unclear whether they will seek to secure the Red Sea as they did before.

Even in 2024, when India-bound ships were attacked by the Houthis, New Delhi had to lean directly on Tehran to bring the attacks to a halt. But that was a different time for India-Iran ties. Meanwhile, the UN Security Council is more divided today than ever before, and even if it manages to call for "freedom of navigation" in the Red Sea, it is unlikely to pass a resolution approving a force to implement that call. China is also likely to again take a unilateral approach to protecting its shipping in the Red Sea through quiet pro quos with the Houthis.

If the Houthis resume attacks on shipping in the Strait, the impact on India's economy — which is already reeling from the Strait of Hormuz crisis — would be dire. While India has now ordered that no Indian mariner be deployed on ships bound to or from the Strait of Hormuz, extending the same restriction to a busy route such as the Strait of Bab el-Mandeb would not be easy and would adversely affect the safety and welfare of thousands of Indian seafarers.

What India should do
In 2023, France stayed out of a U.S.-led operation to guard its role in mediating between Hezbollah and Israel in Lebanon. Those conditions no longer exist. However, France and Japan — two countries that need shipping lanes in the Red Sea for their connectivity with Asia and Europe respectively — maintain bases in Djibouti, perched on the Red Sea. Their navies have also

conducted joint drills with the Indian Navy, which creates an opportunity for India to pre-empt a recurrence of the events of 2024. India therefore needs to pro-actively build a naval taskforce in collaboration with France and Japan to deter attacks on shipping in the Bab el-Mandeb.

India would also do well to engage Egypt and Saudi Arabia. They had refused to join the alliance against the Houthis in 2024, given their own stance on Gaza. This time, with their economies at stake, they may not stand by. On July 20, the Houthis announced a "maritime embargo" on Saudi ships, seen as a threat against their transit through the Bab el-Mandeb. India needs to engage with these nations proactively to help secure the Red Sea, from the Suez to Bab el-Mandeb, while keeping its other partners in the region informed.

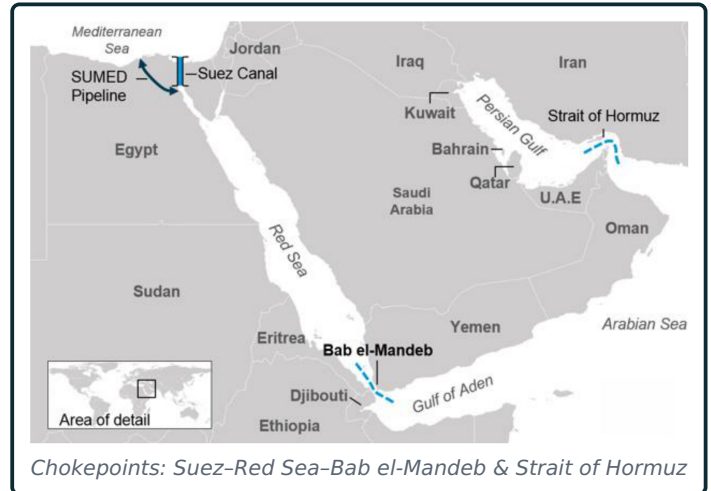
A rules-based maritime response
It needs to be emphasised that this would be a theatre-specific "Trade Protection Task Force" of navies, rather than a strategic alliance. In addition to ships and personnel, the Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region hosted by India could provide the necessary maritime domain awareness, while France and Japan could complement these efforts with on-ground logistical support. The commitment navies could agree on joint rules of engagement in response to any hostile attacks. They could provide security cover or escorts requested by commercial and civilian vessels transiting the Strait, especially those bound for Europe, India, or Japan. The task force would serve as a lasting demonstration of India's resolve to ensure "respect for maritime rules and norms" as part of Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR).

India has both the responsibility and the capability to prevent the Bab el-Mandeb from becoming a literal "Cape of Tears" this time.

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TOPIC 7 (contd.) What India Should Do — A Rules-Based Maritime Response

- ◆ **Naval taskforce with France & Japan:** both need Red Sea lanes for connectivity with Asia/Europe, maintain bases in **Djibouti**, and have drilled jointly with the Indian Navy — India should pro-actively build a taskforce to **deter attacks on shipping**.
- ◆ **Engage Egypt & Saudi Arabia:** they had refused to join the 2024 alliance given their stance on Gaza; but with the Houthis' July 20 "**maritime embargo**" on Saudi ships, their own economies are now at stake.
- ◆ A theatre-specific "**Trade Protection Task Force**" of navies — not a strategic alliance: joint rules of engagement, security cover/escorts for commercial vessels transiting the Strait, especially those bound for Europe, India or Japan.
- ◆ The **Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)** hosted by India could provide maritime domain awareness; France and Japan add on-ground logistics.
- ◆ The force would demonstrate India's resolve for "**respect for maritime rules and norms**" under **SAGAR** (Security and Growth for All in the Region) — preventing the Bab el-Mandeb from becoming a literal "**Gate of Tears**."



◆ PRELIMS POINTERS — MARITIME CHOKEPOINTS

- ◆ **Bab el-Mandeb ("Gate of Tears"):** connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden/Arabian Sea; between **Yemen** (Asia) and **Djibouti-Eritrea** (Africa).
- ◆ **Strait of Hormuz:** Persian Gulf ↔ Gulf of Oman; **Suez Canal:** Mediterranean ↔ Red Sea; **SUMED pipeline** bypasses Suez for crude.
- ◆ **IFC-IOR:** Gurugram, 2018 — maritime information-sharing hub with international liaison officers.

MAINS Practice Questions — 23 July 2026**Q1. GS Paper 2 · Polity****15 Marks · 250 words**

The Tenth Schedule punishes individual defection but legitimises collective defection through the 'merger' route. Critically examine, in light of recent controversies, whether the Anti-Defection Law needs structural reform.

दसवीं अनुसूची व्यक्तिगत दल-बदल को दंडित करती है, किंतु 'विलय' मार्ग से सामूहिक दल-बदल को वैधता देती है। हालिया विवादों के आलोक में समालोचनात्मक परीक्षण कीजिए कि क्या दल-बदल विरोधी कानून में संरचनात्मक सुधार आवश्यक है।

► APPROACH

- Intro: purpose of the 52nd Amendment; "Aaya Ram, Gaya Ram" context.
- Body: 91st Amendment & the 2/3rd merger route; Speaker's dual role; Kihoto Hollohan; Keisham Meghachandra (3-month norm); current Shiv Sena (UBT) case.
- Reforms: independent tribunal/ECL route, time-bound decisions; conclude balancing stability with legislator conscience.

Q2. GS Paper 3 · Economy**10 Marks · 150 words**

Rising tariff protectionism in India's largest pharmaceutical export market poses both a threat and an opportunity for the Indian pharma sector. Discuss.

भारत के सबसे बड़े औषधि निर्यात बाज़ार में बढ़ता टैरिफ संरक्षणवाद भारतीय फार्मा क्षेत्र के लिए खतरा और अवसर दोनों है। विवेचना कीजिए।

► APPROACH

- Threat: 37.7% of exports U.S.-bound; price pressure; API import dependence.
- Opportunity: two-year zero-tariff runway, market diversification, PLI for bulk drugs, moving up the value chain (biosimilars, complex generics).

Q3. GS Paper 3 · Disaster Management**10 Marks · 150 words**

Repeated tragedies in Himalayan infrastructure projects point to a gap between environmental clearance on paper and compliance in practice. Suggest measures to close this gap.

हिमालयी अवसंरचना परियोजनाओं में बार-बार होने वाली त्रासदियाँ कागज़ पर पर्यावरणीय स्वीकृति और व्यवहार में अनुपालन के बीच की खाई दर्शाती हैं। इस अंतर को पाटने के उपाय सुझाइए।

► APPROACH

- Cite Teesta-VI methane burst, Teesta-III GLOF, Silkyara collapse; weak post-clearance monitoring.
- Measures: independent compliance audits, real-time gas-detection norms, cumulative basin-level EIA, GLOF early-warning systems, worker-safety protocols.

✦ THOUGHT OF THE DAY

"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." — Mahatma Gandhi

PRELIMS Practice MCQs (Q1-Q5) — Based on Today's Analysis

Q1. With reference to the Anti-Defection Law, consider the following statements: 1. It was added to the Constitution by the 52nd Amendment Act, 1985. 2. The 91st Amendment Act, 2003 omitted the 'merger' provision and retained the 'split' provision. 3. The Supreme Court has held that 'voluntarily giving up membership' can be inferred from conduct alone. Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Q2. Under the Tenth Schedule, which of the following members would NOT face disqualification?

- (a) An independent MLA who joins a political party a year after election
- (b) A nominated MP who joins a party eight months after taking his seat
- (c) A member elected Speaker who resigns from his party to maintain neutrality
- (d) A member who abstains from voting against the party whip without permission

Q3. Consider the following statements about India's pharmaceutical exports: 1. The U.S. is the largest overseas market for Indian pharmaceutical exports. 2. Indian firms account for nearly 47% of generic prescriptions dispensed in the U.S. 3. India's share in the value of U.S. generic imports exceeds 60%. 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

Q4. The Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991 does not apply to which of the following? 1. Ancient monuments protected under the AMASR Act, 1958 2. The Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid site 3. Any place of worship whose religious character changed after 15 August 1947 Select the correct answer using the code below:

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

Q5. The Bhojshala complex, recently in news, is historically associated with which dynasty and ruler?

- (a) Chandela — Vidyadhara
- (b) Parmar — Raja Bhoj
- (c) Chalukya — Pulakeshin II
- (d) Kalachuri — Karnadeva

PRELIMS Practice MCQs (Q6-Q10)

Q6. Consider the following statements about ASEAN: 1. It was established in 1967 by the Bangkok Declaration. 2. Its Secretariat is located in Jakarta, Indonesia. 3. India is a full member of ASEAN. 4. Timor-Leste is its newest member. Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) 1, 2 and 3 only
- (b) 1, 2 and 4 only
- (c) 2, 3 and 4 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Q7. The Strait of Bab el-Mandeb connects:

- (a) The Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman
- (b) The Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden
- (c) The Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea
- (d) The Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal

Q8. The Teesta river, in news due to the Stage-VI project tragedy, is a tributary of:

- (a) The Ganga
- (b) The Brahmaputra
- (c) The Kosi
- (d) The Mahananda

Q9. 'Operation Prosperity Guardian', sometimes seen in the news, is associated with:

- (a) Evacuation of Indian nationals from conflict zones
- (b) A U.S.-led coalition to ensure freedom of navigation in the Red Sea
- (c) An anti-piracy operation in the Strait of Malacca
- (d) NATO's air-defence mission in Eastern Europe

Q10. With reference to the Quad, consider the following statements: 1. It comprises India, the U.S., Japan and Australia. 2. It is a formal military alliance with a mutual defence treaty. 3. Its origins trace to cooperation after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

ANSWER KEY With Explanations

Q1 (b)

Q2 (c)

Q3 (b)

Q4 (b)

Q5 (b)

Q6 (b)

Q7 (b)

Q8 (b)

Q9 (b)

Q10 (c)

Q1 (b): The 91st Amendment, 2003 did the reverse of Statement 2 — it **omitted the 'split'** provision (1/3rd) and retained only the **'merger'** provision. Statements 1 and 3 are correct.

Q2 (c): The Presiding Officer exception protects a Speaker/Chairman who resigns from the party for neutrality; they may rejoin after their tenure. The others attract disqualification.

Q3 (b): India's share of the **value** of U.S. generic imports is only ~30% because generics are priced low — despite supplying ~47% of prescriptions. The U.S. took \$9.7 bn (37.7%) of India's \$25.8 bn pharma exports in 2025.

Q4 (b): Section 4(3) exempts AMASR-protected monuments (basis of the Bhojshala ruling); the Ayodhya site was specifically exempted. The Act otherwise freezes religious character as on 15 Aug 1947 — Statement 3 describes what the Act covers, not an exemption.

Q5 (b): Bhojshala is associated with **Raja Bhoj (1010-1055 CE)** of the **Parmar dynasty** — a centre of Sanskrit learning with a shrine of Vagdevi (Saraswati); the idol is now in the British Museum.

Q6 (b): India is **not** a member of ASEAN — it is a Comprehensive Strategic Partner. The other three statements are correct; Timor-Leste is the 11th and newest member.

Q7 (b): Bab el-Mandeb ("Gate of Tears") lies between Yemen and Djibouti-Eritrea, linking the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and onward to the Arabian Sea.

Q8 (b): The Teesta rises in Sikkim, flows through West Bengal into Bangladesh and joins the **Brahmaputra (Jamuna)**.

Q9 (b): Launched December 2023, the U.S.-led coalition (with allies including Singapore and Sri Lanka) sought "freedom of navigation" in the Red Sea amid Houthi attacks; UNSC Resolution 2722 (2024) followed.

Q10 (c): The Quad is an **informal** strategic forum, not a treaty-bound military alliance — Statement 2 is incorrect. Its origins trace to the 2004 tsunami "Core Group".

✦ REVISION MANTRA

One newspaper, five papers of the syllabus — Read · Analyse · Revise!