DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

Current Affairs Analysis

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COMPILED BY

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1 Pakistan–Saudi Arabia–Turkiye Defence Pact

GS 2 • IR

THE HINDU • PAGE 1 • INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS • BY STANLY JOHNY

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkiye ink defence deal

The countries sign the pact pledging a joint response to aggression against any member; it aims at strengthening security and promoting 'peace and stability in the region', says a joint statement

Stanly Johny

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkiye on Friday signed a joint defence agreement in Mecca committing “collective defence” and “collective deterrence”, at a time when Saudi Arabia is under attack from Yemen's Houthis and West Asia remains engulfed in the ongoing war against Iran.

The three countries, an oil-rich Persian Gulf kingdom, a South Asian nuclear power and a NATO member, said the pact was aimed at strengthening “collective deterrence” and declared that an armed attack against any one of them would be treated as an attack against them all.

The agreement was signed at the Mecca Al-Mukarramah Summit for Joint Defence, attended by Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

According to a joint announcement issued by the Pakistani Foreign Ministry, the leaders, who met at Al-Safa Palace in Mecca after an invitation from Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz, reviewed bilateral ties among the three countries as well as a range of regional issues before signing what was described as the Mecca Joint Defence Agreement.

It added that the pact reflected their commitment to strengthening collective security while promoting “peace, security, and stability in the region and beyond, in pursuit of a secure and prosperous future.”

A Turkish government source said the agreement is “a defence-oriented partnership” that does not target any country. “It seeks to strengthen commitments to preserving regional and global peace, stability and prosperity through burden-sharing and collective security,” the official added.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, and Pakistan PM Shehbaz Sharif pose after signing a trilateral defence agreement in Mecca, on Friday. AP

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- Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkiye on Friday signed a joint defence agreement in Mecca committing to **“collective defence”** and **“collective deterrence”**, at a time when Saudi Arabia is under attack from Yemen's Houthis and West Asia remains engulfed in the ongoing war against Iran.
- The three countries — an oil-rich Persian Gulf kingdom, a South Asian nuclear power and a NATO member — declared that an armed attack against any one of them would be treated as an attack against them all.
- The pact was signed at the **Mecca Al-Mukarramah Summit for Joint Defence**, attended by Saudi Crown Prince and PM Mohammed bin Salman, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Pakistani PM Shehbaz Sharif, who met at Al-Safa Palace on the invitation of King Salman bin Abdulaziz.
- A joint announcement described it as the **Mecca Joint Defence Agreement**, reflecting a commitment to strengthening collective security while promoting peace, security and stability “in the region and beyond”.
- A Turkish government source called it a **defence-oriented partnership** that does not target any country, seeking to preserve regional and global peace through burden-sharing and collective security.

- The trilateral pact provides for the enhancement of all aspects of defence cooperation among the three States, suggesting closer **military coordination** and broader security collaboration.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR INDIA

- The **'attack on one is an attack on all'** clause echoes NATO's Article 5 collective-defence principle, formalising a Pakistan–Saudi–Turkiye security triangle.
- It deepens **Pakistan's strategic depth** in West Asia even as India expands its own Gulf ties (I2U2, IMEC corridor, defence and energy links).
- India will watch the pact's ambiguity on scope — whether 'collective defence' could extend beyond West Asia — given Pakistan's nuclear status.

2 Data Protection Law vs the RTI Regime

GS 2 • POLITY

THE HINDU • PAGE 1 • POLITY & RIGHTS • BY KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL

Is data protection law crippling RTI, asks SC

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday agreed to examine if the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, can be used to cripple the Right to Information Act by classifying all data as "personal" and, separately, gag investigative journalists.

"The earlier law (RTI Act, 2005) gave certain access with conditions. Here (2023 Act), there is an *en bloc* embargo. Is this latter law repugnant to the earlier law? This has to be looked into with extreme circumspection. After all, both are Central laws. There is a need to harmonise these two," Justice Joymalya Bagchi remarked.

He said the RTI law operated on a "much larger domain" than the DPDP Act. It covered all forms of data, while the DPDP law was only concerned with data in a digital form. The court said this even though acknowledging that the data was now overwhelmingly in the digital format.

The judge said the court would examine if this restrictive or "cautionary approach" to sharing data under the DPDP Act worked to repeal earlier transparency laws.

> The earlier law (RTI Act, 2005) gave certain access with conditions. Here (2023 Act), there is an en bloc embargo. Is this latter law repugnant to the earlier law? This has to be looked into with extreme circumspection
> SUPREME COURT

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 10

- The Supreme Court on Friday agreed to examine if the **Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023** can be used to cripple the Right to Information Act by classifying all data as "personal" and, separately, gag investigative journalists.

- Justice **Joymalya Bagchi** observed that while the 2005 RTI Act gave access with conditions, the 2023 Act imposes an **en bloc embargo**, and asked whether the later law is repugnant to the earlier one, stressing a need to harmonise these two since both are Central laws.
- He noted the RTI law operates on a much larger domain than the DPDP Act — covering all forms of data, whereas the DPDP law concerns only **digital** data — even though data is now overwhelmingly digital.
- The court will examine whether this restrictive, cautionary approach to sharing data under the DPDP Act effectively works to **repeal earlier transparency laws**.
- The petitions challenge DPDP provisions, primarily **Section 44(3)**, which amended the RTI Act to let public authorities blanketly refuse information on the ground that the details sought are of a "personal" nature.
- Petitioners argued the provision turns the **fundamental right to privacy on its head** — a right meant to protect citizens against State incursion is now invoked to shield the State and public functionaries from RTI disclosures.

PRELIMS BOOSTER — How Section 44(3) Alters the Balance

- **Section 44(3)** of the DPDP Act amends **Section 8(1)(j)** of the RTI Act, 2005.
- Originally, Section 8(1)(j) exempted personal information only if it had **no relationship to public activity** or would be an unwarranted invasion of privacy — and even then, disclosure was required if **public interest outweighed privacy**.
- That case-by-case balancing was done by the **Public Information Officer** or the First Appellate Authority; petitioners fear the amendment replaces it with a blanket bar.

3 Meta, the Sahyog Portal & Online Censorship

GS 2 • POLITY

THE HINDU • PAGE 12 • POLITY & MEDIA • BY AROON DEEP

Meta ramps up censorship of protest, political reels

Instagram posts by party accounts, CJP representatives, ordinary protesters have been blocked in India; the action comes after the company held meetings with the government over past few days

Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI

Posts by political leaders, parties, Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) members, and ordinary protesters have started disappearing from Instagram at a rapid pace, following tense meetings between the company's leadership and the Union government. The Indian Youth Congress, Aam Aadmi Party convener Arvind Kejriwal, CJP spokesperson Saurav Das, and the news portal Scroll are among those whose posts have been blocked in India.

Instagram's parent company, Meta, has been pressed in meetings about its recommendation algorithm, as the government zeroes in on the amplification of anti-establishment social media content as a factor leading up to last month's youth protests, which concluded with the resignation of Dharmendra Pradhan as Education Minister. Screenshots of posts blocked in India referred to the IT Rules, 2021, indicating that the posts are being censored through a take-down mechanism

'Sahyog Portal puts in place a system to take down content online, without any of the safeguards present under Section 69A'. REUTERS

While numerous reels – short video clips on Instagram – remain available on Meta's platform, many have been removed, including some which have been watched millions of times. Many X users have reported that the protest-related content that remains on Instagram is now appearing less frequently.

'Against free speech'

"What is this blanket ban on protest-related and Modi-related content?" the CJP's Mr. Das asked. "It is unconstitutional and illegal. It is absolutely ridiculous. We appeal to Meta to not succumb to such high-handed pressure from the government. Algo[rithm]s must moderate grossly illegal content, not police free expression. The entire point of free internet is this. Any social media platform doing this under pressure is going against free speech principles and public interest." Meta did not respond to a request for comment on this new wave of censorship.

The government and police agencies had already ramped up censorship of Instagram posts in particular. X leaves up many posts that are reported to it under Section 79(3)(b), since these notices – unlike those under Section 69A of the IT Act, 2000 – do not entail criminal liability. However, as *The Hindu* reported on April 25, Meta complies automatically to such requests, giving the government vast powers of quick censorship.

Pranesh Prakash, a co-founder of the Centre for Internet and Society and now a tech law and policy consultant, had then told *The Hindu* that Meta's automatic compliance to Section 79(3)(b) notices was problematic, as platforms were only in the dock if and when a particular piece of content was taken to court, which happens rarely. "Yet, instead of fighting for their users, Meta is unthinkingly removing content it is legally not even required to remove," Mr. Prakash had said.

Those powers are now being exercised at an unprecedented rate, and affecting a broad range of content. An early viral clip, with over one crore views, featuring Students' Federation of India activist Sakhi mocking police announcements exhorting protesters to clear out of Jantar Mantar, has also been taken down. On August 6, several Facebook posts by Mr. Kejriwal were restricted.

Many Section 79(3)(b) requests are filed to social media platforms through the Home Ministry's Sahyog portal. "The Sahyog Portal puts in place a parallel system to take down content online, without any of the safeguards present under Section 69A," the Software Freedom Law Centre, India said in a statement on Thursday.

- Posts by political leaders, parties, Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) members and ordinary protesters have started **disappearing from Instagram** at a rapid pace, following tense meetings between Meta's leadership and the Union government.
- The government and police agencies had already ramped up censorship of Instagram posts; notably, platforms leave up many posts reported under **Section 79(3)(b)**, since these notices — unlike those under **Section 69A** of the IT Act, 2000 — do not entail criminal liability.
- Many Section 79(3)(b) requests are routed to platforms through the Home Ministry's **Sahyog portal**. The Software Freedom Law Centre warned that it creates a parallel take-down system without any of the safeguards present under Section 69A.

PRELIMS BOOSTER — The Legal Architecture of Take-Downs

- **Section 69A:** empowers the government to block public access to information if it threatens national security, public order, or relations with foreign states.
- **Section 79:** grants 'safe harbour' to intermediaries, shielding them from liability for user-generated content.

- **Section 79(3)(b):** removes safe harbour if an intermediary fails to take down unlawful content upon government notification.
- **Rule 3(1)(d), IT Rules 2021:** prescribes due diligence — intermediaries must disable access to unlawful information upon actual knowledge.
- **Section 66A:** struck down in **Shreya Singhal vs Union of India (2015)** as vague and unconstitutional for arbitrarily restricting free speech under Article 19(1)(a).

4 Money Bills in India — Article 110

GS 2 • POLITY

CURRENT AFFAIRS • POLITY & PARLIAMENT • CONCEPT FOCUS

Money Bill route revives an old constitutional debate

The Rajya Sabha's passage of the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Bill, 2026 as a Money Bill renews questions over bypassing Upper House scrutiny.

ARTICLE 110 — INDIAN POLITY

- The **Rajya Sabha** passed the **Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Bill, 2026**, increasing the sanctioned strength of Supreme Court judges from **34 to 38** (including the CJI).
- Its passage as a **Money Bill** sparked renewed debate over the executive's use of this route to bypass full legislative scrutiny in the Rajya Sabha.
- A Money Bill is a specific category of financial legislation dealing exclusively with taxation, government expenditure, borrowing and appropriation from the **Consolidated Fund of India**.
- It enjoys a special procedure where the **Lok Sabha holds ultimate authority** and the Rajya Sabha plays only an advisory role.

PRELIMS BOOSTER — Constitutional Provisions

- **Article 110(1):** defines a Money Bill — one containing **only** provisions on taxation; regulation of government borrowing; custody/payment into or withdrawal from the Consolidated Fund or Contingency Fund; appropriation from the Consolidated Fund; expenditure charged on it; receipt/custody/audit of such money; and any incidental matter [Article 110(1)(g)].
- **Article 110(3):** if any question arises whether a Bill is a Money Bill, the decision of the **Speaker of the Lok Sabha is final**.
- **Article 109:** lays down the special procedure — a Money Bill cannot be introduced in the Rajya Sabha, which must return it within **14 days** with or without recommendations.

KEY FEATURES & THE PENDING QUESTION

- **Prior presidential recommendation:** introduced only in the Lok Sabha, on the President's prior recommendation, and carries the Speaker's certification.
- **Restricted Rajya Sabha powers:** it cannot reject or amend a Money Bill — only recommend — failing which it is deemed passed after 14 days.
- **No joint sitting:** unlike ordinary Bills, there is no Article 108 deadlock mechanism for Money Bills.
- A **seven-judge Constitution Bench** is tasked with laying down definitive benchmarks for Money Bill certification, amid concerns of a '**fraud on the Constitution**'.

5 Charging UPI — The 'Pay Wall'

GS 3 • ECONOMY

THE HINDU • PAGE 8 • EDITORIAL & ECONOMY

Pay wall

Removing UPI's free nature will not only be unpopular but also unfair

The government's decision to allow banks and payment processors to levy a charge on UPI transactions, while still pending, has already led to several policy questions. No official decision has yet been announced, but the preparations are apparent. The only official change that has been made is the amendment to the Payment and Settlements Systems Act that will now allow the government to notify which types of transactions can attract a charge. This was done through the Taxation and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026, which was passed in the Lok Sabha recently without a debate. Before this law, UPI and RuPay debit card transactions were expressly exempt from any charges. Government sources say that the charge could be allowed only for transactions conducted by large merchants with turnovers of more than ₹1 crore-₹1.5 crore and for transactions above ₹2,000 in value. This would limit the charge to only about 5% of all UPI transactions. However, the amended law gives the government the ability to widen this scope. The fear also is that merchants will pass this cost on to consumers, who will move back to cash, which remains free to use. That said, the issue must also be looked at from the point of view of the payment ecosystem. UPI was made free in 2020. The payments players have argued that they have been bearing the cost of maintaining and running UPI since then. As Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Sanjay Malhotra recently said, "somebody has to pay" for UPI. Presuma-

2020. The payments players have argued that they have been bearing the cost of maintaining and running UPI since then. As Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Sanjay Malhotra recently said, "somebody has to pay" for UPI. Presuma-
bly, he meant that "somebody" should no longer be the payment processors or banks.

However, the burden of the cost has not solely been borne by these players. Taxpayers are already bearing some of it. In 2021, the government introduced a scheme where it paid these payment processors and banks a subsidy to partially cover the cost of processing transactions up to ₹2,000 done by small merchants. The government has already paid about ₹11,349 crore on this, with another ₹2,000 crore budgeted for 2026-27. The question is whether consumers and merchants should be asked to pay an additional charge when some of their taxes are already being used for this purpose. There is also some anger over the perception that the government pushed people towards UPI through demonetisation, only to now allow it to become chargeable. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has argued that such a charge will help payment players invest more on infrastructure, innovation, and security. The RBI has the resources to pay for UPI's development. Using this would entail a small reduction in the vast surplus that it transfers to the Centre each year, but it would save the government from an increasingly unpopular decision.

- The government's decision to allow banks and payment processors to **levy a charge on UPI transactions**, while still pending, has already raised policy questions; no official decision is announced, but preparations are apparent.

- The only official change so far is an amendment to the **Payment and Settlements Systems Act** — via the **Taxation and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026**, passed in the Lok Sabha without debate — letting the government notify which transactions can attract a charge. Earlier, UPI and RuPay debit-card transactions were **expressly exempt**.
- Government sources say the charge could apply only to large merchants (turnover above ₹1–1.5 crore) and transactions above ₹2,000 — about **5% of all UPI transactions** — but the amended law lets the government widen this scope, and merchants may pass the cost to consumers, pushing them back to cash.
- Taxpayers already bear part of the cost: in 2021 the government introduced a **subsidy** to partially cover processing of transactions up to ₹2,000 by small merchants, paying about **₹11,349 crore** so far, with another **₹2,000 crore** budgeted for 2026-27.
- The editorial questions charging consumers and merchants when their taxes already fund this, and notes anger that people pushed towards UPI via demonetisation now face charges. FM **Nirmala Sitharaman** argues a charge would help players invest in infrastructure, innovation and security.
- It suggests the **RBI could instead fund UPI's development** from the vast surplus it transfers to the Centre — a small reduction that would spare the government an unpopular decision.

6 RBI Holds Rates — 'Prudent Approach'

GS 3 • ECONOMY

THE HINDU • PAGE 8 • EDITORIAL & ECONOMY

Prudent approach

The RBI did well to hold interest rates, but inflationary pressures remain

There was little room for the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)'s interest rate-setting committee to manoeuvre during its meeting in early August. Elevated global crude prices over the past few months had already pushed retail inflation beyond the central bank's 4% target, with headline CPI rising to 4.38% in June, the highest in the current CPI series. While the outcome was a foregone conclusion, leading the RBI to keep the repo rate unchanged at 5.25% for the fourth consecutive meeting, RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra's post-MPC statement suggests that the central bank's principal concern has, for some time now, been containing the fallout of mounting geopolitical uncertainties on India's macroeconomic fundamentals. The recent dollar-rupee swap and the decision to absorb the hedging cost on fresh Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank) deposits are clear indications of the RBI's focus. The objective is twofold: to maintain adequate domestic liquidity as the rupee weakens amid capital outflows, while shoring up foreign exchange reserves as the merchandise import bill swells on the back of elevated crude prices. Foreign exchange reserves have now climbed close to $700 billion, while FCNR(B) deposits have risen to around $40 billion and are expected to grow further before the scheme closes. The rupee, which until recently was the worst-performing Asian currency, has recovered to around ₹95.

However, the MPC's assessment that inflationary pressures are not yet broad-based and remain largely confined to food and fuel may prove premature. Higher fuel costs have affected sectors including transport, food, travel, and tourism. Inflation in transport services more than doubled to 4.31% in June from 1.75% in May. Although the Centre cut commercial LPG prices for a second consecutive month in July, it is unrealistic to expect restaurants and eateries to pass on these savings immediately. Passenger vehicle manufacturers have also raised prices this year, reflecting higher input and logistics costs. While U.S. President Donald Trump has indicated a possible truce and a durable arrangement to secure navigation through the Strait of Hormuz, the Ukraine war continues to threaten supplies from Russia, India's largest crude supplier. Even so, the RBI's decision to prioritise growth while remaining alert to inflationary pressures from global supply shocks is underpinned by India's relatively strong domestic fundamentals. Merchandise exports grew 15.5% year-on-year in June, consumption demand has remained resilient, and public and private investments continue to strengthen. Governor Malhotra's assertion that future policy decisions will remain "data dependent" and that the RBI will adopt a "wait-and-watch" approach is arguably the most prudent course.

- There was little room for the RBI's rate-setting committee to manoeuvre in early August: elevated global crude prices had pushed retail inflation beyond the 4% target, with headline **CPI rising to 4.38% in June** — the highest in the current CPI series.
- The RBI kept the **repo rate unchanged at 5.25%** for the fourth consecutive meeting; Governor **Sanjay Malhotra's** post-MPC statement suggests the bank's principal concern is containing the fallout of geopolitical uncertainties on India's macroeconomic fundamentals.
- The MPC's assessment that inflation is not yet broad-based and remains confined to food and fuel may prove premature — higher fuel costs have hit transport, food, travel and tourism, with **transport-services inflation more than doubling to 4.31% in June** from 1.75% in May.
- Even so, prioritising growth while staying alert to global supply shocks rests on strong fundamentals — **merchandise exports grew 15.5% year-on-year in June**, consumption is resilient and investment is strengthening; a 'data dependent', 'wait-and-watch' approach is arguably the most prudent course.

PRELIMS BOOSTER — Price Indices at a Glance

- **CPI** measures the change in retail prices of a fixed basket of goods and services and is India's headline retail-inflation indicator (YoY % change).
- Published by **MoSPI** through the National Statistical Office (NSO); price collection by the Field Operations Division. New base year: **2024 = 100** (earlier 2012 = 100).
- **WPI** now uses base **2022–23 = 100** (released by the Office of Economic Adviser, DPIIT, on 15 June 2026), replacing the 2011–12 series.
- The **Producer Price Index (PPI)** is released by the Office of Economic Adviser under **DPIIT**, Ministry of Commerce & Industry (base 2022–23).

7 The Changing Logic of the India–U.S. Partnership

GS 2 • IR

THE HINDU • PAGE 8 • OP-ED & IR • BY G. VENKAT RAMAN

The changing logic of the India-U.S. partnership

The Trump administration's latest tariffs on several trading partners, including India, are widely seen as another trade dispute. That interpretation misses the larger picture. Alongside growing demands for greater burden-sharing, tighter technology restrictions and a more reciprocal approach to international partnerships, the tariffs reflect a broader shift in American statecraft. Washington is increasingly judging partners and competitors through the lens of national interest rather than strategic convergence. The immediate impact will be felt in trade negotiations; the more enduring implications are strategic. They signal a changing American approach to alliances and partnerships with important implications for India.

This approach reflects what the Trump administration describes as 'flexible realism'. Unlike the post-Cold War liberal international order, this approach places national interest at the centre of American foreign policy. It treats trade, technology, industrial policy, and security as integrated instruments of statecraft. Partnerships are judged less by shared values or historical goodwill than by the tangible strategic and economic value they deliver. Rather than signalling a retreat from global engagement, it recalibrates how the United States pursues its interests in an increasingly competitive international environment.

The China factor

It is useful to recall the strategic logic that has underpinned the India-United States partnership over the past decade. With China's emergence as Washington's principal strategic competitor, India assumed growing strategic importance in the U.S.'s calculations. Defence cooperation expanded, the Quad gained momentum, technology partnerships deepened, and supply-chain resilience became a shared priority. While democratic values provided a favourable political backdrop, it was the convergence of strategic interests driven by China's rise that gave the partnership its real momentum. For both New Delhi and Washington, managing the geopolitical consequences of a more powerful China became the principal driver of bilateral cooperation. This shift in American statecraft does not diminish India's strategic importance, but it does redefine the basis on which that importance will be judged. Strategic convergence with the U.S. remains important, but it can no longer be assumed to be the principal driver of the relationship. Washington is increasingly likely to assess even close partners through the lens of reciprocal economic benefit, technological capability, and strategic contribution. Consequently, India can no longer assume that intensifying U.S.-China competition will, by itself, continue to enhance its strategic relevance. The partnership must increasingly rest on what India brings to the table than on China's rise alone.

G. Venkat Raman

Professor at the Indian Institute of Management, Indore, Madhya Pradesh

India's challenge is to build capabilities that make it an indispensable U.S. partner

The next phase

The more significant implication of this evolving approach is that it redefines the nature of strategic partnerships. The first phase of the India-U.S. relationship was shaped by strategic convergence driven by China's rise. The next phase will increasingly depend on strategic complementarity, with each country expected to contribute capabilities that reinforce the other. Defence cooperation, critical technologies, resilient supply chains, and advanced manufacturing will matter not merely because they help manage China's rise, but because they strengthen the resilience and competitiveness of both economies. The India-U.S. partnership is therefore evolving from one defined primarily by a shared strategic challenge to one sustained by mutual strategic value. Far from weakening the relationship, this evolution could make it more balanced and resilient.

If flexible realism encourages Washington to rely on stronger and more capable partners, it also creates greater space for India's strategic agency. A more economically competitive, technologically advanced, and militarily capable India is not only a more valuable partner for the U.S. but also better positioned to pursue its own strategic interests. The relationship can therefore evolve from one shaped primarily by China's rise to one anchored in India's capabilities and strategic contribution.

For India, this evolution reinforces rather than weakens the relevance of strategic autonomy. In the emerging international environment, strategic autonomy is not about maintaining equal distance from competing powers; it is about preserving the ability to make independent choices based on India's own interests. That also means that India's approach to China should increasingly be guided by its own long-term strategic calculations rather than by the trajectory of U.S.-China relations. In practice, this requires a strategy of multi-alignment: strengthening the strategic partnership with the U.S., managing competition and cooperation with China on India's own terms, and deepening strategic, economic, and technological partnerships with the European Union, Japan, and Global South.

Looking ahead

The India-U.S. partnership is entering a new phase. During the past decade, its momentum was driven by a shared response to China's rise. That strategic convergence will remain important, but it will no longer be sufficient on its own. In this emerging strategic environment, enduring partnerships will increasingly be built on capability, reciprocity, and strategic value. For India, this carries a broader strategic lesson. India's strategic relevance must increasingly flow from its own economic dynamism, technological capabilities, defence preparedness, and diplomatic influence. The challenge, therefore, is not merely to remain relevant in Washington's strategic calculus, but to build the capabilities that make it an indispensable partner. That would not only strengthen the India-U.S. partnership but also reinforce India's strategic autonomy in an increasingly contested world.

The views expressed are personal

- The Trump administration's latest tariffs on trading partners, including India, are widely seen as a trade dispute — but that misses the larger picture: alongside demands for greater burden-sharing, tighter technology restrictions and more reciprocity, they reflect a **broader shift in American statecraft**.

- Washington increasingly judges partners through **national interest** rather than strategic convergence, treating trade, technology, industrial policy and security as integrated instruments of statecraft — what the administration calls **'flexible realism'**.
- Recalling the **China factor:** over the past decade India gained strategic importance as China emerged as Washington's principal competitor — defence cooperation expanded, the **Quad** gained momentum, technology ties deepened and supply-chain resilience became a shared priority.
- The next phase will depend less on convergence and more on **strategic complementarity**, with each country contributing capabilities — defence, critical technologies, resilient supply chains and advanced manufacturing — that strengthen the resilience and competitiveness of both economies.
- For India, this reinforces rather than weakens **strategic autonomy**: autonomy is not equal distance from major powers but the ability to make independent choices in India's own interests, guided by long-term calculations rather than the trajectory of U.S.–China relations.
- The lesson: India's strategic relevance must flow from its **own economic dynamism, technological capability, defence preparedness and diplomatic influence** — the challenge is not merely to stay relevant, but to build the capabilities that make it an indispensable partner.

PRELIMS PRACTICE

10 MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS FROM TODAY'S EDITION

1. The Mecca Joint Defence Agreement, recently signed, is a trilateral pact among:

(a) India, Pakistan, Iran
(b) Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkiye
(c) Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt
(d) Turkiye, Qatar, Pakistan

2. Consider the following statements about the Mecca pact:

1. An armed attack on any one member is to be treated as an attack on all.
2. It was signed at the Mecca Al-Mukarramah Summit for Joint Defence.
3. The pact explicitly names Iran as its target.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

3. Section 44(3) of the DPDP Act, 2023 amended which provision of the RTI Act, 2005?

(a) Section 8(1)(a)
(b) Section 8(1)(j)
(c) Section 6(1)
(d) Section 11

4. Consider the following statements regarding the IT Act, 2000:

1. Section 69A empowers the government to block public access to information.
2. Section 79 grants safe-harbour protection to intermediaries.
3. Notices under Section 79(3)(b) entail criminal liability.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

5. Section 66A of the IT Act was struck down as unconstitutional in which case?

(a) K.S. Puttaswamy vs Union of India
(b) Shreya Singhal vs Union of India
(c) Anuradha Bhasin vs Union of India
(d) PUCL vs Union of India

6. Consider the following statements about Money Bills:

1. A Money Bill is defined under Article 110 of the Constitution.
2. The Speaker's decision on whether a Bill is a Money Bill is final.
3. The Rajya Sabha may amend or reject a Money Bill.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

7. The Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Bill, 2026 increased the sanctioned strength of Supreme Court judges from:

(a) 31 to 34
(b) 34 to 38
(c) 30 to 34
(d) 34 to 40

8. The recent amendment enabling charges on UPI transactions was made to which law?

(a) Reserve Bank of India Act
(b) Payment and Settlements Systems Act
(c) Banking Regulation Act
(d) FEMA, 1999

9. Consider the following statements about the recent RBI monetary policy:

1. The repo rate was kept unchanged at 5.25%.
2. It was the fourth consecutive meeting with no change in the repo rate.
3. Headline CPI rose to 4.38% in June.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

10. Consider the following statements about India's price indices:

1. The new base year for CPI is 2024 = 100.
2. The WPI base year is 2022–23 = 100.
3. The Producer Price Index (PPI) is released by MoSPI.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

ANSWER KEY

1 — (b) | **2** — (a) | **3** — (b) | **4** — (a) | **5** — (b) | **6** — (a) | **7** — (b) | **8** — (b) | **9** — (d) | **10** — (a)

MAINS PRACTICE

TWO ANALYTICAL QUESTIONS • 250 WORDS EACH

GS PAPER II

15 Marks

Q1. “By classifying information broadly as ‘personal’, the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 risks undermining the transparency regime built by the Right to Information Act, 2005.” Critically examine.

Approach: Explain how Section 44(3) of the DPDP Act amends Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act, removing the earlier public-interest override and case-by-case balancing; present the privacy-vs-transparency tension and the SC’s ‘harmonisation’ concern; weigh the right to information as part of Article 19(1)(a) against informational privacy under Puttaswamy; conclude with a proportionality-based reconciliation that preserves both.

GS PAPER III

15 Marks

Q2. Allowing charges on UPI transactions raises questions of equity, digital inclusion and public policy. Critically examine the rationale for, and the concerns against, ending UPI’s free nature.

Approach: Outline the amendment to the Payment and Settlements Systems Act and the proposed scope (large merchants, transactions above ₹2,000); present the case for charges (sustainability, investment in infrastructure and security) against the concerns (double burden on taxpayers who already fund the ₹11,349 crore subsidy, risk of a return to cash, trust after demonetisation); suggest RBI-surplus funding or MDR calibration as a balanced path.

—— END OF TODAY’S ANALYSIS ——