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The Hindu Analysis

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

MONDAY, 15 SEPTEMBER 2026

UPSC · HPAS / HAS · ALLIED SERVICES · GENERAL STUDIES

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Compiled by **Sapna Chauhan** · Vedanta Coaching Academy & Library

1 Colombo Security Conclave — Table Top Exercise

GS-II · IR

A three-day maritime **Table Top Exercise (TTX)** under the Colombo Security Conclave (CSC) concluded at the **Eastern Naval Command (ENC), Visakhapatnam**, hosted by the Indian Navy — a simulated operational drill for tactical commanders to rehearse joint protocols and coordinated crisis responses **without deploying any physical assets at sea**.

WHAT IS A TABLE TOP EXERCISE?

- A **discussion-based war-game** in which commanders and delegations work through a scripted crisis around a map/table — testing decision-making, communication and inter-agency coordination rather than moving ships or troops.
- Low-cost, low-risk and diplomatically non-provocative — well suited to building **interoperability** across a multi-nation grouping.

FOCUS AREAS OF THE EXERCISE

- **Non-traditional security threats:** drug trafficking, maritime terrorism, human trafficking, piracy and **IUU (Illegal, Unreported, Unregulated) fishing**.
- **SOP harmonisation** of operational procedures and inter-agency protocols for faster, coordinated responses during maritime crises.
- **Information-sharing framework:** strengthens **Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)** via real-time surveillance, intelligence sharing and **white-shipping exchange** (advance data on commercial vessels' identity and movement).
- **Doctrinal fit:** advances India's **SAGAR** (Security & Growth for All in the Region) and the newer **MAHASAGAR** vision — cooperative security, capacity-building and IOR stability.

ABOUT THE COLOMBO SECURITY CONCLAVE

- A regional security grouping of Indian Ocean nations for common challenges in the **Indian Ocean Region (IOR)**; convenes **NSAs and Deputy NSAs** of member states.
- **Origin:** began **2011** as a **Trilateral Maritime Security Cooperation** (India, Sri Lanka, Maldives) → **dormant after 2014** amid strained India–Maldives ties → **revived & rebranded as the CSC in 2020**.

Membership expansion	Year
India, Sri Lanka, Maldives (founders)	2011 · revived 2020
Mauritius	2022
Bangladesh	2024
Seychelles (newest)	2025

FIVE PILLARS & SECRETARIAT

- ① **Maritime Safety & Security** (core) · ② Counter-Terrorism & Radicalisation · ③ Combating Trafficking & Transnational Organised Crime · ④ Cyber Security & Critical-Infrastructure Protection · ⑤ **HADR** (Humanitarian Assistance & Disaster Relief).
- **Permanent Secretariat: Colombo, Sri Lanka.**

SIGNIFICANCE FOR INDIA

- Reinforces India as the IOR's **net security provider** and preferred "first responder," countering China's growing maritime footprint (port projects, "String of Pearls").
- Institutionalises minilateral cooperation among smaller littoral states — complementing IORA, IONS and BIMSTEC.



2 Ramanathaswamy Temple

GS-I · ART & CULTURE

During the 18th BRICS Summit at **Bharat Mandapam**, the PM of India and China's President shook hands before a high-definition projection of the iconic **1,212-pillar corridor** of Tamil Nadu's Ramanathaswamy Temple — spotlighting one of India's greatest Dravidian monuments.

ABOUT THE TEMPLE

- A world-renowned Hindu temple in classical **Dravidian** style, dedicated to **Lord Shiva** (enshrined as Ramanathaswamy).
- Revered as one of the sacred **12 Jyotirlingas** and the **southernmost anchor** of the foundational **Char Dham** pilgrimage circuit.
- **Location:** pilgrim town of Rameswaram on **Pamban Island**, Ramanathapuram district, Tamil Nadu — flanked by the **Palk Strait** and the **Gulf of Mannar**.

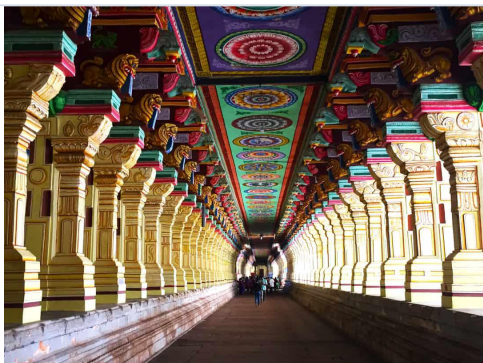
LEGEND & EVOLUTION OF THE STRUCTURE

- Believed established by **Lord Rama**, who consecrated a sand lingam (*Ramalingam*) to worship Shiva on returning from Lanka.
- Managed by ascetic monks until the 10th century; the **inner sanctum** was built in the 12th century by **King Parakramabahu of Sri Lanka (Ceylon)**.
- Extensively expanded (15th–18th c.) under the **Sethupathi** kings of Ramanathapuram and the **Nagarathar** community.
- The **126-ft, nine-tiered East Rajagopuram** was completed **1897–1904** by the AL.AR. Nagarathar family of Devakottai.

ARCHITECTURAL HIGHLIGHTS

- **World's longest pillared corridor:** the outer (third) corridor has **1,212 carved granite pillars** (~6.9 m tall) spanning a cumulative perimeter of ~3,850 ft.
- **Linear perspective & symmetry:** perfectly aligned columns, beams and capitals create an optical effect where parallel lines converge to a vanishing point.
- **Dravidian detailing:** bas-reliefs, floral carvings, seated **yalis** (mythical leonine beasts) and dynastic portraits of Sethupathi rulers.
- A colossal **monolithic Nandi** — 17 ft high, 22 ft long, 12 ft wide.
- **22 sacred theerthams** (wells/tanks) within the precincts for ceremonial purification baths.

Prelims pointer: Jyotirlingas relevant to the South — Ramanathaswamy (TN), Mallikarjuna (Srisailem, AP). Char Dham (Badrinath–Dwarka–Puri–Rameswaram) vs the "Chota Char Dham" of Uttarakhand — don't confuse the two circuits.



3 UPI & RuPay — Bank Charges Barred ($\leq ₹2,000$)

GS-III · ECONOMY

The Ministry of Finance notified that banks and system providers **cannot levy any charge** — direct or indirect — on **UPI transactions up to ₹2,000** and on **RuPay debit-card** payments, even as an earlier statutory amendment now clears the way for charges on **larger** transfers.

WHY IN NEWS — THE LEGAL CHAIN

- The **Taxation & Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026** amended **Section 10A of the Payment & Settlement Systems (PSS) Act, 2007**, removing its link to the exemption under **Section 269SU of the Income-tax Act, 1961**.
- Sec 269SU applied to every business with turnover over **₹50 crore**, mandating prescribed electronic modes (**RuPay debit cards, BHIM-UPI, UPI-QR**) free of charge. Removing the tie-in paves the way for a **Merchant Discount Rate (MDR)** on UPI/RuPay payments to **large merchants** (e.g. Amazon, Flipkart).
- The fresh notification **protects small transactions** (UPI $\leq ₹2,000$ and RuPay debit) — but a final decision on whether, and how, to levy charges on larger transfers is **still pending**.

DATA SNAPSHOT — FY 2025-26

Metric	Value
P2M (person-to-merchant) payments > ₹2,000	Only 4% by number... yet ~two-thirds of UPI value
Total UPI transactions	24,000 crore+ worth ₹314 lakh crore

WHAT IS UPI?

- A **real-time payment system by NPCI** letting users operate multiple bank accounts through a single mobile app — integrating fund transfers, banking and merchant payments with **24×7** settlement.
- **Timeline:** pilot Apr 2016 (21 banks) → public Aug 2016 → **BHIM** app Dec 2016 → **dynamic QR codes** 2017 (faster, error-reduced merchant payments).

ABOUT NPCI

- **National Payments Corporation of India** — a **not-for-profit** umbrella entity for retail payments; an initiative of the **RBI + Indian Banks' Association (IBA)** under the PSS Act, 2007.
- Key initiatives: **RuPay, UPI, NETC-FASTag** (National Electronic Toll Collection), **IMPS, NACH, Aadhaar Payment Bridge System**.

The debate: zero-MDR drove mass UPI adoption but strains the payments ecosystem (banks/PSPs bear costs). A graded, **large-merchant-only MDR** could fund the rails without hurting small vendors — the core policy trade-off.



4 New Development Bank & BRICS

GS-II/III · ECONOMY

A commentary argues India should use BRICS to maximise the grouping's potential **without strengthening Beijing** – with the **New Development Bank (NDB)** as the most practical avenue: more capital, wider membership and local-currency lending can make BRICS relevant without a confrontational de-dollarisation crusade.

THE BRICS BACKDROP

- At its 2011 formation, the five members were ~20% of global GDP but held just **11% of IMF voting share**. The expanded grouping is now **~40% of global GDP** and **55% of population** – yet the voting share has barely expanded.
- Internal divergence:** Russia, China and Iran lean "**anti-West**"; India, Brazil and South Africa insist it is "**non-West**." Given India-U.S. ties, Delhi avoids the Beijing-Moscow **de-dollarisation** push.
- The one area BRICS can meaningfully reshape global finance **without overtly challenging U.S. predominance** is by expanding the NDB's efficiency and membership.

ABOUT THE NEW DEVELOPMENT BANK

- Set up by the BRICS countries in **2015** to "mobilise resources for infrastructure and sustainable development in BRICS and other emerging/developing economies." **HQ: Shanghai.**
- An alternative to Western lenders (World Bank, IMF) – one of BRICS' most tangible tools.
- Underperformance:** in a decade, only **139 projects (~\$43 bn)**, mostly among core members; skewed local-currency lending favours the **Renminbi** (recent **¥7 bn / ~\$1.04 bn Panda bond**). India's push: a **rupee (Masala) bond** programme.

NDB VS AIIB — THE COMPARISON

	New Development Bank	AIIB
Established	2015 (by BRICS)	Jan 2016
Headquarters	Shanghai	Beijing
Portfolio	139 projects · ~\$43 bn	350 projects · ~\$69 bn
Members / rating	Core BRICS-heavy · below AAA	100+ members · AAA-rated
Shareholding	Equal among founders	China 27% (\$50 bn); India 2nd, 8% (\$8.4 bn)

Correct your slide: the deck's fact-box lists **Beijing** only under AIIB and omits the NDB's HQ — **NDB is headquartered in Shanghai**. Also note: **AIIB total authorised capital = \$100 bn**; 16 of the G20 are members (US, Japan, Mexico & EU are not).

At BRICS, India must bank on the NDB

India should use BRICS to maximise the grouping's potential without strengthening Beijing, with the New Development Bank offering a practical avenue for cooperation; strengthening the NDB through greater capital, membership and local-currency lending can make BRICS more relevant

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AMIT KUMAR, ANUSHKA SAXENA

🔔 READ LATER

5 Crop Diversification

GS-III · AGRICULTURE

The **Union Budget 2026–27** emphasised a crop-specific, regionally differentiated agricultural framework to accelerate high-productivity **crop diversification** – moving beyond cereal monocropping toward high-value horticulture, plantation crops and agroforestry across India's agro-climatic zones.

WHAT IS CROP DIVERSIFICATION?

- Shifting land use from conventional **monoculture** (notably the water-intensive **paddy-wheat rotation**) toward **pulses, oilseeds, horticulture and commercial tree crops**.

WHY IT MATTERS

- **Farm-income enhancement** through higher-value crops and reduced input dependence.
- **Water & soil conservation** – easing the groundwater and fertility stress of continuous paddy-wheat.
- **Export expansion** – aligned with merchandise-trade targets of **\$2 trillion by 2030** and **\$21 trillion by 2047**.
- Nutritional security and climate resilience via a wider crop basket.

CHALLENGES IN SCALING UP

- **Price volatility & perishability:** unlike wheat/paddy backed by open-ended **MSP** procurement, perishable horticulture faces post-harvest price crashes and weak market-intervention frameworks.
- **Cold-chain & logistics deficits:** insufficient farm-gate pre-cooling, cold storage and refrigerated transport cause heavy post-harvest losses.
- **Long gestation for tree crops:** agarwood, sandalwood and nut trees need multi-year gestation before commercial harvest, straining smallholder liquidity.

Way forward: assured procurement/PSS for horticulture, FPO-led aggregation, expanded cold-chain under schemes like the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund, contract farming and price-stabilisation buffers to de-risk the transition.



MAINS QUESTIONS

Q1 · GS-II · 15 marks

The Colombo Security Conclave has evolved from a lapsed trilateral into the principal minilateral for Indian Ocean security. Examine its structure and India's stakes in it.

प्रश्न 1: कोलंबो सुरक्षा सम्मेलन एक निष्क्रिय त्रिपक्षीय व्यवस्था से हिंद महासागर सुरक्षा के प्रमुख लघुपक्षीय मंच के रूप में विकसित हुआ है। इसकी संरचना तथा इसमें भारत के हितों का परीक्षण कीजिए।

Approach: Trace 2011 trilateral → 2020 revival, members & Colombo secretariat; five pillars; the TTX as capacity-building; link to SAGAR/MAHASAGAR; conclude on India as net security provider vs Chinese presence in the IOR.

Q2 · GS-III · 15 marks

Removing the statutory bar on charges for digital payments risks undoing India's UPI success story. Critically analyse in light of the amendment to the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007.

प्रश्न 2: डिजिटल भुगतान पर शुल्क के विधिक प्रतिबंध को हटाना भारत की यूपीआई सफलता की कहानी को पलट सकता है। भुगतान एवं निपटान प्रणाली अधिनियम, 2007 में संशोधन के आलोक में समालोचनात्मक विश्लेषण कीजिए।

Approach: Explain Sec 10A / 269SU exemption & its removal; MDR logic & incidence; the 4%/two-thirds data; trade-off between merchant-payment sustainability and zero-cost adoption; recommend a graded, large-merchant-only MDR.

PRELIMS MCQS

1. The Table Top Exercise recently in the news was conducted under which grouping?

- (A) Colombo Security Conclave
- (B) IORA
- (C) BIMSTEC
- (D) QUAD

2. Which is NOT a member of the Colombo Security Conclave?

- (A) Mauritius
- (B) Bangladesh
- (C) Seychelles
- (D) Indonesia

3. With reference to the CSC, consider: (1) It began as a trilateral in 2011. (2) Its secretariat is in New Delhi. (3) Seychelles is its newest member. Which are correct?

- (A) 1 and 2
- (B) 1 and 3
- (C) 2 and 3
- (D) 1, 2 and 3

4. The Ramanathaswamy Temple is correctly described as:

- (A) A Char Dham site & one of the 12 Jyotirlingas
- (B) A Shakti Peetha in Nagara style
- (C) Located in Andhra Pradesh
- (D) A Chola-built Vaishnavite shrine

5. The inner sanctum of the Ramanathaswamy Temple is credited to:

- (A) Krishnadevaraya
- (B) King Parakramabahu of Sri Lanka
- (C) Raja Raja Chola
- (D) The Pallavas

6. The recent notification bars charges on UPI person-to-merchant transactions up to:

- (A) ₹1,000
- (B) ₹2,000
- (C) ₹5,000
- (D) ₹10,000

7. Which Act was amended to remove the exemption on digital-payment charges?

- (A) RBI Act, 1934
- (B) Payment & Settlement Systems Act, 2007
- (C) Banking Regulation Act, 1949
- (D) FEMA, 1999

8. The New Development Bank is headquartered in:

- (A) Beijing
- (B) Shanghai
- (C) New Delhi
- (D) Moscow

9. Consider the AIIB: (1) India is its second-largest shareholder. (2) The USA and Japan are members. (3) Its authorised capital is \$100 billion. Correct statements:

- (A) 1 only
- (B) 1 and 3
- (C) 2 and 3
- (D) 1, 2 and 3

10. Crop diversification (Budget 2026–27) primarily seeks to move away from:

- (A) Pulses cultivation
- (B) The paddy–wheat rotation
- (C) Horticulture
- (D) Agroforestry

ANSWER KEY

1. A	2. D	3. B	4. A	5. B
6. B	7. B	8. B	9. B	10. B

Q3 → only (1) & (3): secretariat is in Colombo, not Delhi. Q9 → (1) & (3): India is AIIB's 2nd-largest shareholder and capital is \$100 bn, but the US & Japan are NOT members. NDB HQ = Shanghai; UPI free ≤ ₹2,000; PSS Act Sec 10A amended via the 2026 Bill.

QUICK REVISION RECAP

- **CSC:** 2011 trilateral → 2020 revival; 6 members (Seychelles newest, 2025); secretariat Colombo; 5 pillars; TTX at ENC Vizag; SAGAR/MAHASAGAR.
- **Ramanathaswamy:** Dravidian; Shiva; 12 Jyotirlingas + Char Dham; 1,212-pillar corridor; inner sanctum by a Sri Lankan king; Pamban Island, TN.
- **UPI/RuPay:** free ≤ ₹2,000; PSS Act Sec 10A amended (269SU link removed); MDR possible on large merchants; NPCI under RBI + IBA.
- **NDB:** est. 2015, HQ Shanghai; 139 projects/\$43 bn vs AIIB 350/\$69 bn (AAA, \$100 bn capital, India 2nd shareholder).
- **Crop diversification:** Budget 2026–27; away from paddy–wheat; challenges = no MSP, cold-chain, long gestation; export targets \$2 tn/2030, \$21 tn/2047.

TRAP-SETTERS & ONE-LINERS

- **NDB ≠ Beijing.** Beijing = AIIB. NDB = **Shanghai.**
- CSC secretariat = **Colombo**, not New Delhi.
- TTX = tabletop war-game; **no assets at sea.**
- Ramanathaswamy sanctum = built by a **Sri Lankan** king.
- UPI zero-charge cap = **₹2,000** (P2M).
- US, Japan, Mexico, EU = **NOT** AIIB members.
- Seychelles = **newest** CSC member (2025).
- Export targets: **\$2 tn/2030, \$21 tn/2047.**

PLACES & PERSONS IN NEWS

- **Visakhapatnam** — Eastern Naval Command; host of the CSC TTX.
- **Rameswaram / Pamban Island** — Ramanathaswamy Temple, TN.
- **Bharat Mandapam** — venue, 18th BRICS Summit, New Delhi.
- **Shanghai** — HQ of the New Development Bank.

MAINS ANSWER SKELETONS

Q1 (CSC): Intro — CSC as premier IOR minilateral. Body — (i) evolution 2011→2020; (ii) members, Colombo secretariat, NSA-led; (iii) five pillars + TTX capacity-building; (iv) India's stakes: net security provider, MDA, counter to Chinese footprint. Concl — SAGAR/MAHASAGAR anchor.

Q2 (UPI): Intro — UPI's zero-MDR base built adoption. Body — (i) Sec 10A/269SU exemption & its removal; (ii) MDR rationale & incidence; (iii) data: 4% txns = two-thirds value; (iv) risk to small-merchant uptake vs a viable payments economy. Concl — graded, large-merchant-only MDR with ≤ ₹2,000 protected.

STATIC ↔ CURRENT LINKAGES

- **CSC / TTX** → IOR geopolitics, India's neighbourhood-first & SAGAR doctrine, minilateralism (GS-II).
- **Ramanathaswamy** → Dravidian temple architecture, Jyotirlingas, Bhakti & pilgrimage circuits (GS-I).
- **UPI / NPCI** → digital public infrastructure, financial inclusion, RBI & payment systems (GS-III).
- **NDB / BRICS** → reform of global financial architecture, Bretton Woods vs new institutions (GS-II).
- **Crop diversification** → MSP, cropping patterns, Green Revolution legacy, food vs nutritional security (GS-III).
- **AIIB** → China's institutional diplomacy, India's balancing between AIIB & NDB (GS-II).