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THE HINDU ANALYSIS

Editorial & News Decoded for the Civil Services Aspirant

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UPSC · HPAS / HAS · STATE PCS

Compiled by **SAPNA CHAUHAN**
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India remains 131st on the Global Gender Gap Index 2026

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India remains at 131st rank in global gender parity index

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI/GENEVA

India retained the 131st rank on the Global Gender Gap Index 2026 released by the World Economic Forum on Wednesday, with Iceland, Finland and Norway maintaining their top three slots respectively.

The 14 countries ranked below India on the index include Papua New Guinea, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Tajikistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco, Mali, Algeria, and Congo.

Chad was the lowest-ranked country in the index, with Iran and Pakistan joining it in the bottom three.

For India, the progress towards gender parity stood at 64.5%, below the global average. While India's score improved slightly over the last year, its global ranking remained unchanged at 131st.



WHY IN NEWS

- India retained **131st rank** on the **Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) 2026**, released by the **World Economic Forum (WEF)**; **Iceland, Finland, Norway** held the top three slots.
- Of 145 countries, only **14 ranked below India** (incl. Papua New Guinea, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Algeria, Congo). **Chad** was last, with **Iran** and **Pakistan** in the bottom three.

KEY NUMBERS

- India's progress towards gender parity: **64.5%** — below the global average; score improved slightly but rank was unchanged.
- Globally, **69.2%** of the gender gap is now closed (up 0.4 pp); WEF estimates **full parity is ~120 years away**.

ABOUT THE INDEX

The GGGI (since **2006**) benchmarks gender-based gaps on **four sub-indices: Economic Participation & Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health & Survival, and Political Empowerment** (score 0–1, 1 = parity). It measures *gaps*, not levels of development, and India's weakest dimensions remain economic participation and political empowerment.

Oman pitches Sohar Port to expand India's access to Gulf energy

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Oman pitches new port that could expand India's access to Gulf energy

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

With the Strait of Hormuz in a chokehold due to Iran-U.S. hostilities, Oman has pitched investment opportunities to India in a new port that could provide uninterrupted access to energy resources from the Persian Gulf.

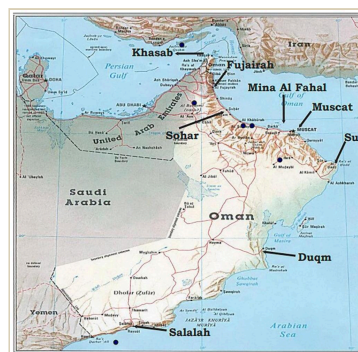
Speaking here on Wednesday, a high-level representative of the Sohar Port of Oman welcomed Indian investments into the port and said it would serve as a platform to connect businesses in regional and global markets.

"India represents an important and growing dimension of Sohar's international investment landscape, with established Indian businesses already contributing to our industrial ecosystem. There is significant potential to deepen this relationship through investments that complement our industrial clusters, strengthen value chains and create new opportunities for growth," said Raid Al Rubaiey, CEO of Sohar Freezone and Deputy CEO of Sohar Port. The port is located on the Omani coast on the Gulf of Oman, far from the Strait of Hormuz. FILE PHOTO

handling 72 million tonnes of cargo annually. "Sohar provides an established industrial and logistics platform connecting businesses to regional and global markets," he said.

The remarks came at the end of a two-day promotional event organised by the Embassy of Oman, during which the Ambassador of Oman, Issa Saleh Al Shilbani, introduced the port and the Freezone to Indian businesses, manufacturers and exporters to increase Indian participation in the port.

Earlier, Oman had offered Duqm and Salalah ports to India, but the Sohar Port has the advantage of being located in the northeast of Oman, close to vital energy pipelines of the United Arab Emirates and eastern Saudi Arabia.



WHY IN NEWS

- ◆ With the **Strait of Hormuz** under a chokehold amid Iran–U.S. hostilities, **Oman** pitched investment in the **Sohar Port** to give India **uninterrupted access** to Persian-Gulf energy.
- ◆ Sohar lies on Oman's **Gulf of Oman** coast — **outside the Strait of Hormuz** — so ships can reach Gulf hubs without transiting the chokepoint. It handles **~72 million tonnes** of cargo annually.

STRATEGIC EDGE

- ◆ Sits in Oman's **north-east**, close to the energy pipelines of the **UAE** and **eastern Saudi Arabia**; received investments of **over \$30 billion**.
- ◆ Earlier Oman offered India the **Duqm** and **Salalah** ports; Sohar's advantage is proximity to Gulf energy infrastructure. Pitch made via the **Embassy of Oman** and **Sohar Freezone**.

MAP POINTERS

Oman commands the southern shoulder of the **Strait of Hormuz** (Musandam exclave, near Khasab). Key ports: **Sohar & Mina Al Fahal** (Gulf of Oman), **Muscat**, **Sur**, **Duqm** (Arabian Sea), **Salalah** (Dhofar). Neighbours: UAE, Saudi Arabia, Yemen.

Saudi Arabia accuses Houthis of targeting Mecca with a drone

Page No.1, GS 2

Saudi Arabia accuses Houthis of targeting Mecca with a drone

Agence France-Presse
RIYADH

Saudi Arabia accused Yemen's Houthis on Wednesday of launching a "cowardly" attack targeting Islam's holy city of Mecca, sparking outrage across the Muslim world.

The Houthis swiftly rejected the Saudi claim that it had shot down a drone heading towards Mecca as a "lie". New fighting between the Iran-backed Houthis and Yemen's Saudi-backed government has dragged in the kingdom, after the Houthis declared a maritime blockade on Saudi ships in the Red Sea.

Last week, the Houthis seized control of the entirety of Yemen's Red Sea coast and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, a vital artery for

Saudi oil exports as the wider war chokes off the Strait of Hormuz shipping route.

'Cowardly attack'
Saudi Arabia's Foreign Ministry condemned the targeting of Mecca as a "cowardly terrorist attack" and reaffirmed the kingdom's right to "defend the security of the two holy mosques, the pilgrims, and the entire Saudi territory".

Houthi politburo member Hazem al-Assad, however, dismissed the accusation as "a worn-out lie that has been used before and no longer fools anyone".

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SAUDI PLANES POUND YEMEN
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WHY IN NEWS

- ◆ Saudi Arabia accused Yemen's **Iran-backed Houthis** of a "cowardly" drone attack targeting **Mecca**; the Houthis rejected the claim as a "lie".
- ◆ New fighting between the Houthis and Yemen's Saudi-backed government has dragged in the kingdom after the Houthis declared a **maritime blockade** on Saudi ships in the Red Sea.

THE CHOKEPOINT ANGLE

- ◆ The Houthis seized Yemen's entire **Red Sea coast** and the **Bab el-Mandeb Strait** — a vital artery for Saudi oil exports — as the wider war also chokes the **Strait of Hormuz**.
- ◆ Recent gains include the port of **Mokha**, then **Dhubab** and **Perim Island** — the island sits astride the **~18 km (12-mile)-wide** strait, giving control over shipping traffic between the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR INDIA

Bab el-Mandeb (between Yemen and Djibouti/Eritrea) links the **Red Sea** to the **Gulf of Aden/Arabian Sea** and is the gateway to the **Suez Canal** route. With both Bab el-Mandeb and Hormuz under stress, India's energy shipping and trade face compounding chokepoint risk — reinforcing the case for routes like Sohar (Topic 2).

Dadasaheb Phalke Award for Kannada film artist Anant Nag

Page No.3 , Prelims

Dadasaheb Phalke honour for Kannada film artist Anant Nag

The Hindu Bureau

In a big honour for Kannada cinema, veteran actor Anant Nag became the second artist from the State to win the Dadasaheb Phalke Award on Wednesday. The recognition comes a year after the actor was given the Padma Bhushan.

After Dr. Rajkumar received the honour in 1995, no Kannada actor had bagged the country's highest award in the field of cinema.

Mr. Nag, who debuted with the 1973 Kannada film *Sankalpa*, has acted in more than 300 movies for over five decades in both mainstream and parallel cinema, with more than 250 of his performances being in Kannada.

The actor, born Anant Nagarkatte in 1948 in Uttara Kannada district, began his acting stint with Kannada, Marathi, Hindi and Konkani plays, and has a rich background in theatre shaped largely in Mumbai.

Mr. Nag is the recipient of five Karnataka State Awards, including the Lifetime Achievement honour. He will receive the Phalke award at the 72nd

will be conferred the prestigious Dadasaheb Phalke Award 2024 for his contribution to Indian cinema and an illustrious cinematic journey that has inspired generations.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated the actor for "outstanding unparalleled performance and vitality in every role he played." Mr. Modi took to social media, and said, "Over the past several decades, his natural acting, remarkable versatility, and exceptional artistic talent have left an indelible mark on Indian cinema, particularly in the Kannada film industry."

Karnataka Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar also commended Mr. Nag's cinematic journey and the Phalke award. In a post on X, the Chief Minister said, "Heartfelt congratulations to Shri Anant Nag. His artistic journey will forever inspire future generations."

Though cinematographer V.K. Murthy, from Karnataka, received the award in 2008, it recognised his work in Hindi cinema. Consequently, Mr. Nag's win marks only the second time Kannada cinema has been honoured.

'Great feeling'

"It's a great feeling to receive this honour. It is a joy, I feel the Padma Bhushan was a rehearsal for the big award, with all the excitement and anticipation that came with it. I dedicate this award to Kannadigas and Karnataka", the actor told prespersers in Bengaluru.

A statement from the Press Information Bureau read, "On the recommendation of the Dadasaheb Phalke Award Selection Committee, the Government of India is pleased to announce that the actor

— WHY IN NEWS

- ◆ Veteran actor **Anant Nag** is to receive the **Dadasaheb Phalke Award 2024** — only the **second Kannada artist** to win it after **Dr. Rajkumar (1995)**. He was given the **Padma Bhushan** a year earlier.
- ◆ Born **Anant Nagarkatte (1948)** in Uttara Kannada; debuted in the 1973 Kannada film **Sankalpa**; acted in 300+ films (250+ in Kannada). Award to be conferred at the **72nd National Film Awards** on **22 Sept, Kevadia (Gujarat)**.

— ABOUT THE AWARD

- ◆ Instituted in **1969** by the Government of India to honour **Dadasaheb Phalke** — the "**father of Indian cinema**", who directed India's first full-length feature **Raja Harishchandra (1913)**.
- ◆ India's **highest award in cinema**. Comprises a **Swarna Kamal (Golden Lotus)** medallion, a shawl and **₹10 lakh** cash. **First recipient: Devika Rani**.

PRELIMS HOOK

V.K. Murthy (2008, Karnataka) won for his work in **Hindi** cinema — hence Anant Nag's win is counted as only the **second time Kannada cinema** is honoured. Distinguish the **Dadasaheb Phalke Award** (lifetime honour) from the **Dadasaheb Phalke International Film Festival Awards** (a private event) — a common confusion.

Currency conundrum — BRICS local-currency trade is no simple choice for India

- The Dadasaheb Phalke Award was instituted in 1969 by the Government of India.
- The award was established to commemorate Dadasaheb Phalke, who is regarded as the father of Indian cinema.
- It is the highest honour in Indian cinema.
- It is presented to individuals for their outstanding contribution to the growth and development of Indian cinema.
- Award: The award comprises a Swarna Kamal (Golden Lotus) medallion, a ceremonial shawl, and a cash prize of ₹10 lakh.
- The first recipient of the award was Devika Rani.
- Dadasaheb Phalke directed India's first full-length feature film, Raja Harishchandra, in 1913.

— WHY IN NEWS

- ◆ The **BRICS New Delhi Declaration** shows only **incremental** progress on local-currency trade — acknowledging task-force efforts "while respecting national priorities" and admitting **no one-size-fits-all** approach, but offering no concrete proposals.
- ◆ India's rupee trade with BRICS partners is **limited** (mainly UAE & Russia) and small; India already uses the **UAE Dirham** to pay for Russian oil.

— INDIA'S DILEMMA

- ◆ As an **exporter**, India prefers being paid in **dollars** — a depreciating rupee yields more rupees per dollar; as a big **importer**, it would like to pay in cheaper local currencies. It must eventually choose.
- ◆ **China accounts for ~two-thirds of BRICS exports**, so a BRICS local-currency system would largely be **yuan-denominated** — which India is loath to adopt. India backs *local-currency trade* but opposes a single **BRICS currency**.

EXTERNAL PRESSURE

U.S. President **Trump's threat of 100% tariffs** on countries adopting a BRICS currency shapes India's caution. Nations like Iran and Russia have pressing reasons to de-dollarise; India, so far, does not — and the New Delhi Declaration reflects that pragmatism.

Pygmy hog — survival tied to a thriving grassland ecosystem

Mains Question

“Local currency trade arrangements can reduce dependence on dominant international currencies, but their success requires more than monetary cooperation.” Discuss the opportunities and challenges associated with local currency trade for India.

(250 words | 15 Marks)

“स्थानीय मुद्राओं में व्यापार की व्यवस्था प्रमुख अंतरराष्ट्रीय मुद्राओं पर निर्भरता को कम कर सकती है, किंतु इसकी सफलता के लिए केवल मौद्रिक सहयोग पर्याप्त नहीं है।” भारत के लिए स्थानीय मुद्रा व्यापार से जुड़े अवसरों एवं चुनौतियों की चर्चा कीजिए।

(250 शब्द | 15 अंक)

Page No.6, GS 3

Hog in the limelight

The survival of the pygmy hog depends on a thriving ecosystem

The decline of the pygmy hog – the sole surviving species of the genus *Porcula* and the world's smallest wild suid – is a narrative about the decline of India's alluvial floodplains. The pygmy hog depends significantly on dense grasslands to feed, conceal itself, and reproduce, so distress among these animals is an indicator of the floodplain suffering degradation. Protecting the pygmy hog can also extend protections to threatened species such as the Bengal florican, hispid hare, hog deer, and greater one-horned rhinoceros. The Assam government was recently right to laud the efforts of a captive breeding programme that increased the pygmy hog population in the State 32-fold in the last three decades. Breeding from a small founder stock while preventing diseases – suids are highly susceptible to swine diseases – and inbreeding requires conservationists to track pedigree, follow biosecurity protocols, and condition individuals before release. That said, the species' survival in the wild depends on the survival of specific ecosystems, and the latter remains a work in progress. The pygmy hog was believed to be extinct by the mid-20th century as floodplains were converted for farms, tea plantations, and flood control infrastructure and were degraded by invasive plants and altered flood cycles, with the unscientific burning of grasslands further fragmenting habitats. A few individuals were rediscovered in 1971, prompting one conservation

the unscientific burning of grasslands further fragmenting habitats. A few individuals were rediscovered in 1971, prompting one conservation effort. The current efforts are due to the Pygmy Hog Conservation Programme from 1995.

Even now, the difficulty of spotting and counting these animals means that it is hard to say how many exist in the wild; per the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, there were some 250 individuals in early 2025, with the last surviving natural population in the Panbari grasslands area of the Manas National Park. Since they continue to be threatened, the captive individuals form the insurance group, but even so, the group's long-term evolutionary fitness is still not guaranteed. Researchers are also alert to the accumulation of harmful gene variants in the population and low genetic diversity, and thus look forward to the pygmy hog's natural habitats being restored. Alluvial floodplains are dynamic ecosystems; in addition to threats such as land conversion, efforts to 'save' them, such as widespread dry-season fires, can still destroy the dense cover the pygmy hog needs. On the other hand, suppressing ecological processes can leave trees and shrubs to turn grassland into woodland. Given the plan to increase the wild pygmy hog population to 300 by 2040, Assam needs to revert the fragmentation of its protected grasslands, especially in Rupahi and Kanchanbari, and to restore buffer zones around the Manas and Orang National Parks and the Sonai Rupai Wildlife Sanctuary.

— WHY IN NEWS

- ◆ The **pygmy hog** — sole surviving species of genus **Porcula** and the world's **smallest wild suid** — is an **indicator species** for the health of India's alluvial floodplain grasslands.
- ◆ Assam's captive-breeding programme grew the population **32-fold** in three decades. Per the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, **~250 individuals** survived in early 2025, the last natural population in the **Panbari grasslands, Manas National Park**.

— ECOLOGY & HABITAT

- ◆ One of few mammals that builds its own **roofed nest**; prefers undisturbed tall riverine grasslands. Forages with its snout on roots, tubers, termites, earthworms & eggs — aiding **soil aeration** and **seed dispersal**.
- ◆ Umbrella value: protecting it also shields the **Bengal florican, hispid hare, hog deer** and **greater one-horned rhino**. Present distribution: **Manas** and **Orang** National Parks (Assam).

CONSERVATION STATUS

IUCN: Critically Endangered · **WPA 1972:** Schedule I. Rediscovered **1971**; current efforts via the **Pygmy Hog Conservation Programme (1995)**. Assam aims for a wild population of **300 by 2040** by restoring grasslands at Rupahi & Kanchanbari and buffers around Manas, Orang and Sonai Rupai WLS.

China's strategy amid West Asia's security realignment

Page No.6 , GS 2

China's strategy amid West Asia's security realignment

Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Egypt (September 1-2, 2026) marked a shift in Beijing's engagement with West Asia, as he set out a four-point formula for a new regional security architecture. Beijing has long talked about the need to rethink regional security, but this is the first time it has elaborated what such an architecture should look like.

Among the four points, the first is the need to "unleash the internal momentum of regional common security". The core component of this is to reduce the "interference by external forces", while supporting regional countries to strengthen dialogue on peace and security. Second, Mr. Xi called for the issues in the region to be discussed comprehensively, while prioritising the goal of a two-state solution for the Palestinian question. Third, he stressed that "lasting stability and security in West Asia relies fundamentally on development". In doing so, he articulated Beijing's opposition to the weaponisation of international waterways, while positioning economic diplomacy and development cooperation as the preferred instrument for Chinese engagement. Finally, Mr. Xi insisted that all these efforts must happen through the United Nations framework.

A shifting security order
The announcement comes at an interesting moment in the evolution of West Asian geopolitics. The United States-Israeli war against Iran, the fracturing of Gulf security assumptions, diverted energy flows and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, and rising Türkiye-Israel tensions have all pressed on Chinese interests. Pakistan's brokering of a U.S.-Iran understanding, which Beijing supported, offered a template for extending influence without exposure. Then came the Mecca Joint Defence Agreement on August 7, 2026 between Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye. In theory, a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-style mutual defence agreement would



Wang Kangkang
Chairperson,
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Fudan's
Institute

not be welcome in Beijing. Over the years, the Chinese leadership has repeatedly pushed back against what it says is Cold War mentality and bloc politics. But in this case, it has been extremely cautious. There has been no formal comment, no direct leadership statement, and no word from its ambassadors. That, however, does not mean that there has not been an internal debate.

Mecca pact, Chinese views
For instance, Long Chen of Renmin University's Cheng-tung Institute has argued that the Mecca pact might actually serve American purposes. Every administration since then (U.S. President Barack Obama has sought to shed direct security costs, the 2025 National Security Strategy says as much explicitly, and regional states arming themselves is precisely what offshore balancing requires. He noted that all three signatories remain dependent on American weapons and intelligence. Of course, what all of this ignores is the difficult security relationship that Mecca pact members have with Israel, a key American ally in the region.

Others such as Zhou Li, a former Vice-Minister of the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, has argued that the pact is an exercise of regional strategic autonomy, produced by the erosion of American hegemony, and consistent with China's Global Security Initiative. Mr. Zhou has contended that competing this agreement to a NATO-style treaty is foolhardy, as there is no published text, no joint command, no cost-sharing, and no binding obligation. Essentially, Mr. Zhou concludes that such a pact dilutes American primacy without creating a rival bloc that Beijing would have to position itself against. Mr. Zhou also suggested that the next member to join the agreement could be Egypt, which is where Mr. Xi's statement and the choice of venue for it are significant. In calling to "unleash the internal momentum of regional common security", Mr. Xi seems to have weighed

in on the domestic debate, leaning in favour of Mr. Zhou's argument.

What likely prompted him to do so is the belief that while Washington retains the preponderant military power in the region, its ability to defend allies against Iranian strikes, to enforce its will in the Strait, and to sustain commitment as its dependence on Gulf energy declines are all now open questions. Gulf states are, therefore, hedging, buying insurance from Pakistan and others. In other words, the American credibility problem has become an opportunity too juicy to miss out on. This is a moment during which Beijing can throw cautious support behind stronger among regional actors to pursue autonomy, with little practical cost to itself.

Beijing's interests
China has significant economic and energy stakes in West Asia. If regional states are building their own infrastructure, Beijing can suggest the process economically and remain militarily disengaged. It already has substantial defence and technology trade with Pakistan, growing ties with Saudi Arabia, and openings in Türkiye and Egypt. Saudi Arabia and Egypt together absorbed roughly a third of China's combat drone deliveries in the decade to 2023, according to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). China, Riyadh has also built domestic solid-fuelled ballistic missile capacity with Chinese technical assistance and is increasingly attracting Chinese technology investment. So there could be money to be made and influence to be cemented in terms of defence and technological engagement. In essence, the formula announced by Mr. Xi in Cairo is a significant position being articulated with regard to the emerging security framework in West Asia. Whether this framework will demand certain concessions that China remains reluctant to offer is something that must be sorted going forward. More interestingly, it seems that despite all the friction, Beijing and Washington might be able to find some common ground in West Asia.

The Chinese President's visit to Egypt has outlined Beijing's approach

— WHY IN NEWS

- ◆ **Xi Jinping's visit to Egypt (Sept 1–2, 2026)** marked a shift in Beijing's West Asia engagement; Xi set out a **four-point formula** for a new regional security architecture.
- ◆ Context: the **U.S.–Israel war on Iran**, fractured Gulf security, closure of the **Strait of Hormuz**, Türkiye–Israel tensions, and the **Mecca Joint Defence Agreement (Aug 7, 2026)** among Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye.

— XI'S FOUR POINTS

- ◆ **1.** "Unleash the internal momentum of regional common security" — cut **external interference**; **2.** Address issues comprehensively, prioritising a **two-state solution** for Palestine.
- ◆ **3.** Lasting stability rests on **development** — opposing the **weaponisation of international waterways**, favouring economic diplomacy; **4.** All efforts to run through the **UN framework**.

BEIJING'S CALCULUS

China prefers to back regional architecture **economically while staying militarily disengaged**. It has deep defence-tech ties with Pakistan and growing links with Saudi Arabia, Türkiye & Egypt — Saudi Arabia and Egypt together took roughly a **third of China's combat-drone exports** in the decade to 2023 (SIPRI). A fading U.S. security guarantee opens space for Beijing at low cost.

MMDR Amendment 2026 — 'unfair to States'?

Page No.7 , GS 3

Mining amendment is unfair to States

India's mineral wealth is not evenly spread across the country. States such as Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Karnataka possess enormous reserves of coal, iron ore, and other minerals that are vital to the nation's growth. While mining brings in investment and employment, it also leaves the host State with challenges such as the environmental degradation, pressure on public infrastructure, and the long-term consequences of extracting minerals that can never be replaced.

It is why the Mines and Minerals Development and Regulation Amendment Act (MMDR), 2026 deserves close attention. At the heart of the amendment is Section 9D which restricts State Governments from imposing taxes, cesses or duties on mineral rights or mineral-bearing land except in accordance with conditions prescribed by the Central government. The Centre says the measure is intended to create a predictable tax, environment, present revenue levels, and to encourage long-term investment in mining. There is an understandable economic argument behind that objective. Mining projects involve enormous investments and operate over decades. Investors need to know that the financial rules will not change unpredictably from one year to another.

The real question is not merely whether States will continue receiving the benefits of the economic resources and other

revenues they receive today. The Centre claims that 90% of mining sector revenue accrues to the States and that this will continue. The larger concern is about what States may be prevented from earning otherwise.

A federal State possesses a natural resource advantage. Undoubtedly, one would expect it to have some ability to use that advantage to raise resources for its own development. Section 9D substantially reduces that freedom by making future state taxes subject to a framework controlled by the Centre. This measure is extremely onerous for States whose budgets are closely connected with mining. NITI Aayog's Fiscal Health Index has highlighted the strong performance of Odisha and Chhattisgarh in mobilising revenue and has specifically recognised the role played by mining receipts. In Odisha, mining has accounted for a large proportion of the State's non-tax revenue. Mineral producing districts often require greater public expenditure because they bear the costs of mining.

The federal problem

The constitutional issue is equally significant. The Constitution gives States the power to tax mineral rights under Entry 50 of the State List, although Parliament can impose limitations on that power through laws relating to mineral development. States also possess a separate constitutional power to tax lands and building under Entry 49 of the State List.

In 2024, a nine-judge bench of the Supreme Court ruled that mineral-bearing land falls within States' land-taxation power.

of India held, among other things, that usually practice on minerals is not a tax. It also recognised the State's legislative power to tax mineral-bearing land that is mineral-bearing and not fall within the State's mineral power and land. The 2026 Amendment risks rendering the impact of this judgment nugatory.

While Entry 9D permits Parliament to place limitations upon State taxation on mineral rights, Section 9D of the amending statute goes further by extending its restriction to taxes or duties on mineral-bearing lands. That is likely to create an important debate: how far can a Central law dealing with mineral development restrict a State's exclusive power to tax land? The issue is larger than mining policy alone. It concerns the relationship between the Union and the States.

India's federal system cannot function effectively if States have responsibilities without financial capacity. A State that bears the infrastructural and social consequences of mineral extraction must retain a meaningful stake in the economic value generated from its natural resources. Uniformity in taxation may be desirable, but predictability should not come at the cost of narrowing the fiscal choices available to States.

The debate over the specific provisions should therefore not be reduced to a contest between promoting investment and protecting investment. The minerals beneath a State's soil may serve the entire country, but the costs of extracting them are also borne directly by the people who live above them.

— WHY IN NEWS

- ◆ The **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2026** inserts **Section 9D**, restricting States from levying taxes/cesses on **mineral rights or mineral-bearing land** except per Centre-prescribed conditions.
- ◆ Centre's rationale: a **predictable tax environment**, preventing excessive levies and encouraging long-term investment; it says **90% of mining revenue** accrues to States and will continue. States fear losing **future** fiscal freedom.

— THE CONSTITUTIONAL CORE

- ◆ States tax mineral rights under **Entry 50, State List** (Parliament may impose limits via mineral-development law) and tax lands/buildings under **Entry 49, State List**.
- ◆ The **9-judge Bench** in **Mineral Area Development Authority v. Steel Authority of India (2024)** held that **royalty is not a tax**, upheld States' power to tax mineral rights, and that mineral-bearing land falls within States' land-taxation power.

THE FEDERAL QUESTION

Section 9D extends restrictions from mineral **rights** (Entry 50) to **mineral-bearing lands** — risking rendering the 2024 verdict **nugatory**. NITI Aayog's Fiscal Health Index credits mining receipts for Odisha & Chhattisgarh's strong non-tax revenue. Core issue: how far can a Central law restrict a State's **exclusive power to tax land**? A State bearing extraction's social/infrastructural costs must retain a **meaningful fiscal stake**.

Practice Zone

MAINS — ANSWER WRITING (GS 3 / GS 2)

Q1. "Local-currency trade arrangements can reduce dependence on dominant international currencies, but their success requires more than monetary cooperation." Discuss the opportunities and challenges associated with local-currency trade for India. **(250 words / 15 marks)**

प्रश्न 1. "स्थानीय मुद्राओं में व्यापार की व्यवस्थाएँ प्रमुख अंतरराष्ट्रीय मुद्राओं पर निर्भरता को कम कर सकती हैं, किंतु इसकी सफलता के लिए केवल मौद्रिक सहयोग पर्याप्त नहीं है।" भारत के लिए स्थानीय मुद्रा व्यापार से जुड़े अवसरों एवं चुनौतियों की चर्चा कीजिए।

Approach: Define local-currency trade vs. a common BRICS currency → opportunities: cushions dollar/sanction risk, rupee settlement (UAE Dirham for Russian oil), trade with Russia/UAE → challenges: rupee non-convertibility & trapped balances, trade imbalances (Russia's rupee surplus), yuan dominance (China ~2/3 of BRICS exports), depreciating-rupee export incentive, Trump's 100% tariff threat → need for convertibility, deeper markets, and credible settlement rails, not just political intent → balanced conclusion on strategic autonomy.

Q2. "Predictability for investors should not come at the cost of the fiscal autonomy of resource-rich States." Critically examine this tension in the context of the MMDR Amendment Act, 2026 and the Supreme Court's 2024 mineral-royalty verdict. **(250 words / 15 marks)**

प्रश्न 2. "निवेशकों के लिए पूर्वानुमेयता, संसाधन-संपन्न राज्यों की वित्तीय स्वायत्तता की कीमत पर नहीं आनी चाहिए।" MMDR संशोधन अधिनियम, 2026 तथा उच्चतम न्यायालय के 2024 के खनिज-रॉयल्टी निर्णय के संदर्भ में इस तनाव का समालोचनात्मक परीक्षण कीजिए।

Approach: Set up Entry 50 & 49 (State List) and the 2024 nine-judge verdict (royalty ≠ tax; States can tax mineral rights & mineral-bearing land) → Section 9D of MMDR 2026 restricts State levies, risking making the verdict nugatory → Centre's case (predictable regime, 90% revenue to States) vs. States' case (fiscal capacity for extraction's social costs, Odisha/Chhattisgarh non-tax revenue) → fiscal-federalism principle: responsibility must match financial capacity → suggest cooperative mechanisms (GST-Council-style consultation) → conclude.

Q1. Consider the following about the Global Gender Gap Index 2026:

- ◆ 1. It is released annually by the World Economic Forum.
- ◆ 2. India was ranked 131st out of 145 countries.
- ◆ 3. It benchmarks gaps across four sub-indices, including Health and Survival.
- ◆ 4. It measures the absolute level of women's development in a country.

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

Q2. The four sub-indices of the Global Gender Gap Index include which of the following?

- ◆ 1. Economic Participation and Opportunity 2. Educational Attainment
- ◆ 3. Health and Survival 4. Political Empowerment 5. Digital Access

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

Q3. With reference to the Sohar Port, consider the following:

- ◆ 1. It is located on Oman's Gulf of Oman coast, outside the Strait of Hormuz.
- ◆ 2. It lies close to the energy pipelines of the UAE and eastern Saudi Arabia.
- ◆ 3. Oman had earlier offered India the Duqm and Salalah ports.

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

Q4. The Bab el-Mandeb Strait connects which two water bodies?

- (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 Persian Gulf

Q5. Consider the following about the Dadasaheb Phalke Award:

- ◆ 1. It was instituted in 1969 by the Government of India.
- ◆ 2. Its first recipient was Devika Rani.
- ◆ 3. It carries a Swarna Kamal (Golden Lotus) medallion and a cash prize.
- ◆ 4. Dadasaheb Phalke directed India's first full-length feature, Raja Harishchandra (1913).

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

Q6. With reference to the pygmy hog, consider the following:

- ◆ 1. It is the sole surviving species of the genus Porcula.
- ◆ 2. Its last natural population survives in the Manas National Park, Assam.
- ◆ 3. It is listed as Critically Endangered by the IUCN.
- ◆ 4. It is placed under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

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

Q7. The Supreme Court's 2024 ruling in 'Mineral Area Development Authority v. Steel Authority of India' held that:

- ◆ 1. Royalty payable on minerals is not a tax.
- ◆ 2. States have the legislative power to tax mineral rights.
- ◆ 3. Mineral-bearing land can fall within the States' power to tax land.

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

Q8. Consider the following about taxation of minerals under the Constitution:

- ◆ 1. States derive the power to tax mineral rights from Entry 50 of the State List.
- ◆ 2. States tax lands and buildings under Entry 49 of the State List.
- ◆ 3. Parliament can impose limitations on State taxation of mineral rights through mineral-development law.

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

Q9. Regarding BRICS local-currency trade and India, consider the following:

- ◆ 1. India already uses the UAE Dirham to pay for Russian oil.
- ◆ 2. India has been vocal in supporting a single common BRICS currency.
- ◆ 3. China accounts for roughly two-thirds of BRICS exports.

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

Q10. The 'Mecca Joint Defence Agreement' (August 2026), referenced amid West Asia's realignment, was signed among:

- (a) Iran, Saudi Arabia and Egypt (b) Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye
(c) Saudi Arabia, UAE and Egypt (d) China, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia

ANSWER KEY & RATIONALE

Q1 — (a) 1, 2 and 3 only. The GGGI measures gender GAPS (relative to men), not the absolute level of development — 4 is wrong. 1, 2, 3 are correct.

Q2 — (c) 1, 2, 3 and 4 only. The four dimensions are Economic Participation & Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health & Survival, and Political Empowerment. 'Digital Access' is not one of them.

Q3 — (d) 1, 2 and 3. All three are correct — Sohar sits on the Gulf of Oman (outside Hormuz), near UAE/Saudi energy pipelines, and Duqm & Salalah were offered earlier.

Q4 — (b) The Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Bab el-Mandeb links the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden (and onward to the Arabian Sea), lying between Yemen and Djibouti/Eritrea. Hormuz links the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman.

Q5 — (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4. All four are correct. The award (India's highest in cinema) was instituted in 1969; Devika Rani was the first awardee; it includes the Golden Lotus + ₹10 lakh.

Q6 — (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4. All four statements are correct. The pygmy hog is a Porcula species, IUCN Critically Endangered, Schedule I (WPA 1972), with its natural population in Manas NP.

Q7 — (d) 1, 2 and 3. The nine-judge Bench held royalty is not a tax, upheld States' power to tax mineral rights, and that mineral-bearing land falls within States' land-taxation power. All three correct.

Q8 — (d) 1, 2 and 3. All three are correct: Entry 50 (mineral rights, subject to Parliamentary limits via mineral-development law) and Entry 49 (lands and buildings) are both in the State List.

Q9 — (c) 1 and 3 only. India supports local-currency trade but OPPOSES a single BRICS currency (fearing yuan dominance) — 2 is wrong. 1 and 3 are correct.

Q10 — (b) Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye. The Mecca Joint Defence Agreement (Aug 7, 2026) was among Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye — a NATO-style mutual-defence pact debated in the context of Xi's West Asia outreach.

LAST-MINUTE Revision & Value Add

⚡ QUICK REVISION RECAP

- ▶ **Gender Gap Index 2026:** WEF; India 131st/145; parity 64.5%; top 3 Iceland–Finland–Norway; global gap 69.2% closed; ~120 yrs to parity.
- ▶ **Sohar Port:** Oman, Gulf of Oman coast, outside Hormuz; near UAE/Saudi pipelines; alt to Duqm & Salalah; ~72 MT cargo.
- ▶ **Chokepoints:** Bab el-Mandeb (Red Sea ↔ Gulf of Aden, Yemen–Djibouti) & Hormuz (Persian Gulf ↔ Gulf of Oman) both under stress.
- ▶ **Dadasaheb Phalke:** instituted 1969; 1st awardee Devika Rani; Golden Lotus + ₹10 lakh; Anant Nag = 2nd Kannada artist after Dr. Rajkumar.
- ▶ **BRICS currency:** India backs local-currency trade, opposes single BRICS currency (yuan fear); Trump's 100% tariff threat.
- ▶ **Pygmy hog:** genus *Porcula*; Manas NP; IUCN CR; Schedule I; indicator species; target 300 by 2040.
- ▶ **MMDR 2026:** Section 9D curbs State mineral levies; vs. 2024 MADA v. SAIL (royalty ≠ tax; Entry 50/49).

TRAP-SETTERS — WATCH OUT

- ⚠ GGGI measures **gaps**, not absolute development levels; it has **4** sub-indices (no 'digital access').
- ⚠ **Bab el-Mandeb** = Red Sea ↔ Gulf of Aden; do **not** confuse with **Hormuz** (Persian Gulf ↔ Gulf of Oman).
- ⚠ Anant Nag gets the **2024** Phalke Award; V.K. Murthy (2008) won for **Hindi** cinema, not Kannada.
- ⚠ India supports **local-currency trade** but **opposes** a common BRICS currency.
- ⚠ 2024 verdict: **royalty is NOT a tax** — reversed the earlier *India Cement* position.

PERSONS & PLACES IN NEWS

- ★ **Anant Nag** — Dadasaheb Phalke Award 2024.
- ★ **Xi Jinping** — Egypt visit; 4-point West Asia formula.
- ★ **Sohar · Duqm · Salalah · Khasab** — Oman ports.
- ★ **Bab el-Mandeb · Mokha · Perim Island** — Yemen coast.
- ★ **Manas · Orang NP · Panbari grasslands** — pygmy hog.
- ★ **Mecca Joint Defence Agreement** — Pak–Saudi–Türkiye.
- ★ **MADA v. SAIL (2024)** — 9-judge mineral-royalty case.
- ★ **Kevadia (Gujarat)** — 72nd National Film Awards venue.

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