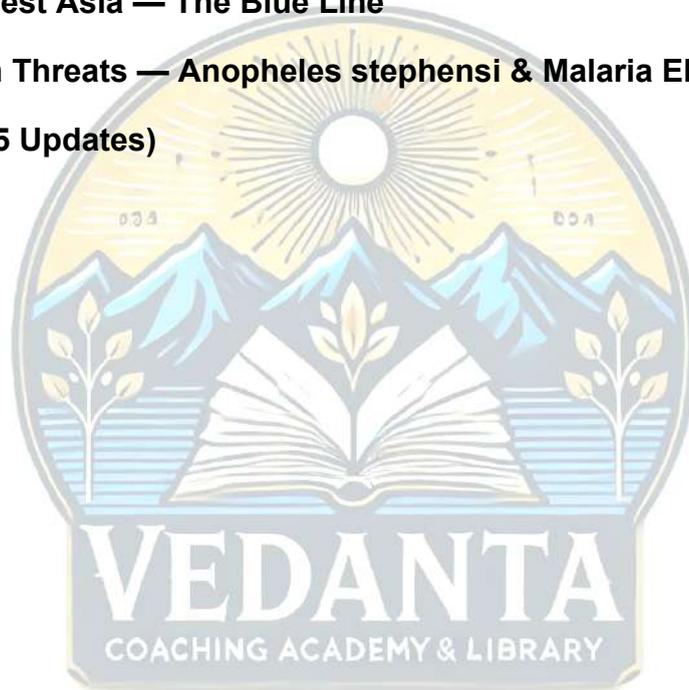


Topics of Discussion:

1. Child Marriages in India
2. Beyond Algorithms: Why Thought Still Defines Being
3. State of Marginal Farmers in India 2025
4. The Communist Party of India (CPI)
5. Plasser's Quick Relaying System (PQRS)
6. Maritime Environmental Security — RPREX-2025
7. Drug Standardization & The Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC)
8. Geopolitics of West Asia — The Blue Line
9. Emerging Health Threats — Anopheles stephensi & Malaria Elimination
10. Somaliland (2025 Updates)



Child Marriages in India

What it is:

Child marriage refers to any formal or informal marital union where either or both parties are below 18 years of age. It violates the fundamental rights of children—particularly their right to education, health, safety, and freedom of choice. The practice disproportionately impacts girls, exposing them to early pregnancy, domestic violence, educational discontinuation, and lifelong economic dependence.

Historical Background

During the **colonial period**, social reformers such as *Raja Ram Mohan Roy* and *Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar* drew attention to early marriage as a regressive social practice. The first legislative measure, the **Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929** (Sarda Act), set minimum age limits for marriage but lacked effective enforcement.

In 2006, the **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA)** was introduced, making such marriages *voidable*, imposing stricter penalties, and appointing *Child Marriage Prohibition Officers*. More recently, the government launched the **Bal Vivah-Mukt Bharat campaign**, aligning with **Sustainable Development Goal 5**, to eliminate child marriage by 2030.

Trends and Patterns

Although the prevalence of child marriage has declined—from **47% (2005–06)** to around **27% (2015–16)**—the issue persists. Nearly **16% of girls aged 15–19** remain married, and India continues to account for approximately **1.5 million child marriages annually**, the highest absolute number globally. States such as **Bihar, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh** still record higher incidences, often linked with economic deprivation.

Why Child Marriage Persists

- 
- **Poverty and economic hardship:** For poor families, early marriage is seen as a strategy to reduce financial burdens and enhance a daughter's perceived security. NFHS data indicates a stark wealth-based divide, with the poorest households showing much higher rates.
 - **Low awareness levels:** Many families are unaware of the legal provisions under the PCMA and the associated health and social repercussions. Surveys from *Bal Vivah-Mukt Bharat* highlight poor awareness of marriageable age and legal punishments.
 - **Persistent patriarchal norms:** Deep-rooted gender stereotypes view daughters as *paraya dhan* (someone else's asset), reinforcing the notion that their primary role is within marriage, not education or employment.

- **Education barriers:** Distance to schools, safety issues, and financial constraints drive school dropout rates—especially among girls—raising their vulnerability. *UNICEF* data confirms that completing secondary schooling significantly reduces early marriage risk.
- **Social stigma and family pressure:** Concerns about girls’ “honour” and fear of elopement often push families into arranging marriages at an early age. Mass “auspicious day” weddings exemplify such pressure.

Ongoing Challenges

- **Weak implementation:** Despite frequent interventions, conviction rates remain extremely low. Judicial delays and case pendency diminish the law’s deterrent value.
- **Family involvement:** Since entire families are frequently complicit, identifying and preventing such marriages becomes complex. Informal betrothals, in particular, help families sidestep legal oversight.
- **Institutional shortcomings:** Lack of adequate shelters, counselling services, and properly trained officers hamstringing rescue and rehabilitation efforts. Many Child Marriage Prohibition Officers manage additional administrative duties, reducing their focus.
- **Gendered health consequences:** Adolescent pregnancies increase risks of anaemia, maternal mortality, and underweight infants. Nutrition and health audits show these areas often overlap with early marriage prevalence.

Way Forward

- **Education-centric approach:** Encouraging girls’ retention in secondary education delays marriages and expands their future choices. Conditional cash transfer schemes linked to

schooling have proven effective in several districts.

- **Economic security initiatives:** Skill training, livelihood support, and *cash-plus* interventions reduce poverty-induced marriage pressures. *Upgraded Anganwadi centres* now integrate life skills and vocational training for adolescents.
- **Community participation:** Sustainable change requires the participation of local panchayats, religious leaders, and youth groups. Declarations of villages as “Child Marriage-Free Zones” have shown encouraging results.
- **Stronger enforcement and monitoring:** Creation of dedicated enforcement units, use of digital reporting platforms, and prompt FIR registration enhance accountability. Newly developed online portals enable real-time alerts and faster administrative action.
- **Integrated adolescent empowerment:** Holistic programs combining education, health, nutrition, and legal awareness—such as *Nari Adalats*—offer both protection and empowerment at the community level.

Conclusion

Child marriage remains not just a **legal offence**, but a **manifestation of poverty, gender discrimination, and systemic neglect**. Legislative reforms alone cannot resolve it; progress depends on expanding educational opportunities, ensuring economic resilience, and transforming community attitudes. Ending this practice is vital to safeguarding children’s rights and breaking the cycle of gendered deprivation across generations.

Q. By addressing the root causes of child marriage and implementing targeted interventions, we can create a future where girls are empowered to reach their full potential, free from the harmful effects of early and forced marriage. Discuss.

Beyond Algorithms: Why Thought Still Defines Being

AI and fast-changing tech are shaking up old ideas about thinking, awareness, and what makes humans special. This brings back big philosophy questions. Yet philosophy seems less common in daily talks, making people worry if we're ready for these changes ethically and mentally.

What This Topic Covers

Tech and philosophy team up to study how machines, tools, and AI change our values, knowledge, ethics, and who we are. Tech gives us more power, but philosophy asks: What's the point? What's right? Where do we draw lines?

Why Thinking Makes Us Human

- **Descartes' big idea:** "I think, therefore I am" says clear, self-aware thinking proves we exist—more reliable than what we see or feel.
- **Thoughts have purpose:** Human minds aim at real goals and meanings (called intentionality), which lets us take moral blame or credit. AI just crunches numbers without true "aboutness."
- **We check ourselves:** Humans can think about our own thoughts, judge if they're good or bad—this self-review is key for ethics, missing in machines.
- **Right vs. wrong thinking:** People ask "What should happen?" based on morals. AI only finds the best way to do a job, not if the job is good.
- **What makes a person?:** Thinkers like Kant say it's freedom and inner worth, not just smart computing—humans stand apart from AI.

Why Philosophy Feels Less Important Now

- **Missing real-life wisdom:** We praise tech skills over smart, experience-based choices (phronesis) for tough ethical spots.
- **Schools focus on jobs:** Money-driven learning skips deep thinking, calling philosophy "useless" even though it builds better citizens.
- **Ethics talks break down:** No shared big ideas lead to "anything goes" views and angry fights without real solutions.

- **Tech experts run everything:** Leaders use data and efficiency, skipping talks on fairness, rights, and long-term harm.
- **Ideas turn rigid:** Without questioning everything, strict beliefs take over, making morals simple "good guy vs. bad guy."

Wrong Ideas About Philosophy Dying

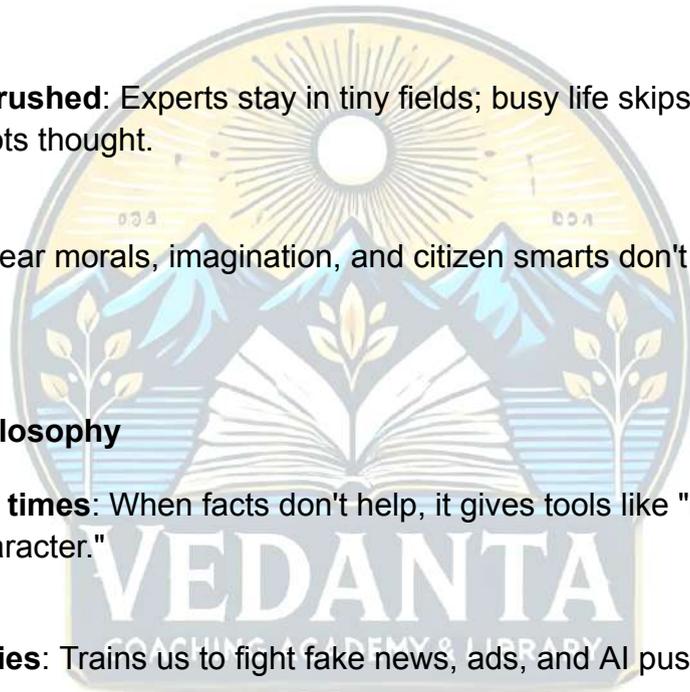
- **Science doesn't cover values:** It shows how stuff works, but not why it's good, meaningful, or our duty—that's philosophy's job.
- **Fake deep thinking:** Hard beliefs act like philosophy but skip real doubt, openness, and "maybe I'm wrong."
- **Too narrow, too rushed:** Experts stay in tiny fields; busy life skips slow, connecting-the-dots thought.
- **Can't count it:** Clear morals, imagination, and citizen smarts don't show in charts, so they're ignored.

Why We Can't Skip Philosophy

- **Choices in fuzzy times:** When facts don't help, it gives tools like "best results," "duty first," or "build good character."
- **Spot tricks and lies:** Trains us to fight fake news, ads, and AI pushes with sharp thinking.
- **Base of fairness:** Ideas like respect, equal worth, and rights start here—they hold up laws and governments.
- **Life's deeper point:** Asks what makes life worth living, beyond fast work or big money.

How Tech Brings Philosophy Back

- **Who blames the robot?:** Self-driving cars or AI choices need deep talks on fault and intent, not just fixes.



- **Fair AI power?:** Hidden biases, spying, and unfairness call for checks on right, agreement, and sharing benefits.
- **Words and truth under attack:** Fake news bubbles restart old worries about what words really mean and how we know truth.
- **What humans offer now:** Machines beat us at jobs, but our heart, new ideas, and morals can't be copied.

Q. The gravest ethical failures occur when public trust is converted into private opportunity. Discuss the ethical meaning of public trust. Explain why its breach results in disproportionate social harm.

State of Marginal Farmers in India 2025

Relevance: GS Paper III (Agriculture & Economy); GS Paper II (Governance); GS Paper I (Society)

1. Introduction and Report Context

On **Kisan Diwas (December 23, 2025)**, the Forum of Enterprises for Equitable Development (**FEED**) released a pivotal empirical study titled "*State of Marginal Farmers in India 2025.*" The report scrutinizes the effectiveness of **Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS)** and other cooperatives in supporting farmers with landholdings of less than **1 hectare**.

2. Core Findings: The "Crisis of Exclusion"

The report highlights a significant disconnect between the demographic weight of marginal farmers and their institutional representation.

- **Low Cooperative Penetration:** Although marginal farmers account for **60–70%** of India's total agricultural households, **less than 25%** are active members of cooperatives. This indicates a "structural exclusion" from the formal credit and resource ecosystem.

- **Geographic Imbalances:** States like **Bihar, Tripura, and Himachal Pradesh** show the weakest participation rates, pointing toward localized failures in state capacity and institutional outreach.

3. Barriers to Institutional Access

The report identifies four primary "bottlenecks" preventing marginal farmers from joining cooperatives:

1. **Administrative Hurdles:** Overly complex registration and membership protocols.
2. **Infrastructure Gaps:** Physical distance to PACS centers makes regular interaction difficult.
3. **Capital Deficiency:** Inadequate capitalization of local societies limits their lending capacity.
4. **Social Bias:** Persistent exclusion based on **caste and gender** continues to steer marginalized groups toward high-interest informal moneylenders.

4. The Digital and Leadership Divide

- **Technological Lag:** Digital transformation is highly uneven. For example, **77.8%** of cooperatives in Tripura and **25%** in Bihar report zero usage of digital tools. This "digital divide" disproportionately affects elderly and women farmers who lack specific technical training.
- **The "Glass Ceiling" in Cooperatives:** There is a stark contrast between membership and power. While over **21 lakh women** are enrolled as members, only **3,355** hold directorial positions globally. This suggests that female inclusion is largely symbolic and lacks substantive decision-making authority.

5. The "Inclusion Dividend" (Positive Outcomes)

Where institutional access is provided, the results are transformative:

- **Income Gains:** 45% of marginal farmers linked to cooperatives reported a tangible increase in earnings.

- **Stability:** Nearly 49% experienced enhanced livelihood security, proving that cooperatives are a vital tool for rural resilience.
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HPAS Syllabus Linkage & Strategy

- **GS-I (Society):** Use the data on gender leadership and caste exclusion to answer questions on "Social Empowerment" and "Rural Institutions."
- **GS-II (Governance):** Use the PACS digitization data to discuss "E-governance" and "Decentralized Planning."
- **GS-III (Economy/Agri):** This serves as a primary case study for "Institutional Credit" and "Doubling Farmers' Income."

The Communist Party of India (CPI)

Centenary of the Communist Party of India (1925–2025)

Relevance: GS Paper I (Modern Indian History — Political Ideologies); GS Paper II (Political Parties)

1. Historical Context and Genesis

The year 2025 marks the **centenary (100 years)** of the CPI, representing a century of organized Marxist-Leninist politics in the Indian subcontinent.

- **Foundation:** The party was officially established on **December 26, 1925**, during a national conference of communist groups held in **Kanpur**.
- **The Tashkent Debate:** Historians often note that an "émigré" version of the party was previously formed in **Tashkent in 1920** by M.N. Roy and others, though the 1925 Kanpur meet is considered the formal start of its domestic organizational structure.
- **Ideological Core:** Rooted in Marxism, the party focuses on the rights of the proletariat (laborers), the peasantry, and socially marginalized sections.

2. Foundational Objectives

- **Anti-Imperialism:** The primary pre-1947 goal was the total liberation of India from British colonial rule.

- **Economic Socialization:** Advocating for state/social ownership of the means of production to end capitalist exploitation.
- **Social Equality:** The creation of a classless, egalitarian society through the abolition of social hierarchies.

3. Evolutionary Phases of the Movement

- **1920s–1930s (Resistance & Repression):** Heavily inspired by the **1917 Russian Revolution**. The British administration attempted to stifle the movement through the **Kanpur (1924)** and **Meerut (1929) Conspiracy Cases**.
- **1930s–1940s (Mass Mobilization):** Transitioned into trade unionism and agrarian radicalism. Played a pivotal role in the **Tebhaga Movement** (Bengal) and the **Telangana Armed Struggle**.
- **Post-Independence (Parliamentary Transition):** Adopted the path of electoral politics. It achieved a historic milestone in 1957 by forming the first democratically elected Communist government in **Kerala**.
- **The 1964 Schism:** Internal friction regarding the Sino-Soviet split and the strategy toward the Indian National Congress led to a major split, resulting in the creation of the **CPI (Marxist)**.

4. Intellectual and Political Pillars (Key Leaders)

- **M.N. Roy:** A global figure in the Comintern; founded the Tashkent group.
- **S.A. Dange:** A founding pillar of the Kanpur conference and a pioneer of the Indian trade union movement.
- **Muzaffar Ahmad:** Known as 'Kaka Babu,' he was instrumental in rooting the movement in Bengal.
- **P.C. Joshi:** As General Secretary, he promoted the "United Front" strategy during the anti-colonial struggle.
- **E.M.S. Namboodiripad:** The first non-Congress Chief Minister (Kerala) and a significant Marxist theoretician.

5. Distinctive Features of the CPI

1. **Dual Strategy:** Operates through a mix of legislative participation (Parliament/Assemblies) and grassroots movements (strikes/protests).
 2. **Institutional Wings:** Maintains strong ties with the **All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC)** and various Kisan Sabhas (peasant fronts).
 3. **Indigenization:** While inspired by internationalism, the party adapted Marxist theory to the specific socio-cultural conditions of India (e.g., addressing the caste-class nexus).
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HPAS Exam Insight

- **For Prelims:** Focus on the years (1920 vs 1925), the locations (Kanpur/Meerut), and the specific conspiracy cases.
- **For Mains:** The role of the CPI in the **Freedom Struggle** and its contribution to **Land Reforms** in post-independence India (specifically in Kerala and West Bengal) are high-yield topics.

Mechanized Track Renewal — Plasser's Quick Relaying System (PQRS)

Relevance: GS Paper III (Science & Technology; Infrastructure Development)

1. Context

The **Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR)** recently achieved a milestone by renewing **1,033 track meters** in a single day using the PQRS technology. This highlights the shift from manual labor to high-speed mechanization in Indian Railways.

2. Overview of PQRS

PQRS is a **semi-automated track laying technology** designed for the rapid replacement of aged railway tracks. It allows for the simultaneous removal of old track sections and the installation of pre-assembled new panels.

- **Origin:** Engineered by **Plasser & Theurer** (Austria), a global pioneer in railway infrastructure machinery.
- **Core Objective:** To maximize track renewal output within limited "traffic blocks" (the time intervals when trains are halted for maintenance), thereby ensuring minimal disruption to passenger and freight schedules.

3. Operational Mechanism

The system operates through a specialized sequence involving portal cranes and auxiliary infrastructure:

1. **Auxiliary Rails:** The system runs on a temporary **auxiliary track** (gauge width of **3,400 mm**) laid outside the standard rails.
2. **Portal Cranes:** Self-propelled cranes traverse this auxiliary track to lift old "panels" (the combined unit of rails and sleepers).
3. **Track Laying Equipment (TLE):** These cranes then precisely position new, prefabricated panels on the prepared ballast bed.
4. **Logistics Efficiency:** The system uses **Bogie Flat Wagons (BFRs)** to stack and transport old panels away immediately, reducing secondary handling and site clutter.

4. Technical Specifications and Features

- **Enhanced Load Capacity:** Modern iterations (like the **PQRS-201**) can lift up to **9 tonnes**, facilitating the installation of heavy 13-meter Pre-stressed Concrete (PRC) sleeper panels.
- **Precision Gripping:** Equipped with specialized rail clamps and sleeper grippers to ensure stable handling of the heavy infrastructure.
- **Turntable Functionality:** A built-in turntable allows the cranes to be rotated and loaded onto flat wagons even in restricted mid-section areas.
- **Modular Architecture:** The compact design ensures the machinery can be deployed easily across diverse terrains, including hilly or narrow stretches.

5. Significance for Indian Infrastructure

- **Structural Integrity:** Mechanization ensures **uniform track geometry**, which is critical for the safety of high-speed trains like the Vande Bharat Express.
- **Resource Optimization:** Significant reduction in manual intervention leads to lower long-term maintenance costs and minimizes human error in track alignment.
- **Operational Resilience:** By enabling longer renewals in shorter timeframes, the system boosts the overall carrying capacity of the railway network.

HPAS Exam Note

In questions regarding "**Modernization of Indian Railways**" or "**Role of Technology in Infrastructure**," use PQRS as a specific case study to demonstrate how India is adopting global engineering standards to improve safety and efficiency.

Maritime Environmental Security — RPREX-2025

Relevance: GS Paper III (Disaster Management; Environment); GS Paper II (Role of Constitutional/Non-Constitutional Bodies — ICG)

1. Context

The **Indian Coast Guard (ICG)**, in collaboration with **ONGC**, recently executed **RPREX-2025** off the Mumbai coast. This exercise is a strategic drill designed to evaluate India's readiness to combat large-scale marine oil pollution.

2. Overview of RPREX-2025

RPREX is a comprehensive maritime simulation aimed at validating the **National Oil Spill Disaster Contingency Plan (NOSDCP)**. It ensures that various stakeholders can act in unison during an ecological emergency.

- **Primary Coordinator:** Indian Coast Guard (the designated National Authority for oil spill response in Indian waters).

- **Key Partners:** ONGC, Port Authorities, State Agencies, and Coastal Police.

3. Exercise Architecture

The drill was conducted in a structured **two-phase format** to cover both theoretical and operational aspects:

- **Phase I (Planning & Strategy):** Involved tabletop exercises, technical briefings, and multi-agency coordination conferences to establish a command structure.
- **Phase II (Operational Execution):** A live-sea exercise simulating a collision between a tanker and a fishing vessel. This phase tested the physical deployment of resources in the Arabian Sea.

4. Technical and Operational Components

- **Deployment of Specialized Assets:** The exercise utilized **Pollution Control Vessels (PCVs)** equipped with advanced technological tools such as:
 - **Oil Skimmers:** To mechanically remove oil from the water surface.
 - **Containment Booms:** Floating barriers used to prevent the spread of oil.
 - **Dispersants:** Chemical agents used to break down oil slicks.
- **Sea-to-Shore Integration:** A critical component was testing the protection of sensitive "Tier-1" areas, including **mangroves**, estuaries, and fishing harbors.

5. Strategic Significance

1. **Ecological Safeguarding:** Critical for protecting the fragile marine biodiversity of the Konkan coast and preventing irreversible damage to mangrove ecosystems.
2. **Economic Security:** By preventing oil from entering ports and fishing zones, the exercise ensures the continuity of maritime trade and protects the livelihoods of coastal communities.
3. **Inter-Agency Synergy:** Validates the communication protocols between the ICG, oil companies, and state administration, reducing the "response lag" during actual disasters.
4. **Global Alignment:** Strengthens India's commitment to international maritime conventions regarding marine pollution (such as MARPOL).

HPAS Exam Insight

When writing about **Disaster Management** in Himachal Pradesh, we focus on landslides and floods; however, for the **General Studies** section on national security, understanding the role of the **Indian Coast Guard** as the "Central Coordinating Authority" for marine pollution is essential.

Drug Standardization & The Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC)

Relevance: GS Paper II (Statutory/Autonomous Bodies); GS Paper III (Science & Tech; Health Infrastructure)

1. Context

The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare recently reviewed the IPC's progress, confirming the upcoming launch of the **10th Edition of the Indian Pharmacopoeia (IP 2026)** in January 2026. This serves as a milestone in India's journey toward pharmaceutical self-reliance.

2. Overview of the IPC

The IPC is an **autonomous institution** under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, tasked with establishing the official quality standards for all drugs manufactured, sold, and consumed in India.

- **Legal Mandate:** It derives its authority from the **Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940**.
- **Operational Status:** Fully government-funded; operational as an autonomous body since January 1, 2009.
- **Headquarters:** Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh.

3. Primary Objectives

- **Standardization:** To define scientifically rigorous benchmarks for drug identity, purity, and potency.
- **Public Health:** To safeguard human and veterinary health by ensuring medication safety.
- **Vision:** To align with the goals of **Atmanirbhar Bharat** (Self-reliance) and **Viksit Bharat** (Developed India) by achieving global parity in pharmaceutical regulations.

4. Core Institutional Functions

The IPC operates through several critical vertical functions:

1. **The Indian Pharmacopoeia (IP):** Regular publication and updating of "monographs" (standard specifications) for Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs), excipients, herbal products, and medical devices.
2. **National Formulary of India (NFI):** Compiling a comprehensive guide for medical practitioners to promote rational and cost-effective prescribing habits.
3. **Pharmacovigilance (PVPI):** Serving as the **National Coordination Centre** for the Pharmacovigilance Programme of India, which tracks and analyzes Adverse Drug Reactions (ADRs).
4. **Reference Standards:** Production and certification of **IP Reference Substances (IPRS)**, which serve as the "fingerprint" or benchmark for laboratory testing of drug quality.

5. **International Collaboration:** Working toward "Global Harmonization" by engaging with international peers like the British (BP), United States (USP), and European (Ph. Eur.) pharmacopoeias.

5. Strategic Significance

- **Quality Assurance:** Guarantees that medicines are efficacious and safe across the entire Indian market.
 - **Global Footprint:** The Indian Pharmacopoeia is officially recognized by **19 countries**, enhancing the export potential and credibility of India's "Pharmacy of the World" status.
 - **Regulatory Leadership:** Strengthens India's position in global pharmaceutical supply chains by setting high-tier regulatory benchmarks.
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HPAS Exam Note

In the **Mains** examination, the IPC can be used as a primary example when discussing "Health Governance" or "Drug Safety Regulations in India." Its role in **Pharmacovigilance** is especially relevant for questions concerning the "Impact of Technology and Monitoring in Public Health."

Geopolitics of West Asia — The Blue Line

Relevance: GS Paper II (International Relations; Important International Institutions — UN)

1. Current Context

Tensions have escalated along the **Blue Line** following an incident where a **UNIFIL** (UN Interim Force in Lebanon) peacekeeper was injured. This highlights the volatile nature of the boundary between Israel and Lebanon and the risks faced by international monitoring missions.

2. Defining the Blue Line

The Blue Line is a **United Nations-demarcated withdrawal line** established to track and verify the exit of Israeli military forces from southern Lebanon.

- **Not a Border:** It is crucial to note that the Blue Line is **not a legally recognized international border**. It serves as a "line of withdrawal" to maintain a cessation of hostilities.
- **Geography:** It stretches approximately **120 kilometers**, starting from the Mediterranean coast and terminating at the tri-border junction near the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.
- **Proximity:** It separates Southern Lebanon from Northern Israel and borders the Golan Heights area.

3. Historical & Legal Genesis

The line has its roots in multiple UN Security Council (UNSC) interventions:

- **Establishment (2000):** Created by the UN to confirm that Israel had complied with **UNSC Resolution 425 (1978)** by withdrawing its forces from Lebanese territory.
- **Reinforcement (2006):** Following the 34-day Israel-Hezbollah war, **UNSC Resolution 1701** reaffirmed the Blue Line as the central reference for peace and security in the region.

4. Structural & Security Features

- **The Litani River Buffer:** Under Resolution 1701, the area between the Blue Line and the **Litani River** is designated to be free of any armed personnel, assets, and weapons, except for those belonging to the **Lebanese Armed Forces** and **UNIFIL**.
- **UNIFIL's Role:** The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) is mandated to monitor the line, report violations, and act as a "buffer" to prevent direct military confrontation.
- **Visual Marking:** In many sections, the line is physically marked by **Blue Barrels** to provide a clear visual indicator for patrols and local populations, reducing accidental crossings.

5. Strategic Significance & Challenges

- **A Persistent Flashpoint:** Due to the absence of a formal peace treaty between Israel and Lebanon, the Blue Line is subject to frequent "encroachment" disputes, cross-border skirmishes, and construction-related tensions.
- **Security Dilemma:** It represents one of the most sensitive frontiers in the Middle East, where local tactical errors can quickly escalate into regional conflicts.

HPAS Exam Insight

In GS-II International Relations, when discussing **UN Peacekeeping Missions**, the Blue Line serves as a prime case study for the "Challenges of Peace Enforcement." Mentioning **Resolution 1701** and the **Litani River** provides the technical depth required for high-scoring answers.



Emerging Health Threats — *Anopheles stephensi* & Malaria Elimination

Relevance: GS Paper III (Science & Technology; Issues relating to Health/Public Health)

1. Context

India's national target to achieve a **Malaria-Free status by 2030** faces a significant hurdle due to the emergence of *Anopheles stephensi*. This invasive mosquito species has been recently identified in major metropolitan areas, including **Delhi**, marking a shift in the epidemiology of the disease.

2. Biological Profile of the Vector

Anopheles stephensi is a highly potent malaria vector capable of transmitting the two most dangerous human malaria parasites: *Plasmodium falciparum* and *Plasmodium vivax*.

- **Geographic Origin:** Originally native to the **Arabian Peninsula and South Asia**, it has recently exhibited "transcontinental spread," notably invading several African nations.
- **Invasive Nature:** Unlike traditional malaria-carrying mosquitoes that prefer rural, swampy habitats, this species is highly **invasive and urban-centric**.

3. Unique Habitat and Adaptive Traits

The primary challenge with *An. stephensi* lies in its specialized adaptation to modern human environments:

- **Artificial Breeding Sites:** It thrives in man-made water storage units, such as **overhead tanks, construction site sumps, discarded tires, and decorative fountains.**
- **"Dengue-like" Behavior:** Its breeding habits closely mimic those of the *Aedes aegypti* (Dengue vector), making it difficult to isolate malaria control from other urban vector-borne disease programs.
- **Urban Resilience:** It can survive in high-density metropolitan settings where traditional rural vectors (like *Anopheles culicifacies*) typically cannot persist.

4. Strategic Implications for India

The spread of this vector has profound consequences for India's healthcare policy:

1. **Threat to 2030 Goals:** It threatens the intermediate goal of achieving **zero indigenous cases by 2027.**
2. **The "Urban Shift":** Historically, malaria in India was a rural and tribal concern. *An. stephensi* is causing a **resurgence of urban malaria**, requiring a complete overhaul of metropolitan sanitation and surveillance.
3. **Complexity in Vector Control:** Since the mosquito breeds indoors and in closed containers, traditional "outdoor fogging" is less effective, requiring door-to-door inspections and community-level water management.

5. Proposed Mitigation Strategies

- **Integrated Vector Management (IVM):** Harmonizing malaria and dengue control efforts since both vectors share urban breeding grounds.
- **Urban Planning:** Stricter enforcement of anti-larval measures at construction sites and improved piped water supply to reduce the need for domestic water storage.
- **Genomic Surveillance:** Tracking the spread of the vector and monitoring for insecticide resistance.

HPAS Exam Note

In the **Mains** examination, when discussing "Challenges to Public Health in India," use *Anopheles stephensi* as a specific example of how **urbanization and climate change** are altering disease patterns. Contrast its behavior with traditional vectors to demonstrate a deeper understanding of "Invasive Species."

Somaliland (2025 Updates)

Relevance: GS Paper II (International Relations; Effect of Policies of Developed Countries)

1. Context (The "Israel Factor")

On **December 26, 2025**, Israel made history by becoming the first United Nations member state to formally recognize **Somaliland** as an independent sovereign state. This landmark move, signed by PM Benjamin Netanyahu and Somaliland President **Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi**, has shifted the geopolitical landscape of the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea corridor.

2. Geographical and Political Overview

Somaliland is a self-declared republic located in the **Horn of Africa**, functioning as a *de facto* independent state since 1991, though it was largely unrecognised until now.

- **Strategic Location:** Situated on the southern coast of the **Gulf of Aden**, near the critical **Bab al-Mandab** maritime choke point.
- **Capital:** Hargeisa.
- **Borders:**
 - * **North:** Gulf of Aden (maritime).
 - **West:** Djibouti.
 - **South & Southwest:** Ethiopia.
 - **East:** Somalia (specifically the Puntland region).
- **Territory:** Largely corresponds to the borders of the former **British Somaliland Protectorate**.

3. Historical Evolution

- **Colonial Era (1888–1960):** Governed as **British Somaliland**. It gained independence on June 26, 1960, and was recognized by 35 countries (including Israel) for five days.
- **The Union (1960–1991):** Voluntarily merged with the former *Italian Somaliland* to form the **Somali Republic**. However, the union was fraught with inequality and political marginalization of the north.
- **Secession (1991):** Following a brutal civil war and the collapse of the Siad Barre regime in Mogadishu, Somaliland unilaterally revoked the 1960 union and declared independence.
- **Referendum (2001):** A popular vote saw **97% support** for a separate constitution and independence.

4. Contemporary Status and Stability

Somaliland is often cited as a "Beacon of Stability" in a volatile region:

- **Institutional Maturity:** It maintains its own democratically elected government, a professional military, its own currency (Somaliland Shilling), and its own passports.
- **Contrast with Somalia:** While Somalia has struggled with prolonged instability and the Al-Shabaab insurgency, Somaliland has managed peaceful democratic transitions.

- **Current Leadership:** Led by President **Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi** (elected/taking office in late 2024/2025).

5. International Reaction to Recognition

The 2025 recognition by Israel has created a polarized global response:

- **Opposition:** **Somalia** views the move as an "attack on its sovereignty." The **African Union (AU)** and the **Arab League** have rejected the recognition, citing the principle of the "intangibility of colonial borders."
- **Strategic Interests:** Israel's recognition is seen as part of the **Abraham Accords** spirit, aimed at securing strategic depth in the Red Sea to counter Houthi threats and monitoring Chinese influence in the Horn of Africa.
- **Regional Dynamics:** Ethiopia (which signed a port deal with Somaliland in 2024) and the UAE maintain strong informal ties, while Egypt and Turkey have condemned the unilateral recognition.

HPAS Exam Insight

- **For Prelims:** Remember the specific year of secession (**1991**) and the neighboring countries. Note that **Israel is the first UN member** to grant formal recognition.
- **For Mains:** This is a classic case of "**Self-Determination vs. Territorial Integrity.**" Use Somaliland to discuss the challenges of statehood in Africa and how maritime security (Red Sea) dictates the foreign policy of Middle Eastern powers like Israel.

