

Topics of Discussion:

Goa nightclub fire: Owners escape to Thailand, CBI to seek Interpol notice

To fulfil STEM potential, India must cast the net wider, go to the roots

USA may impose Anti Dumping on India

In power sector, more players is the answer, not bailouts

Lessons from Beijing in clearing Delhi's air pollution

As Thailand strikes Cambodia, recalling the conflict's colonial roots

Goa nightclub fire: Owners escape to Thailand, CBI to seek Interpol notice

Syllabus:

Preliminary Examination: Current events of national and international importance

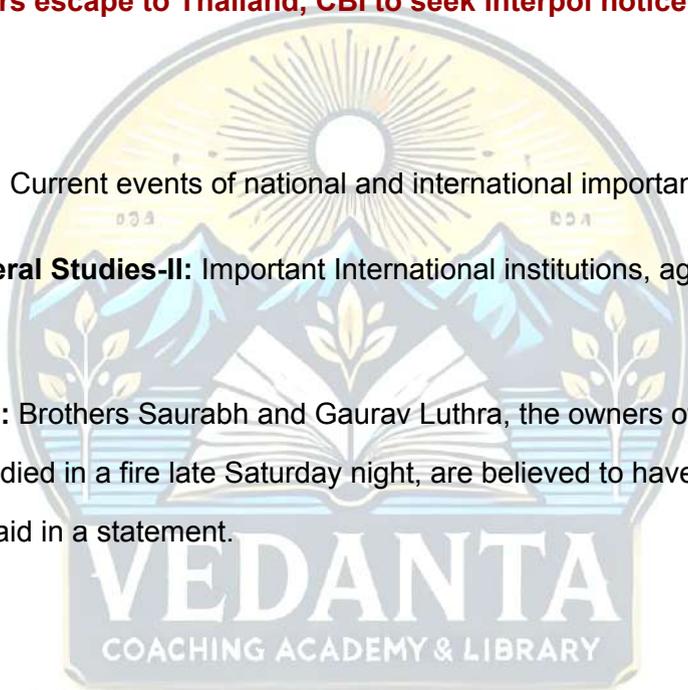
Mains Examination: General Studies-II: Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.

What's the ongoing story: Brothers Saurabh and Gaurav Luthra, the owners of Birch by Romeo Lane, the Goa club where 25 people died in a fire late Saturday night, are believed to have left the country for Thailand, the Goa Police said in a statement.

Key Points to Ponder:

- What is a lookout circular (LOC)?
- What is the reason for the fire tragedy in Goa nightclub?
- What are the fire safety guidelines?
- What is the Blue Corner Notice?
- What is an extradition treaty?
- What are the different types of notices issued by the Interpol?

Key Takeaways:



— “By the evening of December 7 (Sunday), a lookout circular (LOC) was issued against them by the Bureau of Immigration at the request of the Goa Police,” the statement said.

— A senior police officer said the brothers were in [Delhi](#) when the incident happened on Saturday midnight. “When the Bureau of Immigration at [Mumbai](#) was contacted, it was found that both the accused had taken a flight to Phuket at 5.30 am on December 7, that is hours after the incident,” an officer said,

— According to sources, the CBI is likely to request the Interpol to issue a Blue Corner Notice against the brothers. The Blue Notice is issued to collect additional information about a person’s identity, location or activities in relation to a criminal investigation.

— India and Thailand have an extradition treaty, operational since 2015.

Do You Know:

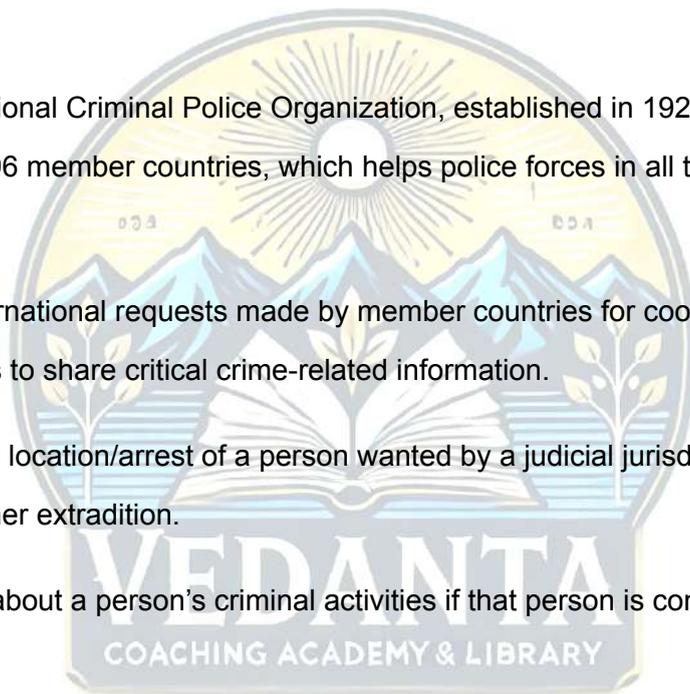
— The Interpol, or International Criminal Police Organization, established in 1923, is an inter-governmental organisation comprising 196 member countries, which helps police forces in all these countries to better coordinate their actions.

— Interpol notices are international requests made by member countries for cooperation or alerts allowing police in member countries to share critical crime-related information.

— Red Notice: To seek the location/arrest of a person wanted by a judicial jurisdiction or an international tribunal with a view to his/her extradition.

— Green Notice: To warn about a person’s criminal activities if that person is considered to be a possible threat to public safety.

— Blue Notice: To locate, identify or obtain information on a person of interest in a criminal investigation.



UPSC Prelims Practise Question Covering similar theme:

(1) [Consider the following statements:](#)

1. Fire service is a state subject included as a Municipal function in the XII Schedule.
2. The Fifteenth Finance Commission has recommended a provision of Rs.5000 crore for strengthening the fire services at a state level.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2



Silver Notice

—INTERPOL Silver Notice was launched in 2023 as part of a pilot phase, running until 2025, following consultations during the 2022 United Nations (UN) General Assembly.

—The initiative involves 52 countries, including India.

—It is aimed at identifying and recovering criminal assets linked to illegal activities and trace laundered assets such as properties, vehicles, financial accounts, and businesses.

—It enables member countries to request information about assets connected to criminal activities like fraud, corruption, drug trafficking, and environmental crimes.

To fulfil STEM potential, India must cast the net wider, go to the roots

Syllabus:

Preliminary Examination: Current events of national and international importance

Mains Examination: General Studies-II: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation

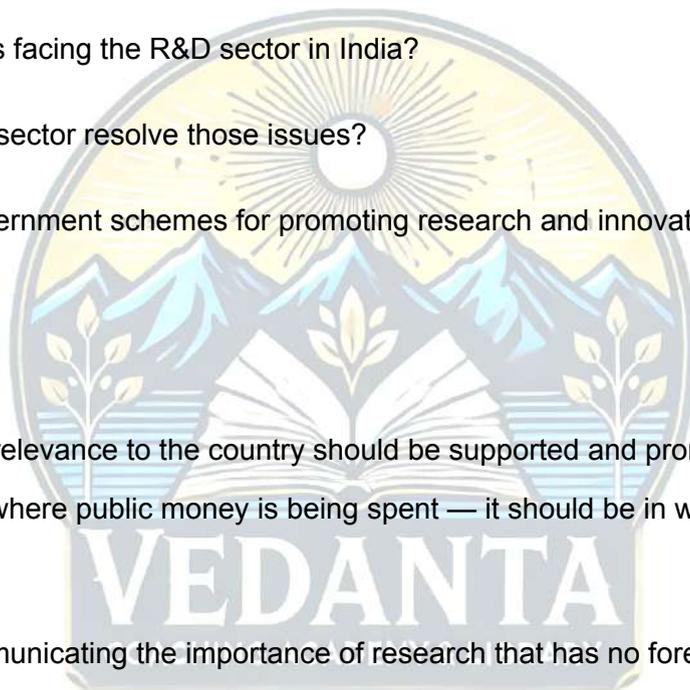
What's the ongoing story: Gautam I Menon writes: A recent news report says that the government has asked ministries and departments to re-examine how guides for doctoral degrees are selected. According to it, the government intends for research to be largely confined to “topics that fit emerging needs and priorities of the country”, believing that PhD programmes should be “reoriented to promote innovation and development of new relevant ideas and technologies”.

Key Points to Ponder:

- What are the challenges facing higher education in India?
- What are the initiatives taken by the government to promote research and innovation in STEM?
- Highlight the importance of a balanced ecosystem of both STEM and non-STEM disciplines.
- What are the challenges facing the R&D sector in India?
- How can the education sector resolve those issues?
- What are the major government schemes for promoting research and innovation in Higher Education (STEM and non-STEM)?

Key Takeaways:

- That research of direct relevance to the country should be supported and promoted is inarguable. It is a good starting point to ask where public money is being spent — it should be in ways that can be explained to the public.
- This also includes communicating the importance of research that has no foreseeable application. This is as true for STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) subjects as for non-STEM ones
- The obvious areas of immediate relevance to India include renewable energy, battery technology, sustainable agriculture, and health technologies. These areas tend to be well-supported anyway, though mainly through a variety of national missions spread across several ministries and government departments.
- In science, developments in applied areas typically lag basic research, sometimes by decades. This year's Nobel Prize in Physics is a good example. An experiment, done in the 1980s, that demonstrated that quantum mechanics could manifest at a scale much larger than that of single atoms, is of relevance to quantum computers, an application that wasn't even referred to in the original papers.



— Here's one such problem: Pick any government-funded student, one who receives a fellowship directly. Fellowships awarded by agencies such as the DST and the UGC are examples. The likelihood is that they receive their scholarships only at intermittent intervals, often separated by months.

— Some years ago, an innovative idea was implemented, that of transferring fellowship amounts directly to the bank accounts of PhD students. This eliminated a specific corrupt practice, whereby some institutions would siphon off a cut from the PhD scholar's stipend before paying them.

— A large number of university-funded PhD students in India, the non-NET students, receive a stipend of Rs 8,000 per month, which is below the minimum wage. This amount has remained unchanged since 2012.

— Here's another problem: Industry-funded PhDs are few and far between. They are absent altogether outside a few IITs and similar institutions. This is for several reasons, among them a historical disconnect between industry and academia and the feeling that Indian academia cannot deliver on its promises in a timely manner.

— But there's no greater demotivator than not being paid — or being paid very poorly — for one's work. Ensuring the timely disbursement of salaries and fellowships that come from the government is a basic hygiene factor that Indian higher education needs to address.

Do You Know:

— India's gross expenditure on R&D hovers around 0.60.7 per cent of GDP as of 2020-21 — far below the United States (~3.4 per cent), China (~2.6 per cent) and Israel (6 per cent). AISHE recorded roughly 2.12 lakh PhD registrations in 2021–22, yet converting that pipeline into stable careers is far from guaranteed. As of early 2024, 1.33 million Indian students were studying abroad, with 7,60,000 migrating in 2024 alone.

— The example of China's Thousand Talents programme is instructive. Launched in 2008 as part of a broader push to transform China into a knowledge-driven economy, it was accompanied by a systemic overhaul of universities, creating cutting-edge facilities that supported both returning scholars and domestic talent.

— The result is evident: China now has five universities in the QS World University Rankings' top 100, and 72 overall, ranking third globally, after the US and the UK. In contrast, India, though at number four globally with 54 institutions on the list, is yet to break into the top 100. IIT [Delhi](#), at 123, is the country's highest-ranked institution.

Previous year UPSC Prelims Question Covering similar theme:

(2) Which of the following statements is/are correct regarding National Innovation Foundation-India (NIF)?
(UPSC CSE 2015)

1. NIF is an autonomous body of the Department of Science and Technology under the Central Government.

2. NIF is an initiative to strengthen the highly advanced scientific research in India's premier scientific institutions in collaboration with highly advanced foreign scientific institutions. Select the correct answer using the code given below:

(a) 1 only

(b) 2 only

(c) Both 1 and 2

(d) Neither 1 nor 2

Previous year UPSC Mains Question Covering similar theme:

Scientific research in Indian universities is declining, because a career in science is not as attractive as are business professions, engineering or administration, and the universities are becoming consumer-oriented. Critically comment. (UPSC CSE 2014)

USA may impose Anti Dumping on India

Context: The United States is contemplating new tariffs on Indian rice after American farmers complained that India has been selling subsidised rice at unfairly low prices, leading to a drop in U.S. market prices.

1. Definition of Dumping

- Dumping refers to a situation where a company exports goods at a price lower than its domestic market price or even below production cost.
- It is a form of international price discrimination aimed at capturing foreign market share.
- Such practices are feasible when trade barriers or high transport costs prevent goods from being re-imported into the exporter's home market.

2. Criteria for Identifying Dumping

A product is treated as *dumped* if:

1. The export price is lower than its home market price; or
2. If the domestic price is unavailable, comparison is made with:
 - The price of the same product in a third-country market, or
 - The average cost of production for the exporter.

Once this underpricing is proven, the importing nation may initiate an anti-dumping investigation.

3. Impact of Dumping

- Adverse effects:
 - Local producers lose competitiveness and market share.
 - Reduced profits can lead to job losses and industry slowdown.
 - Over time, domestic industries become less resilient.
- Short-term benefits:
 - Consumers gain from cheaper imports.
- Market consequences:
 - Artificially low prices—often the result of subsidies—distort competition and deepen trade conflicts.

4. WTO Provisions on Dumping

- The World Trade Organization (WTO) does not ban dumping outright, but allows countries to impose measures if it is proven that:
 1. Dumping exists,
 2. Domestic industries have suffered material damage, and
 3. The injury is directly linked to dumping.
- Member nations may levy anti-dumping duties equivalent to the dumping margin (the difference between normal value and export price).
- All related investigations and enforcement fall under the WTO Agreement on Anti-Dumping.

5. Methods to Counter Dumping

- Anti-dumping duty: Extra tariff matching the price gap (example: proposed by the U.S. on Indian rice).

- Countervailing duty: Imposed to cancel out unfair foreign subsidies.
- Import quota: Restricts inflow of low-priced goods to protect local markets.
- Price undertaking: The exporter voluntarily raises export prices to avoid penalties.
- Domestic strengthening: Governments may boost industrial capacity through innovation, modernization, and diversification.

In power sector, more players is the answer, not bailouts

Syllabus:

Preliminary Examination: Current events of national and international importance

Mains Examination: General Studies-II: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation

General Studies-III: Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc

What's the ongoing story: Ishan Bakshi writes: There are certain realities that perhaps need to be accepted. For instance, populist policies such as free electricity are unlikely to disappear from the political landscape. In fact, it is increasingly likely that more political parties and states will embrace these giveaways.

Key Points to Ponder:

- What are the challenges of power distribution companies?
- What are the initiatives implemented to address those challenges?
- Know about Aggregate Technical and Commercial (AT&C) Losses
- What is the EU's Carbon tax?
- What are the major government schemes related to the power sector?
- How does the free electricity subsidy impact the power sector?

Key Takeaways:

- There is also the inevitability of another bailout of power distribution companies. One can call it restructuring, but with total discom debt exceeding Rs 7.5 lakh crore, the question is when, not if.

— It is also almost certain that discoms will face an even more challenging future. Their better-paying commercial and industrial customers – these units pay up to twice what domestic users are charged, while agricultural consumers are charged next to nothing – are already exiting the system, even if only partially.

— In 2022-23, 30 per cent of all industrial demand was met by captive units, with a growing share from renewables. Considering the cost advantage of renewables plus storage, by the end of this decade, this number is likely to be considerably higher.

— This also means that discoms will have fewer high-tariff paying customers to subsidise agriculture and lower income households, which will only aggravate their already precarious financial position, leaving MSMEs and the relatively more affluent households to bear the brunt of the state's redistributive impulses.

— Over the past two-and-a-half decades, there have been multiple bailouts, restructuring and turnaround schemes for discoms. Carrots have been tried, and some sticks too. But, the end result has been the same. Another scheme, another bailout, is unlikely to bring about any meaningful change.

— Arguably, the only way out of this quagmire is to open up the sector – usher in competition. Bring more players in distribution. It will help weed out inefficiencies in the system – in billing, collection, labour costs, for instance.

— State governments, however, also face the demand for cheaper power from industry. Average commercial and industry tariffs, which can be up to 40 per cent higher than the cost of supply, are higher when compared to some of India's competitors.

— As higher energy tariffs hurt competitiveness and act as deterrents for fresh investment, industry will flock to areas where costs are lower. Especially when cost-effective alternatives are available. Moreover, the imposition of carbon taxes – for instance, the EU's CBAM – will only accelerate the industry's push to clean energy.

— Managing this balance – providing free/subsidised power for agriculture and households while supplying cheap power for industry – is a difficult proposition. No wonder in some states the same minister holds both the power and industry portfolios.

— This is why, if there is one hill to die on, it is to usher in competition. The proposed amendments to the Electricity Act allow for multiple licensees/suppliers to operate in the same geographical area using their own or existing/shared infrastructure, in effect, laying the foundations of a competitive retail electricity market.

— Separating content (electricity) from carriage (wire) holds the key. Another bailout will not change anything. It's the rules of the game that need to be changed.

Do You Know:

— The travails of the electricity sector are well known: Loss-making discoms, perennial inefficiency, compromised state finances and bailouts ad nauseam.

— In a forthcoming Madras Institute for Development Studies (MIDS) research paper, we (Abhishek Anand, Praveen Ravi, Navneeraj Sharma, and Arvind Subramanian) elaborate on some principles that need to characterise electricity pricing: Radical simplicity of electricity tariffs, which should vary only for technical and not for policy reasons; no user of electricity should pay for inefficiencies of supply; all users except the really poor should pay for efficient costs of supply; and no user should pay for more than efficient costs.

Previous year UPSC Prelims Question Covering similar theme:

- (3) Which one of the following is a purpose of 'UDAY', a scheme of the Government? (UPSC CSE 2016)
- (a) Providing technical and financial assistance to start-up entrepreneurs in the field of renewable sources of energy
 - (b) Providing electricity to every household in the country by 2018
 - (c) Replacing the coal-based power plants with natural gas, nuclear, solar, wind and tidal power plants over a period of time
 - (d) Providing for financial turnaround and revival of power distribution companies

Lessons from Beijing in clearing Delhi's air pollution

Syllabus:

Preliminary Examination: General issues on Environmental ecology, Biodiversity and Climate Change – that do not require subject specialization.

Mains Examination: General Studies-III: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

What's the ongoing story: As the government looks to tackle the stubborn smog choking the national capital region (NCR), flagging vehicular pollution and calling for a shift to electric vehicles (EVs), China's action plan for curbing air pollution in its capital city offers some actionable cues.

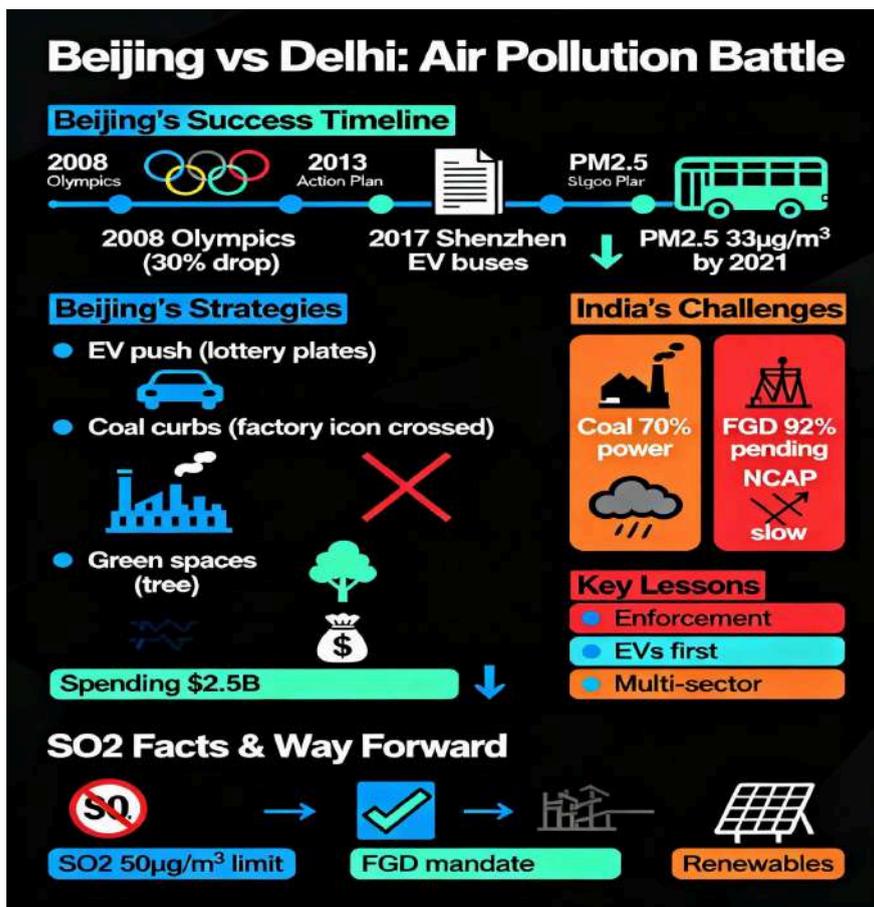
Key Points to Ponder:

- What are the reasons for air pollution in India?
- How is Air pollution measured?
- What are the constituents of air pollution?
- What are the steps taken by the government to curb air pollution?
- What are the various particulate matter and how do they impact human health?
- What are the long term plans for reducing air pollution in India?
- Is air pollution in India a local problem?
- What are flue gas desulphurisation or FGD systems?

Key Takeaways:

- Beijing's transformation — from one of the world's most polluted cities to among the ones with the cleanest air — was built on a strong policy framework accompanied by a blueprint fostering cooperation across sectors.
- The Beijing municipal government started by launching a set of urgent measures to tackle air pollution in the months ahead of the 2008 Olympics. It also progressively began publishing weekly air quality reports and a set of measures to comprehensively track air pollution at the source...
- Importantly, China continued to double down on these initiatives to curb pollution even after the Games. In September 2013, Beijing announced a five-year action plan that acknowledged the Chinese capital's air pollution had turned "severe" — an important first step.
- The plan for a national fightback set specific targets, strict emissions standards and tight enforcement and its early focus was on the country's transport sector.
- Beijing started off China's embrace of electric vehicles, especially public transport, with other Chinese cities forced to follow the capital's example. Shenzhen became the first city in the world to electrify all of its 16,000 public buses in 2017. Shanghai and Hangzhou followed the same trajectory.
- For passenger vehicles, Beijing's authorities instituted a city-wide lottery on licence plates for anyone wanting to purchase a new internal combustion engine car. Those buying an electric car were able to get a

plate more easily, providing a clear incentive. The plan required old cars to be scrapped and increased the frequency of inspections for those that were still on the road.



— Beyond the transport sector, the Chinese plan focused on limiting the use of coal-fired boilers and restructuring industry to reduce emissions through a set of clear incentives and disincentives. It aimed to prevent dust pollution by revamping run-down urban ecosystems in and around Beijing, while increasing the amount of green spaces within the city.

— This all came at a cost. Beijing's spending to fight air pollution surged from just over \$450 million in 2013 to more than \$2.5 billion in 2017, according to the United Nations Environment Programme.

— China's reliance on coal in electricity generation and industrial production has decreased, while the use of renewable energy has increased, Lee told The [Indian Express](#) in an interview earlier this year. Pollution standards for many industries have been strengthened and heavy industries are generally encouraged to relocate outside the capital.

— In India, it's the opposite. As [Delhi's](#) air quality deteriorates, many thermal power plants in its 300 km radius continue to operate without flue gas desulphurisation or FGD systems, which are critical for reducing sulphur dioxide emissions.

— Sulphur dioxide reacts with other compounds in the air to form air particles with a diameter of 2.5 micrometers (PM 2.5) or less, which are not visible to the naked eye.

— In October, a high-level meeting at the Prime Minister's Office red-flagged vehicular pollution as among the key reasons for the stubborn smog choking the national capital region. States and UTs were told to accelerate the shift to electric vehicles, expand charging networks and intensify enforcement, The [Indian Express](#) reported last month.

— China's efforts at managing air pollution have hitherto focused on the eastern parts of the country. The national air pollution action plan that the country's State Council issued in 2013 set PM 2.5 targets for cities clustered in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei area, and in the deltas of the Yangtze and Pearl rivers.

Do You Know:

— A significant portion of the world's electricity continues to be generated from coal. In India, coal accounts for more than 70 per cent of electricity generation. Although India has one of the lowest electricity tariffs in the world, its per capita electricity consumption remains low.

— Sulphur, a non-metal in Group 16 of the periodic table, forms acidic oxides, most notably sulphur dioxide (SO₂), which is a major air pollutant emitted mainly from coal-fired power plants. SO₂ contributes to acid smog, acid rain, and secondary aerosols.

— In the US, SO₂ is listed as a criteria pollutant under the Clean Air Act and is regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). In India, the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981, sets the annual average SO₂ limit of 50 µg/m³ for residential/industrial areas, and 20 µg/m³ for ecologically sensitive zones. The 24-hour average limit is 80 µg/m³ for both.

— Coal contains 0.5–6 per cent sulphur, present as organic sulphur (bound to carbon) and inorganic sulphur (mainly iron pyrites, FeS₂). Notably, inorganic sulphur can be partially removed through washing and pulverising. Besides coal, other significant sources of SO₂ include petroleum refining, copper smelting, and cement production.

Previous year UPSC Prelims Question Covering similar theme:

(4) In the cities of our country, which among the following atmospheric gases are normally considered in calculating the value of Air Quality Index? (2016)

1. Carbon dioxide
2. Carbon monoxide

3. Nitrogen dioxide
4. Sulfur dioxide
5. Methane

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1, 2 and 3 only
- (b) 2, 3 and 4 only
- (c) 1, 4 and 5 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Previous year UPSC Mains Question Covering similar theme:

Describe the key points of the revised Global Air Quality Guidelines (AQGs) recently released by the World Health Organisation (WHO). How are these different from its last update in 2005? What changes in India's National Clean Air Programme are required to achieve revised standards? (2021)

As Thailand strikes Cambodia, recalling the conflict's colonial roots

Syllabus:

Preliminary Examination: Current events of national and international importance.

Mains Examination: General Studies-I: Modern Indian history from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the present – significant events, personalities, issues

What's the ongoing story: Thailand's army on Monday (December 8) announced that it had launched airstrikes at "military targets in several areas" of Cambodia in retaliation for the killing of at least two soldiers in purported Cambodian attacks along their border. Cambodia has denied opening fire and claims that the Thai army attacked of its own volition, while it refrained from retaliating.

Key Points to Ponder:

- Map work: Locate Thailand and Cambodia
- What is the history of colonialism in Southeast Asia?
- How were the French and British empires able to colonise Asia?

- How colonialism impacted the border disputes in the former colonies?
- Know the history of colonialism in India?
- What is the historical and cultural connection between India and Thailand?
- What is the significance of UNESCO World Heritage site?

Key Takeaways:

- The two countries have disputed their land border ever since it was drawn in 1907 by France, then the colonial administrator in Cambodia. Despite their shared ethnic and linguistic ties, social norms, culinary traditions, and cultural activities, nationalism drove this dispute in part. Both the predominantly Theravada Buddhist neighbours claim the mantle of being the “original” owners of their heritage, fueling the animosity.
- According to scholars, these claims of cultural ownership are based on contesting readings of history, which the governing elites on both sides have often propped up to strengthen their domestic positions. Thus, every border skirmish has the potential to devolve into a much larger conflict, a situation that has held since Cambodia’s independence from France in 1953.
- At the centre of the border dispute is the Preah Vihear temple, known in Thai as Phra Viharn.
- The temple was built in the 11th and 12th centuries during the golden age of the Khmer Empire, which then governed much of South Asia, including Siam. As the empire declined, Siam made inroads into Cambodian territory.
- In 1867, Cambodia officially handed the area around Preah Vihear to Siam. However, France colonised Laos and Cambodia around this period, sending the Siamese kingdom from a position of relative strength in its neighbourhood to weakness.
- In 1904, Siam and France signed a border treaty that placed Cambodia’s northern frontier along the watershed line of the Dangrek Mountains. By this principle, most of the Preah Vihear complex should have been located in Siam.



— However, the official map, drawn by the French in 1907, placed the temple in Cambodia. Siam offered weak resistance to this move at the time, but in 1941, its alliance with Japan empowered it to seize control of Preah Vihear. It returned control to France after World War II ended.

— Both Thailand and Cambodia have disputed the temple's ownership since the latter's independence from France. Thai troops occupied Preah Vihear in 1954, prompting Cambodia to take the matter to the International Court of Justice (ICJ). In 1962, it upheld its claim over Preah Vihear.

— In 2008, tensions arose after Cambodia sought to list the Preah Vihear temple as a UNESCO World Heritage site. The Thai opposition used the issue to attack the government, accusing it of "forfeiting Thai dignity and sovereignty," Ciorciari wrote. Cambodian leaders also used the issue to rally nationalist sentiment in the country.

Previous year UPSC Mains Question Covering similar theme:

What problems are germane to the decolonization process in the Malay Peninsula? (UPSC CSE 2017)

ALSO IN NEWS

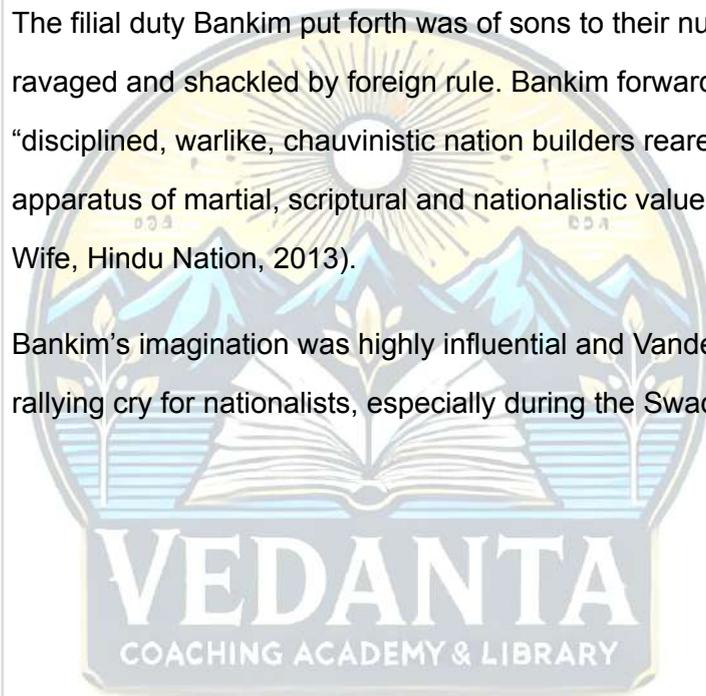
How Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay imagined nation as motherland in Ananda Math

Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's Ananda Math (1882) is considered a foundational text for understanding Indian nationalism.

Ananda Math, written at a time when the British were consolidating their rule over the subcontinent and modern education was spurring nationalist ideas, does exactly that. Concerned about the loss of historical consciousness, Bankim mythologises specific events as a part of a larger project to reimagine the nation. As Sahitya Akademi Award-winning littérateur Meenakshi Mukerjee wrote in the paper 'Anandamath: A Political Myth' (1982): "The novel consolidated certain nebulous ideals and aspirations of a people who needed a new myth."

The filial duty Bankim put forth was of sons to their nurturing mother, long ravaged and shackled by foreign rule. Bankim forwarded an imagination of "disciplined, warlike, chauvinistic nation builders reared on a pedagogical apparatus of martial, scriptural and nationalistic values". (Tanika Sarkar, Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation, 2013).

Bankim's imagination was highly influential and Vande Mataram became a rallying cry for nationalists, especially during the Swadeshi Movement of 1905.



In City: Looking beyond NCR, air quality panel seeks to eliminate coal fuel usage in industries in four states near Delhi

Even as the Centre has directed measures against polluting industries in the National Capital Region (NCR) states, the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) wants to also draw focus on industries outside NCR areas.

As part of a slew of measures it had placed before the Supreme Court on November 19, the CAQM wants states adjoining [Delhi](#) to prepare action plans to eliminate use of coal as fuel in industries in non-NCR districts. This signals a shift to also focus on the polluting industries in non-NCR areas along with other emission sources. Thus far, action against air pollution sources beyond NCR areas have been focussed on stubble burning, brick kilns, and emissions from thermal power plants.

PRELIMS ANSWER KEY

1. (c) 2. (a) 3. (d) 4. (b)

