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Important Issues of the Day

- **HPV vaccination – Page No. 1, GS 2**
- **An Israel visit – Page No.6 , GS 2**
- **Band aid – Page No. 6, GS 2**
- **Cow vigilantism – Page No. 6, GS 2**
- **India's trade strategy – Page No. 6, GS 2,3**
- **Attracting talent – Page No. 7, GS 2**
- **Keralam – Prelims**
- **Mexico – Places in News**

Kerala to become 'Keralam': Union Cabinet approves change of name

The Kerala Assembly on June 24, 2024, had unanimously adopted a resolution urging the Centre to officially change the State's name to Keralam

Updated - February 24, 2026 03:57 pm IST

THE HINDU BUREAU



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Alteration of the name of the
State of **“Kerala”** to
“Keralam”



- **Cabinet approves** the proposal for alteration of name of State of 'Kerala' as '**Keralam**'
- After approval of Union Cabinet, the **President of India** will refer the **Kerala (Alteration of Name) Bill, 2026** to the State Legislative Assembly of Kerala for expressing its views under proviso to **article 3 of the Constitution of India**
- After receipt of the views of the **State Legislative Assembly of Kerala**, Government of India will take further action and the recommendation of President will be obtained for introduction of the **Kerala (Alteration of Name) Bill, 2026** in Parliament



Consider the following statements:

Statement-I: India is an indestructible union of destructible states.

Statement-II: Parliament can reorganise the states even against the will of affected states .

Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?

- (a) Both Statement-1 and Statement-II are correct and Statement-II is the correct explanation for Statement-1 .
- (b) Both Statement-1 and Statement-II are correct and Statement-II is not the correct explanation for Statement-1
- (c) Statement-1 is correct but Statement-II is incorrect
- (d) Statement-I is incorrect but Statement-II is correct

Centre to roll out free HPV vaccination drive

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

The Union Health Ministry is set to launch a nation-wide Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination programme targeting girls aged 14.

The vaccination will be voluntary and free of cost, ensuring equitable access across socio-economic groups.

India will use Gardasil, a quadrivalent HPV vaccine, for protection from HPV types 16 and 18, which cause cervical cancer, and types 6 and 11.

“Global and Indian scientific evidence confirms that a single dose provides robust and durable protection when administered to girls in the recommended age group,” a senior Health Ministry official said.

“The nation-wide programme will target girls aged 14 years, an age at which the HPV vaccine offers maximum preventive

benefit, well before potential exposure to the virus,” the official said.

Procurement method

To ensure uninterrupted availability and quality, India has secured HPV vaccine supplies through a transparent, globally supported procurement mechanism.

“Under India’s partnership with Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, Gardasil vaccines, which are approved by India’s drug regulator and widely used internationally, have been made available for the national programme. The procurement follows stringent quality and cold chain standards, enabling the government to provide the vaccine free of cost to eligible girls across all States and Union Territories,” the official said.

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OPPORTUNITIES » **PAGE 5**

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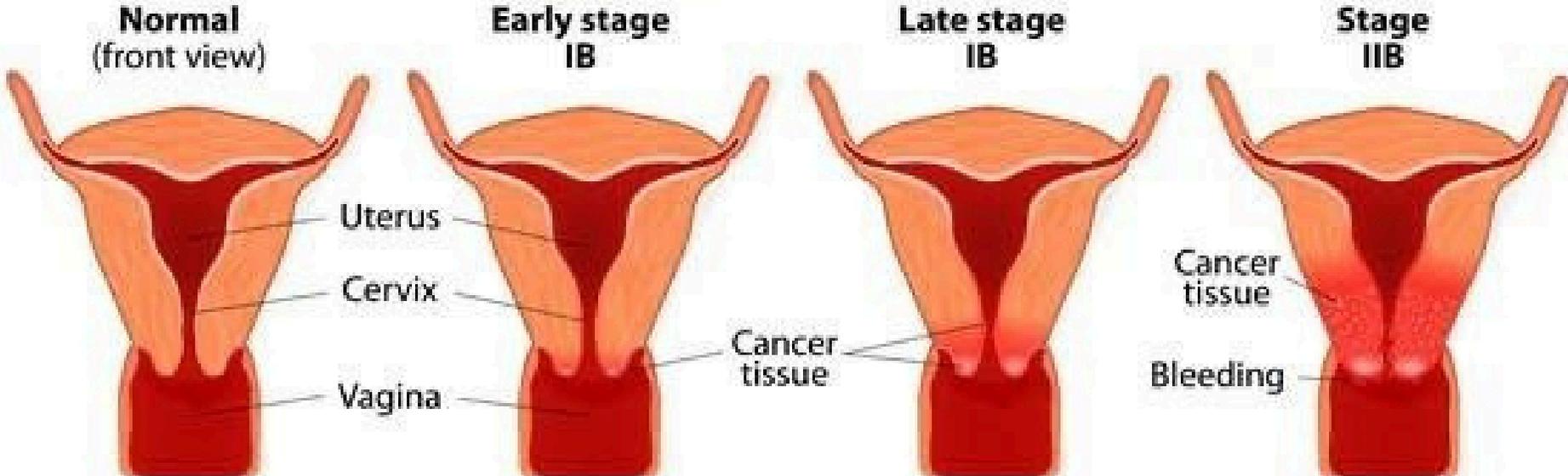
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- **Union Territories,” the official said.**

- **Human papillomavirus is a small, double-stranded DNA virus from the papillomavirus family.**

Threat:

- **The virus is capable of infecting both women and men.**
- **HPV can cause genital warts and cancer in the cervix, vulva, vagina, penis, anus, and throat.**
- **HPV infection is responsible for about 5% of all cancers worldwide.**
- **Primary mode of transmission:**
- **Any intimate skin-to-skin contact and sexually transmitted via vaginal, anal, or oral sex.**
- **The immune system usually clears the virus, but high-risk strains can lead to cancer.**

CERVICAL CANCER



Carcinoma only in cervix

The cancer spreads outside cervix



Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation:

- **Created in 2000, Gavi is an international organisation, a global vaccine alliance.**
- **It brings together public and private sectors with the shared goal of creating equal access to new and underused vaccines for children living in the world's poorest countries.**
- **Its core partners include the World Health Organisation (WHO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Bank and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.**
- **As part of its mission to save lives, reduce poverty and protect the world against the threat of epidemics, GAVI has helped vaccinate more than 822 million children in the world's poorest countries, preventing more than 14 million future deaths.**

An Israel visit — its strategic, economic, regional impact

Page No. 6, GS 2

The West Asian region is staring at the possibility of its worst ever military conflict with one of the largest American military buildups in the Persian Gulf. Iran is defiant and has refused to bow down to 'unreasonable demands' from the United States. Concurrently, in Gaza, although the ceasefire has held since October 2025, the prospects of lasting peace still look remote. In addition, emerging fault lines in the region are drawing allies such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia into opposing military blocs.

In the midst of such an uncertain security situation, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to undertake a two-day visit to Israel (February 25-26, 2026). This will be Mr. Modi's second visit to Israel, following his historic first visit in July 2017 — the first by any Indian Prime Minister. Notably, this is a standalone visit with no engagement with Palestinian Authority leadership, highlighting India's success in "de-hyphenating" its Israel engagement.

The question, however, that arises is why this visit? What role can India play in this fragile security situation in the region? With India and Israel facing similar security threats, how can they take this very important partnership forward?

Convergence in a security partnership
Surrounded by hostile neighbours and as victims of frequent terror attacks, both countries have often sought convergence on security and defence issues. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), India has been Israel's largest defence customer for several years, accounting for about 34% of Israel's total arms exports between 2020 and 2024. The cooperation has gradually progressed from imports to joint development and technology collaboration.

Over the past few decades, Israel has provided India with a number of cutting-edge technologies, weapon and surveillance platforms such as unmanned aerial vehicles, missiles, special forces equipment and radar systems. The Barak-8 air and missile defence system, co-developed by India and Israel, is one such success story. During Israel Defence Minister Benjamin Gantz's visit to New Delhi in June 2022, there was the 'India-Israel Vision on Defence Cooperation' for enhancing cooperation in the field of futuristic defence technologies. In November 2025, India and Israel signed an agreement to deepen cooperation in defence, industry and technology, including the sharing of advanced systems to support joint development and production.

For India, there were lessons from its experience in Operation Sindoor (May 2025) — the need for a strong and impregnable air (including anti-drone) and missile defence shield under Mission 'Sudarshan Chakra'. There are inputs that there could be special focus on it during Mr. Modi's visit including the procurement and co-production of the 'Iron Beam' — a



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is a foreign policy expert, a retired colonel, and Senior Research Consultant, Chintan Research Foundation (CRF)

The Prime Minister's visit will help deepen engagement with Tel Aviv, going far beyond routine diplomacy

100kW-class high-energy laser system capable of intercepting drones, rockets, and mortars efficiently and cost-effectively. There are also reports that Autonomous Guard, an Israeli company has signed a deal with an Indian private defence firm valued at approximately \$51.9 million, which would cover the supply of advanced surveillance and threat-detection systems, specialising in sensor-based observation technologies.

The science, technology and innovation link

India has benefited immensely from Israel's success in modern technology and innovations, especially in agriculture, water and electronics. There are more than 35 Centres of Excellence (CoE) in India which are focused in high quality and high-density production of flowers, vegetables, fruits (mango, citrus, litchi, date palm, pomegranate), and beekeeping. Water management technologies too are critical, especially with many water-scarce areas in India. MASHAV, Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation under Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, signed agreements with Haryana in June 2022 and Rajasthan in December 2024 to collaborate on integrated water resource management and capacity building. With Artificial Intelligence (AI) rapidly emerging as a key driver of modern technology, it is expected to become a focus area in future bilateral cooperation and innovation initiatives.

Israel-India bilateral trade is often overshadowed by security cooperation. It, however, remains a significant pillar of engagement. India is Israel's second-largest trading partner in Asia, with bilateral trade reaching \$3.75 billion in FY2024-2025. While merchandise trade continues to be dominated by diamonds, petroleum and chemicals, the partnership is expanding into electronics, high-tech products, communications and medical equipment.

In September 2025, during the visit of Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, India and Israel signed a Bilateral Investment Agreement. This was followed by the signing of the Terms of Reference for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) during Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal's visit to Israel in November 2025. With India having recently concluded several significant trade deals, the FTA with Israel could gain the necessary momentum during Mr. Modi's visit. Israel is also keen to establish arrangements and exemptions for Indian infrastructure companies to participate in building critical roads and ports. Additionally, similar to India's agreement with Russia, Israel may pursue a deal to facilitate "human mobility" to attract skilled Indian talent.

Another key aspect to watch during the Modi visit is the progress of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). Announced at the G-20 Summit in Delhi in September 2023, this intercontinental connectivity project holds strategic significance

for both countries. Although the Gaza conflict had temporarily stalled the initiative, there is now a renewed sense of urgency to advance it. Recent trade agreements with the European Union, Oman, and the UAE are expected to boost trade in both value and volume, creating the need for a shorter and safer transport route. With the Suez Canal route vulnerable to disruptions from regional conflicts, IMEC could provide an alternative, secure corridor to Europe. But achieving lasting peace in Gaza remains crucial for the project's success.

Gaza peace process and regional dynamics

Discussion on the Gaza peace process is a definite likelihood. During the recent 'Summit' of the Board of Peace, presided over by U.S. President Donald Trump on February 19, 2026, more than 50 countries participated, with some pledging \$7 billion in funding and others committing troops to the International Stabilisation Force. India attended as an observer and has not yet defined its role in the process. Given India's strong ties with both the Gulf region and Israel, discussions may include potential avenues for India's involvement in Gaza.

Both leaders are also expected to discuss regional dynamics in depth, including developments in Iran, given the potential implications of conflict for India and the wider region, particularly with regard to India's energy security. India's hosting of the 2nd India-Arab Foreign Ministers' Meeting (IAFMM), in January 2026, along with Mr. Modi's visits to Jordan and Oman (December 2025), and the visit of the UAE President in January 2026, demonstrate the careful balance that India has forged in the region. This sets the stage for a constructive and realistic discussion on various regional issues during the visit.

Ahead of the Modi visit, Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu tweeted this: "we will create a 'hexagon' of alliances around or within the Middle East. This includes India, Arab nations, African nations, Mediterranean nations (Greece and Cyprus), and nations in Asia... The intention here is to create an axis of nations that see eye-to-eye on the reality, challenges and goals against the radical axes, both the radical Shiite axis, which we have struck very hard, and the emerging radical Sunni axis."

India, however, does not necessarily see things in the region from this lens. How India reacts to such a proposal, given how close India's ties are with countries in the region, will also be a thing to be watched.

Mr. Modi's visit is being closely watched, as India and Israel are at pivotal points in their journeys. Despite domestic differences, the two have built a strong strategic partnership over the past decade. Mr. Modi's address to the Knesset — a privilege usually reserved for U.S. Presidents — and his visit to a Jerusalem innovation centre highlight the visit's significance. It is far more than routine diplomacy, with potential long-term implications for both countries and the region.

- **The West Asian region is staring at the possibility of its worst ever military conflict with one of the largest American military buildups in the Persian Gulf. Iran is defiant and has refused to bow down to 'unreasonable demands' from the United States.**
- **Concurrently, in Gaza, although the ceasefire has held since October 2025, the prospects of lasting peace still look remote.**
In addition, emerging fault lines in the region are drawing allies such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia into opposing military blocs.
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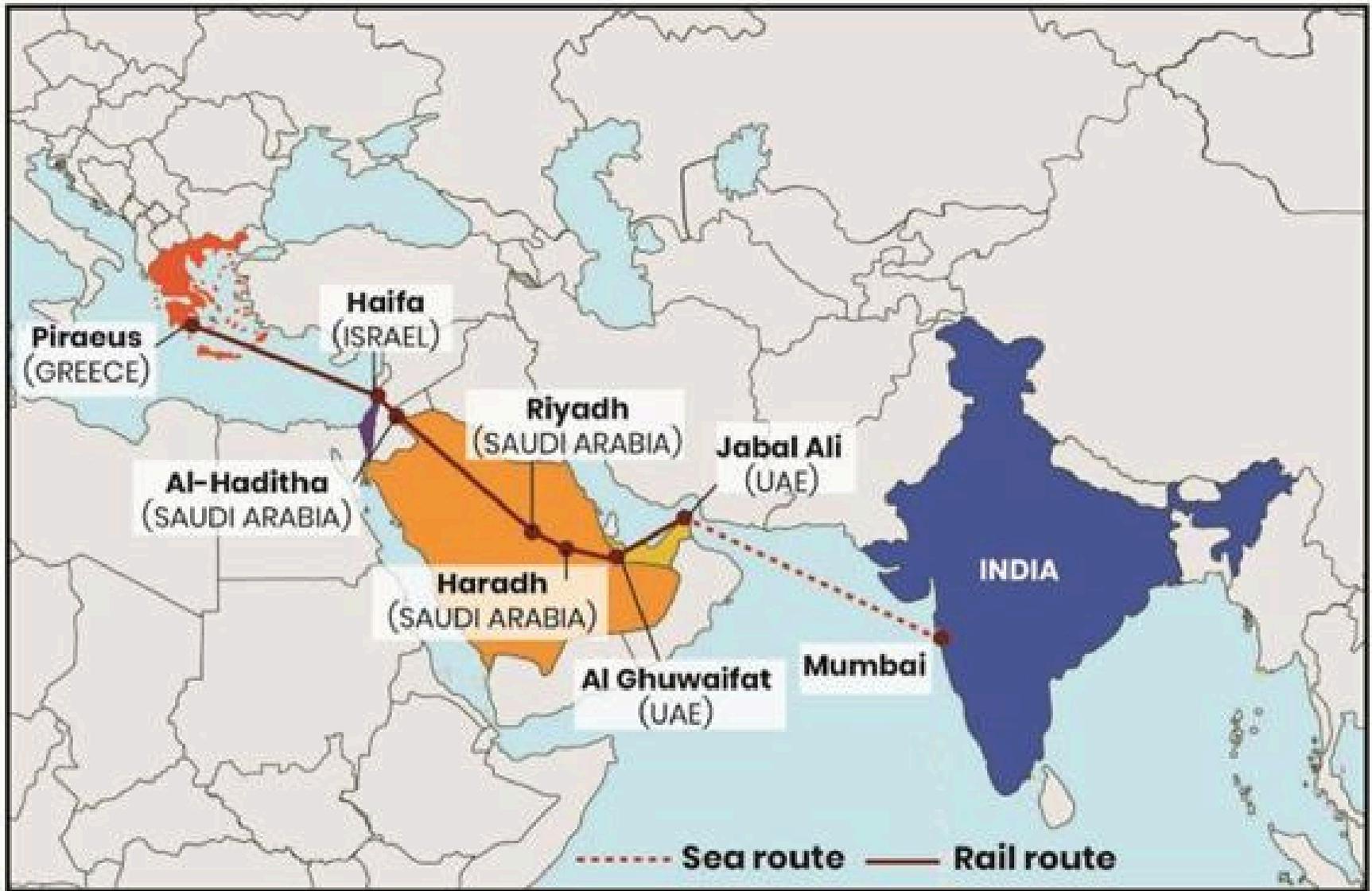
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Band aid

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The constitutionality of the flawed SIR process must be decided quickly

With the corrections and claims process coming to an end, the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) process has seen the release of final electoral rolls except in West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh which are due soon. The net number of voters removed (with fresh additions) from the pre-SIR electoral rolls in States such as Tamil Nadu (nearly 11.5%), Gujarat (13.4%) and Chhattisgarh (11.8%) remain high. Tamil Nadu and Gujarat are, after all, net in-migrant States unlike Bihar where deletions were around 6%. The high number of deletions, and the fact that excisions are higher for female than male electors, suggests that the SIR process, as envisaged and implemented by the Election Commission of India (ECI), suffered from clear structural defects. A clear-cut assessment could have only been possible with comparison with Census figures, but due to the prolonged delay by the Bharatiya Janata Party-led Union Government, only outdated numbers from 2011 are available. The final figures of the electorate in major States where the SIR was conducted indicate that the registered adult population in the final rolls is much below the projected estimates. This again raises the question of whether the ECI should have waited for the Census before rushing the SIR – but that is now only of academic interest.

The exercise's lacunae and anomalies could have been mitigated if the Supreme Court of India had ruled on SIR's constitutionality and compelled the ECI to adopt a more robust – though slower – household-by-household count, instead of depending on an enumeration that shifts the burden onto electors to prove their eligibility. This exercise has clearly, and unduly, affected migrant voters – especially those leaving their residence for the short term and married women who have shifted residences. By letting the process to continue despite its frailties, the Court relied on the ECI's claim that concerns with omissions are overblown, given the relatively few complaints filed by political parties. But the fact that political parties participate in a zero-sum game of competition should alert to the possibility of their relative lack of agency in assisting all electors to be part of the list. Also, unlike other identity documents such as ration card, passport or Aadhaar, the voter identity card is of use only during quinquennial elections, disincentivising citizens from trying to ensure that they are on the list. This is even more so in West Bengal, where the ECI's shoddy implementation has created such a humongous mess that the Court has sought the services of not just the State's judicial officers but those of its neighbours to aid in the "legal verification" process. The Court is seeking to ease the hurt rather than aid the process of universal adult franchise.

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Inglorious retreat

Top court's failure to uphold directives on cow vigilantism is shocking

The Supreme Court of India has washed its hands of the responsibility to enforce its own guidelines of 2018 to prevent and punish mob violence in the name of cow protection. The trajectory of this case over the years had foretold this outcome, and fits within a disturbing pattern of judicial diffidence in the face of majoritarian politics. On February 23, the Chief Justice of India (CJI), Justice Surya Kant, observed that the “general directions” issued by the Court in a 2018 judgment to the Centre and States to prevent and prosecute cow vigilantism and mobocracy were “unmanageable”. The CJI favoured an approach of taking up each crime on its singular facts and merits, and went on to add that if someone’s rights are infringed, they could seek legal recourse. Petitioners had sought contempt proceedings against States that have refused to implement preventive, punitive and remedial measures against cow vigilantism. In 2018, a Bench headed by then CJI Dipak Mishra had expressed shock and dismay over the spate of violence perpetrated by cow protection gangs. The Court had observed that lynching “must be curbed and crippled”, stressing that the state has a “sacrosanct duty” to protect citizens. The 2018 guidelines assumed the Court would remain a watchdog, but what followed was a gradual, but unmistakable, judicial retreat that now appears final with the pronouncement of the CJI.

In a situation of perfect rule of law, there is no reason for the highest court of the land to be directly involved in monitoring policing. Any police force acting in fidelity to the law would curb and bring to justice acts of violence. That citizens had to seek the intervention of the Supreme Court for what should be a routine police function was itself revealing, and the 2018 judgment reflected that awareness. Since 2018, cow vigilantism has grown more monstrous, while the police and State governments, in many places, overlook or even encourage mob violence in the name of cow protection. In several States, cow vigilantes have been accorded legal sanctity and quasi-policing powers in blatant violation of the Court’s guidelines. The Court earlier refused to entertain a special challenge to such empowerment of mobs, asking petitioners instead to file individual petitions in High Courts. Several Bharatiya Janata Party-ruled States have not only refused to implement the Court’s directives but have also moved in the opposite direction by enabling vigilantism. Vigilante violence continues unabated, with the police looking away – or worse, turning against the victim. It will be a severe blow to the rule of law if the Court sticks to the view that it has no reason or intent to uphold its own directives.

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India's trade strategy in a multipolar world

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India's recent global trade strategy aims to boost exports and strengthen its position as a leading global trade partner. This has resulted in ambitious free trade agreements and a stronger presence in key international economic forums. In 2023, India updated its Foreign Trade Policy (FTP) with the goal of increasing exports to \$2 trillion by 2030, reinforcing a framework of strategic autonomy that supports sovereign decision-making while engaging major global powers. According to the Department of Commerce's 2025 Year-End Review, India recorded a 6.05% annual increase in total exports – merchandise and services combined – reaching \$825.25 billion.

A shift in approach

For many years, India adopted a cautious approach to free trade agreements (FTA), engaging primarily with economies that were similar in structure and stages of development. In recent years, however, New Delhi has shifted to a more proactive trade strategy, pursuing intensive negotiations and concluding comprehensive FTAs with major developed economies that were previously beyond reach. According to recent estimates, India's network of FTAs is projected to cover nearly 71% of its total export basket by 2026 – an extraordinary increase from approximately 22% in 2019. This rapid expansion reflects a decisive shift away from primarily regional trade arrangements toward deeper integration with advanced economies such as Australia, the European Union (EU), the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the United Kingdom (U.K.) and the United States, signalling India's broader strategic ambition to integrate into global value chains and high-value markets.

A major development in India's trade diplomacy is the India-EU Free Trade Agreement, signed on January 27, 2026 after nearly two decades of negotiations. Described as "historic" by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, it creates a vast free trade zone covering nearly two billion people.

The agreement reduces or eliminates tariffs on



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Indian Industry (CII)

Free trade agreements and trade reforms are key to propelling India's exports and global presence

over 90% of traded goods, boosting market access for Indian exporters, especially in textiles, leather, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, and marine products. It enhances India's competitiveness against exporters such as Bangladesh and Vietnam. The FTA also removes tariffs on many pharmaceutical exports, strengthens regulatory cooperation, and lowers production costs by easing access to advanced European machinery and inputs. It is also expected to foster digital trade, boost investor confidence, and strengthen long-term economic resilience. Widely regarded as the "mother of all deals", the agreement represents a transformative boost to India's export ecosystem and marks a decisive shift in India's broader global trade strategy.

The deal with the U.S.

Early in February 2026, India and the U.S. signed a framework for an interim agreement on reciprocal trade, restating their commitment to advancing negotiations on a broader U.S.-India Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA). The interim framework is designed to progressively reduce tariffs across a range of products, thereby facilitating greater Indian exports to the U.S. market and enhancing overall market access.

The agreement also prioritises strategic collaboration in critical sectors such as rare earths and semiconductors. This cooperation is expected to support India's ambitions in high-technology manufacturing, reinforce its electronics export capacity, and strengthen its emergence as a reliable global hub for electronics and semiconductor-related production. By diversifying export destinations and reducing overdependence on specific markets, the pact enhances India's strategic and economic flexibility. Strategically, India's recent global trade agreements collectively signal a major shift toward enhancing its role as a leading player in the global trading system. This shift is visible across four key dimensions. First, deeper engagement with advanced economies such as the EU and the U.S. provides India with preferential access to some of the world's most

lucrative and high-demand markets. Such access is expected to significantly strengthen India's export potential and global market presence with benefits flowing to labour intensive sectors integrating the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises into the Global Value Chains. The agreements are across continents that reinforces India's strategic attempt to diversify and not become overly dependent on any single geography.

Second, FTAs reduce barriers on both exports and imports of intermediate goods, enabling Indian firms to integrate more effectively into global supply chains and improve their global competitiveness. This integration is especially beneficial for high-growth sectors such as technology, electronics, pharmaceuticals and services, all of which depend heavily on seamless cross-border movement of inputs and components.

Third, trade agreements serve as strategic instruments for enhancing India's diplomatic influence. By establishing deeper economic interdependence with major powers, India strengthens its role in global economic governance and positions itself as a more influential voice in shaping trade norms and standards.

At the core

India's evolving global trade strategy is central to its ambition of becoming an economic superpower and achieving Viksit Bharat. After opting out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, India adopted a calibrated approach – boosting domestic manufacturing through production-linked incentives and infrastructure expansion while deepening global integration. Trade agreements with Australia, the EU, the UAE, and the U.K. aim to expand market access, attract investment, and diversify exports. By strengthening supply chains, promoting digital and services trade, and integrating into global value chains, India seeks to scale high-value exports and position itself as a leading force in global commerce.

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Attracting talent positioned abroad

Page No.7 , GS 2

When Washington imposed a one-time \$1,00,000 fee on the issuance of new H-1B visa petitions in 2025, the move did more than unsettle young Indian engineers based in the U.S. It also forced skilled professionals to reassess the cost of their American aspirations and compelled companies to reconsider where they source and retain talent.

A geopolitical earthquake triggered by the Trump administration has also coincided with a moment when India is looking for its best talent positioned abroad to think and act Swadeshi and consider reinvesting in India. Macrotrends in this regard have all been adversely positioned over the last 10 years, given how poorly India's domestic private investment scenario has been despite the best government efforts. Recent government signals indicate a structured push to re-engage India's global talent through initiatives including Global Access to Talent from India (GATI), eMigrate V2.0, Visiting Advanced Joint Research (VAJRA) Faculty Scheme, and the Know India Programme. Senior officials have urged overseas professionals to "return and reinvest" amid global visa uncertainties.

State-level experiences

A common paradox in India's major metropolises is that while they excel at building startup ecosystems, they remain unliveable for families of returnees. Maharashtra continues to be the nation's largest startup cluster. It also has a Startup, Entrepreneurship, and Innovation Policy (2025). However, because of the lack of housing subsidies, school seat guarantees, and spouse-employment support, household entry costs remain high. This offsets declining firm costs and makes its congested, expensive cities affordable only to the wealthy. Delhi draws more returnees due to its institutional centrality, proximity to national



Deepanshu Mohan

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Geetaali Malhotra and Aditi Lazarus contributed to this piece.

The H-1B disruption could catalyse a wave of innovation if cities, universities, and firms strengthen social and research infrastructure to retain returnees

labs, policy networks, and ministries than its entrepreneurial volume. This benefit is enhanced by a proposed startup to increase venture activity. However, Delhi serves as both a gateway and a gatekeeper, favouring those with established institutional capital due to housing costs and extensive recruitment networks at universities and institutes. Karnataka serves as an example of structural ambition devoid of absorptive realism. Its Beyond Bengaluru and Skill Development Policy (2025-32) seek to decentralise growth through Global Capability Centres in Mysuru and Mangaluru. However, "family-readiness" is constrained by inadequate global research infrastructure, healthcare, and education.

These cases are connected by two empirical insights. First, States give institutional support such as incubators, seed money, and infrastructure priority over family relocation policies. Second, mobility studies demonstrate that while wages draw migrants, retention is influenced by networks, spouse employment, and educational attainment. This unevenness shows that while States compete to attract firms, they rarely plan for people. The absence of housing, education, and spousal employment provisions explains why returnees often view India as a temporary assignment rather than a permanent reintegration.

H-1B policy shift

With nearly 71% H-1B approvals in FY2024, India's dominance in the H-1B visa programme is unparalleled. This dominance makes India highly sensitive to U.S. policy shifts. According to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, in FY 2024, 71% of the 3,99,395 total H-1B approvals were Indian nationals and 46% of total beneficiaries held a master's degree.

The educational profile of H-1B holders has also shifted markedly over time: the proportion of

workers with a master's degree as their highest qualification rose from 31% in 2000 to 57% in 2021, while those with only a bachelor's degree declined from 57% to 34%. Following policy revisions in September 2025, the U.S. introduced limited exemptions to the proposed \$1,00,000 filing fee, particularly for applicants already in the country who transition from F-1 student to H-1B status. This provides short-term relief for U.S.-educated Indian graduates but affects new overseas applicants. Shivani Desai, the CEO of BDO Executive search firm, estimates that the number of Indian students from Ivy League universities seeking positions in India has risen by about 30% this year, while senior Indian executives in the U.S. are increasingly reassessing long-term career prospects amid visa uncertainty. This reversal comes at an opportune moment. With 1,600+ Global Capability Centres employing 1.66 million people and rising U.S. visa costs, conditions are ripe for a shift from brain drain to brain circulation.

Retaining talent remains equally challenging. India's R&D investment is merely 0.64% of GDP, far below the U.S. (3.47%), China (2.41%), and Israel (5.71%), due to limited private sector incentives. This gap reflects both limited public funding and the structural composition of India's corporate sector.

Addressing this imbalance by incentivising private R&D investment and diversifying into higher-intensity sectors such as software products, semiconductors, and advanced manufacturing will be crucial if India is to convert the H-1B disruption into a genuine innovation dividend. The H-1B disruption could catalyse a wave of innovation if cities, universities, and firms strengthen social and research infrastructure to retain returnees. Otherwise, the next generation of highly qualified workers will simply pursue their futures elsewhere.

- **When Washington imposed a one-time \$1,00,000 fee on the issuance of new H-1B visa petitions in 2025, the move did more than unsettle young Indian engineers based in the U.S.**
- **It also forced skilled professionals to reassess the cost of their American aspirations and compelled companies to reconsider where they source and retain talent.**
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- **This dominance makes India highly sensitive to U.S. policy shifts. According to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, in FY 2024, 71% of the 3,99,395 total H1-B approvals were Indian nationals and 46% of total beneficiaries held a master's degree.**

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- **into higher-intensity sectors such as software products, semiconductors, and advanced manufacturing will be crucial if India is to convert the H-1B disruption into a genuine innovation dividend.**
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- **The H-1B visa is a temporary, non-immigrant visa that enables US companies to hire skilled foreign professionals in specialized fields such as STEM and IT, requiring at least a bachelor's degree. Introduced in 1990, it was designed to help employers address skill shortages when qualified US workers were not available.**
Validity Period: The H-1B visa is valid for up to six years. After this, holders must either leave the US for 12 months before reapplying or seek permanent residency (Green Card).
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- **Share of Indians: Indians dominate H-1B approvals, making up 70%+ annually since 2015. China consistently ranks second, with 12–13% of approvals since 2018.**
Quotas and Exemptions: Each fiscal year, there is a cap of 65,000 new visas. An additional 20,000 visas are available for those with a US master's degree or higher.
Cap exemptions apply for applicants continuing employment or working with universities, affiliated nonprofits, and government research bodies.
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Mexico



- **Mexico deployed around 10,000 troops after the death of drug cartel leader Nemesio El Mencho Oseguera, which triggered large-scale violence across multiple states.**
- **Mexico, officially called the United Mexican States (Estados Unidos Mexicanos), is a federal republic located in southern North America.**
- **It is one of the largest economies in Latin America and has a diverse cultural, historical, and ecological landscape.**
- **United States to the north.**
- **Guatemala and Belize to the southeast.**
- **Bounded by the Pacific Ocean (west & south) and the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean Sea (east).**