

If you want something you have
never had, you must be willing to
do something you have never done.

Thomas Jefferson

Important Issues of the Day

- **Padma awards - Page No.1 , Prelims**
- **Neo-colonial shadows - Page No.10 , GS 2**
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Nation honours 131 personalities with Padma awards

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Centre on Sunday announced Padma honours for 2026, with five Padma Vibhushan, 13 Padma Bhushan, and 113 Padma Shri awards. The recipients include eight personalities from Kerala, 11 from West Bengal, and 13 from Tamil Nadu, all poll-bound States.

A former Kerala Chief

Minister and Communist stalwart, the late V.S. Achuthanandan, and the late actor Dharmendra have been posthumously named for the Padma Vibhushan, the country's second highest civilian award. Former Supreme Court judge K.T. Thomas and educationist P. Narayanan, both from Kerala, and violinist N. Rajam are the other three to get the Padma Vibhushan.

A former Jharkhand Chief Minister and tribal leader, the late Shibu Soren, has been named for the Padma Bhushan posthumously.

Diverse disciplines

Actor Mammooty, singer Alka Yagnik, banker Uday Kotak, and tennis legend Vijay Amritraj are among the 13 selected for the Padma Bhushan.

Prime Minister Naren-

dra Modi congratulated all the awardees for their contribution to diverse fields.

"Congratulations to all the Padma Awardees for their outstanding contributions to our nation. Their excellence, dedication, and service enrich the fabric of our society," he said in a post on X.

The Padma awards are given in disciplines such as social work, public affairs, science and engineering,

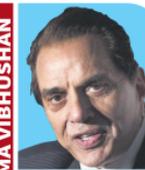
trade and industry, medicine, literature and education, sports, civil service, among others. While the Padma Vibhushan is awarded for exceptional and distinguished service, Padma Bhushan is for distinguished service of high order, and Padma Shri for distinguished service in any field.

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Field of honour

The Padma honours for 2026 announced by the Centre include **5 Padma Vibhushan, 13 Padma Bhushan, and 113 Padma Shri awards**, covering personalities from all corners of the country in over 100 unique fields

PADMA VIBHUSHAN



Dharmendra Singh Deol
Art (Posthumous)



K.T. Thomas
Public Affairs



N. Rajam
Art



P. Narayanan
Literature and Education



V.S. Achuthanandan
Public Affairs (Posthumous)

PADMA BHUSHAN

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Alka Yagnik | 5. Nori Dattatreyyudu | 8. Shatavadhani R. Ganesh | 11. V. K. Malhotra (Posthumous) |
| 2. Bhagat Singh Koshyari | 6. Piyush Pandey (posthumous) | 9. Shibu Soren (Posthumous) | 12. Vellappally Natesan |
| 3. K.R. Palaniswamy | 7. S.K.M. Maeilanandhan | 10. Uday Kotak | 13. Vijay Amritraj |
| 4. Mammooty | | | |

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13. Vijay Amritraj

- **Instituted in 1954, the Padma Awards are among India's highest civilian honours, announced annually on Republic Day (26th January).**
- **Their objective is to honour excellence in various fields involving public service.**
- **Categories: The Awards are given in 3 categories:**
 - **Padma Vibhushan: For exceptional and distinguished service**
 - **Padma Bhushan: For distinguished service of high order**
 - **Padma Shri: For distinguished service.**
- **The Padma Vibhushan is the highest among the Padma Awards, followed by the Padma Bhushan and then the Padma Shri.**

- **Presentation and Recognition:** Padma Awards are conferred by the President of India in March/April, with recipients receiving a Sanad, medallion, and a replica for ceremonial use.
- **Disciplines:** The awards are presented across diverse fields such as art, social work, public affairs, science and engineering, trade and industry, medicine, literature and education, sports, civil service, and more.
- **Eligibility:** All persons without distinction of race, occupation, position or sex are eligible for these Awards.
- **Since 2014,** the government has been recognizing "unsung heroes" with the Padma Awards, transforming them into the "People's Padma". This year, 30 such individuals were honoured.

- **Jury Composition: All Padma Award nominations are reviewed by the Padma Awards Committee, appointed annually by the Prime Minister and chaired by the Cabinet Secretary.**
- **The committee includes the Home Secretary, Secretary to the President, and four to six eminent persons as members.**
- **Its recommendations are submitted to the Prime Minister and President for final approval.**
- **The award is not a title and cannot be used as a prefix or suffix to the recipient's name.**
- **It is limited to a maximum of 120 awards per year (excluding posthumous, Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), foreigner, and Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) recipients).**
- **Padma awards were not conferred during the years 1978 and 1979 and 1993 to 1997.**
- **Article 18(1) of the Indian Constitution abolishes and prohibits the state from conferring titles on individuals, except for military and academic distinctions.**
- **Awards like Bharat Ratna, Padma Vibhushan, and Padma Shri are exempt as they recognize exceptional work.**

**Q. Consider the following statements in respect of Bharat Ratna and Padma Awards:
(2021)**

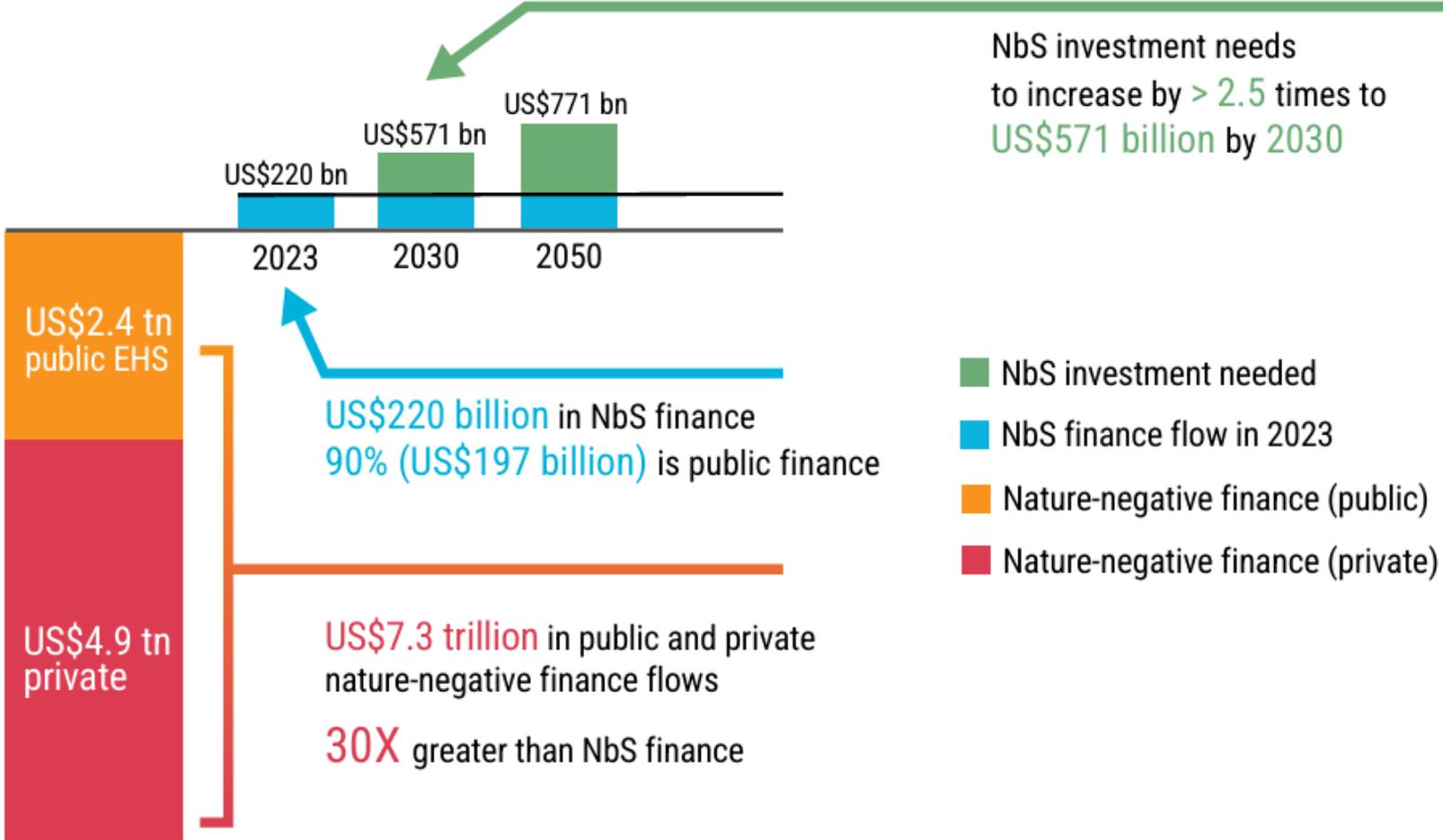
- 1. Bharat Ratna and Padma Awards are titles under the Article 18(1) of the Constitution of India.**
- 2. Padma Awards, which were instituted in the year 1954, were suspended only once.**
- 3. The number of Bharat Ratna Awards is restricted to a maximum of five in a particular year.**

Which of the above statements are not correct?

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

State of Finance for Nature 2026

Figure ES.1: Nature-negative finance and NbS finance flows in 2023 and future NbS investment needs



- **The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) released the State of Finance for Nature 2026 report, warning that nature-negative finance (US\$7.3 trillion) vastly outweighs nature-positive investment (US\$220 billion).**
- **The State of Finance for Nature (SFN) 2026 is the fourth edition of a flagship report that tracks global capital flows related to nature.**
- **It provides a financial assessment to help policymakers and businesses transition from an economy that erodes its nature bank account to one that invests in Nature-based Solutions (NbS)—actions that protect, restore, and sustainably manage ecosystems to address societal challenges**
- **Massive Finance Gap: To meet global Rio Convention targets, NbS investment must increase 2.5 times to US\$571 billion annually by 2030.**

- **Nature-Negative Dominance:** Annual finance flows harming nature reached US\$7.3 trillion in 2023, representing roughly 7% of global GDP.
- **Public Subsidies:** Governments provided US\$2.4 trillion in environmentally harmful subsidies (EHS), primarily for fossil fuels (US\$1.13 trillion), followed by agriculture and water.
- **Private Sector Impact:** Private capital flows to nature-negative sectors totaled US\$4.9 trillion, concentrated in utilities, industrials, and energy.
- **Public Finance as Main NbS Driver:** Of the US\$220 billion in NbS finance, 90% (US\$197 billion) comes from public sources, mostly through domestic expenditure.
- **Slow Private NbS Growth:** Private investment in NbS is only US\$23.4 billion, with biodiversity offsets and certified commodity supply chains being the largest contributors.

Neo-colonial shadows

Donald Trump is driving the U.S.'s allies towards China with his antics

President Donald Trump's neo-colonial posturing at the World Economic Forum in Davos could mark the opening salvo of what may be termed great-power climate wars – an irony, given that it is being waged by a climate-change denier. As global warming is rapidly melting Arctic polar ice, it has sharpened interest in the Northern Sea Route (NSR), which promises to cut shipping time between East Asia, western Europe and North America. The route also carries geopolitical implications: it enables tighter trade and market integration between China and the Western Hemisphere – an outcome Mr. Trump has often sought to obstruct. At Davos, his renewed suggestion that the U.S. could “purchase” Greenland has rattled allies and revived colonial anxieties. The remark came even as Sara Olsvig, chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council, has said that “there’s no such thing as a better coloniser”, reflecting on over three centuries of Danish rule.

Greenland's strategic value is undeniable. China has conducted trial commercial voyages through the NSR, promoting it as a shorter, and potentially lower-emission, shipping route, even though its existence is a product of climate breakdown. Chinese firms have also shown sustained interest in Greenland's significant mineral wealth, particularly rare earths. For Mr. Trump, who has weaponised trade and was forced to moderate tariffs against China due to Beijing's dominance over rare earth supply chains, such activity is easily framed as strategic encroachment

minance over rare earth supply chains, such activity is easily framed as strategic encroachment into America's sphere of influence. Yet, extraction in Greenland would be neither easy nor uncontested. Much of the mineral wealth is buried deep under permanent ice, and local resistance is likely. Greenlanders have fought long struggles for political and economic sovereignty, achieving enhanced self-rule only in 2009. Recent opinion polls suggest that an overwhelming majority of Greenland's population opposes any form of American rule. Nevertheless, Mr. Trump claimed on the sidelines of Davos that Washington had reached a “framework” with the European Union, addressing U.S. security and resource interests. Media reports of proposals allowing indefinite American basing rights and access to subsoil resources reinforce the perception that this push is driven less by security than by extraction and control. Davos, long projected as a forum for global cooperation, appeared this year as a staging ground for resurgent resource nationalism. In doing so, it may have sown the seeds of a new world order, undermining the very rules-based system that post-war America once built. Ironically, by alienating allies, Mr. Trump may be nudging them towards Beijing – a China that has now arrived as a full-spectrum great power.

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The Donroe Doctrine, Venezuela's fragile pragmatism

Statecraft often rides on contradictions. None is more evident than in the aftermath of the U.S. military intervention in Venezuela and its abduction of sitting President Nicolás Maduro. On January 15, as Venezuela's opposition leader María Corina Machado met U.S. President Donald Trump at the White House and handed over the Nobel Peace Prize she had won in 2025 for leading Venezuela's movement against "autocracy", CIA Director John Ratcliffe was in Caracas meeting with Delcy Rodríguez, Mr. Maduro's former Vice-President and now the interim President of the beleaguered country. On January 14, Mr. Trump had described Ms Rodríguez as "a terrific person" with whom the U.S. was "getting along very well."

This spectacle, where the architect of an invasion is embracing a key figure from the regime whose leader he had just abducted, captures the essence of what might be called the "Donroe Doctrine": an extension of the Monroe Doctrine that represents a departure from earlier forms of U.S. imperialism. Unlike the neocon interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, which sought not only resource extraction but also "nation-building" and the installation of ideologically aligned regimes, the Venezuela operation is more nakedly transactional. Mr. Trump's emphasis is on securing imperial control in order to maximise resource extraction, even while leaving in place a governing apparatus that is led by the very Bolivarians whose leader was snatched as "the head of the snake", as long as it proves compliant.

Ghanaian leader Kwame Nkrumah, writing in 1965, defined this arrangement presciently: "The essence of neo-colonialism is that the [s]tate which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside."

Venezuela today in a way fits this description. On January 15, Ms. Rodríguez delivered defiant rhetoric in her State of the Union address even as she had to negotiate the terms of her country's economic subordination with the CIA director.

A case of 'regime management'

The Trump administration's preference for "regime management" over "regime change" is not out of any respect for Venezuelan sovereignty. *The New York Times* reported that senior policymakers explicitly discussed how removing the Bolivarian government would risk replicating the disastrous dissolution of Iraq's army and bureaucracy. Mr. Trump has long criticised the military escalation in Iraq. Besides, his Make America Great Again (MAGA) base, large sections of which opposed the interventions under the Bush, Clinton, and Obama administrations, do not want another quagmire.

In Ms. Rodríguez, Washington sees someone who can maintain equilibrium with the powerful armed forces led by Defence Minister Vladimir Padrino López and the ruling party's ideologues such as Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello, who



Srinivasan Ramani

controls the PSUV party and the militant colectivos of the Bolivarian movement. The opposition, with its leadership having been driven underground and lacking institutional continuity, cannot offer this. Ms. Machado's obsequious approval of Mr. Trump's actions, including absurd claims about Mr. Maduro's intervention in the 2020 U.S. elections, has so far earned her little. There has been considerable speculation about why the Bolivarians provided so little resistance to the U.S. actions, and why Ms. Rodríguez's responses since the invasion have seemed like capitulation. Left-wing activist Tariq Ali, has in an interview put it bluntly: "I think Delcy has capitulated completely." He concluded that "important sections of the Bolivarian state apparatus were prepared to let Maduro go".

While this account is outlandish, the current choices for Ms. Rodríguez are limited. The country has been under crushing U.S. sanctions since the late 2010s, targeting its oil sector – the lifeblood of its economy – and brought hyperinflation and economic collapse.

To circumvent these sanctions, Venezuela redirected crude exports to China and other countries through a "shadow fleet" of aging tankers. It relied on Russia and Cuba. But now, with a naval blockade in place, ships carrying Venezuelan crude to Cuba and China have been seized and Chinese tankers have been denied access to Venezuelan waters.

Neither China nor Russia has shown any willingness to confront the U.S. in its self-declared backyard. In this context, the regime's adoption of pragmatism, negotiating with Washington to ease sanctions, even while the blockade remains, in order to keep the economy afloat and preserve what remains of the welfare state, appears less like capitulation than the only available strategy for survival. From all accounts, this has been a consensus among the different wings of the Bolivarian state.

The Bolivarians were never opposed to economic partnership with U.S. companies. They were opposed to the terms of partnership which led to the late Hugo Chávez's 2001 Hydrocarbon Law allowing foreign companies to participate only as minority stakeholders in joint ventures with the state oil company, PDVSA, and ensuring that Venezuela received the lion's share of profits.

Those terms are now being rewritten under duress. But the alternative, attempting to maintain the old model in a sanctioned environment, with no access to world markets and no great-power protection, is equally untenable. The pragmatic calculation is to secure whatever economic breathing room is possible and wait for the geopolitical situation to turn.

Rodríguez and a balancing act

As Vice-President overseeing the economy under U.S. sanctions, Ms. Rodríguez managed to bring down hyperinflation and achieve modest GDP growth from a low base. Oil production, which had collapsed below 4,00,000 barrels a day, recovered to 9,00,000 barrels under arrangements she promoted, including the 2020

Anti-Blockade Law that allowed greater private investment and ownership in the oil sector, effectively trading some sovereign control for economic survival.

In her State of the Union address, she spoke of the U.S. crossing "red lines" and Venezuela's willingness to "confront them diplomatically" while attacking the opposition for "[competing] to see who could grovel the most." But in talks with Washington, she has sought to negotiate economic survival through the country's key leverage: its oil.

Under the Biden administration, companies such as Chevron enjoyed limited licences allowing them to export Venezuelan crude while depositing proceeds in private Venezuelan banks – an indirect way for the government to earn foreign exchange. The Trump administration halted this before the invasion and oil revenues now flow through accounts in Qatar, accessible to the Venezuelan state only with American approval. Imports from these proceeds must be from American manufacturers. Reports indicate that despite the blockade, commodities traders Vitol and Trafigura have received licences to move Venezuelan crude, with initial sales reportedly worth \$500 million. In essence, Mr. Trump is reversing the sanctions he initiated, but on his own terms. The country is being offered what it was denied under sanctions – U.S. investment and participation in oil extraction – but now as a subordinate partner.

Lessons beyond borders

Yet, Washington's leverage faces its own constraints. Venezuelan crude is predominantly heavy and extra-heavy oil, expensive to extract and refine. ExxonMobil's chief executive publicly called Venezuela "uninvestable". With oil prices relatively low, the profit margins that would justify such investments remain uncertain. This economic reality may ultimately require the administration to allow broader market access for Venezuelan crude including sales to China and India through licensed intermediaries and more favourable revenue-sharing terms. The present situation is neither the regime change that Ms. Machado and her supporters in the West champion nor the sovereign resource control that the Bolivarian project promised when Mr. Chávez first came to power. Ms. Rodríguez will seek to preserve what she can of the welfare state. But she will remain constrained.

Venezuela's travails offer a lesson for the developing world. Economic diversification could have mattered, but that alone is insufficient when a hegemon intervenes. The warning is about the limits of the emerging multipolar order: when the Trump regime moved against Venezuela, neither China nor Russia, for all their rhetoric about a post-American world, was willing to confront Washington in its declared sphere of influence. An alternative may only emerge if the Global South acts in concert rather than waiting for great-power rivalries to provide shelter.

Venezuela is now a subordinate partner to the U.S., and the pointer is that the Global South needs to act in concert

Mains Question

“The unpredictability and unilateralism associated with Donald Trump’s foreign policy have strained traditional U.S. alliances.”

In this context, examine whether such an approach is pushing U.S. allies closer to China. Discuss with suitable examples.

(250 words / 15 marks)

“डोनाल्ड ट्रम्प की विदेश नीति से जुड़ी अनिश्चितता और एकतरफ़ा रवैये ने अमेरिका के पारंपरिक गठबंधनों पर दबाव डाला है।”

इस संदर्भ में, परीक्षण कीजिए कि क्या इस प्रकार का दृष्टिकोण अमेरिका के सहयोगी देशों को चीन के और अधिक निकट जाने के लिए प्रेरित कर रहा है। उपयुक्त उदाहरणों के साथ चर्चा कीजिए।

(250 शब्द / 15 अंक)

India-UAE ties — stability, substance, strategic union

Page No.10 , GS 2

At a time of significant churn in global geopolitical equations, relations between India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) stand out for their remarkable stability and a steady deepening. The very brief visit of UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan (MbZ) to India, last week, was a clear reflection of this robustness. The January 19, 2026 visit was substantive, outcome-oriented and strategically significant. This visit, the eleventh at the leadership level in as many years, shows the mutual importance the countries accord to each other.

A continuity

Since MbZ's last visit in January 2024 as the chief guest at the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit, two other high-profile engagements have reinforced bilateral momentum. At the Prime Minister's personal invitation, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed, and the Crown Prince of Dubai, Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed Al Maktoum, visited India, yielding concrete outcomes across sectors such as defence, nuclear cooperation, energy, education and economic engagement. The active participation of the next generation of Emirati leadership lends a distinctive depth and continuity to the India-UAE partnership.

Following the signing of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement in 2017, the relationship has evolved in a genuinely comprehensive manner. MbZ's latest visit produced a wide-ranging set of outcomes, including a defence cooperation framework, a joint space initiative, a target of \$200 billion in bilateral trade, collaboration in artificial intelligence, data embassies, infrastructure investment, partnership on small nuclear reactors, a supercomputing cluster in India, and a 10-year LNG supply agreement.

The signing of a Letter of Intent towards a Strategic Defence Partnership is timely, given the



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The partnership is based on trust and shared interests, and stands out for its stability

evolving defence architecture in parts of West Asia. Equally significant was the unequivocal joint condemnation of terrorism in all its forms, and the emphasis that no country should provide a safe haven to those who finance, plan, or perpetrate such acts.

Infrastructure investment

The UAE's interest in India's infrastructure story is well established. The Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA)'s \$1 billion commitment to India's National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) Master Fund in 2017 was an early signal. Since then, UAE entities have emerged as key long-term substantial investors.

Ongoing discussions on the UAE's participation in developing the Special Investment Region in Dholera, Gujarat reflect this commitment. The envisaged partnership covers strategic assets including an international airport, pilot training facilities, maintenance and repair infrastructure, a greenfield port, a smart urban township, rail connectivity and energy infrastructure.

Investor interest in Dholera has been reinforced by successful roadshows in the UAE, where sovereign wealth funds and institutional investors have shown a strong appetite. Dholera's appeal lies in its status as a government-backed smart city, with advanced connectivity and utilities, anchor investments by major corporates, focus on high-technology sectors such as semiconductors and electric vehicles, and its potential as a future hub within the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor. The announcement that DP World and First Abu Dhabi Bank will establish offices in GIFT City further enhances its profile as an emerging international financial centre. These offices will serve as critical bridges connecting Indian companies with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Middle East and Northern Africa markets. ADIA already operates from GIFT City, reinforcing the UAE's long-term financial engagement with India. Buoyed by the strong

performance of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which has led to a 37% rise in bilateral trade since FY 2022-23, leaders have set an ambitious target of \$200 billion in trade by 2032. India's exports to the UAE grew by 28% last year to \$36 billion, while imports rose by 41% to \$64 billion, making the target realistic. This expansion could partly offset export pressures arising from unilateral tariff measures elsewhere. Beyond trade volumes, CEPA has significantly deepened trust between businesses and investors on both sides.

Initiatives such as Bharat Mart at Jebel Ali will provide a major boost to India's MSME exporters. The proposed Bharat-Africa Setu aims to connect Indian exporters with markets across Africa by leveraging DP World's logistics footprint. The Virtual Trade Corridor announced during Sheikh Khaled's visit is close to becoming operational and could also support broader connectivity initiatives such as the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor.

Building on the MoU on civil nuclear cooperation signed in September 2024, the decision to explore partnerships in advanced nuclear technologies, including large reactors, small modular reactors, operations and safety, is particularly significant. With the UAE generating nearly a quarter of its electricity from nuclear power, complementarities are evident, especially in the context of India's clean energy ambition.

The overview

The significance of MbZ's visit extends beyond announced deliverables. Recent intra-GCC political dynamics could have wider regional implications. India, with deep stakes across West Asia, must continue to carefully recalibrate its relationships, guided by strategic autonomy and multi-alignment, while avoiding entanglement in regional rivalries. The India-UAE partnership, anchored in trust and shared interests, offers a stable pillar amid regional uncertainty.



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Mains Question

India–UAE relations have evolved from an energy-centric partnership to a comprehensive strategic partnership.

Examine the key drivers of this transformation and discuss its strategic significance for India in the changing geopolitics of West Asia.

(250 words / 15 marks)

भारत-यूएई संबंध एक ऊर्जा-आधारित साझेदारी से आगे बढ़कर एक व्यापक रणनीतिक साझेदारी के रूप में विकसित हुए हैं।

इस परिवर्तन के प्रमुख कारकों का परीक्षण कीजिए तथा पश्चिम एशिया की बदलती भू-राजनीति में भारत के लिए इसके रणनीतिक महत्व की चर्चा कीजिए।

(250 शब्द / 15 अंक)

Bigger schools, better futures

Page No. 11, GS 2

A recent visit to China offered a striking view of what scale and holistic school design can achieve. A Class 1-9 school there serves around 1,200 students, with K-12 schools averaging 2,800 students. This is in stark contrast with India, where an average government K-8 school has around 150 students. Although three times the size of India, China has only one-third the number of schools. While India has succeeded in ensuring access at the elementary level, China has used scale to strengthen quality. Its schools have specialised subject teachers, support staff, viable vocational laboratories, and counselling, sports, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) labs, and co-curriculars – the kind of holistic learning environment that the National Education Policy, 2020, envisions.

India has made enormous strides in enrolment and infrastructure, but the school network remains fragmented. There are about 5.6 lakh schools nationally, which enrol less than 50 students each. Over 1 lakh single-teacher schools cover 33 lakh students, making multi-grade teaching a necessity (UDISE 24-25). At secondary levels, the need for subject expertise and lab infrastructure becomes even more critical. Around 40% of government secondary schools have fewer than 100 students enrolled (across Classes 9-12), making such provision difficult. Today, only 19% of schools have functional ICT labs, 51% have integrated science labs; about 10% offer higher secondary classes; and just 6% provide vocational education (UDISE 24-25).

Experiments with schools

These gaps highlight the next phase of India's education reform: building school systems that address not only access, but also the quality of education. Several States have already experimented with different models of this. Rajasthan has established one



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The road to universal, high-quality school education runs through integrated schools

upgraded, well-resourced government school in every Gram Panchayat, called Adarsh Schools. Over the past decade, the State has upgraded thousands of schools in a phased manner – improving infrastructure, staff deployment, and secondary-grade offerings. In Uttar Pradesh, Model Composite Schools (Class 1-12) have been approved in every district; these will have tech-based learning, including smart classrooms and WiFi. Madhya Pradesh has consolidated 36,000 under-enrolled schools under the NITI Aayog's SATH-E programme to create larger campuses with better facilities. In 2023, the Chief Minister announced the rollout of one 'CM RISE' school (now Maharishi Sandipani Schools) for every 25-30 villages to improve learning. Odisha, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Gujarat are also moving in this direction.

Composite and consolidated schools are not about efficiency alone; their core purpose is to create real learning environments, with one teacher per class and adequate subject specialists to support every child. Equity must remain paramount. This is enabled through decentralised decision-making, and supported by transport facilities so that no child loses access. Equally essential is thoughtful change management: engaging teachers, parents, and communities early to build consensus and ensure smooth, trusted transitions towards larger, integrated schools.

Drawing on these lessons, two clear directional goals can guide India's progress towards universal, high-quality school education by 2035. The first is to have one K-8 school in every Gram Panchayat. By 2035, India should transition towards K-8 integrated schools (elementary and middle) as the default elementary school model. If each K-8 school serves around 300 students, these campuses could collectively educate close to 8.1 crore children. This shift could allow each school to reach the

minimum enrolment threshold required for one teacher per class, and better facilities, leading to a better learning environment. Second, only 87% of students transition from middle to secondary school, and this falls to around 75% from secondary to higher secondary. Too often, secondary education is delivered through fragmented, under-resourced campuses with limited subject teachers, weak lab infrastructure, and few pathways beyond board examinations. What India needs at scale are composite secondary schools.

By 2035, India is projected to have nearly 8 crore students in Classes 9-12. This scale creates the possibility of large, well-resourced secondary schools with the capacity to offer real-world, application-based learning, career guidance, subject specialist teachers and multiple academic and vocational pathways. Supported by transport facilities, such schools ensure that distance does not become a barrier to continuing education and allow secondary schooling to move beyond exam preparation.

Achieving these goals

India needs State-specific road maps that lay out how each State will move towards larger, well-resourced schools, grounded in local realities of population density, geography and existing school networks. States can consider the following levers while designing these road maps. The first is thoughtful teacher deployment so that there is one teacher per class and subject specialists. The second is localised planning and decentralised decision making. The third is coming up with transport solutions for students. States will need a mix of transport models to ensure that students can reach these schools. The fourth is providing funding for composite schools. Samagra Shiksha, supported by State funds and coordinated with other schemes, can finance these upgrades.

- **A recent visit to China offered a striking view of what scale and holistic school design can achieve. A Class 1-9 school there serves around 1,200 students, with K-12 schools averaging 2,800 students.**
- **This is in stark contrast with India, where an average government K-8 school has around 150 students. Although three times the size of India, China has only one-third the number of schools.**
- **While India has succeeded in ensuring access at the elementary level, China has used scale to strengthen quality.**
- **India has made enormous strides in enrolment and infrastructure, but the school network remains fragmented.**

- **There are about 5.6 lakh schools nationally, which enrol less than 50 students each. Over 1 lakh single-teacher schools cover 33 lakh students, making multi-grade teaching a necessity (UDISE 24-25).**
- **At secondary levels, the need for subject expertise and lab infrastructure becomes even more critical. Around 40% of government secondary schools have fewer than 100 students enrolled (across Classes 9-12), making such provision difficult.**
- **Today, only 19% of schools have functional ICT labs, 51% have integrated science labs; about 10% offer higher secondary classes; and just 6% provide vocational education (UDISE 24-25).**
- **These gaps highlight the next phase of India's education reform: building school systems that address not only access, but also the quality of education.**

- **Composite and consolidated schools are not about efficiency alone; their core purpose is to create real learning environments, with one teacher per class and adequate subject specialists to support every child. Equity must remain paramount.**
- **Of the voters whose names were deleted, almost 4.79 lakh are dead, over 5.23 lakh have shifted, and 53,619 were found to have duplicate entries.**
- **By 2035, India is projected to have nearly 8 crore students in Classes 9-12.**
- **This scale creates the possibility of large, well-resourced secondary schools with the capacity to offer real-world, application-based learning, career guidance, subject specialist teachers and multiple academic and vocational pathways. Supported by transport facilities, such schools ensure that distance does not become a barrier to continuing education and allow secondary schooling to move beyond exam preparation.**

Which of the following provisions of the Constitution of India have a bearing on Education?

- 1. Directive Principles of State Policy**
- 2. Rural and Urban Local Bodies**
- 3. Fifth Schedule**
- 4. Sixth Schedule**
- 5. Seventh Schedule**

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

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

Mains Question

Universal access to education is central to inclusive growth and social justice.

Examine the extent to which India has achieved universal access to education.

Discuss the key challenges and suggest measures to address existing gaps.

(250 words / 15 marks)

सार्वभौमिक शिक्षा तक पहुँच समावेशी विकास और सामाजिक न्याय का मूल आधार है।

भारत में सार्वभौमिक शिक्षा तक पहुँच की उपलब्धि का आकलन कीजिए।

मौजूदा चुनौतियों की चर्चा करते हुए उन्हें दूर करने के उपाय सुझाइए।

(250 शब्द / 15 अंक)

Asiatic Wild Dog (Dhole)



- **A rare Asiatic Wild Dog (Dhole) has been camera-trapped for the first time in Ratapani Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh, indicating improving habitat and prey conditions.**
- **The Asiatic Wild Dog, commonly called the Dhole (*Cuon alpinus*), is a wild canid native to South and Southeast Asia. It is a highly social, pack-hunting top predator that plays a key role in regulating herbivore populations.**

Habitat and distribution:

- **Preferred habitats: Dense forests, forest-grassland mosaics, and hilly/undulating landscapes with adequate prey.**
- **India: Found mainly in central Indian forests and the Western/Eastern Ghats, typically within or near large protected landscapes where prey base is strong.**

- **Ecological requirement: Needs large, connected habitats because packs range widely and depend on continuous prey availability.**
- **IUCN Red List: Endangered (EN)**

Key characteristics:

- **Pack hunter: Typically hunts in cooperative groups, relying on teamwork rather than solitary ambush.**
- **Prey preference: Medium-to-large ungulates such as chital, sambar, deer, etc.**
- **Highly social: Lives in clans/packs with cooperative care of young; strong coordination during hunts.**
- **Distinctive identity: Reddish coat, rounded ears, and specialised dentition adapted for meat-shearing.**

Thank You!

