



Political Unrest in Nepal

For Prelims: [Treaty of Sugauli](#), [Treaty of Peace and Friendship 1950](#), [Belt and Road Initiative](#), [Mahakali River hydropower](#), [BIMSTEC](#)

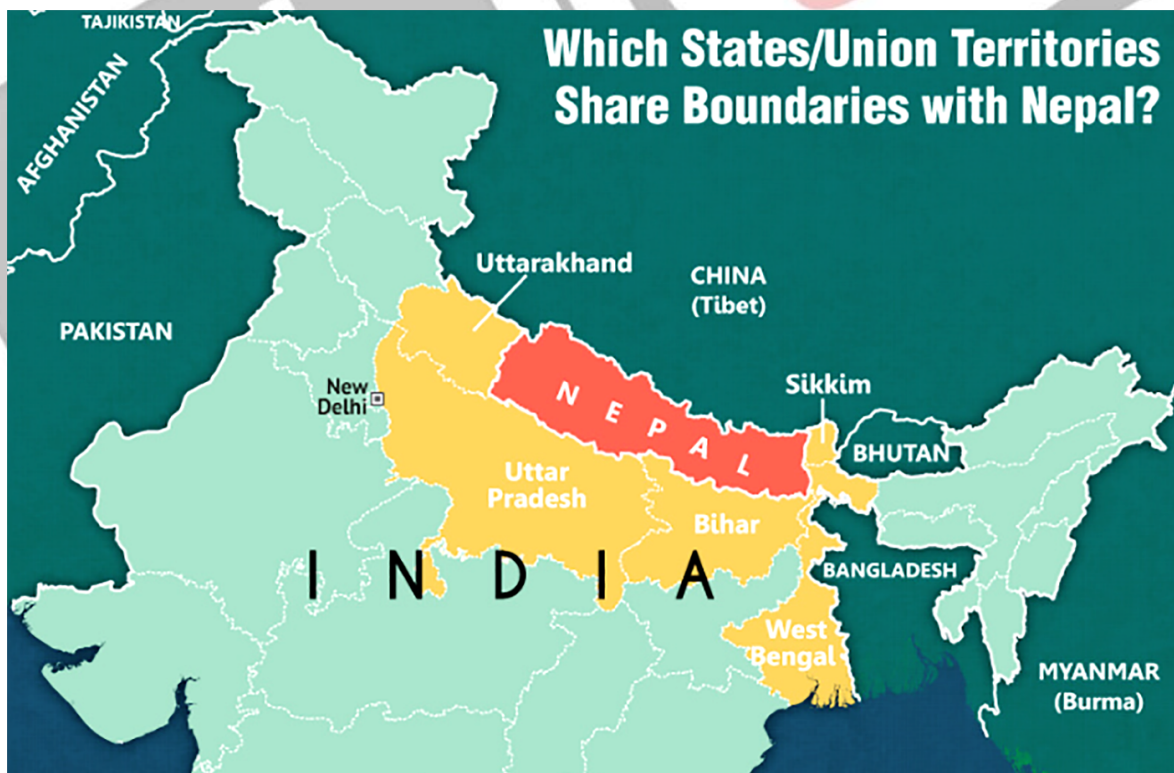
For Mains: [India's Neighbourhood First Policy](#), [India's Act East Policy](#)

[Source:IE](#)

Why in News?

Nepal is facing a phase of political unrest, with Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli resigning amid widespread **youth-led** (Generation Z) **demonstrations**. The unrest stems from long-standing concerns **over corruption, nepotism, unemployment, and widening inequalities**, alongside discontent with restrictions on social media platforms.

- The situation grew more volatile after police firing in **Kathmandu** resulted in casualties, deepening public grievances and instability.



Historical and Cultural Connections Between India and Nepal

- **Epic Ties:** In the *Ramayana*, Lord Rama (Ayodhya) married Goddess Sita (Janakpur, Nepal).

- **Ancient Republics:** In 6th century BC, **Magadh and Shakya Republics spanned both sides of the Indo-Nepal border.**
 - Prince Siddhartha (Buddha) was born in Lumbini (Nepal) and attained Nirvana at Bodh Gaya (India).
- **Shared Freedom Struggles:** K.P. Bhattarai, born in Varanasi, actively participated in the **Quit India Movement against the British and in Nepal's anti-Rana movements.**
 - At the time, Banaras served as a key center for anti-Rana activism.
- **Military Ties:** The **1816 Treaty of Sugauli**, an agreement between the Gurkha chiefs of Nepal and the **British Indian government**, ended the **Anglo-Nepalese War (1814-16)** and paved the way for Nepali recruitment into the Indian (erstwhile British Indian) Army.
- **Treaty of Peace and Friendship 1950:** The **Treaty of Peace and Friendship 1950** granted national treatment to each other's citizens in economic participation, property ownership, trade, residence, and movement.

How does Nepal's Political Crisis Affect India's Interests?

- **Security Concerns: Political instability in Nepal creates gaps in governance, which can be exploited by insurgent groups, cross-border criminals, and illicit networks.**
 - India shares an open border with Nepal, so any law-and-order vacuum or unrest directly threatens India's internal security and may increase cross-border smuggling, trafficking, or militant infiltration.
- **Economic Impact:** **India is Nepal's key trading partner**, exporting USD 7.32 billion worth of goods to Nepal in FY25, while importing USD 1.2 billion, giving India a significant trade surplus.
 - Due to the political crisis, Indian investments and supply chains in Nepal face uncertainty, while instability creates openings for China to step in.
- **Impact on Development Cooperation:** India's **High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDPs)** in Nepal (over 573 projects in health, education, electrification, sanitation, etc.) play a crucial role in strengthening bilateral ties and fostering positive relations.
 - Political instability weakens project implementation and creates space for competing influences like China's **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**.
- **Halt to Hydropower and Energy Cooperation:** Nepal is central to India's plans for cross-border electricity trade (e.g., the **India-Nepal long-term power trade agreement** and **trilateral energy trade with Bangladesh**).
 - Political instability could slow or derail major hydropower projects like Arun-3, Phukot Karnali, and Lower Arun.
 - **This affects India's goal of becoming a regional energy hub.**
- **Disturbance to Defence and Security Cooperation:** India and Nepal have strong military ties (e.g., joint Surya Kiran exercises).
 - But political crises weaken institutional continuity, disrupt defence exchanges, and give room for rival external actors like China to step in.

Note: Nepal's political unrest is not an isolated episode but a symptom of the **broader fragility that grips India's neighbourhood**. Such unrest does not remain confined within borders, it spills into security, connectivity, and regional cooperation, constraining India's strategic leverage.

What are the Consequences of Neighbourhood Turmoil for India?

- **Internal Security Threat:** With Pakistan, the dispute over Jammu and Kashmir remains a **core issue, fueling cross-border terrorism and military confrontations.**
 - Also, porous Northeast borders with Myanmar and Bangladesh allow illegal movement of weapons, drugs, and insurgents.
- **Geopolitical and Strategic Implications:** Neighbourhood turmoil creates a power vacuum that

major powers, especially China and the US, seek to exploit.

- China leverages the BRI in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bangladesh to gain strategic influence, exploiting regional instability.
- Militarization of the **Indian Ocean and Chinese control over critical ports (Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Gwadar in Pakistan)** create long-term security vulnerabilities for India.

▪ **Economic and Developmental Impacts: Political unrest delays cross-border projects, e.g., [India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway](#). This affects [India's Act East Policy](#) and its role as a regional economic hub.**

- Instability deters investments and delays Indian developmental projects, weakening India's goodwill.
 - Delayed Indian projects, such as [Mahakali River hydropower](#), create a trust deficit.
- **Political turmoil also complicates management of shared rivers, e.g., [Teesta river dispute with Bangladesh](#), impacting agriculture and energy security.**

▪ **Refugee and Humanitarian Crisis: Refugee inflows create socio-cultural tensions and competition for resources in border areas, e.g., Assam.**

- India often provides aid and shelter during crises, showcasing responsibility but straining domestic infrastructure.
- These inflows sometimes trigger identity-based tensions, as seen in the **debates around the [National Register of Citizens \(NRC\)](#) and the [Citizenship Amendment Act \(CAA\), 2019](#).**

▪ **Erosion of India's Strategic Space in Multilateral Forums: Instability weakens South Asian regional organizations (like [SAARC](#), and [BIMSTEC](#)), limiting India's ability to build consensus and drive cooperative initiatives.**

- Political deadlock often sidelines India's proposals and turns forums ineffective, allowing extra-regional powers to exploit divisions and shape the regional agenda.

What Measures India Can Adopt to Enhance its Active Engagement in the Neighbourhood?

▪ **Improving Border and Cross-Border Management: Effective border management is key to preventing security threats and ensuring smooth trade.**

- This requires investing in modernized border infrastructure, including integrated check posts and digital customs systems to reduce delays

▪ **Comprehensive Security and Defence Cooperation: Build regional crisis management frameworks in collaboration with SAARC, and BIMSTEC for coordinated response to natural disasters, political upheavals, and security threats.**

- Expand joint military exercises with countries like Nepal, Maldives, and Myanmar. Enhance maritime domain awareness and secure the Indian Ocean through shared resources.

▪ **Strengthen Regional Connectivity and Infrastructure: Expand road, rail, and port linkages through initiatives like the [BBIN Motor Vehicle Agreement](#), and [Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Project](#)**

- Fast-track and complete infrastructure projects in Nepal, Sri Lanka, and other neighbours using a "whole-of-government" approach.

▪ **Economic and Connectivity-Driven Diplomacy: India must prioritize economic cooperation by offering a more attractive and reliable alternative to China's "debt trap diplomacy."**

- This involves providing soft loans and grants with flexible terms for infrastructure projects and offering development assistance tailored to each country's specific needs.

▪ **Leveraging Soft Power and People-to-People Ties: A more effective neighborhood policy goes beyond government-to-government relations to include people-to-people connections.**

- India can enhance its soft power by expanding programs like the [Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation \(ITEC\)](#), which offers training and scholarships to professionals from neighboring countries.

Conclusion

The political unrest in Nepal highlights the challenges of deeper instability in India's neighbourhood,

affecting trade, security, and regional influence. India's [Neighbourhood First Policy](#) calls for **proactive engagement** combining robust diplomacy, strategic security cooperation, developmental assistance, and cultural engagement to **safeguard regional stability and strengthen its role as a reliable and influential partner**.

Drishti Mains Question:

Q. Critically analyse how instability in neighbouring countries affects India's security, trade, and regional influence.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. Elephant Pass, sometimes seen in the news, is mentioned in the context of the affairs of which one of the following? (2009)

- (a) Bangladesh
- (b) India
- (c) Nepal
- (d) Sri Lanka

Ans: (d)

Q. Consider the following statements: (2020)

1. The value of Indo-Sri Lanka trade has consistently increased in the last decade.
2. "Textile and textile articles" constitute an important item of trade between India and Bangladesh.
3. In the last five years, Nepal has been the largest trading partner of India in South Asia.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Ans: (b)

Mains:

Q. "China is using its economic relations and positive trade surplus as tools to develop potential military power status in Asia". In the light of this statement, discuss its impact on India as her neighbour. (2017)

Should the 50% Reservation Cap Be Raised?

For Prelims: [Reservation](#), [Article 14](#), [Article 15](#), [Article 16](#), [economically weaker sections \(EWS\)](#), [Supreme Court of India](#), [Scheduled Castes](#), [Scheduled Tribes](#)

For Mains: [Reservation](#), Challenges and Way Forward

[Source: TH](#)

Why in News?

Bihar's Opposition leader has proposed increasing **quotas to 85%** if voted to power, while the **Supreme Court** has sought the Centre's response on applying the '**creamy layer**' concept to **SCs and STs**.

- These debates on **reservation** challenge the **50% constitutional cap** and raise concerns about equitable distribution of benefits among marginalised groups.

What are the Key Provisions Related to Reservations in India?

- **About:** Reservation is a form of **positive discrimination aimed at promoting equality for marginalized groups** and addressing social and historical injustices. It provides **preferential treatment in education and employment** to uplift disadvantaged communities.
 - At the central level, reservations include **27% for OBCs, 15% for SCs, 7.5% for STs, and 10% for EWS**, making a **total of about 59.5%**, though the **share differs across States** as per their policies and demographics.

The journey of reservations

A brief summary of important developments with respect to reservations at the central level

Year	Key development
1950 and 1951	Commencement of the Constitution and the First Amendment — enabling provisions in Articles 15 and 16 for the advancement of OBCs, SCs and STs
1982	Reservations for SCs and STs fixed at 15% and 7.5% respectively in central educational institutions and public sector undertakings
1990	The introduction of 27% reservation for OBCs in central government employment based on the recommendation of the Mandal Commission
2005	Article 15(5) inserted by the 93rd constitutional amendment that enabled reservations for OBCs, SCs and STs in educational institutions, including private ones
2019	Articles 15(6) and 16(6) inserted by the 103rd constitutional amendment which enabled up to 10% reservation for the EWS among the unreserved category in educational institutions and public employment

- **Key Provisions:** The **Constitution of India** incorporates various provisions to promote **social justice and ensure adequate representation** for historically disadvantaged communities.
 - These provisions span across **Part III (Fundamental Rights)** and **Part XVI (Special Provisions Relating to Certain Classes)**.
 - **Articles under Part III on Reservation:**
 - **Article 15(3):** Empowers the State to make special provisions for women and children.
 - **Article 15(4):** Enables the State to make special provisions for the advancement of socially and educationally backward classes, including SCs and STs.
 - **Article 15(5):** Allows for reservation in educational institutions (including private, unaided institutions but excluding minority institutions) for socially and educationally backward classes, SCs, and STs.

- **Article 15(6):** Introduced via the 103rd Constitutional Amendment (2019), allows the State to make special provisions, including reservations, for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) among unreserved categories.
- **Article 16(4):** Permits reservation in appointments/posts for any backward class of citizens not adequately represented in state services.
- **Article 16(4A):** Allows reservation in promotions for SCs and STs (77th Amendment Act, 1995, modified by the 85th Amendment Act, 2001 to include consequential seniority).
- **Article 16(4B):** Allows the State to carry forward unfilled reserved vacancies from previous years without breaching the 50% ceiling (81st Amendment Act, 2000).
- **Article 16(6):** Provides for reservation in public employment for EWS, distinct from the backward class reservations.
- **Articles under Part XVI on Reservation:**
 - **Article 330 & 332:** Provide for the reservation of seats for SCs and STs in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, respectively.
 - **Article 233T:** Ensures reservation of **seats for SCs and STs** in every Municipality.
 - **Article 243D:** Mandates reservation for **SCs and STs in every Panchayat**.
 - **Article 335:** States that the claims of **SCs and STs shall be taken into account in the making of appointments** to public services and posts, consistent with the maintenance of administrative efficiency.
- **Key Judicial Rulings Shaping the Reservation Framework:**
 - In [Balaji vs. State of Mysore, 1962](#) case, **Supreme Court (SC)** held that **reservations under Articles 15 and 16** must be **within "reasonable limits"** and **should not exceed 50%**, viewing them as an **exception to equality of opportunity (formal equality)**.
 - In the [State of Kerala vs. N.M. Thomas 1975 case](#), **SC** recognized '**substantive equality**', stating that **reservations are not an exception but an extension of equality of opportunity**.
 - In [State of Punjab vs. Davinder Singh, 2024](#), the **SC** suggested that **policies be framed for applying the creamy layer principle** within **SC/ST reservations**. However, the Union Cabinet clarified that the **creamy layer exclusion does not apply to SC/ST quotas**.

Landmark Cases and Judgements regarding Reservation

Cases	Judgement	Fallout
State of Madras v. Champakam Dorairajan, 1950	Court ruled that caste-based reservations violate Article 15(1) of the Constitution. It said reservation was an exception to equality and hence violated the right to equality.	Led to the introduction of the First Amendment of the Constitution, which invalidated the judgment.
M. R. Balaji v. State of Mysore, 1963	The Mysore government's 68% reservation in college admissions was ruled as excessive and unreasonable, and was capped at 50%.	The Supreme Court in the Indra Sawhney case imposed the 50 % limit on reservations in 1992.
Devadasan v Union of India, 1964	The court ruled that if reservations go beyond 50% they would be invalid.	Reservation was rationalised and was termed a facet of equality.
State of Kerala v NM Thomas	Reaffirmed the idea that reservation is not an exception but is necessary to establish equality. It ruled that Article 16(1)'s conception of equality itself includes remedial action to ensure due representation for hitherto excluded classes.	The ruling is considered to be the first definite judicial endorsement of the philosophy of reservation
Indra Sawhney & Others v. Union of India, 1992	The court upheld separate reservation for OBCs but excluded the "creamy layer". It rejected economic reservation and set a ceiling of 50 % for all reservations.	The case was pressed again in 1999 and the Supreme Court reaffirmed the creamy layer exclusion and extended it to SCs and STs.
M. Nagraj & Others v. Union of India and Others, 2007	Upheld 77th Amendment which extended reservations for promotion in employment for SCs and STs.	The court ruled that promotions should satisfy the triple test of backwardness, representation and the need for efficiency. Backlog vacancies were excluded from the 50% limit.
I. R. Coelho (deceased) by LRS. v. State of Tamil Nadu, 2007	Tamil Nadu advised by Supreme Court to follow 50% reservation limit	Tamil Nadu reservations were put under the 9th Schedule of the constitution, which had already been upheld by the court.
P. A. Inamdar v. State of Maharashtra, 2005	Reservations cannot be enforced on private educational institutions which do not receive government funding.	Led to 93rd Constitution Amendment introduced Art 15(5).
Ashoka Kumar Thakur v. Union of India, 2007	Upheld the 93rd Amendment on reservation for admission to unaided educational institutions	Recommended reviews of backwardness every 10 years.
Ram Singh & Ors v Union of India, 2014	Struck down the inclusion of Jats in the Central list of OBCs	Proposed new ways to determine backwardness
Jaishri Laxmanrao Patil v Union of India, 2021	Maratha reservation struck down as unconstitutional	The 50 % ceiling on reservations was reaffirmed
Janhit Abhiyan vs Union Of India, 2022	Upheld 103rd Amendment which introduced 10% reservation for Economically Weaker Sections in education and public employment	A new reservation regime created

Formal Equality Vs Substantive Equality

- **Formal Equality** refers to the principle of "**equality before the law**" and "**equal protection of laws**" under **Article 14**, ensuring identical treatment for all citizens regardless of caste, religion, or socio-economic status.
 - However, it may overlook historical disadvantages and systemic inequalities, potentially leading to unfair outcomes.
- **Substantive Equality** focuses on **achieving fair outcomes by addressing historical disadvantages and systemic inequalities**.
 - It **goes beyond identical treatment**, aiming to provide equitable opportunities and outcomes, and is reflected in policies like reservation. However, it requires differentiated support and its implementation can be complex.

What are the Arguments For and Against Exceeding the 50% Reservation Cap?

Arguments For	Arguments Against
Demographic Justification: Backward classes (OBCs, SCs, STs) constitute over 60% of India's population, and the current 50% ceiling limits proportional representation.	Legal Constraints: The SC in Indra Sawhney (1992) reaffirmed the 50% ceiling to balance merit and social justice, allowing exceptions only in extraordinary circumstances.
Addressing Unequal Benefits: The Rohini Commission (2017-23) found 97% of OBC benefits go to 25% of sub-castes; raising quotas and introducing sub-categorisation could correct this imbalance.	Implementation Challenges: 40-50% of reserved seats remain unfilled, indicating that raising quotas without improving implementation will not increase representation.
Promoting Substantive Equality: The SC in <i>State of Kerala vs. N.M. Thomas (1975)</i> stated that reservations are a continuation of equality, not an exception, and should not be limited by numerical caps.	Creamy Layer Concerns: As the <i>Davinder Singh (2024)</i> case emphasized, intra-caste inequalities within SCs and STs must be addressed. Expanding reservations without excluding the creamy layer could worsen disparities.
State-Level Precedent: States like Tamil Nadu, Haryana, and Maharashtra have implemented reservations beyond 50%, reflecting the need to adapt policies to social realities.	Administrative Efficiency: Raising quotas excessively could compromise administrative efficiency by sidelining merit, potentially affecting governance.

What Measures Can be Taken for Effective Implementation of Reservation in India?

- **Data on Population:** Undertake a **comprehensive caste census** to collect **accurate data on population distribution** and **socio-economic status of various communities**.
- **Sub-Categorisation & Creamy Layer:** Implement *Rohini Commission recommendations* such as **sub-categorisation for OBCs** and consider **creamy layer exclusion** for SCs/STs to ensure **equitable distribution** within communities.
- **Two-Tier Reservation for SC/STs:** Prioritise **more marginalised sections** before extending benefits to relatively better-off members within these communities.
- **Address Backlogs:** Focus on **filling vacant reserved posts** and improving **administrative efficiency** to make reservation policies effective.
- **Skill Development & Employment:** Complement reservations with **training programs and job creation initiatives** to meet the aspirations of India's **large youth population**.

Conclusion

The reservation debate balances **formal equality** (equal treatment) with **substantive equality** (correcting historical disadvantages). While exceeding the 50% cap is constitutionally sensitive, it reflects demands for **greater inclusion**. Effective implementation requires **data-driven policies, sub-categorisation, and focus on marginalised groups**, complemented by **skill development**, to ensure reservations empower rather than exclude.

Drishti Mains Question:

Critically examine the role of reservation in promoting social justice in India. How can its benefits be made more equitable?

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question:

Prelims

Q. Consider the following organizations/bodies in India: (2023)

1. The National Commission for Backward Classes
2. The National Human Rights Commission

3. The National Law Commission
4. The National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission

How many of the above constitutional bodies?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) Only three
- (d) All four

Ans: (a)

Mains:

Q. What are the two major legal initiatives by the State since Independence addressing discrimination against Scheduled Tribes (STs). (2017)

Harnessing BRICS for India's Strategic Ambitions

For Prelims: [New Development Bank](#), [BRICS](#), [US tariff hikes](#), [SWIFT](#), [Purchasing Power Parity](#), [QUAD](#)

For Mains: Potential does BRICS Hold in Cushioning India Against Geoeconomic Shocks, Key Barriers Stand in the Way of India's Deeper Involvement in BRICS.

Source: [IE](#)

Why in News?

At the virtual [BRICS Leaders' Summit](#), India's External Affairs Minister cautioned against **linking trade measures with political or non-trade issues** in the backdrop of [US tariff hikes](#).

- The importance of **fair, transparent, and resilient trade systems amid global conflicts, climate shocks**, and supply chain disruptions was also emphasised.

What is BRICS?

- **About:** BRICS is a cooperative intergovernmental organization of **emerging economies that was originally formed to enhance economic collaboration** and increase the global political and economic influence of its members.
 - The name BRICS is an acronym for its five founding countries: **Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa**.
- **Foundation:** The term "**BRIC**" was first coined in 2001 by **Jim O'Neill** to describe the rapidly growing economies of Brazil, Russia, India, and China.
 - **The first formal summit of the four countries was held in 2009 in Russia**, where they officially formed a diplomatic club.
 - **South Africa** was invited to join in 2010, which led to the group's name being changed to BRICS.
- **Purpose:**

- **Promote Economic Cooperation:** This includes increasing trade, investment, and financial ties among member states.
- **Counterbalance Western Influence:** The group seeks to create a more equitable and multipolar world order by advocating for reforms in global governance institutions like the **United Nations, IMF, and the World Bank.**
- **Establish Alternative Financial Systems:** To reduce reliance on the U.S. dollar and Western-dominated institutions, the BRICS countries created [the New Development Bank \(NDB\)](#) and the **Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA).**
- **Expansion of BRICS:** BRICS has expanded its membership to include **Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates,** a development often described as “BRICS+.”

What Potential does BRICS Hold in Cushioning India Against Geoeconomic Shocks?

- **Alternative Financial Architecture:** BRICS offers India access to financial resources outside the Western-dominated institutions like IMF and World Bank.
 - NDB has approved nearly USD 10 billion in loans for 28 major infrastructure projects in India, including the Chennai, Indore, and Mumbai metro systems, the Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut Regional Rapid Transit System, and the Namo Bharat high-speed trains.
 - Such financing cushions India during global credit squeezes or when Western agencies impose conditionalities.
 - It also enhances India’s bargaining power in negotiations with Bretton Woods institutions.
- **Energy Security and Diversified Supplies:** The grouping includes major energy exporters like Russia and Brazil and large consumers like India and China, making it a natural platform for energy cooperation.
 - India, which imports over 80% of its crude oil needs, benefited after the Ukraine crisis when Russia emerged as a key supplier.
 - Access to discounted Russian oil has helped India manage inflation and trade deficits. BRICS discussions on an “Energy Alliance” further promise stable supplies at predictable prices.
- **Local Currency Trade and De-dollarisation:** By promoting settlement in local currencies, BRICS cushions India against dollar volatility and sanctions risk.
 - Efforts toward a BRICS reserve currency and bilateral arrangements like rupee-ruble trade are significant steps.
 - For instance, India and Russia agreed to increase bilateral trade to \$100 billion dollars by 2030, including the use of national currencies to circumvent Western sanctions.
 - This reduces India’s vulnerability to external shocks like U.S. monetary tightening or sanctions-driven disruptions in global payments systems such as [SWIFT](#).
- **Market Access Amid Global Slowdowns:** The expanded BRICS market acts as a cushion for India when Western economies slow down or erect trade barriers.
 - IMF data reveals that BRICS accounted for 40% of the global economy (measured by [Purchasing Power Parity](#)) in 2024.
 - India’s pharmaceutical exports, agri-products, and IT services can find steady demand within this bloc.
 - Thus, BRICS provides a buffer against demand shocks in traditional Western markets.
- **Technology and Digital Cooperation:** Geoeconomic shocks often manifest in technology sanctions, as seen in U.S. restrictions on semiconductors and digital platforms.
 - BRICS fosters cooperation in AI, fintech, 5G, and space technologies, creating alternative ecosystems.
 - NDB support for India’s smart cities projects also illustrates how BRICS strengthens digital infrastructure, insulating India against external tech-driven shocks.
- **Food and Fertilizer Security:** Global crises often disrupt food and fertilizer supplies, threatening India’s agrarian economy.
 - BRICS offers a safety net, as Russia is among the largest suppliers of fertilizers and agri-

inputs.

- Similarly, cooperation in agricultural research and supply chains ensures stability in grain and edible oil availability, safeguarding India's food security during global disruptions.

What Key Barriers Stand in the Way of India's Deeper Involvement in BRICS?

- **China's Dominance and Strategic Rivalry:** China's economic size and political influence overshadow other BRICS members, limiting India's ability to shape agendas.
 - **With China's GDP nearly 5 times India's**, it sets the tone on issues like de-dollarisation and technology frameworks.
 - The border tensions at **Galwan (2020)** and **Beijing's opposition to India's UNSC bid** weaken mutual trust.
- **Divergent Strategic Alignments:** Member states often hold conflicting foreign policy stances, making cohesion difficult.
 - For instance, **Russia and China openly challenge Western dominance**, whereas India maintains strong ties with the **EU**, and **QUAD**.
 - Brazil under different governments has oscillated between West-leaning and South-South engagement.
 - This divergence dilutes BRICS' effectiveness as a united front, and India risks being seen as an outlier between two camps.
- **Limited Institutional Depth:** Unlike the EU or ASEAN, BRICS lacks binding structures, permanent secretariats, or enforcement mechanisms.
 - Most initiatives such as the **BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement—remain underutilized and symbolic**.
 - For India, which needs tangible economic and strategic benefits, the absence of strong institutional frameworks reduces BRICS' ability to act as a reliable buffer against shocks.
- **Slow Progress on Financial Alternatives:** Although BRICS promotes de-dollarisation and local currency trade, actual implementation remains patchy.
 - **Intra-BRICS trade is still largely dollar-denominated**, and the much-discussed BRICS reserve currency is yet to materialize.
 - For India, which needs credible and quick financial alternatives to cushion against dollar shocks, this slow pace reduces the practical utility of BRICS promises.
- **Overlap with Other Alliances and Strategic Balancing:** India's foreign policy is based on the principle of strategic autonomy, engaging with multiple blocs without being tied to any single one.
 - As a member of BRICS, **India also maintains strong ties with Western-led groups like the G7 and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)**.
 - This requires a delicate balancing act. India must ensure that its participation in BRICS, which is often seen as a counterweight to the West, **does not alienate its strategic partners, particularly the United States**.

What Measures can India Adopt to Effectively Utilise BRICS for its Geoeconomic Ambitions?

- **Promote Local Currency Trade and Payment Systems:** To reduce vulnerability to dollar volatility, India can expand **rupee-based trade mechanisms** within BRICS.
 - **Linking UPI with Russia's SPFS** or promoting rupee-yuan settlements can reduce reliance on SWIFT.
- **Push for Balanced Trade and Supply Chain Resilience:** India must negotiate for diversified supply chains within BRICS to **correct its large trade deficit with China**.
 - Deepening cooperation with **Brazil for agri-products, Russia for energy, and South Africa for minerals** and with newer **BRICS+ members like the UAE, Egypt, and Indonesia for trade, investment, and strategic sectors** can help India build more balanced and diversified economic linkages.
 - This reduces India's overdependence on Chinese imports, aligning BRICS with India's vision of **Atmanirbhar Bharat** and resilient global value chains.
- **Leverage Energy and Resource Partnerships:** India can institutionalize long-term energy

partnerships with Russia and Brazil through **BRICS energy frameworks**.

- For example, **ensuring stable access to oil, natural gas, and fertilizers** at predictable prices will shield India from global market volatility.
- **Joint exploration and renewable energy projects** under BRICS can further diversify India's energy basket while supporting its **net-zero 2070 commitment**.

▪ **Expand Digital and Technology Cooperation:** India should champion BRICS cooperation in **AI, fintech, cybersecurity, and space technology**, where it already has comparative advantages.

- Promoting **UPI-like models across BRICS** or **collaborating on 6G and digital infrastructure** would position India as a digital leader.
- This would reduce exposure to Western tech sanctions while creating export opportunities for India's IT sector.

▪ **Pursue Issue-Based Pragmatism:** Given internal divergences, India must adopt a **selective engagement approach** focusing on areas like energy security, green finance, and digital cooperation where BRICS adds real value.

- Simultaneously, it should avoid being drawn into anti-West blocs led by China or Russia.
- This pragmatic strategy ensures that BRICS complements, rather than complicates, India's parallel engagements in **Quad, G20, and SCO**.

▪ **Strengthen People-to-People and Cultural Linkages:** Beyond economics, India can promote academic exchanges, tourism, and joint research initiatives within BRICS to build long-term soft power.

- Cultural cooperation with BRICS+ members like **Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Indonesia** can also foster goodwill, trust, and collaboration in strategic sectors.

Conclusion:

In an era of increasing geoeconomic volatility, **BRICS presents India with a strategic platform to diversify trade, strengthen energy and resource security**, and expand technological and financial cooperation. A pragmatic, issue-based approach ensures that BRICS complements India's broader foreign policy and economic vision of fostering resilience.

Drishti Mains Question:

In the context of India's geoeconomic ambitions, critically examine the potential and challenges of India's engagement with BRICS. How can India strategically leverage this grouping to enhance trade, energy security, and technological cooperation while safeguarding its broader foreign policy interests?

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. Consider the following statements: (2016)

1. New Development Bank has been set up by APEC.
2. The headquarters of the New Development Bank is in Shanghai.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Ans: (b)

Q. The 'Fortaleza Declaration', recently in the news, is related to the affairs of (2015)

- (a) ASEAN

- (b) BRICS
- (c) OECD
- (d) WTO

Ans: (b)

Gyan Bharatam Mission

[Source: IE](#)

Why in News?

The Ministry of Culture, at the **first Gyan Bharatam International Conference on ‘Reclaiming India’s Knowledge Legacy through Manuscript Heritage’** under the [Gyan Bharatam Mission](#), invited experts to present research on [deciphering the Harappan \(Indus Valley\) script](#).

What is the Gyan Bharatam Mission?

- **About:** The Gyan Bharatam Mission, announced in [Union Budget 2025-26](#), is a national initiative to preserve, digitise, and disseminate **India’s vast manuscript heritage**, combining tradition with modern technology for future generations.
- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Culture.
- **Objective:**



- **Mission Components:**
 - **Survey & Documentation:** Nationwide identification and cataloguing of manuscripts.
 - **Conservation & Restoration:** Safeguard fragile texts through scientific and traditional methods.
 - **Digitisation & Repository:** AI-assisted digitisation and creation of a **National Digital Repository**.
 - **Technology & AI Innovation:** Tools like **Handwritten Text Recognition** and **Gyan-Setu AI Challenge**.
- **Significance:** With over 44 lakh manuscripts documented in **Kriti Sampada (National Database of Manuscripts)**, it preserves India’s civilisational knowledge spanning **philosophy, science, medicine, mathematics, arts, literature, and spirituality**.
 - Supports **Article 51A(f)**, fundamental duty to value and preserve cultural heritage.
 - Aligns with [National Education Policy \(NEP\) 2020](#), integrating Indian Knowledge Systems into modern education.
 - It bridges **heritage and technology**, empowering youth while promoting India’s global cultural leadership.

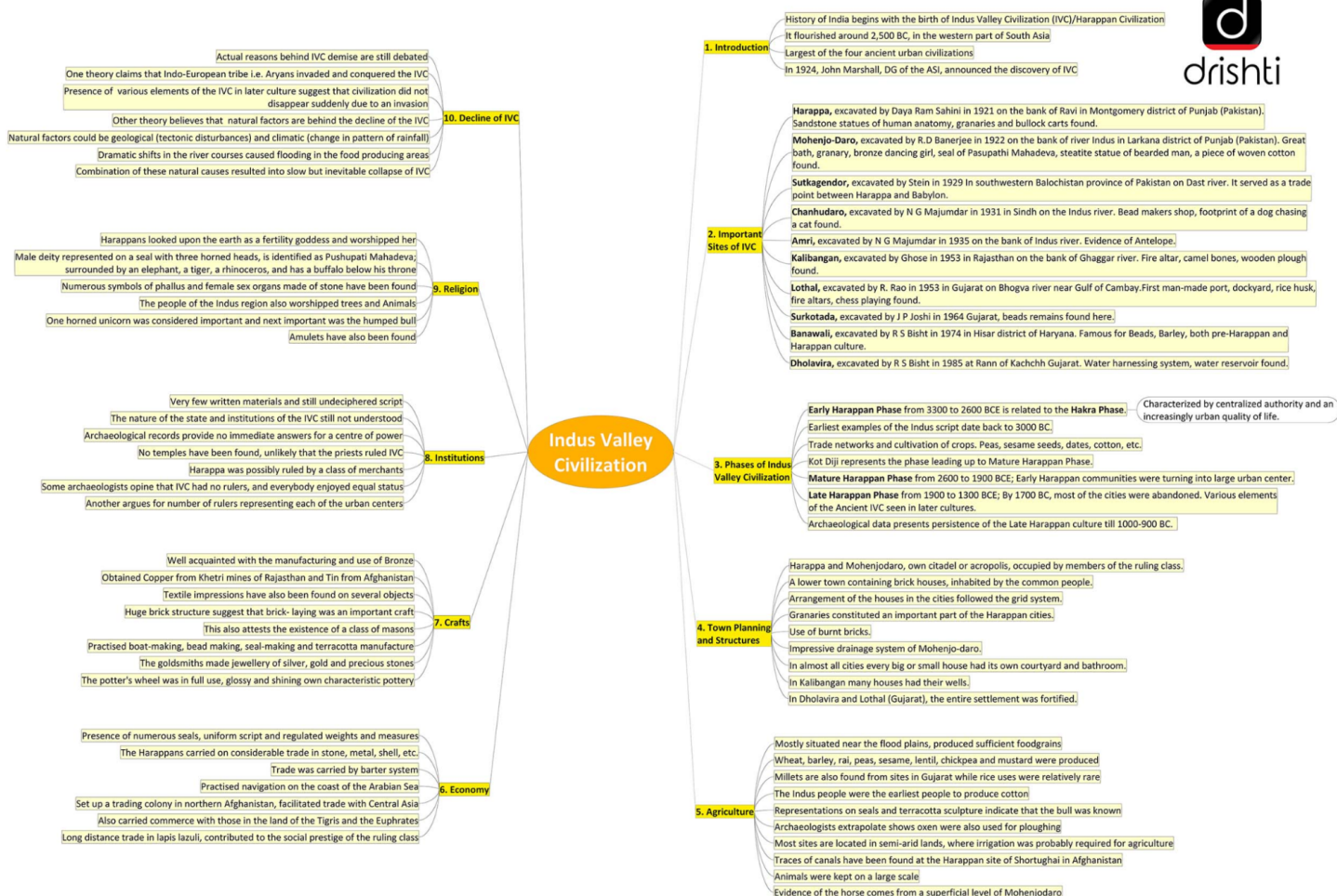
Manuscripts

- **Manuscripts** are handwritten works on palm leaf, birch bark, cloth, paper, or metal, over 75 years old, with historical, scientific, or aesthetic value.
- Cover diverse fields like philosophy, medicine, astronomy, literature, arts and exist in multiple languages and scripts.
- **National Mission for Manuscripts (NMM, 2003)** was established to preserve and safeguard India's intellectual heritage.

What is the Harappan (Indus Valley) Script?

- **About:** It is used by [Indus Valley Civilization \(2600-1900 BCE\)](#) in present-day Pakistan and north-west India.
 - Discovered in the **1920s by Sir John Marshall's team**, the Indus Valley script found on seals, terracotta tablets, and metal is **still undeciphered** and features pictograms, animals, and human motifs.
- **Writing Style & Nature: It is generally written right to left; longer texts sometimes in Boustrophedon style (alternating lines).**
 - Inscriptions are brief, averaging 5 symbols, the longest text has 26 symbols.
 - Likely a logosyllabic system, combining pictograms and syllables, similar to other scripts of its era.
 - Scholars propose a rebus principle, where symbols represent sounds or ideas indirectly.
- **Purpose and Function:** Used for trade, taxes, and identification, though full role is unclear. Some symbols may have educational or religious significance.
- **Major Theories on Harappan Script:**
 - **Dravidian Hypothesis:** Some argue that the script has **Dravidian roots**, using the **rebus principle**; e.g., the fish symbol may represent "star" in Dravidian. Supported by **Brahui language** in Balochistan and **Old Tamil** links.
 - **Sanskrit Connection:** Some suggest a link to **Vedic Sanskrit**, but this is largely **rejected** because the Aryan migration occurred **after 2000 BCE**.
 - **Tribal Language Links:** A few researchers connect it to Adivasi languages such as **Santali and Gondi**.
 - **Non-linguistic Symbols Theory:** The script may have been used for **trade, taxation, or religious purposes**, and may **not represent a full language**.

Indus Valley Civilization



Conclusion

The Gyan Bharatam Mission uses Digital India and AI to digitize over five million manuscripts, making India's ancient knowledge globally accessible. It engages youth and reimagines heritage as living knowledge. Aligned with the vision of a **Viksit Bharat**, **Gyan Bharatam strengthens India's role as a Vishwa Guru** by combining heritage, innovation, and global knowledge sharing.

Drishti Mains Question:

Q. Discuss the significance of the Gyan Bharatam Mission in preserving India's manuscript heritage.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. Regarding the Indus Valley Civilization, consider the following statements: (2011)

1. It was predominantly a secular civilization and the religious element, though present, did not dominate the scene,
2. During this period, cotton was used for manufacturing textiles in India.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2

(d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: (c)

Q. Which of the following characterize/characterises the people of the Indus Civilization? (2013)

1. They possessed great palaces and temples.
2. They worshiped both male and female deities.
3. They employed horse-drawn chariots in warfare.

Select the correct statements using the codes given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 only
(c) 1, 2 and 3
(d) None of the above

Ans: (b)

Mains

Q1: The ancient civilisation in the Indian sub-continent differed from those of Egypt, Mesopotamia and Greece in that its culture and traditions have been preserved without a breakdown to the present day. Comment. (2015)

SPREE 2025

[Source: PIB](#)

The [Employees' State Insurance Corporation \(ESIC\)](#) has launched two major initiatives- **SPREE-2025** and the **AMNESTY Scheme**, aimed at strengthening the **social security framework** and simplifying compliance for industries.

SPREE-2025

- **About:** The **SPREE-2025 (Scheme for Promoting Registration of Employers and Employees)** approved by the **ESIC**, aims to expand social security coverage under the **ESI Act, 1948**.
 - Active from **1st July to 31st December 2025**, it offers a **one-time opportunity for unregistered employers** and employees, **including temporary and contractual workers**, to enroll without facing inspections or past dues.
- **Key Features:**
 - Employers **can digitally register** through the **ESIC, Shram Suvidha, and MCA portals**, with registration valid from the employer's declared date.
 - No contributions or benefits will apply for periods before registration, and no inspections or past record demands will be made for that period.
 - It **removes the fear of retrospective penalties** and simplifies the process, encouraging voluntary compliance.

AMNESTY Scheme

- This **is a one-time dispute resolution initiative designed** to settle issues related to damages, interest, and coverage under the ESI Act.
- It will be in effect from **1st October 2025 to 30th September 2026**.
- The scheme seeks to provide employers with an opportunity to **resolve pending disputes and strengthen compliance**, thereby reducing the number of lawsuits and ensuring the smooth delivery of social security benefits to employees.

Read more: [ESIC Funds](#)

PASSEX and EEZ surveillance in Mauritius

Source: [TH](#)

The ships of the **Indian Navy's First Training Squadron (1TS)** (**INS Tir**, **ICGS Sarathi**, and **INS Shardul**) made port calls at **La Réunion (France)** and **Port Louis (Mauritius)** as part of their **Long Range Training Deployment**.

- **France:** At La Réunion, **INS Tir** and **ICGS Sarathi** held a [Passage Exercise \(PASSEX\)](#) with the French Navy and discussed regional security and strengthening the [India-France naval partnership](#).
- **Mauritius:** At Port Louis, **INS Shardul** conducted joint [Exclusive Economic Zone \(EEZ\)](#) patrols, training, and outreach with Mauritius, boosting [India-Mauritius ties](#).
- **Significance:** The concurrent 1TS port calls at La Réunion and Mauritius highlight India's commitment to maritime cooperation, regional stability, and the [MAHASAGAR](#) vision in the [Indian Ocean Region](#).

INS Tir	It is the first dedicated Indian Navy cadet training ship, designed by the Navy and built by Mazagon Dock Ltd. , Mumbai. It is based at Kochi and equipped with a Decca collision avoidance plot and a SATNAV (Satellite Navigation) system .
Indian Coast Guard ship Sarathi	It is the third indigenously built offshore patrol vessel (OPV) by Goa Shipyard Ltd. , it enhances the Coast Guard's operational capability along India's western coastline and island territories.
INS Shardul	It is the lead ship of its amphibious warfare class , and is based at Kochi. It has conducted cadet training, Indian Ocean surveillance , and humanitarian missions , including relief to Madagascar in 2020, the largest relief load by an Indian warship.

Read more: [Navigating India's Maritime Path](#)

National Conference on Adi Karmayogi Abhiyan

Source: [PIB](#)

The **Ministry of Tribal Affairs** organized the **National Conference on Adi Karmayogi Abhiyan**

with Project Officers of **Integrated Tribal Development Agencies (ITDAs)** at **Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi**.

- The event focused on flagship tribal development initiatives like [Adi Karmayogi Abhiyan](#), [PM-JANMAN](#), and [Dharti Aaba Abhiyan](#) to enhance grassroots leadership and service delivery.
 - **Adi Karmayogi Abhiyan**: The world's largest grassroots tribal leadership programme, **mobilizing 20 lakh change leaders across 1 lakh villages** to act as catalysts of social transformation.
 - **Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan**: It is a convergence-driven mission aimed at delivering essential services, schemes, and infrastructure comprehensively in tribal villages through coordinated planning
 - **Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM-JANMAN)**: A focused initiative to ensure housing, health, education, water, electrification, and livelihoods for [Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups \(PVTGs\)](#).
- A major highlight was the launch of **Adi Sanskriti**. It is **envisioned as the world's first Digital University to preserve and promote the culture and traditional knowledge of tribal communities**, and an online marketplace for the world to access products made by tribal artisans. The platform integrates three major components:
 - **Adi Vishwavidyalaya (Digital Tribal Art Academy)**: Currently offering 45 immersive courses on tribal dance, painting, crafts, music, and folklore.
 - **Adi Sampada (Socio-Cultural Repository)**: A collection of over 5,000 curated documents across five themes, covering paintings, dance, clothing & textiles, artefacts and livelihood.
 - **Adi Haat (Online marketplace)**: Currently linked with TRIFED, this will evolve into a dedicated online marketplace for tribal artisans, enabling sustainable livelihoods and direct consumer access.
- **Integrated Tribal Development Agencies (ITDAs)**, established in the 1970s and 1980s, are designed as specialized institutions to ensure effective delivery of public services and development programs to **Scheduled Tribes**.

Read more: [Bridging the Gap in Tribal Welfare](#)

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