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SPECIAL FOR UPSC & GPSC EXAMINATION

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The Union government's proposal to replace the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005 with the Viksit Bharat — Guarantee For Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) Bill marks a significant policy shift in India's rural employment framework. The Bill signals a transition from a rights-based, demand-driven employment guarantee to a supply-driven, allocation-based scheme aligned with the government's vision of Viksit Bharat @2047.

New job guarantee plan to be supply-driven

Allocations will be capped and be determined by the govt. based on 'parameters' not yet specified

The new Bill gives Centre greater control over where and how the scheme is implemented

Bill allows pausing of scheme during peak season to 'facilitate availability of labour'

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

The Union government is set to introduce the Viksit Bharat — Guarantee For Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) Bill to replace the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005 in the Lok Sabha. The move will mark a shift from a "demand-driven framework" to a "supply-driven scheme".

Under the new system, allocations will be capped within a fixed budget determined by the Union government based on "parameters" not yet specified. Employment will be provided only in rural areas notified by the Centre.

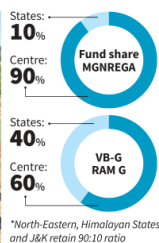
While the VB-G RAM G Bill increases the number of guaranteed workdays from 100 to 125, it significantly raises the financial burden on States from the

Framework change

The government has circulated the VB-G RAM G Bill to MPs, framing it as legislation to 'establish a rural development framework aligned with the national vision of Viksit Bharat @2047'

Shifts from MGNREGA to VB-G RAM G Bill

- Rights-based employment guarantee → **Supply-driven employment and livelihood scheme**
- 100 days of wage employment → **125 days**
- Flexible budget → **Budget cap**
- Year-round → **Seasonal pause allowed**



current 10% share to 40% of total expenditure. The government circulated the Bill among MPs on Monday, framing it as legislation to "establish a rural development framework aligned with the national vision of Viksit Bharat @2047".

Under the MGNREGA, the Centre was responsible for 100% of the labour wages

and 75% of the material wages.

In practice, this translated to a 90:10 cost share between the Centre and the States. However, Section 22(2) of the Bill says "the fund-sharing pattern between the Union government and the State governments shall be 90:10 for the north-eastern States, Himalayan States/Union

Territories (Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, and Jammu and Kashmir), and 60:40 for all other States and Union Territories with legislature".

While this increases the financial burden on States, the new Bill gives the Centre greater control over where and how the scheme will be implemented. Section 4(5) says: "The

Opposition parties raise questions over new Bill

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Opposition on Monday raised questions about the Bill that seeks to replace the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, ranging from the rationale behind removing the name of Mahatma Gandhi to increasing the

financial burden on States and dismantling the rights-based architecture of the law. "I don't know what problem they have with Babu's name. They wanted to finish it because it was a Congress scheme," Congress MP Saptagiri Ulaka said.

FULL REPORT
» PAGE 4

duced under the MGNREGA — such as mobile app-based attendance, Aadhaar-based payment systems, and geotagging of worksites — are now codified into law.

In its Statement of Objects and Reasons, the government argues that the MGNREGA needs to be replaced in view of the "significant socio-economic transformation" in rural India.

'End of right to work'

Nikhil Dey, a founder member of Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan and one of the architects of the MGNREGA, criticised the move, calling it a retreat from the rights-based framework enjoyed for two decades. "The new legislation takes the country back to allocation-based schemes where the Centre plays a bigger role and the beneficiary has little say. It also places impractical financial burden on the States," Mr. Dey said.

State but also decide where it will be spent. Section 5(1) empowers the Union government to "notify rural areas in a State" where the scheme will be implemented.

The new Bill allows for pausing the programme during peak agricultural seasons to "facilitate availability of labour". Technological interventions intro-

Central government shall determine the State-wise normative allocation for each financial year, based on objective parameters as may be prescribed by the Central government." The MGNREGA was demand-based and allowed flexibility to increase the budget based on need.

The Centre will not only set the budget for each

Key Features and Changes

Shift from Demand-driven to Supply-driven Model

- MGNREGA guaranteed employment on demand, with legal entitlement and uncapped funding based on need.
- The new Bill caps allocations within a fixed budget determined by the Centre, thereby weakening the legal enforceability of employment as a right.

Increased Centralisation

- The Centre will determine State-wise allocations based on unspecified "objective parameters".
- It will also notify specific rural areas where the scheme will operate, reducing States' discretion and local planning autonomy.

Financial Burden on States

- Cost-sharing for most States shifts to 60:40 (Centre:State), compared to an effective 90:10 under MGNREGA.

- This may strain fiscally weaker States and deepen inter-State disparities in implementation.

Changes in Work Guarantees and Implementation

- Guaranteed workdays increase from 100 to 125, but without assured funding, this may remain nominal.
- Provision to pause the scheme during peak agricultural seasons aims to ensure labour availability for farming but may undermine livelihood security during distress periods.

Codification of Technology-driven Governance

- Aadhaar-based payments, app-based attendance, and geotagging are formalised, potentially improving transparency.
- However, concerns remain about digital exclusion, especially for migrant workers, women, and the elderly.

Implications

Erosion of Rights-based Welfare: Critics argue that the Bill dilutes the constitutional spirit of social justice by converting a legal right into a discretionary welfare programme.

Federal Concerns: Enhanced central control and higher State contributions may weaken cooperative federalism.

Labour Market Impact: Pausing employment during peak seasons prioritises agricultural labour supply but risks ignoring the role of MGNREGA as a safety net during rural distress and climate shocks.

Political Economy Dimension: The reform reflects a broader trend of moving from entitlement-based welfare to targeted, fiscally controlled schemes.

Conclusion

The proposed VB-G RAM (Gramin) Bill represents a paradigm shift in rural employment policy—from empowerment through legal guarantees to administratively managed welfare provisioning. While objectives such as fiscal discipline, efficiency, and alignment with long-term development goals are valid, the dilution of demand-driven employment and increased centralisation raise concerns about livelihood security, State capacity, and social equity. For sustainable rural development, any reform must balance efficiency with the foundational principle of employment as a right, especially in an economy still marked by agrarian distress and uneven growth.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques: The shift from a demand-driven to a supply-driven employment scheme is most likely to affect which principle of public policy?

- (a) Subsidiarity
- (b) Fiscal federalism
- (c) Legal enforceability of welfare entitlements
- (d) Monetary decentralisation

Ans: (c)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: Replacing MGNREGA with a supply-driven rural employment scheme marks a departure from India's rights-based welfare architecture. Critically examine this statement in the context of the proposed Viksit Bharat — Guarantee For Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Bill. **(250 Words)**

Recent official data on India's external sector and labour market present a relatively optimistic short-term macroeconomic picture. A sharp contraction in the trade deficit in November, driven by robust merchandise export growth, coincides with an improvement in key labour market indicators as reflected in the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS). Together, these developments offer insights into the state of economic recovery, external resilience, and employment dynamics, while also raising questions about sustainability and structural strengths.

I. Trade Deficit Compression: Key Drivers and Implications

Key Highlights

- Trade deficit narrowed sharply to \$6.6 billion in November, a decline of over 61%.
- Total exports grew 15.5% to \$74 billion, while total imports declined marginally by 0.6%.
- Merchandise exports rose 19.4% to \$38.1 billion, the highest November level in a decade.
- Exports to the U.S. grew despite a 50% tariff, indicating demand resilience and diversification within product baskets.
- Gold imports fell sharply, correcting the October surge and significantly lowering the import bill.

Trade deficit falls to \$6.6 bn. in Nov. due to merchandise export growth

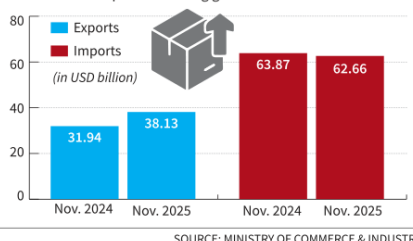
T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

India's trade deficit plummeted by more than 61% in November to \$6.6 billion, due to strong growth in merchandise exports and a fall in merchandise imports. Notably, India's exports to the U.S. in November 2025 were higher than in October 2025, as well as in November last year.

Data released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry showed that total exports grew 15.5% to \$74 billion in November, while total imports slid 0.6% to \$80.6 billion. The further disaggregated data showed that merchandise exports grew 19.4% to \$38.1 billion in November. Merchandise

Recovery in goods exports

Merchandise exports in November 2025 helped reduce India's trade deficit despite continuing global uncertainties



exports had fallen 11.8% in October.

"In terms of merchandise exports, November 2025 has seen the highest exports out of any November in the last 10 years,"

Commerce Secretary Raghav Agrawal said. "The November data takes care of the worries that arose after the October data."

The data show that India's exports to the U.S.

grew 22.6% to \$6.98 billion in November compared with the previous year's. This was also 10.7% higher than in October 2024.

The U.S. has been imposing a 50% tariff on imports from India since August-end.

"...the November data shows our trade relations with the U.S. are going on well, and this is a positive sign," he said.

Merchandise imports fell 1.9% to \$62.7 billion in November. These were 17.6% lower than in October, when they had surged due to gold imports. Gold imports fell nearly 60% to \$4 billion in November compared to the previous year and by nearly 73% compared to October.

Analysis

- The improvement reflects a favourable trade cycle supported by strong external demand, especially from the U.S., and a correction in non-essential imports like gold.
- However, part of the deficit compression is import-compression driven, which may also indicate subdued domestic demand rather than purely export-led strength.

- Sustained export growth despite higher tariffs suggests competitiveness in select sectors, but continued exposure to global protectionism remains a risk.
- Services exports, though not the focus of the headline data, continue to play a stabilising role in the overall current account.

II. Labour Market Trends: PLFS November Findings

Key Highlights

- Unemployment Rate (UR) declined to 4.7%, the lowest since April.
- Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) rose to 55.8%, driven mainly by rural areas.
- Female LFPR increased steadily, particularly in rural India, reaching 39.7%.
- Worker Population Ratio (WPR) improved modestly, with rural female employment being a key contributor.

Analysis

- Rising LFPR alongside falling unemployment suggests improved absorption of labour, particularly in rural areas.
- The increase in female participation reflects the impact of agricultural activities, self-employment, and public works, but also raises concerns about the quality of employment and informality.
- Urban labour indicators remain largely stable, pointing to uneven sectoral recovery, with manufacturing and services yet to generate strong urban employment momentum.
- Seasonal and short-term factors may partly explain the improvement, necessitating caution in interpretation.

Combined Macro Perspective

- Together, the trade and labour data indicate short-term macroeconomic stability with positive signals for growth and employment.
- However, both trends have structural caveats:
 - Export performance remains sensitive to global demand, tariffs, and geopolitical uncertainties.
 - Employment gains are concentrated in rural and informal segments, raising issues of productivity and income security.

Unemployment rate dips to 4.7% in November: PLFS

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The unemployment rate (UR) among people aged 15 years and above declined to 4.7% in November, the lowest level since April, when it stood at 5.1%, according to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) report for November released on Monday.

The PLFS, conducted by the National Statistical Office (NSO) of the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (MoSPI), stated that the overall Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) increased to 55.8% in November, the highest level recorded since April.

According to a MoSPI statement based on the PLFS report, the rise in LFPR was primarily driven by rural areas, where it increased to 58.6% in November from 58% in April.

On a month-on-month basis, the rural LFPR rose from 57.8% in October, while the urban LFPR decreased marginally from 50.5% to 50.4%.

Overall, the female LFPR showed a steady rise from June 2025 to November 2025, the MoSPI said.

"It increased from 32%

The overall LFPR increased to 55.8% in November, the highest since April, the survey found

to 35.1% during this period, driven mainly by higher labour force participation in rural areas, while urban female LFPR remained relatively stable. Rural female LFPR recorded a consistent upward movement, rising from 35.2% in June 2025 to 39.7% in November 2025," it added.

The Worker Population Ratio (WPR) for persons aged 15 years and above in rural areas increased from 55.4% in April 2025 to 56.3% in November 2025, while the overall WPR rose from 52.8% to 53.2%.

"Urban WPR remained largely stable. Notably, rural female WPR improved from 36.8% in April 2025 to 38.4% in November 2025, driving the rise in overall female WPR from 32.5% to 33.4% over this period," the Centre said.

The NSO surveyed 3,73,229 people for the PLFS. 2,13,337 from rural and 1,59,892 from urban areas were surveyed in this round.

- The data underscore the importance of export diversification, manufacturing competitiveness, and quality job creation to convert cyclical gains into durable growth.

Conclusion

The November data point to a welcome easing of external pressures and an improvement in labour market outcomes, reflecting resilience in exports and gradual employment recovery. Nevertheless, the sustainability of these trends depends on strengthening domestic demand, boosting high-value exports, and generating productive, formal employment—especially in urban areas. For India's medium-term growth trajectory, policy focus must move beyond headline improvements to addressing structural constraints in trade competitiveness and labour market quality.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques : Which one of the following best explains why a fall in gold imports can significantly reduce India's trade deficit?

- (a) Gold is a non-essential import with high foreign exchange outgo
- (b) Gold imports directly increase employment
- (c) Gold is counted under services trade
- (d) Gold imports are financed entirely through FDI

Ans : (c)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : The recent PLFS data shows a decline in unemployment rate alongside a rise in labour force participation, particularly among rural women. Analyse this trend and discuss the challenges related to quality of employment in India.

The introduction of the Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Bill, 2025 marks a major shift in India's nuclear energy governance. By proposing to replace the Atomic Energy Act, 1962 and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage (CLND) Act, 2010, the Bill seeks to open the nuclear power sector to private and foreign participation. This move aligns with India's long-term goals of clean energy transition, energy security, and achieving net-zero emissions by 2070.

SHANTI Bill to allow private sector to make, run nuclear power plants

Jacob Koshy
Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

The Centre introduced in the Lok Sabha on Monday the SHANTI Bill that aims to incentivise private sector participation, both Indian and foreign, into nuclear power production. It does this by replacing India's existing laws – the Atomic Energy Act, 1962, and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage (CLND) Act, 2010, – with the Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Bill, 2025.

The latter creates an atomic energy regulatory structure that is answerable to Parliament, removes the Nuclear Power Corpo-

ration of India's monopoly over operating nuclear plants, and restricts the instances under which nuclear power plant operators can claim compensation from suppliers of equipment in case of an accident. Simultaneously, it also buffers operators by introducing limits on the extent of their liability, in case of violating the laws under the Act, based on the size of the plants they operate, and limits the maximum penalty on them to ₹1 crore even in the case of a "severe breach".

"The Bill proposes a revised and pragmatic civil liability framework for nuclear damage, confers statutory status on the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB), and strengthens

mechanisms related to safety, security, safeguards, quality assurance and emergency preparedness," a statement by the Union Ministry of Science and Technology said. Jitendra Singh, Minister of State for Science and Technology, introduced the Bill.

Privatising the nuclear power sector, which currently makes up 1.5% of India's installed power capacity, and 3% of the electricity produced, has been on the government's agenda in recent years to boost clean energy production, improve grid stability, and move towards its 2070 net-zero (zero net-carbon emissions) targets.

This includes scaling-up installed nuclear power to 100 GW, up from the cur-

rent 8.8 GW, by 2047; a ₹20,000 crore mission launched in the Union Budget this year to develop 'small modular reactors'; and a slew of customised 220 MW pressurised heavy water reactors.

"The Bill gives hope for large-scale innovation in nuclear technology through amendments in patent laws, aligns with global liability conventions, and proposes the expansion of nuclear energy projects through private sector participation. Any explanation regarding the CNLD Act of 2010 seemed inadequate to foreign and domestic suppliers and vendors," M.P. Ram Mohan, Professor, Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, told *The Hindu*.

Key Provisions of the SHANTI Bill

Opening the Nuclear Sector to Private Participation

- Ends the monopoly of the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) in operating nuclear power plants.

- Allows Indian and foreign private players to set up and operate nuclear facilities, subject to regulation.

Revised Liability Framework

- Introduces a more “pragmatic” civil nuclear liability regime.
- Limits the extent to which operators can seek compensation from equipment suppliers.
- Caps penalties for operators, even in cases of severe violations, at ₹1 crore, with liability linked to plant size.
- Aligns India’s framework more closely with global nuclear liability conventions, addressing a long-standing concern of foreign suppliers.

Strengthening Regulation and Accountability

- Grants statutory status to the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB).
- Makes the regulatory framework accountable to Parliament, enhancing transparency and democratic oversight.
- Emphasises safety, security, safeguards, emergency preparedness, and quality assurance.

Support for Nuclear Expansion and Innovation

- Complements India’s target of expanding nuclear capacity from 8.8 GW to 100 GW by 2047.
- Supports initiatives such as the ₹20,000 crore Small Modular Reactor (SMR) mission and deployment of indigenous PHWRs.
- Encourages innovation and technology development, including changes in patent-related provisions.

Significance and Implications

Energy Transition and Climate Goals: Nuclear power provides reliable baseload electricity and can support the integration of renewables, aiding India’s net-zero commitment.

Investment and Technology Access: A reformed liability regime may attract foreign investment and advanced reactor technologies that were previously deterred by the CLND Act.

Federal and Governance Concerns: Increased private participation in a sensitive sector raises questions about regulatory capacity, safety oversight, and public accountability.

Safety and Public Trust: While the Bill strengthens institutional regulation, liability caps and reduced supplier accountability may generate concerns about adequate deterrence and compensation in case of accidents.

Conclusion

The SHANTI Bill, 2025 represents a decisive policy shift from a state-dominated nuclear sector to a more liberalised and investment-friendly framework. If implemented with robust regulatory oversight and uncompromising safety standards, it can significantly enhance India's clean energy capacity and technological capabilities. However, balancing private participation with public safety, environmental responsibility, and accountability will be critical to ensuring that nuclear energy contributes sustainably to India's development and climate objectives.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques: With reference to the SHANTI Bill, 2025, consider the following statements:

1. It seeks to replace both the Atomic Energy Act, 1962 and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010.
2. It removes the monopoly of the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) in operating nuclear power plants.
3. It provides unlimited liability for nuclear plant operators in case of severe nuclear accidents.
4. It gives statutory backing to the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB).

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Ans : a)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: Analyse the changes proposed in the civil nuclear liability regime under the SHANTI Bill, 2025. How might these changes impact nuclear safety, innovation, and foreign investment in India? (150 Words)

Page 09 : GS 2 : International Relations

The latest report by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) presents a stark picture of global security in 2025, revealing that nearly one in six people worldwide have been exposed to conflict. With around 831 million people (about 10% of the global population) affected, the findings underline the intensification, geographic spread, and changing character of contemporary conflicts, marked particularly by rising violence against civilians and increased involvement of state actors.

One in six people exposed to conflict worldwide in 2025

ACLED's latest report indicates that civilians do not just face more violence, but more state violence this year

DATA POINT

The Hindu Data Team

According to a new report from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), an estimated 831 million people, or 10% of the world's population, were exposed to conflict this year. That means roughly, one in six people globally were exposed to conflict in 2025.

The report says that conflict was characterised by less restraint and increasing violence targeting civilians. That is, armed actors around the globe were more likely to use force and disregard the consequences that came with it. Not only did the number of conflicts increase, but also, nearly three out of four such events directly involved state forces.

ACLED has recorded nearly 2 lakh violent events worldwide this year – nearly twice the number of events recorded just four years ago. A region-wise analysis shows that Europe recorded the greatest increase in violence, largely driven by the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which has affected the highest number of people since the invasion in 2022. While conflicts persisted in West Asia, the end of Syria's civil war and a series of ceasefires in Lebanon and Gaza decreased the number of violent events significantly (Chart 1). Compared to 2024, there was 48% decrease in violent conflicts in the region. Also, the decreases in air campaigns by Israel and Türkiye in Lebanon and Iraq, respectively, drove a 17% drop in aerial warfare globally compared to 2024.

Global trends indicate that civilians now do not just face more violence, but they also face more state violence. More than 56,000 incidents of violence directed at civilians were recorded in 2025. This is the highest in the last five years.

Government forces were involved in 74% of violent events worldwide in 2025. Chart 2 shows

the share of violence by state actors in all recorded violent events since 2020.

Data show that state-led violence targeting civilians has increased since 2020. Where state forces were responsible for 20% of global violence directed towards civilians in 2020, they now make up 35% of such events.

While Israel and Russia were collectively responsible for about 90% of violent incidents that targeted civilians outside their borders, the Myanmar military accounted for nearly a third of violence committed by state forces against its civilians this year.

However, in terms of fatalities, about 60% were due to the actions of non-state armed groups and mobs. The Rapid Support Forces (RSF), Sudan's paramilitary group locked in a years-long conflict with the Sudanese army, killed more than 4,200 civilians in attacks till November this year. This is much higher than any other non-state armed group (Chart 3).

This figure makes up about 11% of all recorded fatalities caused by non-state armed groups and is likely to be a severe undercount. The Allied Democratic Forces, an armed group of former Ugandan rebels which has pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, was responsible for at least 1,370 reported civilian fatalities. The March 23 Movement (M23) is one of 120 insurgent groups active in the same conflict, and was responsible for more than 1,100 civilian deaths.

The report also highlights that the repurposing of readily accessible commercial drones as weapons in recent conflicts reflects changes in contemporary warfare. Data show that 469 non-state armed groups have deployed drones at least once in the past five years. This is a 14% rise compared to last year (Chart 4). ACLED says this indicates that non-state armed groups are either able to access technology previously reserved for states or adapt and use minimal resources to expand their arsenal.

Tracking conflict

The data for the charts were sourced from ACLED's report 'What's driving conflict today?', published on December 11, 2025. The report was authored by ACLED's Head of Analysis Andrea Carboni and Associate Analysis Coordinator Ciro Murillo

Chart 1: Region-wise number of violent events recorded since 2020

The greatest increase in violence was recorded in Europe due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which began in 2022

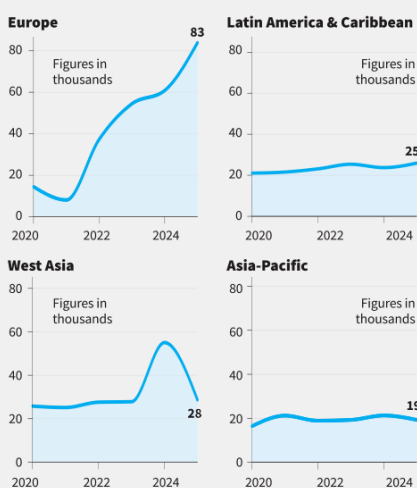


Chart 2: Share of violence by state and non-state forces

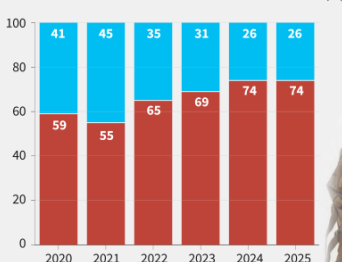


Chart 3: Civilians killed by non-state armed groups in 2025

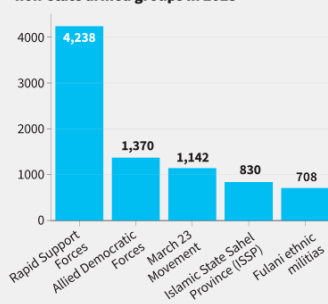
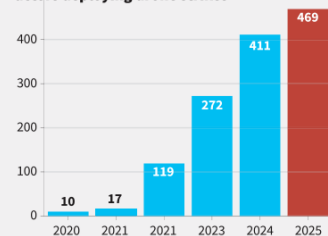


Chart 4: Cumulative number of non-state actors deploying drone strikes



Key Findings and Trends

Scale and Intensity of Conflict

- ACLED recorded nearly 2 lakh violent events in 2025, almost double the number seen four years ago, indicating a sharp escalation in global instability.
- Europe witnessed the largest increase in violence, primarily driven by the prolonged Russia–Ukraine conflict, which continues to have wide regional and global repercussions.

Regional Variations

- West Asia saw a 48% decline in violent events compared to 2024, partly due to the end of Syria's civil war and ceasefires in Lebanon and Gaza.
- A reduction in Israeli and Turkish air campaigns contributed to a 17% fall in global aerial warfare, showing how political decisions and ceasefires can significantly alter conflict intensity.

Rise in State-led Violence

- A critical shift highlighted in the report is the growing role of state forces, which were involved in 74% of violent events globally in 2025.
- Violence by state actors against civilians has risen sharply—from 20% of civilian-targeted violence in 2020 to 35% in 2025, raising serious concerns about accountability, human rights, and adherence to international humanitarian law.

Civilian Impact and Non-state Actors

- Over 56,000 incidents of violence against civilians were recorded, the highest in five years.
- Although state actors are increasingly involved, non-state armed groups accounted for around 60% of civilian fatalities.
- Groups such as Sudan's Rapid Support Forces (RSF), the Allied Democratic Forces, and M23 were responsible for thousands of civilian deaths, underscoring the persistence of weak state authority and protracted internal conflicts in parts of Africa.

Changing Nature of Warfare: Technology and Drones

- The report highlights the weaponisation of commercial drones, with 469 non-state armed groups deploying drones in the past five years—a 14% increase over the previous year.
- This reflects the democratisation of military technology, lowering entry barriers to sophisticated warfare and complicating counter-insurgency and international security responses.

Implications

Humanitarian and Governance Challenges: Rising civilian casualties and state-led violence strain humanitarian systems and erode trust in state institutions.

International Law and Accountability: The growing role of states in civilian-targeted violence challenges existing mechanisms of accountability under international humanitarian law.

Global Security Architecture: The spread of low-cost military technologies like drones calls for updated global norms and stronger arms-control and export-regulation frameworks.

Relevance for India: For India, these trends have implications for foreign policy, peacekeeping, counter-terrorism, and advocacy for a rules-based international order.

Conclusion

The ACLED report underscores that global conflict in 2025 is not only more widespread but also more brutal, with civilians increasingly caught between state forces and non-state armed groups. The rise of state-led violence and the diffusion of military technologies such as drones signal a profound transformation in the nature of warfare. Addressing these challenges requires renewed international cooperation, stronger protection mechanisms for civilians, and reforms in global governance to respond effectively to the evolving conflict landscape.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : Non-state armed groups continue to remain major contributors to civilian fatalities despite increased state involvement in conflicts. Analyse the reasons and consequences of this phenomenon. (150 Words)

Page 10 : GS 3 : Internal Security / Science & Technology

Advances in modern biotechnology have significantly enhanced humanity's ability to understand and manipulate biological systems. While these developments have immense benefits for healthcare, agriculture and industry, they also increase the risk of intentional misuse of biological agents by states and non-state actors. In this context, the question of whether India needs to upgrade its biosecurity measures has gained renewed urgency, especially given global concerns over biological weapons, pandemics and agro-terrorism.

Does India need to upgrade its biosecurity measures?

What is the Biological Weapons Convention? Are non-state actors also pursuing biological tools?

Shambhavi Naik

The story so far:

New age biotechnologies endow powers to understand biology better and, consequently, harness biological agents to target humans. Thus, biosecurity measures need to be upgraded.

What is biosecurity?

Biosecurity refers to the set of practices and systems designed to deter the intentional misuse of biological agents, toxins or technologies. In other words, it covers everything from safeguarding labs handling dangerous pathogens, to detecting and containing an intentional outbreak of a pathogen. Biosecurity is not only about protecting human health from pathogens, but extends to agricultural and animal health too. Biosecurity differs slightly from biosafety, which is a set of practices meant to prevent the accidental

leakage of pathogens. A robust biosafety protocol feeds into biosecurity.

After a few instances of bioweapons development, the Biological Weapons Convention came into existence in 1975. It became the first international treaty that not only prohibited the use and development of biological weapons of mass destruction, but also asked its signatories to destroy existing stockpiles.

Why does India need biosecurity?

India's geography and ecology make it vulnerable to cross-border bio-risks. India's dependence on agriculture and large population makes the threat more dangerous. While India has not had any explicitly known biosecurity attack, there have been reports of the alleged preparation of the toxin Ricin (derived from castor oil) for potential use in a terror attack. This incident underscores how non-state actors are pursuing biological tools, reinforcing the urgency

of robust biosecurity. Further, the rapid spread of biotechnologies have endowed humans with increased control over biology, increasing the chances of malicious actors experimenting with bioweapons development.

The Department of Biotechnology oversees research governance and safety frameworks for labs. The National Centre for Disease Control manages outbreak surveillance and response. The Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying monitors livestock biosecurity and transboundary diseases. The Plant Quarantine Organisation of India regulates agricultural imports and exports. India's biosafety and biosecurity laws include the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, which governs hazardous microorganisms and genetically modified organisms (GMOs), and the Weapons of Mass Destruction and their Delivery Systems (Prohibition of Unlawful Activities) Act, 2005, which

criminalises biological weapons. India has also developed Biosafety Rules (1989) and specific guidelines were released in 2017 for the purposes of Recombinant DNA Research and Biocontainment. The National Disaster Management Authority has a detailed guideline on the management of biological disasters.

India is also part of international platforms that emphasise biosecurity, such as the Biological Weapons Convention and Australia Group.

Although India has multiple agencies engaged in bio-risk reduction, lab regulation, public-health surveillance, agriculture protection, a unified national biosecurity framework is still evolving. India is currently ranked 66 on the Global Health Security Index, and while its score for detecting biothreats has increased, its score for being able to effectively respond to threats has reduced.

What are the risks ahead?

The risk of an inadequate biosecurity apparatus is profound. It jeopardises the lives of billions of Indians. It is therefore necessary that a national biosecurity framework that coordinates actions across various government agencies is developed. Such a framework would also be able to identify infrastructure and capability gaps that need to be addressed.

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THE GIST

▼ Biosecurity refers to the set of practices and systems designed to deter the intentional misuse of biological agents, toxins or technologies.

▼ India's geography and ecology make it vulnerable to cross-border bio-risks. India's dependence on agriculture and large population makes the threat more dangerous.

▼ The risk of an inadequate biosecurity apparatus is profound. It jeopardises the lives of billions of Indians.

Understanding Biosecurity and the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC)

- Biosecurity refers to policies, practices and institutional mechanisms designed to prevent the deliberate misuse of biological agents, toxins or technologies. It includes securing laboratories, regulating dual-use research, early detection of outbreaks, and effective response mechanisms. It is broader than biosafety, which focuses on preventing accidental release of pathogens.
- The Biological Weapons Convention (1975) is the first multilateral disarmament treaty banning an entire category of weapons of mass destruction. It prohibits the development, production, stockpiling and use of biological and toxin weapons and mandates the destruction of existing stockpiles. India is a signatory and has consistently supported the Convention, although the BWC lacks a strong verification mechanism, which remains a major global concern.

Why Biosecurity is Critical for India

- India's vulnerability to biosecurity threats arises from multiple factors:

Geographical and ecological exposure: Long and porous borders, diverse ecosystems, and high population density increase susceptibility to cross-border biological risks.

Agriculture dependence: Any biological attack on crops or livestock could have devastating economic and food-security consequences.

Non-state actor threats: Reports of attempted use of toxins like ricin highlight the possibility of terrorist groups experimenting with biological tools.

Rapid biotech diffusion: Cheaper and accessible biotechnologies lower entry barriers for malicious experimentation.

- Although India has not faced a confirmed biological attack, the convergence of these risks makes preparedness essential rather than optional.

Existing Institutional and Legal Framework

- India has developed a multi-layered but fragmented biosecurity architecture:

Department of Biotechnology (DBT): Oversees biosafety and research governance.

National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC): Responsible for disease surveillance and outbreak response.

Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying: Monitors livestock health and transboundary diseases.

Plant Quarantine Organisation of India: Regulates agricultural imports and exports.

Key legal instruments include:

Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 – regulation of hazardous microorganisms and GMOs.

Biosafety Rules, 1989 and **Recombinant DNA Guidelines, 2017.**

WMD Act, 2005 – criminalisation of biological weapons.

NDMA Guidelines on biological disaster management.

- Internationally, India participates in the BWC and the Australia Group, reflecting its commitment to non-proliferation.

Gaps and Emerging Risks

- Despite multiple agencies and laws, India lacks a unified national biosecurity framework that integrates public health, agriculture, defence, intelligence and research governance. This fragmentation affects coordination and rapid response.
- This weakness is reflected in India's ranking of 66th in the Global Health Security Index, where improvements in detection capabilities contrast with declining scores in response effectiveness.

Inadequate preparedness could lead to catastrophic consequences, including mass casualties, economic disruption and erosion of public trust.

Way Forward

Creation of a comprehensive national biosecurity framework with clear inter-agency coordination.

Strengthening disease surveillance, forensic epidemiology and rapid response systems.

Regulation of dual-use research and capacity-building in laboratory security.

Enhanced international cooperation under the BWC, including advocacy for verification mechanisms.

Conclusion

In an era where biology can be weaponised as easily as it can be harnessed for welfare, biosecurity has emerged as a core component of national security. For India, upgrading biosecurity measures is not merely a public health imperative but a strategic necessity. A coordinated, forward-looking national biosecurity framework will be crucial to safeguarding human life, food security and economic stability in the face of evolving biological threats.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : Advances in biotechnology have expanded both beneficial and malicious applications of biological agents. In this context, examine the need for a comprehensive biosecurity framework in India.

The right moment to boost India-Ethiopia ties

Ethiopia, with a population of around 109 million (2024) and as one of Africa's fastest-growing economies, is of growing strategic and economic interest to major partners, including India. Its substantial manufacturing base, large domestic market, and geographic position in the Horn of Africa make it one of the continent's pivotal states.

Despite internal challenges, Ethiopia continues to be viewed as a regional anchor of stability with an effective military, and a central role in the evolving politics of a subregion marked by conflict. It is also the headquarters of the African Union and a potential renewable-energy powerhouse, especially in hydropower, positioning it to become an important regional energy exporter.

Although landlocked, Ethiopia has traditionally relied on Djibouti for access to the Red Sea. Recent efforts to diversify access through Somaliland and Eritrea underline its desire to secure strategic autonomy in trade and logistics. Politically, the country is emerging from the traumas of civil conflict and is attempting to build a new national consensus. This regeneration provides an important window for enhancing India-Ethiopia engagement across multiple domains.

Deep ties with India

India's relationship with Ethiopia has deep and long-standing roots. For more than a century, Indian teachers and university professors have formed the backbone of Ethiopia's education system, shaping generations of students and earning enormous respect. Although the number of Indian teachers has declined, Ethiopia's interest in educational collaboration remains high. Ethiopia was the pilot country for the Pan-African e-Network project in 2007 and has maintained long-term cooperation with IIT Delhi for tele-education, demonstrating strong receptivity to modern educational technologies.

Today, Ethiopia sends one of the highest numbers of African students to India, often through government-funded programmes. Remarkably, it has the largest number of PhD students from Africa studying in India. Ethiopia also successfully used graduates from the Pan-African e-Network's Master's programmes to help staff newly opened universities and academic departments.

Expanding this education partnership – through digital learning, vocational training,



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With Ethiopia attempting to build a new national consensus, its engagement with India can be developed across multiple domains

university linkages and new scholarship frameworks – remains one of the most promising avenues for bilateral cooperation.

Investment and defence cooperation

Indian investment in Ethiopia is another pillar of the partnership. Indian businesses first ventured into Ethiopia in the 1950s, but the real surge came after India extended major lines of credit beginning in 2006. These catalysed a wave of private investment that surpassed \$4 billion. Ethiopian leaders continue to acknowledge the positive developmental impact of Indian investors, particularly at a time when International Monetary Fund (IMF) conditionalities require the country to mobilise new capital. While earlier investments focused heavily on agriculture, many investors withdrew due to taxation and operational issues.

Today, the most promising opportunities lie in mining – especially gold, critical minerals, and rare earth elements – which is an area where Ethiopia has vast but underexplored potential. The Indian Embassy's recent comprehensive mining survey identifies key opportunities while noting regulatory, infrastructural, and logistics constraints that must be addressed. If India can work with Ethiopia to commission and operate selected mines, this could help secure supplies for India's fast-growing renewable energy, battery, and semiconductor sectors. Mining cooperation could become a core element of a strategic economic partnership.

Defence cooperation is another promising frontier. Ethiopia was one of the first foreign countries to receive Indian military assistance, beginning with the establishment of the Harar Military Academy in 1956. Since 2009, Indian defence teams have supported the training of Ethiopian forces. After years of demanding internal deployments and operations in Somalia, the Ethiopian military requires fresh training and modern equipment to replace aging Soviet-era systems. India, with its competitively priced and battle-tested platforms, is well placed to become a key supplier.

A new MoU on defence cooperation and the first meeting of the Joint Defence Cooperation Committee held this year provide an institutional framework for expanding training, capacity building, and defence exports. Ethiopia, which has responsibly repaid earlier Indian lines of credit under the Indian Development and Economic Assistance Scheme (IDEAS)

programme, could be considered for new defence-related lines of credit within IMF guidelines.

Potential for a new phase

As both countries enter new phases of development, and with Ethiopia now a member of BRICS, the moment is ripe to redefine the partnership. Ethiopian officials repeatedly express strong interest in attracting Indian investment, especially in pharmaceuticals, agro-processing, light manufacturing and mining.

India could help by updating bilateral agreements such as the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) and the Bilateral Investment Treaty to support private-sector engagement. Ethiopia, in turn, needs to address long-standing investor concerns related to foreign exchange availability, taxation, approvals, and consistency of regulations. The 2,500-strong and influential Indian diaspora, represented through the India Business Forum, continues to highlight foreign exchange accessibility as a key bottleneck.

At the multilateral level, expanding cooperation through BRICS, G-20 platforms, and South-South frameworks strengthens political convergence. Demonstrating success stories of Indian investment within Ethiopia and across Africa could help both countries build wider regional partnerships. Under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), Ethiopian-based Indian companies can now access East African and continental markets more easily, making Ethiopia an attractive hub for Indian enterprises. In a rapidly changing global economy – marked by tightening regulations in the United States and European Union and uncertainty around arrangements such as African Growth and Opportunity Act – India's duty-free tariff preference scheme for Ethiopian exports remains important. Ethiopia can leverage this preferential access by welcoming more Indian investors, including in export-oriented manufacturing with buy-back arrangements.

Overall, the prospects for India-Ethiopia relations are bright. With renewed political will, targeted reforms, and strategic alignment, the partnership can evolve into one of the most dynamic and mutually beneficial relationships between India and Africa in the coming decade.

The meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali at Johannesburg during the G-20 summit has catalysed the relationship again.

GS Paper 2 : International Relations

UPSC Mains Practice Question : Oman has emerged as a key pillar of India's West Asia policy. Discuss how Oman's foreign policy of neutrality and mediation aligns with India's strategic autonomy and regional security objectives in the Indian Ocean Region. (150 words)

Context :

Prime Minister's visit to Oman in December 2025 is not a routine diplomatic engagement but a strategically significant intervention in India's West Asia policy. Taking place amid regional instability in West Asia, ongoing conflicts, energy transitions, tariff wars, and evolving connectivity corridors, the visit coincides with the 70th anniversary of India–Oman diplomatic relations. It reflects India's attempt to consolidate a trusted partnership with a country known for moderation, mediation, and strategic autonomy in a volatile region.

Strategic Significance of Oman for India**Oman as a Stabilising Power in West Asia**

- Oman occupies a unique position in West Asia due to its policy of deliberate neutrality and long-standing role as a mediator in regional conflicts. Unlike many regional actors, Oman has avoided ideological alignment, making it a credible interlocutor during crises, including Iran–West tensions and intra-Gulf disputes.

For India, Oman serves as:

- A balancing factor in a conflict-prone region
- A reliable partner that maintained ties with India even when the region leaned towards Pakistan
- A gateway to the Gulf of Oman and Arabian Sea, critical for India's maritime interests
- This aligns with India's broader doctrine of strategic autonomy and multi-alignment.
- Defence and Security Cooperation: A Strategic Pillar
- Defence ties form the backbone of India–Oman relations.

Key aspects include:

- Oman is the first Gulf country to conduct joint exercises with all three wings of the Indian armed forces.
- The 2005 MoU on Military Cooperation institutionalised defence engagement.
- The Duqm Port Logistics Agreement (2018) provides India with access to basing, refuelling, and maintenance facilities, enhancing India's blue-water naval capability.
- Oman's geographic position enables India to monitor Chinese PLA Navy activity in the Western Indian Ocean.

The visit may further deepen defence cooperation through:

- Joint production and defence manufacturing
- Supply of platforms such as Tejas aircraft, naval patrol vessels, radar systems
- Enhanced counter-terrorism and anti-piracy cooperation

- This complements India's vision of Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR).

Economic and Trade Engagement

- Although bilateral trade remains modest, it has shown steady growth, reaching \$10.6 billion (FY 2024–25).

Key economic dimensions:

- Strong investment flows, with over \$600 million FDI from Oman to India
- The Oman–India Joint Investment Fund (OIJIF) as a model of long-term institutional investment
- Likely signing of the India–Oman Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)

The CEPA assumes significance in:

- Trade diversification, especially amid U.S. tariff pressures
- Integrating Indian firms into Gulf supply chains
- Enhancing services, MSME, and digital trade

Digital Public Infrastructure and Fintech Cooperation

- India's soft power increasingly rests on Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI).
- Notable developments:
- NPCI–Central Bank of Oman MoU (2022)
- Launch of RuPay cards in Oman
- Potential interoperability of payment systems

This positions India as:

- A global norm-setter in digital governance
- A provider of scalable, low-cost fintech solutions for developing economies

Connectivity, Energy, and Emerging Domains

1. Connectivity and IMEC

- Oman could play a complementary role in the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) by:
- Acting as a logistics and transshipment hub
- Enhancing resilience of global supply chains

2. Energy Cooperation

- As both countries navigate energy transitions, cooperation may expand to:
- Green hydrogen
- Renewable energy
- Critical minerals

- Strategic petroleum reserves (on the UAE model)
- This supports India's goals of energy security, diversification, and sustainability.

3. Space, Education, and Health

- The visit may also catalyse cooperation in:
 - Space technology
 - Offshore campuses of IITs and IIMs
 - Healthcare and medical education
- Such initiatives strengthen people-to-people ties and long-term capacity building.

Geopolitical Context and India's West Asia Policy

- The visit gains further relevance amid:
 - The fragile Gaza ceasefire
 - Intensifying great power competition
 - China's expanding naval footprint in the Indian Ocean
- India's engagement with Oman reflects a non-ideological, interest-based diplomacy, reinforcing:
 - Multipolar regional order
 - India's role as a net security provider
 - Stable partnerships without entangling alliances

Conclusion

The Oman visit is emblematic of India's mature and forward-looking diplomacy in West Asia. It reaffirms one of India's oldest strategic partnerships in the Gulf while adapting it to contemporary challenges such as maritime security, energy transition, digital governance, and connectivity. Whether through a CEPA, defence cooperation, green energy, or IMEC, the visit has the potential to set new benchmarks in bilateral relations. In an era of geopolitical flux, Oman remains a dependable anchor for India's strategic, economic, and security interests in its extended neighbourhood.
