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SPECIAL FOR UPSC & GPSC EXAMINATION

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The discovery of a new microscopic crustacean species, *Indiaphonte bijoyi*, from the Kavaratti lagoon in Lakshadweep highlights India's growing contribution to marine taxonomy and biodiversity research. Reported by The Hindu, the finding underscores the ecological importance of lesser-known microscopic organisms in sustaining aquatic ecosystems.

Microscopic crustacean from Kavaratti established as a new genus and species

The Hindu Bureau

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

A tiny crustacean discovered from the Kavaratti lagoon on the Lakshadweep islands has now been established as a new genus and a new species. The organism, which belongs to the family *Laophontidae* within the *Copepoda* class, is so minuscule that it can be properly studied only with a microscope.

The crustacean has been named *Indiaphonte bijoyi*, with the generic name *Indiaphonte* honouring India and the species name *bijoyi* named after S. Bijoy Nandan, dean, Faculty of Marine Sciences, Co-



Indiaphonte bijoyi play a key role in maintaining health of aquatic ecosystems.

chin University of Science and Technology (Cusat) and a former Vice-Chancellor of Kannur University.

The new organism has been scientifically de-

scribed by Neelima Vasu K., a researcher in the Department of Marine Biology at Cusat, in collaboration with Samuel E. Gómez-Noguera, a copepod taxonomist and Professor at UNAM University, Mexico. The discovery has been highlighted in a paper in the journal *Zootaxa*.

The newly described species has a semi-cylindrical, depressed body that is wider in the middle and tapering towards the posterior. It also has antennae-like appendages at the front. Females are slightly larger than males with a body length ranging from 518 to 772 micrometres.

Organisms such as *In-*

diaphonte bijoyi are essentially Meiofauna, tiny invertebrate animals less than 1 millimetre in size living in sediments in aquatic environments. With 350 species across 77 genera, the family *Laophontidae* is among the most diverse within the order *Harpacticoida*. Though microscopic in size, they play a vital role in maintaining the health of marine and freshwater ecosystems.

The genus *Indiaphonte* is considered new because it exhibits a unique combination of morphological traits that do not match any previously recorded genus within the *Laophontidae* family.

Key Details and Scientific Significance

- *Indiaphonte bijoyi* belongs to the family *Laophontidae* under the class *Copepoda*, order *Harpacticoida*.
- The organism qualifies as meiofauna—microscopic invertebrates (<1 mm) inhabiting aquatic sediments.
- It was discovered in the Kavaratti lagoon, a sensitive coral atoll ecosystem.
- The species was described by a researcher from Cochin University of Science and Technology in collaboration with an international taxonomist, and published in *Zootaxa*, a reputed peer-reviewed journal.
- The establishment of a new genus (*Indiaphonte*) is particularly significant. In taxonomy, a new genus is created only when an organism exhibits a unique combination of morphological traits not fitting any existing genus. This reflects both the distinct evolutionary lineage of the species and the incompleteness of our current biodiversity records.

Ecological Importance: Although microscopic, harpacticoid copepods like *Indiaphonte bijoyi* play a critical role in:

Nutrient cycling and decomposition of organic matter

Maintaining sediment health

Acting as a food source for higher trophic levels

Their presence is often an indicator of ecosystem health, making them important for marine environmental monitoring.

Broader Relevance for UPSC

Biodiversity Conservation: Highlights undocumented marine biodiversity in India's island ecosystems.

Science & Technology: Emphasizes taxonomy, microscopy, and international scientific collaboration.

Environment & Ecology: Reinforces the ecological role of meiofauna and the need to conserve fragile coastal and lagoon ecosystems.

Policy Perspective: Strengthens the case for marine biodiversity mapping under initiatives like the National Biodiversity Mission and blue economy strategies.

Conclusion

The identification of *Indiaphonte bijoyi* as a new genus and species is a reminder that significant biodiversity remains hidden at microscopic levels. Such discoveries enhance scientific understanding, support evidence-based conservation, and reinforce India's role in global marine research—an aspect increasingly relevant for sustainable management of coastal and island ecosystems.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: *Indiaphonte bijoyi*, recently seen in the news, is best described as:

- A. A freshwater fish endemic to the Western Ghats
- B. A microscopic crustacean belonging to Copepoda
- C. A marine algae species found in coral reefs
- D. A benthic mollusc from mangrove ecosystems

Ans: (b)

Page 04 : GS II : International Relations / Prelims Exam

The United States' invitation to India to join the proposed Board of Peace for Gaza signals New Delhi's rising diplomatic profile in global conflict-resolution efforts. While India has not yet responded, the development is significant in the context of West Asia geopolitics, post-conflict reconstruction of Gaza, and India's principled foreign policy rooted in strategic autonomy.

India invited to join Gaza peace board

New Delhi has not yet responded to the invitation, officials say; the Board of Peace, to be headed by Trump and to include 'other members and heads of state', is expected to oversee funding for the 'redevelopment of Gaza' until the Palestinian Authority completes a 'reform programme'

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

United States President Donald Trump has invited India to be a part of the Board of Peace for Gaza, sources in New Delhi said on Sunday.

U.S. Ambassador Sergio Goro also shared a letter on social media from Mr. Trump to Prime Minister Narendra Modi inviting India.

The Board of Peace for Gaza comprises a group of countries that are being invited by the U.S. to provide a governance structure for the Gaza Strip, as Hamas is being pressured to give up its governance role in the territory as part of Mr. Trump's peace plan.

Officials unwilling to be named said that India has the "invite in hand",

though New Delhi has not responded as yet. This comes three days after Mr. Trump announced on social media that the Board of Peace had been formed and that its members would be announced "shortly".

The Trump peace plan for Gaza was first floated on September 29, 2025, when the U.S. President hosted Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the White House. Following the announcement, Hamas agreed to return all 48 remaining hostages who were being held in Gaza in exchange for Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails and Gaza detainees.

As per the plan, Gaza will be administered by the "temporary transitional governance of a technocratic apolitical Palestinian committee", which will



U.S. President Donald Trump with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the Oval Office of the White House on February 13, 2025. AFP

consist of Palestinian and international experts. This transitional outfit will be supervised by the Board of Peace, to be headed by Mr. Trump and include "other members and heads of state", as well as the United Kingdom's former Prime Minister Tony Blair.

The Board of Peace is expected to handle fund-

ing for the "redevelopment of Gaza" till the Palestinian Authority has completed a "reform programme".

The U.S. is expected to work with international partners to develop a "temporary" International Stabilisation Force (ISF) to be deployed in Gaza soon. The U.S. has been in talks with multiple countries

UAE President arrives today

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

India will host UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, on Monday.

The UAE President will hold talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "The visit will provide an opportunity for the two

leaders to chart new frontiers for the India-UAE Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. It will also enable exchange of views on regional and global issues of mutual interest, where India and the UAE share a high degree of convergence," the External Affairs Ministry said.

across the world for troops to participate in the ISF.

Officials here have maintained that India would not be part of the ISF as it is not a peacekeeping force under the aegis of the United Nations.

On October 9, 2025, however, Mr. Modi had welcomed the Trump peace plan in a post on X.

"We welcome the agreement on the first phase of President Trump's peace plan. This is also a reflection of the strong leadership of PM Netanyahu," he said.

Jordan, Greece, Cyprus, and Pakistan also said on Sunday they had received invitations. (With PTI inputs)

Static Portion

1. Gaza Strip: Strategic and Political Context

- Gaza is a narrow coastal territory located between Israel and Egypt, home to over two million Palestinians.
- Since 2007, Gaza has been under the control of Hamas, following its split with the Palestinian Authority.
- The region has witnessed repeated conflicts, humanitarian crises, and economic blockade, making governance and reconstruction a persistent challenge.

2. India's Traditional Position on Palestine-Israel Issue

- India has historically supported the two-state solution, advocating an independent, sovereign Palestine living side by side with Israel.
- India maintains strong strategic ties with Israel while also supporting Palestinian statehood through diplomatic and humanitarian assistance.
- India supports peace processes that are inclusive, negotiated, and respect international law.

3. UN Peacekeeping and India

- India is one of the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping missions.
- A consistent principle of Indian foreign policy is non-participation in non-UN mandated military deployments, which explains India's refusal to join the proposed International Stabilisation Force (ISF) for Gaza.

Current Developments

- U.S. President Donald Trump has proposed a Board of Peace for Gaza to oversee governance and reconstruction during a transitional phase.
- India has received a formal invitation, but no response has been conveyed so far.
- The Board is expected to:
 - Supervise a technocratic, apolitical Palestinian transitional administration
 - Oversee funding for redevelopment of Gaza
 - Function until the Palestinian Authority completes institutional reforms
- The Board is to be headed by President Trump and may include other heads of state and former UK PM Tony Blair.
- India has clearly stated it will not participate in the ISF, as it is outside the UN framework.

Analysis: Significance for India

Opportunities

- Enhances India's image as a responsible global stakeholder.
- Allows India to shape post-conflict reconstruction discourse without military involvement.
- Aligns with India's expanding engagement in West Asia, including strong ties with the UAE and other regional actors.

Concerns and Constraints

- Participation may require balancing relations with Israel, Palestine, and the wider Islamic world.
- Risk of being drawn into a politically sensitive and unstable conflict zone.
- Governance mechanisms led by major powers outside the UN could undermine multilateral legitimacy.

Strategic Autonomy

- India's cautious approach reflects its preference for:
 - Multilateralism over ad-hoc coalitions
 - Developmental and humanitarian roles rather than coercive security roles
 - Issue-based alignment instead of bloc politics

Conclusion

The invitation to join the Gaza Board of Peace reflects India's growing diplomatic credibility and relevance in global peace initiatives. However, India's measured response underscores its commitment to strategic autonomy, UN-centric peacekeeping, and a balanced West Asia policy.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques : Ques : The Gaza Strip is best described as:

- (a) A self-governing region under full UN administration
- (b) A coastal Palestinian territory currently under Hamas control
- (c) A disputed territory jointly administered by Israel and Egypt
- (d) A mandated territory governed by the Palestinian Authority since 2007

Ans: b)

UPSC Mians Exam Practice Question

Ques : Discuss the relevance of India's traditional support for the two-state solution in the backdrop of the United States' proposed governance framework for Gaza. **(150 Words)**

Page 05 : GS II & III : International Relations & Indian Economy

The statement by Poland's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski during his visit to India reflects growing European efforts to engage New Delhi on the Russia-Ukraine war, global norms of sovereignty, and economic cooperation.

'Borders should not be decided by tanks or terrorists, but through negotiations'

Polish Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister says his country is 'pleased' with India's reduction in Russian oil purchases; hopes New Delhi shares the view that a world in which the 'law of the jungle becomes acceptable is not a good world'; he expresses optimism for an EU-India FTA soon

INTERVIEW

Radoslaw Sikorski

Suhasini Haidar
JAIPUR

Borders should not be decided by "tanks or terrorists", the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Poland, Radoslaw Sikorski, said ahead of his meeting with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Monday. Mr. Sikorski, hoping that India and Poland could have a closer understanding on the issue of Russia's war in Ukraine, said that Poland is "pleased" India has begun reducing its dependence on Russian oil, four years after the war in Ukraine began. The Polish Foreign Minister, one of a number of high-level visitors from Europe to India this month, said the EU-India Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is still being negotiated, but he hoped it would be



SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

signed at the EU-India summit on January 27. Edited excerpts:

You have referred to India's cut in buying Russian oil and said you are 'pleased' and 'satisfied' – are you convinced that this is a permanent shift, or are these just market adjustments?

Well, Russia lost its most lucrative market for gas and oil in Europe as a result of its aggression against one of its neighbours (Ukraine). We hope India understands our

pain, in the sense that we were both colonised in the 19th century; Poland was, so was Ukraine. And we, I think both [India and Poland] believe that the time of European empires trying to colonise other people should be over, and I think both of our regions appreciate how transitory and sometimes accidental borders are, but we also believe that they should be decided through negotiation and adjudication, and not by sending tanks or terrorists.

Do you think the Indian government is shifting

its position due to what Poland has been saying?

Well, India is such a huge country that we understand that it needs to have relationships with everyone. But we hope that India shares our view that principles still matter, that a world in which the law of the jungle becomes acceptable is not a good world. I understand that importers always want a bargain, and Russia is forced to sell its oil at a huge discount, and it's sometimes tempting to take advantage of that, but countries should be careful, because we have successfully sanctioned the Russian "shadow fleet". And so, even when Russia sells [crude oil], they might not be able to deliver it.

Is there any sign of a Russia-Ukraine ceasefire? Poland has been seen as anti-ceasefire, given its transfer of weapons and fighter aircraft...

That's not anti-ceasefire. That's just helping the vic-

tim of aggression resist the aggressor. Doing nothing means that the aggressor wins. And yes, the war can be over as soon as Mr. Putin decides to stop.

Is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as united, given the U.S. threats against Greenland?

We have had a war within NATO before, when Turkey landed its paratroopers in Cyprus (the Turkish invasion in 1974). We survived it, and we'll survive this one, too.

Do you expect to see the EU-India FTA being signed next week?

I hope so. There are, of course, both benefits and some sectoral difficulties where we need to be sensitive to each other's pain. But overall, I think President Donald Trump deserves credit for encouraging us to sign, first, the agreement with Latin America (the EU-Mercosur FTA) and now with India

[reference to tariffs].

You said there are certain sensitivities that still have to be dealt with – in particular, agricultural market access is believed to have been kept out of the deal. Would Poland support that?

The negotiations are continuing, and we are talking about thousands of products, so it's complicated, and let's leave that to the experts. Since communism collapsed in Poland, when the iconic picture from Poland was of food queues, we are now a huge food exporter. I believe that there are very few product lines in which [India and Poland's] agriculture competes with one another. Together, [India and EU] are two billion people. So there is a great deal of potential. And you have a political system which is more compatible with us than some others. So we have hope [of a deal].
(Read the full interview here: newsth.live/sikorski)

Static Portion

1. Principle of Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity

- A core principle of international law, enshrined in the UN Charter, is that borders cannot be altered through use of force.
- Territorial disputes are expected to be resolved through peaceful negotiations, arbitration, or adjudication.
- This principle is central to debates on conflicts such as Russia-Ukraine, West Asia, and South China Sea.

2. Russia-Ukraine War: European Perspective

- The war, beginning in 2022, is viewed by Europe as aggression against a sovereign state.

- Countries like Poland, with historical experiences of occupation and shifting borders, see the conflict as an existential threat to European security architecture.
- NATO and the EU consider military support to Ukraine as defensive assistance, not escalation.

3. India's Energy Diplomacy

- India imports over 85% of its crude oil requirements.
- Following Western sanctions, Russia offered crude oil at discounted rates, increasing India's imports.
- India maintains that energy security and affordability are legitimate national interests, while also calling for dialogue and diplomacy.

4. EU-India Free Trade Agreement (FTA)

- Negotiations resumed after a long gap, aiming to deepen trade, investment, and supply-chain resilience.
- Sensitive sectors include agriculture, dairy, automobiles, data protection, and intellectual property rights.
- The FTA is strategically important in the context of global protectionism and supply chain diversification.

Current Developments

- Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski urged that borders must not be redrawn by "tanks or terrorists," implicitly referring to Russia's actions in Ukraine.
- Poland expressed satisfaction with India's reduction in Russian oil purchases, interpreting it as a positive political signal.
- He emphasized that a world governed by the "law of the jungle" undermines global stability and rules-based order.
- Poland hopes India will align more closely with Europe on normative principles, even while recognizing India's need to maintain relations with multiple partners.
- On security, Poland justified military aid to Ukraine as supporting the victim, not opposing peace.
- Optimism was expressed about the EU-India FTA, with hopes of signing it at the upcoming summit.

Analysis: Implications for India

Diplomatic Balancing

- India continues its policy of strategic autonomy, avoiding explicit alignment with either bloc.
- While India supports sovereignty and territorial integrity, it has refrained from directly condemning Russia, prioritizing dialogue.

Energy vs Principles Debate

- European concerns highlight the tension between ethical foreign policy and economic pragmatism.
- India argues that energy purchases are non-political and necessary for domestic stability.

Economic Opportunities

- The EU–India FTA could significantly boost exports, technology transfer, and market access.
- Poland’s supportive stance reflects broader European interest in India as a trusted economic and political partner.

Conclusion

The Polish Foreign Minister’s comments underline Europe’s expectation that India, as a rising global power, will play a greater role in defending international norms while shaping a multipolar world. India’s challenge lies in balancing moral principles with national interest, leveraging economic opportunities like the EU–India FTA, and maintaining diplomatic flexibility.

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Discuss the strategic significance of the proposed EU–India Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in the changing global economic order. What are the major challenges in concluding the agreement? **(150 words)**

Page 10 : GS II : Social Justice

The recent directions issued by the Supreme Court of India in an ongoing case related to student suicides have brought the systemic crisis in India's higher education sector into sharp focus. By linking student distress to structural deficiencies such as faculty shortages, weak governance, and inadequate institutional capacity, the Court has underlined that student well-being cannot be addressed without comprehensive reforms in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

Conceptual Background

1. Massification of Higher Education

- India has witnessed rapid expansion of higher education enrolment, driven by privatisation and increased access.
- However, this massification has not been matched by proportional improvements in quality, infrastructure, or academic staffing.
- Consequences include overcrowded classrooms, declining research output, and poor student support systems.

2. Student Distress and Suicides

- Student suicides are a multidimensional issue, linked to:
 - Financial stress
 - Social discrimination and social injustice
 - Academic pressure and lack of mentoring
- HEIs play a critical role in early identification and mitigation through institutional support, counselling, and academic guidance.

3. Governance in Public Universities

- Effective functioning of universities depends on timely appointment of Vice-Chancellors, Registrars, and faculty.
- Vacancies weaken academic leadership, delay decision-making, and erode institutional credibility.
- The UGC-regulated recruitment process, though necessary for quality control, is time-consuming and requires sustained budgetary support.

4. Constitutional Aspect

- Article 142 empowers the Supreme Court to pass orders necessary for "complete justice," even in areas involving executive and administrative action.
- Its use here reflects judicial recognition of higher education as a matter of public interest and constitutional importance.

Current Developments

- The Supreme Court has issued nine directions to Central and State governments.
 - Seven directions focus on systematic record-keeping, reporting, and tracking of student suicides in HEIs.

Crisis in education

Higher education institutions need systemic reforms

In an ongoing case relating to student suicides, the Supreme Court of India has issued nine directions to Central and State governments. Recognising the massification of higher education front-ended by privatisation without a commensurate boost in quality, the Court has taken note of student distress covering financial, social, social injustice and academic issues. The Court has invoked Article 142 of the Constitution and seven of the nine directions relate to record-keeping, reporting, and tracking suicides in higher education institutions (HEI) separately. Two directives order the filling of the posts of Registrars and Vice-Chancellors as well as all vacant faculty positions. Evidently, the Court sees these steps as critical to student well-being.

Across India, ground reportage shows that many public HEIs, especially universities, report 50% vacancies. The University of Madras is a case study as it is the premier State-administered HEI in Tamil Nadu – a State which leads the nation in enrolment in higher education and with a stellar record in women's education. With such a storied legacy, the university was known for quality research besides awarding degrees in affiliated colleges through examinations. Teaching became an important component in the late 1970s, but in the last decade, its decline has been pronounced. No new faculty appointments have been made and the teaching strength is half of the sanctioned strength. The university's research component is just about functional. It boasts of centres for advanced studies such as in philosophy, botany and mathematics, but these are a shadow of their original selves. Today, the humanities, science-based and social science research focused on Tamil Nadu, that the government can leverage from its public universities, has been given short shrift. Vice-Chancellor appointments have been stalled by a recalcitrant Governor. The ambiguity thrown in by the Court on the Presidential reference on a Governor's powers may need to be resolved before Vice-Chancellor vacancies can be quickly filled. Filling faculty positions would have to follow UGC process that takes at least six months and a budgetary commitment that may be helped with Union government support. Availability of qualified faculty can be a hurdle. Corruption and political-ideological appointments have affected quality and need to be addressed. Although the four-month schedule prescribed by the Court might seem daunting, the order is a call to action to fulfil the basic requirements of a robust public higher education system before goals such as Viksit Bharat can be seriously aspired for.

- Two key directions mandate:
 - Filling vacancies of Vice-Chancellors and Registrars
 - Filling all vacant faculty positions
- The Court explicitly linked governance and staffing deficits with student well-being.

Case Study: University of Madras

- Despite being a premier public university in a State with high enrolment and strong women's education indicators, it faces:
 - Nearly 50% faculty vacancies
 - No new faculty appointments in a decade
 - Severe decline in teaching and research quality
- Advanced research centres exist largely in name, and socially relevant research has weakened.
- Vice-Chancellor appointments have been delayed due to Centre–State–Governor tensions, exposing governance bottlenecks.

Analysis: Implications and Challenges

Why the Court's Directions Matter

- Data-driven tracking of suicides will help shift policy from reactive to preventive.
- Filling leadership and faculty positions is foundational to:
 - Academic mentoring
 - Research supervision
 - Institutional accountability

Implementation Challenges

- UGC recruitment procedures require time and qualified faculty availability may be limited.
- Budgetary constraints at State level may necessitate Union government support.
- Issues of corruption and politicisation in appointments continue to undermine quality.

Link to National Goals

- Aspirations such as Viksit Bharat and demographic dividend cannot be realised without strong public universities producing skilled, resilient, and socially aware graduates.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's intervention is not merely about preventing student suicides but about restoring the core institutional health of India's higher education system. The order serves as a call to action for governments to address vacancies, governance paralysis, and declining academic standards.

Ques : Student distress in higher education institutions is a reflection of deeper structural and governance failures in India's public university system. In the light of the recent directions issued by the Supreme Court of India, critically examine the systemic challenges facing higher education institutions in India and suggest reforms to address them. **(150 Words)**

Page 12 : GS II : Social Justice / Prelims Exam

Child trafficking remains one of the gravest human rights violations in India, undermining the right to life and dignity of children. Despite rescues running into thousands every year, conviction rates remain abysmally low. The recent Supreme Court judgment in K. P. Kiran Kumar vs State has reiterated that trafficking is a gross violation of fundamental rights, calling for stronger legal enforcement, institutional coordination, and preventive social measures.

How should India tackle child trafficking?

What is the Palermo Protocol? How does the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 define trafficking? How does the Constitution of India protect children from exploitation? How has the Supreme Court reacted? Why is a strong Centre-State relationship important for countering exploitation?

EXPLAINER

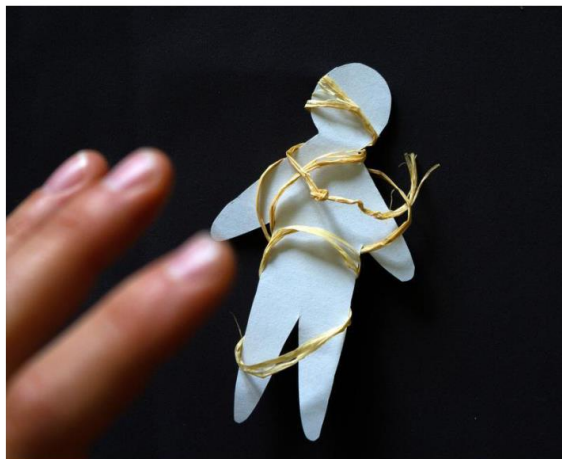
C. B. P. Srivastava

The story so far:

Child trafficking remains a deeply disturbing reality in India. The Supreme Court in its recent decision in *K. P. Kiran Kumar versus State* has given strict guidelines to prevent such offences, and held that trafficking grossly violates children's fundamental right to life as guaranteed by the Constitution. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, in 2022, about 3,098 children below 18 years were rescued. Between April 2024 and March 2025, over 53,000 children were rescued from child labour, trafficking and kidnapping across India. However, the conviction rate for such offences between 2018 and 2022 was only 4.8%.

What is child trafficking?

Internationally, the Palermo Protocol (UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children), 2000 defines child trafficking as 'the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation.' Presently, Section 143 of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) 2023 provides that "whoever, for the purpose of exploitation, recruits, transports, harbours, transfers, or receives, a person or persons by, using threats; or using force, or any other form of coercion; or by abduction; or by practising fraud, or deception; or by abuse of power; or by inducement, including the giving or receiving of payments or benefits, in order to achieve the consent of any person having control over the person recruited, transported, harboured, transferred or received, commits the offence of trafficking." The word 'exploitation' is wide enough in its scope and includes physical and sexual exploitation as well. It also includes any form of slavery, servitude, or forced



ISTOCKPHOTO

removal of organs.

What are the rights of children?

The Constitution extensively provides for the protection of children. Articles 23 and 24 give protection from human trafficking, begging, forced labour and employment in hazardous industries. Apart from these provisions, the state is also obliged to ensure that children are not abused, and that they are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity. They are protected against exploitation and moral and material abandonment under Clauses (e) and (f) of Article 39 respectively.

The BNS under Sections 98 and 99 specifically addresses the 'selling and buying' of minors. On the other hand, prevention of trafficking for sexual exploitation is provided in the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956.

Furthermore, care, protection and rehabilitation for victims of child trafficking is provided under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015. The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 2013 also intends to check such activities by providing a more comprehensive definition of trafficking by including sexual exploitation, slavery, servitude, forced labour, and organ removal. It will cover trafficking irrespective of consent.

The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 assumes greater significance in this regard. Apart from defining offences covering sexual assault, harassment and child pornography, the Act includes stringent punishments which inter alia include life imprisonment and even death penalty in extreme cases. One of the most important aspects of the Act is that it is gender-neutral. In order to provide rapid

trials, about 400 fast track courts set up exclusively for implementing the POCSO Act are in operation across India. These courts have set a target to dispose of around 165 cases per year per court.

What has been the judicial approach?

In *Vishal Jeet versus Union of India, 1990* it was held that trafficking and child prostitution are serious socio-economic problems and hence a preventive and humanistic approach is essential to deal with them. In *M. C. Mehta versus State of Tamil Nadu, 1996*, the Court issued guidelines with a view to prohibiting employment of children in hazardous industries. Moreover, in the *Bachpan Bachao Andolan versus Union of India, 2011* case, the top court issued directions to address widespread exploitation and trafficking of children.

What next?

The guidelines point out that the socio-economic vulnerabilities of the victims must be considered, especially those from marginalised communities. Society is still unable to protect children and adolescents from being criminals or being victims of crimes. Factors such as poverty, unemployment, migration, disasters and breakdown of the family system push children into vulnerability which strengthens the trafficking chain. In recent years, the spread of social media and online platforms has contributed to such offences, especially in terms of recruitment in the name of jobs or opportunities for "modelling". The government must first ensure that the social, economic and political rights of children are well protected with the help of institutions built for the purpose. Second, it must come down heavily on traffickers and ensure that the conviction rate improves considerably so that a deterrence may be created. Moreover, a strong Union-State relationship is also required because law and order and police are State subjects.

C. B. P. Srivastava is President, Centre for Applied Research in Governance, Delhi.

THE GIST

The Supreme Court in its recent decision in *K. P. Kiran Kumar versus State* has given strict guidelines to prevent such offences, and held that trafficking grossly violates children's fundamental right to life as guaranteed by the Constitution.

The guidelines point out that the socio-economic vulnerabilities of the victims must be considered, especially those from marginalised communities.

The Constitution extensively provides for the protection of children. Articles 23 and 24 give protection from human trafficking, begging, forced labour and employment in hazardous industries.

What is the Palermo Protocol?

- The Palermo Protocol (2000), formally known as the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, defines child trafficking as:
- "Recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation."

Key Features

- Consent of the child is irrelevant.
- Exploitation includes sexual exploitation, forced labour, slavery, servitude, and organ removal.
- India is a signatory, and its domestic laws broadly align with this definition.

How Does the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 Define Trafficking?

- Under Section 143 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), trafficking includes recruitment, transport, harbouring, transfer, or receipt of persons for exploitation through coercion, fraud, abuse of power, or inducement.

Key Points

- Exploitation is broadly defined (physical, sexual exploitation, slavery, servitude, forced labour, organ removal).
- Consent is immaterial where exploitative intent exists.
- Sections 98 and 99 separately criminalise buying and selling of minors.

How Does the Constitution of India Protect Children?

- The Constitution provides robust safeguards against exploitation:
- Article 23: Prohibits human trafficking, forced labour, and begar.
- Article 24: Prohibits employment of children in hazardous industries.
- Article 39(e) & (f) (DPSPs): Mandate protection of children from abuse, exploitation, and moral/material abandonment.
- Together, these provisions impose a positive obligation on the State to protect children.

Legal Framework Beyond BNS

POCSO Act, 2012

- Gender-neutral law
- Stringent punishments including life imprisonment and death penalty in extreme cases
- Fast Track Special Courts for speedy trials

Juvenile Justice Act, 2015

- Focuses on care, protection, rehabilitation, and reintegration of trafficked children

Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956

- Targets sexual exploitation and trafficking networks

What Has Been the Supreme Court's Approach?

The Supreme Court of India has consistently adopted a humanistic and rights-based approach:

Vishal Jeet vs Union of India (1990) → Trafficking and child prostitution identified as serious socio-economic problems requiring prevention-focused strategies.

M. C. Mehta vs State of Tamil Nadu (1996) → Issued guidelines prohibiting child labour in hazardous industries.

Bachpan Bachao Andolan vs Union of India (2011) → Directed institutional mechanisms to combat child trafficking and exploitation.

K. P. Kiran Kumar vs State (recent) → Held trafficking as a violation of Article 21 and issued strict preventive guidelines.

Why Is a Strong Centre–State Relationship Crucial?

- Police and law & order are State subjects, but trafficking networks operate inter-State and transnationally.
- Rescue, investigation, prosecution, and rehabilitation require:
 - Data sharing
 - Joint task forces
 - Coordinated intelligence
- Central agencies like National Crime Records Bureau provide data, but implementation rests with States.
- Weak coordination leads to poor conviction rates (only 4.8% between 2018–2022).

Way Forward: How India Should Tackle Child Trafficking

Prevention First

- Address root causes: poverty, migration, disasters, unemployment, family breakdown.
- Strengthen education, nutrition, and social security for vulnerable children.

Technology Regulation

- Monitor social media and online recruitment platforms used for trafficking under false job/modeling offers.

Stronger Enforcement & Convictions

- Specialised anti-trafficking units
- Witness protection and victim-centric trials
- Faster disposal of cases under POCSO and BNS

Rehabilitation & Reintegration

- Psychological care, education, skill training
- Community-based reintegration to prevent re-trafficking

Centre–State Synergy

- Unified national database
- Standard operating procedures (SOPs)
- Financial and logistical support from the Union to States

Conclusion

Child trafficking in India is not merely a criminal law issue but a failure of social protection, governance, and coordination. While India has a strong constitutional and legal framework aligned with international standards like the Palermo Protocol, effective implementation remains the key challenge. A child-centric, rights-based approach backed by strong Centre–State cooperation, higher conviction

rates, and preventive socio-economic policies is essential to dismantle trafficking networks and safeguard India's future generation.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques : A The POCSO Act, 2012 is significant because:

1. It is gender-neutral.
2. It provides for Fast Track Special Courts.
3. It covers offences related to child trafficking for labour exploitation.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Ans: B)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Child trafficking is a gross violation of the fundamental right to life and dignity. In this context, examine the constitutional, legal, and judicial framework in India to combat child trafficking. (150 Words)

India-Germany ties can only soar higher

Last week, we witnessed something rather unusual. Television channels, newspapers and social media were full of images/pictures of two very important leaders – Prime Minister Narendra Modi and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz flying kites together in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. It was quite a contrast to the other images of this very substantial meeting. But I actually think that the kite is the perfect symbol to illustrate where Germany's partnership with India is going.

Germany and India have both experienced strong headwinds in recent months. The eroding international trade system is a challenge for both their economies. They both watch the increasing disregard for international law and the disruption of the rules-based global order with great worry. And they both share concerns on the stability in their neighbourhoods. Both countries want predictable conditions. This is what they need for their people to prosper. Based on hard work, on inventiveness and innovation, on education and on science. But it is only in stormy conditions that a good kite flyer shows you what it is capable of – just like the India-German partnership.

Two countries that have economic heft

Chancellor Merz and Mr. Modi are also the leaders of the third- and fourth-biggest economies, respectively, of the world. We are talking about two economic heavyweights. In a few years, India will overtake Germany, to become the undisputed number three in the world. And let me tell you something: Germany will celebrate the day this happens. The world economy is not a zero-sum game, contrary to



Philipp Ackermann

is the German Ambassador to India

A kite is the apt symbol to show where Germany's partnership with India is going

what some leaders think. When India profits, Germany also profits. A stronger Indian economy means a bigger market for German products, and a stronger footprint of Indian companies in Germany spells more competitive products and services for German businesses and consumers.

One of the central messages of Chancellor Merz in India was that a free-trade agreement between Europe and India is what India and Germany need to propel their economies to the next level. And to become more resilient against unpredictable trade wars and supply chain interruptions. This was Chancellor Merz's first visit outside the Western Alliance, and his first time in India. The invitation to Ahmedabad, to Mr. Modi's home State of Gujarat, was a very special gesture of friendship for Germany. There was a lot of substance to discuss and decide upon, but the Chancellor's personal impressions of this trip are just as significant.

The basis of the migration partnership

Here is an anecdote of the visit – it might sound like a small detail, but there is much more to it. Chancellor Merz had a conversation with young Indians who were about to move to Germany. One of these young women had a casual chat with Mr. Merz in German. This young Indian had been learning German for only four months. And I have been struggling with Hindi for four years now. My excuse is usually “*Maf kijie, lekin Hindi kafi mushkil hai* (Sorry, but Hindi is very difficult)”, but I can tell you that learning German will also feel like a case of brain jogging at times. The chat that Chancellor Merz had with that young lady epitomises what I admire so much

about Indians. They are nimble and quick to adapt, they always have a game plan, and they know how to get there – with a mix of perseverance, smartness and sometimes disarming assertiveness. Many well-established professional pathways and educational opportunities around the world are closing up. But Germany continues to welcome smart, skilled and spirited Indians. Its migration partnership with India is built on safe, legal and predictable migration.

Platinum jubilee of ties

In 2026, Germany is celebrating 75 years of diplomatic ties with India and I cannot imagine a better start into this year than this visit. Today, India and Germany stand closer together than ever before. Not just because external shocks brought them closer together, but because in the previous years, they set a clear strategic direction for their partnership. In the same sense, I believe that the diplomatic anniversary between Germany and India will set them up for future success.

A European Union-India-Free Trade Agreement, a closer defence partnership between Germany and India, and stronger and stronger bonds between their people will be the building blocks for something truly lasting.

I am convinced that by the end of this year, when Mr. Modi and his cabinet will travel to Germany for the biennial Intergovernmental Consultations, India and Germany will celebrate a year of significant progress in their bilateral relations, a year that has started with flying their kites in the skies of Ahmedabad.

GS Paper II : International Relations

UPSC Mians Practice Question: In an era of global economic uncertainty and weakening multilateralism, India–Germany relations have acquired renewed strategic significance. Discuss with reference to recent developments in trade, migration, and global governance. (250 Words)

Context :

The recent visit of German Chancellor Friedrich Merz to India, marked symbolically by his interaction with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Ahmedabad, reflects the deepening strategic partnership between India and Germany. Beyond symbolism, the visit highlights growing convergence between two major economies amid global uncertainty, erosion of the rules-based order, and shifting geopolitical and economic realities.

Static Portion

1. India–Germany Relations: An Overview

- India and Germany established diplomatic relations in 1951; 2026 will mark 75 years of ties.
- Germany is India's most important economic partner in the European Union.
- The relationship rests on four pillars:
 - Trade and investment

- Science, education, and innovation
- Climate and sustainability
- Strategic and global issues

2. Shared Global Concerns

Both countries:

- Support a rules-based international order
- Are affected by disruptions in global trade and supply chains
- Seek stability in their respective neighbourhoods
- Emphasise multilateralism, international law, and predictability

3. Economic Significance

- Germany is currently the world's third-largest economy, while India is the fourth, soon expected to overtake Germany.
- Both reject the notion of a zero-sum global economy, seeing growth as mutually reinforcing.

Key Takeaways from the Article

1. Economic and Trade Cooperation

- Chancellor Merz strongly supported an EU–India Free Trade Agreement (FTA) as a key driver of growth and resilience.
- The FTA is seen as essential to counter:
 - Trade wars
 - Protectionism
 - Supply chain disruptions
- This aligns with India's broader goal of diversifying trade partners and reducing overdependence on any single bloc.

2. Strategic and Political Convergence

- The visit underlines closer alignment on:
 - Respect for international law
 - Concerns over global instability
 - Need for predictable global governance
- Merz's choice of India as his first visit outside the Western Alliance signals India's rising strategic importance in Europe's foreign policy.

3. Migration and People-to-People Ties

- Germany continues to welcome skilled Indian professionals and students, amid shrinking migration opportunities elsewhere.
- The India–Germany migration partnership is based on:
 - Legal
 - Safe
 - Predictable migration
- This supports India’s demographic dividend while addressing Germany’s skill shortages.

4. Symbolism with Substance

- The kite-flying imagery in Ahmedabad symbolised resilience and adaptability amid global “headwinds”.
- The visit combined soft diplomacy with substantive discussions on trade, defence, migration, and innovation.

Strategic Importance for India

Opportunities

- Access to advanced German technology and manufacturing expertise
- Enhanced market access through the EU–India FTA
- Stronger defence and security cooperation
- Greater voice in shaping global economic governance

Challenges

- Translating intent into concrete outcomes on FTA negotiations
- Balancing relations with other major powers while deepening EU ties

Conclusion

The visit of Chancellor Friedrich Merz marks a high point in India–Germany relations, reaffirming their shared commitment to economic openness, multilateralism, and people-centric growth. As both countries approach the 75th anniversary of diplomatic ties, cooperation in trade, defence, migration, and innovation is set to deepen further. In a turbulent global environment, the India–Germany partnership—like a well-flown kite—demonstrates resilience, balance, and the potential to soar higher together.
