

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

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Following a deadly terror attack in Pahalgam, Jammu & Kashmir, that killed at least 26 individuals including a Nepalese national, India has launched a five-pronged counter-response targeting Pakistan, believed to be the origin of the infiltration and terror elements.

India revokes visas issued to Pakistan nationals; Foreign Secretary briefs envoys of G-20 nations

Kallol Bhattacharjee
Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

India on Thursday announced the revocation of “all existing valid visas” issued to Pakistani nationals with effect from April 27 as tensions between the two countries escalated over the Pahalgam attack.

“Medical visas issued to Pakistani nationals will be valid only till April 29, 2025. All Pakistani nationals currently in India must leave India before the expiry of visas, as now amended. Indian nationals are strongly advised to avoid travelling to Pakistan. Those Indian nationals currently in Pakistan are also advised to return to India at the earliest,” the External Affairs Ministry said, announcing that the “Go-



India on Wednesday announced a five-pronged response targeting Pakistan against the backdrop of the attack. PTI

vernment of India has decided to suspend visa services to Pakistani nationals with immediate effect.”

India had on Wednesday announced a five-pronged response targeting Pakistan against the backdrop of the attack. On Wednesday, it announced that the Integrated Check

Post at Attari will be closed with “immediate effect” saying that “those who have crossed over with valid endorsements may return through that route before May 1, 2025”.

Misri briefs envoys
Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri on Thursday briefed

the India-based envoys of the G-20 nations about the Indian response to the terror attack.

Diplomatic sources who spoke to *The Hindu* on condition of anonymity said Mr. Misri's briefing indicated that further Indian actions would “depend on how the other side reacts”.

The briefing focused on the extent of the terror attack in Pahalgam that left at least 25 Indian citizens and a Nepal citizen dead. The envoys were told that the attackers were “hard-core terrorists who had infiltrated from across the border” and that India is uncovering links between terrorists and their backers in Pakistan.

Diplomatic sources said Mr. Misri shared that investigators had identified one of the attackers, but did

not mention his nationality.

He said the “communication platforms” that were used during the attack and that authorities here used facial recognition technology to identify the attackers. India has identified that one of the killers was involved in a similar attack in Jammu and Kashmir in the past.

King Abdullah II of Jordan and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel called Prime Minister Narendra Modi and condemned the terror strike. “PM Netanyahu strongly condemned the terror attack on Indian soil. PM Modi reiterated India's firm resolve to bring the perpetrators and their supporters to justice,” said External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal.

Key Measures Announced by India:

1. Revocation of Visas:
 - All valid visas issued to Pakistani nationals revoked with effect from April 27, 2025.
 - Medical visas valid only till April 29, 2025.
 - Pakistani nationals in India directed to leave before visa expiry.
2. Suspension of Visa Services:
 - Visa issuance to Pakistani nationals has been suspended indefinitely.

3. Travel Advisory:
 - Indian citizens advised not to travel to Pakistan.
 - Those already in Pakistan asked to return to India at the earliest.
4. Closure of Integrated Check Post at Attari:
 - Cross-border movement via Attari halted with effect from April 24, return permitted till May 1 for those who already crossed over.
5. Diplomatic Briefing to G-20 Nations:
 - Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri briefed envoys of G-20 countries.
 - India highlighted cross-border infiltration, use of communication platforms, and facial recognition for identifying perpetrators.

Significance and Strategic Analysis:

1. Strategic Messaging:

India's actions signal a strong, non-military retaliation leveraging diplomatic and administrative tools, focusing on:

- Publicly isolating Pakistan.
- Informing global stakeholders (G-20) to gather diplomatic support.
- Using facial recognition and tech-based forensics to assert capability and legitimacy of claims.

2. Shift in Counter-Terror Strategy:

Rather than an immediate kinetic (military) strike, India is adopting:

- A graduated escalation framework.
- Waiting for Pakistan's reaction before further steps.
- Keeping options open for further diplomatic, economic, or even covert actions.

3. International Diplomacy:

- Gaining support from Jordan and Israel.
- Showcasing the attack as part of global terrorism, not merely a bilateral issue.
- Aligning with global counter-terror narratives post-9/11.

Challenges and Concerns:

- Impact on people-to-people contacts and medical diplomacy, especially patients and cultural exchanges.

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Contact no : 7202080202

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Daily News Analysis

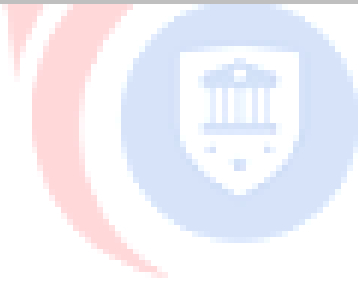
- Possible retaliatory actions from Pakistan in kind, including border tensions.
- Escalation risks in India-Pakistan relations, especially near election cycles or sensitive anniversaries.
- Humanitarian issues due to abrupt visa suspensions.

Conclusion:

India's response to the Pahalgam attack demonstrates a calibrated, tech-backed, and diplomatically aware approach to cross-border terrorism. By revoking visas and briefing global stakeholders, India is both securing its territory and shaping international opinion. The effectiveness of this approach will depend on Pakistan's reaction and sustained international support.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques :India's approach to cross-border terrorism has evolved from direct military action to strategic diplomacy and administrative tools. In the context of recent developments, evaluate this shift and its implications for regional security.(250 Words)

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CIVIL SERVICES

Observed annually on April 25 as World Malaria Day, this year's reflection brings attention to not just the contemporary health burden of malaria, but also its historical influence on global migration, colonialism, and racial constructs. The article explores the "mosquito effect" – how malaria and its scientific understanding altered the course of history, especially in the context of European imperialism in Africa.

The mosquito effect: how malarial chaos influenced human history

Once thought to arise from 'bad air', the mosquito-borne parasite altered migration and shaped racial hierarchies; the disease continues to afflict approximately 263 million people annually, with Africa still shouldering a majority of the burden; while the deaths have decreased, it still remains a major public health challenge

WORLD MALARIA DAY

G. Aravinda

April 25 has been recognised globally by the World Health Organization (WHO) as World Malaria Day (previously African Malaria Day), since 2006 to highlight the need for continued investment and innovation. The "butterfly effect" from chaos theory might result in a Tornado, but the "mosquito effect" (through the parasite it carries) has fundamentally altered human migration patterns, enabling European colonisation and reshaping the geopolitical landscape of entire continents. The mosquito, a seemingly insignificant insect, wielded astonishing power and profoundly altered human civilisation. Malaria, derived from the Italian "*mala aria*", meaning "bad air", is a saga of discovery, colonisation, human suffering and scientific breakthroughs.

Miasma to parasite

Before modern science unravelled malaria's secrets, people believed it was caused by miasma – poisonous air emanating from marshes. It wasn't until 1880 that the French military doctor Alphonse Laveran identified the malaria parasite from the blood of soldiers who had died of fever in Algeria. However, identifying the parasite was just the first puzzle; the full picture of malaria's transmission remained elusive. In 1885-86, Camillo Golgi and Angelo Celli demonstrated the cyclical nature of the fever in relation to the parasite. In 1892, Ettore Marchiafava further characterised the five species of the parasite, distinguishing *Plasmodium falciparum* from others. Of notable mention is Patrick Manson, often regarded as the "father of tropical medicine", who first established the role of mosquitoes in disease transmission with filariasis and later hypothesised that mosquitoes could transmit malaria, too. Ross, inspired by Manson's theory, identified the parasite in the gut of the *Anopheles* mosquito after studying avian malaria in birds in 1897. His breakthrough paved the way for understanding human disease. Giovanni Battista Grassi made significant contributions by linking human malaria to the female *Anopheles* mosquito in 1898. By 1898, the complete transmission cycle of malaria was scientifically understood.

Before these discoveries, European colonial efforts in Africa were severely constrained by extraordinarily high mortality rates. In coastal African colonial trade posts, European troop mortality averaged 500 deaths per 1,000 soldiers annually in the 1800s, with those venturing inland facing even worse



Challenges remain: A nurse assistant administering malaria vaccine on a child in Uganda. April 25 has been recognised by the World Health Organization (WHO) as World Malaria Day. GETTY IMAGES

prospects of up to 60% mortality. In 1865, a British parliamentary committee recommended withdrawing from West Africa altogether due to disease threats. When the Gold Coast (modern Ghana) became a colony in 1874, the first three candidates declined the governor's position due to "health concerns", and the fourth died of malaria within a month of taking office. Consequently, until 1870, European powers controlled only 10% of the African continent, with settlements primarily restricted to coastal areas. Africa was known as "the white man's grave," a place where European colonial ambitions perished.

The correlation between understanding malaria and colonial expansion is striking. As scientists decoded malaria's mysteries between 1880 and 1900, European powers dramatically expanded their control across Africa. Following the 1884 Berlin Conference, which regulated European colonisation and trade in Africa, the "Scramble for Africa" accelerated rapidly. By 1914, European powers had seized control of nearly 90% of the continent, with only Liberia, Ethiopia, and a few more maintaining independence. This was no coincidence. With knowledge about malaria transmission, colonial administrators implemented targeted prevention strategies for European settlements: draining mosquito-breeding swamps, establishing segregated European quarters, and creating hill stations at higher elevations with fewer mosquitoes. Scientific findings about malaria transmission quickly percolated into colonial policy. By 1901, the British adopted a policy of segregated living

based on new knowledge about *Anopheles* mosquitoes and the racist perception of Africans as disease reservoirs.

Scramble for Africa

King Leopold II of Belgium epitomised this exploitation in the brutal colonisation of the Congo. Equipped with quinine, mosquito nets, and a scientific understanding of malaria, European troops subdued resistance and established lucrative colonies. Quinine, derived from the bark of the Cinchona tree, was discovered during Portuguese conquests in South America. Its use post-1880s was guided by scientific understanding. But, the success of colonizing Africa was not purely biological. Innovations and technology to build railroads, steamships, enhanced rifles, and telegraphs helped navigate and control vast territories. But, knowledge about malaria transmission was the "keystone technology". It neutralised nature's deadliest resistance, allowing soldiers to survive and civil servants to administer colonial machinery.

The impact of malaria extended beyond Africa. In the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Africans with a natural genetic resistance to malaria were preferred labour in malaria-infested regions like the Caribbean and the Americas. Consequently, they were traded at higher prices than European labourers, who died of the disease. It created a racialised labour economy, the aftershocks of which echo even today. The modern racial tensions in American and European societies bear this genetic legacy. The valuation of African bodies not only

established brutal slavery systems but also seeded pseudo-scientific justifications for racial superiority. Thus, malaria contributed to the present long-standing racial prejudices and social structures.

Malaria today

With quinine as a base, more refined drugs like chloroquine and artemisinin followed. Insecticide-treated bed nets and indoor spraying revolutionised prevention. Today, the malaria vaccine RTS,S brings new hope, though challenges persist. Malaria remains treatable, but Africa still shoulders 94% of the global burdens (as per the WHO World Malaria Report 2024). Beyond medicine, malaria is increasingly considered in modern environmental impact assessments. Deforestation, water stagnation, and climate change influence mosquito habitats, making disease control part of ecological planning.

Today, malaria continues to afflict approximately 263 million people annually, killing over 600,000, with Africa reporting 95% of the mortality. Although the death toll has decreased substantially, in absolute numbers, malaria remains a major public health challenge. The history of the discovery of malaria transmission is a powerful reminder that scientific breakthroughs can have complex and contradictory impacts. The discoveries that eventually saved millions of lives also enabled colonial exploitation.

Dr. G. Aravinda is an academic and public health physician. The views expressed are personal.
aravindaiimsjr10@hotmail.com

THE GIST

▼ The complete transmission cycle of malaria was scientifically understood in 1898. Before these discoveries, European colonial efforts in Africa were severely constrained by extraordinarily high mortality rates

▼ With knowledge about malaria transmission, colonial administrators implemented targeted prevention strategies for European settlements. Malaria contributed to the present long-standing racial prejudices and social structures

▼ Beyond medicine, malaria is increasingly considered in modern environmental impact assessments. Deforestation, water stagnation, and climate change influence mosquito habitats, making disease control part of ecological planning

Key Themes & Issues for Analysis:

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Contact no : 7202080202

Website: civilservices.vuf.org

1. Malaria: From Miasma to Microbe – A Scientific Journey

- Initially attributed to miasma or "bad air", malaria's scientific understanding evolved with discoveries between 1880–1900:
 - Alphonse Laveran (1880): Identified parasite in Algerian soldiers.
 - Ronald Ross (1897): Proved mosquito as malaria vector.
 - Giovanni Grassi (1898): Linked human malaria to female Anopheles mosquito.
- These discoveries led to targeted prevention strategies like draining swamps, mosquito nets, and use of quinine.

2. Malaria as a Barrier to Colonization

- Africa was dubbed "the white man's grave" due to massive European mortality from malaria.
 - European troop death rate: 500 per 1,000 per year in coastal colonies.
 - The 1865 British Parliament considered withdrawal from West Africa due to health risks.
- Until the 1880s, colonial presence was limited mainly to coasts.

3. Scientific Breakthroughs → Accelerated Colonisation

- Post-discovery of malaria's transmission:
 - The 1884 Berlin Conference kicked off the Scramble for Africa.
 - By 1914, 90% of Africa was colonized.
- Quinine, combined with colonial medicine, became a "keystone technology", enabling survival and governance in the interiors.

4. Colonial and Racial Ramifications

- Understanding malaria transmission encouraged:
 - Segregated settlements (racial hygiene).
 - Establishment of hill stations for Europeans.
 - Pseudoscientific racism, viewing Africans as disease carriers.
- In the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Africans with genetic resistance to malaria (e.g. sickle cell trait) were preferred, reinforcing racialised labour hierarchies.
- This fed into modern racial biases and systemic discrimination.

5. Malaria in the Contemporary Era

- Still affects 263 million people annually; 600,000 deaths, with Africa accounting for 95% of fatalities.

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- Despite vaccines like RTS,S and tools like insecticide nets, malaria remains a climate-linked, socio-ecological issue.
 - Urbanisation, deforestation, stagnant water, and climate change affect mosquito habitats.
- Modern public health planning includes environmental considerations for vector control.

Critical Reflections :

- **Historical Relevance of Science:** Malaria exemplifies how scientific discovery can be a double-edged sword – enabling both human advancement and imperial exploitation.
- **Intersectionality of Health, Race, and Power:** The disease was central to the racialization of labour, justification of colonial segregation, and even geopolitical expansion.
- **Science-Policy Interface:** The quick incorporation of malaria research into colonial policy-making shows the role of evidence-based governance, albeit used with racial bias.
- **Contemporary Parallels:** Just like malaria influenced colonialism, today climate-linked diseases (e.g., dengue, chikungunya) shape migration, urban policy, and international development agendas.

Points to Include in Your Answer:

- **Introduction:** Brief on malaria's impact historically and medically.
- **Historical section:** Pre-1880 mortality; post-discovery expansion.
- **Public Health + Policy:** Disease control as administrative technology.
- **Racial Constructs:** Slave trade, segregation, bio-politics.
- **Contemporary Linkages:** Vaccines, climate change, disease burden.
- **Conclusion:** The ethical dimension of science in governance.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : Discuss how the discovery of malaria's transmission influenced patterns of colonisation, racial hierarchies, and public health policies. Also, comment on the relevance of this historical episode in today's context of global health challenges.

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In recent years, the World Trade Organization (WTO) has come under severe criticism for its diminished effectiveness, paralysis of its dispute settlement mechanism, and the inability to achieve consensus on major trade issues. With rising unilateralism, retaliatory tariffs (especially by the U.S.), and global economic uncertainty, the relevance and future of WTO as the cornerstone of global trade governance is being questioned.

Is the World Trade Organization still relevant?



Mohan Kumar

Professor of Diplomatic Practice at the Jindal School of International Affairs, O.P. Jindal Global University. He previously served as India's lead negotiator at GATT and WTO

PARLEY

United States President Donald Trump's 'reciprocal tariffs' have been compared to the Smoot-Hawley tariffs of the 1930s, which many say hastened the slide into the Great Depression. The difference between the 1930s and now is that we have the World Trade Organization (WTO) to oversee and enforce global trade rules. However, some argue that over the years, the WTO has gradually lost its compass and is in need of massive reforms. Is the WTO still relevant? Mark Linscott and Mohan Kumar discuss the question in a conversation moderated by Samreen Wani. Edited excerpts:

Has the WTO been sidelined? Will the U.S. pay heed to any advice from the WTO?

Mohan Kumar: The WTO, as we know it, is gone. It is irrelevant and has been sidelined. I don't want to say it is dead yet. The WTO was expected to perform three functions – the negotiating function, the dispute settlement function, and the trade monitoring function – and it is not performing any of them. The negotiating function has gone for a six since Doha [the Doha Round of talks in 2001]. There is only one multilateral agreement – the fisheries agreement – that has been concluded, and even that has not been fully concluded. The Appellate body or the dispute settlement mechanism (DSM) has also been rendered dysfunctional. It started during Barack Obama's time. Since then, the U.S. has blocked appointments to the Appellate body, the ultimate court of appeal. The WTO tries to do whatever it can under the trade monitoring function, but that is not being performed efficiently because there is a lot of opacity about trade measures from a number of members, particularly one big member. The fact that the Trump tariffs are happening at a time when the multilateral trading system has been rendered toothless and inefficient makes it much more serious.

Mark Linscott: I agree with Ambassador Kumar that the WTO has been sidelined. The decline of the WTO and its diminishing relevance goes back long before the first Trump administration to the launch of the Doha Round. I think that mandate was misplaced. It was perhaps too ambitious, too far reaching, and basically [had] mismatched expectations. We also had the accession of China. And I think there was a degree of naivete about how well WTO rules would function with respect to China's measures and its behaviour on trade. During the Doha Round, the mismatched expectations involved some of the grievances that are felt now by the



A logo outside the WTO in Geneva, Switzerland. REUTERS

Trump administration. There were efforts to negotiate on large disparities on tariffs and [there was] really no traction in those negotiations to lower tariffs multilaterally on a non-discriminatory basis.

The U.S. has for too long blocked appointments to the Appellate body, but there were grievances associated with the operations of the WTO's DSM and the Appellate body, and whether it was in fact engaging in 'legislating' as opposed to simply looking at facts.

If these tariffs do come into effect, can the WTO prevent an economic crisis?

ML: No. The WTO is not in a position to stem any global economic decline. It is not a forum where most nations can come together, be honest with one another, and essentially find a solution out of that kind of crisis.

MK: The basic problem is that consensus or decision making by consensus is proving to be a problem. When this issue was discussed in the legal drafting group, two countries opposed voting – India and the U.S. So, if there are reforms to be made on the basis of decision making, we will have to get around the principle of 'consensus'. On the question of dispute settlement, the European Union put forward a proposal on arbitration which has not found universal favour. On trade monitoring, there is no way of forcing countries to somehow disclose the measures they have taken, to the WTO.

At this juncture, is there a complete erosion of the MFN (most-favoured-nation) principle?

MK: The bedrock of the multilateral trading system is Article 1, MFN. Free trade agreement (FTA) is an exception to Article 1 and has to be blessed by the WTO. If you conclude an FTA, you have to intimate the WTO. I concede that



The WTO was expected to perform three functions – the negotiating function, the dispute settlement function, and the trade monitoring function – and it is not performing any of them.

MOHAN KUMAR

the WTO has not done a great job in minutely scrutinising the FTAs.

The tariffs indicate the U.S.'s final withdrawal from the WTO system. Second, they introduce tremendous uncertainty. And finally, they also introduce a certain degree of complexity because I don't know if the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) has the resources to negotiate with 60 countries all at once. But India has got a first movers advantage [in negotiating a trade deal].

ML: MFN goes back to 1947 with the creation of GATT [General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade]. And that is part of the problem, at least from the U.S.'s standpoint. What has fed the grievances of the Trump administration is the sense that the U.S., perhaps rashly and unilaterally, over many rounds of trade negotiations, lowered its simple average tariffs to a very low level compared to many other countries, including India. Then, when efforts were made to continue tariff liberalisation and expectations were high that other countries would follow suit and lower their tariffs, that didn't happen. The U.S. started stepping away boldly from MFN during the first Trump administration but it was continued by the Biden administration. Section 232 (tariffs on steel and aluminium) and Section 301 (tariffs against China) were maintained by the Biden administration. With Trump 2.0 we have got a much more radical set of circumstances. There is consensus among Democrats and Republicans that MFN has not worked well for the U.S. Countries started negotiating FTAs on an accelerated basis in the late 1990s and early 2000s. And many countries through FTAs were stepping away from MFN. They found it easier to negotiate on tariffs bilaterally than at the WTO.

It has been decades since any consensus was reached on fisheries subsidies, agricultural subsidies, and on public stock holding of grains. India has led the opposition to these agreements. Why is that the case?

MK: While the major players will have to bear the major responsibility of the collapse of the WTO because of just the sheer weight of trade clout that they possess, India also did its bit. We

objected to some things that we should not have objected to.

India cannot do much when it comes to agriculture. This is a politically sensitive area for any government in India. The WTO was callous when it came to India's concerns on agriculture. While the U.S. and the EU were allowed to subsidise so much over the years, India, which relies on domestic production, was limited to a 10% subsidy. India finds itself in a situation where it does not want to negotiate labour standards and environmental protection at the WTO, but is okay to discuss this bilaterally with the EU, the U.K., and maybe even with the U.S. The only explanation I have heard is from a former commerce secretary who said that India wants a certain degree of comfort doing this bilaterally first.

ML: The view in the U.S. is different from the Indian view as to what extent the developed world was ignoring the sensitivities and food security concerns of many developing countries, particularly India's. There are many other developing countries which don't necessarily share India's view. Negotiations collapsed on agriculture and domestic support. It is almost impossible to negotiate bilaterally on subsidies.

There has been a lot of criticism, particularly from the U.S., that the WTO has allowed China to flood the global markets with cheap exports, but simultaneously restricted access to its domestic markets. Would you agree with this assessment?

ML: China is a remarkable challenge globally, economically, and on trade. When China joined the WTO, nobody anticipated how lacking the WTO rules would be in addressing the China challenge and how dominant China would become as an export juggernaut.

MK: When we framed the rules we had no idea of things which do not necessarily violate the WTO rules but which still undermine the integrity of the multilateral trading system. So, for example, there was never any question of looking at excess capacity and how one country, which can produce more than 50% of steel and cement, would suddenly flood the market and distort trade. And trade distorting measures are extremely important to the WTO. But we could not frame the rules for it because we simply did not foresee this.



To listen to the full interview
Scan the code or go to the link
www.thehindu.com

Core Issues Highlighted in the Discussion

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Contact no : 7202080202

Website: civilservices.vuf.org

1. WTO's Core Functions Have Broken Down

The WTO was created to:

- Negotiate trade rules.
- Enforce them via a Dispute Settlement Mechanism (DSM).
- Monitor trade practices.

Today:

- Negotiations have largely stalled post the Doha Round (2001).
- Dispute Settlement is crippled due to the U.S. blocking appointments to the Appellate Body since 2017.
- Trade monitoring is ineffective due to opacity from members and lack of enforceability.

"The WTO, as we know it, is gone. It is irrelevant and has been sidelined." – **Mohan Kumar**

2. The Crisis of Consensus and Institutional Paralysis

- WTO decisions require consensus, which has paralysed reforms.
- India and the U.S. have opposed shifting to voting, stalling decision-making.
- Key reforms in agriculture, fisheries subsidies, e-commerce, and public stockholding have made no real progress for two decades.

3. Appellate Body Paralysis: Legal Crisis in DSM

- The Dispute Settlement Mechanism was the "crown jewel" of the WTO.
- But the U.S. accused it of overreach or judicial activism, especially under Section 301 (China) and 232 (steel/aluminum).
- Now, trade disputes are unresolved or moved outside WTO mechanisms (bilateral retaliation, plurilateral talks).

4. MFN Principle Undermined by Proliferation of FTAs

- The Most-Favoured Nation (MFN) principle (Article I of GATT) is central to WTO's rule-based system.
- However:
 - Rise of bilateral FTAs has bypassed multilateralism.
 - The U.S., EU, and others now prefer bilateral deals to advance their interests.

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- Even India, while opposing WTO discussions on labour and climate, is comfortable bilaterally discussing them with the EU/U.K.

5. India's Complex Position in WTO

- India has led opposition on:
 - Agricultural subsidy caps (bound at 10% of production value).
 - Public stockholding for food security.
 - Fisheries subsidy reforms.
- However, India has also blocked consensus on other reforms and has been reluctant to engage in negotiations on labour and environment standards multilaterally.

. The China Challenge and WTO's Blind Spot

- WTO rules could not anticipate:
 - Excess capacity and state-backed production in China.
 - Non-transparent trade practices, like subsidies and restricted market access.
- Result: China's export dominance distorted global trade but did not violate any clear WTO provision.
- WTO lacked instruments to deal with trade distortions that are legal but unfair.

Implications for Global Trade and Multilateralism

1. **Decline of Rule-Based Trade** : With dispute resolution ineffective, nations rely more on economic muscle, tariffs, and plurilateral deals.
2. **Rise of Protectionism** : U.S. tariffs under Trump and their continuation under Biden reflect consensus across party lines that MFN and WTO no longer serve American interests.
3. **Fragmentation of Trade Order** : Multiplication of plurilateral trade deals (like RCEP, IPEF, CPTPP) bypass WTO, leading to fragmentation of the global trading system.
4. **Loss of Developing Country Leverage** : WTO gave a level playing field to small economies. Its decline weakens their voice and negotiation power.

Critical Reflections for UPSC Mains

Is WTO Still Relevant?

- Despite its dysfunction, WTO remains the only multilateral trade institution with near-universal membership.
- Its notification system, capacity-building, and norm-setting functions still matter for developing economies.

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- But for WTO to regain relevance, substantive reforms in decision-making, DSB revival, and new trade issues (e-commerce, digital trade, climate) are essential.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : *"The World Trade Organization has been sidelined in recent years, raising concerns over the future of multilateral trade governance." Critically examine the reasons behind the declining relevance of the WTO and suggest a roadmap for its revival. (250 words)*



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As nations prepare their national climate action plans for 2035 (ahead of the UNFCCC COP in Brazil, November 2025), concerns are growing that land-use carbon sinks, especially forests, are being used by some major economies to overstate climate progress. This can mask inadequate reductions in fossil fuel emissions and undermine the integrity of the Paris Agreement targets.

Key Issues Identified:

1. Climate Accounting Loophole

- Countries like Brazil and Australia are relying heavily on forests to claim progress in emissions reduction.
- This "carbon sink optimism" enables them to delay or reduce actual cuts in fossil fuel use.
- Example:
 - Australia: Forest absorption offsets $\approx 10\%$ of its fossil fuel cuts.
 - Brazil: Pledged 59%-67% emission cuts by 2035 but left forest absorption undefined.

2. Lack of Uniform Standards

- No globally binding rules under the Paris Agreement for:
 - Measuring forest carbon absorption.
 - Long-term behavior of forests as sinks under climate stress (heatwaves, droughts, fires).
- Scientific uncertainty around:
 - Saturation points of forests.
 - Decreased carbon absorption capacity under warming.

3. Impact on Paris Agreement Goals

- The 1.5°C target demands real, verifiable, deep cuts in fossil fuel use.



A deforested area in the border of Xingu river, northern Brazil, in the Amazon rain forest. FILE PHOTO

‘Countries could use forests to mask real emission cuts’

Agence France-Presse
PARIS

Major economies are overstating how much carbon their forests can absorb in a climate accounting fudge that could allow them to use even more fossil fuels, new research said on Thursday.

The assessment singled out Brazil and Australia, and warned a lack of rules around accounting for forests and other land-based carbon sinks meant countries could "game the system" when reporting national greenhouse gas emissions.

Scientists are still unclear about how carbon sinks might behave as the planet warms in future, and exactly how much heat-trapping carbon dioxide they might soak up from the atmosphere. But that has not stopped countries from making their own assumptions and using those numbers in their national climate plans, which are due to be finalised to 2035 before the next UN climate talks in Brazil in November.

Climate Analytics, a policy institute, said overly optimistic assumptions about how much CO2 forests might draw down was "masking the scale and pace of the fossil fuel emissions cuts needed". This concealed the true effort needed to limit global warming to 1.5 C above pre-industrial levels, the ambition set out in the 2015 Paris climate agreement. In the latest versions of its climate plan, Australia had leaned so heavily on forests to reduce its carbon footprint that it would amount to scaling back real cuts to emissions by 10%, it said. Brazil, meanwhile, has announced its own pledge to cut emissions by 59% to 67% below 2005 levels by 2035, but has not defined the extent to which forests will help meet this goal.

Address : C/o. Radiant School of Science , Kh - 0, Sargasan Ganoninagar - 382421, Gujarat.

Contact no : 7202080202

Website: civilservices.vuf.org

- Overstating sink capacity creates a false sense of achievement and shifts the burden of mitigation.
- Undermines equity and transparency in global climate commitments.

4. Risk of Greenwashing and System Gaming

- Countries may "game the system" by:
 - Claiming CO₂ absorption from forests without actual reforestation or afforestation.
 - Counting existing forests or unstable ecosystems (e.g., fire-prone Amazon) as consistent sinks.

Broader Implications:

For Developing Nations:

- May pressure smaller economies to meet stricter targets, while major emitters manipulate accounting.
- India, which emphasizes climate justice and the common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) principle, can raise this in multilateral forums.

For Global Governance:

- Highlights the urgent need to reform global climate accounting under the UNFCCC.
- Push for independent verification, transparent reporting standards, and adaptive targets.

Critical Evaluation:

Is forest-based carbon offsetting viable long term?

- While forests are natural carbon sinks, their capacity is:
 - Finite and vulnerable to degradation.
 - Subject to climate change feedback loops.
- Thus, relying too heavily on forests without parallel fossil fuel cuts is scientifically and ethically questionable.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : "Over-reliance on forests as carbon sinks in climate action plans risks masking the actual pace of emission reduction." Critically examine this statement in the context of recent climate pledges and accounting practices. (250 words)

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In News : Parens Patriae Doctrine

The Bombay High Court, invoking 'parens patriae', recently appointed a daughter as the legal guardian of her 78-year-old mother diagnosed with severe dementia.

About Parens Patriae Doctrine

- The Doctrine of Parens Patriae, meaning "parent of the nation" in Latin, is a legal principle that empowers the state to act as a guardian for individuals who are unable to care for themselves.
- Under parens patriae, a state or court has a paternal and protective role over its citizens or others subject to its jurisdiction.
- Originating from English common law, the doctrine allows the government to protect the welfare of vulnerable groups such as minors, incapacitated individuals, and persons with disabilities.
- It embodies the state's responsibility to ensure the safety, rights, and interests of those unable to safeguard their own.
- In modern legal systems, this principle has been applied in areas such as juvenile justice, mental health, consumer protection, and environmental conservation, making it a cornerstone of judicial intervention to promote societal welfare and equity.

Parens Patriae in Indian Legal Framework:

- In India, the Doctrine of Parens Patriae reflects the state's constitutional commitment to protecting the welfare and rights of its citizens, particularly vulnerable groups.
- Indian courts have consistently invoked this doctrine in areas such as juvenile justice, consumer protection, environmental conservation, mental health, and the rights of persons with disabilities.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques : What does the doctrine of Parens Patriae primarily signify?

- (A) The principle of non-intervention in private affairs
- (B) The government's power to impose taxes
- (C) The state's duty to act as a guardian for those unable to care for themselves
- (D) The right to free legal aid

Ans : C)

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Contact no : 7202080202

Website: civilservices.vuf.org

Page : 08 Editorial Analysis

Amidst regional ferment, Kurds' quest for statehood

West Asia is in a geo-engineering flux not seen since the birth of Israel 77 years ago. The perennial Palestinian issue is at a pivotal moment with an extreme right Israeli government's hard-line position at odds with the Arab States' insistence on a two-state solution for the Abraham Accords' expansion. After the loss of regional proxies and the resumption of American "maximum pressure" tactics and military threat, a weakened and isolated Iran has agreed to negotiate its nuclear programme. The topping of the five decades-old al-Assad regime has created new paradigms. Although Turkey has ambitions to reshape Syria, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is battling an Intefadah at home. The decline of oil prices by a fifth in 2025 may upend the regional economic stability. Amidst this tumult, U.S. President Donald Trump, the global disruptor of "Gaza Riviera" fame, is set to pay his first visit abroad to the Gulf next month.

How does this regional commotion impact a century-old quest by Kurds for statehood? In the past century, two diaspora-based states, viz. Israel and Armenia, have been created in West Asia. Could Kurdistan be the next or, once again, likely to be brushed under the carpet as weightier developments and superpower politics take precedence? Let us examine the prospects in some detail.

An unrealised dream

Kurds are not only the biggest minority group in West Asia, but they are also the world's largest ethnic minority without a state of their own. Estimates vary, but their total population is put at 35 million-45 million. The overwhelming majority of them live in Turkey (around 17 million, 20% of the total population), Iraq (9 million, 20%), Iran (8 million, 10%), and Syria (2.5 million, 10%). Kurd diaspora exists in Germany (around 1.5 million) and other West European countries.

While Kurds have their sub-divisions, their common identity is shaped by a shared history and the craggy geography of Asia Minor. Anthropological studies put them to be of Old Mediterranean and Caucasian stock, distinct from either Turkic, Semitic, or Iranian ethnicities dominating their existence. While most Kurds are Sunni Muslims, they are linked to other regional ethnic minorities, such as Yezidis, Alevi, and Zoroastrianism.

The Kurds have a reputation for gritty bravery. Historically, they have often been either exploited as a geopolitical pawn or subject to suppression and exclusion. One of the rare occasions when they led the endgame was in the 12th century when Salahuddin, a Kurd General, commanded the Islamic legion to liberate Jerusalem from crusading Christian armies. The Kurdish quest for a state has remained unrequited. The nearest the Kurds came to realising this ambition was at the



Mahesh Sachdev

Retired Indian Ambassador with an interest in West Asian geopolitics. He is currently the president of Eco-Diplomacy and Strategies, based in New Delhi

Treaty of Sevres in 1920, negotiated to dismantle the Ottoman empire. It promised the Kurds an autonomous state in eastern Turkey. However, the Young Turks under Kemal Ataturk thwarted the Kurdistan Homeland project and instead foisted assertive Turkish nationalism. Since then, Ankara has single-mindedly suppressed the identity of Kurds, who were officially called "mountain Turks". This repression has continued: as late as 1994, a Kurdish female MP was sentenced to 15 years in prison for temerity to speak a sentence in Kurdish after her swearing-in about the Kurd-Turk brotherhood.

Counterproductive repression

Turkish repression has been counterproductive: it led to the formation in 1978 of PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) by Abdullah Öcalan which has waged a campaign for Kurdish independence. Mr. Öcalan was caught in 1999 and is still in solitary confinement in a Turkish jail. Four decades of no-holds-barred conflict has killed an estimated 37,000 people. Following the recent softening of Ankara's policies, Mr. Öcalan has called for the cessation of hostilities and PKK declared a ceasefire on March 15. Turkey has announced a \$20 billion socio-economic reconstruction plan for the south-east of the country where most Kurds live but a political package to bring the Kurds to the Turkish mainstream is still awaited.

The 13-year civil war provided Syria's Kurds a rare opportunity to fill in the politico-strategic vacuum. With substantive American support, a formidable Kurdish Self Defence Force (SDF) was created to fight the Islamic State and al-Qaeda. SDF currently controls nearly 40% of Syria. This has caused considerable threat perceptions in Ankara which accuses SDF of helping PKK. Turkey has sought to checkmate the SDF by creating exclusion zones and forming a militia against it. However, the US pressure has prevented it from an anti-SDF military campaign. In a potentially far-reaching move on March 11, the SDF Commander and the interim Syrian President signed a basic agreement to integrate the SDF into the new Damascus politico-strategic architecture. Even otherwise, SDF's good fortunes may diminish with the planned attenuation of American military presence in Syria.

During Saddam Hussein's rule, Kurds in neighbouring Iraq suffered brutal pogroms, forced deportation and even chemical weapons attacks. However, the situation changed in 1991 after the U.S. Operation Desert Storm substantially weakened Iraqi hold over Kurds and a Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) was formed in 1992. The Constitution of Iraq following the U.S. occupation of the country granted the KRG considerable autonomy although a 2017 referendum on Kurdistan Regional Independence, which received 92% support, was

disallowed by the Iraqi Supreme Court stating that no Iraqi province was allowed to secede. Meanwhile, oil-rich KRG has sought to assert its autonomy, often creating a piquant situation with Baghdad authorities. Following an international arbitration ruling, oil exports through the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline have been suspended for the past two years. Turkish armed forces have also been active in hitting alleged PKK targets in KRG. Iran, too, has occasionally attacked the alleged hostile U.S.-Israeli presence in KRG. Thus, although KRG has now been around for over three decades, its existence is still quite tenuous.

The situation of Iranian Kurds

Compared to repression elsewhere in the region, the Iranian regimes have been marginally benign to its Kurds who mostly live in the northwest of the country along mountainous borders with Turkey and Iraq; some Kurds are also living in the Khorasan province in the northeast. These areas lie along the geo-strategic faultlines, forcing Kurds to choose between loyalty to Tehran, Ankara, or Baghdad. Unlike in other Kurdish-populated countries, there are strong ethnic and cultural ties between Kurds and Persians and some modern Iranian dynasties were partly of Kurdish origin. While Tehran has never employed the same level of brutality against its own Kurds as Turkey or Iraq, it has always been implacably opposed to Kurdish separatism. During the long Persian-Ottoman wars and the recent Iran-Iraq war, largely Sunni Kurds were often suspected of being the fifth column of the foreign powers. Under the Islamic Republic, attempts to Persianise, and general economic deprivation, spurred centrifugal tendencies among Iranian Kurds. With the considerable weakening of the Iranian state and looming prospects of the U.S.-Israel military campaign against Tehran, Iranian Kurds, the country's largest minority, may feel encouraged to secede.

Recent weakening of the central authority in each of the aforementioned four countries has brightened the prospects of Kurdish statehood and such proto-states have already emerged in Iraq and Syria. At the same time, they neither have a unifying ideology such as Zionism nor a transnational political entity to dovetail their statehood to the emerging grand Western strategy for West Asia. Their hopes rest on the regional entropy creating a situation conducive to the creation of a Kurdistan. However, even if such a pro-Western surrogate Kurdish state is grafted, it remains to be seen whether it would face autoimmune rejection (as Israel) from regional powers or take deep roots.

In short, Kurds' fate currently swings between two of their apt proverbs: "It is easy to catch a serpent with someone else's hand" and "Kurds (as a nation) have no friends, except the mountains."

The prospects of Kurds being able to realise their aspirations for statehood have brightened. At the same time, Kurds remain divided along national, tribal, and intra-ethnic lines

Paper 02 : International Relations

UPSC Mains Practice Question: Examine the geopolitical, cultural, and historical factors that have impeded the Kurdish people's quest for statehood. In light of recent developments in West Asia, discuss the prospects and challenges of a sovereign Kurdistan. (250 words)

Context :

As West Asia witnesses renewed turbulence — from Israel's hardline stance to Iran's diplomatic re-engagements and internal uprisings in Turkey — the century-old Kurdish demand for statehood is once again surfacing. With a population of nearly 35-45 million spread across four countries, Kurds remain the world's largest stateless ethnic group. This article examines whether shifting geopolitical realities can finally catalyze the birth of a Kurdish state.

Key Takeaway for Mains:

The Kurdish issue highlights how identity-based struggles intersect with geopolitics, resources, and regional power dynamics. Despite controlling territories and receiving Western support, Kurdish statelessness persists, revealing the limits of self-determination in a world dominated by realpolitik and state sovereignty.

Key Themes and Issues:

1. Who are the Kurds?

- An ethnic group with unique language, culture, and history; majority are Sunni Muslims, but many are linked to minorities like Yazidis and Alevis.
- Spread across Turkey (17 million), Iraq (9 million), Iran (8 million), and Syria (2.5 million) with diaspora in Europe.
- Despite being a homogeneous group, they lack political unity and ideological coherence.

2. Historical Struggle for Statehood

- Treaty of Sèvres (1920) post-Ottoman Empire collapse promised autonomy, but was reversed by Treaty of Lausanne (1923).
- Since then, their aspirations have been repeatedly denied, most notably by Turkey, which labelled them "mountain Turks".

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Contact no : 7202080202

Website: civilservices.vuf.org

3. Country-Wise Kurdish Status

Turkey:

- Repression of Kurdish identity led to formation of PKK in 1978.
- 37,000 deaths in armed conflict.
- Recent ceasefire and \$20 billion reconstruction plan, but no political resolution yet.

Syria:

- Syrian Kurds, under SDF, now control ~40% of Syrian territory after civil war.
- Integration with the interim Syrian administration has begun, but under threat due to Turkey's opposition and declining U.S. support.

Iraq:

- Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) formed in 1992.
- 2017 independence referendum (92% support) was nullified by Baghdad.
- Ongoing tensions with Iraqi government over oil and PKK presence; Turkey and Iran frequently conduct strikes in KRG territory.

Iran:

- Comparatively less violent repression, but no tolerance for separatism.
- Economic neglect, attempts at Persianisation, and suspicions of disloyalty have created discontent.
- Iranian Kurds may see current state weakening as an opportunity.

4. Barriers to Kurdish Statehood

- No unified political front or ideology (unlike Zionism for Israel).
- Kurds remain divided by geography and political objectives.
- Risk of being used as geopolitical pawns by powers like the U.S., only to be later abandoned.
- Regional powers (Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria) adamantly oppose Kurdish independence fearing territorial disintegration.
- International community's lack of appetite for redrawing boundaries in West Asia.

5. Strategic Significance of the Kurdish Question

- Buffer force against Islamic extremism (e.g., ISIS).
- Potential pro-Western democratic ally in the region.
- Rich in oil resources, particularly in northern Iraq.
- Sits at the intersection of Turkish-Iranian-Arab geopolitics.

Implications for India:

- India traditionally supports sovereignty and territorial integrity of nation-states.
 - Any Kurdish state could redraw boundaries, setting precedents in ethno-national separatist movements.
 - India has growing stakes in West Asian stability (diaspora, energy security, trade).
 - As a non-interventionist actor, India is unlikely to endorse Kurdish independence but will watch regional alignments carefully.
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