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**SPECIAL FOR UPSC & GPSC EXAMINATION**

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## The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

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## Page 04:GS 2 : International Relations

India and China are exploring the resumption of border trade through Shipki-La in Himachal Pradesh's Kinnaur district, which has remained suspended since 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This development comes after Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's recent visit to India, during which Beijing agreed in principle to India's proposal. The issue holds significance not just for bilateral trade, but also for strategic, cultural, and people-to-people ties, especially in the Himalayan border regions.

### Key Highlights of the News

- **Historic Route:** Shipki-La is one of the three designated Indo-China trade points, alongside Lipulekh (Uttarakhand) and Nathu La (Sikkim).
- **Suspension in 2020:** Trade was halted following the pandemic and broader geopolitical tensions.
- **Revival Efforts:** Himachal CM Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu pushed for reopening; Union Government formally raised the issue with China.
- **China's Positive Response:** China has agreed in principle to resume trade via Shipki-La.
- **Kailash Mansarovar Yatra:** Discussions are also underway to allow Shipki-La as an additional pilgrimage route, supplementing Lipulekh and Nathu La.
- **Next Steps:** The matter will be taken up with the Union Commerce Ministry to complete procedural formalities.

### Significance

#### 1. Economic & Local Livelihoods

- Boosts traditional cross-border trade for Himachal's tribal communities.
- Provides market access for local produce (apples, dry fruits, wool).
- Generates revenue and livelihood opportunities in border districts.

#### 2. Cultural & Religious Importance

- Facilitates Kailash Mansarovar Yatra, an important pilgrimage for Hindus and Buddhists.
- Revives centuries-old Indo-Tibetan trade and cultural links.

## India, China plan to resume trade via Shipki-La in Himachal

### Press Trust of India

SHIMLA

China has agreed in principle to the proposal of resuming trade through Shipki-La in Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh during the recent visit of its Foreign Minister Wang Yi to India, a statement by the State government said on Sunday.

Trade through the route was suspended in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar has informed the State government that the Union government has initiated discussions with China for the resumption of border trade through all three designated points – Shipki-La (Himachal Pradesh), Lipulekh (Uttarakhand) and Nathu La (Sikkim), the statement said.

"The Himachal government's consistent efforts to resume trade with China through Shipki-La (Kinnaur) have yielded encouraging results. The government of China has agreed in principle to the proposal during the recent visit of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to India," the statement said.

"This breakthrough was made possible due to the

### Trade through the route was suspended in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic

personal intervention of Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, who had written to the Union government urging for the revival of the historic Indo-Tibetan trade route" following which the Centre "formally took up the matter with China", leading to a consensus to restart the trade," the statement said.

The State government would now take up the matter with the Union Commerce Ministry for completing procedural formalities.

The State government has also received a positive response regarding the resumption of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra through Shipki-La, it said.

The External Affairs Minister, in a letter to the CM, conveyed that after a five-year gap, the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra has resumed through Lipulekh Pass (Uttarakhand) and Nathu La Pass (Sikkim), and discussions are under way with China on the possibility of adding Shipki-La as an additional route.

### 3. Strategic & Diplomatic Angle

- Resumption indicates a thaw in strained ties post-2020 Galwan clashes.
- Acts as a confidence-building measure (CBM) between India and China.
- Balances trade interests with security considerations in sensitive border areas.

### Challenges

- Security Concerns: Proximity to sensitive border areas in Himachal, given India-China tensions.
- Infrastructure Gaps: Need for better road connectivity, customs, and trade facilities at Shipki-La.
- Dependence on China: India's cautious approach due to trade imbalance and geopolitical rivalry.

### Conclusion

The possible resumption of trade through Shipki-La marks an important step in reviving historic Indo-Tibetan ties, boosting local economies, and improving pilgrimage access. However, while the move signals a diplomatic opening, it must be pursued cautiously against the backdrop of lingering border disputes and strategic rivalry with China. For UPSC, this development reflects the intersection of foreign policy, border management, local economy, and cultural diplomacy.

### UPSC Mains Practice Question

**Ques: Which of the following are officially designated border trade routes between India and China?**

1. Shipki-La
2. Lipulekh
3. Nathu La
4. Bomdila

**Choose the correct answer:**

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

**Ans : (a)**

India has taken another significant step towards self-reliance in defence technology. The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has successfully conducted maiden flight tests of the Integrated Air Defence Weapon System (IADWS) off the coast of Odisha. This achievement strengthens India's multi-layered air defence capability and reflects the progress under Atmanirbhar Bharat in defence sector.

Key Features of IADWS

## DRDO successfully conducts maiden tests of indigenous integrated air defence system

**Saurabh Trivedi**  
NEW DELHI

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) successfully conducted the maiden flight tests of the Integrated Air Defence Weapon System (IADWS) off the coast of Odisha around 12.30 p.m. on Saturday.

According to the Defence Ministry, the IADWS is a multi-layered air defence system comprising indigenous Quick Reaction Surface-to-Air Missiles (QRSAM), Advanced Very Short Range Air Defence System (VSHORADS) missiles, and a high-power laser-based Directed Energy Weapon (DEW). The integrated operation of all weapon system components is controlled by a Centralised Command and Control Centre developed by DRDO, which is the being nodal laboratory of the



The Integrated Air Defence Weapon System being deployed off the coast of Odisha on Saturday. ANI

programme.

Three different targets, including two high-speed fixed wing unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) targets and a multi-copter drone, were simultaneously engaged and destroyed com-

pletely by the QRSAM, VSHORADS and high-energy laser weapon system at different ranges and altitudes. All the weapon system components, including missile systems, drone detection and destruction

system, weapon system command and control along with communication and radars, performed flawlessly, which was confirmed by range instruments deployed by the Integrated Test Range at

Chandipur. The test was witnessed by senior scientists from the DRDO and representatives from the armed forces, a press release stated.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh complimented the DRDO, the armed forces, and industry for successful development of the IADWS.

He stated that this unique flight tests has established the multi-layered air-defence capability of the country and is going to strengthen area defence for important facilities against enemy aerial threats.

Secretary, Department of Defence R&D and Chairman DRDO Secretary of Department of Defence (Research and Development) and DRDO Chairman Dr. Samir V. Kamat has congratulated all teams involved in the successful flight tests.

### • Multi-layered Air Defence:

- Quick Reaction Surface-to-Air Missiles (QRSAM) – medium range, for high-speed targets.
- Advanced Very Short Range Air Defence System (VSHORADS) – short-range for low-altitude aerial threats.

- Directed Energy Weapon (DEW) – high-power laser-based system for neutralizing drones and UAVs.
- **Command & Control:**
  - Centralised system developed by DRDO for integrated operations.
  - Enables real-time coordination between missile systems, radars, and detection platforms.
- **Test Details:**
  - Conducted at Integrated Test Range (ITR), Chandipur (Odisha).
  - Engaged and destroyed three different targets (two high-speed UAVs + one multi-copter drone).
  - Confirmed effectiveness against varied altitudes and ranges.

## Significance

### 1. Strategic & Defence Readiness

- Provides area defence against enemy aircraft, drones, UAVs, and precision weapons.
- Enhances protection of critical infrastructure and military bases.

### 2. Indigenisation & Atmanirbhar Bharat

- Developed indigenously by DRDO with participation of Indian industry.
- Reduces dependence on imported missile defence systems.

### 3. Technological Advancement

- Successful integration of conventional missile defence + laser-based weapons.
- Demonstrates India's progress in Directed Energy Weapons (DEWs) – futuristic technology.

### 4. Operational Utility

- Can be deployed in border regions and sensitive installations.
- Addresses the emerging drone warfare threat as seen in recent conflicts (e.g., Russia-Ukraine, Armenia-Azerbaijan).

## Challenges

- Need for scaling up production for armed forces deployment.
- Continuous upgradation against evolving aerial threats (stealth drones, hypersonic weapons).
- Integration with existing air defence systems like Akash, S-400, and upcoming indigenous BMD.

## Conclusion

The successful testing of the Integrated Air Defence Weapon System (IADWS) marks a milestone in India's quest for a robust, indigenous, and futuristic air defence shield. With layered protection combining missiles and laser-based DEWs, India now moves closer to building a self-reliant and technologically advanced defence ecosystem. For UPSC, it exemplifies themes of science & technology, defence indigenisation, and national security preparedness.



**UPSC Prelims Practice Question**

**Ques: Consider the following weapons that are part of India's Integrated Air Defence Weapon System (IADWS):**

1. Quick Reaction Surface-to-Air Missiles (QRSAM)
2. Advanced Very Short Range Air Defence System (VSHORADS)
3. High-power laser-based Directed Energy Weapon (DEW)
4. Prithvi Missile

**Which of the above are included in the IADWS?**

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

**Ans: (a)**

On 24 August 2025, Nepal officially became a member of the International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) by signing the Framework Agreement. The alliance, launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in April 2023 at Mysuru, Karnataka, seeks to conserve seven big cat species worldwide. Nepal's inclusion is significant as it hosts tigers, snow leopards, and common leopards, making it a crucial range country in South Asia for big cat conservation.

### About the International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA)

- Launched: April 9, 2023, Mysuru, Karnataka (during 50 years of Project Tiger celebration).
- Species Covered:
  1. Tiger
  2. Lion
  3. Leopard
  4. Snow Leopard
  5. Cheetah
  6. Jaguar
  7. Puma
- Membership: Open to all 90+ big cat range countries, and even non-range countries interested in conservation.
- Purpose:
  - Promote conservation through research, technology, capacity building, and funding.
  - Create a global knowledge-sharing platform on big cat ecology and threats.
  - Mobilise resources for transboundary conservation.

### Significance of Nepal Joining IBCA

#### 1. Ecological Importance

- Nepal is home to three big cats: Tiger (Terai plains), Snow Leopard (Himalayan ranges), and Common

## Nepal joins India-led initiative to protect 7 species of big cats

### Press Trust of India

KATHMANDU

Nepal has officially joined the International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA), an India-led global initiative to protect seven species of big cats.

The IBCA is a multi-country, multi-agency coalition of over 90 big cat range countries and non-range countries with an interest in big cat conservation.

“Nepal has formally joined the International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) by signing the Framework Agreement,” announced the IBCA on Saturday (August 24, 2025).

“With snow leopard, tiger and common leopard in its landscape, Nepal's joining the IBCA will strengthen global collaboration for big cat conservation,”

the IBCA said.

The IBCA has “congratulated the Government of Nepal for this significant step towards shared ecologically significant step towards ecological security”.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) for global conservation of seven big cats, namely tiger, lion, leopard, snow leopard, cheetah, jaguar and puma on April 9, 2023, in Mysuru, Karnataka. India has a long-standing experience on tiger agenda and exemplary conservation models for other big cats such as lion, snow leopard and leopard.

With the help of this platform, big cat range countries can share their experiences and mobilise resources in order to find solutions to conserve big cats.



Leopard (mid-hills).

- Strengthens transboundary conservation with India, especially in the Terai Arc Landscape (shared tiger habitats).

## **2. Regional Cooperation**

- Boosts India-Nepal collaboration in biodiversity protection.
- Enhances South Asian leadership in global conservation diplomacy.

## **3. Global Conservation Impact**

- Adds credibility and momentum to IBCA's objectives.
- Helps in pooling international expertise and funding for joint projects.

## **India's Role**

### **• Experience in Conservation:**

- Project Tiger (1973) – successful model, expanded tiger numbers.
- Conservation of Asiatic lion (Gir, Gujarat).
- Snow Leopard conservation under SECURE Himalaya project.
- Cheetah reintroduction project (Kuno, Madhya Pradesh).
- Leadership: India is positioning itself as a global conservation leader, extending its domestic experience to an international scale.

## **Challenges Ahead**

- Poaching and Illegal Wildlife Trade (especially tiger skins, leopard pelts, and bones).
- Habitat Fragmentation due to infrastructure expansion.
- Human–Wildlife Conflict in buffer zones.
- Climate Change impacting snow leopard habitats.

## **Conclusion**

Nepal's entry into the International Big Cat Alliance marks a milestone in regional and global biodiversity governance. It strengthens the collective resolve to conserve iconic species that are not only ecologically significant but also deeply linked to cultural heritage. With India leading IBCA, and countries like Nepal joining, the initiative is poised to become a model for transboundary wildlife cooperation and a step towards ensuring ecological security in the Anthropocene.

**UPSC Prelims Practice Question**

**Ques :Consider the following statements regarding the International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA):**

1. It was launched in 2023 at Kathmandu during the Global Tiger Summit.
2. It aims to conserve seven species of big cats, including tiger, lion, cheetah and jaguar.
3. Membership is restricted only to big cat range countries.

**Which of the above statements is/are correct?**

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

**Ans : b)**

**UPSC Mains Practice Question**

**Ques :** The International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) reflects India's evolving role as a global leader in biodiversity conservation. Discuss the significance of IBCA in the context of regional cooperation, ecological security, and India's conservation diplomacy. **(250 Words)**

A new study published in *Nature Ecology & Evolution* has revealed that non-native invasive species have caused economic damage worth more than \$2.2 trillion globally (1960–2022), with plants being the most economically impactful group. For India, the findings highlight a massive underreporting of management costs, with a recorded discrepancy of 1.16 billion percent — the highest among all assessed countries. This raises serious questions about India's ability to assess, document, and respond to the growing ecological

## Is India underestimating the cost of dealing with invasive species?

In a new assessment, non-native plants have emerged as the most economically impactful invasive species worldwide as well as the costliest group vis-à-vis the cost of management, demanding \$926 billion in 1960-2022; next in line were arthropods (\$830 billion) and mammals (\$263 billion)

Monika Mondal

**D**amage from non-native plants and animals expanding into new ecosystems has cost society more than \$2.2 trillion worldwide, a new study by an international team of researchers has said.

Published in *Nature Ecology & Evolution*, the study used numbers from InvaCost, a public database that records the economic costs of biological invasions by country, and modelling exercises to analyse data from 1960. It concluded that costs may have been underestimated by 16x over previous estimates.

Beyond global economic losses, the study also modelled the impact in 78 countries for which no data was previously available. In India, a nation grappling with numerous environmental and economic challenges, the findings underscore an oft-overlooked financial drain.

### A global discrepancy

Europe was found to have the highest potential impact in absolute terms at \$1.5 trillion (71.45% of global cost), followed by North America (\$226 billion), Asia (\$182 billion), Africa (\$127 billion), and Australia and Oceania (\$27 billion).

Brian Leung, one of the lead researchers and the UNESCO Chair for Dialogues on Sustainability, said, "The cost of invasions might just be higher because of the cost of things in Europe. There's more to damage, the cost of the agricultural products, and the cost of management might be higher."

The study did not estimate a total economic damage figure for India in absolute terms but emphasised the magnitude of underreported management costs. In fact, among all the countries assessed, the study found India had the highest percentage discrepancy of management expenditure: 1.16 billion percent.

Per the study, this exceptionally high disparity suggests a significant amount of management spending in India has likely been unrecorded or underreported in the existing data, leading to a substantial "hidden" cost. The researchers were careful to note that India's limited resources could have contributed as much to this gap as a recording bias in the InvaCost database, which may be overlooking reports in languages predominant in Africa and Asia.

Europe reported a discrepancy of 15.044%, followed by Asia (3.090%), and Africa (1.944%). The median cost discrepancy among the assessed countries was 3.241%.

Mr. Leung said he was unsure of



A large portion of Bandipur National Park is covered by the Lantana weed, which is highly combustible when dry. FILE PHOTO

India-level specifics or how the figures break down, but noted that general management strategies could include different elements like prevention, eradication, control or suppression, and efforts to slow the spread of invasion. "These are all tools used for managing invasions," he said.

S. Sandilyan, a former fellow on Invasive Alien Species at the Centre for Biodiversity Policy and Law in Chennai, said the findings of the study are plausible. "India is falling short in documenting, reporting, and strategically funding biological invasion management. Lack of centralised data systems, limited inter-agency coordination, and competing conservation priorities exacerbate this," he added.

### Who are the invaders?

Plants emerged as the most economically impactful invasive species worldwide as well as the costliest group vis-à-vis the cost of management, demanding \$926.38 billion in 1960-2022. Next in line were the arthropods (\$830.29 billion) and mammals (\$263.35 billion). The researchers speculated that these species spread to new ecosystems — where they could thrive at the cost of its incumbents — primarily through trade and travel, helped along by globalisation and bilateral deals. They singled out Japanese knotweed (*Reynoutria japonica*) and common Lantana (*Lantana camara*) to be among the costliest to manage per square kilometre.

Leung, however, cautioned that simply eradicating all invasive species would make the problem worse. "A lot of the agricultural products that dominate our system now are not native," he said.



India is falling short in documenting, reporting, and funding invasion management. Lack of centralised data systems, limited coordination, and competing conservation priorities exacerbate this

**S. SANDILYAN**  
CENTRE FOR BIODIVERSITY POLICY AND LAW IN CHENNAI

"Invasive species transport is a byproduct of trade and importation of living organisms because we want them, and sometimes these are the driving forces behind invasions," Mr. Leung added. "Europe has been doing that for a long time."

This presents a two-faced challenge: on one hand, there is an imperative to mitigate economic losses; on the other, there is the desire to foster further globalisation. Thus, according to Mr. Leung, efforts must simultaneously be made to curtail the spread of invasive species and address global warming by increasing vegetation. Given these complex, intersecting objectives, reconciling these disparate goals in studying invasive species becomes a significant challenge, he added.

### Control measure

The study also acknowledged that several international policies to deal with invasive species are in place, which scientists at large believe have had a positive effect on reducing the rate of biological invasions. Key among them is a regulation concerning shipping traffic and trade

practice: the International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments (a.k.a. Ballast Water Management Convention), which is designed to prevent the spread of harmful aquatic organisms from one region to another via ships' ballast water.

Likewise, regulations under the Convention on Biological Diversity call on parties (including India) to "prevent the introduction of, control, or eradicate those alien species which threaten ecosystems, habitats, or species."

These international agreements underscore a global recognition of the threat posed by invasive species and efforts to mitigate their spread through various control points.

As for management costs, Mr. Leung said response strategies can range from preventing new invasions aiming for complete eradication of established populations or controlling their spread to minimise impact.

The large discrepancies in reported costs also underscore the need for improved data collection, comprehensive tracking of expenditures, and robust reporting mechanisms.

"For example, even though the cost estimates in Africa are really quite limited, it doesn't mean the damages are limited," he explained.

While the study does not say anything about the state of invasive species, it may be a call to action. Its specific analysis and the database were based on the measured economic costs, according to Mr. Leung, "because it's often easier to measure and people often understand money better."

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### THE GIST

Europe was found to have the highest potential impact in absolute terms at \$1.5 trillion, followed by North America (\$226 billion), Asia (\$182 billion), Africa (\$127 billion), and Australia and Oceania (\$27 billion)

India had the highest percentage discrepancy of management expenditure: 1.16 billion percent. This suggests spending has likely been unrecorded or underreported, leading to a substantial hidden cost. Europe reported a discrepancy of 15.044%, Asia (3.090%), and Africa (1.944%)

Researchers cautioned that simply eradicating all invasive species would make the problem worse since many agricultural products across the world are not native. Invasive species are a byproduct of trade and importation of living organisms



and economic threat posed by invasive alien species (IAS).

### **The Issue at Hand**

- **Global Findings:**

- Plants (\$926 bn), Arthropods (\$830 bn), Mammals (\$263 bn) are the top invasive groups.
- Europe reported the highest overall costs (\$1.5 trillion).
- Management costs globally are 16x underestimated compared to earlier estimates.

- **India-Specific Concern:**

- India's cost reporting gap is the largest globally, suggesting huge hidden expenses.
- Management expenditures are either undocumented or scattered across agencies, without centralised reporting.
- Example: Lantana camara dominates Bandipur National Park, altering fire regimes and biodiversity, but its control costs are not systematically tracked.

### **Why the Underestimation in India?**

1. Weak Data Systems – No centralised mechanism for cost tracking and impact assessment.
2. Fragmented Institutional Roles – Overlap between MoEFCC, state forest departments, agriculture ministries, and biodiversity boards.
3. Language and Documentation Bias – Local reports in Indian languages may not enter global databases like InvaCost.
4. Competing Conservation Priorities – Flagship species protection (tiger, elephant) often sidelines IAS management.
5. Limited Funding – IAS control often treated as ad-hoc project-based activity, not integrated into long-term planning.

### **Impacts of Invasive Alien Species in India**

- **Ecological:**

- Lantana, Parthenium, Prosopis juliflora outcompete native flora.
- Affect fire cycles, soil health, pollination patterns, and wildlife movement.

- **Economic:**

- Agriculture loss from pests like fall armyworm.
- Reduced fodder availability affecting livestock.
- Increased forest management costs.

- **Social:**

- Human–wildlife conflict escalates as invasives alter habitats.
- Rural communities face reduced access to forest resources.

## Global and National Efforts

- **International Conventions:**

- Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) obligations on IAS.
- Ballast Water Management Convention (shipping-related species transfer).

- **India's Measures:**

- National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) mentions IAS control.
- Projects like SECURE Himalaya address snow leopard habitats and invasive threats.
- State-specific efforts: Mechanical removal of lantana in Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh.

But these remain piecemeal and poorly documented, lacking a unified national IAS strategy.

## Way Forward

1. Centralised Database: Establish a National Invasive Species Information System linked to InvaCost.
2. Dedicated IAS Mission: Similar to Project Tiger, for long-term eradication/control.
3. Integrated Governance: Better coordination between MoEFCC, Agriculture Ministry, and state biodiversity boards.
4. Community Participation: Involve local communities in mechanical removal, alternative livelihood generation.
5. Research & Innovation: Invest in biological control, AI-based monitoring, and GIS mapping.
6. Mainstreaming Costs: Recognise IAS management as a core budgetary priority in environmental planning.

## Conclusion

The study's findings are a wake-up call for India. By underestimating and underreporting the costs of invasive species, the country risks not only ecological degradation but also hidden economic losses that undermine development and livelihood security. A national strategy with robust data systems, funding, and community-driven management is essential to align India's biodiversity governance with global conservation commitments.

### UPSC Mains Practice Question

**Ques:** "India is underestimating the economic and ecological cost of invasive alien species." Critically examine the challenges posed by invasive species in India and suggest a roadmap for effective management. **(150 Words)**

The Monsoon Session of Parliament 2025 marked a historic moment for India's maritime sector with the passage of five key legislations: the Merchant Shipping Bill, the Indian Ports Bill, the Coastal Shipping Act, the Carriage of Goods by Sea Act, and the Bills of Lading Act. Together, they replace colonial-era laws with a forward-looking legal framework that aligns with international conventions, promotes ease of doing business, and strengthens India's vision of becoming a global maritime hub under Maritime India Vision 2047.

## Key Highlights of the Reforms

### 1. Merchant Shipping Act, 2025

- Replaces outdated colonial provisions with globally benchmarked rules.
- Expands ownership categories to register chartered vessels under the Indian flag.
- Focuses on tonnage growth, safety, salvage ecosystem, and marine pollution control.
- Strengthens employment through training and skilling of Indian seafarers.

### 2. Indian Ports Act, 2025

- Establishes State Maritime Boards for transparent governance of major and non-major ports.
- Introduces a national maritime single window system for data centralisation.
- Ensures long-term evidence-based planning, waste reception facilities, and emergency preparedness.
- Aims at lowering logistics costs and enhancing India's EXIM competitiveness.

### 3. Coastal Shipping Act, 2025

- Removes licensing requirements for Indian vessels, encouraging coastal shipping.
- Projects coastal cargo movement growth from 165 million tonnes to 1,300 million tonnes by 2047.
- Promotes integrated coastal and inland waterways, sustainable transport, and Indian ownership of fleets.

## Bills to steer voyage to 'Amrit Kaal'

The just concluded Monsoon Session of Parliament cleared five key legislations, replacing archaic laws; together, they aim to ease business processes, align India with international conventions, and accelerate investments in ports, shipbuilding, and shipping services

#### NEWS ANALYSIS

Abhishek Law

In a first, India has enacted a sweeping overhaul of its maritime sector, replacing all pre-Independence era laws with a modernised framework that seeks to make the country a global maritime hub.

The just concluded Monsoon Session of the Parliament cleared five key legislations, namely, the Merchant Shipping Bill; the Indian Ports Bill; the Coastal Shipping Act (after receiving Presidential assent); the Carriage of Goods by Sea Act (after Presidential assent), and the Bills of Lading Act (after Presidential assent).

Together, they aim to ease business processes, align India with international conventions, and accelerate investments in ports, shipbuilding, and shipping services.

"This has been a landmark session with these new legislations set to transform India's maritime sector, and bring in a wave of new investments," said Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal.

Atmanirbhar seas

The centrepiece of the reforms—the Merchant Shipping Act, 2025—provides a robust legal framework to realise India's Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047. It replaces colonial-era provisions and updates India's



Smooth sail: Expanded ownership categories will enable registration of chartered vessels in India. PTI

maritime regulation in line with International Maritime Organization (IMO) conventions and global best practices.

The law aims to increase tonnage under the Indian flag; reduce dependence on foreign vessels, and boost India's image as a reliable shipping jurisdiction.

Expanded ownership categories will enable registration of chartered vessels in India—a segment it intends to tap, while quality training and skill development of seafarers will create new employment opportunities.

Crucially, it mandates a stronger salvage ecosystem, safety standards in navigation, and preventive measures for marine pollution. Stringent environmental protection laws covering oil-spill have also been included.

"This is about making India not just self-reliant in



This has been a landmark session with these new legislations set to transform India's maritime sector, and bring in a wave of new investments

SARBANANDA SONOWAL, Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways

shipping but also a responsible stakeholder in global seas," said a senior ministry official.

Indian Ports Bill

Ports are the gateways to India's maritime economy, handling over 90 per cent of trade by volume.

The new Indian Ports Act, 2025, establishes a forward-looking framework for port development, data-driven planning, and integration with India's global commitments on

pollution control.

The Act mandates long-term evidence-based planning, requires ports to maintain emergency preparedness and reception facilities for waste, and creates State Maritime Boards and dispute resolution committees. A national maritime single window system will centralise port-related data, enabling transparency and efficiency.

Coastal States will be empowered to set up State Maritime Boards, bringing uniform and transparent governance across India's 12 major and 200+ non-major ports. The Bill also creates dispute resolution committees to deliver sector-specific redressal in a timely manner.

"Single-window system for maintenance and accessibility of port-related data; improved trade data, and lower logistics cost are seen as logical impact. It will enhance India's EXIM

competitiveness," said a second Ministry official.

The expected outcome include accelerated port capacity growth at local, State, and national levels; improved trade connectivity; lower logistics costs, and job creation.

The Coastal Shipping Act, 2025, focuses on reducing logistics cost, promoting sustainable transport, and boosting India's domestic shipping industry. It exempts Indian vessels from licensing requirements. This allows more cargo movement through India-flagged vessels. By promoting Indian ownership of coastal fleets, the law seeks to cut dependence on foreign ships for domestic cargo movement. A National Coastal and Inland Shipping Strategic Plan and a publicly accessible National Database of Coastal Shipping will guide investment and policy priorities. Promotion and development of integrated coastal and inland waterways is part of upscaling measures.

The government projects India's coastal cargo movement to rise nearly eight-fold—from 165 million tonnes today to 1,300 million tonnes by 2047.

This Act replaces archaic carriage laws with simplified provisions, adopting the globally-recognised Hague-Visby Rules that govern liabilities and rights of carriers and shippers. It will facilitate smoother implementation of trade pacts like the Comprehensive Economic and

Trade Agreement (CETA) between India and the UK, particularly for sea-borne exports.

Officials said the law enhances transparency, commercial efficiency, and strengthens India's credentials as a maritime trading nation on a par with global standards.

Bills of Lading and documents crucial to maritime trade, now have a clear, modern legal framework.

The Act provides for the transfer of rights of suit and liabilities to the consignee, or lawful endorsee, reducing ambiguity that often lead to litigation.

By simplifying language and aligning with best practices, the Act promotes ease of doing business and ensures smoother transactions between carriers, shippers, and lawful holders of Bills of Lading.

According to Rajiv Jaita, former Chairman, Mumbai Port Authority, the legislations are more than statutory updates. They are strategic enablers supporting India's vision under Maritime India Vision 2047. They create a more competitive environment for Indian shipping and port services.

Taken together, these legislations mark the most comprehensive reforms in India's maritime history.

As India positions itself for the next phase of growth, the seas here, once regulated by outdated colonial laws, are now charted for Amrit Kaal.

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)



#### 4. Carriage of Goods by Sea Act, 2025

- Adopts Hague-Visby Rules, harmonising India's carriage laws with global practices.
- Simplifies provisions to facilitate trade agreements like India-UK CETA.
- Enhances commercial efficiency and reduces litigation.

#### 5. Bills of Lading Act, 2025

- Provides legal clarity on transfer of rights, liabilities, and suits.
- Promotes transparency and ease of doing business in maritime trade.
- Modernises documentation practices to global standards.

### Significance for India

- **Economic Impact:** These reforms will reduce logistics costs, attract foreign and domestic investments, and strengthen India's competitiveness in global trade.
- **Strategic Advantage:** A robust maritime framework enhances India's role in Indo-Pacific geopolitics and trade corridors.
- **Sustainability:** Provisions on pollution control, waste reception, and integrated waterways promote green shipping.
- **Employment Generation:** Training, skilling, and fleet expansion will create jobs across ports, shipping, and allied services.

### Challenges Ahead

- Ensuring uniform implementation across coastal States.
- Balancing rapid port expansion with ecological sustainability.
- Attracting private investment while safeguarding national maritime security.
- Strengthening institutional capacity to enforce international conventions.

### Conclusion

India's maritime reforms of 2025 represent the most comprehensive overhaul since Independence, transforming the sector from colonial-era regulation to a modern global framework. By combining economic efficiency with sustainability, these laws are strategic enablers of Maritime AmritKaal Vision 2047. If effectively implemented, they can reduce logistics costs, create millions of jobs, and position India as a global maritime power in the Indo-Pacific century.

### UPSC Mains Practice Question

**Ques:** The enactment of the five new maritime legislations in 2025 is being termed as the most comprehensive reform in India's maritime history. Discuss how these reforms can contribute to achieving India's Maritime AmritKaal Vision 2047. **(150 Words)**

## Page : 08 Editorial Analysis

# The new Constitution Bill, the need for a balancing act

**M**oral integrity in the political class is a paradox that India has continually struggled with. While, on the one hand, the electorate demands moral rectitude in the political class, there has, on the other, been a pervading spectre of criminality prevailing in the political class. The proposed Constitution (One Hundred and Thirtieth Amendment) Bill, 2025, that was introduced in the Lok Sabha on August 20, 2025, is aimed at filling this vacuum by providing a condition. Under this, Ministers, Chief Ministers and even the Prime Minister must either resign or automatically be subject to removal if they continue to be in custody even after a consecutive period of 30 days in crimes that carry a maximum punishment of five years or more of imprisonment.

On the surface, the action appears to be a decisive initiative toward enabling cleaner politics. It touches upon the disturbing fact of corrupt leaders in custody holding on to power, a situation that has made people lose trust in governance. But there are political pitfalls and constitutional quandaries that lurk beneath its promise.

The foundation for this Bill rests on Articles 75, 164 and 239AA of the Constitution, which deal with the appointment and tenure of Ministers in the Union, States and Delhi, respectively. While Articles 75(1), 164(1) and 239AA(5) mandate that Ministers shall hold office at the pleasure of the President of India (or Governor), this "pleasure" has been judicially interpreted within the bounds of constitutional morality and legal propriety, as in cases such as *Shamsher Singh and Anr. vs State Of Punjab* and *Nabam Rebia And Etc. Etc. vs Deputy Speaker And Ors*.

### Judicial pronouncements

The Supreme Court of India, in *S.R. Bommai vs Union of India*, underscored the role of constitutional morality as a guiding principle, thus pronouncing that democratic institutions must be nurtured through integrity and accountability. Later, in *Manoj Narula vs Union of India*, the Court directly addressed the ethical dimension of ministerial appointments, warning that individuals with serious criminal charges should not be entrusted with executive power. Although the Court stopped short of mandating automatic removal, it clearly signalled that morality is intrinsic to the constitutional framework. The Bill, therefore, draws strength from these pronouncements, seeking to give legislative form to what has long been a judicially recognised moral imperative.

But this Bill's very ambition may be its Achilles' heel. The most glaring issue concerns the principle of presumption of innocence, which forms part of the right to life and liberty under Article 21. To equate arrest and detention with



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grounds for removal, without conviction or even the framing of charges, risks undermining this foundational constitutional value. Section 8(3) of the Representation of The People Act concerns the disqualification of members on the conviction of certain offences. In the case of *Lily Thomas vs Union of India*, the Supreme Court held that a lawmaker, only upon conviction, immediately stands immediately disqualified. The three-month window to file an appeal and continue as a legislator was also struck down, thus providing jurisprudential support for stringent accountability even before the existence of the Bill. Here, it is important to note that disqualification begins only when someone is convicted, and not when someone is arrested or detained.

The problem is compounded by the Bill's reliance on executive discretion through the insertion of Clause 5A after Clause 5 of Article 75, Clause 4A after Clause 4 of Article 164 and Clause 5A after Clause 5 of Article 239AA of the Constitution. Ministers can be removed on the advice of the Prime Minister or Chief Minister, but automatic removal kicks in if such advice is withheld. This dual mechanism politicises the process: a Prime Minister may shield allies for 30 days, while a hostile Chief Minister may allow rivals to fall by the automatic rule. Instead of insulating governance from partisanship, the Bill risks embedding accountability in the shifting sands of political calculation.

### Inconsistency in treatment

The inconsistency in treatment between legislators and Ministers further complicates matters. Members of Parliament and Members of State legislatures face disqualification only upon conviction under the Representation of the People Act. By contrast, Ministers under this Bill would be forced to resign on mere detention. This creates a paradoxical situation wherein a legislator convicted of corruption may technically continue as a Minister until disqualified under the Act, while a Minister only under arrest would be forced out. The asymmetry may appear to elevate the standards for executive office, but it also undermines consistency in the constitutional treatment of public officials. It risks deterring capable individuals from accepting ministerial responsibility, knowing that they face harsher consequences than their legislative peers on the basis of unproven allegations.

There is also the problem of the "revolving door". Because the Bill allows reappointment once a Minister is released from custody, there could be cycles of resignation and reinstatement depending on the pace of legal proceedings. Imagine a Chief Minister who is arrested and detained for 31 days, who is forced to resign, but later released on bail and promptly reinstated by the Governor. The State would have endured

weeks of political uncertainty with little to gain in ethical accountability. Such instability may not only weaken governance but also incentivise tactical legal manoeuvres, where political actors use the law as a tool to manipulate executive offices.

### Need for a more nuanced model

None of this is to deny the urgency of reform. The rise of criminalisation in politics is a stark reality. According to a comprehensive analysis by the Association for Democratic Reforms and National Election Watch of all 543 winning candidates in the 2024 general election, 251 Members of Parliament (46%) had declared criminal cases against themselves, up from 43% in 2019, 34% in 2014, and 30% in 2009, representing a 55% increase over 15 years. Yet, the bluntness of its approach risks undermining both the principle of fairness and the stability of governance. A more nuanced model would better serve the constitutional goal of clean politics without eroding democratic safeguards.

One pathway could be to link removal not to arrest but, instead, to judicial milestones such as the framing of charges by a competent court. This would ensure that only cases that pass initial judicial scrutiny trigger resignation, filtering out frivolous or politically motivated arrests. Another safeguard could be the establishment of an independent review mechanism, such as a tribunal or a judicial panel, to examine whether the conditions for removal have been met. This would prevent executive overreach and ensure impartial application. Similarly, instead of outright removal, the law could provide for interim suspension of ministerial functions during ongoing trials, allowing governance to continue without compromising accountability. Most importantly, the Bill should refine its scope to apply only to offences involving moral turpitude and corruption, rather than casting a wide net over any offence punishable with five years' imprisonment, which could include relatively minor criminal conduct.

In sum, the Constitution (One Hundred and Thirtieth Amendment) Bill, 2025, stakes out a significant normative position that citizens might welcome as a forceful stand against corruption and criminality. But its formulation elides the inherent tension between safeguarding democratic deliverance of justice and urgent demands for ethical governance. Unless the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) carefully recalibrates to incorporate due process and institutional checks – the Bill is with the JPC – it could transmute constitutional safeguards into instruments of political exclusion, testing the delicate balance of India's democratic experiment. For, in the long run, power without integrity corrodes democracy, and integrity without fairness endangers it.

The Joint Parliamentary Committee needs to carefully recalibrate the formulation of the Constitution (One Hundred and Thirtieth Amendment) Bill, 2025

## GS. Paper 02 Indian Polity

**UPSC Mains Practice Question:** "Power without integrity corrodes democracy, and integrity without fairness endangers it." In light of this statement, suggest reforms to balance ethical governance and democratic safeguards in India. (150 words)

## Context :

The Constitution (130th Amendment) Bill, 2025, introduced in the Lok Sabha on August 20, 2025, seeks to address the long-standing problem of criminalisation of politics by mandating that Ministers, Chief Ministers, and even the Prime Minister must resign or be automatically removed if they remain in custody for over 30 consecutive days in cases carrying a maximum punishment of five years or more. While the Bill appears to further the cause of clean politics and public trust, it raises constitutional, legal, and political dilemmas around presumption of innocence, executive discretion, and democratic stability.

## Key Provisions of the Bill

- Applies to Union and State Ministers under Articles 75, 164, and 239AA (Delhi).
- Adds new clauses (e.g., 75(5A)) mandating resignation or automatic removal after 30 days in custody.
- Operates through a dual mechanism:
  - Removal by advice of PM/CM.
  - Automatic removal if no such advice within 30 days.
- Allows reappointment once the person is released from custody.

## Judicial and Constitutional Context

- S.R. Bommai (1994): Stressed integrity and constitutional morality in governance.
- Manoj Narula vs Union of India (2014): Court advised against appointing Ministers with serious criminal charges, but left discretion to PM/CM.
- Lily Thomas vs Union of India (2013): MPs/MLAs stand disqualified only on conviction, not arrest.
- Problem: Bill creates higher standards for Ministers than legislators, leading to inconsistency.

## Issues and Concerns

### 1. Presumption of Innocence (Article 21):

- Removal on arrest/detention without conviction undermines a core constitutional principle.
- Opens space for misuse via politically motivated arrests.

### 2. Executive Discretion and Politicisation:

- PM/CM may shield allies or target rivals depending on political climate.
- Accountability becomes hostage to partisan politics.

### 3. Inconsistency:

- Legislators face disqualification only upon conviction.
- Ministers face removal merely on detention → creates constitutional asymmetry.

### 4. Governance Instability (Revolving Door Problem):

- Ministers may resign after 30 days in custody but return upon bail → policy paralysis and uncertainty.



**5. Overbreadth:**

- Applies to all offences punishable by 5+ years, including relatively minor ones, instead of focusing on serious crimes of moral turpitude/corruption.

**Need for a Balanced Approach**

- Link to Judicial Milestones: Removal should be tied to framing of charges by a competent court, not mere arrest.
- Independent Review Body: A tribunal/judicial panel could oversee whether removal conditions are met → prevents executive misuse.
- Interim Suspension Model: Ministers could be suspended (not permanently removed) pending trial → balances governance continuity and accountability.
- Narrower Scope: Limit to crimes involving moral turpitude, corruption, and abuse of public office.

**Conclusion**

The 130th Amendment Bill, 2025, reflects the popular demand for integrity in politics, especially against the backdrop of rising criminalisation (46% MPs in 2024 elections had criminal cases). Yet, in its present form, the Bill risks undermining constitutional fairness and stability by equating detention with guilt. A calibrated framework—tying removal to judicial milestones, narrowing the scope to serious crimes, and instituting impartial oversight—can ensure that the Bill promotes ethical governance without eroding democratic safeguards. In the long run, India's democracy depends on striking a balance where power is exercised with integrity, but integrity is secured without sacrificing justice.