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U.S., Israel launch strikes on Iran; Tehran retaliates

Tehran retaliates with drone attacks on Israel, U.S. air bases in West Asia; Strait of Hormuz shut, says IRGC

Many signs indicating Khamenei 'is no longer', says Israeli PM Netanyahu after 'strikes near his offices'

Trump urges Iranian citizens to seize control during the escalation, says 'your only chance for generations'

Associated Press
Reuters
DUBAI

The U.S. and Israel launched a major attack on Iran on Saturday, and U.S. President Donald Trump called upon the Iranian public to "seize control of your destiny" by rising up against the Islamic leadership that has ruled the West Asian nation since 1979.

Iran retaliated by firing missiles and drones toward Israel and U.S. military bases in the region.

Some of the first strikes on Iran appeared to hit areas around the offices of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Smoke could be seen rising from the capital as part of strikes that Iranian media said occurred nationwide.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said

that there were many signs indicating Mr. Khamenei "is no longer", without explicitly confirming his death.

Iran's Defence Minister Amir Nasirzadeh and Revolutionary Guards commander Mohammed Pakpour were killed in Israeli attacks, three sources told Reuters.

In a video announcing the "major combat operations", Mr. Trump told Iranians that "when we are finished, take over your government. It will be yours to take. This will be probably your only chance for generations".

Mr. Netanyahu echoed that goal, saying, "Our joint operation will create the conditions for the brave Iranian people to take their fate into their own hands".

Iran responded to the strikes by launching missiles and drones targeting Israel and strikes targeting



Smoke billows from a site during air strikes by Israel and the U.S., in Tehran on Saturday. ANI

U.S. military installations in Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar.

'Defend the homeland'

"The time has come to defend the homeland and confront the enemy's military assault," Iran's Foreign Ministry said on X.

The Iranian Red Crescent reported on Saturday evening that at least 201 people were killed and 747 wounded in strikes by the U.S. and Israel against Iran.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards radioed ships to say the Strait of Hormuz, a strategic waterway, was

shut, according to the EU's naval mission.

The strikes during Ramadan opened a stunning new chapter in U.S. intervention in Iran and marked the second time in eight months that the Trump administration has used military force against the Is-

Flights cancelled or rerouted

NEW DELHI

Large swathes of airspace over West Asia became a no-go zone forcing global and Indian airlines to cancel flights to the region and reroute several others on Saturday. India's aviation safety regulator Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has issued an urgent safety advisory valid until March 2 for all airlines to avoid 11 countries, including Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan and Lebanon. » PAGE 4

lamic Republic. The targets included members of Iran's leadership, according to a U.S. official and another person briefed on the attacks who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss an ongoing operation.

Democrats decried that

Mr. Trump had taken action without congressional authorisation. Rep. Hakeem Jeffries, the top House Democrat, said that though Iran is a "bad actor," the President must nonetheless "seek authorisation for the pre-emptive use of military force that constitutes an act of war."

School attacked

At least 85 people were reportedly killed at a girls' school in southern Iran in the Israeli-U.S. strikes, and dozens of others were wounded, according to Iran's state-run IRNA news agency.

In an indication of the scope of the conflict, flights across West Asia were disrupted and air defence fire thudded over Dubai, the commercial capital of the United Arab Emirates. Shrapnel from an Iranian missile attack on the capital of the UAE killed one

person, state media said. The U.S. military has for weeks amassed forces in the region, even as U.S. and Iranian envoys held talks in Switzerland and Oman aimed at finding a diplomatic solution. Israel said the operation has been planned for months with the U.S.

Mr. Trump's statement listed grievances beyond the nuclear programme, stretching back to the beginning of the Islamic Republic following a revolution in 1979 that turned Iran from an American ally in West Asia into a fierce foe.

The U.S. President said he was aiming to "annihilate" the Iranian Navy and destroy regional proxies supported by Tehran.

'WAR OF SURVIVAL'

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- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Axis of Resistance:** A loose geopolitical and military alliance led by Iran, including the Syrian government, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Palestine, and the Houthis in Yemen.

- *Example:* Iran provides technical expertise for drone production to these groups to exert regional influence without direct state-to-state war.

- **Strait of Hormuz:** A narrow waterway between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. It is the world's most important oil chokepoint.

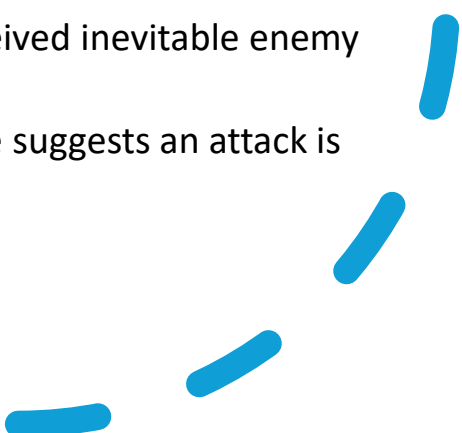
- *Example:* If Iran shuts this strait, global oil prices could skyrocket overnight, affecting everything from petrol prices in Delhi to manufacturing in China.

- **JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action):** The 2015 "Iran Nuclear Deal" intended to curb Iran's nuclear program in exchange for lifting economic sanctions.

- **Maximum Pressure vs. Maximum Resistance:** A policy cycle where the U.S. uses crippling sanctions (Pressure) and Iran responds with aggressive regional maneuvers or nuclear enrichment (Resistance).

- **Pre-emptive Strike:** A military action taken to prevent a perceived inevitable enemy offensive.

- *Example:* Striking a missile launch site because intelligence suggests an attack is imminent.






- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **The Shift to Direct War:** The core argument is that the decades-old "shadow war" (assassinations, cyberattacks, proxy strikes) has finally transitioned into a direct, high-intensity conventional conflict involving major powers.

- **Regime Change as an Explicit Goal:** Unlike previous administrations that focused on "behavior change" regarding nuclear enrichment, the current U.S. and Israeli leadership appear to be pursuing the collapse of the Islamic Republic's governance.


- **Erosion of Diplomacy:** The article highlights a tragic irony—strikes were launched just as diplomatic channels in Oman suggested a "breakthrough" on nuclear issues, implying that military objectives have now superseded diplomatic ones.

- **Regional Retaliation:** Iran's strategy remains "forward defense." By striking U.S. bases in Qatar, UAE, and Kuwait, Iran is signaling that no American ally in the region is safe if Iran is attacked.





- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
- **Pre-1979 (The Strategic Ally):** Under the Shah, Iran was the "policeman of the Persian Gulf" and a close ally of both the U.S. and Israel. They even collaborated on secret missile programs (Project Flower).
- **1979 (The Geopolitical Earthquake):** The Islamic Revolution replaced the Monarchy with a Theocracy. Iran rebranded the U.S. as the "Great Satan" and Israel as the "Little Satan."
- **1980s–1990s (Exporting the Revolution):** Iran founded Hezbollah and supported Palestinian groups to bridge the Shia-Sunni divide and gain leadership in the Muslim world.
- **2003–2011 (The Shia Crescent):** The U.S. invasion of Iraq removed Iran's biggest enemy (Saddam Hussein), inadvertently allowing Tehran to create a land corridor of influence from Iran to the Mediterranean.
- **2015–2018 (The Diplomatic Peak and Valley):** The signing of the JCPOA offered a brief window of de-escalation, which was slammed shut by the U.S. withdrawal in 2018.
- **2024–2026 (The Boiling Point):** Following the collapse of the Assad regime's stability in Syria and the October 7 attacks, the conflict moved from the periphery to the Iranian heartland.

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- **Linkages with NCERTs**
 - **Class 12 Political Science (Contemporary World Politics):** Chapter on "US Hegemony in World Politics" and "Contemporary South Asia/West Asia." It explains the history of US interventionism.
 - **Class 12 History (Themes in World History):** Focus on the displacement of empires and the rise of the Middle East as a zone of conflict.
 - **Class 11 Geography (Physical Geography):** Study of the Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf as strategic geographical features.
-
- **Previous Years' Questions (PYQs)**
 - **UPSC Mains (2017, GS-2):** "The "strait of Hormuz" is the most important maritime chokepoint. Discuss its strategic significance for India."
 - **UPSC Mains (2020, GS-2):** "The USA-Iran cordiale is a thing of the past. In the light of the recent developments, examine the impact on India's energy security."
 - **UPSC Prelims (2022):** Questions regarding the location of the Levant and West Asian geography.

True justice lies in being able to rise above factional debates, says Kapil Sibal

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The true dispensation of justice lies in a purposive interpretation of the Constitution, attuned to the needs of society, senior advocate Kapil Sibal said at Justice Unplugged: Shaping the Future of Law, a conclave organised by the VIT School of Law, VIT Chennai, in association with *The Hindu*, in Delhi on Saturday. He was in conversation with N. Ram, Director, The Hindu Group of Publications.

"Constitutional morality ultimately is justice without fear or favour... True justice lies in the ability to rise above factional debates and interpret the Constitution in a manner that serves the larger community," he said.

Earlier, delivering the welcome address, Suresh Nambath, Editor of *The Hindu*, said that societies – from ancient civilisations to modern nation-states – are anchored in the rule of law. In India, he said, the Constitution remains supreme and functions as a bulwark against social and structural inequalities.

"In India, the Constitution, and not Parliament, is supreme... the Constitution represents the voice of the people across generations", he said.

At the inaugural session of the conclave, G. Vishwanathan, Founder and Chancellor of the Vellore



L.V. Navaneeth, CEO of The Hindu Group; G. Viswanathan, Founder and Chancellor of VIT; Abhishek Singhvi, senior advocate and chief guest; N. Ram, Director of The Hindu Group; G.V. Selvam, Vice-President, VIT, and Suresh Nambath, Editor, during *The Hindu Justice Unplugged 2026* in New Delhi on Saturday. *ix* 0000000

Institute of Technology (VIT), described law as a vital instrument for the protection of the marginalised and said that lawyers render an essential service to society. He, however, underlined the pressing need for institutional reforms to address the mounting judicial backlog.

"India has the highest number of pending cases. As of January 2026, the total number of pending cases at all levels in India is 5.4 crore," he said.

Wide-ranging topics

The conclave brought together senior advocates and scholars for wide-ranging conversations on the challenges confronting the profession.

S. Muralidhar, senior advocate and former Chief Justice of the Odisha High Court, in a discussion with Krishnadas Rajagopal, legal correspondent, *The*

Hindu, said it was becoming increasingly challenging to safeguard collective liberties and preserve constitutional rights. At the same time, he said that such periods of constitutional uncertainty demand a renewed and resolute commitment from the Bar to uphold constitutional values.

Practitioners and academics also described AI as a powerful aid but one that requires rigorous human oversight. Advocate-on-Record, Supreme Court, Neha Rathi said AI is "already acting as a great, efficient tool" in legal practice. From summarising lengthy briefs to assisting with translations, AI tools are now routinely used by lawyers, particularly for urgent matters, Ms. Rathi noted.

FULL COVERAGE
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- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Constitutional Morality:** This refers to adherence to the core philosophies of the Constitution rather than just its literal text. It involves a commitment to democratic values, the rule of law, and the protection of individual liberties.

- *Example:* Even if a majority supports a law that discriminates against a group, "constitutional morality" dictates that the court strikes it down to protect fundamental rights.

- **Purposive Interpretation:** A method where judges interpret the law by looking at the "purpose" or "intent" behind it, rather than just the literal words.

- *Example:* Interpreting the "Right to Life" (Article 21) to include the "Right to a Clean Environment" because life cannot be sustained without it.

- **Majoritarianism:** A traditional political philosophy that asserts a majority of the population is entitled to a certain degree of primacy in society. In a legal context, it refers to the risk of the executive using its numerical strength to override the rights of the minority.

- **Article 32:** Known as the "Heart and Soul" of the Constitution, it allows citizens to move the Supreme Court directly for the enforcement of Fundamental Rights.

- **Judicial Backlog:** The accumulation of unresolved cases in the court system. As of early 2026, this stands at a staggering **5.4 crore** cases in India.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **The Breakdown of Constitutional Machinery:** Kapil Sibal argues that the "checks and balances" system is failing. The executive, backed by a massive legislative majority, effectively dominates the discourse, leaving the Opposition sidelined and the judiciary seemingly hesitant to intervene.

- **The "Fear or Favour" Dilemma:** A core argument is that true justice requires judges to act without fear of the executive. Sibal critiques the tendency of the Supreme Court to redirect sensitive petitions back to High Courts, questioning if this stems from institutional apprehension.

- **Erosion of Public Faith:** The dialogue highlights that public trust is the only "currency" the judiciary has (lacking both the "purse" of the executive and the "sword" of the military). Corruption allegations and perceived judicial passivity are cited as reasons for declining trust.

- **The Textbook Controversy:** The mention of judicial corruption in a Class 8 NCERT textbook is viewed through two lenses:

- As a reflection of genuine public perception.
- As a potential tool for the executive to "intimidate" the judiciary by damaging its reputation.

- **Technology as an Enabler:** The legal fraternity acknowledges AI as an "efficient tool" for summarization and translation, though it warns that human oversight is non-negotiable to maintain legal nuances.

Historical Evolution of the Issue

19th Century Origins: George Grote coined "Constitutional Morality" to describe the "habits" of mind necessary for a democracy.

1948 (Constituent Assembly): Dr. B.R. Ambedkar introduced the concept to the Indian context, warning that democracy in India was "only a top-dressing on Indian soil, which is essentially undemocratic."

Post-Independence (1950s-70s):

Initial years focused on state-building and land reforms. The judiciary and executive often clashed over the right to property, leading to the "Basic Structure Doctrine" (1973).

The 2014 Pivot: The article suggests a shift toward more "blatant" majoritarianism post-2014, citing a move from "subterranean" themes to overt political strategies.

2026 Milestone: The current era is defined by massive case pendency (5.4 crore) and the integration of AI into legal practice.

- **Linkages with NCERTs**
 - **Class 11 Political Science (Indian Constitution at Work):** Chapters on "The Judiciary" and "Philosophy of the Constitution."
 - **Class 8 Social and Political Life - III:** Chapters on "The Judiciary" and "Understanding Our Criminal Justice System." (Directly relevant to the textbook controversy mentioned).
 - **Class 12 Politics in India Since Independence:** Relevant for understanding the evolution of majoritarianism and judicial-executive conflicts.
-
- **All Previous Years' UPSC Questions**
 - **GS 2 (2020):** "Judicial Activism has many facets. Describe with the help of valid arguments."
 - **GS 2 (2019):** "The local self-government system in India has not proved to be an effective instrument of governance. Critically examine." (Parallel to the argument on 'breakdown of machinery').
 - **GS 2 (2023):** "The Constitution of India is a living instrument with capabilities of enormous dynamism. It is a constitution made for a progressive society."
 - **Ethics (2017):** "Conflict of interest in the public sector arises when... there is a conflict between personal interest and public interest."



Canada, India negotiating pact to double trade by 2030, says Carney

Press Trust of India
MUMBAI

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney on Saturday said his country is negotiating a comprehensive economic partnership agreement with India with the intention to double two-way trade by 2030.

It is expected to be signed by end of this year, Mr. Carney said while addressing the Canada-India Forum here. The Canadian Prime Minister is on a four-day visit to India.

"This is an enormous opportunity for both our countries... but it is one that is about to move to the next level. We should aim much higher, and we are aiming much higher, and to be more strategic in our partnership. And that's why, immediately after my election last year, our government set out to renew our relationship with India," he said.



Union Minister of State Jayant Chaudhary with Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney in Mumbai on Friday. PTI

"I invited Prime Minister Modi to the G7 Summit in Canada. When he came a few weeks later, we agreed to re-engage across security, energy and technology. A few months later, at the G20 Summit in Johannesburg, Prime Minister Modi and I launched a landmark partnership with Australia on critical minerals and technology," Mr. Carney said.

"That naturally begins

with food and energy, given Canada's position as a food and energy superpower," he said, adding that it also extends to nuclear cooperation, from being the most reliable long-term supplier of uranium to building large-scale and SMR (Small Modular Reactors).

"We could also be India's strategic partner in critical minerals and metals for your manufactur-

ing, for your clean tech, and for your nuclear industries. And in the other respect, India can help us to double our grid with clean power by 2040," he added.

Defence innovation

India's leadership in AI and the digital economy aligns well with Canada's mission to develop and commercialise those technologies, as well as quantum, to deepen its defence innovation, Mr. Carney asserted. "Canada is clear-eyed about the world as it is, and we are equally determined to forge a new path in it. We are a confident and ambitious nation, and that confidence, that ambition, brings us here to India. To lay the foundations that have been laid by tens of millions of citizens in both our nations. To work together to create a more resilient, a more prosperous, and a more just future for our peoples," he said.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA):** A type of free trade pact that is broader than a standard Free Trade Agreement (FTA). It covers negotiation on trade in services and investment, and other areas like IPR, competition, and economic cooperation.

- *Example:* If India and Canada sign a CEPA, it doesn't just lower tariffs on Canadian lentils; it also makes it easier for Indian IT professionals to work on projects in Toronto.

- **Small Modular Reactors (SMRs):** Advanced nuclear reactors that have a power capacity of up to 300 MW(e) per unit—about one-third of the generating capacity of traditional nuclear power reactors.

- *Example:* Think of them as "portable" nuclear plants that can be built in a factory and shipped to remote locations where a massive plant isn't feasible.

- **Critical Minerals:** Mineral substances that are essential to the economy and whose supply is at risk. These include lithium, cobalt, and graphite, which are vital for EV batteries and clean energy.

- **Clean Tech:** Short for "clean technology," referring to any process, product, or service that reduces negative environmental impacts through energy efficiency or the sustainable use of resources.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The core thesis of the current engagement is a **strategic reset** to move beyond past diplomatic frictions and focus on shared economic and security interests.
- **Trade Ambition:** The goal is to double two-way trade by 2030 through a CEPA, expected to be finalized by the end of 2024.
- **The Energy-Food Nexus:** Canada positions itself as a "superpower" in food and energy. The argument is that Canadian uranium and potash (fertilizer) are essential for India's energy security and food productivity.
- **Technological Synergy:** There is a "hand-in-glove" fit between India's digital economy/AI leadership and Canada's ability to commercialize these technologies, particularly in the quantum and defense sectors.
- **Multilateral Alignment:** The mention of G7, G20, and trilateral partnerships (with Australia) suggests that India-Canada ties are no longer just bilateral; they are part of a broader Indo-Pacific strategy to secure supply chains.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
- **1950s-1970s (The Nuclear Era):** Early cooperation was centered on nuclear energy (the CIRUS reactor). However, relations soured after India's "Smiling Buddha" nuclear test in 1974, leading to a long period of Canadian sanctions.
- **2010 (The Thaw):** The signing of the Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement marked a turning point, allowing Canada to export uranium to India for peaceful purposes.
- **2018-2023 (The Turbulent Phase):** Relations faced significant "trust deficits" due to internal Canadian political issues, diaspora concerns, and allegations regarding sovereignty.
- **2024-Present (The Realist Reset):** Under new leadership and shifting global geopolitics (China's rise), both nations are prioritizing "realpolitik"—focusing on critical minerals, SMRs, and trade to bypass political roadblocks.

Linkages with NCERTs

Class 12 Political Science (Contemporary World Politics): Chapters on Globalization and International Organizations.

Class 12 Geography (India: People and Economy): Chapters on International Trade and Mineral and Energy Resources.

Class 10 Economics: Chapter on Globalization and the Indian Economy.

Previous Years' UPSC Questions

GS2 (2017): "The Indian diaspora has a decisive role to play in the politics and economy of America and European Countries. Comment." (Relevant to the Canada context).

GS2 (2019): "What introduces friction into the ties between India and Canada?"

GS3 (2021): "What are the main socio-economic implications arising out of the development of IT industries in major cities of India?" (Relevant to AI/Digital economy partnership).

India calls for respecting 'sovereignty and territorial integrity' of all countries

Kalid Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

India on Saturday issued a series of advisories for citizens as a regional conflict started with the U.S.-Israel attack on Iran and the subsequent Iranian retaliation that hit several military and commercial hubs in the Gulf states. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), in a statement, called upon all sides to resort to "dialogue and diplomacy", and said "safety of civilians" should be prioritised.

"India is deeply concerned at the recent developments in Iran and the Gulf region. We urge all sides to exercise restraint, avoid escalation, and prioritise the safety of civilians. Dialogue and diplomacy should be pursued to de-escalate tensions and address underlying issues. Sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states must be respected," the MEA said in reports posted in exchange of missiles and drone attacks between the U.S.-Israel coalition and Iran. In keeping with the dynamic situation in the extended neighbourhood, India has been engaged with a broad spectrum of decision-makers from the region in the recent past.

UAE's President Sheikh Mohamed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan visited New Delhi in the third week of January when the two sides sealed a "Letter of Intent towards the conclusion of a Strategic Defence Partnership". That apart, two days before the latest conflict, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had returned from Israel, where he held wide-ranging talks with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and was honoured with a special medal at the Knesset. During Mr. Modi's visit, the two sides agreed to increase the presence of Indian workers and professionals in Israel. A joint statement released on this occasion had said that both sides agreed that 50,000 "additional Indian workers" may arrive in Israel in the next five years.

Saturday's official response on the escalating conflict came hours after the Indian diplomatic mis-



War effects: A smoke plume rises over Abu Dhabi from the site of an Iranian missile strike on Saturday. AP

Opposition asks govt. to ensure safety of Indians

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Opposition parties have expressed concern over the attacks on Iran, and asked the Centre to take immediate measures to protect Indian citizens.

Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi said the rapidly escalating hostilities between the United States-Israel and Iran are deeply concerning. "The safety and security of every Indian citizen across the

Middle East must be our highest priority. I urge the Government of India to take immediate and proactive measures to safeguard our people," he said. Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge said peace and stability in the region must be preserved. He said, "We are equally concerned about the safety of Indians in Iran and across the Middle East. We urge the Government of India to take all possible measures to ensure their protection and well being."

sions across the West Asian region issued urgent "advisories" for Indian citizens, asking them to "strictly follow" safety guidelines in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Iraq and Israel. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states hold more than 10 million expat Indian workers and professionals who form a strong bond between the region and India. The GCC countries also host millions of Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Nepalese workers.

Officials speaking off the record acknowledged the region-wide dimension of the latest air war between the U.S.-Israel and Iran poses a challenge to any immediate evacuation plans for Indian citizens who are based in these countries. Apart from the GCC member states, Israel and Iran host a significant number of Indians.

Safety of millions of Indians in the region came

into the spotlight as the latest conflict is qualitatively different from previous recent exchanges as it is the first time that Iran targeted prominent cities, like Abu Dhabi in the UAE, Qatar's capital Doha, and Bahrain, that are well known for being hubs of Indian workers. "Our Missions in the region are in touch with Indian nationals and have issued appropriate advisories asking them to remain vigilant, stay in contact with the Missions and follow local security guidance," the MEA has said.

Emergency numbers

Emergency numbers shared by the missions of India: +972-54-752070 (Israel), +966-11-4884697 (Saudi Arabia), +9852300915 (Iran), +9656550946 (Kuwait), +974-55647502 (Qatar), +973-39488071 (Bahrain), +968-98282200 (Oman), +963-993285973 (Syria), +964-771-626-1185 (Iraq).

Key Terms and Explanations

Territorial Integrity: The principle under international law that prohibits states from the use of force against the border or political independence of another state.

GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council): A political and economic union of six Arab states—Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain.

Advisory: An official announcement by a government warning citizens about risks (security, health) in a specific country.

Sovereignty: The supreme authority of a state to govern itself without external interference.
Example: India deciding its own energy policy despite global pressure.

Strategic Autonomy: A nation's ability to pursue its national interests and adopt its own preferred foreign policy without being constrained by other states.

De-escalation: The reduction of the intensity of a conflict or potentially violent situation.

Main Arguments and Substantive Parts

India's Multi-aligned Balance: The core thesis is India's attempt to balance its deepening security ties with Israel and the US against its vital energy and diaspora interests in Iran and the Gulf.

The Diaspora Factor: With over 10 million Indians in the GCC, any regional "air war" shifts India's priority from trade to emergency evacuation (Non-combatant Evacuation Operations).

Shift in Conflict Dynamics: The article highlights that the conflict has moved beyond border skirmishes to targeting commercial and civilian hubs like Abu Dhabi and Doha, directly endangering Indian professionals.

Institutional Cooperation: Recent "Letters of Intent" for defense partnerships with the UAE and labor agreements with Israel show that India is no longer a passive spectator but a stakeholder in West Asian security.

Historical Evolution of the Issue

Pre-1990s: India's policy was primarily "Pro-Arab," driven by oil needs and a large Muslim population. Relations with Israel were cold/non-existent.

1992: Full diplomatic ties established with Israel under the Narasimha Rao government, marking the start of a "de-hyphenated" policy.

2014–Present (Link West Policy): Under PM Modi, India moved from a transactional relationship (oil-buyer) to a strategic partnership (security, investment, technology) with both the UAE/Saudi Arabia and Israel.

The Iran-Israel Shadow War: Over the last decade, this has moved from cyber-attacks and proxies to direct missile exchanges, forcing India to refine its "Middle Path" diplomacy.

- **Linkages with NCERTs**
- **Class 12 Political Science (Contemporary World Politics):** Chapter on "International Organisations" and "Security in the Contemporary World."
- **Class 12 Geography (India: People and Economy):** Chapter on "Migration"—explaining the push-pull factors of the Indian diaspora in the Gulf.

- **Previous Years' Questions (PYQs)**
- **UPSC Mains (2017):** "Indian Diaspora has a decisive role to play in the politics and economy of West Asia." Discuss.
- **UPSC Mains (2022):** "The Israel-Palestine conflict has been a long-standing issue... Examine India's changing stance."
- **UPSC Prelims (2023):** Questions regarding the "Region often mentioned in news" (Levant, etc.).

'Constitutional thinking has to start from home'

Indians do not allow constitutional provisions to influence personal behaviour, says former Orissa HC Chief Justice at *The Hindu* Justice Unplugged 2026; change comes from social milieu, he adds

Aaratrika Bhaumik
NEW DELHI

We are in a country where we do not allow the provisions of the Constitution to influence our personal behaviour, S. Muralidhar, former Chief Justice of the Orissa High Court and now a senior advocate of the Supreme Court, said at *The Hindu* Justice Unplugged on Saturday.

In a conversation with Krishnadas Rajagopal, Legal Correspondent at *The Hindu*, the eminent jurist and author said change comes from the social milieu where you grow up in your houses, in your homes, while talking about how constitutional thinking has to start from home. He said it was up to each young lawyer to make the best of the initial years of struggle. Edited excerpts:

SM: Law is very much in everyone's mind, imagination. The amount of coverage of courts and lawyers in the last two decades has been phenomenal. After the advent of social media,

tion. I think there is a greater realisation that courts are playing, whether we want it or not, a very active role in people's life. Almost every aspect of life in India is governed by some court order or some statute or some legal policy. So everybody is interested in knowing what's happening in the courts and with lawyers.

The one marked change I am finding, and this owes to the change in legal education, is the advent of the national law schools and products of the national law schools coming into the Bar.

Of course, some have been fired by idealism and are very clear that they want to practice from day one. But there is this trend. There is also a trend of the national law school products coming back into academia. So, they are coming back to teach in the national law schools. Of course, the divide does exist.

But overall I would think it is improving the quality in an indirect way, also among the Bench, because many of these young law

Krishnadas Rajagopal
Correspondent
The Hindu



S. Muralidhar, former Chief Justice of Orissa HC, with Krishnadas Rajagopal, Legal Correspondent at *The Hindu*, in conversation at *The Hindu* Justice Unplugged 2026 in New Delhi on Saturday.

I know judges who are driven to perform better with many young minds around them. There is a whole building up of public opinion and driving lawyers and judges to get homosexuality decriminalised. Even the latest Sukanya Shanta judgment which invalidated many provisions of prison manuals which permitted segregation of prisoners on caste lines or allocation of duties to prison-

Many of them I know within chambers questioning judges... I am not a pessimist. As you must have all realised by now. I am this eternal optimist, and I think the better days are yet to come.

KDR: On the one side there are new branches of law opening up like AI governance, on the other, courts are seeing more and more cases with a commu-

S. Muralidhar
Senior Advocate
& Former Chief Justice,
High Court of Orissa



fraternity, dignity and right to life – have to be inculcated at a very young age, it has to evolve as a natural way of thinking?

SM: We have many law reform statutes which have not changed societal behaviour. I am prefacing my remarks with this because lawyers are products of society, right? And judges are from among the lawyers. So, if you look at the entire



tional values, you are not going to be able to find that happen. It has to start at home. You know, these things have happened for a long time. We are in a country where we do not allow the provisions of the Constitution to influence our personal behaviour. Change comes from the social milieu where you grow up in your houses, in your homes.

KDR: We have a mushrooming of law schools, different branches of law coming up. Is the focus largely on corporate, law as a money-spinner? Do you think that the human aspect of law, the litigant as a sufferer, is on the wane?

SM: One can be pessimistic

stand up for rights, is very small. But I think the better way of looking at it is looking at the better examples in the present generation of lawyers, of cases and causes being taken up not for money, not for fame, but for belief in constitutional values. Look at Square Circle, it is so encouraging to see very young lawyers with complete commitment undertaking great risks in going to the prisons. These young lawyers are visiting prisons in the most remote corners of our country. Talking to prisoners who are on death row, who are serving life sentence, getting out their stories... Younger people are coming forward. It is not like a transformative change, but it is happening, and that is very encouraging.

KDR: There is a legend that you came to Delhi and you had function initially from a blue Maruti Omni van... Is it tough to be a first generation lawyer?

SM: So, in Chinese whispers what was a white Maruti van has become blue.

a law student in this country, particularly because you do not find a country as diverse as India. Law helps you actually encounter society in ways that you will not encounter in other professions. It gives you an enormous opportunity to learn about your own society, to learn about the discriminatory practices in your society. When you are doing human rights work, when you are doing law and poverty work, you are also doing political work. You will have to find your way amidst all of this. The good news is there is enough space for all of us. There is enough space for the idealist lawyer, for the hard working lawyer, for the corporate lawyer, they can all rub shoulders.

KDR: Should laws be simplified?

SM: Absolutely. Legal English is jargon-heavy. Litigants often know their case better than lawyers, but cannot articulate it in court language. Much is lost in translation. We must simplify statutes and judg-



- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Constitutional Morality:** This refers to adherence to the core principles of the Constitution (like liberty and equality) rather than just its legal text.

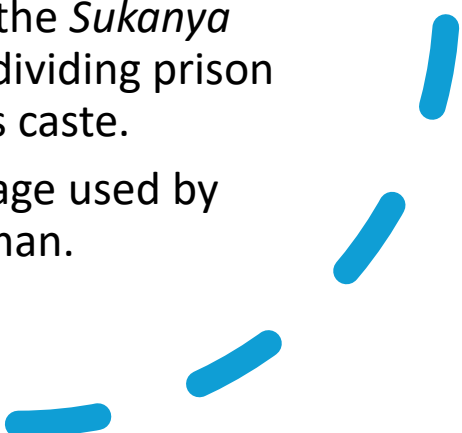
- *Example:* A person who believes in "Equality" (Article 14) but practices untouchability or gender discrimination at home lacks constitutional morality.

- **Social Milieu:** The social environment, culture, and physical setting in which a person lives or which influences them. The argument here is that our upbringing often outweighs our legal education.

- **Decriminalization of Homosexuality:** Referring to the landmark *Navtej Singh Johar* case, where the Supreme Court struck down Section 377 IPC, moving from a "moral" code to a "constitutional" code of rights.

- **Segregation on Caste Lines:** Recently addressed in the *Sukanya Shanta* judgment, this refers to the illegal practice of dividing prison labor (e.g., cooking vs. cleaning) based on a prisoner's caste.

- **Legal Jargon:** The specialized, often complex language used by lawyers that makes law inaccessible to the common man.





- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**


- The core thesis is that **law is a reflection of society, but the Constitution is meant to transform it.**

- **The "Home" as the First Classroom:** The jurist argues that constitutional values like dignity and fraternity cannot be forced by statutes alone. If a child sees discrimination at the dinner table, no amount of law school will make them a truly "constitutional" lawyer.

- **The Role of Young Legal Minds:** There is a rising trend of "Idealist Lawyers." These are individuals working in remote prisons and taking on human rights cases (e.g., the "Square Circle" initiative) not for money, but for the "Human Aspect" of law.

- **Judicial Dynamism vs. Social Stagnation:** While courts are innovating (AI governance, decriminalization), society is still grappling with communalism and casteism.

- **Accessibility of Law:** A major hurdle to justice is the language of the law. If a litigant doesn't understand the judgment, the "Rule of Law" is weakened.



- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **Pre-Independence:** Laws were tools of colonial control (e.g., Seditious). Social reform was driven by leaders like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ambedkar, who realized law must follow social awareness.

- **1950 (The Grand Experiment):** India adopted a transformative Constitution, hoping it would change a traditional, hierarchical society into an egalitarian one.

- **1970s-80s (The PIL Era):** Justice P.N. Bhagwati and V.R. Krishna Iyer opened court doors to the poor, recognizing that the "Human Aspect" was missing.

- **Present Day:** The rise of National Law Schools (NLS) has professionalized law but also created a divide between "Corporate Law" (profit-driven) and "Human Rights Law" (value-driven).



Where does the India-U.S. trade deal stand?

After the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the tariffs imposed by Donald Trump on countries across the world, how did the American President react? Will reciprocal tariffs be removed? Why does a 50% tariff on aluminium and steel imports continue?

T.G.A. Sharad Raghavan

The story so far:

February was an eventful month for India-U.S. trade relations. The two countries announced an impending interim agreement on trade, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned President Donald Trump's tariffs, the Indian negotiating team indefinitely postponed its visit to Washington, and Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal hosted U.S. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick in New Delhi. All of this has raised the question: what happens to the trade deal and U.S. tariffs?

What did the U.S. Supreme Court say?

Mr. Trump implemented most of his tariffs on other countries, including on India, using the International Emergency Economic Powers Act of 1977. The U.S. Supreme Court on February 20 struck down the tariffs implemented under this law. It said that the U.S. President would need congressional approval before levying tariffs under these laws. For most countries, this involved the removal of the 'reciprocal tariffs' Mr. Trump had imposed on them since mid-2025. Mr. Trump had on February 6 removed the 25% penal tariffs he had imposed on India for its import of Russian oil. This had brought India's total tariff down from 50% to 25%. As per the joint statement issued by the two countries, the remaining 25% reciprocal tariffs would be reduced to 18% under the interim agreement. However, before this could be done by the U.S., its Supreme Court struck down the tariffs.

What was Trump administration's reaction?

Mr. Trump lashed out at the Supreme Court in



Uncertain future: A protest by the Ram Rastri party against the India-U.S. trade treaty at Freedom Park in Bengaluru on February 15. www.bbc.com/news/india-68111111

The U.S. has said that it expects its partners to stand by the deals they signed

several social media posts and speeches. Also expectedly, he resorted to other laws under which he could impose tariffs on other countries. As of now, this stands at a flat 10% tariff on all imports for a period of 150 days starting January 24. However, Mr. Trump has said he will raise this to the maximum permissible limit of 15%. That has not happened yet. Several other tariffs that the U.S. has imposed over the last year or so remain in place. These include a 50% tariff on aluminium and steel imports, and country-specific tariffs on items valued at less than \$800. Both continue to impact India since steel and aluminium form a substantial portion of India's exports to the U.S., and India's MSMEs used to leverage e-commerce platforms and avail of the tariff exemption on items below \$800.

The U.S. on February 24 imposed a 20% tariff on the import of solar modules from India after a 'preliminary' finding that subsidised exports from India were hurting U.S. solar firms.

What about the impact on other trade deals?

The European Union, which has already signed a trade deal with the U.S., was very vocal about what it expected following the Supreme Court judgment. "The European Commission requests full clarity on the steps the U.S. intends to take following the recent Supreme Court ruling on the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA)," the Commission said in a statement. "The current situation is not conducive to delivering fair, balanced, and mutually beneficial transatlantic trade and investment, as agreed to by both sides and spelled out in the EU-U.S. Joint Statement of August 2025." Japanese officials, too, were vocal about the deal, saying that since Japan's deal with the U.S. focused on automobile tariffs that were not affected by the Supreme Court judgment, they were not keen to revisit the deal.

The Australian trade minister said that the U.S. must honour the free trade agreement signed between the two countries and allow duty-free imports of Australian goods into the U.S., since Australia was holding up its end by allowing duty-free imports of U.S. goods.

How has India reacted?

In various interviews and press conferences, Mr. Goyal had said the interim agreement was set to be formally signed by the middle of March, and could be implemented by early April. These statements, however, were made before the Supreme Court's ruling. In response to the ruling, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry issued a relatively anodyne statement compared to statements made by other countries and

groupings. "We have noted the U.S. Supreme Court judgment on tariffs yesterday," the statement said, adding, "President Trump has also addressed a press conference in that regard. Some steps have been announced by the U.S. Administration. We are studying all these developments for their implications."

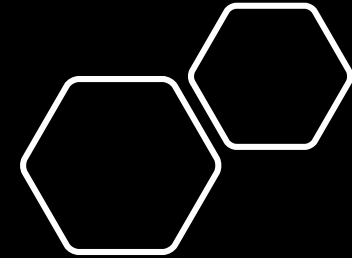
The Indian team was meant to be in Washington on February 23-25 to finalise the contours of the interim agreement so that it could be signed in mid-March. While not mentioning the deal in the official statement, sources in India's Ministry of Commerce and Industry said that "the two sides are of the view that the proposed visit of the Indian chief negotiator and the team be scheduled after each side has had the time to evaluate the latest developments and its implications". In other words, the visit to the U.S. was postponed indefinitely. However, on the other hand, Mr. Goyal hosted both Mr. Lutnick and U.S. Ambassador to India Sergio Gora in New Delhi on February 26 for what turned out to be a "fruitful" meeting, in Mr. Goyal's words. A new date for an official meeting of negotiators is yet to be announced.

At the moment, a deal is more important to the U.S. than India because India can reduce its tariffs on U.S. goods only once a deal is signed. At the same time, the U.S. tariff threat that had been looming over issues like Russian oil and buying more U.S. goods has been removed for the time being.

Has the U.S. changed its stance?

Regarding trade deals, the Trump Administration has been clear: nothing changes. Mr. Trump warned countries that he had signed deals with to honour them and not "play games", or risk facing higher tariffs. "Any Country that wants to 'play games' with the ridiculous supreme court decision, especially those that have 'kipped off' the U.S.A. for years, and even decades, will be met with a much higher Tariff, and worse, than that which they just recently agreed to [sic]," he said in a post on Truth Social. He followed this up with: "As President, I do not have to go back to Congress to get approval of Tariffs. It has already been gotten, in many forms, a long time ago! They were also just reaffirmed by the ridiculous and poorly crafted supreme court decision!"

Mr. Lutnick, too, spoke about how nothing has changed from the U.S. point of view and that it expects other countries to honour their commitments. "I've been telling them [the U.S. trade partners] for a year whether we won or lost, we were going to have tariffs," Mr. Lutnick said in a TV interview. "The President's policy was going to continue. That's why they signed these deals, even while the litigation was pending... We want them to understand that these deals are going to be good deals. We expect to stand by them. We expect our partners to stand by them."



- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), 1977:** A U.S. federal law that allows the President to regulate commerce after declaring a national emergency in response to any unusual and extraordinary threat to the U.S. originating outside the country.
- **Reciprocal Tariffs:** In this context, it refers to tariffs imposed by President Trump as a "tit-for-tat" measure against countries that he perceived as having higher tariffs than the U.S. or engaging in "unfair" trade practices.
- **Interim Trade Agreement:** A "mini-deal" or a temporary pact that covers a limited range of goods and issues (like price caps or specific market access) before a full-scale Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is signed.
- **Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974:** A provision that allows a U.S. President to impose temporary tariffs (up to 15%) for a maximum of 150 days to deal with "large and serious" balance-of-payments deficits.
- **Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962:** A law allowing the President to impose tariffs on imports if the Department of Commerce finds that those imports threaten to impair national security (commonly used for steel and aluminium).
- **Countervailing Duty (CVD):** An import tax imposed on certain goods to prevent "dumping" or to offset subsidies given by the exporting country's government, which help keep the price of those goods low.



- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**
- The article outlines a dramatic shift in trade dynamics:
- **The Judicial Check:** The U.S. Supreme Court's ruling on February 20, 2026, struck a blow to the Trump administration's trade strategy by declaring that IEEPA does not grant the President unilateral power to levy tariffs without Congressional approval.
- **The Trump Response:** Rather than retreating, the U.S. administration pivoted to **Section 122** (10% flat tariff) and is exploring **Section 338** to maintain high tariff walls, asserting that "nothing has changed" for their trade partners.
- **India's Strategic Pause:** India has indefinitely postponed its high-level negotiating visit to Washington. While the intent to sign a deal remains, India is waiting for the "legal dust to settle" to ensure that any agreement reached is not immediately undermined by new U.S. legal maneuvers.
- **Specific Sectoral Friction:** Despite talk of a "deal," the U.S. recently slapped a **126% tariff on Indian solar modules**, citing non-cooperation by major Indian firms (Adani Group) in subsidy probes.

Historical Evolution of the Issue

Period	Milestone	Impact on India-U.S. Trade
Pre-2018	Strategic Partnership	Focus on defense and technology; trade remained stable but modest.
2018-2019	GSP Removal	U.S. removed India from the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), ending duty-free access for \$6B of Indian exports.
2024-2025	"Reciprocal" Era	Trump imposed broad 25-50% tariffs on various goods, including a 25% penal tariff on India for buying Russian oil.
Feb 6, 2026	Framework Agreement	Joint statement: U.S. removes 25% oil-related tariff; promises to drop total tariff from 50% to 18% in exchange for India buying \$500B in U.S. goods.
Feb 20, 2026	SCOTUS Ruling	The Supreme Court invalidates IEEPA tariffs, technically removing the 50% wall but creating a legal vacuum.

- **Linkages with NCERTs**
 - **Class 11 Political Science (Indian Constitution at Work):** Chapter on the Executive and Legislature (Separation of Powers).
 - **Class 12 Macroeconomics:** Chapter on Open Economy Macroeconomics (Balance of Payments and Exchange Rates).
 - **Class 12 Contemporary World Politics:** Chapter on US Hegemony and Global Trade.
-
- **All Previous Years' UPSC Questions**
 - **Mains 2021 (GS 2):** "The USA is facing an internal policy crisis regarding its role as a global leader. How does this affect India's strategic and economic interests?"
 - **Mains 2023 (GS 2):** "The growing convergence between India and the US is overshadowed by trade disputes. Discuss."
 - **Prelims 2020:** Question on the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP).

Why is the NEP undergrad course in chaos?

What are the challenges? Why are both students and teachers struggling with the fourth year schedule? Is there extra funding from UGC for the fourth year programme? What about infrastructure? Why are there frequent changes in guidelines? What lies ahead?

Priscilla Jebara

The story so far:

India's fledgling four-year undergraduate programme, recommended as part of the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 has reached a critical point, with the first students who opted for four-year degrees now in their final semester. The roll-out has been chaotic, as students and faculty cope with changing guidelines, uncertainty regarding learning outcomes, and a severe shortage of infrastructure, funding, and faculty.

What is the four year UG programme?

The NEP 2020 proposed a complete overhaul of higher education in India. Among the changes recommended was an expansion of the country's traditional three-year bachelors degree structure into four years, aligned with global standards, with an expanded curriculum intended to focus on flexibility, interdisciplinary learning, exposure to research, and skill development. Students would have multiple entry and exit options. After one year, they could get a certificate; after two years, a diploma; after three years, a Bachelor's degree; and after four years, a Bachelor's degree with honours, or options such as honours with a research or entrepreneurship focus.



'Students do not have sufficient training or access to proper material for their fourth year of research'

The University Grants Commission (UGC) issued its guidelines for this model, as part of its Curriculum and Credit Framework, in December 2022. Earlier that year, however, several universities had already started rolling out four-year programmes from the 2022-23 academic year, as part of the implementation of NEP, including top central universities such as Delhi University, Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), and Ambedkar University. There are thousands of students in these institutions now in their final semester of study. The Karnataka government also announced its own implementation of NEP, and launched four-year programmes across the State, in public and private institutions. A year later, the Union government announced that 105 universities would enrol students into four-year programmes in 2023-24, including 19 central universities, 22 State universities, 18 State private universities, and over 40 deemed-to-be universities.

What have been the challenges?

In Delhi University alone, 23,337 students are now in their fourth year, according to K. Ratnabali, Dean of Academic Affairs. About 13,000 of them have chosen to complete a dissertation or thesis, so that they can earn an honours with research degree. The rest of the students will complete extra coursework in their fourth year, including skill-based programmes, while a few hundred have opted for an entrepreneurship focus, or a translation or other academic projects. "The four-year Undergraduate Programme in its current form represents a mockery," says Maya John, an assistant professor at Jesus and Mary College, who is a member of DU's Academic Council. She says students are struggling with "unreasonable research outcomes" dictated by the university authorities, including the requirement for Scopus-indexed journal publications and presentations in international or national conferences. Dr. Ratnabali says this requirement has now been diluted, with the university willing to accept a paper presentation or submission, without actual publication. Students, however, complain that the constant changes in guidelines from the university, and individual

college departments have often been contradictory and disconcerting.

Students do not have sufficient training or access to proper materials for their fourth year of research, says Madhuri Sharma, who is part of the history faculty at Bharathi College, noting that undergraduates are not allowed research access to the Teen Murti library, the National Archives, or the National Museum, and have only restricted access even to DU's Central Reference Library. Moreover, "teachers are also overloaded, research supervision is not counted as part of their working hours," says Dr. Sharma.

"At AMU, over 90% of students stayed on for the fourth year in many subjects, leading to immense pressure on faculty and infrastructure," says Aftab Alam, a member of the Academic Council at AMU. "For science programmes, we simply do not have the requisite lab facilities to support undergraduate research. Faculty are continuously appealing for infrastructure and additional teachers, but there is no extra funding from UGC."

"The fourth year programme is an additional burden to both the student and the exchequer, simply to ape a western model. There is a commercial impetus from private universities, who simply want to get one more year of fees," says Navneet Sharma, an education professor at the Central University of Himachal Pradesh, who was also a member of the Karnataka State Education Policy task force that recommended a return to the traditional three-year degree programme in the State from 2024-2025 onwards. "Keeping a four-year degree programme would potentially reduce access to undergraduate education for the poor, the socially disadvantaged groups such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, women and students from rural areas," the Karnataka Education department said in its order to abandon the four-year programme.

What changes may help the next batch?

Dr. Alam suggested that UGC take feedback from faculty and students in the trenches of the four-year programme to adapt its guidelines to ground realities. Dr. Ratnabali agrees that more infrastructure, especially laboratories, are needed to make the four-year programme a success, and recommends that colleges apply for a HEFA (Higher Education Financing Agency) loan from the government before the start of the next academic year, and also seek funding from research agencies.

istockphoto



- **Key Terms and Explanations**


- **FYUP (Four-Year Undergraduate Programme):** A redesigned degree structure extending the traditional three-year course to four years to include research, vocational training, and interdisciplinary studies.

- **Multiple Entry and Exit Options (MEES):** A flexible system allowing students to leave with a *Certificate* (1 year), *Diploma* (2 years), *Bachelor's Degree* (3 years), or *Honours/Research Degree* (4 years).

- *Example:* A student facing financial hardship can exit after year two with a diploma and return years later to complete their degree.

- **HEFA (Higher Education Financing Agency):** A joint venture of the Ministry of Education and Canara Bank that provides financial assistance for creating capital assets in top educational institutions.

- **Scopus-indexed Journals:** An international database of high-quality, peer-reviewed journals. In the FYUP context, requiring undergraduates to publish here is considered a high academic bar.



- **Academic Bank of Credits (ABC):** A digital storehouse that contains the information of the credits earned by individual students throughout their learning journey.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The core thesis of the current debate is that while the **FYUP is conceptually sound** (aiming for global parity and holistic learning), its **execution is lagging** due to a "resource-policy gap."
- **The Global Parity Argument:** Proponents argue that a four-year degree makes Indian students more competitive for international Masters and PhD programs (which often require 16 years of formal education).
- **The Research Gap:** A major pillar of the 4th year is "Honours with Research." However, the article highlights that undergraduates lack access to premier archives (like the National Museum) and labs.
- **The Burden on Faculty:** Teachers are expected to supervise intense research projects without a reduction in their teaching workload or additional financial compensation.
- **The Funding Crisis:** There is a notable absence of direct UGC grants to support the extra year, forcing colleges to consider loans (HEFA), which might lead to fee hikes.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **Pre-Independence:** The British system established the 3-year model (London University style), focusing on creating "generalists" for colonial administration.
- **Kothari Commission (1964-66):** Recommended the 10+2+3 structure to standardize education across India.
- **National Policy on Education (1986):** Solidified the 3-year degree as the national norm.
- **The 2013 DU Experiment:** Delhi University briefly introduced FYUP in 2013, but it was scrapped in 2014 following intense protests over its "rushed" implementation.
- **NEP 2020:** Re-introduced the 4-year model as a national recommendation to foster a "multidisciplinary" approach.



- **Linkages with NCERTs**
 - **Class 12 Sociology (Social Change and Development in India):** Chapters on "Structural Change" and "Social Movements" (contextualizing how education policies shift societal structures).
 - **Class 11 Political Science (Indian Constitution at Work):** The "Federalism" chapter explains why the Center (UGC) and States often disagree on education.
-
- Previous Years' Questions (PYQs)
 - UPSC 2020 (GS2): "The quality of higher education in India requires major reforms to make it globally competitive. Discuss."
 - UPSC 2023 (GS2): "The National Education Policy 2020 is in conformity with the Sustainable Development Goal-4 (2030). Critically examine."
 - APSC 2022: "Discuss the role of NEP 2020 in transforming the higher education landscape of Assam."

Centre's focus shifts from selling PSUs to earning more from them

By removing a separate 'disinvestment' heading in budget documents, doubling down on asset monetisation, and focusing on dividends, the Union government's policy has shifted away from simply exiting doing business

NEWS ANALYSIS

J.C.A. Shreed Narayanan
New Delhi

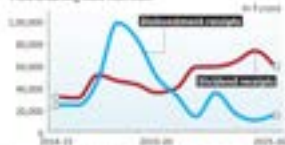
Despite having launched a re-stamped 'disinvestment policy' in 2023, the central government's focus has decisively shifted from selling off its assets to extracting the maximum value from them, an analysis of data shows. The recent launch of the national privatisation pipeline 2.0 marks an extension of this policy shift.

The Centre had in 2023 launched the Public Sector Enterprises Policy, under which it said it would exit all non-strategic sectors, and would retain a minimum presence in strategic ones. An analysis by The Hindu of data with the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management, however, shows that, except for a brief surge in 2023-25, revenue from disinvestment has been falling every year.

On the other hand, revenue from dividends from public sector companies has grown consistently every year. In addition, several other policy decisions — such as removing a separate heading for disinvestments in the budget documents, and pushing forward with the National Asset Monetisation Pipeline — show the focus has shifted to better utilisation

Changing priorities

The Centre's focus has shifted decisively from selling state-owned PSUs to earning more from them.



Source: Department of Investment and Public Asset Management

of existing assets. Back in 2020, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had categorically asserted that the government has "no business to be in business".

"When a government engages in business, it leads to losses," Mr. Modi said during a 2020 webinar organised by DIPAM. "The government is bound by rules and the lack of courage to take bold commercial decisions. It is the government's duty to support enterprises and businesses, but it is not essential that it should own and run enterprises."

More recently, in August 2023, Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary informed the Lok Sabha that the policy on strategic disinvestment or privatisation is based on the economic principle that the Government "should minimise presence in sectors" where the private sector has come of age and where

the economic potential of the public sector companies may be better realised in the hands of a stronger investor.

In 2022-23, the Central Government sold a portion of its stake in several PSUs such as Oil and Natural Gas Corporation, Life Insurance Corporation, GAIL India, and Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation. This saw earnings from disinvestment recover to ₹3,294 crore in 2022-23, snapping a four-year declining streak.

Not enough takers

Therefore, the government found it increasingly difficult to raise revenue through disinvestments. According to officials that had been in the Ministry of Finance at the time, the issue was that the private sector was not keen to buy public sector companies due to their large employee headcounts and

loss-making assets.

In fact, in the revised estimates for 2023-24, the Centre removed the separate header for disinvestments in the budget documents, instead clubbing them with several other capital receipts under the heading "Miscellaneous Capital Receipts". With that, the government no longer sets targets for disinvestment proceeds in any given year.

The revenue earned from disinvestments, as per the data compiled by the modal Department DIPAM, fell to ₹8,307.1 crore in 2023-24 and further to ₹9,043.02 crore in 2024-25. The government has so far earned ₹15,363.9 crore through disinvestments in 2025-26, with a much more to go in the financial year.

Pushing for more

On the other hand, the Centre has pushed ahead with its policy of maximising the dividends it can receive from its companies. In November 2020, DIPAM issued an advisory to the CEOs and Managing Directors of all central PSUs regarding a "consistent dividend policy".

"PSUs are advised to strive to pay higher dividends taking into account relevant factors like profitability, capex requirements with due leveraging cash/reserves and net worth," it said.

This was reiterated

through a November 2024 release of Revised Guidelines on Capital Restructuring of Central Public Sector Enterprises, in which DIPAM said "the Government seeks to emphasise on creating value in the PSUs in order to maximise returns for the Government and other shareholders."

The guidelines also sought to improve the performance and efficiency of the PSUs by providing them more operational and financial flexibility.

The government's dividend receipts, not counting what is received from public sector banks and the Reserve Bank of India, rose from ₹25,750 crore in 2020-21 to ₹4,128.61 crore by 2024-25. This amount stands at ₹9,730.6 crore in 2025-26 so far.

Stapling in private sector

In 2021, the government also launched the National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP) under which the government would lease out various assets held in public sector, without ownership, changing hands, with a target of earning ₹5 lakh crore from 2023-24 to 2024-25.

According to the government, it has achieved 90% of this goal. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on February 21 launched NMP 2.0 with the aim of earning about ₹6.72 lakh crore over the five-year period 2025-26 to 2029-30 through this route.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Public Sector Enterprises (PSEs):** Companies owned by the government. They are categorized into Strategic (e.g., Atomic energy, Space, Defence) and Non-strategic sectors.

- **Disinvestment:** The sale or liquidation of assets or stakes by the government in a PSE.

- *Example:* The government selling 5% of its shares in LIC to the public.

- **Strategic Disinvestment:** Selling a majority stake (50% or more) along with the transfer of management control to a private entity.

- *Example:* The sale of Air India to the Tata Group.

- **Asset Monetisation:** Transferring the revenue rights of a public asset (like a highway or a power line) to the private sector for a specific period in exchange for an upfront payment or shared revenue. The government retains ownership.

- *Example:* Leasing a government-owned stadium to a private sports club for 30 years.

- **National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP):** A four-year plan to unlock the value of "brownfield" (already developed) infrastructure assets.

- **Dividends:** A portion of a company's profit distributed to its shareholders. As the majority owner of CPSEs, the government receives a large share of these profits.

- **Capital Restructuring:** Reorganizing a company's assets and liabilities to make it more efficient. For CPSEs, this often means pushing them to use their cash reserves for either expansion or higher dividends.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The core thesis is that the Indian government has shifted from an **Exit Strategy** to a **Value-Creation Strategy**.

- **The Disinvestment Slowdown:** Despite the 2021 policy to exit non-strategic sectors, actual revenue from selling stakes has dwindled. Private buyers are often deterred by high employee costs and the "legacy baggage" of state-run firms.

- **Dividends as the New Revenue Engine:** Instead of selling the company, the government is demanding higher efficiency and higher payouts from profits. This provides a steady, recurring income stream for the Budget without the political or legal hurdles of privatisation.

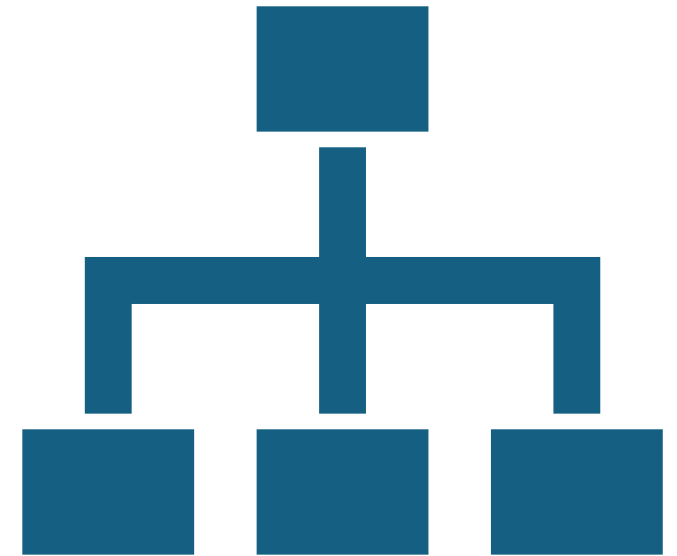
- **Monetisation over Privatisation:** NMP 2.0 suggests that the government prefers "leasing" over "selling." By letting the private sector manage assets (like railways or warehouses), the government gets efficiency gains and cash while keeping the underlying title of the asset.

- **The "No Business to be in Business" Paradox:** While the Prime Minister's philosophy leans toward a minimal government footprint, the practical reality shows the government is staying invested but acting more like a "demanding shareholder" than a "passive owner."



- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **Pre-1991 (Command Economy):** PSEs were the "temples of modern India." The focus was on the state commanding the "heights of the economy."
- **1991 Reforms:** Under LPG (Liberalisation, Privatisation, Globalisation), the first serious talks of disinvestment began to reduce the fiscal deficit.
- **Vajpayee Era (1999–2004):** A dedicated Ministry of Disinvestment was created. Major strategic sales occurred (e.g., BALCO, Hindustan Zinc).
- **UPA Era (2004–2014):** Shifted toward "Minority Stake Sale." The government kept 51% control but sold small portions to the public.
- **Modi 1.0 & 2.0 (2014–2024):** Initially aggressive on strategic sales (Air India). Later, the focus shifted to NMP and high-dividend mandates.
- **Current Phase (2025-26):** Disinvestment targets are no longer explicitly highlighted in the Budget; the focus is now on "Miscellaneous Capital Receipts" and NMP 2.0.



- **Linkages with NCERTs**
- **Class 11 Economics (Indian Economic Development):** Chapter 3 (Liberalisation, Privatisation, and Globalisation). Discusses the 1991 shift and the role of PSEs.
- **Class 12 Political Science:** Politics in India Since Independence (Chapter on Development). Discusses the shift from the Nehruvian model to the market model.

- **Previous Years' Questions (PYQs)**
- **UPSC 2020 (GS 3):** "Explain the meaning of investment objects in the context of a budget. What are the types of investment objects?"
- **UPSC 2017 (GS 3):** "The obsession of the government for different methods of disinvestment... needs to be seen in the light of the objective of the government."
- **UPSC 2021 (GS 3):** "Explain the rationale behind the National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP)."



A small piece of RNA copies itself, hinting at how life began

Scientists have reported the first evidence of a small RNA molecule that can make copies of itself; the molecule, dubbed QT45, strengthens RNA's case to be the earth's first genetic material, but doesn't prove it

Arun Panchapakesan

In a 1953 experiment, two scientists named Stanley Miller and Harold Urey attempted to recreate the conditions of the early earth long before life existed. They showed that organic molecules such as amino acids, the building blocks of proteins, could form spontaneously in the conditions that prevailed on a primitive earth, 3.5-4 billion years ago.

While the experiment was revolutionary, it did not settle the question of life's origins. Critics pointed out that while amino acids could form, there was still no sign of genetic material, i.e. neither DNA nor RNA. Living organisms don't merely contain proteins; they rely on genetic information encoded in DNA or RNA to build them. Demonstrating that proteins could arise was therefore only part of the story.

Importantly, life must be able to produce more life. For that, a primitive system would need genetic information and also a way to copy that information. This created a problem. Usually, DNA or RNA stores instructions to make proteins called polymerases. These polymerases then copy the DNA or RNA so that, when a cell divides, each new cell receives a complete set of genetic information. It was and remains a classic chicken-or-egg problem.

Then, in the early 1980s,



An illustration of the hammerhead ribozyme; QT45 is also a ribozyme
WILLIAM G. SCOTT/UCR/NSF

From matter to life

QT45 suggests self-replicating RNAs could be the way life first began on the earth

- The Miller-Urey experiment in 1953 showed that amino acids can form naturally but it didn't explain heredity
- Life needs a way to store and copy information, but scientists aren't sure which came first: genes or proteins
- Scientists have also found that RNA can do simple

chemical reactions, suggesting RNA could be the earliest genetic material

• Scientists also know that some RNA enzymes can copy other RNAs, but couldn't help RNAs make copies of themselves

• A new study in *Science* has found a short RNA called QT45 that can self-replicate, albeit very slowly

• QT45 is also imperfect, which means natural selection can act on it and help it 'evolve'

scientists discovered that RNA itself could perform simple chemical reactions, including being able to cut and paste pieces of itself. This discovery strongly shifted scientists' thinking towards the possibility that RNA could have been the earliest genetic material on the primitive earth. If a single molecule could both store information and carry out chemical reactions, it could bypass the chicken-and-egg problem of needing proteins to copy genetic material.

However, while scientists have already developed RNA molecules that could build other RNA molecules, they still lack an RNA that could copy the information contained within itself. The difficulty was structural: the RNA enzymes capable of copying other RNA were large and complex – between 150-

300 nucleotides – and in trying to fold into their functional shapes they could not easily serve as templates for their own replication. In other words, RNA could help other proteins replicate but couldn't self-replicate.

Now, however, in a paper in *Science*, scientists from the MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology in the U.K. have reported that they have generated a self-replicating RNA molecule. Specifically, the researchers produced a small RNA molecule, just 45 nucleotides long, that could copy its own genetic information.

To do this, they first sifted through enormous pools of RNA, building on earlier work with much larger RNA enzymes, and repeatedly selected those rare sequences that showed even faint signs of

replication. This led to the development of QT45, which is, according to the researchers, the world's first RNA molecule that can make copies of itself.

However, while the QT45 RNA can do this, its process of self-replication was extraordinarily slow and required special conditions. Producing a single full-length copy took weeks. In contrast, modern cellular polymerases can copy 45 nucleotides in less than a second.

Though the difference is dramatic, primitive earth had millions of years, so even QT45's stringent and slow copying conditions could realistically have occurred and been sustained.

Also, modern enzymes add nucleotides one at a time, reading the template, and making a new chain of complementary nucleo-

tides. QT45 used short three-nucleotide building blocks, even if it also followed the same logic: it first assembled a complementary negative strand, then used that as the template to reproduce the original copy.

However, the most striking, and in many ways the most beautiful, feature of the QT45 RNA was that it was imperfect. Its copying accuracy was only about 50-94%. This means it makes mistakes when replicating the genetic information, a property at the core of a true copying system. Every mistake creates variation, and variations are the raw material upon which natural selection can act.

While the development of the QT45 RNA is indeed a breakthrough, it is important to remember that while it strengthens RNA's case as the first genetic material, it doesn't prove it. QT45 merely shows that self-replicating RNA can exist and that that could be the way in which life on the earth first began.

The exact manner in which life originated may remain lost to history forever, but discoveries like QT45 show that inert matter can sometimes begin to behave like life. At the heart of it, it's just chemistry, slowly learning to remember itself.

Arun Panchapakesan is an assistant professor at the Y.R. Gaitonde Centre for AIDS Research and Education, Chennai.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **RNA (Ribonucleic Acid):** A nucleic acid present in all living cells. Unlike DNA, it is usually single-stranded. It acts as a messenger carrying instructions from DNA for controlling the synthesis of proteins.
- **Nucleotides:** The basic building blocks of nucleic acids (DNA and RNA). They consist of a sugar, a phosphate group, and a nitrogenous base.
 - *Example:* Think of nucleotides as individual letters that, when strung together, form a "sentence" or genetic code.
- **Polymerase:** An enzyme that synthesizes long chains of polymers or nucleic acids. In modern cells, these are proteins that "read" a template to build a new DNA or RNA strand.
- **The "Chicken-and-Egg" Problem (in Biology):** DNA needs proteins (enzymes) to replicate, but proteins need the instructions in DNA to be built. The paradox is: which came first?
- **QT45:** A synthetic RNA molecule, 45 nucleotides long, capable of self-replication. It is "ribozyme"—an RNA molecule that acts like an enzyme.
- **Template and Negative Strand:** In replication, the original strand (template) is used to create a mirror image (negative strand). This negative strand is then used to recreate the original sequence.



- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **The Core Thesis**

- The discovery of QT45 provides experimental evidence that a small, simple RNA molecule can serve both as a storage unit for genetic information and as the machinery to copy that information, potentially solving the mystery of how life began without complex proteins.

- **Supporting Evidence**

- **Structural Simplicity:** Previous synthetic RNAs were too large (150–300 nucleotides) to be "templates" because they folded into complex shapes. QT45 is small enough to be copied while remaining functional.

- **Replication Logic:** QT45 uses a two-step process (creating a negative strand first) which mirrors the fundamental logic of all known life.

- **Constructive Error Rate:** With a 92-94% accuracy, the molecule is "imperfect." These errors allow for mutations, which are the engine of Darwinian evolution.

- **Counterarguments and Limitations**

- **Speed:** QT45 takes weeks to do what modern cells do in a second.

- **Building Blocks:** It requires "trimers" (three-nucleotide blocks) rather than single nucleotides, suggesting a specific environment was necessary.

- **Proof vs. Possibility:** The experiment proves such a molecule *can* exist, but it does not prove this is exactly how Earth's first life originated.



- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
- **1953 (Miller-Urey Experiment):** Demonstrated that organic molecules (amino acids) could form from inorganic precursors under "primitive Earth" conditions.
- **1960s (The RNA World Hypothesis):** Scientists like Carl Woese and Francis Crick proposed that RNA preceded DNA because of its versatility.
- **1980s (Discovery of Ribozymes):** Thomas Cech and Sidney Altman discovered that RNA could catalyze chemical reactions. This won the Nobel Prize and proved RNA wasn't just a "messenger."
- **2000s–Present:** Research has focused on creating "Synthetic Life" or "Protocells" in labs to replicate the transition from chemistry to biology.
- **2024/2025 (Discovery of QT45):** The first instance of a small, potentially "pre-biotic" RNA showing self-replication.



Linkages with NCERTs

Class 12 Biology (Chapter 6: Molecular Basis of Inheritance): Discusses the structure of RNA and the "RNA World" hypothesis.

Class 12 Biology (Chapter 7: Evolution): Discusses the Miller-Urey experiment and the origin of life.

Class 11 Chemistry (Chapter 14: Biomolecules): Explains the chemical structure of nucleic acids.

Previous Years' UPSC Questions

Prelims (2012): Which of the following are the characteristics of RNA? (Basic structure and function).

Mains (2019, GS3): "How is science interwoven deeply with our lives? What are the striking changes in agriculture triggered by science-based technologies?" (Can be adapted to "Evolutionary Science").

Mains (2013, GS3): Discussion on the "Origin of Life" is often a background theme for questions on Biotechnology.

Nine Botswana cheetahs released into Kuno park

India's total cheetah population touches 48; this is the third batch of big cats to be brought from Africa as part of a reintroduction programme; 21 of these animals had died at the national park

Mehul Malgani
BHOPAL

In a major boost to India's cheetah reintroduction programme, nine cheetahs, translocated from Botswana, were released into their enclosures at the Kuno National Park (KNP) in Madhya Pradesh on Saturday by Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change Bhupender Yadav.

With the release of the six females and three males, the total cheetah population in India has gone up to 48. Of them, 28 are Indian-born cubs and 20 are adults translocated from African nations as part of the Union government's Project Cheetah.

Mr. Yadav said that this was the third batch of cheetahs to arrive from an African nation after the first batch of eight big cats from Namibia in September 2022, and another 12 from South Africa in February 2023. "We have had many challenges in this project such as their immunity and survival and helping them adapt to the local habitat. But our forest officials, the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), our veterinarians and scientists here [at Kuno] and especially locals from nearby



New ahead: Cheetahs from Botswana being released in the presence of Union Minister Bhupender Yadav and forest officials at the Kuno National Park in Sheopur on Saturday. @irvonsaur

areas around Kuno by becoming 'cheetah mitra' worked to preserve cheetahs in this region," the Union Minister said.

The nine cheetahs had been officially donated to India during President Droupadi Murmu's visit to Botswana in November last year and had been in quarantine at the African nation's Mokolodi nature reserve. They were airlifted by the Indian Air Force (IAF) to the Gwalior Air Base, and were further flown to the KNP on two IAF helicopters.

Kuno field director and Project Cheetah director

Uttam Kumar Sharma told *The Hindu* that the cheetahs will undergo a mandatory quarantine for minimum one month in quarantine bomas or special enclosures at the KNP.

Continuous monitoring

"Tracking collars have been put around their necks. We have formed special teams consisting of two veterinarians and other staff members who will visit the big cats twice a day to monitor their health and how they are adapting to local conditions," Mr. Sharma said.

Since the beginning of

the ambitious programme, 21 cheetahs – nine translocated adults and 12 Indian-born cubs – had died at Kuno from various causes.

Asked about any changes to the staff's approach now, Mr. Sharma said, "We have learnt a lot of things in the past three-and-a-half years. Our staff have done this in the past and know the whole procedure. We are an experienced team."

Apart from the 45 cheetahs at Kuno, three translocated adults are at the Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh's Mandla and Neemuch districts.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Project Cheetah:** The world's first intercontinental large wild carnivore translocation project. It aims to re-establish the cheetah in its historical range in India.
- **Translocation:** The deliberate movement of organisms from one site for release in another. *Example: Moving cheetahs from Botswana to Kuno.*
- **Quarantine Boma:** A temporary, secure enclosure where animals are kept to monitor health and prevent disease transmission before full release.
- **Cheetah Mitra (Cheetah Friends):** A community engagement initiative where local villagers are trained to sensitize the public, prevent man-animal conflict, and protect the cats.
- **In-situ vs. Ex-situ Conservation:** *In-situ* is conservation in the natural habitat (Kuno); *Ex-situ* would be in zoos or captive breeding centers.
- **Tracking Collars (GPS/Satellite):** Devices fitted on the animals to monitor movements in real-time, essential for studying adaptation and ensuring safety.





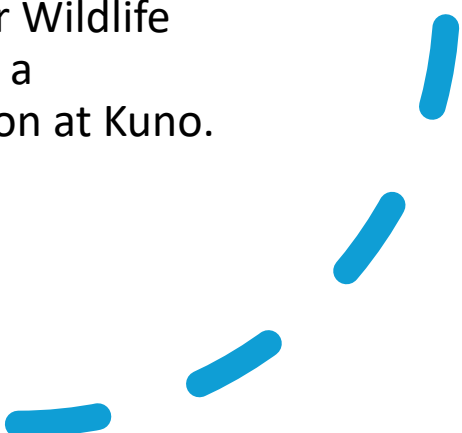
- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The core premise of the current phase is that **diversifying the genetic pool** and increasing the founder population are essential for a self-sustaining colony.

- **Population Dynamics:** With the addition of nine Botswana cheetahs, the total count stands at 48. Crucially, 28 of these are Indian-born cubs, suggesting that the animals are physically capable of breeding in the Indian climate.

- **Adaptation Challenges:** The project has faced high mortality (21 deaths). Arguments focus on whether these deaths are "infant mortality" typical of new projects or systemic failures in habitat suitability.

- **Expansion of Habitat:** The mention of Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary indicates a shift from a single-site model to a "metapopulation" model to prevent over-concentration at Kuno.



- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **1947-1952:** The Asiatic Cheetah was hunted to extinction in India. Maharaja Ramanuj Pratap Singh Deo of Koriya is credited with shooting the last three.
- **1952:** The Cheetah was officially declared extinct in India.
- **1970s:** Initial talks with Iran to trade Asiatic Lions for Asiatic Cheetahs failed due to the Iranian Revolution.
- **2009-2010:** The "Action Plan for Introduction of Cheetah in India" was drafted under the UPA government.
- **2013-2020:** Legal hurdles in the Supreme Court regarding the introduction of an "alien species" versus the priority of the Asiatic Lion.
- **2020:** The Supreme Court allowed the project on an experimental basis.
- **2022-Present:** Arrival of batches from Namibia (8), South Africa (12), and now Botswana (9).



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