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Govt. firm on norms against transpersons giving blood

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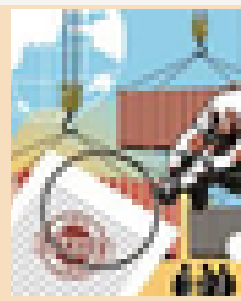


Beijing adopts ethnic unity law that 'erodes' minority rights and cements assimilation

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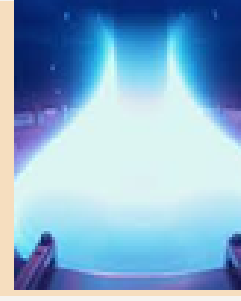
U.S. begins probing 'discriminatory trade policies' against India

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UPSC Spotlight - focus page for prelims 2026

The Pala Civil Times special feature



NEW SUPREME LEADER OF IRAN VOWS TO KEEP STRAIT OF HORMUZ SHUT



Iran's new Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei called on neighbouring Arab states to close U.S. military bases and warned that Iran could keep the Strait of Hormuz blocked. Iranian leadership has demanded recognition of Iran's rights, payment of reparations for war-related losses, and guarantees against future attacks as conditions for ending hostilities. Reports indicate that the number of vessels transiting the strait has dropped sharply amid Iranian targeting of cargo ships and concerns about possible mining of the waterway by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Iranian officials have also stated that if the conflict continues, additional fronts could emerge through allied non-state actors in the region, including groups such as Hezbollah. Meanwhile, Iran continues to maintain that, as a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, it considers nuclear enrichment a legitimate right.

TO AVOID ATTACKS, SHIPS PASSING STRAIT OF HORMUZ POSE AS 'CHINESE'

Escalating tensions following the killing of Ali Khamenei and the rise of Mojtaba Khamenei have heightened risks around the Strait of Hormuz, a passage carrying about 20-34% of global oil trade. Iranian actions, including targeting vessels and possible mining by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, have sharply reduced shipping traffic. Reflecting rising security concerns, some commercial ships have begun declaring themselves "China-linked" in maritime tracking signals to reduce the likelihood of attacks while transiting the Gulf. The disruption highlights growing vulnerabilities in global energy supply chains and maritime trade routes. Prolonged instability could lead to higher shipping insurance costs and energy price volatility, affecting global markets and energy security.

Govt. firm on norms against transpersons giving blood

A legal debate has emerged before the Supreme Court of India over the Union government's 2017 blood donation guidelines that exclude transgender persons, men who have sex with men (MSM), and female sex workers from donating blood. Representing the government, the Additional Solicitor General argued that the policy is based on expert medical advice and treats these categories as "at-risk groups," maintaining that public health considerations must sometimes take precedence over individual rights to ensure the safety of the blood supply.

Background

A constitutional challenge has been raised before the Supreme Court of India against the "Guidelines on Blood Donor Selection and Blood Donor Referral, 2017." These guidelines were issued by the National Blood Transfusion Council and the National AIDS Control Organisation under the Union Health Ministry. The rules place a permanent restriction on blood donation by transgender persons, men who have sex with men (MSM), female sex workers, and LGBTQI individuals, categorising them as higher-risk groups for transfusion-transmissible infections.

Government's Position: Public Health Concerns

The Union government has defended the policy, arguing that it is based on expert committee recommendations and is intended to safeguard the safety of the blood supply. According to the government, certain population groups are considered "at risk," and precautionary restrictions are necessary to minimise the chances of infections entering the blood transfusion system. The court also remarked during the proceedings that the petitions could amount to "luxury litigation," though it agreed to examine the matter further.



Petitioners' Arguments: Equality and Scientific Advances

Senior Advocate Jayna Kothari, appearing for the petitioners, argued that the reasoning of the expert committee has not been adequately placed on record and that the rules discriminate against individuals based solely on sexuality and gender identity. The petitioners contend that the guidelines reflect outdated assumptions dating back to early HIV-related restrictions introduced in the 1980s in countries such as the United States. They point out that many countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Israel, have since revised their policies to remove blanket bans and instead rely on individual risk assessments.

Scientific and Constitutional Debate

The case highlights a broader debate between public health precaution and individual equality rights. Petitioners argue that modern medical screening techniques test every blood donation for infections before transfusion, making blanket exclusions unnecessary. The government, however, maintains that broader restrictions are justified as a precautionary public health measure. The court has agreed to examine the issue in detail, placing the matter at the intersection of scientific evidence, constitutional rights, and public health policy.

Beijing adopts ethnic unity law that 'erodes' minority rights and cements assimilation

China's legislature, the National People's Congress, passed the Promoting Ethnic Unity and Progress Law on March 12, 2026, reinforcing the assimilation-oriented ethnic policy promoted under Xi Jinping. The law aims to strengthen a shared national identity across the country's diverse communities and requires all state institutions, private enterprises, armed forces and social organisations to actively promote "ethnic unity." Key provisions include expanding the use of Mandarin (Putonghua) as the national common language in education, administration and public life, requiring preschool children to become proficient in it, and mandating that Chinese characters be displayed more prominently than minority scripts where both appear. The law also creates a legal basis to prosecute individuals or organisations — including those outside China — if their actions are considered harmful to ethnic unity.

China officially recognises 55 ethnic minority groups, which together account for about 8.9% of its 1.4 billion population, while the majority belongs to the Han ethnic group. The Chinese Constitution guarantees ethnic groups the right to use and develop their own languages and promises limited autonomy through the Law on Regional Ethnic Autonomy. However, observers argue that the new law may override these earlier provisions in practice. Critics warn that policies encouraging migration and integration between Han and minority communities could weaken minority identities and traditional neighbourhoods. Scholars such as James Leibold describe the legislation as part of a broader shift in China's ethnic governance framework that places greater emphasis on national integration rather than symbolic regional autonomy.

India co-sponsors resolution at UNSC condemning Iran's attacks on Gulf nations

Amid escalating tensions in West Asia, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2817, condemning attacks attributed to Iran against members of the Gulf Cooperation Council and Jordan. The resolution was adopted with 13 votes in favour and abstentions by China and Russia, while none voted against. India joined over 130 countries as a co-sponsor of the Bahrain-led resolution, which reaffirmed support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Gulf states such as Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. It also demanded the immediate cessation of attacks and urged Iran to avoid threats or provocations toward neighbouring countries.

The resolution further emphasised the importance of freedom of navigation under international law, particularly in key maritime chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab al-Mandab, which are critical to global trade and energy supplies. It condemned attacks on civilian areas and called for adherence to international humanitarian law.



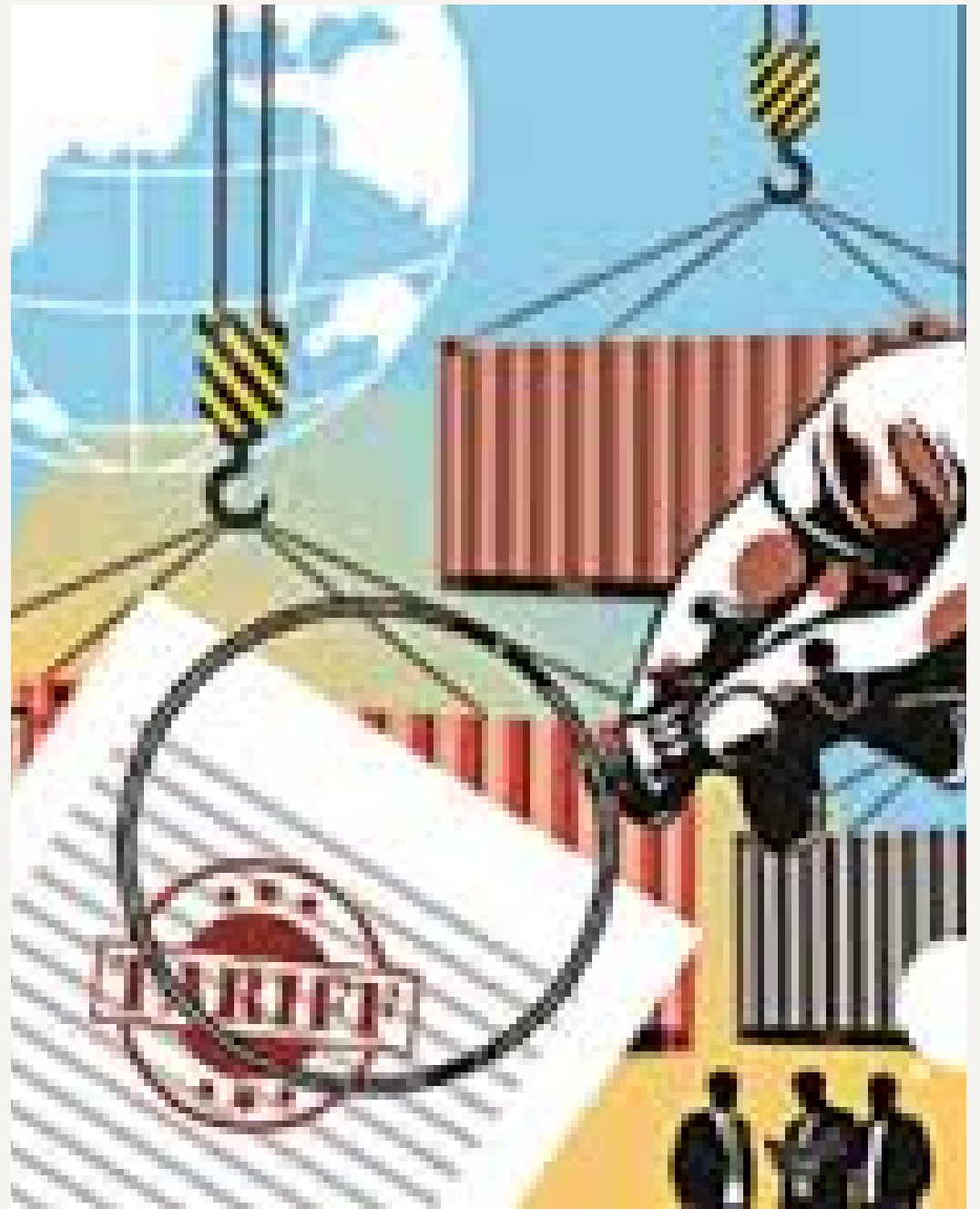
Exporters seek priority allocation of LPG, natural gas for manufacturing units

The ongoing conflict in West Asia has begun to generate secondary economic effects on global production and trade, particularly through disruptions in energy supply chains. The crisis, triggered by joint military action by the United States and Israel against Iran, has created uncertainty in the supply of fuels such as LPG and natural gas. In response to tightening supply conditions, the Government of India revised its domestic natural gas allocation priorities, placing LPG production, CNG and piped cooking gas at the top. This has raised concerns among industrial exporters who rely on these fuels as critical inputs in manufacturing processes.

The Federation of Indian Export Organisations has urged the government to ensure priority allocation of LPG and natural gas to export-oriented units (EOUs) and export-oriented SMEs. According to industry representatives, uninterrupted fuel supply is essential to maintain production schedules and meet strict delivery timelines demanded by global buyers. Export industries operate within highly structured global supply chains where delays can quickly lead international purchasers to shift orders to competing manufacturing hubs such as China and other East Asian economies. Manufacturers have warned that continued fuel shortages could disrupt factory operations, weaken export competitiveness, and undermine India's credibility as a reliable sourcing destination. Ensuring stable industrial fuel supply during geopolitical crises is therefore seen as crucial for safeguarding export orders, maintaining employment in manufacturing sectors, and protecting India's position in global trade networks.



U.S. begins probing 'discriminatory trade policies' against India



The United States has initiated investigations into the trade practices of 16 economies, including India, under Section 301(b) of the Trade Act of 1974. The move was announced by the Office of the United States Trade Representative following a ruling by the Supreme Court of the United States that struck down earlier reciprocal tariffs imposed by the administration of Donald Trump. As a temporary measure, the U.S. imposed a 10% tariff on imports for 150 days while exploring alternative trade actions.

The investigation cites concerns about structural excess capacity and trade imbalances, noting that India recorded a \$58 billion trade surplus with the U.S. in 2025. Sectors such as textiles, engineering goods, steel, and solar modules have been highlighted. Experts note that the inquiry could lead to new tariffs once the temporary measures expire, potentially affecting export-oriented industries. Other economies under investigation include China, the European Union, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Mexico, and Bangladesh.

Prelims 2026 Most Probable High-Yield Topics

Steady-state Superconducting Tokamak-Bharat (SST-Bharat)

Scientists working on the EAST Tokamak recently achieved stable plasma at densities 1.3–1.65 times above the Greenwald density limit, a long-standing theoretical limit on plasma density. India's long-term ambition is to develop a full-scale fusion demonstration reactor by around 2060, capable of generating about 250 MW of power and achieving a Q value of around 20, a level considered necessary for commercially viable fusion energy.

What is Nuclear Fusion?

Fusion is the process in which two light atomic nuclei combine to form a heavier nucleus, releasing enormous energy (the process powering stars).

- Requires extreme temperature (~100 million °C) and high plasma density.
- Achieved mainly through:
 - **Magnetic confinement (tokamaks)**
 - **Inertial confinement (laser-driven fusion)**

Fusion is considered the “holy grail” of clean energy because it produces minimal long-lived radioactive waste compared with fission.

Key Scientific Conditions for Fusion

The performance of a fusion reactor depends on the triple product:

Density × Temperature × Confinement Time

- Density – number of fuel particles in plasma
- Temperature – energy needed for nuclei to overcome repulsion
- Confinement time – duration plasma remains stable

Achieving sufficiently high values leads to ignition (self-sustaining fusion).

Important Concepts in Tokamak Fusion

Greenwald Density Limit

- A theoretical limit on maximum plasma density in tokamak reactors.
- Crossing the limit traditionally caused plasma disruption, damaging reactors.

However, recent developments have exceeded this limit in a non-disruptive manner.

Recent Breakthrough

Scientists working on the EAST Tokamak achieved stable plasma at 1.3–1.65× the Greenwald limit, suggesting density limits may be extendable.

Key enabling factors:

- Electron Cyclotron Resonance Heating (ECRH) – microwave heating of electrons.
- Lithium-coated tungsten walls reducing impurities.
- Cooler divertor region (plasma-wall interaction zone).

The results support **Plasma-Wall Self-Organisation (PWSO) theory**, which predicts a “density-free regime” allowing densities beyond the classical limit.

International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER)

- ITER is the world's largest fusion research project, currently being constructed in France as a collaborative international effort.
- The reactor follows the magnetic confinement approach to hold extremely hot plasma in powerful magnetic fields.
- The project aims to achieve a Q value of 10, meaning the reactor should produce ten times more fusion power than the energy required to heat and sustain the plasma.
- Achieving this would demonstrate that burning plasma — a state where fusion reactions largely sustain themselves — is technologically achievable.
- ITER is a multinational scientific collaboration involving the **European Union, India, China, Russia, Japan, the United States, and South Korea**, pooling expertise, funding, and advanced engineering capabilities to accelerate fusion research.

Prelims 2026 Most Probable High-Yield Topics

Leading National / Regional Tokamak Facilities

EAST Tokamak – China

- Located in Hefei.
- Known for record plasma temperatures and long-duration experiments.
- Recently exceeded the Greenwald density limit in stable plasma experiments.

WEST Tokamak – France

- Operated by the French atomic energy agency.
- Achieved ~22 minutes plasma confinement in 2025, one of the longest sustained plasma operations.

Joint European Torus – United Kingdom

- Located at Culham.
- Produced the highest fusion energy output so far and achieved $Q \approx 0.67$.

India's Fusion Energy Ambitions

India's fusion research is led by the **Institute for Plasma Research (IPR)**.

- India is a full partner in the international fusion project ITER in France.

Current Experimental Facility

- SST-1 Tokamak (Steady-State Superconducting Tokamak-1)
- India's present experimental fusion reactor.
- Has produced plasma confinement for about 650 milliseconds.
- Designed to eventually sustain plasma for up to 16 minutes.
- Serves as a research platform to study plasma behaviour under strong magnetic fields.

Proposed Next-Generation Reactor

- SST-Bharat (Steady-state Superconducting Tokamak-Bharat)
 - Proposed next step beyond SST-1.
 - Estimated construction cost: ₹25,000 crore.
 - Planned as a fusion–fission hybrid reactor.
 - Total power output: ~130 MW.
 - About 100 MW expected from fission support.
 - Initial target Q value ≈ 5 (five times more energy output than input).

Prelims model questions

1. With reference to the Greenwald Density Limit in nuclear fusion research, consider the following statements:

1. It represents the theoretical maximum plasma density that can be stably confined in a tokamak reactor.
2. Exceeding this limit usually leads to plasma disruption that can damage the reactor.
3. Scientists at the EAST Tokamak have recently achieved stable plasma significantly beyond this limit.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: d) 1, 2 and 3

2. With reference to nuclear fusion reactors, the term “Q value” refers to:

- a) The ratio of neutron production to proton production in a fusion reaction
- b) The ratio of energy output from fusion reactions to the energy input used to sustain the plasma
- c) The ratio of plasma density to plasma temperature in a tokamak reactor
- d) The ratio of magnetic confinement time to plasma heating time

Answer: b)

PRELIMS CORNER :

1) With reference to the book "Desh Katha" written by Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar during the freedom struggle, Consider the following statements :

1. It warned against the Colonial State's hypnotic conquest of the mind.
2. It inspired the performance of swadeshi street plays and folk songs.
3. The use of 'desh' by Deuskar was in the specific context of the region of Bengal.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

2) Which among the following events happened earliest? (2018)

- (a) Swami Dayanand established Arya Samaj.
- (b) Dinabandhu Mitra wrote Neel Darpan.
- (c) Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay wrote Anandmath.
- (d) Satyendranath Tagore became the first Indian to succeed in the Indian Civil Services Examination.

PRELIMS 2026 COUNTDOWN

72 DAYS TO GO

When a Distant Strait Reaches Your Doorstep



Sometimes global events travel quietly into everyday life. A disruption thousands of kilometres away in the Strait of Hormuz—through which nearly 90% of India's LPG imports pass—has begun to ripple through India's restaurant kitchens. With commercial LPG supplies tightening, many eateries are cutting down menus or temporarily slowing operations. Since most restaurants keep only two to six days of gas inventory, even a short disruption can affect cooking within a couple of days.

The effects are already being noticed in the digital food economy. Platforms like Swiggy and Zomato may see a temporary moderation in orders as restaurants struggle with fuel availability. A small restaurant typically uses one or two commercial LPG cylinders a day, while larger kitchens consume several more—making gas supply as vital as ingredients themselves.

It is a quiet reminder of how deeply everyday life is linked to global supply chains. A conflict affecting energy routes in West Asia can, in subtle ways, shape something as ordinary as what arrives at our doorstep for dinner. In an interconnected world, the story of globalisation often unfolds not only in markets and diplomacy—but also in kitchens and delivery apps.

Prelims Corner: Explanations

1) Answer is option a

Deshar Katha was written by Sakharan Ganesh Deuskar during the early phase of the Swadeshi movement. The book strongly criticised British economic exploitation and warned Indians about the colonial state's "mental" domination, encouraging national awakening. It also inspired Swadeshi cultural activism, including street plays and patriotic songs promoting indigenous goods. However, Deuskar used the term "desh" to mean the Indian nation as a whole, not merely the region of Bengal.



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2) Answer is option b

Chronology of Events

1. Neel Darpan – 1858–59

- Written by Dinabandhu Mitra.
- The play exposed the exploitation of indigo cultivators by European planters in Bengal.
- It gained prominence during the Indigo Revolt (1859–60) and helped raise public awareness about colonial oppression.

2. Satyendranath Tagore clears the ICS examination – 1863

- He became the first Indian to qualify for the Indian Civil Services.
- He formally joined the service in 1864, marking a significant step in Indian participation in colonial administration.

3. Arya Samaj founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati – 1875

- Established in Bombay (Mumbai).
- The organisation aimed at reviving Vedic ideals and promoting social reform, including opposition to caste discrimination and child marriage.

4. Anandamath – 1882

- Written by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay.
- Set against the background of the Sannyasi rebellion of the late eighteenth century.
- The novel includes the patriotic song Vande Mataram, which later became an important symbol of Indian nationalism.

Correct Chronological Order

- Neel Darpan – 1858–59
- Satyendranath Tagore clears ICS – 1863
- Arya Samaj founded – 1875
- Anandamath published – 1882

Therefore, the earliest event among the options is (b) Dinabandhu Mitra wrote Neel Darpan.