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The Pala Civil Times special feature



US ATTACK ON **KHARG ISLAND**



Heavy bombing has been reported on Kharg Island on March 14, an eight-kilometre-long coral island in the Persian Gulf located about 50 km from mainland Iran. The attack occurred during the ongoing military operations involving the United States and Israel. According to statements by Donald Trump, the strikes targeted military installations on the island, while oil infrastructure was deliberately spared for the moment. The United States also indicated that its navy may escort oil tankers moving through the nearby Strait of Hormuz to ensure safe passage of shipping. Kharg Island holds major strategic importance because it serves as Iran's primary oil export terminal, handling a large share of the country's crude shipments. Any direct attack on its oil storage facilities or export pipelines could disrupt nearly 90% of Iran's crude exports, severely affecting global oil supply.

NOT READY FOR DEAL, MIGHT HIT KHARG 'FOR FUN', SAYS TRUMP

Tensions around Kharg Island have escalated further as the conflict between United States, Israel, and Iran intensifies. Donald Trump stated that Washington is not ready to negotiate a peace deal with Tehran and warned that additional strikes on Iranian coastal targets, including Kharg Island, could continue. Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi rejected claims that Tehran is seeking negotiations and alleged that U.S. bases in West Asia were used in attacks on Iran's oil export hub. Meanwhile, calls by the United States for other countries to deploy warships to secure shipping routes through the Strait of Hormuz have not yet received firm commitments.

The situation has also triggered direct military exchanges between Iran and Israel.

Nor'wester wreaks havoc in Odisha



A Nor'wester thunderstorm struck the Karanjia area of Mayurbhanj district in Odisha, causing strong winds, heavy rain, lightning, and significant damage. Nor'westers are pre-monsoon convective storms commonly associated with the Indian monsoon circulation and seasonal wind patterns in eastern India. The State government has announced an ex-gratia of ₹4 lakh for the victims.

Some Famous Local Storms of Hot Weather Season

(i) Mango Shower : Towards the end of summer, there are pre-monsoon showers which are a common phenomena in Kerala and coastal areas of Karnataka. Locally, they are known as mango showers since they help in the early ripening of mangoes.

(ii) Blossom Shower : With this shower, coffee flowers blossom in Kerala and nearby areas.

(iii) Nor Westers : These are dreaded evening thunderstorms in Bengal and Assam. Their notorious nature can be understood from the local nomenclature of 'Kalbaisakhi', a calamity of the month of Baisakh. These showers are useful for tea, jute and rice cultivation. In Assam, these storms are known as "Bardoli Chheerha".

(iv) Loo : Hot, dry and oppressing winds blowing in the Northern plains from Punjab to Bihar with higher intensity between Delhi and Patna.

Resign if you can't enforce rule of law, Allahabad HC tells Sambhal DM, SP

The Allahabad High Court has taken a stern view of restrictions imposed by district authorities in Sambhal, Uttar Pradesh, on the number of worshippers allowed to offer prayers at a mosque during Ramadan. The case arose after a petitioner alleged that the administration permitted only 20 people to offer namaz, citing possible law-and-order concerns. The court rejected the State's justification and observed that individuals have the right to worship peacefully on private property without requiring State permission, and that administrative authorities must ensure law and order rather than restrict religious practices. It also directed the local Superintendent of Police and District Magistrate to either enforce the rule of law effectively or consider resignation or transfer if they felt incapable of doing so.

The episode highlights the practical tension district administrations often face between maintaining law and order and facilitating the exercise of religious freedoms. Local authorities frequently take preventive measures when they anticipate communal or public order concerns, but such decisions must remain consistent with constitutional protections. In this case, the Allahabad High Court emphasised that the responsibility of the State is not merely to avoid disturbances but to actively ensure that lawful religious practices can take place peacefully.

At the same time, the situation illustrates the broader role of the judiciary in reviewing administrative actions to ensure they conform to the principle of rule of law and protection of fundamental rights. Courts often step in when executive decisions are perceived to disproportionately restrict civil liberties, thereby reinforcing constitutional governance. Such interventions underscore the continuing balance in India's administrative system between preventive governance by district authorities and constitutional oversight by the judiciary.

Myanmar civil war drives drugs epidemic in northern frontiers of Thailand

What happened?

Northern Thailand, particularly the border areas of the Golden Triangle, has seen a surge in drug-related challenges following Myanmar's 2021 military coup and ongoing civil war. **Opium and methamphetamine** production has risen sharply, with traffickers smuggling drugs into Thailand, causing usage rates in the northern provinces to triple over five years. Hill-tribe communities, especially the **Lahu**, are disproportionately affected, with many turning to opium farming, low-level trafficking, or addiction due to limited economic opportunities and language barriers. Thai authorities have increased border patrols and crackdowns, seizing large quantities of drugs, but the porous border and presence of armed groups complicate enforcement.

Why it matters?

The situation underscores the human and social costs of cross-border instability, where civil conflict in Myanmar directly impacts public health, security, and livelihoods in Thailand. It highlights the vulnerability of marginalized communities to exploitative economies like drug production and trafficking. The spike in drug use and production poses challenges for governance, law enforcement, and community development, emphasizing the need for coordinated cross-border policy, socioeconomic support for affected populations, and long-term strategies to reduce reliance on illicit economies.



Sri Lanka adopts QR code-based fuel sales, calls it 'precautionary measure'



Sri Lanka has reintroduced a digital QR code-based fuel rationing system as a precautionary measure due to geopolitical instability in West Asia affecting global energy supply chains. Authorities reported an abnormal rise in fuel demand and declining domestic fuel stocks, prompting the government to regulate consumption to ensure continuity of economic activities. Under the new system, vehicle owners must register to obtain a QR code used at fuel stations, with weekly quotas fixed at 15 litres for cars and 5 litres for motorbikes. The system was previously used during the 2022 economic crisis when severe fuel shortages occurred. The decision reflects the vulnerability of Sri Lanka's energy security to external geopolitical shocks, especially disruptions linked to tensions near key oil routes such as the Strait of Hormuz. The government has also explored remote working to reduce national fuel consumption. Sri Lanka has received assurance of continued supply from the Indian Oil Corporation, whose subsidiary Lanka IOC controls about 20% of the island's fuel retail market. The development highlights the broader economic implications of the West Asian crisis, including supply-chain disruptions, energy insecurity, and the need for demand-management strategies in import-dependent economies.

34 cr LPG consumers: Average household use half cylinder per month

Amid the ongoing energy crisis linked to tensions in West Asia, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas data shows that the consumption of LPG has increased dramatically over the past three decades, reflecting the country's transition toward cleaner cooking fuels. According to data released by the Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell under the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, LPG consumption rose from 446 thousand metric tonnes (TMT) in 1998–99 to about 2,754 TMT in 2025–26, marking a six-fold increase. The highest growth occurred during the 2000s and 2010s, when annual consumption increased by about 8–11%.

Role of the Ujjwala Scheme

A major turning point came with the launch of the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) in 2016. The scheme aims to provide free LPG connections and subsidised cylinders to poor households, particularly in rural areas. Following its launch, LPG consumption recorded a 10.1% growth in 2016–17, indicating rapid adoption of clean cooking fuel among previously underserved populations. Today, India has about 33.37 crore LPG consumers, including 10.56 crore PMUY beneficiaries. By the end of 2024, around 80% of the beneficiaries were from rural households, demonstrating the programme's strong rural outreach.

State-Level Distribution

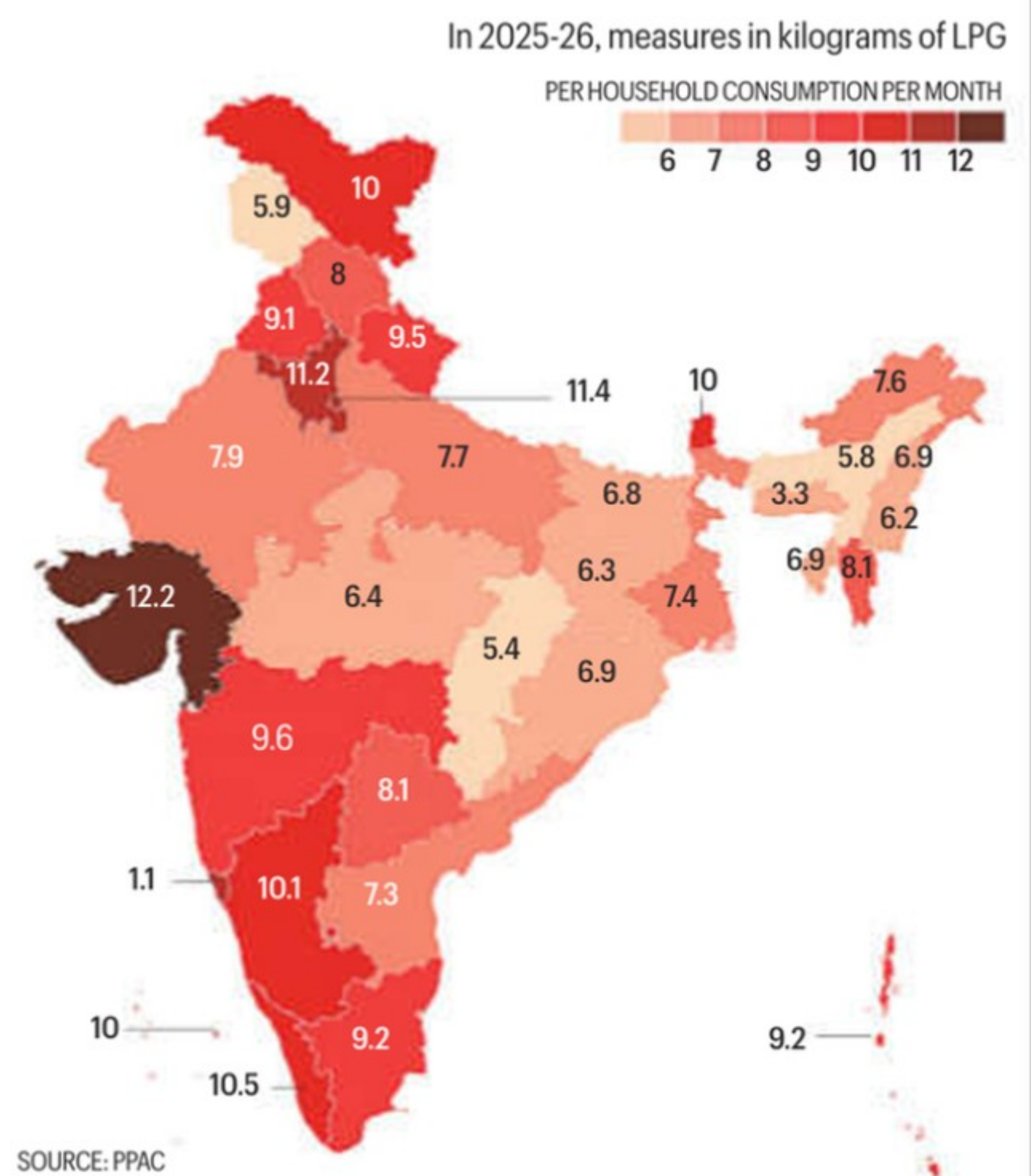
States with large populations and high rural shares account for the largest number of LPG consumers.

- Uttar Pradesh – about 4.87 crore consumers (around 15% of India's total)
- Maharashtra – about 3.2 crore
- West Bengal – about 2.72 crore
- Tamil Nadu – about 2.4 crore
- Bihar – about 2.33 crore
- Karnataka – about 1.9 crore

Under PMUY specifically, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan have the largest number of beneficiaries, largely because these states have higher rural population shares.

India's rising Liquefied Petroleum Gas consumption highlights a transition toward cleaner cooking energy driven by the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, though lower rural usage shows that affordability and behavioural factors still limit full adoption.

• Average household consumption of LPG



Despite large numbers of LPG connections, average LPG usage per household is lower in rural states compared to urban ones. This indicates a gap between access and actual consumption.

For example:

- Delhi (largely urban) – about 11.4 kg LPG per household per month
- Bihar – about 6.7 kg
- Uttar Pradesh – about 7.7 kg

Since a standard LPG cylinder contains 14.2 kg, many rural households consume less than half a cylinder per month.

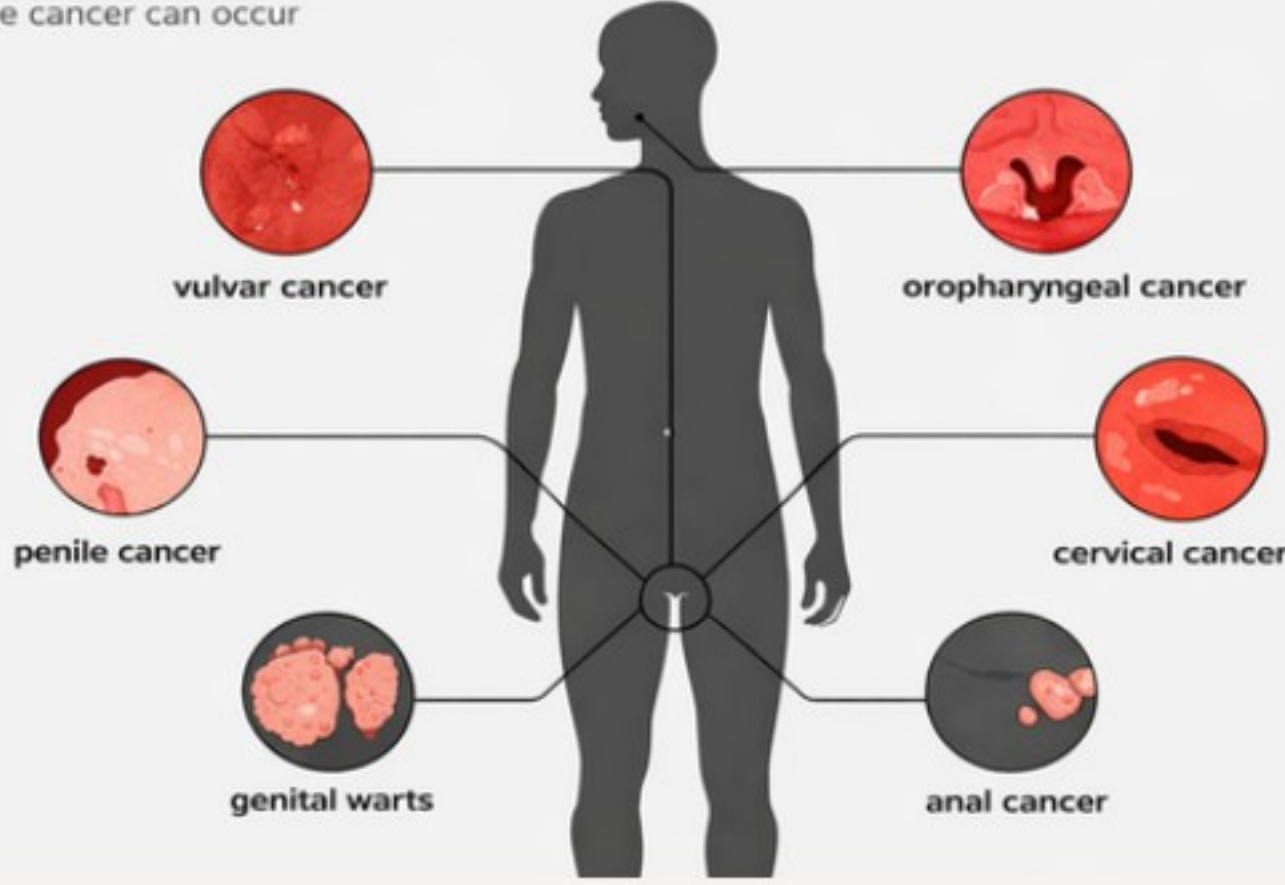
Reasons for Lower Rural LPG Consumption

- Mixed fuel usage: Rural households often continue to use firewood, agricultural residue, or animal dung alongside LPG.
- Income constraints: Poorer households tend to minimise LPG usage to reduce expenditure.
- Fuel stretching behaviour: Families may prolong the use of one cylinder for longer periods.

In contrast, urban households depend almost entirely on LPG for cooking, resulting in higher monthly consumption.

Bengaluru oncologist says boys at high risk of throat and mouth cancer: Why they need HPV vaccine too

High Risk Papillomavirus (HPV)
Where cancer can occur



Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is a group of viruses transmitted mainly through skin-to-skin sexual contact. More than 200 types of HPV exist, some of which are considered high-risk strains because they can cause cancer. HPV is one of the most common viral infections globally, affecting both men and women. Most infections remain asymptomatic, allowing the virus to circulate silently in the population.

Diseases Caused by HPV

Although HPV is widely known for causing cervical cancer in women, it can affect both genders. High-risk strains of the virus are linked to several cancers, including:

- Cervical cancer
- Penile cancer
- Anal cancer
- Oropharyngeal cancers (mouth and throat)

In addition, certain low-risk strains cause genital warts. Increasing evidence shows that HPV-related throat cancers are rising in men in several developed countries. A common misconception is that HPV is only a women's health issue. However, men can carry and transmit the virus without showing symptoms.

A global study published in *The Lancet Global Health* (2023) found that:

1 in 3 men over the age of 15 carries at least one type of genital HPV.

1 in 5 men carries high-risk cancer-causing strains.

Since men do not undergo routine screening tests (like Pap smears for women), infections can persist undetected for years. This makes men a reservoir for HPV transmission.

Countries that adopted early gender-neutral vaccination have achieved significant results. Australia is projected to become the first country to eliminate cervical cancer as a public health problem by around 2035, largely due to widespread vaccination of both boys and girls along with screening programmes.

HPV Vaccination Programme in India

India has recently introduced HPV vaccination in public health programmes primarily to prevent cervical cancer. The campaign focuses on free vaccination of girls around 14 years of age, the stage when the immune response to the vaccine is strongest.

However, vaccination for boys is recommended by the Indian Academy of Pediatrics, though it is not yet included in the government's free national vaccination drive.

Public health experts increasingly advocate gender-neutral vaccination for HPV. Vaccinating boys provides two major benefits: Direct protection – prevents genital warts, penile cancer, anal cancer, and throat cancers in men.

Indirect protection – reduces transmission of HPV to women.

Because the virus infects both genders, excluding boys from vaccination creates a "leaky" prevention system, allowing the virus to continue circulating.

Herd Immunity attainment

The concept of herd immunity becomes crucial in HPV control. When both boys and girls are vaccinated, the number of potential hosts for the virus declines, thereby reducing overall transmission. Many countries have adopted this gender-neutral vaccination approach, including Australia, United States, United Kingdom, Canada and Germany.

For example, the UK expanded its HPV vaccination programme to include boys aged 12–13 in 2019 through the National Health Service (NHS).

Commonly used vaccines against HPV include:

Gardasil 4 – protects against HPV types 6, 11, 16, and 18, which cause most cervical cancers and genital warts.

Gardasil 9 – provides broader protection against additional HPV strains and can be administered to adults up to 45 years.

These vaccines have shown high effectiveness (over 90%) in preventing infections caused by targeted HPV strains.

Prelims 2026 Most Probable High-Yield Topics

India's Forest Cover: Types, Status and Conservation Initiatives

India has achieved a significant milestone in global forest statistics by advancing to the **9th position worldwide** in terms of total forest area, according to the **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)'s Global Forest Resources Assessment (GFRA) 2025** released on 22 October 2025. In the previous assessment, India was ranked 10th. India has also maintained its **3rd position globally** in the **annual net gain of forest area**. (source : pib)

Current Status of Forest Cover in India

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization Global Forest Resources Assessment 2025, India has moved to the 9th position globally in total forest area, improving from 10th place earlier. India also ranks 3rd globally in annual net gain in forest area, highlighting steady expansion in forest resources.

According to the India State of Forest Report 2023:

- Total Forest Cover: **7,15,343 sq km**
- Percentage of geographical area: **21.76%**

States with Largest Forest Cover:

1. Madhya Pradesh – **77,073 sq km**
2. Arunachal Pradesh – **65,882 sq km**
3. Chhattisgarh – **55,812 sq km**

Mangrove Cover

India's mangrove area is about **4,992 sq km**, mainly concentrated in:

- **Andaman and Nicobar Islands**
- **West Bengal**
- **Gujarat**
- **Maharashtra**

India hosts nearly 7% of the world's mangrove forests, highlighting its importance for coastal biodiversity and climate resilience.

National Mission for a Green India (Green India Mission)

The National Mission for a Green India was launched in 2014 under the National Action Plan on Climate Change.

Key objectives:

- Increase forest and tree cover by 5 million hectares
- Improve forest quality in another 5 million hectares
- Enhance biodiversity, carbon sinks and ecosystem services
- Improve livelihoods of 3 million forest-dependent households

National Afforestation Programme

The National Afforestation Programme focuses on regeneration of degraded forests through community participation.

Implementation structure:

- State Forest Development Agencies (State level)
- Forest Development Agencies (Division level)
- Joint Forest Management Committees (Village level)

Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment)

Mission LiFE promotes sustainable lifestyles and environmental responsibility.

Key initiatives include:

- Meri LiFE Portal to encourage sustainable practices
- Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam campaign promoting tree plantation as a social movement

Mission LiFE has also gained international recognition through a resolution at the United Nations Environment Assembly.

Forests in India: Basis of Classification

India's forests are classified based on climate, rainfall patterns and dominant vegetation. These diverse ecological conditions have resulted in multiple forest types across the country. According to standard geographical classification, Indian forests are broadly grouped into five categories:

1. Tropical Evergreen and Semi-Evergreen Forests
2. Tropical Deciduous Forests
3. Tropical Thorn Forests
4. Montane Forests
5. Littoral and Swamp Forests

Prelims 2026 Most Probable High-Yield Topics

Tropical Evergreen and Semi-Evergreen Forests

These forests occur in areas with high rainfall (above 200 cm) and temperatures above 22°C. They are found mainly on the western slopes of the Western Ghats, the hills of northeast India and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Evergreen forests are dense and multilayered with trees reaching heights of 60 metres or more. Since trees shed leaves at different times, the forests remain green throughout the year. Important species include rosewood, ebony and mahogany, while semi-evergreen forests contain a mixture of evergreen and moist deciduous trees.

Tropical Thorn Forests

These forests occur in semi-arid regions with rainfall below 50 cm. Vegetation mainly consists of shrubs and grasses, and trees remain leafless for much of the year. They are found in parts of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Haryana and the dry regions of north-western India. Common species include babool, khejri, ber and wild date palm.

Tropical Deciduous Forests

- Moist Deciduous Forests (100–200 cm rainfall) – found along the Himalayan foothills, eastern slopes of the Western Ghats and parts of Odisha. Important species include teak, sal, shisham, mahua and sandalwood.
- Dry Deciduous Forests (70–100 cm rainfall) – common in the plains of northern India and interior peninsular regions. Trees shed their leaves during the dry season. Important species include tendu, palas, khair and amaltas.

Montane Forests

In mountainous regions, vegetation changes with altitude due to decreasing temperature.

- In the Himalayas, forests progress from tropical forests at lower altitudes to alpine vegetation and tundra at higher elevations. Important trees include oak, chestnut, deodar, pine, spruce and fir.

Prelims model questions

Q. Which of the following trees are commonly associated with Tropical Thorn Forests in India?

1. Babool
2. Khejri
3. Ber
4. Deodar

Select the correct answer:

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 1, 2 and 3 only
- C. 2, 3 and 4 only
- D. 1, 3 and 4 only

Answer: B

Q. Consider the following statements regarding Montane Forests of the Himalayas:

1. Pine forests are generally found between 1500 m and 1750 m altitude.
2. Deodar is mainly found in the eastern Himalayas.
3. Alpine forests occur roughly between 3000 m and 4000 m.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: A

Q. According to the FAO Global Forest Resources Assessment 2025, India currently ranks:

- A. 5th in total forest area globally
- B. 7th in total forest area globally
- C. 9th in total forest area globally
- D. 12th in total forest area globally

Answer: C

PRELIMS CORNER :

1) Consider the following States:
(2015)

1. Arunachal Pradesh
2. Himachal Pradesh
3. Mizoram

In which of the above States do 'Tropical Wet Evergreen Forests' occur?

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



2) Consider the following description: (2024)

1. Annual and daily range of temperatures is low.
 2. Precipitation occurs throughout the year.
 3. Precipitation varies between 50 cm – 250 cm. What is this type of climate?
- a) Equatorial climate
 - b) China type climate
 - c) Humid subtropical climate
 - d) Marine West coast climate

PRELIMS 2026 COUNTDOWN

69 DAYS TO GO

First in the bloodline, a fist of freedom



A recent social media trend has quickly turned into a powerful collective reflection on women's experiences. Thousands of women began sharing their own "firsts" — the first to graduate, move abroad, buy property, divorce, remain unmarried, or openly express their identity. What started as a simple online post soon evolved into a kind of living feminist archive, revealing how many freedoms that appear ordinary today were once denied to earlier generations of women. These posts highlight that being "the first" is not merely a personal achievement but often the result of challenging deep-rooted social expectations within families and communities. For many women, the struggle begins at home, where education, mobility and ambition may be questioned or restricted under the language of protection. The trend also reflects a broader paradox noted by Abhijit Banerjee — rising female education does not always translate into greater economic participation or freedom. By sharing these experiences publicly, women are exposing structural barriers that still shape their lives while also supporting each other in breaking long-standing cycles. Ultimately, the trend suggests a hopeful future for feminism: one where individual acts of courage gradually transform social norms so that opportunities for women become ordinary rights rather than exceptional "firsts."

Prelims Corner: Explanations

1) Answer is option (c) 1 and 3 only.

Tropical Wet Evergreen Forests occur in regions with very high rainfall (usually above 200 cm), warm temperatures, and high humidity throughout the year. In India, such climatic conditions are found mainly in the Western Ghats, the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, and parts of the North-Eastern states.

Among the given options, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram lie in the humid northeastern region where heavy monsoon rainfall supports tropical evergreen forests. However, Himachal Pradesh is located in the Himalayan temperate zone, where temperate coniferous and alpine forests dominate rather than tropical wet evergreen forests.

Evergreen forests are dense and multilayered with trees reaching heights of 60 metres or more. Since trees shed leaves at different times, the forests remain green throughout the year. Important species include rosewood, ebony and mahogany, while semi-evergreen forests contain a mix of evergreen & moist deciduous trees.



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2) Answer is option d

The Marine West Coast Climate is typically found along the western margins of continents in the mid-latitudes, roughly between 40° and 60° latitude. Prominent examples occur in regions such as Western Europe, New Zealand, and the coastal belt of Chile. The dominant influence of the nearby ocean and prevailing westerly winds moderates the climate, preventing extreme seasonal variations. As a result, both the annual and diurnal (daily) temperature ranges remain small, with mild summers and cool winters rather than very hot or very cold conditions.

Another important feature is precipitation throughout the year, largely associated with mid-latitude cyclones that travel along the westerly wind belt. Rainfall is generally moderate, usually between 50 cm and 250 cm annually, and is fairly well distributed across seasons, though winters often receive slightly more rainfall. The persistent cloud cover and humidity also support temperate evergreen forests and rich pastures.