



**Iran war: Why Ras Laffan and South Pars attacks compound India's worries**

THE INDIAN EXPRESS : Explained



**Punishment up to life term: Chhattisgarh passes new Freedom of Religion Bill**

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## IRAN WAR DAY 21: ENERGY SITES HIT, GULF TENSIONS RISE

**T**ensions escalated in the Middle East after an Israeli airstrike targeted parts of the South Pars gas field in Iran's Bushehr province—one of the world's largest gas reserves shared with Qatar (where it is known as the North Field). Following the strike, Iran launched retaliatory missile and drone attacks on energy infrastructure across multiple countries, including Qatar, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Israel. Key facilities such as Qatar's Ras Laffan Industrial City (a major global LNG hub), Abu Dhabi's Habshan gas facility, refineries in Saudi Arabia, and an oil refinery in Israel's Haifa were reportedly hit, causing damage and raising concerns about global energy security. These developments led to a surge in oil prices, with Brent crude crossing \$115 per barrel.

Amid rising tensions, U.S. President Donald Trump distanced the United States from Israel's strike, stating that Washington had no prior knowledge of the attack and assuring that Israel would not target the South Pars field again unless provoked. He also warned Iran against further attacks, particularly on Qatar's energy facilities. In response, Qatar took diplomatic action by expelling Iranian officials, while the UAE condemned the strikes as a violation of international law. Iran, on its part, indicated a willingness to exercise restraint but warned of stronger retaliation if its infrastructure was targeted again, leaving the situation highly volatile with risks of further escalation.

## Punishment up to life term': Chhattisgarh passes new Freedom of Religion Bill

The Chhattisgarh Dharm Swatantraya Vidheyak, 2026 was passed by the Chhattisgarh Legislative Assembly to regulate religious conversions and curb alleged illegal practices. The Bill introduces stringent provisions, including severe penalties for “mass conversions,” reflecting a broader trend of state-level anti-conversion laws in India.

The move has political significance, with opposition members demanding wider consultation through a Select Committee, indicating concerns over procedural and constitutional implications.

### Key Provisions: Prior Declaration and Public Disclosure

The Bill mandates that individuals intending to convert must submit a prior declaration to the District Magistrate (DM) or an authorised अधिकारी. Within seven days, authorities must publicly disclose details of the proposed conversion on official platforms and local administrative offices.

This provision introduces a system of prior state scrutiny, aiming to ensure transparency but raising questions about privacy and individual autonomy in matters of faith.



### Verification, Objections, and Administrative Oversight

Authorities are empowered to verify the authenticity of conversions, investigate complaints, and summon records. A 30-day window is provided for objections, after which an inquiry is conducted and a decision issued.

Such administrative oversight expands the role of the state in personal religious choices, linking the issue to debates on fundamental rights under Articles 25–28 of the Constitution (freedom of religion).

### Provisions Related to Marriage and Conversion

The Bill clarifies that marriage alone does not constitute conversion. However, conversion solely for the purpose of marriage is deemed illegal unless due process is followed.

A declaration must be filed 60 days before marriage, and authorities will assess whether the marriage involves unlawful conversion. This reflects concerns over “forced” or “induced” conversions but may also intersect with the right to marry and personal liberty.

### Penal Provisions and Definition of ‘Mass Conversion’

All offences under the Bill are cognisable and non-bailable. “Mass conversion,” defined as conversion of two or more persons in a single event, attracts rigorous imprisonment of 10 years to life imprisonment and a minimum fine of ₹25 lakh.

Enhanced penalties (10–20 years imprisonment and ₹10 lakh fine) apply when victims belong to vulnerable groups such as minors, women, or SC/ST/OBC communities. The Bill also provides compensation up to ₹10 lakh for victims.

### Institutional Mechanisms and Additional Restrictions

The legislation mandates that priests or clerics submit declarations regarding conversions and maintain official records. It also restricts foreign or domestic funding linked to illegal conversions and allows withdrawal of government benefits for violators. Cases will be investigated by police officers (Sub-Inspector rank and above) and tried in special courts, with a six-month timeline for trial completion, indicating an attempt to ensure speedy justice.

The Bill has significant implications for governance and rights discourse. While it aims to prevent coercion and protect vulnerable groups, concerns arise regarding potential infringement on individual freedoms, privacy, and misuse of administrative powers. A balanced approach—ensuring safeguards against forced conversions while upholding constitutional freedoms—will be crucial. Judicial scrutiny and clear procedural safeguards may shape its long-term impact.

## Iran war: Why Ras Laffan and South Pars attacks compound India's worries

The conflict in West Asia has sharply escalated after Israel targeted the South Pars Gas Field—the world's largest natural gas field shared by Iran and Qatar. In retaliation, Iran launched missile attacks on Qatar's Ras Laffan Industrial City, the world's largest LNG facility. This marks a shift from indirect conflict to direct targeting of critical energy infrastructure, raising global concerns.

### Widening Regional Impact

Iran expanded its response by targeting or attempting strikes on energy facilities in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. Saudi Arabia reported a drone strike on the SAMREF refinery in Yanbu, while the UAE intercepted missiles. These developments indicate a regionalisation of the conflict, involving key Gulf energy producers and increasing geopolitical instability.

### Shift from Transit to Production Risk

Initially, disruptions were linked to the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz, affecting energy transportation. However, the latest attacks signal a deeper crisis, with risks now extending to production and supply infrastructure. This escalation could prolong disruptions even if hostilities cease, as damaged facilities may take time to recover.

### Impact on Global Energy Markets

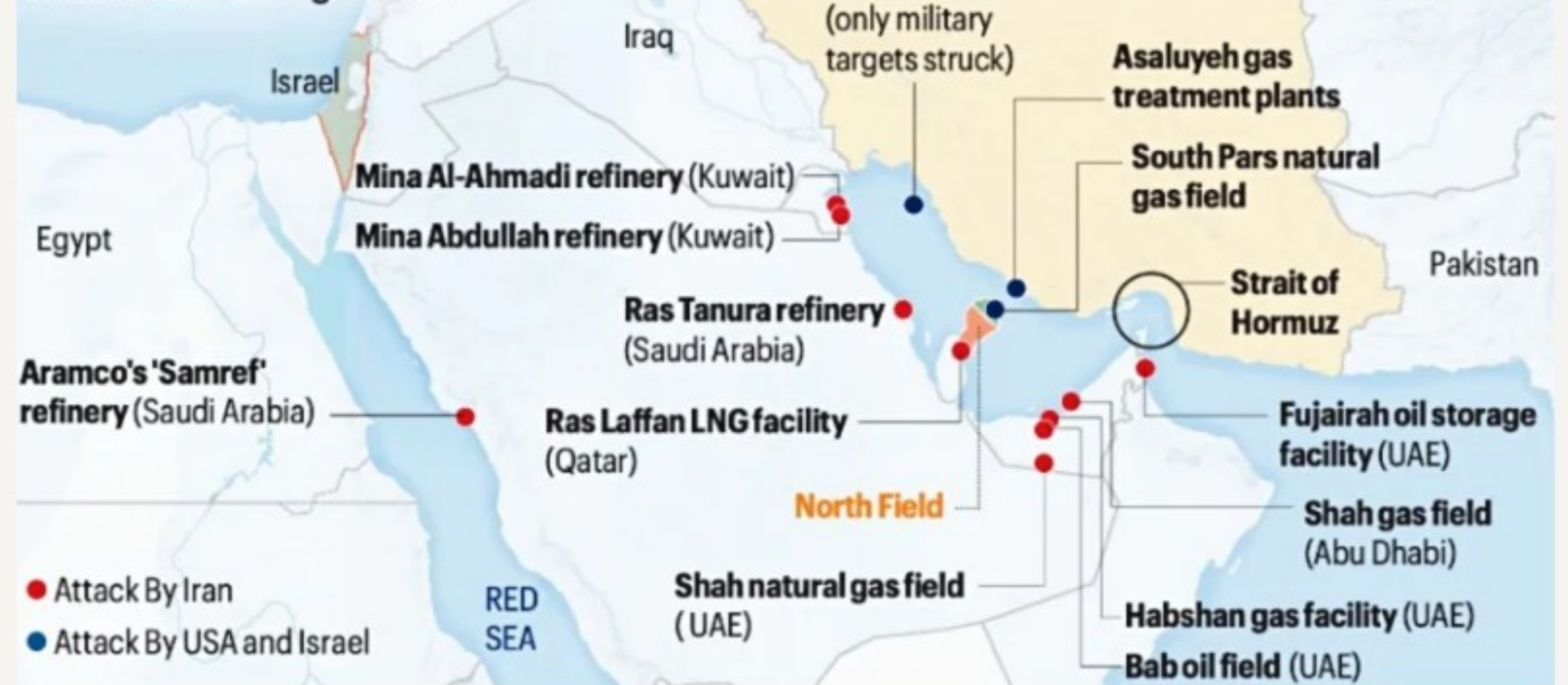
The attacks have significantly affected global energy prices. Brent crude prices surged to around \$118 per barrel—over 50% higher than pre-conflict levels—while natural gas prices also rose sharply. The targeting of Ras Laffan, which handles nearly 20% of global LNG supply, has heightened fears of a sustained global energy shock.

### Significance of Ras Laffan Facility

Ras Laffan is central to global LNG supply, housing QatarEnergy's liquefaction plants and export infrastructure. Missile strikes caused extensive damage and fires, following earlier disruptions. Although no casualties were reported due to prior evacuation, the scale of damage raises uncertainty over how quickly LNG production can resume.

### ENERGY FACILITIES IN THE CROSSHAIRS

Some of the energy facilities in the region that have come under attack during the war



### Implications for India's Energy Security

India is heavily dependent on West Asia for energy imports, particularly LNG from Qatar. Around 41% of India's LNG imports come from Qatar, most of it from Ras Laffan. With disruptions and the Strait of Hormuz effectively blocked, India has already begun cutting gas supplies to some industries. Overall, India imports:

- Over 88% of crude oil
- Around 50% of natural gas
- Nearly 60% of LPG needs

This makes India highly vulnerable to prolonged disruptions in the region.

### Strategic Importance of Strait of Hormuz

A significant share of India's energy imports—about 40–50% of crude oil and nearly 60% of LNG—passes through the Strait of Hormuz. The current conflict has effectively restricted tanker movement, turning a supply chain issue into a potential full-scale supply crisis if production infrastructure continues to be targeted.

U.S. President Donald Trump distanced Washington from the Israeli strike while issuing warnings to Iran against targeting Qatar's energy infrastructure. His statements indicate a mix of de-escalation and deterrence, though uncertainty remains regarding U.S. influence over Israel and the future trajectory of the conflict. The conflict has entered a dangerous phase where energy infrastructure itself has become a target, increasing risks of prolonged disruption. For countries like India, this highlights the urgency of energy diversification, strategic reserves, and geopolitical risk management.

## A bit of a blur over India's new carbon credit plan

The Union Budget 2026 announced a ₹20,000 crore outlay for a carbon credit programme, triggering confusion about its intended beneficiaries. The debate centres on whether the allocation targets industrial decarbonisation or aims to create a new income stream for farmers through carbon markets.

This ambiguity has led to competing narratives, highlighting gaps between official policy intent and public interpretation.

### Official Basis: CCUS for Hard-to-Abate Industries

The primary foundation of the budgetary allocation lies in the R&D Roadmap for CCUS released by the Department of Science and Technology. This document clearly identifies sectors such as power, steel, cement, refineries, and chemicals as targets. These “hard-to-abate” industries generate concentrated emissions that cannot be easily reduced through renewable energy, making them suitable for Carbon Capture, Utilization, and Storage (CCUS) technologies.

### Scope of CCUS and Technological Focus

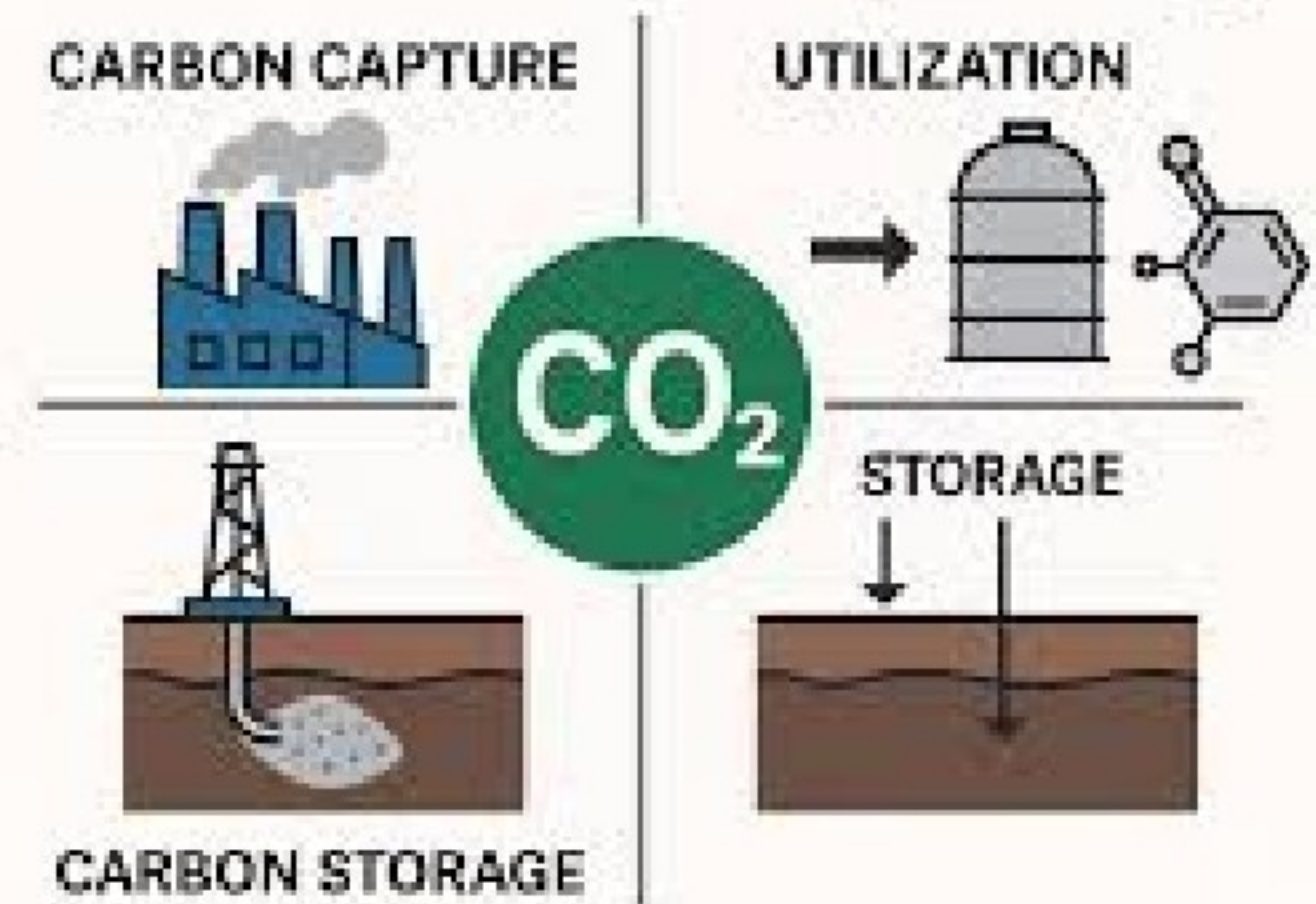
The ₹20,000 crore allocation is meant for large-scale deployment of CCUS, which involves capturing carbon dioxide from industrial emissions and either reusing it or storing it underground. This approach focuses on preventing new emissions at the source, making it a critical strategy for industrial decarbonisation and achieving India's net-zero targets.

### Exclusion of Agriculture from CCUS Strategy

Official documents explicitly exclude agriculture from CCUS frameworks. Agricultural emissions, mainly methane and nitrous oxide, are diffuse and biologically generated, making them unsuitable for point-source carbon capture technologies.

Instead, agriculture is linked to Carbon Dioxide Removal (CDR) strategies such as soil carbon sequestration, agroforestry, and biochar, which operate differently from industrial carbon capture.

### Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage (CCUS) in India: Reality or Mirage?



### Emergence of the 'Farmer Carbon Credit' Narrative

Despite the industrial focus, a parallel narrative has emerged suggesting that the Budget supports farmers in earning carbon credits through sustainable practices. This view is driven by growing global demand for nature-based carbon credits and ongoing pilot projects.

The confusion arises from conflating the CCUS programme with the broader voluntary carbon market, where agriculture and forestry projects are already generating credits.

### Understanding Malnutrition Indicators

The mismatch between official intent and public perception highlights both a communication gap and a policy opportunity. While the CCUS initiative is clearly defined, the use of the term “carbon credit programme” has created expectations of farmer inclusion.

A structured carbon farming policy—separate from CCUS—could formalise incentives for sustainable agriculture and create an additional income stream for farmers.

### Way Forward

The Budget's focus on industrial decarbonisation is crucial, given that heavy industries contribute significantly to emissions. However, India's agricultural sector also offers vast potential for carbon sequestration. A dual strategy is needed: advancing CCUS for industry while developing a robust domestic carbon market for agriculture. Clear policy communication and parallel institutional frameworks will be essential to harness both “smokestack” and “soil” solutions effectively.

## How far should governments go in using AI?

As governments increasingly deploy Artificial Intelligence (AI) in administration, security, and policymaking, concerns around safety, accountability, and control have intensified. A recent dispute involving the Pentagon and Anthropic—over refusal to remove safeguards against surveillance and autonomous weapons—highlights tensions between state objectives and corporate control.

This raises a core governance question: who ultimately controls AI systems that influence public decision-making?

### AI and State Capacity: Potential and Limitations

AI can enhance state capacity by improving data access, enabling better analysis, and supporting decision-making. Its effectiveness is highest in well-defined, narrow use cases—such as medical image analysis during COVID-19. However, governments often deploy AI without clearly defining the problem, assessing data quality, or evaluating costs. This can reduce effectiveness and lead to inefficient or inappropriate applications.

### High-Risk Applications and Need for Caution

Certain areas—such as facial recognition, mass surveillance, and sensitive health applications—pose high risks of misuse and harm. In such domains, a “do no harm” principle should guide policy, and in extreme cases, outright prohibition may be justified. Governments must apply tests of necessity and proportionality before adopting AI, ensuring that less intrusive alternatives are considered.



The idea that AI adoption is inevitable is questioned; governments should align adoption with public interest rather than global trends or industry pressure. Over-reliance on foreign infrastructure can undermine technological sovereignty and create long-term dependencies. A balanced approach is required—focusing on core scientific capacity, clear use cases, robust data protection, and accountability frameworks. Ultimately, AI governance must prioritise democratic values, minimise risks, and ensure that technological adoption serves societal welfare rather than narrow commercial or strategic interests.



### Privacy, Data Use, and Citizen Risks

The assumption that greater data sharing leads to better services is contested. Efficiency gains are often unclear and may result in labour substitution rather than improved outcomes.

Risks include function creep (data used beyond original purpose), lack of informed consent, and misuse of welfare data for policing or exclusion. In contexts like India, low digital literacy further complicates meaningful consent, increasing vulnerability.

### Data Governance: Public Asset vs Private Use

There is debate over whether public datasets should be treated as strategic assets or shared with private companies. Unregulated data sharing raises concerns about privacy, security, and sovereignty.

Framing data purely as an economic asset risks ignoring its status as a fundamental right. Additionally, partnerships may enable private firms to extract value from public data with limited accountability, creating imbalances in benefits.

### Public-Private Partnerships and Structural Risks

While governments have long collaborated with private actors, AI introduces new challenges. Large-scale partnerships may create technological lock-in, dependency on global firms, and reduced policy flexibility. Examples like Aadhaar and DigiYatra illustrate risks of exclusion, accountability gaps, and trade-offs in welfare delivery. Premature deployment without regulation can amplify such issues.

## Prelims 2026 Most Probable High-Yield Topics

### British Economic Policies in India

British economic policies in India were primarily extractive, aimed at maximizing revenue and serving imperial interests. India, traditionally an agrarian economy with a thriving handicraft sector, experienced structural transformation under colonial rule. The British disrupted the traditional balance between agriculture and cottage industries, making agriculture the backbone of colonial revenue while simultaneously deindustrialising the economy.

#### **Agrarian Policies: Objective and Impact**

The British abandoned the traditional system of revenue collection (based on share of produce) and introduced rigid, monetised land revenue systems. Their primary objective was maximum revenue extraction, with little concern for cultivators' welfare.

This led to:

- Overburdening of peasants.
- Rise of intermediaries and exploitation.
- Increased vulnerability to famines and rural distress.

#### **Land Revenue Systems**

##### **Zamindari System (Permanent Settlement, 1793)**

Introduced by Lord Cornwallis in Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa ( $\approx 19\%$  area).

- Zamindars recognised as landowners
- Revenue permanently fixed ( $\approx 89\%$  to Company)
- Peasants reduced to tenants

Drawbacks:

- No proper land survey or assessment
- High revenue  $\rightarrow$  zamindar defaults and land auctions
- Exploitation by intermediaries
- Peasant misery and stagnation of agriculture

##### **Ryotwari System**

Introduced by Thomas Munro in Madras, Bombay, Assam ( $\approx 51\%$  area).

- Direct settlement between state and cultivator (ryot)
- Peasant recognised as proprietor
- Revenue fixed periodically (20–40 years)

Drawbacks:

- High and inflexible revenue demand
- Harsh collection methods
- Peasant indebtedness and insecurity

##### **Mahalwari System (1833)**

Introduced in Punjab, Central Provinces, North-Western Provinces ( $\approx 30\%$  area).

- Village (mahal) as unit of settlement
- Collective responsibility for revenue

Features & Issues:

- Some improvement in irrigation
- Benefits largely accrued to the state
- Continued burden on village communities

#### **Impact of Agrarian Policies**

- Disruption of traditional agrarian structure
- Emergence of absentee landlordism
- Commercialisation of agriculture
- Rural indebtedness and frequent famines
- Decline in agricultural productivity in the long run

#### **Decline of Handicraft Industry (Deindustrialisation)**

- India was a global leader in textiles and handicrafts (e.g., Dacca muslin, Banaras silk, Kashmir shawls). British policies led to its systematic decline:
- Key Reasons:
- Flooding of Indian markets with cheap British machine-made goods
- Discriminatory tariff policies (low import duty on British goods, high export duty on Indian goods)
- Promotion of raw material exports (e.g., raw silk)
- Restrictions on Indian finished goods



## Prelims 2026 Most Probable High-Yield Topics

### Role of Industrial Revolution and Market Policies

The Industrial Revolution intensified decline:

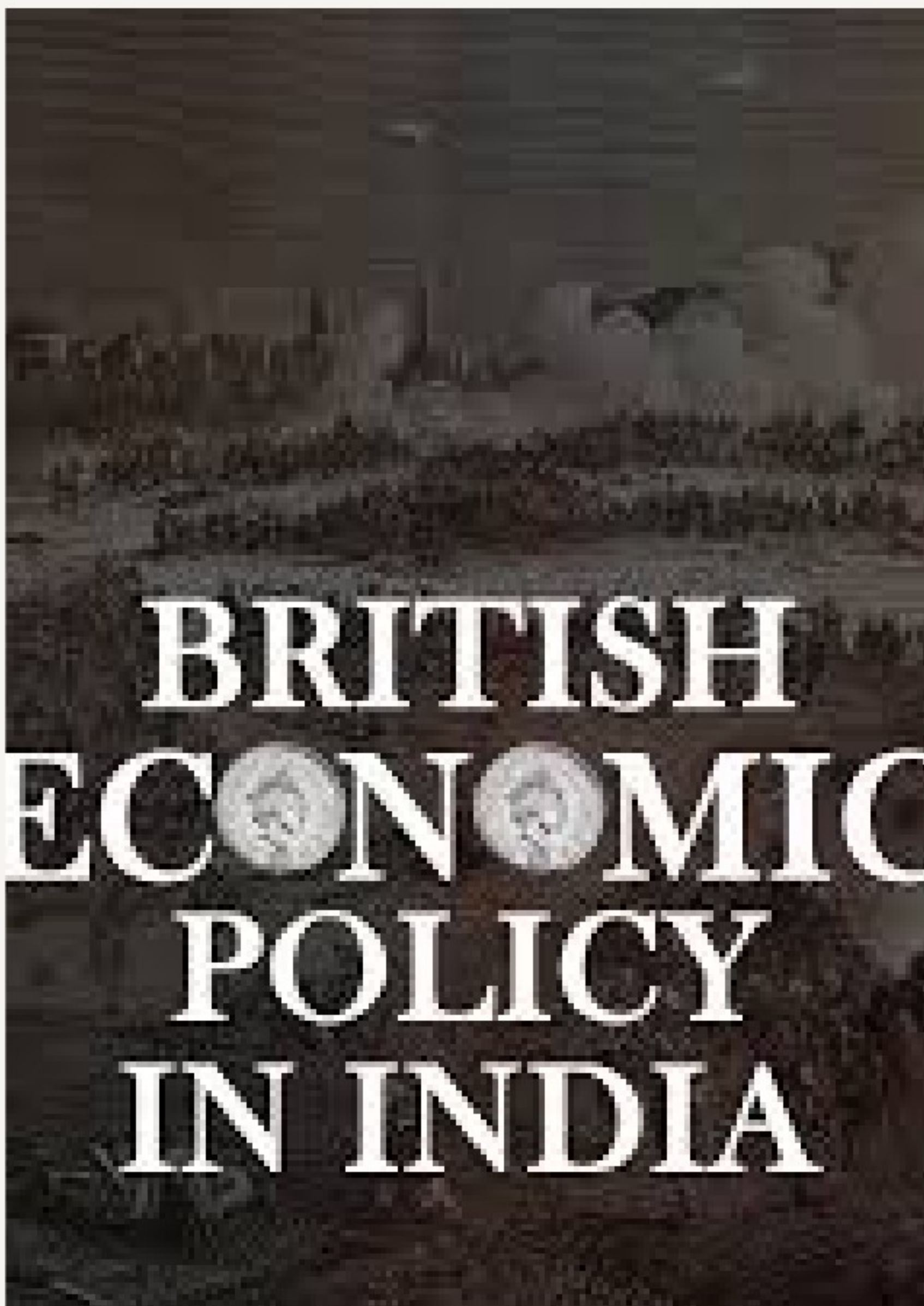
- Machine-made goods replaced handlooms
- Mass production reduced costs
- Indian artisans could not compete

Additionally:

- Loss of royal patronage (decline of princely states)
- Decline in demand for luxury handicrafts
- Monopoly trade practices of the East India Company

### Impact of Industrial Revolution and Market Policies - key takeaway

- Agrarianisation of economy (decline of industry)
- Drain of wealth to Britain
- Stagnation of agriculture and industry
- Rise in poverty and unemployment
- Transformation of India into a supplier of raw materials and market for British goods



### Prelims model questions

Q. With reference to the British land revenue systems in India, consider the following statements:

1. Under the Zamindari system, land revenue demand was permanently fixed.
2. Under the Ryotwari system, the state directly collected revenue from cultivators.
3. Under the Mahalwari system, revenue responsibility rested solely with individual cultivators.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: (a)

Q. Consider the following statements regarding the decline of Indian handicrafts:

1. British tariff policies favored Indian exports over British imports.
2. Industrial Revolution led to availability of cheaper machine-made goods.
3. Decline of royal patronage contributed to reduced demand for luxury crafts.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: (a)

## PRELIMS CORNER :

1) Which amongst the following provided a common factor for tribal insurrection in India in the 19th century? (2011)

- (a) Introduction of a new system of land revenue and taxation- of tribal products
- (b) Influence of foreign religious missionaries in tribal areas
- (c) Rise of a large number of money lenders, traders and revenue farmers as middlemen in tribal areas
- (d) The complete disruption of the old agrarian order of the tribal communities

2) Indigo cultivation in India declined by the beginning of the 20th century because of: (2020)

- (a) peasant resistance to the oppressive conduct of planters
- (b) its unprofitability in the world market because of new inventions
- (c) national leaders' opposition to the cultivation of Ans: b indigo
- (d) Government control over the planters

**PRELIMS 2026**  
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**65 DAYS TO GO**

## HERITAGE

### Gudi Padwa



Gudi Padwa is a significant spring festival marking the traditional New Year for Marathi and Konkani Hindus, observed on the first day of the Chaitra month in the Hindu calendar. The festival symbolizes the arrival of spring, renewal, and prosperity, and coincides with Ugadi celebrated in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, both linked to agricultural cycles and the harvesting of rabi crops. Gudi Padwa is rooted in multiple cultural and mythological traditions: it is believed to commemorate the creation of the universe by Lord Brahma, while another popular legend associates it with the coronation of Lord Rama after his return to Ayodhya following victory over Ravana, symbolizing the triumph of good over evil. The central ritual involves hoisting a "Gudi" outside homes—a decorated bamboo stick adorned with a bright silk cloth, neem and mango leaves, flowers, and topped with a metal pot (kalash)—believed to ward off evil and invite prosperity. Celebrations begin early in the morning with cleaning and decorating homes, wearing new clothes, and performing rituals. Devotees take a ritual bath, decorate entrances with mango leaves, install the Gudi, and offer prayers to Lord Brahma and Lord Vishnu, reflecting themes of spiritual renewal, cultural continuity, and auspicious beginnings.

# Prelims Corner: Explanations

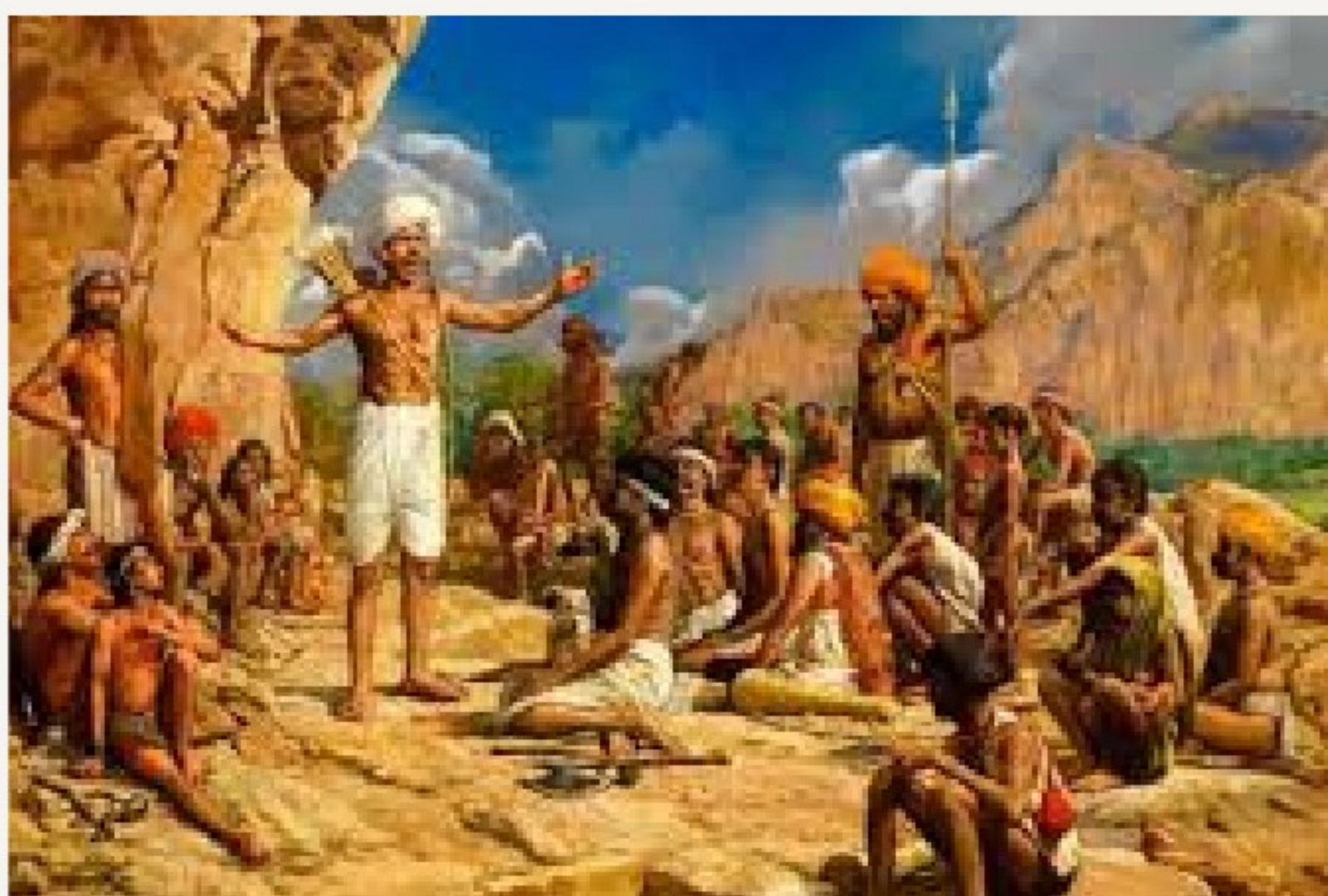
1) The correct answer is (d)

The complete disruption of the old agrarian order of the tribal communities, as it represents the most common and underlying cause of tribal uprisings in 19th-century India.

Tribal insurrections during this period were largely a response to the systematic breakdown of their traditional socio-economic systems under British colonial rule. Tribal communities had a self-sufficient agrarian structure based on communal land ownership, shifting cultivation, and customary rights over forests and resources. The introduction of new land revenue systems by the British disrupted this equilibrium by imposing private property concepts and monetised taxation.

Additionally, the entry of outsiders—commonly referred to as dikus (moneylenders, traders, and revenue farmers)—led to large-scale land alienation and exploitation of tribal populations. Forest laws restricted access to traditional forest resources, further undermining their livelihood.

While factors such as missionary activity and the rise of intermediaries did contribute to discontent in specific cases, they were not universal across all tribal movements. The most consistent and widespread cause was the destruction of the traditional agrarian and social order, which eroded tribal autonomy and identity, leading to rebellions such as the Santhal and Munda uprisings.



2) The correct answer is (b) its unprofitability in the world market because of new inventions, which was the primary reason for the decline of indigo cultivation in India by the early 20th century.

Indigo cultivation, once a major commercial crop under British colonial rule, faced a steady decline due to global economic and technological changes. The most decisive factor was the invention of synthetic dyes in Germany in the late 19th century. These artificial dyes were significantly cheaper, easier to produce, and more consistent in quality compared to natural indigo. As a result, the demand for Indian indigo in international markets sharply declined, making its cultivation unprofitable for planters.

While other factors contributed to weakening the indigo system, they were not the primary cause of its eventual decline.





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