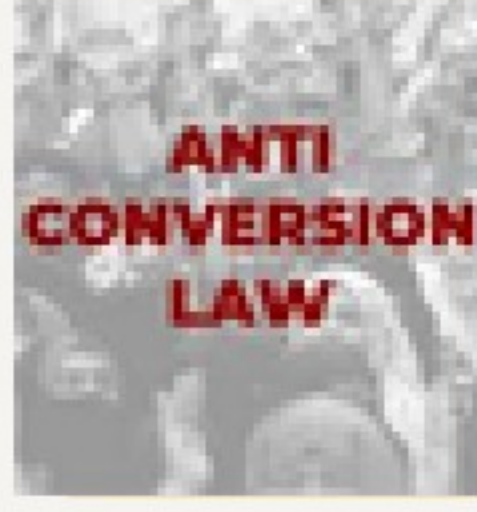




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INDIA RAISES CLIMATE AMBITION: NEW NDC TARGETS FOR 2035 ANNOUNCED



India has updated its climate targets under its Paris Agreement commitments by strengthening its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) for the period up to 2035. The country has pledged that 60% of its installed electricity capacity will come from non-fossil fuel sources, reduce emissions intensity of GDP by 47% from 2005 levels, and increase its carbon sink to 3.5–4 billion tonnes. These build upon its earlier 2030 targets, which included 50% non-fossil capacity, a 44% reduction in emissions intensity, and a carbon sink of 2.5–3 billion tonnes. India has already made notable progress, with about 52% of installed electricity capacity coming from non-fossil sources and a 36% reduction in emissions intensity achieved between 2005 and 2020.

These updated targets are to be communicated to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and are shaped by global climate assessments such as the Global Stocktake, as well as principles like equity and Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR-RC). While India is on track to meet its existing targets, experts note that global efforts remain insufficient to limit warming to 1.5°C. The updated NDC reflects a balance between climate commitments, energy security, and development priorities, while also highlighting the role of developing countries in advancing climate action amid concerns about reduced ambition from developed nations.

IIT Kharagpur, IIM-A leap in QS world varsity ranks; ISM tops mining

The QS World University Rankings by Subject 2026 highlight strong performances by several Indian institutions in specialised fields. The Indian School of Mines (IIT-ISM) Dhanbad secured the highest rank among Indian institutions, placing 21st globally in Engineering – Mineral and Mining. The Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad also ranked 21st in both Business and Management Studies and Marketing. IIT Kharagpur showed notable improvement by rising to 22nd position in Mineral and Mining Engineering, marking a significant jump from its previous rank.

The QS World University Rankings, prepared by Quacquarelli Symonds, evaluate universities based on indicators such as academic reputation, employer reputation, research output, and faculty quality. Subject-specific rankings assess performance in particular disciplines, allowing for detailed comparisons across institutions globally.

Trends in Engineering and Technology

In the broader category of Engineering and Technology, five Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) are placed within the global top 100. However, several of these institutions experienced a decline in rankings compared to the previous year. IIT Delhi and IIT Bombay saw noticeable drops, mainly due to lower employer reputation scores and a decline in citation indicators. The rankings indicate that global competition has intensified, with universities from South Korea, the United Kingdom, Canada, and France improving their positions.

Growth in Computer Science

Indian institutions have shown significant progress in the field of Computer Science and Information Systems. The number of Indian entries in this category increased to 44, reflecting growing strength in this domain. Leading institutions such as IIT Bombay and IIT Delhi improved their rankings considerably. Other IITs, including Kanpur, Kharagpur, and Madras, also feature within the top 100. Notably, Vellore Institute of Technology is the only private Indian institution in this category's top 100.

Institution	Subject	2026	2025
IIT-ISM Dhanbad	Engineering-Mineral & Mining	21	20
IIM Ahmedabad	Business & Management Studies	21	27
	Marketing	21	Debut*
IIT Kharagpur	Engineering-Mineral & Mining	22	45
Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Sciences	Dentistry	25	26
JNU	Development Studies	26	29

Overall Representation and Global Standing

India's overall presence in the rankings has expanded significantly, with 99 institutions featured this year compared to 79 in the previous year. This places India fourth globally in terms of representation, after the United States, China, and the United Kingdom. This increase reflects the growing scale and recognition of India's higher education system.

Areas of Concern

Despite improvements in technical fields, some areas remain weak. In the Arts and Humanities category, no Indian institution is ranked within the top 100, with Delhi University and Jawaharlal Nehru University experiencing declines in their rankings. Similarly, in Life Sciences and Medicine, no Indian institution features in the top 100, although AIIMS Delhi showed improvement in the Medicine category.

Significance for India

Improved rankings enhance the global visibility and credibility of Indian institutions. They help attract international students, promote research collaborations, and reflect the country's progress in higher education and innovation. At the same time, the rankings highlight areas that require further improvement, particularly in non-technical disciplines, to ensure balanced academic development. The QS Rankings 2026 indicate that India is making steady progress in fields such as engineering and computer science. However, uneven performance across disciplines suggests the need for a more balanced approach to strengthening the overall quality of higher education in the country.

How anti-conversion laws mirror each other

In March 2026, the Maharashtra Cabinet approved the Dharma Swatantrya Adhiniyam, 2026, which proposes stringent penalties for unlawful religious conversions. The Bill prescribes imprisonment of up to seven years along with a fine of ₹5 lakh for conversions carried out through prohibited means. It forms part of a broader legislative trend seen across several Indian states in recent years.

Expansion of Similar Laws Across States

Since 2017, multiple states have enacted laws regulating religious conversion, including Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Karnataka, and Rajasthan. While the details vary, these laws broadly aim to prevent conversions carried out through force, fraud, or inducement. They follow a similar legal framework that introduces procedural requirements and places regulatory oversight on religious conversion.

High Dependence on West Asian Markets

A defining feature of these laws is the broad interpretation of terms such as “**allurement**” or “**inducement.**” These are not limited to monetary or material benefits but may also include intangible promises like improved lifestyle or spiritual fulfilment. Some laws, such as the one in Rajasthan, extend these provisions to digital platforms by addressing online solicitation and dissemination of content related to conversion.

Regulation of Conversion and Marriage

Several state laws, including those in Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana, and Rajasthan, specifically address conversions linked to marriage. In such cases, marriages conducted for the sole purpose of conversion may be declared void. Additionally, individuals intending to convert are often required to submit prior declarations to district authorities within a stipulated time frame, which ranges from 30 to 90 days depending on the state.



Procedural Requirements and Burden of Proof

These laws introduce administrative procedures such as prior notice to the District Magistrate and, in many cases, allow authorities to conduct inquiries into the intent behind conversion. A notable feature is the shift in the burden of proof, where the accused must demonstrate that the conversion did not occur through coercion, misrepresentation, or inducement. Offences under these laws are generally classified as cognisable and non-bailable.

Punishments and Legal Stringency

The severity of punishments has increased over time. Earlier laws prescribed shorter terms of imprisonment, while more recent amendments provide for harsher penalties, especially in cases involving vulnerable groups such as minors, women, or Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, as well as in instances of mass conversion.

Judicial Review and Court Observations

Several provisions of these laws have faced judicial scrutiny. High Courts in states such as Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh have intervened in specific instances, raising concerns about provisions that may affect personal freedoms or privacy. Courts have also clarified that certain activities, such as the distribution of religious literature, do not automatically constitute an offence under these laws.

The constitutional validity of these laws is currently under consideration by the Supreme Court of India. Petitioners have challenged the statutes, arguing that some provisions may be vague, overly broad, and could lead to misuse. They raise concerns about potential impacts on fundamental rights, including personal liberty and freedom of religion. The final outcome of these challenges is expected to provide greater legal clarity on the issue.

Cuban Sorrow

The United States has historically had complex relations with countries in Central and South America. Despite geographical proximity, these relationships have often been shaped by ideological differences, political disagreements, and economic disparities. Issues such as immigration, drugs, and governance have further contributed to this divide. Within this broader context, Cuba has remained one of the most significant and sensitive cases.

Cold War Origins of Conflict

The tensions between the United States and Cuba date back to 1959, when Fidel Castro overthrew the U.S.-backed regime of Fulgencio Batista and established a socialist government aligned with the Soviet Union. In response, the United States began imposing economic restrictions. Key Cold War events such as the Bay of Pigs Invasion and the Cuban Missile Crisis deepened mistrust and solidified long-term hostility between the two countries.



Economic Embargo and Policy Measures

The United States imposed a comprehensive economic embargo on Cuba in 1962, which has been strengthened over time, through various measures including the Helms-Burton Act. These measures restricted trade, investment, and financial interactions, significantly affecting Cuba's economy. Cuba's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism at different points has also limited its access to international banking systems. Over the decades, these policies have aimed at isolating Cuba economically and diplomatically.



Shifts in Diplomatic Engagement

There have been brief periods of improved relations. Under Barack Obama, the United States moved towards normalising ties, restoring diplomatic relations and engaging with Raúl Castro. However, this approach was reversed during the presidency of Donald Trump, who reimposed sanctions and redesignated Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism. Subsequent policy adjustments under later administrations have been limited, and tensions continue to persist.

Recent Developments and Energy Constraints

Recent actions by the United States have further strained relations. Measures targeting fuel supplies, including restrictions on oil shipments and trade pressures on other countries, have affected Cuba's energy sector, which relies heavily on imported oil. These disruptions have contributed to power shortages and economic challenges within Cuba, affecting daily life and industrial activity.

Wider Implications and Global Context

The developments in U.S.-Cuba relations are part of a broader pattern of geopolitical tensions involving multiple regions. Long-standing policies, combined with recent actions, highlight the continued complexity of bilateral relations. These issues also raise questions about international law, economic sanctions, and the balance between national interests and humanitarian concerns.

The relationship between the United States and Cuba remains shaped by historical events, ideological differences, and evolving policy decisions. While there have been moments of engagement, the overall trajectory continues to reflect enduring mistrust and periodic escalation, making it one of the most persistent geopolitical challenges in the region.

Gulf: Growth vs Nature

The Persian Gulf is a relatively young and shallow sea formed around 3,000 to 6,000 years ago when seawater flooded the Arabian basin through the Strait of Hormuz. It spans about 226,000 sq. km with an average depth of only 30 metres. Due to its shallow nature and limited water exchange with the open Arabian Sea, the Gulf experiences extreme environmental conditions, including very high temperatures and salinity levels that are nearly twice that of normal seawater.

Unique and Resilient Ecosystems

Despite harsh conditions, the Gulf supports a wide range of ecosystems. Intertidal zones, lagoons, mangroves, mudflats, and seagrass meadows play important ecological roles such as nutrient recycling, fish breeding, and supporting coastal food chains. These ecosystems also act as habitats for diverse species, including five of the world's seven sea turtle species, notably the endangered Hawksbill sea turtle. The Gulf also supports the second-largest population of dugong after Australia. Coral reefs spread across an area comparable to Goa serve as biodiversity hotspots and offer insights into how marine life adapts to extreme climates.

Historical Economic Importance

Historically, the Gulf was known for its thriving pearl industry. Between the 18th and early 20th centuries, oyster beds supplied nearly 80% of the world's pearls, known as Basra pearls. However, this industry declined sharply in the 1920s after the introduction of cultured pearls from Japan. Later, the discovery of oil transformed the region's economy and global importance.

Oil Economy and Urban Expansion

Today, the Gulf produces nearly one-third of the world's oil, with extensive offshore infrastructure and heavy tanker traffic. Rapid economic growth has led to large-scale urbanisation, with over 85% of the population and economic activity concentrated near coastlines. Coastal cities have expanded significantly, often through land reclamation and infrastructure projects.

The Persian Gulf represents a fragile ecological system that has adapted to extreme natural conditions but is now under severe pressure from human activities and conflict. Sustained and coordinated conservation efforts are necessary to preserve its biodiversity and ecological balance before critical thresholds are crossed.



Coastal Transformation and Habitat Loss

Human activities such as dredging, land reclamation, and construction have drastically altered natural coastlines. In cities like Dubai, a majority of the coastline has been modified. These changes have disrupted natural sediment flows, reduced mangrove cover, eliminated nesting sites for birds and turtles, and buried important habitats like seagrass beds and mudflats. Coral reefs have also been damaged due to sedimentation and construction activities.

Industrial Pressures and Pollution

The Gulf faces significant environmental stress from industrial activities. It hosts nearly half of the world's desalination plants, which discharge hot, saline, and chemically contaminated brine into the sea, increasing water temperature and salinity. These plants also remove plankton and larvae, disrupting marine food chains. Additionally, sewage discharge and nutrient pollution have led to algal blooms, oxygen depletion, and fish deaths.

Impact of Conflict and Oil Spills

War and conflict have further damaged the Gulf's ecosystems. The Gulf War caused one of the largest oil spills in history, severely affecting coastlines, mangroves, and marine life. Oil leaks, tanker traffic, and ongoing geopolitical tensions continue to threaten the region. Wildlife conservation has also suffered due to instability, affecting species such as the Arabian oryx and the Asiatic cheetah.

Some countries in the region, including the UAE and Saudi Arabia, have initiated conservation measures such as limiting shrimp trawling, restoring mangroves, and establishing marine protected areas. However, the Gulf remains one of the most environmentally stressed marine regions in the world.

Prelims 2026 Most Probable High-Yield Topics

Mughal Empire in India - Part II

Akbar (1556–1605)

Religious Policy

- Akbar initially followed orthodox Islam but gradually adopted a policy of religious tolerance and syncretism.
- His influences included scholars like Shaikh Mubarak, Abul Fazl, and Faizi.
- He abolished pilgrim tax and jizya to promote social harmony.
- In 1575, he established the Ibadat Khana at Fatehpur Sikri for inter-religious debates.
- He invited scholars from Hinduism, Jainism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism.
- In 1579, he issued the Infallibility Decree, asserting supremacy in religious matters.
- In 1582, he introduced **Din-i-Ilahi**, a syncretic faith based on monotheism, rationalism, and ethical conduct.
- Din-i-Ilahi had very limited acceptance and declined after his death.

Land Revenue Administration

- Akbar introduced the Zabti (Bandobast) system with the assistance of Raja Todar Mal. It was later refined into the Dahsala System.
- A uniform land measurement system was implemented. Land was classified into:
 - Polaj – cultivated annually
 - Parauti – cultivated once in two years
 - Chachar – cultivated once in 3–4 years
 - Banjar – uncultivated for 5+ years

Mansabdari System

- Akbar introduced the Mansabdari system as a framework of civil and military administration.
- Each official was assigned a mansab (rank) ranging from 10 to 5000 (higher for princes).
- The rank had two components:
 - Zat – personal rank and status
 - Sawar – number of cavalry to be maintained
- Mansabs were non-hereditary and subject to imperial control.

Jahangir (1605–1627)

Jahangir ascended the throne as Prince Salim.

- His reign witnessed rebellions, notably by his son Khusrau.
- Guru Arjun Dev, the fifth Sikh Guru, was executed during his reign.

Shah Jahan (1628–1658)

Military and Territorial Policy

- Attempted to recover Kandahar but faced heavy losses and failure.
- Successfully expanded in the Deccan region by annexing Ahmadnagar.
- Bijapur and Golkonda accepted Mughal suzerainty through treaties.
- Created four Deccan provinces: Khandesh, Berar, Telangana, and Daulatabad.

War of Succession

- Conflict among his sons: Dara Shikoh, Shuja, Aurangzeb, and Murad Baksh.
- Aurangzeb emerged victorious and imprisoned Shah Jahan in Agra Fort.
- Shah Jahan died in 1666 and was buried in the Taj Mahal.

Aurangzeb (1658–1707)

He Assumed the title Alamgir.

- Early reign marked by military success and expansion.
- Faced revolts from Jats, Satnamis, Sikhs, and Marathas.
- Continued Mughal expansion in Deccan initiated by earlier rulers.
- Annexed Bijapur and Golkonda, ending Deccan Sultanates.
- This removed the buffer between Mughals and Marathas, leading to prolonged conflict.
- Continuous campaigns drained the treasury and weakened the empire.
- Historians describe this as the “Deccan Ulcer”.
- Reimposed jizya (1679) and pilgrim taxes.
- Banned music, festivals (e.g., Dasara), and court rituals like Jharokha Darshan.

Prelims 2026 Most Probable High-Yield Topics

Prelims model questions

Q. Consider the following statements regarding Akbar's religious policy:

1. The Ibadat Khana was established to conduct debates only among Muslim scholars.
2. The Infallibility Decree gave Akbar authority in religious matters.
3. Din-i-Ilahi was based on strict Islamic orthodoxy.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 2 only

Q. Consider the following statements regarding the Mansabdari system:

1. Mansabs were hereditary.
2. Zat indicated personal rank and status.
3. Sawar indicated the number of cavalry to be maintained.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 2 and 3 only

Q. Which of the following correctly describes the term "Zabti system"?

- (a) A system of military ranking
(b) A land revenue assessment system
(c) A judicial reform system
(d) A system of religious taxation

Answer: (b)

Prelims model questions

Q. With reference to Aurangzeb's religious policy, consider the following statements:

1. He abolished jizya to promote religious harmony.
2. He banned music in the Mughal court.
3. He appointed officials called Muhtasib to enforce moral codes.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (b) 2 and 3 only



**PRELIMS 2026
COUNTDOWN**

59 DAYS TO GO

PRELIMS CORNER :

1) Which of the following are the key features of 'National Ganga River Basin Authority (NGRBA)? (2016)

1. River basin is the unit of planning and management.
2. It spearheads the river conservation efforts at the national level
3. One of the Chief Ministers of the States through which the Ganga flows becomes the Chairman of NGRBA on rotation basis.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

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

2) Consider the following statements: (2016)

1. The Sustainable Development Goals were first proposed in 1972 by a global think tank called the 'Club of Rome'.
 2. The Sustainable Development Goals have to be achieved by 2030.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

CASE STUDY

Care, Dignity, and Innovative Therapy

The use of tango as a therapeutic intervention for patients with Parkinson's disease in Buenos Aires reflects an evolving approach in healthcare that integrates medical treatment with social and behavioural support systems. At Ramos Mejía Hospital, structured dance sessions help patients manage symptoms such as impaired balance, stiffness, and coordination through guided physical movement. Tango, with its emphasis on controlled steps, pauses, and weight shifts, enables patients to relearn everyday motor functions like walking, turning, and maintaining posture. The therapy also combines auditory, visual, and motor stimuli, which improves neurological coordination and enhances functional mobility in a way that conventional treatment alone may not achieve.

Beyond physical benefits, such initiatives highlight the importance of inclusive and patient-centric healthcare systems. The therapy provides emotional support, social interaction, and a sense of dignity, reducing the stigma often associated with chronic neurological conditions. By involving caregivers, volunteers, and trained professionals, the programme creates a community-based support structure that strengthens mental well-being alongside physical rehabilitation. This model demonstrates how public health systems can move towards holistic care—where treatment is not limited to medication but extends to improving quality of life, accessibility, and social integration for vulnerable sections of society.



Prelims Corner: Explanations

1) The correct answer is (a) 1 and 2 only.



The National Ganga River Basin Authority (NGRBA) was established to ensure the effective conservation and management of the Ganga River using a comprehensive and coordinated approach.

Statement 1 is correct. The NGRBA follows the river basin as the unit of planning and management. This means that instead of focusing only on the main river, it considers the entire Ganga basin, including its tributaries, surrounding ecosystems, and human activities. Such an integrated approach helps in addressing pollution, water use, and ecological issues in a holistic manner.

Statement 2 is also correct. The NGRBA acts as a central coordinating body for river conservation at the national level. It formulates policies, plans, and programs for cleaning and rejuvenating the Ganga. It also ensures coordination among different ministries, state governments, and agencies involved in river management.

Statement 3 is incorrect. The Chairman of the NGRBA is not selected from among the Chief Ministers on a rotational basis. Instead, the Prime Minister of India serves as the Chairperson, reflecting the national importance of the Ganga conservation mission. However, the Chief Ministers of the Ganga basin states—such as Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, and West Bengal—are members of the authority and play an important role in its functioning. Thus, only Statements 1 and 2 are correct.

2) The correct answer is (b) 2 only.

Statement 1 is incorrect. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were not first proposed in 1972 by the Club of Rome. It is true that the Club of Rome played an important role in raising global awareness about environmental limits through its 1972 report "The Limits to Growth." However, this was an early discussion on sustainability and resource constraints, not a proposal for the SDGs. The idea of the SDGs emerged much later in the context of global development debates.

The SDGs were formally proposed during the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) held in 2012. They were then officially adopted in 2015 by all member states of the United Nations as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This agenda laid out a comprehensive framework of 17 goals addressing issues such as poverty, inequality, health, education, climate change, and environmental protection.

Statement 2 is correct. The SDGs are designed to be achieved by the year 2030, providing a 15-year timeline for countries to work collectively towards sustainable and inclusive development. These goals are universal in nature and apply to both developed and developing countries.

Thus, while the Club of Rome contributed to early sustainability discourse, the SDGs are a much more recent global initiative with a defined timeline up to 2030.

