

# THE PALA CIVIL TIMES



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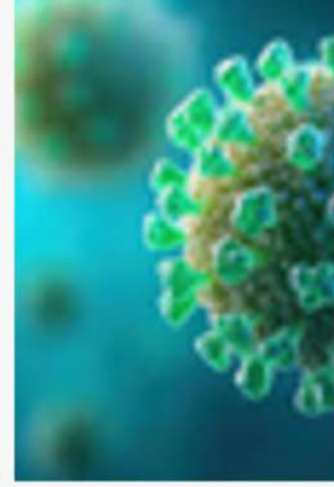
**Government doubles duty on imports of gold and silver**

THE HINDU : 14-05-2026



**What has the IMD announced ahead of this year's monsoon?**

THE HINDU : 14-05-2026



**Revving up immune cells might help fight HIV: study**

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**'Limited' religious symbols to be allowed with uniforms in Karnataka institutions**

THE HINDU : 14-05-2026



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**Just War, Power Balance and Modern Conflict**

THE HINDU : 14-05-2026

## Government doubles duty on imports of gold and silver

India has sharply increased the effective import duty on gold and silver from 9.2% to 18.4% amid concerns over rising bullion imports, widening Current Account Deficit (CAD), pressure on foreign exchange reserves, and global uncertainty linked to crude oil prices and the West Asia crisis. While the government views the move as necessary for prudent external sector management and prioritisation of essential imports, economists and industry experts argue that India's culturally rooted demand for gold is relatively inelastic and that excessive tariff hikes may instead encourage smuggling, expand informal trade networks, and adversely affect employment and exports in the gems and jewellery sector.

## EDITORIALS DECODED

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### Testing Troubles

*Leaks and breaches have destroyed the National Testing Agency's credibility*



### Chief Secretary and a chief challenge



### Failing the test

*NEET exam leak must lead up to systemic overhaul*



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## 'Limited' religious symbols to be allowed with uniforms in Karnataka institutions

The Karnataka government withdrew the 2022 uniform order linked to the hijab controversy and issued a fresh directive permitting students to wear limited faith-based symbols, including headscarves and sacred threads, along with prescribed uniforms in educational institutions.

### STATIC CORE LINKAGE

#### Constitutional Provisions

**Article 25** - Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion.

All persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right to profess, practise, and propagate religion.

Religious freedom is subject to:

- public order,
- morality,
- health,
- and other Fundamental Rights.

*\*The State may regulate secular or non-religious activities associated with religious practices\**

**Article 26** - Freedom to manage religious affairs

**Article 27** - Freedom from taxation for promotion of any religion

**Article 28** - Freedom from religious instruction in certain educational institutions

#### Judicial / Constitutional Linkage

**Indira Nehru Gandhi v. Raj Narain** : Secularism recognised as part of Basic Structure

### PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q. What can France learn from the Indian Constitution's approach to secularism? (GS II - Indian Polity - 2019)

Q. Starting from inventing the 'basic structure' doctrine, the judiciary has played a highly proactive role in ensuring that India develops into a thriving democracy. In light of the statement, evaluate the role played by judicial activism in achieving the ideals of democracy. (GS II - Indian Polity - 2019)

### 360° MAINS ANALYSIS

#### Factors Behind the Policy Change

##### Concerns Regarding Religious Expression

: The government stated that students and communities had raised concerns regarding restrictions on faith-based symbols such as headscarves and sacred threads.

##### Balancing Uniformity and Individual Rights

: The revised order seeks to maintain institutional discipline while accommodating limited expressions of religious identity.

##### Constitutional Values in Education

: Educational institutions are expected to promote equality, fraternity, dignity, secularism, and mutual respect among students.

##### Administrative Clarification

: The new order attempts to provide clearer guidance regarding permissible religious symbols within educational institutions.

#### Constitutional and Governance Dimensions

**Freedom of Religion** - The issue involves balancing individual religious freedom under Article 25 with institutional rules and administrative regulation.

**Secularism in Practice** - Indian secularism is based on principled equidistance and equal respect toward all religions rather than strict separation between religion and public life.

**Reasonable Restrictions** - Religious freedoms are not absolute and may be regulated in the interests of public order, discipline, safety, and institutional functioning.

**Equality and Non-Discrimination** - Policies relating to dress codes must ensure equal treatment across religions and communities.

**Constitutional Morality** - Educational institutions are expected to uphold constitutional values while fostering inclusiveness and social harmony.

### RELEVANCE

**GS II : Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.**

## Just War, Power Balance and Modern Conflict

The ongoing tensions involving the U.S., Israel, and Iran have revived debates surrounding anticipatory self-defence, the limits of international law, the weakening role of the United Nations, and the declining effectiveness of global peacekeeping mechanisms in preserving international peace and stability.

### STATIC CORE LINKAGE

#### Concepts :

**Just War Theory** - Use of force justified only under specific ethical and legal conditions

**Jus ad Bellum** - Conditions under which war can be initiated

**Jus in Bello** - Ethical conduct during war

**Anticipatory Self-Defence** - Use of force before an actual attack occurs

**Balance of Power** - Stability maintained through competing power centres

#### Important UN Charter Provisions

**Article 2(4)** - Prohibits threat or use of force against territorial integrity of states

**Article 51** - Recognises inherent right of self-defence against armed attack

**Article 53** - Permits regional arrangements such as NATO under UN framework

**Article 5 (NATO)** - Collective defence if a member is attacked

### PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q. Is there still a role for the concept of balance of power in contemporary international politics? Discuss. (GS II - International Relations - 2011)

Q. How have the US sanctions against Iran affected India's bilateral relations with Iran? (GS II - International Relations - 2012)

Q. In what ways would the ongoing US-Iran Nuclear Pact Controversy affect the national interest of India? How should India respond to its situation? (GS II - International Relations - 2018)

### 360° MAINS ANALYSIS

#### Factors Driving the Conflict

**Strategic Importance of West Asia** - West Asia remains central to global geopolitics due to its vast energy resources, shipping routes, and strategic maritime chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz.

**Security Dependence of Gulf States** - Several Gulf countries continue to rely heavily on external military protection, particularly from the United States, for regime and energy security.

**Nuclear Security Concerns** - The U.S. and Israel justify pressure on Iran through concerns regarding Iran's nuclear capabilities and missile programmes.

**Great Power Rivalry** - The conflict reflects broader geopolitical competition involving the U.S., Russia, China, and regional powers over influence in West Asia.

#### Rule of Law Concerns

**Ambiguity in International Law** - Differences in the interpretation of Article 51 of the UN Charter have created disputes regarding the legality of anticipatory self-defence.

**Selective Application of International Norms** - Powerful states are often accused of applying international law selectively based on strategic interests rather than universal legal principles.

**Weakening of UN Authority** - Frequent unilateral military interventions have reduced the credibility and effectiveness of the United Nations as a global peacekeeper.

**Expansion of Realpolitik** - National security interests and strategic calculations increasingly dominate over legal and humanitarian considerations.

**Erosion of Collective Security** - Global institutions designed to preserve peace have struggled to prevent conflicts, enforce accountability, or maintain neutrality.

### RELEVANCE

**GS II : Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.**

## Government doubles duty on imports of gold and silver

The Central Government sharply increased the effective import duty on gold and silver from 9.2% to 18.4% to reduce rising bullion imports, ease pressure on foreign exchange reserves, and manage the widening Current Account Deficit (CAD) amid global uncertainty and rising crude oil prices.

### STATIC CORE LINKAGE

#### Concepts :

**Customs Duty** : Tax imposed on imported goods.

**Bullion** : physical gold/silver with minimum 99.5% purity.

**Current Account Deficit (CAD)** : situation where imports exceed exports.

**Foreign Exchange Reserves** : assets held by RBI (Foreign currency, Gold, Special Drawing Rights)

#### Why it matters?

- India is among the world's largest gold importers.
- Gold imports require large foreign exchange outflows.
- Rising imports widen the trade deficit and CAD.
- Combined with high crude oil imports, this pressures the rupee.

#### Schemes

**Sovereign Gold Bonds (SGBs)** - Reduce physical gold purchases

**Gold Monetisation Scheme** - Mobilise idle household gold

### PYQ Compass

*UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.*



Q. Which one of the following groups of items is included in India's foreign-exchange reserves? (2013)

- Foreign-currency assets, Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) and loans from foreign countries
- Foreign-currency assets, gold holdings of the RBI and SDRs
- Foreign-currency assets, loans from the World Bank and SDRs
- Foreign-currency assets, gold holdings of the RBI and loans from the World Bank

### 360° MAINS ANALYSIS

#### Factors Behind the Duty Hike

**Rising Current Account Deficit (CAD)** - Increasing gold imports have widened the Current Account Deficit and intensified pressure on India's external sector stability.

**Pressure on Foreign Exchange Reserves** - Large-scale bullion imports require substantial dollar outflows, reducing the availability of foreign exchange reserves.

**Global Geopolitical Uncertainty** - The West Asia crisis and volatility in crude oil markets have increased concerns regarding India's import bill and macroeconomic stability.

**Priority for Essential Imports** - The government aims to conserve foreign exchange resources for essential imports such as crude oil, fertilizers, defence equipment, and industrial inputs.

#### Impacts and Concerns

**Pressure on the Rupee** - Higher dollar demand for imports can weaken the rupee exchange rate and increase currency volatility.

**Limited Reduction in Gold Demand** - Gold consumption in India is strongly linked to cultural practices, savings behaviour, and investment preferences, making demand relatively inelastic.

**Risk of Smuggling** - Sharp increases in import duties may encourage illegal trade channels and smuggling networks.

**Impact on Employment and Exports** - Higher import costs may adversely affect the gems and jewellery sector, which supports large-scale employment and export earnings.

**Growth of Informal Markets** - Excessive tariff barriers can strengthen grey-market transactions and reduce transparency in the economy.

### RELEVANCE

**GS III : Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment.**

**The Indian EXPRESS**

## Chief Secretary and a chief challenge

The appointment of Manoj Agarwal as Chief Secretary of West Bengal has raised concerns regarding bureaucratic neutrality and public trust in electoral institutions. Agarwal had overseen the controversial Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, which reportedly led to nearly 91 lakh deletions, many of which remain under judicial and appellate scrutiny before the Supreme Court of India. The controversy stems less from questions of individual competence and more from concerns over conflict of interest and the perception of politicisation of the bureaucracy. Critics argue that appointing an official associated with a disputed electoral exercise to a major executive position risks weakening confidence in institutional impartiality.

The issue also intersects with debates surrounding citizenship, welfare access and constitutional safeguards. The State government's indication that individuals deleted during the SIR process may lose access to welfare schemes, while applicants under the Citizenship Amendment Act framework remain eligible, has revived concerns about exclusionary governance. The episode highlights broader issues relating to due process, electoral integrity, administrative accountability and the balance between governance efficiency and constitutional inclusiveness in a diverse democracy.

**Editorial to Exam - Most probable question from this editorial**

*"Public trust in democratic institutions depends not only on legality but also on the perception of institutional neutrality." Discuss in the context of electoral roll revision exercises, bureaucratic appointments and debates surrounding citizenship and welfare access in India.*



## Testing troubles

The cancellation of the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test following allegations of paper leakage has intensified concerns regarding the credibility and governance standards of the National Testing Agency. More than 22 lakh students were affected after investigators reportedly found substantial overlap between the actual examination paper and a pre-circulated "guess paper" circulated through coaching networks. The episode adds to a series of controversies that have repeatedly undermined public trust in the NTA, including the 2019 impersonation scam, the 2022 frisking controversy in Kerala and the 2024 paper leak and grace marks dispute. Originally established to create a standardised, transparent and professionally managed national examination system, the NTA now faces criticism for persistent lapses in examination security, operational oversight and institutional accountability. The latest incident has also led to investigations by State agencies and the Central Bureau of Investigation, highlighting the seriousness of the breach. The controversy points to deeper structural weaknesses in India's high-stakes examination ecosystem. Despite strong recommendations, reforms remain inadequately implemented which is a strong reason for concern.

**Editorial to Exam - Most probable question from this editorial**

*"Repeated controversies surrounding national entrance examinations reveal systemic governance and accountability deficits in India's testing architecture." Examine in the context of recent NEET-UG irregularities and suggest reforms required to strengthen the credibility of public examinations.*

thehindu**businessline.**

TUESDAY - MARCH 31, 2026

## Failing the test

The cancellation of the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test following a major paper leak has exposed serious weaknesses in India's examination governance system. Affecting nearly 23 lakh students, the incident has raised concerns regarding the credibility, transparency and security of high-stakes examinations conducted by the National Testing Agency. Investigations traced the leak across multiple cities, suggesting organised networks and possible breaches in printing and logistics. The case is being probed under the Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act 2024 by the Central Bureau of Investigation. Coming after earlier controversies involving NEET and UGC-NET, the episode reflects recurring institutional lapses that undermine public trust in merit-based selection systems. The controversy highlights broader structural challenges in India's education system. Unlike computer-based examinations such as JEE, NEET still relies heavily on paper-based logistics vulnerable to malpractice. The episode has renewed demands for secure digital testing, stronger accountability mechanisms and stricter oversight of the NTA. It also reflects the intense competition arising from limited medical seats, which fuels commercialisation, coaching dependence and examination-related corruption.

**Editorial to Exam - Most probable question from this editorial**

*"Recurring paper leak controversies in national entrance examinations reveal both institutional governance failures and structural stresses in India's education system." Discuss in the context of recent NEET-UG developments and suggest measures to strengthen examination integrity and educational access.*

## What has the IMD announced ahead of this year's monsoon?

The India Meteorological Department has launched a new AI-assisted block-level monsoon forecasting system covering **3,196 blocks (about half of India's roughly 7,200-odd blocks) across 15 States and one Union Territory**, aiming to provide hyper-local rainfall predictions to improve agricultural planning and monsoon preparedness.

### STATIC CORE LINKAGE

Concepts :

**Block-Level Forecasting** - Weather prediction at sub-district administrative level

**Hyper-Local Forecast** - Highly localised weather prediction for smaller geographic areas

**El Niño** - Warming of Pacific Ocean waters affecting global weather patterns

### Why Monsoon Forecasting Matters ?

**Agricultural Dependence** - A large part of Indian agriculture remains rainfed and depends heavily on the southwest monsoon.

**Sowing Decisions** - Timely and accurate rainfall forecasts help farmers determine sowing periods and crop planning.

**Disaster Preparedness** - Better forecasts improve preparedness against droughts, floods, and erratic rainfall events.

**Climate Variability** - Climate change and El Niño events have increased monsoon unpredictability.

### PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q. With reference to 'Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD)' sometimes mentioned in the news while forecasting Indian monsoon, which of the following statements is/are correct? (2017)

1. The IOD phenomenon is characterised by a difference in sea surface temperature between tropical Western Indian Ocean and tropical Eastern Pacific Ocean.
2. An IOD phenomenon can influence an El Nino's impact on the monsoon. Select the correct answer using the code given below:
  - a) 1 only
  - b) 2 only
  - c) Both 1 and 2
  - d) Neither 1 nor 2

### RELEVANCE

**GS I : Salient features of world's physical geography - Important Geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic activity, cyclone etc**

**GS III : Major crops-cropping patterns in various parts of the country, - different types of irrigation and irrigation systems storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints; e-technology in the aid of farmers.**

### 360° MAINS ANALYSIS

#### Factors Behind the New Forecasting System

**Need for Hyper-Local Forecasts** - District-level forecasts often fail to capture the uneven and patchy nature of monsoon rainfall within smaller regions.

**Agricultural Requirements** - Farmers require location-specific rainfall information for sowing, irrigation, and crop management decisions.

**Climate Uncertainty** - Increasing climate variability and irregular monsoon patterns have increased demand for more precise forecasting systems.

**Technological Advancements** - Advances in artificial intelligence, weather modelling, and data analytics have enabled finer-scale forecasting.

**Policy Push for Actionable Forecasts** - The Agriculture Ministry has increasingly focused on converting weather forecasts into directly usable farm advisories.

#### Significance and Benefits

**Improved Agricultural Planning** - Block-level forecasts can help farmers optimise sowing schedules and reduce crop losses caused by delayed rainfall.

**Better Disaster Preparedness** - More granular forecasts can improve preparedness for droughts, floods, and extreme weather events.

**Enhanced Climate Resilience** - Localised forecasting strengthens adaptive capacity in rainfed agricultural regions vulnerable to climate shocks.

**Scientific Modernisation** - The system reflects the growing integration of AI with traditional physics-based meteorological models.

**Data-Driven Governance** - The initiative promotes evidence-based agricultural and disaster management planning.

## Revving up immune cells might help fight HIV: study

Scientists are testing a modified form of CAR-T cell therapy — widely used in cancer treatment — as a potential long-term treatment strategy for HIV. In an early-stage study, genetically engineered immune cells successfully suppressed HIV in some patients for months without requiring regular antiretroviral medicines.

### STATIC CORE LINKAGE

#### Concepts :

**HIV** - Human Immunodeficiency Virus that attacks the immune system

**AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome)** - Advanced stage of HIV infection causing severe immune deficiency

**CAR-T Cell Therapy** - Treatment where immune T-cells are genetically modified to fight disease

**Gene Therapy** - Modification of genes to treat or prevent disease

**Viral Reservoirs** - Hidden pockets in the body where HIV remains dormant

#### What is CAR-T Cell Therapy?

##### Process

1. T-cells are removed from a patient's blood.
2. These cells are genetically engineered in the laboratory.
3. Modified cells are designed to identify and destroy diseased cells.
4. The engineered cells are infused back into the patient

### PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q. Which one of the following statements best describes the role of B cells and T cells in the human body? (2022)

- a) They protect the body from environmental allergens.
- b) They alleviate the body's pain and inflammation.
- c) They act as immunosuppressants in the body.
- d) They protect the body from the diseases caused by pathogens.

### 360° MAINS ANALYSIS

#### Why HIV is Difficult to Cure

**Viral Reservoirs** - HIV hides inside dormant cells and can reactivate even after years of treatment.

**Rapid Viral Rebound** - The virus quickly returns if antiretroviral therapy (ART) is stopped.

**Immune System Damage** - Long-term HIV infection weakens immune response mechanisms.

**Genetic Variability** - HIV mutates rapidly, making vaccine and cure development difficult.

#### Challenges and Concerns

**Early-Stage Evidence** - Current findings are based on a very small sample size and require larger clinical trials.

**Cost and Accessibility** - CAR-T therapies are currently highly expensive and technologically intensive.

**Safety Concerns** - Gene-based therapies may carry risks such as immune overreaction and unintended genetic effects.

**Scalability Issues** - Large-scale production and deployment remain difficult, particularly in developing countries.

**Viral Mutation Risks** - HIV's high mutation rate could reduce long-term effectiveness of targeted therapies.

#### Ethical and Governance Dimensions

**Equity in Advanced Healthcare** - Breakthrough therapies may remain accessible only to developed countries.

**Regulation of Gene Therapy** - Strong regulatory oversight is necessary to ensure safety and ethical compliance.

**Informed Consent and Clinical Trials** - Experimental therapies require rigorous ethical safeguards during human testing.

#### India-Specific Challenges

**Stigma and Awareness** - Social stigma continues to affect testing and treatment.

**Unequal Healthcare Access** - Rural and economically weaker populations often face treatment barriers.

**Need for Affordable Innovation** - Advanced therapies must become affordable for wider public-health use.

### RELEVANCE

GS II - Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health; GS III : bio-technology