

THE PALA CIVIL TIMES



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P2. NATIONAL



Hasdeo-Aranya: Coal Mining and Tribal Rights - The auction of the Tara coal block brings into focus the difficult balance between coal-based development, ecological conservation and the rights of forest-dependent communities.

P3 WORLD



Iran’s rise in West Asia : the unintended consequences of the global war on terror - How U.S. interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq unintentionally removed Iran’s strategic rivals

P4. ECONOMICS



U.S.-Canada Trade Dispute : Lessons for India - How a trade relationship built on decades of deep economic integration has unravelled into tariffs, retaliation and restrictions, offering important lessons for India’s trade policy.

P7. HEALTH



What happens when AI becomes the first confidant in a mental health crisis?
: The growing use of AI for emotional support highlights the central challenge of responsible technology.

Editor’s Note

The latest edition of the Pala Civil Times brings together a set of stories that demonstrate how public policy can shape societies, economies, environments and even the way people respond to emerging technologies.

Beginning with the ongoing debate around the Hasdeo-Aranya forests and the Tara coal block, the edition examines the difficult balance between development, ecological conservation and the rights of forest-dependent communities. On the International page, as the world marks 25 years since the 9/11 attacks, we look beyond the tragedy itself to understand how the events that followed transformed West Asia and contributed to the emergence of Iran as a major regional power.

The Health page turns to a very different but increasingly relevant question: what happens when young people begin relying on AI chatbots for mental-health support, and what does this mean for individual and collective well-being? Our Editorial Decoder then explores two important policy-driven transformations — the long-term consequences of China’s One-Child Policy on marriage and inequality, and India’s growing adoption of alternative powertrain vehicles such as CNG, hybrids and electric vehicles.

Together, these stories show that public policy rarely ends with the problem it was designed to address. Its effects can extend across generations, borders, ecosystems, markets and everyday lives.

We hope this edition helps you look beyond the immediate news, understand the larger picture and develop the curiosity to ask.

Happy reading.

Editorials Decoded



Growth spurt: On data by Federation of Automobile Dealers’ Associations



India’s automobile market is moving beyond a simple petrol-versus-electric divide as CNG, hybrids and EVs gain ground amid changing fuel economics and consumer preferences.



For China’s single kids, love means not having to deal with siblings



How a population policy designed to control fertility produced unexpected effects on marriage preferences and concentration of economic advantages.

New Areas of India–France Space Cooperation

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, addressing the International Space Summit in Paris, called for countries to explore, innovate and protect space together and invited France and other nations to partner with India in its next phase of space development. The summit witnessed new agreements involving Indian and French space companies covering satellite launches, space surveillance and microsatellite technology, signalling the expansion of India–France cooperation into new areas of the space sector.

New Areas of India–France Space Cooperation

Space Surveillance: Safran Space has signed contracts worth more than €5 million with India's Dhruva Space to supply communication systems, inertial navigation units, optical payloads and ground stations for India's planned SBS-III space-surveillance constellation. The constellation envisages deploying 52 satellites between 2027 and 2030, strengthening India's space-surveillance capabilities.

Commercial Launches: French launch-services company RIDE! has signed an agreement to launch two satellites for India's TakeMeToSpace, which is developing orbital data centres.

Microsatellite Technology: France's U-Space and India's AXISCADES have signed a commercial cooperation agreement to explore the Indian microsatellite market and address growing commercial and institutional requirements.

Hasdeo-Aranya: Coal Mining and Tribal Rights

The auction of the Tara coal block in Chhattisgarh's Hasdeo-Aranya region has renewed debate over coal mining, forest conservation and community concerns.

Hasdeo-Aranya

A biodiverse forest region: Hasdeo-Aranya is a densely forested and ecologically significant region of Chhattisgarh, with local Adivasi communities dependent on its natural resources.

A legacy of local opposition: Communities have opposed mining for nearly 15 years through Gram Sabha resolutions, campaigns, sit-ins and protest marches, citing concerns over forests and wildlife.

Core issue

Forest and wildlife concerns: Mining has raised concerns over forest clearance, biodiversity loss and disruption of elephant movement corridors associated with the Lemru Elephant Reserve.

Changing policy position: The Chhattisgarh Assembly opposed further coal blocks in July 2022, while the State told the Supreme Court in 2023 that new mines were unnecessary. Tara was subsequently excluded from auction.

Reconsideration and auction: In December 2025, Chhattisgarh requested inclusion of Tara, stating that it lay outside the Lemru Elephant Corridor. Its boundaries were subsequently revised, removing the corridor's influence zone, and the block was auctioned in the 15th round.

The Hasdeo-Aranya controversy highlights the challenge of balancing energy security and resource extraction with ecological sustainability and community rights. It underscores the need for environmental governance that protects biodiversity while ensuring meaningful participation of forest-dependent communities and clear institutional accountability. The larger policy objective should therefore be to pursue development without weakening ecological integrity or legitimate local rights.

PYQ Compass



Q. Consider the following space missions : I. Axiom-4
 II. SpaDeX
 III. Gaganyaan
 How many of the space missions given above encourage and support micro-gravity research? (2025)
 (a) Only one
 (b) Only two
 (c) All the three
 (d) None

Iran's rise in West Asia : the unintended consequences of the global war on terror

As West Asia remains mired in conflict, Iran's ability to confront the United States has drawn attention to how the post-2001 regional order strengthened Tehran's strategic position. U.S. interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq removed two hostile regimes bordering Iran, while subsequent conflicts and power vacuums enabled Iran to expand its influence through an extensive network of regional partners and proxy groups.



The impact on Iran by the Global War on Terror

Iran's pre-2001 environment: Before 2001, Iran faced hostile regimes in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

Regime change : The U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq removed both governments, creating a more favourable strategic environment for Tehran.

Iraq-Iran relations: The fall of Saddam Hussein's Sunni-dominated regime paved the way for a Shia-led government with deep ties to Iran, transforming a former adversary into an important strategic partner.

Proxy warfare expanded: Iran supported Shia militias in Iraq which allowed Iran to build influence without directly confronting stronger conventional military powers from other states in the west asian region.

Rise of ISIS: The emergence of ISIS, with its strongly anti-Shia ideology, created a major threat to Iran. Tehran consequently became a critical military supporter of the Iraqi government and deployed the Quds Force to coordinate Baghdad's defence.

How Iran Built Regional Influence

Power through regional networks: Iran responded to its conventional military limitations by building the "Axis of Resistance", a network of political and military partners across Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Yemen. Groups such as Hezbollah, Hamas, the Houthis and Shia militias in Iraq enabled Tehran to project influence beyond its borders and create strategic depth, often described as a "ring of fire" around Israel.

Asymmetric power projection: The IRGC, particularly its Quds Force, became central to supporting and coordinating Iran's regional partners. Conflicts in Iraq and Syria also enabled groups such as Hezbollah to become more militarily capable and politically entrenched.

Regional vacuums strengthened the network: The U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, the Arab Spring and the Syrian conflict created new spaces for Iranian influence. Iran supported the Assad regime in Syria while strengthening its position in Iraq and maintaining links with Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Strategic outcome: Prolonged U.S. military engagement in the region consumed American resources while allowing Iran to expand its asymmetric capabilities, regional partnerships and strategic reach, transforming instability into an instrument of power

The Paradox of the Global War on Terror

The post-9/11 U.S. interventions inadvertently strengthened Iran by removing its major regional adversaries in Afghanistan and Iraq and creating power vacuums that Tehran could exploit. Over time, Iran used these opportunities to build regional alliances and proxy networks, transforming itself from a strategically contained state into a major regional power in West Asia.

PYQ Compass



Q. India is one of the founding members of the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC), a multimodal a transportation corridor, which will connect

- (a) India to Central Asia to Europe via Iran
- (b) India to Central Asia via China
- (c) India to South-East Asia through Bangladesh and Myanmar
- (d) India to Europe through Azerbaijan

ECONOMICS

U.S.–Canada Trade Dispute : Lessons for India

The U.S.–Canada trade dispute has intensified with new U.S. tariffs and import restrictions on Canadian goods, despite decades of deep economic integration between the two countries. The dispute offers important lessons for India on trade negotiations, tariff vulnerability and the need to protect long-term competitiveness.

U.S - Canada trade relations : Evolution

Long-standing integration: U.S.–Canada economic integration began with free trade in automobiles and their parts in 1965, expanded through a broader free trade agreement in 1989, and later continued under NAFTA.

Highly interconnected economies: Canada developed an export-oriented model based on producing large volumes of selected products for the U.S. market. It supplies around 70% of the oil refined in the American Midwest, 60% of U.S. aluminium and nearly all the lumber used in U.S. residential construction.

Root of the Current Trade Dispute and Its Escalation

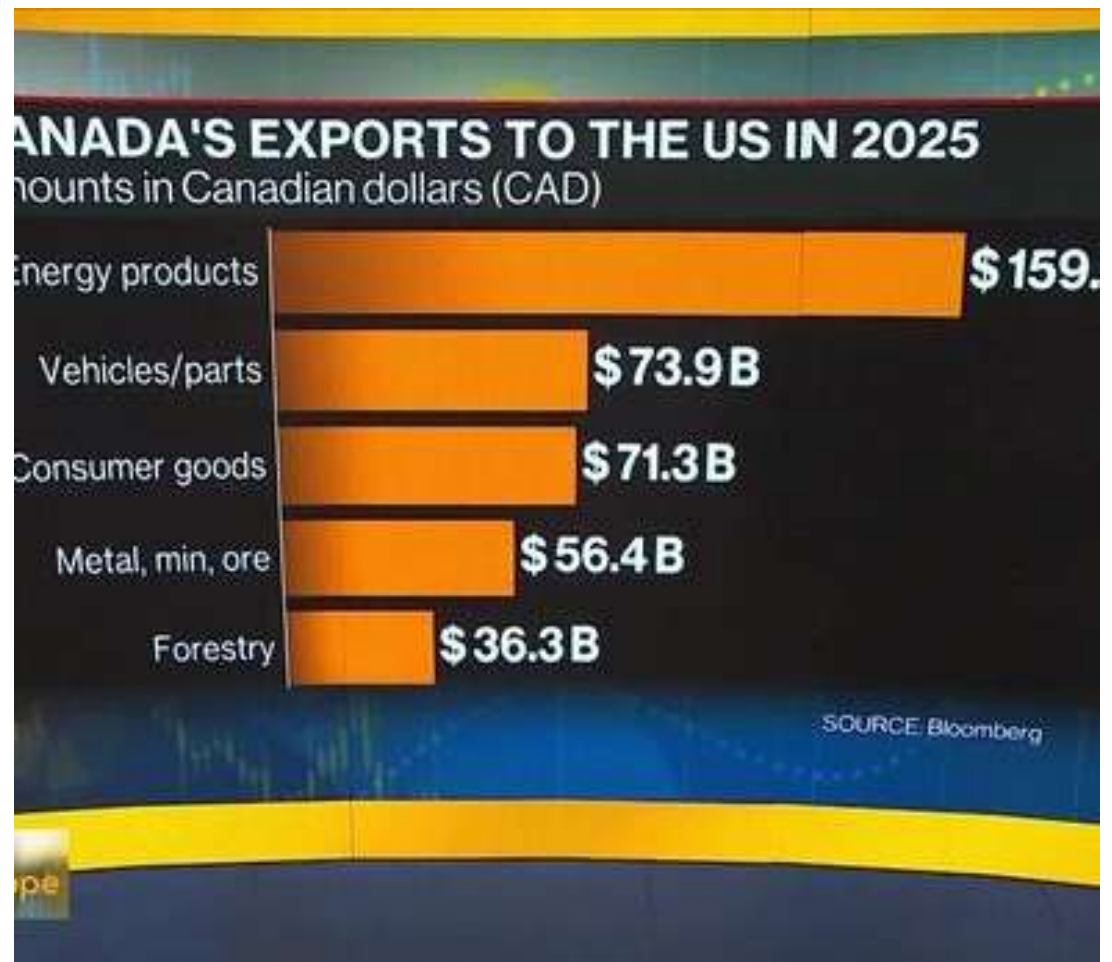
Breakdown in tariff negotiations: Recent negotiations over a new tariff arrangement broke down, with both sides accusing the other of making last-minute changes.

Reciprocal tariffs: Canada subsequently imposed tariffs of up to 50% on U.S. products in response to U.S. tariffs announced on Canadian imports.

U.S. retaliation: The U.S. responded by imposing a 50% surcharge on several Canadian products from September 15, including mattresses, motorboats and golf carts.

Import bans: From September 29, the U.S. will ban certain Canadian alcoholic beverages and some dairy products. The measures were presented by the U.S. as a response to what it described as discriminatory Canadian restrictions and retaliation.

Escalation beyond tariffs: The dispute has also moved into government procurement, with the U.S. threatening to remove Canadian-origin products from its procurement programmes.



What Does the Dispute Teach India?

Preferential treatment cannot be taken for granted:

Even a long-standing neighbour, alliance partner and deeply integrated trading partner can face sharp tariff measures. India therefore cannot assume that favourable treatment from the U.S. will remain permanent.

Trade agreements require careful cost-benefit assessment: India should assess whether market access obtained through a trade agreement provides sufficient and durable advantages before making significant concessions.

A trade agreement may not end tariff pressure:

The U.S.–Canada dispute shows that tariff and trade pressures can continue even after negotiations or agreements. India has also faced this uncertainty, with investigations into forced labour and excess capacity potentially affecting tariff levels despite the February 2026 agreement on 18% tariffs on imports from India.

Competitiveness must remain central: India should enter trade agreements when the resulting advantage over competing economies is sufficiently clear, rather than treating the conclusion of an agreement as an end in itself.

PYQ Compass



Q. "With the waning of globalization, post-Cold War world is becoming a site of sovereign nationalism." Elucidate. (GS II - 2025)

For China's single kids, love means not having to deal with siblings (I.E : 11-09-2026)

A working paper by Fangqi Wen of Ohio State University examines how China's former One-Child Policy (1979–2015) influenced marriage patterns. The study suggests that only children are more likely to marry other only children, showing how a population policy can produce long-term effects extending beyond fertility into family formation, marriage patterns and economic inequality.



From Population Policy to Marriage Preferences

Changing family structures: The One-Child Policy produced generations of only children who grew up as the sole recipients of parental attention, family resources and potential inheritance.

Only-child assortative mating: The study finds that only children have a significantly higher likelihood of marrying other only children, with their chances of such a match estimated to be 18.4% higher than those of people with siblings.

Why sibling status matters: Only-child status can signal greater parental support and better inheritance prospects. Consequently, marrying another only child may be perceived as a way of combining similar family resources and avoiding competition with siblings over inheritance and parental support.

Marriage Patterns Can Reinforce Economic Inequality

Economic advantage of only-child couples:

Using data from the China Family Panel Studies, the study finds that couples in which both partners are only children generally have higher incomes, receive more monetary transfers and own more expensive homes than other married couples.

Assortative mating and inequality: When individuals with similar social and economic advantages are more likely to marry each other, existing advantages can become concentrated within particular families and transmitted across generations.

The Larger Population-Policy Lesson

The Chinese experience shows that population policies can have consequences far beyond fertility and population size. By reshaping family structures, the One-Child Policy altered the distribution of parental attention, inheritance prospects and household resources, which in turn influenced marriage preferences and patterns of marital sorting. When only children increasingly marry other only children, these advantages can become concentrated within particular households and transmitted across generations. The case therefore illustrates how a policy designed primarily to regulate population growth can produce wider and unintended consequences for family formation, social mobility and economic inequality.

PYQ COMPASS



Q. Evaluate the impact of globalization on Indian youths with reference to social, political, economic and cultural spheres (GS II – 2026)

Q. Globalization has increased urban migration by skilled, young, unmarried women from various classes. How has this trend impacted upon their personal freedom and relationship with family? (GS II – 2024)

Growth spurt: On data by Federation of Automobile Dealers' Associations (The Hindu : 11-09-2026)

According to the Federation of Automobile Dealers' Associations (FADA), total vehicle registrations in August 2026 increased 17.5% year on year, recording the highest-ever volume for August. More significantly, CNG, hybrid and electric powertrains together accounted for 40.59% of passenger vehicle sales, indicating a growing shift away from petrol-powered vehicles.

A Strong but Uneven Automobile Market

Record August sales: Total vehicle registrations increased 17.5% year on year, although August sales were 6.4% lower than July, suggesting that the monthly record should be interpreted cautiously.

Rural demand strengthened: Rural vehicle registrations grew 19.7% year on year, compared with 15.1% in urban areas. Rural passenger vehicle sales grew by 24.9%, against 10.9% in urban areas, pointing towards strengthening rural consumption and mobility.

Rural demand is not entirely agriculture-driven: Tractor sales remained almost unchanged year on year but declined 25% month on month, while two-wheelers and passenger vehicles performed strongly. This suggests that non-farm rural incomes and mobility demand may be strengthening alongside rural consumption.



Alternative Powertrains Are Gaining Ground

Diversification of passenger vehicles: In the first part of FY 2026-27, CNG accounted for 24.67%, hybrids 8.02% and EVs 7.90% of passenger vehicle sales, taking the combined share of these powertrains to 40.59%.

Cost is an important driver: Rising fuel prices and the lower running costs of CNG and electric vehicles are encouraging consumers to consider alternatives to petrol.

Infrastructure and product choice matter: Wider CNG and charging infrastructure, along with the availability of newer models, is supporting the shift towards alternative powertrains.

The transition is uneven: Three-wheelers are predominantly electric, two-wheelers are increasingly adopting alternative powertrains, while passenger cars are witnessing greater diversification.

Why the Shift Needs to Be Interpreted With Caution

Sales need a cautious reading: August 2026 sales benefited from a base effect, as buyers had postponed purchases in August 2025 ahead of revised GST rates. August sales were also 6.4% lower than July, possibly reflecting monsoon-related factors, while dealer inventories remained high at 38-40 days against the recommended 21 days.

Alternative powertrains do not mean complete decarbonisation: Although CNG, hybrids and EVs are gaining market share, CNG remains a fossil fuel and most hybrids continue to use petrol. The current trend therefore represents a diversification of India's automobile powertrain mix, rather than a complete transition away from fossil fuels.

Structural shift still needs confirmation: The August figures are significant, but whether they mark a lasting transformation will depend on whether alternative-powertrain sales remain strong after the base effect fades and dealer inventories normalise.

PYQ Compass



Q. Consider the following types of vehicles (2025):

I. Full battery electric vehicles

II. Hydrogen fuel cell vehicles

III. Fuel cell-electric hybrid vehicles

How many of the above are considered as alternative powertrain vehicles?

(a) Only one

(b) Only two

(c) All the three

(d) None

HEALTH

What happens when AI becomes the first confidant in a mental health crisis?

The growing use of AI chatbots for mental health support has raised concerns about their ability to respond safely when conversations involve suicidal thoughts or severe psychological distress. While chatbots offer instant, non-judgmental and round-the-clock interaction, experts warn that inappropriate responses may reinforce hopelessness, prolong rumination or delay professional intervention in vulnerable users.



What is the Issue?

AI as an informal mental-health support tool:

AI chatbots are increasingly being used by young people to discuss personal problems, emotional distress, relationships and other concerns before approaching family, friends or mental-health professionals.

Growing use among young people: A U.S. survey of 1,009 people aged 12–21 found that 19.2% had used AI chatbots for mental-health advice in 2025. Nearly 43% of these users used them at least monthly, while 5.8% used them daily or almost daily. Nearly two-thirds had not disclosed this use to anyone.

Mental-health discussions are present in AI use:

An analysis of more than 620,000 publicly available ChatGPT conversations found that 4.9% could broadly be classified as involving mental health, although only 0.21% met a stricter definition involving an identifiable person explicitly seeking mental-health help.

Why Can AI Responses Become Risky?

Suicidal distress is contextual: Studies indicate that chatbots can struggle to distinguish intermediate levels of suicide risk, where subtle cues about suicidal thinking become important.

Empathy can reinforce the interaction: An empathetic response may provide immediate comfort, but repeated reassurance can lead users to focus on validation while overlooking the need for professional help.

AI may delay human intervention: Some users may continue discussing serious difficulties with AI instead of approaching mental-health professionals.

Withdrawal from human support is a warning sign: Repeatedly quoting AI responses, withdrawing from human confidants, resisting professional help or developing rigid views about oneself or relationships based on chatbot responses may indicate unhealthy dependence on AI-mediated support.

Way Forward

Limited supportive role: AI can help patients organise thoughts or record medication effects while taking professional medical help.

Need for human assessment: A chatbot lacks access to a patient's complete psychiatric history, life experiences, protective factors and current mental state. This limits its ability to judge the seriousness of distress.

Safety and accountability: AI systems used for mental-health support require mandatory safety audits, independent clinical evaluation, clear liability frameworks and reporting of serious safety incidents. Users should also be informed about the limits of AI and when professional help is necessary.

Human support remains essential: Technology cannot address the stigma that prevents people from seeking care. Families and communities must create supportive environments that encourage people to discuss distress and access professional help.

PYQ Compass



Q. With the present state of development, Artificial Intelligence can effectively do which of the following? (2020)

1. Bring down electricity consumption in industrial units
2. Create meaningful short stories and songs
3. Disease diagnosis
4. Text-to-Speech Conversion
5. Wireless transmission of electrical energy

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- a) 1, 2, 3 and 5 only
- b) 1, 3 and 4 only
- c) 2, 4 and 5 only
- d) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Registered Unrecognised Political Parties

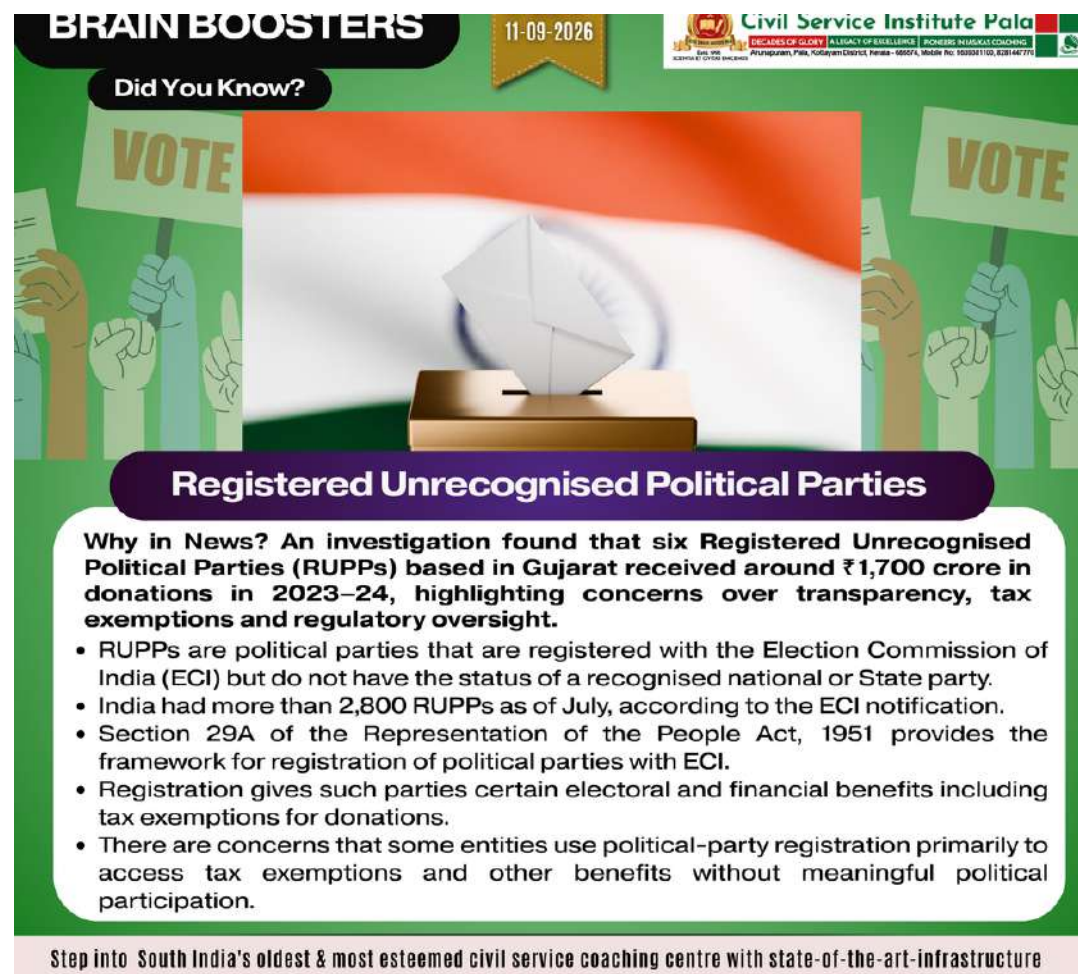
An investigation found that six Registered Unrecognised Political Parties (RUPPs) based in Gujarat received around ₹1,700 crore in donations in 2023–24, highlighting concerns over transparency, tax exemptions and regulatory oversight.

What are Registered Unrecognised Political Parties?

- Registered Unrecognised Political Parties (RUPPs) are political parties that are registered with the Election Commission of India (ECI) but do not have the status of a recognised national or State party.
- Political parties can be formed by citizens as an association or body of individuals and can seek registration with the ECI.
- Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 provides the framework for registration of political parties.
- After examining the documents submitted by a party, the ECI registers it as a political party if the prescribed requirements are satisfied.
- Registration gives such parties certain electoral and financial benefits, even though they have not acquired recognition as a national or State party.

What Benefits Do RUPPs Receive?

- Tax exemption:** Donations received by eligible political parties can receive tax exemption under the relevant provisions of the Income Tax law.
- Common symbol:** RUPPs can obtain a common symbol for contesting Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections, subject to the applicable conditions.
- Star campaigners:** A registered party can have up to 20 star campaigners during an election campaign.
- These benefits make registration valuable even for parties that have limited electoral presence or support.



What Financial Disclosure Requirements Apply?

- RUPPs are required to maintain details of individual donors contributing more than ₹20,000 in a financial year.
- These details have to be submitted to the ECI annually.
- Under Section 29C of the Representation of the People Act, failure to furnish the required contribution reports can result in the loss of income-tax exemption.
- Donations exceeding ₹2,000 are required to be received through cheque or bank transfer, rather than cash, under the provisions referred to in the supplied material.
- These requirements are intended to improve financial transparency and traceability of political donations.

The Scale of the RUPP Issue

- India had more than 2,800 RUPPs as of July, according to the ECI notification referred to in the material.
- However, only around 750 RUPPs contested the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.
- This large gap has led to the description “letter pad parties” for parties that remain registered but have little or no meaningful electoral activity.
- The concern is not simply the existence of small political parties, but whether some entities use political-party registration primarily to access tax exemptions and other benefits without meaningful political participation.

PYQ Compass



Q. Consider the following space missions : I. Axiom-4

II. SpaDeX

III. Gaganyaan

How many of the space missions given above encourage and support micro-gravity research? (2025)

(a) Only one

(b) Only two

(c) All the three

(d) None

Ans : C

Axiom-4: A private mission to the International Space Station (ISS), Axiom-4 supports microgravity research by carrying experiments related to medicine, materials science, and biology in space conditions. Hence option I is correct.

SpaDeX (Space Docking Experiment): An Indian mission to demonstrate autonomous docking. While its primary goal is technological, microgravity effects are often studied during such missions, especially in maneuvering and system validation in orbit. Hence option II is correct.

India's first human spaceflight program. It aims to send humans into space, where microgravity research is a key scientific objective, especially in life sciences and space medicine. Hence option III is correct.

Q. India is one of the founding members of the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC), a multimodal a transportation corridor, which will connect

(a) India to Central Asia to Europe via Iran

(b) India to Central Asia via China

(c) India to South-East Asia through Bangladesh and Myanmar

(d) India to Europe through Azerbaijan

Ans : a

The INSTC is a multi-modal, cost and time effective from India to Northern and Western Europe. It has the potential to enhance India's connectivity with Central Asia and Eurasian Region and vice versa, taking into account the geo-strategic and economic importance of all the involved countries. The eastern corridor connects Russia to India through the Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. Iran and Russia are essential links in the corridor, not just Azerbaijan. Hence option (a) is the correct answer.

PYQ Compass



Q. With the present state of development, Artificial Intelligence can effectively do which of the following? (2020)

1. Bring down electricity consumption in industrial units
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5. Wireless transmission of electrical energy

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- a) 1, 2, 3 and 5 only
- b) 1, 3 and 4 only
- c) 2, 4 and 5 only
- d) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Ans : b

Artificial Intelligence (AI) can optimize energy usage in industrial units by analyzing patterns, predicting energy needs, and automating processes to reduce waste and enhance efficiency.

AI is widely used in medical diagnostics, such as detecting patterns in imaging (e.g., X-rays, MRIs) or analyzing patient data to predict diseases. **(this is different from analysing mental health issues).**

AI-driven systems like voice assistants (e.g., Siri, Alexa) and other text-to-speech tools have become highly advanced and can convert text into natural-sounding speech effectively.

Q. Consider the following types of vehicles (2025):

- I. Full battery electric vehicles
- II. Hydrogen fuel cell vehicles
- III. Fuel cell-electric hybrid vehicles

How many of the above are considered as alternative powertrain vehicles?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All the three
- (d) None

Ans : C

A powertrain is the system in a vehicle that generates power and delivers it to the wheels, allowing the vehicle to move. It typically includes the engine, transmission, and drivetrain (including axles, differentials, and drive shafts).

I. Full battery electric vehicles (BEVs): These are powered entirely by electricity stored in batteries and use non-ICE systems. Hence option I is correct. II. Hydrogen fuel cell vehicles (FCEVs): Use hydrogen fuel cells to generate electricity to power electric motors. Hence it has an alternative powertrain. Hence option II is correct. III. Fuel cell-electric hybrid vehicles: Combine a fuel cell and a battery or other electric storage system. Thus it is an alternative powertrain. Hence option III is correct

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Q. With reference to the growing adoption of alternative powertrains in India, which of the following factors can influence consumers' shift towards vehicles such as CNG, hybrid and electric vehicles?

1. Rising fuel costs and the resulting demand for vehicles with lower running costs.
2. Concerns regarding the use of ethanol-blended petrol.
3. Greater availability of alternative-fuel vehicles and supporting infrastructure.
4. Changes in taxation that affect the relative cost of purchasing different categories of vehicles.
5. A mandatory shift of all automobile manufacturers from petrol vehicles to electric vehicles by consumers.
6. A decline in the importance of vehicle running costs as household incomes increase.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1, 2, 3 and 4 only
- (b) 1, 2, 5 and 6 only
- (c) 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 only
- (d) 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6 only

Answer: (a) 1, 2, 3 and 4 only

Rising fuel costs, concerns over ethanol-blended petrol, wider availability of alternative-fuel vehicles and supporting infrastructure, and changes in taxation can influence consumer choices. Statements 5 and 6 are incorrect because there is no such mandatory consumer-driven shift, and running costs can remain an important consideration even as incomes rise.

Q. The term "Axis of Resistance", frequently heard in the context of International Relations, is associated with which of the following?

- (a) A formal military alliance established by Iran and Russia to counter NATO expansion
- (b) A network of Iran-aligned political and armed groups operating across West Asia
- (c) A regional economic grouping formed by Iran, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon
- (d) A collective security arrangement established by Arab states against external intervention

Answer: (b) A network of Iran-aligned political and armed groups operating across West Asia

The "Axis of Resistance" refers to a network of Iran-aligned political and armed groups across West Asia, including groups in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Yemen. Iran has used these relationships to expand its regional influence and project power through asymmetric means.