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DAILY NEWSPAPER ANALYSIS



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1 Flydubai FZ1073 Inflight Cockpit Attack and Emergency Diversion

GS-III | Prelims + Mains | Aviation security and unlawful interference | The Hindu

A detailed incident reconstruction article tracing a single aviation emergency event — what happened on the flight, what happened to the aircraft, what the airline said publicly, and how the investigation is proceeding — with embedded technical explanation of cockpit safety tools and transponder codes.

Syllabus — Security challenges and their management in border areas; linkages of organised crime with terrorism
Prelims — Current events of national and international importance



What happened on the flydubai aircraft?

Why did FZ 1073 from UAE to Israel get diverted to Saudi Arabia on September 30? What led to the inflight incident? How did captain Smit Machchhar and the passengers deal with the situation? What is the damage caused to the aircraft?

Murali N. Krishnaswamy

The story so far:

On September 30, 2026, at about 8.35 a.m. IST, a flight from the United Arab Emirates to Israel was diverted to Saudi Arabia after one pilot stabbed the other and "apparently tried to crash the plane," according to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The inflight incident took place on a flydubai Boeing 737-8 MAX flight, FZ 1073, carrying mostly Israeli passengers. The aircraft was diverted to Tabuk in Saudi Arabia, where it made a safe landing despite extensive damage. The airline has announced the suspension of all flights to and from Israel. An investigation has begun, also examining a 'terror angle'.

What happened on the flight?

Media reports have said that an altercation is alleged to have broken out between the two flight crew, with one of the pilots being stabbed. The captain was Smit Machchhar, an Indian national, and a former SpiceJet pilot, who was recruited by flydubai in 2022. Other reports identify the co-pilot, who was arrested, as an Omani national. Both crew were moved to Abu Dhabi after initial hospitalisation in Saudi Arabia.

Initial reports quoted passengers talking about a pocket knife having been used in the attack. Other reports cited the use of the flight deck crash axe as another possibility.

Media reports, eyewitness accounts, and inflight video clips have detailed how passengers were overtaken by the events, with chaos prevailing towards the front of the aircraft.

Briefs by Reuters and *The Times of Israel* say that "after being stabbed and seriously wounded by the copilot, the Indian captain managed to click open the cockpit door in what allowed several Israelis to burst in and subdue the attacker," attributing this to a spokesperson for Mr. Netanyahu. Other flydubai pilots, who were in the cabin, were able to intervene and carry out the safe landing in Saudi Arabia.

Initial reports quoted passengers talking about a (pocket) knife having been used in the attack. Other reports cited the use of the flight deck crash axe as another possibility. On October 3, a BBC report, quoting the United Arab Emirates Prosecutor General, said that the pilot had been "attacked with a crash axe in an attempt to take control of the aircraft". Senior pilots have told *The Hindu* that the crash axe (a mandatory aircraft safety emergency tool for aircrew) is "normally stored in the flight deck. It is to be accessed quickly, as it is in plain sight, and is used to breach the fuselage in an emergency, if there is structural deformation, or to pry open panels to get to the source of smoke in the case of a fire".

A video clip shared with *The Hindu* by aviation sources has shown both pilots on the cabin floor, bleeding profusely, with bloodstains on the cabin wall. One of the pilots can be seen in a blood-soaked shirt with epaulettes while the other crew member can be seen with an oxygen mask. Some passengers around the injured pilots can be seen asking for the filming to stop.

What happened to the flight?

Amid the commotion on the flight deck, a series of transponder codes were squawked from the aircraft – these codes are used globally during an aviation emergency. In this instance, the codes 7700 and 7500 denoted an emergency (in the case of mechanical or technical problems) as well as trouble due to 'unlawful interference'. This may have prompted Israel and Saudi Arabia to scramble fighter jets. At 10.50 a.m. IST, the Boeing, which was flying at about 34,000 feet, made a sudden descent to about 19,000 feet, followed by an ascent and descent again, before levelling off at about 15,000 feet.

The incident happened about two and a half hours into the three-hour flight. The jet, which was in Jordanian airspace for a short while, looped back to Saudi Arabia and landed at Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz International Airport in Tabuk. This civil-military airfield is also the base of the Royal Saudi Air Force Wing 7.

An emergency descent can be controlled, but in this instance, where the descent could have occurred erratically, there could have been severe damage and stress to crucial flight control surfaces and even aircraft tail.

Ground images from Tabuk showed damage to the rudder on the tail/vertical stabiliser of the aircraft – a large part of it was missing. Passengers were seen deboarding the aircraft using a step ladder of Saudi Ground Services Company, the ground handling agency. The airport said that its Air Traffic Control centre had received a distress call from the flight, with a request for an emergency landing.

What has the airline said?

In four statements shared with *The Hindu*, a flydubai spokesperson said that "an altercation occurred in the flight deck", adding that the aircraft was "successfully secured by on-duty flydubai crew travelling on the flight, who diverted and landed the aircraft with 172 passengers and crew safely".

The spokesperson said that "... the underlying reasons and motives are unknown and remain subject to a formal investigation, urging all parties to refrain from premature speculation while authorities gather the facts."

The spokesperson added that "flydubai flights to and from Israel will be suspended while the investigation continues".

How is the investigation proceeding?

Authorities have begun an investigation, even as the incident has drawn attention to earlier instances of (suspected) 'unlawful interference', examples being Japan Airlines flight 350 in 1982, Royal Air Maroc flight 630 in 1994, SilkAir flight 185 in 1997, EgyptAir flight 990 in 1999, LAM Mozambique Airlines flight 470 in 2013 and the Germanwings flight 9525 crash in 2015.

Israel has decided to step up security checks on all pilots flying into the country.

This photo released on Israel's Foreign Ministry's social media shows Indian Capt. Smit Machchhar in the cockpit of a plane. PTI

WHY IN NEWS

On September 30, 2026, flydubai flight FZ1073 from UAE to Israel was diverted to Tabuk, Saudi Arabia, after an alleged cockpit attack in which the Indian captain was stabbed. The incident drew global attention to aviation security protocols, with the airline suspending all Israel routes and a formal investigation launched examining a 'terror angle'.

What Happened in the Cockpit

- An altercation broke out between the two crew members; one pilot allegedly stabbed the other and reportedly attempted to crash the aircraft, according to Israeli official statements.
- The captain, **Smit Machchhar**, an Indian national and former SpiceJet pilot recruited by flydubai in 2022, was the victim; the co-pilot, identified as an **Omani national**, was arrested.
- Both crew members were found on the cabin floor bleeding profusely; a video shared with the newspaper showed bloodstains on the cabin wall and one pilot in a blood-soaked shirt.
- Disputed weapon accounts emerged: initial reports cited a **pocket knife**, while a BBC report quoting the UAE Prosecutor General stated the pilot was attacked with the **flight deck crash axe** — a mandatory safety tool stored in plain sight in the flight deck to breach the fuselage in emergencies.
- Other flydubai pilots in the cabin were able to intervene, and Israeli passengers helped subdue the attacker after the cockpit door was opened.

How the Aircraft Was Controlled and Damaged

- Transponder codes **7700** (mechanical/technical emergency) and **7500** (unlawful interference) were squawked, likely prompting Israel and Saudi Arabia to scramble fighter jets.
- The Boeing 737 MAX, flying at 34,000 feet, made a sudden descent to 19,000 feet, ascended again, then levelled off at 15,000 feet, indicating erratic control consistent with a struggle in the cockpit.
- The aircraft briefly entered Jordanian airspace before looping back to Saudi Arabia and landing at **Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz International Airport, Tabuk** — a civil-military airfield and base of the Royal Saudi Air Force Wing 7.

  Ground images revealed **damage to the rudder and vertical stabiliser** (tail section), with a large part missing —

structural stress consistent with an erratic emergency descent.

- Passengers deplaned via a step ladder provided by **Saudi Ground Services Company**, the ground handling agency, after Tabuk ATC received the distress call and emergency landing request.

Airline's Official Position

- Flydubai issued four statements describing the event as 'an altercation in the flight deck', stopping short of characterising it as an attempted hijacking or terror attack.
- The airline credited **on-duty flydubai crew** travelling as passengers with securing the aircraft, noting all **172 passengers and crew** landed safely.
- Flydubai **suspended all flights to and from Israel** pending the outcome of a formal investigation, urging parties to refrain from premature speculation.
- Both crew members received initial hospital treatment in Saudi Arabia before being moved to Abu Dhabi for further care and legal proceedings.

Investigative and Security Implications

- Authorities are examining a **'terror angle'**, placing the incident in the context of a global pattern of suspected **unlawful interference with civil aviation**.
- Historical precedents cited include Japan Airlines flight 350 (1982), SilkAir flight 185 (1997), EgyptAir flight 990 (1999), LAM Mozambique Airlines flight 470 (2013), and the **Germanwings flight 9525 crash (2015)** — the most recent major case of deliberate pilot action.
- The Germanwings precedent prompted many airlines to adopt **two-person cockpit rules**, making the breach of these norms by a sole pilot aboard particularly significant here.
- Israel announced it would **step up security checks on all pilots** flying into the country in response to the incident.
- The event highlights tensions around **single-pilot vulnerability** in the cockpit and whether existing crew screening and mental health evaluation protocols are sufficient.

HIGH-YIELD FACTS

- **Flight number** — FZ1073, operated by flydubai
- **Aircraft type** — Boeing 737 MAX
- **Date of incident** — September 30, 2026, departing at approximately 8:35 a.m. IST
- **Diversion airport** — Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz International Airport, Tabuk, Saudi Arabia — also base of Royal Saudi Air Force Wing 7
- **Transponder codes used** — 7700 (mechanical/technical emergency) and 7500 (unlawful interference)
- **Passengers and crew on board** — 172 passengers and crew
- **Captain's nationality** — Indian national; former SpiceJet pilot, joined flydubai in 2022
- **Crash axe purpose** — Mandatory aircraft safety emergency tool stored in the flight deck; used to breach fuselage or pry open panels in fires or structural deformation

VALUE ADDITION

DATA YOU CAN QUOTE

Cruise altitude at time of incident — 34,000 feet, with sudden descent to 19,000 feet, September 2026
Final stabilised altitude before landing — approximately 15,000 feet

REPORTS, BODIES AND INSTRUMENTS

ICAO Annex 17 — Standards and Recommended Practices for Aviation Security (Security), International Civil Aviation Organization
ICAO Annex 13 — Aircraft Accident and Incident Investigation procedures

EXAMPLES FOR THE ANSWER

Germanwings flight 9525 (2015): co-pilot deliberately crashed the aircraft into the French Alps, killing 150; prompted ICAO and EASA to recommend mandatory two-person cockpit rules — illustrates how a single crew member's deliberate action can defeat technical safety systems.
EgyptAir flight 990 (1999): NTSB concluded deliberate pilot input caused the crash; Egypt disputed the finding — illustrates how jurisdictional and political disputes can complicate attribution in cases of suspected unlawful interference.
Japan Airlines flight 350 (1982): captain deliberately reversed engine thrust on approach; passengers survived because crew and passengers restrained him — a precedent for cabin intervention stopping an inflight cockpit attack, directly comparable to the FZ1073 event.

2 J&K Statehood Resolution: Constitutional Row and Bureaucratic Friction

GS-II | **Prelims + Mains** | **J&K statehood restoration dispute** | **The Hindu**

A multi-layered explainer tracing the immediate political controversy around the J&K Statehood resolution — what the resolution says, why the principal Opposition objected, what the 2000 autonomy and 2024 special-status resolutions were, why they were cited, and how the episode escalated into a stand-off between elected legislators and senior bureaucrats over the limits of UT assembly authority.

Syllabus — Devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein; Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure
Prelims — Polity — Constitutional provisions relating to J&K, Article 370, Article 35A, Union Territory administration



Why did the J&K Statehood resolution cause a row?

What does the resolution passed in the J&K Assembly say? What is the 2000 autonomy resolution that Omar Abdullah spoke of that the BJP objected to? Why did the Chief Minister include the 2000 and 2024 resolution as well? What did two bureaucrats do that he objected to?

Peerzada Ashiq

The story so far:

On September 25, Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) Chief Minister Omar Abdullah introduced a resolution before the autumn session of the J&K Assembly. It called upon the Government of India for the "immediate and urgent restoration of full Statehood to J&K". Mr. Abdullah argued that the resolution was necessitated by the Centre's inexplicable delay in granting J&K Statehood status, which was downgraded in 2019 after its autonomous status under Article 370 was diluted by Parliament under the rule of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

On September 28, the resolution was put to vote and was passed after 61 members out of 90 — from the ruling National Conference (NC), Congress, Communist Party of India (Marxist), Peoples Democratic Party, J&K People's Conference, Aam Aadmi Party, and Awami Ittehad Party — extended their support. After the resolution was passed, Mr. Abdullah called upon the Government of India to "fulfil its commitment towards restoration of Statehood".

Why did the BJP decide to stay away from voting?

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) took exception to the wording of the resolution. The part that piqued the BJP was that the current resolution was "in addition to the resolutions passed by this House on 26th June 2000 and 6th November 2024", referring to the 2000 autonomy resolution and the special status. BJP legislators raised a hue and cry, stormed into the well of the House, and staged walkouts over the

The 2000 autonomy resolution and the 2024 special status resolutions are bids by the ruling NC to bring a solution to Kashmir within the ambit of the Constitution and address all the political constituencies.

J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah looks on amid a protest by Opposition MLAs during the autumn session of the Assembly, in Srinagar. PTI

resolution. J&K Leader of Opposition Sunil Sharma termed references to the 2000 autonomy resolution and the 2024 special-status "unnecessary". The BJP asked the ruling NC to bring a resolution confined exclusively to the issue of Statehood. Mr. Sharma said J&K was a sensitive region with neighbours which were always trying to take advantage of internal issues and disturb the peace. He said there was no room for any "Pakistan agenda" in J&K, a region which is an integral part of India. The BJP also targeted NC leader and Speaker Abdul Rahim Rather for allowing the resolution and moved a motion seeking his removal.

What is the 2000 autonomy resolution?

In the 1990s, at the peak of militancy, NC leader and then Chief Minister Dr. Farooq Abdullah was forced to step down and leave Kashmir. He returned to power in 1996 and set up a State Autonomy Committee to examine the steady erosion of J&K's regional autonomy since 1953, when his father, then J&K Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, was dismissed from office and arrested by the Central government. The committee was part of the NC's attempt to offer a constitutional alternative to separatist groups that were demanding either complete independence for Kashmir or its merger with Pakistan.

On June 26, 2000, Dr. Abdullah, as Chief Minister, tabled the resolution to restore the pre-1953 autonomy status of J&K; it was passed unanimously by the State Assembly. This envisaged a much more limited Union jurisdiction over J&K, with defence, foreign affairs, and communications among the principal subjects with New Delhi. It called for the Governor to be re-designated as Sadr-e-Riyasat (Head of State) and the Chief Minister as Wazir-e-Azam (Prime Minister). It also proposed replacing the word 'temporary' in Article 370 with 'special', barring the use of Article 356 of the Constitution to impose President's rule, having a separate Election Commission and Comptroller and Auditor General, and rescinding all constitutional orders issued after 1954.

After the resolution was sent to Parliament, the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee rejected it. The Union Cabinet described the recommendations as unacceptable and an attempt to "set the clock back".

Why did Omar Abdullah include the previous resolutions?

After J&K was downgraded to a Union Territory in 2019, mainstream political parties in Kashmir have again been offering an alternative within the Constitution to the aforesaid sections, to protect land, jobs, and identity. The 2000 autonomy resolution and the 2024 special status resolution are bids by the ruling NC to bring a solution to Kashmir within the ambit of the Constitution and address all the political constituencies.

While Mr. Abdullah clarified in the Assembly that the resolution was confined to the restoration of Statehood, he cautioned the Centre against linking it to the complete cessation of militancy, which, he said, would effectively allow Pakistan to determine when Statehood should be restored. He underlined that the decision on Statehood should be taken in New Delhi and should not be made contingent on any other factor or external consideration.

Mr. Abdullah also stalled an attempt by eight NC legislators to amend the resolution to include references to Article 370, Article 35A, and the pre-August 5, 2019 position. The Chief Minister argued that these words could provide an excuse to the BJP not to participate in the voting and stall a unanimous resolution on Statehood.

How has this resolution caused a rift with the bureaucracy?

Mr. Abdullah informed the J&K Assembly that a day after he moved the resolution, Chief Secretary Atul Dulloo and Law Secretary Achal Sethi, in two separate communiques to the Speaker, advised against allowing the resolution. Mr. Abdullah said the letters cited "matter sub judice" as the reason not to allow the resolution on Statehood. He lamented that this bid by the bureaucracy to scuttle the Statehood resolution only highlighted the need to restore Statehood.

He said, "The Law Secretary and the Chief Secretary had forwarded their opinions to the Speaker, saying that the subject was sub judice and should not be discussed." He was not shown the letters, he said. "I don't know on whose behalf they did this. Which State in the country will witness the Law Secretary and Chief Secretary oppose a resolution moved by the Chief Minister? It's because of the Union Territory status," Mr. Abdullah said.

The episode has sparked a debate over the powers of the legislature in the Union Territory. Congress legislator Nizamuddin Bhat demanded that the letters be made part of the Assembly records and taken up for discussion in the House. He termed the officers' decision to write to the Speaker a "challenge to the prestige, dignity and powers of the Assembly" and questioned whether officers could act as a government. He said the move challenged the authority of both the Speaker and the house. He argued that the Assembly was governed by the same rules as a State legislature, and that neither the Constitution nor the J&K Reorganisation Act provided otherwise. PDP legislator Waheed-ur-Rehman Parra has initiated a breach of privilege motion against the two officials.

WHY IN NEWS

On September 25, the J&K Chief Minister introduced a resolution in the Assembly's autumn session demanding immediate and urgent restoration of full Statehood to J&K. The resolution was passed on September 28 with 61 out of 90 members voting in favour. It triggered a walkout by the principal Opposition party, an attempted bureaucratic intervention by the Chief Secretary and Law Secretary, and a broader debate over legislative powers of a Union Territory assembly.

What the September 2026 Resolution Says

- Introduced on **September 25** and passed on **September 28**, the resolution calls upon the Government of India for the **'immediate and urgent restoration of full Statehood'** to J&K.
- The Chief Minister argued the resolution was necessitated by the Centre's 'inexplicable delay' in restoring Statehood after J&K was **downgraded to a Union Territory in 2019** following the dilution of Article 370.
- The resolution was passed by 61 out of 90 members, with support from the ruling National Conference, Congress, CPI(M), PDP, J&K People's Conference, AAP, and Awami Ittehad Party.
- The Chief Minister subsequently called upon the Government of India to 'fulfil its commitment towards restoration of Statehood'.

Why the Principal Opposition Boycotted

- The **Bharatiya Janata Party** objected to the resolution referencing two earlier resolutions — the **2000 autonomy resolution** and the **2024 special-status resolution** — describing the references as 'unnecessary'.
- BJP legislators argued the current resolution should have been confined exclusively to the issue of Statehood, without importing the more expansive constitutional demands of those earlier resolutions.
- The Opposition Leader warned that J&K was a sensitive region with neighbours that exploit internal differences, and said there was **'no room for any Pakistan agenda'** in J&K.
- The Opposition also moved a motion against the **Assembly Speaker** for allowing the resolution, and staged a walkout from the well of the House.
- An attempt by **eight NC legislators** to amend the resolution to include references to **Article 370, Article 35A**, and the pre-August 5, 2019 position was itself blocked by the Chief Minister, who argued it would hand the Opposition a pretext to abstain and prevent a unanimous outcome.

The 2000 Autonomy Resolution and Its Demands

- On **June 26, 2000**, the then Chief Minister Dr. Farooq Abdullah tabled a resolution to restore **J&K's pre-1953 autonomy status**, passed unanimously by the State Assembly.
- The resolution envisaged a greatly reduced Union jurisdiction over J&K, limited to **defence, foreign affairs, and communications**, with all other subjects reverting to the State.
- It proposed renaming the Governor as **Sadr-e-Riyasat (Head of State)** and the Chief Minister as **Wazir-e-Azam (Prime Minister)**, replacing 'temporary' with 'special' in Article 370, and barring use of **Article 356** to impose President's Rule.
- It also called for rescinding all **constitutional orders issued after 1954** and for J&K to have a separate Election Commission and Comptroller and Auditor General.
- The then Prime Minister **Atal Bihari Vajpayee** rejected the resolution; the Union Cabinet described its recommendations as **'unacceptable'** and an attempt to 'set the clock back'.
- The 2000 and 2024 resolutions are characterised as NC's bid to offer a **constitutional alternative to separatist demands**, providing a solution to Kashmir within the ambit of the Constitution.

Bureaucratic Intervention and Legislative Sovereignty

- A day after the resolution was moved, the **Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo** and **Law Secretary Achal Sethi** separately wrote to the Assembly Speaker advising against allowing the resolution, citing **'matter sub judice'** as the reason.
- The Chief Minister publicly questioned the intervention: 'Which State in the country will witness the Law Secretary and Chief Secretary oppose a resolution moved by the Chief Minister?', attributing the anomaly to J&K's **Union Territory status**.
- He said he was not shown the letters and did not know on whose behalf the officers acted, making it a direct dispute over whether UT bureaucracy can override elected legislative authority.
- A Congress legislator demanded the letters be made part of Assembly records, calling the officers' action a **'challenge to the prestige, dignity and powers of the Assembly'** and questioning whether officers could act as a government.
- A PDP legislator initiated a **breach of privilege motion** against the two senior officials, raising a formal constitutional question about the limits of bureaucratic power over a UT legislature.

Unresolved Constitutional Question

- The episode reactivates the debate over whether a **Union Territory legislature has the same constitutional standing** as a full State legislature, particularly in relation to resolutions directed at the Centre.
- The Chief Minister underlined that the decision on Statehood must be taken in **New Delhi** and must not be made contingent on any external factor — implicitly rejecting the Opposition's linkage to cessation of militancy.
- He cautioned against linking Statehood restoration to the end of militancy, saying that would effectively allow **Pakistan to determine** when Statehood should be restored.
- The J&K Reorganisation Act 2019 and the Constitution are silent on whether J&K's UT legislature is governed by the same rules as a State legislature, a gap the breach of privilege motion is likely to probe.

HIGH-YIELD FACTS

- **Resolution introduced** — September 25, 2026, in the J&K Assembly's autumn session in Srinagar
- **Resolution passed** — September 28, 2026, with 61 out of 90 members voting in favour
- **2000 autonomy resolution date** — June 26, 2000, passed unanimously by the J&K State Assembly
- **J&K downgraded** — 2019, from a State with special status under Article 370 to a Union Territory
- **Article 370** — Conferred special autonomous status on J&K; diluted by Parliament in August 2019
- **Article 35A** — Gave J&K legislature power to define 'permanent residents' and their special rights; abrogated in 2019
- **Article 356** — Provides for imposition of President's Rule; the 2000 resolution sought to bar its use in J&K
- **Breach of privilege motion** — Initiated by a PDP legislator against the Chief Secretary and Law Secretary for writing to the Speaker against the resolution

VALUE ADDITION

REPORTS, BODIES AND INSTRUMENTS

J&K Reorganisation Act, 2019 — Parliament of India
State Autonomy Committee Report, 2000 — Government of Jammu and Kashmir
Article 370, Constitution of India — conferring special status on J&K
Article 35A, Constitution of India (now abrogated) — permanent residents of J&K

EXAMPLES FOR THE ANSWER

The 2000 J&K autonomy resolution precedent illustrates how a State legislature can formally demand constitutional restructuring of Centre-State relations, yet the Centre is not bound to act — relevant to any question on the limits of legislative resolutions versus legislative enactments.
The Delhi Assembly's long-running dispute with the Lt. Governor over bureaucratic control (resolved partially by the Government of NCT of Delhi (Amendment) Act, 2021 and Supreme Court judgment in 2023) offers a comparable case of elected UT governments asserting legislative authority against centrally appointed administrators.
Sadr-e-Riyasat and Wazir-e-Azam as constitutional titles used in J&K before 1965 illustrate how Article 370 permitted J&K to maintain a distinct constitutional vocabulary — usable in answers on asymmetric federalism or cooperative federalism in India.

3 River Interlinking as Ecological Highway for Invasive Species

GS-III | Prelims + Mains | River interlinking and biological invasions | The Hindu

A science-policy explainer built around a newly published research finding: the ecological mechanism of risk is described first, the most vulnerable basins are identified with specifics, secondary hazards (pathogens, fish migration, biota flattening) are then layered in, and the piece closes with a policy gap and what evidence-based planning would require.

Syllabus — Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment
Prelims — General Science and Environment — invasive alien species, river interlinking



India's river interlinks may create invasive species 'highways'

Lower Ganga basin hosts 13-15 invasive alien species and could become a major source of invasives for the Mahanadi river interlinking project could also help aquatic pathogens to spread and flatten the unique biota of individual river basins

Jhimook Mitra

The National River-Linking Project is the world's most ambitious project of its kind to date, proposing to link 37 major river basins across India, potentially redistributing around 174 billion cubic metres of water from 'surplus' to 'deficit' basins while generating some 34,000 MW of power.

The Project has also raised serious concerns about its environmental costs. Experts have said the idea of 'surplus' and 'deficit' basins can mask seasonal and year on-year variations in river flows, and that transferring water between basins can alter downstream flows, sediment transport, floodplains, deltas, and the habitats that depend on them. Dams, reservoirs, and canals can also break ecosystems up into pieces and disturb fish migration and other ecological processes.

It seems river-linking also poses another, less obvious problem. Researchers from the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), Bengaluru, assessed the project as possibly creating "ecological highways" that invasive species can travel on to new, ecologically sensitive areas. Their findings were recently published in Scientific Reports.

Given how India's river basins are isolated from each other, many species inhabit a small area and are not found elsewhere, and river links may then threaten them more than native species.

In the paper, the team showed that all Northeast and peninsular Indian basins are more vulnerable to biological invasions than those in Central and North India.

The southwestern Ghats, Kaveri, Krishna, Lower Ganga, and Brahmaputra basins support diverse habitats and complex ecological niches that host native species, threatened species, and invasive alien species.

"Right now, [the invasive alien species] are isolated, restricted to individual river basins," the study's lead author and ATREE senior fellow Aravind Sankaar Anantharam said. "By connecting rivers, we would not only introduce new species that are not naturally found but also increase the vulnerability of the native species that cannot compete with the invasive alien species."

This finding is consistent with research worldwide, which has suggested that biodiversity hotspots can accumulate more invasive alien species, thus compromising the long-term prospects of native species and themselves turning into 'invasion hotspots'. For example, the Lower Ganga basin hosts 13-15 invasive alien species, and could become a major source of invasives for the Mahanadi, which is home to 69 threatened species. In fact, this is one of the Project's most ecologically sensitive links, and it could increase the risk of extinction for the threatened species.

Water connections under the Project could also help aquatic pathogens to spread, disrupt the migratory routes of fish, and flatten the unique biota that individual river basins boast today.

"Fishes in one river basin may be well adapted or immune to the pathogens it harbours, while species in other basins may not be able to protect themselves against such pathogens," Dr. Anantharam said. "If one reduces the water flow by taking out water from one river and putting it in to another, the downstream water flow will be reduced. As a consequence, the downstream biodiversity will be severely affected and there is a high chance that the endemic species in the lower reaches might go extinct."

"Rivers like the ten have sand of great ecological value. But if the Ken-Betwa link is live, large quantities of water will be moved away from the river, lowering the flow volume and reducing sediment production rates in the river," Siddharth Agarwal, director-founder of the Vedinam India Foundation, a nonprofit working on environmental governance, said. "That could ultimately reduce the biodiversity in the river and potentially even trigger a food-chain collapse."

The Project's consequences may also extend to downstream nations.

"Right now, we have only considered 15 freshwater invasive species for which data is available," Dr. Anantharam said. "If one looks at all species across India, including terrestrial and marine systems, it would be approximately 350 to 400 species in different stages of invasion. Developed economies like Australia and Europe have very strong policies for invasive alien species. It is an urgent need that India comes up with a policy targeted to regulate, manage, and control" such species.

Embedding evidence-based management of river basins into national infrastructure planning could provide ecological foresight.

"The health risks, biodiversity, wildlife, and economic costs of [the Project] to India, especially for the agro-economy, farmers' livelihoods, and fisheries, are matters of urgent attention," he added. "While the government's intention might be good to address water deficit, development plans and policy decisions should be holistic, addressing the ecological impact, the effect on biodiversity, and people's lives."

Jhimook Mitra is an independent researcher and ecologist, currently with the Nature Conservation Foundation, Bengaluru.

Flowing farther

Invasive species can use river interlinks to journey to new areas

- India's ambitious river-linking project aims to redistribute water by connecting 37 major river basins
- A recent study has found that connecting these rivers could create 'ecological highways' for invasive alien species
- Native endemic species living in isolated basins could be threatened by newly introduced conditions
- Northeast and peninsular Indian river basins are especially vulnerable to these potentially damaging biological invasions
- The Lower Ganga basin could quickly transfer numerous invasive species to the ecologically sensitive Mahanadi basin
- Proposed water connections may also spread deadly aquatic pathogens among previously isolated native fish populations
- Scientists urge implementing specific national policies to regulate invasive alien species and preserve natural ecosystems

A view of the Krishna in Srisailam. Research has found that peninsular basins are more vulnerable to biological invasions than those in Central and North India. HYMA SANKARA CS, THE HINDU

WHY IN NEWS

A study by researchers from the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), Bengaluru, published in Scientific Reports, warns that India's National River-Linking Project could create 'ecological highways' for invasive alien species across previously isolated river basins. The findings have renewed debate about the environmental costs of the world's most ambitious river-redistribution scheme, which aims to connect 37 major river basins.

The Ecological Highway Mechanism

- India's river basins are naturally **isolated** from each other, meaning species inhabiting one basin are often endemic and found nowhere else — making them simultaneously unique and vulnerable.
- By physically connecting basins via canals and links, the Project would allow **invasive alien species** — currently restricted to individual basins — to travel to ecologically sensitive areas they could not otherwise reach.
- Native endemic species in receiving basins face a double threat: direct **competitive displacement** by invasive newcomers and increased exposure to **aquatic pathogens** to which they have no immunity.
- The study, published in *Scientific Reports*, is the first to systematically assess the Project as a vector for **biological invasion** at national scale.
- Researchers also flag that the concepts of 'surplus' and 'deficit' basins **mask seasonal and inter-annual flow variability**, meaning ecological disruption from water transfer could be larger than hydrological models suggest.

Which Basins Face the Highest Risk

- **Northeast and peninsular Indian basins** — including the southwestern Ghats, Kaveri, Krishna, Lower Ganga, and Brahmaputra — host the most complex ecological niches and are found to be most vulnerable to biological invasion.
- The **Lower Ganga basin** already harbours 13–15 invasive alien species and could rapidly transfer them to the ecologically sensitive Mahanadi basin, which is home to 69 threatened species.
- **Peninsular basins** are shown to be more vulnerable to damaging biological invasions than those in Central and North India, consistent with global findings that biodiversity hotspots accumulate more invasive species.
- Biodiversity hotspot basins risk becoming **'invasion hotspots'**, with long-term damage to native species whose competitive fitness is no match for invasives introduced via the links.

Secondary Hazards: Pathogens, Fish and Biota

- Water connections could spread **deadly aquatic pathogens** among previously isolated native fish populations; fish in one basin may have no immunity to pathogens endemic to another.
- Reduced downstream flow — caused by diverting water out of donor rivers — lowers **sediment production rates**, degrades floodplains and deltas, and reduces river volume, shrinking habitat for endemic species.

  Canal construction and reservoir operation **disrupt fish migration routes** and break ecosystems into fragments,

compounding the invasion risk with direct habitat destruction.

- The **Ken-Betwa link**, one of the first planned under the Project, illustrates the trade-off: sand of high ecological value in the Ken river would be lost as large water volumes are diverted, potentially driving endemic species locally extinct.

India's Policy Gap and What Researchers Urge

- India currently has data on only 15 freshwater invasive species; estimates suggest 350–400 species across all ecosystems — terrestrial, marine and freshwater — are in various stages of invasion, most unmonitored.
- Unlike **Australia and Europe**, which have strong statutory frameworks for invasive alien species management, India lacks a national policy specifically targeting regulation, management and control of such species.
- Researchers call for **species-specific national policies** and for embedding evidence-based management of river basins into infrastructure planning as a precondition — not an afterthought — to project approval.
- The consequences of inaction extend downstream to **neighbouring nations**, as transboundary rivers carry both water and any biological or pathogenic load introduced by the links.

HIGH-YIELD FACTS

- **Project scope** — National River-Linking Project proposes to connect 37 major river basins across India
- **Water redistribution volume** — Approximately 174 billion cubic metres of water to be transferred from 'surplus' to 'deficit' basins
- **Power generation target** — Project is projected to generate approximately 34,000 MW of power
- **Research institution** — Study conducted by researchers at ATREE (Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment), Bengaluru
- **Publication** — Findings published in Scientific Reports (Nature Portfolio journal)
- **Threatened species — Mahanadi** — Mahanadi basin is home to 69 threatened species
- **Invasive species — Lower Ganga** — Lower Ganga basin currently hosts 13–15 invasive alien species
- **Known freshwater invasives in India** — Only 15 freshwater invasive species have data available in India as of the study

VALUE ADDITION

DATA YOU CAN QUOTE

Estimated total invasive species across all Indian ecosystems — 350–400 species in various stages of invasion (study estimate, 2024)

REPORTS, BODIES AND INSTRUMENTS

Scientific Reports (Nature Portfolio) — ATREE study on river interlinking and invasive species ecological highways

EXAMPLES FOR THE ANSWER

Australia's biosecurity framework for invasive alien species — cited as a model of statutory regulation India currently lacks — illustrates how developed economies pre-empt biological invasion through dedicated national policy rather than reactive management.

The Nile Perch introduction into Lake Victoria (1950s–1980s) shows how connecting previously isolated aquatic ecosystems via a single introduced species can trigger cascading extinctions of endemic fish — a precedent directly applicable to arguments against inter-basin water transfer without invasion risk assessment.

4 Centres of Excellence for Five Classical Languages Approved

GS-II | Prelims + Mains | Classical language promotion institutions | The Hindu

A scheme-announcement article identifying what has been approved, which institutions will host each centre, and what functions the centres will perform, with a brief heritage-conservation rationale embedded in official statements.

Syllabus — Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education, Human Resources
Prelims — Prelims — General Science and Current Affairs: Classical Languages of India, institutions of higher education

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Govt. plans Centres of Excellence in five classical languages

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Union government has approved the establishment of five Centres of Excellence for studies in five classical languages – Assamese, Bengali, Marathi, Pali and Prakrit.

The initiative will provide dedicated institutional support for advanced academic research, preservation and digitisation of linguistic and literary heritage, and help in wider dissemination of knowledge relating to these classical languages, said an official statement by the Ministry of Education on Saturday.

The Centre of Excellence for Classical Assamese will be established at Tezpur University in Assam. Similarly, Visva-Bharati University in West Bengal has been selected to establish the Centre of Excellence for Classical Bengali. The Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute (deemed to be university) in Pune, Maharashtra, will host the centre for Marathi. The Central University of Odisha will house the centre for classical Pali and the Central University of Gujarat will host the centre for Prakrit.

"The Ministry of Education's approval of a Centre of Excellence for Classical Pali at the Central University of Odisha will strengthen the study, preservation and promotion of Pali, a language deeply connected with India's intellectual, spiritual and cultural traditions," Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi said on X.

The centres will strengthen regional ecosystems for higher education in classical languages

Heritage conservation

The Centres of Excellence will focus on strengthening academic research and scholarship, providing dedicated institutional platforms for advanced research, scholarly work and academic engagement in the respective classical languages.

The centres will support the documentation, preservation and digitisation of linguistic and literary resources.

They will also strengthen regional ecosystems for higher education, research and scholarship in classical languages.

"The initiative reinforces the government's efforts to preserve and promote India's rich linguistic and literary heritage while strengthening institutions of higher education as centres of research and scholarship," the statement said.

A total of 11 languages have been granted the status of classical languages.

WHY IN NEWS

The Union Ministry of Education has approved five Centres of Excellence for classical language studies — covering Assamese, Bengali, Marathi, Pali and Prakrit — assigning each to a specific university. The announcement follows India's total count of classical languages reaching eleven. The decision was reported on Saturday and is directly linked to the broader policy of extending institutional support to all recognised classical languages.

What Has Been Approved

- The Union government approved **five Centres of Excellence** for studies in **Assamese, Bengali, Marathi, Pali and Prakrit** — all languages that carry classical status.
- The mandate covers **advanced academic research, preservation and digitisation** of linguistic and literary heritage, and wider dissemination of knowledge.
- The initiative is described officially as reinforcing efforts to preserve India's **linguistic and literary heritage** while strengthening universities as research institutions.
- A total of 11 languages now hold classical language status in India; this scheme covers five of them in the current tranche.

Which University Hosts Which Centre

- **Tezpur University** (Assam) — Centre of Excellence for **Classical Assamese**.
- **Visva-Bharati University** (West Bengal) — Centre of Excellence for **Classical Bengali**.
- **Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute** (Pune, Maharashtra, deemed university) — Centre for **Classical Marathi**.
- **Central University of Odisha** — Centre for **Classical Pali**, a language linked to India's intellectual, spiritual and cultural traditions.
- **Central University of Gujarat** — Centre for **Classical Prakrit**.

Language	Host Institution	State
Assamese	Tezpur University	Assam
Bengali	Visva-Bharati University	West Bengal
Marathi	Deccan College PG & Research Institute	Maharashtra
Pali	Central University of Odisha	Odisha
Prakrit	Central University of Gujarat	Gujarat

Core Functions of the Centres

Advanced research and scholarship: dedicated institutional platforms for scholarly work and academic engagement in

each classical language.

- **Documentation and digitisation**: systematic preservation of linguistic and literary resources to prevent heritage loss.
- **Regional higher-education ecosystems**: strengthening university-level capacity in states where these languages are rooted.
- The centres are expected to act simultaneously as **research bodies and dissemination hubs**, connecting specialist scholarship to wider academic audiences.

HIGH-YIELD FACTS

- **Total classical languages in India** — 11 languages have been granted classical language status as of 2025
- **Nodal ministry** — Ministry of Education approved and announced the scheme
- **Pali host institution** — Central University of Odisha, located in Odisha
- **Prakrit host institution** — Central University of Gujarat, located in Gujarat
- **Marathi host institution** — Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute, Pune — a deemed university
- **Bengali host institution** — Visva-Bharati University, West Bengal — a central university
- **Assamese host institution** — Tezpur University, Assam — a central university

VALUE ADDITION

EXAMPLES FOR THE ANSWER

The Sahitya Akademi already maintains separate language advisory boards for classical languages — this Centre of Excellence model extends institutional depth from cultural recognition to dedicated university-level research infrastructure, illustrating how language policy moves from symbolic status to funded scholarship.

France's Collège de France has maintained chairs for ancient and classical languages (Latin, Greek, Sanskrit) since 1530, demonstrating that state-funded dedicated research chairs are a proven mechanism for sustaining scholarly traditions in languages no longer in everyday vernacular use — a comparative model relevant to questions on minority and heritage language policy.

5 Child Leprosy Cases Threaten India's 2027 Elimination Target

GS-II | Prelims + Mains | Leprosy eradication and NLEP | The Hindu

A data-driven accountability article that sets NLEP annual figures against programme targets, unpacks what specific indicators (child cases, G2D rate) reveal about transmission and detection failure, situates India in a global epidemiological context, and closes on the structural and geographic obstacles the programme must overcome.

Syllabus — Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health
Prelims — General Science and Health; Government schemes and programmes



Rising child leprosy cases challenge India's 2027 goal

Country records 3,832 child leprosy cases in 2025-26, a figure that is 91.6% above the Centre's target of 2,000; 37 Grade-2 disability cases point to delayed detection and ongoing transmission

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

India recorded 3,832 new leprosy cases among children in 2025-26, including 37 who had Grade-2 disability (G2D) at diagnosis – an indicator of delayed detection. The child caseload was 91.6% higher than the National Leprosy Eradication Programme's (NLEP) target of 2,000 cases for the year.

The figures, from the latest NLEP annual report for 2025-26, come even as India pursues the National Strategic Plan for Leprosy 2023-27, which seeks to interrupt transmission at the district level by 2027.

Under the roadmap, a district is considered to have interrupted transmission after reporting zero new indigenous child cases for five consecutive years.

The NLEP's programme objectives include zero disability among new child cases and a national G2D rate of less than one case per million population. The roadmap projects 1,000 child cases and a G2D rate of 0.5 per million for 2026-27.

Epidemiologic question

The World Health Organisation (WHO) considers new cases among children below 15 years an indicator of recent transmission, while G2D among newly detected patients indicates delayed diagnosis.

The WHO also says disabilities among newly detected child cases signal both delayed detection and ongoing transmission.

India recorded 63 children with G2D in 2019-20, followed by 35 in 2020-21, 41 in 2021-22, 55 in 2022-23 and 45 in 2023-24. The continued detection of children with G2D contrasts with the NLEP's objective of zero disability among new child cases.

The latest numbers therefore raise a fundamental epidemiological question: if India is working to interrupt transmission by 2027, why are children still developing leprosy, and why are some reaching diagnosis only after visible disability has appeared?

India detected 91,783 new leprosy cases in 2025-26, according to the Union Health Ministry. The prevalence rate was 0.56 per 10,000 population, and 1,945 patients had Grade-2 disability at diagnosis, accounting for 2.12% of all newly detected cases. The national G2D rate was 1.34 per million, above the NLEP's target of less than one case per million.

Global hubs

According to the WHO's latest global update, India reported the world's largest number of newly detected leprosy cases in 2025, with 91,783 cases, followed by Brazil with 22,901 and Indonesia with 16,292. Together, the three countries accounted for 78.3% of all new cases reported globally. The WHO notes that, although the update is for 2025, India reported data for April 2025 to March 2026.

India also reported the world's largest number of new child leprosy cases in the WHO's 2025 global update, with 3,832 cases.

The WHO figures and the NLEP figures refer to the same reporting period for India – April 2025 to March 2026 – although the WHO presents India's data in its 2025 global table. The WHO table records 3,832 child cases and 37 child cases with G2D for India.

Hard-to-reach areas

The Health Ministry identifies high-endemic and hard-to-reach areas as priorities for intensified case detection. The NLEP emphasises active case detection, household contact surveys and focused campaigns, along with special plans for hard-to-reach areas. The programme also identifies stigma and discrimination as continuing concerns.

Leprosy, or Hansen's disease, is a chronic bacterial infection caused mainly by *Mycobacterium leprae*. It primarily affects the skin and peripheral nerves. Transmission occurs mainly through prolonged, close contact with an untreated person. The disease is curable with multidrug therapy.

The Health Ministry has identified high-priority States and districts where the burden remains concentrated. Twenty-three districts in Chhattisgarh, 21 in Jharkhand, 18 each in Maharashtra and Odisha, and 10 in Madhya Pradesh had a prevalence rate above one case per 10,000 population.

The Health Ministry has identified high-priority States and districts where the burden remains concentrated. FILE PHOTO

WHY IN NEWS

India's NLEP annual report for 2025-26 recorded 3,832 new child leprosy cases — 91.6% above the programme's target of 2,000 — and 37 children with Grade-2 disability at diagnosis. The data arrives as India pursues the National Strategic Plan for Leprosy 2023-27, which aims to interrupt district-level transmission by 2027. Simultaneously, the WHO's 2025 global update identified India as the country with the world's largest number of newly detected leprosy cases.

What the 2025-26 Numbers Show

- India detected **3,832 new child leprosy cases** in 2025-26 — 91.6% above the NLEP target of 2,000 cases for the year.
- **37 of these children had Grade-2 disability (G2D)** at the time of diagnosis, signalling that visible nerve damage had already set in before detection.
- India's overall new case detection stood at **91,783**, with a prevalence rate of 0.56 per 10,000 population; **1,945 patients had G2D**, yielding a national G2D rate of 1.34 per million against the NLEP target of less than 1 per million.
- The NLEP roadmap projects reduction to **1,000 child cases and a G2D rate of 0.5 per million** by 2026-27 — both targets now appear significantly out of reach at the current trajectory.

Why Child Cases and G2D Are the Critical Indicators

- The **WHO regards new cases among children under 15 as a direct indicator of recent, ongoing transmission** within a community — child infection cannot be attributed to exposures decades past.
- **G2D at diagnosis** indicates delayed detection: the bacterium *Mycobacterium leprae* has been active long enough to cause irreversible peripheral nerve damage, meaning existing surveillance and contact-tracing failed to catch the case early.
- The NLEP's headline objective is **zero disability among new child cases** — the continued appearance of children with G2D therefore represents a direct failure against the programme's own stated goal.
- Trend data shows G2D child cases have persisted — **63 in 2019-20, 35 in 2020-21, 41 in 2021-22, 55 in 2022-23, 45 in 2023-24** — with no sustained downward trend despite programme activity.

India's Position in the Global Burden

- India reported the **world's largest number of newly detected leprosy cases in 2025**, with 91,783 cases, followed by Brazil (22,901) and Indonesia (16,292).
- Together these three countries accounted for 78.3% of all new cases reported globally in the WHO's 2025 update.
- India also recorded the **world's largest number of new child leprosy cases** in the WHO 2025 global table, with 3,832 — underscoring that the scale problem is not merely national but determines global elimination trajectories.
- Leprosy is caused by **Mycobacterium leprae**, affects skin and peripheral nerves, transmits through prolonged close contact with an untreated person, and is curable with **multidrug therapy (MDT)**.

The 2027 Goal and What Stands in the Way

- The **National Strategic Plan for Leprosy 2023-27** targets interruption of transmission at the district level by 2027; a district is considered transmission-free only after **zero new indigenous child cases for five consecutive years**.
- The NLEP strategy relies on **active case detection, household contact surveys, focused campaigns and special plans for hard-to-reach areas**, but high-burden pockets remain concentrated in specific States.
- **23 districts in Chhattisgarh, 21 in Jharkhand, 18 each in Maharashtra and Odisha, and 10 in Madhya Pradesh** had a prevalence rate above one case per 10,000 population — these are the epicentres that determine whether the 2027 target is credible.
- The programme also identifies **stigma and discrimination** as continuing barriers to early self-reporting, complicating efforts to detect cases before disability develops.

HIGH-YIELD FACTS

- **NLEP child case target 2025-26** — 2,000 new child leprosy cases; actual figure was 3,832, i.e. 91.6% above target
- **G2D rate target (NLEP)** — Less than 1 per million population; actual national G2D rate in 2025-26 was 1.34 per million
- **Causative organism** — Mycobacterium leprae — a chronic bacterial infection; disease also called Hansen's disease
- **Transmission interruption definition** — Zero new indigenous child cases in a district for five consecutive years
- **NLEP roadmap targets for 2026-27** — 1,000 child cases and a G2D rate of 0.5 per million
- **Top high-burden States (district count)** — Chhattisgarh (23 districts), Jharkhand (21), Maharashtra (18), Odisha (18), Madhya Pradesh (10) with prevalence above 1/10,000
- **Global burden share (India + Brazil + Indonesia)** — 78.3% of all new leprosy cases globally in WHO 2025 update
- **Strategic plan period** — National Strategic Plan for Leprosy 2023-27, under the National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP)

VALUE ADDITION

DATA YOU CAN QUOTE

India's overall new leprosy cases detected 2025-26 — 91,783 cases (prevalence 0.56 per 10,000 population)
G2D among all newly detected cases 2025-26 — 1,945 patients — 2.12% of all newly detected cases

REPORTS, BODIES AND INSTRUMENTS

NLEP Annual Report 2025-26 (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India)
WHO Global Leprosy Update 2025 (World Health Organization)
National Strategic Plan for Leprosy 2023-27 (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare)

EXAMPLES FOR THE ANSWER

Brazil's sustained use of active contact-tracing and post-exposure prophylaxis (single-dose rifampicin) under its national leprosy programme is cited internationally as a model for reducing G2D rates — illustrating that targeted chemoprophylaxis can complement case-detection in high-burden settings.
India's 2005 declaration of leprosy elimination (prevalence below 1 per 10,000) without achieving zero transmission illustrates how statistical thresholds can be met while the disease continues to circulate — a distinction relevant to evaluating any WHO elimination target.

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