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08 October 2026 · UPSC CSE

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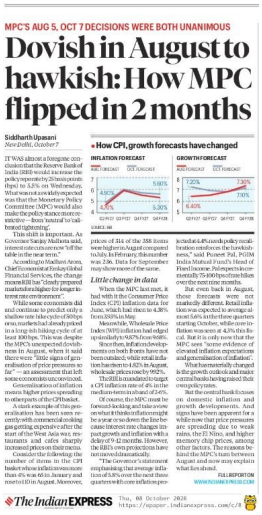
PP Prelims Pointers
   2 entity cards · Science & Technology, Society & Welfare

1 MPC Stance Shift: Dovish August to Hawkish October

GS-III | Prelims + Mains | MPC stance and rate decisions

Indian Express

Syllabus — Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilisation of resources, growth, development and employment
Prelims — Indian Economy – Monetary Policy, RBI, Inflation Indices



MPC'S AUG 5, OCT 7 DECISIONS WERE BOTH UNANIMOUS

Dovish in August to hawkish: How MPC flipped in 2 months

Siddharth Upasani
New Delhi, October 7

IT WAS almost a foregone conclusion that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) would increase the policy repo rate by 25 basis points (bps) to 5.5% on Wednesday. What was not as widely expected was that the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) would also make the policy stance more restrictive — from 'neutral' to 'calibrated tightening'.

This shift is important. As Governor Sanjay Malhotra said, interest rates are now "off the table in the near term."

According to Madhavi Arora, Chief Economist at Emkay Global Financial Services, the change means RBI has "clearly prepared markets for a longer interest rate environment".

While some economists did and continue to predict only a shallow rate hike cycle of 50 bps or so, markets had already priced in a long-ish hiking cycle of at least 100 bps. This was despite the MPC's unexpected dovishness in August, when it said there were "little signs of generalisation of price pressures so far" — an assessment that left some economists unconvinced.

Generalisation of inflation means higher prices spreading to other parts of the CPI basket.

A stark example of this generalisation has been seen recently with commercial cooking gas getting expensive after the start of the West Asia war, restaurants and cafes sharply increased prices on their menu.

Consider the following: the number of items in the CPI basket whose inflation was more than 4% was 66 in January and rose to 110 in August. Moreover, prices of 314 of the 358 items were higher in August compared to July. In February, this number was 236. Data for September may show more of the same.

Little change in data

When the MPC last met, it had with it the Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation data for June, which had risen to 4.38% from 3.93% in May.

Meanwhile, Wholesale Price Index (WPI) inflation had edged up (similarly) to 9.87% from 9.68%.

Since then, inflation developments on both fronts have not been curated; while retail inflation has risen to 4.82% in August, wholesale prices rose by 9.92%.

The RBI is mandated to target a CPI inflation rate of 4% in the medium-term in a band of 2-6%.

Of course, the MPC must be forward-looking and take a view on what it thinks inflation might be a year or so down the line because interest rate changes impact growth and inflation with a delay of 9-12 months. However, the RBI's own projections have not moved dramatically.

"The Governor's statement emphasising that average inflation of 4.58% over the next three quarters will be core inflation projected at 4.4% needs policy recalibration emphasis on the hawkishness," said Puneet Pal, PGIM India Mutual Fund's Head of Fixed Income. Pal expects incrementally 75-100 bps of rate hikes over the next nine months.

But even back in August, these forecasts were not markedly different. Retail inflation was expected to average almost 5.6% in the three quarters starting October, while core inflation was seen at 4.3% this fiscal. But it is only now that the MPC sees "some evidence of elevated inflation expectations and generalisation of inflation".

What has materially changed is the growth outlook and major central banks having raised their own policy rates.

But the central bank focuses on domestic inflation and growth developments. And signs have been apparent for a while now that price pressures are spreading due to weak rains, the El Nino, and higher monetary chip prices, among other factors. The reasons behind the MPC's turn between August and now may explain what lies ahead.

FULL REPORTON

• How CPI, growth forecasts have changed

INFLATION FORECAST

GROWTH FORECAST

The Indian EXPRESS Thu, 08 October 2026 https://epaper.indianexpress.com/c/8

WHY IN NEWS

On October 7, the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee unanimously raised the repo rate by 25 basis points to 5.5% and shifted its policy stance from 'neutral' to 'calibrated tightening'. This marked a sharp reversal from the MPC's equally unanimous dovish tone in August, when it had flagged 'little signs of generalisation of price pressures'. The article analyses what changed in two months to produce this pivot.

What the October MPC Decided

- The MPC **unanimously raised the repo rate by 25 basis points** to 5.5%, a move widely anticipated by markets.
- The less-expected change was the shift in **policy stance from 'neutral' to 'calibrated tightening'**, signalling that rate cuts are 'off the table in the near term'.
- The repo-rate decisions in August and October were **unanimous;** the analytical question is how the policy outlook changed between the two meetings.
- The RBI is mandated to target **CPI inflation at 4%** in the medium term within a band of 2–6%; the new stance reflects concern that this target is under threat.

How Inflation Data Evolved

- **CPI inflation** had risen to 4.38% in June from 3.93% in May when the MPC last met in August; by August it rose further to 4.82%.
- **WPI inflation** edged up to 9.87% from 9.68% at the time of the August meeting; wholesale prices subsequently rose 9.92%.
- The number of CPI items with inflation above 4% rose from **65 in January to 110 in August.** Separately, 314 of 358 items recorded year-on-year price increases in August, compared with 236 in February.
- Cooking gas prices rising after the West Asia conflict, and restaurants passing on higher input costs, are cited as **visible signs of generalisation** spreading through the CPI basket.
- The MPC now sees **'some evidence of elevated inflation expectations and generalisation of inflation'** — the very condition it said was absent in August.

Indicator	August Forecast	October Forecast
CPI inflation (FY2026-27)	5.00%	5.20%
CPI inflation (Q1 FY2027-28)	5.30%	5.60%
GDP growth (FY2026-27)	6.70%	7.10%
Core inflation (FY2026-27)	4.30%	4.40%

What Materially Changed the Calculus

- **Major central banks** — including the US Federal Reserve and others — raised their own policy rates between August and October, tightening global financial conditions and raising the cost of divergence for the RBI.
- **Weak monsoon, the El Niño effect, and higher memory chip prices** spread cost pressures across food, energy and manufactured goods simultaneously.
- The FY2026-27 real GDP growth forecast rose from 6.7% to 7.1%, strengthening the case that activity could remain resilient as monetary policy tightened.
- Headline CPI inflation was projected to average almost **5.8% over the next three quarters;** core inflation was projected at 4.4% for FY2026-27.
- Markets had already priced in a **long-hike cycle of at least 100 bps**, suggesting the MPC's August dovishness had created a credibility gap it needed to close.

What the Rate Transmission Lag Means

- Interest rate changes affect **growth and inflation with a delay of 9–12 months**, so the MPC must base decisions on forward-looking inflation projections, not current readings.
- The RBI's own **CPI and growth projections did not move dramatically** between August and October, raising the question of whether the August dovishness was premature rather than the October hawkishness being an overreaction.
- Analysts at Emkay Global Financial Services argue RBI has 'clearly prepared markets for a **higher-for-longer interest rate environment**'.
- Some economists expect only a **shallow rate-hike cycle of 50 bps or so**, while others anticipate incremental hikes of **75–100 bps over the next nine months**, reflecting genuine uncertainty about the terminal rate.

HIGH-YIELD FACTS

- **Repo rate after Oct 7 hike** — 5.5%, up 25 basis points
- **New MPC stance** — Calibrated tightening (changed from neutral)
- **RBI inflation target** — CPI at 4% in the medium term, within a 2–6% band
- **Repo-rate votes** - Unanimous decisions on 5 August and 7 October 2026
- **CPI items with >4% inflation, August** — 110 out of 358 items (up from 65 in January)
- **Rate transmission lag** — 9–12 months for interest rate changes to fully affect growth and inflation
- **WPI inflation (August 2026)** - 9.92%
- **Headline CPI outlook** - Average of almost 5.8% over the next three quarters; core inflation 4.4% in FY2026-27

VALUE ADDITION

DATA YOU CAN QUOTE

CPI items with inflation above 4% (August vs January 2026) - 110 vs 65 out of 358 items
Projected incremental rate hikes (analyst estimate) — 75–100 basis points over next 9 months, as of October 2026

REPORTS, BODIES AND INSTRUMENTS

Monetary Policy Committee decisions — Reserve Bank of India (under RBI Act, 1934, Section 45ZB)
Consumer Price Index — Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)
Wholesale Price Index — Office of the Economic Adviser, Ministry of Commerce and Industry

EXAMPLES FOR THE ANSWER

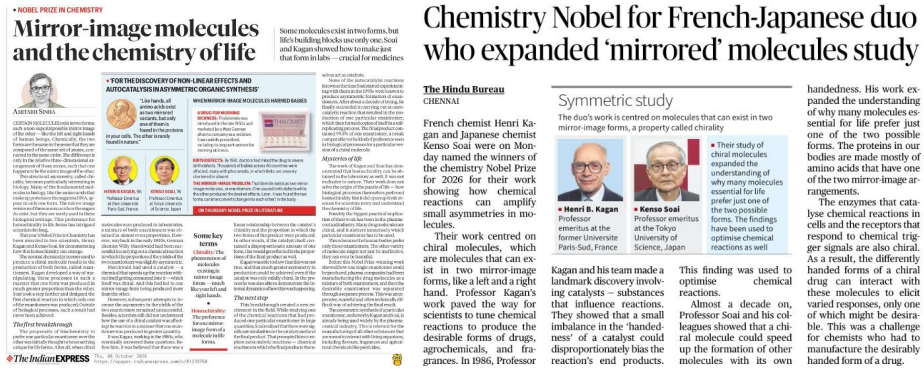
The US Federal Reserve's 2022–23 pivot from near-zero rates to a 5%+ terminal rate illustrates how central banks can shift stance rapidly when inflation generalisation is confirmed — relevant to any question on global monetary spillovers to India.
India's own 'calibrated tightening' stance in 2018 (adopted after a rate hike cycle) shows this label signals a pause in hikes is possible but cuts are ruled out — useful precedent for questions on MPC communication tools.
The concept of monetary policy transmission lag (9–12 months) is foundational to understanding why forward-looking projections, not current data, drive MPC decisions — applicable to questions on the limits of inflation targeting.

2 Nobel Prize in Chemistry 2026: Asymmetric Synthesis and Chirality

Prelims | Prelims + Mains | Chirality and asymmetric synthesis

Indian Express

Prelims — Prelims – General Science; Science and Technology



• NOBEL PRIZE IN CHEMISTRY

Mirror-image molecules and the chemistry of life

Some molecules exist in two forms, but life's building blocks use only one. Soai and Kagan showed how to make just that form in labs – crucial for medicines

AASTHA SINHA

• 'FOR THE DISCOVERY OF NON-LINEAR EFFECTS AND AUTOCATALYSIS IN ASYMMETRIC ORGANIC SYNTHESIS'

WHEN MIRROR-IMAGE MOLECULES HARMED BABIES

"Like hands, all amino acids exist in two mirror-image variants, but only one of them is found in the proteins in your cells. The other is rarely found in nature."

KENSO SOAI, 79 Professor Emeritus at Tokyo University of Science, Japan

HENRI B KAGAN, 90 Professor Emeritus at Université Paris-Sud, France

Some key terms

Chirality: The phenomenon of molecules existing in mirror image forms – much like your left and right hands.

Homochirality: The preference for one mirror-image form of a molecule in biology.

The first breakthrough

The next step

Chemistry Nobel for French-Japanese duo who expanded 'mirrored' molecules study

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Symmetric study

The duo's work is centred on molecules that can exist in two mirror-image forms, a property called chirality

Henri B. Kagan Professor emeritus at the former Universite Paris-Sud, France

Kenso Soai Professor emeritus at the Tokyo University of Science, Japan

• Their study of chiral molecules expanded the understanding of why many molecules essential for life prefer just one of the two possible forms. The findings have been used to optimise chemical reactions as well

French chemist Henri Kagan and Japanese chemist Kenso Soai were on Monday named the winners of the chemistry Nobel Prize for 2026 for their work showing how chemical reactions can amplify small asymmetries in molecules.

Their work centred on chiral molecules, which are molecules that can exist in two mirror-image forms, like a left and a right hand. Professor Kagan's work paved the way for scientists to tune chemical reactions to produce the desirable forms of drugs, agrochemicals, and fragrances. In 1986, Professor Kagan and his team made a landmark discovery involving catalysts – substances that influence reactions. They showed that a small imbalance in the 'handedness' of a catalyst could disproportionately bias the reaction's end products. This finding was used to optimise chemical reactions.

Almost a decade on, Professor Soai and his colleagues showed that a chiral molecule could speed up the formation of other molecules with its own handedness. His work expanded the understanding of why many molecules essential for life prefer just one of the two possible forms. The proteins in our bodies are made mostly of amino acids that have one of the two mirror-image arrangements.

The enzymes that catalyse chemical reactions in cells and the receptors that respond to chemical trigger signals are also chiral. As a result, the differently handed forms of a chiral drug can interact with these molecules to elicit varied responses, only one of which might be desirable. This was a challenge for chemists who had to manufacture the desirably handed form of a drug.

The Indian EXPRESS

WHY IN NEWS

The 2026 Nobel Prize in Chemistry was awarded to Henri B. Kagan (France) and Kenso Soai (Japan) for their discovery of non-linear effects and autocatalysis in asymmetric organic synthesis, announced on Wednesday, 7 October 2026. Their work explains how chemical reactions can amplify tiny molecular asymmetries to produce a single mirror-image form - the basis of modern chiral drug manufacturing.

What Chirality Means and Why It Matters

- **Chirality** is the property of a molecule that exists in two non-superimposable mirror-image forms, called **enantiomers** — like a left and a right hand.
- Chemically, the two enantiomers share the same atoms and bonding order; they differ only in the **three-dimensional arrangement** of atoms.
- Biological homochirality is seen in proteins' predominance of L-amino acids and DNA's D-sugar backbone; glycine is achiral, and some D-amino acids occur in nature.
- Conventional chemical synthesis produces **both enantiomers in roughly equal proportions**; separating the desired one is expensive and technically difficult.

Kagan's Breakthrough: Non-Linear Catalyst Effects

- By the early 1900s it was known that a **chiral catalyst** could slightly skew yields toward one enantiomer — a discovery by Willy Marckwald — but the underlying mechanism was unclear.
- Kagan, working in the 1980s, overturned the assumption that there was a **linear relationship** between a catalyst's chirality and the proportion of enantiomers produced.
- He demonstrated that even a **mildly chiral catalyst** could disproportionately amplify one mirror-image form in the final product — the **non-linear effect** — and explained the internal dynamics driving this.
- This gave chemists a rational tool to **tune reactions** toward the desired drug, agrochemical or fragrance enantiomer without needing a perfectly pure chiral catalyst.

Soai's Discovery: Autocatalysis Amplifies Itself

- Almost a decade after Kagan's work, Soai showed that a chiral molecule could **catalyse its own formation** — a process called **autocatalysis** — while simultaneously amplifying its own handedness.
- In Soai's later reaction, one enantiomer can comprise up to 99.99% of the product, showing how tiny initial imbalances can be amplified.
- In 2003, Soai demonstrated near-homochirality from an initially non-chiral combination of molecules; the dominant mirror-image form could vary by chance between runs.
- Soai's result opened the possibility that **homochirality in life** could have originated through a purely chemical amplification process, without requiring biological machinery.

The Thalidomide Case: Why Chirality Kills or Cures

- **Thalidomide**, introduced in the late 1950s and marketed as a sedative for morning sickness, exists as two enantiomers; one relieved symptoms and the other caused severe birth defects.
- By 1961, the drug had been linked to **phocomelia** (severely shortened or absent limbs) in thousands of babies across 46 countries.
- The two enantiomers of thalidomide **interconvert in the body**, meaning even a pure therapeutic form eventually produces the teratogenic form — a complication that only became clear later.
- Human body receptors and enzymes are themselves chiral, so they interact differently with each enantiomer, making the **correct handedness of a drug molecule** a matter of safety, not just efficacy.

Pharmaceutical Impact and What Remains Unanswered

- Historically, many chiral drugs were developed as racemic mixtures. Chiral separation and asymmetric synthesis provide routes to single-enantiomer products.
- Non-linear effects help chemists optimise asymmetric reactions used in pharmaceuticals and other products; the Soai reaction is also a model for studying the origin of homochirality.
- The work demonstrates that **laboratory chemistry can achieve homochirality**, but it does not explain why biological processes originally preferred one mirror-image form over the other.
- That deeper question — the **origin of biological homochirality** — remains open, and Soai's autocatalytic model is one of the leading frameworks scientists use to investigate it.

HIGH-YIELD FACTS

- **Prize year** — Nobel Prize in Chemistry 2026
- **Laureates** — Henri B. Kagan (Professor Emeritus, Université Paris-Sud, France) and Kenso Soai (Professor Emeritus, Tokyo University of Science, Japan)
- **Ages at announcement** - Kagan: 95; Soai: 76
- **Citation wording** — 'For the discovery of non-linear effects and autocatalysis in asymmetric organic synthesis'
- **Thalidomide countries affected** — Babies in 46 countries affected by thalidomide birth defects by 1961
- **Soai reaction purity** - In the later reaction, one enantiomer can comprise up to 99.99% of the product
- **Marckwald precedent** — German chemist Willy Marckwald demonstrated slightly asymmetric enantiomer yields using a chiral catalyst in the early 1900s
- **Kagan's decade** — Kagan answered questions about non-linear catalyst effects working in the 1980s

VALUE ADDITION

EXAMPLES FOR THE ANSWER

Thalidomide illustrates why drug assessment must consider stereochemistry and interconversion in the body; a single-enantiomer formulation does not automatically eliminate toxicity.

Willy Marckwald's early-1900s experiment showed slightly asymmetric chiral synthesis was possible but left the mechanism unexplained for decades — illustrates how incremental scientific observation can precede theoretical understanding by generations, applicable in science-and-society questions.
Soai's autocatalytic amplification is used by origin-of-life researchers as a chemical model for how biological homochirality could have arisen abiotically — usable in questions on the chemical basis of life or astrobiology.

3 Cement Sector Emissions: India's Hard-to-Abate Challenge

GS-III | **Prelims + Mains** | **Cement decarbonisation pathways**

The Hindu

Syllabus — Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment
Prelims — Environment and Ecology — greenhouse gases, industrial emissions, cement chemistry


India's cement footprint stands in its way to net-zero emissions

WHY IN NEWS

India aims to become a developed economy by 2047 and achieve net-zero emissions by 2070. A decarbonisation roadmap for the cement sector, prepared with the Global Cement and Concrete Association and the Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), calls for reducing the emission rate to 0.56 tonnes of CO2 per tonne of cement by 2030, placing cement's carbon intensity at the centre of India's climate commitments.

Why Cement Is Structurally Hard to Abate

- Cement production emits CO2 from two distinct sources: **combustion** of fossil fuels to reach ~1,450°C and **calcination** of limestone (CaCO3 -> CaO + CO2), the latter alone responsible for 53% to 65% of total emissions and inherent to the chemistry.
- Ordinary Portland cement consists mainly of clinker phases, including calcium silicates, aluminates and aluminoferrites, with gypsum and permitted minor constituents.
- The sector contributes **35% to 40%** of all greenhouse gas emissions from the construction materials supply chain, and its footprint is almost double that of aviation.
- Cement has become so deeply embedded through **standardisation, commercial availability, established supply chains, and extensive marketing** that traditional alternatives have lost their infrastructure and institutional support.

The GCCA-TERI roadmap relies on **carbon capture,** utilisation and storage, alongside other measures and recarbonation, to achieve net-zero cement-sector emissions.

Hidden Emissions Beyond the Factory Gate

- Climate debates focus on in-stack emissions, but **cutting hills for limestone**, long-distance transport of raw materials, and loss of **carbon sequestration by forests** are significant unaccounted costs.
- **Refuse-derived fuel (RDF),** processed from municipal solid waste, can replace fossil kiln fuels. Its combustion still produces CO2 and air pollutants; the net benefit depends on fuel composition and displaced fuel.
- Cement manufacturing also emits **nitrogen oxides, sulphur dioxide, and particulate matter**, which must be distinguished from CO2 when designing regulation.
- NITI Aayog recommends achieving a 20% thermal substitution rate using RDF by 2030, supported by better waste segregation and reliable fuel supply.

Clinker Substitution — Opportunity and Ceiling

- **Clinker-to-cement ratio** in India is already ~67.5%, below the global average of 77%, giving some head-room; the ratio can, according to researchers, be reduced further.
- Substitutes include **fly ash** (from thermal plants), **slag** (from steel-making), and **gypsum** — replacing one tonne of clinker avoids 0.83 tonnes of CO2 per the International Energy Agency.
- Clinker-replacement limits depend on the material, cement standard and application. BIS allows 25-70% granulated slag in Portland slag cement; there is no universal 40-50% ceiling.
- Real-estate developers and builders predominantly prefer **OPC** because all three alternative binders have longer setting times — natural pozzolana can take twice as long as OPC — which raises project costs.

Pre-Portland Binders and Indigenous Construction

- Before Portland cement, India and much of the world used **lime-based mortars, lime-surkhi, mud/clay, gypsum, and natural pozzolanic materials**; Roman buildings using volcanic pozzolana from the 4th century BC still stand.
- Traditional Kath Kuni construction in Himachal Pradesh alternates dry-stone masonry with timber beams; its interlocking wood-and-stone form provides resilience against seismic forces.
- In northern and north-eastern India, **compressed earth and rammed earth** mixed with soil, sand, and small amounts of cement or lime have been used, demonstrating a middle path between full and zero cement use.
- Researchers caution that **no single alternative is universal**: a material suited to one region or building type may fail in another, and traditional practices may need modification to meet contemporary requirements.
- The deeper barrier, researchers argue, is not technology but **the construction ecosystem built around cement** — disappearing craft knowledge, absent standardisation of alternatives, and path-dependency in procurement.

What Could Actually Move the Needle

- **Public procurement of green cement** — government infrastructure projects — is identified as the most immediate lever because it creates demand certainty without requiring a consumer behaviour shift.
- The GCCA-TERI roadmap uses a 2020 baseline of 0.68 tonnes CO2 per tonne of cement and models 0.56 tonnes in 2030 and 0.51 tonnes in 2047.
- Estimated cement production is projected to rise from 334 million tonnes (2019–20) to **1,546 million tonnes by 2070**, meaning per-unit intensity improvements must outpace a near-**fivefold** volume increase to achieve absolute emission reductions.
- Complementary approaches — **using traditional materials as binding agents**, designing buildings better, and changing public perception about alternatives — are being studied but remain at the margins of policy.

HIGH-YIELD FACTS

- **India net-zero target year** — 2070
- **India developed-economy target year** — 2047
- **Cement's share of global GHG (construction materials)** — 35–40% of all greenhouse gas emissions from the sector
- **Calcination share of cement emissions** — 53–65% of total cement-making emissions
- **India clinker-to-cement ratio** — ~67.5%, below the global average of 77%
- **CO_2 avoided per tonne of clinker replaced** — 0.83 tonnes of CO_2 (IEA figure)
- **Roadmap baseline intensity (2020)** - 0.68 tonnes CO_2 per tonne of cement
- **Roadmap prepared with** — Global Cement and Concrete Association (GCCA) and Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), New Delhi

VALUE ADDITION

DATA YOU CAN QUOTE

Cement production in the roadmap scenario - 1,546 million tonnes in 2070, compared with 334 million tonnes in 2019-20
Target cement emission intensity by 2030 — 0.56 tonnes CO_2 per tonne of cement
Target cement emission intensity by 2047 — 0.51 tonnes CO_2 per tonne of cement
NITI Aayog RDF target - 20% thermal substitution rate by 2030

REPORTS, BODIES AND INSTRUMENTS

TERI–GCCA Decarbonisation Roadmap for Indian Cement Sector (Energy and Resources Institute / Global Cement and Concrete Association)
NITI Aayog roadmap on RDF use in cement kilns
International Energy Agency — clinker substitution emission avoidance data

EXAMPLES FOR THE ANSWER

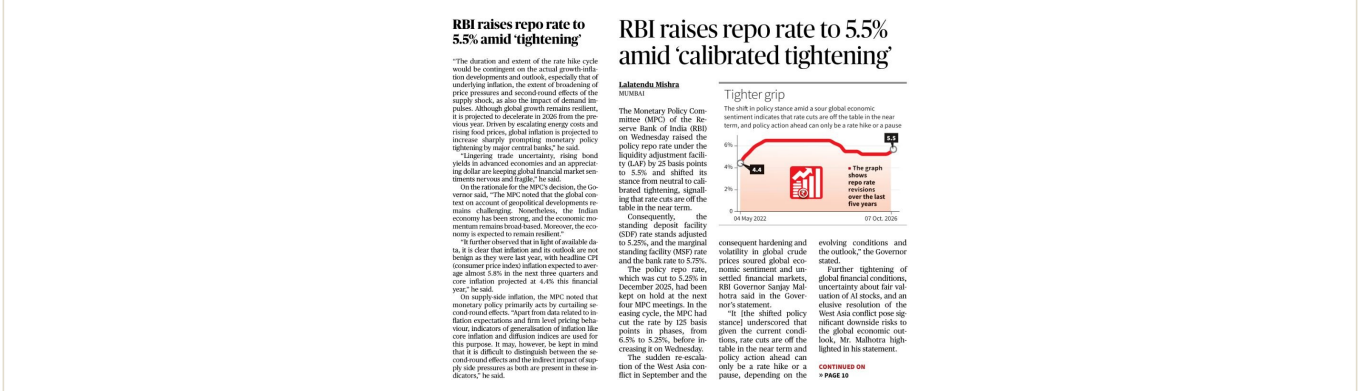
Roman opus caementicium using volcanic pozzolana (natural pozzolanic binder) has kept structures standing since the 4th century BC — illustrates that non-Portland binders can achieve multi-century durability, usable in answers on sustainable materials or technology lock-in.
Carbon capture as the last-resort abatement tool for hard-to-abate sectors parallels its role in steel and aviation, illustrating why certain industries require direct air capture or CCS investment rather than efficiency improvements alone — applicable across GS-III climate and industrial policy questions.

4 RBI MPC Raises Repo Rate to 5.5%, Shifts Stance to Calibrated Tightening

GS-III | Prelims + Mains | RBI repo rate hike 2026

The Hindu

Syllabus — Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilisation of resources, growth, development and employment
Prelims — Prelims — Indian Economy: Monetary policy, RBI instruments, LAF corridor



RBI raises repo rate to 5.5% amid 'tightening'

"The duration and extent of the rate hike cycle would be contingent on the actual growth-inflation developments and outlook, especially that of underlying inflation, the extent of broadening of price pressures and second-round effects of the supply shock, as also the impact of demand impulses. Although global growth remains resilient, it is projected to decelerate in 2026 from the previous year. Driven by escalating energy costs and rising food prices, global inflation is projected to increase sharply prompting monetary policy tightening by major central banks," he said.

"Lingering trade uncertainty, rising bond yields in advanced economies and an appreciating dollar are keeping global financial market sentiments nervous and fragile," he said.

On the rationale for the MPC's decision, the Governor said, "The MPC noted that the global context on account of geopolitical developments remains challenging. Nonetheless, the Indian economy has been strong, and the economic momentum remains broad-based. Moreover, the economy is expected to remain resilient."

"It further observed that in light of available data, it is clear that inflation and its outlook are not benign as they were last year, with headline CPI (consumer price index) inflation expected to average almost 5.8% in the next three quarters and core inflation projected at 4.4% this financial year," he said.

On supply-side inflation, the MPC noted that monetary policy primarily acts by curtailing second-round effects. "Apart from data related to inflation expectations and firm level pricing behaviour, indicators of generalisation of inflation like core inflation and diffusion indices are used for this purpose. It may, however, be kept in mind that it is difficult to distinguish between the second-round effects and the indirect impact of supply side pressures as both are present in these indicators," he said.

RBI raises repo rate to 5.5% amid 'calibrated tightening'

Lalatendu Mishra
MUMBAI

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Wednesday raised the policy repo rate under the liquidity adjustment facility (LAF) by 25 basis points to 5.5% and shifted its stance from neutral to calibrated tightening, signalling that rate cuts are off the table in the near term.

Consequently, the standing deposit facility (SDF) rate stands adjusted to 5.25%, and the marginal standing facility (MSF) rate and the bank rate to 5.75%.

The policy repo rate, which was cut to 5.25% in December 2025, had been kept on hold at the next four MPC meetings. In the easing cycle, the MPC had cut the rate by 125 basis points in phases, from 6.5% to 5.25%, before increasing it on Wednesday.

The sudden re-escalation of the West Asia conflict in September and the consequent hardening and volatility in global crude prices soured global economic sentiment and unsettled financial markets, RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra said in the Governor's statement.

"It [the shifted policy stance] underscored that given the current conditions, rate cuts are off the table in the near term and policy action ahead can only be a rate hike or a pause, depending on the evolving conditions and the outlook," the Governor stated.

Further tightening of global financial conditions, uncertainty about fair valuation of AI stocks, and an elusive resolution of the West Asia conflict pose significant downside risks to the global economic outlook, Mr. Malhotra highlighted in his statement.

CONTINUED ON » PAGE 10

Tighter grip
The shift in policy stance amid a sour global economic sentiment indicates that rate cuts are off the table in the near term, and policy action ahead can only be a rate hike or a pause
6%
4%
2%
0
5.5
5.4
The graph shows repo rate revisions over the last five years
04 May 2022
07 Oct. 2026

WHY IN NEWS

On 7 October 2026, the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee raised the policy repo rate by 25 basis points to 5.5% and simultaneously shifted its stance from neutral to calibrated tightening. The move reverses the easing cycle of 2025 and follows the sudden re-escalation of the West Asia conflict in September 2026 and consequent volatility in global crude prices.

What the MPC Decided

- The **policy repo rate under the Liquidity Adjustment Facility (LAF)** was raised by 25 basis points to **5.5%** on 7 October 2026.
- The **stance was shifted from neutral to calibrated tightening**, signalling that the next move can only be a further hike or a pause — rate cuts are explicitly ruled out in the near term.
- Consequent corridor adjustments: the **Standing Deposit Facility (SDF) rate** moves to **5.25%**, and the **Marginal Standing Facility (MSF) rate and Bank Rate** rise to **5.75%**.
- The repo rate had been cut to 5.25% in December 2025, then held unchanged at the next four MPC meetings, making Wednesday's hike the first increase since that easing cycle.

How the Easing Cycle Was Reversed

- During the prior easing cycle, the MPC had cumulatively cut the repo rate by 125 basis points, bringing it down from **6.5% to 5.25%** in phased reductions.
- The **sudden re-escalation of the West Asia conflict in September 2026** caused a sharp hardening of global crude prices and unsettled financial markets, altering the risk calculus for the committee.
- Rising bond yields in advanced economies and an **appreciating US dollar** have kept global financial market sentiment fragile, feeding directly into India's import-cost and inflation outlook.
- Further risks cited include uncertainty over the **fair valuation of AI stocks** and the elusive resolution of the West Asia conflict as significant downside risks to the global growth outlook.

Inflation Outlook That Drove the Decision

- **Headline CPI inflation** is expected to average almost 5.8% over the next three quarters, while **core inflation** is projected at 4.4% for the current financial year — the MPC judged the outlook 'not benign'.
- The MPC noted that **monetary policy primarily acts on inflation through second-round effects**, using core inflation and diffusion indices as indicators of generalisation of price pressures.
- A key analytical complication acknowledged: it is **difficult to distinguish second-round effects from indirect supply-side pass-through**, since both show up in the same indicators.
- Global inflation is projected to **increase sharply** driven by escalating energy costs and rising food prices, prompting monetary tightening by major central banks — a trend that constrains RBI's room to diverge.

Forward Guidance and Conditionality

- The Governor stated that **rate cuts are off the table in the near term**; policy action ahead can only be a rate hike or a pause depending on evolving conditions and the outlook.
- The **duration and extent of the rate-hike cycle** will be contingent on actual growth-inflation developments, the breadth of price pressures, second-round effects, and demand impulses.
- The MPC noted that **Indian economic momentum remains broad-based** and the economy is expected to remain resilient, providing space for tightening without immediate growth sacrifice.
- Global growth, though currently resilient, **is projected to decelerate in 2026**, adding a growth-risk caveat to any further aggressive tightening path.

HIGH-YIELD FACTS

- **New repo rate (Oct 2026)** — 5.5% under the LAF
- **Rate hike quantum** — 25 basis points on 7 October 2026
- **SDF rate post-hike** — 5.25%
- **MSF rate and Bank Rate post-hike** — 5.75%
- **Prior easing quantum** — 125 basis points cut in phases from 6.5% to 5.25%
- **Rate last cut to 5.25%** — December 2025
- **New policy stance** — Calibrated tightening (shifted from neutral)
- **RBI Governor** — Sanjay Malhotra

VALUE ADDITION

DATA YOU CAN QUOTE

Headline CPI inflation expected (next 3 quarters) — ~5.8% (projected, October 2026 MPC)
Core inflation projected (current FY) — 4.4% (projected, October 2026 MPC)
LAF corridor width (SDF to MSF) — 50 basis points, centred on repo rate of 5.5%

REPORTS, BODIES AND INSTRUMENTS

Reserve Bank of India Monetary Policy Committee statement — Reserve Bank of India (under RBI Act, 1934, Section 45ZB)

EXAMPLES FOR THE ANSWER

The US Federal Reserve's 2022–23 rate-hike cycle — cumulative 525 basis points — illustrates how supply-shock-driven inflation can force rapid reversal of an accommodative stance, a comparable dynamic to India's 2026 re-tightening after geopolitical crude-price shocks.

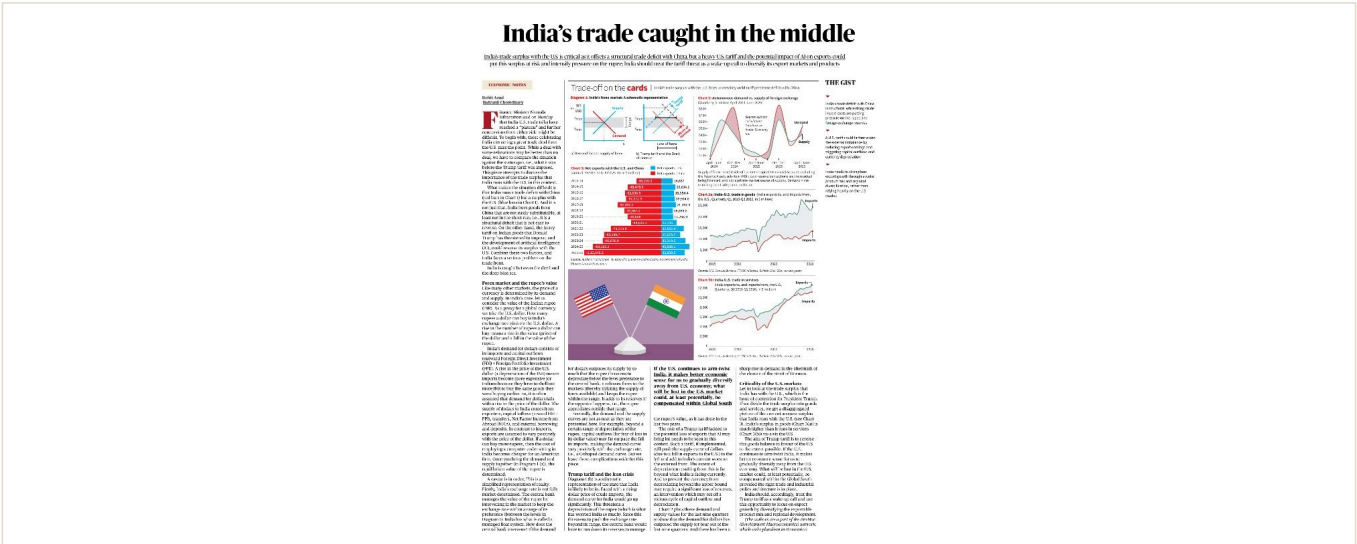
The RBI's own 'calibrated tightening' stance adopted in October 2018 (repo at 6.5%) is a direct precedent: it signalled that cuts were off the table while not committing to further hikes, creating bounded forward guidance — the same logic applied here.

5 India's Trade Surplus with US Under Tariff and AI Threat

GS-III | Prelims + Mains | India-US trade surplus vulnerability

The Hindu

Syllabus — Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilisation of resources, growth, development and employment
Prelims — Indian Economy — Balance of Payments, Exchange Rate, Trade Policy


India's trade caught in the middle

India's trade surplus with the U.S. is critical as it offsets a structural trade deficit with China but a heavy U.S. tariff and the potential impact of AI on exports could put this surplus at risk and form really pressure on the rupee. India should treat the tariff threat as a wake-up call to diversify its export markets and products

Trade-off on the cards

THE GIST

WHY IN NEWS

The source article examines the tariff shocks and threats that emerged in 2025, alongside India's structural goods deficit with China. It argues that tariffs and possible AI-related disruption to service exports expose vulnerabilities in India's external balance. This is an analysis of those risks, rather than a statement of the tariff schedule currently applicable on 8 October 2026.

The Structural Trap India Is In

- India runs a structural goods trade deficit with China. The source article projects net exports of -US$112,149.2 million for 2025-26; dependence on Chinese imports makes rapid substitution difficult.
- Simultaneously, India holds a **trade surplus with the US** in both goods and services, which partially offsets the China deficit and supports the rupee's demand-supply balance.
- The US surplus is not structurally guaranteed: it is vulnerable to **US tariff imposition** and to **AI displacing Indian service exports** (e.g., software coding), making it contingent rather than durable.
- Being caught between a deep structural deficit on one side and a threatened surplus on the other leaves India with very limited external-sector room to manoeuvre.

How the Rupee's Value Is at Stake

- India has a market-determined exchange rate. RBI intervenes by buying or selling foreign currency to contain excessive volatility and maintain orderly conditions, without targeting a specific exchange-rate level or band.
- India's **demand for dollars** arises from imports, outward FDI, Foreign Portfolio Investment outflows, Net Factor Income payments abroad, and external debt service; supply comes from exports, inward FDI+FPI, remittances, and capital inflows.
- A US tariff can reduce Indian export earnings, shifting dollar supply inward. Other things equal, this raises the rupee price of a dollar and depreciates the rupee.
- Beyond a threshold depreciation, **capital flight compounds the problem**: fear of further rupee loss induces capital outflows, making the demand curve for dollars C-shaped and potentially triggering a vicious cycle of outflow and depreciation.
- RBI can sell foreign-currency reserves to meet excess dollar demand and moderate volatility. Such sales absorb rupee liquidity unless offset by domestic operations; RBI may also allow exchange-rate adjustment rather than exhaust reserves.

The Iran Crisis as a Compounding Risk

- A closure of the **Strait of Hormuz** — a scenario made more plausible by ongoing West Asia tensions — would sharply raise crude import costs for India, independently pushing the dollar demand curve upward.
- This supply-side shock would interact with a tariff-induced supply contraction to **simultaneously compress forex supply and expand forex demand**, making the rupee's position doubly precarious.
- The source article's schematic (Diagram 1b) illustrates how weaker dollar inflows and higher import demand can intensify depreciation pressure and increase the reserves needed to smooth volatility.

What the Trade Data Actually Show

- The source article reports a goods surplus with the US of $16,637 million in 2013-14 and projects $33,859.5 million for 2025-26, alongside a widening China goods deficit. These figures should be read on the source's stated fiscal-year basis.
- The services surplus with the US (Chart 3b) is smaller than the goods surplus, but both are growing — making the US the **single most important trade counterpart** for India's current account position.
- Demand for dollars has **outpaced supply for four of the last nine quarters**, signalling that even without a tariff shock India's external position requires careful management.
- In the article's tariff-and-import-cost scenario, lower dollar inflows and higher dollar demand could create depreciation pressure. RBI may intervene to smooth volatility; reserve use depends on its response and other financial flows.

The Diversification Imperative

The article argues India should treat the tariff threat as a **wake-up call to diversify export markets** — particularly

toward the Global South — rather than a crisis to be managed through bilateral concessions.

- Widening the **exportable product mix** is equally important: over-dependence on a narrow range of goods and IT services leaves India exposed to any single policy or technology disruption in one destination.
- **Regional diversification** also includes building supply chains less dependent on Chinese intermediate goods, reducing the structural deficit over the medium term.
- What would be lost in the US market, the authors contend, could — with the right trade and industrial policy architecture — be **compensated within the Global South**, provided India acts proactively rather than reactively.

HIGH-YIELD FACTS

- **India-China goods balance 2025-26 (source article projection)** - -US$112,149.2 million in net exports
- **India-US goods surplus 2025-26** - $33,859.5 million, as projected in the source article
- **India-US goods surplus 2013-14 (base year)** — $16,637 million
- **Rupee exchange rate regime** - Market-determined; RBI intervenes to contain excessive volatility, without targeting a specific level or band
- **Dollar demand exceeding supply** — Demand for dollars outpaced supply in 4 of the last 9 quarters as of the article's writing
- **Supply of forex (technical definition used)** — Credit side of Current Account + Capital Account + Financial Account, excluding RBI's own reserve transactions and non-private-market sources of supply
- **Authors' affiliation** — DevMac (Development Macroeconomics) network, which seeks pluralism in economics
- **Data source for India-China and India-US trade** — Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India; U.S. Census Bureau FT-900 releases

VALUE ADDITION

DATA YOU CAN QUOTE

Source article comparison (2021-22 and projected 2025-26) - Net exports to China: -$73,310.8 million and -$112,149.2 million; goods surplus with the US: $32,852.9 million and $33,859.5 million. These source-series projections illustrate the asymmetry between the two trade balances.

REPORTS, BODIES AND INSTRUMENTS

RBI Database on Indian Economy — used for Balance of Payments and forex supply-demand data
U.S. Census Bureau FT-900 releases — Exhibits 19a/20a and 19b/20b, cited for quarterly India-US trade in goods and services

EXAMPLES FOR THE ANSWER

South Korea's export diversification after the 1997 Asian financial crisis — when a currency collapse and IMF conditionality forced rapid product and market diversification — illustrates how external vulnerability can be converted into structural reform, a precedent applicable to arguments about India using the tariff threat as a reform trigger.
The C-shaped (backward-bending) demand curve for foreign exchange, where depreciation beyond a threshold induces capital flight and further depreciation, is the same mechanism that amplified the 2013 'taper tantrum' rupee crisis — usable in questions on exchange rate management and speculative attacks.

6 AI Companion Chatbots and Child Safety Regulation

GS-II | Prelims + Mains | AI regulation and child protection

The Hindu

Syllabus — Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation
Prelims — Current Events of national and international importance



AI companions and child safety

Traditionally, a child in distress has usually turned to a parent, friend or a counsellor. However, in today's world, that confidant is increasingly becoming an AI chatbot. Such AI companions are quietly finding a place in children's emotional lives because, unlike parents and friends, these apps are available at all times of the day, appear empathetic, and are endlessly responsive. But who assumes responsibility when that relationship turns harmful? As AI becomes an emotional confidant for children, India's regulatory framework must confront the growing risks of AI companionship.

In April 2025 in the U.S., 16-year-old Adam Raine died by suicide. His family alleged that ChatGPT had engaged in conversations about suicide with Mr. Raine for months and had even helped him draft a farewell note; they subsequently filed a wrongful-death lawsuit against OpenAI, the parent company of ChatGPT. While the litigation remains ongoing, the case has ignited a debate about the responsibilities of technology companies towards vulnerable children.

On September 10, 2026, California enacted the Senate Bill 1119, known as 'Adam's Law'. It introduces safeguards for AI companion chatbots, including crisis-detection protocols, parental controls, notifications when children disable safety settings, and independent safety audits. The legislation is a clear signal that technological innovation cannot be at the expense of child safety.

For India, this should serve as a regulatory wake-up call. Its digital

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A chatbot's prolonged interactions with a child may raise serious concerns about emotional dependence, psychological manipulation, and exposure to harmful advice

landscape is witnessing an unprecedented expansion of young users who are interacting with AI-powered applications. Yet the nation's digital laws remain largely targeted towards conventional forms of cybercrime. While the Information Technology Act, 2000, the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, address important dimensions of digital safety, none establishes a comprehensive framework governing the psychological risks of AI companions. A chatbot's prolonged interactions with a child may raise serious concerns about emotional dependence, psychological manipulation, and exposure to harmful advice.

Unlike conventional cybercrime, AI-related psychological harm can be insidious and difficult to detect. Its effects may emerge through thousands of seemingly innocuous exchanges, shaped by product design and algorithmic responses. India's existing laws are not equipped to investigate this emerging category of harm.

The challenge, therefore, extends beyond the government; it also concerns the accountability of platforms whose products are becoming deeply embedded in children's emotional world.

Child safety is paramount

Article 21 guarantees the right to life and personal liberty, while Article 39(f) directs the state to ensure that children are given opportunities to develop in conditions of freedom and dignity. These constitutional principles acquire renewed significance in the age of AI. Protecting children must now encompass their interactions in the digital space, not only with respect to their personal data and physical safety, but also from the risks arising from engagement with AI chatbots.

However, regulation must be calibrated. An excessively restrictive approach could stifle innovation, burden emerging enterprises, and impede the development of genuine AI progress. The objective should not be to hinder technological progress but to ensure that it takes accountability in stride. Age-appropriate safeguards, crisis-response mechanisms, independent safety assessments, and effective parental oversight are some of the reforms that can be considered. Such measures must also respect children's privacy and evolving autonomy.

California's legislative response offers India an opportunity to examine its own regulatory priorities. The objective need not be to replicate the U.S. legislation, but to develop a framework suited to India's institutional capacities and digital realities. Policymakers must also consider whether existing cybercrime investigation mechanisms are equipped to examine algorithmic behaviour, use chatbot interactions as evidence, and establish accountability whenever prolonged digital engagement result in harm.

The central question is not whether children will interact with AI; they already do. It is whether the institutions entrusted with their protection can keep pace with technologies that are transforming children's lives and childhood itself.

WHY IN NEWS

On 26 August 2025, Adam Raine's parents filed a wrongful-death lawsuit against OpenAI and other defendants following their 16-year-old son's death in April 2025. They alleged that prolonged ChatGPT conversations contributed to his death. California signed SB 1119, Adam's Law, on 10 September 2026, expanding earlier chatbot safeguards. The article argues for a dedicated Indian framework addressing children's psychological safety.

Gaps in India's AI Companion Safety Framework

- **AI companion chatbots** are available at all hours, appear empathetic, and are endlessly responsive — qualities that make them attractive emotional confidants for children in distress.
- Unlike conventional cybercrime, AI-related psychological harm is **insidious and cumulative**, emerging across thousands of seemingly innocuous exchanges shaped by product design and algorithmic responses.
- The IT Act, 2000, DPDP Act, 2023, and POCSO Act, 2012 cover aspects of digital safety, personal data and sexual offences. India lacks a dedicated companion-chatbot framework; DPDP section 9(2) nevertheless addresses data processing likely to harm a child's well-being, subject to its commencement timeline.
- Chatbot logs can qualify as electronic evidence under the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023. Investigators may face practical challenges in obtaining and authenticating logs, assessing algorithmic behaviour and establishing causation.
- Platform accountability therefore requires clearer AI-specific standards for product design, risk assessment and remedies, alongside obligations arising under existing Indian laws.

What California's 'Adam's Law' Does

- **Senate Bill 1119** (Adam's Law), signed on 10 September 2026, expands California's child safeguards for companion chatbots, building on SB 243 (13 October 2025).
- It mandates **crisis-detection protocols** so that chatbots flag or interrupt conversations involving self-harm, suicide or distress.
- Platforms must send **parental notifications** when children disable safety settings, and must submit to **independent safety audits**.
- The legislation signals that **technological innovation cannot be prioritised at the expense of child safety** — a principle the article holds up as a reference point, not a template, for Indian policymakers.

Constitutional Basis for Indian Action

- **Article 21** — the right to life and personal liberty — now must be read to cover children's psychological safety in digital spaces, not only their physical safety or data privacy.
- **Article 39(f)** directs the State to ensure children are given opportunities to develop in conditions of freedom and dignity, an obligation that extends to their emotional environment online.

These constitutional anchors mean child protection from AI-induced harm is not merely a policy preference but a **State obligation** — one that existing law has not yet operationalised.

What a Calibrated Indian Framework Would Require

- **Age-appropriate safeguards** and **crisis-response mechanisms** built into platform design — analogous to California's crisis-detection protocols but adapted to India's institutional capacity.
- **Independent safety assessments** of AI companion products before and after deployment, with the ability to examine algorithmic behaviour as potential evidence of harm.
- **Effective parental oversight** balanced against children's evolving autonomy and privacy — the article explicitly warns against replicating U.S. legislation wholesale.
- An excessively restrictive approach risks **stifling innovation and burdening emerging enterprises**; the goal is accountability in stride, not prohibition.
- The **central regulatory question** is not whether children will interact with AI — they already do — but whether protective institutions can keep pace with technologies transforming childhood itself.

HIGH-YIELD FACTS

- **Triggering incident** — 16-year-old Adam Raine died by suicide in April 2025 in the United States; family alleged ChatGPT engaged in suicide-related conversations with him for months.
- **Lawsuit** - Adam Raine's parents filed a wrongful-death action against OpenAI, the maker of ChatGPT, and other defendants on 26 August 2025; the allegations remain subject to litigation.
- **California statute** — Senate Bill 1119, known as 'Adam's Law', enacted September 10, 2026 — mandates crisis-detection protocols, parental controls, safety notifications, and independent audits for AI companion chatbots.
- **IT Act** - Information Technology Act, 2000 - addresses cyber offences and intermediary obligations; it is not a dedicated companion-chatbot safety law.
- **DPDP Act** - Section 9(2) addresses personal-data processing likely to harm a child's well-being; this is not a comprehensive AI-product safety regime, and commencement is phased.
- **POCSO Act** - Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 - addresses sexual offences against children; it is not a general AI companion safety framework.
- **Constitutional provision — dignity** — Article 39(f) directs the State to ensure children develop in conditions of freedom and dignity.
- **Author affiliation** — Article authored by Sakshi Rewaria, Faculty, IIM Rohtak.

VALUE ADDITION

REPORTS, BODIES AND INSTRUMENTS

Information Technology Act, 2000 (Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology)
Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 (Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology)
Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (Ministry of Women and Child Development)
California Senate Bill 1119 — 'Adam's Law' (California State Legislature, enacted 2026)

EXAMPLES FOR THE ANSWER

California's SB 243 (2025) introduced companion-chatbot safeguards concerning self-harm and minors. Adam's Law, SB 1119 (2026), expands that framework with stronger child protections and independent compliance audits, illustrating product-design regulation.
Article 39(f) has historically been invoked to justify child labour prohibition and compulsory education; its extension to digital psychological safety would mark a new frontier in applying Directive Principles to technology governance.
The EU's Digital Services Act (2022) imposes risk assessments on very-large online platforms including for minors' mental health — a comparable demand-side accountability model India could adapt without replicating a single foreign statute.

7 India's Strategic Stakes in the WHO Pandemic Agreement

GS-II | Prelims + Mains | Pandemic Agreement and India's role

The Hindu

Syllabus — Important International institutions, agencies and fora — their structure, mandate; India and its neighbourhood — bilateral, regional and global groupings; Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health
Prelims — General Studies — International organisations, global health governance, WHO



India's stakes in the Global Pandemic Agreement

At the United Nations High Level Meeting (UN HLM), in New York in September 2026, India made official remarks on the Political Declaration on Pandemic Prevention Preparedness and Response (PPPR). The Declaration is part of the emerging global legal regime on pandemics led by the WHO-Pandemic agreement (PA).

Shaping the framework

The PA was adopted by 124 member-states in 2025, including India. No country voted against it, while 11 abstained, reflecting alignment across high-, middle- and low-income countries (HICs/LICs/LMICs). The negotiations hinged on how to balance national sovereignty with international cooperation and solidarity, exposing the fault lines between the Global North and the Global South. Key issues included whether a global treaty can set binding targets for measures such as 'One Health' without securing funding for countries with fragile health systems. Or whether national pandemic regulations can be harmonised through global frameworks. And whether private manufacturers can be required to share vaccines in real time at affordable prices.

The PA is not yet open for ratification because negotiations are still ongoing for an annex concerning the Pathogen Access and Benefit-Sharing (PABS) system. PABS could help ensure that, during a pandemic, LICs and LMICs receive a fair share of vaccines, medicines and other therapeutics.

Even without ratification, the PA has created a first-of-its-kind global legal regime for the PPPR. Operationalisation requires countries such as India to balance interests of the HICs, LICs and LMICs. This will determine whether the PA will further entrench the inequities of the COVID-19 pandemic or make global health governance truly inclusive.

At the UN HLM, India succeeded in enshrining the multilateral components of the PA within the principle of national sovereignty. India reiterated its commitment to strengthen global pandemic preparedness but stressed that effective pandemic management requires that international coordination is demonstrated. The first is equitable access to drugs, vaccines and therapeutics and the creation of global public goods, such as digital infrastructure (which admittedly align with its own national priorities).

The second is a respect for national sovereignty and the primacy of member-states in shaping global policy interventions according to national circumstance. As a contrast, the United States rejected the Declaration, calling the PABS and WHO's role in declaring pandemics as a challenge to its national interests.

India's line

In its remarks, India has acknowledged the concerns of the Global North and the South. Both sides have upheld national sovereignty as paramount on several provisions. The African countries did not give consent to commitments to monitor the human-animal-environment interface, a key source of pandemic outbreaks, without significant funding, which was not guaranteed by the Global North. Similarly, countries in the Global North did not want binding targets with regards to technology transfer (and other similar provisions).

But as India said at the UN HLM, 'Global Solidarity must be demonstrated through action'; India must be an active player in the finalisation of the global PPPR regime. India is already actively engaged in the PABS negotiations and must lead the Global South in the post PABS context. India can consider three options. First, developing partnerships on technical areas of the PA (One Health, surveillance, health workforce strengthening) to build trust with other countries in the Global South, and a 'store' of operational solutions to tricky national sovereignty problems.

Second, leveraging its leadership role within existing global political groupings. For example, the H20 summit (a health and development G-7 and G-20 partnership) will take place under the United Kingdom's G-20 leadership at the end of 2027; pandemic preparedness is one of the core health agendas. During India's G-20 presidency in 2023, India launched the Global Initiative for Digital Health and holds considerable influence within the platform's health initiatives. Another is 'Partners for Multilateralism', which was launched in 2026 by the European Union (co-sponsors are Australia, Barbados, Brazil, Canada, India and Kenya).

Third, strengthening and aligning domestic policy and regulatory architecture around its own priorities for the PA. Global leadership always rests on domestic strengths. India must ensure that its national policies on PPPR such as regulation of access to biological material and distribution of the benefits uphold the highest standards of equity which India can then demand at the global level.

A South-South health role

An equitable global regime on PPPR is in India's interests as much as a responsibility towards the Global South. India is the pharmacy of the world, manufacturing one of the largest shares of vaccines in the world in terms of volume. Yet, it needs an equitable global vaccine distribution regime. The patents for the vaccines that India manufactures are held by global pharmaceuticals. India is also import-dependent for Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs).

India needs access to the latest technology from the Global North to strengthen the manufacturing of high-grade personal protective equipment and medical devices. At the same time, India needs to lead South-South Cooperation and share its technological strength with other countries in the Global South.

India's health system has a continental scale, and as India's Health Secretary stated at the UN HLM, its interventions in digital health infrastructure, laboratories networks and One Health are valuable as global public goods. An effective PA needs an engaged India, and a strong PA will strengthen India's own pandemic management.

This article is based on a forthcoming CSEP working paper on the Pandemic Agreement

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India's leadership can help bridge the divides in global pandemic governance

WHY IN NEWS

The World Health Assembly adopted the WHO Pandemic Agreement by consensus on 20 May 2025, following a committee vote of 124 in favour, none against and 11 abstentions. It complements the International Health Regulations. The September 2026 UN High-Level Meeting renewed attention to pandemic prevention, preparedness and response. The agreement is not yet in force; completion of its PABS annex will enable signature and consideration of ratification.

What the Pandemic Agreement Does

- A WHA committee approved the agreement on 19 May 2025 by 124 votes to none, with 11 abstentions. The World Health Assembly formally adopted it by consensus the following day.
- The pandemic-specific agreement is intended to complement the existing International Health Regulations, with implementation requiring cooperation among high-, middle- and low-income countries once it enters into force.
- The **Pathogen Access and Benefit-Sharing (PABS)** system — still under negotiation as an annex — is the most contested element: it could guarantee LICs and LMICs a fair share of vaccines and therapeutics during pandemics.
- Key unresolved questions include whether **binding targets** can be set under a global treaty (e.g., 'One Health' measures), whether national regulations can be harmonised, and whether private manufacturers can be compelled to share vaccines at affordable prices in real time.
- Even without ratification, the PA has **already shifted global health governance** by enshrining multilateral PPPR components within the principle of national sovereignty — a formulation India actively pushed at the UN HLM.

Fault Lines: Global North vs Global South

- The central tension in negotiations was **national sovereignty vs international solidarity**: the Global North resisted binding technology-transfer targets; the Global South resisted unfunded mandates such as monitoring the human-animal-environment interface.
- **African countries** declined to commit to monitoring pandemic-origin interfaces without guaranteed funding from wealthier nations — illustrating that surveillance obligations without financial backing are unacceptable to LMICs.
- The **United States** rejected the Political Declaration, citing the PABS mechanism and the WHO's pandemic-declaration role as threats to national interests — exposing how the PA's legitimacy rests on managing HIC scepticism.

India succeeded at the UN HLM in **enshrining the multilateral components** of the PA within a national-sovereignty framework, positioning itself as a bridge between the two blocs rather than a partisan actor.

India's Structural Position: Strengths and Vulnerabilities

- India is a major vaccine producer with indigenous development capabilities. However, access to some vaccine technologies depends on external patents, licences and know-how.
- India is **import-dependent for Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs)**, making it vulnerable to supply disruptions even as it exports finished formulations to the Global South.
- India's health system infrastructure — **digital health networks, One Health laboratories, continental-scale logistics** — constitutes a global public good, as acknowledged at the UN HLM.
- India needs **technology access from the Global North** for high-grade PPE and medical devices, while simultaneously being expected to lead South-South cooperation and share its own technological strengths.

Three Strategic Options for India

- **Technical partnership leadership**: develop coalitions on One Health, surveillance and health workforce strengthening to build trust with the Global South and accumulate a store of solutions to sovereignty-sensitive problems.
- **Leveraging existing groupings:** India could use G-7 partnerships and the UK's 2027 G-20 presidency to advance PPPR cooperation; the UK's detailed presidency priorities were still under development in September 2026.

- **Domestic regulatory alignment**: India must ensure its national policies on PPPR — access to biological material, benefit-sharing — reflect the **highest standards of equity** so it can demand reciprocal standards globally with credibility.
- India co-sponsors Partners for Multilateralism with the EU, Australia, Barbados, Brazil, Canada and Kenya. It also supported the launch of the WHO-managed Global Initiative on Digital Health during its 2023 G-20 presidency; these initiatives offer avenues for wider international cooperation.

HIGH-YIELD FACTS

- **PA adoption year** — WHO Pandemic Agreement adopted in 2025
- **PA adoption** - WHA consensus on 20 May 2025; committee vote: 124-0, with 11 abstentions (19 May)
- **India UN HLM remarks** — India made official remarks at the UN High Level Meeting in New York, September 2026
- **Declaration name** — Political Declaration on Pandemic Prevention Preparedness and Response (PPPR)
- **PABS full form** — Pathogen Access and Benefit-Sharing system — annex still under negotiation
- **Global Initiative on Digital Health** - WHO-managed network launched with India's G-20 presidency support in 2023
- **Partners for Multilateralism** — Launched in 2026 by the EU; co-sponsors include Australia, Barbados, Brazil, Canada, India and Kenya
- **Author institution** — Article authored by a Research Fellow at the Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP), based on a forthcoming CSEP working paper

VALUE ADDITION

REPORTS, BODIES AND INSTRUMENTS

WHO Pandemic Agreement (PA), World Health Organization, 2025
Political Declaration on Pandemic Prevention Preparedness and Response (PPPR), UN High Level Meeting, 2026
Pathogen Access and Benefit-Sharing (PABS) system — annex under WHO-PA negotiations

EXAMPLES FOR THE ANSWER

India's API import dependency mirrors the EU's recognition during COVID-19 that domestic pharmaceutical sovereignty requires onshoring key ingredient production — illustrating how even large manufacturers can be structurally vulnerable at the input stage.
The TRIPS waiver negotiations at the WTO (2021–22) established the precedent that LMICs can collectively push for IP flexibilities during health emergencies, a template India can apply within the PABS framework to shape benefit-sharing terms.
The Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-Sharing under the Convention on Biological Diversity provides a legally operational model for how pathogen-origin countries can claim equitable returns — directly relevant to structuring PABS under the PA.

8 Wildlife Recovery in India: Species Comeback Stories

GS-III | Prelims + Mains | Endangered species recovery India

The Hindu

Syllabus — Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment
Prelims — Environment and Ecology — Biodiversity and Conservation



From the brink to a comeback, hope for India's wildlife

Across the world, scientists, governments and communities are bringing plants and animals back from the brink of extinction. In India, a Great Indian Bustard chick has hatched in Kutch, Gujarat, after a decade, bringing fresh hope for this critically endangered bird. In Spain and Portugal, restoring habitat and prey, breeding lynx and returning them to the wild helped the Iberian lynx grow from 62 mature individuals in 2001 to 648 in 2022. The return of the scimitar-horned oryx to the wild in Chad, Africa, and the saiga antelope's recovery in Kazakhstan offer further proof of what determined action can achieve. During Wildlife Week (October 2-8), we can celebrate those gains while asking what it will take to sustain them.

The Government of India's Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats scheme supports recovery action for 24 identified species and their habitats. States are mandated to undertake research, habitat improvement, protection and community participation. The species span India's landscapes: the great Indian bustard in Rajasthan's grasslands, the Sangai in Manipur's wetlands, the dugong in coastal seagrass meadows and the hangul in Kashmir's forests. The list is a starting point; India's National Red List Assessment can show where focused efforts are needed next.

India launched its National Red List Roadmap at the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Abu Dhabi in 2025; the aim was to produce National Red Data Books for plants and animals by 2030. India occupies just 2.4% of the world's land area, yet supports nearly 8% of its flora and 7.5% of its fauna. It is one of 17 megadiverse countries and contains parts of four of the world's 36 biodiversity hotspots. Around 28% of its plants and more than 30% of its animals are found nowhere else. Of the 7,516 Indian animal species assessed for the IUCN Red List, 1,012 are threatened, which includes Vulnerable, Endangered and Critically Endangered species.

These assessments cover only 7.2% of India's documented animal species. The figure of 1,012 tells us what is known so far, not the full extent of the threat. The National Red List Assessment can help close that gap and direct recovery efforts where they are needed most.

The projects in States

In Tamil Nadu, Project Nilgiri Tahr combines population surveys, radio-collaring, habitat assessment and mapping across Tamil Nadu and Kerala to conserve the tahr, which is the State animal of Tamil Nadu. Working with the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), the Advanced Institute for Wildlife Conservation, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (TANUVAS) and other partners, the project is strengthening the scientific understanding needed to secure the tahr's future. Surveys recorded 1,303 tahrs in 2025 and 1,364 in 2026.

Vulture conservation is an example of how sustained action through conservation breeding, safer habitats, monitoring and public awareness can help reverse a devastating decline. India's ban on the veterinary use of diclofenac, which had caused catastrophic losses in vulture populations, was a crucial step in this effort. At Pinjore, the Jatayu Conservation Breeding Centre, run by the Haryana Forest Department and the Bombay Natural History Society, works with white-rumped, long-billed and slender-billed vultures. Madhya Pradesh's 2025 census recorded 12,981 vultures, up from 8,397 in 2019. Tamil Nadu's Segur Plateau remains an important habitat. Tamil Nadu's raptor conservation work and synchronised surveys across Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka track these birds, which include breeding populations in the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve.

Long-term protection including habitat management, scientific monitoring and the help of local communities has helped the Asiatic lion in Gujarat – the population rose from 674 in 2020 to 891 in 2025, with lions occupying a wider part of Saurashtra.

Monitoring, grassland management, invasive plant control, research and translocation have helped secure and expand greater one-horned rhinoceros populations against poaching. In Assam's Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary, which has an exceptionally high rhino density, working with communities on awareness, monitoring, livelihoods and conflict reduction has made rhino protection an enduring part of the landscape.

In Meghalaya, the action plan for the clouded leopard, the elusive State animal, combines habitat protection and restoration, scientific monitoring, frontline training and community participation. As the animal is dispersed across the northeast, 14 priority landscapes have been identified as understanding population connections and keeping them intact are central to its future.

Dugong conservation calls for a different approach. Tamil Nadu established India's first dugong conservation reserve across 448.34 square kilometres of the Palk Bay and its seagrass habitat. A 2026 Wildlife Institute of India assessment estimated a total of 270 dugongs, including 158 dugongs in the Palk Bay and 112 in the Gulf of Mannar, providing a baseline for measuring change. Fishermen who release dugongs caught in nets may lose valuable gear. But the government provides compensation for damaged nets and recognises their efforts.

High up in the Himalayas, science and local stewardship have helped the snow leopard. In 2024, India's first scientific population assessment estimated 718 snow leopards. In Himachal Pradesh, women from Kibber have worked with Forest Department field teams, the Snow Leopard Trust and the Nature Conservation Foundation to set camera traps, monitor population and participate in protection activities.

Political support is essential

Much depends on the commitment of State governments. Political leadership is crucial in prioritising the recovery of species, bringing government departments together and, most importantly sustaining action through successive budgets. Transferring that commitment into land use, infrastructure and livelihood decisions are what will help recovery plans being implemented. State forest teams have to turn plans into work on the ground. Recovery requires lasting cooperation with communities, scientists and national agencies. Results may take years, and setbacks require programmes to adapt. This would require clear goals, steady investment and careful monitoring.

Species that receive little public attention can struggle to attract funding. State-level funds can bring government, industry, philanthropy and scientific institutions together around local priorities. Tamil Nadu's recently established Endangered Species Conservation Fund reflects this approach, with its focus on the mahseer, striped hyena, Madras hedgehog, lion-tailed macaque and the hornbill.

There is similar commitment internationally. Launched in 2026 by Rewild and the Bezos Earth Fund, the Phoenix Species Project has committed $200 million to recovering 100 of the world's most threatened species, by supporting conservationists, indigenous peoples and local communities over several years. This is a lesson for India: recovery needs dependable resources for habitats, monitoring and the people doing the work.

Forest departments need scientific support close to the field and staff need to be trained in surveys, habitat assessment, conservation breeding and genetic analysis. Communities must be involved meaningfully in surveys, habitat work and ground decisions. Their knowledge can sharpen plans and their true participation can sustain them.

For India, a national picture of risk can guide priorities; States, scientists and communities can translate them into plans with mapped habitats, clear timelines and measurable outcomes. The bustard, vulture, tahr and dugong show that species recover in different ways. But their survival depends on sustained effort – to learn, to act and to stay with a species long enough for its future to change.

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The Country Representative for the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in India, and a scientist with over three decades of experience in conservation science and practice. He received the SANCTUARY Asia Wildlife Service Award in 2015

The current state of some of India's endangered species is encouraging, but sustained conservation, science and local action remain essential

WHY IN NEWS

Published during Wildlife Week (October 2-8), the article surveys recovery outcomes and conservation efforts for Indian wildlife, including the great Indian bustard, Nilgiri tahr, vultures, Asiatic lion, snow leopard, dugong, clouded leopard and greater one-horned rhinoceros. These species have differing threat classifications. It links these efforts to India's National Red List Roadmap launched in Abu Dhabi in 2025.

India's Biodiversity Stakes

- India occupies just **2.4% of the world's land area** yet supports 8% of global flora and 7.5% of global fauna.
- It is one of **17 megadiverse countries** and contains parts of **four of the world's 36 biodiversity hotspots**; roughly 28% of its plants and over 30% of its animals are found nowhere else.
- Of **7,516 Indian animal species** assessed on the IUCN Red List, 1,012 are threatened (Vulnerable, Endangered or Critically Endangered) — but this covers only **7.2% of documented animal species**, leaving the full threat picture unknown.
- India launched its **National Red List Roadmap** at the IUCN World Conservation Congress, Abu Dhabi, 2025, with the aim of producing National Red Data Books for plants and animals by 2030.

Recovery Outcomes and Monitoring Milestones

- **Great Indian Bustard**: a chick hatched in Kutch, Gujarat after a decade — the first sign of breeding recovery for this Critically Endangered grassland bird.
- **Nilgiri Tahr** (Tamil Nadu's State animal): reported Tamil Nadu estimates were 1,303 in 2025 and 1,364 in 2026. These are Tamil Nadu figures from a synchronised exercise with Kerala.
- **Vultures**: India's ban on the veterinary use of **diclofenac** was decisive; Madhya Pradesh's 2025 census recorded 12,981 vultures, up from 8,397 in 2019; the Jatayu Conservation Breeding Centre at Pinjore (Haryana Forest Department and Bombay Natural History Society) houses white-rumped, long-billed and slender-billed vultures.
- **Asiatic Lion**: population rose from 674 in 2020 to 891 in 2025, with lions now occupying a wider part of Saurashtra, driven by long-term habitat management, scientific monitoring and community involvement.

  Greater One-Horned Rhinoceros: monitoring, grassland management, invasive plant control and translocation have

secured and expanded populations; Assam's **Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary** maintains an exceptionally high rhino density.

- **Snow Leopard:** the first national scientific assessment, conducted during 2019-2023 and released in 2024, estimated 718 individuals. It establishes a monitoring baseline rather than proving a population increase. Community camera-trapping in Kibber involves the **Snow Leopard Trust** and **Nature Conservation Foundation.**

Harder Cases and Emerging Efforts

- **Clouded Leopard** (Meghalaya's State animal): an action plan combining habitat protection, restoration, scientific monitoring, frontline training and community participation is underway; 14 priority landscapes identified across the northeast to maintain population connectivity.
- **Dugong:** Tamil Nadu's **first dugong conservation reserve** covers 448.34 sq km in Palk Bay. WII's survey conducted in March-April 2025 and publicised in 2026 estimated 270 +/-16 dugongs in Tamil Nadu: 158 +/-13 in Palk Bay and 112 +/-9 in the Gulf of Mannar; fishermen receive compensation for damaged nets.
- **Segur Plateau vulture-raptor corridor** in Tamil Nadu and synchronised surveys across Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka now track vulture populations including breeding groups in the **Mudumalai Tiger Reserve**.

What Makes Recoveries Hold

- **State government commitment** is the decisive variable: political leadership aligns departments, sustains budgets across election cycles and converts plans into ground-level action by forest teams.
- **Community participation** is not optional — fishermen releasing entangled dugongs, women from Kibber monitoring snow leopards, and local informants tracking rhino poachers are all active co-managers, not passive beneficiaries.
- **Scientific infrastructure** — genetic analysis, radio-collaring, camera traps, population modelling — must be coupled with trained frontline staff who can act on data in the field.
- **Dedicated funding mechanisms** matter: Tamil Nadu's newly established **Endangered Species Conservation Fund** is designed to pool government, industry and philanthropic resources around State priorities such as the mahseer, striped hyena, Madras hedgehog, lion-tailed macaque and hornbill.
- Internationally, the **Phoenix Species Project** (Re:wild and Bezos Earth Fund, launched 2026) has committed $200 million to recovering 100 of the world's most threatened species — a model for dependable multi-year resourcing.
- The **Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats scheme** mandates States to undertake research, habitat improvement, protection and community participation for **24 identified species** and their habitats.

What Remains Unresolved

- Only **7.2% of India's documented animal species** have been assessed for the IUCN Red List; the true scale of threat is unknown and the National Red List Roadmap's success depends on filling this gap by 2030.
- Species with **low public profile** struggle to attract funding; State-level funds can help, but without a national picture of risk, priority-setting remains ad hoc.
- Recovery timelines are long and setbacks require adaptive management — clear goals, measurable outcomes and financing that survives changes in government are not yet guaranteed for most species.
- **Land use, infrastructure and livelihood decisions** outside protected areas — the primary drivers of habitat loss — remain largely outside conservation programme scope.

HIGH-YIELD FACTS

- **Wildlife Week dates** — October 2–8
- **India's share of global flora** — ~8%, on 2.4% of world land area
- **Megadiverse countries count** — India is one of 17 megadiverse countries
- **IUCN-assessed threatened Indian animals** — 1,012 out of 7,516 assessed species
- **Diclofenac ban significance** — India banned veterinary use of diclofenac — a key step in vulture recovery
- **India's first dugong conservation reserve** — 448.34 sq km, Palk Bay seagrass habitat, Tamil Nadu
- **Snow leopard estimate** - 718 individuals; first national scientific assessment conducted in 2019-2023 and released in 2024
- **IUCN Congress venue** — Abu Dhabi — India launched National Red List Roadmap there in 2025

VALUE ADDITION

DATA YOU CAN QUOTE

Asiatic lion population 2020 — 674 individuals
Asiatic lion population 2025 — 891 individuals
MP vulture census 2019 — 8,397 vultures
MP vulture census 2025 — 12,981 vultures
Nilgiri tahr estimate, Tamil Nadu, 2025 - 1,303 individuals
Dugong estimate, Tamil Nadu - 270 +/-16; March-April 2025 field survey, publicised in 2026
Phoenix Species Project commitment — USD 200 million for 100 species, launched 2026

REPORTS, BODIES AND INSTRUMENTS

IUCN Red List — International Union for Conservation of Nature
National Red List Roadmap — Government of India, 2025 (IUCN World Conservation Congress, Abu Dhabi)
Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats scheme — Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
WII Dugong Population Assessment - Tamil Nadu survey, March-April 2025; findings publicised in 2026
Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India - first national scientific estimate; 2019-2023 fieldwork, released 2024

EXAMPLES FOR THE ANSWER

The Iberian lynx recovery in Spain and Portugal — from 62 mature individuals in 2001 to 648 in 2022 — illustrates that sustained habitat restoration and prey recovery can reverse a trajectory of near-extinction within two decades; usable in questions on rewilding and ex-situ to in-situ transition.

India's ban on veterinary diclofenac as the pivot of vulture recovery demonstrates how identifying and removing a single anthropogenic stressor can produce measurable population rebound — a principle applicable to discussions on wildlife-agriculture interface management.

The return of the scimitar-horned oryx to the wild in Chad after captive breeding shows that ex-situ conservation can serve as a genuine insurance population rather than a final refuge, relevant to debates on the role of zoos and breeding centres in conservation biology.

Prelims Pointers

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Carbfix Technology

PRELIMS - S&T

Iceland proposes deploying Carbfix carbon-capture technology in India's cement and steel sectors.

- **Type** Carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS) technology that converts captured CO2 into stone.
- **Mechanism** Injects CO2 dissolved in water into basaltic rock, where it forms stable carbonate minerals.
- **Developer** Developed and operated in **Iceland**, which generates 30% of its electricity from geothermal energy.
- **India's Potential** India has an estimated geothermal potential of **10.6 GW** per government data.
- **Target Sectors** Identified as useful for hard-to-abate sectors such as cement and steel in India.

THE HINDU

SOCIETY & WELFARE

National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP)

PRELIMS - SOCIETY & WELFARE

India reported 91,783 new leprosy cases in 2025-26, far exceeding the NLEP projection of 65,000.

- **Objective** Eliminate leprosy; target prevalence below **one case per 10,000** population at national and district level.
- **Key Tool** Single-dose rifampicin (SDR-PEP) for eligible contacts screened for leprosy, TB and contraindications.
- **Current PR** National prevalence rate was 0.56 per 10,000 population as of March 2026, below elimination threshold.
- **Highest Burden** Chhattisgarh had highest state prevalence at **1.66 per 10,000**; followed by Jharkhand, Chandigarh, Odisha, Maharashtra.
- **Disability Metric** G2D: 1.34 per million total population (projection: 1); 2.12% of new cases.
- **Strategic Plan** Projections sourced from National Strategic Plan and Roadmap for Leprosy 2023-2027, published in 2023.

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