



Delimitation, Lok Sabha Expansion and Women's Reservation

Why in news?

The Union Government has introduced the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026, which proposes to increase Lok Sabha seats from 543 to 850, while also removing the long-standing freeze on delimitation and speeding up the implementation of 33% women's reservation in Parliament and State Assemblies, reigniting the federal debate on population-based seat allocation.

What is delimitation and why it matters?

- Delimitation is the process of redefining the boundaries of parliamentary and assembly constituencies so that each constituency represents roughly equal population, thereby maintaining fairness in elections.



- Physical constituency boundaries were last adjusted using 2001 Census data, but the total number of seats per state has remained frozen based on the 1971 population for over five decades due to constitutional provisions.
- Article 82 currently prohibits delimitation until after the first Census conducted after 2026; the 131st Amendment Bill proposes to remove this condition and give Parliament the power to decide when delimitation should take place.

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131st Amendment Bill and Lok Sabha expansion

- The Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026 seeks to increase the maximum strength of the Lok Sabha from 543 to 850 seats, with 815 allocated to States and 35 to Union Territories.
- This expansion will create smaller constituencies with fewer voters per MP, which is intended to improve local-level representation, governance, and accountability.
- The freeze on seat numbers, in place since 1976, has prevented reallocation of Lok Sabha and State Assembly seats despite major population changes; the Bill seeks to lift this freeze and start a new delimitation cycle.

Delimitation Act and Delimitation Commission

- Along with the Constitution Amendment, the Centre is moving the Delimitation Bill 2026 to repeal and replace the Delimitation Act, 2002 and set up a fresh Delimitation Commission.
- The Delimitation Commission will be chaired by a sitting or former Supreme Court Judge, and will include the Chief Election Commissioner and the State Election Commissioner of the concerned state, with ten associate members (five MPs and five State legislators) in an advisory role without voting rights.
- The Commission will decide Lok Sabha seat-allocation to states, State Assembly strengths, constituency



boundaries, and the identification of seats reserved for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and women; its orders, once notified in the Gazette of India, will have the force of law and cannot be challenged in court.

Connection to women's reservation (Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam)

- The Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023, or Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, mandates that one-third of seats in the Lok Sabha, State Assemblies, and Union Territory Assemblies be reserved for women, including women from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
- According to the 106th Amendment, women's reservation was to be activated after the first Census following 2023 and the subsequent delimitation; delays in the Census could have postponed implementation for many years.
- The 131st Amendment Bill

proposes to amend Article 334A so that women's reservation can be triggered earlier by using the 2011 Census as the base, thereby decoupling it from the yet-to-be-completed 2026 Census-linked delimitation.

- Expanding the Lok Sabha to 850 seats will allow the 33% women's quota to be accommodated without reducing the total number of general seats, which can help reduce political resistance to the reservation.
- In the 17th Lok Sabha, women's share was about 14.4%, and in State Assemblies it was mostly below 10%; the Act, once implemented, will reserve seats for women by rotation across constituencies to ensure wide geographic spread.
- The reservation will initially remain in force for 15 years from the date of implementation, and Parliament can extend it further if needed.

Federal fault lines: North versus South

- A core concern in the current

delimitation debate is that the scheme seems to reward population growth, because seat-allocation under the Amendment is based on population size.

- Northern states such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, which have higher population growth rates, stand to gain more Lok Sabha and State Assembly seats, while Southern states such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Karnataka, which have successfully controlled population growth risk a relative decline in political representation.
- Southern states argue that this would penalise them for effective demographic governance and weaken the federal balance by shifting political power further towards the North, despite their higher per-capita contributions to national GDP and better governance indicators.

Constitutional and governance implications

The 131st Amendment and

the new Delimitation Act mark a historic reshaping of India's electoral map, expanding the Lok Sabha, refreshing constituency boundaries, and accelerating 33% women's reservation; while smaller constituencies can deepen MP-voter links and gender-inclusive politics may enrich policy discourse, these gains must be balanced against higher election costs, administrative complexity, and the risk that women's seats could be used for elite capture rather than real grassroots empowerment.

Conclusion

The 131st Amendment and the proposed delimitation package seek to modernise India's electoral architecture by expanding the Lok Sabha, removing the decades-long freeze on seat-allocation, and accelerating full-scale women's reservation, but they also sharpen the federal fault line between population-growth-rewarding and population-control-rewarding states, making balanced, transparent, and consensual implementation

crucial for preserving both gender justice and federal fairness.

Prelims Practice question

Q. With reference to the proposed delimitation and women's reservation measures in India, which of the following statements are correct?

1. The Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026 proposes to increase the maximum strength of the Lok Sabha from 543 to 850 seats.
2. The Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023 (Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam) mandates one-third reservation of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.
3. The Delimitation Commission set up under the Delimitation Bill 2026 shall be chaired by a sitting or former Chief Justice of India.
4. Reserved seats for women under the women's reservation law will be allotted by rotation among constituencies.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

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

Answer: (a) Statements 1, 2 and 4



INDIA'S 1,000-KM QUANTUM COMMUNICATION BREAKTHROUGH



AI pic

WHY IN NEWS?

India has achieved a 1,000-km quantum communication network under the National Quantum Mission (NQM) in less than two years, far ahead of the original 2,000-km-in-eight-years target.

The network uses indigenous Quantum Key Distribution (QKD) technology developed by QNu Labs with support from the Department of Science and Technology (DST).

WHAT IS THE 1,000-KM QUANTUM COMMUNICATION NETWORK?

- It is an ultra-secure communication backbone built on Quantum Key Distribution (QKD) over

optical-fibre lines.

- It is one of the longest QKD-based systems in the world.
- Developed by Bengaluru-based startup QNu Labs under the NQM ecosystem.
- Achieving 1,000 km in under two years positions India to meet and surpass the 2,000-km target earlier than expected.

WHY IS QUANTUM KEY DISTRIBUTION (QKD) IMPORTANT?

- QKD is a method to share secret encryption keys using quantum particles (photons).
- Ensures theoretically unhackable communication if implemented correctly.
- Any interception disturbs

photons (observer effect and no-cloning theorem), alerting users.

- Classical cryptography can be broken by future quantum computers, but QKD is secure against both classical and quantum attacks.

ROLE OF NATIONAL QUANTUM MISSION (NQM)

- Approved: April 2023; Launched: October 2024
- Budget: ₹6,003 crore (2023–24 to 2030–31)
- Implemented by Department of Science and Technology (DST)
- Objective: Develop quantum computing, communication, sensing, and materials
- Supports 17 deep-tech startups including QNu Labs
- Uses funding tools like

Optionally Convertible Debt (OCD)

QUANTUM COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVES UNDER NQM

- Build 2,000-km inter-city QKD networks using optical fibre
- Develop satellite-based quantum communication (~2,000 km)
- Enable secure links within India and internationally
- 1,000-km network is a milestone towards these goals

OTHER PILLARS OF NQM

Quantum Computing:

- ▶ Develop 50–1,000 qubit systems
- ▶ Platforms: superconducting, photonic

Quantum Sensing & Metrology:

- ▶ Atomic clocks, magnetometers
- ▶ Applications: navigation, aviation, defence

Quantum Materials:

- ▶ Research on superconductors,

semiconductors, topological materials

Institutional Framework:

- ▶ Four Thematic Hubs (T-Hubs) in academic institutions

STRATEGIC AND SECURITY SIGNIFICANCE

- Secures defence, banking, power grids, railways
- Protects against cyber-espionage
- Works in underwater and underground systems
- Useful for naval and border communication
- Enhances digital sovereignty and national security
- Places India among leading quantum nations (US, China, etc.)

ECONOMIC AND INNOVATION IMPACT

- Reduces dependence on foreign technology
- Supports Aatmanirbhar Bharat
- Boosts deep-tech startups
- Applications: cybersecurity, biosensors, photon sensing

- Builds domestic supply chain
- Encourages private investment via NQM support

CONCLUSION

India's 1,000-km quantum communication network is a major milestone in secure communication technology that strengthens national security, digital sovereignty, and indigenous technological capability; the next critical step is to scale it to 2,000 km, integrate satellite-based links, and deepen the domestic quantum ecosystem to secure India's position in the global race for quantum-safe infrastructure

PRELIMS Practice QUESTION

Q. The term "qubit" is most commonly used in the context of:

- (a) Cloud Services
- (b) Quantum Computing
- (c) Visible Light Communication
- (d) Wireless Communication

Answer: (b)

Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR)



Why in news?

India has achieved a major milestone in its nuclear journey as the indigenously designed Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) at Kalpakkam, Tamil Nadu, has successfully attained its first criticality, marking the start of a sustained nuclear chain reaction. With this, India has officially entered the second stage of its three-stage nuclear power programme, originally conceived by Dr. Homi J. Bhabha, and taken a decisive step towards energy security and advanced fuel-cycle closure. ▶ **Continued on P6**

What is the Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR)?

- The PFBR is a 500 MWe (Megawatt electrical) advanced nuclear reactor, technologically designed by the Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research (IGCAR) and built by the state-owned Bharatiya Nabhikiya Vidyut Nigam Limited (BHAVINI).
- 'First criticality' means the reactor core has reached a stable, self-sustaining nuclear fission chain reaction, where the number of neutrons produced equals the number lost, allowing controlled power generation and transitioning PFBR from construction to operation.
- Once fully commercialised, India will become only the second country in the world (after Russia) to operate a commercial fast breeder reactor of this scale, as Japan, France, and the United States have shut down or scaled back their FBR programmes due to technical and economic challenges.

Technical features of a Fast Breeder Reactor (FBR)

- A Fast Breeder Reactor (FBR) uses fast neutrons (not slowed down by a moderator) to produce more fissile material than it consumes, hence the term "breeder".
- Unlike conventional Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs) that use natural uranium, the PFBR

Why India needs Fast Breeder Reactors

- » India holds only about 1–2% of global uranium reserves, and PHWRs extract only about 1% of the energy from uranium; FBRs can extract up to about 60 times more energy from the same uranium, drastically improving fuel efficiency.
- » India has more than 25% of the world's thorium reserves (in monazite sands along the coasts of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, and elsewhere); since thorium is not naturally fissile, FBRs are essential to convert it into usable Uranium-233, enabling a transition to thorium-based Stage-3 reactors.
- » The country aims to nearly triple its nuclear capacity from the current 8.78 GW to about 22.38 GW by 2031–32, with a long-term 2047 target of 100 GW of nuclear power; FBRs will be vital for scaling up baseload, low-carbon generation to meet fast-rising industrial and economic demand.
- » By minimising dependence on coal and providing reliable, 24/7 electricity, large-scale FBR deployment is also critical for India's net-zero-by-2070 climate goal and for stabilising the grid as more variable solar and wind power is added.

uses Uranium–Plutonium Mixed Oxide (MOX) fuel, which is recovered by reprocessing spent fuel from Stage-1 PHWRs.

- The reactor core is surrounded by a "blanket" of fertile Uranium-238; when fast neutrons strike this blanket, it transmutes into fissile Plutonium-239, effectively breeding more fuel. PFBR is also designed to later incorporate Thorium-232 in the blanket, which will breed Uranium-233 for Stage-3 thorium-based reactors.
- Because spent fuel is reprocessed and recycled into new fuel, the PFBR supports a closed nuclear fuel cycle, greatly reducing the volume and radiotoxicity of nuclear waste compared with once-through PHWR-type systems.

India's three-stage nuclear power programme

India's three-stage nuclear programme was formulated by physicist Dr. Homi J. Bhabha in the 1950s to secure long-term energy independence by using the country's limited uranium and vast thorium reserves.

Stage-1 uses Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs) running on natural uranium; the spent fuel from these PHWRs generates plutonium as a by-product.

Stage-2 uses Fast Breeder Reactors (FBRs) like PFBR, which use plutonium-based fuel to generate electricity and also breed more plutonium and, crucially, irradiate Thorium-232 to produce Uranium-233.

Stage-3 envisions thorium-based reactors running on Uranium-233 bred in Stage-2, so that India can exploit



its large thorium reserves for large-scale clean-energy generation.

Current nuclear power landscape in India

- India currently has 24 operational nuclear power plants with an installed capacity of about 8.78 GW, contributing roughly 3.1% of the country's total electricity generation (about 56,681 million units in 2024–25).
- Planned expansion includes indigenous 700 MW reactors and 1,000 MW units built in collaboration with global partners, supported by India's 18 Civil Nuclear Cooperation Inter-Governmental Agreements (IGAs) with other countries.

Challenges in accelerating FBRs in India

■ FBRs use liquid sodium as a coolant for efficient heat transfer, but liquid sodium reacts violently with air and

water, requiring extremely robust engineering, strict leak-detection systems, and a strong safety culture to avoid chemical and radiological accidents.

- The Kalpakkam PFBR was originally scheduled for commissioning around 2010 but faced more than a decade of delays due to safety-upgradation programmes and bottlenecks in the indigenous supply chain, highlighting the complexity of FBR technology and raising concerns about the time needed to scale up to the 2047 target of 100 GW.
- FBRs are much more capital-intensive than PHWRs because of sodium-handling systems, multiple safety-barriers, and reprocessing infrastructure; this can slow financing and investment without strong public-sector backing.
- Since FBRs produce and use plutonium, safeguards

and international scrutiny are intense, and any perceived risk of diversion raises security and diplomatic concerns.

- India's nuclear sector still relies on a limited set of global partners (especially Russia) for Light-Water Reactor (LWR) technology and enriched fuel; geopolitical disruptions such as the Russia-Ukraine war have already delayed projects like Kudankulam Units 3 and 4, underscoring the risk of supply-chain dependence.

India's long-term nuclear vision and new initiatives

- The Union government has outlined a Nuclear Energy Mission in the 2025–26 Budget to reach 100 GW of nuclear power by 2047, with PFBR acting as a technological anchor for the expansion of FBR fleets.
- To diversify the portfolio, Rs 20,000 crore has been allocated for Small Modular Reactors (SMRs), with a goal of at least five indigenously designed SMRs

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(such as BSMR-200 and SMR-55) becoming operational by 2033, providing flexible, factory-built, and easier-to-safeguard systems.

- The Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) is developing advanced reactor designs, including high-temperature gas-cooled reactors suitable for hydrogen production, aligning nuclear energy with India's clean-fuel and industrial-decarbonisation targets.

- The Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Act, 2025, modernises the legal framework and allows limited private-sector participation and investment in nuclear projects under strict regulatory oversight, opening a new channel for finance and innovation.

Measures to scale up nuclear capacity

- Classifying nuclear energy as a "green" or "sustainable" asset under India's green

taxonomy would allow nuclear projects to access cheaper international climate finance and green bonds, improving cost-competitiveness.

- Adopting a Nuclear Park or Special Nuclear Zone model—where sites are pre-cleared for environment, seismic, and security evaluations and supplied with basic infrastructure—can reduce pre-construction delays and create a "plug-and-play" setup for developers.
- Nuclear-hydrogen and industrial-integration strategies can turn power plants into multi-product hubs by co-generating electricity, hydrogen, and industrial steam; using surplus baseload power for hydrogen production adds revenue streams and improves overall plant utilisation.
- Introducing Nuclear Purchase Obligations (NPOs), similar to Renewable Purchase Obligations, can mandate distribution companies (DISCOMs) and industries to buy a fixed share of nuclear

power at stable tariffs, ensuring predictable demand and revenue for high-capital-cost projects.

Conclusion

The successful first criticality of the PFBR at Kalpakkam marks India's entry into the second stage of its three-stage nuclear programme, unlocking a far more efficient use of uranium and paving the way for large-scale thorium-based energy in the future; however, technical, financial, safety, and supply-chain challenges must be systematically addressed if FBRs are to scale up fast enough to meet India's 2047 target of 100 GW of nuclear power and its broader net-zero and energy-security goals.

Prelims Practice question

Q. With reference to the Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) at Kalpakkam, which of the following statements are correct?

1. The PFBR is a 500 MWe sodium-cooled fast breeder reactor designed by the Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research (IGCAR).
2. It uses Uranium-Plutonium Mixed Oxide (MOX) fuel derived from reprocessed spent fuel of Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs).
3. The PFBR operates on natural uranium and does not require a breeding blanket of fertile material.
4. The PFBR supports a closed nuclear fuel cycle by reprocessing and reusing its spent fuel.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

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

Answer: (a) Statements 1, 2 and 4



11 Years of Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY)

WHY IN NEWS?

On its 11th anniversary, the Prime Minister hailed the Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY) as a major success in extending formal credit to micro-entrepreneurs and pulling them out of informal money-lenders' networks.

WHAT IS PMMY?

PMMY was launched on 8 April 2015 by the Government of India as a flagship scheme to provide collateral-free institutional credit to non-corporate, non-farm micro and small enterprises (MSEs).

Its main objective is to promote self-employment and entrepreneurship and bring grassroots entrepreneurs into the formal financial system.

The scheme is a core pillar of India's financial-inclusion

strategy, built on:

- Banking the Unbanked
- Securing the Unsecured
- Funding the Unfunded

IMPLEMENTATION AND FUNDING STRUCTURE

PMMY operates under the Department of Financial Services, Ministry of Finance. MUDRA (Micro Units Development & Refinance Agency Ltd.), a subsidiary of SIDBI, acts as the central refinance agency.

MUDRA does not lend directly; it provides refinance to:

- Scheduled Commercial Banks (SCBs)
- Regional Rural Banks (RRBs)
- NBFCs
- Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs)

The Credit Guarantee Fund for Micro Units (CGFMU) provides guarantee coverage for PMMY

loans.

ELIGIBILITY, MUDRA CARD, AND LOAN CATEGORIES

Eligible borrowers:

- Individuals
- Proprietary firms
- Partnerships
- Private/Public companies
- Other non-corporate, non-farm enterprises

MUDRA Card:

- RuPay debit card
- Overdraft facility
- Helps meet working capital needs

Loan Categories:

- **Shishu:** Up to ₹50,000
- **Kishor:** ₹50,000–₹5 lakh
- **Tarun:** ₹5–10 lakh
- **Tarun Plus:** ₹10–20 lakh (introduced in Budget 2024–25)

ACHIEVEMENTS (11 YEARS)

- 57+ crore loans sanctioned

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- ₹40.07 lakh crore total amount
- **Women beneficiaries:** ~67%
- **SC/ST/OBC beneficiaries:** 51%+
- 12 crore first-time entrepreneurs
- **2023-24:** 6.67 crore loans worth ₹5.41 lakh crore
- **By March 2026:** ₹5.65 lakh crore sanctioned

MAJOR CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

- Over 70% loans in Shishu category
- Low transition to larger enterprises
- Poor financial literacy and business skills
- High failure rate of micro-enterprises
- Sectoral skew towards trade/services
- Weak manufacturing

contribution

- Rising NPAs
- Debt substitution instead of asset creation

MEASURES TO STRENGTHEN PMMY

- Use Digital Public Infrastructure (Account Aggregator, GSTN)
- Shift to cash-flow-based lending
- Move to "Credit Plus" model
- Convergence with ONDC and Skill India
- Use AI and Early Warning Systems (EWS)
- Incentives for micro-manufacturing
- Strengthen NBFCs and MFIs

CONCLUSION

PMMY has significantly expanded formal credit access for women and marginalized

groups while reducing dependence on informal lenders, but its impact is constrained by small-loan concentration, rising NPAs, weak enterprise growth, and low manufacturing penetration; adopting a credit-plus model, digital cash-flow-based lending, and targeted manufacturing incentives can strengthen the scheme and better align it with India's goals of inclusive growth and Viksit Bharat-2047.

Prelims Practice Question

Q. PMMY is primarily aimed at:

- (a) Bringing small entrepreneurs into the formal financial system
- (b) Providing loans to farmers
- (c) Providing pensions
- (d) Funding NGOs

Answer: (a)

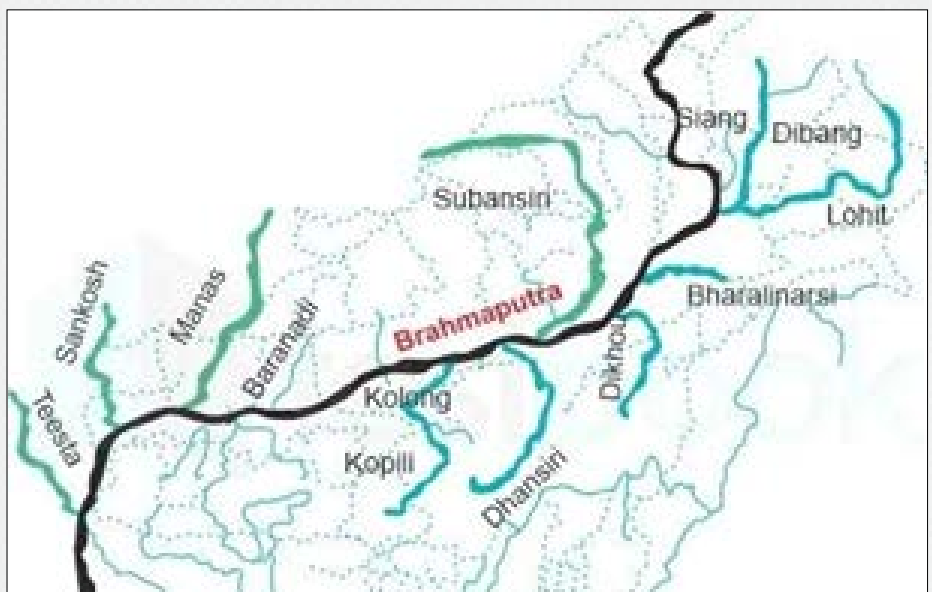
HYDROPOWER PROJECTS IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH

WHY IN NEWS?

- Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved ₹40,175 crore investment.
- Projects: Kamala (1,720 MW) and Kalai-II (1,200 MW).
- Aim: Boost clean energy and develop North-East region.

OVERVIEW OF HYDROPOWER IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH

- Located in Eastern Himalaya.
- High rainfall and steep gradients.
- Huge hydropower potential in



Brahmaputra basin.

- Known as India's "power house".

- Major projects: Subansiri, Dibang Valley, Oju, Etalin, Kamala, Kalai-II.

KAMALA HYDRO ELECTRIC PROJECT (1,720 MW)

- **River:** Kamala (tributary of Subansiri)
- **Location:** Kamle, Kra Daadi, Kurung Kumey districts
- **Type:** Storage-cum-run-of-the-river
- **Capacity:** 1,720 MW
- **Generation:** 6,870 million units annually
- **Developer:** NHPC + Arunachal Govt (JV)
- Aligns with 500 GW non-fossil target by 2030

KALAI-II HYDRO ELECTRIC PROJECT (1,200 MW)

- **River:** Lohit (tributary of Brahmaputra)
- **Location:** Anjaw district (near Hawaii village, India-China border)
- **Type:** Run-of-river with pondage
- **Capacity:** 1,200 MW
- **Generation:** 4,853 million units annually
- **Developer:** THDC India Ltd (THDCIL)
- Revived from stalled project list (13 projects)

BENEFITS AND STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE

- **Combined capacity:** 2,920 MW
- Supports renewable energy integration
- Helps manage peak demand
- Flood moderation in Brahmaputra basin
- Reduces flood risk in Assam & Bangladesh



KALAI-II HYDRO ELECTRIC PROJECT

State benefits:

- 12% free power
- 1% LADF (Local Area Development Fund)

Strategic importance:

- Strengthens India's control in border regions
- Geopolitical leverage vs China

ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL CONCERNS

- Located in biodiversity-rich Eastern Himalaya
- Threat to endangered species (e.g., white-bellied heron)
- Habitat fragmentation and deforestation
- Alters river flow and sediment transport
- Impacts agriculture, fisheries, groundwater downstream

POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES

- Stalled projects reallocated to PSUs (NHPC, THDCIL)
- Overcomes private sector delays

Integrated with:

- One Sun One World One Grid
- North-East power

development

Legal frameworks:

- Hydropower Purchase Policy
- Grid code norms
- EIA and forest clearances

CONCLUSION

Major hydropower expansion in Arunachal Pradesh gives a strong boost to clean energy and regional development, enhances power security and flood management, but success depends on enforcing robust environmental safeguards and striking a careful balance between development and long-term ecological sustainability.

PRELIMS PRACTICE QUESTION

Q. With reference to hydroelectric projects in Arunachal Pradesh:

1. Kamala project is on Kamala River (tributary of Subansiri)
2. Kalai-II is run-of-river on Lohit River
3. State gets 12% free power + 1% LADF
4. All projects are outside biodiversity hotspot

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 3 only

India withdraws COP33 UNFCCC host bid

Why in news?

India has formally withdrawn its candidacy to host the 33rd Conference of the Parties (COP33) under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2028. The government has given the reason as a “review of its commitments for 2028”, without specifying detailed climate-policy or diplomatic reasons.

What is COP and UNFCCC?

UNFCCC is the main international climate treaty, adopted at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 and enforced in 1994. Its core objective is to prevent “dangerous human interference with the climate system” while ensuring food security and sustainable development. It operates through the Conference of the Parties (COP), its supreme decision-making body, which meets annually to review national action, update pledges, and negotiate new rules.

COP31–COP33 sequence and India’s planned role

COP31 (2026) will be co-hosted by Australia and Turkey. COP32 (2027) will be hosted by Ethiopia in Africa. India had earlier pitched to host COP33 (2028), signalling a desire to lead climate negotiations from



the Global South, especially after Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s 2023 proposal at COP28 in Dubai.

Why did India withdraw the COP33 bid?

Stated official reason: A “review of its commitments for 2028”, implying that India is reassessing its domestic and international obligations in that year. Analysts’ view: Possible desire to avoid the logistical and financial burden of hosting another “big-ticket” event; avoiding pressure to raise climate commitments at a politically sensitive time; diplomatic-strategy angle: skipping COP33 may reduce spotlight on India’s fossil-fuel investments but risks weakening India’s moral leadership among developing

countries on climate finance.

Impact on host rotation and Asia–Pacific group

COP-hosting rotates among five UN regional groups; India belongs to the Asia–Pacific group. India previously hosted only COP8 in 2002 (New Delhi); COP33 was expected to be a much larger, high-visibility summit. After India’s withdrawal, South Korea has become the only known contender to fill the COP33 vacancy in 2028, leaving the Asia–Pacific group effectively to nominate a single alternative host.

Context: India’s updated climate commitments

In March 2026, India announced updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), including:

targeting around 60% of installed electricity capacity from non-fossil sources by 2035; reducing emissions intensity of GDP by about 47% over 2005 levels; enhancing its carbon sink by 3.5–4 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent.

Financial and institutional mechanisms under UNFCCC

UNFCCC oversees several key funds: Green Climate Fund (GCF), Global Environment Facility (GEF), Adaptation Fund, and Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD). The CBDR-RC principle (“Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities”) remains central, placing greater historical and financial responsibility on developed countries.

Diplomatic and strategic implications for India

Pros (+):

- Avoids heavy organisational

and economic costs of hosting a mega-COP and possible domestic political backlash.

- Retains flexibility in climate-policy space without committing to additional “headline” announcements at home.

Cons (-):

- May weaken India’s image as a champion of the Global South in climate-finance negotiations.
- Risks diluting India’s voice as a leader of developing countries in ongoing climate-governance discussions.

Conclusion

India’s withdrawal of the COP33 host bid signals a shift in climate-diplomacy priorities, trading the spotlight of a high-profile summit for relief from heavy hosting costs and short-term political pressure. Yet, by stepping back, India risks weakening its leadership voice in the Global South on climate finance and burden-sharing; to retain credibility, it must now match this move with

strong, visible action on NDCs, South-South cooperation, and the 2028 Global Stocktake.

Prelims Practice Question

Q. With reference to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which of the following statements are correct?

1. The UNFCCC was adopted at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 and entered into force in 1994.
2. The Conference of the Parties (COP) is the supreme decision-making body of the UNFCCC.
3. The principle of “Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities” (CBDR-RC) is central to the UNFCCC.
4. India has hosted two COP meetings under the UNFCCC so far.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

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

Answer: (a) Statements 1, 2 and 3

7th EDITION OF EXERCISE DUSTLIK

WHY IN NEWS?

- The 7th edition of Exercise DUSTLIK has been conducted between India and Uzbekistan.
- It highlights growing defence cooperation and strategic partnership in Central Asia.

ABOUT EXERCISE DUSTLIK

- A joint military exercise between India and Uzbekistan.
- Conducted annually, alternatively in both countries.
- **Focus:** Joint counter-terrorism

operations.

OBJECTIVES OF THE EXERCISE

- Enhance interoperability between armed forces.
- Share best practices in tactics, techniques, and procedures.
- Strengthen military cooperation.
- Improve coordination in counter-terror operations.

PARTICIPATING FORCES

- Indian Army contingent.

- Uzbekistan Army contingent.

FEATURES OF THE EXERCISE

- Joint tactical drills.
- Counter-terrorism operations in semi-urban and rural scenarios.
- Use of modern military equipment.
- Focus on physical fitness, endurance, and combat readiness.

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STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE

FOR INDIA:

- Strengthens ties with Central Asian region.
- Counters regional security threats.
- Enhances defence diplomacy.
- Supports India's Connect Central Asia Policy.

FOR UZBEKISTAN:

- Gains operational experience.
- Strengthens bilateral defence ties.
- Improves counter-terror capabilities.

REGIONAL IMPORTANCE

- Central Asia is strategically

important due to:

- Proximity to Afghanistan
- Energy resources
- Geopolitical significance

INDIA-UZBEKISTAN RELATIONS

- Diplomatic relations established in 1992.
- Member of multilateral platforms like SCO
- Cooperation in:
 - Defence
 - Trade
 - Culture

CONCLUSION

Exercise DUSTLIK reflects deepening defence

cooperation between India and Uzbekistan, enhancing military preparedness, strengthening strategic ties, and contributing to regional stability by building interoperability and trust in a key Central Asian security partnership.

PRELIMS Practice QUESTION

Q. Exercise DUSTLIK is conducted between:

- (a) India and Kazakhstan
- (b) India and Uzbekistan
- (c) India and Kyrgyzstan
- (d) India and Tajikistan

Answer: (b)

Himalayan Griffon Vultures Death in Dudhwa Tiger Reserve

Why in news?

Over 25 Himalayan Griffon vultures were found dead in the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve in Uttar Pradesh, likely due to suspected secondary poisoning after they scavenged on carcasses of stray dogs that had eaten pesticide-laced rice.

Location and protected area context

The dead vultures were found in the buffer zone of Dudhwa Tiger Reserve, in Lakhimpur Kheri district, Uttar Pradesh. Dudhwa Tiger Reserve lies in the Terai belt along the India–Nepal border and includes Dudhwa National Park, Kishanpur Wildlife Sanctuary, and Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary, drained by the Mohana and Suheli rivers.



What is the Himalayan Griffon vulture?

The Himalayan Griffon vulture (*Gyps himalayensis*) is a large Old World vulture, second only to the cinereous vulture in size among Old World vultures. Old World vultures are found in Europe, Asia, and Africa and belong to the family Accipitridae, which includes eagles, hawks, and harriers, not the New World vultures of the Americas.

Physical features and appearance

The body is pale, khaki-coloured with dark flight feathers, and the head is covered with white down. Around the neck there is a distinct “ruff” of long, pale-brown feathers, giving it a characteristic collar-like look. They have a very large wingspan of about 2.5–3 metres (8–10 feet) and an adult body weight of roughly 8–12 kg.

Habitat, range, and nesting behaviour

Himalayan Griffons usually live at altitudes between 1,200 and 5,500 metres, mainly in the

Himalayan and Tibetan-plateau regions. Their range spans India, Nepal, Bhutan, China (Tibetan Plateau), and parts of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan). They are colonial nesters, building nests on steep, inaccessible rock cliffs to avoid predators and human disturbance.

Feeding behaviour and ecological role

Himalayan Griffons are obligate scavengers, feeding almost entirely on the carcasses of dead animals and rarely hunting live prey. Being social birds, they often gather in large groups around a single carcass, which makes them highly vulnerable to mass poisoning if the carcass is contaminated. Ecologically, vultures act as natural “sanitation workers”, preventing disease spread by rapidly disposing of animal carcasses and reducing the number of scavenging feral dogs and rats.

Threats and past poisoning events

The primary threat to vultures in India has been poisoning by veterinary drugs, especially diclofenac and other

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non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs used in livestock, which remain toxic in carcasses and cause fatal kidney failure in vultures. Earlier mass-mortality events across India were linked to such chemical poisoning, leading to a catastrophic decline of several vulture species by over 90% in the 1990s–2000s.

Conservation status and legal protection

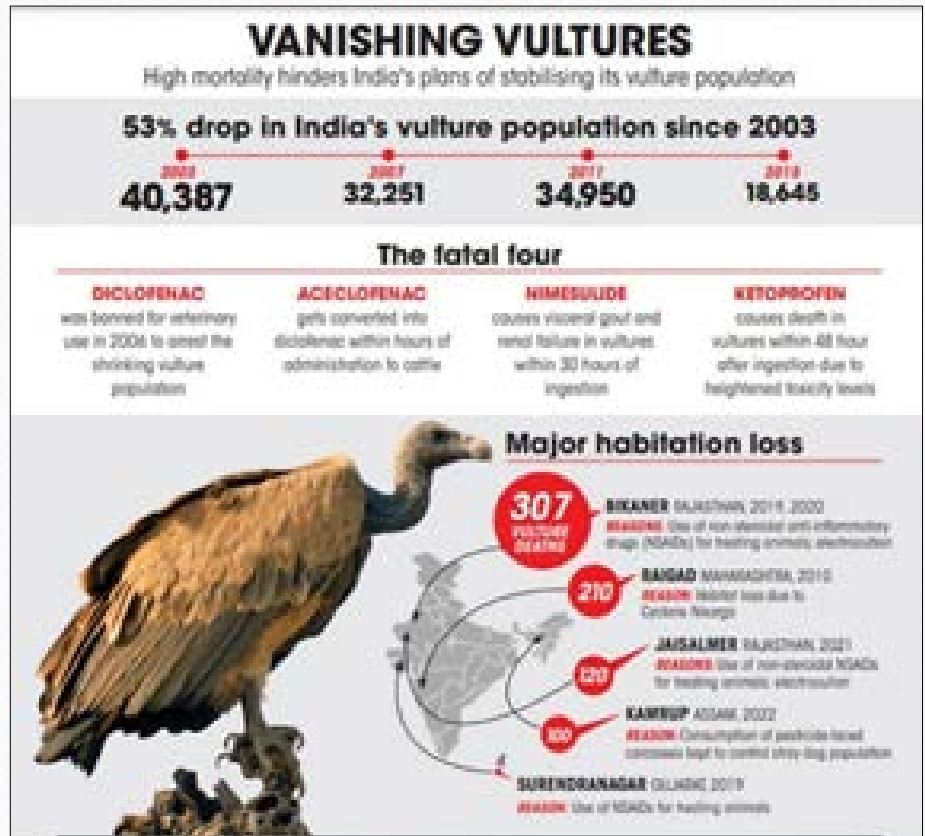
In the IUCN Red List, the Himalayan Griffon is classified as Near Threatened (NT), meaning it is at risk of becoming endangered if threats continue. Under Indian law, it is listed under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, giving it the highest level of legal protection in the country (same as tiger, elephant, etc.). It is also listed under Appendix II of CITES, which controls international trade in the species to prevent over-exploitation.

Suspected cause of the Dudhwa incident

Officials suspect secondary poisoning: the vultures scavenged on carcasses of stray dogs that had earlier eaten pesticide-laced rice, a common method used to control feral animals around villages and fields. Because vultures feed in groups on the same carcass, even a small number of poisoned bodies can lead to mass deaths of dozens of birds at once, exposing the fragility of their small populations.

Ecological and policy implications

The mass death in Dudhwa



highlights how poorly regulated pesticide use and uncontrolled stray-dog management can spill over into wildlife, especially high-risk scavengers like vultures. It also raises concerns about the effectiveness of existing vulture-conservation programmes, such as vulture-safe zones and ban on diclofenac, as long as alternative poisoning routes (like pesticide-laced bait) remain in use.

Conclusion

The death of over 25 Himalayan Griffon vultures in Dudhwa Tiger Reserve is a sharp warning that secondary poisoning from pesticide-laced animal carcasses still threatens even legally protected scavengers, despite past bans on veterinary drugs like diclofenac. This incident underlines the need for tighter control on toxic baits, better community-level awareness,

and stronger enforcement of wildlife-protection laws to prevent such mass-mortality events and to secure the fragile gains of India's vulture-conservation efforts.

Prelims Practice question

Q. With reference to the Himalayan Griffon vulture (*Gyps himalayensis*), which of the following statements are correct?

1. It is listed as "Near Threatened" on the IUCN Red List.
2. It is protected under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 in India.
3. It is an Old World vulture belonging to the family Accipitridae.
4. It is primarily a predator of live small mammals and birds.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

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

Answer: (a) Statements 1, 2 and 3