

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

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—It's about quality—

The ongoing protests and highway blockades in Manipur highlight deep-seated ethnic and political tensions, particularly between the Kuki-Zo and Meitei communities.

Protests continue in Manipur, highways blocked

Kangpokpi and Churachandpur districts affected as Kuki-Zo people protest against free movement plan on National Highways no. 2 and 37; these highways are vital for supply of essentials and other commodities; Union Finance Minister will table State Budget today; roads were blocked at multiple points with the help of wooden logs and huge rocks

Vijaita Singh
KANGPOKPI

Women protesters blocked National Highway no. 2 in Kangpokpi district of Manipur on Sunday, a day after the area witnessed clashes between security forces and the Kuki-Zo people that left one person dead.

A shutdown observed in the hill district of Churachandpur too affected the movement of vehicles. An indefinite shutdown was called by civil society groups in all Kuki-Zo areas.

The developments are being closely watched with Union Home Minister Amit Shah scheduled to table the proclamation of President's Rule in Manipur in Parliament on Monday, when the House reconvenes for the second leg of the Budget Session. Union Finance Minister Nirmala

Sitharaman will place Manipur's Budget.

Violence was reported for the first time since the February 13 imposition of President's Rule on Saturday over the enforcement of free movement of all vehicles through National Highways no. 2 and 37. The highways are critical for supply of essentials and other commodities.

Hai Hatchingthem Kipgen, a fourth-year college student who was leading the protests at Kangpokpi bazaar on Sunday, accused the security forces of attacking the protesters.

"A member of the security force told us that we are not Indians. We are a part of India and that is why we are fighting for a separate administration. We have blocked the road because we lost one brother yesterday," said Ms. Kipgen.

The anti-riot Rapid Action Force (RAF) and the



Hurdles remain: Protesters block NH-2 in Kangpokpi of Manipur a day after violence was reported from the area. VIJAITA SINGH

Central Reserve Police Force marched on the violence-hit stretch at regular intervals. The roads were blocked at multiple points with the help of wooden logs and huge rocks.

Two police vehicles that were set on fire during the protests remained on the highway to block the movement of heavy vehicles.

"Since the violence be-

gan [in May 2023], we never clashed with the security forces. This is the first time that the RAF was deployed in a hill district. The Centre should not force the movement of all vehicles, it

is a majoritarian idea," said Nengche Kimmeng, 54, a housewife.

Another resident Angam Leivon, 70, whose house in Imphal was torched during the May 2023 violence said that people from the hill district were not going to visit the valley areas in the future and the enforced normalcy was not acceptable.

"President's Rule should have been imposed much earlier. So many lives were lost, my house in Imphal was burnt down. The Meiteis will also not come here, what is the need for the movement of State Transport buses on the highways then?" asked Mr. Leivon.

A day after a protestor identified as Lalgouthang Singsit was killed, a post-mortem was conducted and his body was handed over to the family.

After Home Minister

Amit Shah's direction to enforce free movement on highways, the Manipur administration ran Manipur State Transport (MST) buses on two routes on Saturday - Imphal-Kangpokpi-Senapati and Bishnupur-Churachandpur-Imphal passing through Meitei, Kuki-Zo and Naga areas.

Kuki-Zo protesters clashed with security forces at multiple points in Kangpokpi as an "empty" MST bus that originated from Imphal reached the area. The bus could not cross Kangpokpi and has been kept at an undisclosed location.

The other MST bus which plied on the Bishnupur-Churachandpur-Imphal route under security cover could complete the journey without any violence.

The buses are scheduled to ply again on Monday.

Key Issues at Play

1. Ethnic Tensions and Demands for Separate Administration

- The Kuki-Zo people have been demanding a separate administration, citing historical grievances and recent violence.
- The imposition of President's Rule on February 13, 2024, has not de-escalated the situation, as evident from fresh clashes.

2. Security and Governance Challenges

- Deployment of Rapid Action Force (RAF) and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) in Kangpokpi indicates a breakdown of state law enforcement.
- Protesters accuse security forces of bias, reflecting deep mistrust in state institutions.
- The failure to ensure free movement of essential supplies underscores governance failures.

3. Economic and Humanitarian Impact of Blockades

- National Highways No. 2 and 37 are critical for the transport of essential goods, and their blockade can cause food and fuel shortages.

- Damage to public property (burning of police vehicles) suggests rising lawlessness.
- 4. **Political Implications and Role of the Central Government**
 - Union Home Minister Amit Shah is expected to present the proclamation of President's Rule in Parliament, indicating a strong federal intervention.
 - The Union Finance Minister's budget presentation for Manipur is crucial for rebuilding efforts and addressing economic hardships.
 - The decision to run Manipur State Transport (MST) buses under security cover reflects an attempt to restore normalcy, but the resistance from Kuki-Zo groups suggests continued unrest.

Way Forward

1. **Dialogue and confidence-building measures**– The government should engage with Kuki-Zo leaders to address their concerns regarding security and governance.
2. **Restoration of normalcy** – A balanced approach between law enforcement and humanitarian considerations is needed to prevent an economic crisis due to prolonged blockades.
3. **Long-term conflict resolution** – A structured reconciliation process involving all ethnic groups can prevent recurring violence.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: Discuss the impact of highway blockades in insurgency-prone areas on economic stability and national security. How can the government ensure the free movement of goods and people while addressing local grievances?(250 words)

The declaration of Madhav National Park in Madhya Pradesh as India's 58th Tiger Reserve marks a significant step in wildlife conservation. This move aligns with India's ongoing efforts to restore ecological balance and protect its rich biodiversity. The recognition also highlights Madhya Pradesh's role as a leader in tiger conservation, being home to the highest number of tiger reserves in the country.

Madhav National Park becomes India's 58th Tiger Reserve

The Hindu Bureau
BHOPAL

The Centre declared the Madhav National Park in Madhya Pradesh as the country's 58th tiger reserve on Sunday, with Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav making the announcement. The newly added Tiger Reserve is also the ninth from the State to get the recognition.

Mr. Yadav posted on X, "58th roar and counting! Thrilled to announce that the country has added the 58th Tiger Reserve to its tally with the latest entrant

being Madhya Pradesh's Madhav Tiger Reserve. This is Madhya Pradesh's 9th Tiger Reserve."

Located in Shivpuri district in the Chambal region of Madhya Pradesh, the reserve has a population of five tigers at present, including two cubs born recently.

Three tigers, including two females, were introduced to the Madhav National Park in 2023 as part of the tiger reintroduction project in the State.

Two more tigers
Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav could



Conservation counts: The reserve has five tigers at present, including two cubs that were born recently. ANI

soon release two more tigers into the reserve.

"With historic emphasis

laid on restoring the ecological diversity on planet Earth by PM Shri Narendra

Modi ji, India continues to make great strides in environmental protection and wildlife conservation. I congratulate all wildlife lovers and conservationists. The development is a testament to the relentless efforts of our forest officials who are selflessly working towards the cause," the Union Minister said in his post.

Applauding the move, Mr. Modi said that India was blessed with wildlife diversity and a culture that celebrated wildlife.

"Amazing news for wildlife lovers! India is blessed with wildlife diversity and

a culture that celebrates wildlife. We will always be at the forefront of protecting animals and contributing to a sustainable planet," he said on social media platform X.

The Chief Minister also thanked the Prime Minister for the development.

"Heartfelt thanks to the Hon'ble Prime Minister for your visionary leadership in designating Madhav National Park as India's 58th and MP's 9th Tiger Reserve! Madhya Pradesh is proud to lead wildlife conservation and protect our biodiversity," the Union Minister wrote.

Key Aspects of the Announcement

➤ Tiger Conservation and Reintroduction

- The reserve currently has five tigers, including two cubs born recently.
- Three tigers were introduced in 2023 as part of a tiger reintroduction project.
- Two more tigers are expected to be released soon by the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh.

➤ Madhya Pradesh's Role in Tiger Conservation

- With Madhav National Park, Madhya Pradesh now has nine tiger reserves, reaffirming its status as a key player in India's tiger conservation efforts.
- The state has been a stronghold for tigers, with reserves such as Kanha, Bandhavgarh, Panna, and Satpura playing a crucial role in conservation.

➤ Government's Commitment to Wildlife Conservation

- The announcement reflects India's commitment to Project Tiger, which has played a major role in tiger conservation since its inception in 1973.
- The Union Environment Minister highlighted the government's focus on restoring ecological diversity and the efforts of forest officials in conservation.

➤ Ecological and Economic Significance

- Madhav National Park, located in Shivpuri district in the Chambal region, is ecologically significant due to its diverse flora and fauna.

- *The recognition as a tiger reserve will boost eco-tourism, providing economic benefits to local communities while ensuring conservation efforts are sustained.*

Conclusion

The recognition of Madhav National Park as India's 58th Tiger Reserve reinforces India's leadership in global tiger conservation. The success of such initiatives depends on continued government support, local community involvement, and sustainable conservation policies. This development serves as a case study for environmental governance and conservation efforts in India.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques :Tiger conservation in India has seen both successes and challenges. Critically analyze the impact of Project Tiger in ensuring the long-term survival of tigers.(250 words)

The Supreme Court's recent directive allowing the appointment of ad hoc judges under Article 224A of the Constitution is a significant step towards addressing the backlog of cases in High Courts.

Centre awaits prospective names from High Courts to be appointed ad hoc judges

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Over a month after the Supreme Court cleared the decks to appoint ad hoc judges in High Courts to deal with the rising pendency of cases, the government is yet to receive proposals from respective High Courts naming candidates.

Considering a backlog of over 18 lakh criminal cases, the Supreme Court on January 30 allowed the High Courts to appoint ad hoc judges, not exceeding 10% of the court's total sanctioned strength.

Article 224A of the Constitution allows the appointment of retired judges as ad hoc judges in High Courts to help deal with pendency.

Sources said the Union Law Ministry is yet to receive any recommendation



from respective High Court collegiums for appointing ad hoc judges.

The procedure for appointing ad hoc judges follows a similar path as regular judges, except the President does not sign a warrant of appointment but gives assent.

Bench eases conditions

In a judgment on April 20, 2021, on the appointment of ad hoc judges in the High Courts, the top court had imposed certain con-

ditions. However, later a special Supreme Court Bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justices B.R. Gavai and Surya Kant had relaxed certain conditions and kept some in abeyance.

The Bench said each High Court should keep the appointment to two to five ad hoc judges and not exceed 10% of the total sanctioned strength. "The ad hoc judges will sit in a Bench presided over by a sitting judge of the High Court and decide pending criminal appeals," said the top court's order.

The court kept certain conditions in abeyance, such as the requirement that vacancies should not exceed 20% of the sanctioned strength.

Article 224A of the Constitution deals with the appointment of ad hoc judges in High Courts.

- However, over a month after this decision, the Union Law Ministry has not yet received recommendations from the respective High Courts, highlighting procedural and administrative challenges in implementing judicial reforms.

Key Aspects of the Development

➤ **Background: Judicial Backlog and Need for Ad Hoc Judge**

- High Courts across India face a backlog of over 18 lakh criminal cases, delaying justice delivery.

- The Supreme Court, in its January 30, 2024 ruling, permitted High Courts to appoint ad hoc judges, limited to 10% of the total sanctioned strength.
- Article 224A of the Constitution allows retired judges to be appointed as ad hoc judges to clear pending cases.
- **Supreme Court's Directive on Appointment**
 - A special Bench of Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justices B.R. Gavai and Surya Kant eased earlier conditions on appointing ad hoc judges.
 - The cap of two to five ad hoc judges per High Court was introduced to ensure limited yet effective use of additional judicial resources.
 - The ad hoc judges must sit in a Bench presided over by a sitting judge and primarily handle pending criminal appeals.
- **Delay in Implementation**
 - Despite the SC's green light, no recommendations have been sent by High Court collegiums to the Union Law Ministry.
 - The delay suggests possible hesitation from High Courts or administrative bottlenecks in forwarding names.
 - Unlike regular judges, ad hoc judges do not require a presidential warrant of appointment, simplifying the process.

Way Forward

- **Prompt Action by High Courts** – High Court collegiums must expedite the process and send recommendations without administrative delays.
- **Structured Monitoring by Supreme Court** – A timeline-based review can ensure swift action and accountability.
- **Comprehensive Judicial Reforms** – Beyond ad hoc appointments, reforms in case management, digitization, and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms should be strengthened.

The appointment of ad hoc judges is a step in the right direction, but timely execution and a broader judicial reform agenda are essential for sustainable solutions.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques :Discuss the challenges posed by judicial backlog in India. How effective will the appointment of ad hoc judges under Article 224A be in addressing this issue. **(250 words)**

The representation of women in the Indian judiciary has significantly improved over the last century, but gender disparity persists in the higher judiciary.

Closing the gender gap in the higher judiciary

Women in law have seen great progress over the last 100 years in India. The first woman lawyer, Cornelia Sorabji, was entitled to practice in 1924. Since then, the number of women lawyers has increased, several women have been designated Senior Advocates, and there have been many women judges in the lower judiciary.

Inequality at the top
However, there remains a glass ceiling for women in the higher judiciary. The share of women judges in the High Courts is only 14.27% (109 out of 764). In eight High Courts, the number of woman judges is limited to just one. The High Courts of Uttarakhand, Meghalaya, and Tripura have no woman judge. The Allahabad High Court, which is the largest High Court in the country with 79 judges at present, has only three women judges (2%). Not only is there a disproportionately low number of women judges in the High Courts, but they are also appointed later than men. The average age of appointment of men is 51.8 years, but for women it is 53 years. Thus, women judges do not reach positions of seniority. Out of 25 High Courts, only the Gujarat High Court has a woman Chief Justice.

The numbers for the Supreme Court are much worse, with only two women judges serving at present – Justice B.V. Nagarathna and Justice Bela Trivedi. With Justice Bela Trivedi due to retire in June 2025, the top Court will be left with just one woman judge. The last woman judge appointed to the Supreme Court was in 2021. Since then, 28 judges have been appointed to the Supreme Court, and not a single of them is a woman. Over the last 75 years, the Supreme Court has elevated nine men from the Bar directly to the Supreme Court, but only one woman has been elevated directly from the Bar to the Court.

Many justifications are given for not appointing women. It is said that there are not enough eligible



Jayna Kothari
Senior Advocate,
Supreme Court of
India

women candidates, not enough women with seniority, or that women do not want to become judges. All of this is merely top dressing, when the underlying factor is one of deep inequality, to borrow the analogy of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. One of the main causes for the exclusion of women from the higher judiciary is deep-rooted and systemic inequality, where women are seen as inferior within the legal profession. Women lawyers nominated for judgeship face heightened scrutiny. Far from compromising on merit, women are almost always required to prove merit more than men.

We also have the collegium system of appointments, which is opaque and non-transparent. There are no clearly stated criteria for eligibility or merit and there is no transparency in the process. This also works against women. The collegiums almost always comprise men and little or no effort is taken to get names of meritorious women lawyers for elevation. This is not the only hurdle. Even when names of women are recommended by the collegium, women are disproportionately not confirmed by the government. Since 2020, nine women's names were recommended by the collegium for appointment to the High Courts, but were not confirmed. Of these, five were the only names to be rejected.

This year, as we celebrate International Women's Day and 75 years of the Supreme Court, we need a transformation of our courts. Constitutional courts have to be gender equal in the true sense, where women are working, serving and leading in equal measure, especially on the Bench.

Steps towards equality
Women's representation in the judiciary is key to ensuring that courts represent their citizens and hand down sound judgments. Having an equal number of women on the Bench will enhance the legitimacy of courts and give a

signal that our judiciary is inclusive and representative of the people whose lives they affect.

First, the collegium could frame a transparent process and provide clear criteria for appointment. This must include a process for lawyers to express interest in being considered for appointment, such as through applications. There must be clear criteria based on the highest standards of excellence and integrity, and a specified time frame during which the recommendations be made.

Second, there has to be a focus on gender diversity while making appointments. Diversity and merit are not contradictory; rather, in a pluralistic society such as ours, diversity makes the judiciary more representative, thus fostering impartiality and enhancing the moral legitimacy of the

institution. There is, at present, a clear consideration of State-wise representation of judges, as well as of caste and religion. Gender diversity also needs to be taken into account to ensure that at least one-third of our higher judiciary, if not half, is composed of women.

This will mandate the appointment of a competent, independent, and impartial judiciary capable of upholding constitutionalism and the rule of law in the country, through a process that ensures selections solely based on merit and encourages diversity in the range of persons appointed, so as to enhance public confidence in the institution. Most importantly, gender balance needs to be a stated objective of the judiciary in making appointments.

Justice Indira Banerjee, a former judge of the Supreme Court, famously said in one of her interviews that she did not want any fanfare when she was appointed just because she was a woman. We have to ensure that women's appointments to the Supreme Court and High Courts are so normalised that it does not seem out of the ordinary at all.

We have to ensure that women's appointments to the Supreme Court and High Courts are so normalised that it does not seem out of the ordinary at all



- ➔ While women have entered the legal profession in large numbers, their presence in High Courts and the Supreme Court remains disproportionately low. The article highlights systemic barriers to women's inclusion and suggests reforms to ensure gender parity.

Current Status of Women in Higher Judiciary

- ➔ **Low representation in High Courts and Supreme Court**
 - **High Courts:** Only 14.27% (109 out of 764) judges are women.
 - Several High Courts have only one woman judge, while three High Courts (Uttarakhand, Meghalaya, and Tripura) have none.
 - Allahabad High Court, the largest in India, has only three women judges out of 79 (2%).
 - **Supreme Court:** Out of 34 judges, only two are women (Justice B.V. Nagarathna and Justice Bela Trivedi).
 - Since 2021, 28 new judges have been appointed, but none are women.
- ➔ **Barriers to Women's Representation**
 - **Later appointments:** The average age of appointment for men is 51.8 years, while for women, it is 53 years, limiting their chances for seniority.
 - **Limited direct elevation from the Bar:** Only one woman has been directly appointed to the Supreme Court from the Bar, whereas nine men have been elevated over the last 75 years.
 - **Bias in the collegium system:** The opaque and male-dominated collegium system does not actively seek meritorious women lawyers for elevation.
 - **Government's role in rejection:** From 2020 to 2023, nine women recommended by the collegium were rejected, with five of them being the only names denied confirmation.

Why Gender Parity in Judiciary Matters?

- ➔ **Enhancing judicial legitimacy:** A gender-balanced judiciary ensures inclusivity and impartiality, making the courts more representative of society.
- ➔ **Improving legal judgments:** Diverse perspectives on the Bench strengthen judicial reasoning and improve sensitivity in cases related to gender, family law, and human rights.
- ➔ **Encouraging women in the legal profession:** More women judges inspire young female lawyers and enhance participation in the legal profession.
- ➔ **Upholding constitutional values:** Gender diversity strengthens the principles of equality and fairness, key elements of constitutional democracy.

Proposed Reforms to Achieve Gender Parity

- ➔ **Transparent and inclusive collegium system**
 - Establish a clear and structured appointment process with well-defined merit-based criteria.

- Introduce a system for women lawyers to express interest in judicial appointments.
- Ensure diverse representation within the collegium to address gender biases.
- **Institutional focus on gender diversity**
 - Set a minimum threshold of one-third representation for women in High Courts and the Supreme Court, if not 50%.
 - Proactively seek and recommend women candidates with outstanding credentials for elevation.
 - Include gender as a factor in judicial appointments, alongside regional and caste considerations.
- **Government's role in ensuring fair appointments**
 - Ensure that qualified women recommended by the collegium are not arbitrarily rejected.
 - Implement a transparent review process for rejected recommendations.

Way Forward

- The appointment of women judges must become a norm, not an exception. Unless deliberate efforts are made to reform the collegium system, address biases, and ensure gender diversity, the higher judiciary will remain male-dominated, affecting the inclusivity and fairness of justice delivery in India.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques:Critically examine the underrepresentation of women in the Indian judiciary. Suggest measures to improve gender diversity in the higher judiciary.(250 words)

In News : Shingles Disease

A new global survey shows that 56.6% of Indian participants aged 50 and above know little to nothing about shingles, although more than 90% of adults above 50 years have this virus in their body, and are vulnerable to the disease.

About Shingles Disease

- ▶ Shingles (herpes zoster) is a viral infection that causes an outbreak of a painful rash or blisters on the skin.
- ▶ The rash most often appears as a band of rashes or blisters in one area of your body.
- ▶ Shingles can occur anywhere on your body.
- ▶ The risk of shingles goes up as you get older and it is most common in people over age 50.

What Causes Shingles?

- ▶ It's caused by the varicella-zoster virus, which is the same virus that causes chickenpox.
- ▶ When you have chickenpox as a child, your body fights off the varicella-zoster virus and the physical signs of chickenpox fade away, but the virus always remains in your body.
- ▶ In adulthood, sometimes the virus becomes active again.
- ▶ This time, the varicella-zoster virus makes its second appearance in the form of shingles.

Is Shingles Contagious?

- ▶ Shingles is not contagious, but the virus can be spread to someone who has never had chickenpox.
- ▶ This will cause chickenpox, not shingles.
- ▶ **Symptoms:**
 - The symptoms of shingles can include pain, itching, tingling, and numbness, as well as fever, headache, chills, and fatigue.
 - Shingles isn't life-threatening. But it can be very painful.
 - The most common complication is postherpetic neuralgia. This is a painful condition that causes shingles pain for a long time after your blisters have cleared.
- ▶ **Prevention:** There is a vaccine called Shingrix available, which helps in preventing shingles and its complications.
- ▶ **Treatment:** There is no cure for shingles. Antiviral medications can reduce the severity and duration of shingles, especially if started early.

India, Mauritius and a visit to deepen long-standing ties

In our current era of geopolitical churn and uncertainty, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Mauritius (March 11-12, 2025), will be a celebration of the deep and long-standing ties between the two countries. Mr. Modi had last visited the island country in 2015, but on this occasion, he will be the guest of honour at its Independence Day celebrations on March 12. India-Mauritius relations have enjoyed political consensus, irrespective of the party in power in either country. Mauritius has a new government in power led by Navinchandra Ramgoolam of the Labour Party, whose coalition won a landslide victory in the elections held in November last year. While India-Mauritius relations will continue to be positive and stable, the visit provides an opportunity for Mr. Modi to establish a personal connect with Mr. Ramgoolam and reassure him of India's continuing support to the island's security and prosperity. It was during the latter half of my tenure as India's High Commissioner to Mauritius (1992-97) that Mr. Ramgoolam was Prime Minister. India-Mauritius relations saw significant growth under his leadership and he was particularly sensitive to India's security concerns. I have no doubt that he will prove to be a trusted partner for India and will open new vistas for our cooperation.

The strong link of history

Mr. Ramgoolam's father, Sir Seewosagur Ramgoolam, had led the struggle for his country's independence and was its first Prime Minister. Not many people know that Sir Seewosagur worked closely with Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose during Bose's stay in Britain between 1919-21. They were part of the Indian students' movement in London working for Indian independence. Ramgoolam did the proof-reading for Bose's famous work, *The Indian Struggle*, and received an autographed copy in appreciation.



Shyam Saran

is a former Foreign Secretary and was India's High Commissioner in Mauritius (1992-97)

The Indian Prime Minister's forthcoming visit is a reminder that India-Mauritius ties need to remain firm in today's uncertain world

There are strong people-to-people ties between the two countries. Nearly 70% of the population of Mauritius is of Indian origin, being the descendants of Indian indentured labour who were brought by the colonial rulers to work on sugar plantations. About 50% trace their ancestry to Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and still speak the Bhojpuri dialect. There are smaller communities of Tamil-, Telugu-, and Marathi-speaking communities who have preserved their languages and traditional culture. Mauritius appears like a microcosm of India.

However, the country is home to other ethnic groups including African and mixed populations, which create its proud rainbow culture. Though only 2% of the population, the island's French population is wealthy and influential, still owning its large sugar plantations, dominating its banking and financial sector and other commercial business.

The challenge for India's diplomats lies in maintaining links with all segments of the Mauritian population, even while celebrating the kinship and cultural ties that exist with its India-origin population. India has done much to nourish the linguistic and cultural heritage of the Indian-origin population. In 1976, it inaugurated the Mahatma Gandhi Institute as a premier institution for promoting Indian languages and culture. The Indian Cultural Centre in Mauritius is the largest of anywhere in the world and is one of the most active. The island hosts the World Hindi Secretariat that is supported by India.

A business gateway

India-Mauritius bilateral trade has expanded rapidly over the past few years, reaching \$554 million in 2022-23. Mauritius is a part of the African Union and has preferential trade agreements with African countries. It is bilingual, with most of its citizens being fluent in English

and French. With its well-developed finance and banking sector and reliable laws and regulations, Mauritius has become a preferred platform for doing business with Africa particularly Francophone Africa. Thanks to a favourable Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) with India, Mauritius is also a major channel for foreign investment into India. Mauritius has emerged as a successful international financial centre, mainly on the back of the DTAA.

Crucial to India's maritime security

Mauritius is the sentinel of the western Indian Ocean and maritime security cooperation between our two countries is critical to enhancing India's maritime security. The Colombo Security Conclave brings together India, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Mauritius and Bangladesh to work together to make this ocean space safe and secure. Mauritius is a small island but its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is 2.3 million square kilometres. India has set up a chain of coastal radar stations, redeveloped the Mauritian island of Agaléga to serve as a joint surveillance facility and given Mauritius access to the Indian Navy's Information Fusion Centre for the Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) in Gurugram, India, to significantly advance domain awareness in its vast EEZ. India's oceanographic survey ship, *INS Sarvekshak*, has just completed the survey of 25,000 sq.km of Mauritius' ocean territory.

At a time when China's footprint in the Indian Ocean is expanding, India-Mauritius maritime security cooperation has assumed special importance.

Beyond the ceremonial honours bestowed upon him, Mr. Modi will have much substance to discuss with his Mauritian counterpart. India-Mauritius relations must remain a strong and stable anchor in an uncertain and potentially risky world.

GS Paper 02 International Relations

UPSC Mains Practice Question: How does Mauritius act as an economic gateway for India into Africa? Evaluate its significance for India's trade and investment strategy.

Context :

- ➔ Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Mauritius on March 11-12, 2025, marks a significant milestone in the deep-rooted relationship between the two nations.

- The visit comes at a time of shifting geopolitical dynamics, reinforcing India's commitment to its maritime neighbor. Modi's participation as the chief guest at Mauritius' Independence Day celebrations highlights the historical, economic, and strategic importance of bilateral ties.

Historical and Cultural Ties

➤ Shared History and People-to-People Relations

- Nearly 70% of Mauritius' population is of Indian origin, primarily descendants of indentured laborers from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, with Tamil, Telugu, and Marathi communities also present.
- Sir Seewosagur Ramgoolam, Mauritius' first Prime Minister, had historical ties with India, having worked with Subhas Chandra Bose in London.
- India has promoted cultural preservation in Mauritius through institutions like the Mahatma Gandhi Institute and the Indian Cultural Centre.

➤ Challenges of a Diverse Society

- Mauritius is a multi-ethnic society with African, European, and mixed-race communities.
- French-origin elites continue to dominate business, finance, and sugar plantations.
- India must maintain balanced relations with all communities while strengthening ties with the Indian diaspora.

Economic and Trade Cooperation

➤ Bilateral Trade and Investment

- India-Mauritius trade reached \$554 million in 2022-23.
- Mauritius, as part of the African Union, provides India access to African markets.
- The nation serves as an investment gateway to Africa, leveraging its bilingual population and financial sector.

➤ Mauritius as a Financial Hub

- Mauritius has been a key foreign investment channel for India due to a favorable Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA).
- It has developed as an international financial center, facilitating capital inflows.

Maritime Security and Strategic Cooperation

➤ Mauritius as a Key Partner in the Indian Ocean

Daily News Analysis

- The country's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) spans 2.3 million sq. km, making maritime security cooperation with India essential.
- India has established coastal radar stations and redeveloped the Agaléga island for surveillance operations.
- Mauritius has access to India's Information Fusion Centre for the Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) for maritime domain awareness.

➤ **Regional Security Cooperation**

- Mauritius is part of the Colombo Security Conclave (India, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius, and Bangladesh), ensuring regional maritime security.
- The increasing Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean underscores the need for stronger India-Mauritius defense ties.

Conclusion

- India-Mauritius relations continue to be a stable pillar in an unpredictable world. Strengthening trade, maritime security, and strategic cooperation will further cement this partnership, ensuring long-term mutual benefits.