

Today's Prelims Topics

Taxing Coconut Oil - Long pending dispute

Context

The Supreme Court in its recent judgement has ruled that coconut oil in small bottles should be taxed as **edible oil (5% GST) unless explicitly labeled and marketed as hair oil, which would attract an 18% GST.**

Coconut Oil Taxation in India

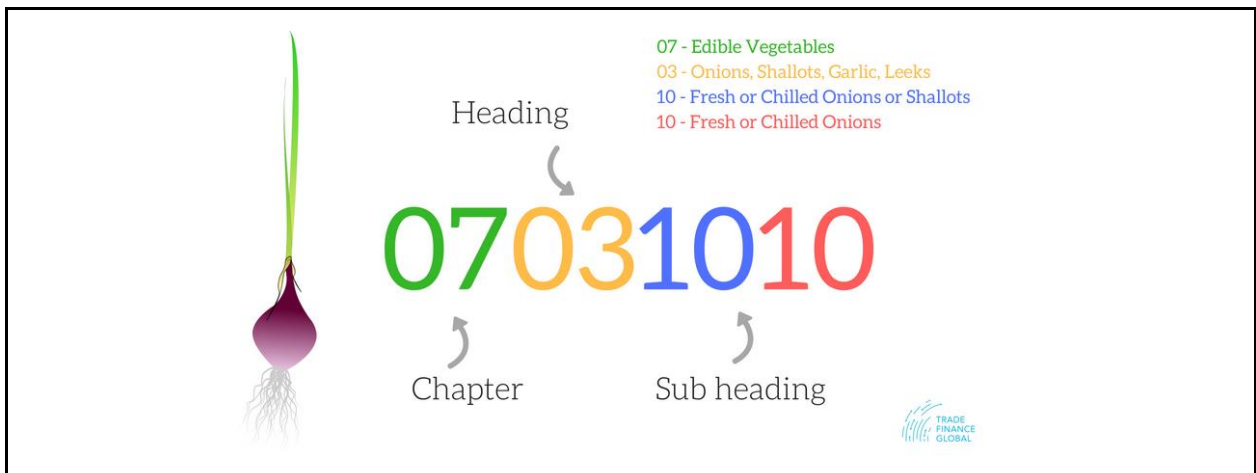
- **Background:** The dispute was on whether coconut oil, packaged in quantities from 5 ml to 2 litres, should be taxed as edible oil or hair oil
- **Prior to GST Regime:**
 - **Taxation Under the CET Act, 1985:** Prior to GST, coconut oil was taxed under the Central Excise Tariff Act, 1985 (CET Act).
 - In 2005, the CET Act classified coconut oil under Section III as "Animal or Vegetable Fats and Oils" with an 8% excise duty, distinguishing it from haircare products under Section VI, which carried a 16% excise duty.
 - These classifications followed international norms set by the **Harmonised System of Nomenclature (HSN) by the World Customs Organisation.**

World Customs Organisation (WCO)

- It is an Inter governmental organisation, it was established in **1952 as the Customs Co-operation Council (CCC)**. It was **renamed in 1994. (HQ - Brussels, Belgium)**
- It represents **186 customs administrations across the globe that process approximately 98% of world trade.**
- India joined **WCO in 1971**. The **Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC)** is India's nodal agency for WCO.
- **Functions:**
 - Simplify and harmonize customs systems and procedures
 - Improve customs operations
 - Promote cooperation between governments to facilitate international trade

Harmonized System of Nomenclature Code (HSN)

- It is a **six-digit identification code developed by WCO in 1988**. It helps in systematic classification of goods across the globe.



- **After introduction of GST:**
 - **Coconut oil** was categorized under edible oils, attracting a **5% tax**.
 - **Haircare products** under the category “Preparations for use on the hair” continued to attract a higher tax rate of **18%**.

Facts

- Coconut oil is extracted from the dried and crushed coconut endosperm, called **copra**, by pressing and crushing.
- Copra has the highest **Minimum Support Price (MSP)** among all MSP crops.
- **Major coconut producing states of India:** (1) Kerala (2) Karnataka (3) Tamil Nadu.
- **Major coconut producing countries:** (1) Indonesia (2) Philippines (3) India (4) Brazil

Source:

- [Indian Express - taxing coconut oil](#)

How scientists used Scotch tape to create ultra-thin films of diamond

Context

Researchers have developed a new method to create ultra-thin films of diamond using Scotch tape, which could revolutionize the production of diamond-based electronics.

Invention of the Method

- The method was discovered accidentally by **Jing Jixiang**, an electrical engineer at the **University of Hong Kong**. While working on a project, Jixiang used Scotch tape to peel away a small piece of diamond from a silicon wafer.
- Initially, the team implanted nano-sized diamonds into a small silicon wafer and exposed it to **methane gas** at high temperatures, a process known as **chemical vapor deposition (CVD)**, which is commonly used to create thin films for semiconductors.
- To extract the diamond layer, the researchers cut the silicon wafer to expose the diamond edge and applied Scotch tape. Peeling the tape away successfully removed a **thin layer of diamond**.
- A similar Scotch tape technique was used to create **graphene** (a single layer of carbon atoms).

Electronic Properties of Diamond

- Acts as a **good insulator**.
- Allows electrons of certain energies to move with **minimal resistance**.
- Can handle **higher energies with greater efficiency compared to silicon chips**.

Properties and Advantages of Diamond Films

- **Thinness and Smoothness:** The produced diamond films are extremely thin (less than one micrometre) and smooth enough to support standard micromanufacturing techniques.
- **Flexibility:** The films are highly flexible, allowing for applications in various technological fields, including electronics and sensors.

Potential Applications:

- **Quantum Devices:** Diamond's unique properties make it suitable for sensors in **quantum technologies**.
- **High-Energy Electronics:** Ideal for handling **greater energy loads** with efficiency.
- **Power Grids:** Could revolutionize power grids and electric vehicles by managing larger amounts of electricity.

Source:

- [Indian Express](#)

Farmer outfits reject Centre's draft policy on agri marketing

Context

The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare has drafted the **National Policy Framework on Agricultural Marketing** to address the challenges in agricultural marketing and create a unified national market. It has been prepared by a committee under the chairmanship of **Faiz Ahmed Kidwai**.

About Key proposals of the draft policy

- **GST-Like Empowered Committee for Agricultural Marketing:** Formation of a panel of **state agriculture ministers**, on the lines of the **Empowered Committee of State Finance Ministers on GST**, to bring reforms in agricultural marketing and build consensus among states.
 - **Structure of the Committee:**
 - Chaired by a **state agriculture minister** on a rotational basis.
 - Other state agriculture ministers as members.
 - Registered under the **Societies Registration Act, 1860**.
- **Need for a Unified Market:** Create a unified national agricultural market with seamless trade across states. Also simplify agricultural marketing through **single licensing/registration** and **uniform market fees**.
 - **Current Challenges:**
 - Fragmentation of markets due to **state-legislated APMC Acts**.
 - Resistance to adopting earlier reforms like the Model APMC Act, 2003.
- **Price Insurance Scheme:** Proposal to launch a price insurance scheme modeled after the **Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)**.
 - **Objective:** Protect farmers from price crashes or drops below a threshold level.
 - **PMFBY's Framework:**
 - Covers production risk through insurance.
 - Stabilizes farmer income.
 - Encourages modern farming practices.
 - Ensures credit flow to the agriculture sector.
- **Other Reforms:**
 - Opening up agricultural markets for private investments to improve infrastructure and competitiveness.
 - Promotion of **Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)** and direct farmer-to-consumer sale channels.
 - Emphasis on agro-processing, storage and transportation infrastructure **to reduce post-harvest losses and improve market access**.

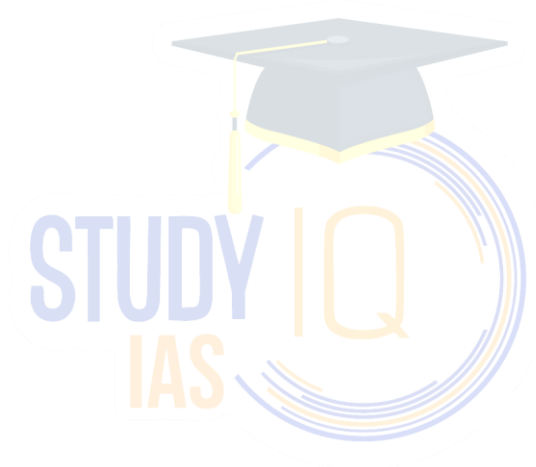
Why farmers are opposing this policy

- Farmers fear that opening up markets to private players could lead to **monopolistic practices by big corporations**.
- Farmers fear dependency on **private storage facilities** like warehouses and cold storage, which may come with high costs and limited accessibility for small farmers.
- While the draft suggests a **price insurance scheme** to protect farmers from price crashes, details about its implementation and effectiveness remain unclear.

Agricultural marketing a State subject under Entry 28 of List-II (State List) of VII Schedule under article 246 of the Constitution.

Source:

- [The Hindu - Farmer outfits reject Centre's draft policy on agri marketing](#)



Eklavya Model Residential Schools

Context

Challenges in Meeting 5% Sub-Quota for PVTG Students in Eklavya Model Residential Schools.

About Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS)

- EMRS is a **Central Sector Scheme** started in **1997-98** to impart quality education to ST children in remote areas.
- EMRS are established in the States/UTs **from the grants received under Article 275(1) of the Constitution of India.**
- **Features:**
 - The schools focus not only on academic education but on the all-round development of the students.
 - Each school has a capacity of 480 students, catering to students from **Class VI to XII.**
 - **Non-ST students** can be admitted in these schools on seats up to **10% of the total seats.**
- **Implementing Agency: National Education Society for Tribal Students (NESTS)** , an autonomous organization under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs manages EMRS across India.
- **Criteria for establishment:** Every block with more than **50% ST population** and at least **20,000 tribal persons**, will have an EMRS.

Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)

- The **Dhebar Commission (1960-61)**: It identified disparities among Scheduled Tribes, leading to the creation of the Primitive Tribal Groups (PTG) category.
- In 2006, the PTG category was renamed to PVTGs, (**Criteria for PVTG**)
 - Pre-agricultural lifestyles
 - Low literacy rates
 - Small or stagnant populations
 - Subsistence economies.
- **75 communities in 18 States** and the Union Territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands are categorized as PVTGs.
- **Odisha has the highest number of PVTGs (15).**

PVTG Sub quota in EMRS

- In **2020**, a **5% sub-quota** was introduced for PVTGs to enhance their access to education.
- **Current Enrollment Data:**
 - **Total EMRS Students:** 1,30,101 (across 407 functional schools as of October 2024).
 - **PVTG Students:** 4,480 students, comprising only **3.4%** of the total population, falling short of the 5% target.
 - Dropouts among PVTG students have increased **consecutively over 3 years.**
- **Reasons for Low Enrollment and Dropouts:**
 - **Infrastructure Gaps:** Poor facilities in many schools.
 - **Teacher Shortage:** Lack of sufficient and qualified teaching staff.
 - **Economic Pressure:** Many PVTG students are compelled to work to support their families.
 - **Quality of Education:** Perception of subpar education and inadequate resources.

UPSC PYQ

Q. Consider the following statements about Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in India: (2019)

1. PVTGs reside in 18 States and one Union Territory.
2. A stagnant or declining population is one of the criteria for determining PVTG status.
3. There are 95 PVTGs officially notified in the country so far.
4. Irular and Konda Reddi tribes are included in the list of PVTGs.

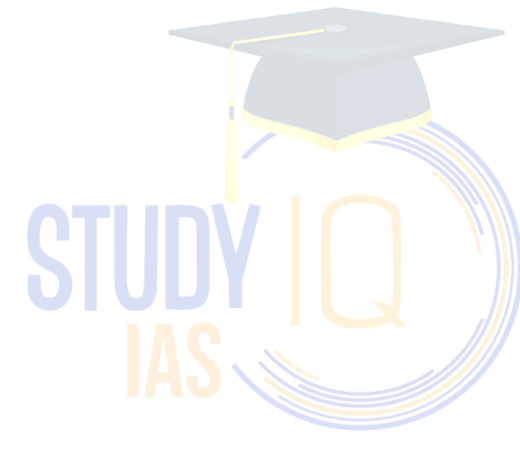
Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: C

Source:

- [The Hindu - Eklavya schools struggle to meet 5% PVTG sub-quota; dropouts on the rise](#)



India-made solar photovoltaic (PV) cells

Context

The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) has set a deadline for all solar companies wishing to participate in government procurement programs must use **India-made solar photovoltaic (PV) cells** in their panels.

Key points of the order

- **Deadline for Adoption:** By **June 2026**, solar companies must use domestically produced solar cells to be eligible for government procurement schemes.
 - Currently, Indian solar companies predominantly rely on solar cells imported from **China and Southeast Asia**.
- **ALMM List-II:** The MNRE will issue **List-II** of solar PV cells under the **Approved List of Module Manufacturers (ALMM)**, effective from **June 1, 2026**. This list will include only companies that manufacture solar cells in India.

Approved List of Models and Manufacturers (ALMM)

- It is a list of solar panel models and manufacturers that are certified by the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) and approved by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE).
- It ensures the quality and reliability of solar panels used in government-sponsored projects.

About Photovoltaic Cells

- **Photovoltaic (PV) cells**, also known as **solar cells**, are the fundamental building blocks of solar panels, responsible for converting sunlight into electricity.
- **Key Components of a Photovoltaic Cell:**
 - **Semiconductor Layer:** The primary material, often silicon, absorbs sunlight and generates electrical charge.
 - **Electrodes:** These collect the electrical charge generated by the semiconductor material.
 - **Glass/Protective Layer:** This protects the PV cell from environmental damage while allowing sunlight to pass through.
- **Types of Photovoltaic Cells:**
 - **Monocrystalline Solar Cells:** Made from a single crystal structure, known for high efficiency.
 - **Polycrystalline Solar Cells:** Made from silicon crystals that are melted and poured into molds, less efficient than monocrystalline cells.
 - **Thin-Film Solar Cells:** Made by depositing thin layers of photovoltaic material on a substrate, these are flexible but less efficient.

Why is India Import-Dependent for Photovoltaic Cells ?

- **Lack of Domestic Manufacturing of Raw Materials:**
 - India's domestic capacity to produce the core components needed for photovoltaic cells is limited.
 - **E.g. Materials like wafers (used in PV cells) and ingots (a raw form of silicon)** are not produced in sufficient quantities within India.

- **Cost-Competitiveness of Imported Cells:**
 - Imported solar cells from countries like China are more cost-effective due to lower production costs.
 - The cost of domestically produced solar cells is about **1.5 to 2 times** higher than imported cells, even after considering Basic Customs Duty.
- **Lack of Advanced Manufacturing Technologies:**
 - India lacks the advanced technologies and specialized production facilities required to manufacture high-efficiency photovoltaic cells at a competitive price.
- **Policy and Investment Gaps:**
 - While the Indian government has launched various **incentive schemes** to promote solar energy, such as the **PM KUSUM Scheme** and the **Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative**, the **domestic manufacturing sector** has not been able to scale up quickly enough to meet demand.

Solar Manufacturing Capacity in India:

- **Installed Solar Capacity:** As of now, India has installed **92 GW** of solar capacity.
- **Manufacturing Capacity:** India's solar-module manufacturing capacity stands at 63 GW, while the solar-cell manufacturing capacity is about 5.8 GW.
- **India's biggest solar power plant:** Bhadla Solar Plant (Rajasthan) - 2,245 megawatts

Source:

- [The Hindu - Centre sets June '26 deadline for solar firms to adopt India-made solar cells](#)

News in Shorts

Never Events

- Serious, preventable incidents that should never occur in healthcare if safety protocols are followed.
- **Origin:** Term introduced in 2002 by the **National Quality Forum (NQF)** in the U.S.
- **E.g.** Wrong-site surgery, insulin overdose, mismatched blood transfusions etc.

Indian Context

- The term "never events" is not explicitly used in India, here the focus is on medical negligence.
- India uses the **Bolam test** to determine if a medical professional's actions were negligent.
- **Bolam test** is a peer review that compares a medical professional's actions to those of other qualified professionals in the same field.
- India has adopted the Bolam test from the **United Kingdom**.

Source:

- [The Hindu - Never events: unacceptable failures in implementing patient safety protocol](#)

Popular drugs for weight loss endorsed by WHO scientists

- The World Health Organisation (WHO) has endorsed **GLP-1 receptor** agonists as a new class of medicines for managing **obesity**.
- **Glucagon-like peptide-1 receptor agonists (GLP-1RAs)** are a class of medications that treat type 2 diabetes and obesity.
 - They work by: Increasing insulin secretion, Slowing stomach emptying and Reducing calorie intake.
- **GLP-1 receptor** is a protein that plays a key role in regulating blood glucose levels, insulin secretion and other physiological functions in the human body.
- **Obesity stats:**
 - Globally 1 in 8 people is living with obesity. **890 million adults and 160 million** adolescents affected by it.
 - India ranks **3rd** globally in obesity, **after USA and China**.
 - 44 million women and 26 million men have obesity in India.

Source: [Indian Express - WHO scientists endorse weight loss drugs for controlling obesity](#)

SC stays Kerala High Court directives on elephant parades at temple festivals

- In a recent judgement the Supreme Court has stayed Kerala High Court directives on elephant parades at temple festivals.
- In its order, the Kerala High Court had stated that during the Thrissur Pooram festival, a maximum of 10 elephants should participate, with a minimum distance of three metres maintained between them in the procession.
- **Thrissur Pooram:**
 - It is a Hindu temple festival that takes place in Thrissur, Kerala. It's **one of the largest festivals in Asia**.

- Various temples arrive with their **elephants** and traditional orchestras. The elephants are decorated with flowers, gold, bells, and ornaments.
- **Caparisoned Elephants:** A parade of elephants adorned with traditional golden ornaments (**nettippattam**) is a major attraction of the festival.

Source:

- [The Hindu](#)

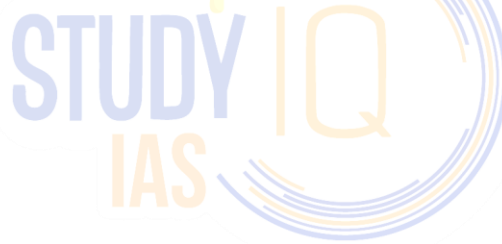
Supreme Court Ruling on Tree Preservation in Delhi

Key Directives from the Supreme Court

- **Mandatory Tree Census:** The Tree Authority must conduct a census of existing trees in Delhi under **Section 7(b) of the Delhi Preservation of Trees Act, 1994.**
- **Funding:** The Union government will finance the census through the **Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA).**
- **Approval for Felling 50 or More Trees: Central Empowered Committee (CEC) Approval Mandatory.**
 - Any permission to fell 50 or more trees granted by a Tree Officer must first be vetted and approved by the CEC.
 - The CEC can reject, modify, or approve the Tree Officer's order.
 - No trees can be cut until the CEC gives its final decision

Source:

- [The Hindu - SC orders tree census, prunes Tree Officers' power to okay felling](#)



Editorial Summary

Crime Against Humanity (CAH Treaty)

Context

On December 4, 2024, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted a resolution by approving the text for a proposed treaty aimed at preventing and punishing crimes against humanity (CAH).

Background

- CAH were first codified in the **1945 London Charter**, which established the Nuremberg Tribunal to prosecute atrocities committed during World War II.
- Further addressed in the statutes of the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda.

Reasons for a Dedicated CAH Treaty

- **Jurisdictional Limitations:** The ICC's jurisdiction covers only member states, limiting action in non-member states.
- **State Accountability:** Unlike the Rome Statute, a CAH treaty could hold states accountable for failing to prevent CAH, similar to the Genocide Convention.
 - **Example:** The Gambia filed a case against Myanmar at the ICJ under the Genocide Convention for violations against the Rohingya population.
- **Expanded Scope:** Potential to include new acts like:
 - Starvation of civilian populations.
 - Gender apartheid and forced pregnancy.
 - Use of nuclear weapons and terrorism.
 - Exploitation of natural resources and crimes against indigenous populations.

Gap in Accountability for Crimes Against Humanity (CAH)

- **Limited Governance Framework:** Unlike **genocide** (governed by the Genocide Convention, 1948) and **war crimes** (covered by the Geneva Conventions, 1949), CAH lack a dedicated treaty.
 - Currently, CAH are addressed only under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC).
 - The Rome Statute defines CAH as acts like murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, torture, imprisonment, and rape when committed as part of a *widespread or systematic attack directed against civilians with knowledge of the attack*.

India's Position on the CAH Treaty

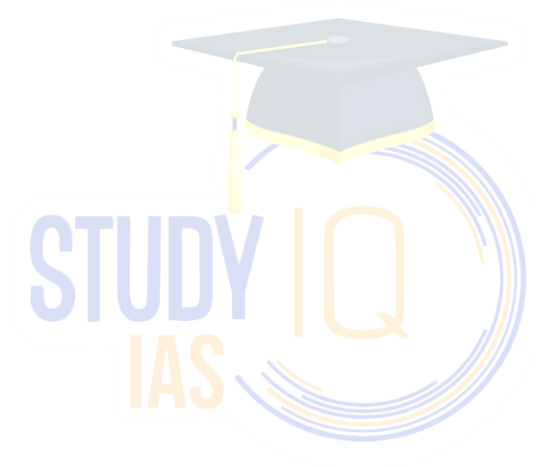
- **Non-Party Status:** India is not a party to the Rome Statute and has raised concerns about ICC jurisdiction over issues like prosecutorial powers and the exclusion of nuclear weapon use from war crimes definitions.
- **Definition of CAH:** India argues that only crimes committed during armed conflicts should qualify as CAH and opposes including enforced disappearance as a crime under this framework.
 - Instead, it advocates for terrorism to be recognized as a CAH.

- **Lack of Domestic Legislation:** India has no specific domestic laws addressing international crimes like CAH or genocide.
 - **Judicial Observation (2018):** Justice S. Muralidhar (Delhi High Court) in *State vs Sajjan Kumar* highlighted the absence of such laws as a significant gap.
 - Recent amendments to Indian criminal laws failed to incorporate CAH and genocide.

India's Potential Role:

- Incorporating CAH in domestic law aligns with India's emphasis on territorial jurisdiction.
- Leading global efforts against impunity for human rights violations would reinforce India's aspiration to be a 'Vishwaguru.'

Source: [The Hindu: Crimes against humanity and an obtuse Indian stance](#)



Detailed Coverage

India Russia Relations

Context

- Foreign policy trends in 2025 will be significantly influenced by evolving great power relationships, particularly in the context of a new U.S. administration under Donald Trump.
- This shift may disrupt traditional alliances in Europe and heighten competition with China.
- India will be crucial to play a central role in maintaining global balance and Indo-Russian relationship will be the most consequential bilateral dynamic in 2025.

Timeline of India Russia Relations



Importance of India-Russia Relations

- **Strategic High-Tech Collaboration:** Russia remains India's **most reliable partner** for advanced technological supplies, particularly in **defense and strategic systems**.
 - While Western nations like **France and the United States** are gradually easing restrictions on dual-use technology (which can have both civilian and military applications), they still impose limitations on certain critical technologies.
 - The **West's restrictions** mean India cannot fully rely on Western countries for its **undersea warfare and long-range weapon systems**.
 - This is where Russia plays a crucial role by providing the necessary technology without such limitations.
 - **Example:** The **BrahMos missile**, a supersonic cruise missile co-developed by India and Russia, exemplifies this collaboration.

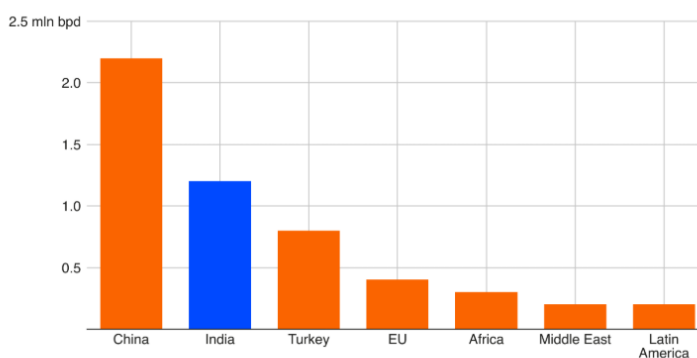
- **Energy Trade and Price Stability:** India's trade with Russia in fossil fuels (oil and gas) helps ensure **global energy price stability**.
 - Even though sanctions are in place to curb Russia's profits due to its actions in Ukraine, India ensures that its trade with Russia complies with these sanctions.
- **Geopolitical Balancing: Russia-China Dynamics:** India helps prevent Russia from becoming overly dependent on China. A Russia that is forced into a subordinate role to China would destabilize the **global power balance** and be harmful to Western interests.

Areas of Cooperation

- **Political Cooperation:** Both countries form a part of several multilateral forums such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, BRICS, and Connectivity projects such as INSTC (International North-South Transport Corridor), etc.
 - Russia has backed India joining the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)
 - Russia supports India's position on the Kashmir issue.
 - In July 2024, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was awarded the Order of St. Andrew the Apostle, Russia's highest state honor, for "his contribution to fostering India-Russia ties".
- **Economic Cooperation:** Bilateral trade between India and Russia reached a record high of US\$65.70 billion in FY 2023-24.
 - India and Russia established a Strategic Partnership Declaration in 2000, which was elevated to a Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership in 2010.
 - Both countries' targets are to boost bilateral investment to US\$50 billion and bilateral trade to US\$30 billion by 2025 and US\$100 billion by 2030.
 - The India-Russia Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA), effective since 1996, seeks to eliminate double taxation and reduce fiscal evasion.
- **Defense Cooperation:** Russia ranks first in the field of military-technical cooperation with India.
 - However, in recent years, with India's share of Russian arms exports decreasing from 58% in 2014-2018 to 34% in 2019-2023.
 - India purchased various military equipment from Russia such as the S-400 Triumph Missile system.
 - Kamov 226 helicopters, T-90S tank to be jointly manufactured under the Make in India initiative.
 - Both countries have jointly developed several Defense technologies: BrahMos supersonic cruise missile, Sukhoi Su-30 fighter aircraft, the Fifth Generation Fighter Aircraft (FGFA), and the Akula-class nuclear submarine.
 - **Military Technical Cooperation Agreement (2021-2031)** was signed during the inaugural India-Russia 2+2 Dialogue in December 2021.
 - This agreement outlines a decade-long framework for defense cooperation, including joint development and production of military equipment, components, and spare parts.
 - **Bilateral exercise:** Exercise Indra, India and Russia also participate in multilateral military exercises, such as Vostok 2022.
- **Infrastructure and Connectivity Projects:**

- **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC):** This multimodal network aims to connect Mumbai to Moscow through Iran and Central Asia, reducing transport time and boosting trade efficiency.

India is the second-largest buyer of Russian oil



Note: Russian oil exports for November 2024

Source: IEA analysis of data from Argus Media Group and Kpler | S. Bose | Dec. 12, 2024

Reuters Breakingviews

- **Chennai-Vladivostok**

Maritime Corridor: This proposed route seeks to connect the ports of Chennai (India) and Vladivostok (Russia), enhancing maritime trade and energy transport.

- **Energy Cooperation:** In February 2024, India and Russia upgraded an agreement to build six civil nuclear power plants in the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant, Tamil Nadu.
 - India is the **2nd largest buyer of Russian Oil**.
 - Recently, Russia's state-owned oil company **Rosneft** and India's **Reliance Industries** signed a 10-year deal involving the supply of **500,000 barrels per day** of crude oil valued at approximately **\$13 billion annually**.

India's Efforts to Maintain Global Order

- **Bridge Between Russia and the West:** India acts as a bridge between Russia and an otherwise alienated Western ecosystem.
 - Through its multilateral commitment, India anchors Russia to the global system and fosters connectivity across geopolitical divides.
- **Global Supply Chain Security in the Arctic:** The Arctic is emerging as a crucial region for **natural resources, shipping routes**, and strategic interests.
 - Without India's involvement, a strong **Russia-China alliance** could dominate this region.
 - India's growing presence in the Arctic, supported by partnerships with **European and Nordic countries**, helps balance this potential dominance.
 - **Example:** The proposed **Chennai-Vladivostok corridor** is a maritime trade route connecting India and Russia.
- **Moderation in Multilateral Groupings:** India plays a crucial role in **multilateral organizations** like **BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa)** and the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)**.
 - India ensures these platforms are **not used against the West**.
 - India's approach, as articulated by External Affairs Minister **S. Jaishankar**, is **non-Western but not anti-Western**. They are complementary to Western-led systems rather than antagonistic.

What are The Challenges?

- **Russia's Closer Ties with China:** Russia's deepening partnership with China, especially amid escalating Sino-Indian tensions.
- **Impact of the Ukraine Conflict:** The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has led to delays in the delivery of critical defense equipment to India, notably the S-400 missile defense systems and spare parts for fighter jets.
 - This situation undermines India's defense preparedness and confidence in Russian military hardware.
- **Economic Imbalance:** The bilateral trade relationship is marked by a significant imbalance, with India experiencing a substantial trade deficit.
 - In the fiscal year 2023-24, India's exports to Russia were valued at \$4.3 billion, while imports stood at \$61.44 billion, largely due to increased energy imports.
- **Shift Towards Western Suppliers:** India's efforts to diversify its defense procurement, including increased engagements with Western countries, may affect the traditional defense ties with Russia.
 - This shift is influenced by the need for advanced technology and reliable supply chains.

Way Forward

- **Diversify Defense Procurement:** Reduce reliance on Russian military hardware by increasing defense acquisitions from Western countries and strengthening domestic production under the Make in India initiative.
- **Address Trade Imbalance:** Boost Indian exports to Russia in key sectors like pharmaceuticals, agriculture, and IT while negotiating favorable trade agreements and alternative payment mechanisms to manage the deficit.
- **Strengthen Energy Cooperation:** Leverage Russia's role as a key energy supplier by securing long-term deals and exploring partnerships in renewable energy to create a balanced and sustainable energy relationship.
- **Enhance Multilateral Diplomacy:** Utilize platforms like BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to reinforce strategic ties with Russia while balancing relations with Western allies and navigating Sino-Russian dynamics.
- **Build Strategic Resilience:** Establish localized facilities for maintenance and production of critical defense equipment, ensure technology transfer, and accelerate indigenous development to mitigate delays and supply chain vulnerabilities.

Source: [Indian Express: The Bridge To Moscow](#)

Value Addition

Should legislatures in India have fixed tenures?

Context

The debate surrounding the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024, which proposes fixed five-year terms for the Lok Sabha and aligns State Legislature elections with this cycle, presents various arguments both in favor of and against fixed legislative tenures in India

Arguments in Favor of Fixed Legislative Tenures

- **Reduced Electoral Disruptions:** Fixed tenures and simultaneous elections could minimize frequent election cycles, allowing governments to focus on governance rather than continuous campaigning.
 - **Example:** Frequent elections at different levels often disrupt policymaking due to the imposition of the Model Code of Conduct.
- **Lower Electoral Costs:** A uniform election schedule could reduce the expenditure incurred by the Election Commission and state machinery.
- **Political Stability:** Fixed tenures could provide stability, as governments would have a predetermined term, and might deter practices like defections, resignations, or horse-trading, as mid-term elections would result in shorter legislative terms.
 - **Global Examples:** Systems like the U.S. and Germany demonstrate the potential benefits of fixed tenures in providing political continuity and reducing frequent disruptions.
- **Accountability During Tenure:** Fixed tenures might compel elected representatives to focus on governance and deliver results within their limited term, enhancing accountability.

Arguments Against Fixed Legislative Tenures

- **Threat to Federalism:** Aligning the tenures of State Assemblies with Parliament undermines the autonomy of state legislatures, violating the federal structure of India.
 - **Example:** Premature dissolution of State Assemblies to align with Lok Sabha elections weakens state-level decision-making.
- **Historical Precedents of Flexibility:** India's current system allows dissolving a legislature to resolve political crises or seek a fresh mandate.
 - Fixed tenures might take away this flexibility, leaving governments stuck in situations where they cannot function effectively.
- **Questionable Cost Savings:** The claim that simultaneous elections reduce costs may not hold, as a significant portion of election spending is incurred by political parties, not state machinery.
- **Potential Policy Paralysis:** Fixed tenures might lead to policy paralysis, especially if governments lose majority support but cannot be replaced due to the fixed term.
 - **Example:** The U.K.'s Fixed-term Parliaments Act (2011–2022) faced criticism for triggering constitutional crises.
- **Voter Behavior and Federal Representation:** Concerns that simultaneous polls may influence voters to favor the same party for both State and Central elections, potentially undermining political plurality.

- **Counter-example:** Delhi's 2014 elections, where voters distinguished between Central and State elections, demonstrate that voters are capable of making independent choices.
- **Potential for Shortened Tenures:** Fixed tenures might lead to truncated terms for newly elected governments after mid-term polls, limiting their ability to implement long-term policies.

Source: [The Hindu: Should legislatures in India have fixed tenures](#)

