Today's Prelims Topics

Swachh Vayu Sarvekshan Awards – 2025

Context

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) announced Swachh Vayu Sarvekshan 2025 awards.

What is Swachh Vayu Sarvekshan?

- Annual ranking of cities under the **National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)**.
- Conducted since 2021, expanded to **130 cities**.
- **Purpose:**
  - To promote **healthy competition** among cities.
  - Encourage cities to take **expeditious action** for improving air quality.
  - Create **accountability** and **public awareness**.
- **Evaluation:**
  - Multi-tiered and rigorous methodology.
  - Based on indicators like:
    - Reduction in **PM10 and PM2.5** levels.
    - **Road dust management**, **waste management**, **vehicular pollution control**.
    - Greening, EV adoption, C&D waste management.
    - Public transport electrification, renewable energy adoption.
- **Categories:**
  - **Category-1:** Cities with population >10 lakh.
  - **Category-2:** Cities with population 3–10 lakh.
  - **Category-3:** Cities with population <3 lakh.
- **Cash Rewards:** Linked to ranks and city size (e.g., Indore received ₹1.5 crore).
- **Integration:** Aligned with other government schemes like **Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban), AMRUT, Smart Cities Mission, SATAT, FAME-II, Nagar Van Yojana**.

Key Highlights of Swachh Vayu Sarvekshan Awards - 2025

- **11 cities awarded** as best performers for innovative and effective measures in improving air quality.
- **Indore** secured 1st rank (Category-1, population >10 lakh) with a perfect score of 200/200.
- **Indore & Udaipur** recognised as *Wetland Cities* under the **Ramsar Convention**.
- Launch of **Ward-level Swachh Vayu Sarvekshan Guidelines** to deepen local action.
- ★ Release of a **Compendium of Best Practices** under NCAP.
- Progress: **103 out of 130 cities** show improved air quality (PM10 reduction).
- **64 cities** achieved 20% PM10 reduction, and **25 cities** achieved 40% reduction (2017–2025).
- **Funding mobilised:** ₹1.55 lakh crore (Centre, States & ULBs combined) for clean air initiatives.

Source: PIB

Universal Postal Union (UPU)

Context

India launched the **Unified Payments Interface (UPI) - Universal Postal Union (UPU) Integration Project** at the 28th Universal Postal Congress in Dubai.

What is its Significance?

- Makes **cross-border money transfers faster, cheaper, and safer**.
- Helps **migrant workers and their families**, especially in rural areas.
- Uses the **trust of the postal network** with the **speed of UPI**.
- Promotes **financial inclusion** and supports India's **Digital India & Viksit Bharat** vision.
- Strengthens **South–South cooperation** and India's role in **UPU governance**.

What is UPU?

- **Founded:** 1874,
- **Headquarter:** Bern, Switzerland.
- **Status:** A **specialized agency of the United Nations (UN)** since 1948.
- **Membership:** 192 member countries.
    - **Any non-member country** of the United Nations may become a UPU member provided that its request is **approved by at least two-thirds of the member countries** of the UPU
- **Mandate:**
    - Coordinate international postal policies among member nations.
    - Ensure smooth, affordable, and reliable **cross-border mail and financial services**.
    - Standardize postal systems (address formats, postal codes, parcel tracking, etc.).
    - Encourage cooperation in e-commerce and digital financial services through postal networks.

Source: PIB

Vice President Of India

Context

Maharashtra Governor **C.P. Radhakrishnan** has been elected as the **17th Vice-President of India.**

Process of Election of Vice-President

- **Electoral College:** Comprises **members of both Houses of Parliament** (Lok Sabha + Rajya Sabha).
  - Unlike the President's election, **State Legislatures do not participate**.
- **Voting System:** Conducted through **Proportional Representation** using the **Single Transferable Vote (STV)** system.
  - Voting is by **secret ballot**.
- **Eligibility Criteria:**
  - Must be a citizen of India.
  - At least **35 years old**.
  - Qualified for election as a **Rajya Sabha member**.
  - Must not hold any office of profit under Government of India/State.
- **Conducted by**: Election Commission of India (ECI).
  - Returning Officer usually is the **Secretary General of Rajya Sabha**.

Vice-President of India vs Western Counterparts (USA as example)		
Feature	**India**	**USA (Western Model)**
Election	Indirect election by MPs (Lok Sabha + Rajya Sabha) using **Single Transferable Vote (STV)** system.	Directly elected by citizens as part of **Presidential ticket** (President + VP together).
Term	5 years.	4 years.
Role in Legislature	Ex-officio **Chairman of Rajya Sabha**.	**President of the Senate**.
Succession	Acts as **President of India** in case of vacancy until new President is elected.	Direct **successor**; becomes full President immediately upon vacancy.
Political Status	Mostly **ceremonial**, except for role in Rajya Sabha; less visible in executive governance.	**High-profile** political role; often seen as "President-in-waiting."

Source: The Hindu

Global Reserves and Production of Rare Earths

Context

China's **Ministry of Industry and Information Technology** has tightened rules on **rare earth mining and processing** to centralize oversight of extraction, refining, and exports.

Status of Global Reserves and Production of Rare Earths

- **Global Reserves of Rare Earths (as per U.S. Geological Survey 2025)**
  - **China**: 48.9%
  - **Brazil**: 23.3%
  - **Vietnam**: 7.7%
  - **Australia**: 6.3%
  - **Russia**: 4.2%
  - **India**: 3.9%
  - **U.S.**: 2.1%
  - Others (South Africa, Tanzania, Canada, etc.): <2%
- **Global Production of Rare Earths (2020–25 estimates)**
  - **China**: 65.8% of world output
  - **U.S.**: 13.2%
  - **Burma (Myanmar)**: 9%
  - **Australia**: 5.6%
  - **Thailand**: 2.1%
  - **Nigeria**: 1.2%
  - **India**: 0.9%

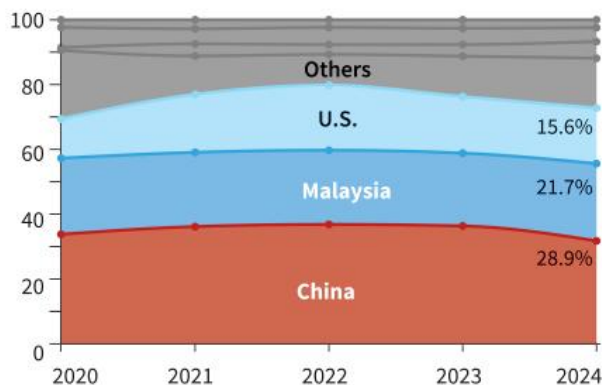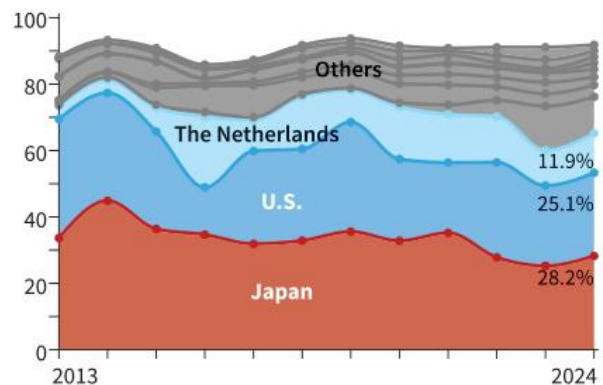**Chart 3:** Major exporters of rare earth. Figures in % shows their share in global exports

Chart 5: Major importers of China's rare earth. Figures in % shows their share in China's exports

Source: The Hindu

iDEX (Innovations for Defence Excellence)

Context
iDEX-DIO (Defence Innovation Organisation) has inked an MoU with EdCIL (India) Limited to foster the development of dual-use cutting-edge technologies, linking defence expertise with emerging ed-tech solutions, driven by the new ASPIRE (Accelerating Strategic Progress in Research and Education) program.

About iDex Initiative
- **Launched in** 2018.
- **Implementing Body:** Defence Innovation Organization (DIO) under the Department of Defence Production, Ministry of Defence, India.
- **Objectives of iDEX**
  - **Rapid Development:** Facilitate quick development of indigenized technologies to meet defence needs.
  - **Engagement with Startups:** Encourage collaboration and co-creation with innovative startups in the defence sector.
  - **Empower Technology Co-Creation:** Promote a culture of co-innovation within the Defence and Aerospace sectors.
- **Funding and Support**
  - **Grants Available:**
    - Up to ₹1.50 crore for projects.
    - Up to ₹10 crore under the iDEX Prime initiative.
  - **Support Framework:** Includes the Support for Prototype and Research Kickstart (SPARK) framework to facilitate research and development.

Related Initiatives of the iDEX Scheme
Defence India Startup Challenges (DISC)
- **Purpose:** Launched to address specific problems faced by the Armed Forces, Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs) and Ordnance Factories (OFB).
- **Structure:** Startups and innovators are invited to provide solutions to various problem statements issued by the Ministry of Defence.
- **Funding:** Winners receive grants for prototype development through the SPARK framework, with amounts up to ₹1.5 crore.
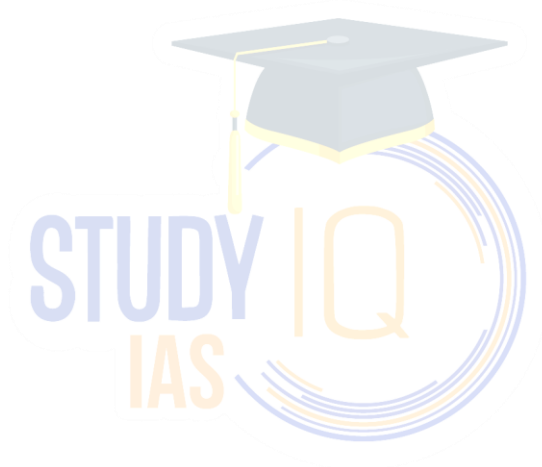
ADITI Challenges
- Aims to develop innovative technologies for the Defence sector.
- **ADITI 2.0:** Recently launched, featuring 19 challenges from armed forces and allied agencies focusing on areas like:
  - Artificial Intelligence (AI)
  - Quantum Technology
  - Military Communication
  - Anti-drone Systems
  - Adaptive Camouflage
- **Funding:** Offers grants up to ₹25 crore, targeting critical technological advancements.

Medical Innovations and Research Advancement (MIRA) Initiative

- Part of DISC, MIRA focuses on developing medical technologies tailored for the armed forces.
- Introduces targeted challenges to address the unique medical needs within military environments.

Source: PIB

News In Short

Exercise ZAPAD 2025	**News?** India participates in multilateral joint military exercise ZAPAD 2025 in Russia.
	About the Exercise
	● **Type:** Multilateral strategic/military exercise hosted by Russia.
	● **Participants:** Russia, India, and several other countries (varies each edition).
	Belarus, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Congo, Mali, India, Iran, Niger, and Tajikistan are the participants, while Cambodia, China, Cuba, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nicaragua, North Korea, Pakistan, Serbia, Thailand, the UAE, and Uzbekistan are observers. A 70-member team from India is travelling to Russia for Zapad.
	● **Aim:**
	○ Strengthen **military cooperation**.
	○ Improve **interoperability** in conventional and counter-terrorism operations.
	○ Exchange **tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs)**.
	Related fact
	● India participated in this exercise in 2021 & 2025.
	Source: PIB
UK India Infrastructure Financing Bridge (UKIIFB)	**News?** The UK-India Infrastructure Financing Bridge (UKIIFB) Year-1 Report (2025) released.
	What is UK-India Infrastructure Financing Bridge (UKIIFB)?
	● A **bilateral initiative** between India (NITI Aayog) and the UK (City of London Corporation).
	● **Launched:** During the **12th UK-India Economic and Financial Dialogue in September 2023**, and later formalized in **September 2024**
	● **Purpose:**
	○ To **attract long-term "patient capital"** for India's large-scale infrastructure projects.
	○ To **bridge India's infrastructure financing gap** by using London's financial ecosystem and expertise.
	● **Functions:**
	○ Develop **globally benchmarked project assessment frameworks**.
	○ Integrate **climate adaptation, ESG, and resilience** in project planning.
	○ Enhance **risk-sharing mechanisms** to safeguard investor returns.
	○ Build **transparent project pipelines** tested with global investors.
	○ Encourage digital monitoring for governance and

	accountability.
	● **Focus Areas (so far):**
	  ○ Highways, expressways, and rapid transit systems.
	  ○ Expanding into **green hydrogen, offshore wind, and sustainable infrastructure sectors**.
	Source: PIB

Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD)	**News?** Ethiopia has inaugurated the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD).
	About it
	● Located in **Guba, Benishangul-Gumuz region**, Ethiopia, near the border with Sudan.
	● Built on the **Blue Nile River**, a major tributary of the Nile.
	● Construction began in **2011**.
	● **Significance for Ethiopia:**
	  ○ Provides **massive electricity generation** to address domestic shortages (Ethiopia has one of the lowest electricity access rates in Africa).
	  ○ Expected to make Ethiopia an **energy hub** in the Horn of Africa, enabling **electricity exports** to neighboring countries (Sudan, Djibouti, Kenya).
	Source: The Hindu

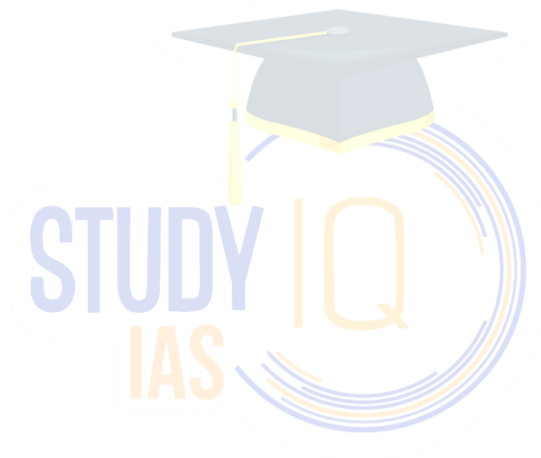# Places in News

Evia Island (Euboea) Island

News? A moderate earthquake, measuring magnitude 5.2, struck offshore near the Greek island of Evia (also known as Euboea).

About it

- Second-largest Greek island (after Crete).
- Lies along the **eastern coast of Central Greece**, separated from the mainland by the **Euripus Strait**.
- Close to **Athens** (capital of Greece).

Source: The Hindu

Mains Topics

Fisheries Sector in India

Context

As the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (2020–2025) completes five years, India's fisheries sector has become a key pillar of the Blue Economy, achieving record levels of production and exports.

Current Status of Fisheries Sector in India (2025)

- **Global Standing:** India is the **2nd largest fish producer** in the world (~8% of global output).
- **Contribution to GVA:** Fisheries contribute **~1.24% to India's GDP** and **~7.7% to Agriculture GVA**.
- **Employment:** ~3 crore people directly or indirectly dependent.
- **Exports:** Fisheries exports contribute **~20% to India's agri-exports**.
- **Types of Fisheries:**
  - **Marine Fisheries** – Along coastline.
  - **Inland Fisheries** – Rivers, reservoirs, ponds; India is the largest inland fish producer globally.
  - **Aquaculture (Freshwater & Brackish water):** India is the **largest producer of shrimp** and **2nd largest aquaculture producer** globally.
- **Largest Producers (State-wise):** Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Gujarat, Odisha, Tamil Nadu.
- **Major Export Destination of Seafood:**
  1. **US**
  2. **EU**
  - China, Japan, Vietnam, and Thailand are also major seafood export destinations of India.

Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMSSY)

- PMMSY was launched in September 2020 to make the fisheries sector **ecologically healthy, economically viable, and socially inclusive**.
- **Investment Size (2020–25):** ₹20,050 crore (largest ever investment in fisheries).
- **Objectives:**
  - Enhance production and productivity.
  - Improve value chain efficiency and post-harvest infrastructure.
  - Empower women and fish farmers.
  - Strengthen exports and global competitiveness.
- **Achievements in 5 years:**
  - **Fish Production:** 195 lakh tonnes in 2024-25 (up from 141.64 lakh tonnes in 2019-20).
  - **Aquaculture Productivity:** Improved from **3 tonne/ha (2019–20) to 4.7 tonne/ha (Feb 2025)**.
  - **Employment:** 58 lakh jobs created (target of 55 lakh surpassed by Dec 2024).
  - **Women Empowerment:** 99,018 women empowered through sanctioned projects worth **₹4,061.96 crore (2020–21 to 2024–25)**.

○ **Exports:** Increased from ₹46,662.85 crore (2019–20) to ₹60,524.89 crore (2023–24).

Challenges in the Fisheries Sector

- **Overfishing and Resource Depletion:** Marine stocks are under severe pressure due to **unregulated fishing practices**. Declining catch per unit effort reduces profitability of fishers.
- **Post-Harvest Losses:** Around **20% of total fish catch is lost** due to poor cold-chain and storage infrastructure.
- **Climate Change and Environmental Stress:** Rising sea surface temperatures, frequent cyclones, and ocean acidification threaten marine ecosystems. Coastal erosion and saline intrusion disrupt traditional fishing livelihoods.
- **Fragmented and Informal Sector:** Majority of fishers are small-scale operators with limited access to **formal credit, insurance, and social security**. Absence of organised markets forces distress sales.
- **Low Technology Penetration:** Modern aquaculture technologies like **RAS, IoT-based water quality monitoring, and drones** remain confined to pilot projects.
- **Export and Quality Challenges:** Inadequate compliance with international quality standards & Lack of modern processing and packaging facilities reduces export competitiveness.
- **Institutional and Policy Gaps:** Overlapping jurisdictions between Centre and States delay regulatory reforms.

Technology Integration in Fisheries Production

- **Biofloc Technology (BFT):** Uses microbes to recycle nutrients, reduces water usage, and provides natural feed.
  - **Eg: Kapil Talwar (Uttarakhand)** set up 50 biofloc tanks under PMMSY subsidy, creating jobs and pioneering ornamental aquaculture.
- **Recirculatory Aquaculture Systems (RAS):** Conserves water, increases stocking density, enables urban aquaculture.
- **Satellite & GIS in Marine Fisheries:** Satellite-based advisories on **Potential Fishing Zones (PFZs)** reduce fuel use and improve efficiency.
- **Digital Platforms: NFDP (2024):** Single-window system for scheme benefits, credit, insurance, e-trade.
  - e-NAM integration for fish marketing.
- **Drones & IoT Sensors:** Monitoring water quality, feeding, and fish health in real-time.
- **Cold-Chain & Smart Logistics:** Solar-powered cold storages, e-platforms for fish trade ensure better prices and reduced waste.

Way Forward

- **Sustainability First:** Balance between higher production and ecological protection.
- **Strengthening Value Chains:** Expand cold storage, processing units, and export hubs.
- **Social Security Nets:** Universalise insurance and pension schemes for fishers.
- **Women-Centric Approaches:** Expand women-led cooperatives and FFPOs.
- **Blue Economy Strategy:** Integrate fisheries with marine tourism, shipping, and renewable energy.
- **Research & Innovation:** Encourage R&D in genetics, breeding, climate-resilient species.

- **International Standards:** Strengthen traceability, certification, and quality compliance for exports.

Source: PIB

Nepal's Political Crisis & Instability in India's Neighbourhood

Context

The recent **Gen Z-led protests in Nepal**, triggered by a controversial social media ban, escalated into violent clashes, mass casualties, arson, and the resignation of Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli.

Nepal's Political Crisis

Immediate Triggers of Protests

- **Social Media Ban (September 2025):** Nepal blocked 26 platforms including Facebook, X, and YouTube to curb misinformation and cybercrime.
- **Youth Backlash**: Gen Z saw it as an attack on free expression; protests reflected frustration with:
  - Rising **unemployment (~20%)**.
  - **Corruption and nepotism** in politics ("Nepo kids" controversy).
  - Lack of accountability in governance.
- **Escalation**: Peaceful protests soon turned violent; government buildings including **Singha Durbar (PMO), Parliament, Supreme Court, and the Presidential Residence** were attacked and torched.

Nepal's Democratic Instability - Background

- **Monarchy to Republic**: Nepal abolished monarchy in 2008, adopting a federal democratic republic.
- **Frequent Political Turnover**: Since then, Nepal has seen **13 governments in 17 years**, reflecting deep instability.
- **Factional Politics**: Major parties (Nepali Congress, CPN-UML, Maoists) frequently splinter, leading to unstable coalitions.
- **Constitutional Issues**: The 2015 Constitution faced protests from Madhesi groups over representation and federalism.
- **Pro-monarchy Protests (2025)**: Large rallies in Kathmandu demanded return of Hindu monarchy under former King Gyanendra Shah.
- **China Factor**: Beijing often shields Nepal's ruling class and pushes economic projects, complicating domestic and external politics.

Implications for India

- **Border Security Concerns:** India and Nepal share an **open border (1,770 km)**. Instability risks **illegal migration, smuggling, cross-border terror, and refugee influx**.
- **Disruption of Trade and Connectivity:** Nepal is heavily dependent on India for fuel, food, and medicines. Turmoil threatens bilateral trade (~US$9 billion annually) and connectivity projects like highways, rail links, and power grids.
- **India's Role as a Regional Stabiliser:** Managing crises in Nepal is crucial for India's **Neighbourhood First Policy**. India's response will shape its **soft power image** as a protector of democratic stability in South Asia.

- **Strategic Balance with China:** Instability may push Nepal closer to China's orbit via the **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**. India risks losing strategic influence if it is seen as an unreliable partner.
- **Impact on Indian Diaspora and Tourism:** Thousands of Indian tourists and businesses in Nepal faced disruptions. Tourism, a major revenue source for Nepal, directly affects Indian tour operators and airlines.

Instability in India's Neighbourhood and Its Implications
Countries Facing Instability in India's Neighbourhood

1. **Pakistan:**
   a. **Politics:** Frequent clashes between civilian governments and the powerful military. Political parties are unstable and often ousted before completing their term.
   b. **Economy:** Heavy dependence on IMF bailouts, rising debt, very high inflation, and unemployment.
   c. **Security:** Cross-border terrorism remains a major concern for India.
   d. **China's Role:** China has a strong foothold through the **China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)**, part of BRI.

2. **Bangladesh:**
   a. **Politics:** Recent Student-People uprising led to resignation of PM Sheikh Haseena. Democratic decline with allegations of authoritarianism and misuse of power.
   b. **Refugee Issue:** Burdened by the Rohingya refugee crisis, creating humanitarian and security challenges.
   c. **Geopolitics:** Balances ties with **India** (for security and trade) and **China** (for large infrastructure projects).

3. **Sri Lanka:**
   a. **Economy:** Severe financial crisis since 2022 - debt defaults, foreign exchange shortages, and inflation. Dependent on IMF rescue packages tied with austerity measures.
   b. **Politics:** Massive protests in 2022–23 toppled the ruling leadership, creating instability.
   c. **China's Role:** China has invested heavily in ports (like Hambantota) and infrastructure, raising concerns of "debt-trap diplomacy."

4. **Myanmar:**
   a. **Politics:** A 2021 military coup led to civil war and violent suppression of democracy.
   b. **Insurgency:** Several ethnic armed groups operate, especially along the India–Myanmar border (affecting Northeast India).
   c. **China's Role:** China is investing in pipelines, ports, and infrastructure, strengthening its hold.

5. **Nepal:**
   a. **Politics:** Extremely unstable - 13 governments in 17 years. Current **Gen Z protests (2025)** highlight anger over corruption and social media restrictions.
   b. **Geopolitics:** Balancing act between India (historical ties, open border) and China (infrastructure and investment).

6. **Maldives:**
   a. **Politics:** Power alternates between **pro-India** and **pro-China** regimes.
   b. **Strategic Role:** Key position in the **Indian Ocean**, raising fears that China could use it as a naval base in the future.

Implications of Neighbourhood Instability on India

Security Concerns:
- Cross-border terrorism from **Pakistan** and radicalisation threats from **Bangladesh and Afghanistan (indirectly)**.
- Refugee inflows from **Myanmar (Mizoram, Manipur)**, **Bangladesh (Rohingya)**, and potentially **Nepal** during crises.
- Chinese military presence in **Pakistan (Gwadar, CPEC)** and **Sri Lanka (Hambantota port)** poses long-term strategic risks.
- Smuggling of arms, drugs, and human trafficking through porous borders.

Diplomatic and Strategic Challenges
- India's **"Neighbourhood First"** and **"Act East"** policies face setbacks when regimes tilt towards China.
- Frequent political instability forces India into constant crisis-management instead of long-term strategic planning.
- India's image as a regional stabiliser is challenged, giving space to external powers (China, U.S., Gulf states).

Border Management Issues
- Open borders with **Nepal** and **Bhutan** become vulnerable during unrest.
- Violence and insurgency in **Myanmar** spill over into India's Northeast, fuelling local unrest.
- Illegal migration from **Bangladesh** raises social and political tensions in Assam and West Bengal.

Economic and Trade Disruptions
- Political and economic instability in Sri Lanka and Nepal reduces Indian exports and tourism revenues.
- Port instability (Sri Lanka, Maldives) threatens India's **energy supply chains and maritime trade routes**.
- Projects like **India-Myanmar-Thailand highway** and **TAPI pipeline** suffer delays due to turmoil.
- Regional economic groupings like **SAARC** remain ineffective due to political friction.

India's Global Aspirations
- Instability in the neighbourhood undermines India's claim to be a **regional leader and global power**.
- China exploits vacuums to expand its **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**, challenging India's influence.
- **Global perception:** If India cannot stabilise its own neighbourhood, its credibility as a **voice for the Global South** may weaken.

Source: Indian Express, The Hindu