

Prelims Exam Topics

MATTALA AIRPORT

Context:

- Sri Lanka has invited global investors to operate the loss-making Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport(MRIA).

About Mattala Airport

- **Strategic Location:** Situated in **Hambantota**, near key Indian Ocean sea lanes, envisioned as a logistics and aviation hub.
- **Second International Airport:** Opened in 2013 to complement Bandaranaike International Airport(BIA).
- **Chinese-Funded Project:** Built with ~\$200 million Chinese loan under Mahinda Rajapaksa as part of Hambantota infrastructure push.



Current Situation

- **Low Traffic:** Known as the “world’s emptiest airport” due to minimal passenger and flight activity.
- **Financial Losses:** Losses of ~LKR 40 billion (~\$130 million) since opening.
- **Limited Operations:** Handles mainly **charter and occasional cargo flights**.
- **EOI for Investors:** Sri Lanka has invited global investors to manage and utilise the airport

India–Russia Deal (Attempted)

- **Proposed Joint Venture:** India earlier explored operating MRJA through a **joint venture with a Russian company**, aiming to convert it into a regional hub.
- **Why It Failed:** The proposal did not materialise due to **commercial viability concerns and strategic sensitivities**, leaving the airport underutilised.

Strategic Significance

- **Sea–Air Connectivity Potential:** Close to major shipping lanes, enabling cargo integration (air + maritime trade).
- **Regional Hub Potential:** Can decongest Colombo and boost tourism and logistics in southern Sri Lanka.
- **Geopolitical Importance:** Part of India–China strategic competition (*Chinese-funded asset, Indian interest in operation*).
- **Backup & Defence Utility:** Useful for emergency operations, disaster relief and military logistics.

Strategic Ports & Airports of Sri Lanka

Infrastructure	Location	Strategic Significance
Colombo Port	Western coast	Major transshipment hub (<i>handles large share of India-bound</i>)

	(Colombo)	<i>cargo; key node in global shipping routes)</i>
Hambantota Port	Southern coast (Hambantota)	Near key sea lanes (<i>strategic maritime foothold; part of China's Indian Ocean presence</i>)
Trincomalee Port	Eastern coast	Natural deep-water harbour (<i>strategic for naval use and energy storage</i>)
Kankesanthurai Port	Northern Sri Lanka	Close to India (<i>enhances regional connectivity and coastal trade</i>)
Bandaranaike International Airport	Near Colombo	Main international gateway (<i>critical for tourism, trade and connectivity</i>)
Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport	Hambantota	Near sea lanes (<i>potential logistics hub; currently underutilised</i>)
Jaffna International Airport	Northern Sri Lanka	Close to India (<i>boosts regional connectivity and strategic ties</i>)

NEANDERTHAL

Context

New research from the Universities of Cambridge and Montreal suggests that poor social networking, rather than climate change, was the primary driver of Neanderthal extinction.

About Neanderthals

- **Species Profile:** *Homo neanderthalensis* was our closest extinct human relative, characterized by a robust build, large brows, and sophisticated tool-making abilities.
- **Geographic Range:** They were widely distributed across **Europe and Southwest to Central Asia**, successfully navigating multiple glacial periods.
- **Core Habitats:** Simulations indicate they maintained stable "core" regions in **Spain and Italy**, which provided necessary shelter even during the volatile **Marine Isotope Stage 3**.
- **Cultural Sophistication:** Evidence shows they practiced burial rituals, used fire, and were highly adapted to cold-weather hunting.

How They Went Extinct

- The replacement of Neanderthals by humans was not a single event but a localized process; they disappeared at different times in different regions for varied social and demographic reasons.
- **The Social Connectivity Gap:** Unlike *Homo sapiens*, who benefited from expansive networks along coastal migration routes, Neanderthal groups were increasingly **isolated**.
- **Demographic Pressure:** Groups in regions like **Eastern Europe** were too fragmented to survive environmental or biological pressures, leading to a slow population collapse.

SNAKEBITE MANAGEMENT

Context

Despite high availability of Anti-Snake Venom (ASV), Kerala faces rising challenges in preventing snakebite fatalities due to environmental shifts and systemic diagnostic flaws.

Key Facts

- **Neglected Tropical Disease (NTD):** The World Health Organization (WHO) classifies snakebite envenoming as a **High-Priority NTD**, highlighting the need for global attention to a condition that primarily affects impoverished rural communities.
- **Anti-Snake Venom (ASV):** This life-saving treatment is produced by immunizing horses with snake venom. In India, ASV is **polyvalent**, meaning a single vial is designed to be effective against all members of the "Big Four" venomous snakes.
- **SARPA Programme:** A Kerala state initiative to professionalize snake rescue and reduce accidental bites during handling.
 - **SARPA App:** A specialized digital tool launched by the Kerala government to professionalize snake rescue.

DHANNA BHAGAT

Context

Birth Anniversary of Dhanna Bhagat

About Dhanna Bhagat

- He was a mystic poet whose hymns are included in the Guru Granth Sahib (under Raag Asa and Raag Dhanasari).
- **Origins:** Born in 1415 AD into a Dhaliwal Jat family in the village of **Dhuan** (now in Tonk district, Rajasthan).
- **Spiritual Lineage:** He was a prominent disciple of **Swami Ramananda**, the same spiritual master who guided other luminaries like Kabir, Ravidas, and Sena.
- **Philosophical Contributions**
 - **Nirguna Bhakti:** Like many followers of Ramananda, Dhanna Bhagat preached the worship of the **Nirguna** (formless) Divine, though his early devotion started with the worship of idols (Sarguna).
 - **Caste Equality:** As a member of the farming community, his inclusion in the spiritual pantheon of the era served as a direct challenge to the then-prevalent orthodoxy that restricted religious learning to the higher castes.
 - **Emphasis on Honest Labor:** He continued his occupation as a farmer even after achieving spiritual enlightenment, promoting the idea that one can reach the Divine while performing worldly duties (*Kirat Karni*).

WHY BELOW AVERAGE RAINS DON'T RULE OUT FLOOD THREAT

Context

While the IMD has forecast 92% of normal monsoon rainfall, new climate patterns reveal that overall below-average rains do not eliminate the high risk of devastating localized flooding due to an increase in extreme rainfall events.

Rising Trend of Extreme Heavy Rainfall

- **Defining Extreme Events:** The IMD classifies any rainfall exceeding **21 cm within a 24-hour period** as "extremely heavy rainfall."
- **Consistently High Frequency:** Historically, such events were rare, accounting for less than 0.1% of total incidents.
 - However, IMD's Annual Monsoon Reports show a consistent rise. For over a decade, India has averaged one major rainfall-induced disaster per year.
- **Key Statistics from Image:** The frequency has consistently exceeded 100 events per year since 2017, with **160 extremely heavy rainfall events** recorded as recently as 2025.
- **Major Historical Triggers:**
 - **2013 Kedarnath Tragedy:** Sparked the decade-long rising trend.
 - **2015 Chennai Floods:** Highlighted urban vulnerability.
 - **2018 Kerala Floods:** Exceptional rainfall, the maximum since 1931.

Challenges in Prediction and Forecasting

- **High Uncertainty in Granularity:** Increased computational capabilities and a denser observation network are improving broad forecasts.
 - However, identifying exactly where **250 mm vs. 500 mm** will fall within a small radius is extremely difficult to achieve with certainty.
- **Intra-Seasonal Volatility:** The forecast of overall normal or below-normal rain does not capture the intra-seasonal and regional variations, which are the main drivers of catastrophic localized events.

Urban Flooding: A Governance-Driven Crisis

- **Shift in Policy Focus:** From drought management to handling localized extreme rainfall events.
- **Urban Vulnerability:** Cities like Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru are increasingly disaster-prone.
 - **Rising Fiscal Burden:** Sixteenth Finance Commission noted floods accounted for **58% of state disaster expenditure (2019–24)**.
- **Governance Failure:** Urban flooding is largely a result of poor planning rather than purely natural causes.
 - **Encroachment Issues:** Floodplains and drainage channels obstructed by unregulated development.

THE ORANGE ECONOMY

Context

India is shifting its growth strategy to centralize creativity, culture, and content through the Orange Economy, aiming to transform its vast cultural assets into scalable global Intellectual Property (IP).

Definition

The Orange Economy is an economic model powered by creativity, cultural expression, and intellectual property. It spans diverse fields such as design, film, animation, VFX, gaming, fashion, digital media, and immersive storytelling, focusing on monetizing cultural assets as internationally scalable and reusable resources.

Factsheet

- **Digital Reach:** India has over 1.028 billion internet subscribers, including more than one billion broadband users, making it a premier market for digital entertainment.

- **Gaming Sector:** India is the world's second-largest gaming market with approximately 42.5 crore gamers; the sector reached **₹16,428 crore in FY23 with a 28% CAGR.**
- **Creator Impact:** Between 2 to 2.5 million active creators in India influence \$350–400 billion in consumer spending, a figure projected to hit \$1 trillion by 2030.
- **Economic Contribution:** YouTube's creative ecosystem alone contributed over ₹16,000 crore to India's GDP in 2024 and supported over **930,000 full-time equivalent jobs.**

Orange Economy as an Engine of Growth

- **Monetization of Cultural Assets:** By transforming myths, languages, and local traditions into owned IP (characters and franchises), India can extract long-term value rather than just one-time production fees.
- **Multidisciplinary Convergence:** The intersection of design, film, and gaming creates multi-layered, globally impactful experiences that are more adaptable and monetizable than isolated disciplines.
- **Employment Generation:** The government's AVGC-XR initiative is projected to generate 20 lakh direct and indirect jobs over the next decade.
- **Creator-Led Entrepreneurship:** The creator economy acts as a potent distribution engine, helping Indian narratives reach niche global audiences and build community-led cultural momentum.
- **Strategic Infrastructure:** Treating culture as strategic national infrastructure allows for the development of studio-scale IP that travels across cinema, streaming, and merchandise.

Challenges Associated

- **Platform Dependency:** Much of the creator economy's visibility and monetization is controlled by foreign platforms' algorithms and policies.
- **Lack of IP Ownership:** India often produces high volumes of creative content but extracts little value because it lacks ownership of the underlying characters or storytelling systems.
- **Fragmented Training:** Current educational systems often focus on narrow specializations rather than the fluid, cross-disciplinary creative intelligence needed for modern markets.
- **Monetization Fragility:** Creator wealth is often unstable, relying on advertising markets rather than proprietary formats or licensing.
- **Funding and Legal Literacy:** There is a need for greater access to capital and improved legal literacy regarding IP ownership and international distribution.

Way Ahead

- **Reform Creative Training:** Move beyond narrow specializations to integrate storytelling, design systems, and business models into core curricula.
- **Prioritize Ownership:** Encourage creators and studios to move beyond platform reach into proprietary formats, licensing, and paid communities.
- **Integrate AI Workflows:** AI-supported workflows, licensing, and entrepreneurial thinking must become core components of professional creative training.
- **Strengthen Global Distribution:** Establish stronger, more confident distribution channels to ensure Indian narratives can scale internationally as reusable resources.
- **Foster Cooperative Federalism:** Align design education and policy across Union, State, and local levels to build a competitive national creative ecosystem.

Mains Exam Topics

INDIA AND NEW ZEALAND FTA

Context

- India and New Zealand are set to sign a landmark FTA marking one of India’s fastest trade negotiations and reflecting growing economic and strategic engagement.



India-New Zealand FTA

Attracting Investments

\$20 billion FDI
from New Zealand
Over 15 years
with a rebalancing mechanism

Expanding Markets & Exports

- Zero duty on 100% of goods exports upon entry into force
- 8,284 tariff lines to see elimination
- Fast-track mechanism for export inputs
- Farmers, MSMEs, Women-led enterprises

Sectors to get a push

Manufacturing Infrastructure Innovation & job creation Services

Big Winners: MSMEs & Jobs

Employment opportunities across:

- Labour-intensive sectors**: Textiles, apparel, leather, footwear
- Engineering & manufacturing**: Automobiles, electronics, machinery, plastics
- Pharmaceuticals & chemicals**
- Agri & processed foods**: Fruits, vegetables, coffee, spices, cereals, ready-to-eat foods

Support through SME collaboration, incubators, accelerators & digital platforms

New Opportunities in Trade & Services

- Trade & Services**: New growth avenues in IT-ITeS, finance, education, tourism & audio-visual
- Mobility & Workforce**: MFN status boosts competitiveness, India positioned as a key global supplier of skilled workforce

Benefits of India and New Zealand FTA

Area	Key Benefits for India
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Market Access (Goods)	Zero-duty access on 100% of New Zealand tariff lines (8,284) from entry into force; elimination of ~10% tariffs on ~450 Indian export lines;
Protection of Sensitive Sectors	India has excluded key sectors to protect domestic interests (e.g. <i>dairy products, onions and pulses, sugar, edible oils, metals like copper and aluminium</i>).
Services Trade	New Zealand's best-ever offer : commitments in 118 services sectors ; MFN treatment in 139 sectors
Health & AYUSH	First-ever Health & Traditional Medicine Annex ; global promotion of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Sowa-Rigpa, Homeopathy); boost to medical value travel and wellness services
Education & Student Mobility	Students allowed 20 hrs/week work during study; protected against future policy changes; extended post-study work visas (STEM Bachelor: 3 yrs; Master's: up to 3 yrs; Doctorate: up to 4 yrs)
Professional Mobility	5,000 skilled visas (up to 3 years) for Indians in AYUSH, Yoga, Indian cuisine, music, IT, engineering, healthcare, education, construction
Working Holiday Scheme	1,000 Indian youth annually eligible for multiple-entry stays up to 12 months
Investment	USD 20 billion FDI commitment from New Zealand over 15 years
Regulatory Facilitation	Faster approvals for pharmaceuticals & medical devices ; recognition of inspections from US, EU, UK, Canada regulators
Intellectual Property	Binding commitment to amend laws within 18 months for EU-level GI protection for Indian products
Customs & Trade Facilitation	Advance rulings, e-documentation , clearance within 48 hours (24 hours for perishables)
Future-Proofing Clause:	Includes provisions ensuring New Zealand gets equal benefits if India offers better terms to other countries in future (e.g. in services or wine sector.)

The brief overview of the India-New-Zealand Relations

Areas of Cooperation

Historical Relation

- **Early Indian Migration:** Indians began arriving in New Zealand in the **late 18th century** on British East India Company ships.
 - Early migrants were primarily from **Gujarat** and later from **Punjab**.
 - Formation of the **Auckland Indian Association in 1920** (centenary celebrated in 2020).
- **Diplomatic Relations:** Both countries became independent in **1947**.
 - India established diplomatic representation in **1950** with a **Trade Commission**, later upgraded to a **High Commission**.
- **Shared Similarities:**
 - Commonwealth membership.
 - Common law practices.

- Democratic governance focused on diverse communities.

Political, Defence, and Security Cooperation

- **Parliamentary Engagement:** Regular parliamentary delegation visits.
- **Defence Collaboration:** Increased participation in **military exercises** and **staff college exchanges**.
 - Regular **port calls** by naval ships (e.g., *Tarini* at Lyttelton and *HMNZS Te Kaha* at Mumbai).
 - Signing of **India-New Zealand MoU for Defence Cooperation** to establish regular bilateral defence engagement.
- **Maritime Security:** NZ sees India as a safe bet to counter China's assertive rise in the Indo-Pacific region.
 - India's participation in **Combined Maritime Forces** and cooperation under **Command Task Force 150**.

Combined Task Force (CTF) 150 is a multinational naval task force working under **Combined Maritime Forces** and is based in Bahrain. Indian Navy has committed a contribution of 5 staff members to the CTF150 battle staff during the period RNZ Navy is leading the CTF150 from January 2025.

- New Zealand's interest in joining the **Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)**. PM Modi welcomed New Zealand into this partnership with like-minded countries.
- Discussions on maritime cooperation at the **National Maritime Heritage Complex (NMHC)** at Lothal.
- **Capacity Building:** Regular officer training exchanges at Defence Colleges.

Trade, Investment, and Financial Cooperation

- **India and New Zealand merchandise bilateral trade:** India's exports to New Zealand grew 32.1% in 2024-25 to \$711.1 million. Imports from New Zealand grew 75.2% to \$587.1 million over the same period.
- **Customs Cooperation:**
 - **Authorized Economic Operators Mutual Recognition Arrangement (AEO-MRA):** It facilitates smoother trade by easing movement of goods between trusted traders.
 - **Customs Cooperative Arrangement:** In August 2024, New Zealand and India signed it to enhance trade ties and intensifying collaboration against transnational organized crime
- **Sectoral Cooperation in Horticulture and Forestry: Memorandum of Cooperation on Horticulture** to promote knowledge sharing and research exchanges.
 - Development of **post-harvest and marketing infrastructure**.
 - **Letter of Intent on Forestry Cooperation** for policy dialogues and technical exchanges.
- **Tourism and Air Connectivity:** Recognition of tourism's role in enhancing economic ties and mutual understanding.
 - Update to the **India-New Zealand Air Services Agreement** to support direct flights.
 - Encouragement for airlines to commence **non-stop flights** between India and New Zealand.

Science, Technology, and Disaster Management

- **Technology Partnerships:** Strengthening collaboration in **research, innovation, and commercialization** of technologies.

- **Climate Change Cooperation:**
 - New Zealand's membership in the **International Solar Alliance (ISA)** (since 2024).
 - New Zealand's membership in the **Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)**.
- **Earthquake Mitigation:** Work towards a **MoU on Earthquake Mitigation** to enhance preparedness and response capacity.

Education, Mobility, and People-to-People Ties

- **Education:** India is the 2nd largest source of international students in NZ.
 - Signing of a **refreshed Education Cooperation Arrangement**.
 - Expansion of Indian student access to New Zealand education institutions.
- **Skilled Migration:** Agreement to negotiate skilled worker mobility under trade agreement.
 - Addressing irregular migration issues.
- **Sports:** MoU on Sports Cooperation in cricket, hockey, and Olympic sports.
 - **Sporting Unity events** in 2026 to celebrate 100 years of sporting ties.
- **Traditional Medicine:** Expert discussions on knowledge exchange and collaboration.
- **Cultural Ties:** Growing New Zealand interest in **yoga, Indian music, dance, and festivals**.
- Promotion of bilateral cultural exchange.



WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION ON CORPORATE BOARDS IN INDIA

Context

Despite legal provisions mandating the inclusion of women directors, their actual representation in corporate boardrooms remains limited. Recent data from leading companies highlights a gap between compliance and meaningful participation.

Legal Framework for Women Representation

- **Companies law:** The Companies Act, 2013 requires certain companies to appoint at least one woman director.
- **Explanation:** This rule applies to large companies based on capital or turnover, aiming to ensure minimum gender diversity in decision-making bodies.

Current status of women on boards

- **Limited Presence:** Most companies meet the requirement of appointing at least one woman director. While formal compliance is high, many boards stop at the minimum requirement instead of improving overall representation.
- **Low Overall Share of Women Directors:** Women constitute only about 21% of board members in top companies. This shows that women remain underrepresented in leadership roles despite policy efforts.
- **Token Representation in Many Firms:** Around 17 major companies have only one woman director. This indicates symbolic inclusion rather than meaningful participation in governance.

Key concerns

- **Compliance over Commitment:** Companies often appoint women directors just to meet legal requirements. This reduces the effectiveness of the policy, as real empowerment requires active roles and influence.
- **Limited Focus on Women's Advancement:** Reports show that companies prioritise diversity broadly, but not specifically women's career growth. Without targeted efforts, women may not rise to senior leadership positions.
- **Use of Family Appointments:** In some cases, family members are appointed as directors. This practice may not contribute to genuine diversity or independent decision-making.

Way Forward

- **Move Beyond Minimum Compliance:** Encourage companies to increase the number of women directors beyond one. A higher proportion ensures better representation and diverse viewpoints.
- **Strengthen Leadership Pipeline:** Promote women into senior executive roles. This creates a pool of experienced candidates for board positions.
- **Ensure Meaningful Participation:** Assign key roles and responsibilities to women directors. Real empowerment comes from influence in decision-making, not just presence.
- **Regular Monitoring and Disclosure:** Improve transparency in reporting gender diversity. Public disclosure can push companies to improve performance.