

One-horse races are no triumph for democracy

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies - 2
Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies. Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies.

1. Competition is Essential for Democracy

- **Competition gives legitimacy** and meaning to democratic elections.
- Citizens can **replace governments only when genuine political alternatives exist.**
- Strong electoral competition improves governance and policy-making.
- Lack of competition weakens democratic participation and public trust.

2. Provision for Unopposed Elections under the RPA, 1951

- **Section 53(3) of the Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1951** allows a candidate to be declared elected unopposed if no other valid candidate remains in the contest.
- A **person can become a representative without a vote** being cast.
- **Uncontested elections** reduce meaningful democratic competition.
- Genuine mandates require actual electoral contests.
- Such provisions may **weaken the spirit of representative democracy.**

3. Importance of a Neutral Election Commission

- The **Election Commission of India (ECI)** is responsible for the superintendence, direction, and control of elections.

- **Fair elections** require a level playing field for all political parties.
- **Allegations of bias reduce confidence** in electoral outcomes.
- Public trust depends on impartial election administration.

4. Issues Related to the Special Intensive Revision (SIR)

- The **Special Intensive Revision (SIR) in West Bengal led to large-scale voter deletions.**
- Around 27 lakh electors were reportedly removed from electoral rolls.
- Most deletions **involved duplicate, shifted, or deceased voters.**
- Such corrections could normally be addressed through regular electoral roll revision.

5. Concerns About Declining Electoral Competition

- Weak opposition **reduces meaningful electoral contestation.**
- One-sided political dominance may weaken democratic functioning.
- **Electoral institutions must remain independent** and transparent.
- **Free and fair competition is necessary** for democratic legitimacy.
- Democracy becomes weaker when contests are unfair or competitors disappear.

Oslo summit must mark India's northward turn

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1. Changing Nature of India–Nordic Relations

- Prime Minister **Narendra Modi is visiting Oslo for the third India-Nordic Summit.**
- **Earlier cooperation focused on climate, innovation, digitalisation and the blue economy.**
- **Geopolitical changes have increased the strategic importance** of the partnership.
- The **Russia–Ukraine war reshaped Europe’s security order.**
- India and Nordic countries **now share interests in technology, supply chains, maritime security and green energy.**

2. Arctic Geopolitics and Nordic Security

- The **Arctic is emerging as a region of competition over shipping routes, energy resources and critical minerals.**
- **Finland and Sweden joined NATO,** changing Nordic security architecture.
- **Russia became the Arctic Council’s only non-NATO member** after these accessions.
- **Russia and China expanded cooperation in Arctic shipping and energy.**
- **Denmark’s Greenland has strategic importance in Arctic sea routes** and mineral networks.
- New technologies like **autonomous underwater vehicles and satellite-enabled seabed mapping** are reshaping Arctic security.

3. India’s Arctic Presence and Strategic Interests

- **India became an observer in the Arctic Council** in 2013.
- **India operates the Himadri research station** in the Arctic region.
- India **established the IndARC underwater observatory and Gruevbadet atmospheric laboratory** in Norway.
- The **Arctic is warming more than three times faster than the global average.**
- **Ice loss in the Barents-Kara Sea affects variability** in India’s summer monsoon.
- **Rising polar melt threatens India’s coastline,** ports and island territories through sea-level rise

4. Economic and Maritime Opportunities

- Melting Arctic ice is opening **new shipping routes such as the Northern Sea Route.**
- **Extending the Chennai–Vladivostok corridor to Murmansk and the Nordic region** would strengthen maritime connectivity.
- India **should build five Arctic-capable ice-class tankers by 2030–31.**
- An **India-Arctic Economic Forum can strengthen cooperation** in shipping, energy and infrastructure.
- An **“Arctic–Himalaya Climate Data Corridor”** can support joint climate monitoring.
- India should appoint a Special Envoy for Arctic Affairs.

5. Areas of India–Nordic Cooperation

- **Nordic countries lead in offshore wind, hydrogen and green shipping.**
- **India’s clean-energy goals require technology and investment partnerships.**
- **Norway and Sweden** can support **critical mineral supply diversification.**
- **Nordic strengths in AI, semiconductors, batteries and telecom** complement India’s manufacturing ambitions.
- The Oslo Summit can deepen long-term strategic cooperation.

As trees fall in thousands, innovative protests erupt across India

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
General issues on Environmental ecology, Biodiversity and Climate Change.

Mains: General Studies - 3
Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

1. Rising Tree Felling and Environmental Concerns

- In **Uttarakhand,** protests erupted against large-scale **tree cutting** for development projects.
- Around **4,400 trees** may be cut for the **Dehradun-Rishikesh road widening project.**

- Protesters compared the situation to the historic **Chipko Movement**, where villagers hugged trees to stop logging.
- In the last **5 years**, nearly **83,000 trees** were reportedly felled in Uttarakhand.
- Activists argue the **real loss is much higher because**:
 - ➔ Small plants and shrubs are not counted.
 - ➔ **Tree translocation** efforts usually fail.

2. Importance of Trees and Forests

- **Avenue trees** help reduce:
 - ➔ **Air pollution**
 - ➔ **Urban heat**
 - ➔ Harmful gases like **nitrous oxide** and **sulphur oxide**
- Trees act as important **carbon sinks**.
- Species like **peepal, banyan, neem, tamarind, mango, and jackfruit** have:
 - ➔ **Ecological value**
 - ➔ **Cultural significance**
 - ➔ **Livelihood importance**
- Forests also support rich **biodiversity**, including:
 - ➔ **Birds**
 - ➔ **Medicinal plants**
 - ➔ **Wildlife**

3. Major Protests and Threatened Projects

- The **'Dol Ka Badh' movement** in **Jaipur** is opposing the cutting of around **600 trees** for a mall and commercial projects.
- Activists say the **forest near Jaipur airport contains**:
 - ➔ **2,400 native trees**
 - ➔ **60 medicinal plant species**
 - ➔ Around **90 bird species**
- In **Maharashtra**, about **5,000 trees** may be lost for development and the **Kumbh Mela**.
- The **National Green Tribunal (NGT)** temporarily stopped tree felling in Nashik.
- Activists warn that the **Nicobar transshipment terminal project** could destroy nearly **1 million trees**.

4. Victories and Key Lessons

- Citizens successfully saved:
 - ➔ Ancient **Chevella banyan trees** near Hyderabad.
 - ➔ A large part of **Delhi Ridge forest**, now declared a **reserved forest**.
- Environmentalists criticised **compensatory afforestation** because:
 - ➔ New saplings take **30-40 years** to match old forests.
 - ➔ Planting trees elsewhere cannot replace lost local ecological benefits.

- **Chevella banyan trees** - The **banyan trees** lining the **46-km Hyderabad-Manneguda road** were planted during the **Nizam era** and represent one of the last remaining historic **tree avenues** in **Telangana**.
- More than **900 banyan trees** stand along the narrow **six-metre-wide road**, providing vital **shade** and supporting the local **ecological habitat**.

U.S., China, and the search for stability

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1. Context of the Visit

- Donald Trump (U.S President) visited China (May 13–15) to meet Xi Jinping after a **nine-year gap**, aiming to stabilize strained ties.
- Relations deteriorated since the **2018 trade war**, followed by renewed **tariff escalation in 2025**.
- A **temporary truce at APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) Summit (Busan, October 2025)** halted further decline but did not normalise relations.
- The visit occurred amid a **global energy crisis (Strait of Hormuz closure)** and **Iran-U.S. war**.
- Rising **Taiwan tensions** increased risk of U.S.-China confrontation.

- The delegation included top CEOs (tech, semiconductors, aerospace, agriculture) and **Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth**, signalling economic + security focus.
- China hosting **U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio** despite sanctions indicated **Beijing's willingness to stabilise ties**.

2. Expectations of the United States

- **Stabilise relations** amid global turmoil and domestic electoral pressures (midterms).
- **Expand market access** and boost exports (chips, aircraft, agriculture, energy).
- Focus on **"3Bs" - beans, beef, Boeing**; revival of stalled trade flows.
- Push for **Nvidia H200 chip sales** and easing tech restrictions.
- Seek **China's support to end the Iran war** and ease the energy crisis.

3. Expectations of China

- **Curtail U.S. support to Taiwan** and prevent pro-independence moves.
- Seek **normalisation of ties** and relief from **technology restrictions**.
- Use the Iran crisis to **expand strategic influence and secure energy interests**.
- Leverage visit for **domestic political legitimacy** amid internal tensions.
- Strengthen bargaining position on Taiwan

4. Significance and Outcomes

- The visit was **largely symbolic**, with **no formal agreements** announced.
- Indicated possible **thaw and renewed engagement** through leader-level diplomacy.
- China signalled openness to trade: **Boeing deal (200 aircraft, 450–500 engines), soybeans, beef, oil**.
- The U.S. retained **strategic ambiguity on Taiwan**, while Xi Jinping (President of China) issued strong warnings.

- Emphasis on **"strategic stability" and partnership**, with hints of a **"G2" framework (A U.S.-China global leadership model, though controversial)**.
- Highlighted need for **U.S.-China cooperation** for global stability (energy, conflicts).
- Revived question of avoiding the **Thucydides Trap** in great power relations.

Thucydides Trap is the idea that when a rising power challenges an existing dominant power, the resulting fear and rivalry often increase the risk of conflict between them.

KEYWORDS

Anaimangalam / Leiden Copper Plates

- The Anaimangalam / Leiden Copper Plates are important **Chola-era inscriptions**, originally issued by **Raja Raja Chola I** and later confirmed by **Rajendra Chola I**, with another set issued by **Kulothunga Chola I**, reflecting continuity in royal administrative practices.
- They record a **land revenue grant** from the village **Anaimangalam** to the **Chudamani Vihara (Buddhist monastery at Nagapattinam)**, highlighting the **religious tolerance of the Cholas**, who, despite being **Shaivites**, patronised Buddhism.
- The grant is linked to the **Srivijaya king Sri Mara Vijayattungavarman**, showing strong **maritime, diplomatic, and trade relations between the Chola Empire and Southeast Asia**, even before later naval conflicts.
- The plates are **bilingual inscriptions**, with the **genealogical portion in Sanskrit (Grantha script)** and the **administrative details in Tamil**, demonstrating advanced **epigraphic and administrative traditions**.
- Known as the **"Leiden Plates"** because they were preserved at **Leiden University (Netherlands)**, they have gained **current affairs importance due to their recent repatriation to India**, linking **art & culture with heritage diplomacy**.

Ebola Virus Disease

- Ebola Virus Disease (EVD), formerly called Ebola haemorrhagic fever, is a **severe and often fatal infectious disease affecting humans and other primates**.
- It is caused by viruses of the **Orthoebolavirus genus under the Filoviridae family**.
- The **recent Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo involves the rare Bundibugyo strain**, which was first identified in Uganda and differs from the common strain previously seen in the DRC.
- The **disease was first identified in 1976 near the Ebola River**, while **fruit bats are considered the natural hosts transmitting the virus to humans** through infected bodily fluids.
- **Human-to-human transmission occurs through direct contact with the blood, secretions, organs, or bodily fluids** of infected persons, making outbreaks difficult to control in conflict-affected regions.

Arctic Council

- The Arctic Council **was established in 1996 through the Ottawa Declaration to promote cooperation, environmental protection, and sustainable development in the Arctic region**.
- It consists of **eight member states: Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States**, which possess sovereign rights over Arctic territories and resources within their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs).
- The Council also **includes six Permanent Participant organisations representing Indigenous Arctic communities**, ensuring their role in decision-making.
- **Observer status has been granted to countries such as India, China, Japan, the United Kingdom, and France**, along with several intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations.
- All major decisions in the Arctic Council are taken through consensus among the eight Arctic states in consultation with Indigenous representatives.

Places In News

Barakah Nuclear Energy Plant, Abu Dhabi



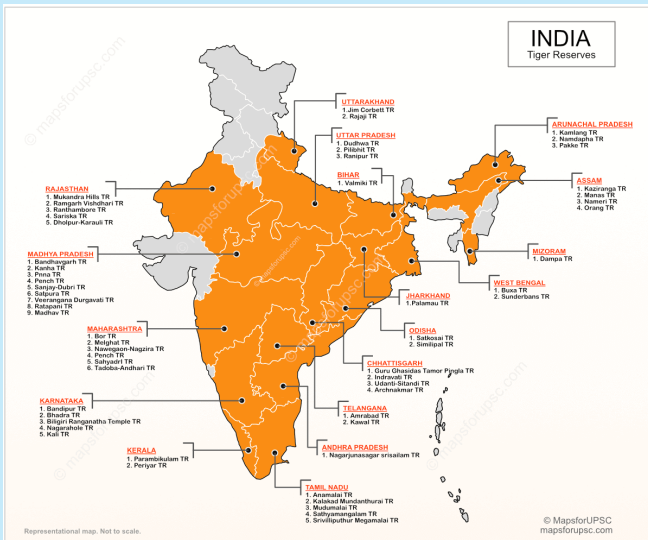
- The **Barakah Nuclear Energy Plant**, located in the **Al Dhafra region** of the Emirate of **Abu Dhabi**, around **53 km southwest of Al Dhannah city**, is the **first nuclear energy plant in the Arab World**.
- The plant has **four APR1400 nuclear reactors**, all of which are now **fully operational**.
- Together, they help prevent the release of nearly **21 million tonnes of carbon emissions annually**.
- **Unit 1** of the Barakah Plant started commercial operations in **April 2021**, **Unit 2** in **March 2022**, **Unit 3** in **February 2023**, and **Unit 4** began commercial operations in **September 2024**.

Periyar Tiger Reserve

- Periyar Tiger Reserve is **located in the Western Ghats in Kerala** and is **one of India's most important tiger reserves under Project Tiger**.
- It is **famous for its rich biodiversity, including tigers, elephants, gaurs, Nilgiri langurs, and numerous endemic bird species**.
- The **reserve surrounds the scenic Periyar Lake, formed after the construction of the Mullaperiyar Dam**, which serves as a major water source for wildlife.

- Originally **declared a sanctuary in 1950**, it became a **tiger reserve in 1978** and is known for **eco-tourism activities** such as boating, bamboo rafting, and trekking.
- The reserve also plays a vital ecological role by protecting forests, conserving water resources, and supporting local livelihoods

- The **Barents Sea** lies to the west of **Novaya Zemlya** and is influenced by the warm **North Atlantic Drift**, making it relatively ice-free compared to other Arctic regions.
- The **Kara Sea** lies to the east of **Novaya Zemlya** and is among the **coldest seas in the world**, remaining ice-covered for most of the year.
- Major Siberian rivers such as the **Ob, Yenisei, and Kara** drain into the **Kara Sea**, bringing large amounts of freshwater and sediments.
- These seas are strategically important due to their role in Arctic navigation, climate regulation, fisheries, and energy resources.



Barents Sea and Kara Sea



- The **Barents and Kara Seas** are marginal seas of the **Arctic Ocean** located north of **Norway and Russia**, separated by the **Novaya Zemlya archipelago**.

