

An Israel visit — its strategic, economic, regional impact

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

Mains: General Studies - 2
Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

1. Context

- West Asia faces rising instability due to U.S-Iran tensions and fragile peace in Gaza.
- Narendra Modi's recent visit to Israel shows continued engagement despite unrest.
- It strengthens ties and reflects India's stabilising role in the region.

2. Strengthening Bilateral Defence Collaboration

- India and Israel face similar security threats, leading to close defence cooperation.
- India accounts for 34% of Israel's arms exports, with ties shifting to joint production.
- The 2022 India-Israel Vision on Defence Cooperation and the 2025 defence agreement institutionalise this partnership.
- Key projects include coproduction of the Barak-8 system.
- Modi's visit may advance co-production of the Iron Beam laser system.

3. Expanding Strategic, Economic and Technological Cooperation

- Israel supports India through 35+ Centres of Excellence in horticulture, beekeeping, and advanced farming practices.

- Israel is also partnering with Haryana and Rajasthan to strengthen water management in water-scarce areas of India.
- Bilateral trade stands at \$3.75 billion, with India as Israel's second-largest Asian partner.
- The Bilateral Investment Agreement 2025 and FTA talks aim to boost economic ties.
- The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, launched at the 2023 G20 Summit, seeks to enhance strategic connectivity and regional stability.

4. Gaza Peace Process and India's Balanced West Asia Strategy

- India attended the Summit of the Board of Peace in 2026 as an observer, but has not yet decided its exact role.

The 'Board of Peace' Summit on Gaza was held on 19 February 2026. It was led by the United States under President Donald Trump to coordinate international funding and stabilization efforts in Gaza

- Any conflict in the region, especially involving Iran, can affect India's oil supply and interests.
- Israel suggested a new alliance, but India usually avoids joining blocs and prefers an independent foreign policy.
- PM Modi's visit is not a routine one; it strengthens India-Israel ties and highlights India's balanced and independent approach in West Asia.

India's trade strategy in a multipolar world

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
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India and its neighborhood- relations.

1. Context

- India's **new global trade strategy aims to boost exports and make India a leading global trade partner** through active Free Trade Agreements (FTAs).
- The **Foreign Trade Policy 2023 (FTP) targets \$2 trillion in exports by 2030**, while maintaining strategic autonomy.
- **In 2025, India's total exports grew by 6.05%, reaching \$825.25 billion** (goods and services combined).

2. Shift from Cautious to Proactive Trade Policy

- Earlier approach: **India signed FTAs mainly with similar developing economies.**
- **Global integration was limited**, with only 22% export coverage in 2019.
- Current approach: **India is actively signing comprehensive FTAs** with major developed countries.
- **By 2026, 71% of exports** are expected to be covered under FTAs.
- This **shift helps India integrate into advanced markets (EU, U.S., U.K., Australia, UAE)** and global value chains.

3. India–EU Free Trade Agreement (2026)

- The **India–EU FTA (January 27, 2026) is a landmark deal concluded** after nearly 20 years of negotiations.
- It **cuts tariffs on over 90% of goods.**
- It **boosts Indian exports in textiles, leather, pharmaceuticals**, chemicals, and marine products.
- The agreement **improves competitiveness, strengthens digital and regulatory cooperation.**

4. India–U.S. Trade Framework (2026)

- In February 2026, **India and the U.S. signed an interim trade framework** while negotiating a broader Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA).
- It focuses on **gradual tariff reduction and cooperation in key sectors like rare earths and semiconductors.**
- It aims to boost high-tech manufacturing, diversify exports, and reduce dependence on limited markets.

5. Key Outcomes of India's Evolving Trade Strategy

- **Better market access** for Indian exports.
- **Integration** into global supply chains.
- **Stronger and more competitive industries.**
- **Greater influence** in global trade affairs.
- Overall, this strengthens India's position as a leading player in global trade.

The evolving nature of trade agreements

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1. Background

- The U.S. has signed several **trade deals** under President Donald Trump with countries such as **Malaysia, Cambodia, Argentina, and Bangladesh.**
- These agreements were often **concluded under pressure** from high and intimidating tariffs.
- The U.S. has also announced a **trade agreement with India**, termed an **Agreement on Reciprocal Trade (ART)**, distinct from traditional **Free Trade Agreements (FTAs).**
- This marks an **evolution in trade agreements**, creating three broad models: **multilateral agreements, preferential trade agreements, and ARTs.**

2. Multilateral Trade Framework

- Global trade was initially governed by the **General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).**
- It later came under the **World Trade Organization (WTO)**, built on the principle of **Most-Favoured-Nation (MFN) non-discrimination.**

Most-Favoured-Nation (MFN):

- MFN means that any **trade advantage** given by a country to one WTO member must be **extended equally to all other WTO members.**

- The WTO, **established in 1995**, expanded trade rules to **services and intellectual property** and created a **dispute settlement system**.
- Its **one-country-one-vote structure** gives developing countries **bargaining space** despite power asymmetries.

3. Preferential Trade Agreements (FTAs and Customs Unions)

- WTO rules allow **limited exceptions to MFN** under Article XXIV of GATT, **permitting FTAs** and Customs Unions under strict conditions.
- FTAs must cover most trade between members, and **Customs Unions** must also follow a **common external trade policy**.
- Since the **1990s**, FTAs have grown rapidly and often include **rules beyond the WTO**, such as on **labour, environment, and investment**.
- Although they may **burden developing countries**, FTAs are notified to the WTO, allowing **transparency and scrutiny**.

4. Agreements on Reciprocal Trade (ARTs): Key Concerns

- U.S. **Agreements on Reciprocal Trade (ARTs)** are **not signed under GATT Article XXIV** and have **no formal link with the WTO**, raising legal concerns.

GATT Article XXIV:

- GATT Article XXIV allows countries to **form Free Trade Agreements or Customs Unions** as exceptions to the MFN rule.
- These arrangements must **cover substantially all trade** and **must not raise trade barriers** against non-member countries.
- They follow an **“America First” approach**, using **WTO-inconsistent U.S. tariffs** to pressure partners into reducing their tariffs.
- ARTs contain **one-sided clauses**, such as requiring partners to **support U.S. trade measures** taken for security reasons.
- They **limit data sovereignty** by banning customs duties on electronic transactions.

- Since ARTs are not notified to the WTO, they **escape multilateral scrutiny** and **weaken the global trade system**.

Does the Data Act dilute the Right to Information Act?

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1

Indian Polity and Governance-Constitution, Political System, Panchayati Raj, Public Policy, Rights Issues, etc.

Mains: General Studies - 2

Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential; citizens charters, transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures.

1. Background: Evolution of the DPDP Act

- In **Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) v. Union of India (2017)**, the Supreme Court declared the **Right to Privacy** a **Fundamental Right** under **Article 21**, and linked it to **Article 19**.
- The Court directed the government to establish a **data protection framework**.
- A committee chaired by **B. N. Srikrishna** submitted a **Draft Data Protection Bill (2018)**.
- Parliament enacted the **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023**.
- The DPDP Act **provides the legal framework for the protection of personal data** of individuals which they share with other persons, companies and government entities.

2. The Controversy: Amendment to the RTI Act

- The **Right to Information Act, 2005** ensures citizens' **right to access information** from public authorities.
- Earlier, **Section 8(1)(j)**:
 - ➔ Exempted disclosure of **personal information**.
 - ➔ Allowed disclosure if **larger public interest** justified it.
- **Section 44(3) of the DPDP Act** amended this provision.
- It provides a **blanket exemption** for all **personal information**, removing the **public interest override**.
- The amendment's intent was not clearly explained in the Statement of Objects and Reasons.

3. Constitutional Challenge

- Petitions argue the amendment is **ultra vires the Constitution**.
- The matter has been referred to a **Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court** due to its **constitutional sensitivity**.
- The issue involves balancing:
 - ➔ **Right to Privacy (Article 21)**
 - ➔ **Right to Information (Articles 19 & 21)**

4. Way Forward

- The Supreme Court has recognized **Right to Information** as integral to **democracy, transparency, and accountability**.
- Earlier framework enabled disclosure of:
 - ➔ **Assets and liabilities of public servants**
 - ➔ Information related to **corruption investigations**
- The amendment may allow denial of:
 - ➔ **Procurement records**
 - ➔ **Audit reports**
 - ➔ **Public expenditure details**
- The Court may define the scope of **“personal information.”**
- The suggested solution:
 - ➔ Restore the earlier **proportionality-based balance**
 - ➔ **Keep the public interest requirement to balance privacy and transparency.**

KEYWORDS

Lenacapavir

- Lenacapavir is the **first HIV drug that targets the viral capsid**, the protein shell protecting HIV's genetic material.
- It was **approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)** in June 2025.
- Since HIV mutates rapidly, **single-drug therapies fail**; lenacapavir is used in **combination therapy** to block the virus at multiple stages.
- The capsid is an **essential but fragile structure**, and mutations here severely weaken the virus.
- Due to **poor solubility**, lenacapavir is given as **one injection every six months**.
- Prevention trials showed **near-100% protection against HIV infection**, giving it a **vaccine-like effect**.
- Resistance develops mainly when used alone, and resistant HIV becomes much weaker.
- When **used in combination** therapy, lenacapavir ensures strong and **long-lasting viral suppression**.
- It confirms the **HIV capsid as an important drug target** and opens scope for new antivirals.

Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)

- The **Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action** is a 2015 agreement between Iran and the **P5+1 (U.S., U.K., France, Russia, China, and Germany)**.
- It aimed to **restrict Iran's nuclear programme** in return for relief from nuclear-related international sanctions.
- The deal was endorsed by **UN Security Council Resolution 2231 (2015)** and verified by the **International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)**.
- Key provisions included **capping uranium enrichment at 3.67%**, reducing centrifuges and uranium stockpiles, and strict IAEA monitoring.
- In **2018**, the **United States withdrew from the JCPOA** under President Trump and reimposed sanctions.

- From **2019, Iran began scaling back compliance**, increasing enrichment and limiting inspections.
- The agreement **remains effectively defunct**, but continues to shape U.S.–Iran negotiations and regional security dynamics.

Iron Beam

- Iron Beam, also **called Magen or Light Shield**, is a **laser-based air defence system developed by Israel**.
- It is a 100 kW High Energy Laser Weapon System built by Rafael Advanced Defense Systems and was first unveiled in 2014.
- The **system uses directed energy beams to destroy** rockets, drones, and other fast-moving projectiles within a range of about 7 km.
- Unlike conventional systems, it **does not rely on physical ammunition**, reducing costs and ensuring continuous operation as long as power is available.
- It is **designed to complement Israel's Iron Dome** and function as part of a multi-layered air defence network.

Mission Sudarshan Chakra

- Mission Sudarshan Chakra is a **national defence initiative announced on India's 79th Independence Day (15 August 2025) to build an indigenous, multi-layered air and missile defence shield**.
- The mission **aims to strengthen India's deterrence and protection against aerial threats** across land, sea, and air.
- It is **designed to integrate advanced technologies, including AI-enabled surveillance, early warning systems, and long-range interceptors**, to create a comprehensive defence network.
- **Mission Sudarshan Chakra is planned to be completed by 2035**, with phased deployment of components including long-range surface-to-air missiles.

SIM binding

- SIM binding is a **form of device binding that securely links a user's mobile device to their SIM card to enhance security**.
- This approach ensures that authentication is tied not just to the device but specifically to the SIM card's identity, reducing the risk of unauthorized access.
- Recently, the **Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has directed major messaging apps** like WhatsApp, Telegram, Snapchat and Signal **to implement SIM binding**.
- Enforcing SIM binding will help prevent misuse of inactive SIM-linked accounts and curb online fraud.

Mausamgram

- The **India Meteorological Department (IMD)** has launched an innovative web portal called **"Mausamgram."**
- In this name, **"Mausam"** means **weather** and **"Gram"** means **village**, reflecting its focus on delivering **village-level weather forecasts**.
- The platform enables users to access **highly localized and accurate weather information** for any selected location, including **villages and oceanic areas**—simply by clicking on the map.
- It provides forecasts on an **hourly, 3-hourly, and 6-hourly basis** for up to **10 days** ahead.
- The portal covers key weather parameters such as **rainfall, temperature, humidity, wind speed, and cloud cover**, making it a powerful tool for **citizens, farmers, and local planners**.