

# MANTHAN

**MAY 2025 : WEEK-2**

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# 1. New York Times wins 4 Pulitzers, New Yorker 3; Washington Post wins for coverage of Trump shooting

- The New York Times won four Pulitzer Prizes and the New Yorker three on Monday for journalism in 2024 that touched on topics like the fentanyl crisis, the U.S. military and last summer's assassination attempt on President Donald Trump.
- The Pulitzers' prestigious public service medal went to ProPublica for the second straight year.
- Kavitha Surana, Lizzie Presser, Cassandra Jaramillo and Stacy Kranitz were honored for reporting on pregnant women who died after doctors delayed urgent care in states with strict abortion laws.
- The Washington Post won for "urgent and illuminating" breaking news coverage of the Trump assassination attempt.
- The Pulitzers honored Ann Telnaes, who quit the Post in January after the news outlet refused to run her editorial cartoon lampooning tech chiefs — including Post owner Jeff Bezos — cozying up to Trump.
- The Pulitzers honored the best in journalism from 2024 in 15 categories, along with eight arts categories including books, music and theater. The public service winner receives a gold medal. All other winners receive \$15,000.
- The New York Times showed its breadth with awards honoring reporting from Afghanistan, Sudan, Baltimore and Butler, Pennsylvania.
- Doug Mills won in breaking news photography for his pictures of the Trump assassination attempt, including one that captured a bullet in the air near the GOP candidate.
- The Times' Azam Ahmed and Christina Goldbaum and contributing writer Matthieu Aikins won an explanatory reporting prize for examining U.S. policy failures in Afghanistan.
- Declan Walsh and the Times' staff won for an investigation into the Sudan conflict.
- The Wall Street Journal won a Pulitzer for its reporting on Elon Musk, "including his turn to conservative politics, his use of legal and illegal drugs and his private conversations with Russian President Vladimir Putin."

## Pulitzer Prize details

The Pulitzer Prize is one of the most prestigious awards in journalism and the arts in the United States.

## Overview of the Pulitzer Prize

- **Established:** 1917
- **Founder:** Joseph Pulitzer, a Hungarian-American journalist and newspaper publisher
- **Administered by:** Columbia University, New York City
- **Purpose:** To honor excellence in journalism, literature, drama, and music composition in the U.S.

## Categories

As of recent years, there are 23 Pulitzer Prize categories, grouped into two main sections:

### I. Journalism (15 categories)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Public Service (Gold Medal)</li><li>• Breaking News Reporting</li><li>• Investigative Reporting</li><li>• Explanatory Reporting</li><li>• Local Reporting</li><li>• National Reporting</li><li>• International Reporting</li><li>• Feature Writing</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Commentary</li><li>• Criticism</li><li>• Editorial Writing</li><li>• Editorial Cartooning / Illustrated Reporting and Commentary</li><li>• Breaking News Photography</li><li>• Feature Photography</li><li>• Audio Reporting (added in 2020)</li></ul> |
|--|--|

### II. Books, Drama & Music (8 categories)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fiction</li><li>• Drama</li><li>• History</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Biography or Autobiography</li><li>• Poetry</li></ul> |
|---|---|

### General Nonfiction

- Memoir or Autobiography (separated category in recent years)
- Music

### Selection Process

- **Submission:** Entries are submitted by media organizations, authors, publishers, or composers. Only U.S.-based works are eligible.
- **Juries:** Each category has a jury of experts (5-7 members) who review the submissions and recommend up to 3 finalists to the Pulitzer Prize Board.

### Pulitzer Prize Board:

- Composed of 18 members, including leading journalists, editors, and academics.

Reviews jury recommendations and makes the final decisions, which can include:

- Accepting the jury's choice
- Choosing another finalist
- Declining to give an award in a category
- **Announcement:** Winners are usually announced in April each year.

### Awards and Recognition

- **Public Service Prize:** The winning organization receives a gold medal.
- **Other categories:** Winners receive a certificate and a cash award (as of 2023, the amount is \$15,000 per winner).
- In some cases, no award is given if the board feels no entry meets the standard.

### Notable Points

- Only U.S. citizens are eligible for the book, drama, and music prizes.
- The Pulitzer has adapted over time to include digital media, visual journalism, and audio reporting (e.g., podcasts).
- It is considered one of the highest honors for U.S. journalists and authors.

## Indian Americans to win the Pulitzer Prize

- Several Indian Americans have won the Pulitzer Prize in various categories, including journalism, literature, and music.
- Notable winners include Gobind Behari Lal, Jhumpa Lahiri, Geeta Anand, and Siddhartha Mukherjee.
- Megha Rajagopalan and Neil Bedi also won Pulitzers in 2021 for their investigative reporting.
- Gobind Behari Lal, the first Indian to win a Pulitzer Prize in 1937 for his science reporting, paved the way for future generations in journalism.

### QUESTIONS

1. Consider the following statements:

1. Gobind Behari Lal, the first Indian to win a Pulitzer Prize in 1937 for his science reporting, paved the way for future generations in journalism.
2. Megha Rajagopalan and Neil Bedi also won Pulitzers in 2021 for their investigative reporting.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 Only
  - B. 2 Only
  - C. Both 1 and 2
  - D. Neither 1 nor 2
2. Which of the following categories does not fall under the Journalism section of the Pulitzer Prize?
- A. Audio Reporting
  - B. Memoir or Autobiography
  - C. Investigative Reporting
  - D. Feature Photography
3. What is unique about the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service compared to other journalism categories?
- A. It is the only award open to international journalists.
  - B. It is awarded to individual journalists only.
  - C. It carries the largest monetary prize.
  - D. It is the only category awarded a Gold Medal.
4. Which of the following eligibility criteria applies to Books, Drama & Music Pulitzer Prizes?
- A. The work must be originally published in English and the U.S.
  - B. The author must be a U.S. citizen.
  - C. The entry must be recommended by a state governor.
  - D. It must have won another literary award prior to submission.

## 2. New Zealand's prime minister proposes social media ban for under-16s

- New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon has proposed a groundbreaking law to ban children under the age of 16 from accessing social media platforms.
- The move is part of a broader effort to safeguard young people from the growing dangers of the digital world, including cyberbullying, exposure to violent or inappropriate content, online exploitation, and social media addiction.
- The proposed legislation would require social media companies to verify that users are at least 16 years old before allowing them to create accounts. Companies that fail to comply could face fines of up to NZ\$2 million (approximately US\$1.2 million).
- The proposal comes in response to growing concerns among teachers and parents, who have expressed their struggles in monitoring and controlling their children's social media use.
- Catherine Wedd, the National Party MP who authored the bill, pointed out that New Zealand currently lacks legally enforceable age-verification measures for social media platforms.
- The proposed legislation aims to address this gap and provide families with better tools to oversee and guide their children's online behavior.
- The initiative closely mirrors a recent legislative move in Australia, which in November passed some of the strictest social media regulations in the world. Australia's law prohibits users under 16 from accessing social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter).
- The proposed bill, introduced by the centre-right National Party—Luxon's party and the largest member of the current governing coalition—would require the backing of the two other coalition partners to pass.
- If passed, the law would place New Zealand among the global frontrunners in efforts to regulate social media and protect young people from the evolving threats of the digital age.

### Children's use of social media

- In New Zealand, there is growing concern about children's use of social media, with public opinion, research, and policy discussions highlighting the need for protective measures.

### Public Sentiment and Policy Discussions

- A 2024 Horizon Research survey revealed that 74% of New Zealand adults support setting an age limit for children's access to social media, with most favoring restrictions up to age 16.
- Concerns include cyberbullying (75%), exposure to inappropriate content (72%), and negative impacts on mental health (69%).
- Similarly, a 1News Verian poll found that 68% of respondents backed legislation to restrict social media access for those under 16, following Australia's implementation of such a law.

### Impact on Children's Wellbeing

- Research indicates that social media use among children is linked to various health concerns.
- A study found that about 25% of New Zealand children experience online harm by age 8, which correlates with increased depressive symptoms and lower self-worth.

- Additionally, children are spending approximately one-third of their after-school time on screens, often exceeding recommended guidelines, leading to issues like poor sleep, obesity, and exposure to harmful content.

## Legal and Regulatory Landscape

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- New Zealand's Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015 addresses online bullying and harassment, imposing penalties for harmful digital communications.
- However, experts argue that child privacy laws need strengthening, particularly concerning "sharenting"—the practice of parents sharing their children's images online without consent.
- Unlike countries like France, New Zealand lacks specific legislation to protect children's digital privacy and regulate the commercial use of their images.

## Support and Education Initiatives

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- Organizations like the Classification Office provide resources to help families navigate online safety, including tools for setting parental controls and understanding content ratings.
- Experts advocate for incorporating digital media literacy into education to empower children to critically engage with online content.
- However, media studies have been removed from New Zealand's NCEA Level 1 curriculum, raising concerns about the devaluation of this essential subject in the digital age.

## New Zealand

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### Geography

- Located in the southwestern Pacific Ocean.
- Composed of two main islands: the North Island and the South Island, plus many smaller islands.
- Known for dramatic landscapes: mountains, fjords, beaches, and volcanoes.

### People & Culture

- Population: Around 5 million.
- Indigenous people: Māori, who arrived from Polynesia over 700 years ago.
- Official languages: English, Māori, and New Zealand Sign Language.
- Known for its unique cultural fusion and the concept of "kaitiakitanga" (guardianship of nature).

### Government

- Parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy.
- Head of state: King Charles III (represented by a Governor-General).
- Prime Minister (as of latest update): Christopher Luxon (elected in 2023).

### Economy

- Strong sectors: Agriculture (dairy, meat), tourism, renewable energy, and film production.
- Known for exporting dairy, wine, and kiwifruit.
- Emphasis on green economy and sustainability.

### 1. Geographical Isolation and Stunning Landscapes

- Located in the southwestern Pacific Ocean, it consists of two main islands and numerous smaller ones.



- Famous for its diverse and dramatic scenery — fjords, mountains, volcanoes, beaches, rainforests, and plains — all within short distances.
- Home to geological wonders like the Southern Alps, geothermal areas in Rotorua, and glowworm caves in Waitomo.

## 2. Unique Biodiversity

- Due to its long isolation, New Zealand has many species found nowhere else on Earth.
- Notable endemic species include the kiwi bird (national symbol), tuatara (a reptile from the time of dinosaurs), and kauri trees.
- No native land mammals (except for bats) — a rarity among major landmasses.

## 3. Rich Māori Culture

- The indigenous Māori culture is deeply integrated into national identity.
- Te Reo Māori is an official language alongside English and New Zealand Sign Language.
- Cultural values like whānau (extended family), manaakitanga (hospitality), and kaitiakitanga (guardianship of nature) influence national ethos.

## 4. Political and Social Progressiveness

- First country to grant women the right to vote (1893).
- Often praised for high levels of transparency, low corruption, and progressive social policies.
- A strong record in environmental preservation and nuclear disarmament (declared nuclear-free zone in 1987).

## 5. Adventure Capital of the World

- Birthplace of commercial bungee jumping.
- Offers top-tier experiences for adventure sports like skydiving, rafting, hiking (tramping), and skiing.

## QUESTIONS

- Which of the following legal mechanisms best aligns with New Zealand's proposed approach to restrict under-16s' access to social media?
  - Age-verification by social media companies, enforceable under statutory provisions with financial penalties
  - Self-declaration by users of their age, with parental consent required for minors
  - Optional parental control tools mandated by law, without legal penalties for companies
  - Government-controlled social media platforms exclusively for child users
- New Zealand is an island country located on \_\_\_\_\_.
  - East of Australia
  - South of Australia
  - West of Australia
  - North of islands of New Caledonia, Fiji, and Tonga



## 3.2 new genome-edited rice varieties

- Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan released two genome-edited varieties of rice, the first achievement of its kind in the country.
- These two varieties, which are climate-resilient, conserve water, and boost yields, have been developed by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) using cutting-edge genome editing technology.

### Which are these two genome-edited varieties of rice?

- ICAR has introduced two innovative, genome-edited rice varieties — DRR Dhan 100 (Kamala) and Pusa DST Rice 1 — offering enhanced stress tolerance, yield, and climate adaptability, while maintaining the desirable traits of their parent varieties.
- **DRR Dhan 100 (Kamala)**, developed by the ICAR-Indian Institute of Rice Research (ICAR-IIRR), Hyderabad, is an improved version of the popular Samba Mahsuri (BPT 5204).
- Using the Site Directed Nuclease 1 (SDN1) genome editing technique, scientists edited the CKX2 (Gn1a) gene to boost grain number per panicle.
- This resulted in a variety with significantly higher yields, improved drought tolerance, high nitrogen-use efficiency, and early maturity (130 days, about 20 days earlier than Samba Mahsuri).
- Multi-location trials under the All India Coordinated Research Project on Rice (AICRPR) during 2023–2024 showed a 19% yield increase, averaging 5.37 tonnes/ha with potential yields reaching up to 9 tonnes/ha.
- It retains Samba Mahsuri's grain and cooking quality and is recommended across major rice-growing states in India.
- **Pusa DST Rice 1**, developed by ICAR-Indian Agricultural Research Institute (ICAR-IARI), New Delhi, is based on the MTU1010 variety and targets the DST gene for drought and salt tolerance using the SDN1 approach.
- This variety has no foreign DNA, making it comparable to conventionally bred crops.
- Tested under the AICRPR, it demonstrated notable yield improvements in challenging environments: 9.66% higher yield in inland salinity, 14.66% in alkaline soils, and 30.4% in coastal salinity compared to MTU1010.
- It has been recommended for cultivation in the same major rice-producing regions as Kamala.

### But what specific practical benefits will derive from cultivating these two new varieties?

- **BIGGER YIELDS, LESS EMISSIONS:** According to ICAR, cultivation of DRR Dhan 100 (Kamala) and Pusa DST Rice 1 varieties in about 5 million hectares of the recommended area will produce 4.5 million tonnes of additional paddy, and a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 20% (32,000 tonnes).
- **LESS WATER CONSUMPTION:** Due to shorter duration of Kamala, three irrigations will be saved resulting in saving of a total of 7,500 million cubic metres of irrigation water, which can be used for other crops.

### So are these varieties safe, and have they received all clearances required for cultivation?

- The ICAR scientists have used the revolutionary CRISPR-Cas9 genome-editing technology, which won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 2020, to develop these two varieties.

- This technology enables scientists to make targeted changes in the native genes of living organisms, creating new and desirable traits without introducing foreign DNA.
- “Two key approaches — Site Directed Nuclease 1 (SDN1) and Site Directed Nuclease 2 (SDN2) — produce genetically edited organisms that are considered indistinguishable from naturally occurring or conventionally bred mutants.
- As such, they are exempt from the stringent biosafety regulations under Rules 7-11 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986,” according to ICAR.
- The Council said that the Institutional Biosafety Committees (IBC) of respective ICAR institutes had approved the lines, and the Review Committee on Genetic Manipulation (RCGM) had granted clearance on May 31, 2023 for their classification under India’s relaxed regulatory framework for SDN1 and SDN2 genome edits.
- Therefore, these two varieties have received “appropriate biosafety clearance” under India’s simplified regulations for genome-edited crops.

### Why is this breakthrough in paddy so significant?

- Paddy is India’s principal crop of the kharif season, and is grown on one-third of the entire area under all foodgrain crops. It contributes about 40% to the country’s foodgrain basket, and is critical to the nation’s food security.
- West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh, Bihar and Assam are the main paddy growing states.
- As per the Agriculture Ministry, paddy (kharif and rabi together) accounted for 45 million hectares of area, which was the highest in the world in 2020.
- However, in terms of production, India (186.5 million tonnes) ranked second after China (211 million tonnes).
- The reason is the lower yield in India. India’s paddy yield (4,138 kg/ha) was lower than the world’s average of 4,717 kg/ha, China’s (7,043 kg/ha), Indonesia’s (5,128 kg/ha) and Bangladesh’s (4,809 kg/ha).

### QUESTIONS

- Which of the following gene-editing techniques was used to develop both DRR Dhan 100 (Kamala) and Pusa DST Rice 1?
  - CRISPR-Cas9 with SDN-3 pathway
  - TALEN-based transgenesis
  - Site-Directed Nuclease 1 (SDN1) approach
  - RNA interference (RNAi) silencing
- What combination of traits makes DRR Dhan 100 (Kamala) particularly suited to modern agricultural needs?
  - Long duration, moderate yield, and pest resistance
  - High yield, drought tolerance, early maturity, and nitrogen-use efficiency
  - Salinity tolerance, red pericarp grain, and aromatic qualities
  - Short duration, poor grain quality, and herbicide tolerance

9. What is the combined environmental impact of cultivating DRR Dhan 100 (Kamala) and Pusa DST Rice 1 on 5 million hectares, as per ICAR's estimates?
- A. Increase in water requirement but reduction in pest load
  - B. 4.5 million tonnes of additional paddy and 7,500 MCM water saved
  - C. 32,000 tonnes of methane emissions and loss in grain quality
  - D. Reduction in emissions by 10% and yield loss under stress

## 4. Russia honours Biju Patnaik

- Former Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik and Russian Ambassador Denis Alipov inaugurated a memorial plaque dedicated to the late Biju Patnaik at the Russian Embassy in New Delhi.
- The plaque is meant to honour Biju Patnaik's role in the Battle of Stalingrad, one of the most decisive Allied victories over Nazi Germany in World War II.
- Patnaik, who at the time was flying for the Royal Indian Air Force, had made multiple sorties dropping off supplies to the besieged Red Army in Stalingrad.

### The Battle of Stalingrad

- On June 22, 1941, the Wehrmacht, at the time in control of almost all of Western Europe, launched a massive invasion of the Soviet Union — Operation Barbarossa.
- By the spring of 1942, much of what is now Belaruss and Ukraine were under Nazi control.
- After the Red Army managed to rebuff German advances toward Moscow, the Wehrmacht looked southwards.
- And the city of Stalingrad was chosen as a major objective.
- Renamed Volgograd in 1961, Stalingrad was a major industrial centre on the Volga, and home to the Red Army's artillery production centre.
- The River Volga itself made up one of the USSR's most important shipping routes, connecting western Russia to the Caspian Sea and the country's vast eastward expanse.
- More importantly, given that the city bore the name of Josef Stalin, the leader of the Soviet Union, it was also a target of great symbolic significance.
- The 6<sup>th</sup> Army of the Wehrmacht, under Gen Friedrich Paulus began the assault on Stalingrad on August 23, 1942.
- The fighting got very bloody, very quickly. The Red Army, suffering massive losses, slowed down the German advance into the city. But it could not stop it.
- By the fall of 1942, constant artillery shelling and bombing by the Luftwaffe had turned Stalingrad into a pile of ruins.
- And the Germans controlled almost 90% of the city. But the Russians kept fighting, even as Stalin instructed his forces to take "not one step back".
- The tide of the battle turned in November, when the Soviets launched a counterattack called Operation Uranus.

- Gathering all available troops in the region, the Red Army effectively formed a defensive cordon around the city, trapping the nearly 300,000 Axis troops. And then the Russian winter set in.
- With supply lines cut off and unprepared for a protracted winter war, the Germans were slowly pounded into submission by Red Army forces surrounding them.
- And even though they “controlled” most of the city, Russian resistance within Stalingrad — now a stuff of legend — continued to inflict heavy losses.
- Gen Paulus surrendered on January 30, 1943. By February, the Red Army had retaken Stalingrad, capturing nearly 100,000 German troops in the process.
- The defeat in Stalingrad all but turned the tide for the Allies in World War II. The Wehrmacht lost all of its momentum, and never set a foot further in the east.
- The Red Army, on the other hand, was galvanised. Over the two-and-a-half years, it fought its way towards Germany, ultimately arriving in Berlin on May 2, 1945.
- The Germans formally surrendered on May 9, which is till date observed as Victory Day in Russia.

### **The bravery of Biju**

- Patnaik joined the Royal Indian Air Force in 1936, mostly flying supply and transport planes such as the Douglas C-47 Skytrain, more commonly known as ‘Dakota’.
- As World War II heated up and Imperial Japan advanced through Southeast Asia, Biju flew numerous sorties rescuing British officials and their families.
- He was integral in the evacuation of British officials from Rangoon. Patnaik also flew supply missions to assist China’s Chiang Kai-Shek.
- While the specifics of the operation in which Biju Patnaik participated are not available, he was likely one of the many Allied pilots to brave the Luftwaffe and German anti-aircraft batteries to supply the Red Army inside Stalingrad.
- After all, while the troops encircling the city were well-supplied, those inside were in the same boat as their German counterparts, cut-off from the rest of the world.
- And like their German counterparts, the Russian civilians and troops inside the city were completely dependent on aerial supplies to continue their war efforts.

### **Biju Patnaik and Indonesia**

- Biju Patnaik was conferred Indonesia’s ‘Bintang Jasa Utama’ award for the heroic role he had played when Dutch colonialists had tried to gain control over the country in 1947.
- An ace pilot who had started training at the Delhi Flying Club in 1930, had joined the Royal Indian Air Force in 1936.
- Patnaik played a significant role in the Indian freedom struggle.
- He had air-dropped leaflets on the Quit India Movement for Indian soldiers fighting against Myanmar as part of the British Indian armed forces. He also helped ferry freedom fighters from one place to another during the Independence struggle.
- The former Odisha CM had also founded the Kalinga Airlines that operated the Dakota planes in the early years of Independence. These planes played a significant role in Indonesia.
- In 1953, Kalinga Airlines merged with the Indian Airlines
- Indonesia was freed from Dutch rule in 1945, after which Indonesia’s first President Sukarno along with its Prime Minister Sutan Sjahrir formed an independent government in the country.

- However, the year after, in 1946, the Dutch started invading Indonesia again and launched a full-fledged attack in July 1947.
- The Dutch army had put Sjahrir under house arrest in Jakarta.
- Patnaik was asked by Nehru to fly Sjahrir and then vice-president Mohammad Hatta out of Java.
- In 1950, the Indonesian government rewarded Patnaik with a piece of forest land and a palatial building but he did not accept the offer.
- He was also given an honorary citizenship of Indonesia and awarded the 'Bhoomi Putra', a recognition rarely granted to a foreigner.

## QUESTIONS

- Which of the following best explains why the city of Stalingrad was a strategic and symbolic target during World War II?
  - It was the headquarters of the Soviet Navy
  - It controlled the only land route to Siberia
  - It was a major industrial hub and bore Stalin's name
  - It served as Germany's entry point into Central Asia
- Which of the following statements about Biju Patnaik's involvement in the Battle of Stalingrad is most accurate?
  - He led a Soviet air regiment in the city
  - He flew supply missions inside Stalingrad as part of the Royal Indian Air Force
  - He coordinated ground assaults alongside Red Army infantry
  - He trained Soviet pilots during Operation Barbarossa
- Which event marked the turning point in the Battle of Stalingrad leading to the encirclement of Axis troops?
  - Operation Barbarossa
  - Fall of Moscow
  - Operation Uranus
  - Battle of Kursk
- Biju Patnaik was awarded Indonesia's Bintang Jasa Utama primarily for:
  - His diplomatic efforts as India's ambassador to Indonesia
  - His resistance to British imperial rule
  - His role in fighting Japanese troops in Indonesia during WWII
  - His daring rescue missions during Indonesia's struggle against Dutch colonial forces
- Why did Russia recently unveil a memorial plaque for Biju Patnaik at its Embassy in New Delhi?
  - For his diplomatic efforts during Indo-Russian defense deals
  - For his support in launching Sputnik I during the Cold War
  - For his role in supplying the Red Army during the Battle of Stalingrad
  - For training Soviet air force pilots during World War II



## 5. UK-India Free Trade Agreement (FTA) signed: the key goods included

- India and the United Kingdom inked a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) bringing to an end around three years of negotiations.
- The timing of the deal, signed by the world's fifth and sixth largest economies, respectively, is significant.
- It comes as global trade is reeling under the tariffs unleashed by US President Donald Trump in early April.

### What's in the UK-India trade deal?

#### Trade Boost:

- The agreement is expected to boost bilateral trade by £25.5 billion a year, from 2040 onwards, Britain said.
- Trade between the two nations totalled £42.6 billion in 2024.
- Total UK exports to India amounted to £17.1 billion, while total UK imports from India amounted to £25.5 billion in 2024.
- India was Britain's 11<sup>th</sup>-largest trading partner last year. Britain said the deal was the "biggest and most economically significant" bilateral trade agreement it had signed since leaving the European Union in 2020 (what was dubbed "Brexit").

#### Goods & Services:

- Whisky and gin tariffs will be halved from 150% to 75%, before falling to 40% by the tenth year of the deal, benefiting Britain's Scotch whisky industry and making the beverage cheaper in the world's largest whisky market.
- India will also cut automotive tariffs to 10% under a quota from over 100% currently.
- Other British goods categories which will face lower tariffs include cosmetics, aerospace, lamb, medical devices, salmon, electrical machinery, soft drinks, chocolate and biscuits.

### What led to the deal, and what issues emerged during negotiations?

- The need for a trade agreement between India and the United Kingdom emerged from several strategic and economic factors.
- The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the risks of over-reliance on China, prompting Western nations to adopt a 'China-plus one' strategy to diversify supply chains.
- For the UK, the loss of access to the European Single Market post-Brexit significantly altered its trade landscape.
- The vast and growing Indian market presented a valuable alternative, offering economic opportunities to offset Brexit-related challenges.
- The UK has also been grappling with a cost-of-living crisis, and for Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who came to power in July, finalizing the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with India would represent a key accomplishment early in his leadership.

- India, for its part, has been seeking new trade partners since its decision in 2019 to opt out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which is dominated by China.
- However, a report by the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) suggests that the India-UK FTA may yield only modest gains for India, as most of its exports to the UK already face minimal or zero tariffs.
- Services, particularly in IT and healthcare, remain a key focus for India in this agreement.
- One contentious issue was work permits for Indian professionals. Immigration had been a sensitive topic in the UK, especially around the Brexit campaign, and while India pushed for expanded quotas for service sector workers, the final agreement reportedly allows only around 100 new visas annually.
- Another friction point was the UK's proposed carbon tax on metal imports based on emission levels, which could have negatively impacted Indian exporters.
- Overall, while the FTA is symbolically and strategically significant, its tangible trade benefits—especially for India—may be limited.

### **And finally, what is a Free Trade Agreement or FTA?**

- Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) are arrangements between countries to reduce or eliminate tariffs and trade barriers, promoting easier trade in goods and services. According to India's Ministry of Commerce, FTAs enhance trade by easing customs and regulatory constraints.
- The UK's Department of International Trade highlights that FTAs lower costs for businesses and offer consumers a wider, more affordable product range.
- The timing of the India-UK FTA is crucial, given global uncertainty and the US's lingering 10% tariff rate.
- Countries are now focusing on diversifying trade partnerships to reduce reliance on the US and mitigate future trade policy shifts.

### **Some Major FTA**

#### **India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement (ISLFTA)**

- Signed: 1998, Operational since 2000
- Covers: Trade in goods and services.

#### **India-Thailand Early Harvest Scheme**

- Operational under a framework agreement for an eventual FTA.
- Includes tariff elimination on select goods.

#### **India-Singapore Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA)**

- Signed: 2005
- Covers: Trade in goods, services, investment, and economic cooperation.

#### **India-Malaysia Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement**

- Signed: 2011
- Trade in goods and services, investment.

#### **India-South Korea Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)**

- Signed: 2009
- Extensive coverage on trade in goods and services.

#### **India-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement**

- Signed: 2011



- Tariff reduction/elimination on more than 90% of trade.

### **India–Mauritius Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA)**

- Signed: 2021
- India’s first CECPA with an African nation.

### **India–UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)**

- Signed: 2022
- Aims to boost bilateral trade to \$100 billion in 5 years.

### **India–Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (Ind-Aus ECTA)**

- Signed: 2022
- Tariff reduction and liberalization in goods and services.

### **India–European Free Trade Association (EFTA) Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA)**

- Signed: March 2024
- Includes Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein; focuses on trade, investment, and sustainable development.

### **Regional Agreements**

- South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) – Among SAARC countries.
- ASEAN–India Free Trade Area (AIFTA) – With the 10 ASEAN nations.

## **QUESTIONS**

- Which of the following statements best explains why the India–UK FTA is considered the UK’s most significant trade agreement since Brexit?
  - It reduces all tariffs on agricultural products from India.
  - It replaces all existing EU trade deals applicable to the UK.
  - It is the largest bilateral deal in terms of economic potential post-Brexit.
  - It makes India the UK’s largest trading partner globally.
- The India–European Free Trade Association (EFTA) Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA), signed in 2024, does NOT include which of the following countries?
  - Switzerland
  - Liechtenstein
  - Norway
  - Finland
- Which of the following correctly identifies India’s first Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) with an African nation?
  - India–Mauritius CECPA
  - India–South Africa CECPA
  - India–Ethiopia CECA
  - India–Nigeria CECA

## 6. Operation Sindoor

- Operation Sindoor is a significant military operation launched by India on May 7, 2025, targeting alleged terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-administered Kashmir.
- This action was in retaliation for a terrorist attack on April 22 in Pahalgam, Indian-administered Kashmir, which resulted in the deaths of 26 people, including 25 Indian tourists and one Nepalese national.

### What Happened During Operation Sindoor?

- **Targets and Execution:** India conducted precision strikes on nine locations associated with terrorist organizations such as Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT).
- The operation utilized Rafale jets equipped with SCALP missiles and AASM Hammer bombs, as well as indigenous SkyStriker loitering munitions. The strikes lasted approximately 23 minutes.

### Locations Struck:

- The targeted sites included areas in Pakistan's Punjab province and Pakistan-administered Kashmir, notably Bahawalpur, Muridke, Muzaffarabad, and Kotli.

### Casualties:

- India reported the elimination of at least 100 terrorists during the operation. Pakistan, however, claimed that the strikes resulted in 31 civilian deaths and 57 injuries, including children.

### Pakistan's Response

#### Military Retaliation:

- Pakistan condemned the strikes as an act of war and reported shooting down five Indian fighter jets. They also engaged in artillery exchanges along the Line of Control (LoC), leading to additional casualties on both sides.

#### Drone Incursions:

- On May 8, Pakistan claimed to have shot down 12 Indian drones that allegedly targeted locations in cities like Lahore and Karachi.

### International Reactions

#### Global Concern:

- The escalation raised alarms internationally, with countries like the United States, United Kingdom, China, and Turkey urging both nations to exercise restraint and seek diplomatic solutions to avoid further conflict.

#### Travel Advisories:

- In light of the heightened tensions, several countries issued travel warnings for India and Pakistan, advising their citizens to avoid non-essential travel to the region.

### Tensions between India and Pakistan

- The tensions between India and Pakistan stem from a complex history shaped by partition, territorial disputes, political differences, and security concerns. Here are the main reasons:

## 1. Kashmir Conflict

- **Core Issue:** The root cause of tension is the dispute over the region of Jammu and Kashmir. After the 1947 partition, both countries claimed the territory. Multiple wars (1947, 1965, 1999) and countless skirmishes have occurred over it.
- **Current Status:** India controls Jammu and Kashmir; Pakistan controls parts known as Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan.

## 2. Cross-border Terrorism

- **Major Incidents:** Attacks such as the 2001 Indian Parliament attack, 2008 Mumbai attacks, 2016 Uri attack, and 2019 Pulwama attack have been attributed to Pakistan-based terrorist groups like Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba.
- **India's Stand:** India accuses Pakistan of supporting and harboring terrorists.
- **Pakistan's Stand:** Pakistan denies involvement and claims to be a victim of terrorism itself.

## 3. Water Disputes

- The Indus Waters Treaty (1960), brokered by the World Bank, governs water sharing of the Indus River system.
- While generally respected, both sides have accused each other of violating the treaty during times of heightened tensions.

## 4. Military Rivalry and Nuclear Arms

- Both nations are nuclear powers, leading to a fragile balance of power.
- Regular military build-ups, border skirmishes, and provocative rhetoric keep tensions high.

## 5. Political and Diplomatic Hostility

- Periodic breakdowns in dialogue, mutual suspicions, and nationalistic politics hinder long-term peace.
- Efforts like the Agra Summit (2001), Composite Dialogue Process, and Track-II diplomacy have shown potential but often stall due to renewed conflict.
- The root cause of the Jammu and Kashmir issue lies in the complex partition of British India in 1947, particularly the Instrument of Accession signed by the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir and the territorial dispute that followed between India and Pakistan.

## Partition of British India (1947)

- At independence, princely states were given the option to join either India or Pakistan.
- Maharaja Hari Singh, the Hindu ruler of the Muslim-majority state of Jammu and Kashmir, initially chose to remain independent.

## Tribal Invasion and Accession (1947)

- In October 1947, tribal militias from Pakistan, supported by the Pakistani military, invaded Kashmir.
- Facing invasion, the Maharaja requested military help from India.
- India agreed, on the condition that Kashmir would formally accede to India.
- The Instrument of Accession was signed on October 26, 1947.
- This led to India sending troops and the first India-Pakistan war began.

## UN Mediation and Ceasefire (1949)

- The war ended in a UN-brokered ceasefire, which left Pakistan in control of one-third of the region (now called Pakistan-occupied Kashmir), and India in control of the rest.
- The UN recommended a plebiscite (public vote) after peace was restored — but this was never held due to differing interpretations and preconditions.

## Legal and Constitutional Developments

- Jammu & Kashmir was given special autonomy under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution.
- In 2019, the Indian government revoked Article 370, integrating the region more fully into India — a move strongly opposed by Pakistan.

### QUESTIONS

18. What was the reason for India launching Operation Sindoor?
  - A. A cross-border attack on Indian airbases
  - B. The Pahalgam terrorist attack in Jammu and Kashmir
  - C. A retaliatory strike after Pakistan launched missile attacks
  - D. To counter a naval blockade by Pakistan
19. What was the main objective of Operation SINDOOR?
  - A. To improve air defence capabilities
  - B. To dismantle terror infrastructure across the Line of Control and deeper inside Pakistan
  - C. To launch a retaliatory missile strike against Pakistan
  - D. To conduct intelligence gathering on Pakistan's military facilities
20. What is the name of the mission launched by Pakistan in retaliation to India's Operation SINDOOR?
  - A. Operation Bunyan-un-Marsoos
  - B. Operation Zarb-e-Azb
  - C. Operation Al-Badr
  - D. Operation Khudai

## 7. Friedrich Merz elected German Chancellor on second attempt

- Friedrich Merz, the leader of Germany's conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU), was elected chancellor after a tense and unprecedented second-round vote in the Bundestag.
- His initial failure to secure an absolute majority in the 630-seat parliament — falling just six votes short — marked the first time since 1949 that a chancellor candidate had not been elected on the first attempt, exposing fractures within the newly formed coalition between the CDU, its Bavarian sister party the Christian Social Union (CSU), and the centre-left Social Democrats (SPD).
- The failed first vote triggered confusion and speculation about dissent within the coalition ranks.

- While the CDU/CSU and SPD together control 328 seats, 18 MPs abstained, opposed Merz, or were absent.
- Bundestag President Julia Klöckner confirmed that nine members did not attend, three abstained, and one ballot was invalid.
- This mix of absences and possible strategic dissent hinted at discontent, possibly related to disappointment over cabinet appointments.
- Gunther Krichbaum, the new Europe Minister, suggested that some MPs may have been frustrated over not being offered key positions, while some younger SPD members had publicly voiced their reservations about backing Merz.
- Amid growing pressure and behind-the-scenes negotiations, Bundestag leaders called a second vote the same day, during which Merz narrowly secured the chancellorship with 325 votes — just nine more than the required majority.
- CDU General Secretary Carsten Linnemann defended the urgency of the second vote, citing the need for stability in Europe.
- CDU parliamentary leader Jens Spahn emphasized the international significance of the outcome, noting the global attention on Germany's leadership.
- Following his swearing-in by President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Merz unveiled a 17-member cabinet largely composed of newcomers from the private sector.
- Only Defence Minister Boris Pistorius retained his post from the previous administration.
- The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), which finished second in the February election with 20.8% of the vote, capitalized on the drama.

## **Selection process for the Chancellor of Germany (Bundeskanzler)**

- The selection process for the Chancellor of Germany (Bundeskanzler) is defined in the Basic Law (Grundgesetz) of the Federal Republic of Germany.

### **1. Federal Election (Bundestag Election)**

- The process begins with a general federal election, held every four years, in which members of the Bundestag (German federal parliament) are elected.
- Political parties campaign and seek to form a majority (or a coalition) in the Bundestag.

### **2. Proposal by the Federal President**

- After the election, the Federal President (Bundespräsident) proposes a candidate for Chancellor.
- This candidate is usually the leader of the largest party or coalition in the Bundestag with a likely majority.

### **3. Bundestag Vote (Election by the Parliament)**

- The Bundestag votes on the President's proposal.
- The proposed candidate must receive a majority of all Bundestag members (an absolute majority, also called the "Chancellor majority" or Kanzlermehrheit).
- If elected, the President formally appoints the Chancellor.

### **4. If the Candidate Is Not Elected**

- If the President's candidate fails to receive an absolute majority:

- The Bundestag has 14 days to elect a Chancellor on its own by absolute majority.
- If this fails as well, a final vote is held on the 15<sup>th</sup> day.
- If a candidate wins an absolute majority in the final vote, the President must appoint them.
- If a candidate wins only a plurality (most votes, but not a majority), the President has two choices:
  - Appoint the candidate, or
  - Dissolve the Bundestag and call new elections within 60 days.

## 5. Swearing-In

- Once elected and appointed, the Chancellor is sworn in by the President of the Bundestag.
- The Chancellor then forms a government and proposes federal ministers, who are appointed by the President.

## Germany

- Germany (officially the Federal Republic of Germany or Bundesrepublik Deutschland) is a central European country known for its rich history, powerful economy, engineering excellence, and cultural contributions.
  - **Capital:** Berlin
  - **Population:** ~84 million (2024 estimate)
  - **Area:** ~357,022 sq km
  - **Official Language:** German
  - **Currency:** Euro (€)

## Political Structure:

- Divided into 16 federal states (Länder) such as Bavaria, Saxony, and North Rhine-Westphalia.
- The Bundestag (lower house) and Bundesrat (upper house) form the legislative system.
- The Chancellor is the head of government; the President is the head of state (mostly ceremonial).

## Economy:

- Largest economy in Europe and fourth-largest in the world (by nominal GDP).
- **Highly developed industrial base:** automotive (Volkswagen, BMW, Mercedes-Benz), machinery, chemicals, and electronics.
- **Major exports:** cars, machinery, electronics, chemicals.
- **Key economic hubs:** Frankfurt (finance), Munich (tech), Stuttgart (automobiles), Hamburg (shipping).

## Education & Innovation

- Tuition-free public universities for local and international students.
- **World-renowned institutions:** LMU Munich, Heidelberg University, TU Munich.
- Heavy investment in research, especially engineering, AI, and green technology.

## Major Cities:

- Berlin – capital, known for history, culture, and arts.
- Munich – Bavarian capital, Oktoberfest, technology.



- Frankfurt – financial hub, home to the European Central Bank.
- Hamburg – major port and media center.
- Cologne – known for its cathedral and media industry.

### Culture & Society:

- Deep literary and philosophical traditions (Goethe, Kant, Nietzsche).
- Known for precision, punctuality, and environmentalism.
- Famous for beer, sausages, Christmas markets, and classical music (Bach, Beethoven, Brahms).
- **Annual festivals:** Oktoberfest, Berlinale Film Festival.

### Environment:

- Leader in renewable energy.
- High commitment to sustainability and recycling.
- Extensive forests, rivers, and national parks.

## QUESTIONS

21. Which of the following accurately reflects the constitutional provision in Germany when a chancellor candidate fails to secure an absolute majority in the Bundestag on the first vote?
- The President must immediately appoint a caretaker chancellor.
  - A second vote is allowed only after approval by the Federal Constitutional Court.
  - The Bundestag has 14 days to elect a chancellor by absolute majority, failing which a final vote is held.
  - The President automatically dissolves the Bundestag and calls for new elections.
22. Germany shares its border with which of the following countries?
- Denmark
  - Poland
  - Czech Republic
  - Austria
  - Switzerland
  - Luxembourg
  - Belgium

Select the correct answer using codes given below:

- 1, 3, 5 and 7 only
- 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 only
- 1, 2, 4, 6 and 7 only
- All of the above



## 8. Gabon swears in ex-military chief Oligui as president

- Brice Oligui Nguema, who came to power after leading a military coup in August 2023 that ended the Bongo family's 55-year rule in Gabon, has been officially sworn in as the country's president.
- Oligui, a 50-year-old former head of Gabon's elite Republican Guard, assumed office after winning nearly 95 percent of the vote in national election.
- His inauguration took place at the Angondje Stadium in northern Libreville, attended by over 20 African heads of state, including leaders from The Gambia, Senegal, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.
- The event marked the end of a 19-month transitional period during which Oligui led a military-backed interim government.
- During this time, he sought to project himself as a reform-minded leader, initiating several high-profile construction projects and anti-corruption efforts.
- His administration's campaign slogan, "We Build Together," was prominently featured during rallies and public appearances leading up to the election.
- Oligui's rise came in the wake of discontent over decades of dynastic politics under the Bongo family.
- The Bongos had long dominated Gabonese politics through a system of patronage that benefited political elites while marginalizing the broader population.
- Despite Gabon's oil wealth, widespread poverty and unemployment persist, particularly among youth.
- According to World Bank data from 2024, nearly 40 percent of young Gabonese are unemployed, and roughly one-third of the population lives below the poverty line.

### Gabon

- Gabon is a Central African nation located along the Atlantic Ocean, bordered by Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, and the Republic of the Congo. With a population of approximately 2.3 million, it is one of Africa's most urbanized countries, with over 90% of its residents living in cities.
  - **Capital:** Libreville
  - **Official Language:** French
  - **Currency:** Central African CFA franc (XAF)
  - **Time Zone:** UTC+1
  - **Independence:** August 17, 1960 (from France)
  - **Major Ethnic Groups:** Fang, Punu, Myènè, Nzebi, Teke
  - **Religion:** Predominantly Christian

### Political Landscape

- In August 2023, Gabon experienced a significant political shift when General Brice Oligui Nguema led a military coup that ousted President Ali Bongo Ondimba, ending over five decades of Bongo family rule.
- Nguema was subsequently sworn in as president in April 2025 after winning the election with 94.85% of the vote.

- His administration has pledged to diversify the economy, tackle youth unemployment, and improve infrastructure.
- However, critics express concerns about the continuity of power structures from the previous regime and the genuine implementation of promised reforms.

## Economy & Environment

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- Gabon is rich in natural resources, particularly oil, which has been the backbone of its economy.
- Despite its wealth, a significant portion of the population lives in poverty, and youth unemployment remains high.
- The country is also known for its vast rainforests, covering about 85% of its territory, making it a crucial area for biodiversity and conservation efforts.

## Gabon Uniqueness in World

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### 1. High Forest Cover and Biodiversity

- **88% forested:** Gabon is one of the most forested countries in the world, with about 88% of its land covered in rainforest.
- **Part of the Congo Basin:** It contains some of the most pristine parts of the Congo Basin—the world's second-largest tropical rainforest.
- **Wildlife haven:** Gabon is home to rare and endangered species such as forest elephants, western lowland gorillas, and mandrills.

### 2. Network of National Parks

- In 2002, Gabon's President Omar Bongo established 13 national parks (covering ~11% of the country) in one day, a global first in conservation.
- This move transformed Gabon into a global eco-tourism and conservation leader.

### 3. Carbon-Negative Country

- Gabon is one of the few countries in the world that absorbs more carbon than it emits, thanks to its dense forests.
- It plays a crucial role in global climate regulation and has received international funding for forest conservation.

### 4. Oil-Rich Yet Conservation-Focused

- Although Gabon is heavily dependent on oil, it is investing in sustainable development, aiming to diversify its economy through eco-tourism, agriculture, and green technologies.

### 5. Political Stability in Central Africa

- Compared to its neighbors, Gabon has enjoyed relative political stability since its independence in 1960.
- It has had only a few leaders, with long-serving presidencies, though this has also attracted criticism over democracy and governance.

### 6. Low Population Density

- Gabon has a population of just over 2 million people in a land area similar in size to the UK, giving it one of the lowest population densities in Africa.

## Gabon's Bongo Family

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- The Bongo family has been a dominant political dynasty in Gabon for over five decades, playing a central role in the country's governance and political landscape.

### **Omar Bongo Ondimba (President: 1967–2009)**

- Came to power in 1967, initially as vice president, then as president after the death of Léon M'ba.
- One of Africa's longest-serving leaders.
- Oversaw a one-party state until 1990, when Gabon transitioned to multiparty politics.
- Accused of widespread corruption and using oil wealth to consolidate power.
- Died in 2009 after ruling for 42 years.

### **Ali Bongo Ondimba (President: 2009–2023)**

- Son of Omar Bongo.
- Elected president after his father's death in a disputed 2009 election.
- Re-elected in controversial polls in 2016 and again in 2023.
- His rule was marked by allegations of electoral fraud, authoritarianism, and a strong grip on the military and economy.
- Suffered a stroke in 2018, leading to questions about his capacity to govern.
- Deposed in a military coup in August 2023, shortly after being declared the winner of a disputed election.

### **2023 Coup and Aftermath**

- Led by General Brice Oligui Nguema, a former aide to Omar Bongo and head of the presidential guard.
- The military cited concerns about election transparency and governance.
- The coup ended over 55 years of Bongo family rule in Gabon.

### **QUESTIONS**

**23.** Which of the following countries share a land border with Gabon?

1. Equatorial Guinea
2. Cameroon
3. Republic of the Congo
4. Democratic Republic of the Congo

Select the correct answer using codes given below:

- A. 1, 2, and 3 only
- B. 2, 3, and 4 only
- C. 1 and 4 only
- D. All of the above

**24.** Which of the following statements is correct regarding the political transition in Gabon between 2023 and 2025?

- A. Brice Oligui Nguema came to power through a democratic election held in August 2023.
- B. Ali Bongo Ondimba voluntarily stepped down to allow democratic reforms.
- C. Brice Oligui Nguema led a military coup in 2023 and later became the elected president in 2025.
- D. The Bongo family's rule ended due to constitutional reforms approved by parliament.

## 9. Vinod Kumar Shukla will receive the 59<sup>th</sup> Jnanpith Award for 2024

- Renowned Hindi poet and novelist Vinod Kumar Shukla has been chosen for the 59<sup>th</sup> Jnanpith Award (2024), India's highest literary honour, for his profound contribution to Hindi literature.
- Shukla becomes the first writer from Chhattisgarh and the 12<sup>th</sup> Hindi author to receive the prestigious recognition.
- The award is conferred by Bharatiya Jnanpith, and the selection was made by a distinguished committee chaired by Jnanpith laureate Pratibha Rai.
- Known for his experimental and sensitive writing, Shukla's work portrays the complexities and subtle beauty of ordinary lives in a uniquely poetic and minimalist style.
- His prose and poetry are celebrated for blending the magical with the real, elevating everyday moments into deeply moving literary experiences.
- His most acclaimed novel, *Naukar Ki Kameez* (The Servant's Shirt), exemplifies this narrative style.
- Beginning with a line reflecting the joy of returning home, the novel was later adapted into a film by acclaimed director Mani Kaul in 1999.
- Other notable works by Shukla include *Deewar Mein Ek Khidki Rehti Thi* (A Window Lived in the Wall) and *Khilega To Dekhenge* (Will See When It Blooms), each exploring themes of longing, perception, and the silent dignity of small lives.
- His literary voice has earned him the 2023 PEN/Nabokov Award for international literature.
- Filmmaker Achal Mishra's 2024 documentary, *Chaar Phool Hain Aur Duniya Hai*, explores Shukla's personal and literary world in Raipur, where he has spent much of his life.

### Jnanpith Award details

- The Jnanpith Award is India's highest literary honour, awarded annually to an author for their outstanding contribution to literature.

### History of the Jnanpith Award

- **Established:** 1961
- **Founder:** Bharatiya Jnanpith, a literary and research organization founded by industrialist Sahu Shanti Prasad Jain.
- **Purpose:** To recognize Indian writers for their contribution to Indian literature across any of the languages listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.
- **First Awarded:** 1965, to G. Sankara Kurup for his collection of poems *Odakkuzhal* (Malayalam).

### Award Details

#### Eligibility:

- The writer must be Indian.
- The literary work must be of outstanding merit.

- The work must be in one of the 22 Indian languages included in the 8<sup>th</sup> Schedule of the Constitution.

### Components of the Award:

- A cash prize (currently ₹11 lakh),
- A citation,
- A plaque,
- A bronze replica of Saraswati, the Hindu goddess of learning.

### Multiple Languages Represented:

- The award has been conferred for works in several Indian languages, including Hindi, Bengali, Malayalam, Kannada, Urdu, Gujarati, Marathi, Odia, and Assamese.
  - **Most Awarded Language:** Hindi and Kannada have had the most recipients.
  - **Women Recipients:** Several women authors have received the award, including Ashapoorna Devi, Mahadevi Verma, and Krishna Sobti.

### Other Major Literary Awards:

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#### Sahitya Akademi Award

- **Established:** 1954
- **By:** Sahitya Akademi (India's National Academy of Letters)
- **For:** Outstanding literary works in 24 recognized Indian languages.
- **Categories:** Includes awards for original writing, translation, children's literature, and more.

#### Saraswati Samman

- **Established:** 1991
- **By:** K. K. Birla Foundation
- **For:** Prose or poetry literary works in any Indian language (listed in the 8<sup>th</sup> Schedule).
- **Prize:** ₹15 lakh and a citation.

#### Vyas Samman

- **Established:** 1991
- **By:** K. K. Birla Foundation
- **For:** Outstanding Hindi literary work published in the last 10 years.

#### Padma Awards (Literature & Education category)

- **Includes:** Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan, Padma Vibhushan
- **By:** Government of India
- **For:** Distinguished service in various fields, including literature and education.

#### Yuva Puraskar

- **Established:** 2011
- **By:** Sahitya Akademi
- **For:** Young writers (below 35 years) for outstanding literary works in Indian languages.

## Tagore Literature Award

- **By:** Sahitya Akademi and other cultural institutions (some awards are international)
- **In honor of:** Rabindranath Tagore
- **For:** Promoting literary excellence, especially in poetry and cross-cultural works.

### QUESTIONS

25. Which of the following statements about the Jnanpith Award is incorrect?
- A. It is awarded only for works written in Indian languages listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.
  - B. The award was first instituted in 1965 by the Ministry of Culture.
  - C. It includes a bronze idol of Saraswati as part of the prize.
  - D. Kannada and Hindi are the two most awarded languages in Jnanpith history.
26. Which of the following is NOT true about the Jnanpith Award?
- A. It is awarded only to Indian citizens writing in any recognized Indian language.
  - B. The award may be given posthumously for a deceased author's unpublished manuscript.
  - C. It includes a cash prize, a citation, a plaque, and a Saraswati bronze idol.
  - D. It is awarded annually to one outstanding author for their contribution to literature.
27. Who has been selected for the 59<sup>th</sup> Jnanpith Award (2024)?
- A. Ashok Vajpeyi
  - B. Pratibha Rai
  - C. Vinod Kumar Shukla
  - D. Uday Prakash

## 10. Angola signed the International Solar Alliance (ISA) Framework Agreement and became the 123<sup>rd</sup> member of the ISA

- India and Angola have significantly enhanced their bilateral partnership during Angolan President João Lourenço's historic visit to India—the first in 38 years.
- Marking the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic ties, both nations signed several Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) focused on cooperation in energy, digital infrastructure, defence, space technology, and more.



- A key announcement was the extension of a \$200 million Line of Credit for the modernisation of Angola's armed forces.
- Defence cooperation will also include training, equipment supply, and maintenance support.
- India committed to sharing its expertise in digital public infrastructure, space technology, capacity building, and healthcare.
- The countries plan to collaborate in diamond processing, fertilisers, critical minerals, and also launch a youth exchange programme to deepen cultural ties.
- Angola joined the International Solar Alliance (ISA) as its 123<sup>rd</sup> member and has been invited to join other global coalitions led by India, including the CDRI, Big Cat Alliance, and Global Biofuels Alliance.
- PM Modi welcomed Angola's upcoming African Union chairmanship and reaffirmed shared goals of representing the Global South's interests.
- India also appreciated Angola's solidarity after the recent terrorist attack in Pahalgam and reiterated its firm stance against terrorism.
- Economic ties remain robust, with bilateral trade at \$4.2 billion—90% of which is oil and gas.
- Angola is India's second-largest African supplier of crude oil and LNG.
- Angola has sought Indian expertise in refining and developing its new oil fields.
- India continues expanding its Africa outreach, with 17 new embassies, over \$12 billion in credit lines, and joint initiatives like the recent AIKEYME maritime exercise enhancing regional cooperation.

### International Solar Alliance (ISA)

- The International Solar Alliance (ISA) is an international organization that promotes the use of solar energy to help achieve sustainable development and combat climate change.

### Overview

- **Founded:** Jointly launched by India and France on 30 November 2015 during the COP21 UN Climate Change Conference in Paris.
- **Headquarters:** Gurugram, Haryana, India
- **Objective:** To promote solar energy deployment across member countries, particularly in sunshine-rich tropical nations (located between the Tropic of Cancer and Tropic of Capricorn).
- **Legal Framework:** The ISA became a treaty-based intergovernmental organization after its framework agreement entered into force on 6 December 2017.

### Key Objectives

- Facilitate energy access in developing countries using solar power.
- Mobilize over \$1 trillion in investments in solar energy by 2030.



- Reduce the cost of solar technology and improve solar innovation.
- Promote capacity building, R&D, and regulatory support among member countries.

## Membership

- Open to all UN member countries.
- As of April 2025, 123 countries have signed the ISA Framework Agreement.

## Initiatives

- **One Sun One World One Grid (OSOWOG):** A global initiative led by India to interconnect solar energy grids.
- **STAR-C (Solar Technology Application Resource-Centers):** To help in capacity building and knowledge dissemination.
- **Solar Finance Facility (SFF):** To scale up investments in solar energy.

## Significance

- ISA supports the implementation of the Paris Agreement by promoting clean energy.
- Helps reduce dependence on fossil fuels, mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, and improve energy security.
- Especially beneficial for small island developing states (SIDS) and least developed countries (LDCs).

## Line of Credit (LOC)

- A Line of Credit (LOC) is a flexible loan from a bank or financial institution that allows a borrower to access funds up to a specified limit at any time, as needed, rather than receiving a lump sum upfront.

## Features of a Line of Credit:

- **Pre-approved limit:** The borrower can withdraw funds as needed up to a set credit limit
- **Revolving credit:** As you repay the borrowed amount, the available credit replenishes (like a credit card).
- **Interest:** You only pay interest on the amount you actually borrow, not the entire limit.

## Types:

- **Personal LOC:** For individuals, usually unsecured.
- **Home Equity Line of Credit (HELOC):** Secured against your home.
- **Business LOC:** Helps manage cash flow and short-term capital needs.
- **Repayment terms:** Can vary; some require minimum monthly payments, others may have interest-only periods.

### Example:

- If your bank gives you a ₹5 lakh line of credit, you can borrow ₹2 lakh today, repay it in a month, and then borrow ₹3 lakh next time — all within the ₹5 lakh limit.

## Big Cat Alliances

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### International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA)

- The International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) is a global initiative launched by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on April 9, 2023, during the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Project Tiger.
- It officially became a treaty-based intergovernmental organization on January 23, 2025, with its headquarters in New Delhi, India.

### Objectives

#### Conservation of Seven Big Cats:

- IBCA focuses on the conservation of seven major big cat species: Tiger, Lion, Leopard, Snow Leopard, Cheetah, Jaguar, and Puma.
- **Combatting Threats:** The alliance aims to address challenges like poaching, illegal wildlife trade, habitat loss, and human-wildlife conflict.
- **International Collaboration:** IBCA facilitates knowledge sharing, joint research, and coordinated conservation efforts among member countries.

### Membership and Governance

#### Members:

- As of early 2025, five countries—India, Nicaragua, Eswatini, Somalia, and Liberia—have ratified the agreement, with 27 countries consenting to join. Membership is open to all 97 range countries of big cats and other interested nations.

#### Structure:

- The alliance operates through a General Assembly, a Council, and a Secretariat. The Director-General is appointed by the General Assembly based on the Council's advice.

#### Funding:

- India has pledged ₹150 crore (approximately \$18 million) for the initial five years (2023–2028). Additional funding will be sourced from bilateral and multilateral donors, CSR, and voluntary contributions.

### Big Cat Sanctuary Alliance (BCSA)

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- The Big Cat Sanctuary Alliance (BCSA) is a U.S.-based coalition established in 2017.
- It comprises sanctuaries and organizations dedicated to the welfare of big cats in captivity.

- **Eliminating Private Ownership:** BCSA works to end private ownership and commercial exploitation of wild cats in the United States.
- **Rescue and Rehabilitation:** The alliance coordinates rescue operations, provides sanctuary for abused or neglected big cats, and ensures high standards of animal care.
- **Advocacy and Education:** BCSA advocates for stronger legislation to protect big cats and educates the public about the issues surrounding big cat captivity.

### QUESTIONS

28. Which of the following correctly distinguishes the International Solar Alliance (ISA) from the International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) in terms of legal and functional status as of 2025?
- ISA remains a voluntary coalition, while IBCA is a treaty-based intergovernmental organization.
  - ISA and IBCA are both headquartered in Gurugram, India.
  - ISA became a treaty-based body in 2017, while IBCA achieved the same status in 2025.
  - IBCA is open to all UN members, while ISA restricts membership to tropical countries.
29. Which of the following correctly matches the ISA initiative with its primary goal?
- One Sun One World One Grid (OSOWOG) – A. Supporting solar R&D in national labs
  - STAR-C – B. Building solar power transmission interconnections globally
  - Solar Finance Facility (SFF) – C. Mobilizing investments in solar projects
- Choose the correct matching:
- 1-B, 2-A, 3-C
  - 1-C, 2-B, 3-A
  - 1-A, 2-C, 3-B
  - 1-B, 2-C, 3-A
30. Which of the following statements best explains why the International Solar Alliance focuses primarily on countries between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn?
- These countries are the largest carbon emitters in the world.
  - These countries are largely developed and have advanced solar industries.
  - These countries receive abundant sunlight, making them ideal for solar energy deployment.
  - These countries have agreed to reduce fossil fuel subsidies under the Paris Agreement.

## ANSWER KEY AND EXPLANATION

1. **C** Gobind Behari Lal, the first Indian to win a Pulitzer Prize in 1937 for his science reporting, paved the way for future generations in journalism. Megha Rajagopalan and Neil Bedi also won Pulitzers in 2021 for their investigative reporting.
2. **B** "Memoir or Autobiography" falls under the Books, Drama & Music section of the Pulitzer Prize. Categories like Audio Reporting, Feature Photography, and Investigative Reporting are part of the Journalism categories.
3. **D** The Pulitzer Prize for Public Service is the only category that awards a Gold Medal to the winning news organization, not to individuals. Other categories receive a certificate and \$15,000 cash prize.
4. **B** For the Books, Drama, and Music categories, only U.S. citizens are eligible. However, there's no requirement for prior literary awards, nor does a state governor's recommendation influence the entry.
5. **A** The proposed New Zealand law mandates that social media companies positively verify that users are at least 16 before account creation. It enforces compliance through financial penalties of up to NZ\$2 million for breaches. Options B and C lack regulatory teeth—option D is unrelated to the age-ban objective.
6. **A** New Zealand is an island country in the southwestern Pacific Ocean. It consists of two main landmasses—the North Island (Te Ika-a-Māui) and the South Island (Te Waipounamu)—and over 600 smaller islands. It is the sixth-largest island country by area and lies east of Australia across the Tasman Sea and south of the islands of New Caledonia, Fiji, and Tonga.
7. **C** Both rice varieties were developed using SDN1, a precise genome-editing technique that introduces small, targeted mutations without incorporating foreign DNA. It contrasts with SDN-3, which involves gene insertion. RNAi and TALEN involve different mechanisms or may involve foreign gene elements, making them inconsistent with the “non-transgenic” nature of these varieties.
8. **B** DRR Dhan 100 (Kamala) shows a 19% increase in yield, enhanced drought tolerance, high nitrogen-use efficiency, and early maturity (20 days earlier than Samba Mahsuri). This makes it particularly suitable for climate-resilient, resource-efficient farming, which is critical amid changing climatic conditions.
9. **B** ICAR estimates 4.5 million tonnes of extra paddy from cultivating these two varieties on 5 million hectares. DRR Dhan 100's shorter duration saves three irrigations, leading to 7,500 million cubic metres (MCM) of water conserved. The initiative is also expected to reduce GHG emissions by 20% (32,000 tonnes), making this choice environmentally and economically optimal.
10. **C** Stalingrad was home to the Red Army's artillery production, and it lay on the Volga River, a vital shipping route. Its symbolic significance, bearing Stalin's name, made it a psychological prize. Capturing it would have delivered both a strategic and propaganda victory for Nazi Germany.
11. **B** Biju Patnaik, flying for the Royal Indian Air Force, participated in aerial supply sorties to assist Russian troops and civilians trapped in Stalingrad. These missions were critical due to cut-off ground access and heavy German control of the city.

12. **C** Operation Uranus, launched by the Soviets in November 1942, was a massive counter-offensive that encircled nearly 300,000 Axis troops, including Germany's 6<sup>th</sup> Army. It marked a decisive shift in momentum in favour of the USSR in World War II.
13. **D** Biju Patnaik played a heroic role in 1947, using his flying skills to assist Indonesian independence leaders. He was later honoured with the Bintang Jasa Utama, one of the country's highest civilian awards, for his bravery during Indonesia's anti-colonial struggle.
14. **C** Russia honoured Biju Patnaik with a memorial plaque to recognize his contributions as a pilot in the Royal Indian Air Force, where he flew supply missions to assist the Red Army during the critical Battle of Stalingrad in World War II.
15. **C** Britain has described the India–UK FTA as its “biggest and most economically significant” bilateral trade agreement since it exited the EU (Brexit) in 2020. The deal is expected to boost bilateral trade by £25.5 billion annually by 2040, highlighting its strategic importance. While it doesn't make India the UK's largest trading partner, it is their most ambitious bilateral deal in the post-Brexit era.
16. **D** The EFTA comprises Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein. Finland is a member of the European Union (EU) and not part of EFTA. Therefore, it is not included in the India-EFTA TEPA signed in March 2024. This is a common confusion due to Finland's geographical and trade proximity to other Nordic countries.
17. **A** India signed its first Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) with Mauritius in 2021, making it the first African nation to enter into such a comprehensive trade partnership with India. The agreement covers goods, services, investment, and other areas of cooperation. The other countries listed have no such CECPA with India yet.
18. **B** The 2025 India–Pakistan conflict was a brief armed conflict between India and Pakistan that began on 7 May 2025, after India launched missile strikes on Pakistan, in a military campaign codenamed Operation Sindoor. India said that the operation was in response to the Pahalgam terrorist attack in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir on 22 April 2025 in which 26 civilians were killed. India accused Pakistan of supporting cross-border terrorism, which Pakistan denied.
19. **B** Operation SINDOOR was conceived as a punitive and targeted campaign to dismantle the terror infrastructure across the Line of Control and deeper inside Pakistan.
20. **A** As conflict escalated on 10 May, Pakistan launched its Operation Bunyan-un-Marsoos, in which it said it had targeted several Indian military bases.
21. **C** According to Germany's Basic Law (Grundgesetz), if the proposed candidate for chancellor fails to secure an absolute majority (Kanzlermehrheit) in the first Bundestag vote, the Bundestag has 14 days to elect another candidate by the same majority. If this too fails, a final vote is held on the 15<sup>th</sup> day. If no one secures a majority in that vote, the President may either appoint the person with the most votes or dissolve the Bundestag and call for new elections within 60 days. This process was significant in Merz's case because he failed on the first vote but narrowly succeeded in the second.
22. **D** Germany is a country in Central Europe. It lies between the Baltic Sea and the North Sea to the north and the Alps to the south. It borders Denmark to the north, Poland and the Czech Republic to the east, Austria and Switzerland to the south, and France, Luxembourg, Belgium, and the Netherlands to the west.

23. **A** Gabon shares borders with: Equatorial Guinea to the northwest, Cameroon to the north AND Republic of the Congo to the east and south. It does not share a border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which lies further east beyond the Republic of the Congo.
24. **C** In August 2023, Brice Oligui Nguema led a military coup that removed Ali Bongo Ondimba, ending the Bongo family's 55-year rule. He initially led an interim military-backed government during a 19-month transitional period. In April 2025, he was sworn in as president after winning the national election with 94.85% of the vote.
25. **B** The Jnanpith Award was established in 1961, not by the Ministry of Culture, but by the Bharatiya Jnanpith, a private literary and research organization founded by Sahu Shanti Prasad Jain. The first award was given in 1965. Other statements (A, C, D) are factually correct.
26. **B** The Jnanpith Award is not given posthumously, except in rare, special cases when the decision was made while the author was alive. There is no rule or precedent of awarding it for unpublished manuscripts. Other options (A, C, D) are true per the award guidelines.
27. **C** Vinod Kumar Shukla, a noted Hindi poet and novelist, has been awarded the 59<sup>th</sup> Jnanpith Award for 2024 for his significant contributions to Hindi literature.
28. **C** ISA's Framework Agreement came into force in December 2017, making it a treaty-based intergovernmental organization. IBCA became treaty-based only on January 23, 2025. Both are headquartered in different cities (ISA in Gurugram; IBCA in New Delhi), and ISA welcomes all UN members, not just tropical countries (so D is wrong).
29. **A** OSOWOG is a visionary plan to create global solar energy interconnections → B. STAR-C helps with capacity building and application of solar technology (R&D, training, regulatory frameworks) → A. SFF is a financing mechanism to mobilize large-scale investment in solar projects → C
30. **C** The ISA targets tropical countries between the Tropics because they receive consistent, high-intensity sunlight, making them ideal candidates for solar power expansion. This geographic focus maximizes solar energy potential, especially in developing nations with low energy access. Options A, B, and D are unrelated to the core geographic rationale.