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India-New Zealand FTA to come into effect on Oct. 20

Both countries ratify agreement which aims at doubling bilateral trade to ₹35,000 crore in 'next four to five years'; India's dairy, sensitive agriculture sectors protected, says Commerce Minister

Saptaparno Ghosh
NEW DELHI

The Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and New Zealand that was ratified on Monday and comes into effect on October 20 aims at doubling bilateral trade to ₹35,000 crore in the "next four to five years", according to Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal.

"The entry into force of the India-New Zealand FTA will translate this goal into concrete economic outcomes," he told journalists.

According to New Zealand's foreign trade office, the FTA is set to erase import levies on all Indian goods, while 95% of exports to India will either be allowed tariff-free or at "sharply" reduced levies.



Mr. Goyal insisted that India has safeguarded its sensitive sectors, such as dairy and agricultural produce, including onions, almonds, chickpeas, peas, artificial honey, and sugar, not granting Wellington any relaxation or concessions on these products in

the agreement. The deal will benefit India's micro, medium, and small enterprises, farmers, handloom artisans, and weavers, the Minister added.

New Zealand also has technological expertise in manufacturing of engineering and other goods,

Mr. Goyal said. "They could look to support our companies or invest and set up manufacturing in India to capture global markets," he added.

New Zealand's Minister of Trade and Investment, Todd McClay, emphasised the significance of the two countries getting the deal done at a time of global "uncertainty", with escalating tariffs and trade barriers. "It gives confidence to our business communities to grow, form relationships, and trade," he said.

India is New Zealand's ninth largest export market, and the value of bilateral trade between the two countries stood at \$1.3 billion in the fiscal year 2024-25.

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3. India and New Zealand have signed a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in December 2025. In which of the following areas has cooperation under the FTA has been agreed upon between the two countries ?

1. AYUSH
2. Audio-Visual tourism
3. Traditional knowledge system
4. Horticulture

Select the answer using the codes given below :

- (a) 1, 2, 3 and 4
- (b) 2 and 4 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 3 and 4 only

1. India–New Zealand Free Trade Agreement to Come into Effect on October 20

Source: *The Hindu*

GS: GS-2/GS-3 — India–New Zealand Relations, International Trade, Agriculture, MSMEs

Context

- The **India–New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** will enter into force on **20 October 2026**, creating wider opportunities for trade, investment, services and professional mobility while protecting India's sensitive agricultural sectors.

1. Key Provisions

- **Zero-duty access:** New Zealand will eliminate tariffs on **100% of Indian exports**, covering sectors such as textiles, leather, footwear, engineering goods, pharmaceuticals and processed food.
- **Indian tariff offer:** India has opened around **70% of tariff lines**, covering about **95% of bilateral trade value**, with several products receiving phased concessions.
- **Investment:** New Zealand has committed to facilitate **US\$20 billion investment in India over 15 years**, covering agriculture, manufacturing, infrastructure, startups and emerging technologies.
- **Services and mobility:** Access has been expanded across **118 services sectors**, with a dedicated pathway for **5,000 skilled Indian professionals** and enhanced student and youth mobility.
- **Trade facilitation:** Faster customs procedures, electronic certification and simplified regulatory processes are intended to reduce transaction costs.

2. How It Will Help India

- **Boost exports and employment:** Duty-free access can improve the competitiveness of Indian labour-intensive sectors such as **textiles, leather and footwear**, supporting MSMEs and employment.
- **Strengthen manufacturing:** Duty-free access to inputs such as **wooden logs, coking coal and metal scrap** can reduce production costs and improve competitiveness.
- **Expand services exports:** Greater access for IT, professional services, healthcare, education, construction, tourism and other sectors creates opportunities for India's skilled workforce.
- **Attract capital and technology:** The investment commitment can support domestic manufacturing, infrastructure, innovation and technology-intensive sectors.
- **Improve pharmaceuticals and medical-device access:** Acceptance of inspections from recognised regulators can reduce duplication and speed up market entry for Indian products.

3. Safeguards and Wider Significance

- **Protection of farmers:** India has excluded **dairy and several sensitive agricultural products** from tariff concessions, protecting vulnerable domestic sectors.
- **Agricultural productivity:** Cooperation on apples, kiwifruit, Manuka honey and other areas can bring technology, knowledge transfer and productivity improvements to Indian agriculture.
- **Human-capital linkages:** Professional, student and youth mobility connects trade in goods with **skills, knowledge and services**.
- **Trade diversification:** The agreement gives Indian businesses greater access to a developed market and supports the broader target of raising bilateral goods-and-services trade to **NZ\$7 billion by 2030**.

India to attend session on UN-based multilateralism

EU, Brazil, Kenya, Canada launch grouping beyond 'superpower politics'; the P4M initiative seeks a more representative UN that is prepared for global challenges, including AI and climate change

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

India will join a number of countries committed to supporting United Nations (UN)-based multilateralism, away from "Superpower" politics, as External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar was set to attend the "Partners for Multilateralism" (P4M) meeting at the United Nations.

Mr. Jaishankar landed in New York on Monday at the start of the UN General Assembly's "High-Level debate" session. He is due to hold a number of bilateral meetings and multilateral meetings there, and will address the UNGA on September 26.

The P4M initiative, founded by leaders of the European Union, Brazil, Kenya and Canada is expected to make a pitch for the grouping this week.

In a joint editorial, leaders of the four founders said the grouping will support the UN but push for it to be more representative and prepared for global challenges, including AI (artificial intelligence), climate change, health security and digital transformation.

"P4M will support the reform of the UN and other multilateral institutions, to make them more representative, legitimate, effective and trusted," the leaders, including European Council President Antonio Costa, Brazil President Lula da



Gearing up: Security guards checking IDs of people ahead of the United Nations General Assembly in New York. REUTERS

Silva, Kenyan President William Ruto and Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney wrote in an editorial published in the U.K.-based *Financial Times*.

Mr. Carney had delivered a speech on "Middle powers" coming together at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January, which signalled growing dissatisfaction not just with Russia and China for unilateral moves and conflicts, but with the United States over trade and tariffs, expansionist moves, and the conflict in Iran that have been undertaken during U.S. President Donald Trump's second term.

It is unclear whether India was asked to join the joint message.

India is already part of a number of groups like the Non-Aligned Movement,

India is already part of a number of groups like BRICS and G20 that have similar objectives

BRICS, G20, and G-4 that have similar objectives.

The editorial on Monday pointed to comments by United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres in which he had said that "superpowers are discovering their limits", adding that the P4M grouping believes that the "international community must rediscover the extraordinary potential of collective action".

Mr. Guterres, who demits office later this year, spoke to *The Hindu* amongst five global outlets in U.S., U.K., South Africa,

the Gulf region and India.

"We have superpowers that have not yet recognised that their power has limits and they get into adventures that produce terrible results," Mr. Guterres had said, specifically pointing to Russia, which was still embroiled in the war in Ukraine four years later, while the U.S. is facing "difficulties" with its war in Iran.

'Limits to powers'

"I think it's time for superpowers to understand the limits of their power, and that will help the world become more peaceful," Mr. Guterres said, speaking to *The Hindu* in New Delhi, where he attended the 18th BRICS Summit.

The editorial also said that the 'Partners for Multilateralism', would not create another exclusive bloc or international bureaucracy.

"Its purpose is the opposite: to create a flexible, open framework for countries from different regions and political traditions that are willing to work across divides, to build coalitions for reform and to translate shared principles into practical action," the co-authors wrote, pointing out that 2025 saw the highest recorded number of state-based armed conflicts since 1946, in 35 countries, and highest recorded military spending of nearly \$3 trillion.

2. India to Join “Partners for Multilateralism” Initiative at the United Nations

Source: *The Hindu*

GS: GS-2 — United Nations, Multilateralism, Global Governance, International Relations

Context

- India is participating in the **Partners for Multilateralism (P4M)** initiative at the United Nations General Assembly, which seeks to strengthen **UN-based multilateralism and reform global institutions** amid growing geopolitical fragmentation.

1. What is Partners for Multilateralism (P4M)?

- Founding members:** European Union, Brazil, Kenya and Canada initiated the grouping.
- Nature:** It is a **flexible and open platform**, rather than a new exclusive bloc or international organisation.
- Purpose:** To bring countries from different regions and political traditions together for **dialogue, coalition-building and practical cooperation**.

2. What Does P4M Seek to Achieve?

- UN reform:** Make multilateral institutions more **representative, legitimate, effective and inclusive**.
- International law:** Reinforce principles of the **UN Charter, sovereign equality, territorial integrity and peaceful settlement of disputes**.
- Global challenges:** Promote collective responses to **climate change, artificial intelligence, global health, digital transformation and economic disruptions**.
- Practical multilateralism:** Convert common principles into coordinated action rather than creating another parallel institution.

3. Why India is Participating

- Strategic autonomy:** Provides another platform through which India can engage different power centres without aligning exclusively with any one bloc.
- UN reform:** India can advance its longstanding demand for **greater representation and reform of multilateral institutions**, particularly the UN system.
- Global South voice:** India can connect the concerns of developing countries with European and other middle-power partners.
- Issue-based cooperation:** P4M creates space for cooperation on emerging issues such as **AI governance, climate change, health security and digital transformation**.

4. Significance for India

- **Coalition-building:** Adds another avenue for India to build flexible coalitions on specific global issues.
- **Bridge-building role:** India can engage countries across different geopolitical groupings while retaining its existing participation in **BRICS, G20, Quad and other forums.**
- **Reformed multilateral order:** The initiative aligns with India's emphasis on a **more representative, inclusive and effective global governance system.**

A Malacca-Singapore model for resolving Hormuz

As the siege warfare continues in the Strait of Hormuz and the world suffers, it may be instructive to revisit the Straits of Malacca and Singapore.

The Strait of Malacca runs for some 800 kilometres between the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian island of Sumatra, connecting the Andaman Sea to the Strait of Singapore, while the Strait of Singapore, some 105 km long, forms its eastern continuation and connects the Malacca Strait to the South China Sea.

A territorial turning point

The Straits were once considered "international" in the sense that they were like the high seas, over which no country had any claim. In 1971, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore jointly challenged this notion.

Indonesia, a newly decolonised nation, feared for the security of its individual islands if the waters between them were not considered its territory, and in 1957 declared that all waters "surrounding, between and connecting the islands" were Indonesian waters. Then Indonesian President Sukarno had an adversarial relationship with the colonial powers, and the nation was wary of big-power interference.

As the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) was being formulated, Indonesia insisted that its territorial waters should extend 12 nautical miles from the outermost islands. Malaysia, despite its 1963 armed conflict with Indonesia over Borneo, revised the stance it had taken at the 1958 UNCLOS conference and also announced a 12-nautical-mile territorial sea, choosing to work with Jakarta on the Straits through bilateral treaties and joint naval patrols. The two nations continue to cooperate actively to this day.

At their narrowest points, the Straits are well under 24 nautical miles wide. Once both states claimed 12-nautical-mile territorial seas, the zones met in the middle, leaving no strip of high seas or exclusive economic zone (EEZ) between them. Under the customary law of the time, this meant that the Straits were simply territorial seas, where foreign vessels enjoyed only the right of "innocent passage" – a right that Indonesia or Malaysia could suspend for security reasons and



M. Kalyanaraman

that excluded submerged submarines.

The three nations issued a joint statement in 1971 proposing a coordinating body comprising representatives of the three states to administer the Straits. Singapore, an island nation dependent on trade and shipping, did not quite agree to declaring the Straits "not international", but did make common cause with Malaysia over the safety of navigation.

The Straits and the great powers

Japan, a major player through the Japan-funded Malacca Strait Council, offered cooperation with the three states rather than seeking an internationalised regime. The United States and the Soviet Union, otherwise rivals, were allies on this one issue – keeping the Straits under territorial waters "international" so that ships retained the right of "continued, politically uncluttered transit".

As UNCLOS entered its final phase of formulation in the 1970s, the United Kingdom introduced the concept of "transit passage" for straits connecting the high seas or EEZs – a right of transit only in a "continuous and expeditious" manner, with no stopping or loitering, but one that applied to warships as well, going beyond mere innocent passage. Indonesia agreed to this formulation with reservations, trading its acceptance for greater security for its archipelago, which UNCLOS eventually addressed separately. Malaysia's concerns centred on environmental safety, insurance requirements and permissible vessel draught.

In 2007, the three states working with the international community arrived at a Cooperative Mechanism building on a traffic separation scheme similar to what Iran and Oman had agreed for the Strait of Hormuz in the 1960s. A core aspect of the 2007 mechanism was for user states and industry to contribute to a fund for aids to navigation, hydrographic surveys and safety projects, administered jointly with the littoral states.

The Aids to Navigation Fund is supported through voluntary financial contributions from non-profit organisations such as The Nippon Foundation and the International Foundation for Aids to Navigation, as well as industry

stakeholders and states with an interest in the safe and efficient use of the Straits. These contributions do not amount to tolls. The fund is administered on a rotation basis by a committee comprising representatives of the three littoral States – Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore – do not impose fees, tolls or any other form of payment on ships exercising their right of transit passage.

The geographic parallel

The Strait of Hormuz is similar to the Malacca-Singapore Straits, in that the territorial waters of Iran and Oman intersect, making sections of the Strait part of their territorial waters.

In 1993, Iran, which has not ratified UNCLOS, passed a law requiring foreign warships to seek its authorisation to pass through the Strait. This continues to be a sore point today.

Persian Gulf nations have a history of both conflict and cooperation. The United Arab Emirates, for instance, was among Iran's leading trading partners. Qatar is among the Persian Gulf nations that have supported the Iran-Oman talks. It had also mooted the Malacca-Singapore straits as a model.

Yet, even if the Gulf nations arrive at a framework they all agree on, the U.S. has shown that it may not accept it. The Malacca-Singapore issue was resolved as UNCLOS itself was being put into effect, when trade-offs were part of negotiating a convention intended to govern the world's oceans.

A key concern in the Malacca-Singapore Straits was the safety of navigation and the environment, whereas in the Strait of Hormuz, the key issue is Iran's security.

Iran is demanding that all nations revisit the Strait of Hormuz, and some are willing to do so. Though Iran and Oman have apparently agreed on a framework for reopening the Strait of Hormuz, the Strait has not been reopened, and the U.S. has not accepted the arrangement. The context has changed, even though there are clear parallels in the technical details.

The Malacca-Singapore experience has lessons for navigating the Hormuz impasse

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3. A Malacca–Singapore Model for Resolving the Strait of Hormuz

Source: *The Hindu*

GS: GS-2 — International Relations, Maritime Security, UNCLOS, West Asia

Context

- The continuing crisis around the **Strait of Hormuz** has renewed interest in the cooperative framework developed by **Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore** for managing the strategically important Malacca–Singapore Straits.

1. What Was the Malacca–Singapore Model?

- Littoral-state cooperation:** Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore retained primary responsibility for the Straits while cooperating on common maritime concerns.
- International participation:** User states, shipping companies and other stakeholders were allowed to contribute to navigation and safety projects.
- Cooperative Mechanism (2007):** It created a framework for **navigation safety and environmental protection**, consistent with **Article 43 of UNCLOS**.

- **Aids to Navigation Fund:** Voluntary contributions from user states and other stakeholders helped maintain navigation infrastructure without imposing mandatory transit charges.
- **Core principle:** The model separated **sovereignty disputes from practical cooperation** and focused on keeping the waterway safe, open and environmentally sustainable.

2. How Could It Be Applied to the Strait of Hormuz?

- **Iran–Oman-led framework:** Iran and Oman, as the principal littoral states, could take the primary role in establishing a cooperative mechanism for the Strait.
- **User-state participation:** Major energy-importing and shipping countries, including **India**, could contribute financially and technically to navigation safety, monitoring and emergency-response systems.
- **Navigation and environmental fund:** A voluntary fund could finance **navigational aids, hydrographic surveys, pollution control, wreck removal and maritime emergency response**, following the Malacca model.
- **UNCLOS-based arrangement:** The framework could seek to reconcile **littoral-state security concerns with uninterrupted international navigation**, including the principle of transit passage under UNCLOS.
- **No transit tolls:** As in Malacca–Singapore, cooperation could focus on safety and shared responsibility without turning international passage into a system of compulsory charges. The International Maritime Organization has specifically reaffirmed that Hormuz should remain free of tolls and charges.

'Nearly 40% of coal power plants critically low on fuel'

The number of power plants with critically low coal stocks of less than 25% of the required inventory rose sharply to 74 as of September 19 from about 60 plants last week, data show

Reuters
NEW DELHI

Nearly 40% of India's coal-fired power plants are operating with critically low fuel stocks due to a surge in power demand amid hotter-than-usual weather linked to El Niño, government data showed on Monday.

The number of power plants with critically low coal stocks of less than 25% of the required inventory or only able to generate power for less than three days rose sharply to 74 as of September 19 from about 60 plants last week, data from the Central Electricity Authority that is updated daily showed.

India's peak power de-



Power struggle: India's peak power demand has been hovering between 230 gigawatts and 250 gigawatts in the past week. REUTERS

mand, a measure of the maximum electricity requirement, has been hovering between 230 gigawatts and 250 gigawatts in the past week.

Peak power demand hit an all-time high of 270.70

gigawatts in May.

The decline in power plant stocks appears to be a temporary logistical issue rather than a sign of any structural supply constraints, Crisil analysts said. India's coal and rail-

way ministries said in early September they were increasing supplies to the plants after erratic monsoon rains had impacted shipments.

Renewable power generation rose about 21% between April and August, but due to the intermittent nature of clean energy, coal-fired power continued to play a critical role in meeting round-the-clock demand, Crisil said.

Meanwhile, Indian power producers' coal imports in August rose to a 15-month high as a heatwave boosted electricity demand while hydroelectric power generation remained subdued, prompting utilities to turn to costly overseas supplies, *Reuters* reported last week.

4. Nearly 40% of Coal Power Plants Critically Low on Fuel

Source: *Reuters*

GS: GS-3 — Energy Security, Coal, Power Sector, Climate Change

Context

- **74 of India's 190 thermal power plants** had critically low coal stocks as of **19 September 2026**, with inventories falling to **22.9 million tonnes (MT)**, equivalent to only about **7 days of stock cover**. The immediate pressure is linked to high electricity demand, monsoon-related logistics disruptions and lower hydropower generation.

1. Current Coal and Power Situation

- **Critical plants:** 74 plants had stocks below **25% of the normative requirement**, up from 51 in August.
- **Stock depletion:** Plant-level coal inventories fell **24% from August 31** to 22.9 MT; August stocks were about **42% lower year-on-year**.
- **Rising demand:** Electricity demand crossed **255 GW in early September**, with demand approaching **267 GW**; the year's peak has been around **270 GW**.
- **Thermal generation:** Coal-based generation rose about **13% in August**, as higher demand increased coal consumption.
- **Renewables:** Renewable generation increased **20.7% during April–August**, but its intermittent nature means coal remains important for round-the-clock supply.

2. Why the Shortage Has Emerged

- **Demand surge:** Hotter-than-normal conditions increased cooling demand and electricity consumption.
- **Monsoon disruption:** Heavy rainfall affected **coal production, loading and railway movement** in the eastern coal belt.
- **Transport bottleneck:** During April–August, coal consumption by thermal plants increased about **8%**, while rake loading rose only around **5%** and coal receipts around **3%**.
- **Hydropower weakness:** Lower rainfall reduced hydro generation, increasing dependence on thermal power.
- **Import dependence:** Power-sector coal imports reached **5.52 MT in August**, an **85.6% year-on-year increase** and a 15-month high; around **80% came from Indonesia**.
- **Important distinction:** Coal availability at the production end is not necessarily the main problem. Coal India had around **76 MT at pitheads**, indicating that the immediate constraint is largely **evacuation and replenishment at power plants**.

3. What Does It Mean for Energy Security?

- **Supply reliability:** Persistently low inventories reduce the buffer available during another sudden demand surge.
- **Higher costs:** Greater reliance on imported coal exposes power producers to international price movements; Indonesian coal prices had already risen **18–20% since May**.
- **Renewable transition challenge:** Rapid renewable expansion must be accompanied by **storage, transmission and grid flexibility** so that coal is not required to compensate for every shortfall.
- **Nature of the present problem:** Current assessments indicate a largely **logistics-driven and potentially temporary inventory problem**, rather than evidence of an immediate structural shortage of coal resources.

4. Solutions

- **Strengthen coal evacuation:** Expand railway rakes, sidings, first-mile connectivity and alternative **road evacuation** for plants facing critical stocks.
- **Maintain strategic buffers:** Improve plant-level inventory management before and during the monsoon, with priority replenishment for non-pithead plants.
- **Diversify transport:** Use rail-road combinations and dedicated coal corridors to reduce dependence on a single evacuation route.
- **Improve domestic supply response:** Maintain adequate mining and pithead stocks while improving monsoon-resilient mining and transportation infrastructure.
- **Build renewable flexibility:** Accelerate **battery storage, pumped-storage hydropower, transmission capacity and demand-response systems** so renewable electricity can increasingly meet peak and round-the-clock requirements.
- **Reduce import vulnerability:** Use imported coal as a flexible supplementary source rather than allowing temporary domestic logistics disruptions to create excessive dependence on costly imports.

● WILDLIFE

Conservation, compensation: Tackling Himachal monkey menace

Saurabh Parashar
Shimla, September 21

THE RECENT death of a 63-year-old woman in Shimla has again brought forth the issue of human-wildlife conflict. The woman suffered grievous injuries, including spinal damage, after being attacked by a pack of rhesus macaques on the roof of her house on August 30. She succumbed to her injuries on September 5.

The incident highlights the legal and administrative position of rhesus macaques, or rhesus monkeys. The Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, listed the rhesus macaque as a protected species under Part I of Schedule II, but the Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2022, removed it.

What changed after 2022

Chief Wildlife Warden of Himachal Pradesh, Alok Prem Nagar, told *The Indian Express*: "State forest departments are now no more responsible for looking after the monkey menace. A monkey is now like a stray animal, which falls under the purview of civic bodies."



Shimla records 50-55 cases of monkey attack every month. WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

A senior Indian Forest Service (IFS) officer said there were many reasons why urban local bodies (ULBs) like Shimla Municipal Corporation (SMC) were "not fully competent" to tackle the monkey menace independently. "First, the lack of funds. Second, absence of expertise and trained manpower to capture monkeys, and sterilising the captured monkeys," the officer told *The Indian Express*.

Sustained sterilisation

● Official numbers show that Himachal Pradesh's estimated rhesus macaque population fell from 3,17,512 in 2004 to 2,26,086 in 2013, and then to 1,36,443 in 2019-20.

● The state forest department attributes much of this decline to sustained sterilisation. Starting 2006, the state had sterilised 1,86,448 monkeys by March 2024.

According to the officer, state forest departments earlier used to receive funds from the Centre to control the monkey menace. Now, with the rhesus monkey no longer a protected animal, the officer added, this is no longer the case.

Shimla Municipal Commissioner, Sachin Kanwal, told *The Indian Express*: "We are in the process of training our manpower on how to capture the monkeys. Whenever a situation arises, we take the assistance of the forest department concerned."

Deputy Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) of Himachal Pradesh, Shahnawaz Ahmad Bhat, said that the forest department had not given up its responsibilities. "We do intervene, but largely in and around the forest areas. Whenever Municipal Corporation officials approach us for capturing a monkey and sterilising it, we do provide our assistance. But we charge money from ULBs," he told *The Indian Express*. The cost of sterilisation per monkey is Rs 700.

Conservation dilemma

As per SMC officials, Shimla records 50-55 cases of monkey attack every month.

Wildlife expert Shaminder Boparai said that opinion was divided on whether monkeys "should be treated like vermin or a protected animal", despite the fact that their population increases rapidly.

"The public feeding of wild animals, including monkeys, are forcing animals to come out of the forest in search of easy food," Boparai told *The Indian Express*.

A question of compensation

Last week, a Shimla-based NGO held a protest outside the SMC Commissioner's office demanding a compensation of Rs 5 lakh for the deceased woman. The NGO also demanded stricter action against those found feeding monkeys in Shimla.

The change in legal status, however, has also affected compensation. Under Himachal Pradesh's wildlife compensation policy cited by officials, severe monkey-attack injuries attract a compensation of Rs 75,000, permanent disability Rs 1 lakh, and death Rs 4 lakh. Since rhesus macaque is no longer covered by the Act, officials indicated that the woman's family is unlikely to qualify under this framework.

5. Conservation, Compensation: Tackling Himachal Monkey Menace

Source: The Indian Express

GS: GS-3 — Environment, Human-Wildlife Conflict, Wildlife Conservation

Context

- **Monkey attacks in Shimla:** A recent fatal attack has highlighted the continuing human-macaque conflict in Himachal Pradesh.

1. Rhesus Macaque: Key Facts

- **Species:** Rhesus macaque (*Macaca mulatta*) — a widely distributed primate found across South and Southeast Asia.
- **Legal status:** Removed from the protected category under the **Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2022**.
- **Population trend:** Himachal Pradesh witnessed a decline from about **3.17 lakh (2004)** to **1.36 lakh (2019–20)**.
- **Population control:** **Sterilisation** has been used extensively to control its population.

2. Problems Created

- **Human attacks:** Frequent monkey attacks cause injuries and, in some cases, deaths.
- **Urban conflict:** Monkeys increasingly enter residential areas in search of food.
- **Agricultural damage:** Crop raiding can affect farmers and rural livelihoods.
- **Public safety:** Increasing interaction creates risks for pedestrians, residents and tourists.

3. Reasons for the Conflict

- **Easy food availability:** Household waste and open garbage provide an assured food source.
- **Human feeding:** Feeding by residents and visitors encourages monkeys to remain around settlements.
- **Habitat pressure:** Reduction or disturbance of natural habitats pushes animals towards human-dominated areas.
- **Weak waste management:** Unsecured food waste sustains monkey populations around urban areas.

4. Managing the Problem

- **Waste management:** Secure garbage and eliminate easily accessible food waste.
- **Regulate feeding:** Discourage deliberate feeding of monkeys in residential and tourist areas.
- **Scientific sterilisation:** Continue population-control programmes with regular monitoring.
- **Habitat management:** Improve natural food and habitat availability to reduce dependence on human settlements.
- **Institutional coordination:** Clearly divide responsibilities and funding between the **Forest Department and Urban Local Bodies**.
- **Victim compensation:** Develop a clear mechanism for people suffering serious human-wildlife conflict.
- O human-dominated areas.
- **Weak waste management:** Unsecured food waste sustains monkey populations around urban areas.

Class 10 girl and boy returning from coaching groped, assaulted in Bihar

Police register *suo motu* FIR, arrest three as viral video of crime sparks political row; NCW directs support for teens, says steps should be taken to stop video circulation; Rahul Gandhi slams patriarchy; Tejashwi says Bihar put to shame by NDA govt.

Amarnath Tewary
PATNA

Two Class 10 students, a girl and a boy, returning from a coaching class were allegedly groped and assaulted by a group of men in Jamui district of Bihar on Saturday. A video of the incident went viral on social media on Monday, prodding the police to register an FIR and arrest three people.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and other Opposition leaders said the incident was “deeply disturbing”, indicative of the patriarchal attitudes among the supporters of the ruling BJP, and exposing the State’s law-and-order situation.

The National Commission for Women (NCW) on Monday took *suo motu* cognisance of the alleged assault and harassment, and directed the Director-General of Police to immediately register an FIR. The State Commission for Women also took *suo motu* cognisance of the incident, and promised that strict action would be taken against those found guilty.

Three arrested so far

“There was no formal complaint registered by anyone against anyone in the incident,” said Jamui Superintendent of Police Vishwajit

The NCW has taken *suo motu* cognisance of an incident in Jamui district of Bihar involving alleged assault and harassment of a teenage girl and her male companion. Any compromise on the dignity, safety, and privacy of women is unacceptable at any level



NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR WOMEN

Dayal. “The police took *suo motu* cognisance of the incident and approached the girl and her friend, a boy. Both were returning from a hillside area after their coaching was over on the Jamui-Lakhisarai road where a group of six to seven people, some even masked, stopped them as it is shown in the viral video and they were being harassed on September 19 evening around 7 p.m.,” he added.

An FIR (No 428/ 2026) was registered over the incident at Jamui police station. All the people seen in the viral video were taken into custody and three of them have been arrested. “The police will soon arrest all of those found involved in this unfortunate incident,” Mr. Dayal said.

The NCW said, “Any compromise on the dignity, safety, and privacy of women is unacceptable at any level.” Its chairperson

Vijaya Rahatkar wrote to the Bihar DGP, directing him to immediately register an FIR over the incident. The NCW also directed that security, legal assistance, and psychological counselling be provided to the victims, and sought a detailed Action Taken Report in the matter. All necessary legal action should be taken to stop further sharing of the objectionable video being circulated on social media, it directed.

Bihar State Commission for Women Chairperson Apsara said, “I’ve spoken to the Jamui officials and they told me about the incident as it has happened on September 19 evening at 7 p.m. Stern action will be taken against all those found involved in this incident by people having a weird mindset.”

The Bihar State Commission for Women stands with all such hapless wo-

men,” Ms. Apsara added.

“The video from Jamui is deeply disturbing,” Mr. Gandhi said in a social media post. “Two class 10 students were stopped on a road. Harassed. Humiliated. Molested. A young girl’s hands folded, begged to be let go while goons groped her and dragged her away. This is not ‘culture’. It is patriarchy: the belief that any man can police a girl’s body, her movement, her choice... When control is mistaken for culture, and such attitudes are normalised by ‘Andhbhaktis’, mobs start believing they are the law,” he added.

‘Why is a girl not safe?’

Demanding prosecution of the culprits under the POC SO Act, Mr. Gandhi, who is the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, asked, “Who gave these men the right to behave like this? The Bihar government must answer why a girl is not safe on a public road at 7 p.m.?”

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge demanded the “harshes punishment for culprits, and accountability”. Such incidents, he said, “scream to expose the lies and hypocrisy of the BJP’s ‘Nari Shakti Vandana’ and ‘Beti Bachao’ schemes”, meant to empower women.

Rashtriya Janata Dal

leader Tejashwi Yadav, Leader of Opposition in the Bihar Legislative Assembly, also slammed the State government in a social media post.

“Bihar has been shamed by the BJP-NDA government. Everyone is ashamed. On the Jamui incident, the government’s people are making low-level statements... When the Jamui incident happened, [Bihar Chief Minister] Samrat Choudhary was holding a caste conference,” he said.

Mr. Yadav’s Singapore-based sister Rohini Acharya said: “The incident in Jamui is extremely shameful and expresses the dire state of law and order under the Samrat government, along with lax administrative influence and the stark reality of policing.” She alleged that the “sisters and daughters of the State are entirely unsafe”.

RJD leader and former MLA Shakti Singh Yadav said law and order had collapsed in the State.

State Rural Works Minister Sunil Kumar said he had spoken to the Jamui Superintendent of Police. “All those people allegedly involved into the incident would be behind bars very soon,” said Mr. Kumar.

(With inputs from Sreeparna Chakrabarty in New Delhi)

6. Class 10 Students Assaulted in Bihar’s Jamui

Source: The Hindu

GS: GS-2 — Women & Children, Fundamental Rights, Law and Order, Governance | GS-4 — Human Dignity, Empathy, Constitutional Morality

Context

- **Jamui, Bihar:** Two Class 10 students returning from coaching were allegedly assaulted and harassed by a group of men.
- The incident raises concerns over **women's safety, dignity of minors, public safety and rule of law.**

1. Constitutional and Ethical Dimensions

- **Article 14:** Guarantees equality before law and equal protection of laws.
- **Article 15(1):** Prohibits discrimination on grounds including sex.
- **Article 21:** Protection of life and personal liberty includes the right to **dignity, privacy and personal security.**
- **Human dignity:** No individual can be subjected to humiliation, violence or coercion in the name of social norms.
- **Constitutional morality:** Social attitudes cannot override individual rights or justify taking the law into one's own hands.

2. Why the Incident Matters

- **Women and child safety:** Girls and minors require safe access to education, coaching and public spaces.
- **Patriarchal attitudes:** Control over women's mobility, behaviour or choices can undermine equality and autonomy.
- **Mob behaviour:** Collective intimidation weakens the **rule of law** when individuals assume authority to police others.
- **Digital amplification:** Circulation of videos of such incidents can cause further humiliation and violate the privacy of minors.
- **State responsibility:** Effective policing, speedy investigation and victim-sensitive administration are essential for public confidence.

3. Protection of Children and Victims

- **POCSO Act, 2012:** Provides a specialised framework for protection of children from sexual offences.
- **Privacy of children:** Section 23 restricts disclosure of a child's identity through media; Section 24 requires safeguards while recording a child's statement.
- **Victim-centred approach:** Investigation should ensure safety, confidentiality, counselling and protection from secondary victimisation.
- **Digital responsibility:** Unlawful circulation of material identifying or humiliating a minor can compound the original harm.

4. National Commission for Women

- **Nature:** The **National Commission for Women (NCW)** is a **statutory body** constituted under the **National Commission for Women Act, 1990**; it was established in 1992.

- **Mandate:** Examine constitutional and legal safeguards for women and recommend measures for their effective implementation.
- **Suo motu power:** Under **Section 10**, NCW can take suo motu notice of matters involving deprivation of women's rights or non-implementation of protective laws.
- **Other functions:**
 - Examine complaints and violations of women's rights.
 - Review laws affecting women and recommend amendments.
 - Seek reports from authorities and take up cases with appropriate authorities.
 - Undertake studies and recommend measures against discrimination and atrocities.