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Delhi invites Pakistan Minister for SCO Civilisational Dialogue debut

Suhasini Haidar
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NEW DELHI

India will hold the first "Civilisational Dialogue Forum" of the 10-nation Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) grouping, that includes Pakistan, from November 20-22 in Delhi, sources confirmed to *The Hindu*.

The dialogue, which will be organised by the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of External Affairs, was proposed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the SCO leaders' Summit in Tianjin last year and adopted by the SCO Council.

According to the sources, the government has invited Pakistan's Minister for National Heritage and Culture Aurangzeb Khan Khichi, for the event. Culture Ministers from the 10 member states, including China, Russia, Iran, Belarus and Central Asian states, 15 Dialogue partners and observer countries have been invited.

Aurangzeb Khan Khichi

The event, which will be inaugurated by Mr. Modi, will be held at Delhi's iconic Purana Quila (Old Fort), a 16th Century fort built by Emperor Humayun. The fort is also the site of many excavations showcasing India's ancient past spanning nearly 3,000 years, from the Pre-Mauryan, Mauryan, Shunga, Kushana, Gupta, Post-Gupta period to medieval-era Rajput, Sultanate and Mughal periods, officials said, explaining its importance.

According to diplomatic sources, Pakistan has not so far confirmed who will lead its delegation to the dialogue forum. If Mr. Khichi attends, this will be the first time India will host a Minister from Pakistan since the 2023 SCO Foreign Ministers meeting, when the then Pakistan FM Bilawal Bhutto had travelled to Goa, and the first since the four-day conflict between India and Pakistan in May 2025.

While India has refused to take part in meetings of South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in Islamabad due to differences with Pakistan since 2016, it has joined SCO meetings there in the past, including SCO-Regional Anti-Terror Structure (RATS). In September, India sent SCO National Coordinator Alok Dimri to Islamabad to attend the first coordination meeting for Pakistan's SCO Presidency and events leading up to the leader's Summit in Pakistan, scheduled for August 2027. In November 2024, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar had represented India at the SCO Heads of Government (HoG) Meeting, and all eyes will be on who will represent India at the SCO Heads of State Summit next year.

"India deals with SCO as an entity, as an important organisation," MEA Secretary (West) Sibi George said in response to a question from *The Hindu* at a briefing on August 27 about whether PM Modi would travel to Pakistan for the summit. "As far as our engagement with individual countries is concerned, a decision will be taken by the appropriate authority at the appropriate time and our appropriate level of participation will be decided accordingly," he added.

For the forum, each participating State has been invited to nominate a delegation comprising the Minister responsible for Culture and up to four government representatives.

1. India Invites Pakistan to SCO Civilisational Dialogue Forum

Source: The Hindu
GS Paper II: International Relations

Context: India has invited Pakistan's Minister for National Heritage and Culture, Aurangzeb Khan Khichi, to the first Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Civilisational Dialogue Forum, scheduled in New Delhi from 20–22 November 2026, amid strained bilateral relations.

1. India–Pakistan Relations: Recent Background

1. **Pahalgam Terror Attack (22 April 2025):** The attack killed 26 people. India attributed it to Pakistan-linked terrorism, while Pakistan denied responsibility.
2. **Operation Sindoor (7 May 2025):** India conducted strikes against targets it identified as terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir.
3. **Military escalation and ceasefire:** Hostilities intensified before both countries agreed to stop military action on 10 May 2025.
4. **Diplomatic and economic restrictions:** India placed the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance and introduced other restrictions. Pakistan announced reciprocal measures, including suspending bilateral trade.
5. **Continuing tensions:** Terrorism and unresolved disputes continue to constrain bilateral engagement, although both countries remain members of the SCO.

2. Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and Civilisational Dialogue Forum

1. **SCO:** Established in 2001 and headquartered in Beijing, China. It has 10 member states, including India, Pakistan, China, Russia and Iran.
2. **Objectives:** Regional security, counter-terrorism, economic cooperation and cultural exchange.
3. **Civilisational Dialogue Forum:** An initiative to promote dialogue on the cultural heritage, traditions and historical connections of SCO countries.
4. **India as host:** Scheduled for 20–22 November 2026 in New Delhi, with the Ministry of Culture and Ministry of External Affairs involved in its organisation.
5. **Participation:** All 10 SCO member states have been invited; Pakistan's attendance had not been confirmed at the time of reporting.

3. Why Is Pakistan's Invitation Significant?

1. **Multilateral diplomacy:** India continues engaging with Pakistan within the SCO framework despite strained bilateral relations.
2. **Institutional engagement:** The invitation supports participation by SCO member states in a forum hosted by India.
3. **Cultural diplomacy:** The forum offers an opportunity for cultural exchange without requiring political disputes to be resolved first.
4. **Diplomatic significance:** If Pakistan's minister attends, it would mark the first visit by a Pakistani minister to India since the SCO Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Goa in May 2023.
5. **Limits of engagement:** The invitation does not, by itself, indicate improved bilateral relations, a change in India's position on terrorism, or the resumption of formal India–Pakistan dialogue.

BRICS Forum raises concern over hostilities in West Asia

Kallol Bhattacherjee
NEW DELHI

Expressing "deep concern" about the escalating tension and hostilities in West Asia, parliamentary leaders from the BRICS nations slammed "unilateral coercive measures" and "unilateral economic sanctions" imposed in the region as contrary to international law.

A joint declaration issued after deliberations led by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, at the end of the two-day 12th BRICS Parliamentary Forum on Tuesday, also reiterated the need for a 'two-state' solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict. "We express deep concern over the continued escalation of tensions in Middle East/West Asia and recall-

2. BRICS Forum Raises Concern over Hostilities in West Asia

Source: The Hindu
GS Paper II: International Relations

Context: The 12th BRICS Parliamentary Forum, chaired by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, expressed concern over escalating hostilities in West Asia and called for restraint, respect for international law and a peaceful resolution of conflicts.

1. Key Outcomes of the BRICS Parliamentary Forum

1. **West Asian Conflict:** Expressed deep concern over escalating tensions and called on all parties to exercise maximum restraint.
2. **Unilateral Sanctions:** Opposed unilateral coercive measures and economic sanctions considered contrary to international law.
3. **Israel–Palestine Conflict:** Reaffirmed support for a two-state solution, with Israel and Palestine coexisting peacefully and securely.
4. **Palestinian Statehood:** Supported the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and an independent, sovereign state, consistent with United Nations resolutions.
5. **Terrorism:** Condemned the 22 April 2025 terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir.

2. Significance for India and BRICS

1. **Multilateral Diplomacy:** BRICS provides a platform for member countries to express collective concerns about international conflicts.
2. **International Law:** Emphasises respect for the United Nations Charter and opposition to unlawful coercive measures.
3. **Peaceful Resolution:** Supports dialogue, restraint and diplomatic efforts to prevent further escalation in West Asia.
4. **Palestinian Question:** Reiterates support for a two-state solution in accordance with international law and relevant United Nations resolutions.
5. **Regional Security:** The declaration also reflects concern about attacks involving Iran and the security of BRICS member states, without explicitly naming every party involved.

New Delhi's 'balancing act' risks eroding Russia's trust

Muqtedar Khan

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The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, on August 31-September 1, 2026, and the BRICS summit in New Delhi on September 12-13, 2026, were remarkable. Iran received considerably more attention and support from members of both the groups, far more than anticipated. More consequential, however, was the shift in India's stance on the United States-Israel war against Iran and Russia's war in Ukraine.

Traditionally, the SCO and BRICS summits have offered the three major powers – Russia, India and China – an opportunity to demonstrate their mutual solidarity. For Russia, it is a platform from which it can signal to the West that it is not isolated and still has powerful allies. The expansion of the SCO and BRICS under China's leadership showcases its growing power to the West. For India, the SCO and BRICS have been useful for demonstrating its strategic autonomy. India has sought to remain welcome in both western and non-western forums, from the G-7 to the SCO and BRICS.

A surprise pivot

At Bishkek, however, India sprang two surprises. First, it endorsed the Bishkek Declaration, which condemned the attacks on Iran as violations of international law, reaffirmed Iran's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and mourned the killing of its Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, in U.S.-Israeli air strikes on February 28, 2026.

Although the declaration did not name the U.S. or Israel, its meaning was unmistakable. India reaffirmed its opposition to military strikes on Iran by endorsing the Bishkek Declaration, which condemned the attacks and reiterated support for Iran's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Second, Prime Minister Narendra Modi made an unusually blunt appeal to Russian President Vladimir Putin to bring Russia's seemingly endless war in Ukraine to an end.

India has generally sought to avoid directly condemning the U.S. or Israel for their military actions against Iran, even though Iran, like India, is a member of both the SCO and BRICS. India had previously avoided explicitly accusing Israel of genocide in Gaza, although it had supported UN resolutions calling for a ceasefire and reaffirmed its commitment to Palestinian statehood. Indeed, New Delhi had emphatically declared that it stands with Israel, while often working in multilateral forums to soften language that is critical of Washington and Tel Aviv. But in both the Bishkek and Delhi Declarations, India signed on to very strong criticism of Israel as well as very strong affirmation of Palestinian rights and the two-state solution.

India's performative diplomacy could undermine its longstanding friendship with Moscow

One interpretation of this pivot in policy is that India may have signed on to the declaration to avoid alienating Mr. Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping, and thereby jeopardising their attendance at India's BRICS summit. Without the two leaders, India's presidency of BRICS this year would have been a complete failure. Since Operation Sindoor (2025), India has faced a growing perception of diplomatic marginalisation. Meanwhile, Pakistan has gained diplomatic prominence through Washington's selection of Islamabad as a mediator in the conflict with Iran, while several Gulf nations have sought defence agreements with Pakistan. Consequently, India needed a successful and high-profile BRICS summit, which it got.

Contradictory shifts

While there is a shift in India's policy, New Delhi has not abandoned Washington entirely. Mr. Modi's public appeal to Mr. Putin to end the endless war in Ukraine can therefore be read as a counter-signal to Washington. Had the message been intended only for Moscow, it could have been conveyed privately. Delivering it publicly suggested that Mr. Modi was also reassuring the West. India may have joined the SCO and BRICS consensus on Iran to secure a successful BRICS summit, but it was now leaning more toward the western position on Ukraine than before.

These apparently contradictory shifts reveal the strain on India's foreign policy. New Delhi wants to support Israel while condemning attacks on Iran; buy Russian oil while aligning more closely with the West on Ukraine; and remain central to BRICS and the SCO while assuring Washington that it is not part of an anti-American bloc. Multi-alignment is becoming an increasingly difficult exercise in this era of change and turbulence. India's balancing act is unlikely to sit comfortably with either Moscow or Beijing.

Although Mr. Modi and Mr. Xi did not meet bilaterally at the SCO summit in Bishkek, they held talks on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in New Delhi. The meeting preceded Mr. Xi's high-profile G2 summit with U.S. President Donald Trump in Washington, which was held in September 2026. Neither summit declaration mentioned the war in Ukraine, avoiding criticism of Moscow even as Mr. Modi publicly urged Mr. Putin to end the conflict. India thus endorsed two declarations accommodating Russia's position without fully embracing it.

From Mr. Putin's perspective, this was the second time that Mr. Modi had used what might be called '*jumla*' (performative) diplomacy at Russia's expense. At Samarkand on September 16, 2022, Mr. Modi told Mr. Putin that "today's era is not an era of war". External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar subsequently repeated that phrase in western capitals to demonstrate that India's purchase of discounted Russian oil did not signify political support for Russia's invasion.

The selectivity of these admonitions is difficult to ignore. Mr. Modi has not used comparable language toward Mr. Netanyahu, even as Israel has attacked several countries and territories across West Asia, many on multiple occasions, and has committed genocide in Gaza. Nor has Mr. Modi publicly directed the same admonition at Mr. Trump following American attacks on Iran. India itself attacked Pakistan during Operation Sindoor. Mr. Putin may therefore conclude that Mr. Modi's declaration that this is "not an era of war" reflects neither a consistent principle nor a universal opposition to war, but diplomatic messaging designed to reassure the West at Russia's expense.

Mr. Modi's latest appeal – that "endless war" must give way to an "end of war" – may reinforce that perception. Would Mr. Modi deliver the same message to Mr. Trump about the increasingly prolonged war with Iran – or to Mr. Netanyahu about his unending campaign of revenge in Gaza? How is Moscow interpreting this double standard?

Where ties with Russia stand

Russia, nevertheless, still needs India, at least for now, as a major purchaser of its oil and military equipment. At the same time, Moscow can see that New Delhi has steadily reduced its dependence on Russian arms by turning increasingly to France, Israel, and the U.S. The relationship remains important to both countries, but it is becoming increasingly transactional – and vulnerable to their diverging strategic priorities.

Russia is now leaning ever more toward its "trusted partner" – China, while Mr. Modi's performative diplomacy designed to stay in the good books of Washington risks undermining the long enduring Russia-India friendship.

3. New Delhi's 'Balancing Act' Risks Eroding Russia's Trust

Source: The Hindu
GS Paper II: International Relations

Context: India's positions at the 2026 Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and BRICS summits have raised questions about its strategic autonomy and the future of its longstanding partnership with Russia.

1. India's Changing Diplomatic Position

1. **Iran:** India endorsed the Bishkek Declaration, condemning attacks on Iran and reaffirming its sovereignty and territorial integrity.
2. **Ukraine:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged Russian President Vladimir Putin to end the war, signalling India's concern over the prolonged conflict.
3. **Palestine:** India reaffirmed Palestinian rights and support for a two-state solution, while the editorial highlights differences in India's diplomatic approach towards conflicts involving Israel, Iran and Russia.
4. **Multilateral diplomacy:** India seeks to maintain its influence in Western and non-Western forums, including the SCO and BRICS, while strengthening ties with the United States and Europe.
5. **Diplomatic balancing:** The editorial suggests that India's positions helped secure high-level participation at the BRICS summit while managing competing international expectations.

2. Why Is India's Balancing Act Becoming Difficult?

1. **Risk of Russian mistrust:** Moscow may interpret India's public criticism of the Ukraine war as an attempt to accommodate Western expectations.
2. **Perceived inconsistency:** Different approaches to conflicts in Ukraine, Iran and Gaza may raise questions about the consistency of India's foreign policy principles.
3. **Russia–China partnership:** Moscow's growing closeness to Beijing could complicate India's strategic interests.
4. **Pakistan's diplomatic visibility:** The editorial notes Pakistan's role in mediation efforts related to Iran, raising concerns about India's relative diplomatic position.
5. **Limits of performative diplomacy:** Public statements designed to reassure different partners may undermine credibility if they are perceived as selective or inconsistent.

3. Why Does Russia Remain Important for India?

1. **Defence:** Russia remains an important source of military equipment, spare parts and maintenance support.
2. **Energy security:** Russian oil contributes to India's energy supplies and offers opportunities for competitive procurement.
3. **Strategic cooperation:** Bilateral ties cover defence, nuclear energy, space and multilateral engagement.
4. **Multipolarity:** India seeks an international order in which power is not concentrated in a single country or bloc.
5. **China factor:** Maintaining relations with Moscow remains relevant as Russia's partnership with China deepens, although this growing alignment also creates challenges for India.

4. Way Forward

1. **Consistent principles:** Base foreign policy on sovereignty, territorial integrity, international law and peaceful resolution of disputes.
2. **Sustained dialogue:** Address disagreements with Russia through regular diplomatic engagement while communicating India's independent position clearly.
3. **Diversified partnerships:** Strengthen ties with Russia, the United States, Europe and other partners without aligning exclusively with any bloc.
4. **Reduce strategic dependencies:** Expand domestic defence manufacturing and diversify energy supplies gradually, while maintaining existing partnerships.
5. **Pragmatic cooperation:** Deepen India–Russia cooperation in defence, energy, technology and connectivity while acknowledging differences on global conflicts.

5. Key Takeaway

India's strategic autonomy depends not merely on maintaining relations with competing powers, but on pursuing a **consistent, credible and interest-based foreign policy**. A balancing strategy risks eroding Russia's trust when India's positions appear selective or driven by external pressure. India must therefore reconcile its partnerships through principled diplomacy, strategic diversification and clear communication.

Cyclone Arnab to make early landfall; heavy rain batters A.P.

A.P. cancels several flights, trains, and brings 30,000 fishing boats ashore; Odisha shuts ghat roads, imposes transport restrictions, and begins evacuation of 48,000 people from southern districts

Nellore Sravani
Satyasundar Barik
VIJAYAWADA/ BHUBANESWAR

Heavy rain pounded the northern districts of Andhra Pradesh on Tuesday, leaving one dead and a trail of destruction, while southern Odisha remained on edge as the 'very severe cyclonic storm' Arnab moved closer to the coast.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), the storm is likely to make landfall early – around 2 a.m. to 4 a.m. on Wednesday - near the Yanam-Kakinada region in Andhra Pradesh. Initially, the IMD had said that the landfall would take place around forenoon on Wednesday.

Jathara premises in Visakhapatnam rural mandal saw Tuesday's highest rainfall of 141.75 mm. Visakhapatnam district, where many places recorded rainfall above 100 mm and strong winds, bore the brunt of the cyclone. At least 200 trees got uprooted within the city limits.

Man dies

A 65-year-old man died at Mangalapalem after he came into contact with live electrical wires that had snapped and fallen into water.

Tree branches cover a car in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday as Cyclone Arnab approached the coast. K.R. DEEPAK

Due to the severity of the storm on Tuesday, airlines cancelled at least 21 flights in Vijayawada and Visakhapatnam. At the Vijayawada airport, five flights bound for Hyderabad, Chennai, Bengaluru, Visakhapatnam and Kadapa were cancelled on Tuesday. The authorities have cancelled all flights on Wednesday as well.

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu said 290 cyclone shelters had been set up and 84,396 people evacuated to safer locations.

More than 30,000 fishing boats had been brought back from the sea, while 93 Andhra Pradesh boats and their crew were reported safe at Gopalpur in Odisha.

Odisha on alert

The Odisha government has begun evacuation of over 48,000 people from vulnerable southern districts, sources in the government said. Owing to the prospect of landslips, the government has shut several ghat roads.

The East Coast Railway said 22 express and passenger train services connecting Visakhapatnam, Secunderabad, Kirandul, Jagdalpur, Rourkela, Sambalpur, Rayagada, Howrah, Bhubaneswar and Koraput would remain cancelled or regulated on different dates between October 27 and November 5. Similarly, private bus operators have also placed restrictions on movement of their buses to southern Odisha.

Strong winds

Manorama Mohanty, Director of IMD, Bhubaneswar, said southern districts such as Malkangiri, Nabarangpur, Gajapati, Koraptut, and Rayagada could experience wind speed between 50 and 60 km per hour gusting to 70 kmph.

Thunderstorms accompanied with lightning and gusty surface wind is likely to occur at one or two places over the districts of Kalahandi, Nabarangpur, Rayagada, Koraput, Malkangiri, Gajapati, Ganjam on Wednesday, said the IMD.

"We plan to shift 48,000 people from vulnerable places to safer place in the first phase in eight districts. In Nabarangpur and Gajapati district, 11,000 each will be evacuated. In Malkangiri, 9850 people have been identified for shifting. About 6,500 in Ganjam and 5,000 in Koraput will take shelter in identified locations," said Special Relief Commissioner Rajesh Pravakar Patil.

Consider the following statements :

1. Jet streams occur in the Northern Hemisphere only.

2. Only some cyclones develop an eye.

3. The temperature inside the eye of a cyclone is nearly 10°C lesser than that of the surroundings.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct ?

(a) 1 only

(b) 2 and 3 only

(c) 2 only

(d) 1 and 3 only

4. Very Severe Cyclonic Storm Arnab

Source: The Hindu

GS Paper I: Geography | **GS Paper III:** Disaster Management

Context

Very Severe Cyclonic Storm Arnab moved over the west-central Bay of Bengal towards the Andhra Pradesh coast. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) forecast landfall between Bapatla and Visakhapatnam, close to Yanam, on the morning of 28 October 2026.

1. Basics of Cyclones

A **tropical cyclone** is an intense low-pressure system that develops over warm ocean waters, bringing strong winds, heavy rainfall and thunderstorms.

Conditions for Formation

1. **Warm ocean water:** Provides heat and moisture.
2. **Low-pressure development:** Warm, moist air rises, drawing more air towards the centre.
3. **Condensation:** Releases latent heat, strengthening the storm.
4. **Coriolis force:** Earth's rotation causes the system to rotate.
5. **Low vertical wind shear:** Helps the cyclone maintain its structure and intensify.

2. Structure of a Cyclone

1. **Eye:** The central region, usually relatively calm, with lighter winds.
2. **Eyewall:** The ring of intense thunderstorms surrounding the eye; it generally experiences the strongest winds and heaviest rainfall.
3. **Rainbands:** Spiral bands of clouds and thunderstorms extending outward, bringing heavy rain and gusty winds.

3. Categories of Cyclones in India

The India Meteorological Department classifies cyclonic storms according to maximum sustained wind speed:

1. **Cyclonic Storm:** 62–88 km/h
2. **Severe Cyclonic Storm:** 89–117 km/h
3. **Very Severe Cyclonic Storm:** 118–167 km/h
4. **Extremely Severe Cyclonic Storm:** 168–221 km/h
5. **Super Cyclonic Storm:** 222 km/h or above

4. Cyclone Arnab: Key Details

1. **Location:** West-central Bay of Bengal.
2. **Intensity:** Very Severe Cyclonic Storm.
3. **Forecast wind speed:** 125–135 km/h, with gusts up to 150 km/h.
4. **Expected landfall:** Between Bapatla and Visakhapatnam, close to Yanam, on 28 October 2026.

5. Major Impacts

1. **Strong winds:** Damage to houses, power lines and communication networks.
2. **Heavy rainfall:** Flooding and waterlogging.
3. **Storm surge:** Seawater inundation in low-lying coastal areas.
4. **Economic losses:** Damage to agriculture, fisheries, transport and livelihoods.

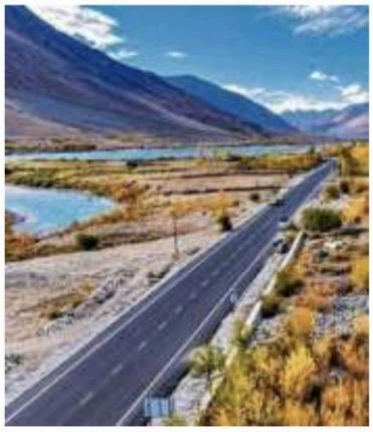
InvITs look at a bigger slice of India's vast household savings

Lalatendu Mishra
MUMBAI

India's infrastructure investment trusts (InvITs) are attracting more investors, creating a potential avenue to channel domestic savings into roads, power transmission networks and other income-generating infrastructure assets.

The number of investors in listed InvITs rose to 6.53 lakh in the first quarter of FY27, while assets under management (AUM) increased to ₹7.3 lakh crore, according to the Bharat InvITs Association (BIA).

Distributions to unitholders during the quarter stood at ₹5,923 crore, taking cumulative payouts since the sector's inception beyond ₹97,000 crore.



Lower entry barriers are an attraction to invest in InvITs.

The growth comes as India faces mounting financing requirements for infrastructure expansion. While government spending and foreign investment remain important, household savings and investments held by mutual funds, insurers and pension funds could provide a larger pool of long-term capital, according to industry executives.

InvITs offer a route to connect these savings with operational infrastructure assets. Investors buy units in trusts that own such assets and receive distributions from the income generated, without directly financing or managing the underlying infrastructure.

"India's next infrastructure financing challenge is creating efficient pathways for enormous pool of local savings to reach infrastructure," said Gaurav Chandna, ED and Joint CEO, Vertis Infrastructure Trust.

The model also helps developers monetise completed, revenue-generating assets, freeing up capital for new projects.

5. InvITs Look at a Bigger Share of India's Vast Household Savings

Source: The Hindu
GS Paper III: Indian Economy and Infrastructure Financing

Context: Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvITs) are attracting more investors, offering a way to channel domestic savings into income-generating infrastructure assets such as highways and power transmission networks.

1. Basics of Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvITs)

1. **Meaning:** An InvIT is an investment vehicle that pools money from investors to invest in income-generating infrastructure assets.
2. **How it works:** Investors purchase units in an InvIT, which owns infrastructure assets and distributes income earned from them.
3. **Example:** A highway generates revenue through toll collection. An InvIT can own the highway, collect the revenue and distribute a portion of the income to its unit holders.
4. **Investor benefit:** Individuals can invest in infrastructure without directly purchasing or managing a highway or power transmission network.
5. **Developer benefit:** Developers can monetise operational assets, release capital and use the funds to build new infrastructure.

2. Key Developments in India

1. **Investor Base:** Investors in listed InvITs reached 6.53 lakh in the first quarter of FY 2026–27.
2. **Assets Under Management (AUM):** Increased to ₹7.3 lakh crore, according to the Bharat InvITs Association.
3. **Quarterly Distributions:** Unit holders received ₹5,923 crore during the quarter.
4. **Cumulative Payouts:** Distributions since the sector's inception exceeded ₹97,000 crore.
5. **Growing Relevance:** InvITs can help meet India's infrastructure financing requirements by connecting domestic savings with operational infrastructure assets.

3. Significance for India

1. **Mobilising Household Savings:** Channels domestic savings into productive infrastructure investment.
2. **Infrastructure Financing:** Supplements government expenditure and foreign investment.
3. **Institutional Investment:** Enables savings managed by mutual funds, insurance companies and pension funds to contribute to infrastructure development.
4. **Capital Recycling:** Allows developers to unlock funds from completed assets and reinvest them in new projects.
5. **Financial Market Development:** Broadens investment opportunities and public participation in infrastructure financing.

EXPRESS special

Project GIB shrugs off one lost bird, next batch to be released soon

One of four birds released this month in Rajasthan was found dead near a desert fox den

Jay Mazoomdaar
New Delhi, October 27

Three captive-bred Great Indian Bustards released in Rajasthan's Desert National Park. COURTESY: PROJECT GIB

TOP OFFICIALS running Project Great Indian Bustard (GIB) for conservation of the species have said that the process of releasing captive-bred ones in Rajasthan's Desert National Park will continue as scheduled in the coming weeks, dismissing reports that the authorities would destroy desert fox dens in the area before it.

In a milestone for the conservation of the critically endangered GIB, Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav released two six-month-old male GIBs into the wild at Sam in Jaisalmer on October 4. Another two birds were released subsequently. On October 17, one of the four was found dead near a desert fox den. Officials said losses to predation are factored into any rewilding process, and there was no question of mass removal of the desert fox species to secure the GIB.

Rajasthan Chief Wildlife Warden Arun Prasad told *The Indian Express*: "There is no such decision. Destroying desert fox dens is out of the question."

Sutirtha Dutta, lead scientist on the Project GIB, said: "We will release up to 10 six-month-old birds in the first phase. The actual number will depend on the condition of individual birds. The six-month cut-off is ideal because the birds reach 70-75% of their adult size and gain flight capability by then, and are yet young enough to adapt in the wild."

Lessons from Saudi

Long before India launched its captive breeding programme for the GIB in 2018, Saudi Arabia had held a similar project for the bird's evolutionary cousin, the Houbara bustard, in 1986.

Between 1991 and 2016, the Saudi project released 1,117 birds across a royal reserve spanning 2,553 sq km. In the first year, the Houbara releases suffered major setbacks: all five birds in the first batch were lost to predation; only three of 12 survived in the second batch; and only five of 14 in the third.

Houbara project researchers then relocated red foxes and feral cats from the vicinity of the release enclosure. But this did not reduce the overall predation rate significantly, as avian raptors – such as the Steppe eagle and eagle-owl – remained major threats.

Finally, releasing 4-month-old flying sub-adults turned the tide, and by 1994, the survival rate was up to 50%. By 2016, the locally extinct Houbara had reached a self-sustaining population of 300-400 birds.

Predation is natural

Project GIB is releasing six-month-old sub-adults with flight capability which, even at that stage, are typically too large for a desert fox to run down or ambush during twilight hours. However, the birds which roost on the ground are vulnerable to foxes, which are nocturnal predators, at night. Other predators, such as raptors, desert cats and dogs, also pose a threat to GIB in the Desert National Park.

Dutta noted that the captive-bred GIBs they released were seen in the company of wild GIB flocks within days. "Beyond their natural instincts, they are expected to pick up certain survival skills through social interaction over time," he said.

Even wild-born birds are not immune to predation, pointed out G S Bhardwaj, Director, Wildlife Institute of India, which means wild reintroduction programmes are bound to face initial hurdles. "Across species and geographies, it has always been about learning from experience, calibrating the response, and filling up the gaps. Our scientists are doing a good job with the help of Rajasthan forest officials. Project GIB is on the right track," he said.

Ground realities

The Rajasthan Forest Department claims to have established approximately 200 sq km of fenced grassland enclosures inside the Desert National Park for the GIB. However, the quality of the GIB habitat restoration work has often been questioned.

"One cannot train a bird how to avoid predators it has never encountered in captivity. But the species would have a better chance of survival if habitat restoration was given as much importance as captive breeding," said Dau Lal Bohra, a Bikaner-based member of the IUCN Wildlife Health Specialist Group.

A senior forest official said along with the birds, their eggs at wild nesting sites are vulnerable to predation. "Our focus is on the prime nesting areas – around 20 sq km in all – where we do limited predator management through selective translocation. But other predators occupy the empty space. So far, we have succeeded in keeping only dogs out permanently."

Project GIB facilities at Sam and Ramdevra now house 97 birds – 40 from wild-laid eggs and 57 bred in captivity. Of these, 86 birds are being maintained for captive reproduction.

Dutta outlined the project's realistic ambitions: "Captive breeding resulted in 24 live chicks in 2025 and 29 in 2026. Our plan is to release up to 30 birds annually in the coming years. Even at a 30-35% survival rate, that will provide a major boost to India's wild GIB population, currently estimated at around 130."

6. Project GIB: Conservation Challenges and the Next Release

Source: The Indian Express
GS Paper III: Environment and Biodiversity

Context: Under Project Great Indian Bustard (GIB), four captive-bred birds were released in Rajasthan's Desert National Park in October 2026. One was subsequently found dead near a desert fox den, highlighting the challenges of reintroducing captive-bred birds into the wild.

1. Great Indian Bustard (GIB)

1. **Scientific Name:** *Ardeotis nigriceps*.
2. **Habitat:** Arid grasslands and semi-arid landscapes, particularly in Rajasthan and Gujarat.
3. **Conservation Status:** Critically Endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List.
4. **Major Threats:** Habitat loss, power-line collisions, predation and disturbance of breeding sites.

2. Desert National Park

1. **Location:** Jaisalmer and Barmer districts, Rajasthan.
2. **Ecosystem:** Thar Desert, comprising sand dunes, rocky terrain and arid grasslands.
3. **Significance:** A key habitat for the Great Indian Bustard and other desert wildlife.
4. **Conservation Role:** Protects fragile desert ecosystems and threatened grassland species.

3. Project GIB: Progress and Challenges

1. **Captive Breeding:** Birds are bred in protected facilities before being released into suitable habitats.
2. **Recent Progress:** The report records 24 live chicks in 2025 and 29 in 2026 through captive breeding.
3. **Predation:** Desert foxes, feral cats, dogs and raptors threaten released birds.
4. **Habitat and Infrastructure:** Grassland degradation and overhead power lines remain major threats.
5. **Reintroduction Challenge:** Captive-bred birds must adapt to natural conditions and develop survival skills.

4. Way Forward

1. Restore grasslands and protect nesting sites.
2. Monitor released birds and improve release strategies using survival data.
3. Reduce power-line collisions through appropriate mitigation measures.
4. Strengthen scientific monitoring and coordination among conservation authorities.

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• HEALTH

The risks of food colouring, as UP steps up scrutiny

Maulshree Seth
Lucknow, October 27

BRIGHT RED chutney served with samosas, pink cotton candy sold outside schools, vivid red tandoori chicken — food colourings have come under scrutiny in Uttar Pradesh after authorities found non-food grade industrial dyes in chutney. Amid the festive season, with Diwali approaching, the state's Food Safety and Drug Administration has issued detailed guidelines about where and how food colours can be used, which ones cannot be used, and how vendors must measure and account for the colours they buy.

What's under the scanner?

For street-food lovers, one of the most direct changes concerns the green and red chutneys served with *samosas*, *chaat*, *momos* and rolls. The guidelines prohibit adding colours to chutney and advise vendors to use ingredients such as tomatoes, beetroot, coriander and mint to achieve the desired colour and flavour.

Cotton candy and ice lollies have also been included. The use of non-food colours, particularly Rhodamine-B, is prohibited. This industrial dye is used in textile and paper colouring and cannot be used as a substitute for food-grade colour. The same restriction applies to the use of other industrial dyes to give a bright red appearance to chicken *tikka*, *kebabs*, *chaap* and fried fish. Vendors have been advised to use suitable food ingredients, including Kashmiri red chilli and degi mirch, for colour and flavour.

How widespread is use of Rhodamine-B?

A food safety officer had earlier told *The Indian Express* that Rhodamine B is usually reported from roadside vendors in small cities. "Small vendors are not aware that this

7. Risks of Food Colouring as Uttar Pradesh Steps Up Scrutiny

Source: The Indian Express
GS Paper II: Governance | **GS Paper III:** Science and Technology, Health

Context: Uttar Pradesh's Food Safety and Drug Administration has tightened scrutiny of food colouring after non-food-grade industrial dyes were detected in chutney. New guidelines specify permitted colours, prohibited dyes and requirements for food vendors.

1. Food Colouring: Key Concerns

1. **Commonly Affected Foods:** Red and green chutneys, cotton candy, ice lollies, tandoori chicken, kebabs, sweets and fried foods.
2. **Prohibited Dye:** Rhodamine-B, an industrial dye used in textiles and paper, cannot be used as a substitute for food-grade colour.
3. **Other Prohibited Dyes:** Metanil Yellow, Butter Yellow, Malachite Green, Auramine, Orange II and Sudan dyes.
4. **Safer Alternatives:** Tomatoes, beetroot, coriander, Kashmiri red chilli and deगी mirch can provide natural colour and flavour.
5. **Regulatory Requirements:** Artificial colours may be used only in permitted food categories and within prescribed limits under the Food Safety and Standards Regulations, 2011.

2. Health Risks of Artificial and Industrial Dyes

1. **Rhodamine-B:** Prolonged exposure may cause serious health risks, including potential liver damage and cancer.
2. **Metanil Yellow and Other Industrial Dyes:** Their consumption can pose health risks depending on the substance and level of exposure.
3. **Tartrazine:** A synthetic yellow food colour associated with allergic reactions in some people.
4. **Carmoisine:** A red food colour that may trigger hypersensitivity reactions, including hives and breathing difficulties.
5. **Food Adulteration:** Industrial dyes may be used to make foods appear brighter or fresher, misleading consumers about quality.

3. Legal and Regulatory Framework

1. **Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006:** Provides the legal framework for regulating food safety and punishing violations involving unsafe or misbranded food.

2. **FSSAI Regulations, 2011:** Specify which food colours are permitted, the categories in which they may be used and applicable limits.
3. **Penalties:** According to the report, violations may attract fines of up to ₹3 lakh and imprisonment of up to six months, depending on the offence.
4. **State-Level Enforcement:** Uttar Pradesh's Food Safety and Drug Administration has issued guidelines for vendors on the use and measurement of food colours.

4. Way Forward

1. Strengthen food sampling, laboratory testing and inspections of street vendors.
2. Raise consumer awareness about unsafe dyes and food adulteration.
3. Encourage the use of natural colouring ingredients and permitted food-grade colours.
4. Ensure transparent labelling and strict compliance with food-safety standards.