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Cultural connect is biggest guarantee of global peace, PM says at SCO forum

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Cultural connect is the biggest guarantee of global peace, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Friday. He was speaking at the first civilisational dialogue forum of the 10 nation Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) grouping. He said it was important that at a time when war and unrest were dominating the world, India was holding a dialogue on shared civilisations.

The SCO forum is being attended by Pakistan for the first time since the four-day conflict between the two countries in May 2025. Pakistan has nominated Federal Minister for Climate Change and Environmental Coordination, Mr. Musadik Masood Malik, to lead its delegation to the event being held in the historic Purana Qila in the national capital from November 20 to 22.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacts with an exhibitor at the first SCO civilisational dialogue forum at Purana Qila, in New Delhi. PTI

Speaking to the media at the SCO forum, Mr. Malik said, "It is a tremendous opportunity for us to have a multilateral dialogue about civilisation. I think cultures and civilisations cut across boundaries, and it is fantastic that we are here and talking about our history, geography, and our cultures and civilisations..."

He is scheduled to address the forum on November 21.

On Friday, Mr. Modi said Indian culture had taught "*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, that is, the whole world is our family". "Therefore, our desire for our own well-being is deeply rooted in the spirit of global well-being. We consider mutual harmony the foundation of global well-being."

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Cultural ties guarantee of world peace: PM

He said empires had certainly changed the map of the world, but civilisational dialogues had changed the way the world thinks, adding, "That is why the SCO civilisational summit is not merely a ceremonial platform. It can become a platform for giving the world direction". "In recent years, SCO has significantly increased cooperation in security, economy, connectivity and Cultural, civilisational cooperation will strengthen relations among various countries," Mr. Modi said. Pointing out that that 21st century technology has created new possibilities for cultural connectivity, Mr. Modi proposed that the SCO countries collaborate on digitisation and translation of ancient texts.

SCO Civilisational Dialogue Forum: India's Cultural Diplomacy and Global Engagement

Source: The Hindu

GS Paper II: International Relations, International Organisations and Indian Soft Power

Context: At the first SCO Civilisational Dialogue Forum, held at Purana Qila, New Delhi (November 20–22, 2026), Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted shared cultural and civilisational heritage as a foundation for global peace, mutual trust and international cooperation.

1. Key Ideas Highlighted by the Prime Minister

1. **Cultural Connectivity:** Shared cultural connections can strengthen global peace, mutual understanding and trust among nations.
2. **Historical Exchanges:** Ancient trade routes connected India, China, Central Asia and Eurasia through the exchange of knowledge, languages, traditions and philosophies.
3. **Civilisational Dialogue:** Political boundaries may change, but cultural exchanges continue to connect societies across generations.
4. **Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam:** The world is one family; the well-being of nations is interconnected with global welfare.
5. **Technology and Heritage:** Digitisation and translation of ancient manuscripts, technological cooperation and joint research can strengthen cultural engagement among SCO countries.

2. Why Hosting the Forum in India Matters

1. **Strengthening India's Diplomatic Role:** Positions India as a promoter of intercultural dialogue and cooperation across the Eurasian region.
2. **Showcasing Civilisational Heritage:** Provides an international platform to highlight India's contributions through Buddhism, the Ramayana tradition, ancient universities and philosophical thought.
3. **Bridging Geopolitical Differences:** Creates space for dialogue among countries with competing strategic interests, beyond political and security disagreements.
4. **Deepening Central Asian Engagement:** Reinforces India's historical, Buddhist and cultural connections with Central Asian countries.
5. **Institutionalising Cultural Cooperation:** Encourages joint research, manuscript digitisation, translation, cultural exchanges and heritage preservation within the SCO framework.
6. **Enhancing India's Soft Power:** Demonstrates how India's cultural heritage can complement its contemporary foreign-policy objectives and strengthen its international influence.

3. Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO): Key Facts

1. **Established:** 2001, Shanghai, China; evolved from the Shanghai Five mechanism established in 1996.
2. **Headquarters:** Beijing, China.
3. **India's Membership:** India became a full member in 2017.

4. **Permanent Bodies:**
    - SCO Secretariat – Beijing, China.
    - Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) – Tashkent, Uzbekistan.
5. **Civilisational Dialogue Forum:** Proposed by India at the 2025 Tianjin Summit.

4. UPSC Previous-Year Questions

Prelims 2022 – GS Paper I

India is a member of which of the following?

1. Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
2. Missile Technology Control Regime
3. Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

Answer: 1, 2 and 3.

Mains 2023 – GS Paper II

“Virus of Conflict” is affecting the functioning of the SCO. In light of the above statement, point out the role of India in mitigating the problems.

Mains 2021 – GS Paper II

Critically examine the aims and objectives of the SCO. What importance does it hold for India?

After Shenzhen: how India can forge a fourth pole

After leaders of the U.S., China and Russia met for an unprecedented trilateral in Shenzhen on November 19, a Chinese proposal suggested that the new world order be called the "Shenzhen International System". Whether or not the name sticks, it's clear that these three nations now regard each other as the only powers that matter in the world.

For decades, whenever Indians spoke of the desirability of a "multipolar order", they implicitly assumed that India would be a pole. But nothing is pre-determined in history, and we cannot take it for granted that our rise is inevitable. India, which comprises one-sixth of humanity and is legatee to a rich civilisation, is certainly deserving of great power status. But this is a status that has to be achieved, and is not granted. India need not wait for others to recognise its worth. It also should not presume that its heritage privileges it to claim the role of a *Vishwaguru*. What India can be, however, is the friend that others are willing to be led by.

The question then is how. India's economic reality which is defined by unsatisfactory per capita income and deepening inequality will mean that it will take a long time for it to stake a claim as an economic power. And until the country achieves complete self-reliance in arms manufacturing, its military might will also remain incomplete. However, this does not mean that we've hit a dead-end. Just as we advanced the non-alignment movement, India can take creative pathways in forging a 'fourth pole'.

An action plan

First, India should lead in declaring that a truly multi-polar order won't be just "tri-polar"; there will be a "fourth pole". However, the fourth pole will be "not one country, but a collective of nations". It should be a collective that will not compromise on sovereignty; that will not give in to expansionism; and whose member nations are unwilling to adhere to decisions that they are not consulted on. India is after all not the only country that is striving for "strategic autonomy" in an uncertain world. From Tokyo to Taipei, from Rabat to Riyadh, from Kyiv to Berlin, from Yaounde to Manila, from Copenhagen to Brasilia – there now exist similar fears, hopes and a quest to secure peace while preserving sovereignty and independence of action. Securing such unity will be a test of India's statesmanship.



Raja Karthikeya

geopolitics researcher and former international civil servant

Groupings such as G20 and BRICS may be helpful in building networks of trust in an uncertain world but cannot replace the legitimacy of multilateral forums

Second, India needs to rewire its diplomacy to squarely address the conflicts in today's world that have consumed nearly half a million lives in the last five years alone, and which have rendered supply chains and capital markets vulnerable. Launching a "diplomacy of conscience", India should take a strong stand against mass civilian casualties including ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. An instance such as the 2024 ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh should never be allowed to recur on our watch. The civil wars in Sudan and Yemen that are threatening regional stability are a concern for all.

India will need to position itself as a mediator and facilitator. The recent moves by New Delhi to mediate on Ukraine are welcome, but a "diplomacy of conscience" would require that the country puts the protection of civilians at the very heart of its mediation.

Enhancing the multilateral system

Third, groupings such as G20 and BRICS may be helpful in building networks of trust in an uncertain world but cannot replace the legitimacy of multilateral forums. India needs to rebuild its presence in the multilateral system. It can do so, for instance, by becoming the host country for significant UN and allied multilateral agencies. Embracing the spirit of multilateralism requires us to eschew short-term gains for long-term friendship. India is currently fighting for an elected Security Council seat for 2028-29 against Tajikistan (which is trying to enter the Council for the first time). India could consider the reputational benefits it will achieve among nations of the Global South by bowing out of the race this time in favour of Tajikistan.

Similarly, in the ongoing race for the election of the next UN Secretary-General, India could help rally the elected members of the Security Council around a candidate from Latin America, whose rightful turn it is for the post.

Fourth, the fourth pole of a new world order would need to step away from the cynical transactionalism of today's world and stem the irreverent dismantling of international law. India should lead the collective of nations in signing and ratifying key instruments of international law including human rights conventions such as the Convention Against Torture and the Refugee Convention.

Need to stand firm

Fifth, India cannot afford a post-Shenzhen world order in which the three "foremost nuclear-armed powers" – as the international media describes them – become the only powers to preserve their strategic weapons or become the sole arbiters of international security on the basis of their large arsenals. It should be conceivable for like-minded nuclear powers in the collective to devise common rules on strategic arsenal growth, and perhaps even create a joint nuclear umbrella.

A new world order is emerging, but nations that were not at Shenzhen need not resign themselves to taking orders. India can and should lead in making the fourth pole a reality.

Views are personal

2. After Shenzhen: How India Can Forge a Fourth Pole

Source: The Hindu, 21 November 2026
Author: Raja Karthikeya
GS Paper II: International Relations, Global Groupings and Multilateralism | GS III: Indian Economy and Defence Manufacturing

Context: The US, China and Russia's trilateral meeting in Shenzhen (19 November 2026) signals the possibility of a world order dominated by three major powers. India cannot automatically claim great-power status merely because of its civilisational heritage or population size. It must strengthen its economic and military foundations while building a collective fourth pole based on sovereignty, strategic autonomy and international cooperation.

1. Key Challenges for India

1. **Economic Weakness:** Low per capita income and deepening inequality constrain India's ability to translate its large population into global economic influence.
2. **Defence Dependence:** Incomplete self-reliance in arms manufacturing limits military strength and strategic autonomy.
3. **Geopolitical Marginalisation:** The emerging US–China–Russia axis risks concentrating global decision-making among three powers.
4. **Divergent Interests:** Potential partners across Asia, Europe, Africa and Latin America have different strategic priorities.
5. **Institutional Limitations:** G20 and BRICS can build networks of trust but cannot replace the legitimacy of universal multilateral institutions.

2. Five-Pillar Strategy for India's Rise

A. Strengthen Domestic Economic Foundations

- Raise per capita income and address persistent inequality.
- Build a productive economy capable of supporting India's global ambitions.
- Strengthen industrial capacity and reduce strategic economic dependencies.

B. Achieve Defence Self-Reliance

- Expand indigenous arms manufacturing, research and technological capabilities.
- Reduce dependence on external suppliers to strengthen military preparedness and strategic autonomy.

C. Build a Collective Fourth Pole

- Bring together like-minded countries committed to sovereignty, independence of action and resistance to expansionism.
- Develop a coalition rather than another power bloc dominated by a single country.

D. Reorient Diplomacy Towards Humanitarian Principles

- Promote a 'diplomacy of conscience' centred on civilian protection.
- Oppose ethnic cleansing, mass civilian casualties and crimes against humanity.
- Strengthen India's role in conflict mediation.

E. Strengthen Multilateralism and International Law

- Enhance India's presence in the United Nations and other international institutions.
- Promote more representative global governance and long-term diplomatic cooperation.
- Support international human rights instruments and strategic stability among nuclear powers.

3. UPSC Mains PYQ

UPSC Mains 2015 – GS Paper II: Discuss the impediments India is facing in its pursuit of a permanent seat in the UN Security Council.

Core sector growth hits record 10.9% in October

Coal production and electricity generation lead the growth, with cement and iron ore output also contributing; a low base, following 0.8% growth in October last year, also boosts the latest figure

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

Growth in the core industrial sectors of the economy climbed to a series-high of 10.9% in October 2026, driven by a surge in electricity generation and coal, cement, and iron ore production, and a low base effect, official data released on Friday showed.

Data released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry on the Index of Core Industries show that growth in October surpassed 8.2% in September, the previous series high. The new index, released this year with a base year of 2022-23, has data that go back only up to April 2024. However, the data also show that the strong growth figure in October was likely aided by the fact that the index grew a relatively poor 0.8% in October last year.



"While core output surged by 10.9% in October 2026, this was supported by a low base related to the shift in the festive calendar, with output having expanded by a marginal 0.8% in the year ago month," Aditi Nayar, chief economist at ICRA, said. "While the growth print for October signals a strong start for the third quarter of FY2027, this is largely optical," she added. "The average performance for October-November would provide a better assessment, as this would adjust for festive base effects."

Within the index, the coal sector saw growth accelerating to 23.05% in October 2026, far faster than the 10.7% registered in September. October's performance, however, is likely also due to low base effect, since the sector contracted 8.4% in October last year. The growth in the index, however, is in line with what the industry itself has reported. Coal India, the country's largest coal company, reported that production increased about 19% to 67.2 million tonnes (MT) in October.

A major reason for the growth in coal production was likely demand from the power sector, which saw electricity generation jump by 21.6% in October 2026, up from 12.6% in the previous month.

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Core sector growth hits record 10.9% in October

However, this sector too could have benefited from a low base effect, since it contracted nearly 7% in October 2025.

Within the index, the infrastructure-related sectors were the only ones that grew strongly without the aid of a statistical low base effect.

The iron ore sector, for example, grew at a three-month high of 23.4% in October 2026, compared to 18.4% in September and 8.7% in October last year. One of the factors driving this strong growth was that steel production grew at 7.3% in October, the fastest rate in seven months.

The cement sector also grew at a series-high of 15.4% in October 2026, compared to 10.1% in September, and 5.2% in October last year.

The fuel-related sectors in the Index other than coal continued to perform relatively poorly.

3. Core Industries Record 10.9% Growth in October 2026

Source: The Hindu, 21 November 2026
GS Paper III: Indian Economy, Infrastructure and Industrial Growth

Context: India's Index of Core Industries recorded a series-high growth of 10.9% in October 2026, up from 8.2% in September, driven by strong performance in coal, electricity, cement and iron ore.

1. Basics: Index of Core Industries (ICI)

Tracks production across major infrastructure sectors and indicates industrial performance.

- **Compiled by:** Office of the Economic Adviser, DPIIT, Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- **Frequency:** Monthly | **Base year:** 2022–23.
- **Coverage:** 9 industries, following the inclusion of iron ore.
- **Weight in IIP:** 40.27%.

Nine Industries: Coal, Crude Oil, Natural Gas, Petroleum Refinery Products, Fertilizers, Steel, Cement, Electricity and Iron Ore.

2. Overall Performance – October 2026

- October 2026: **10.9%** (series high).
- September 2026: 8.2%.
- October 2025: Contraction of 8.4%.

Sector	Growth
Iron ore	23.4%
Coal	23.05%
Electricity	21.6%

Cement	15.4%
Steel	7.3%

3. Reasons for Strong Growth

1. **Higher Power Demand:** Electricity generation rose 21.6%, supporting increased coal production.
2. **Infrastructure Expansion:** Strong construction activity boosted cement demand and production.
3. **Steel Production:** Output grew 7.3%, its fastest pace in seven months, supporting iron ore demand.
4. **Coal Production:** Output increased approximately 19% to 67.2 million tonnes due to power-sector requirements.
5. **Base Effect:** The 8.4% contraction in October 2025 created a favourable comparison base for the latest growth.

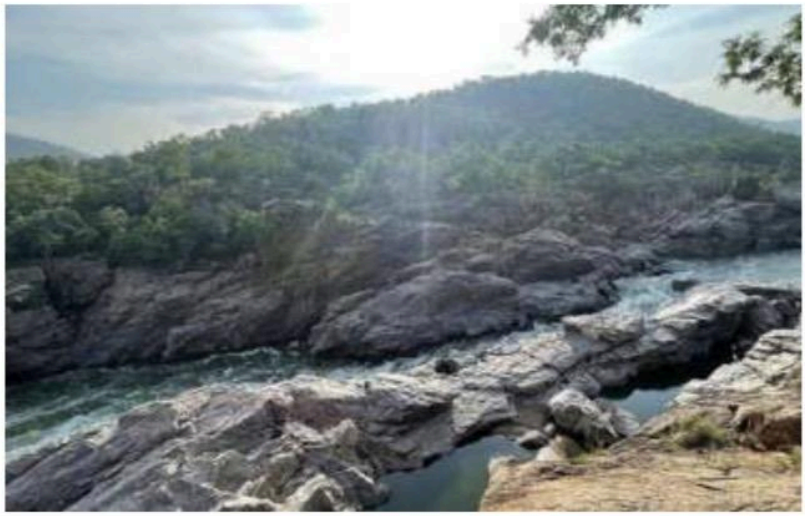
SC dismisses Tamil Nadu plea over Cauvery water

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday dismissed a plea by Tamil Nadu claiming that Karnataka has to make good a shortfall of 16.01 tmc ft (later modified to 11.719 tmc ft) of Cauvery water on a pro-rata basis during the current irrigation year of 2026-27.

A Bench headed by Justice Vikram Nath had reserved the case for judgment in mid-October after Karnataka argued that Tamil Nadu had even received excess water allocation.

Senior advocate Mohan Katarki, the counsel for Karnataka, said the decision was a welcome one and "puts a check on States frequently rushing to the court to challenge the decisions of the expert body – the Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA), constituted under Section 6A of the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956 – on distribution of water during a distress water year".



Water divide: The Cauvery water dispute centres on water releases during the current irrigation year. K. MURALI KUMAR

The judgment is based on applications filed by Tamil Nadu from September onwards, alleging that Karnataka failed to implement the binding judgment of the Supreme Court to ensure water to Tamil Nadu at Billigundulu on a pro-rata basis during distress years like the current one.

Tamil Nadu, represented by senior advocate G. Umapathy, had vehemently submitted that even flows directed by he CWMA to be ensured by Karnataka, from time to time, were released only after its reservoirs reached nearly full capacity, or in case of reservoir spills or after releasing water for its irrigation or intermittently, creating uncertainty.

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SC dismisses T.N. plea over Cauvery water

Noting that Karnataka had paid scant respect to its commitments, Tamil Nadu said it was still waiting for the former to ensure that the backlog in the quantity due was made good to it.

Tamil Nadu had referred to the Cauvery Tribunal decision of 2007 and the Supreme Court judgment of 2018 affirming the award of the Tribunal, both of which had underscored that Cauvery waters had to be proportionately shared among Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry.

The Tribunal award, along with the top court judgment in 2018, had assessed the total annual flow of the Cauvery basin at 740 TMC (thousand million cubic feet) at 50% dependability at Lower Coleroon Anicut. This water was apportioned between Karnataka (284.75 TMC), Tamil Nadu (404.25 TMC), Kerala (30 TMC), and Puducherry (7 TMC), alongside allocations of 10 TMC for environmental flows and 4 TMC earmarked as inevitable wastage to the sea. In case the annual yield was less than 740 TMC in any water year due to distress caused by less rainfall, the States were directed to share distress proportionately (pro rata).

But Tamil Nadu had said the State of Karnataka was heavily drawing water for irrigation through canals and river releases from its reservoirs since August 2026.

4. Supreme Court Dismisses Tamil Nadu's Plea over Cauvery Water Sharing

Source: The Hindu
GS Paper II: Federalism, Inter-State River Water Disputes and Constitutional Provisions

Context: The Supreme Court dismissed Tamil Nadu's plea seeking an additional 11.719 TMC of Cauvery water from Karnataka for the 2026–27 irrigation year, highlighting the challenges of equitable water distribution during deficient rainfall.

1. Basics: Cauvery River Dispute

- **Origin:** Talakaveri, Brahmagiri Hills, Karnataka.
- **Basin states:** Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry.
- **Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT):** Constituted in 1990; final award in 2007.
- **Supreme Court judgment:** 2018; modified the Tribunal's award.
- **Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA):** Established under Section 6A of the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956, to implement water-sharing arrangements.

2. Constitutional and Legal Framework

- **Article 262:** Parliament can provide for adjudication of inter-state river-water disputes.
- **Article 246, Entry 17 (State List):** Water and irrigation, subject to Entry 56 of the Union List.
- **Entry 56 (Union List):** Regulation and development of inter-state rivers and river valleys.
- **Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956:** Provides the framework for adjudicating such disputes.

3. Cauvery Water Allocation – Supreme Court, 2018

Total annual availability: 740 TMC at 50% dependability at the Lower Coleroon Anicut.

State / Purpose	Allocation
Karnataka	284.75 TMC

Tamil Nadu	404.25 TMC
Kerala	30 TMC
Puducherry	7 TMC
Environmental flows	10 TMC
Sea discharge	4 TMC
Total	**740 TMC**

Distress-sharing: When availability falls below 740 TMC due to deficient rainfall, the shortage must be shared proportionately among the states.

4. Recent Dispute and Supreme Court Decision

1. **Tamil Nadu's Plea:** Initially sought 16.01 TMC, subsequently modified to 11.719 TMC, alleging Karnataka had failed to ensure timely and proportionate water releases.
2. **Karnataka's Position:** Argued that Tamil Nadu had already received excess water and opposed repeated litigation.
3. **CWMA Disagreement:** Tamil Nadu alleged that Karnataka released water irregularly, often after its reservoirs approached full capacity or after meeting its own irrigation requirements.
4. **Supreme Court:** Dismissed Tamil Nadu's plea.

Federal Significance: Highlights the need for cooperative federalism, effective implementation of tribunal awards, transparent reservoir management and stronger inter-state coordination.

5. UPSC Mains Previous-Year Question

UPSC CSE 2013 – GS Paper II (10 Marks)

"Constitutional mechanisms to resolve the inter-state water disputes have failed to address and solve the problems. Is the failure due to structural or process inadequacy or both? Discuss."

Nepal PM to begin state visit to India tomorrow; talks with PM on agenda

Kallol Bhattacherjee
NEW DELHI

Nepal Prime Minister Balendra Shah will be on a two-day visit to India from November 22, the External Affairs Ministry (MEA) announced on Friday.

Official spokesperson for the Ministry, Randhir Jaiswal said Mr. Shah's trip will be a "state visit, during which he will be accorded state honours".

"He will meet with our President and hold discussions with our Prime Minister. Given that this is a highly multifaceted relationship, the talks will cover a wide range of topics, including our development partnership, economic cooperation, and various other matters," said Mr. Jaiswal during the biweekly media briefing.

The MEA, in a statement, said that India-Nepal bilateral cooperation has witnessed progress across sectors, including trade and commerce, development partnership, energy and water resources, and physical and digital connectivity, with growing engagement in areas such as start-ups, technology and innovation, and sports.


Balendra Shah

In Kathmandu, Nepal's Foreign Secretary Amrit Bahadur Rai told the media that Mr. Shah will be accompanied by a 34-member delegation.

Mr. Rai said the two countries are expected to sign several memorandums of understanding covering different areas of cooperation, and a few completed projects are expected to be inaugurated following Mr. Shah's meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Sources said the Dharchula Bridge, the land port of Banbasa at the Uttarakhand-Nepal border, and a train route between Janakpur and Gorakhpur are slated to be opened.

Formal engagements will begin Monday morning with a ceremonial reception at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, followed by a visit to Rajghat, where Mr. Shah will lay a wreath at Mahatma Gandhi's memorial. He will then meet Prime Minister Modi at Hyderabad House, where the MoUs will be signed. He will leave for Kathmandu later that afternoon.

This will be the Nepal Prime Minister's first visit to India since he took charge last March. Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle and Foreign Minister Shisir Khanal, who both visited India earlier this year, will join the delegation.

5. Nepal PM’s India Visit: Strengthening Bilateral Relations

Source: The Hindu, 21 November 2026
GS Paper II: India and Neighbourhood Relations, Bilateral Relations

Context: Nepal Prime Minister Balendra Shah’s first state visit to India (November 22–23, 2026) aims to strengthen economic cooperation, energy security, trade and connectivity while addressing longstanding bilateral differences.

1. Key Areas of Cooperation

1. **Economic Partnership:** Trade, investment and development assistance.
2. **Energy Cooperation:** Hydropower development, electricity trade and cross-border transmission.
3. **Connectivity:** Railways, roads, bridges, petroleum pipelines and integrated check posts.
4. **Emerging Sectors:** Start-ups, digital technology, innovation and sports.

2. Major India–Nepal Projects

Project	Significance
Jaynagar–Janakpur–Bijalpura Railway	Cross-border passenger connectivity
Jogbani–Biratnagar Railway	Trade and freight connectivity
Motihari–Amlekhgunj Pipeline	First cross-border petroleum pipeline in South Asia
Pancheshwar Multipurpose Project	Hydropower, irrigation and flood management

Lower Arun Hydropower Project	Electricity generation and energy cooperation
Raxaul–Kathmandu Railway	Proposed strategic rail connectivity

Projects highlighted for the visit:

- Dharchula Bridge, Banbasa land port and Janakpur–Gorakhpur railway connectivity.
- Proposed inauguration of the Lower Arun Hydropower Project and Siliguri–Charali petroleum pipeline.

3. Major Challenges in India–Nepal Relations

1. **Border Dispute:** Territorial disagreements over Kalapani, Limpiyadhura, Lipulekh and Susta.
2. **1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship:** Nepal seeks revision of provisions perceived as unequal.
3. **China's Growing Influence:** Chinese investment and infrastructure initiatives create strategic competition.
4. **Hydropower Disagreements:** Delays in Pancheshwar and differences over water utilisation and benefit-sharing.
5. **Trade Imbalance:** Nepal's dependence on Indian transit routes and its trade deficit.
6. **Gorkha Recruitment:** Nepal's concerns over India's Agnipath scheme and its compatibility with the 1947 Tripartite Agreement.
7. **Connectivity Concerns:** Nepal seeks additional air-entry routes through Indian airspace for its international airports.

4. Strategic Significance for India

1. **Neighbourhood First:** Strengthens India's engagement with its immediate neighbourhood.
2. **Himalayan Security:** Supports border management and security cooperation along the open border.
3. **Energy Security:** Provides access to Nepal's hydropower potential and electricity exports.
4. **Geopolitical Importance:** Prevents excessive strategic dependence on external powers in India's neighbourhood.
5. **Regional Connectivity:** Strengthens India's economic links with Nepal and the wider Himalayan region.
6. **People-to-People Relations:** Builds on historical, cultural, religious and economic ties.

Study shows most births in private hospitals taking place via C-section

Ramya Kannan
CHENNAI

As the debate about the rising number of Caesarian sections being conducted in India reaches a crescendo, new data on 1,60,00-plus delivery-related hospitalisation insurance claims show that the average rate of such births has hit at an all-time high of 69%.

The data were based on hospitalisation claims by corporate employees and white-collar workers in the country secured by insurer Plum.

A Plum Data Labs analysis of the claims looked at patterns in delivery care in hospitals, the choice of hospitals, and the percentage of out-of-pocket expenditure, including some regional variations.

The medical reasons for a C-section include breech presentation (baby is not in a head downwards position), complications with the placenta or umbilical cord, women bearing more babies per pregnancy, and high blood pressure in mothers.

As per the World Health Organization, since 1985, the international healthcare community has considered the ideal rate for C-sections to be between 10% and 15% of all births.

While high, the Plum Data Labs findings are in line with trends in the National Family Health Survey for 2023-24 released earlier this year, which showed that 54% of deliveries in the private sector were C-sections.

While Telangana (62%) and Andhra Pradesh (52%) led the pack, the number of C-sections in Kolkata was also high at over 44%.

The Data Labs study showed that nursing homes, single-speciality private hospitals, multi-speciality hospitals and mother-and-child speciality hospitals all conducted C-section deliveries in 67%-72% of cases. Single-speciality private hospitals in non-Metro cities had the highest rate of 72%-73%, compared with 51% at mission and trust hospitals.

Saurabh Arora, chief technology officer of Plum, explained that clinical factors - including gestational diabetes, thyroid conditions, other pre-existing conditions, the mother's weight and a prior C-section - decided whether a birth would be via C-section.

Lowest rates

Interestingly, the data showed that the percentage of C-sections in Tamil Nadu (39% in Chennai, 27% in Coimbatore, 20% in Madurai), where mothers give birth earlier, was lower than in Mumbai, the Delhi-NCR and Bengaluru, where nearly 60% of mothers are 30 or older. The four cities with the lowest C-section rates are all in Tamil Nadu: Chennai, Coimbatore, Salem and Vellore. Vellore is the lowest of all, with only 34% of births happening via C-sections.

The other big surprise in the report was the revelation that 82% of insured families still pay out of pocket.

Standard policy limits are often ₹50,000 for a normal delivery and ₹75,000 for a C-section and have not been revised in a long time, Mr. Arora said.

"Median claims are about ₹60,000 and ₹94,000, so even a typical delivery crosses the limit, and complications push costs higher. If the policy has no baby day-one cover, NICU costs for the newborn also fall on the family," Mr. Arora said.

6. Study Shows High Caesarean Section Rates in Private Hospitals

Source: The Hindu
GS Paper II: Health, Public Health, Social Justice

Context: A study by Plum Data Labs, based on over 1.6 lakh delivery-related hospitalisation insurance claims, found that Caesarean (C-section) deliveries accounted for an all-time high of **69% of births in private hospitals**, raising concerns about unnecessary surgical interventions, healthcare costs and maternal health.

1. Understanding Caesarean Section (C-section)

- A surgical procedure in which a baby is delivered through incisions in the mother's abdomen and uterus.
- **WHO recommendation:** Since 1985, the international health community has considered a C-section rate of approximately 10–15% of all births as an ideal population-level range.
- C-sections are medically necessary in certain high-risk pregnancies, but unnecessary procedures can increase maternal and neonatal health risks.

2. Key Findings of the Study

1. **Private Hospitals:** C-section rate reached 69%, according to over 1.6 lakh insurance claims.
2. **NFHS Comparison:** NFHS-5 (2019–21) reported that 54% of deliveries in the private sector were C-sections.
3. **State Variation:** Telangana (62%) and Andhra Pradesh (52%) recorded high rates; Tamil Nadu had comparatively lower rates.
4. **Hospital Variation:** Multi-speciality and mother-and-child hospitals recorded 67–72% C-sections; single-speciality private hospitals in non-metro cities recorded 72–73%.
5. **Regional Variation:** Bengaluru and Delhi-NCR recorded nearly 60% C-sections among mothers aged 30 or above. Vellore recorded a relatively low rate of 34%.
6. **Insurance Gap:** Around 82% of insured families still paid out of pocket for delivery-related expenses.

3. Reasons Behind High C-section Rates

Medical factors:

- Breech presentation (baby positioned feet or buttocks first).
- Placental or umbilical cord complications.
- Multiple pregnancies and high maternal blood pressure.
- Gestational diabetes, thyroid disorders and previous C-section.

Healthcare-system factors:

- High C-section rates in private hospitals and multi-speciality facilities.
- Possible financial and institutional incentives favouring surgical deliveries.
- Limited insurance coverage and inadequate maternity protection.

4. Major Concerns

1. **Maternal Health:** Surgical deliveries involve risks such as infection, blood loss and longer recovery.
2. **Newborn Health:** Unnecessary early C-sections may increase respiratory complications.

3. **Financial Burden:** Median insurance claims were approximately ₹60,000 for normal delivery and ₹94,000 for C-section, often exceeding policy limits.
4. **Out-of-Pocket Expenditure:** Inadequate maternity coverage and neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) expenses increase household healthcare costs.
5. **Over-medicalisation:** Excessive reliance on surgical delivery can undermine evidence-based and patient-centred maternity care.

5. Way Forward

- Strengthen evidence-based maternity care and medical audits of C-section rates.
- Improve insurance coverage for normal delivery, C-sections and newborn care.
- Promote informed consent and awareness of delivery options.
- Monitor hospital-level delivery patterns while ensuring medically necessary C-sections remain accessible.

Publication puts Rafale count at 32; officials dispute claims

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The number of active Rafale fighter jets in the Indian Air Force (IAF) inventory has been revised downward to 32 from 35 in the latest edition of the World Air Forces directory released by British aviation publication *FlightGlobal*.

However, sources in the Defence Ministry questioned the authenticity of the assessment, saying the information was not provided by the Ministry.

Senior Ministry officials said the figures published in the directory did not originate from the IAF. The latest assessment, compiled using aviation analytics firm Cirium's military fleet database, does not specify which aircraft were excluded from the active inventory or the reasons behind the revision.

The government procured 36 Rafale fighters from France, comprising 28 single-seat EH and eight twin-seat DH variants. *FlightGlobal*'s 2026 edition, published in late 2025, listed 35 aircraft as active, while the latest edition has reduced the number to 32.



Defence Ministry officials said the figures in the directory did not originate from the IAF.

After Operation Sindoor, the IAF said "losses are a part of combat", but it never disclosed the total number or the types of aircraft involved.

The officials added that, in June this year, the IAF issued a tender seeking "bridge support" for all 36 Rafale aircraft, underlining that the entire fleet remains part of its support and maintenance requirements.

Cirium tracks military aircraft at the individual airframe level using publicly available information, including aircraft sightings.

Variations in active fleet figures could reflect aircraft undergoing maintenance, upgrades, or structural repairs. However, the latest directory does not provide details to establish the reasons for the reduction.

The publication has also revised the inventory of Pakistan's Saab 2000 Erieye airborne early warning and control aircraft from nine to seven.

7. Rafale Fighter Fleet: Active Aircraft Count Revised to 32

Source: The Hindu, 21 November 2026
GS Paper III: Defence and Security, Military Modernisation

Context: The *FlightGlobal World Air Forces Directory 2026* has revised India's active Rafale fighter fleet estimate from 35 to 32 aircraft. However, Defence Ministry officials have disputed the assessment, stating that the figures were not provided by the Indian Air Force (IAF).

1. Rafale: Key Facts

- **Manufacturer:** Dassault Aviation, France.
- **Acquisition:** 36 aircraft under the 2016 India–France defence agreement.
- **Composition:** 28 single-seat EH and 8 twin-seat DH aircraft.
- **Category:** 4.5-generation multirole fighter.
- **Capabilities:** Air superiority, precision strikes, reconnaissance and nuclear deterrence.

2. What Does the Report Reveal?

1. **FlightGlobal 2025:** Listed 35 Rafale aircraft as active.
2. **FlightGlobal 2026:** Revised the active fleet estimate to 32.
3. **Government's Position:** Defence Ministry officials questioned the assessment, stating that it did not originate from the IAF.
4. **Maintenance Support:** In June 2026, the IAF issued a tender seeking bridge support for all 36 Rafale aircraft, covering maintenance and fleet support.
5. **Uncertainty:** The publication did not specify which aircraft were excluded or the reasons for the revised active fleet count.

3. Strategic Significance for India

- **Air Superiority:** Enhances India's advanced air-combat capabilities.
- **Deterrence:** Strengthens conventional and strategic deterrence.
- **Operational Readiness:** Maintenance, spare parts and fleet availability are critical to combat preparedness.
- **Defence Partnership:** Reflects India's strategic defence cooperation with France.
- **Operation Sindoor:** The IAF acknowledged aircraft losses during combat but did not disclose their number or types.

4. UPSC Prelims PYQ

UPSC CSE 2024 – GS Paper I

Consider the following aircraft:

1. Rafael
2. MiG-29
3. Tejas MK-1

How many of the above are considered fifth-generation fighter aircraft?

(a) Only one
(b) Only two
(c) All three
(d) None

Answer: (d) None

- Rafale: 4.5-generation fighter.
- MiG-29: Fourth-generation fighter.
- Tejas MK-1: Fourth-generation-class fighter.