Currently — 8th, 9th and 10th November 2026

1. **U.S. Strikes Iran's Qeshm Island** — The Hindu | GS II: International Relations
2. **IL-76 Lands at Nyoma Airbase** — The Hindu | GS III: Defence and Security
3. **A Decade After Demonetisation: Cash and Counterfeit Currency Trends** — The Hindu | GS III: Economy
4. **ED Is Not a 'Super Cop': Karnataka High Court** — The Hindu | GS II: Governance and Accountability
5. **Delhi Air Pollution: PM2.5 Nearly 200 Times WHO Guideline** — The Hindu | GS III: Environment
6. **Commercial Cultivation Not Protected Under FRA: Supreme Court** — The Hindu | GS II: Tribal Rights; GS III: Environment
7. **Nvidia CEO Under Probe Amid Chinese Espionage Allegations** — The Hindu | GS IV: Organisational Ethics and National Security

U.S. strikes island in Hormuz as Iran says 'its forces have grown stronger'

Friday's strikes are the first since Trump's Republican Party was dealt a stunning rejection in the U.S. midterm elections; Washington says it targeted an air defence system on Qeshm island; Iran Guards lift limit on long-range ballistic missiles

Associated Press
WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump said the U.S. military on Friday carried out limited strikes on Iran's Qeshm island in the Strait of Hormuz, targeting an Iranian air defence system, as Iran said its military has grown "stronger" since the outset of its war with the U.S.

Friday's strikes are the first since Mr. Trump's Republican Party was dealt a stunning repudiation in the U.S. midterm elections.

"They built a little bit of an anti-aircraft device and we knocked it out in about 15 minutes, maybe five," Mr. Trump said.



Water wars: Iran's military reported on Saturday that a tanker in the Strait of Hormuz caught fire after striking a naval mine. REUTERS

On Saturday, Iran's Tasnim news agency reported that two missiles had struck the island. The Iranian Army said that its air defences had "struck and destroyed" a U.S. drone flying over the island.

Meanwhile, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Instagram on Saturday that over the past 48 hours he held phone calls with Ministers from 12 countries.

U.S. President Donald Trump called Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani on Friday to discuss efforts to end the war.

Tanker hit in Hormuz

On Saturday, Iranian Army said that a tanker in the Strait of Hormuz "caught fire and came to a halt after striking a naval mine". The U.S. had recently said all mines had been cleared from the waterway.

Tehran has fortified its grip on the strait, which normally carries about one-fifth of global oil consumption.

Iranian Army spokesman Mohammad Akrami nia said the forces "are on higher alert and are stronger than they were at the beginning of the war". "They now possess greater motivation, commitment and self-confidence," he added, state news agency IRNA reported on Saturday.

The Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) have lifted a self-imposed limit of 2,000 kilometres on the range of its ballistic missiles, suggesting the country may seek to develop missiles capable of reaching more distant targets. IRGC spokesman Hossein Mohebbi told Fars news agency on Saturday that "the increase in the range of Iran's missiles continues steadily". "There is no pause in this regard."

(With inputs from AFP)



1. U.S. Strikes Iran's Qeshm Island in the Strait of Hormuz

GS Paper: II – International Relations

Context: U.S. strikes on Iran's Qeshm Island have highlighted its strategic importance due to its proximity to the Strait of Hormuz, a critical global maritime and energy chokepoint.

1. Geographical Location

1. **Location:** Qeshm is Iran's largest island, situated in the Persian Gulf, off Iran's southern coast in Hormozgan Province.
2. **Strategic Position:** Located near Bandar Abbas, Iran's major port, and along the northern side of the Strait of Hormuz, opposite Oman's Musandam Peninsula.

3. **Maritime Connectivity:** The Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea, carrying approximately one-fifth of global oil consumption.

2. Strategic Importance for Iran

1. **Military Significance:** Supports Iran's coastal defence, maritime surveillance and military infrastructure, including reported missile facilities.
2. **Geopolitical Leverage:** Its proximity to major international shipping lanes provides Iran with strategic influence over maritime movement through the Strait of Hormuz.
3. **Energy Security:** Its location near major oil and gas shipping routes makes it important for protecting Iran's energy interests.
4. **Economic Importance:** The Qeshm Free Trade Zone, commercial ports and industrial infrastructure support Iran's trade, investment and regional connectivity.

History at 13,600 feet: Heavy-lift aircraft lands at Nyoma airbase

Amrita Nayak Dutta
New Delhi, November 7



Indian Air Force IL-76MD aircraft lands at Mudh-Nyoma airbase in eastern Ladakh. PTI

SCRIPTING HISTORY in aviation records, an Indian Air Force (IAF) IL-76MD 'Gajraj' has landed at Eastern Ladakh's Mudh-Nyoma airbase at 13,629 feet, marking the highest-altitude landing by the military transport aircraft anywhere in the world and underscoring India's strategic airlift capability.

The successful landing took place on Friday, it is learnt. The airbase, which lies barely 25 km from the Line of Actual Control (LAC), was inaugurated just a year ago.

The development is significant as it demonstrates that the Russian-origin four-engine turbofan heavy-lift strategic airlifter can carry men and military equipment right up to the borders — a key capability in mountain warfare.

It also comes amid tensions along the LAC and at a time when India and China are yet to achieve a full de-escalation of troops in the Ladakh region, despite achieving disengagement at the friction points and resumption of patrolling since October 2024.

The IAF announced the development in a post on X, stating it marked a "remarkable demonstration of the aircraft's enduring capability, backed by the exceptional skill, precision and professionalism of its crew," adding that it is a "milestone that reinforces India's strategic capability".

Military transport aircraft of the IAF have landed at high altitudes in the past. In 2013, a C-130J aircraft successfully landed at the airstrip in Daulat Beg Oldie in eastern Ladakh, which lies at an altitude of 16,614 ft.

What makes the IL-76 landing at Nyoma different and substantial is that it is a heavy strategic transport aircraft, and its ability to operate from Nyoma would demonstrate a different level of airlift capability and logistical reach in eastern Ladakh.

An IL-76 MD can carry 40-45 tonnes, depending on configuration and operating conditions, including heavy platforms such as tanks and BMPs. India acquired 17 of the aircraft between 1985 and 1989, making the Gajraj fleet one of the oldest strategic airlift assets. They have faced serviceability issues due to difficulty in obtaining spares after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which have been aggravated further after the onset of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war. There were discussions on extending the technical life of a dozen of these aircraft; the IAF is pursuing the Medium Transport Aircraft programme that is intended to replace both the IL-76 and AN-32 fleets.

During the military standoff with China in eastern Ladakh, the aircraft played a critical role in carrying many of the heavier military platforms to eastern Ladakh.

However, the Nyoma runway was not equipped to handle bigger aircraft such as the IL-76. The decision to upgrade the airbase and the runway came after 2020, following the military standoff with China in eastern Ladakh, which also has airbases in Kargil, Thoise and Leh.

Under the Rs 218 crore project, the BRO had constructed a 2.7-km-long runway. The base was operationalised in November last year, after former IAF Chief Air Chief Marshal A P Singh (retd) landed a C-130J there.

The operationalisation of the base represents a major upgrade in India's ability to sustain military deployments in eastern Ladakh, with the IL-76 landing showing that Nyoma's upgraded air infrastructure can now accommodate a much heavier class of transport aircraft than the tactical transports that earlier operated from the older landing ground.

This changes the scale and flexibility of logistical support available to the Army in eastern Ladakh.



2. History at 13,600 Feet: Heavy-Lift Aircraft Lands at Nyoma Airbase

Source: The Hindu | **GS Paper:** III – Defence and Security

Context: Indian Air Force (IAF) IL-76MD Gajraj successfully landed at Mudh-Nyoma airbase in eastern Ladakh at 13,629 feet, demonstrating India's enhanced strategic airlift and logistical capabilities near the China border.

1. Geographical Location and Strategic Importance of Nyoma Airbase

1. **Location:** Situated in eastern Ladakh at an altitude of 13,629 feet, barely 25 km from the Line of Actual Control (LAC).
2. **Infrastructure:** Developed by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) with a 2.7-km-long runway at a cost of ₹218 crore.
3. **Border Security:** Strengthens India's ability to rapidly deploy troops, heavy military equipment and supplies along the China border.

4. **Strategic Context:** Development accelerated after the 2020 India-China military standoff in eastern Ladakh.
5. **Operational Significance:** Complements airbases at Leh, Thoise and Kargil, improving logistical support in high-altitude terrain.

2. IL-76MD Gajraj: Basic Features

1. **Origin:** Russian-origin, four-engine turbofan strategic military transport aircraft operated by the Indian Air Force.
2. **Payload Capacity:** Can carry approximately 40–45 tonnes of cargo, depending on configuration and operating conditions.
3. **Transport Capability:** Can transport troops, tanks, infantry combat vehicles (BMPs) and other heavy military equipment.
4. **Indian Fleet:** India acquired 17 IL-76 aircraft between 1985 and 1989.
5. **Future Replacement:** The IAF is pursuing the Medium Transport Aircraft programme to replace its ageing IL-76 and AN-32 fleets.

10 years of note ban: cash use consistent, fake notes on rise

This Deepavali marks 10 years since PM Narendra Modi announced overnight demonetisation of 86% of the country's cash; data shows some stated goals of the move remain largely unmet

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

Ten years after Demonetisation, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) data show the exercise has had little impact on reducing cash in circulation and detection of fake currency, particularly ₹500 notes also increased.

On the other hand, the value of transactions on the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) had grown steadily year after year, even when measured as a percentage of India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Cash usage unchanged

"The magnitude of cash in circulation is directly linked to the level of corruption," PM Narendra Modi said when announcing note ban decision on November 8, 2016. "Inflation becomes worse through the deployment of cash earned in corrupt ways."

The "high circulation of cash also boost hawala trade which is directly connected to black money and illegal trade in weapons".

One of the stated aims of demonetisation, therefore, was to turn India into a less-cash society. The data show that this objective remains largely unfulfilled.

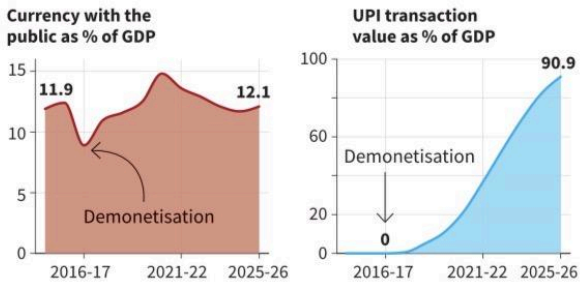
The RBI's data on currency with the public show this amount, as a percentage of GDP, stayed largely the same as it was prior to note ban. Currency with the public as a percentage of GDP stood at 11.9% in 2015-16, the financial year preceeding demonetisation and rose marginally to 12.1% by March 31, 2026. The value of UPI transactions as a percentage of GDP, however, had grown from zero in 2016-17 to nearly 91% in 2025-26.

Demonetisation a decade later

10 years on, cash remains as popular, and counterfeiting on the rise

Constant cash, surging UPI

Cash with the public has remained largely the same before and since Demonetisation

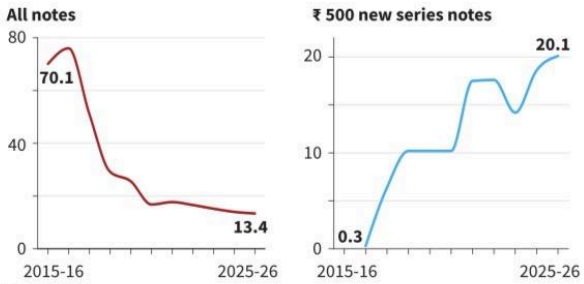


Source: RBI and NPCI • Note: GDP is taken as nominal GDP based on the new series with base year 2022-23 and backwards estimated for previous years.

Fakes detected

The number of counterfeit new Rs 500 notes, issued post Demonetisation, has increased sharply

Number of counterfeit notes detected per 1 crore in circulation (in nos.)



Source: RBI

Fake notes, a problem

"Have you ever thought about how these terrorists get their money," Mr. Modi further said in his speech in 2016. "Enemies from across the border run operations using fake currency notes. This has been going on for years. Many times, those using fake ₹500 and and ₹1,000 notes have been caught and many of the notes seized."

Another aim of demonetisation was to end the scourge of counterfeiting of Indian currency. However, performance on this metric also was uneven.

The RBI has data on the number of counterfeit notes detected per one crore of notes in circulation. Across all notes, the data shows a significant improvement in terms of counterfeiting.

That is, the number of total fake notes detected per crore of notes in circulation fell from 70.1 in 2015-16 to 13.4 in 2025-26.

However, in the wake of demonetisation, the government also introduced a new series of ₹500 notes and ₹2,000 notes that were supposed to be more secure and difficult to fake.

Detection up

The RBI data shows the central bank's detection of fake ₹500 notes had shot up since demonetisation.

While it found 0.3 fake ₹500 notes per 1 crore of those notes in circulation in 2016-17 when they were introduced, this number stood at 20.1 as of 2025-26.

Making a calculation for the ₹2,000 note is more tricky because the RBI in 2023 began taking the note out of circulation.

However, the data shows once it started doing this, its detection of fake ₹2,000 notes shot up. The detection of fake notes can be for two reasons. The first is that there is a rise in counterfeiting, and the second is that detection has become better. It is unclear from the data which of these is the driving factor.

3. A Decade of Demonetisation: Cash Usage Remains Consistent, Counterfeit Notes on the Rise

GS Paper: III – Indian Economy, Banking, Financial Inclusion and Internal Security

Context: Ten years after demonetisation, RBI data indicate that cash usage remains broadly unchanged as a proportion of GDP despite the rapid expansion of digital payments. Meanwhile, counterfeit currency, particularly new-series ₹500 notes, continues to pose challenges.

1. Demonetisation: Meaning, Background and Objectives

Meaning: Demonetisation refers to the withdrawal of the legal tender status of a particular currency denomination, making it invalid for ordinary transactions.

India's 2016 Exercise:

1. Announced on 8 November 2016, withdrawing the legal tender status of existing ₹500 and ₹1,000 banknotes.
2. Affected approximately 86% of the total currency value in circulation.
3. New ₹500 and ₹2,000 banknotes were introduced.
4. **Objectives:** Curb black money, counterfeit currency, corruption and terror financing; promote digital payments, tax compliance and economic formalisation.
5. **Legal Basis:** Section 26(2) of the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934.

2. RBI Findings: Ten Years After Demonetisation

1. **Cash in Circulation:** Currency held by the public as a proportion of GDP increased from 11.9% in 2015–16 to 12.1% in 2025–26, indicating continued dependence on physical currency. *(RBI Annual Report 2025–26 – Currency Management)*
2. **Digital Payments:** UPI transaction value increased from virtually zero in 2016–17 to approximately 90.9% of GDP in 2025–26, reflecting the expansion of India's digital payment ecosystem. *(RBI Annual Report 2025–26 – Payment and Settlement Systems; NPCI data)*
3. **Counterfeit Currency:** Total counterfeit notes detected per crore notes in circulation declined from 70.1 in 2015–16 to 13.4 in 2025–26. *(RBI Annual Report 2025–26 – Currency Management)*
4. **New-Series ₹500 Notes:** Counterfeit detection increased from 0.3 per crore notes in 2016–17 to 20.1 in 2025–26, highlighting continuing currency-security concerns. *(RBI Annual Report 2025–26 – Currency Management)*

5. **Overall Trend:** Despite the expansion of digital payments, cash remains an important medium of exchange in the Indian economy.

3. Economic and Institutional Implications

1. **Economic Disruption:** Cash shortages affected agriculture, small businesses, informal employment and daily-wage workers, particularly those dependent on cash transactions.
2. **Financial Formalisation:** Increased bank deposits and digital transactions encouraged the use of formal financial channels and improved transaction traceability.
3. **Black Money:** Currency withdrawal alone cannot eliminate black money, which is also held in real estate, gold, benami properties and offshore assets. Structural reforms in taxation and financial disclosure remain necessary.
4. **Digital Transformation:** UPI and electronic payment systems expanded financial transparency and convenience, although digitalisation also reflects broader technological and policy developments beyond demonetisation.
5. **Financial Inclusion:** Digital payments improved access to financial services, but the digital divide, inadequate connectivity, limited digital literacy and cyber fraud remain challenges.
6. **Internal Security:** Counterfeit currency can facilitate organised crime, illegal trade and terror financing, necessitating stronger currency authentication and financial surveillance.
7. **Governance:** Large-scale monetary interventions require institutional preparedness, effective communication, adequate currency management and transparent assessment of long-term outcomes.

4. Way Forward

1. **Combating Black Money:** Strengthen tax administration, financial disclosure, action against benami assets and anti-money laundering mechanisms.
2. **Currency Security:** Improve banknote security features, counterfeit detection technology and coordination among RBI, banks and enforcement agencies.
3. **Digital Inclusion:** Expand affordable digital infrastructure, rural connectivity, financial literacy and cybersecurity.
4. **Economic Formalisation:** Improve access to institutional credit, banking and social-security systems for informal workers and small businesses.
5. **Evidence-Based Policymaking:** Ensure major monetary interventions are supported by institutional preparedness, transparent impact assessments and measurable outcomes.

5. Relevant UPSC CSE Mains PYQ Linkages

GS Paper III

1. **2013:** Money laundering poses a serious threat to a country's economic sovereignty. What is its significance for India and what steps are required to control this menace?
2. **2021:** Discuss how emerging technologies and globalisation contribute to money laundering. Elaborate measures to tackle the problem at national and international levels.
3. **2023:** Give out the major sources of terror funding in India and the efforts being made to curtail these sources.

ED not a 'super cop', can't file private complaint: HC

ED's power under PMLA is 'derivative and not original', says Karnataka HC; it adds that the agency can't prosecute an offence on its own when competent agencies decline to act on its information

Krishnaprasad
BENGALURU

Declaring that the Directorate of Enforcement (ED) is "not a super cop," the High Court of Karnataka said the agency cannot file a private complaint to initiate a money-laundering probe when the competent agencies decline to prosecute a scheduled offence based on the information filed by the ED.

The court ruled that the ED's power under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) is "derivative and not original," and that filing a private complaint under Section 200 of the Code of Criminal Procedure or Section 223 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita was not contemplated under the PMLA Act.

> One institution in the country does not become supreme so that it is in a position to abuse the powers conferred on it. Law recognises the requirements of checks and balances
> KARNATAKA HIGH COURT



"One institution in the country does not become supreme so that it is in a position to abuse the powers conferred on it. Law recognises the requirements of checks and balances. The ED is not a super cop to investigate anything and everything which comes into its notice," the court said, adding that the ED must exercise only those powers expressly conferred on it by the PMLA.

Justice M.I. Arun passed the order while allowing a batch of writ petitions filed by Malur MLA and Congress leader K.Y. Nanjegowda, who also chairs the Kolar and Chikkaballapur Milk Union Ltd. (KOMUL) and the Malur Land Grant Committee, and others.

Case background

The case stemmed from a private complaint about an alleged "land scam" on the basis of which the ED registered an Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR) in November 2023. While probing this, the ED reportedly found evidence of a "job scam" involving KOMUL, and shared its information with the police. As they did not act on this information, the ED itself filed a private complaint on this matter.

The petitioners challenged the ED's ECIR, the order confirming seizure of articles, summons issued to them, and the private complaint filed by the ED before a special court.

"If the ED is permitted to file a private complaint, it will be in a position to file a private complaint against any person by itself and take up investigation against them. This is not contemplated under the provisions of the PMLA," the court clarified.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 9

4. Enforcement Directorate: Powers, Accountability and Judicial Limits

GS Paper II: Statutory and Regulatory Bodies, Governance, Federalism and Accountability

GS Paper III: Money Laundering, Economic Offences and Internal Security

Context: The Karnataka High Court observed that the Enforcement Directorate (ED) is not a "super cop" and cannot assume investigative powers beyond those expressly provided under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). The ruling highlights the need to balance effective investigation with institutional accountability and the rule of law.

1. Enforcement Directorate: Establishment and Functions

1. **Establishment:** Set up in 1956 as the Enforcement Unit and renamed the Enforcement Directorate in 1957.
2. **Administrative control:** Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance.
3. **Nature:** Executive investigative agency; neither a constitutional body nor an independent statutory body established under a separate Act.
4. **Major laws enforced:**
    - Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002 – investigates money laundering and attaches proceeds of crime.
    - Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA), 1999 – investigates violations of foreign exchange regulations.
    - Fugitive Economic Offenders Act (FEOA), 2018 – takes action against fugitive economic offenders and facilitates confiscation of their properties.
5. **Key powers:** Investigation, search and seizure, provisional attachment of property, arrest under PMLA and prosecution before designated courts.

2. Karnataka High Court: ED Is Not a 'Super Cop'

Case: *Y.B. Ashwathanarayan v. Union of India* (2026)

1. The Court held that ED cannot file a private complaint under Section 200 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), now Section 223 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), to initiate proceedings for a separate scheduled offence when the competent agency does not act on information forwarded by ED.
2. **Section 66(2), PMLA:** Requires ED to share information regarding offences under other laws with the concerned agency; it does not authorise ED to take over that agency's investigation.
3. The Court emphasised that ED's powers must remain within the statutory framework and that investigative authority cannot become unlimited.
4. It reiterated the importance of **federalism, separation of powers and institutional checks and balances**.

Significance: Prevents jurisdictional overreach and reinforces that specialised agencies must operate within their legally defined mandates.

3. Major Concerns Regarding ED

1. **Extensive powers:** Arrest, search, seizure and property attachment raise concerns about procedural safeguards and individual liberty.
2. **Due process:** Issues surrounding disclosure of grounds of arrest, access to case information and prolonged detention.
3. **Political neutrality:** Allegations of selective or politically motivated investigations can affect public trust.
4. **Federalism:** Investigations involving state-level offences may create friction between central and state agencies.
5. **Prolonged trials:** Delays in adjudication and lengthy pre-trial detention can undermine the presumption of innocence.

4. Important Supreme Court Judgments

1. **Vijay Madanlal Choudhary v. Union of India (2022):** Upheld key provisions of PMLA, including the statutory framework for arrest, attachment and bail. Held that an Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR) is not equivalent to a First Information Report (FIR), and its copy need not routinely be supplied.
2. **Pankaj Bansal v. Union of India (2023):** Held that written grounds of arrest must be furnished to the arrested person as a matter of course under Section 19 of PMLA.
3. **Manish Sisodia v. Directorate of Enforcement (2024):** Reaffirmed that prolonged incarceration and unreasonable trial delays engage the right to personal liberty under Article 21; bail cannot be denied merely because the offence is serious.

5. Way Forward

1. **Procedural safeguards:** Ensure transparent arrest procedures, recorded reasons and effective access to legal remedies.
2. **Institutional accountability:** Strengthen independent oversight and transparent reporting of investigations and outcomes.
3. **Federal coordination:** Improve cooperation between ED, state police and other investigating agencies while respecting their respective jurisdictions.
4. **Timely justice:** Strengthen Special Courts and ensure time-bound investigation and trial.

5. **Rule of law:** Exercise investigative powers proportionately, without political interference or jurisdictional overreach.

6. UPSC Previous-Year Question Linkages

Prelims 2025 – Organisation, Function and Parent Ministry

Question: With reference to the Government of India, consider the following information:

Organisation	Some of its functions	It works under
I. Directorate of Enforcement	Enforcement of the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018	Internal Security Division-I, Ministry of Home Affairs
II. Directorate of Revenue Intelligence	Enforces provisions of the Customs Act, 1962	Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance
III. Directorate General of Systems and Data Management	Big data analytics to assist tax officers in policy-making and identifying tax evaders	Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance

In how many of the above rows is the information correctly matched?

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

Answer: (b) Only two

Explanation: Row I is incorrectly matched because ED functions under the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance. Rows II and III are correctly matched.

Mains – GS Paper III

2013: “Money laundering poses a serious threat to a country’s economic sovereignty. What is its significance for India and what steps are required to control this menace?”

2018: “India’s proximity to two of the world’s biggest illicit opium-growing states has enhanced her internal security concerns. Explain the linkages between drug trafficking and other illicit activities such as gunrunning, money laundering and human trafficking. What counter-measures should be taken to prevent the same?”

2021: “Discuss how emerging technologies and globalisation contribute to money laundering. Elaborate measures to tackle the problem of money laundering both at national and international levels.”

2023: “Give out the major sources of terror funding in India and the efforts being made to curtail these sources. In the light of this, also discuss the aim and objective of the ‘No Money for Terror (NMFT)’ Conference recently held at New Delhi in November 2022.”

Air pollution spikes 200 times above WHO limits in Delhi during Deepavali

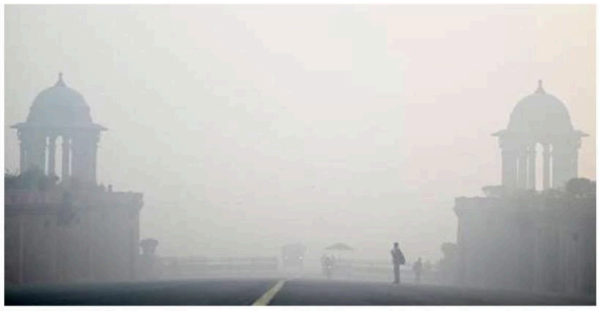
Data missing from several monitoring stations at the peak of air pollution during the intervening night of Nov. 8 and 9; AAP accuses BJP govt. of ‘data fraud’, the latter hits back alleging stubble burning ‘conspiracy’ by AAP-governed Punjab, which recorded 1,152 stubble burning incidents on Sunday

Nikhil M. Babu
NEW DELHI

As Delhiites burst firecrackers well past the 10 p.m. deadline set by the Supreme Court for Deepavali night, air pollution shot up to over 150-200 times World Health Organisation (WHO) limits in parts of the city, but fell through the early morning hours of Monday due to better weather conditions, show official data.

At the peak of pollution, following the bursting of firecrackers on Sunday night, crucial air quality data were missing from several monitoring stations managed by government authorities. Experts say missing data on peak values of air pollution will artificially show better air quality than the reality.

Though the Supreme Court allowed only green firecrackers during fixed windows on November 7 and 8, traditional firecrackers, which are more polluting, were also available in the markets of Delhi.



Worrying trend: Rashtrapati Bhavan was shrouded in thick smog during the early morning hours of Monday after Deepavali celebrations in New Delhi. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

As per the Delhi government’s Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) data, the level of PM2.5 (a major pollution) in Patparganj of East Delhi was 2,597 micrograms per cubic metre at 1 a.m. on Monday – about 173.13 times the WHO permissible limit of 15 micrograms per cubic metre for a 24-hour period.

Similarly, the level of PM2.5 on NSUT West Campus was 3,008.4 micrograms per cubic metre at 5 a.m. on Monday – about 200.5 times the WHO permissible limit. PM2.5 (Particulate matter 2.5) are fine inhalable particles, which can get into lungs and bloodstream and lead to a range of respiratory and other diseases.

Favourable wind

Gufran Beig, chair professor, National Institute of Advanced Studies, said though the air pollution spiked around 12 midnight on Sunday to 5 a.m. on Monday due to bursting of firecrackers on Deepavali, both wind direction and speed were very favourable for faster dispersion of air pollution.

“The wind direction was earlier north westerly, originating from stubble burning areas in Punjab and Haryana. But around Sunday afternoon, it changed to easterly and south easterly and also picked up speed by Sunday evening. The reversal of wind direction led to almost negligible effect of stubble burning in Delhi,” said Mr. Beig, who is also the founder-director of the Central government’s SAFAR (System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting Research).

The 24-hour average overall Air Quality Index (AQI) of Delhi stood at 344 (“very poor”) at 4 p.m. on Monday, lower than 376 (“very poor”) a day earlier, according to the CPCB’s daily bulletin, which is considered the day’s AQI. A higher AQI means worsening of air quality. The overall AQI of Delhi which stood at 370 (very poor) at 9 a.m. on Monday, improved through the day to reach 344 by 4 p.m.

Meanwhile, both the AAP and the Congress attacked the BJP government over the missing data, with the former alleging that it was “data fraud”. Hitting back, Delhi Labour Minister Kapil Mishra alleged there was a “conspiracy” by AAP-governed Punjab to set stubble on fire on Sunday evening.

Every winter, air pollution spikes in Delhi-NCR and many parts of the larger Indo-Gangetic Plains, mainly due to meteorological factors such as lower wind speeds and a drop in temperature. Also, pollution from stubble burning during October and November and bursting of firecrackers during the festive season add to existing pollution from vehicles and dust, worsening the air quality.

Stubble burning

Meanwhile, Punjab recorded 1,152 stubble burning incidents on Sunday – the highest this paddy harvest season, according to the Indian Agricultural Research Institute’s (IARI) daily bulletin. But it dropped to 198 on Monday, taking the total this harvest season to 4,657, the second lowest since 2020 (till November 9), the data show.

The contribution of stubble burning in neighbouring States to PM2.5 (a chief pollutant) in Delhi on Sunday was 5.1%, according to the Union Ministry of Earth Sciences data.

5. Delhi Air Pollution: PM2.5 Levels Nearly 200 Times WHO Guideline During Deepawali

Source: The Hindu
GS Paper III: Environment, Pollution and Public Health

Context: Post-Deepawali, Delhi recorded extreme PM2.5 concentrations, while missing data from monitoring stations raised concerns about air-quality monitoring and transparency.

1. WHO Air Quality Guidelines (2021)

Pollutant	Annual limit	24-hour limit
PM2.5	5 µg/m³	15 µg/m³
PM10	15 µg/m³	45 µg/m³

1. **PM2.5:** Particles of diameter 2.5 micrometres or less; can penetrate deep into the lungs and enter the bloodstream.
2. **PM10:** Particles of diameter 10 micrometres or less; can enter the respiratory tract.
3. WHO guidelines are health-based recommendations, not legally binding national standards.

2. Pollution Levels and Major Causes

1. **Extreme levels:** PM2.5 reached 2,597 µg/m³ at Patparganj and 3,008.4 µg/m³ at NSUT West Campus—approximately 173 and 201 times the WHO 24-hour guideline, respectively.
2. **AQI:** Delhi's overall Air Quality Index (AQI) was 370 (very poor), improving to 344 during the day.

3. **Major sources:** Firecrackers, vehicular emissions, construction dust, industrial pollution and crop-residue burning.
4. **Weather conditions:** Low wind speed, falling temperatures and changing wind direction restricted pollutant dispersion.
5. **Monitoring gaps:** Missing data from several stations during peak pollution hours raised concerns about transparency.

3. Way Forward

1. **Regional action:** Coordinate pollution-control measures across Delhi-NCR, Punjab and Haryana.
2. **Cleaner agriculture:** Promote crop-residue management machinery and alternatives to stubble burning.
3. **Urban measures:** Control vehicular and industrial emissions, construction dust and improve public transport.
4. **Accountable monitoring:** Ensure continuous, transparent and independently verifiable air-quality data.
5. **Public health:** Strengthen pollution alerts and protection for vulnerable groups.

4. UPSC Previous-Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims 2022 – WHO Air Quality Guidelines

Consider the following statements:

1. The 24-hour mean of PM2.5 should not exceed 15 μg/m³ and its annual mean should not exceed 5 μg/m³.
2. The highest levels of ozone pollution occur during periods of inclement weather.
3. PM10 can penetrate the lung barrier and enter the bloodstream.
4. Excessive ozone in the air can trigger asthma.

Which statements are correct?

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

Answer: (b) 1 and 4 only

Mains 2021 – GS Paper III

“Describe the key points of the revised Global Air Quality Guidelines (AQGs) recently released by the World Health Organisation (WHO). How are these different from its last update in 2005? What changes in India’s National Clean Air Programme are required to achieve these revised standards?”

Commercial farming in forest land is not protected by FRA: SC

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has made it clear that commercial crop cultivation within reserve forest areas is not protected under the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006.

The court has distinguished commercial cultivators and plantation owners from forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers, who have lived in forests for generations and depend on them for livelihood. Their rights are protected under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, commonly known as the FRA.

A Bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta recorded the court's view in an order concerning extensive silk cotton cultivation within the reserve forests of the Agasthyamalai Biosphere Reserve. The court, in its November 6 order, directed the Central Empowered Committee to examine the Tamil Nadu government's opinion that silk cotton was a 'minor forest produce'.

The Bench made clear its *prima facie* view against the State's claim of historical cultivation of silk cotton. "If commercial crops are permitted to be cultivated in the forest areas, the very nature of the forest is bound to change," Justice Mehta, who authored the order, observed.

6. Commercial Cultivation in Forest Areas Not Protected Under FRA: Supreme Court

Source: The Hindu
GS Paper II: Tribal Rights and Government Policies
GS Paper III: Forest Conservation and Biodiversity

Context: The Supreme Court clarified that commercial crop cultivation in reserved forests cannot automatically claim protection under the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006. The case concerns silk-cotton cultivation in Tamil Nadu.

1. Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006

Objective: To recognise the historical rights of forest-dwelling communities and protect their traditional livelihoods.

1. **Beneficiaries:** Forest-Dwelling Scheduled Tribes (FDSTs) and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFDs). OTFDs must establish forest residence and dependence for at least three generations (75 years) before 13 December 2005.
2. **Individual rights:** Occupation of forest land for habitation and self-cultivation for livelihood, subject to statutory conditions.
3. **Community rights:** Grazing, fishing, access to water bodies and management of community forest resources.
4. **Minor Forest Produce (MFP):** Ownership, collection, use and disposal of naturally occurring non-timber forest produce, such as bamboo, tendu leaves, honey and medicinal plants.
5. **Recognition process (Section 6):** Gram Sabha initiates the process, followed by Sub-Divisional and District Level Committees.

2. Supreme Court Ruling

Case: *A. John Kennedy v. State of Tamil Nadu*
Order: 6 November 2026 | Bench: Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta

1. **Background:** The case concerns extensive silk-cotton cultivation in the Megamalai Reserve Forest, Tamil Nadu, within the Agasthyamalai landscape.
2. **Key observation:** Commercial cultivation cannot automatically qualify as a forest right under FRA, which protects customary rights and traditional forest-based livelihoods.

3. **MFP distinction:** The Court questioned the State's claim that commercially cultivated silk cotton qualified as Minor Forest Produce, distinguishing natural forest produce from commercial plantations.
4. **Further examination:** The Court directed the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) to examine the State government's claim and the matter concerning cultivation in the reserve forest.

3. Significance

1. **Forest conservation:** Checks commercial exploitation and conversion of natural forests into plantations.
2. **Tribal rights:** Protects genuine customary rights while distinguishing them from commercial interests.
3. **Biodiversity:** Supports conservation of forest ecosystems and wildlife habitats.
4. **Governance:** Reinforces transparent verification of forest-rights claims.

4. Way Forward

1. Ensure transparent implementation of FRA and protection of legitimate forest rights.
2. Strengthen Gram Sabha participation in community forest management.
3. Promote sustainable livelihoods through Minor Forest Produce and community-based enterprises.
4. Balance tribal welfare with biodiversity conservation and ecological restoration.

5. UPSC Previous-Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims 2019 – Forest Rights Act and Minor Forest Produce

Consider the following statements:

1. As per the recent amendment to the Indian Forest Act, 1927, forest dwellers have the right to fell the bamboos grown on forest areas.
2. As per the Forest Rights Act, 2006, bamboo is a minor forest produce.
3. The Forest Rights Act, 2006 allows ownership of minor forest produce to forest dwellers.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 and 3 only

(c) 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (b) 2 and 3 only

Explanation: Bamboo is classified as MFP under FRA, and forest dwellers have ownership and use rights over MFP. The 2017 amendment to the Indian Forest Act eased restrictions on bamboo grown on non-forest land; it did not grant a general right to fell bamboo in forest areas.

Nvidia initiates probe into its CEO amid reports China spied on him

Tech firm opens inquiry into reports that Jensen Huang was 'the target of a foreign intelligence effort'; U.S. officials believe the woman Huang acknowledged having affair with was spying for China; Beijing dismisses claims as a smear campaign

Agence France-Presse
NEW YORK

AI chip behemoth Nvidia was plunged into turmoil on Monday after its CEO Jensen Huang acknowledged having an affair, with reports saying U.S. officials believe the woman was spying for China.

Beijing denied the claim but Nvidia's board opened an inquiry into the reports that Mr. Huang was "the target of a foreign intelligence effort."

Late last month, *The New York Times* reported that U.S. intelligence officials determined that Alice Huang, a Chinese executive linked to a Singapore-based data centre company, Megaspeed, had been funnelling information to Beijing. The executive, also known as Huang Le, developed a close relationship with the Nvidia chief, the *Times* said.



Courting controversy: Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang seen with Alice Huang, a Chinese executive, in Taiwan, in this 2024 photo. REUTERS

Nvidia's board announced on Sunday that it had opened a probe "in light of recent reporting that company's chief executive and co-founder has been the target of a foreign intelligence effort."

Jensen Huang is a huge figure in the AI revolution and a close informal adviser to U.S. President Donald Trump, who has repeatedly spoken out against regulating the industry so as not to let China gain the upper hand in the AI race.

"I was unfaithful to my wife," Mr. Huang said in a message to company employees. "My actions hurt her and our children. There is no excuse for what I did. I am deeply sorry."

AI insights

The *Times* said Alice Huang's relationship with the Nvidia chief could have given her insights into Mr. Trump's thinking around AI.

Mr. Trump was briefed on the findings about Mr. Huang's relationship roughly a year ago and chose not to act on the information, the *Times* said.

China rejected the spying allegations, with Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun telling a regular briefing on Monday that "the narrative of a so-called Chinese spy is entirely baseless vilification and smearing."

The issue of AI is likely to arise during Mr. Trump's planned talks with President Xi Jinping later this month at a summit in China.

Nvidia shares dropped roughly 5% in pre-market trading early Monday.

7. Ethics Example: Nvidia – Organisational Ethics and National Security

Example: Nvidia initiated an internal inquiry following reports that its CEO, Jensen Huang, may have been targeted in an alleged Chinese intelligence operation.

1. Organisational Ethics (Company Perspective)

- **Corporate governance:** Protecting institutional interests and stakeholder trust.
- **Confidentiality:** Safeguarding intellectual property and sensitive information.
- **Accountability:** Ensuring responsible leadership and transparent investigations.

- **Professional integrity:** Preventing personal vulnerabilities from compromising organisational responsibilities.

2. National Security (Country Perspective)

- **National interest:** Protecting strategic technologies from foreign espionage.
- **Technological sovereignty:** Safeguarding critical AI and semiconductor capabilities.
- **Economic security:** Preventing the unauthorised transfer of strategic technological knowledge.
- **Rule of law:** Addressing espionage allegations through impartial investigation and due process.

GS Paper IV Integration: The case illustrates the application of **integrity, probity, accountability, confidentiality, ethical leadership and public interest** in corporate governance and national security. It highlights that institutional loyalty and national interest must be protected through ethical means.