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Institute Of Civil Services

# DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

## 19th September 2025



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19<sup>th</sup> September 2025

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# Attack on one of us is an attack on both, says Saudi Arabia-Pakistan pact

## Associated Press

ISLAMABAD

Saudi Arabia and nuclear-armed Pakistan have signed a mutual defence pact that defines any attack on either nation as an attack on both – a key accord in the wake of Israel's strike on Qatar last week.

The kingdom has long had close economic, religious and security ties to Pakistan, including reportedly providing funding for Islamabad's nuclear weapons programme as it developed.

Analysts – and Pakistani diplomats in at least one case – have suggested over the years that Saudi Arabia could be included under Is-

## Will study pact to protect India's interests: MEA

### NEW DELHI

Hours after Pakistan signed a defence agreement with Saudi Arabia, India said it was aware that the pact had been under consideration. The External Affairs Ministry said India would study its implications for "our national security" and "regional stability". » PAGE 14

lamabad's nuclear umbrella, particularly as tensions have risen over Iran's atomic programme.

But the timing of the pact appeared to be a signal to Israel, West Asia's

only nuclear-armed state, which has conducted a sprawling military offensive since Palestinian nationalist Hamas's October 7, 2023, attack on Israel stretching across Iran, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, Qatar, Syria and Yemen.

The pact marks the first major defence decision by a Gulf Arab country since the Qatar attack.

Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman signed the pact on Wednesday with Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

While not specifically discussing the bomb, the agreement states "any aggression against either

country shall be considered an aggression against both," according to statements issued by both Pakistan's Foreign Affairs Ministry and the state-run Saudi Press Agency.

"This agreement... aims to develop aspects of defence cooperation between the two countries and strengthen joint deterrence against any aggression," the statement said.

A senior Saudi official, speaking on condition of anonymity to The Financial Times, seemed to suggest that Pakistan's nuclear protection was a part of the deal.

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## Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

**Q. Consider the following statements: [2007]**

1. North Atlantic Co-operation Council (NACC) is the name of the new organization which has replaced the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).
2. The United States of America and the United Kingdom became the members of the NATO when it was formed in the year 1949.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

# U.S. visas of Indian executives revoked over 'drug trafficking'

**Kallol Bhattacharjee**

NEW DELHI

Months after charging two Indian companies of "criminal conspiracies" to smuggle fentanyl precursors into the United States, the U.S. Embassy on Thursday said that it has revoked and denied visas for "certain" Indian "business executives and corporate leadership", accusing them of smuggling ingredients that are used in the illegal production of the drug.

In a statement, the Embassy said the "family members" of these business executives would also "face consequences" for the illegal production and trafficking of drugs.

"In furtherance to the Trump Administration's efforts to keep Americans

## Drug precursors

The following are two precursors highly suitable for illicit manufacture of fentanyl and fentanyl analogues

- **4-piperidone**
- **1-boc-4-piperidone**

Fentanyl and fentanyl analogues are very potent narcotic drugs that continue to result in overdose deaths, according to the International Narcotics Control Board



safe from dangerous synthetic narcotics, the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi has revoked and subsequently denied visas for certain business executives and corporate leadership based on involvement in trafficking fentanyl precursors," it said, acknowledging the support received from "counterparts in the Go-

vernment of India" toward stopping the flow of fentanyl and its precursors.

The Embassy continues to be "steadfast in its commitment to combating illicit drug trafficking", said U.S. chargé d'affaires Jorgan Andrews.

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## INBRIEF



### PM Modi to review Maritime Heritage Complex at Lothal

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be on a visit to Gujarat on September 20 where he will review the progress of the National Maritime Heritage Complex (NMHC) at Lothal in Ahmedabad district. He will also inspect the works completed so far and hold a detailed review meeting with officials regarding the ongoing projects at the site. Lothal, once a prominent trading hub of the Indus Valley Civilisation, is a symbol of India's maritime strength and prosperity. "NMHC will seamlessly blend history, education and research. Lothal, which served as a thriving port 5,000 years ago, will be revitalised, showcasing its illustrious maritime legacy," officials said.

## India needs more focus to reach SDG 3, a crucial goal

In June this year, India secured its best-ever position in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Index, ranking 99 out of 167 nations in the 2025 edition of the SDG Report. This marked a significant improvement from its rank of 109 rank in 2024, reflecting steady progress since 2021. India has demonstrated advancement in areas such as access to basic services and infrastructure. Yet, the report also flagged pressing challenges in key sectors, particularly health and nutrition, where progress has been uneven, especially in rural and tribal communities.

#### There is still ground to be covered

In this backdrop, it is critical to ponder over SDG 3. Its goal is to "ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages", and is one of the most crucial, yet demanding, goals in India's SDG journey. It encompasses specific targets that India has committed to achieve by 2030. Despite gains in some areas, the overall trajectory indicates that India is not on track in most targets. For example, the Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) – the number of mothers dying after childbirth per 100,000 live births – stands at 97 deaths per 100,000 live births, higher than the 2030 target of 70.

Even the under-five mortality rate remains at 32 deaths per 1,000 live births against the target of 25. In developed countries, it ranges between two and six deaths. Life expectancy now is only 70 years, falling short of the target of 73.63 years. Out-of-pocket health-care expenditure continues to burden families at 13% of total consumption, nearly double the targeted 7.83%. Even immunisation coverage, though commendably high at 93.23%, has not yet reached the universal target of 100%.

There are multiple reasons for these gaps. They include, first, lack of access to quality health care partially due to poor infrastructure and economic factors; second, non-economic factors such as poor nutrition, hygiene and sanitation and other lifestyle choices and, third, cultural



**Rahul Mehra**  
is National Representative of India, UNESCO Chair for Global Health and Education, and Executive Chairman, Tarang Health Alliance

Compulsory health education in schools is one measure that can help close the gap

practices and stigma around physical and mental health. These cultural practices and limited awareness often prevent communities from accessing even the health-care services available to them.

If India is to accelerate progress on SDG Goal 3, a three-pronged approach is essential and one that focuses on treatment and prevention of diseases. The first is providing Universal Health Insurance to the population. World Bank studies show that countries with robust insurance systems have lowered catastrophic health-care expenditure while ensuring greater equity in access. The second is to have high-quality primary health centres across the country and coordination of primary, secondary and tertiary care.

The World Health Statistics 2022 by the World Health Organization highlights that strong primary systems help in detecting diseases earlier, reducing hospitalisation costs, and achieving better long-term outcomes. This will also require harnessing the transformative potential of digital health tools. Telemedicine and integrated digital health records can bridge access gaps, especially in rural and underserved regions. Evidence from the Lancet Digital Health Commission shows how digital platforms have improved maternal health care and vaccination tracking in several low and middle-income countries, offering lessons that India can adapt.

#### Health education at the school level

Prevention of diseases is more cost-effective than treating them. To prevent diseases, we need to provide health education to all schoolchildren. Children need to be educated about healthy nutrition, good hygiene and sanitation, reproductive health, road safety, and on mental health topics.

At this young age, they need to improve their health behaviour and not just their knowledge. The health habits they develop at this age will be maintained as they grow to be adults. When girls

become mothers, they will be more educated about their health and advocate this for themselves and their family. Over the long term, the school health education initiative has the potential to reduce MMR ratio, under-five mortality and deaths due to road accidents. At the same time, it can increase life expectancy and immunisation rates.

Finland's school-based health reforms in the 1970s, which wove lessons on nutrition, hygiene and lifestyle into the curricula, played a central role in reducing cardiovascular disease rates in the decades that followed. In Japan, compulsory health education has been linked to improved hygiene practices and longer life expectancy. A structured and progressive curriculum in India can achieve similar results.

#### Need for concerted actions

Therefore, closing the SDG gap requires action by policymakers to individual actions. Policymakers need to embed health education in school curricula while simultaneously investing in universal health coverage and primary health care.

All parents have an important role to play in the health education of youth. They can review their child's school curriculum and determine whether topics on physical, mental and social health are being covered. If not, they should push for it by communicating this to the department of education.

India's improved SDG ranking is encouraging. But it should not obscure the reality that only 17% of global SDG targets are currently on track to be achieved by 2030. Educating its youth about healthy behaviour, supported by stronger health-care systems, can act as the foundation for sustainable progress. And while 2030 is an important milestone to reach, the true vision lies further ahead – building a healthier and stronger India. A government that devotes its attention to embedding health education in school curricula can help achieve the goal of a Viksit Bharat 2047.

## Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

### Q. Consider the following statements: [2016]

1. The Sustainable Development Goals were first proposed in 1972 by a global think tank called the 'Club of Rome'.
2. The Sustainable Development Goals have to be achieved by 2030.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only (b) 2 only  
(c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither 1 nor 2

## Why are Maharashtra's onion farmers protesting?

Is the government's buffer stock policy hurting farmers?

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit

The story so far:

**S**ince September 12, thousands of farmers from Maharashtra, India's largest onion-producing State, have been holding a phone protest. The main reason for the agitation is the distress caused by the fall in market prices of onions. Farmers are demanding immediate government intervention and aid of ₹1,500 per quintal. Experts say the problem is systemic. Maharashtra has produced more onions than needed this year, and the quality of stored Rabi onions has deteriorated, lowering market prices. They argue that the government must streamline onion exports, establish a uniform export policy, build trust among importers, and hold discussions with key buyers to secure stable markets.

Why are farmers protesting?

At present, farmers say they earn only

₹800 to ₹1,000 per quintal for their onions, while the production cost stands at ₹2,200 to ₹2,500 per quintal. The Rabi onions stored by farmers in the hope of better rates are deteriorating, forcing them to sell at even lower prices. At the same time, the government has released its buffer stock in the market at cheaper prices, further dragging down rates.

"NCCF and NAFED should be stopped from selling their stocks in cities across the country," one of the key demands put forth by the Maharashtra State Onion Producer Farmers' Organisation said. National Cooperative Consumers' Federation of India Ltd. (NCCF), a major consumer cooperative in India; and National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd. (NAFED), the apex cooperative organisation for promoting and developing the cooperative marketing of agricultural produce for the benefit of farmers, jointly procure, store and

thereafter sell the onions in the market as a part of the Government of India's price stabilisation policy.

**How is the onion price stabilisation policy affecting the farmers?**

India's onion price stabilisation policy focuses on maintaining a strategic buffer stock under the Price Stabilisation Fund (PSF) to manage price volatility. The government procures onions to build this buffer, and during periods of high prices or lean supply, they are released from the stock into major consumption centres through outlets and mobile vans to ensure affordability for consumers and prevent hoarding.

However, at present, farmers are still sitting on the stocks of Rabi onions and are trying to sell them in the market. At a time when their produce is receiving a market price lower than the production cost, the prices are brought down further due to the NAFED and

NCCF stocks.

**What solutions are farmers and experts proposing?**

According to government data, 25.25 lakh tonnes of onions were exported in the year 2022-23, a significant surge compared to previous years. But within two years, exports fell by more than half – in 2024-25, only 11.47 lakh tonnes were exported. "There is an urgent need to restore competitiveness and secure India's position in global onion markets. Bangladesh and Sri Lanka were the two main importers of Indian onions. Today, both of them have looked away from us. The government needs to have a stable export policy. Any flip-flops lead to a loss of credibility for the country in the international market," an exporter who did not wish to be named said.

Farmers and exporters want the government to incentivise exports, as India is one of the leading growers of onions in the world. During the flux in the government's export policy, countries like China and Pakistan have taken over India's export market, farmers said.

Meanwhile, the Andhra Pradesh government has announced procurement of onions at ₹1,200 per quintal, a base price considered crucial to protecting farmers. One of the suggestions given to the government of Maharashtra is to emulate the Andhra model and incentivise the onion farmers.

**THE GIST**

Farmers in Maharashtra, India's largest onion-producing State, are protesting as market prices have plunged to ₹800-₹1,000 per quintal, far below their production costs of ₹2,200-₹2,500.

They demand stable export policies and a halt to buffer stock sales that further drag down market rates.

## Why did India condemn Doha strike?

How does India's reaction differ from its past responses? Why is Qatar treated differently from other countries? What role do India-Qatar ties play? Why has India stayed largely silent on Gaza? What does this mean for India's West Asia policy?

**EXPLAINER**

Subhasini Halder

The story so far:

**I**ndia's condemnation of Israel's bombing in Doha last week as a "violation of sovereignty" is a shift from its more muted positions on previous Israeli operations in other countries, leading some to wonder if there's a larger change in New Delhi's stand on the crisis in West Asia. However, experts said that while the strong wording of the statement denotes growing distress over mounting civilian casualties in the war in Gaza, India's intervention has more to do with its close ties with Qatar and the Gulf region than with an assertion of principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity. This has become particularly important, given New Delhi's concerns over the Saudi-Pakistan mutual defence agreement signed in Riyadh on Wednesday.

**Why did India criticise the Doha strike?**

On September 16, India referred to the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) bombing on September 9 of a home in Doha where leaders of Hamas gathered to discuss the United States' latest ceasefire proposal, as actions that "threaten peace, stability and security" in the region and worldwide. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu defended the strike, which killed five, saying that it was "justified" as Qatar "harbours and funds" Hamas operatives.

"India is deeply concerned about the recent attacks in Doha and their impact on the security situation in the region. We unequivocally condemn the violation of the sovereignty of Qatar," said India's Ambassador to the UN Mission in Geneva Arindam Bagchi, speaking at the UN Human Rights Council, also invoking the UN charter and international law.

"Any escalation must be avoided, and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States must be upheld," Mr. Bagchi added, in a statement that built on an earlier statement by the Ministry of



A damaged building, following an Israeli attack on Hamas leaders, in Doha, on September 9. REUTERS

External Affairs, and another statement issued after Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Qatar Emir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani on September 10, expressing "solidarity with the Qatari people".

**How does this differ from India's past reactions?**

The statements are in stark contrast to New Delhi's reactions to Israel's bombings of several other countries in the region, including Lebanon, Yemen, Tunisia, Syria, and Iran.

When Israel bombed the Iranian Embassy in Damascus last April, the MEA had expressed some "concern", as it had when Israeli forces attacked a UN Peacekeeping post in southern Lebanon, but remained largely silent over other Israeli attacks on other countries. When Israeli intelligence detonated hundreds of pager bombs against Hezbollah in Beirut in September 2024, Indian Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi called the operation a "masterstroke". On Iran – a country with close ties with India and where investments such as the Chabahar port are at stake – the government's reactions have been more puzzling. In June, India called for dialogue after Israel

and U.S. strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities, which Iran responded to. However, New Delhi dissociated from a statement issued by the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) days later, which condemned the strikes on Iran. In a subsequent flip-flop, India signed on to the SCO joint declaration on September 1 that "condemned" Israel and the U.S. for the June strikes.

**Why is Qatar treated differently?**

"India's ties with the other countries mentioned are experts said India's silence on Gaza – where more than 65,000 have been killed, including at least 20,000 children, in Israel's incessant bombardment of Gaza, including the latest offensive against Gaza – is straining its ties with the Arab world. In a rare response to media queries on August 27, the MEA called the killing of journalists and civilians by the IDF "shocking and deeply regrettable". India also voted in favour of a UNGA resolution endorsing the two-state solution for Palestine on September 12, indicating that, despite the steadfast relationship with Israel, the Modi government's shifts may indicate that it needs to factor in the rest of the region as well.

The MEA declined to respond to a question from *The Hindu* on why the Modi government has taken conflicting positions on the issue. Experts said a number of reasons explained the varied statements, from geopolitical to regional and bilateral. According to former

**THE GIST**

India condemns Israel's bombing in Doha as a 'violation of sovereignty' and expresses concern over regional peace and security.

The strong stance reflects India's close ties with Qatar and the Gulf region rather than a shift in principles on sovereignty.

India's silence on Gaza and varied reactions to other Israeli strikes show a careful balancing of strategic, regional, and bilateral interests.

The alarm among Gulf countries was visible at an emergency joint session of the Arab League and the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) conference in Doha this week, which condemned Israel's actions, even as the Gulf Cooperation Council committed to building a "joint defence mechanism" to deal with future threats.

**What does this mean for India's broader West Asia policy?**

India's silence on Gaza – where more than 65,000 have been killed, including at least 20,000 children, in Israel's incessant bombardment of Gaza, including the latest offensive against Gaza – is straining its ties with the Arab world. In a rare response to media queries on August 27, the MEA called the killing of journalists and civilians by the IDF "shocking and deeply regrettable". India also voted in favour of a UNGA resolution endorsing the two-state solution for Palestine on September 12, indicating that, despite the steadfast relationship with Israel, the Modi government's shifts may indicate that it needs to factor in the rest of the region as well.



## Modi calls Nepal's PM Karki, reaffirms India's support

Kallol Bhattacharjee  
NEW DELHI

Marking a fresh beginning, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday spoke with Sushila Karki, the newly appointed Prime Minister of Nepal's interim administration, and consoled the loss of lives in last week's protests.

"Had a warm conversation with Mrs. Sushila Karki, Prime Minister of the Interim Government of Nepal. Conveyed heartfelt condolences on the recent tragic loss of lives and reaffirmed India's steadfast support for her efforts to restore peace and stability. Also, I extended warm greetings to her and the people of Nepal on their National Day tomorrow," Mr. Modi said in a post on X.

The Ministry of External Affairs said Mr. Modi expressed "India's readiness" to continue working closely with Nepal to restore its "peace and stability". "Prime Minister Karki thanked Prime Minister for India's firm support to Nepal and reciprocated Prime Minister's desire to further strengthen ties between the two countries."

**Rebuilding ties**  
Earlier, in the aftermath of deadly police firing in Kathmandu on September



Sushila Karki

8, Mr. Modi had described the incidents as "heart wrenching". On September 12, India had welcomed the formation of the interim government.

Ms. Karki, who served as the Chief Justice of Nepal from July 2016 to June 2017, was sworn in as Nepal's first woman Prime Minister on September 12. After taking charge, she expressed concern over the rising financial corruption in Nepal. On September 16, Indian Ambassador Naveen Srivastava met Ms. Karki and conveyed Mr. Modi's congratulatory message to her.

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri had visited Nepal on August 18 and invited then-Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli to visit India. Mr. Oli resigned after a massive uprising following the killing of youth who revolted against his sweeping order banning most social media platforms.

# Army scales up induction of drones, aims to make every soldier a drone operator

Saurabh Trivedi  
NEW DELHI

The Army is rapidly scaling up the induction of drones and counter-drone systems, with multiple units already operational and drone centres established at premier training institutions. On Thursday, the Chief of the Army Staff, General Upendra Dwivedi, visited one such facility at Likabali in Arunachal Pradesh, underscoring the Army's focus on operationalising drone capabilities.

The initiative aims to make drone operations a standard soldier capability across all arms of the Army. Training institutions include the Indian Military Academy (Dehradun), Infantry School (Mhow), and the Officers Training Aca-



The initiative aims to make drone operations a standard soldier capability. PTI

demy (Chennai).

According to officials associated with the training, the concept is captured in the idea of "Eagle in the Arm" – that every soldier should be able to operate a drone just as he carries his weapon. Depending on mission needs, drones will be deployed for combat, surveillance, logistics, and even medical evacuation, while counter-drone systems are being inducted in

parallel to create layered protection.

The Army chief had earlier, during the 26th Kargil Vijay Diwas at Dras (July 26), announced that every infantry battalion will have a drone platoon, artillery regiments will be equipped with counter-drone systems and loiter munitions, and composite Divyastra batteries will be raised to boost precision and survivability. "Our firepower will now increase manifold in the coming days," Gen. Dwivedi had said.

This dual thrust – arming soldiers with drones while strengthening counter-drone defences – reflects the Army's recognition that unmanned systems are no longer niche but essential elements of modern warfare.

# U.S. to revoke waiver on Chabahar port sanctions

Decision will hamper India's plans for regional connectivity, investment of over ₹200 crore in the project in Iran; move comes just days after U.S. India had signalled rapprochement on trade issues

**Suhasini Haidar**  
NEW DELHI

In yet another harsh measure by the Donald Trump administration, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced on Thursday that the country was revoking its waiver of sanctions over the Iranian port of Chabahar within 10 days, ending a special waiver given to India in 2018.

The decision, among a number of other moves by the U.S. to impose "maximum pressure on Iran", including designating several entities involved in Iran's oil trade, will affect India's plans to develop the Shahid Beheshti terminal at the Chabahar port as an alternative trading route for India, circumventing Pakistan, to send cargo to Afghanistan and Central Asia.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) did not respond to requests for a comment on the development, which could severely hamper India's plans for regional connectivity.

President Trump had first announced that he planned to end the waiver given to India in his pre-



**Key link:** The Chabahar port is being developed by India and Iran to boost connectivity and trade ties. GETTY IMAGES

vious term, on February 5 this year, as he signed an executive order mandating Mr. Rubio to "rescind or modify" all such orders that provided any relief to Iran.

"Consistent with President Trump's maximum pressure policy to isolate the Iranian regime, the Secretary of State has revoked the sanctions exception issued in 2018 under the Iran Freedom and Counter-Proliferation Act (IFCA) for Afghanistan reconstruction assistance and economic development, effective September 29, 2025," the State department said in a statement.

"Once the revocation is effective, persons who op-

erate the Chabahar port or engage in other activities described in the IFCA may expose themselves to sanctions under the IFCA," it added.

Earlier this month, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval had discussed intensifying India's engagement with Iran on Chabahar during a conversation with Iranian SNSC Secretary Ali Larjani over telephone. According to an Iranian official release issued in Tehran, Mr. Doval discussed "expanding cooperation in economic ties, security and defence relations, and advancing the Chabahar port project," adding that the two sides would meet in Delhi soon.

According to a note issued by the Shipping Ministry in 2024, India has spent about ₹200 crore of a total allocation of ₹400 crore on the Chabahar project since 2016.

"The port recorded a 43% rise in vessel traffic and a 34% increase in container traffic in 2023-24" the note said.

The imposition of sanctions on Chabahar is the fourth such round of sanctions the Trump administration has passed that directly affects India, and comes just days after the two sides had signalled a rapprochement on trade issues.

In 2017-18, India had conceded to the U.S.'s demand to end all oil imports from Iran and then from Venezuela. India has not so far agreed to cutting down its imports of oil from Russia this year, despite the U.S.'s demand and imposition of a penalty tariff of 25% on all Indian goods in addition to a 25% "reciprocal tariff" already in place.

The sanctions will cost India in terms of its investment in the Iranian port, for which the Modi government signed a 10-year lease agreement in May 2024.

## Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

**Q. What is the importance of developing Chabahar Port by India? [2017]**

- India's trade with African countries will enormously increase.
- India's relations with oil-producing Arab countries will be strengthened.
- India will not depend on Pakistan for access to Afghanistan and Central Asia.
- Pakistan will facilitate and protect the installation of a gas pipeline between Iraq and India.