

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

13th October, 2025

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Pause, not peace

Donald Trump should play the honest broker, not a partisan patron

After two years of relentless Israeli bombardment, Palestinians in Gaza are finally getting a reprieve. The ceasefire agreement, signed by Hamas and Israel as part of U.S. President Donald Trump's 20-point peace plan, brought a pause in Israel's attacks. Hamas is expected to release all living hostages on Monday and the bodies of the rest on the days after. Israeli troops have already started retreating to the initial withdrawal line, from Rafah in the south to Gaza City in the north along the border, and some 2,000 Palestinian prisoners will be released. Mr. Trump deserves credit for the ceasefire. Until recently, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who always vowed to fight until "total victory", resisted all calls for a ceasefire. When Israel started the Gaza war, after Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack, it pledged to "dismantle" the Islamist militant outfit. In two years, Israel has turned Gaza into rubble and displaced most of its 2.3 million people. Its brutal genocidal assault and starvation of Palestinians led to its international isolation. Yet, Hamas remained an unresolved problem. Mr. Netanyahu wanted to continue to fight irrespective of international public opinion. But the U.S., which continues to back Israel militarily and diplomatically, finally strong-armed Mr. Netanyahu into accepting the ceasefire in return for the release of hostages.

While the ceasefire is a major reprieve for the Palestinians, the hostages and their families, it may not necessarily lead to lasting peace in Gaza. The ceasefire is only the initial phase of the Trump plan, which also calls for demilitarising Hamas, placing Gaza under an international governance body, and the deployment of an International Stabilisation Force for security. In its response to the Trump plan, Hamas agreed to release the hostages but remained non-committal on other terms. Another contentious issue is the continuing presence of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in Gaza - after the initial withdrawal, the IDF will still control some 53% of Gaza. Mr. Trump is expected to travel to Egypt on Monday to attend a summit on Gaza - French President Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer will be present. The renewed international attention on the Palestine question is a positive development. But the question is whether these deliberations can bridge the gaps in the Israeli and Palestinian positions, leading to lasting peace. Hamas is unlikely to accept demands to dismantle itself, certainly not after fighting Israeli forces for two years. But it could be pressured to relinquish power in Gaza for a Palestinian authority, backed by international actors, while Israel should be persuaded to leave. For Mr. Trump's hopes for lasting peace, he should act as an independent broker, not as a partisan patron of one country, and recognise Israel's security and the Palestinian quest for self-determination.

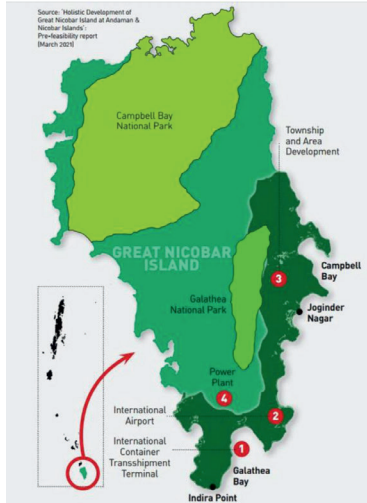
Mature relationship

India and the United Kingdom have deepened business ties without fuss

At a time when social media threats, reciprocal actions, and shrill rhetoric are becoming the global norm, the manner in which the India-U.K. economic relationship is unfolding is a refreshing change. U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer's two-day visit to India last week reinforced the existing solidity in economic relations and deepened them. India's negotiations with the U.S. have been fraught, erratic, and dramatic. U.S. President Donald Trump has also shown that he is more than willing to change the contours of deals already struck. Negotiations with the European Union have been less fraught and dramatic, but there certainly seems to be a gap between the positive assurances made by the leaders and what the negotiators say in private about the deal's progress. Against this backdrop, Sir Starmer chose to bring a delegation of more than 100 entrepreneurs, cultural representatives, and university vice-chancellors and left India with defence, investment and movie deals, further cementing the trade deal signed in July. The keenness to deepen trade relations makes eminent sense. India, despite being the fourth-largest economy in the world and one of the largest markets, accounts for less than 2% of the U.K.'s total merchandise exports. The U.K. accounts for about 3% of India's exports. There is ample scope for trade to grow. Growing India-U.K. trade could also mitigate some of the impact of the U.S.'s punitive 50% tariffs, if they remain.

One of the unsaid reasons why India is slowing its capital expenditure is because it needs to fund its defence acquisitions. Sir Starmer's visit made sure that some of these acquisitions - in the form of a £350 million missile supply deal - came the U.K.'s way. The U.K. government also revealed that 64 Indian companies have so far committed to invest £1.3 billion in the U.K. It goes without saying that U.K. companies would have made similar investment commitments in India, but the Indian government has inexplicably not made these public yet. Yet, statements by companies such as Rolls-Royce show that there is enthusiasm there. The Indian population in the U.K. is the largest ethnic minority, and this is not lost on the political leadership either. One of the first things Sir Starmer did on arriving in Mumbai was to visit Yash Raj Films (YRF) and meet Indian producers. The result was that YRF has committed to shoot three films in the U.K. Two U.K. universities have also committed to opening campuses in India. This cross-sector cooperation is how mature democracies should work together - without fuss and ego, just business.

Great Nicobar revives the issue of nature's legal rights



From an ecological point of view, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands can be easily rated as one of the world's most major biological diversity hotspots, acting as a global carbon reservoir and climate regulator. Unfortunately, the development trajectory of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands has been largely influenced by mainland India which has often been far removed from the needs of an island ecology. The issue in focus now is the Government of India's multi-crore mega-plan for the Great Nicobar Island – the construction of a power plant, township, transshipment port and airport, which will also affect 13,000 hectares of pristine forests.

Essential judicial precedent

A landmark judgment relating to the issue of diversion of forests that could come to the rescue of the Great Nicobar Island is the Niyamgiri Hills case, pursuant to the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006.

In its 2013 judgment, in *Orissa Mining Corporation Ltd. vs Ministry of Environment & Forest and Ors.*, the Supreme Court of India addressed the concerns of the Dongoria Kondh tribe who resisted plans for bauxite mining in the sacred Niyamgiri Hills of Odisha. Following protests by the tribes in the region against mining which threatened their culture, religion and environment, the Court ordered a referendum in the affected *gram sabhas*, which unanimously voted against the project. The Court upheld the competence of the *gram sabha* to safeguard and preserve the traditions of the community, their cultural identity, community resources and community modes of dispute resolution.

In light of this judgment, the pertinent questions with respect to the proposed project on the Great Nicobar Island include whether the Tribal Council of Little and Great Nicobar has been allowed to exercise its competence in certifying the settlement of forest rights under



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the Forest Rights Act before the decision to divert forest land. A report in this daily, "Forest rights of tribal people were not settled for Nicobar project: council" (August 23, 2025), has highlighted how the Tribal Council had said that the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Administration had made a false representation to the Centre by claiming that rights of the tribal people under the Forest Rights Act had been identified and settled before diverting the required forest land for the project.

Granting rights to nature in India

What is being witnessed in the Great Nicobar is not new but one more example of how big multipurpose projects are on track to be planned disasters. The examples are many – from Tehri in the north to Koel Karo in the east to Sardar Sarovar in the west. To respond to a consistent failure of environmental law in protecting ecology, several countries (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and New Zealand) have adopted a new legal approach called 'earth jurisprudence' or 'rights of nature' which grants rights to non-human natural entities (rivers, forests, mountains, and various ecosystems), recognising them as subjects of rights holders.

This approach drew inspiration from an influential article written by Christopher Stone in 1972 – 'Should Trees Have Standing? – Toward Legal Rights For Natural Objects'. He argued that the current approach did not consider damages to the environment, but only environmental-related damages to humans in granting relief.

Second, such relief did not go to the natural entity but only to affected human beings. He said that making natural entities as right holders, by vesting them with legal standing in court and making them the direct beneficiaries of legal redress, would improve the environment. But the question arises whether natural entities, like human adults, be held legally responsible and exercise legal competences by entering into contracts or whether they can sue and be sued by

an aggrieved party. Stone suggested the creation of a guardianship body which could initiate legal action and also collect funds to preserve and restore its condition.

The groundbreaking turn towards recognising the rights of natural entities happened in India in 2017 when the Uttarakhand High Court granted legal personhood to the Ganges and Yamuna rivers, as well as the Gangotri and Yamunotri glaciers. The judgment, in *Mohd. Salim vs State of Uttarakhand and Others*, conferred these entities with rights and obligations but only through a designated person. Although the Supreme Court stayed the ruling of the High Court, some of the elements in the High Court judgment, especially the idea of conferring guardianship responsibilities on behalf of those natural entities, could be a signpost for designing legal personhood.

The case in Colombia as guidance

Pushing the boundary of the Forest Rights Act further to incorporate the idea of granting legal personhood is one such option. Still, the idea of granting legal personhood to natural entities will require the building of greater clarity on the specific legal rights and the responsibility of individuals charged with upholding them. An in-depth study of important normative questions such as how to define rights bearing nature, what rights to recognise, who can speak for nature, and whether someone should be responsible for protecting nature, is required.

In finding answers to these normative questions, there is guidance from Colombia's Atrato River case (2016), which recognised bio-cultural rights – a reference to the right of ethnic communities to autonomously administer and protect their territories as well as the natural resources that constitute their habitat. The formation of a commission of guardians requires the inclusion of representatives from the indigenous people facing the destruction of their habitat.

Do cash transfers build women's agency?

There is a need to ensure that women do not only receive money but also control, grow, and sustain it for their own advancement

DATA POINT

**Shravani Prakash
Jiya Bhatti
Riya Khanna**

The politics of welfare in India has become increasingly gendered, with cash transfers emerging as both a social policy instrument and an electoral strategy. Just weeks before Assembly elections, the Bihar government has rolled out the Mukhyamantri Mahila Rojgar Yojana – a ₹10,000 transfer to 75 lakh women as seed capital for self-employment. The goal is to help them start or expand small enterprises, with up to ₹2 lakh in additional support for successful ventures.

This joins a list of women-focused cash transfer programmes, such as Karnataka's Gruha Lakshmi, West Bengal's Lakshmi Bhandar, Madhya Pradesh's Ladli Behna Yojana, and Telangana's Mahalakshmi. These are powered by India's Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) architecture, anchored on the 'JAM trinity' of Jan Dhan accounts, Aadhaar, and mobile phones. This infrastructure enables targeted delivery and transparency.

As of August 2025, over 56 crore Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana accounts have been opened, with women owning 55.7% of them. According to the World Bank's Global Findex Database 2025, 54% of Indian women reported opening their first bank account primarily to receive government benefits or wages. With 89% of Indian women now holding a bank account – on par with developed nations and far above the global average of 77% – India has achieved a remarkable milestone in recognising women as economic actors with a formal financial identity (Chart 1).

At the heart of this progress lies a critical question: can direct cash empower women as economic agents rather than just welfare recipients? DBT schemes have been

shown to enhance women's visible control over resources. Research shows that income in a woman's name increases her say in household decisions and improves outcomes for children and the elderly. Therefore, schemes such as Bihar's Rojgar Yojana to become genuine instruments of economic empowerment, they need to move beyond simply placing money in women's bank accounts. Beneficiaries require complementary long-term support.

Most importantly, building genuine financial agency will require giving women control over assets by providing them with secure property rights and joint land titles. Only when women have tangible control over land or business assets can they leverage credit, participate in markets, and engage in new forms of commerce.

Equally critical is strengthening the 'mobile' pillar of the JAM trinity. Subsidised smartphones and affordable data plans would allow women to access their accounts and digital payment tools independently, avoiding reliance on shared devices that erode privacy and autonomy. Banks, fintech, and mobile operators must co-create financial products that reflect the realities of women's informal, seasonal, or sporadic incomes, caregiving responsibilities; and limited financial and digital literacy.

Community-based confidence networks can bridge the trust gap. Initiatives such as digital banking sabbas and secure WhatsApp or UPI groups can offer trusted spaces for women to seek advice, share experiences, and resolve doubts collectively. Another priority should be to expand the number of female banking agents – less than 10% of India's 1.3 million business correspondents are women.

The path to real empowerment lies in coupling access with agency-building – ensuring women can not only receive money but also control, grow, and sustain it for their own advancement.

Therefore, India's leap from access to agency for women remains incomplete. So, for schemes such as Bihar's Rojgar Yojana to become genuine instruments of economic empowerment, they need to move beyond simply placing money in women's bank accounts. Beneficiaries require complementary long-term support.

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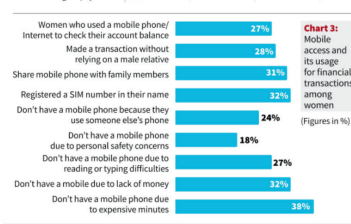
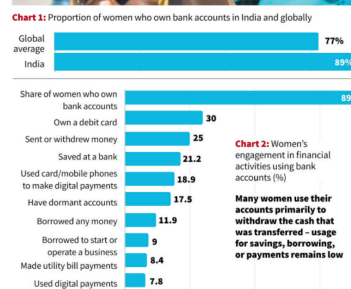
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Shravani Prakash, Jiya Bhatti and Riya Khanna are with ICRIER's Economic Policies for Women Led Development Program

Beyond the transfer

The data for the charts were sourced from the World Bank Findex Report (2025) and the CMS-Telecom Report 2025



India sends Minister to Egypt for Gaza summit

New Delhi will be represented by Minister of State for External Affairs Kirtivardhan Singh in place of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who declined the invitation from Egypt due to the short notice

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

India will send Minister of State for External Affairs Kirtivardhan Singh to represent the country at the Peace Summit on Gaza in Sharm el-Sheikh to be co-hosted by Egypt and the United States on Monday, officials confirmed to *The Hindu*.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was among more than 20 world leaders invited over the weekend to attend the summit, which will be co-hosted by Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and U.S. President Donald Trump, to discuss the ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas, brokered mainly by negotiators from the U.S., Egypt, and Qatar.

However, given the short notice, Mr. Modi, whose invitation was delivered by Egyptian Ambassador Kamel Galal, declined the invitation. Mr. Modi had also met U.S. special envoy and Ambassador-designate Sergio Goro in Delhi on Saturday.

Egypt's FM to visit Delhi
Mr. Singh left for Cairo on Sunday and will travel to Sharm el-Sheikh on Monday, the officials said. Mr. Modi is, however, expected to meet Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty la-



Key gathering: More than 20 world leaders are expected at the Sharm el-Sheikh Summit for Peace on Monday. REUTERS

ter this week, who is travelling to Delhi to hold the India-Egypt Strategic Dialogue.

According to sources, Mr. Abdelatty's visit is part of the Sisi-Modi Strategic Partnership Agreement signed in January 2023, and this is his first visit to India since taking over in 2024. Mr. Abdelatty has been in frequent contact with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, including during Operation Sindoor in May, and Egypt had strongly condemned the Pahalgaon terror attacks.

Mr. Abdelatty is also expected to brief the government on the plans for the reconstruction of Gaza.

Although Egypt is not a member of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), it has been keen to discuss alternative route alignments

through Sharm el-Sheikh with India, given the security issues with Israel's Haifa port, where the current alignment lies.

Among those who have confirmed their participation at Monday's event in Sharm el-Sheikh are UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and the leaders of France, Italy, Spain, and the U.K. A number of leaders from Europe, the Gulf region, and other parts of Asia are expected to be there as well.

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif will attend. Iran's leadership, which received a surprise invitation, has declined it, as has Hamas.

It is still unclear whether Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu or the Palestinian Authority President, Mahmoud Abbas, would attend.

On Monday morning, Mr. Trump will be in Jerusalem to address the Israeli parliament as he and Mr. Netanyahu await the release of 20 Israeli hostages still alive and the return of remaining bodies of those who have died since they were abducted by Hamas during the 2023 terror attacks. Israel will release about 2,000 Palestinian prisoners.

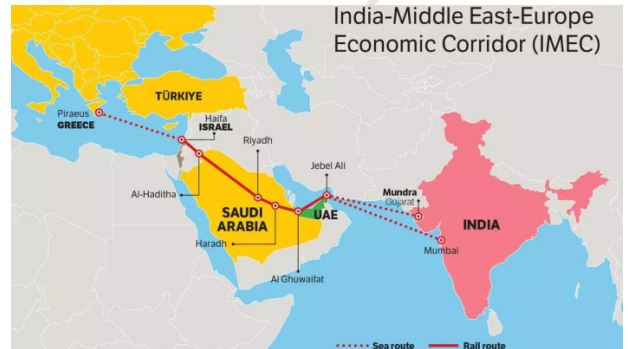
Finalise truce deal

Mr. Abdelatty spoke by telephone to his counterparts in a number of countries, said the Egyptian Foreign Ministry on Sunday, and conveyed the invitation from President Sisi and President Trump to witness the signing of a peace agreement.

"During the calls, Minister Abdelatty discussed the substantive arrangements of the summit, which is a historic summit aimed at ending the war on the Gaza Strip," said the statement.

"The summit seeks to help restore regional stability and alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people in Gaza, in line with U.S. President Donald Trump's vision for peace in the region," it added.

Mr. Modi had welcomed the Gaza ceasefire agreement last week and spoke to Mr. Trump over the telephone to congratulate him.



China and the Philippines trade blame over boat collision in disputed sea

Agence France-Presse
MANILA

The Philippines said a Chinese ship deliberately rammed one of its government vessels in the disputed South China Sea on Sunday, although Beijing blamed Manila for the incident.

Confrontations between Philippine and Chinese vessels occur frequently in the contested waterway, which Beijing claims nearly in its entirety despite an international ruling that its assertion has no legal basis.

The Philippines said a Chinese coast guard ship "fired its water cannon" at the BRP *Datu Pagbuaya*, a vessel belonging to Manila's fisheries bureau, at 9:15 a.m. on Sunday.

"Just three minutes later... the same (Chinese) vessel deliberately rammed the stern" of the Philippine boat, "causing minor structural damage but no injuries to the crew," the Philippine coast guard said in a statement. It said the incident took place near Thitu Island, part of the Spratly Islands



Face off: A Chinese Coast Guard vessel, right, fires its water cannon at the Philippines' BRP *Datu Pagbuaya* in the South China Sea. AP

where Beijing has sought to assert its sovereignty claims for years.

The Philippine National Maritime Council, a body in charge of strengthening maritime governance, condemned the incident and vowed to pursue "appropriate diplomatic action to convey its strong objections to the aggressive and illegal actions of China".

A spokeswoman for the foreign affairs department in Manila, also told reporters that a diplomatic protest would be filed over the incident.

Earlier, China's coast guard said the incident occurred after a Philippine vessel entered waters near Sandy Cay, "ignored repeated stern warnings from the Chinese side, and dangerously approached" the Chinese ship. "Full responsibility lies with the Philippine side," a spokesman said.

'Bullying tactics'
"Despite these bullying tactics and aggressive actions... we will not be intimidated or driven away," the Philippine Coast Guard said.

The incident was the latest in a string of flare-ups between Beijing and Manila in the South China Sea, a waterway through which more than 60% of global maritime trade passes.



Naked Mole Rat–Science Edition



The naked mole rat lives nearly 10x longer than other mammals of similar size. *Tim Eversen*

A mere four mutations help the naked mole rat fix its DNA and live longer

The Hindu Bureau

The naked mole rat (*Heterocephalus glaber*) is a small, hairless rodent native to East Africa, and famous for living an astonishingly long time, up to around 37 years, nearly 10x longer than mammals of similar size. Scientists have long suspected its remarkable longevity comes from adaptations that keep its DNA intact.

As we age, DNA damage accumulates in our cells. Normally, cells repair these breaks using several molecular pathways, but errors or inefficiencies in repair make genomes unstable and lead to ageing and disease.

One molecule known to influence this process is cyclic GMP-AMP synthase (cGAS). In humans and mice, cGAS helps detect foreign DNA, such as that from viruses, and triggers immune responses. However, it also suppresses one of the body's main DNA-repair systems, called homologous recombination. As a result, human cGAS can actually make cells more prone to ageing and cancer.

Scientists have wondered whether, during evolution, the naked mole rat might have changed cGAS so that it no longer interferes with DNA repair, or maybe even helps it. A new study led by researchers at Tongji University, and recently published in *Science*, set out to check this idea.

The researchers compared the cGAS genes and proteins of naked mole rats with those of humans and mice. They used genetic engineering tools to switch specific amino acids – the building blocks of proteins – between species and observe the effects on DNA repair. They also performed experiments in cell cultures, fruit flies, and mice to test how these molecular changes affected genome stability, cellular ageing, and lifespan.

In the naked mole rat, evolution essentially flipped the role of cGAS, supporting the idea that efficient DNA repair is one of the main defences against ageing

Thus, the team found that in humans and mice, cGAS interferes with the homologous recombination pathway; however, in naked mole rats, cGAS enhances it. The reason lay in four amino acid substitutions in cGAS's structure, which allowed naked mole rat cGAS to remain bound to DNA for longer after damage occurred instead of being quickly removed. This binding prevented cGAS from being tagged for destruction by a process called ubiquitination.

Instead, naked mole rat cGAS brought together two repair proteins, called FANCI and RAD50, to speed up homologous recombination and help fix DNA breaks more efficiently. Cells with this modified cGAS showed fewer signs of stress-induced ageing.

When the scientists put the same four amino acid changes into human cGAS, the molecule stopped harming DNA repair.

The discovery is remarkable for showing that longevity can evolve not only by improving helpful repair enzymes but also by weakening harmful regulators. In the naked mole rat, evolution essentially 'flipped' the role of cGAS, supporting the long-standing idea that efficient DNA repair is one of the main defences against ageing.

"Our work provides a molecular basis for how DNA repair is activated to contribute to the exceptional longevity during evolution in naked mole-rats," the researchers wrote in their paper.

Independent experts have said that if scientists can safely reproduce this effect in other species, including humans, it could open new paths for age-related research and therapies. For example, medicines that adjust how cGAS interacts with DNA might help cells maintain genome integrity without compromising the immune system.



Recent digs in T.N.'s Tenkasi reveal presence of Iron Age culture

N. Sai Charan
CHENNAI

The first season of excavations carried out by the Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology (TNSDA) at Thirumalapuram in Tenkasi district has brought to light the presence of Iron Age culture close to the Western Ghats in Tamil Nadu.

According to tentative estimates, the site could date back to the early to



An urn burial site at Thirumalapuram. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

mid-third millennium BCE, similar to Adichanallur and Sivagalai. Official sources said the exact period would be confirmed

through scientific analyses.

Burial site

According to the recently released report, *Archaeo-*

logical Excavations in Tamil Nadu: A Preliminary Report, the burial site at Thirumalapuram covers nearly 35 acres and lies about 10 km northwest of the present-day village, between two seasonal streams that rise from the Western Ghats near the Kulasegarapereri tank. During the first season of excavations started last year, TNSDA archaeologists dug 37 trenches and unearthed several artefacts, including

a rectangular stone slab chamber with urn burials and urns, a first-of-its-kind discovery in Tamil Nadu. The chamber, made of 35 stone slabs, was filled with cobbles up to a depth of 1.5 metres.

The excavations also yielded a rich collection of ceramics found in graves and among grave goods. These included white-painted black-and-red ware, red ware, red-slipped ware, black-pol-

ished ware, and coarse red ware. The black-and-red ware, black ware, and black-slipped ware types had white-painted designs, a unique feature first reported from T. Kallupatti and later from Adichanallur, Sivagalai, Thulukkarpatti, and Korkai, the report said.

According to the report, symbols on the urns were among the most striking discoveries at Thirumalapuram.

Important Facts- Green Sea Turtle

Global green sea turtle population has increased by 28 per cent since 1970s: IUCN

Despite gains, declining hatchling production in Southwest Pacific subpopulation for several years is a cause of significant concern



A green sea turtle on Hikkaduwa's coral reef, Sri Lanka. Danilovich Andrey via iStock

About Green Sea Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*)

It is the **largest hard-shelled sea turtle** species in the world.

- The name "green" comes from the **greenish layer of fat beneath its shell**, not from the shell color (which is olive to black).
- **Diet:**
 - **Juveniles** – Carnivorous (feed on small invertebrates).
 - **Adults** – Primarily herbivorous (feed on seagrasses and algae), making them **omnivorous overall**.
- **Ecological Role:** Acts as a **keystone species** in tropical marine ecosystems — maintains healthy seagrass beds and coral reefs.
- **Distribution:** Found in **tropical and subtropical oceans worldwide**, including the Indian Ocean, Pacific, and Atlantic.

Conservation Status

IUCN Red List: *Least Concern*

Important Facts

Key Features

- **Head:** Relatively **small** compared to body size.
- **Mouth:** Lacks teeth; possesses **strong, beak-like jaws** adapted for grazing on vegetation.
- **Hearing & Smell:**
 - No visible ears; has **skin-covered eardrums**.
 - Sensitive to **low-frequency sounds** and has an **excellent sense of smell**.
- **Behavior:**
 - **Marine-adapted**; spends almost entire life underwater.
 - Comes ashore **only for nesting** (usually females).
- **Lifespan:** Around **60–70 years**.



Important Facts- Bharat Taxi



Ministry of Electronics & IT

National e-Governance Division (NeGD) Join hands with Bharat Taxi — A First-of-its-Kind Cooperative-Driven, Citizen-First National Ride-Hailing Initiative to be launched in December 2025