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DAILY NEWS

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11 July

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USAID SHUTS, NORMAN BORLAUG'S INSTITUTE KNOCKS ON INDIA'S DOOR

With USAID shut, Norman Borlaug's institute knocks on India's doors

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ANCHOR

HARISH DAMODARAN
NEW DELHI, JULY 10

SIX DECADES ago, the legendary agricultural scientist Norman Borlaug ushered in India's Green Revolution through his high-yielding, semi-dwarf wheat varieties such as Lerma Rojo 64A, Sonora 63, Sonora 64 and Mayo 64.

Today, his organisation — the Mexico-headquartered International Maize and Wheat

Improvement Center or CIMMYT — is reaching out to the Indian government and the private sector, seeking financial support for its breeding research and development programme in the two cereals that cover over a quarter of the world's cropped area.

The reason: A funding crunch brought about by global factors, including the shutting down of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) by the Donald Trump administration, officially from July 1.

The agency, which administered civilian foreign aid and development assistance for the US government, accounted for about

\$83 million out of CIMMYT's total grant revenue of \$211 million in 2024. That made it CIMMYT's largest funder, followed by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (now Gates Foundation), which gave \$42 million.

"USAID ceasing operations and other development agencies drastically reducing funding is going to significantly impact our agricultural R&D activities worldwide. While there may be some money this year from projects in winding-down stage, the real effects will be felt from 2026. We are looking for support from countries such as India that have interests in CIMMYT continuing



Norman Borlaug (right) and MS Swaminathan, MSSRF

to empower farmers through science and innovation and breeding varieties today for tomorrow's climate," CIMMYT's director-general, Bram Govaerts, told *The Indian Express*.

CIMMYT's advanced breeding lines are present as parent or grandparent in wheat varieties planted on more than 60 million hectares (mh) globally. The early Green Revolution blockbuster varieties that Indian scientists developed were all through selections from CIMMYT materials. That included Kalyan Sona (released in 1967), Sonalika (1968) and PBW 343 (1995), which, at their peak, were grown on 5-6 mh, 14 mh

and 7-8 mh respectively.

That hasn't changed much. Last year, Indian farmers sowed wheat on around 32 mh, with the top 10 varieties accounting for over 20 mh. Of these 10 varieties, six were released from CIMMYT-derived germplasm — DBW 187, DBW 303, DBW 222, WH 1270, DBW 327 and PBW 826 — and covered an estimated 15.3 mh.

"Roughly 50% of the wheat cultivated in India now is from varieties released after 2019 and developed through collaboration between CIMMYT and national institutions such as the Indian Institute of Wheat and

Barley Research, Karnal. Our partnership has led to India not only becoming self-sufficient, but even transforming wheat for the world," Govaerts said.

He cited the example of DBW 303, "the first wheat variety in South Asia to exceed an average grain yield of 8 tonnes per hectare". Some advanced lines, yet to be released for commercial planting, have even achieved 10-tonnes yield in CIMMYT's field trials.

In October 2011, CIMMYT established the Borlaug Institute for South Asia (BISA) as a joint venture with the Indian Council

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Backdrop: Funding crisis of the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center

Relevance: GS 2/International Organisations

About the news



Six decades after **Norman Borlaug's** high-yielding wheat varieties sparked India's Green Revolution, his organisation, the **International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT)**, is now seeking **financial support** from the **Indian government and private sector** to sustain its **breeding research in wheat and maize**.

International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT)

- It is a cutting-edge, non-profit, international organization.
- It works to enhance the **yield, quality, and resilience** of staple cereals like **maize, wheat, sorghum, and millets**, especially in the **Global South**, through applied science and strong partnerships.
- Initially, a **Mexican government–Rockefeller Foundation** initiative, it later became reliant on funding from **USAID** and the **Gates Foundation**.

Research Focus:

- Breeding **climate-resilient, high-yielding wheat** to tackle **heat stress and temperature spikes**, which reduce wheat yields by ~6% for every 1°C night temp rise.
- Developing **BNI (Biological Nitrification Inhibition-the natural ability of certain plant species to suppress the process of nitrification in the soil by releasing organic compounds from their roots)** traits in wheat and maize to improve nitrogen retention, reducing urea usage by up to 20%.
- **Benefit of BNI**—Improved nitrogen use efficiency:By reducing nitrification, BNI helps retain nitrogen in the ammonium form, which is less prone to loss and can be better utilized by plants.

Funding Crisis of CIMMYT:

- **USAID**, CIMMYT's largest donor (contributing **\$83 million of \$211 million** in 2024), has been **shut down by the US government** effective July 1.
- Other donors, including the **Gates Foundation** (which gave \$42 million), are also reducing contributions.
- The funding crunch is expected to **severely affect global agricultural R&D** from 2026 onwards.

- India's early Green Revolution wheat varieties like **Kalyan Sona (1967)**, **Sonalika (1968)**, and **PBW 343 (1995)** were all developed using **CIMMYT materials**.
- Norman Borlaug developed high-yielding, semi-dwarf wheat varieties such as **Lerma Rojo 64A**, **Sonora 63**, **Sonora 64**, and **Mayo 64**.
- Out of India's 32 million hectares (mh) wheat area, **6 of the top 10 wheat varieties** (covering ~15.3 mh) are from CIMMYT-derived germplasm – **DBW 187**, **DBW 303**, **DBW 222**, **WH 1270**, **DBW 327**, and **PBW 826**.
- About **50% of wheat grown in India today** comes from **varieties released after 2019**, developed through collaboration between **CIMMYT** and national institutions like the **Indian Institute of Wheat and Barley Research (IIWBR)**, **Karnal**.
 - E.g., **DBW 303**, the first wheat variety in South Asia to exceed an average grain yield of 8 tonnes/ha.
 - Some varieties, yet to be released for commercial planting, have even achieved **10-tonne** yields in CIMMYT's field trials.

- CIMMYT established the **Borlaug Institute for South Asia (BISA)** with the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).
 - BISA has three research stations at Ludhiana (Punjab), Jabalpur (Madhya Pradesh), and Samastipur (Bihar).
- Established a **doubled haploid** facility for maize at **Kunigal (Karnataka)**, jointly with the University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore
 - It produces genetically pure inbred lines of maize that can be used as parents for further crossing and breeding of hybrids.
- Wheat and maize varieties with **Biological Nitrification Inhibition** traits may enter trials in India by the **end of 2027**.

India's contribution to CIMMYT

- India's contribution to CIMMYT's budget was just **\$0.8 million** in 2024.
- A tenth of CIMMYT's global staff are Indians.

Significance of new varieties of Wheat



- Wheat is increasingly prone to yield losses from mercury spikes in March, at the crop's final grain formation and filling stage.
 - Every one-degree Celsius rise in night temperatures lowers yields by an average of 6%.
- By identifying traits in wheat plants that promote heat tolerance, scientists are able to develop varieties better adapted to hotter days as well as warmer nights.

- USAID is America's primary agency for global development and humanitarian aid.
- USAID funds critical sectors such as **healthcare, food assistance, disaster relief, and policy advocacy.**
- Key recipients include **Ukraine, Ethiopia, Jordan, Somalia, and Afghanistan.**
- In **2024**, it received **\$44.2 billion**, accounting for just **0.4% of the U.S. federal budget**, but representing **42% of global humanitarian aid** tracked by the UN.
- **USAID in India**
 - In India, USAID has been active since **1951**, initially through the **India Emergency Food Aid Act**, later expanding into areas like **education, immunization, HIV/TB prevention, and economic reforms.**
 - Over the last decade, India has received about **\$1.5 billion**, roughly **0.2–0.4%** of USAID's total global aid.



PRACTICE QUESTION

Q1. following statements:

1. USAID is the primary agency of the USA for providing global humanitarian and development assistance.
2. India has been receiving assistance from USAID since 1991, following the liberalisation of its economy.
3. In the last decade, India received nearly 10% of USAID's total global aid.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) 1 only**
- (b) 2 only
- (c) 2, and 3 only
- (d) All of the above

Zonal councils have transformed into engines of cooperation: Shah

Soren seeks pending payment of ₹1.40 lakh cr from Centre

ENS & PTI

RANCHI JULY 10

UNION HOME Minister Amit Shah on Thursday said zonal councils have transformed from being mere discussion forums into "engines of cooperation", noting that 83% of issues taken up in their meetings have been resolved.

Shah made the remark at the 27th Eastern Zonal Council meeting, attended by representatives from the four eastern states — Jharkhand, Bihar, Odisha, and West Bengal — including Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren and his Odisha counterpart Mohan Charan Majhi.

"Under the Modi government, regional councils have evolved from mere 'forum of discussion' into 'engines of cooperation'. The resolution of 83% of issues during regional council meetings underlines the effectiveness and growing importance of these forums," Shah said.

Shah said the number of zonal council meetings rose to 63 between 2014 and 2025 as

compared to 25 between 2004 and 2014.

At the meeting, long-pending issues related to Masanjore Dam, Taiyabpur Barrage and Indrapuri Reservoir were discussed in detail, in addition to issues related to division of assets and liabilities of many public sector undertakings (PSUs) between Bihar and Jharkhand states, which were pending since the time of division of Bihar.

CM Soren raised the issue of pending payment of over ₹1.40 lakh crore by the Central government to the state, along with 30 other demands. In August last year, the Supreme Court had ruled in favour of Jharkhand, directing the Central government to clear unpaid mineral royalties owed by PSUs since 2005 in phased payments over 12 years.

Soren said coal mining in Jharkhand is primarily conducted by subsidiaries of Coal India Limited, including CCL, BCCL, and ECL. These companies owe the state government substantial pending dues under various heads — ₹1,01,000 crore for non-payment of land compensation, ₹34,213 crore under the Common Cause fund, and ₹6,219

crore as royalty for washed coal. "I respectfully request the Hon'ble Home Minister to ensure this due amount is cleared at the earliest," said Soren.

He said the Jharkhand government strongly opposes the proposed amendment to the Coal Bearing Areas (CBA) Act, which seeks to empower coal companies to allocate mined land to other companies for commercial use. "As per the Constitution, land is a subject under the state's jurisdiction. Therefore, after mining operations conclude, the land must be restructured and returned to the state government," he said.

Referring to the recent deaths of four illegal miners in an abandoned mine in Ramgarh district, the CM said coal companies are also responsible for formally closing such mines.

This negligence, he noted, has led to loss of lives and property and has encouraged illegal mining. "Hence, I urge the government of India to ensure that abandoned mines undergo proper closure procedures to safeguard the environment and prevent illegal activities," Soren said.

Backdrop: 27th Eastern Zonal Council meeting

Relevance: GS 2/Issues and challenges pertaining to the Federal structure

- Held in July 2025, the **27th Eastern Zonal Council** meeting was chaired by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, with participation from **Jharkhand, Bihar, Odisha, and West Bengal**.
- The Union Home Minister stated that the **zonal councils** have evolved from mere **discussion forums** into "**engines of cooperation**", resolving **83% of issues** discussed.
- He also highlighted a significant rise in meetings, from **63 between 2014 and 2025**, compared to **25 between 2004 and 2014**, showcasing their growing effectiveness and relevance.

Major Issues Discussed:



- Long-pending inter-state issues like **Masanjore Dam**, **Taiyabpur Barrage**, and **Indrapuri Reservoir**.
- **Division of assets and liabilities** of many public sector undertakings (PSUs) between Bihar and Jharkhand post-bifurcation.
- **Jharkhand's Demands: ₹1.4 lakh crore pending dues** from the Centre, including:
 - ₹1,01,000 crore for land compensation (Coal India subsidiaries: CCL, BCCL, ECL).
 - ₹34,213 crore under the **Common Cause Fund**.
 - ₹6,219 crore in **washed coal royalties**.
- **Jharkhand opposes** amendments to the **Coal Bearing Areas (CBA) Act**, arguing that **land is a state subject** and should revert to the state post-mining.

Common Cause Fund

- Established based on the Supreme Court's directive, it collects financial penalties from companies involved in illegal or unauthorised coal mining.
- Used for: Environmental restoration, Welfare of affected communities, and Development of mining-affected areas

Coal Bearing Areas (Acquisition and Development) Act, 1957:

Enacted to facilitate government acquisition of land that contains coal deposits, for coal mining and development.

Background

- Proposed by **PM Nehru** in **1956** during the debate on the **States Reorganisation Commission Report**.
- Intended to **reduce linguistic hostilities** and promote **Centre-State** and **inter-State cooperation**.

Definition

- Zonal Councils are **advisory bodies** formed to resolve **inter-State issues**, promote **balanced regional development**, and build a **cooperative federal environment** across different zones of India.
- Created under the **States Reorganisation Act, 1956**.
- They are **statutory** (not constitutional) bodies.
- **Five Zonal Councils**: Northern, Central, Eastern, Western, and Southern.
- **North Eastern States** are covered under the **North Eastern Council Act, 1972**.
- Unlike broader platforms (e.g., **Inter-State Council**, **National Development Council**), Zonal Councils are **region-specific** and focus on **zone-based issues**.
- Facilitate **focused, high-level dialogue** considering **regional and national perspectives**.

Objectives

- Promote **national integration**.
- Prevent **regionalism, linguistic conflicts, and state parochialism**.
- Foster **Centre-State collaboration** and idea-sharing.
- Enable **joint development efforts** among States.

Organisational Structure

- **Chairman:** Union Home Minister (ex-officio).
- **Vice Chairman:** Chief Ministers (rotating annually).
- **Members:** Chief Ministers and two Ministers from each State; two from UTs in the zone.
- **Advisors:** NITI Aayog nominee, Chief Secretaries, Development Commissioners, and relevant Union Ministers.

Functions

- Acts as an **advisory body** on issues of **common interest** to States in a zone.
- May discuss and recommend on:
 - **Economic and social planning**
 - **Border disputes, linguistic minorities**
 - **Inter-State transport, issues from state reorganization**



PRACTICE QUESTION



Q2. With reference to the Zonal Councils in India, consider the following statements:

1. They are constitutional bodies established under Article 263 of the Constitution.
2. The Chairman of each Zonal Council is the Prime minister.
3. Zonal Councils aim to promote national integration and foster Centre-State cooperation.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

QUAD (QUADRILATERAL SECURITY DIALOGUE)



Like-minded nations may be added to Quad, says Japan diplomat

DIVYAA
NEW DELHI, JULY 10

AHEAD OF the Quad leaders' summit in New Delhi this year, a senior Japanese diplomat on Thursday indicated that more "like-minded" nations may be included in the Quad grouping in future, calling it an "evolving framework".

This comes barely a week after the Quad Foreign Ministers' meeting in Washington DC, which was attended by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar.

During an event in New Delhi, Noriaki Abe, Minister for Political Affairs, Embassy of Japan in India, responding to a question whether South Korea or the Philippines can be added as new members to Quad, said, "I don't exclude the possibility of adding other like-minded countries to this framework." An interactive session was organised by the Embassy in collaboration with Centre for Integrated and Holistic Studies, a think tank.

Terming Quad "an evolving framework", Abe said they were looking to expand cooperation with regional partners. "But this possibility has not been discussed in the Quad context," he said.

For the Quad Leaders' sum-

mit, US President Donald Trump, Australian PM Anthony Albanese and Japanese PM Shigeru Ishiba are slated to travel to the national capital later this year, even as specific dates are still being worked out.

Abe also spoke on the disagreements related to tariff that the other Quad partners, including India and Japan, may be having with the US at the moment, and how they plan to overcome those divergences and work on cooperation towards "a free and open Indo-Pacific".

"We have many divergences. Like it or not, we need the US's engagement to promote peace, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region. We should not create any power vacuum in this region," he said.

"We need US's engagement and we need to multiply and multi-facet our cooperation with like-minded partners, including the US, of course. But we may expand our cooperation with other regional partners," Abe said.

Even as Quad partners have often expressed concern about China's unilateral actions in the South China Sea and East China Sea, Abe insisted that "the framework is not intended to do something with any specific country".

Backdrop : A week after the Quad Foreign Ministers' meeting in Washington DC, a Japanese diplomat indicated that like-minded nations may be added to the Quad in the future.

Relevance: GS 2- Regional and Global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

- Japan termed the **Quad** as an “**evolving framework**”, open to **adding like-minded countries** in the future.
- The possibility of including nations like **South Korea or the Philippines** was **not ruled out** by Japan's Political Affairs Minister **Noriaki Abe**.
- However, such expansion has **not been formally discussed** within the Quad.
- Remarks follow the **Quad Foreign Ministers’ meeting** in **Washington DC**, attended by **EAM S. Jaishankar**, a week earlier.

Upcoming Quad Leaders’ Summit

- Scheduled to be held in **New Delhi** later in 2025.
- Expected attendees:
 - **US President Donald Trump**
 - **Australian PM Anthony Albanese**
 - **Japanese PM Shigeru Ishiba**

Indo-Pacific Cooperation & US Role

- Despite **tariff-related disagreements**, Japan emphasized the need for **US engagement** to maintain:
 - **Peace**
 - **Stability**
 - **Prosperity** in the **Indo-Pacific**
- Urged **multi-faceted cooperation** with both Quad members and **other regional partners**.

Position on China

- Japan clarified that the Quad is **not aimed at any specific country**, despite concerns over **China's actions** in the **South China Sea** and **East China Sea**.

Counterterrorism & Pahalgam Attack

- Quad Foreign Ministers **condemned the Pahalgam terror attack** but **did not name Pakistan**.
- Japan reaffirmed its **strong commitment to counterterrorism**, especially **cross-border terrorism**.
- Japan was **among the first nations** to consult India post-attack at the **NSA(National Security Advisor) and Foreign Minister levels**.
- India also sent an **all-party delegation to Japan**, helping Japan **understand India's stance** and the **gravity of the terror attack**.

Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD)

- QUAD is an **informal strategic forum** involving **India, the U.S., Australia, and Japan**.
- It focuses on promoting **cooperation for a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region**.

- Emerged as a **cooperative response** to the **2004 Indian Ocean tsunami**, with the four nations collaborating on **humanitarian and disaster relief** operations.
- The grouping was **formalized in 2007** by **Japanese PM Shinzo Abe**, aiming for deeper strategic collaboration.
- The forum became **inactive** shortly after its formation.
 - It was **revived in 2017**, driven by concerns over **China's growing assertiveness** and shifting regional dynamics.

Global Footprint: Represents:

- 24% of the world's population,
- 35% of global GDP
- 18% of global trade

Strategic Significance of Quad



- Strengthens **maritime security** through **joint military exercises** and **intelligence sharing**.
- Acts as a strategic tool to **counterbalance China's influence** in the Indo-Pacific.
- Safeguards **maritime trade routes** and upholds **freedom of navigation**.
- Aligns with India's pursuit of a **rule-based multipolar world** and its goal to become a **regional superpower**.

Key Initiatives of the Quad



- **Vaccine Partnership:** Enhancing vaccine production and delivery across the Indo-Pacific.
- **Infrastructure Coordination:** Promoting transparent, high-quality infrastructure to counter BRI.
- **Climate Working Group:** Collaborating on clean energy, climate resilience, and green technologies.
- **Emerging Tech Group:** Advancing cooperation on 5G, AI, quantum tech, and semiconductors.
- **Cybersecurity Cooperation:** Strengthening cyber defense, infrastructure protection, and resilience.
- **Malabar Exercise:** Conducting joint naval drills to boost maritime interoperability.
- **Space Collaboration:** Using space tech for climate monitoring, disaster response, and security.

- **Weak Institutional Framework:** Quad currently lacks formal structure and is sustained through ad-hoc meetings, irregular summits, and limited coordination.
- **Cold War Allegations:** China views Quad as an attempt to form an "Asian NATO", accusing it of adopting a Cold War-style approach.
- **Diverging National Priorities:**
 - India focuses on regional security and border concerns with China.
 - The U.S. pursues global strategic dominance.
 - Australia depends economically on China.
 - Japan relies on the U.S. for security.
 - These divergent interests make cohesive action difficult.
- **Identity Crisis:** Defining Quad's distinct role remains difficult amidst existing platforms like ASEAN, IORA, and Pacific Islands Forum.

- **Avoidance of Military Bloc Formation:** India resists turning Quad into a military alliance to preserve its strategic autonomy.
- **Managing China Relations:** As the only Quad member sharing a land border with China, India must ensure the grouping is not seen as overtly anti-China.
- **Flexible Diplomacy:** India maintains strategic ties with SCO members and countries like Russia and Iran, which may conflict with Quad dynamics.
- **Risk to Traditional Partners:** A deeper Quad alignment could alienate important strategic partners like Russia and Iran.

- **Institutional Strengthening:** Establish a formal secretariat or framework to give Quad structure and continuity.
- **Complement Regional Mechanisms:** Rather than replace ASEAN or IORA, Quad should enhance regional cooperation through coordination and inclusivity.
- **Engage Wider Asia-Pacific:** Expand cooperation with more regional players on shared concerns like climate change, tech, and infrastructure.
- **Strategic Balance:** Maintain ambiguity on hard security issues to reduce friction with China while advancing common regional goals.



PRACTICE QUESTION

Q3. With reference to the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), consider the following statements:

1. It is a formal military alliance to counter China's maritime expansion in the Indo-Pacific.
2. It was formed after the 2004 tsunami for humanitarian cooperation.
3. One of the key initiatives of QUAD includes cooperation in space-based technologies and disaster response.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

REDRAWING OF CRITICAL TIGER HABITAT OF SARISKA RESERVE

Decks cleared to redraw critical tiger habitat boundary of Sariska reserve

NIKHIL GHANEKAR

NEW DELHI, JULY 10

THE STANDING committee of the National Board for Wildlife (SC-NBWL), chaired by Union Environment Minister Bhopendra Yadav, has approved the proposal to redraw and rationalise the boundaries of Sariska Tiger Reserve's critical tiger habitat and buffer areas, as per minutes of the June 26 meeting.

The committee's decision was accompanied by caveats, and it will also be referred to the Supreme Court, which is suo moto examining a host of issues relating to the Sariska Tiger Reserve, including the rationalisation of its boundaries.

The SC's directions on

boundary rationalisation were based on a report of its Central Empowered Committee (CEC). CEC was entrusted with the task of looking into the issue of human disturbances in the tiger reserve, and it also made recommendations on the issues of village relocations, cattle grazing, and boundary demarcation.

The SC-NBWL decision comes just over a fortnight after the Rajasthan State Board for Wildlife (SBWL) cleared the proposal for the Union government's approval. The Sariska proposal did not figure in the original agenda of the SC-NBWL meeting, and was provided to committee members very close to the meeting, it has been learnt.

The Sariska Tiger Reserve falls in Bhopendra Yadav's Alwar Lok Sabha constituency.

Prior to Rajasthan SBWL's meeting, *The Indian Express* reported last month that if approved, the boundary rationalisation could aid operations of over 50 marble and dolomite mines that were closed following a Supreme Court order last year. These mines were closed because they fell within a 1-km radius of the critical tiger habitat (CTH), a protected area.

A critical tiger habitat is an area within a tiger reserve that is to be kept free of human activity and presence to aid tiger conservation and tiger breeding, as per the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

The Rajasthan government had proposed certain hilly and peripheral areas for exclusion from CTH and the addition of areas from the buffer zone to the CTH.



Express

A truck carrying dolomite lumps near the Sariska reserve.

During the meeting, SC-NBWL noted that the boundary alteration proposal was already approved by the Rajasthan Chief Wildlife Warden, the State Board for Wildlife, as well as the National Tiger Conservation Authority.

Following the alteration in the tiger reserve's boundaries, the critical tiger habitat will increase from 881.11 sq km to 924.49 sq km, and the buffer area will decrease from 245.72 sq km to 203.2 sq km, as per the

SC-NBWL minutes.

Among the conditions specified while approving the proposal was protection of areas with low tiger density due to their continued ecological significance and role in providing landscape connectivity.

"As the proposed western section for rationalisation from core to buffer has lower tiger density, it still holds ecological significance due to confirmed tiger presence and its role in broader landscape connectivity. Therefore, any developmental activities detrimental to wildlife habitats may be avoided," the NBWL panel stated, as per minutes of the June 26 meeting.

It also directed that protection measures should be maintained or strengthened in the proposed buffer area and CTH

through enhanced patrolling, community engagement, and habitat monitoring.

A Supreme Court bench of Justice B R Gavai and Justice K V Viswanathan on December 11, 2024, had directed the Rajasthan government to carry out a boundary rationalisation exercise, based on the recommendations of CEC. In May last year, the SC had directed the closure of several stone, limestone and dolomite mines in and around Sariska.

The bench had acknowledged in December the concerns raised over the impact of mining activities due to rationalisation, as well as concerns of legal mine operators regarding the impact of rationalisation. The southern part of the Sariska Tiger Reserve is rich in marble and dolomite

deposits in the Tehla range.

The bench noted in the order CEC's observations that the tiger reserve's CTH has fragmented, which led to legal and management challenges. "Hence, critical tiger habitat of STR should be rationalised based on the pattern of tiger breeding while ensuring the total area of CTH after rationalisation does not decrease rather the area of the Sariska wildlife sanctuary should be increased," the CEC report had stated.

"As the forest boundary and land records were not clear, the Mining Department has allotted mining leases. Mining leases operating on the forest land were closed down after orders from the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India," the CEC report filed in July 2024 had stated.

Backdrop: Redrawing and rationalisation of the boundaries of Sariska Tiger Reserve's critical tiger habitat and buffer areas.

Relevance: GS 3- Ecology, Environmental Conservation and Environment Impact Assessment.

About the news



The Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (SC-NBWL), chaired by Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav, approved the proposal to redraw and rationalize Sariska Tiger Reserve's CTH and buffer zone boundaries.

The matter will be referred to the **Supreme Court**, which is **suo moto** monitoring multiple issues related to Sariska, including boundary rationalisation

What is the need to Redraw the boundaries?

- The SC's directions are based on a report by its **Central Empowered Committee (CEC)**, which reviewed:
 - Issue of human disturbances in the tiger reserve
 - Made recommendations on the issues of
 - Village relocations
 - Cattle grazing
 - Boundary demarcation.
- **CEC Report Highlights:**
 - CTH is **fragmented**, causing legal and management issues.
 - Rationalisation must **not reduce** total CTH area.
 - Need to ensure protection of **low tiger density zones** due to ecological connectivity.

Increase in Critical Tiger Habitat (CTH)

- **Potential Benefit to Mining Sector:** Over **50 marble and dolomite mines**, closed by a Supreme Court order for being within 1 km of CTH, could benefit if the boundary rationalisation is implemented.

Critical Tiger Habitat (CTH)

- **Definition:** A **Critical Tiger Habitat** is a legally designated core area within a tiger reserve meant to ensure the long-term survival of tigers and their prey.
- **Legal Basis:** Established under **Section 38V of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972**, notified by the **state government** in consultation with the **NTCA** and experts.
- **Key Features:**
 - Identified through **scientific assessment**.
 - Human activities like **mining, logging, and settlement** are **strictly prohibited**.
 - Aims to protect **tiger breeding grounds**, maintain a **prey base**, and ensure **ecological balance**.

Proposed Boundary Changes

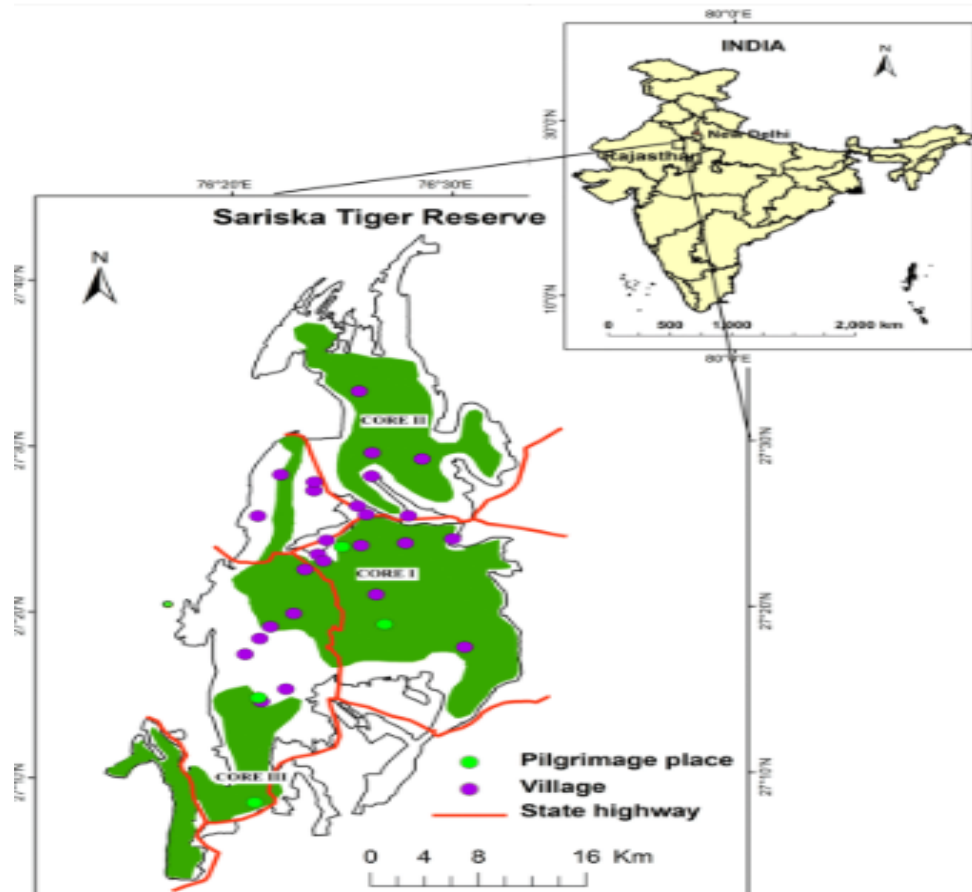


- Suggested **removal of hilly and peripheral areas** from the existing CTH.
- Proposed **inclusion of some buffer zone areas** into the CTH.
- **CTH increased** from **881.11 sq km** to **924.49 sq km**
- **Buffer area reduced** from **245.72 sq km** to **203.2 sq km**
- **Approval Chain:** The proposal was approved by:
 - **Rajasthan Chief Wildlife Warden**
 - **Rajasthan State Board for Wildlife (SBWL)**
 - **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)**
- **NBWL Safeguards:**
 - Development must be **avoided in western sections** with ecological importance.
 - **Protection mechanisms** must be further strengthened through:
 - Patrolling
 - Community engagement
 - Habitat monitoring

- **Development Restrictions Imposed:** NBWL recommended **avoiding developmental activities** in such sensitive zones to prevent **disruption of wildlife habitats**.
- **Impact on Mining Sector:**
 - Over **50 marble and dolomite mines**, previously closed for being within 1 km of old CTH, could **resume operations** if rationalisation proceeds.
 - The **Tehla range** in southern Sariska, rich in minerals, is particularly impacted.
- **Mining and Rationalisation Link – Concerns Raised:**
 - Fear that rationalisation may **indirectly favour mining** interests.
 - CEC warned against **fragmenting CTH**, and advised aligning rationalisation with **tiger breeding patterns** to ensure **no net loss of habitat area**.
- **Legal and Land Record Issues:**
 - **Inaccurate forest boundaries** and land records led to **illegal mining lease allotments**.
 - These leases were **cancelled by SC** after legal scrutiny.
- **Ecological Significance of Low Tiger Density Zones:** SC-NBWL emphasized that even areas with low tiger density are **ecologically vital** due to confirmed tiger presence and their role in **landscape connectivity**.

About Sariska Tiger Reserve

- Located in the state of Rajasthan, within the Aravalli mountain range – one of the oldest mountain ranges in the world.
- Originally a **hunting ground** for the **Maharaja of Alwar**, it was declared a **natural reserve in 1955** and later a **national park in 1979**.



Tourism & Heritage Sites

- Sariska is also known for its **historical and cultural sites**, including:
 - **Pandu Pol, Bhangarh Fort, Ajabgarh, Pratapgarh**
 - **Siliserh Lake, Jai Samand Lake**

Tourism & Heritage Sites

Topography

- The reserve features a mix of:
 - **Rocky terrain**
 - **Scrub-thorn arid forests**
 - **Hilly cliffs**
 - **Grasses**
 - **Semi-deciduous woodland**

Vegetation Types

- Falls under the categories of:
 - **Northern Tropical Dry Deciduous Forests**
 - **Northern Tropical Thorn Forests**
- Dominated by dhok trees, with other species such as:
 - **Salar, Kadaya, Gol, Ber, Banyan, Gugal, Bamboo, Kair, Adusta**

Fauna – Wildlife in Sariska

- Apart from **tigers**, the reserve is home to a variety of wildlife including:
 - Leopards
 - Sambhar
 - Chital (spotted deer)
 - Nilgai (blue bull)
 - Four-horned antelope
 - Wild boar



PRACTICE QUESTION

Q4. With reference to Sariska Tiger Reserve, consider the following statements:

1. It is located in the Vindhya range.
2. It includes Northern Tropical Dry Deciduous and Thorn Forests.
3. Siliserh Lake and Bhangarh Fort are associated with it.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

AIDING INDIA'S PROGRESS WITH CHOICE CONTROL AND CAPITAL



Aiding India's progress with choice, control and capital

With the world's population having crossed the eight billion mark, looking at the macros is all but natural. However, there has to be an equal focus on the micro-vulnerable groups, key populations and individuals on the fringes. We must endeavour to ensure that the promise of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICDP) is kept, and that every person gets the right to make informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health, free from coercion, discrimination and violence.

This year, the United Nations has announced its theme for World Population Day as "Empowering young people to create the families they want in a fair and hopeful world". It highlights the ICDP's special focus on youth, by affirming their right to accurate information, education and services in order to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health. It also reflects a simple but pressing need: of bringing youth to the centre when envisioning the future, ensuring their freedom of choice and opportunities.

Home to the largest youth population

UNICEF reports there being 371 million youth in the age group of 15 to 29 years in India, making it the world's largest youth population. This is a number that stretches existing resources and systems. But with the right investments in education, skills and also access to health, nutrition, and family planning services, it can become a powerful driver of national progress. Unleashing this youth potential in India could boost its GDP by up to \$1 trillion by 2030, unlocking a demographic divide as projected by the World Bank and NTI Aayog, while significantly reducing unemployment and improving social outcomes.

India has made significant strides with initiatives such as 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' and the National Adolescent Health Programme, reducing child marriage and adolescent fertility rates. Yet, there is still room to do more as a nation in order to address persistent challenges such as limited reproductive autonomy, socio-cultural barriers and gender inequality. These continue to restrict many young people (especially young women) from realising their true potential.

For instance, the prevalence of child marriages in India has reduced by half since 2006, but is still reported at 23.3% (National Family Health Survey-5, 2019-21). Further, teenage childbearing among women in the age group of 15 to 19 years was pegged at 7% nationally. But in some States, the rate was reported to be more than double, highlighting stark regional disparities (National Family Health Survey-5). In addition, the recently published State of World Population Report 2025 by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) underscores the lack of reproductive autonomy

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With the right investments in education, skills and access to health, nutrition and family planning services, India's youth population can boost national progress

and the crisis of fertility aspirations, particularly among women. More than a third of Indian adults (36%) face unintended pregnancies, while another 30% reported unmet reproductive goals, i.e., an inability to exercise their choice about the number of children they have. Almost 23% of Indian adults faced both.

Issue of child marriage

The need is for a comprehensive, multi-pronged strategy which includes education, contraception access, nutrition, mental health support and community empowerment to tackle the root causes rather than addressing symptoms.

UNICEF reports that each additional year of secondary education can reduce the likelihood of child marriage by up to 6%. Project Udaan (implemented by IPE Global in Rajasthan between 2017 and 2022), used this as its basis; it became an example of how a streamlined, 360° approach can drive meaningful change for young people.

The initiative addressed the challenge of early marriages and teenage pregnancies by keeping girls in secondary school through the strategic use of government scholarship schemes, improving their awareness of sexual and reproductive health, and improving access to modern contraceptives for young women, which helped bolster the voice and reproductive agency of girls and women. The initiative led to almost 30,000 child marriages being prevented and nearly 15,000 teenage pregnancies being averted, while also ensuring an education and a bright future for these girls.

Similarly, the Advika programme, launched by the Government of Odisha in partnership with UNICEF-UNFPA in 2019-20, has made strides in preventing child marriage through strategies which include strengthening state systems, fostering awareness about child protection issues, and empowering adolescents through education, skill development and leadership training. Its youth-focused approach has enabled about 11,000 villages to be declared child marriage-free; in 2022, nearly 950 child marriages were stopped.

Addressing child marriage and early pregnancy is essential, but true empowerment means going further – equipping adolescents, especially girls, with the skills, the education and the opportunities they need to lead independent and meaningful lives, while also fostering enabling environments that support their agency, voice and participation in decisions that affect them. This includes the timing of their marriage, reproductive freedom (whether or not to have children, the age at which they have the first child, the number of children they wish to have), or how they choose to live meaningful lives on

their own terms. At the heart of this empowerment lies economic independence.

When economically empowered, women gain the resources, the confidence and the voice to shape their futures and contribute meaningfully to society.

To address the issues surrounding women's economic empowerment and the low female labour force participation, Project Manzil is being implemented by IPE Global in collaboration with

the Government of Rajasthan in six selected districts (2019-25). The programme which utilises a human-centred design approach, understands the aspirations of young women, then aligns skill training with these aspirations, and enables them to have unhindered access to dignified employment opportunities at gender-friendly workplaces. As with all effective programmes, this

has been complemented with addressing harmful social norms through consistent behaviour change communication strategies. The project has made families prosperous and has also transformed communities. For instance, it helped 28,000 young women (ages 18 to 21 years) to complete skill training at government skill training centres – 16,000 were employed, making them the first generation of women from their communities to enter skilled professions. Empowered by financial stability, these young women exude better negotiation power to delay or get married.

Accelerating progress

The State of World Population 2025 report aptly focuses on rights-based, multi-sector investments and underscores that progress hinges on expanding universal access to contraception, safe abortion, maternal health and infertility care, and also in removing structural barriers such as education, housing, childcare and workplace flexibility. It also emphasises that investing in girls' education, life-skills development, conditional cash transfers, community mobilisation and health services delivers measurable gains. Programmes such as Udaan, Advika and Manzil showcase how these investments can be brought to life and improve the future of youth everywhere.

The UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, has rightly called for this World Population Day to celebrate the potential and the promise the largest-ever generation of youth holds. It is important to remember that they are entitled to shape their futures by making informed choices about their health, families, careers and lives. India stands at a defining moment on its development journey, and its success will depend on how well it can understand the aspirations of its youth, amplifying the voices of young women, and helping unlock opportunities for them.

Backdrop: Celebration of World Population Day
Relevance: GS 1/Population and associated issues



About the news



As the global population surpasses 8 billion, attention must not only remain focused on large-scale trends but also on vulnerable and marginalized groups. Upholding the promise of the 1994 **International Conference on Population and Development** (ICPD) is essential, ensuring that every individual can make **informed, autonomous decisions** about their sexual and reproductive health without facing coercion, discrimination, or violence.

The **2025 World Population Day theme**, *“Empowering young people to create the families they want in a fair and hopeful world,”* underscores this commitment.

Demographic Opportunity in India



- India is home to **371 million youth (15–29 years)**, the largest in the world (UNICEF).
- This youthful population, if empowered through **education, health, nutrition, and family planning**, can significantly **boost India's GDP by up to \$1 trillion by 2030** while reducing unemployment and improving social outcomes (World Bank and NITI Aayog).

- **Reproductive Autonomy and Gender Inequality**

- Challenges such as **limited reproductive choice**, **socio-cultural barriers**, and **gender inequality** persist.
 - **Teenage pregnancies** (15–19 years): **7%** nationally; higher in several states. (NFHS 5, 2019-21).
 - **36%** of adults face unintended pregnancies; **30%** have unmet fertility goals; **23%** experience both (**UNFPA**)

- **Issues of Child Marriage**

- **Child marriage**: Reduced by half since 2006, but still at **23.3%** (NFHS 5, 2019-21).

- **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP):**
 - To improve the child sex ratio, prevent gender-biased sex selection, and promote education for girls.
 - **Impact:**
 - Decline in child marriage and adolescent fertility rates.
 - Strengthened awareness around girls' rights and education.
- **National Adolescent Health Programme (Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram)**
 - To improve the reproductive and sexual health of adolescents and address mental health, nutrition, and substance abuse.
 - **Impact:**
 - Enhanced **adolescent-friendly health services** and created awareness on key health issues.
 - Helped reduce adolescent pregnancy through preventive and counselling services.

- **Project Udaan (Rajasthan, 2017–2022)**

- To prevent child marriage and teenage pregnancy by keeping girls in school and increasing access to reproductive health services.
- **Strategies adopted:**
 - Government scholarship schemes
 - Improving awareness of sexual and reproductive health
 - Improving access to modern contraceptives for young women.
- **Impact:**
 - Prevented **30,000 child marriages**.
 - Averted **15,000 teenage pregnancies**.
 - Improved **school retention**, contraceptive access, and girls' reproductive agency.

- **Advika Programme (Odisha, 2019–20)**
 - **Objective-** Prevention of Child marriage
 - **Strategies adopted**
 - Strengthening of State system
 - Fostering awareness about child protection issues
 - Empowering adolescents through education
 - Skill development and Leadership training
 - **Impact:**
 - Declared **11,000 villages child marriage-free**.
 - Stopped **950 child marriages** in 2022 alone.
 - Promoted **education, leadership, and protection rights** for adolescents.

- **Project Manzil (Rajasthan, 2019–2025)**

- To address the issues surrounding women's economic empowerment and the low female labour force participation.
- **Strategies adopted**
 - It utilises a human-centred design approach, understands the aspirations of young women, and then aligns skill training with these aspirations.
 - Unhindered access to dignified employment opportunities at gender-friendly workplaces.
 - Addressing harmful social norms through consistent behaviour change communication strategies.
- **Impact:**
 - **28,000** young women trained at government skill training centres, **16,000 employed** in skilled professions.
 - Boosted **economic independence**, delaying early marriage and increasing self-determination.
 - Challenged **social norms** through behaviour change communication.

What needs to be done?



- **Strengthen Access to Education**

- Ensure **universal secondary education** for girls; each additional year reduces child marriage likelihood by **up to 6%** (UNICEF).
- Provide **free, quality, and safe schooling** especially in rural and marginalized areas.

- **Expand Access to Reproductive Health Services**

- Ensure **adolescent-friendly reproductive health services, including contraception, safe abortion, maternal health, and infertility care.**
- Tackle misinformation and stigma around sexual and reproductive health.

- **Promote Economic Empowerment of Girls and Young Women**

- Offer **vocational training and skill development** linked to real job opportunities.
- Ensure **access to dignified, gender-inclusive workplaces** (as done in Project Manzil).

- **Foster Enabling Social Norms and Community Support**
 - Launch **community mobilisation campaigns** to challenge patriarchal norms and reduce the social acceptability of child marriage.
 - Encourage **community declarations of child marriage-free villages** (as in Odisha's Advika programme).
- **Provide Mental Health and Nutrition Support**
 - Integrate **mental health counselling** into school and community health services.
 - Ensure **adequate nutrition** for adolescent girls through targeted government schemes.
- **Use Conditional Cash Transfers**
 - Link **cash incentives and subsidies** to milestones such as completion of secondary education or skill training.
 - Protect against **early marriage pressure through financial support mechanisms**.
- **Ensure Youth Participation and Voice**
 - Create platforms where adolescents can participate in policy dialogue and express their needs.
 - Support youth-led organisations and peer education models for awareness and advocacy.

Conclusion

Our youths are entitled to shape their futures by making informed choices about their health, families, careers, and lives. India stands at a defining moment on its development journey, and its success will depend on how well it can understand the aspirations of its youth, amplify the voices of young women, and help unlock opportunities for them.





PRACTICE QUESTION



- Q. Today India stands at a demographic crossroads. In light of this, critically examine how reproductive autonomy, education, and economic empowerment can aid India's progress. *(250 words)***