Current Affairs 19th August 2025 by Right IAS

Removal of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) in India

Constitutional Provision Article 324(5) of the Constitution deals with the removal of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC).

Process of Removal: The CEC can only be removed in the same manner and on the same grounds as a Supreme Court judge. Grounds: proved misbehaviour or incapacity. Process: A motion must be passed in both Houses of Parliament. It requires a special majority: Majority of the total membership of the House, and Majority of not less than two-thirds of members present and voting. After Parliament passes it, the President orders removal. Protection to Other Election Commissioners Other Election Commissioners (ECs) cannot be removed by Parliament.

They can only be removed by the President, but only on the recommendation of the CEC. This ensures their independence, but with some check through the CEC. Why such protection? To safeguard the independence of the Election Commission. Prevents arbitrary removal by the Executive (Government).

Indian Ports Bill, 2025

Replaces the Indian Ports Act, 1908, ending colonial-era regulation. Passed by Rajya Sabha (2025) after clearance from Lok Sabha.

Objectives Strengthen Centre–State coordination for port-led development. Boost investor confidence and attract private investment. Enhance trade competitiveness and job creation. Promote sustainability and digitalisation in maritime operations. Position India as a global maritime leader by 2047 (Viksit Bharat goal).

Key Reforms in the Bill Maritime State Development Council (MSDC): Statutory consultative body for Centre–State cooperation. Prepares a National Perspective Plan for integrated port development.

State Maritime Boards: Coastal States empowered to establish these boards. Brings uniform and transparent governance across major & non-major ports. Dispute Resolution Committees: Sector-specific mechanism for quick and effective resolution.

Environmental Safeguards: Mandatory compliance with international conventions (MARPOL, Ballast Water Management).

Emergency preparedness systems in all ports. Digitalisation: Maritime Single Window system for port operations. Advanced vessel traffic systems to improve efficiency, reduce delays & costs

Achievements of Past Decade (Context) Cargo handling: Increased from 581 MT (2014-15) to 855 MT (2024-25). Port capacity: Rose by 87% in the last 10 years. Turnaround time: Reduced to 48 hours (global benchmark). Coastal shipping volumes: Doubled (+118%). Inland waterways cargo: Increased sevenfold. Global recognition: 9 Indian ports ranked in World Bank's Container Port Performance Index. India's Global Maritime Ambition Aligns with practices of Singapore, South Africa, EU nations, USA. Aims to transform ports into engines of growth, employment & sustainability. Seen as a milestone reform to unlock India's maritime potential. Integral part of the Amrit Kaal roadmap towards Viksit Bharat, 2047. The Indian Ports Bill, 2025 replaces a 117-year-old colonial law with a modern, globally aligned framework. It strengthens federal partnership, integrates sustainability & digitalisation, and lays the foundation for India's ambition to become a leading maritime nation by 2047.

The Hindu

UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Establishment & Headquarters Created: 14 December 1950 by the UN General Assembly. Purpose: To protect refugees and displaced people after World War II. Headquarters: Geneva, Switzerland. Main Functions Protection of Refugees – Provide safety to people fleeing from war, violence, or persecution. Resettlement – Help refugees move to safe countries. Emergency Support – Provide food, shelter, healthcare, and education. Citizenship Rights – Support stateless people who lack nationality. International Law – Work on global rules like the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol.

UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

Legal Framework

1951 Refugee Convention – Defines who is a refugee and their rights. 1967 Protocol – Expands protection without limits of geography or time. India – Not a signatory to either Convention or Protocol, but still cooperates with UNHCR on humanitarian grounds.

Funding Funded by UN member states, donors, and private organizations. Does not receive money from the UN's regular budget.

Achievements Helped millions of refugees worldwide. Awarded the Nobel Peace Prize twice (1954 and 1981). India & UNHCR India hosts many refugees (Tibetans, Sri Lankan Tamils, Afghans, etc.). UNHCR has an office in New Delhi. India provides asylum on humanitarian grounds, even though it hasn't signed the Refugee Convention.

The Hindu

Ethanol Blending in India

Raw Materials for Ethanol Production Ethanol is procured from two main sources: Sugarcane-based materials → C-heavy molasses, B-heavy molasses, sugarcane juice, sugar, sugar syrup. Other sources → Damaged food grains (broken rice, maize), and lignocellulosic biomass. Molasses: Thick, dark syrup (~40% sugar), a byproduct of sugar production.

Types of Molasses

C-heavy molasses → Final byproduct, with 28–32% sugar content. B-heavy molasses → Intermediate byproduct, richer, with 48–52% sugar content. Ethanol Production Process Fermentation method: Sucrose (from molasses) diluted with water. Enzyme invertase converts sucrose → glucose.

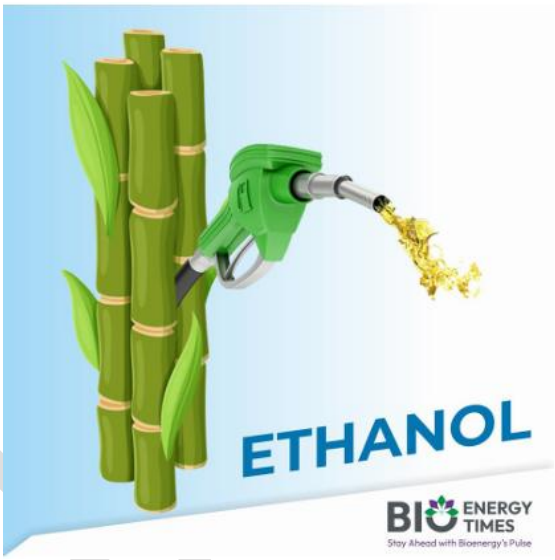
Enzyme zymase converts glucose → ethanol + carbon dioxide. Food grains & lignocellulosic materials require extra steps to break them into fermentable sugars. Example of fermentation: homemade ginger soda (sugar breakdown by microbes releasing CO_2).

Fuel Properties of Ethanol Calorific Value: Lower than petrol → less energy per litre. Theoretically reduces burning efficiency, but the government says drop is negligible. Octane Number: Higher than petrol → reduces engine knocking. Improves performance against premature burning.

Impact on Mileage and Efficiency Mileage loss is minor when moving from E10 to E20 fuel. Noticeable reduction occurs only with 100% ethanol. Vehicle performance also depends on driving habits, maintenance, tyre pressure, etc. Hygroscopic Nature of Ethanol Ethanol attracts water molecules → leads to challenges: Corrosion of fuel tanks.

Damage to rubber components (pipes, injectors, filters). Rust particles mixing with fuel, clogging fuel lines → mileage drop. Problem is not due to ethanol's thermodynamics, but due to vehicle components not designed for higher blends.

Government's Stand Issues can be solved by replacing rubber parts and gaskets. Cost is low and replacement is needed only once in vehicle's lifetime. Newer vehicles (BS-IV & BS-VI) are better suited to blended fuels. In cold regions, fuel additives prevent freezing Expert Opinions Concerns of mileage drop are exaggerated; effect is minimal at E20 level. Moisture-related problems affect mainly old or unused vehicles. Regular vehicle use → engine heat evaporates accumulated water. Overall Conclusion: Ethanol blending is a cleaner alternative to petrol, reduces oil



imports, and helps farmers. While there are minor challenges (mileage drop, corrosion, component wear), they are manageable and not significant for modern vehicles.

The Hindu

Martian Meteorite ownership

Record-Breaking Auction A Martian meteorite weighing 25 kilograms was sold for $5.3 million at Sotheby's, New York the largest Martian meteorite ever discovered on Earth. It was found in November 2023 in the Sahara Desert, Niger.

Niger Government's Response Niger announced an investigation into the meteorite's sale, suspecting illicit international trafficking. NWA 16788 is much larger than previously known Martian meteorites, making it a unique scientific resource.

Meteorite's Journey Named NWA 16788, the rock travelled 140 million miles through space before landing in Niger. After discovery, it was sold to an international dealer, exhibited in Italy, and later auctioned in New York. Experts' Concerns Paul Sereno (American paleontologist) argued that since the meteorite landed in Niger, it legally and ethically belongs to Niger. Meteorite Ownership Laws United States: Meteorites belong to the landowner if found on private property. Niger: Laws on "national cultural patrimony" protect rare mineralogical specimens, which experts argue should cover meteorites.

The Hindu

Alaska Moment" (Trump-Putin Summit) and India's position

Background On August 15, 2025, U.S. President Donald Trump met Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Alaska Summit. The summit created hopes for progress in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, possibly leading to a trilateral summit with Ukraine. For India, expectations were high, but the results were disappointing

India's Expectations vs. Reality India's Hopes U.S.-Russia rapprochement would reduce U.S. pressure on India over its ties with Russia. Rollback of U.S. secondary sanctions (25%) on India for buying Russian oil. Resumption of India-U.S. trade talks stalled by the Russia oil issue. Revision of 25% reciprocal tariffs already in place.

Reality Summit produced warmth between Trump and Putin, but no softening in U.S. tone towards India. Trump administration continues with tariff and sanction pressure on India. Harsh criticism in the Financial Times by Trump aide Peter Navarro, accusing India's

1. Key Takeaways for India

No Policy Change towards India Despite Trump-Putin bonhomie, no relief for India on sanctions or tariffs. Sanctions seem political, not economic the U.S. itself has increased trade with Russia, while China imports far more Russian oil than India.

Suggests Trump's actions are linked to personal pique, including Modi's rejection of Trump's mediation claims over the India-Pakistan ceasefire (Operation Sindoor). Summitry vs. Substance Modi's foreign policy has emphasized personal chemistry with world leaders ("Howdy Modi", "Namaste Trump"), but results have been limited. Example: Despite multiple meetings with Xi Jinping, India could not foresee Chinese aggression at Galwan (2020). Lesson: India must prioritize substance over style in diplomacy.

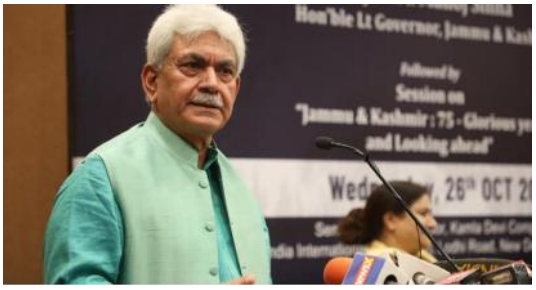
Bipartisanship in U.S. Relations India's closeness to Trump earlier (2019–2020 rallies) hurt ties with Democrats later. Now, Trump resents Modi's stronger ties with Biden during his presidency. Lesson: India must maintain bipartisan balance in the U.S. and in neighbouring countries. Sanctions and Strategic Autonomy India has traditionally followed only UN-mandated sanctions, but in 2018, it bowed to U.S. pressure on Iranian and Venezuelan oil. This may have emboldened Trump to demand similar compliance on Russian oil. By resisting, India can reinforce its strategic autonomy and win respect in the Global South.

Need for Countermeasures U.S. actions (tariffs, sanctions, remittance taxes, manufacturing curbs) hurt India's interests. India must devise firm countermeasures to safeguard its economic and strategic agency.

Future Path for India Recalibrate diplomacy away from over-dependence on the U.S. Explore trade and strategic ties with Japan, China (SCO), South Africa (G-20), Russia, and the Global South. Focus on Quad Summit 2025 as a test of India-U.S. ties. Return to a principle-based foreign policy that balances global power blocs. ✅ Overall Message: The Alaska Summit shows that India cannot rely on summit optics or personal chemistry in diplomacy. Instead, it must strengthen strategic autonomy, pursue bipartisan U.S. relations, prepare countermeasures against hostile policies, and diversify its international partnerships.

Who decides nominations to UT Assemblies?

Background The Union Home Ministry submitted to the J&K and Ladakh High Court that the Lieutenant Governor (LG) of J&K can nominate five members to the Assembly without the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers.



Constitutional Provisions on Nominated Members : The Indian Constitution allows nominated members in Parliament and State legislatures. Lok Sabha & State Assemblies: Anglo-Indian nomination provision discontinued in 2020. Rajya Sabha: 12 nominated members (by President on advice of Union Council of Ministers). Legislative Councils (6 States): 1/6th members

nominated (by Governors on advice of State Council of Ministers) Union Territories (UTs)

Delhi: 70 elected members, no nominated members (Delhi Act, 1991). Puducherry: 30 elected + up to 3 nominated members (by Union govt, not Council of Ministers). J&K: Section 14 of J&K Reorganisation Act, 2019 → 90 elected seats. Sections 15, 15A, 15B → LG may nominate 5 members (2 women, 2 Kashmiri migrants, 1 displaced person from PoK).

Judicial Precedents Puducherry Case (2018, Madras HC): Union govt can nominate without advice of UT's Council of Ministers; but court recommended statutory clarity. Supreme Court: Set aside HC's recommendations. Delhi Case (2023, SC): Emphasized "triple chain of accountability": Civil servants → Ministers → Legislature → Electorate. Held: LG bound by advice of Council of Ministers in all matters except those outside Assembly's legislative powers. Rationale may apply to nominations too.

Democratic Concerns UTs have limited federal status, but UTs with Assemblies have elected governments accountable to the people. Nominated MLAs may alter political balance (turning majority into minority).

Risk of Union–UT conflicts disrupting democratic mandate. Special Case of J&K J&K was a full-fledged State till 2019, with higher autonomy. SC upheld UT status but Union govt promised early restoration of statehood. Given the context, nominations should be made by LG with advice of Council of Ministers → strengthens democratic principle.

The Hindu

Public Accounts Committee (PAC) Report on Toll Collection

Key Recommendations End perpetual tolling Toll collection should cease or reduce significantly once capital expenditure and O&M costs are fully recovered. Any continuation beyond cost recovery must require justification + approval of an independent oversight authority.

Key Recommendations

End perpetual tolling Toll collection should cease or reduce significantly once

capital expenditure and O&M costs are fully recovered. Any continuation beyond cost recovery must require justification + approval of an independent oversight authority. Independent Regulatory Authority A specialised authority for toll determination, collection and regulation to ensure fairness and transparency. Reimbursement to Users Toll reimbursements for commuters when highways are under construction/repair and full services not available. FASTag reforms Address bottlenecks due to faulty scanners. Provide on-site services for recharge, purchase, or exchange of FASTags.

The Hindu

On soaps and detergents: how they are made and manufactured

History of Soap

Soap used for cleaning dates back to 2800 BC in Mesopotamia. In ancient India, soap nuts, tree bark, flowers, and leaves were used for cleaning. Soap spread to Europe later; during the Industrial Revolution, mass production started. Until the 19th century, soaps were luxury items and heavily taxed in Europe.

What is Soap?

Soap = Sodium (Na) or Potassium (K) salt of fatty acid (from vegetable oil or animal fat). General formula: RCOONa or RCOOK. Solid soaps = Sodium salts; Liquid soaps = Potassium salts.

Examples: Coconut oil → Lauric acid ($C_{12}H_{24}O_2$) → Soap formula: $C_{11}H_{22}COONa$. Palm oil → Palmitic acid ($C_{16}H_{32}O_2$). 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. Soap-making Process Traditional Method: Coconut/olive oil + caustic soda (NaOH). Slow and laborious. Modern Method (Industrial): Triglycerides (vegetable oils) converted into fatty acids + glycerin using hot water under high temperature and pressure. Fatty acid + NaOH → Soap (RCOONa) + Water. Soap dried by vacuum drying, producing soap noodles. Total Fatty Matter (TFM) is a key measure — higher TFM = better cleaning quality. Bathing soap → lower moisture. Laundry soap → higher moisture. Noodles mixed with perfume, colour, fillers (talc, sodium silicate), surfactants (e.g. SLS), and additives (antibacterial/antifungal oils like neem, tea tree, triclosan). Final extrusion → shaped, stamped, wrapped, packed. Modern automation: 600-700 soaps (100 g each) per minute.

Why Do Soaps Clean?

Soap molecule has two ends: Hydrophilic end (water-attracting). Hydrophobic end (repels water, attaches to grease/dirt). During scrubbing, the hydrophobic end embeds in dirt; hydrophilic end stays with water → dirt removed when rinsed. 5. Detergents Developed during WWI (due to shortage of natural oils/fats). Mass use since 1930s. More surfactants than soaps + additives (bleach, fragrances, dyes). Can soften hard water → more effective cleaning. Environmental issues: Phosphates →

nutrient pollution. Sulphonates → non-biodegradable, persist in environment. Current research: biodegradable surfactants & enzymes

Culture in News → La Feria de Béziers Location: Béziers, a town in southern France (Occitanie region). Event Type: A traditional summer festival, celebrated every August. Duration: Usually lasts 4–5 days