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Headlines:

- Russia's Rising Share and India's Diversified Oil Diplomacy (GS II: International Relations and GS – III: Economy)
- Census 2027: Caste Enumeration and the Equality Paradox (GS – II: Polity and Governance)
- Strait of Hormuz Tensions: India's Energy Security at Risk (GS – II: IR)
- Prison Riots and Governance Deficits in South Asia (GS Paper II – Governance, India & Neighbourhood)
- AISHE 2023–24: Expanding Access, Empowering Inclusion (GS – II: Governance and Social Justice)



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Sources: The Hindu, PIB

1. Russia's Rising Share and India's Diversified Oil Diplomacy (GS II: International Relations and GS – III: Economy)

Context:

Russia's share in India's oil imports rose above 40% in May 2026 at a premium price, while India simultaneously expanded sourcing from alternative nations like Iran and Venezuela to diversify its basket.

I. Key Dimensions of India's Evolving Energy Dynamics

India's Energy Security

- India relies on imports for nearly 85% of its crude oil requirement, making supply security a vital national priority.
- Broadening the supplier ecosystem reduces structural vulnerability and critical dependence on a single geographical source.

Russia's Dominant Position

- Russia's share reached 40.5% by volume in May 2026, marking its highest level in nearly two years.
- Continued high-volume buying indicates resilient bilateral strategic energy cooperation despite persistent Western economic sanctions.

Import Diversification Strategy

- India is actively expanding its crude basket by sourcing from Russia, UAE, USA, Iran, and Venezuela.
- Resuming imports from Iran and Venezuela in early 2026 reflects a pragmatic, multi-vector energy diplomacy.

Geopolitical Transformations

- Russia altered its pricing strategy, charging India a calculated premium of \$46 per tonne over average import prices.
- The US relaxing sanctions on Venezuelan oil exports in February successfully reopened crucial supply channels for Indian refiners.

Economic Significance & Vulnerabilities

- A steep rise in crude prices to \$106/barrel expanded India's May 2026 import bill by 66% year-on-year.
- Elevated oil costs directly stress domestic inflation, the fiscal deficit via subsidies, and the Current Account Deficit (CAD).

II. Challenges:

- India's reliance on imports exceeding 88% renders it vulnerable to global geopolitical tensions and supply disruptions.
- The additional cost of \$46 per tonne for Russian crude oil considerably increases the national oil import expenditure.
- Currently, India's Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) provide coverage for merely 9.5 days, which is significantly less than the 90-day requirement set by the IEA.
- Conflicts in West Asia pose risks to vital energy transit routes, such as the Strait of Hormuz.
- Rising import expenses exacerbate the Current Account Deficit, undermine the value of the Rupee, and contribute to domestic inflation.

Way Forward:

- Accelerate the scheduled expansion of SPR facilities at Chandikhol and Padur to strengthen emergency reserves.
- Diversify the crude import portfolio by ensuring stable alternative supplies from the Americas and Africa.
- Require LNG terminal operators to establish strategic gas reserves to meet non-crude energy requirements.
- Speed up the shift towards renewable energy, green hydrogen, and biofuels to reduce dependence on fossil fuels.
- Enhance domestic crude oil exploration and production by encouraging active involvement from both state and private sectors.

2. Census 2027: Caste Enumeration and the Equality Paradox (GS – II: Polity and Governance)

Context:

The government has initiated a rehearsal for the second phase of Census 2027 featuring an statutory "open column" for caste enumeration, triggering debates over administrative methodology and its socio-political outcomes.

I. Core Dimensions of Caste Enumeration

Methodology of Caste Enumeration

- **Open-Ended Limitations:** Self-reporting without bounds returns unmanageable, error-ridden names, rendering datasets functionally unusable like the SECC 2011.
- **Digital Standardization:** Transitioning to hand-held devices pre-loaded with curated drop-down lists avoids typographical variances and enhances administrative coherence.

Constitutional Perspective

- **The Equality Paradox:** While the Constitution strives for a caste-blind republic, counting caste risks ossifying primordial hierarchical identities.

- **Substantive Justice:** Empirical data remains necessary to design state-led affirmative action and targeted welfare initiatives.

Reservation & Affirmative Action Debate

- **Policy Rationalization:** Robust demographic facts assist in identifying and isolating truly marginalized communities requiring state intervention.
- **Sub-categorization Reforms:** Verifiable statistics guide courts and executives on sensitive matters like creamy layer exclusions and intra-caste sub-classification.

II. Challenges and Roadblocks

- Confounding surnames, clans, and sub-castes can cause massive database inflation and data distortion.
- Verifying complex local caste hierarchies presents steep field-level hurdles for manual enumerators.
- Politicizing the collection process risks stoking regional polarization and competitive reservation demands.
- Discrepancies in state versus central backward class lists create legal and administrative classification issues.
- Relying heavily on digital technology faces implementation friction due to rural network gaps.

III. Way Forward Measures

- Deploy pre-coded drop-down lists on handheld devices to standardize responses during enumeration.
- Incorporate empirical lessons from successful state-level exercises, such as the Bihar caste survey.
- Cleanse final data rigorously before deployment to eliminate duplicate clan or regional surnames.
- Align the consolidated census data with the ongoing judicial and policy parameters of sub-categorization.
- Synchronize welfare targeting with objective socio-economic parameters to slowly dismantle underlying structural disparities.

3. Strait of Hormuz Tensions: India's Energy Security at Risk (GS – II: IR)

Context:

Renewed military tensions between the US and Iran over commercial shipping safety in the Strait of Hormuz have rapidly spotlighted West Asia's shifting geopolitical architecture.

Iran's Geopolitical Significance

- The nation houses some of the world's largest combined crude oil and natural gas reserves.

- It acts as an influential, Shia-majority regional power driving West Asian political and military dynamics.
- Iran commands a pivotal geographic position linking South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East.

The Strait of Hormuz:

- It is a vital maritime chokepoint linking the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Sea and the broader ocean.
- The strait facilitates the transit of roughly one-fifth of the world's total daily oil consumption.
- Disruption here directly threatens India's primary supply corridor for crude oil imports from Gulf nations.



India's Strategic Interests

- Ensuring unhindered transit through the strait is essential for India's domestic energy security and economic stability.
- Sustaining diplomatic ties with Iran is critical for the operational viability of the Chabahar Port infrastructure.
- Iran acts as a gateway to the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) for seamless Central Asian connectivity.
- India must actively practice multi-vector balancing to maintain strategic autonomy amid US-Iran-Israel polarizations.

Regional Security Architecture

- Intense Iran-Israel-US military frictions continually threaten global crude supply chain operations.
- Traditional US-led Gulf security systems face deterioration as regional powers re-evaluate their alliance frameworks.
- Continued military escalation undermines maritime safety regulations, significantly inflating global shipping and insurance costs.

4. Prison Riots and Governance Deficits in South Asia (GS Paper II – Governance, India & Neighbourhood)

Context:

A recent deadly riot at Sri Lanka's Negombo prison has highlighted the systemic vulnerabilities and chronic governance deficits plaguing prison administration across South Asia.

Prison Administration: Key Challenges

- **Overcrowding:** Facilities operating far beyond their sanctioned capacity severely strain resources, compromising basic healthcare and living standards.
- **Resource Deficit:** Chronic understaffing and inadequate infrastructure hinder effective supervision and emergency response.
- **Security Lapses:** Instances of inmates overpowering guards and accessing weapons expose critical flaws in internal security protocols.
- **Human Rights:** Substandard living conditions and custodial violence fundamentally violate the human dignity of inmates.

Emerging Concerns

- **Organized Crime:** The infiltration of drug cartels transforms correctional facilities into operational hubs for illicit networks.
- **Gang Violence:** Unchecked syndicates fuel internal turf wars, fatal clashes, and the radicalisation of vulnerable undertrials.
- **Public Security Risk:** The failure to curb illicit operations within prisons actively undermines broader state law enforcement efforts.

Governance Lessons

- **State Accountability:** The state bears absolute responsibility for the safety of individuals in judicial custody; custodial deaths reflect profound administrative failures.
- **Independent Oversight:** Impartial, independent investigations into administrative lapses are vital to ensure accountability and restore public trust.
- **Institutional Transparency:** Robust monitoring mechanisms are necessary to curb systemic corruption and the abuse of power.

Way Forward

- Implement strict prison decongestion measures through speedy trials and rationalized bail for non-violent undertrials.
- Drive infrastructure modernisation to eliminate physical blind spots and ensure humane confinement conditions.
- Strengthen surveillance and prison intelligence to proactively dismantle internal gang and narcotics networks.

- Pivot from punitive containment to rehabilitation and correctional reforms to facilitate social reintegration and reduce recidivism.
- Ensure rigorous capacity building for prison staff in human rights, ethical administration, and crisis management.

5. AISHE 2023–24: Expanding Access, Empowering Inclusion (GS – II: Governance and Social Justice)

Context:

The Ministry of Education released the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2023–24, highlighting continued growth in higher education enrolment, improved gender parity, and greater social inclusion.

Expansion of Higher Education

- Total enrolment reached 4.5 crore in 2023–24, registering a 31.5% increase over 2014–15.
- The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) increased to 30, reflecting improved access to higher education.
- The survey covered over 59,500 higher education institutions, indicating broad institutional participation.

Women Empowerment

- Female student enrolment registered a steady 42.2% growth over a decade, totaling 2.24 crore in 2023-24.
- The Gender Parity Index (GPI) stood at 1.08, indicating that female participation in higher education remained higher than male participation.
- The share of women in STEM programmes increased to 44%, reflecting greater participation in technical disciplines.

Social Inclusion & Justice

- Scheduled Castes enrolment jumped 51.4% since 2014-15, pushing their specific Gross Enrolment Ratio up to 27.8.
- Scheduled Tribes recorded an exceptional 75.7% rise in student numbers, with their GER climbing up to 22.8.
- Enrolment of students from Other Backward Classes expanded by 60.2%, indicating improved access to higher education among socially disadvantaged groups.

Human Capital Development

- Higher education enhances employability, innovation, research capacity, and productivity, contributing to long-term economic growth.
- Greater access to quality higher education strengthens India's demographic dividend and supports the transition towards a knowledge-based economy.

Challenges

- Regional disparities persist across states in overall access and quality infrastructure related to higher education.
- Concerns remain regarding the global quality of education, outdated curricula, and actual foundational learning outcomes.
- Severe faculty shortages and inadequate funding continue to weaken the domestic academic research ecosystem.
- Significant employability gaps exist among fresh graduates despite the steady rise in institutional enrolment.

Way Forward

- Strengthen the comprehensive implementation of NEP 2020 across all state and central tier institutions.
- Improve higher education quality through enhanced research grants, industry innovation, and structured faculty development.
- Enhance equitable access through expanded digital infrastructure, targeted scholarships, and strategic institutional expansion.

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