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Headlines:

- India-Bangladesh Relations: Extradition Issue Clouds Bilateral Reset
- MSC Elsa 3 Shipwreck: Marine Pollution Risks & Island Ecosystem Resilience
- One Nation, One Election: Electoral Efficiency vs Federal Democracy
- West Asia's Changing Security Architecture: Strategic Choices for India
- Rat-Hole Coal Mining in Meghalaya: Mine Closure & Environmental Governance



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1. India–Bangladesh Relations: Extradition Issue Clouds Bilateral Reset

GS-II – International Relations

Why in News?

- Bangladesh has sought a “propitious environment” before Prime Minister Tarique Rahman’s proposed visit to India.
- Dhaka has linked the issue with its demand for the extradition of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and other wanted persons.
- India has stated that Bangladesh’s extradition requests are being examined through applicable legal processes.



Extradition Framework

- India–Bangladesh Extradition Treaty, 2013 provides the legal framework.
- The treaty contains safeguards, including provisions concerning political offences and grounds for refusal.
- Political-offence exceptions exist, while serious offences such as murder, terrorism and certain violent crimes are excluded from such protection.
- Therefore, extradition is not an automatic diplomatic obligation; it involves treaty provisions, domestic law and due process.

Key Data & Strategic Context

- 54: Transboundary rivers shared by India and Bangladesh.
- 1996: Ganga Water Sharing Treaty signed for lean-season water sharing at Farakka.
- December 2026: The 30-year Ganga Treaty is due for renewal/expiry, making water diplomacy especially important.

- ~US\$10 billion: India's development assistance to Bangladesh through concessional Lines of Credit and grants.

Water Diplomacy

- Ganga: The 1996 treaty governs lean-season sharing at Farakka.
- Teesta: A major unresolved water-sharing issue; no agreement has been concluded.
- Joint Rivers Commission (JRC): Established in 1972 as a bilateral mechanism for cooperation on common rivers and related water issues.
- Emerging concerns: Climate variability, changing river flows, floods and water stress underline the need for adaptive and basin-level cooperation.

Broader Strategic Stakes

- Northeast Connectivity: Bangladesh offers crucial transit routes for India's Northeast.
- Trade & Infrastructure: Rail, road, inland waterways and border infrastructure can deepen regional economic integration.
- Security: Cooperation is important against terrorism, trafficking, narcotics, arms smuggling and cross-border crime.
- Bay of Bengal: Bangladesh is strategically important for India's maritime security and regional connectivity.

Significance for India

- Bangladesh is central to Neighbourhood First and India's eastern connectivity strategy.
- Stable relations support Act East, sub-regional integration, energy cooperation and Northeast development.
- India must balance strategic interests, treaty obligations, domestic legal processes and respect for Bangladesh's sovereignty.

Way Forward

- Pursue quiet and sustained diplomatic dialogue on contentious issues.
- Address extradition requests through transparent treaty-based legal procedures.
- Revitalise the JRC and water-sharing negotiations, especially ahead of the Ganga Treaty's 2026 deadline.
- Deepen cooperation in trade, connectivity, energy, border management and security.
- Build a relationship based on sovereign equality, mutual sensitivity and long-term strategic interests.

2. MSC Elsa 3 Shipwreck: Marine Pollution Risks & Island Ecosystem Resilience

GS-III – Environment & Disaster Management

Why in News?

- MSC Elsa 3, a Liberian-flagged container vessel, sank off the Kerala coast on 25 May 2025.
- A comprehensive NCSCM assessment found no measurable ecological or socio-economic damage to the Lakshadweep archipelago from the incident.
- The assessment followed directions of the National Green Tribunal (NGT), which took suo motu cognisance of the incident.

Key Facts

- Vessel: MSC Elsa 3
- Flag: Liberia
- Location: Arabian Sea, off Kerala
- Sinking: 25 May 2025
- Cargo: 640 containers, including 13 containers with hazardous cargo; 12 contained calcium carbide.
- Bunker fuel: Around 367 tonnes of furnace oil and 64–84 tonnes of diesel, according to official/reported assessments.



NCSCM Assessment

- Based on:
 - Field surveys
 - Remote sensing
 - Numerical spill-trajectory modelling
 - Stakeholder consultations
- Assessment focused on possible impacts on Lakshadweep's ecology and socio-economic activities.
- Finding: No measurable ecological or socio-economic damage to the Lakshadweep archipelago was detected.

Why Lakshadweep is Vulnerable

- Coral reefs and lagoons: Highly sensitive to chemical and plastic pollution.
- Marine biodiversity: Pollution can disrupt fragile food webs and habitats.

- Island isolation: Makes rapid containment, evacuation and clean-up more difficult.
- Livelihood dependence: Fisheries and tourism are closely linked to marine ecosystem health.

Key Environmental Concerns

- Oil pollution: Can damage marine organisms, beaches and fisheries.
- Hazardous substances: Calcium carbide reacts with water and releases highly flammable acetylene gas.
- Plastic pollution: Containers and plastic materials can reach beaches and marine habitats.
- Navigational hazards: Floating containers pose risks to fishing and maritime activity.

Agencies Involved

- NCSCM: Environmental and ecological assessment.
- INCOIS: Ocean-state forecasting and spill/drift trajectory modelling.
- NGT: Environmental oversight through suo motu proceedings.
- Indian Coast Guard: Maritime surveillance, pollution response and rescue operations.
- CPCB/KSPCB: Pollution assessment, technical guidance and remedial measures.
- MoEFCC & other agencies: Coordination of environmental response.

Disaster Management Lessons

- Strengthen early-warning and real-time maritime surveillance.
- Undertake risk mapping of ecologically sensitive coastal and island zones.
- Develop island-specific oil-spill and hazardous-cargo contingency plans.
- Expand ocean forecasting, drift modelling and remote-sensing capabilities.
- Establish stronger inter-agency coordination and rapid-response mechanisms.
- Apply polluter-pays and environmental liability principles to strengthen accountability.

Broader Concern

- Increasing maritime traffic, marine pollution and climate-related changes in coastal ecosystems can magnify risks to vulnerable islands.
- Therefore, India needs a shift from reactive response to anticipatory, ecosystem-based disaster risk reduction.

Significance

- Highlights the importance of protecting fragile island ecosystems while securing India's blue economy.
- Provides a useful case study of science-based environmental risk assessment, maritime disaster preparedness and multi-agency coordination.

3. One Nation, One Election: Electoral Efficiency vs Federal Democracy

GS-II – Polity & Governance

Why in News?

- The Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) examining the Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024 and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024 is undertaking nationwide consultations on simultaneous elections.
- Consultations have examined mid-term elections, premature dissolution, remainder of tenure, ECI powers, federalism and the Basic Structure Doctrine.
- Recent consultations have also highlighted the proposed system's implications for governance, administration and democratic functioning.

What is ONOE?

- Proposes synchronising Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly elections.
- The proposed Article 82A seeks to establish the constitutional framework for synchronisation.
- An “appointed date” would be used to align Assembly terms with the Lok Sabha electoral cycle.
- If a House is dissolved prematurely, the subsequent election would be for the unexpired remainder of the original term, rather than a fresh five-year term.

Historical Context

- India conducted simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in 1952, 1957, 1962 and 1967.
- The common cycle was subsequently disrupted by premature dissolution of legislatures and political instability.
- Thus, ONOE seeks to restore a feature that existed during the early decades of the Republic.

Arguments in Favour

- **Administrative efficiency:** Reduces repeated deployment of teachers, police and election personnel.
- **Governance continuity:** May reduce disruptions associated with frequent election cycles and the MCC.
- **Expenditure:** Could reduce recurring public expenditure on election management, though substantial one-time EVM/VVPAT, security and logistics costs would remain.
- **Policy focus:** May provide governments greater continuity for implementing long-term programmes.

Key Concerns

- **Federalism:** National campaigns may overshadow State-specific issues and regional priorities.
- **Democratic accountability:** Synchronisation may constrain the flexibility inherent in a parliamentary system.
- **Premature dissolution:** Remaining-term elections could create short-duration legislatures, raising questions of stability and mandate.
- **Political representation:** Simultaneous campaigning may favour parties with greater national organisational and financial reach.
- **ECI discretion:** Proposed mechanisms for postponing elections raise questions about institutional safeguards and constitutional accountability.

Constitutional Framework

- **Article 82A:** Proposed constitutional provision for simultaneous elections.
- **Article 83:** Duration of Houses of Parliament.
- **Article 172:** Duration of State Legislatures.
- **Article 327:** Parliament's power to make election-related laws.
- The reform also entails amendments to the Representation of the People Act, 1951 and laws concerning Union Territory Assemblies.

Federalism & Democratic Accountability

- India's parliamentary system is based on legislative confidence, allowing governments to fall before completing their normal tenure.
- ONOE must therefore reconcile electoral synchronisation with the right of legislatures to reflect changing political majorities.
- Ending a functioning State Assembly merely to restore an electoral cycle could raise concerns regarding political federalism and the State electorate's mandate.
- A common electoral calendar could also intensify the nationalisation of State elections.

Technical Challenge: Premature Dissolution

- If the Lok Sabha or an Assembly falls early, elections would be held for the remaining period of the original cycle.
- This could result in very short legislatures, potentially creating governments with limited policy horizons.
- Clear rules would be necessary for hung Houses, no-confidence motions and coalition breakdowns.
- Proponents have discussed alternative safeguards, including mechanisms that ensure a government is replaced without automatically destabilising the electoral cycle.

Way Forward

- Build bipartisan political and inter-State consensus before implementation.
- Undertake extensive consultation with State governments, ECI and constitutional experts.
- Create explicit safeguards for hung Houses, premature dissolution, no-confidence situations and deferred elections.
- Ensure adequate EVM/VVPAT, security and administrative capacity.
- Balance electoral efficiency with federalism, representative democracy and continuous accountability.

4. West Asia's Changing Security Architecture: Strategic Choices for India

GS-II – International Relations; GS-III – Energy Security & Maritime Security

Why in News?

- Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan signed the Mecca Joint Defence Agreement on 7 August 2026, providing for collective defence and deeper military cooperation.
- The pact has emerged amid wider regional instability and growing interest in regional security mechanisms.
- India is assessing its implications for national security and regional stability.

Changing Regional Order

- Signals a move towards greater regional security cooperation amid uncertainty over external security guarantees.
- Brings together Saudi financial strength, Türkiye's defence capabilities and Pakistan's military capacity.
- The agreement is described by its members as defensive and not directed against any particular country.
- Its long-term impact will depend on implementation, interoperability and the evolution of regional conflicts.

Key Data & Strategic Importance

- **Gulf region:** Critical to India's energy security, trade, investments and diaspora interests.
- **Chabahar Port:** Important for India's connectivity with Iran and Central Asia.
- **Strait of Hormuz:** Vital for movement of energy supplies to global markets.
- **Red Sea–Bab-el-Mandeb:** Crucial for India–Europe maritime trade and shipping security.

India's Strategic Stakes

- **Saudi Arabia & UAE:** Energy, investment, trade, diaspora and defence cooperation.
- **Iran:** Chabahar, connectivity and access to Central Asia.
- **Israel:** Defence, technology, innovation and security cooperation.
- **Türkiye:** Requires calibrated engagement given its close ties with Pakistan.
- **Egypt:** Important for the Suez Canal, Red Sea and wider Arab strategic environment.

India's Strategic Challenges

- **Balancing multiple partners:** Preserve ties with Saudi Arabia, UAE, Iran, Israel and Türkiye without being drawn into regional rivalries.
- **Emerging alignments:** Saudi–Türkiye–Pakistan convergence could alter regional power equations and expand Pakistan's diplomatic space.
- **Strategic autonomy:** Avoid bloc politics while safeguarding energy, trade, defence and connectivity interests.
- **Maritime security:** Instability around Hormuz, Red Sea and Bab-el-Mandeb can affect Indian shipping, energy supplies and seafarers.
- **Diaspora & remittances:** Regional instability can impact the large Indian expatriate community and remittance flows.
- **Diplomatic manoeuvrability:** India must prevent regional conflicts from constraining its independent foreign-policy choices.

Way Forward

- Pursue multi-alignment and issue-based partnerships rather than bloc politics.
- Strengthen maritime domain awareness, shipping protection and energy diversification.
- Deepen defence cooperation with Gulf partners while retaining diplomatic engagement with Iran, Israel, Türkiye and Egypt.
- Support dialogue, de-escalation and inclusive regional security mechanisms.

5. Rat-Hole Coal Mining in Meghalaya: Mine Closure & Environmental Governance

GS-III – Environment, Natural Resources & Disaster Management

Why in News?

- The Justice (Retd.) B.P. Katakey Committee, constituted by the Meghalaya High Court, flagged delays in adopting a comprehensive mine-closure policy.
- It called for immediate sealing and fencing of abandoned and illegally operated rat-hole mine openings to prevent deaths and accidents.

- The National Green Tribunal (NGT) prohibited rat-hole coal mining in Meghalaya in 2014.

Key Facts

- State: Meghalaya
- Major hotspot: East Jaintia Hills
- Nature: Hazardous underground coal extraction through narrow horizontal tunnels
- NGT prohibition: 2014
- Major concern: Thousands of abandoned/open mine shafts and inadequate systematic mine closure.

What is Rat-Hole Mining?

- A hazardous and largely unregulated form of coal extraction involving narrow tunnels branching from vertical pits.
- Tunnels are often too narrow for conventional mining equipment.
- Creates high risks of mine collapse, flooding, suffocation and fatalities.

Environmental & Social Concerns

- **Acid Mine Drainage (AMD):** Can contaminate surface and groundwater with acidic and metal-rich effluents.
- **Land degradation:** Abandoned pits destabilise landscapes and hinder ecological restoration.
- **Water pollution:** Mining can adversely affect rivers, streams and groundwater.
- **Human safety:** Open shafts endanger workers, children and livestock.
- **Livelihood impacts:** Environmental degradation can affect agriculture, fisheries, drinking water and local communities.

Governance & Federal Dimensions

- **Mine-closure gap:** District-level proposals and restoration measures remain incomplete.
- **Institutional complexity:** Regulation involves the State government, district authorities and institutions associated with Autonomous District Councils in Sixth Schedule areas, requiring coordinated enforcement.
- **Industrial oversight:** Gaps persist in monitoring coal-based industries and coke-oven plants.
- **Judicial intervention:** The NGT and Meghalaya High Court mechanisms highlight the role of environmental adjudication in ensuring executive compliance.

Mine Closure & Economic Dimension

- **Progressive mine closure:** Rehabilitation should begin during the mining lifecycle, not only after abandonment.
- **Final closure:** Requires land reclamation, pit stabilisation, water management, fencing and post-closure monitoring.
- **Economic trade-off:** Regulation must address local dependence on coal-linked livelihoods while preventing environmental externalities and unsafe informal mining.

Institutional & Legal Framework

- **NGT:** Prohibited rat-hole mining in Meghalaya in 2014.
- **Katakey Committee:** Monitors compliance, restoration and mine-closure measures.
- **MMDR Act, 1957:** Principal legal framework governing mining and mineral development.
- **NGT Oversight Committee:** Facilitates monitoring of restoration-related measures.

Way Forward

- Implement a time-bound, scientifically designed mine-closure policy.
- Seal and fence abandoned mine openings immediately.
- Undertake land reclamation, afforestation and acid-water treatment.
- Use GIS, satellite imagery and digital mine inventories for monitoring.
- Enforce polluter-pays, environmental liability and restoration principles.
- Provide safer and sustainable livelihood alternatives to reduce dependence on illegal mining.

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