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- Building Collapses in India: Urban Safety and Governance
- UN Map & India–China Territorial Dispute: Cartographic Sovereignty
- India's Automobile Sector: Inflection Point in Clean Mobility



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1. India–Belgium Relations: Deepening a Strategic Partnership

GS Paper: GS-II – International Relations | GS-III – Economy, Defence & Technology

Why in News?

- Belgian Prime Minister Bart De Wever visited India for talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, signalling renewed efforts to deepen bilateral economic, defence and strategic cooperation.
- The engagement assumes significance in the context of India–EU economic integration, supply-chain diversification and India's growing strategic engagement with Europe.

Key Dimensions:

1. Trade & Economic Cooperation

- India–Belgium bilateral trade is around \$13 billion, with the diamond industry accounting for a significant share.
- Antwerp is a major global diamond-trading hub, while Mumbai and Surat are important centres of cutting and polishing.
- Both sides aim to double bilateral trade over the next five years.
- Cooperation can expand into renewable energy, food processing and advanced manufacturing, particularly with greater market access through the India–EU FTA.



2. Defence & Security Cooperation

- Belgium possesses specialised capabilities in drones, counter-drone systems, ammunition and naval defence.
- Both sides agreed to strengthen defence-industrial cooperation and co-development of military hardware.
- India's proposed resident Defence Attaché in Brussels would strengthen institutional military engagement.

3. Strategic Autonomy & Supply-Chain Resilience

- Belgium's technological and industrial capabilities can support India's efforts to diversify defence and critical-technology supply chains.
- Cooperation with European partners can reduce excessive dependence on any single external power while strengthening India's strategic autonomy.

4. India–EU Dimension

- Belgium can serve as an important partner in advancing India's broader engagement with the European Union.
- The relationship complements negotiations on trade, investment, technology, connectivity and resilient supply chains.

5. Geopolitical Significance

- The partnership demonstrates India's ability to deepen ties with Europe while maintaining its longstanding relationship with Russia.
- It reflects India's preference for multi-alignment and issue-based partnerships rather than bloc politics.

Challenges

- **Limited diversification of trade:** Bilateral commerce remains heavily concentrated in diamonds.
- **EU regulatory barriers:** Standards, sustainability requirements and other non-tariff barriers can constrain market access.
- **Defence-entry barriers:** Differences in procurement procedures, technology transfer and intellectual-property arrangements may slow defence cooperation.
- **Geopolitical divergences:** India's position on the Russia–Ukraine conflict differs from that of many European countries.
- **Competition with China:** Europe's economic dependence on China creates challenges for building resilient alternative supply chains.

Way Forward

- Diversify bilateral trade towards clean energy, pharmaceuticals, technology, food processing and advanced manufacturing.
- Promote co-development and co-production rather than merely defence imports.
- Leverage the India–EU FTA to reduce tariff and non-tariff barriers and expand investment.
- Develop partnerships in critical minerals, semiconductors, clean technologies and resilient supply chains.
- Strengthen institutional dialogue, defence exchanges and people-to-people connectivity.
- Pursue strategic autonomy through diversified partnerships, while maintaining India's independent foreign-policy choices.

2. India's R&D Ecosystem: Beyond the Tariff Debate

GS Paper: GS-III – Science & Technology | Economic Development | Manufacturing

Why in News?

- The debate over U.S. tariffs on Indian exports has raised concerns about their impact on India's innovation and higher-value manufacturing.
- However, India's deeper structural challenge is low R&D intensity and inadequate private-sector participation in research and innovation.

Key Dimensions:

1. Low R&D Intensity

- India's GERD remains around 0.8% of GDP, significantly below major innovation-driven economies.
- The private sector's contribution to R&D needs substantial strengthening.
- India's research capability remains concentrated in a few sectors.

2. Manufacturing–Innovation Gap

- Several traditional manufacturing sectors exposed to trade shocks have historically had low R&D intensity.
- Tariff protection alone cannot create globally competitive industries.
- India needs to move from low-value, standardised production → differentiated, technology-intensive products.

3. R&D → Commercialisation Gap

- The challenge is not merely increasing R&D spending but converting research into:
- technology → patents → commercial products → competitive exports.
- Weak industry–academia linkages and technology transfer hinder this process.

4. Research, Development & Innovation (RDI) Scheme

- The ₹1 lakh crore RDI Scheme seeks to promote high-risk, high-impact research and crowd-in private-sector investment.
- It focuses on strategic and emerging areas such as AI, semiconductors, quantum technology and biotechnology.

5. Trade Shocks as an Innovation Trigger

- External trade pressures can be used to incentivise firms to upgrade technology and diversify products.
- Industrial support should therefore encourage innovation rather than perpetuate low-value production.

Challenges

- Low private-sector R&D participation.
- Weak industry-academia collaboration.
- Limited commercialisation of research.
- Sectoral concentration of R&D.
- Inadequate and delayed R&D data.
- High-risk research faces financing and market uncertainties.

Way Forward

- Link industrial incentives with measurable R&D commitments.
- Expand university-industry partnerships and technology-transfer mechanisms.
- Extend R&D incentives to traditional sectors such as auto components, chemicals and engineering.
- Promote patient capital, risk-sharing and outcome-based funding.
- Improve firm-level R&D data for evidence-based policymaking.
- Use trade policy to encourage technology upgrading and movement up global value chains.

3. Building Collapses in India: Urban Safety and Governance

GS Paper: GS-II – Governance & Urban Local Bodies | GS-III – Disaster Management & Infrastructure | GS-I – Urbanisation

Why in News?

- The collapse of a five-storey building at Satya Niketan, Delhi, has again highlighted gaps in building-safety enforcement, structural monitoring and municipal oversight.
- NCRB's ADSI data recorded 7,874 deaths from building collapses during 2020–2024, indicating a systemic urban-governance challenge.

Key Dimensions:

1. Urban Governance & Regulatory Failure

- Weak enforcement of building bye-laws, safety standards and occupancy norms allows unsafe structures to persist.
- Limited technical capacity of Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and fragmented institutional responsibilities weaken enforcement.
- National Building Code (NBC) provides model standards, but effective implementation depends on State and local authorities.

2. Disaster Risk Reduction

- Building collapses are largely preventable disasters, requiring a shift from post-disaster response to risk prevention and resilience.
- Periodic structural audits, vulnerability mapping, safety certification and emergency preparedness are essential.
- Aligning urban planning with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction can strengthen preventive action.

3. Affordable Housing–Safety Nexus

- Housing shortages can push vulnerable populations towards overcrowded, unauthorised and poorly regulated accommodation.
- Therefore, affordable housing and structural safety must be addressed together.

4. Accountability & Enforcement

- Regulatory violations can persist because of weak penalties, corruption, regulatory capture and poor inter-agency coordination.
- Digital approvals and transparent inspection mechanisms can improve accountability.

Challenges

- Illegal construction and unauthorised modifications.
- Weak municipal inspection and enforcement.
- Ageing and poorly maintained structures.
- Rapid urbanisation and population density.
- Shortage of affordable and regulated rental housing.
- Implementation gap between building codes and ground-level enforcement.
- Environmental stresses such as extreme rainfall and flooding aggravating structural vulnerability.

Way Forward

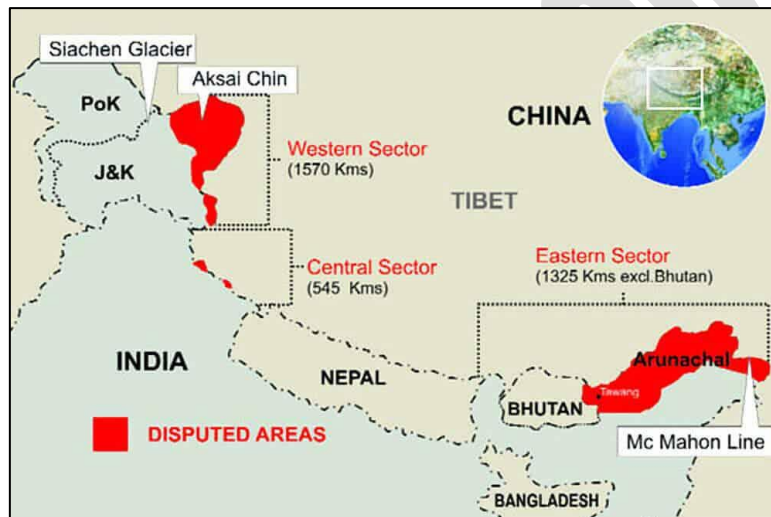
- Conduct periodic structural safety audits of vulnerable buildings.
- Strengthen ULBs with qualified engineers, inspectors and adequate finances.
- Introduce digital building-permit, inspection and geo-tagging systems.
- Integrate structural safety into master plans, land-use planning and disaster-risk maps.
- Expand affordable, regulated rental and student housing.
- Establish clear fixation of responsibility and penalties for violations.
- Promote a “prevention first” approach to urban disaster management.

4. UN Map & India-China Territorial Dispute: Cartographic Sovereignty

GS Paper: GS-II – International Relations | International Organisations | India-China Relations

Why in News?

- The UN General Assembly adopted the “Correct the Map” resolution on September 4, 2026, supporting more equitable equal-area cartographic representation. India supported the resolution while clarifying that it did not endorse any specific map or territorial depiction.
- A UN world map published during the consultation process depicted Arunachal Pradesh and Aksai Chin between Indian and Chinese claim lines, raising concerns over the representation of India's territorial claims.



Key Dimensions:

1. Cartographic Projection ≠ Territorial Depiction

- Equal-area projection concerns how geographical areas are represented on a map and seeks to reduce distortion in relative landmass.
- Territorial depiction concerns how national boundaries and disputed claims are represented.
- India's support for equitable cartography therefore does not imply acceptance of any specific boundary or territorial claim.

2. India-China Territorial Dispute

- Arunachal Pradesh: Administered by India; claimed by China.
- Aksai Chin: Claimed by India as part of Ladakh; administered by China.
- The dispute remains unresolved despite decades of negotiations.

3. LAC vs International Boundary

- The Line of Actual Control (LAC) represents the de facto separation between Indian- and Chinese-controlled territories.
- It is not a mutually agreed international boundary.
- India-China boundary is broadly divided into:
 - Western: Ladakh-Aksai Chin
 - Middle: Himachal Pradesh-Uttarakhand
 - Eastern: Arunachal Pradesh-Tibet

Strategic Significance

- Maps can shape international perceptions, diplomatic narratives and understanding of territorial disputes.
- Inaccurate or ambiguous depictions may create perceived legitimisation of contested claims.
- The issue highlights the importance of India's engagement with multilateral institutions and international geospatial bodies.

Challenges

- Unresolved boundary dispute.
- Divergent Indian and Chinese territorial claims.
- Risk of ambiguous international cartographic representations.
- Balancing cartographic neutrality with territorial sovereignty.

Way Forward

- Engage diplomatically with relevant UN geospatial authorities on territorial depiction.
- Maintain a clear distinction between cartographic projection and sovereignty claims.
- Strengthen India's participation in international geospatial forums.
- Continue dialogue and confidence-building measures with China while firmly safeguarding India's territorial interests.

5. India's Automobile Sector: Inflection Point in Clean Mobility

GS Paper: GS-III – Environment | Energy | Industry & Infrastructure

Why in News?

- According to FADA data, non-petrol powertrain vehicles — CNG, hybrid and EVs combined — accounted for 41.95% of India's passenger-vehicle retail market in August 2026, surpassing petrol vehicles at 40.85% for the first time.
- EV adoption is expanding across segments, with electric two-wheelers crossing 10% share and electric three-wheelers reaching 65.30% penetration.

Key Dimensions:

1. Clean Mobility Transition

- The changing fuel mix signals an inflection point in India's transport-energy transition.
- CNG, hybrids and EVs can diversify transport energy sources and reduce dependence on conventional petroleum fuels.
- Petrol remains the largest individual fuel category, despite non-petrol powertrains collectively overtaking it.

2. EV Adoption & Energy Security

- Rising EV penetration can reduce dependence on imported crude oil, strengthening energy security.
- Electrification creates opportunities in batteries, charging infrastructure, power electronics and critical minerals.

3. Environmental Significance

- EVs have zero tailpipe emissions, potentially reducing urban air pollution.
- However, their overall environmental benefit depends on electricity-generation mix, battery manufacturing and lifecycle management — the well-to-wheel/lifecycle perspective.
- Clean mobility supports India's Net-Zero 2070 pathway.

4. E20 Transition

- Consumer concerns regarding E20 compatibility may influence purchasing preferences.
- Ethanol blending can support energy security, lower crude-oil dependence and agricultural diversification, while requiring appropriate vehicle compatibility and sustainable feedstock.

5. Economic & Industrial Impact

- EV transition can promote domestic manufacturing, technological innovation and green jobs.
- Traditional ICE component industries and workers may face adjustment and reskilling pressures.

Government Initiatives:

- **PM E-DRIVE:** Promotes EV adoption, charging infrastructure and development of the domestic EV ecosystem.
- **ACC Battery Storage PLI:** Supports domestic manufacturing of Advanced Chemistry Cells, reducing import dependence.
- **FAME:** Earlier flagship initiative that helped establish India's EV adoption ecosystem.

Challenges

- High upfront EV costs and financing constraints.
- Inadequate charging infrastructure and interoperability.
- Higher electricity demand and distribution-grid requirements from large-scale electrification.
- Dependence on imported critical minerals and battery components.
- Battery recycling, safety and end-of-life management.
- Need for cleaner electricity to maximise EV climate benefits.
- Uneven EV adoption across regions and vehicle segments.

Way Forward

- Expand fast-charging infrastructure and battery-swapping ecosystems.
- Strengthen domestic battery, critical-mineral and component supply chains.
- Promote R&D in next-generation batteries and affordable EVs.
- Invest in smart grids, smart charging and renewable-energy integration.
- Support reskilling of workers in the ICE ecosystem.
- Ensure sustainable battery recycling and responsible mineral sourcing.
- Continue targeted incentives while gradually building a competitive, market-driven clean-mobility ecosystem.

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