

7th Nov, 2024

1. Anti-terror conference 2024 GS 2 (Governance)

• Why in News:

- A two-day anti-terror conference 2024 in New Delhi will be inaugurated by the Union Home Minister. The event, hosted by the National Investigation Agency (NIA), aims to shape future counter-terrorism policies and strategies.
- NIA has outlined major issues for an upcoming two-day anti-terror conference in New Delhi, including the **role of organized crime in terror funding** in northeast India, the use of encrypted apps, connections between organized criminal gangs and terrorism, and the regulation of social media in terror cases.
- These topics will be discussed with intelligence agency heads and state counter-terrorism squads.

• Organised Crime and Terror Funding

- **About Organised Crime**
 - Organized crime refers to criminal enterprises that are systematically structured to engage in illegal activities for profit.
 - These criminal groups often operate with a high level of coordination, secrecy, and persistence, using violence and corruption to exert control over their operations.
 - In India, organized crime includes activities such as drug trafficking, arms smuggling, human trafficking, extortion, and illegal mining.
- **Symbiosis between Organized Crime and Terrorism**
 - Organized crime has developed a symbiotic relationship with terrorist groups. This collaboration allows both entities to thrive.
 - Terrorist organizations, such as those active in the region, often rely on the financial support provided by organized criminal gangs.
 - These groups, in turn, benefit from the protection and resources offered by the terrorist organizations.
 - This partnership helps sustain their operations, often in remote areas where the government has limited reach.
- **Role of Organized Crime in Terror Funding**
 - Organized crime and terrorism are linked in several ways, including:
 - **Illegal activities** - Terrorist groups can fund their activities through illegal activities like: Drug trafficking; Human trafficking; Weapons trafficking; Extortion; Smuggling; Kidnapping for ransom.
 - **Legal sources** - Terrorist groups can also fund their activities through legal sources like: Donations from wealthy benefactors; Front organizations; Business activities.
 - **Money laundering** - Criminals can use the financial system to support terrorism through: The formal financial system; New payment methods like bitcoin and Ripple; Traditional methods of value transfer like hawala; Trade based money-laundering; Cash couriers.
- **Case Example: Northeast India**
 - In the northeastern states of India, particularly in Manipur, Nagaland, and Assam, insurgent groups have had long-standing ties with organized crime.

TWO-DAY CONFERENCE BEGINS TODAY

On anti-terror meet agenda, role of social media, transnational organised crimes

MAHENDERSINGH MANRAL
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 6

ORGANISED CRIME a key element of terror funding in northeast India, use of encrypted applications, linkages of organised criminal gangs with terrorism, social media regulations and their role in terror cases – these are some of the key issues listed by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) for discussion with the heads of intelligence agencies and state counter-terrorism squads in a two-day anti-terror conference beginning in the national capital Thursday.

Last year, Union Home Minister Amit Shah had asked state police forces and anti-terror agencies to adopt such a "ruthless" approach that no new terrorist group can be formed. Sharing some of the key issues on the list, a source in the Home Ministry said it has been decided by the NIA to share the case details of Rameshwaram cafe blast – how it happened, how the accused evaded their arrest and how they were arrested owing to the coordination of West Bengal police with the NIA.

"Apart from Rameshwaram cafe blast, it has also been decided to discuss in detail organised crime as a key element of terror funding in Northeast India, the rise of Hizb-ul-Tahrir (HuT) in India, especially in southern states, and emerging modus operandi for supplying arms and drugs from across the border via drones," the source said, adding that linkages of transnational organised crime syndicates with terrorist groups and dismantling

terror ecosystem in Left Wing Extremism sectors will also be discussed.

All the Director Generals of Central Armed Police Forces, state police chiefs, senior officials of counter-terrorism squads and Central government officials have been invited to the two-day conference at Sushma Swaraj Bhawan. The conference will start on November 7 and end on November 8. Union Home Minister Amit Shah is likely to attend the conference. "It has also been decided to discuss the importance of uniform anti-terror structure, coordination of counter-terrorism squads with the district after identifying terror hotspots in every police station and the approach of the government against the financing angle of terrorism/terror," the source said.

The NIA, after discussing with the senior officials in the MHA, has also listed issues such as social media regulations and their role in terror cases, probe into the usage of encrypted applications, virtual private networks (VPNs), virtual numbers and the impact of narcotics trafficking on national security.

An official said the NIA will also discuss the usage of its "national-level terror database", which includes the National Automated Fingerprint Identification System with over 90 lakh fingerprint records, Integrated Monitoring of Terrorism with data of 22,000 terrorist cases, National Integrated Database on Arrested Narco-Offenders with data of over 5 lakh offenders, National Database of Human Trafficking Offenders with data of about 1 lakh human traffickers.

- For instance, groups like the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) and National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) have been known to engage in extortion from businesses, smuggling of arms and drugs, and even running illegal taxation operations.
- These activities have helped them finance their operations and sustain insurgency movements.
- In recent years, the NIA and intelligence agencies have reported the increasing involvement of organized crime in financing terrorism.
- The rise of criminal syndicates engaging in cross-border smuggling, coupled with the proliferation of firearms, has exacerbated the security situation in these regions.
- The use of drones to drop drugs and arms across the India-Myanmar border has also become a significant concern.
- **Anti-terror conference 2024**
 - The two-day anti-terror conference, organized by the National Investigation Agency (NIA), will address several critical issues, including:
 - **Terrorist Group Formation and Criminal Linkage**
 - A focus on preventing the formation of new terrorist groups through a "ruthless" approach, as directed by Union Home Minister.
 - Discussion of organized crime's role in terror funding, especially in northeast India.
 - The rise of Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HuT) in southern states and transnational crime syndicates' links to terrorism.
 - **Case Studies and Emerging Threat**
 - Detailed discussion of the **Rameshwaram cafe blast**, including the arrest of the accused through coordination between West Bengal police and the NIA.
 - Examination of new methods for arms and drug trafficking across borders using drones.
 - **Counter-Terrorism Coordination and Strateg**
 - Importance of a uniform anti-terror structure, with better coordination between counter-terrorism squads and local police at the district level.
 - Strategy to tackle terror financing and dismantle the terror ecosystem in areas affected by Left Wing Extremism.
 - **Technological Challenges in Terrorist**
 - The role of social media and encrypted applications in terrorism, including the use of VPNs, virtual numbers, and encrypted apps by terror groups.
 - The impact of narcotics trafficking on national security.
 - **National Databases for Counter-Terrorism**
 - Use of the NIA's national-level terror database, which includes data on fingerprint records, terrorist cases, narco-offenders, and human trafficking offenders, to aid in investigations.

2. Cabinet Approves ₹3,600 Crore PM Vidyalaxmi Scheme GS 2 (Governance)

• Why in News:

- The Union Cabinet, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has introduced the **PM Vidyalaxmi Scheme**—a new Central Sector initiative aimed at supporting meritorious students financially so they can pursue higher education without economic constraints.
- This scheme is rooted in the **National Education Policy, 2020**, which advocates for financial assistance to deserving students across both public and private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

• Objectives of the Scheme:

- The PM Vidyalaxmi Scheme seeks to:
 - **Ensure Financial Inclusion in Education:** Enable meritorious students to pursue higher education without financial hurdles.
 - **Support Top Educational Institutions:** Applicable only to top-quality HEIs as per the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF).
 - **Provide Transparent and Digital Access:** Use a fully digital, transparent, and student-friendly platform for loan processing and management.

• Key Features of the Scheme:

- **Loan Availability:**
 - **Eligibility:** Any student who secures admission to a Quality Higher Education Institution (QHEI) is eligible.
 - **Loan Terms:** Collateral-free and guarantor-free loans will be offered through banks and financial institutions, covering the full amount of tuition and other course-related expenses.
 - **Institutional Coverage:** Applies to institutions ranked in the NIRF top 100 (both government and private) and state government HEIs ranked in the 101-200 bracket, as well as all central government institutions.
 - **Coverage Scope:** In the initial phase, 860 QHEIs qualify, potentially benefiting over **22 lakh students**.
- **Credit Guarantee Support:**
 - For loans up to **₹7.5 lakhs**, a **75% credit guarantee** on the outstanding amount is provided, encouraging banks to make education loans accessible to more students.
- **Interest Subsidy:**
 - **Eligibility:** Students with an annual family income of up to **₹8 lakhs** and not benefiting from other government scholarships or interest subvention schemes.
 - **Subsidy Terms:** A **3% interest subvention** on loans up to ₹10 lakhs during the moratorium period.
 - **Beneficiary Priority:** Preference is given to students in government institutions and technical/professional courses.
- **Budget and Reach:**
 - An allocation of ₹3,600 crore has been set for 2024-25 to 2030-31, targeting interest subvention benefits for **1 lakh students each year** and **7 lakh students** over the scheme's duration.
- **Unified Digital Platform:**
 - A **"PM Vidyalaxmi" portal** managed by the Department of Higher Education will provide a streamlined application process for education loans and interest subvention.

Cabinet clears PM-Vidyalaxmi for collateral-free loans to students

Infusion of equity of ₹10,700 crore in FCI gets approval

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 6

THE UNION Cabinet on Wednesday approved the PM-Vidyalaxmi scheme that makes students who get admission in Quality Higher Education Institutions (QHEIs) eligible for a collateral-free and guarantor-free education loan.

An outlay of ₹3,600 crore has been made for the scheme for 2024-25 to 2030-31 period and around 7 lakh fresh students are expected to benefit from the interest subvention offered under the scheme.

Students will be provided a 75% credit guarantee by the central government for loans up to ₹7.5 lakh. Students, with an annual family income of up to ₹8 lakh, who are ineligible for benefits under any other government scholarship or interest subvention schemes, will be provided 3% interest subvention for loan up to ₹10 lakh during the moratorium period.

"The interest subvention support will be given to 1 lakh students every year. Preference



Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw in New Delhi, Wednesday. Anirudh Mehra

will be given to students who are from government institutions and have opted for technical and professional courses," the government statement said.

This is in addition to an existing scheme—the Central Sector Interest Subsidy (CSIS) that provides full interest subvention on loans up to ₹10 lakh to students with an annual family income of up to ₹4.5 lakh, pursuing technical or professional courses.

In a post on X, Prime Minister Narendra Modi called the Cabinet decision "a big boost to making education more accessible." "The Cabinet has approved the PM-Vidyalaxmi scheme to support youngsters with quality education. It is a significant step towards empowering the Yuva Shakti and building a brighter future for our nation," he wrote.

Quality higher education institutions (QHEIs) will be determined by NIRF rankings. The scheme will be applicable to all institutions, including government and private, in the top 100 in overall and in other domain-specific rankings, state government institutions ranked 101 to 200, and all Centre-run institutions.

Students in 860 higher education institutions will be eligible, and the list will be updated based on NIRF rankings each year.

An official of the Ministry of Education said that with this, students enrolled in all courses, not just technical or professional ones, will be eligible under the scheme. Students can apply for a loan and interest subvention on a portal 'PM-Vidyalaxmi'.

Equity infusion in FCI

In a separate decision, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved infusion of equity of ₹10,700 crore for working capital in FY 2024-25 in Food Corporation of India (FCI).

"The decision is aimed at bolstering the agricultural sector and ensuring the welfare of farmers nationwide," said an official statement issued after the Cabinet meeting.

"FCI started its journey in 1964 with an authorised capital of ₹100 crore and equity of ₹4 crore. The operations of FCI increased manifold resulting in an increase of authorised capital from ₹11,000 crore to ₹21,000 crore in February 2023. The equity of FCI was ₹4,496 crore in Financial Year 2019-20, which increased to ₹10,157 crore in the Financial Year 2023-24. Now, the Government of India has approved a significant amount of equity of ₹10,700 crore for FCI which will strengthen it financially and will give a big boost to the initiatives taken for its transformation," the statement said.

"The infusion of equity is a significant step towards enhancing the operational capabilities of FCI in fulfilling its mandate effectively. FCI resorts to short term borrowings to match the gap of fund requirement. This infusion will help to lower the interest burden and will ultimately reduce the subsidy of the Government of India," it said.

In a post on X, the PM said: "Today's Cabinet decision on the infusion of equity of ₹10,700 crore in the Food Corporation of India will enhance its capacity to manage food procurement and distribution efficiently. It will also ensure better support for farmers and contribute to national food security."

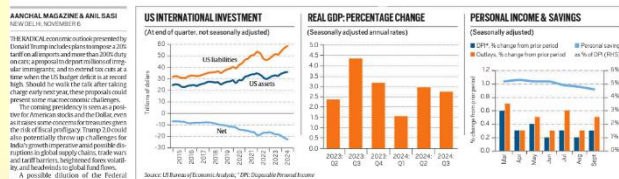
- Payments will be made via **E-vouchers** and **Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC)** wallets, ensuring a secure and efficient transfer of funds.
- Supplementary Government Schemes:**
 - The PM Vidyalaxmi Scheme complements two key schemes under the **PM-USP (Prime Minister's Unique Scholarship Program)**:
 - Central Sector Interest Subsidy Scheme (CSIS)**: Offers full interest subvention during the moratorium for loans up to ₹10 lakhs to students from families with annual incomes up to ₹4.5 lakhs, specifically for technical/professional courses at approved institutions.
 - Credit Guarantee Fund Scheme for Education Loans (CGFSEL)**: Supports education loans with a guarantee fund.
 - Together, PM Vidyalaxmi and PM-USP form a **comprehensive financial support framework** for eligible students, allowing them to access quality higher education and technical training in premier institutions.

3. What Trumponomics means for India GS 2 (International Relations)

- Why in News:**
 - Donald Trump's proposed economic plans include a 20% tariff on all imports, over 200% duty on cars, mass deportations of undocumented immigrants, and extended tax cuts despite a record-high budget deficit. While these measures may challenge the US economy, they are seen as positive for American stocks and the Dollar, though they raise concerns for US treasuries given the risk of fiscal profligacy.
 - For India**, these moves could disrupt global supply chains, increase trade wars and tariff barriers, heighten forex volatility, and impact global fund flows, posing challenges for its growth.
 - The Federal Reserve may reconsider its rate-cut agenda in response to a changing US macroeconomic landscape, which could, in turn influence India's monetary policy approach, with the RBI likely taking a cautious stance on rate cuts amid uncertainties.
- Economic Risks of Trump's Policies: Inflation, Fiscal Deficit, and Global Market Uncertainties**
 - Higher tariffs and trade wars under Trump's policies are expected to increase inflation in the US.
 - Combined with rising deficits and potential shifts in institutional trust, foreign lenders may reconsider their support for US Treasury debt, echoing a shift similar to the 2022 freeze of Russian assets.
 - The 2022 freeze of Russian assets **drove global central banks to favor physical gold over financial derivatives**.
 - Trump's **proposed tax cuts and protectionist measures** might stimulate short-term economic growth but could heighten inflation, potentially forcing the Federal Reserve to end its rate-cutting cycle prematurely.
 - This shift could impact global monetary policies, with institutions like India's RBI possibly delaying rate cuts to manage financial stability amidst bond and forex market volatility.
 - A **weaker US dollar**, as seen during Trump's first term, and **fiscal deficit pressures** may add to inflationary risks and challenge global interest rate cycles.
- Trump's Immigration Shift and Economic Proposals: Impacts on Indian Students and IT Sector**
 - Trump's mixed immigration stance includes a **plan to curb both legal and illegal immigration**, which could add inflationary pressure in a full-employment economy.
 - However, his recent proposal to **automatically grant green cards to foreign nationals graduating from US colleges** is seen as a **positive for Indian students**.

Trumponomics and India

Economic outlook presented by Donald Trump could, if put into practice, trigger higher inflation in US — provoking action by the Federal Reserve that would impact economies across the world, including India. Here's what to look for in the spheres of business and economy



The Fed's decision to continue its rate-cut cycle is expected to be a key factor in the presidential election — and experts believe that the full scale of the cycle may now be in sight. While Trump's protectionist tax cuts and tariff threats could aid up manufacturing, the Fed's monetary policy is likely to remain unchanged — and likely force the Fed to end its rate-cutting cycle sooner.

This could have implications for the monetary policy of other countries, as the Fed's rate cuts could lead to a weaker dollar, which in turn could lead to higher inflation in other countries. The Fed's decision to continue its rate-cut cycle could also lead to a weaker dollar, which in turn could lead to higher inflation in other countries.

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- Economically, a weaker US dollar could benefit India by lowering import costs and supporting domestic investment.
- Additionally, **Trump's plan to cut the corporate tax rate from 21% to 15% could boost budgets for US clients of Indian service providers**, enhancing demand and driving gains in Indian IT stocks.
- **Elon Musk's Possible Role in US Administration: Implications for India**
 - Elon Musk's potential induction into the new administration could influence India's policies.
 - New Delhi's earlier proposal to lower import duties for Tesla fell short of Musk's expectations, but with his strengthened influence, India may face added pressure to offer more favorable terms.
 - Additionally, lobbying efforts in areas like satellite spectrum allocation and space launches may intensify across key global markets, including India, as Musk's interests expand.
- **Global Economic Watch: Fed Policy and China's Stimulus Package**
 - Two key events are expected to impact global markets. First, the Federal Reserve's November 6-7 policy meeting will provide updated inflation insights.
 - Second, China's Standing Committee is likely to approve a substantial economic stimulus package aimed at boosting land purchases, bank recapitalization, and local debt refinancing.
 - Analysts warn that high US tariffs on Chinese goods could reduce China's growth by over 2 percentage points, prompting Beijing to consider even larger fiscal stimulus—potentially reaching 2-3% of GDP annually.
 - This could divert foreign portfolio investment away from other markets, including India.
- **Impact on H-1B visa landscape**
 - **Overview of the H-1B Visa Program**
 - **Purpose and Eligibility**
 - The H-1B program allows American employers to hire foreign professionals in specialty occupations requiring specialized skills and at least a bachelor's degree.
 - The program's intent is to fill skill gaps in the US workforce by authorizing temporary employment for qualified individuals.
 - **Annual Visa Caps and Exemptions**
 - The H-1B visa cap is set at 65,000 new visas per fiscal year, with an additional 20,000 visas for individuals with a US Master's degree or higher.
 - Certain employers, like higher education institutions, non-profits, and government research organizations, are exempt from this cap.
 - **Indian Nationals' Dominance in H-1B Visas**
 - In fiscal year 2023, Indians made up 72.3% (279,000) of total H-1B visa approvals, followed by Chinese nationals at 11.7%.
 - **Historical H-1B Restrictions Under Trump During His First Term**
 - **Increased Scrutiny:** Visa denial rates and Requests for Evidence (RFEs) rose sharply, with denial rates reaching 30% by 2020, compared to just 3.2% under Obama.
 - **Higher Wage Requirements:** The Trump administration attempted to raise wage floors for H-1B holders by 43-71%, though this measure was blocked in court.
 - **Limits on Visa Numbers:** Speculation arose about further limiting visas or prioritizing those with advanced skills.
 - **Planned Restrictions**
 - Trump's "America First" stance suggests potential major reforms to limit immigration and prioritize American workers
 - His 2024 campaign proposed reducing H-1B visa numbers and enforcing stricter eligibility, which may impact tech giants like Amazon and Google that rely on H-1B talent.
 - There is potential for shorter visa durations, especially for third-party placements, increasing uncertainty for both employers and employees.
 - **Impact on Indian Professionals**
 - Tightened H-1B policies could reduce job prospects for Indian professionals in the US tech sector and complicate family reunifications for current visa holders.

4. India-US Ties under Trump as US President GS 2 (International Relations)

- **Why in News:** As Donald Trump has gained the votes required to become the U.S.'s 47th President, we will try to analyse India-US ties during Trump 1.0 and what Trump 2.0 means for India.

• **Trump's First Term - Strengthening Indo-US Strategic Ties:**

○ **Overview:**

- During Donald Trump's presidency (2017-2021), the United States and India transitioned from strategic partners to indispensable allies.
- This period saw **unprecedented cooperation in defence, counter-terrorism, and energy** but also presented certain challenges, particularly around trade and immigration.

○ **Enhanced cooperation in defence, terrorism, and energy:**

- **High-level diplomatic engagement:** PM Narendra Modi's 2017 White House visit set the tone for close diplomatic ties, culminating in Trump's historic visit to India in 2020.
- **Counter-terrorism support:** The US firmly supported India's stance on terrorism, including backing the designation of **Jaish-e-Mohammad chief, Masood Azhar**, as a global terrorist and advocating Pakistan's grey-listing by the FATF.
- **Defence technology and trade:** Under Trump, **India's defence imports from the US reached \$18 billion**, and India gained access to advanced American defence technology, strengthening military capabilities and diversifying defence procurement.
- **Strategic energy partnership:** The 2018 Strategic Energy Partnership facilitated India's import of American crude and LNG, **making the US India's sixth largest source of hydrocarbon imports**.

○ **Confronting China as a common strategic rival:**

- Trump's policies framed China as a **mutual threat**, enhancing Indo-US alignment in strategic goals.
- His administration **revived the Quad alliance** and promoted the **Indo-Pacific strategy** to counter China's growing influence.

• **Trump's First Term - Issues in the India-US Ties:**

- **Energy restrictions:** Trump pressured India to **halt oil imports from Iran**, marking a stark shift in India's energy sourcing strategy.
- **Trade and tariffs:** Trade disputes arose as Trump demanded **lower tariffs**, notably on Harley Davidson motorcycles, reflecting his broader stance on a fairer trade balance.
- **Immigration policy:** The Trump administration's restrictive immigration stance, including limits on **H1-B visas**, strained the relationship due to India's reliance on skilled migration to the US.
- **Kashmir mediation controversy:** Trump's offer to mediate between India and Pakistan on Kashmir sparked backlash in India, as it went against India's stance on third-party involvement in the issue.

• **Trump's Return and its Impact on India-US Relations:**

○ **Overview:**

- With Donald Trump set to re-enter the White House, **India anticipates both benefits and challenges** in the upcoming phase of bilateral relations.
- Building on Trump's earlier tenure, New Delhi expects **continuity in defence, energy cooperation, and strategic ties**, alongside possible **friction in trade and sensitive diplomatic interactions**.
- **Opportunities for stronger India-US ties under Trump:**
 - **Reviving trade and defence deals:**
 - Trump has expressed interest in resuming the Free Trade Agreement talks.
 - Expanded U.S. military hardware sales could further bolster India's defence capabilities.
 - **Focus on energy independence:** As seen with the earlier MoU for the Driftwood LNG plant, potentially reviving investments and boosting India's energy security.

Recalling India-US relations in Trump 1.0

SHIBUJITROY
NEW DELHI, 14 NOVEMBER

INDIA GREYED from being a strategic to an indispensable partner in the United States during Donald Trump's first term as the US became closer than ever before during the period.

With Trump set to return to the White House, here is what Trump 1.0 looked like from New Delhi.

Cooperation on defence, terrorism & energy

Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the White House in June 2017, six months after Trump assumed office. During this meeting, Trump promised Modi that he would visit India during his term – a promise he delivered on three years later when he addressed both Narendra Modi and the US Congress.

The moment overlapped with the 2017 and 2020. The trade of this high-level bilateral engagement was seen in the Trump administration's robust support for India's

crises. The US supported the designation of Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Masood Azhar as a global terrorist by the UN Security Council in 2017, as well as the grey-listing of Pakistan by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) in 2018.

India's defence procurement from the US climbed to \$1 billion annually in 2018, as India moved up the list of the Strategic and Technology Partnership (STP) countries.

This significantly opened up high-level access to the technology transfer regime of export – improving the country's military preparedness, and strengthening its defence acquisition.

The impact of this heightened cooperation is evident in how monthly New Delhi and Washington shared intelligence during the Cabau Valley skirmish between India and China in April-May 2020.

The energy sector was another area in which the India-US relationship grew during Trump 1.0. The Trump presidency saw the launch of the bilateral Strategic Energy Partnership in April 2018, with India starting to import crude and LNG from the US.

In two years, the value of this import was estimated to have risen to \$6.7 billion from zero – making the US India's sixth largest source of hydrocarbon imports.

Some challenges and a major controversy

That said, things were not completely hunky-dory. The energy partnership was signed, but Trump effectively forced India to stop importing oil from Iran – a move that was not in line with the spirit of the deal.

Another issue of Trump's policies was the movement of skilled H1-B visa holders who were seen to be in the two countries' bilateral relationship.

But perhaps the single biggest controversy was the US trade policy towards India.

Trump's trade policy was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it was a move to protect the US economy from the effects of globalisation.

On the other hand, it was a move to protect the US economy from the effects of globalisation.

becoming India's largest trading partner, and

between India and the US under Trump came when the president offered to mediate between New Delhi and Islamabad on the Kashmir issue – a long-standing "no-go" for Indians. This came as the administration sought to improve relations with Pakistan in the run-up to the US deep withdrawal from Afghanistan, in which India had a vested interest.

But, having gone as far as saying that Modi "asked me" to mediate between India and Pakistan, Trump quickly backed out in the official US position – that Washington will remain neutral in the India-Pakistan dispute.

China a common rival, strategic threat

The most significant contribution of Donald Trump to India-US relations was a strategic threat and a rival. That became a strategic plan for the India-US tie during his term. Not only did he revive the Quad grouping with the US, Australia, and Japan, Trump also laid out a strategy to contain China's aggressive behaviour in the Indo-Pacific.

Trump's also had a non-committal approach to India's human rights record – something that New Delhi appreciated.

- **Less pressure on domestic issues:** Compared to the Biden administration, issues like press freedoms, treatment of NGOs, and human rights may see less scrutiny under Trump, easing diplomatic tensions.
- **Stance on regional issues:**
 - Trump's stance of cancelling the majority of U.S. funding to **Pakistan** during his last term is likely to continue.
 - Also, crackdown on **Khalistani** organisations is anticipated during Trump 2.0.
- **Potential areas of friction:**
 - **Trump's tariff policy:** Trump's focus on reducing trade tariffs might reignite disputes over India's tariffs, straining the economic partnership.
 - **Diplomatic mis-steps:** For instance, Trump's previous remarks on Kashmir mediation and India's conflict with China were met with strong denials from New Delhi.
 - **Unpredictable sanctions on oil imports:**
 - Under Trump, India faced pressure to cut off oil imports from **Iran and Venezuela**, risking its energy stability.
 - Similar policies could emerge, impacting India's energy policy and regional diplomacy.
- **Conclusion:**
 - Trump's first term reshaped Indo-US relations and India anticipates both opportunities and obstacles with Trump's return to the presidency.
 - **Shifting regional dynamics will require careful navigation to maintain a balanced and productive partnership.**

5. UP Madarsa Education Act upheld by SC Recent events of importance

- **Why in News:**
 - The Supreme Court, in a three-judge bench led by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud, upheld the Constitutional validity of the Uttar Pradesh Board of Madarsa Education Act, 2004. This Act regulates madarsa education in Uttar Pradesh.
 - Previously, in March, the Allahabad High Court struck down the Act, citing a violation of secularism principles. However, the Supreme Court stayed this High Court ruling in April, allowing the Act to remain effective until the Supreme Court's final decision.
 - The recent verdict affirms the law's legitimacy, emphasizing its compliance with Constitutional standards.
- **2004 UP Madarsa Act**
 - **Background and Purpose of the Madarsa Act**
 - The Uttar Pradesh Board of Madarsa Education Act, 2004, establishes a legal framework for madarsa education in Uttar Pradesh.
 - This Act enables madarasas to teach **both the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) curriculum and religious studies.**
 - **Madarsa Board**
 - It also set up the **Uttar Pradesh Board of Madarsa Education**, primarily comprising members from the Muslim community, to oversee and standardize madarsa education.
 - **Roles and Functions of the Madarsa Board**
 - Under Section 9 of the Act, the Board's responsibilities include designing course material and conducting exams.
 - It provides standardized examinations for courses ranging from 'Maulvi' (equivalent to Class 10) to 'Fazil' (equivalent to a Master's degree).

Why did SC uphold U.P. madrasa Act?

How did the Supreme Court uphold the Uttar Pradesh Board of Madarsa Education Act, 2004? What were the key arguments and the constitutional provisions involved?

The clipping details the Supreme Court's decision to uphold the Uttar Pradesh Board of Madarsa Education Act, 2004. It highlights the Chief Justice's bench and the arguments presented by both sides. The text discusses the constitutional provisions involved and the court's reasoning for upholding the Act.

- **Background of the present case**
 - **Legal Challenge to the Act**
 - A lawyer filed a petition against the Madarsa Act, arguing that it violated several constitutional provisions:
 - **Article 14:** Right to equality before the law
 - **Article 15:** Prohibition of discrimination on religious grounds
 - **Article 21-A:** Right to free and compulsory education for children aged 6 to 14
 - The petitioner claimed that the Act did not provide quality compulsory education up to Class 8 or universal access to quality education, as mandated by Article 21-A.
 - **Matter reaches Allahabad HC**
 - Key Issues Raised Before the Allahabad High Court
 - **Secularism and the Madarsa Act:** Whether the provisions of the Madarsa Act align with secularism.
 - **Religious Exclusivity in Board Membership:** The Act's requirement for Board members to belong to a specific religion was questioned, with arguments for allowing members from diverse backgrounds with expertise in education, regardless of religion.
 - **Administration Under the Minority Welfare Department:** Whether it was arbitrary to place the Board under the Minority Welfare Department instead of the Education Ministry.
 - **Access to Educational Expertise and Policies:** Whether it was unfair to deny madarsa students access to educational experts and their policies, which could enhance the quality of education provided in madaras.
 - **Key highlights of the Judgement by Allahabad HC**
 - Allahabad High Court declared Madarsa Act to be unconstitutional.
 - It directed the State to take steps forthwith for accommodating the Madarsa students in regular schools recognized under various education Boards.
 - **Matter reached to SC**
 - In April 2024, the Supreme Court stayed the Allahabad High Court's judgment, noting that while the state has a valid interest in ensuring quality education for students, the High Court erred in striking down the Madarsa Act.
 - The Apex Court observed that the Act was primarily regulatory and did not warrant complete invalidation.
- **Final Verdict by the SC**
 - **Arguments before SC**
 - **Religious Education vs. Religious Instruction**
 - The Court explored whether madaras impart "religious education" (learning about religions) or "religious instruction" (compulsory participation in worship).
 - Referring to **Aruna Roy vs Union of India (2002)**, the Court highlighted that while religious instruction is restricted in state-recognized institutions under Article 28, religious education aimed at promoting communal harmony is permissible.
 - **Validity of Striking Down the Entire Act**
 - The Court questioned whether the High Court was justified in invalidating the entire Madarsa Act, rather than targeting specific provisions.
 - CJI noted that discarding the entire Act would be extreme, suggesting that the state could enforce rules under the Act to promote a more secular curriculum.
 - **Final verdict by SC**
 - SC upheld the constitutional validity of the 'Uttar Pradesh Board of Madarsa Education Act 2004'.
 - It set aside the Allahabad High Court's judgement which had struck it down earlier.

- **Key highlights of the judgement**
 - **Regulation of Education Standard**
 - The Madarsa Act provides a regulatory framework to ensure educational standards in madarasas recognized by the Board.
 - **Alignment with State Obligations**
 - The Act aligns with the state's obligation to enable students in recognized madarasas to acquire skills and competencies necessary for social participation and employment.
 - **Balance with Minority Rights**
 - The Act must be interpreted alongside Article 21A and the Right to Education Act, respecting religious and linguistic minorities' rights to manage their educational institutions.
 - With state approval, the Board may implement regulations that ensure secular education standards without compromising the institutions' minority character.
 - **Legislative Competence and Limits**
 - While the Madarsa Act falls within the State Legislature's jurisdiction under Entry 25 of List 3, provisions regulating higher degrees (e.g., fazil and kamil) are unconstitutional as they conflict with the UGC Act, which is governed by Entry 66 of List 1.
- **Impact of the Supreme Court Decision on the Madarsa Act**
 - The Supreme Court's decision will directly impact madarsa education in Uttar Pradesh, with broader implications for religious education nationwide.
 - This ruling could influence other religious institutions, such as gurukuls and convent schools, by shaping how secularism principles apply to religious education within state-regulated educational frameworks.

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1. The Bidar Fort is located in which one of the following states?

- a) Gujarat
- b) Madhya Pradesh
- c) Maharashtra
- d) Karnataka

2. Consider the following statements with reference to Spinal Muscular Atrophy:

- A. It is a genetic disease that affects the central nervous system.
- B. It is classified as a motor neuron disease.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) A only
- b) B only
- c) A and B
- d) Neither of two

3. The Kumbhalgarh-Todgarh Raoli Sanctuary is located in which one of the following states?

- a) Odisha
- b) Rajasthan
- c) Madhya Pradesh
- d) Maharashtra

4. The ancient town of Al-Natah was recently discovered in which one of the following countries?

- a) Bangladesh
- b) Indonesia
- c) Iran
- d) Saudi Arabia

5. Okinawicius tekdi, recently seen in the news is a species of:

- a) Snake
- b) Gecko
- c) Butterfly
- d) Spider

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1. d
2. c
3. b
4. d
5. d

