



VAJIRAM & RAVI
Institute for IAS Examination

The Analyst

CURRENT AFFAIRS Handout

08th February 2026



India Malaysia: Act East



CONTEXT: PM Modi visiting Malaysia.

India Malaysia: Significance

Historical Context

- 1957: Diplomatic relations
- Strong 1960s
- 2015: Enhanced Strategic Partnership

Economic Cooperation

- India's 16th trading partner
- Exports: Mineral oils, aluminum, iron/steel, copper, organic chemicals, electrical machinery
- Imports: Palm oil, mineral fuels/oils, copper, wood
- Trade Settlement in INR
- FDI inflow: US\$3.3 bn
- Malaysian companies/JVs

Defence & Strategic Cooperation

- 1993 MoU
- Langkawi International Maritime & Aerospace Exhibition (LIMA)
- JWG: Counter Terrorism & Transnational Crime, S & T, IT

Cultural Cooperation

- NSCB ICC in Kuala Lumpur
- International Yoga Day
- Events commemorating Tagore, World Sanskrit Day

Indian Diaspora

- **2.75 mn** PIOs
- Issues: Illegal immigration, workplace exploitation, exploitation of Indian seafarers, worker repatriation, human trafficking

Other Areas

- Tourists for Malaysia
- 2010 MoU: Traditional Medicine
- 2010 MoU on higher education
- ITEC, ICCR scholarships, AYUSH scholarships



India-Malaysia Trade: 2019-20 to 2023-24, USD billion



Challenges

- Economic
 - Trade volume
- Political
 - Kashmir & CAA
 - Trade Retaliation
 - Zakir Naik Extradition



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Key Malaysia – India Agreements

MoU on Defence Cooperation (1993)	Agreement on Cooperation in Science and Technology (1998)	MoU on Mutual Recognition of Educational Degrees and Certificates (2017)
MoU on Cooperation in Tourism (2010)	Comprehensive Economic and Cooperation Agreement (CECA) (2011)	MoU on Cyber Security (2015)
MoU for Cooperation in Broadcasting between Prasar Bharti and Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) (2023)		

Act East Policy

Act East Policy

- Launched in 2014
- Dynamic, structured
- Multidimensional engagement
- Recalibrated global supply chains and weakening multilateral frameworks
- ASEAN's internal fissures
- Non-traditional security issues
- 4 original pillars: Culture, Commerce, Connectivity, Capacity-building

Achievements of the Act East

Strategic

- Comprehensive Strategic Partnerships
- Participation in ASEAN platforms
- Collaboration on maritime security, cyber governance, counter-terrorism, disaster relief

Economic

- Trade volume with ASEAN
- Diversification of exports
- Newer sectors: semiconductors
- Cross-border payments
- ASEAN-India Funds
- Connectivity: Progress on IMT

Cultural & Soft Power

- Restoration of heritage sites
- Religious diplomacy
- Mekong-Ganga Dhamma Yatra, Bali Jatra celebrations
- Cultural exchanges

Education & Human Resources

- IIT campuses in Malaysia and Thailand
- Vocational training centres and AYUSH programs
- Scholarships, Collaborations

Challenges in Implementing Act East

Geopolitical

- US-China
- Weaponization of economic interdependence
- Political instability

Economic

- Trade deficit with ASEAN
- RCEP
- Tariff/non-tariff barriers
- Underutilization of economic complementarities
- Connectivity

Institutional & Implementation

- Implementation deficit
- Need of a dedicated institutional mechanism
- Asymmetrical engagement
- Unresolved bilateral issues



CONTEXT: PM Modi visiting Malaysia.

Way Forward

Political Will

- Institutionalize coordination
- Dedicated inter-ministerial coordination unit
- Strategic, country-specific roadmaps
- Reciprocity and mutual benefit

Trade and Investment Frameworks

- Trade facilitation infrastructure
- Investment & JVs
- Branding and marketing

P2P Connectivity

- India-ASEAN Youth Fellowships
- Social media campaigns, documentaries, podcasts
- India-ASEAN Centres of Excellence
- Tourism infra
- Liberalize visa policies

Collaborating on Challenges

- CC, health security, food/energy resilience, cybersecurity
- Joint task forces, tabletop exercises, co-develop

ASEAN Centrality and Rules-Based Order

- ASEAN-led mechanisms
- Support ASEAN Community Vision 2045
- Avoid zero-sum strategies

MAINS PRACTISE QUESTION

Q: Malaysia occupies a pivotal position in India's Act East Policy and strategy in the Indo-Pacific. Analyse the strategic, economic and geopolitical importance of India-Malaysia relations.



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CONTEXT: India, US have worked out the framework for an interim agreement on trade.

US Trade Deal: Impact on Agriculture

Positives

- Cheaper, High-Quality Animal Feed
 - Distiller's Dried Grains with Solubles (DDGS) from US
 - i. Cheaper Protein-rich livestock feed ingredient
 - ii. Superior quality: US corn DDGS aflatoxin levels < 20 ppb
- Boost to Livestock, Poultry, Dairy, and Aquaculture Industries
 - Cost reduction for feed manufacturers
- Cheap Feed-Grade Sorghum
- Limited Threat from Specified Farm Produce
 - Tariff cuts on tree nuts, fruits, wine, spirits
- Strategic Concessions
 - Shielded sensitive sectors from imports: soyabean, corn (maize), fuel ethanol, cotton, dairy, poultry

Concerns

- Soyabean Industry
 - Imports of cheaper DDGS and lower-duty soyabean oil
 - Shift in soyabean oil imports
- Ethanol Distilleries
 - Grain-based distilleries sell DDGS
- Potential Hidden Concessions
 - Unspecified "additional products"
 - India agreed to "address long-standing non-tariff barriers" for US farm goods
- Trade Deficit Risk in Specific Categories
 - Already the biggest market for US tree nuts
- Long-Term Market Access Pressure
 - "interim" nature of the deal

US Trade Deal: Russian Oil

Indian Commitments as per U.S. Executive Order

- Committed to stop directly or indirectly importing - Russian Federation oil"
- Purchase U.S. energy products
- Framework to expand defense cooperation

Indian Stance

- U.S. targeting "unjustified and unreasonable"
- "Steadfast position" of ensuring energy security
- Diversifying energy sourcing based on objective market conditions and international dynamics

Current Data Trends

- U.S. share of oil imports: 12.48% (Apr-Oct)
- Russia's share: 32.38% from 37.88%
- 3-year low as of January 2026
- Existing 1-year deal for U.S. LPG imports

Challenges in Halting Russian Imports

- Infeasibility
- Pre-booked Cargos
- Case of Nayara Energy & Rosneft

Challenges in Ramping Up U.S. Crude Imports

- Freight Cost
- Crude Grade Compatibility

Easier U.S. LNG Imports

- Already 2nd LNG supplier
- Discounted price
- LNG quality broadly consistent



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CONTEXT: India, US have worked out the framework for an interim agreement on trade.

US Trade Deal: AI & Data Centres

Initiatives

- Tax holiday for foreign companies
- Budget allocation for 'India AI Mission'
- Subsidised compute (GPU) costs
- No local GPU production capacity

Change in US Policy & India's Gain

- Biden restrictions on GPU exports
- Favourable terms in the interim agreement
- No US export control measure on GPUs
- Unlike imposed on China

Data Centre Investments

- Commitments
 - Google: \$1.5 bn for a 1 GW data centre
 - Microsoft: \$17.5 bn
 - Amazon: \$15 bn
- \$1.2 bn in revenue in FY24 – Anarock report
- Tax breaks, affordable access to land/energy/water

MAINS PRACTISE QUESTION

Q: Examine the impact of the India-US trade agreement with specific reference to agriculture and energy sectors. How does this evolving trade engagement indicate a shift in India's approach to trade negotiations?

US Trade Deal: Shifts in Indian Approach

• Inflection Point

- Breaking from defensive instincts
- Beyond sovereignty or strategic autonomy
- Nature of the Domestic Debate
 - Accord with US more scrutiny

• Economic and Political Context

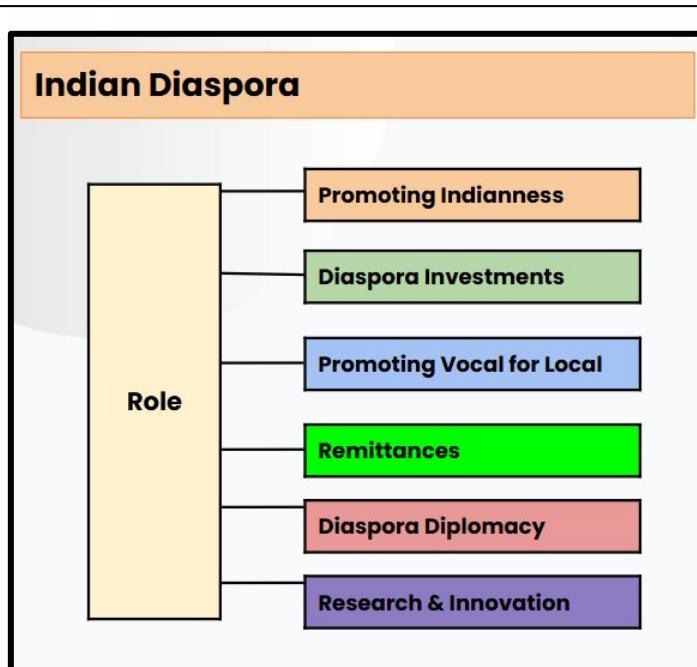
- No serious alternative
- Balanced deal signals pragmatism in US approach
- Contrast with Past Negotiations (The Nuclear Deal Precedent)
 - Conflated US engagement with a surrender of "strategic autonomy"

• Morality Plays to Pragmatism

- Commercial pragmatism
- Economic interests, not litmus tests of autonomy
- Trade as a positive-sum game



SYLLABUS : GS Paper 2: Indian Diaspora
Newspaper The Indian Express **Page Number : 11**



Challenges

- Heterogeneous Nature with Differential needs
- Regulatory cholesterol
- Protectionism in host countries – Nitaqat
- Sectarian conflicts
- Discrimination, Isolation, Exploitation – Kafala
- Recruitment in conflict zones

Steps Taken for Diaspora

- Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) Scheme, 2005
- Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas
- Pravasi Bhartiya Bima Yojana 2006
- MADAD portal
- Pravasi Bharatiya Sahayata Kendras
- Know India Program
- Indian Community Welfare Fund

last week. But the **hyped clout of the Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs)** in the USA appears to have played little part in reaching the nebulous agreement. In fact, **2025 saw the unraveling of the smug assumption that India's most valuable export underpinning a special relationship with the USA are the PIOs**, for whom Prime Minister Modi's rally at Madison Square Garden in 2014 and the Howdy Modi show of strength in Texas were organised.

PIOs were once seen as America's model immigrants, with a mean household income even higher than the US average and a low crime rate. Indian Americans have headed corporate giants and donated millions to the Trump campaign. They have made a name for themselves in professions ranging from academia to technology, banking and medicine. They have even arrived in US politics, traditionally the preserve of those with well established roots in the country. Kamala Harris was the Democrats' candidate for President in 2024. New York's newly elected mayor Zohran Mamdani's bloodlines are Indian, even if he opts to play up his African background. The Indian connection even extends to Vice President J D Vance's household — his wife Usha's parents migrated from Andhra Pradesh. The number of PIOs embedded in

Trump's PIO cohort seems to believe in the old Hindi proverb that the newest convert is keenest to prove his loyalty. Recently, Republican Senator Ted Cruz in a leaked telephone call named Vance as one of the key White House men resisting an Indo-American trade deal. Vance, a product of the MAGA movement, is vulnerable because of his Hindu spouse and he even admitted that he hoped to persuade her to convert. Significantly, Usha did not even meet her relatives or visit her parents' home state during the Vances' brief trip to India. Dhillon in the Justice Department is known for her tough line in prosecuting student demonstrators on campuses and cracking down on universities' hiring practices. Kash Patel has enforced Trump's agenda vigorously, with special attention to MAGA's pet projects. S Paul Kapur contributed in formulating tough immigration-related policies.

When Modi visited the USA for a Quad summit in 2024, Democrat candidate Harris's office could not find an available time slot for meeting the Indian Prime Minister. Mamdani during his mayoral campaign declared that Modi was unwelcome in the USA. He even claimed flippantly that he doubted that after



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SYLLABUS : GS Paper 3: Environment
Newspaper The Indian Express **Page Number : 09,10**

Background

Durgavati TR

- Sagar, Damoh, Narsinghpur districts of MP
- Areas in Nauradehi WS, Durgavati WS
- 7th TR in MP
- Rani Durgavati: Queen of Gondi people
- Rivers: Narmada and Yamuna basins
- Singorgarh Fort
- Vegetation: Dry deciduous
- Flora: Teak, Saja, Dhaora, Ber, Amla
- Fauna
 - Tiger, leopard, wolf, jackal, Indian fox, striped hyena, Nilgai, Chinkara, Chital, Sambhar, Black Buck, Barking deer, Rhesus Macaque
 - White-Rumped and Indian Vultures: CE raptors
- A green corridor linking Panna TR with Durgavati to be developed

Kuno NP

- MP
- Near Vindhyan Hills
- Kuno River - tributary of Chambal
- 'Action Plan for Introduction of Cheetah in India'
- Tropical dry deciduous forests
- Flora: >129 species of trees - Kardhai, Khair, Salai
- Fauna: cheetah, jungle cat, Indian leopard, sloth bear, Indian wolf, striped hyena, golden jackal, Bengal fox, dhole, >120 bird species

THE STANDING committee of the National Board for Wildlife (SC-NBWL) has recommended approval for the diversion of about 272 hectares of forest for the Kopra medium irrigation project in the core area of the Veerangana Durgavati Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh, which was notified in 2023 to compensate for the loss of over 100 sq km of tiger habitat due to the Ken Betwa river-linking project.

As part of the project, irrigation reservoirs will be constructed within Veerangana Durgavati Tiger Reserve, along Byarma River and Kopra River.

AASHA, A cheetah brought from Namibia under India's ambitious reintroduction programme, delivered five cubs at Kuno National Park on Friday, becoming a second-time mother and taking the country's total cheetah population to 35, officials said.



**SYLLABUS : GS Paper 2: Health
Newspaper The Hindu Page Number : 13**

AYUSH in budget

- 2026-27 budget: ₹4.4k cr
- 3 new All India Institutes of Ayurveda
 - Analogous to AIIMS for scientific medicine
 - 3 functions: treat patients, high-level research, teach
- Upgrade of WHO Global Traditional Medicine Centre in Jamnagar
 - Setting global standards for the practice and documentation of traditional medicine
- Budget for National AYUSH Mission up by 66%
 - modernize local AYUSH hospitals
 - AYUSH clinics inside existing modern hospitals
 - Upgrade existing centres to focus on preventive health
- Multilingual AI assistant named Bharat-VISTAAR
 - give farmers growing medicinal plants real-time advice
 - better quality herbs, current market prices, certifying crops for export

India-EU FTA wrt AYUSH

- Indian Ayurvedic doctors working in Europe
- Indian cos. legal guarantee to open wellness centers and Ayurvedic clinics
- Mutual recognition of safety certifications
- Formally recognises TKDL
- Prevent cos. from wrongly patenting

AYUSH resources

- Network of hospitals, research councils
- Govt support to integrate traditional medicine into healthcare
- Co-location primary policy
- All India Institute of Ayurveda in New Delhi
- National Institute of Homoeopathy in Kolkata
- 'AYURGYAN' scheme: education and capacity building
- 'Ayurswasth Yojana': traditional medicine to meet community health goals

Is AYUSH medicine scientific?

- IMA: lack rigorous, empirical evidence & based on ancient texts and observational history
- Allopathic drugs randomised controlled trials for safety and efficacy
- Heavy metals (Pb, Hg) in AYUSH products
- Health advisories in Australia, US, New Zealand
- "Mixopathy"
- IMA: "legalised quackery"
- AYUSH doctors prescribing allopathic medicines: irrational drug use, AB resistance



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**SYLLABUS : GS Paper 2: Health
Newspaper The Hindu Page Number : 13**

Decoding the News

India's mental health burden

- 1/3 of the world's suicides, depression, addiction cases
- Suicide leading cause of death among Indians aged 15-29
- Economic loss (2012-2030) at \$1.03 tn: WHO
- 70% to 92% not receive proper treatment
- Reasons for lack of treatment: awareness, stigma, shortage of professionals
- India: 0.75 psychiatrists per 1,00,000 people
- Specific allocations for mental health ~1% of the total health budget

Does India have enough hospitals?

- Govt integrated mental health services into Ayushman Bharat's HWCs
- >1.73 lakh sub-health centres & PHCs upgraded to Ayushman Arogya Mandirs
- Tele MANAS 24x7, free tele-mental health initiative

Where is the shortfall?

- Mental health allocation <2% of the total health budget
- Total health budget ~2% of national GDP
- Significant share of allocations to tertiary institutions
- Utilisation of funds
- Need community-based, early-intervention models

Way ahead

- Affordable access, continuity of care, timely treatment
- Focus on preventive care
- "whole-of-community" approach: integrating mental well-being into school curricula
- Strengthening workplace policies



SYLLABUS :GS Paper 3: Major Crops – Cropping Patterns in various parts of the country **Newspaper The Hindu Page Number :12**

Background

Restructured National Bamboo Mission

- Centrally Sponsored Scheme in 2018-19
- Assistance to both Govt & private sectors for cultivation of bamboo in non-forest land, bamboo treatment, establishment of markets, incubation centers, value added product development
- Funding: 60:40, NE & Hilly 90:10, UTs/Bamboo Technology Support Groups 100%
- **Objectives**
 - availability of quality planting materials
 - area expansion of cultivation
 - post-harvest management, primary treatment and seasoning, preservation technologies, market infrastructure, product development, skill development and reduce dependency on import
- Implementation through the state nodal department

there is export of bamboo and its materials such as full-length glass mirrors, cotton textiles and bamboo jewellery to the US, Denmark, and Nigeria. Globally, India ranks among the top three exporters of bamboo and its products (the others are China and Vietnam), with an income of several million dollars.



SPEAKING OF SCIENCE
D. Balasubramanian

Bamboo (called 'baans' in Hindi, and 'moongil' in Tamil) is an ancient plant that grows fast in wet soil in broad sunlight. It is well known to people in Asia and Latin America, where communities use bamboo plants for a variety of purposes. The food scientist and historian K.T. Achaya, in his book *A Historical Dictionary of Indian Food*, notes that Jain monks and forest exiles used bamboo stems and leaves for food, since ancient times in India.

Bamboo trees across the country are best planted and grown in tropical and humid conditions, with good sunlight exposure

and soil rich in organic matter. The States where bamboo trees flourish are Assam, Tripura, Mizoram, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. A recent paper titled 'From Forest to future: A sustainable perspective on bamboo's nexus with biodiversity, indigenous knowledge, ecological resilience, and current status in Northeast India', by Singh et al. in the journal *Trees, Forests and People*, reported that bamboo-based industries, using indigenous knowledge, can be strengthened scientifically and by policy interventions through setting up bamboo research centres to enhance local knowledge.

Bamboo finds new uses where sustainability is the goal, for example, in place of plastics for disposable cutlery. In Numaligarh in Assam, Prime Minister Na-

rendra Modi inaugurated a bio-refinery slated to produce 50,000 MT of ethanol from bamboo last year. Its website mentions many products made in India from bamboo, including clothing, baskets, mats, chairs, tables, shelves, roofing and flooring, musical instruments (flutes and drums), and incense sticks.

pointed out the nutritional benefits of including bamboo shoots, leaves, and seeds in diets. They reported that adding these bamboo materials could provide essential amino acids, vitamins A, B6, and E, and regulate blood sugar and lipid levels. These are good against diabetes and heart disease. The scientists also



Daily Quiz



Q1: Consider the following statements regarding Durgavati Tiger Reserve:

1. It is located in Sagar, Damoh and Narsinghpur districts of Madhya Pradesh.
2. It includes areas of Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary and Durgavati Wildlife Sanctuary.
3. It is the first Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: a

Q2: Consider the following statements regarding the Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) Scheme:

1. It was introduced in 2005 for persons of Indian origin.
2. OCI cardholders are entitled to voting rights in India.
3. It provides a multiple-entry, lifelong visa to visit India.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- a) 1 and 3 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 2 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: a

Q3: Consider the following statements regarding the proposed All India Institutes of Ayurveda:

1. They are analogous to AIIMS for modern scientific medicine.
2. They will be set up only in rural areas.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: a

Q4: Consider the following statements regarding mental health in India:

1. India accounts for nearly one-third of the world's suicides, depression, and addiction cases.
2. Suicide is the leading cause of death among Indians aged 15–29.
3. More than half of people with mental illness in India receive proper treatment.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- a) Only One
- b) Only Two
- c) All Three
- d) None

Answer: b

Q5 : Consider the following statements regarding the Restructured National Bamboo Mission:

1. It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme launched in 2018–19.
2. It supports bamboo cultivation only in forest areas.
3. It provides assistance to both government and private sectors.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- a) 1 and 3 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 2 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: a





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