



# Daily Current Affairs



## To The Point

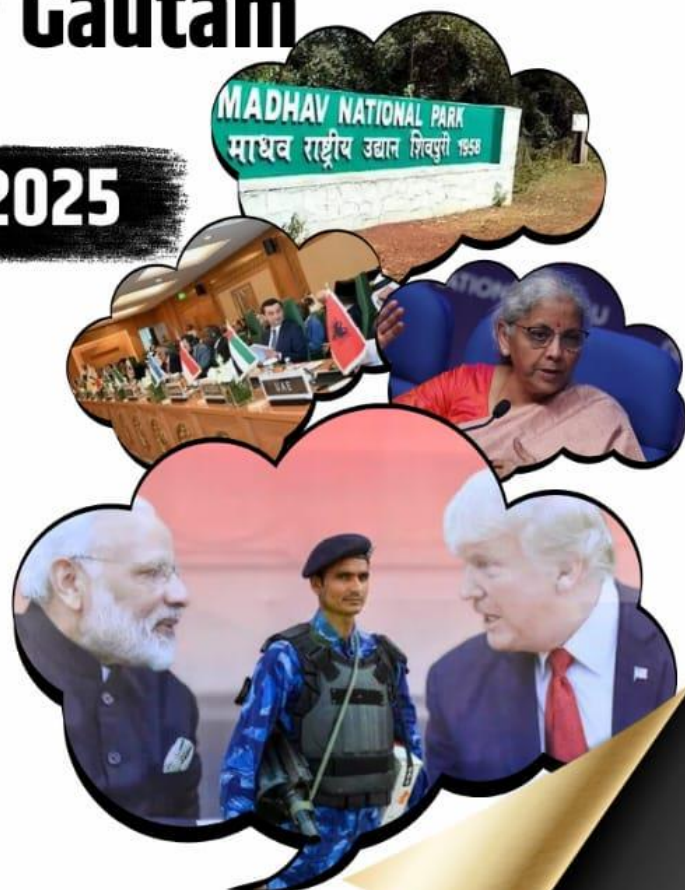
by Dhananjay Gautam

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## 1 India Expands U.S. Oil & LNG Imports, Strengthening Energy Partnership

**Context:** India is set to significantly **increase crude oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports** from the U.S., reinforcing energy cooperation between the two nations. This decision follows discussions between **Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Donald Trump**, aiming to strengthen energy security and expand trade relations.



According to a **Reuters report**, U.S. crude oil exports to India **reached 357,000 barrels per day (bpd) in February**, a sharp increase from **221,000 bpd last year**.

### India's Commitment to U.S. Energy Imports:

As the **world's third-largest oil consumer**, India is heavily dependent on imports, fulfilling **85% of its crude oil needs** through foreign sources. Expanding U.S. energy imports serves multiple objectives:

- **Enhancing Energy Security:** Reducing reliance on a single region for crude oil.
- **Boosting Bilateral Trade:** Contributing to the goal of **doubling U.S.-India trade to \$500 billion** in the next five years.
- **Diversifying Energy Supply:** Strengthening resilience against **price fluctuations and geopolitical risks**.

Currently, trade between the two nations favors India, with a **\$45.7 billion trade surplus in 2024**, marking a **5.4% increase from 2023**.

### Expanding U.S. Energy Supply to India:

India is actively working to establish the **United States as a key supplier of crude oil, petroleum products, and LNG**. The partnership also includes:

- **Increased hydrocarbon trade** covering crude oil, petroleum products, and ethane.
- **Growing investments** in oil and gas infrastructure.
- **Stronger collaboration** between energy companies from both countries.

Additionally, discussions have included **civil nuclear energy cooperation** and **U.S. support for India's full membership in the International Energy Agency (IEA)**.

### India's Soaring Oil & Gas Demand:

In the **2023-24 financial year**, India imported **234.26 million tonnes of crude oil**, with import dependence rising to **87.8%**. Meanwhile, domestic production remained stagnant at **29.36 million tonnes**, meeting less than **13% of total demand**.

- Despite stable import volumes, **India's crude oil import bill fell to \$133.37 billion**, down from **\$157.53 billion in 2022-23**, due to lower global oil prices.
- India spent **\$22.93 billion on petroleum imports**, including **LPG and fuel oil**.
- The country imported **31.80 billion cubic meters (bcm) of LNG**, an increase from **26.30 bcm in the previous fiscal year**.

### Strategic Push for Natural Gas & Clean Energy:

India aims to **increase natural gas consumption from 6% to 15% of its energy mix**, making LNG imports crucial for its energy transition. This aligns with **U.S. interests** in securing long-term LNG buyers, especially if **European demand shifts away from American gas in the future**.

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**India's Diversified Energy Strategy:**

While India is strengthening its energy ties with the U.S., it continues to **diversify its oil suppliers**, engaging with **Brazil, Argentina, Suriname, Canada, and Guyana**.

**Russia's Growing Role in India's Energy Market:**

Since the **Ukraine war**, India has significantly increased **Russian crude oil imports**, benefiting from **discounted prices** amid **G7-imposed sanctions**.

- **India purchased €49 billion worth of Russian crude in the third year of the conflict.**
- **Russian oil now accounts for 40% of India's total crude imports, compared to less than 1% before the war.**

Despite this shift, **India maintains a balanced approach**, ensuring energy security while exploring better pricing options.

**India's Rising LNG Demand & Supply Challenges:**

India's natural gas demand is projected to **reach 103 billion cubic meters (bcm) annually by 2030**. The demand has surged **over 10% annually in both 2023 and 2024**, signaling a new growth phase.

**Challenges & Key Growth Drivers:**

- **Domestic production met only 50% of gas demand in 2023**, though it's expected to **rise to 38 bcm by 2030**.
- **Three key factors** drive India's gas market transformation:
  1. **Rapid infrastructure expansion** in LNG terminals and pipelines.
  2. **Recovering domestic production**, reducing supply constraints.
  3. **Global LNG market stabilization**, improving affordability.

To stay competitive in a **price-sensitive energy market**, India is focusing on **long-term contracts, supply diversification, and strategic planning**.

**Conclusion: India's Path to Energy Security:**

India is **actively working to reduce its energy import dependency** through multiple strategies:

- **Expanding clean energy initiatives**, including **ethanol, compressed biogas, and biodiesel**.
- **Investing in electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure** to reduce reliance on fossil fuels.
- **Securing long-term LNG partnerships**, particularly with the U.S.

By balancing **global energy partnerships**, increasing **domestic production**, and **investing in alternative fuels**, India is shaping a **resilient and sustainable energy future**.



## 2 India Backs Mauritius' Sovereignty Over Chagos Archipelago Key Highlights

**Context:** During his visit to Mauritius, **Prime Minister Narendra Modi** will strengthen India's diplomatic, economic, and strategic ties with the island nation.

Ahead of the visit, **Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri** reiterated **India's full support for Mauritius' sovereignty** over the **Chagos Archipelago**. This aligns with India's **consistent stand on decolonization**, emphasizing the need for historical injustices to be corrected.



### Chagos Archipelago: A Historical Overview:

The **Chagos Archipelago** is a chain of over **60 islands** in the **Indian Ocean**, located about **500 km south of the Maldives**. It forms the southernmost part of the **Chagos-Laccadive Ridge**, an underwater mountain range.

### Colonial History of Chagos::

- **1715-1810:** Controlled by **France** as part of its Indian Ocean territories.
- **1814:** **France ceded the islands to the UK** under the **Treaty of Paris**.
- **1965:** **The UK separated Chagos from Mauritius**—three years before granting Mauritius independence—to form the **British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT)**.
- **1970s-Present:** **Diego Garcia**, the largest island, was leased to the **U.S. and UK** for a **joint military base**, which remains operational.

The **forced displacement of Chagos' native population** and continued British control have been long-standing points of contention.

### Negotiations Over Chagos Sovereignty:

Mauritius and the UK have been engaged in **prolonged negotiations** over the **sovereignty of Chagos**.

- The **UK and U.S. have reached a political agreement** to maintain **Diego Garcia** as a **strategic military base**, while returning the **remaining Chagos islands** to Mauritius.
- On **October 3, 2024**, the **UK announced** that a **treaty** was being drafted to formalize this arrangement.

India's **strong backing of Mauritius** in this dispute underscores its **support for international law and post-colonial justice**.

### India-Mauritius Relations: A Strong and Historic Bond:

India and Mauritius share **deep-rooted ties**, shaped by **history, culture, and economic cooperation**.

- **70% of Mauritius' population** is of **Indian origin**, making India a natural ally.
- **Mauritius was among the first countries with which India established diplomatic ties** in **1948**, even before Mauritius gained independence in **1968**.
- Both nations enjoy **robust cooperation in maritime security, trade, capacity building, and cultural exchanges**.

### Key Aspects of India-Mauritius Ties:

- **First Responder in Crises** – India has always supported Mauritius, including during the **COVID-19 pandemic** and **Wakashio oil spill disaster**.



- **Major FDI Partner** – Mauritius has invested **\$175 billion** into India since 2000, accounting for **25%** of India's total foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows.
- **Strategic Trade Agreement** – The **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA)**, signed in **2021**, was India's first trade deal with an African country.

### Significance of PM Modi's Visit to Mauritius:

PM Modi's visit to Mauritius in **March 2025** carries **major strategic importance**:

- Mauritius is a **key maritime partner** in the **Indian Ocean region**.
- **Indian Air Force contingents** and an **Indian Navy ship** will participate in the **National Day celebrations**.

Several **bilateral agreements** are expected to be signed, further boosting **trade, security, and development cooperation**.

- This marks **PM Modi's return to Mauritius after a decade**, following his last visit in **2015**.

### Conclusion: Strengthening India-Mauritius Ties & Supporting Decolonization

PM Modi's visit underscores India's **commitment to deepening strategic, economic, and diplomatic ties** with Mauritius.

The **Chagos dispute** is a **critical foreign policy issue**, reflecting India's **broader support for decolonization and regional stability**. By backing Mauritius' sovereignty over Chagos, India reinforces its role as a **trusted global partner** advocating for **historical justice and fair international governance**.

## 3 India's New Income Tax Bill: Digital Spaces Now Under Tax Radar

**Context:** The Indian government has introduced the **Income Tax Bill, 2025**, marking a major overhaul of the country's **60-year-old tax framework**.

This bill aims to **streamline tax provisions, eliminate outdated references, and introduce new regulations** to tackle **digital tax evasion**.



### What's New?

- A **key highlight** is the **explicit inclusion of virtual digital spaces** within the scope of **tax searches and seizures**. This means:
- **Tax officers can now access** digital assets, including **social media, emails, online investments, and crypto holdings**, during tax investigations.
- **Digital records will be treated like physical assets**, allowing tax authorities to track and seize undisclosed income.

Currently under review by the **Parliamentary Select Committee**, the bill is expected to come into force on **April 1, 2026**, once passed.

### Key Provisions of the Income Tax Bill, 2025:

The **new bill expands tax authorities' powers**, redefining assets subject to **search and seizure**.

#### Defining Virtual Digital Space:

The bill formally **defines virtual digital space**, covering **all online platforms where financial activities, transactions, and interactions take place**.

#### Power to Override Access Codes:

Tax authorities will be empowered to **bypass digital access codes** to enter:

- **Social media accounts**
- **Email servers**
- **Digital trading platforms**
- **Online wallets**

This will allow deeper scrutiny of **undisclosed digital transactions**.

#### Expansion of Search & Seizure Under Section 247:

While the **Income Tax Act, 1961 (Section 132)** already allows authorities to inspect **electronic records**, the new bill specifically **expands this to virtual digital spaces**.

#### Digital Documents as Taxable Assets:

**Computer systems, encrypted financial records, and digital documents** will now be treated as **taxable assets**, just like **money, real estate, and gold**.

#### Mandatory Cooperation from Account Holders:

Under **Section 132(1)(iib)**, individuals must **provide necessary credentials** for tax audits if asked by tax authorities.

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## Why Are These Changes Being Introduced?

### Cracking Down on Digital Tax Evasion:

- With the rise of **crypto assets**, **online wallets**, and **offshore transactions**, authorities have struggled to track **concealed income**.
- This bill **closes the loophole** by ensuring **digital assets** are scrutinized like **physical assets**.

### Modernizing India's Direct Tax Framework:

- The bill is designed to **simplify India's tax system** while making it more **effective** against **digital financial fraud**.

### Aligning with Global Tax Standards:

- Many developed countries already allow tax authorities to **inspect encrypted financial records**. This bill brings **India in line** with **global best practices**.

### Potential Concerns & Controversies:

- While the bill strengthens **tax enforcement**, it has sparked **debate over privacy and compliance burdens**.

### Privacy & Data Protection Risks:

- Critics argue that **giving tax officials access to personal digital data** could lead to **misuse of private information**.

### Increased Compliance Costs for Businesses:

- Companies may need to **enhance their digital record-keeping** and **prepare for stricter tax audits**, increasing **compliance expenses**.

### Impact of the New Bill: Who Will Be Affected?

#### For Individuals:

- **Digital transactions** will be closely monitored.
- People using **crypto platforms**, **offshore accounts**, or **social media trading** will face **greater scrutiny**.

#### For Businesses:

- Companies must **ensure digital compliance** in financial reporting.
- Legal and **record-keeping costs** may increase.

#### For Tax Authorities:

- The bill **strengthens enforcement powers**, making it easier to **track hidden digital assets**.
- Aligns **India's tax system** with the **digital economy**.

## Conclusion: A Step Forward or a Privacy Concern?

The **Income Tax Bill, 2025**, represents **one of the biggest modernizations** of India's **tax framework**.

While it aims to **prevent digital tax evasion** and **enhance tax transparency**, it also raises concerns over **privacy**, **compliance costs**, and **misuse of power**.

As the bill moves through Parliament, **finding a balance between tax enforcement and privacy rights** will be **key to ensuring fair and transparent implementation**.

## 4 North Korea Unveils Its First Nuclear-Powered Submarine: A Game-Changer in Military Strategy

**Context:** North Korea has officially revealed its **first-ever nuclear-powered submarine**, marking a **major leap in its naval capabilities**. State media released images of what it described as a “**nuclear-powered strategic guided missile submarine**”, showcasing Pyongyang’s growing military ambitions.



### Submarine Specifications: A Stealthy Threat:

Reports indicate that the new **submarine weighs between 6,000 to 7,000 tonnes** and is designed to carry around **10 missiles**. The mention of “**strategic guided missiles**” suggests that the vessel is **equipped for nuclear strikes**, posing a **direct security threat to the United States and South Korea**.

### North Korea’s Military Expansion: A Growing Arsenal:

This **submarine development is part of a broader military modernization plan** set forth by **Kim Jong-un in 2021**. North Korea is aggressively working on **advanced weaponry** to counter what it calls “**U.S.-led military threats**”.

### Other Key Weapons Under Development:

- **Solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs)** for faster, more unpredictable launches
- **Hypersonic missiles** capable of evading missile defenses
- **Spy satellites** for real-time intelligence gathering
- **Multi-warhead missiles** to overwhelm enemy defense systems

Despite being heavily **sanctioned and economically isolated**, North Korea’s ability to build a **nuclear-powered submarine** has raised **global concerns**.

### Possible Russian Assistance?

Experts speculate that North Korea may have received **technological support from Russia** in exchange for **military aid in the Ukraine war**. This raises **serious geopolitical concerns**, as it suggests a **strengthening military alliance** between Pyongyang and Moscow.

### Security Implications: A Silent and Deadly Threat:

One of the **biggest concerns** surrounding North Korea’s **nuclear submarine** is its ability to **launch missiles from underwater**.

### Why This Is a Major Security Threat:

- **Underwater missile launches are difficult to detect in advance**, making it harder for enemies to prepare defenses.
- **Increased risk of surprise nuclear attacks**, complicating security strategies for the **U.S. and South Korea**.
- **Greater mobility and stealth** allow North Korea to **strike from unpredictable locations**, giving it a **huge strategic advantage**.

### Conclusion: A New Era of Military Uncertainty

North Korea’s unveiling of a **nuclear-powered submarine** marks a **critical shift in global security dynamics**. As tensions escalate, **regional powers must adapt their defense strategies** to counter this **stealthy and unpredictable threat**.

The **global response to this military development** will be crucial in shaping the future **security landscape in the Indo-Pacific region**.



**5 Muslim Nations Reject Trump's Gaza Plan, Back Alternative Proposal**

**Context:** The **Organisation for Islamic Cooperation (OIC)** has officially endorsed an **Egyptian-led counterproposal** to U.S. President **Donald Trump's controversial Gaza plan**. This decision comes just days after the **Arab League** ratified the plan at a high-level summit in **Cairo**.

**The Egyptian Plan: A Path to Rebuilding Gaza:**

- The **Egyptian proposal** prioritizes the **reconstruction of Gaza** under the administration of the **Palestinian Authority (PA)**, ensuring Palestinian self-governance.
- Trump's plan, widely condemned, aimed to **relocate Palestinian residents to Egypt or Jordan** and transform Gaza into a **commercial and tourism hub**.
- The **OIC's endorsement** calls on the **global community** to support the economic and infrastructural revival of Gaza.
- However, the plan faces **strong opposition from the U.S. and Israel**, making its implementation a diplomatic challenge.

**The Organisation for Islamic Cooperation (OIC): A Collective Voice**

- The **OIC** is the **second-largest intergovernmental organization** after the **United Nations (UN)**, comprising **57 member states**.
- Established in **1969 in Rabat, Morocco**, the OIC works to **protect and promote the interests of the Muslim world** while fostering peace and international cooperation.
- **Headquarters:** Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.
- **India is not a member** of the OIC, though it has engaged with the organization on various occasions.

**The Arab League: Strengthening Regional Unity:**

- The **Arab League** was founded in **1945 in Cairo** to promote **independence, sovereignty, and cooperation** among **Arabic-speaking nations**.
- It began with **seven founding members**—**Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Syria**—and has since expanded to **22 member states** and **four observer nations**.
- Each country has **one vote** in the **Council of the Arab League**, with decisions **binding only for those nations that approve them**.

**Global Implications and the Road Ahead:**

The **OIC and Arab League's rejection** of Trump's **Gaza plan** signals a growing **regional pushback** against external interventions. The **Egyptian alternative**, though facing **political hurdles**, underscores a **unified effort to ensure Palestinian sovereignty** and **rebuild Gaza's infrastructure**. The coming months will be crucial in determining how the **international community** responds to this diplomatic shift.

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## India's 58th Tiger Reserve: Madhav National Park Boosts Conservation Efforts

**Context:** India has taken a significant step in **wildlife conservation** by declaring **Madhav National Park** in **Madhya Pradesh** as the **country's 58th Tiger Reserve** on **March 9, 2025**. This move highlights the government's ongoing commitment to protecting **India's tiger population**, which accounts for over **70% of the world's wild tigers**.



### Why Are Tiger Reserves Important?

A **Tiger Reserve** is a **protected area** designated under **Project Tiger** to ensure the **long-term survival** of tigers and their ecosystems. These reserves function under the **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)** and operate as per the **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972**.

### Key Features of a Tiger Reserve:

- **Core Zone:** A strictly protected area where **no human activities** are allowed.
- **Buffer Zone:** Surrounding areas where **limited human activities** are permitted under eco-sensitive regulations.
- **Strict Protection Measures:** Anti-poaching laws, deforestation control, and habitat preservation are enforced.
- **Scientific Monitoring:** Use of **AI, drones, and camera traps** to track **tiger populations, prey base, and habitat conditions**.

### How Does a National Park Gain Tiger Reserve Status?

The process of **designating a Tiger Reserve** involves careful scientific evaluation and government approval:

#### Step 1: Identification & Proposal

- A **state government** selects a national park or wildlife sanctuary with a **thriving tiger population**.
- A proposal is sent to the **NTCA** for evaluation.

#### Step 2: NTCA Assessment

- The **NTCA** evaluates the **tiger density, habitat quality, and threats** (such as poaching and human encroachments).
- Conservation measures and potential improvements are analyzed.

#### Step 3: Recommendation to the Central Government

- If approved, the proposal is sent to the **Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (MoEFCC)**.
- Experts review the proposal and consult with stakeholders.

#### Step 4: Official Declaration

- Once all approvals are granted, the **Central Government** issues an **official notification**.
- A **Tiger Conservation Plan** is implemented to ensure scientific management and protection.

### India's Expanding Tiger Reserves:

As of **2025**, India has **58 Tiger Reserves**, covering approximately **2.3% of the country's land area**.

### Notable Facts About India's Tiger Reserves:

- **State with the Most Reserves:** Madhya Pradesh (9 reserves)
- **Largest Tiger Reserve:** Nagarjunsagar-Srisailem (Andhra Pradesh & Telangana)

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- **Smallest Tiger Reserve:** Bor Tiger Reserve (Maharashtra)
- **Tiger Census 2022:** Estimated 3,167 tigers in India, indicating a **steady population growth** due to conservation efforts.

### Madhav National Park: India's 58th Tiger Reserve:

On **March 9, 2025**, Madhav National Park in Shivpuri district, Madhya Pradesh, officially became a **Tiger Reserve**.

### Key Highlights:

- **Tiger Population:** Five tigers, including **two newborn cubs**.
- **Repopulation Project:** Three tigers reintroduced in 2023 to restore their presence in the park.
- **Government Announcement:** Union Environment Minister **Bhupender Yadav** declared the **Tiger Reserve** status.
- **Significance:** This move strengthens **tiger conservation in Central India** and expands **protected tiger habitats**.

Madhav National Park, known for its **diverse wildlife**, is home to species like **leopards, chinkaras, and sambar deer**, contributing to a **thriving ecosystem**.

### Major Challenges in Tiger Conservation:

Despite **significant progress**, India's **tiger conservation efforts** face several challenges:

1. **Habitat Destruction:** Deforestation, urbanization, and infrastructure projects threaten tiger habitats.
2. **Poaching & Illegal Wildlife Trade:** Tiger body parts are still in demand in **black markets**, making poaching a persistent threat.
3. **Human-Tiger Conflicts:** As human settlements expand, **tiger encounters increase**, leading to conflicts.
4. **Climate Change:** Altered **rainfall patterns and rising temperatures** impact the availability of prey and water sources.
5. **Insufficient Funding & Resources:** Some reserves lack **adequate financial and technical support** for effective management.

### Future Strategies for Strengthening Tiger Conservation:

The **government and conservation bodies** are focusing on **innovative strategies** to secure the future of India's tigers:

- **Wildlife Corridors:** Creating **safe passageways** between tiger reserves to **prevent genetic isolation**.
- **AI & Drone Monitoring:** Using **artificial intelligence and drone surveillance** to track tigers and identify threats.
- **Stronger Anti-Poaching Laws:** Enforcing **stricter penalties and enhanced patrolling** to combat poaching.
- **Eco-Tourism & Community Involvement:** Encouraging **local communities** to participate in conservation through **sustainable tourism and employment opportunities**.

**Final Thoughts:** The declaration of Madhav National Park as India's 58th Tiger Reserve marks another **milestone in the nation's conservation journey**. With **scientific advancements, strict laws, and community participation**, India continues to be the **global leader in tiger conservation**. However, sustained **government commitment, international collaboration, and public awareness** will be crucial in ensuring the long-term survival of these majestic big cats.