



Daily Current Affairs



To The Point

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1 Eurasian Otter Spotted Again in Kashmir After Decades

Context: The **Eurasian Otter** (*Lutra lutra*), locally known as "**Vuder**" in Kashmir, has made a surprising return to the region after nearly **three decades** of absence. Once common in **Dachigam, Dal Lake tributaries, Rambiar stream, and the Lidder River in Pahalgam**, this elusive mammal had not been recorded in Kashmir for the past 25–30 years.



A Glimpse into the Eurasian Otter:

The **Eurasian Otter**, also known as the **Common Otter**, is a **semi-aquatic carnivorous mammal** that is native to **Eurasia**. It is a **keystone species**, meaning its presence is vital for maintaining the **health of river ecosystems**. Being highly sensitive to pollution, the otter's return is a **positive sign of improving water quality** and ecological health in Kashmir's freshwater bodies.

Key Features:

- **Taxonomy:** Belongs to the **genus Lutra, family Lutrinae, order Carnivora**.
- **Diet:** Primarily feeds on **fish, crustaceans, and amphibians**. It also eats **reptiles, birds, eggs, insects, and worms**.
- **Habitat:** Found in **clean freshwater ecosystems** like **rivers, lakes, streams, and wetlands**. Also occasionally inhabits **coastal regions**.
- **Behavior:** Generally **nocturnal, solitary**, and known to build **dens (holts)** near water. **Mothers** are sometimes spotted with their **cubs**.

Conservation Status:

- **IUCN Red List:** *Near Threatened*
- **Indian Wildlife Protection Act, 1972:** *Schedule II*
- **CITES:** *Appendix I* – indicating it is under the **highest protection** from international trade.

Otters in India:

India is home to three otter species:

1. **Eurasian Otter** (*Lutra lutra*) – **Himalayas, northeast India, Western Ghats**
2. **Smooth-coated Otter** (*Lutrogale perspicillata*) – **Widespread across India**
3. **Small-clawed Otter** (*Aonyx cinereus*) – **Himalayas and southern India**

The return of the **Eurasian Otter** to Kashmir reaffirms its historic distribution in the region and highlights the **urgent need for freshwater conservation**.

Additional Facts:

- Otters play a crucial role in **controlling fish populations**, preventing overpopulation of certain species.
- A group of otters is called a "**romp**", though they are usually seen alone.



- Otters communicate using **chirps, whistles, and growls**, especially during mating or while caring for cubs.
- The presence of otters is used worldwide as a **biological indicator of river health**.

The recent sighting offers hope for **conservationists** and brings renewed attention to **habitat protection efforts**. Ensuring **clean rivers**, preventing **pollution**, and minimizing **human disturbance** are critical steps toward sustaining this **rare and sensitive species** in Kashmir and beyond.



2 Oceans Are Losing Their Light: A New Environmental Crisis Emerges

Context: A new scientific study has raised serious concerns about a phenomenon now referred to as “**Ocean Darkening**” — the gradual loss of sunlight penetration into ocean waters. According to recent findings, **more than one-fifth of the world’s oceans** have significantly darkened over the past **20 years**, potentially threatening marine life and disrupting global climate patterns.



What Is Ocean Darkening?

Ocean Darkening refers to the **reduction in sunlight** reaching the ocean’s **photic zone** — the sunlit upper layer of the sea, typically extending up to **200 meters deep**. This zone is vital for **photosynthesis**, which fuels the growth of **phytoplankton**, the microscopic plants that form the **foundation of marine food chains**.

Around **90% of marine species** depend directly or indirectly on this zone for survival. It is also key in **absorbing carbon dioxide**, **regulating global climate**, and supporting major **fishing industries** around the world.

What’s Causing the Oceans to Darken?

The darkening is driven by **different factors** in coastal and open ocean areas:

- In **coastal regions**, the primary cause is **runoff from agriculture**, which includes **nutrients**, **organic matter**, and **sediments**. These substances flow into the sea during **rainfall**, promoting **harmful algal blooms** that block sunlight from entering deeper layers.
- In the **open ocean**, the drivers are more complex, including:
 - **Rising sea surface temperatures**
 - **Shifts in plankton populations**
 - **Changes in ocean circulation patterns**

These changes reduce the transparency of the water, effectively **shrinking the sunlit layer** over time.

Why It Matters: The Impact of Ocean Darkening:

The **contraction of the photic zone** could lead to **widespread changes** in ocean ecosystems:

- Species that rely on **light cues** for feeding, migration, hiding, or reproduction may be forced into **shallower, overcrowded layers**.
- This shift could trigger **increased competition** and **stress** across the food chain, from **microscopic plankton** to **large marine mammals**.
- Disruptions to **marine biodiversity**, **carbon cycling**, and **global fisheries** may intensify if the trend continues.

Many marine creatures also navigate and coordinate behaviors based on **sunlight and moonlight cues** — and losing this natural guidance could impact **reproduction patterns**, **predator-prey relationships**, and overall **ecosystem stability**.

**Additional Insights: A Global Signal of Climate Change**

Scientists are beginning to link ocean darkening with the broader effects of **climate change** and **ocean warming**. As sea surface temperatures rise, **stratification** increases — meaning layers of ocean water mix less, reducing oxygenation and light penetration even further.

Moreover, **reduced light penetration** may impair the ocean's ability to **sequester carbon dioxide** — a process largely driven by **photosynthetic plankton**, which could slow down the planet's natural climate regulation capacity.

Looking Ahead:

The phenomenon of **ocean darkening** may become a key indicator in **monitoring ocean health**, alongside metrics like **coral bleaching** and **acidification**.

Protecting coastal ecosystems, reducing runoff pollution, and addressing climate change at its roots are critical steps toward halting this trend. This darkening not only threatens marine biodiversity but also strikes at the heart of **global food security** and **climate balance**.



3

BCAS Cancels Turkish Firm's License Over Security Concerns

Context: The Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS), functioning under the Ministry of Civil Aviation, has recently revoked the license of Celebi Aviation, a Turkish ground-handling firm operating at several major Indian airports.

The decision, rooted in “national security concerns,” comes after Turkey’s open support for Pakistan following India’s Operation Sindoor, which was launched in retaliation to the Pahalgam terror attack.



This move highlights India’s firm stance on aerospace security, particularly in the backdrop of evolving geo-strategic dynamics.

Legal Framework Governing Aviation Licensing:

The action is backed by provisions in India’s aviation security regulations:

- **Aircraft Rules, 1937** (under the Bharatiya Vayuyan Adhiniyam, 2024): Specifically, **Rule 92** mandates that ground-handling agencies must obtain **government clearance** to operate in India.
- **Aircraft Security Rules, 2022** (Rules 11 and 12): These empower the **Director General of BCAS** to **suspend or cancel licenses** based on **non-compliance or national security threats**.

What Is the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS)?

The BCAS serves as India’s apex regulatory authority for civil aviation security. Headquartered in New Delhi, it is led by an officer of the rank of **Director General of Police (DGP)**.

- **Origin:** Established as a cell within DGCA in **January 1978** following recommendations from the **Pande Committee**, it was upgraded to an **independent department** under the **Ministry of Civil Aviation** in **1987**.
- **Functions:**
 - Lays down aviation security standards in line with **Annex 17 of the Chicago Convention**.
 - Oversees **implementation, inspection, and training programs**.
 - Conducts **surprise checks, mock drills, and security audits** across Indian airports.
- **DGCA vs. BCAS:**
 - While **BCAS handles security**, the **Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA)** regulates **air transport services, safety, and airworthiness standards** within India.

International Context: ICAO & the Chicago Convention

The **International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)** is a **UN specialized agency**, founded in **1944** through the **Chicago Convention**. India is one of its **193 member states**.

- **ICAO’s Role:**
 - Sets global standards for **safe, secure, efficient, and environment-friendly** air transport.
 - Provides frameworks for **airspace sovereignty, aircraft registration, tax exemptions on aviation fuel, and air safety protocols**.
 - Grants **Nine Freedoms of the Air** to facilitate international air traffic.
- **Headquarters:** Montreal, Canada.



India's Key Initiatives in the Aviation Sector:

India has launched several ambitious initiatives to expand and modernize its aviation ecosystem:

- **National Civil Aviation Policy, 2016:** Focuses on affordability, connectivity, and private sector involvement.
- **UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik):** Promotes **regional connectivity** by making **air travel accessible** to tier-2 and tier-3 cities.
- **FDI Reforms:** Allows **100% Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)** in sectors like **air transport services** and **Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO)** facilities.
- **Infrastructure Upgrades:**
 - **Digi Yatra:** Enables **paperless travel** and enhances **passenger convenience**.
 - **NABH Nirman:** Aims to expand airport capacity in line with growing demand.
- **Green Aviation Goals:**
 - Airports like **Delhi and Mumbai** have achieved **Level 4+ Carbon Accreditation**.
 - **73 airports** run entirely on **green energy**.
 - All new **greenfield airports** are being designed with **net-zero emission targets**.

The State of India's Aviation Industry:

India today is among the **top three domestic aviation markets globally**, trailing only the **United States and China**. It accounts for **69% of South Asia's air traffic**, and is expected to become the **third-largest air passenger market by 2030**.

- **As of FY25 (up to Sept 2024):**
 - **Total passenger traffic:** 196.91 million
 - **Direct employment:** Over 369,000 people
 - **Total economic contribution:**
 - **USD 5.6 billion** (direct)
 - **USD 53.6 billion** including tourism and linked industries
 - **Nearly 1.5% of India's GDP**
- **Airport Growth:**
 - In 2014, India had **74 operational airports**.
 - By 2024, this number rose to **157**, with a target of **350–400 airports by 2047**.

Final Thoughts:

The cancellation of Celebi Aviation's license underscores India's **strong national security posture** in the **aviation sector**. As the country ascends as a **global aviation powerhouse**, balancing **growth, safety, and sovereignty** remains critical.

India's aviation journey is not just about **connecting cities**, but also about **defending borders, empowering citizens, and leading sustainable innovation** in the skies.

4

India-Cyprus Relations in Spotlight as PM Makes Historic Visit

Context: The **Prime Minister of India** has embarked on a **five-day tour** of three nations, beginning with a **landmark visit to Cyprus**. This is the **first visit by an Indian Prime Minister** to the Mediterranean island nation in over **two decades**, underlining the growing strategic and diplomatic significance of **India-Cyprus relations**.

Where is Cyprus?

Cyprus is a **Eurasian island nation** located in the **northeastern Mediterranean Sea**, just south of **modern-day Turkey** (the Anatolian Peninsula). Though it lies **geographically in Western Asia**, Cyprus is **politically aligned with Europe**, and has been a **member of the European Union** since **May 1, 2004**.



- **Capital:** Nicosia
- **Major Cities:** Limassol, Larnaca, Famagusta, and Paphos
- **Total Area:** 9,251 sq. km (making it the **third-largest island in the Mediterranean**, after Sicily and Sardinia)
- **Climate:** Mediterranean – featuring **dry summers** and **wet winters**
- **Highest Peak:** Mount Olympus (1,952 meters above sea level)

Cyprus is uniquely situated at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa—lying **southeast of Greece**, **south of Turkey**, **west of Syria and Lebanon**, and **north of Egypt and Israel**.

A Divided Island: The Cyprus Conflict

Cyprus has experienced a complex political history marked by **division since 1974**, when **Turkey invaded the northern part of the island** following a **military coup** backed by **Greece**.

- The island remains **partitioned** into:
 - The **northern third**, administered by the **Turkish Cypriots**, known as the **Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus** (recognized only by Turkey)
 - The **southern two-thirds**, governed by the **internationally recognized Republic of Cyprus**, primarily led by **Greek Cypriots**
- The **United Nations** continues to patrol a **buffer zone** known as the **Green Line**, which separates the two communities.
- **Reunification talks** have been ongoing for decades, though progress has been slow due to deep-rooted political and ethnic divisions.

Political System and Languages:

Cyprus operates as a **presidential republic**, where the **President serves as both head of state and government**. The **official languages** are **Greek and Turkish**, reflecting the ethnic composition of the island.

The country's culture is deeply influenced by **Hellenic and Middle Eastern traditions**, and is distinctly split between the **northern Turkish-Cypriot region** and the **southern Greek-Cypriot area**.

A Modern and Developed Nation:

- Cyprus is a developed country with a **high Human Development Index (HDI)**.



- The nation has become a hub for **international business, shipping, and tourism**, especially among European travelers.
- It uses the **euro (EUR)** as its official currency.

India and Cyprus: Strengthening Ties

Cyprus and India have long maintained **warm bilateral relations**, especially in areas like:

- **Trade and Investment:** Cyprus is a significant **source of foreign direct investment (FDI)** in India.
- **Education and Diaspora:** A number of Indian students study in Cypriot universities, and a growing Indian community resides in the country.
- **Multilateral Cooperation:** Both nations share views on international issues such as **sovereignty, peacekeeping, and climate change**, and cooperate at forums like the **United Nations**.

The recent visit is expected to enhance collaboration in **defence, maritime security, tourism, culture, and renewable energy**.

Did You Know?

- **Cyprus is one of the few countries in the world where you can ski in the morning and swim in the afternoon**, thanks to the **Troodos Mountains** and **coastal proximity**.
- The city of **Nicosia** is the **only divided capital city in Europe**, split between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot zones.
- Cyprus is also famous for being the **mythical birthplace of Aphrodite**, the Greek goddess of love and beauty.

Conclusion:

The Prime Minister's visit to Cyprus is more than symbolic — it reaffirms **India's commitment to building strong, diversified international partnerships**. As **geopolitical dynamics evolve**, engaging with strategically located nations like Cyprus will be vital for **India's global outreach**, especially in the **Mediterranean and EU regions**.

5

Iran-Israel Conflict 2025: Escalation of Tensions Threatens Regional and Global Stability

Context: In a major escalation, Israel launched "Operation Rising Lion", targeting Iran's nuclear and military infrastructure, including the Natanz uranium enrichment facility, research centers in Tehran, military bases in Tabriz, and a missile storage site in Kermanshah. These strikes were aimed at halting Iran's perceived march toward developing nuclear weapons.



Iran retaliated with "Operation True Promise 3", unleashing ballistic missile attacks that rocked Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, marking one of the most direct confrontations between the two nations in recent years.

What are the Key Reasons Behind the Iran-Israel Conflict?

- **Historical Hostility:** Relations between Iran and Israel have been hostile since the 1979 Iranian Revolution, when Iran shifted from being a close ally of Israel under the Shah to an Islamic Republic vehemently opposed to its existence.
- **Religious and Ideological Clash:** Iran, a Shia Islamic theocracy, and Israel, a Jewish democratic state, are ideologically polar opposites. This divide has fed deep-rooted animosity and mistrust for decades.

Iran's Support for Anti-Israel Proxies:

- Iran provides financial and military support to groups like Hamas and Hezbollah, both designated as terrorist organizations by Israel. These proxy groups are active in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq, and are considered by Israel to be extensions of Iranian aggression.

Regional Power Struggle:

- Iran and Israel vie for regional supremacy. While Iran backs the Assad regime in Syria and Houthi rebels in Yemen, Israel seeks to curb Iran's expanding influence, especially near its borders.

Nuclear Tensions:

- Israel sees Iran's nuclear programme as an existential threat. It has consistently opposed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and conducted cyber, covert, and overt operations to derail Iran's nuclear ambitions.

What Does This Conflict Mean for India?

- **Threat to Energy Security:** India imports nearly 2 million barrels of oil daily, much of it passing through the volatile Strait of Hormuz. A full-scale conflict could disrupt supplies, trigger oil price shocks, and cause domestic inflation and fiscal stress.

Indian Diaspora at Risk:

- Over 66% of India's 1.34 crore NRIs live in West Asia, especially the Persian Gulf. Any escalation poses serious safety risks to Indians abroad, potentially requiring emergency evacuation operations, as seen during the Gulf War (1991), Libya (2011), and Ukraine (2022).

Impact on Connectivity Projects:

- India's strategic infrastructure like the Chabahar Port in Iran, a vital link to Afghanistan and Central Asia, could be affected. Similarly, the ambitious India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) may face delays due to instability.



Disruptions in the Red Sea and Arabian Sea shipping lanes would raise **transport costs**, affect **global trade routes**, and hinder **India's trade goals**.

Diplomatic Tightrope for India:

India enjoys strong ties with both **Israel (defence and tech)** and **Iran (energy and connectivity)**. As tensions intensify, India must navigate a **delicate diplomatic balance**, resisting pressure to pick sides while advocating for **peace and de-escalation**.

What Steps Can Be Taken to De-escalate the Conflict?

Promote the Two-State Solution:

- A **peaceful resolution in Gaza**, in line with **UN resolutions**, remains critical. A **two-state solution**—ensuring **sovereignty for Palestine** alongside **security for Israel**—can serve as a long-term stabilizer for West Asia.

Encourage Dialogue and Diplomacy:

- Facilitated talks between Iran and Israel—mediated by **neutral actors like the UN or EU**—could build trust. Even **indirect backchannel diplomacy** may help prevent further escalation.

Address Nuclear Proliferation:

- Iran should **rejoin the JCPOA**, allowing **international inspectors** to monitor its nuclear activities. In return, Israel may offer **security guarantees** and recognize Iran's right to **peaceful nuclear energy**.

Strengthen Regional Engagement:

- Creating **regional dialogue platforms**—even informal ones—that involve both Iran and Israel, potentially with **GCC or Arab League** involvement, could lay groundwork for **mutual cooperation** on non-political issues like climate and disaster management.

Steps Toward Normalisation:

- Following the model of **Abraham Accords**, even symbolic steps like **cultural exchanges**, **track-2 diplomacy**, or **humanitarian collaborations** could foster future normalization between Iran and Israel.

Conclusion:

The **2025 Iran-Israel military flare-up** underscores the **fragility of West Asian geopolitics**. The conflict is rooted in decades of **ideological, historical, and strategic rivalry**, but its ripple effects are felt worldwide—especially in countries like **India** that are intricately linked to the region through **energy, diaspora, trade, and diplomacy**.

Moving forward, the global community must push for **dialogue, demilitarization**, and a renewed **commitment to peaceful coexistence**, as any further escalation could have catastrophic global consequences.

6

Centre Caps MGNREGS Spending: Fiscal Discipline or Legal Overreach

Context: In a move that marks a significant policy shift, the **Union Finance Ministry** has imposed a **spending cap** on the **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)** for the first time. Under this directive, **only 60% of the total allocated budget** for FY 2025–26 can be utilized in the first six months. This brings MGNREGS under the ambit of the **Monthly/Quarterly Expenditure Plan (MEP/QEP)**, a financial monitoring mechanism introduced in 2017.



Why the Spending Cap? The Finance Ministry's Rationale

The Finance Ministry cites multiple **financial and administrative concerns** behind this decision:

- **Chronic Budget Overruns:** Historically, **over 70% of MGNREGS funds are exhausted by September**, necessitating **supplementary budget allocations** by December, which are often depleted within a month.
- **Mounting Pending Dues:** For the past five years, year-end **pending wage dues** have consistently ranged between **15,000 crore to 25,000 crore**. On average, **20% of the subsequent year's budget** is used just to clear previous backlogs.
- **Cash Flow Regulation:** The government aims to **prevent premature exhaustion of funds** and streamline cash flows through **MEP/QEP compliance**, thereby **avoiding mid-year fiscal disruptions**.

Current Financial Snapshot (As of June 2025)

- **Total MGNREGS Budget:** 86,000 crore
- **Funds Released So Far:** 28%
- **Pending Dues from FY 2024–25:** 19,200 crore
- **Pending Dues in FY 2025–26 (till June 12):** 3,262 crore

Together, these arrears could consume **nearly 50% of the FY 2025–26 budget**, leaving limited space for new demand.

Key Concerns: Demand Suppression and Legal Violation

Despite its financial justifications, the cap has **raised alarm among legal experts, economists, and civil society**, who see it as **an erosion of statutory rights**.

1. Ignoring Seasonal and Climate-Driven Work Demand:

MGNREGS demand is **not linear**; it **fluctuates with agricultural seasons and weather patterns**:

- Rural labour demand **peaks in April–June** and again **post-Kharif in September**.
- Unforeseen events like **droughts or delayed monsoons** lead to **sharp spikes in work demand**.

For instance, in **2023**, delayed rains caused a **20% surge in job demand in July–August**. **Karnataka exhausted over 70% of its allocation** in the first half due to a **severe drought**. A rigid 60% cap **fails to**

accommodate such contingencies, undermining MGNREGS as a **rural safety net**.

2. MGNREGS Is a Legal Entitlement, Not a Discretionary Scheme: Unlike welfare schemes such as **PM-KISAN**, MGNREGS is **backed by law** — the **MGNREG Act, 2005**, which **guarantees 100 days of wage employment** to any rural household on demand.

- **Section 3** of the Act mandates **work within 15 days of application**.
- **Schedule II, Para 29** guarantees **wage payment within 15 days** after completion of work.

A cap on expenditure **constrains the government's ability to meet these legal obligations**, making it a **violation of statutory rights** rather than a mere policy decision.

Legal and Constitutional Dimensions:

The judiciary has repeatedly emphasized that **budgetary constraints cannot override legal and constitutional commitments**:

- **Swaraj Abhiyan v. Union of India (2016)**: The Supreme Court affirmed that **MGNREGS obligations must be met regardless of fund shortfalls**.
- **Municipal Council, Ratlam v. Vardhichand (1980)**: Public duties under law **cannot be evaded on financial grounds**.
- **Paschim Banga Khet Mazdoor Samity v. State of W.B. (1996)**: The **right to livelihood and minimum welfare** must be protected by the state, even in adverse economic conditions.

By capping funds, the Centre **risks judicial scrutiny** and possible litigation for undermining **legally guaranteed employment**.

Unresolved Questions and Systemic Risks:

The Finance Ministry has **not clarified** what happens when the 60% cap is breached before September:

- Will **states deny work** even if demand exists?
- Or will **workers continue working without timely wages**, further worsening the issue of **payment delays**?

Both scenarios could lead to **non-compliance** with MGNREG Act provisions and deepen **worker exploitation**.

Moreover, **existing systemic failures** such as:

- **Delayed wage payments**
- **Non-payment of unemployment allowance**
- **Inadequate compensation for delays**

...are already flagged by the **Supreme Court and CAG reports**. This cap may exacerbate these issues instead of resolving them.

The Bigger Picture: Undermining the Spirit of MGNREGS:

While fiscal prudence is essential, the **primary objective of MGNREGS is social protection**, not budget management. The scheme is designed as a **counter-cyclical instrument** to shield rural households from economic shocks and climate disruptions.

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Restricting funds through arbitrary caps **dilutes its core mandate**, potentially turning a **rights-based programme** into a **rationed welfare handout**.

Additional Insight: International Comparisons

Globally, **public employment programmes** like MGNREGS are seen as **automatic stabilizers** during economic downturns. The **World Bank** has praised MGNREGS for its ability to **reduce poverty and boost rural incomes** during crises such as the 2008 financial crash and the 2020 pandemic.

In contrast, **India's move to cap demand-based welfare** stands out as **regressive** compared to international best practices.

Conclusion: Balancing Fiscal Discipline and Legal Responsibility

The government's intent to manage public funds wisely is valid. However, it must be **carefully balanced against legal obligations and social responsibilities**. **Rights cannot be capped by budget lines**.

In a time of rising rural distress, **MGNREGS should be strengthened, not restricted**. The spending cap may offer short-term fiscal relief, but it risks **long-term legal and social costs** that the country cannot afford.

