

Great Power Rivalry Threatens 'ASEAN Centrality' in the Indo-Pacific

The ongoing **power rivalry and tariff wars** in the **Indo-Pacific region** threaten to divide the region into **different blocs** and **increase polarization**.

What is 'ASEAN Centrality'?

- It rests on the assumption that the **ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations)** should be the driver behind "the evolving regional architecture of the Indo-Pacific".
- It emerged in the backdrop of **collapse of the Soviet Union** when regional countries experienced immense uncertainty surrounding the US' reduced military presence in the region, the possible remilitarisation of Japan, China's rise, and other security issues.
- It has also been emphasized in **India's vision for free, open, and resilient Indo-Pacific** as enunciated by India's Prime Minister at **Shangri La Dialogue (2018)**.

Threats to 'ASEAN Centrality'

- US-China Cold War:** Threatens to splinter ASEAN due to members' varied relationships with Beijing and Washington, and making cooperation on ASEAN-based platforms difficult.
- Weakened International Architecture:** US-China Cold War has **undermined cooperative, ASEAN-centred formats** such as the **East Asia Summit (EAS)** and the **ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)**.
- US Tariffs:** Tariffs are **destabilizing the international trading system** that ASEAN relies upon, generating tensions and leading to disunity among ASEAN members on trade responses.

Approaches to Shore up ASEAN Centrality

- Strengthen ASEAN Internally:** Greater consolidation, improved crisis response mechanisms, more avenues for non-consensual decision making and a greater willingness to address contentious security issues.
- Cooperation with Like-Minded Partners:** Engage with partners like the **European Union (EU)**, **Australia**, etc., who aim to avoid entanglement in the US-China rivalry.
- Engage India:** India is a natural partner, sharing ASEAN's interest in **enhancing regional trade**, increasing **economic diversification**, and promoting **regional stability**.
- Revise Existing Agreements:** To consider upgrading **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)** and encouraging more members to join **Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)**.

Two Landmark Maritime Bills Pertaining to Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways Passed

While Lok Sabha cleared the '**Merchant Shipping Bill, 2025**', Rajya Sabha passed the '**Carriage of Goods by Sea Bill, 2025**'.

- Former seeks to align India's maritime laws with international conventions like **MARPOL** and **Wreck Removal Convention**, the latter **promotes ease of doing business**.

Key Highlights of the Bills

- Merchant Shipping Bill, 2025** (Replacing Merchant Shipping Act, 1958)
 - Mandatory Registration for all Vessels:** Regardless of type of **propulsion or weight**.
 - Introduces **temporary registration** of vessels **for recycling**.
 - Expands Definition of Vessels:** To include types like **mobile offshore drilling units**, **submersibles**, and **non-displacement crafts**.
 - Ownership Criteria:** Relaxed to include vessels **partly owned** by Indian Citizens, company/body established as per Indian laws, registered cooperative societies, Overseas Citizens of India (OCIs), etc.
 - National Shipping Board and National Welfare Board for Seafarers:** Retains provisions on these from the Act.
 - Renames Director-General of Shipping to Director-General of Marine Administration:** Empowered to regulate maritime education and training.
 - Expands Seafarer Agreements:** To include more parties, ensures **social security access** for seafarers.
 - Preventing Pollution at Sea:** Mandates Pollution certificate **for all vessels** irrespective of tonnage.
- Carriage of Goods by Sea Bill, 2025** (Replacing Indian Carriage of Goods by Sea Act, 1925)
 - Adopts the Hague-Visby Rules (1924):** Along with its subsequent amendments a globally accepted **maritime standard**.
 - Role of Central Government:** To issue directions and amend rules related to **Bills of Lading**.
 - It is a document issued by a freight carrier to a shipper containing details **like type, quantity, condition, and destination** of goods carried.

Japan's Hiroshima marks 80 years since US Atomic Bombing

On **August 6 and 9, 1945**, atomic bombs '**Little Boy**' and '**Fat Man**' struck Hiroshima and Nagasaki respectively, causing massive destruction and long-term radiation effects.

Geopolitical Impacts Post Hiroshima

- **End of World War II:** The war ended with Japan's signing of the instrument of surrender on **September 02, 1945**.
- **Nuclear Arms Race:** Soviet Union's first nuclear test in 1949 marked the beginning of the nuclear arms race which would later define the **Cold War**.
- **Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) doctrine:** A deterrence principle where a nuclear attack guarantees devastating retaliation, ensuring total destruction for both sides.
- **Civil Nuclear Cooperation: International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)** was established in 1957 for international cooperation on civilian nuclear research.
- **Disarmament Efforts: Conference on Disarmament** was established as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the international community.

Global Nuclear Weapons Treaties and Initiatives Post Hiroshima

- **Partial Test Ban Treaty (1963):** Bans nuclear tests in the atmosphere, in outer space, and under water.
- **Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) (1970):** To prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, etc.
- **Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (1996):** Bans all nuclear test explosions, whether for military or civilian purposes.
- **United Nations Office of Disarmament Affairs:** It aims for general and complete disarmament globally.
- **Others:** Pact for the Future, Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, etc.

World Meteorological Organization Certifies Mega Flash Lightning Record

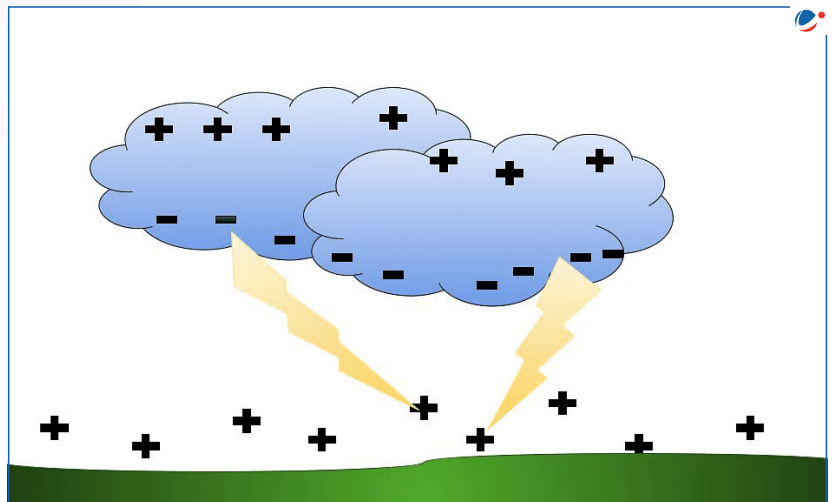
Longest single Lightning flash of **829 km** in **USA (2017)** extending eastern Texas to near Kansas City **sets new record**.

About Lightning

- **Occurrence:** It is a giant spark of electricity that occurs when **opposite charges** build up becomes very large **between the clouds** or **between cloud and ground**.
 - ⊕ This built up of charge **breaks the insulating property of air** causing lightning.
- **Impact:** Lightning causes **Thunder** as it rapidly heats the air around it, causing its expansion producing a loud sound.
 - ⊕ Storm accompanied by lightning and thunder is **thunderstorm**.
- **Causes: Warming** (1 degree rise in temperature, causes rise in lightning from 7% to 18% in India), **Pollution** (rise in aerosol levels), **Urbanisation**, etc.
- **Trends in India: 57% rise** in incidents from 2019- 2024 (India Meteorological Department (IMD) and Climate Resilient Observation- Systems Promotion Council (CROPC)).
- **Key Hazards: Electric fires/explosions** (breakdown of insulation and short circuits) in buildings, **Bursting of trees** due to moisture evaporation, **Loss of lives**, etc.

Measures taken by India

- **NDMA (National Disaster Management Authority)**
 - ⊕ **Two Pronged Approach: Scientific solutions and implementation** among community and **Climate action** to reduce the occurrence.
 - ⊕ **Guidelines for preparation of Action Plan on Prevention and Management against Lightning and Thunderstorms (2019)**.
 - ⊕ **Others: Protocol for Dissemination of Lightning Early Warning**, Mobile application **SACHET**, etc.
- **IMD:** Issues lightning forecasts in **three modes: Lightning outlook** from 5 days to 24 hours, **Nowcast**, **Damini Mobile app**.
- **Others:** **Three Lightning detection networks**, **Network of Doppler Weather Radars (DWRs)**, etc.



RBI tightens Co-lending Norms to Improve Risk Sharing and Transparency

Recently, RBI issued revised **directions for Co-lending Arrangements (CLA)** between banks and Non-bank Financial Companies (NBFCs) under various provisions of the **Banking Regulation Act (1949)**, **Reserve Bank of India Act (1934)**, and **National Housing Bank Act (1987)**.

What is Co-lending?

- Under CLAs, **Regulated Entities (REs)** can enter into a **lending arrangement with other REs** for extension of credit to the borrowers, **subject to compliance with the extant prudential regulations**.

Key highlights of the Revised Directions

- Minimum share:** Each RE to retain a **minimum 10% share of the loans**.
- Priority Sector Lending (PSL) status:** Each lender can claim **PSL status** for its share under co-lending, if the loan qualifies as priority sector.
- Uniform asset classification system:** If one lender tags a loan as **Non-performing Asset (NPA)**, other co-lenders must do the same.
- Blended interest rate:** Interest rate charged to borrowers will be calculated based on the weighted average of each RE's internal rate, proportionate to their funding contribution.

Significance of Co-lending

- For banks:** **Increased penetration** in the remote regions due to NBFC's last mile connectivity, enhanced compliance with PSL targets, etc.
- For NBFCs:** Shared credit risk, enhanced access to cheaper capital, etc.
- For Consumers:** Access to cheaper credit due to competitive interest rates, better customization as NBFCs often offer flexible loan structures suited to local market realities, etc.

Also in News



Refugee Camps in Sudan

UN highlighted grim picture of world's worst humanitarian crisis in the refugee camps in Sudan.

Refugee Camps in Sudan

- Zamzam camp:** Located south of **El Fasher town**, the state capital of North Darfur, Sudan.
- Abu Shouk Camp ("Naivasha Camp"):** Situated north-west of El Fasher town.



Employee Stock Option Plan (ESOP)

It is a **benefit scheme** where companies offer employees the **option (not obligation)** to buy shares at a **predetermined price** after a **specific period**.

- Employees must stay in the company for that **specified period** to exercise the option and once purchased, they **can sell the shares** in the open market.
- Purpose:** Reward employees, improve motivation and retention, promote ownership culture, etc.
- Regulation**
 - SEBI (Share Based Employee Benefits and Sweat Equity) Regulations, 2021 for listed companies.
 - Companies Act, 2013 for unlisted companies.
 - Income Tax Act, 1961.



Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)

MPC of **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** in its August 2025 meeting kept the **repo rate unchanged** at 5.5%, maintaining a **neutral stance**.

About MPC

- Constitution:** Section 452B of the **RBI Act, 1934** (amended in 2016).
- Objective:** Determine the **policy repo rate** to achieve the **inflation target**.
- Six members:** **Three** from RBI and **three** appointed by the **Central Government**.
 - Quorum is **4** members.
- Chairperson:** RBI Governor (ex officio).
- Meetings:** **At least 4 times a year**.
- Voting:** Each member has **one vote**, Governor has a **casting vote** (in case of equality of votes).



Open Weight Reasoning Models

Open AI released **two open-weight language models** that excel in advanced reasoning and are optimised to run on laptops.

About Open Weight Reasoning Models

- Meaning:** Refers to releasing only the **pretrained parameters or weights** of the neural network model allowing users to use the **model for inference and fine-tuning**.
 - Unlike the **Open source models**, the training code, original dataset, model architecture details, and training methodology is **not provided**.
- Significance:** Supports **decentralised AI usage** (people can run them locally) enhanced privacy, flexibility, and accessibility.



Environmental DNA

Scientists are now focusing on modern tools like **Environmental DNA (eDNA)** analysis for biodiversity conservation.

➤ **DNA (Deoxyribonucleic Acid)** serves as the genetic material in most organisms, storing and transmitting hereditary information.

About Environmental DNA

- It is the **genetic material left by organisms** in the environment (e.g., water, soil, Air, etc.).
- It includes **DNA from cells, tissues, fluids, and excrement**.
- **Application:** Mapping species presence and distribution, Tracking ecosystems, etc.
- **Significance:**
 - ⊕ It is a **non-invasive and highly sensitive** biodiversity monitoring method.
 - ⊕ It is **rapid and cost-effective** compared to other biomonitoring methods.



GRIHA Rating

Prime Minister dedicated **Kartavya Bhawan** to the nation which is designed to meet **GRIHA-4 green building standards** with solar panels, rain water harvesting, etc.

➤ Kartavya Bhawan is part of the **Common Central Secretariat buildings** to house the bureaucracy, under the **Central Vista Project**.

About GRIHA

- **GRIHA** is an acronym for **Green Rating for Integrated Habitat Assessment**.
 - ⊕ It is a **rating tool** that helps people assess the performance of their building against certain nationally acceptable benchmarks.
 - ⊕ It was developed by **TERI (The Energy and Resources Institute)** and later adopted as the national rating system in 2007.



BharatGen AI

Union Minister informed that **BharatGen AI** initiative will cover all **22 scheduled Indian languages** by 2026.

➤ It **currently supports 9 languages**.

About BharatGen AI

- **About:** India's **first-of-its-kind, indigenously** developed, Artificial Intelligence (AI) based, **government-funded, Multimodal Large Language Model (LLM)** for **Indian languages** its spanning text, speech, and vision-language systems.
- **Implementation:** Under the **National Mission on Interdisciplinary Cyber-Physical Systems (NM-ICPS)** of the Department of Science and Technology.
 - ⊕ Led by the **Technology Innovation Hub (TIH)** for IoT and IoE at IIT Bombay.



Software Technology Park of India

Recently, Government informed the Lok Sabha that more than 85% of STPIs have been established in Tier 2 and 3 cities and have contributed to 2.98 lakh jobs in non-metro cities.

About STPI (HQ - New Delhi)

- Established in **1991**, it is an S&T organization under **Union Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)**.
- **Role** - To promote IT Industry, innovation, R&D, start-ups, product/IP creation in the field of emerging technologies like IoT, Blockchain, AI, etc.
- Its' Vision aligns with **National Policy on Software Products (NPSP), 2019**.
- **Objectives**
 - ⊕ To promote development and export of software and software services.
 - ⊕ To promote MSMEs by creating conducive environment.
 - ⊕ To provide services to the exporters by implementing Software Technology Park/ Electronics and Hardware Technology Park Schemes.

Place in News



France (Capital: Paris)

Recently, Southern France was affected by one of the largest wildfires driven by strong winds, dry vegetation and hot summer weather.

Political Features

- It is a country in **Northwestern Europe**.
- It is bounded by **Atlantic Ocean in North** and **Mediterranean Sea in the south**.
- On the west it has **Bay of Biscay** and on the northwest the **English Channel**.
- On the north it is separated from England by **Strait of Dover**.
- **Neighbouring countries:** Italy, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Monaco, Andorra, Switzerland, and Luxembourg.

Geographical Features

- **Rivers:** **Loire** (originates in France and drains in Atlantic ocean), **Seine** (originates in France and drains in English channel).
- **Mountains:** Alps (southern France), The Jura Mountains (north of Alps), Pyrenees (Forming a natural border with Spain), etc.



AHMEDABAD



BHOPAL



CHANDIGARH



DELHI



JAIPUR



JODHPUR



GUWAHATI



HYDERABAD



LUCKNOW



PRAYAGRAJ



PUNE



RANCHI



SIKAR