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CURRENT AFFAIRS

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Index

- 1. 'Restrictive' software tools used for SIR: SC**
- 2. New species of dragonfly discovered in Kerala's rubber plantations, named *Lyriothemis keralensis***
- 3. India and Greece agree to strengthen defence industrial cooperation in five-year road map**
- 4. A chance for India to polish the Kimberley Process**

1. 'Restrictive' software tools used for SIR: SC

Why in the News?

The Supreme Court of India has flagged concerns over the use of "restrictive" software tools by the Election Commission of India during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in West Bengal. The Court extended the deadline for the claims-and-objections phase, questioned algorithm-driven exclusions, and sought clarification on allegations of violence and document destruction at verification centres. The issue raises broader constitutional and administrative questions about technology-driven governance, voter inclusion, and due process.

Clearing the air

Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on Monday extended the claims-and-objections phase of the West Bengal SIR for a week beyond the current deadline of February 14

Directions from the Supreme Court:

- West Bengal DGP should file an affidavit responding to allegations of orchestrated violence at verification centres
- EC can temporarily deploy a fresh batch of personnel provided by the State government for the revision exercise

Top court clarifies that micro-observers would only assist the EROs, and will not take calls on inclusion or exclusion of voters in the final electoral roll of the State



Background

- The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) is a large-scale verification exercise conducted by the Election Commission to clean and update electoral rolls.
- In West Bengal, the EC used automated software to detect "logical discrepancies", including:
 - Minor spelling differences in names
 - Variations in surnames (e.g., Roy/Ray)
 - Omission of middle names like "Kumar"
 - Family structure inconsistencies
- Around 1.4 crore electors reportedly fell under discrepancy categories.
- Counsel for the State claimed 70 lakh people were called for hearings despite being traceable to earlier rolls (2002 mapping).
- The Supreme Court observed that rigid algorithmic filters failed to account for India's social naming diversity and demographic realities.

The Court clarified that:

- Micro-observers assist but cannot override Electoral Registration Officers (EROs)
- Final inclusion/exclusion decisions must remain human and statutory
- Additional staff deployment should support due process

This controversy highlights tension between data-driven electoral management and constitutional guarantees of universal adult suffrage.

Features

Algorithmic Governance in Elections

- Automated screening tools are increasingly used to detect duplicate or suspicious entries.
- While improving efficiency, rigid rule-based systems risk false exclusions.
- India's diverse naming practices and documentation gaps complicate standardised data matching.

Due Process and Electoral Rights

- Voting rights flow from Article 326 (universal adult suffrage).
- Mass notices create an administrative burden on citizens.
- The Court emphasised that electoral cleansing must not become disenfranchisement by software.

Federal and Political Dimensions

- The State government alleged excessive central control via micro-observers.
- Concerns were raised over officers lacking local cultural understanding.
- Raises questions about the Centre–State balance in election administration.

Administrative Capacity vs Ground Reality

- Large-scale revisions strain verification infrastructure.
- Automated escalation without contextual review widens the net unnecessarily.
- Software design without sociological inputs creates “policy challenges”.

Challenges

Technological Challenges

- Over-reliance on rigid algorithms
- Lack of linguistic and cultural adaptability
- Poor data harmonisation across legacy electoral records

Legal & Constitutional Challenges

- Risk of arbitrary exclusion
- Burden of proof shifting to citizens
- Potential violation of natural justice

Administrative Challenges

- Massive citizen hearings
- Overworked field officers
- Possibility of clerical or mapping errors

Political & Social Challenges

- Perception of targeted purging
- Erosion of trust in electoral processes
- Risk of local unrest and allegations of coercion

Way Forward

Human-in-the-Loop Governance

- Algorithms should assist, not replace, statutory authorities.
- Mandatory manual review before issuing notices.

Context-Sensitive Software Design

- Incorporate linguistic diversity
- Flexible matching thresholds
- Local demographic calibration

Transparent Audit Mechanisms

- Independent review of software logic
- Public disclosure of discrepancy criteria
- Judicially reviewable safeguards

Citizen-Centric Due Process

- Simplified correction procedures
- Extended timelines
- Mobile verification camps
- Legal aid for vulnerable voters

Institutional Reform

- Training of EROs in digital literacy
- Clear accountability chain
- Separation of technical and adjudicatory roles

Election Technology Policy Framework

- National standards for algorithmic governance
- Ethical guidelines for AI in public administration
- Parliamentary oversight on election tech

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's intervention is not merely about West Bengal's electoral rolls - it is a warning against uncritical techno-bureaucratic governance. Efficiency cannot override constitutional morality. Technology in elections must expand inclusion, not automate exclusion. India's democratic legitimacy rests on trust, accessibility, and fairness - values that no software tool can replace, only support. A modern democracy requires smart systems guided by humane judgment. The challenge is not whether to use technology, but how to embed it within constitutional safeguards.

2. New species of dragonfly discovered in Kerala's rubber plantations, named *Lyriothemis keralensis*

Why in the News?

Lyriothemis keralensis, a new species of dragonfly, has been discovered in Kerala's plantation landscapes and formally described in a scientific journal. The finding is significant because the species survives largely outside protected areas, highlighting the conservation value of agricultural ecosystems and the need for biodiversity-sensitive land use.

Background

- The species was recorded from Varapetty near Kothamangalam in Ernakulam district of Kerala.
- It inhabits vegetated pools and irrigation canals inside shaded pineapple and rubber plantations.

The research was conducted by scientists from:

- Indian Foundation for Butterflies
- Kerala Agricultural University
- Society for Odonate Studies
- National Centre for Biological Sciences
- The findings were published in the International Journal of Odonatology.
- Although observed since 2013, it was long misidentified as *Lyriothemis acigastra*, a species earlier believed to occur only in northeast India.
- Detailed microscopic and anatomical comparisons confirmed it as a distinct species.

Dragonflies belong to the order Odonata, a group widely used as bioindicators of freshwater ecosystem health.



Features

Morphological Traits

- Small-sized dragonfly
- Strong sexual dimorphism:
 - Males: bright blood-red with black markings
 - Females: bulkier, yellow with black markings
- Slender abdomen
- Distinct anal appendages and genital structures

Seasonal Behaviour

- Visible mainly during the Southwest monsoon (late May–August)
- Spends the rest of the year in the aquatic larval stage
- Survives in canal and pool networks within shaded plantations

Ecological Significance

- Dragonflies are top insect predators, controlling mosquito and pest populations
- Sensitive to water quality → act as early warning indicators
- Presence in plantation habitats shows that human-modified landscapes can support biodiversity
- Highlights Kerala's status as a biodiversity-rich region within the Western Ghats landscape

Challenges

Habitat Outside Protected Areas

- Most populations occur in plantation landscapes
- Vulnerable to land-use change and chemical inputs

Agricultural Intensification

- Pesticide runoff threatens aquatic larvae
- Canal cleaning and drainage alter microhabitats

Lack of Awareness

- Plantation biodiversity is often undervalued
- Species may disappear before being documented

Fragmented Conservation Policy

- Focus remains on forests, not agro-ecosystems
- Weak monitoring of freshwater microhabitats

Way Forward

Biodiversity-Friendly Plantation Practices

- Reduce pesticide use
- Maintain shaded canal networks

- Preserve vegetated pools

Agro-Ecological Conservation Zones

- Recognise plantation landscapes as biodiversity corridors
- Incentivise eco-friendly land management

Citizen Science & Monitoring

- Encourage dragonfly surveys
- Involve local communities and students

Policy Integration

- Link biodiversity conservation with agricultural policy
- Promote eco-certification for plantations

Freshwater Habitat Protection

- Safeguard small wetlands and irrigation canals
- Monitor water quality

Conclusion

The discovery of *Lyriothemis keralensis* is a reminder that new species are still being found in everyday landscapes, not just remote forests. Plantation ecosystems, often dismissed as monocultures, can harbour unique life forms when managed sensitively. Conservation in the 21st century must move beyond protected areas and embrace working landscapes.

3. India and Greece agree to strengthen defence industrial cooperation in five-year road map

Why in the News?

Rajnath Singh and Nikolaos-Georgios Dendias signed a Joint Declaration of Intent to deepen defence industrial cooperation between India and Greece. The agreement launches a five-year defence road map under the India–Greece Strategic Partnership and includes a military cooperation plan for 2026, signalling a major expansion of bilateral defence ties.

Background

- India and Greece share historically cordial ties rooted in civilisational linkages and maritime traditions.
- Defence cooperation has steadily expanded in recent years amid growing geopolitical shifts in the Indo-Pacific and Mediterranean.
- Greece is modernising its defence sector under Agenda 2030, while India is pushing defence self-reliance under Aatmanirbhar Bharat.

- The two nations see each other as strategic connectors between Europe and the Indo-Pacific.
- The visit also emphasised maritime security cooperation and intelligence sharing.

Features

Five-Year Defence Industrial Road Map

- Joint production and technology collaboration
- Alignment of defence manufacturing reforms
- Focus on indigenous capability building

Military Cooperation Plan 2026

- Structured armed forces engagements
- Training, exercises, and officer exchanges
- Institutionalised defence dialogue



Maritime Security Cooperation

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A key outcome is Greece deploying an officer to the Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), strengthening information exchange in the Indian Ocean.

- Shared outlook on freedom of navigation

- Cooperation between two historic seafaring nations
- Greek liaison officer at IFC-IOR
- Enhanced maritime domain awareness

Strategic Signalling

- India strengthens European defence partnerships
- Greece expands Indo-Pacific engagement
- Reinforces multipolar strategic balancing

Challenges

Geopolitical Constraints

- Greece's obligations within NATO and EU frameworks
- India's strategic autonomy balancing multiple blocs

Defence Industrial Gaps

- Different procurement systems
- Technology transfer sensitivities
- Scale mismatch in defence production

Implementation Risks

- Agreements often face bureaucratic delays
- Need sustained political will

Regional Instability

- Mediterranean tensions
- Indian Ocean security competition

Way Forward

Joint Defence Manufacturing Projects

- Co-production in naval systems
- Aerospace collaboration
- Defence electronics and cyber security

Maritime Partnership Expansion

- Joint naval exercises
- Port calls and logistics cooperation
- Anti-piracy and surveillance missions

Institutional Framework

- Annual defence ministerial dialogue
- Industry-to-industry forums
- Academic and strategic think tank exchange

Indo-Pacific–Mediterranean Linkage

- Create a corridor of strategic cooperation
- Align EU–India maritime security initiatives

Private Sector Involvement

- Encourage startups in defence tech
- Innovation partnerships

Conclusion

The India–Greece defence road map represents more than a bilateral agreement- it is a bridge between the Mediterranean and the Indo-Pacific. By aligning industrial ambitions and maritime security priorities, both nations signal a shared commitment to stability, autonomy, and multipolar cooperation. For India, it strengthens its European strategic footprint. For Greece, it anchors a deeper Indo-Pacific presence. If implemented effectively, the partnership can evolve into a model of cross-regional defence collaboration in a rapidly shifting global order.

4. A chance for India to polish the Kimberley Process

Why in the News?

The Kimberley Process has announced that India will assume its chairmanship in 2026, giving India a leadership role in shaping global governance of the diamond trade. Experts argue this is a rare opportunity for India to push reforms in the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS), especially on transparency, human rights, and digital traceability.

Background

- The Kimberley Process (KP) was initiated in 2000 by Southern African states to curb the trade in conflict diamonds
- It formally began in 2003 through the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme.
- Today it includes 60 participants representing 86 countries and covers ~99.8% of global rough diamond production.
- Conflict diamonds are defined narrowly as rough diamonds used by rebel groups to fund insurgency.
- Major producers: Angola, Botswana, Canada, Congo, Namibia, and Russia.
- India is not a producer but is the world's largest diamond cutting and polishing hub, importing ~40% of global rough diamonds.

India's central position in the value chain gives it strong diplomatic leverage to influence global standards.

Features

Certification System

- Each shipment must carry a KP certificate
- Trade allowed only among compliant members
- Mandatory statistical reporting

Tripartite Governance Model

- Governments
- Industry bodies
- Civil society organisations

Compliance Mechanism

- National enforcement
- Peer review visits

- Temporary export bans in extreme cases

Objective

- Prevent diamonds from financing armed conflict
- Protect the legitimacy of the global diamond trade

Challenges

Narrow Definition of Conflict Diamonds

- Ignores state violence
- Overlooks labour exploitation
- Does not cover environmental harm
- Fails to address illicit trafficking networks

Political Veto System

- Decisions require consensus
- Any country can block action
- Weak enforcement credibility

Ineffective Sanctions

- Example: Embargoes may increase smuggling
- Mining communities suffer economically
- Violence may worsen instead of being reduced

Weak Transparency

- Limited public access to data
- Inconsistent statistical reporting
- Risk of certificate fraud

Capacity Gaps in Producer Countries

- Poor IT infrastructure
- Weak customs monitoring
- Lack of forensic capability

Way Forward

Expand the Definition Gradually

- Create a technical working group on human rights risks
- Build consensus before formal amendment
- Avoid immediate political confrontation

Digital Certification Reform

- Blockchain-based tamper-proof certificates

- Real-time customs data exchange
- End-to-end traceability

Capacity Building in Africa

- Regional KP technical hubs
- Training and IT support
- Certification assistance
- Forensic and audit infrastructure

Independent Audits

- Third-party verification pilots
- Public release of granular statistics
- Strengthened peer review

Protect Mining Communities

- Align KP with Sustainable Development Goals
- Revenue reinvestment in health & education
- Livelihood safeguards

Strengthen Civil Society Role

- Institutionalised consultation channels
- Transparency forums
- Tripartite balance preservation

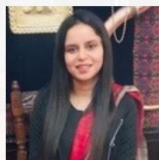
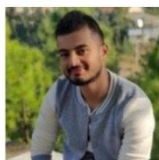
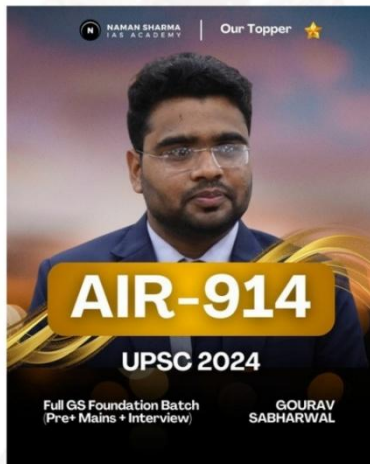
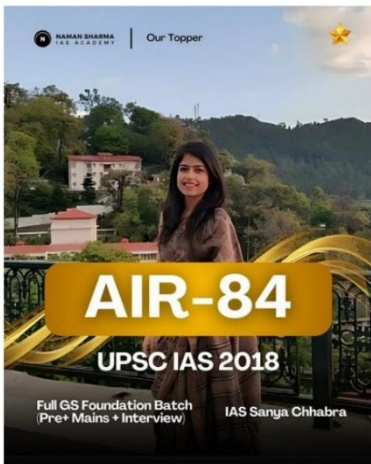
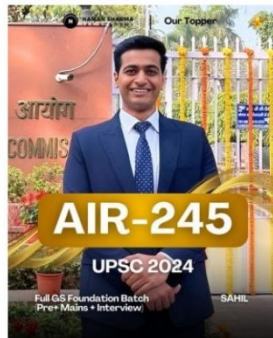
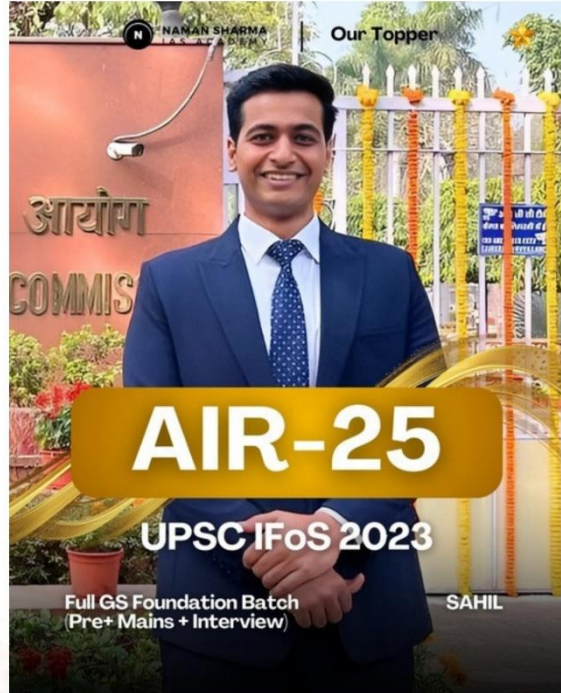
Conclusion

India's 2026 chairmanship is more than ceremonial - it is a strategic opening to modernise a 20-year-old system struggling to keep pace with contemporary realities. The Kimberley Process must evolve from merely blocking rebel-financed diamonds to ensuring a responsible, ethical, and development-oriented diamond economy.

If India successfully blends diplomacy, technology, and Global South leadership, it can transform the KP into a stronger rule-based multilateral framework — one that protects both markets and mining communities. This would mark India's emergence not just as a diamond hub, but as a norm-setter in global resource governance.



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