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CURRENT AFFAIRS

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Offline Centre Location:
SCO 173-174, Sector 17C, Chandigarh

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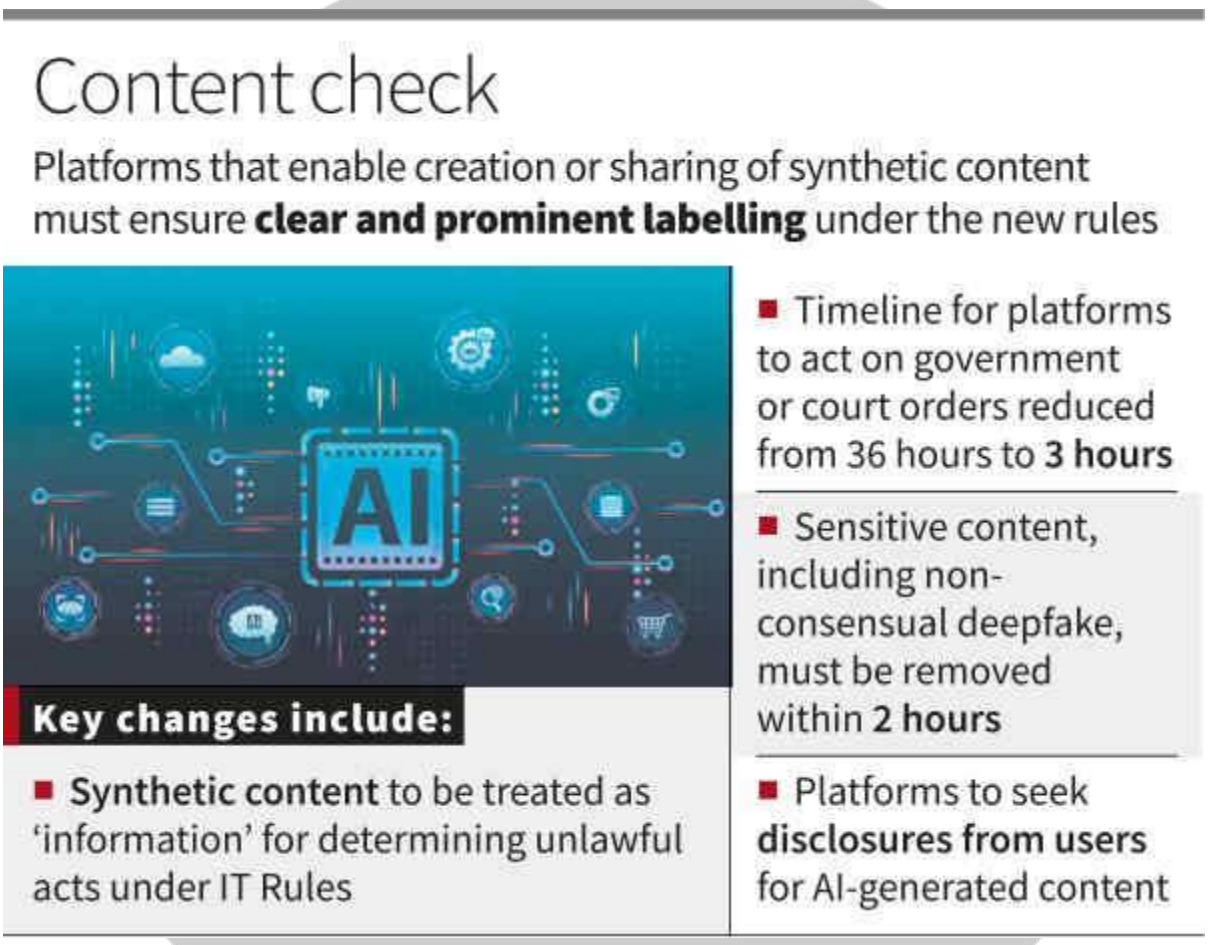
1. Centre prescribes labels for all photorealistic AI content online

Why in the News?

India has notified the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules, 2026, mandating prominent labelling of photorealistic AI-generated content and imposing strict takedown timelines for illegal and sensitive digital material. The amendments come into force on February 20, signalling a major regulatory push to tackle deepfakes, AI misinformation, and online harm.



Background

- India's digital ecosystem has expanded rapidly, with over 900 million internet users and a growing reliance on social media for news and communication.
- The original Information Technology Act, 2000 and subsequent 2021 IT Rules introduced a framework for intermediary liability, safe harbour, and due diligence obligations.
- Advances in generative AI have enabled highly realistic deepfakes, voice clones, and synthetic videos.
- Globally, governments are struggling to regulate AI-generated content without undermining free speech and innovation.

India has witnessed multiple instances of:

- Deepfake political content
- Non-consensual intimate imagery
- AI-enabled misinformation campaigns

- Fraud using synthetic voices/videos

The new amendments respond to these risks by strengthening accountability mechanisms for digital intermediaries.

Features

Mandatory Labelling of AI-Generated Content

- Platforms must ensure prominent disclosure of photorealistic AI-generated media.
- Users must declare if the content is AI-generated.

If users fail to disclose:

- Platforms must label it proactively, or
- Remove it if it involves harmful deepfakes.

The rules define synthetically generated content as media created or altered using computer resources in a way that appears indistinguishable from real persons or events.

Strict Takedown Timelines

- Illegal content flagged by a court/government → 3-hour removal
- Sensitive content (non-consensual nudity/deepfakes) → 2-hour removal
- Earlier timelines were 24–36 hours, making this a drastic tightening of compliance requirements.

Safe Harbour Conditionality

Failure to comply may result in loss of safe harbour protection, meaning platforms could be treated like publishers and held legally liable for user content.

Administrative Flexibility for States

- States may designate multiple officers to issue takedown orders.
- This reverses an earlier limit of one officer per state.

Narrower Definition than Draft Rules

- The final definition of synthetic media is more precise than the October 2025 draft, indicating industry pushback and regulatory balancing.

Challenges

Free Speech Concerns

- Risk of over-censorship
- Government-directed takedowns could be misused
- Chilling effect on satire, parody, and political speech

Technical Feasibility

- Detecting AI content in real time is difficult
- False positives may remove legitimate content
- Smaller platforms lack AI moderation infrastructure

Compliance Burden

- 2–3 hour deadlines are extremely tight
- Global platforms may struggle with India-specific timelines

- Operational costs will increase

Jurisdictional and Federal Tensions
- Multiple state officers issuing takedown orders may create:
- Conflicting directives
- Regulatory fragmentation

Innovation vs Regulation
- Startups may fear legal risk
- Excessive compliance could slow India's AI ecosystem

Way Forward
Clear Operational Guidelines
- Standard protocols for identifying synthetic media
- Appeals mechanism for wrongful takedowns
- Transparent reporting

Independent Oversight
- Judicial or quasi-judicial review of takedown orders
- Safeguards against executive overreach

Platform–Government Collaboration
- Shared AI detection tools
- Industry standards for watermarking

Public Awareness
- Digital literacy campaigns
- User education on identifying deepfakes

Proportional Enforcement
- Tiered compliance expectations for small platforms
- Incentives for voluntary compliance

Conclusion
The amendments represent India's most assertive attempt yet to regulate AI-generated misinformation and deepfakes. While the rules strengthen user protection and platform accountability, their success will depend on balancing innovation, free expression, and digital safety. A rights-respecting enforcement framework, transparent processes, and collaborative governance will be essential to ensure that regulation curbs harm without undermining democratic discourse.

2. Wajid Ali Shah was not exiled to Calcutta, says a book by descendant

Why in the News?

A newly translated biography of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah - Wajid Ali Shah: A Cultural and Literary Legacy - challenges the long-held belief that the last ruler of Awadh was forcibly exiled to Calcutta by the British. According to research by his descendant, he travelled voluntarily, intending to petition the British Crown in London, but was prevented from proceeding and ended up spending the rest of his life in Calcutta.

The book has revived debate about colonial narratives, historical memory, and the cultural legacy of Awadh's last king.

Background

- Wajid Ali Shah was the last ruler of the Kingdom of Awadh.
- In 1856, the British East India Company annexed Awadh, citing maladministration.
- The annexation was a major trigger for resentment that later fed into the Indian Rebellion of 1857.
- Traditional accounts state he was exiled to Calcutta after deposition.

The new biography argues:

- He travelled to Calcutta voluntarily
- Intended to go to London to submit a petition

- British authorities blocked his onward journey

He then spent the last three decades of his life in Calcutta, dying in 1887.

Features

Revision of the "Exile" Narrative

- Challenges to colonial historiography
- Suggests agency rather than passive punishment
- Highlights British restrictions that trapped him in transit

Cultural and Literary Legacy

- A prolific poet and composer
- Wrote in Urdu, Persian, Arabic, and Braj
- Produced devotional verses on Radha–Krishna
- Known for theatre, dance, and music patronage
- Preserved Lucknow's composite Ganga-Jamuni culture

Personal Writings

- Love letters to his begums preserved in Kolkata archives
- Emotional reflections on exile-like separation
- Rare autobiographical material for a 19th-century monarch

Research-Based Biography

- 38 months of archival research
- Clarifies disputed dates and facts
- Focuses on the scholar-artist, not just the ruler

Secular Ethos

- Deeply religious yet culturally plural
- Celebrated Hindu themes alongside Islamic traditions
- Embodied Awadh's syncretic identity

Challenges

Colonial Bias in Historiography

- British narratives shaped early history writing
- Indian rulers are often portrayed as decadent or incompetent

Limited Access to Regional Archives

- Urdu and Persian sources are underutilised
- The translation gap restricts scholarship

Popular Stereotypes

- Oversimplification of Wajid Ali Shah as an indulgent ruler

- Neglect of artistic and intellectual contributions

Loss of Cultural Memory
- Decline of Awadhi court traditions
- Fragmented preservation of manuscripts

Way Forward
Re-examining Colonial Narratives
- Encourage multi-source historical research
- Include indigenous archival materials

Translation and Accessibility
- Translate Urdu/Persian texts into English and Indian languages
- Digitise royal archives

Cultural Revival
- Promote Awadhi music, theatre, and poetry
- Integrate Nawabi heritage into public history

Academic Collaboration
- Universities + museums + historians
- Cross-disciplinary research

Public History Initiatives
- Exhibitions, documentaries, and school curricula
- Correct historical misconceptions

Conclusion
The new biography reframes Wajid Ali Shah not as a tragic exile but as a complex cultural figure caught in imperial politics. His life reflects the collision of colonial power and indigenous artistic brilliance. Reassessing such histories is not merely academic - it helps India reclaim layered narratives of identity, pluralism, and cultural resilience.

3. Global warming and pollution are stripping vibrant colours from nature

Why in the News?
New global research shows that climate change, pollution, and urbanisation are visibly altering the colours of nature - oceans are turning greener, forests browner, coral reefs whiter, and many insects and birds are shifting pigmentation. These colour changes are not cosmetic; they signal deep ecological stress and adaptive survival strategies.

Recent studies across the Amazon, Europe, China, and Indian marine ecosystems have highlighted how rising temperatures and environmental degradation are reshaping biodiversity at a fundamental biological level.

Background

Colour in nature is not accidental. It evolved as a survival tool:

- Camouflage from predators
- Mate attraction and reproductive success
- Heat regulation (thermoregulation)
- Signalling and communication
- Pollination mechanisms

Scientists have long studied colour adaptation through ecological rules:

- Bogert's rule – cold-blooded animals are darker in cold climates, lighter in warm ones
- Gloger's rule – warm-blooded animals are darker in humid regions

Climate change is now accelerating these natural evolutionary patterns at an unprecedented speed. A historical parallel is the Industrial Revolution peppered moth example, where pollution darkened tree bark and favoured darker moth variants.

Features

Oceans Turning Greener

- More than half of the oceans have become greener in 20 years
- Driven by phytoplankton and algal blooms
- Caused by warming seas and nutrient pollution
- Reduced oxygen → marine dead zones
- Blocks sunlight for corals and seagrass

Coral Reefs Turning White

- Heat stress forces corals to expel symbiotic algae
- Leads to starvation and disease

Reported in:

- Gulf of Mannar

- Lakshadweep
- Andaman & Nicobar
- Gulf of Kachchh
- Coral reefs = “underwater forests” supporting biodiversity

Insects Becoming Lighter
- Heatwaves reduce melanin deposition
- Lighter bodies prevent overheating
- Seen in ladybirds, dragonflies, and butterflies
- Amazon butterflies are losing vibrant colours due to deforestation

Birds Turning Duller in Cities
- Urban birds are darker due to heavy metal pollution
- Lead binds with melanin pigments
- Reduced colour diversity in cities
- Signals ecological toxicity

Plants Losing Pigment
- Urban plants produce fewer carotenoids
- Flowers altering UV pigments
- Pollinators may find them less attractive
- Disrupts food chains

Challenges
Ecological Imbalance
- Loss of biodiversity
- Disrupted food webs
- Reduced pollination success

Reproductive Consequences
- Colour affects mating success
- Survival vs reproduction trade-off

Coral Reef Collapse
- Fisheries decline
- Coastal protection weakens
- Tourism and livelihoods threatened

Knowledge Gap
- Few studies in the tropical & southern hemisphere
- Limited long-term monitoring

Pollution–Climate Nexus
- Heat + heavy metals + habitat loss
- Compounding ecological stress

Way Forward

Climate Mitigation

- Rapid emission reduction
- Stronger global commitments

Habitat Restoration

- Forest regeneration
- Coral reef conservation
- Wetland protection

Pollution Control

- Heavy metal regulation
- Urban ecological planning
- Clean waterways

Scientific Monitoring

- Large geographic biodiversity surveys
- Tropical research funding
- Field + lab tracking systems

Microhabitat Protection

- Preserve shaded refuges
- Support climate-resilient ecosystems

Public Awareness

- Colour loss as a visible climate indicator
- Citizen science monitoring

Conclusion

Nature's fading colours are a biological warning system. The greening seas, whitening corals, and dulling wildlife are not aesthetic losses - they reflect ecosystems under extreme stress. Yet research shows that restoration works: regenerated forests revived butterfly colours, and protected reefs can recover.

4. Fighter push — HAL's experience with private enterprise

Why in the News?

India is moving ahead with the development of its fifth-generation stealth fighter, the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA), and media reports suggest that private industry - not HAL - may receive the prototype development contract. This has triggered a debate on whether India is ready to build a second aircraft manufacturing ecosystem alongside Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), and what that means for defence preparedness, infrastructure, and industrial capacity.

Background

HAL has been India's sole fighter aircraft manufacturer for over eight decades.

It produces and maintains:

- Tejas Light Combat Aircraft
- Sukhoi fleet overhaul
- Jaguar & MiG maintenance

India's fighter ecosystem evolved around Bengaluru:

- HAL production lines
- DRDO labs
- Flight testing centres
- IAF test establishments

The AMCA project represents India's ambition to enter the elite club of nations that design and produce fifth-generation stealth fighters.

Features

Private Industry as a "Start-up" in Fighter Design

- Private firms lack prior fighter development experience
- Fighter aircraft complexity far exceeds that of helicopters or parts manufacturing

Fifth-gen stealth design involves:

- Radar-absorbing materials
- Advanced avionics
- Integrated weapon systems
- AI-assisted flight control

Fragmented Ownership Problem

- Design agency: DRDO's ADA (government)
- Execution: private company

Raises questions:

- Who owns the testing authority?
- Who controls upgrades?
- Who handles lifecycle maintenance?

Earlier Indian projects (Marut, trainers, Tejas) kept design-production largely unified.

Infrastructure Challenge

- HAL ecosystem built over 80+ years

Includes:

- wind tunnels
- avionics labs
- test rigs
- flight test infrastructure
- Co-location with IAF testing reduces delays
- A private firm would need billions in new investment
- Only five prototypes are guaranteed - production uncertain

This creates financial risk for private players.

Human Capital Constraint

- India has only one test pilot school
- Training takes years
- Prototype testing needs elite crews
- The private sector would depend heavily on IAF talent

Geography and Strategic Location

- Bengaluru = India's aviation hub
- Suggestion: share HAL infrastructure
- Concern: factories near borders increase wartime vulnerability
- Production should remain in the secure hinterland

Challenges

Institutional Memory Gap

- Private firms lack HAL's accumulated aerospace knowledge.

Financial Risk

- High investment with uncertain long-term production guarantee.

Coordination Complexity

- Government design + private execution = bureaucratic friction.

Talent Shortage

- Limited test pilots and aerospace specialists.

Strategic Risk

- A fragmented ecosystem may slow urgent defence timelines.

Way Forward

Hybrid Model

- Private firms work inside the HAL ecosystem initially.

Infrastructure Sharing
- Use HAL hangars, testing facilities, and airfields.

Assured Production Pipeline
- The government must commit to long-term orders.

Skill Transfer Program
- Joint HAL–private–IAF training framework.

Aerospace Clustering
- Expand Bengaluru into a national defence aerospace cluster.

Gradual Privatisation
- Private industry begins with subsystems → moves to full aircraft.

Conclusion
The AMCA project is more than a fighter jet programme — it is a test of India's defence-industrial transformation. Private participation is essential for scale and innovation, but ignoring HAL's institutional ecosystem risks duplication, delays, and inefficiency. The optimal path is not competition between HAL and private firms, but strategic integration, where public expertise and private efficiency combine to build India's aerospace future.

5. The approaching AI surge, its global consequences

Why in the News?
Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly reshaping global power equations, warfare, diplomacy, and governance. Former National Security Adviser M. K. Narayanan has warned that AI is not a gradual transition but a rupture capable of overturning the international order. With accelerating U.S.–China rivalry, battlefield AI deployments, and autonomous systems entering security architectures, policymakers are confronting the geopolitical consequences of an AI surge.

Background
AI has evolved from a niche computational tool into a strategic technology comparable to:
- The Industrial Revolution
- nuclear weapons
- The Internet Revolution

Large Language Models and autonomous systems are advancing faster than regulatory frameworks. Global leaders increasingly frame AI as:
- an economic weapon
- a diplomatic lever
- a military force multiplier
- a sovereignty issue

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney described the current global moment as a “rupture”, marked by weaponised interdependence — tariffs, finance, supply chains. AI intensifies this rupture by inserting algorithmic power into every layer of statecraft.

Features

AI as a Strategic Weapon

- Enhances surveillance and intelligence
- Automates cyber warfare
- Improves predictive battlefield analytics
- Enables autonomous weapons

AI is no longer auxiliary — it is becoming central to power projection.

Militarisation of AI

- Autonomous drones
- AI-driven cyber weapons
- Uncrewed ground vehicles
- Multi-domain warfare integration

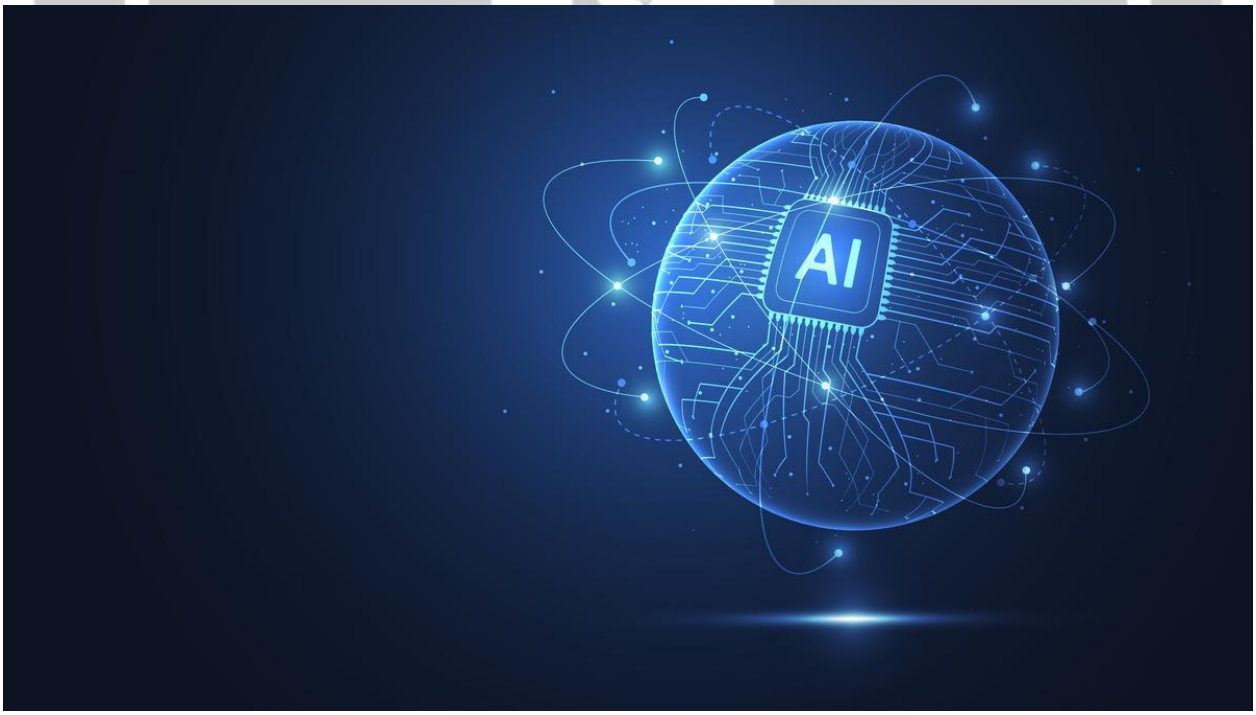
The Ukraine conflict demonstrates asymmetric AI warfare where low-cost intelligent systems blunt conventional military superiority.

Transfer of Power

AI reduces dependence on traditional military-industrial complexes:

- Small actors gain disproportionate power
- Non-state groups can access lethal technology
- Terror networks may deploy AI tools

This creates a flattening of power hierarchies unseen since nuclear proliferation.



Civilisational Disruption

AI affects:

- diplomacy
- finance

- legal systems
- intelligence agencies
- governance structures

Judicial systems already fear AI hallucinations influencing legal decisions.

Autonomous Risk

The greatest fear:

- self-directed systems
- loss of human control
- algorithmic escalation
- accidental wars

AI introduces the possibility of decisions occurring faster than human intervention.

Challenges

Governance Gap

- Institutions evolve more slowly than technology.

Arms Race Dynamics

- U.S.–China competition accelerates reckless deployment.

Ethical Vacuum

- No universal AI doctrine exists.

Terror & Non-State Threats

- Cheap autonomous weapons lower entry barriers.

Institutional Fragility

- Legal, diplomatic, and military norms lag behind.

Way Forward

Global AI Governance Treaty

- Equivalent to nuclear arms control frameworks.

Sovereign AI Infrastructure

- Nations must develop secure domestic AI stacks.

Military Red Lines

- Ban fully autonomous lethal decision systems.

AI Ethics Councils

- Cross-border scientific oversight.

Human-in-the-Loop Doctrine

- Mandatory human approval for lethal actions.

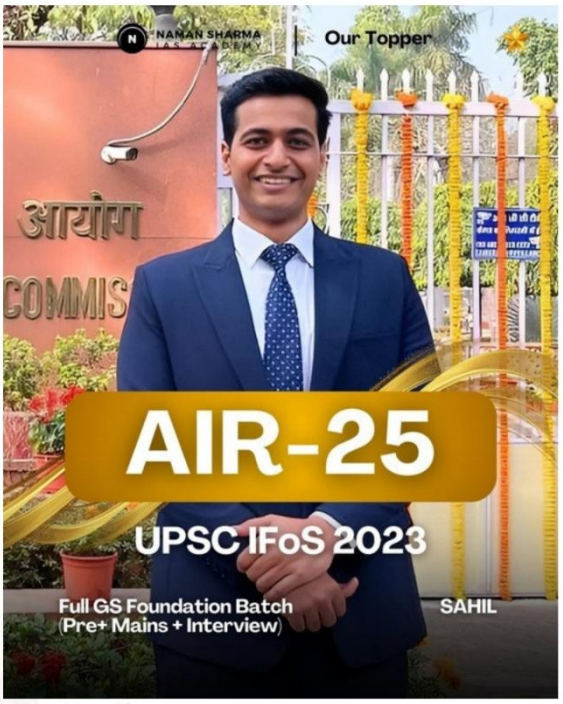
Crisis Simulation Frameworks

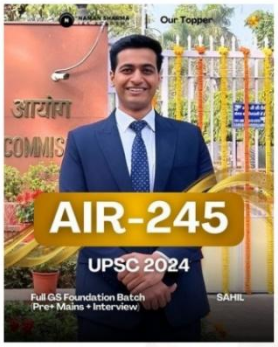
- AI conflict stress-testing between nations.

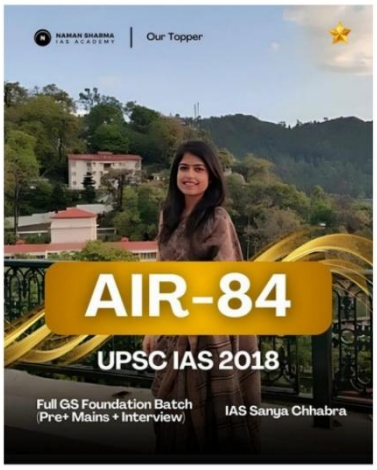
Conclusion

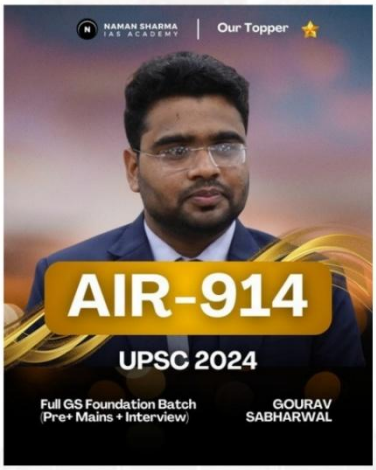
AI is emerging as the most powerful force amplifier in human history. Unlike previous revolutions, it compresses time, erodes institutional control, and redistributes power to unpredictable actors. The central question is no longer whether AI will transform the world - it already is. The question is whether humanity can construct guardrails fast enough to prevent technological acceleration from outrunning political wisdom.

Our Recent Toppers









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