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# Daily

# **CURRENT AFFAIRS**

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

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# 1. Tamil Brahmi inscriptions in Egypt point to ancient trade links

## Why in the News?

Researchers have identified nearly 30 inscriptions in Tamil Brahmi, Prakrit, and Sanskrit inside tombs in Egypt's Valley of the Kings, dating to the 1st–3rd centuries CE. Presented at the International Conference on Tamil Epigraphy, the discovery provides fresh archaeological evidence of Indian presence in Egypt during the height of Indo-Roman trade. The repeated appearance of Tamil names, especially Cikai Korraṇ, has strengthened arguments that traders from ancient Tamilagam were active participants in long-distance commerce and cultural exchange.



## Background

Trade links between ancient South India and the Mediterranean world are well documented in literary and archaeological sources.

- Sangam texts refer to Yavana (Greek/Roman) merchants visiting Tamil ports
- Roman coins have been found across Tamil Nadu and Kerala
- The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea describes Indian Ocean trade routes
- Excavations at Egyptian Red Sea ports like Berenike revealed Indian artefacts

## Tamilakam was a major exporter of:

- Pepper and spices
- Pearls
- Ivory
- Textiles
- Precious stones

In return, it imported Roman gold, wine, glassware and luxury goods. However, most evidence previously came from port cities. The new inscriptions show Indians travelling deep into Egypt's Nile cultural zone, not just coastal trade outposts.

## Features

### Location Significance

- The inscriptions were found in the Valley of the Kings, part of the Theban Necropolis - a sacred royal burial site, not a trade port.
- This suggests Indian travellers were not merely dockside merchants but mobile visitors within Egyptian society.

### Multilingual Context

The Indian inscriptions appear alongside thousands of Greek graffiti. This indicates:

- A shared visitor culture
- Interaction across linguistic communities
- Participation in existing commemorative practices

### Repeated Tamil Identity

The name Cikai Korāṇ appears eight times across five tombs. Linguistic analysis links:

- Śikhā (Sanskrit) → tuft or crown
- Korāṇ (Tamil) → victory, warrior association

The name echoes Sangam-era Chera traditions and appears in inscriptions in South India and at Berenike.

### Everyday Human Markers

- One inscription reads: "Kopān came and saw."
- This resembles modern tourist graffiti — a personal declaration of presence. It humanises ancient trade networks, showing individuals, not just commodities, moving across continents.

### Chronological Match

- The dating (1st–3rd centuries CE) aligns perfectly with the peak of Indo-Roman maritime trade, reinforcing historical timelines.

## Challenges

### Limited Sample Size

- Thirty inscriptions are significant but still small. Scholars must avoid overgeneralising from a limited dataset.

### Preservation Issues

- Graffiti is fragile and vulnerable to erosion, vandalism, and tourism pressure.

### Interpretation Gaps

Names alone do not reveal:

- Social status

- Occupation
- Purpose of travel
- Duration of stay

### **Need for Comparative Evidence**

- More findings are required from other Nile sites to confirm a sustained Indian presence.

### **Underfunded Epigraphic Research**

- Ancient Indian Ocean archaeology remains less funded compared to Mediterranean studies.

## **Way Forward**

### **Expanded Egypt–India Collaborative Research**

- Joint archaeological missions can systematically survey the Nile Valley sites for further inscriptions.

### **Digital Epigraphy Projects**

- High-resolution 3D scanning and AI-assisted script analysis can preserve and decode fragile markings.

### **Integrated Maritime History Studies**

- Link Tamil literary sources, Roman records, and Egyptian archaeology into a unified historical narrative.

### **Protection of Graffiti Sites**

- International conservation frameworks should treat ancient visitor graffiti as heritage, not vandalism.

### **Public History Initiatives**

- Museums and academic platforms should popularise Indian Ocean trade history beyond Eurocentric narratives.

### **Interdisciplinary Research**

- Combine linguistics, archaeology, trade economics, and cultural anthropology.

## **Conclusion**

The Tamil Brahmi inscriptions in Egypt are more than isolated graffiti - they are signatures of an interconnected ancient world. They reveal that early globalisation was not abstract but lived by individuals who travelled, traded, and left traces of identity far from home. These findings reframe Tamilakam not as a peripheral region but as a dynamic participant in a transcontinental economy linking India, Africa, and the Mediterranean.

## 2.Sensitive items out of the U.S. statement on the deal with India

### Why in the News?

The United States quietly amended its official statement and factsheet on the India–U.S. interim trade framework after including references to sensitive sectors such as agricultural products, pulses, digital services tax, and a supposed \$500 billion Indian investment commitment. These additions triggered political and diplomatic questions in India, leading to a rollback by Washington.

### Background

India and the U.S. are negotiating an interim trade framework aimed at reducing tariff barriers, expanding energy and technology trade, and stabilising bilateral commercial ties. The talks are part of a broader effort to deepen strategic and economic partnership amid geopolitical shifts, supply chain realignments, and India’s push to diversify energy imports. Agriculture has historically been a contentious area in India–U.S. trade talks. India protects its farm sector through tariffs and subsidies due to food security concerns, livelihood dependence, and political sensitivity. Similarly, the digital services tax (DST) imposed by India on global tech firms has been a recurring friction point with Washington.

### Taking back

The references had raised concerns after not being present in the original

#### India-U.S. joint statement



#### Dropped references:

- Pulses
- Agricultural products
- Digital service tax
- ‘Commitments’ on investing \$500 billion

### Features

- Rollback of Sensitive References

### The U.S. removed mentions of:

- pulses and agricultural market access
- digital services tax

- a binding \$500 billion investment commitment

These were not part of the original joint statement.

- **Clarification on Purchases:** The revised statement now says India intends to increase purchases of U.S. energy and technology products rather than making a legally binding pledge.
- **Agricultural Scope Narrowed:** Instead of broad agricultural liberalisation, the corrected text limits references to specific items like DDGs, nuts, fruit, wine, and soybean oil.
- **Geopolitical Undertones:** A deleted U.S. Trade Representative post showing India's official territorial map raised questions about whether Washington was shifting its stance on disputed territories.
- **Energy Realignment Debate:** U.S. officials claimed India is reducing Russian energy purchases. India has neither confirmed nor denied this, stating only that diversification serves national interest.

## Challenges

- **Domestic Political Sensitivity:** Agriculture is electorally and socially sensitive in India. Any perception of market opening can trigger farmer unrest.
- **Trust Deficit in Negotiations:** Discrepancies between public statements risk undermining credibility in bilateral trade diplomacy.
- **Strategic Balancing:** India must balance U.S. partnership with energy ties to Russia while maintaining strategic autonomy.
- **Digital Economy Frictions:** The digital services tax reflects a broader dispute over taxation of global tech giants and digital sovereignty.
- **Information Management:** Miscommunication in official documents can escalate into political controversy and diplomatic strain.

## Way Forward

- **Clear Joint Communication Protocols:** Both sides should agree on synchronised public messaging to avoid misinterpretation.
- **Sector-by-Sector Negotiation Transparency:** Sensitive sectors like agriculture should be explicitly ring-fenced unless consensus exists.
- **Institutional Dialogue Mechanism:** Strengthening channels for trade dispute resolution can help prevent public diplomatic friction.
- **Strategic Autonomy Framework:** India should continue diversified energy procurement while aligning with long-term economic interests.
- **Digital Trade Framework:** A dedicated India–U.S. digital economy agreement could reduce recurring tax and regulatory disputes.

## Conclusion

The episode underscores how trade negotiations between major democracies are shaped as much by domestic politics as by economics. The rollback of sensitive items reflects the fragility of trust in high-stakes diplomacy. For India, the priority remains safeguarding core interests while deepening economic ties with the U.S. through calibrated, transparent engagement.

### 3. No reduction in States' share in tax devolution, FM asserts in Lok Sabha

#### Why in the News?

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman clarified in the Lok Sabha that the Centre has not reduced States' constitutionally mandated share in tax devolution. She rejected Opposition claims that the Union government was bypassing the 41% devolution recommended by the Fifteenth Finance Commission by increasing reliance on cesses and surcharges.

#### Background

India follows a system of fiscal federalism, where tax revenues are shared between the Centre and States. The Constitution empowers the Finance Commission of India to recommend how taxes should be divided.

#### Key background points:

- The 15th Finance Commission recommended that 41% of the divisible pool of central taxes be devolved to States for 2020–26.
- The divisible pool excludes cesses and surcharges, which the Centre can levy for specific purposes.
- Opposition parties have argued that increasing cesses shrinks the divisible pool, indirectly reducing States' effective share.

The Finance Minister cited audit findings by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India showing that devolution matches Finance Commission recommendations.



#### Features

- 41% Devolution Maintained. The Centre asserts that it has fully complied with the Finance Commission formula each year.
- Estimated Transfers to States Total transfers (tax devolution + Centrally Sponsored Schemes) for 2026–27 are estimated at ₹25.44 lakh crore, a significant increase over previous years.

## Role of Cesses and Surcharges

- Constitutionally permitted
- Levied for targeted sectors like health, education, and infrastructure
- Not part of the divisible pool

**Audit-Based Validation** The CAG-certified accounts show that transfers align with recommended proportions.

**Medium-Term Budget Vision:** The Budget is aligned with the upcoming cycle of the Sixteenth Finance Commission and includes long-term infrastructure and logistics planning up to 2050.

## Challenges

- **Perception Gap in Fiscal Federalism.** Even if legally compliant, rising cess collections create mistrust among States.
- **Shrinking Divisible Pool Concern:** A higher share of revenue via cesses can reduce the effective fiscal space for States.
- **Centre–State Political Tensions:** Fiscal debates are increasingly politicised, affecting cooperative federalism.
- **Transparency and Complexity:** Budget numbers are technically correct, but difficult for the public and legislators to interpret.
- **Dependence on Centrally Sponsored Schemes:** States worry that conditional transfers will replace unconditional fiscal autonomy.

## Way Forward

- **Revisit Cess Architecture.** Gradually rationalise cesses and merge them into the divisible pool where possible.
- **Strengthen Cooperative Federal Platforms** Use GST Council-style consultation for broader fiscal issues.
- **Transparent Fiscal Reporting** Simplifies public financial disclosures to improve trust.
- **Empower States' Own Revenue Capacity** Encourage tax innovation and compliance reforms at the State level.
- **Finance Commission Reform Dialogue:** Institutional review of devolution formulas to balance equity and efficiency.

## Conclusion

The Finance Minister's assertion highlights a technically compliant but politically sensitive issue in India's fiscal federal structure. While statutory devolution remains intact, debates over cesses and fiscal autonomy reveal deeper tensions in Centre–State relations. Strengthening transparency and cooperative mechanisms will be essential to sustain trust in India's evolving fiscal federalism framework.

## 4. Vande Mataram to be played before National Anthem: govt.

### Why in the News?

The Union government issued fresh guidelines stating that Vande Mataram should be sung or played before the National Anthem, Jana Gana Mana, at events where both are performed. The instructions, uploaded by the Ministry of Home Affairs, clarify protocol, decorum, and occasions for performing the National Song, although no formal public announcement accompanied the upload.

### Background

- Vande Mataram, written by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in the 19th century, emerged as a powerful anthem of India's freedom struggle.
- In 1950, the Constituent Assembly accorded it the status of National Song, while Jana Gana Mana became the National Anthem.
- Over the years, debates have surfaced regarding the appropriate use of the National Song in official and educational settings.
- The government periodically issues protocol clarifications to ensure uniform observance across States and institutions.

### Features

- **Order of Performance** When both are played, Vande Mataram should precede the National Anthem.
- **Standing Protocol:** The audience must stand to attention when the official 3.1-minute version is sung or played.
- **Exception Clause** Standing is not required when the song appears within documentaries or newsreels, to avoid disruption.

### Ceremonial Use:

#### The song is prescribed for:

- Arrival/departure of the President or Governors
- National flag unfurling ceremonies
- Government cultural and ceremonial events
- Presidential broadcasts on radio/television
- School Assemblies Schools are encouraged to begin the day with community singing of the National Song.
- **Band Performance Protocol:** A drum roll should precede the song to signal its performance.

### Challenges

- **Cultural Sensitivities** Interpretations of patriotic symbolism sometimes intersect with religious or political debates.
- **Uniform Implementation:** Ensuring consistent adherence across diverse States and institutions may be difficult.
- **Legal Ambiguity:** Unlike the National Anthem, the National Song's legal status is guided more by convention than strict statutory enforcement.

- **Public Awareness Gap:** Many citizens are unfamiliar with official protocols and versions.
- **Balancing Voluntarism and Respect.** The line between encouragement and compulsion remains politically sensitive.

### Way Forward

- **Public Awareness Campaigns** Educate citizens about historical context and etiquette.
- **Clear Administrative Circulars:** States should issue simplified instructions for schools and institutions.
- **Cultural Sensitivity Training:** Promote an inclusive understanding of national symbols.
- **Archival and Educational Integration:** Include the history of the National Song in curricula.
- **Consultative Federal Approach:** Engage States before implementing symbolic cultural policies.

## Setting the tone

Key guidelines for singing and playing the National Song

- *Vande Mataram* should be sung or played before the National Anthem when both are performed at an event

- The audience must stand at attention when the official version, around 3 minutes 10 seconds long, is sung or played

- Standing is not required if it is played as part of a newsreel or documentary



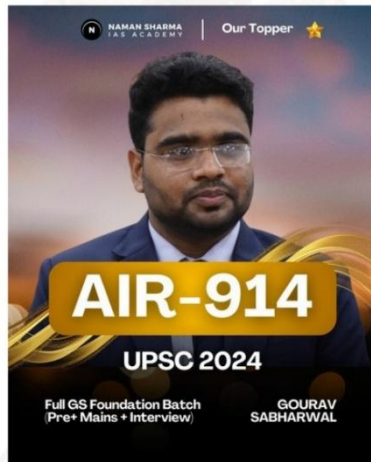
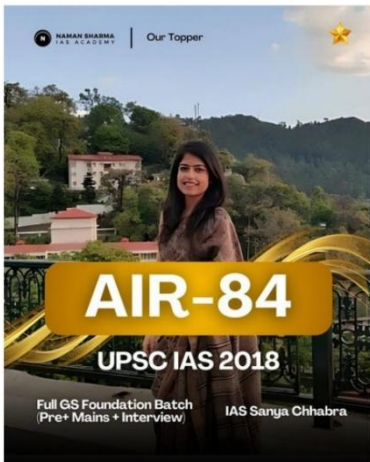
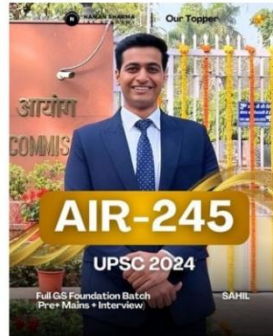
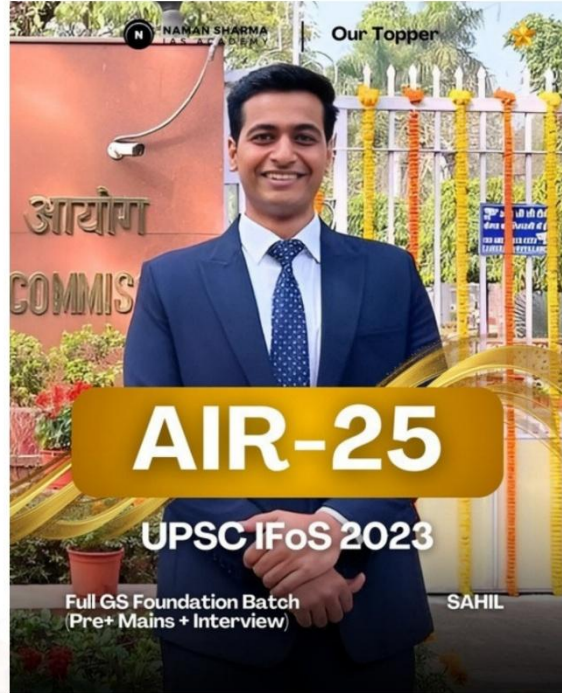
**Proud moment:** A tableau celebrating 150 years of *Vande Mataram* during the Republic Day Parade. PTI

- The official version shall be accompanied by mass singing during unfurling of the National Flag, cultural occasions, or ceremonial functions other than parades

## Conclusion

The guidelines aim to standardise respect for a historic national symbol while reinforcing ceremonial order. Their success will depend not just on administrative compliance but on cultivating informed civic pride rooted in historical understanding and inclusive patriotism.

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