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1. Health Ministry set to roll out free HPV vaccination plan targeting girls aged 14

Why in the News?

The Union Health Ministry has announced the launch of a nationwide Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination programme targeting 14-year-old girls, to be provided free of cost and voluntarily across India.

Key highlights:

- Use of Gardasil (quadrivalent vaccine).
- Single-dose schedule based on global and Indian scientific evidence.
- Procurement through partnership with Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance.
- Implementation at government health facilities, including Ayushman Arogya Mandirs.
- Backed by recommendations of the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI).

This marks a significant public health intervention aimed at preventing cervical cancer, one of the leading causes of cancer-related deaths among Indian women.

Safety shot

The Centre's nation-wide HPV vaccination programme targeting girls aged 14 will begin soon

- A single-shot of Gardasil, a vaccine that provides protection against HPV types 16 and 18, which cause cervical cancer, and types 6 and 11 will be used
- The vaccination will be voluntary and free of cost. It will be administered exclusively at designated government health facilities
- Cervical cancer remains the second most common cancer among women in India



Background

What is HPV?

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is a common viral infection transmitted primarily through sexual contact.

- Over 100 types exist.
- High-risk types 16 and 18 cause nearly 80% of cervical cancer cases in India.
- Types 6 and 11 cause genital warts.

Cervical Cancer Burden in India

- The second most common cancer among Indian women.
- ~80,000 new cases annually.

- ~42,000 deaths every year.
- Disproportionately affects women from lower socio-economic backgrounds due to:
 - Late diagnosis
 - Limited screening
 - Poor awareness

Despite being largely preventable through vaccination and early screening, cervical cancer continues to impose a heavy public health burden.

Features

Target Group

- Girls aged 14 years
- Administered before potential exposure to HPV
- Maximum immunogenic benefit in early adolescence

Vaccine Used: Gardasil

- Quadrivalent vaccine.
- Protects against:
 - HPV 16 & 18 (cervical cancer)
 - HPV 6 & 11 (genital warts)
- Approved by the Indian drug regulator.
- Over 500 million doses administered globally since 2006.
- 93–100% effectiveness against vaccine-covered HPV types.

Single-Dose Schedule

- Supported by global scientific evidence.
- Over 90 countries now implement single-dose HPV vaccination.

Improves:

- Coverage
- Affordability
- Logistical feasibility

Procurement and Supply Chain

- Secured through a Gavi-supported global procurement mechanism.
- **Ensures:**
 - Quality assurance
 - Cold chain compliance
 - Uninterrupted supply

Delivery Mechanism

Vaccination will be conducted exclusively at:

- Ayushman Arogya Mandirs (Primary Health Centres)
- Community Health Centres
- Sub-District Hospitals
- District Hospitals
- Government Medical Colleges

Each session will:

- Be supervised by trained medical officers
- Include post-vaccination observation
- Be equipped to manage rare adverse events

Equity Focus

- Free of cost.
- Available across all States and Union Territories.
- Ensures socio-economic inclusivity.

Challenges

Vaccine Hesitancy

- Cultural stigma linking the HPV vaccine with sexual activity.
- Misinformation regarding fertility or safety.
- Low awareness about cervical cancer prevention.

Gender-Specific Targeting

- Currently focused only on girls.
- Some global programmes also include boys to reduce transmission.

Logistical Issues

- Cold chain maintenance in remote areas.
- Tracking single-dose coverage.
- Ensuring follow-up and documentation.

Screening Gap

- Vaccination does not eliminate the need for cervical screening.
- Low coverage of Pap smear and HPV DNA testing in India.

Urban-Rural Divide

- Awareness and access disparity between metropolitan and rural districts.

Way Forward

Mass Awareness Campaigns

- Integrate with:
- School health programmes
- Adolescent health initiatives
- Community outreach via ASHA workers
- Use culturally sensitive communication.

Integrate Vaccination with Screening

- Combine HPV vaccination with:
- VIA screening (Visual Inspection with Acetic Acid)

- HPV DNA testing under the National Health Mission.

Consider Gender-Neutral Vaccination (Long Term)

- Evaluate expansion to boys to reduce the transmission chain.
- Align with global best practices.

Strengthen Digital Monitoring

- Use CoWIN-like digital tracking.
- Integrate into Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP) databases.

Promote Indigenous Manufacturing

- Encourage domestic vaccine production for long-term sustainability.
- Reduce dependence on global procurement mechanisms.

Conclusion

The launch of a free, nationwide HPV vaccination programme targeting 14-year-old girls represents a transformational step in India's preventive healthcare policy.

By:

- Leveraging scientific evidence supporting single-dose efficacy,
- Ensuring free and equitable access,
- Partnering with global institutions like Gavi,
- Grounding decisions in NTAGI recommendations,

India is moving toward a future where cervical cancer can be significantly reduced, if not eliminated, as a public health problem. However, vaccination must be complemented by sustained awareness, screening expansion, and community engagement to ensure long-term success. For India, this programme is not merely a vaccination drive—it is an investment in women's health, dignity, and intergenerational well-being.

2. Engagement with local people is key to mitigating human-wildlife conflict: SC

Why in the News?

The Supreme Court of India has observed that the growing human-wildlife conflict in southern States, particularly parts of Kerala, is "alarming" and cannot be addressed merely through judicial orders.

A Bench led by Chief Justice Surya Kant emphasised:

- The need for ground-level engagement with local communities.
- A humanitarian approach, rather than purely legal enforcement.
- Sensitivity to economic distress, awareness gaps, and exploitation by vested interests.

The Court was hearing petitions referring to its earlier orders (August 1, 2018 and December 4, 2018) concerning cruel methods used to manage wildlife, such as spikes and fireballs to drive away elephants.

Background

What is Human–Wildlife Conflict?

Human–wildlife conflict (HWC) refers to situations where interactions between humans and wild animals result in:

- Injury or death to humans
- Damage to crops, livestock, and property
- Injury or killing of wildlife

In India, elephants, tigers, leopards, and wild boars are frequently involved.



Situation in Southern States

Southern States such as Kerala, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu have witnessed:

- Increased elephant movement into agricultural lands
- Encroachment into forest fringes
- Retaliatory measures by locals
- Use of illegal and cruel deterrents (e.g., explosives, spiked devices)

The Court noted that commercial interests and systemic evasion of law aggravate the situation.

Legal and Policy Context

- The relevant legal framework includes:
- Wildlife Protection Act, 1972
- Forest conservation laws
- Supreme Court monitoring of forest diversion and wildlife protection

In earlier orders (2018), the Supreme Court had addressed:

- Cruel and illegal methods are used to manage wildlife
- The need for humane and scientific solutions

Features

- Shift from Judicial Activism to a Participatory Approach
- The Court remarked:
- “This issue has to be addressed not by court orders, but through a humanitarian approach.”

This reflects a move toward:

- Community-based conservation
- Participatory governance
- Social dialogue instead of top-down directives

Emphasis on Ground-Level Understanding

The Bench stressed:

- Speaking in the local language
- Understanding economic conditions
- Identifying vested interests exploiting tensions
- Addressing conflict of interest

This recognises that HWC is not merely an environmental issue, but also:

- A livelihood issue
- A governance issue
- A social justice issue

Concern over Cruel Methods

The petitions highlighted:

- Use of spikes
- Fireballs
- Explosive devices

Such methods:

- Violate animal welfare norms
- Risk of human injury
- Escalate conflict
- Undermine conservation ethics

Challenges in Mitigating Human–Wildlife Conflict

Habitat Fragmentation

- Shrinking forest cover
- Infrastructure projects (roads, railways)
- Blocked elephant corridors

Livelihood Dependence

- Communities depend on forest fringe agriculture
- Crop raiding leads to economic distress
- Delayed compensation worsens anger

Weak Enforcement

- Illegal electric fencing
- Unregulated land use
- Political and commercial pressures

Lack of Awareness and Sensitivity

The Court noted:

- Lack of sensitivity
- Lack of awareness
- Systematic evasion of the law

Climate Change

- Altered rainfall patterns
- Water scarcity is pushing wildlife toward settlements

Way Forward

Community-Based Conservation

- Involve Gram Sabhas and local communities.
- Promote joint forest management.
- Strengthen Forest Rights Act implementation.

Strengthen Elephant Corridors

- Identify and legally secure wildlife corridors.
- Prevent encroachment.
- Use scientific land-use planning.

Timely and Transparent Compensation

- Direct benefit transfer mechanisms.
- Fast-track compensation for crop and human loss.
- Insurance-based models.

Humane Deterrence Mechanisms

- Solar fencing
- Early warning systems
- Bee-fencing models
- SMS alert systems

Behavioural and Awareness Campaigns

- Local-language awareness drives.
- School-level conservation education.
- Training frontline forest staff.

Data-Driven Governance

- GIS-based mapping of conflict hotspots.
- AI-based tracking of elephant movement.
- Integration with disaster management systems.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's observations signal a critical shift in India's approach to human-wildlife conflict—from a court-centric, enforcement-driven model to a community-engaged, humanitarian framework.

By recognising:

- Economic vulnerabilities of local people,
- Exploitation by vested interests,
- Legal evasions and awareness gaps,

The Court has underscored that sustainable coexistence requires trust-building, local dialogue, and scientific planning.

Human-wildlife conflict is ultimately a symptom of deeper ecological imbalance. Addressing it demands not just stronger laws, but stronger relationships between the State, communities, and nature.

3. SC closes suo motu case on polluted rivers after 5 years of near inaction

Why in the News?

The Supreme Court recently closed a 2021 suo motu case concerning the remediation of polluted rivers, citing five years of limited progress. A Bench headed by Surya Kant directed the National Green Tribunal (NGT) to reopen and continue monitoring the issue. The case had originated in January 2021 when the Court took cognisance of widespread river pollution caused primarily by untreated sewage and municipal lapses.

Background

Suo Motu Action in 2021

In January 2021, a three-judge Bench led by Sharad A. Bobde observed:

- Rivers are the lifeline of civilisation.
- Freshwater quality is directly linked to public health.
- The right to clean water is part of Article 21 (Right to Life).

The Court had taken note of sewage discharge into rivers and the failure of urban local bodies to treat wastewater adequately.

Trigger: Yamuna Pollution Dispute

- The proceedings were triggered by an urgent plea from the Delhi Jal Board, seeking directions to stop Haryana from releasing untreated effluents into the Yamuna.

Constitutional and Legal Basis

- Article 21: Right to life includes a clean environment.
- Article 48A: The State shall protect and improve the environment.
- Article 51A(g): Fundamental duty to protect the environment.
- Judicial precedents like the M.C. Mehta cases strengthened environmental jurisprudence.

Features

Closure of the Suo Motu Proceedings

- The Court cited the impracticality of examining pollution in all rivers across India.
- Emphasised the need to avoid multiplicity of proceedings.

Transfer of Monitoring Responsibility to NGT

- The NGT was directed to reopen the matter.
- Continued oversight to be ensured through a specialised environmental forum.

Judicial Restraint and Institutional Allocation

- Recognition that environmental monitoring requires sustained technical oversight.
- The Supreme Court may focus on constitutional and high-impact matters.



Key Issues

Feasibility Challenge

- CJI Surya Kant questioned:
- Can the Supreme Court monitor all polluted rivers?
- Is centralised judicial monitoring efficient?

India has over 350 polluted river stretches identified by the CPCB in recent assessments.

Municipal Failures

Major sources of pollution:

- Untreated sewage
- Industrial effluents
- Solid waste dumping

- Agricultural runoff

Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) often lack:

- Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs)
- Financial resources
- Technical expertise

Federal Dimensions

- **River pollution often involves:**
- Inter-state disputes (e.g., Delhi–Haryana over the Yamuna)
- Centre–State coordination gaps
- Weak enforcement of pollution control norms

Challenges

Structural Governance Gaps

- Fragmented institutional framework (CPCB, SPCBs, municipalities).
- Overlapping jurisdiction between courts and tribunals.

Weak Enforcement

- Penalties rarely act as effective deterrents.
- The Polluter Pays Principle is poorly implemented.

Infrastructure Deficit

- STPs operate below capacity.
- Many cities lack sewer connectivity.

Data and Monitoring Issues

- Inconsistent water quality data.
- Lack of real-time monitoring across river basins.

Judicial Overreach vs. Judicial Withdrawal

- Earlier phase: Active judicial intervention.
- Current phase: Delegation to specialised body (NGT).
- Risk of diluted oversight.

Way Forward

Strengthen the NGT

- Provide greater financial and technical support.
- Ensure strict timelines for compliance.
- Strengthen contempt and enforcement mechanisms.

Basin-Level Management Approach

- Shift from city-centric to river basin management.
- Integrate water quality, ecology, and groundwater planning.

Empower Urban Local Bodies

- Increase fiscal transfers for sewage infrastructure.
- Mandate performance-based grants.
- Capacity-building for environmental compliance.

Real-Time Monitoring

- Install IoT-based sensors for pollution tracking.
- Public dashboards for transparency.

Strict Enforcement of Environmental Principles

- Polluter Pays Principle
- Precautionary Principle
- Public Trust Doctrine

Inter-State River Governance Framework

- Permanent river basin authorities.
- Strengthen dispute resolution mechanisms.

Broader Significance for Governance

This development signals:

- A shift from judicial activism to institutional delegation.
- Recognition that environmental governance requires continuous technical monitoring.
- Reinforcement of the NGT's role as India's specialised environmental adjudicatory body.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's decision to close the suo motu case reflects pragmatic judicial restraint rather than abdication of responsibility. By entrusting the National Green Tribunal with continued oversight, the Court acknowledges that river pollution demands sustained, technical, and decentralised monitoring rather than episodic constitutional intervention. However, unless governance reforms, municipal capacity, and enforcement mechanisms improve, toxic foam on rivers like the Yamuna will remain a recurring symbol of India's environmental crisis.

4. An Israel visit — its strategic, economic, regional impact

Why in the News?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to undertake a two-day standalone visit to Israel (February 25–26, 2026). The visit comes amid heightened tensions in West Asia, uncertainty over the Gaza peace process, and evolving regional alignments.

The development gains significance as it:

- Marks Mr. Modi's second visit to Israel after his historic 2017 visit.
- Comes at a time of potential large-scale conflict involving Iran.
- Reflects India's "de-hyphenation" policy — engaging Israel independent of Palestine.

- Occurs amid renewed discussions on the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC).



Background

- Large American military buildup in the Persian Gulf.
- Iran's defiance of U.S. demands.
- Fragile ceasefire in Gaza (since October 2025).
- Emerging fault lines among Gulf states.

Evolution of India–Israel Relations

- 1992: Full diplomatic relations established.
- 2017: First-ever visit by an Indian PM to Israel.
- Defence partnership deepened significantly post-2014.
- Cooperation expanded to agriculture, water, innovation and trade.

India has successfully balanced ties with Israel and Arab states - demonstrated by:

- 2nd India-Arab Foreign Ministers' Meeting (January 2026).
- PM's visits to Jordan and Oman (December 2025).
- UAE President's visit to India (January 2026).

Features of the Visit

- Strategic and Defence Convergence
- India has been Israel's largest defence customer (about 34% of Israel's arms exports, 2020–2024)

Key defence pillars:

- Barak-8 missile system (jointly developed).
- Possible focus on procurement and co-production of the Iron Beam laser system.
- Strengthening of anti-drone and missile shield under Mission “Sudarshan Chakra”.
- Agreement (Nov 2025) to deepen cooperation in the defence industry and technology.

This gains importance after India’s lessons from Operation Sindoor (May 2025)

Science, Technology and Innovation

- 35+ Centres of Excellence in India in agriculture.
- Israeli expertise in drip irrigation and water management.
- MASHAV agreements with Haryana (2022) and Rajasthan (2024)
- Emerging focus: Artificial Intelligence, electronics, and high-tech.

Economic and Trade Engagement

- Bilateral trade: \$3.75 billion (FY 2024–25)
- Dominated by diamonds, petroleum, and chemicals.
- Expanding to electronics, medical equipment and communications.
- Bilateral Investment Agreement (September 2025).
- Terms of Reference for FTA signed (November 2025).
- FTA momentum could accelerate during this visit.

IMEC and Connectivity

- The IMEC project, announced at G-20 (2023), aims to create an alternative trade corridor linking India to Europe via West Asia.

Significance:

- Reduces dependence on the Suez Canal.
- Strategic alternative amid regional instability.
- Enhances India’s role in global supply chains.

Gaza Peace Process & Regional Dynamics

- U.S.-led peace initiative (Feb 19, 2026 Summit).
- 50+ countries pledged funding and troop commitments
India attended as observer; role not yet defined.

Potential discussion areas:

- India’s reconstruction role in Gaza.
- Balancing ties with Israel and the Arab nations.
- Energy security concerns amid Iran tensions.

Challenges

Regional Instability

- Iran–U.S. tensions.
- Fragile Gaza ceasefire.
- Polarisation among Gulf states.

Balancing Act

- Israel PM Benjamin Netanyahu proposed a “hexagon of alliances”
- India may not align with bloc politics due to:
 - Strong ties with the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Oman.
 - Energy security dependence.
 - Strategic autonomy doctrine.

IMEC Vulnerabilities

- Security risks.
- Political instability.
- Need for lasting Gaza peace.

Domestic and Diplomatic Sensitivities

- India's traditional support for the Palestinian cause.
- Need to maintain credibility in the Global South.

Way Forward

Deepen Strategic Autonomy

- Engage Israel strongly without entering exclusive blocs.
- Maintain balanced diplomacy.

Expand Defence Co-Production

- Move from buyer-seller to joint R&D.
- Promote Make in India in defence manufacturing.

Accelerate FTA Negotiations

- Expand high-tech trade.
- Facilitate mobility of skilled professionals.

Operationalise IMEC

- Institutionalise corridor governance.
- Secure maritime and land transit routes.

Constructive Role in Gaza

- Offer humanitarian and reconstruction assistance.
- Avoid military entanglement.
- Promote diplomatic mediation.

Broader Strategic Significance

This visit reflects:

- Consolidation of India–Israel strategic partnership.
- India's rising profile in West Asia.
- Shift from ideology-driven to interest-driven foreign policy.
- Expansion from defence-centric to multi-dimensional partnership.

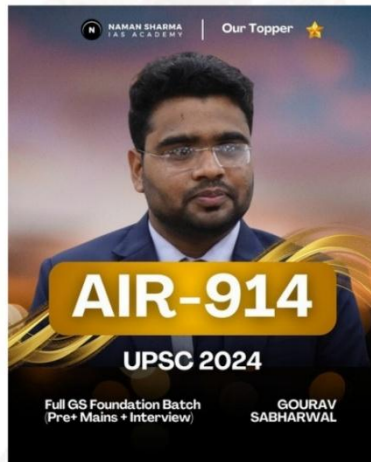
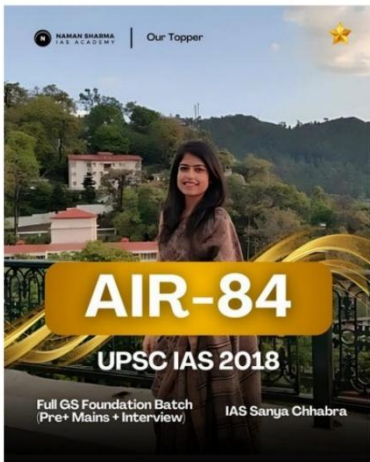
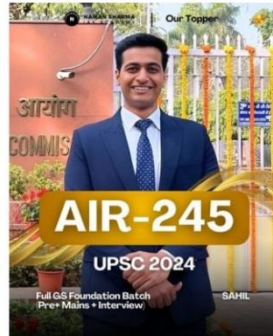
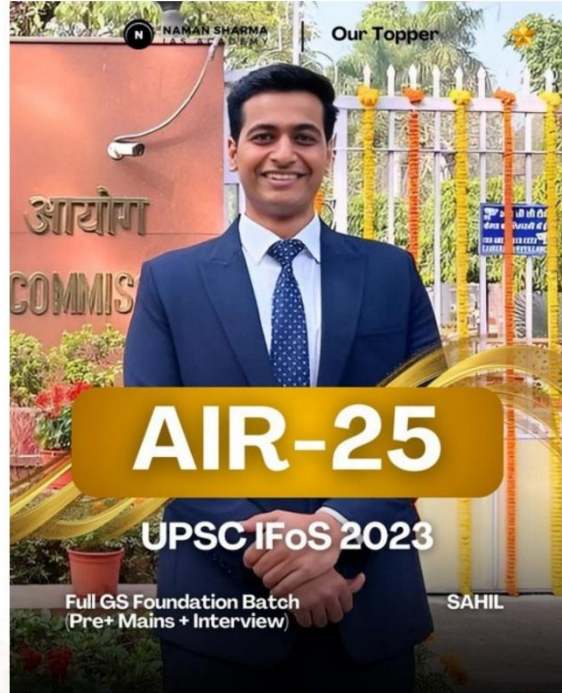
Conclusion

Prime Minister Modi's visit to Israel comes at a pivotal moment for West Asia. While defence cooperation remains the backbone, the partnership now spans technology, trade, connectivity and innovation.

India's challenge lies in leveraging strategic convergence with Israel without compromising its balanced regional diplomacy. If managed prudently, this visit could:

- Strengthen India's defence modernisation,
- Boost trade and connectivity through IMEC,
- Reinforce India's credibility as a stabilising power in West Asia.

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