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 **Offline Centre Location:**
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1. India, U.S. draw up deal on rare earth elements

Why in the News?

On May 26, 2026, India and the United States signed a "Framework on Securing Supply in the Mining and Processing of Critical Minerals and Rare Earths". The agreement was finalised on the sidelines of the Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting in New Delhi, coinciding with a separate Quad-level critical minerals initiative.

Rare deal
The framework comes amid shortfall of critical metals in global markets after China imposed export curbs on rare earth elements



Framework seeks to:

- Deepen India-U.S. cooperation across the critical minerals and rare earths supply chain, including mining, processing, recycling and related investments
- Implement effective management of critical minerals and rare earths scrap
- Strengthen resilient and diversified supply chains
- Promote collaboration in financing

Mining strategy: The agreement follows continued India-U.S. engagements, including India becoming a signatory to the U.S.-led Pax Silica initiative. REUTERS

Background

- **China's Export Controls:** The deal is a direct response to growing global anxiety over China's dominance in the rare earths market. China processes around 90% of the world's supply and has increasingly used export controls as strategic leverage, prompting nations to seek diversified sources.
- **Prior Engagements:** The framework builds on earlier U.S.-led initiatives like the "Pax Silica" initiative, which India joined in February 2026 to secure technology supply chains. It also follows discussions from PM Modi's U.S. visit in February 2025.

Features

- **Comprehensive Supply Chain Coverage:** The bilateral framework covers the entire lifecycle—mining, processing, refining, recycling, and related investments—to build resilient and diversified supply chains.
- **Quad-Level Investment:** In parallel, the Quad nations (U.S., India, Japan, Australia) launched an initiative to mobilise up to \$20 billion in government and private-sector support for critical mineral projects within partner countries.

Challenges

- **Processing Dominance:** While India has significant reserves of rare earth minerals (like 13.15 million tonnes of monazite), the global supply chain bottleneck is China's near-monopoly on processing technology.
- **Infrastructure Gap:** India currently produces only four critical minerals due to limited exploration, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of domestic processing capabilities.

- **Regulatory Hurdles:** Successful implementation requires faster environmental clearances, sustained investment, and policy coordination between India and the U.S., which can be complex.

Way Forward

- **Domestic Development in India:** India plans to create "rare earth corridors" in states like Odisha and Tamil Nadu to boost domestic mining, processing, and manufacturing of high-performance magnets.
- **Technology Partnerships:** Collaboration with the U.S. is expected to bring in advanced processing and recycling technologies to help India move beyond just mining.
- **Global Supply Diversification:** This deal is part of a larger U.S. strategy, which includes partnerships with countries in Africa and South America, to systematically reduce reliance on a single supplier and build a more resilient global supply chain.

Conclusion

The India-U.S. framework signifies a strategic realignment of critical mineral supply chains. While it opens pathways for significant investment and technological cooperation, the success of this initiative hinges on overcoming the substantial gap in processing technology and swiftly developing the necessary infrastructure in India. It is a key move in the broader geopolitical effort to secure resources for future industries.

2. Quad announces maritime plans amid Hormuz crisis

Why in the News?

At the 11th Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting on May 26, 2026, the group launched specific initiatives to enhance maritime surveillance and energy security, directly addressing the escalating crisis in the Strait of Hormuz and ongoing tensions in the South China Sea.



Background

- **Hormuz Crisis:** The immediate backdrop is the conflict involving Iran, which has intensified since February 28, 2026. Iran's Foreign Minister recently claimed the Strait of Hormuz is not an international waterway, contradicting the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). This, combined with threats from Iran-backed Houthi militia in the Red Sea, has created a chokehold threatening global maritime commerce and energy supplies.
- **South China Sea Tensions:** Long-standing disputes over territorial claims and freedom of navigation in the region remain a core concern for the Quad, which opposes unilateral actions that challenge the rules-based order.

Features

- **Maritime Surveillance Collaboration:** A new initiative to leverage and combine the maritime surveillance capabilities of all four Quad nations in the Indo-Pacific to significantly enhance information sharing.
- **Expanded Maritime Domain Awareness:** An expansion of an existing program to provide near real-time commercial maritime data to countries across the Indo-Pacific, boosting transparency and security.
- **Quad Energy Security Initiative:** A new program focused on boosting regional energy resilience and conducting emergency response exercises, directly responding to energy supply vulnerabilities highlighted by the Hormuz situation.
- **Quad at Sea Mission:** It was announced that India will host the next iteration of this mission, bringing together the coast guards of all four member nations for joint operations.

Challenges

- **Escalating Conflict:** The U.S.-Israel military campaign against Iran and continued Houthi attacks pose a direct, ongoing threat to commercial shipping and energy tankers in the region.
- **Contested Legal Frameworks:** Iran's rejection of UNCLOS for the Strait of Hormuz creates a direct legal and operational challenge to the Quad's stated principle of upholding international law and freedom of navigation.
- **Geopolitical Opposition:** The initiative has drawn predictable criticism from China, whose Foreign Ministry reiterated its opposition to the creation of "exclusive small cliques," highlighting the risk of deepening regional polarisation.

Way Forward

- **Operationalising Initiatives:** The focus will be on implementing the newly announced surveillance and energy security programs to have a tangible impact on regional stability.
- **Deepening Collaboration:** As External Affairs Minister Jaishankar stated, the Quad will continue to deepen cooperation in surveillance, logistics networks, and undersea cable security.
- **Upholding International Law:** The Quad will likely continue to collectively assert the principle of freedom of navigation under UNCLOS, particularly in the Strait of Hormuz and the South China Sea, through diplomatic and operational means.

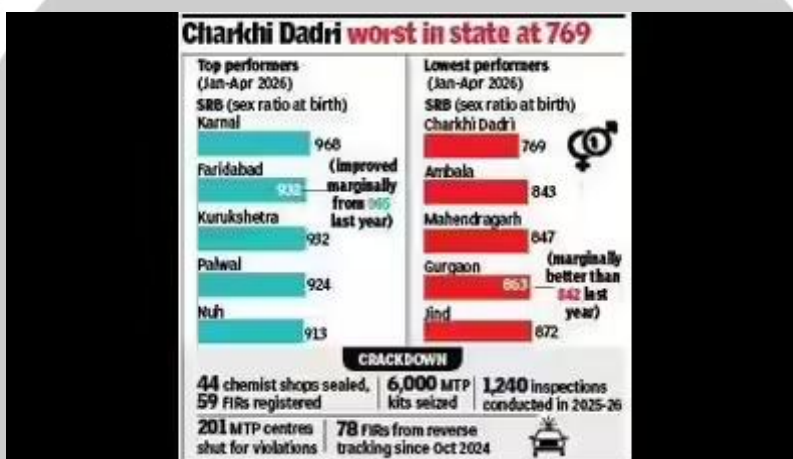
Conclusion

The Quad's latest announcements represent a concrete shift from strategic dialogue to actionable, operational cooperation in the maritime domain. Motivated by immediate threats to global shipping and energy supplies from the Hormuz crisis, the grouping is expanding its role as a provider of maritime security and domain awareness in the Indo-Pacific, directly challenging the claims of nations seeking to restrict international waterways.

3. Gurugram sex ratio dips to 862, DC orders intensified campaign against illegal sex determination

Why in the News?

The Gurugram district administration has ordered an intensified crackdown on illegal sex determination tests after official data revealed a sharp drop in the Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB). The SRB fell from 901 girls per 1,000 boys in 2025 to just 862 in the first four months of 2026, triggering urgent administrative action.



Background

- **Definition:** The Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB) measures the number of female live births per 1,000 male live births. A biologically normal ratio is between 940 and 980. A figure of 862 signals a severe crisis of female foeticide.
- **Persistent Issue:** India has long struggled with a skewed sex ratio due to a deep-rooted societal preference for sons and the illegal practice of sex-selective abortions.
- **Legal Framework:** The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PC-PNDT) Act bans sex-selective abortions, supported by the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act and the Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) Act.
- **State-Wide Trend:** The decline is not isolated to Gurugram; the Haryana state average SRB also dipped from 923 to 898 during the same period, indicating a broader, alarming trend.

Features

- **Stricter Monitoring:** The Deputy Commissioner ordered a strengthened monitoring mechanism under the PC-PNDT Act.
- **Intensified Inspections and Action:** Of 395 registered diagnostic centres, 311 were inspected. Actions include:

- 3 FIRs in 2025 and 2 in 2026 for violations.
- Cancellation of 3 centre registrations and sealing of 5 ultrasound machines.
- Shutdown of 48 unregistered ART centres.
- Awareness Campaigns: A directive to scale up the 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' campaign with rallies, wall writings, and poster drives in low-SRB villages.

Challenges

- **Underground Networks:** Rackets using portable ultrasound machines are hard to detect.
- **Persistent Social Mindset:** Son preference is deeply entrenched and cannot be changed by law alone.
- **Technology Outpacing Regulation:** The rise of unregistered ART centres shows how reproductive technology can circumvent existing rules.

Way Forward

- **Strengthened Enforcement:** Intensified decoy operations, inter-state coordination, and heavy penalties.
- **Community Engagement:** Leveraging local leaders to champion gender equality.
- **Addressing Root Causes:** Focusing on women's safety, education, and economic empowerment to change the perception of a daughter as a "burden."

Conclusion

The steep decline in Gurugram's sex ratio is a stark reminder that legal frameworks require rigorous, continuous enforcement. While the crackdown on illegal centres is necessary, the real victory lies in transforming societal mindsets through persistent awareness and empowerment, making 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' a lived reality.

4. Give prosecution immunity to Chambal guards, says SC

Why in the News?

The Supreme Court has directed Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan to consider granting prosecution immunity to forest guards for actions taken in good faith while combating illegal sand mining in the National Chambal Sanctuary. This direction came on Tuesday during a hearing of a suo motu case on illegal mining threatening the sanctuary's endangered wildlife. The next hearing is scheduled for July 22.

Background

This order follows a series of violent attacks on forest personnel by illegal miners, including the brutal murders of two guards in April 2026:

- Harikesh Gurjar was crushed under a truck in Morena, Madhya Pradesh.
- Jitendra Singh Shekhawat was run over in Dholpur, Rajasthan.

The Supreme Court has previously expressed frustration over the "apathy" of state governments and warned of deploying paramilitary forces if concrete steps were not taken to control the "lawless" miners.

Feature

The directive to consider immunity is based on the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023, and the court invoked its special powers under Article 142 of the Constitution.

Prosecution Immunity under Section 218(3) BNSS:

This is a legal safeguard. Section 218(3) allows state governments to issue a notification extending to a specific class of public servants (like forest guards) the same protection from prosecution that armed forces have. This means that for any offence a guard is accused of while performing official duty in good faith, a court cannot take cognizance without prior government sanction.

Guarding the guards

The court issued the direction for immunity from prosecution under Section 218(3) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita

COURT'S SUPPORT

- Forest guards working in dangerous anti-mining operations should not hesitate to act because of fear of later criminal prosecution
- Court passed the order using extraordinary powers under Article 142 of the Constitution - doing "complete justice" in any pending case
- Court directed installation of CCTV-based carpet surveillance and live monitoring



THE BACKGROUND

- Order comes after two forest guards were brutally killed by miners in Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan
- The case concerns illegal sand extraction inside the National Chambal Gharial Sanctuary, an ecologically sensitive habitat

Key Directions Issued:

The court issued a comprehensive set of directions to strengthen enforcement:

- **Recruitment:** Fill all frontline forest staff vacancies within one year.
- **Surveillance:** Establish carpet surveillance with CCTV cameras and live monitoring on a "war-footing" within six months, including high-resolution night-vision cameras on critical bridges.
- **Vehicle Seizure:** Stringent action against unregistered vehicles and machinery used in mining, with prosecution not just of drivers but also owners and financiers.
- **Community Involvement:** Engage local communities and provide employment opportunities in conservation and eco-tourism.

Challenge

The core challenge is the rampant and organised illegal sand mining by powerful "sand mafias," which has created a parallel economy. The court noted that the states' failure to stop this reeks of "tacit connivance and helplessness" against the miners' superior firepower. This lawlessness not only threatens the lives of forest guards but also causes severe environmental damage, destroying the critical habitat of endangered Gharials and Gangetic dolphins and even compromising the structural integrity of bridges like the one on NH-44.

Way Forward

The Supreme Court has paved the way with a multi-pronged strategy:

- **Protective Shield:** The states must urgently notify immunity under Section 218(3) BNSS to ensure guards are not penalised for doing their duty.
- **Capacity Building:** States must fulfil recruitment and technological upgrades on schedule as directed.
- **Dismantling Networks:** A shift in investigation focus from low-level drivers to the owners and financiers of the illegal mining networks is critical.
- **Sustainable Alternative:** The court's directive to involve local communities in conservation offers a long-term solution to the economic factors that fuel illegal

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's order is a direct response to a crisis marked by violence and environmental destruction. By recommending prosecution immunity and mandating a massive upgrade in enforcement infrastructure, the court seeks to empower forest guards against powerful mining mafias. The successful implementation of these directions by the three states will be crucial for both the rule of law and the preservation of the fragile Chambal ecosystem.

5. SC to examine if law is diluting the count of wetlands in India

Why in the News?

The Supreme Court has agreed to examine a challenge to the constitutional validity of the definition of "**wetlands**" in the **Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017**. A bench led by Chief Justice Surya Kant issued a formal notice to the central government on Tuesday, specifically questioning the "vagueness" of the definition in Rule 2(g), and has asked for a reply by August.

Background

This legal challenge stems from a major policy shift between two sets of environmental rules.

- **The 2010 Rules:** The earlier Wetlands Rules of **2010 adopted a broad definition, aligning closely with the Ramsar Convention, 1971**, an international treaty to which India is a signatory. These rules explicitly protected man-made wetlands and established central and state-level authorities for oversight.
- **The 2017 Rules:** The **2017 Rules, which replaced the 2010 version**, are the subject of the current controversy. The petition, filed by environmental activists and professionals, argues that the 2017 definition arbitrarily excludes a vast number of human-made and artificial wetlands from legal protection.

Feature

The case centres on the definition in **Rule 2(g) of the 2017 Rules**. Here are the key points of contention:

• The "Vague" Definition & Exclusions

The petitioners argue that while the definition begins by echoing the **Ramsar text ("areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial...")**, it then carves out specific exclusions.

- It removes from protection waterbodies constructed for **drinking water, irrigation, aquaculture, salt production, recreation, and allied purposes.**
- The petitioners claim this effectively strips protection from a substantial majority of India's wetlands that were historically developed for these very uses.

Conflict with the Ramsar Convention

- The Ramsar Convention expressly defines wetlands to include both natural and artificial sites, whether permanent or temporary.
- The petition contends that the 2017 Rules are inconsistent with India's binding international obligations under this convention.
- According to the petitioners, the narrowed definition could lead to 39 out of 94 Ramsar sites in India losing their protected status.

Violation of the Principle of Non-Regression

- This principle holds that environmental laws should not be amended if it results in a lowering of protection.
- The petitioners assert that the dilution from the 2010 Rules to the 2017 Rules is a regressive step that violates this established component of Indian environmental jurisprudence.

Challenge

- The central challenge is a legal and ecological one: how to define a "wetland" for the purpose of conservation.
- By excluding many human-made water bodies, the 2017 Rules may leave critical ecological infrastructure, which provides natural flood control, water purification, and biodiversity support, vulnerable to unregulated use and development, even if sites are internationally recognised under the Ramsar Convention

Way Forward

The Supreme Court has initiated the judicial process by seeking the central government's response. The court will now examine the validity of the exclusionary definition in Rule 2(g) against constitutional principles and international environmental law. The government is expected to file its reply, after which a detailed hearing will take place in August. The court's final ruling will have significant implications for the protection of thousands of water bodies across the country.

Conclusion

This case is a crucial test for the balance between development and environmental protection in India. The Supreme Court's scrutiny of the 2017 Wetlands Rules will determine whether the government can legally narrow the scope of conservation, or if it is bound by both the principle of

non-regression and international obligations to maintain a broader, more ecologically sound definition of wetlands.

6. India's energy strategy needs price correction

Why in the News?

India is facing a prolonged energy shock due to geopolitical tensions disrupting the Strait of Hormuz, a critical global oil transit chokepoint. Despite a sharp rise in global crude prices and freight costs, the Indian government has kept domestic petrol and diesel prices artificially stable. This has brought the sustainability of India's energy pricing strategy and the financial health of state-run **Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs)** into sharp focus.

Background

India imports over **85% of its crude oil, making it structurally vulnerable** to global supply disruptions. To manage previous price shocks and elections, the government has used a multi-pronged strategy:

- **Supply Diversification:** Increased oil imports from Russia, the US, and West Africa, reducing overdependence on the Gulf.
- **Strategic Reserves:** Built and filled strategic petroleum reserves, including an agreement with the UAE.
- **Fiscal Interventions:** Cut excise duties and use state-run OMCs as a buffer to absorb rising international costs, shielding consumers from a full price pass-through.

Feature:

- **Artificial Price Stability:** Domestic fuel prices are delinked from global markets. While India's prices hover around ₹95/litre, prices in Germany and the UK have surged to over ₹204-₹220/litre.
- **Financial Stress on OMCs:** State-run Oil Marketing Companies are forced to sell fuel below cost, incurring massive under-recoveries (losses) estimated at ₹700-800 crore per day.
- **A Political-Economic Trade-off:** The policy is "politically prudent" to control inflation and avoid public anger, but is "economically difficult to sustain" as it strains public finances, weakens OMC balance sheets, and discourages energy conservation.

Challenge

- **Fiscal Strain:** Prolonged subsidies and OMC losses will widen the fiscal deficit and potentially impact India's sovereign credit rating.
- **Distorted Market Signals:** Artificially low prices prevent the demand destruction that high prices naturally cause, doing little to change energy consumption behaviour at scale.
- **Vulnerability to External Shocks:** The economy remains tethered to geopolitics, with a prolonged Hormuz disruption capable of weakening the rupee, fuelling inflation, and forcing an eventual, more painful correction.
- How to implement price correction: A piecemeal approach has failed, with a cumulative **7% hike still leaving a 13% gap.**

Way Forward

- **Calibrated One-Time Correction:** The government should implement a one-time price hike of at least 13% on petrol, diesel, and aviation turbine fuel. This would eliminate OMC under-recoveries in one stroke.
- **Embrace Economic Realism:** The true cost of fuel cannot be deferred forever. A one-time correction would remove the uncertainty of frequent, small revisions and allow prices to remain steady until a material shift in global crude.
- **Prepare the Public:** Building on the PM's conservation appeals, the state must prepare the public for a new era where energy is costlier, linking resilience with diplomacy and conservation.

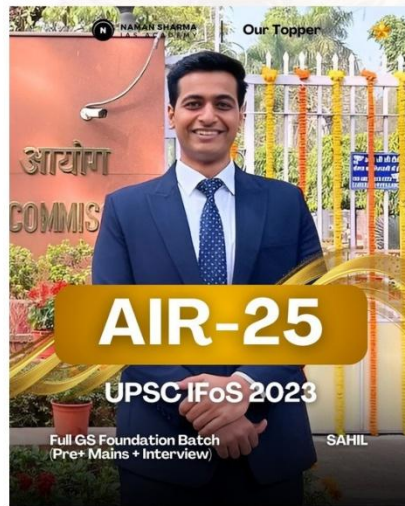
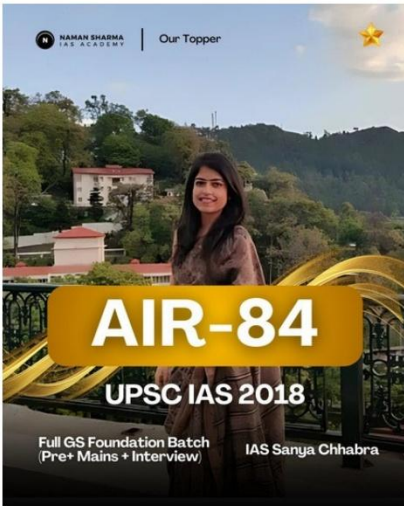
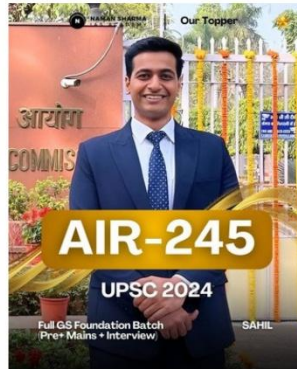
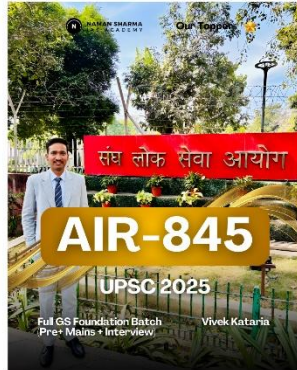
Conclusion

India has successfully navigated the immediate supply crisis with remarkable agility, but this has come at a "steep cost." The strategy of shielding consumers has reached its fiscal and economic limit. The article concludes that moving from a strategy of survival to one of sustainable management requires a politically difficult but economically necessary price correction. The alternative is a worsening fiscal burden and a disorderly, more painful adjustment later.



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