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Pakistan Airstrikes Inside Afghanistan: Sovereignty, International Humanitarian Law & Regional Security Dilemma

Why in News?

- ❖ The Pakistan Air Force (PAF) conducted multiple cross-border airstrikes inside Afghanistan's eastern provinces (Kunar and Nangarhar), targeting alleged hideouts of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Afghan authorities claimed one strike hit a medical facility (hospital) in Khost province, killing at least 12 civilians (including women and children) and injuring over 20 others.
- ❖ Pakistan justified the operation as a "pre-emptive self-defence" measure against TTP militants using Afghan soil for attacks inside Pakistan. The Taliban-led Afghan government strongly condemned the strikes as a "gross violation of sovereignty and territorial integrity" and demanded an immediate apology and investigation.
- ❖ The incident has sharply escalated bilateral tensions, drawn UN and international concern over possible International Humanitarian Law (IHL) violations, and highlighted the persistent Afghanistan-Pakistan security dilemma.

Key Details of the Incident

- **Pakistan's Position**
 - Strikes targeted TTP training camps and launch pads responsible for recent attacks in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.
 - Claimed "precision strikes" with no civilian casualties; intelligence-based operation.
- **Afghanistan's Position**
 - Called the strikes "unacceptable aggression" and "violation of sovereignty".
 - Alleged direct hit on a civilian hospital; demanded UN fact-finding mission.
- **Casualties & Damage**



- At least 12 civilians killed, 20+ injured (per Afghan reports).
- Medical facility damaged; disruption of local healthcare services.
- **International Reactions**
 - UN Secretary-General expressed “deep concern” and urged restraint and respect for sovereignty.
 - China (key player in both countries) called for “calm and dialogue”.
 - India monitored developments closely due to regional security implications.

Background: Roots of the Issue

- **Historical Afghanistan-Pakistan Tensions**
 - Long-standing border dispute (Durand Line).
 - Post-2021 Taliban takeover: TTP found safe havens in Afghanistan; carried out over 100 attacks inside Pakistan in 2024-2025.
- **Previous Incidents**
 - Similar Pakistani airstrikes reported in 2017, 2022, and 2024.
 - Taliban’s refusal to act against TTP despite Pakistani demands.
- **Non-State Actors Role**
 - TTP (banned in Pakistan) uses Afghan territory for planning, training, and cross-border attacks.
 - Weak governance in border regions (FATA-like areas) enables militant sanctuaries.

Implications

- **Sovereignty & Territorial Integrity**
 - Direct challenge to the principle of sovereign equality (UN Charter Article 2(4)).
 - Sets dangerous precedent for unilateral military actions.



- **International Humanitarian Law (IHL)**
 - Deliberate or indiscriminate attack on a hospital violates Geneva Conventions (Additional Protocol I).
 - Possible war crime; demands independent investigation and accountability.
- **Security Dilemma & Regional Instability**
 - Pakistan's "defence" → Afghanistan's "aggression" narrative → cycle of retaliation.
 - Risk of broader conflict spillover into South Asia.
- **Human Security Perspective**
 - Civilian casualties, especially in medical facilities, highlight failure of state-centric security approaches.
 - Displacement, loss of livelihoods, and health crises for border communities.
- **Geopolitical Implications**
 - Strains Afghanistan-Pakistan relations; impacts trade, connectivity, and refugee issues.
 - External powers (China, US, Russia) may intervene diplomatically.
 - India's concerns: Potential TTP spillover, border stability, and regional peace initiatives.
- **Role of International Organisations**
 - UN can facilitate mediation, fact-finding, and humanitarian aid.
 - Limited enforcement due to political interests of major powers.

UPSC CSE & State PCS Relevance

Prelims

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- Key terms: Sovereignty, Territorial Integrity, International Humanitarian Law (Geneva Conventions), Security Dilemma, Non-State Actors
- Data: Durand Line, TTP activities post-2021
- Related: UN Charter Article 2(4), Additional Protocol I to Geneva Conventions

GS-2 (IR)

- India's neighbourhood policy & regional security
- Bilateral relations: Afghanistan-Pakistan dynamics

GS-2 (International Organisations)

- Role of UN in conflict resolution & IHL enforcement

GS-3 (Security)

- Cross-border terrorism & non-traditional security threats

Essay / Interview

- "Sovereignty vs. Self-Defence: The Afghanistan-Pakistan Airstrike and the Limits of International Law"
- "Human Security in South Asia: Beyond State-Centric Approaches to Conflict"

MCQs

1. With reference to the Afghanistan-Pakistan airstrike incident (March 2026), consider the following statements:
2. Pakistan justified the strikes as self-defence against TTP militants.
3. Afghanistan claimed one strike hit a civilian hospital.
4. The UN Charter Article 2(4) prohibits the threat or use of force against territorial integrity.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only

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- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (d)

2. The principle of “sovereign equality” is enshrined in:

- (a) Geneva Conventions
- (b) UN Charter
- (c) Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations
- (d) Additional Protocol I

Answer: (b)

3. Attacks on medical facilities during armed conflict are prohibited under:

- (a) International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- (b) Geneva Conventions
- (c) UNCLOS
- (d) Paris Agreement

Answer: (b)

4. The Durand Line is the disputed border between:

- (a) India and Pakistan
- (b) Afghanistan and Pakistan
- (c) Afghanistan and Iran
- (d) Pakistan and China

Answer: (b)



Mains Questions

1. “The Afghanistan-Pakistan airstrike incident of March 2026 highlights the tension between state security concerns and principles of sovereignty and International Humanitarian Law.” Discuss. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Examine the role of non-state actors like the TTP in perpetuating the Afghanistan-Pakistan security dilemma. How does this affect regional stability in South Asia? (10 marks / 150 words)
3. “Modern international relations must shift from state-centric to human-security approaches.” Analyse this statement in the context of civilian casualties in the recent Pakistan airstrikes on Afghan territory. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** “Sovereignty, Self-Defence and Civilian Protection: The Afghanistan-Pakistan Airstrike and the Future of Conflict Resolution in South Asia.”

Global Energy Shock in India: How the West Asia War Threatens Goldilocks Growth

Why in News?

- ❖ The escalating US-Israel-Iran war (February-March 2026), marked by US strikes on **Kharg Island** (Iran’s primary oil export hub) and repeated Iranian threats to disrupt the **Strait of Hormuz**, has triggered a sharp **global energy shock**.
- ❖ Brent crude prices have surged to **\$105-110 per barrel** (highest since 2022), with analysts warning of a potential spike to \$120-150/bbl if Hormuz is even partially blocked. For India – which imports **85% of its crude oil** (majority via the Gulf route) – this shock is threatening the much-celebrated “**Goldilocks growth**” scenario of steady 6.5-7% real GDP growth with moderate inflation.
- ❖ The Ministry of Petroleum and NITI Aayog have flagged rising import bills, inflationary pressures, and risks to fiscal consolidation. The crisis has revived debates on energy security, diversification, and the sustainability of India’s post-COVID recovery.

Key Details of the Energy Shock

- **West Asia Triggers**

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- US strikes on Kharg Island (13-14 March 2026) disrupted ~90% of Iran's export capacity temporarily.
- Iranian warnings to mine or close the Strait of Hormuz (20% of global oil transit).
- Missile/drone attacks on tankers and ports → war-risk premiums up 300-500%.
- **Impact on Oil Prices**
 - Brent crude: \$105-110/bbl (March 2026 peak).
 - India's import bill: Potential additional ₹60,000-80,000 crore per month at sustained high prices.
- **Goldilocks Growth at Risk**
 - Pre-shock: India projected 6.8-7.2% real GDP growth for FY26 with CPI inflation ~4.5-5%.
 - Post-shock: Fuel and transport costs pushing CPI inflation toward 6%+; CAD widening 1-1.5% of GDP; growth may moderate to 6-6.5%.
- **Sectoral Impact**
 - Aviation: ATF prices up 15-20% → higher fares, grounded flights.
 - LPG: Shortages in Bengaluru and other cities → gig economy distress.
 - Fertilizers & transport: Cost-push inflation in food and goods.

Background: India's Structural Energy Vulnerability

- **Import Dependence**
 - 85% crude oil imported; Gulf region supplies ~60-65% of imports.
 - Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR): Phase-I covers ~9-10 days; Phase-II/III expansion ongoing.
- **Previous Shocks**



- 1973 Oil Crisis, 1990 Gulf War, 2008 Global Financial Crisis, 2022 Russia-Ukraine war.

- **Goldilocks Phase (2023-early 2026)**

- Steady 6.5-7% growth with controlled inflation (post-COVID rebound + strong services/export performance).
- Now threatened by exogenous energy cost-push.

Implications

- **Economic**

- Widening Current Account Deficit (CAD) → rupee pressure.
- Higher inflation → RBI may pause rate cuts or tighten policy.
- Slower private consumption and investment → risk to “Goldilocks” equilibrium.

- **Strategic**

- Renewed push for oil diversification (Russia now ~35-40% of imports).
- Acceleration of renewables, green hydrogen, and EVs (target: 50% non-fossil power by 2030).
- Naval deployment in Indian Ocean for SLOC protection.

- **Social & Political**

- Fuel price pass-through → household distress (especially middle class and gig workers).
- Fiscal strain on subsidies (LPG, kerosene, fertilizers).

- **Global Context**

- Energy shock exacerbates global inflation and slowdown risks.
- Developing nations (including India) most vulnerable.



UPSC CSE & State PCS Relevance

Prelims

- Key terms: Goldilocks Growth, Strait of Hormuz, Kharg Island, Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR), Current Account Deficit (CAD)
- Data: India oil import dependence (~85%), Hormuz transit (~20% global oil), Brent price (\$105-110/bbl)
- Related: Energy Security, OPEC+, Renewable Energy Transition

GS-2 (IR)

- India's multi-alignment policy in West Asia
- Energy geopolitics & great-power rivalry

GS-3 (Economy)

- Oil shocks, inflation, CAD, and growth trade-offs
- Energy security and diversification strategies

GS-3 (Environment)

- Fossil fuel dependence vs. green transition imperatives

Essay / Interview

- "Energy Shocks and the Fragility of Goldilocks Growth: Lessons from the 2026 West Asia Crisis"
- "India's Energy Security in a Geopolitically Volatile World: Challenges and Strategic Choices"

MCQs

1. With reference to the 2026 global energy shock and its impact on India, consider the following statements:



2. The Strait of Hormuz carries approximately 20% of global seaborne oil trade.
3. India imports around 85% of its crude oil requirements.
4. The ongoing West Asia conflict has pushed Brent crude prices above \$105 per barrel.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (d)

2. "Goldilocks growth" in the Indian economic context refers to:

- (a) Very high growth with high inflation
- (b) Steady growth with moderate inflation
- (c) Recessionary conditions
- (d) Export-led hyper-growth

Answer: (b)

3. Which of the following is NOT an immediate impact of the current energy shock on India?

- (a) Rising aviation turbine fuel (ATF) prices
- (b) Widening Current Account Deficit
- (c) Lower LPG cylinder availability
- (d) Sharp decline in rupee value against the euro only

Answer: (d)

4. India's Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) currently provide coverage for approximately:



- (a) 5 days
- (b) 9-10 days
- (c) 20 days
- (d) 30 days

Answer: (b)

Mains Questions

1. "The 2026 West Asia energy shock has exposed the fragility of India's Goldilocks growth model." Discuss the transmission channels of the shock and its implications for macroeconomic stability. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Analyse how rising global oil prices threaten India's energy security and fiscal consolidation. Suggest a multi-pronged strategy to mitigate such external shocks. (10 marks / 150 words)
3. "Diversification and renewable energy transition are the only sustainable answers to recurring energy shocks." Examine this statement in the context of India's dependence on West Asian oil amid the ongoing conflict. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** "Oil Geopolitics and the End of Goldilocks Growth: India's Strategic Imperatives in a Volatile Energy Landscape."

Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026

Why in News?

- ❖ The Union Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment, Virendra Kumar, introduced the **Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026** in the Lok Sabha on **13 March 2026**. The Bill seeks to amend the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, by removing the right to **self-perceived gender identity**, introducing mandatory **medical board certification**, narrowing the definition of "transgender person", and introducing graded penalties for offences.



- ❖ The move has triggered massive protests by the transgender community, human rights groups, and opposition parties, who term it “regressive” and an “erasure” of rights affirmed by the Supreme Court in the **NALSA judgment (2014)**.
- ❖ Activists argue it contradicts the principle of self-identification and increases bureaucratic and medical gatekeeping. The government maintains the changes aim to provide “precise identification” and ensure benefits reach the most marginalised. The Bill has been referred to a Parliamentary Standing Committee amid widespread criticism.

Key Details of the Amendment Bill

- **Major Changes from the 2019 Act**
 - **Removal of Self-Identification:** Deletes Section 4(2) of the 2019 Act, which allowed transgender persons to self-identify their gender.
 - **Medical Certification Process:** Requires approval from a **medical board** (comprising doctors and psychologists) and final certification by the **District Magistrate**.
 - **Narrowed Definition:** Redefines “transgender person” to those with specific socio-cultural identities or medically recognised intersex variations – effectively excluding many who identify through self-perception.
 - **Graded Penalties:** Introduces new slabs of punishment (from 6 months to life imprisonment) for abduction, bodily harm, and forced identity assumption.
 - **No Horizontal Reservations:** The Bill does not introduce reservations in education or jobs, a long-standing demand of the community.
- **Government's Stated Objective**
 - To prevent misuse of benefits and ensure “only those facing severe social exclusion due to biological reasons” are covered.
- **Community Response**
 - Widespread protests in Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru, and Mumbai.



- Transgender leaders and the National Council for Transgender Persons claim they were not consulted.
- Petitions filed in various High Courts challenging the Bill on grounds of violating Articles 14, 15, 19, and 21.

Background: Evolution of Transgender Rights in India

- **Landmark NALSA Judgment (2014)**
 - Supreme Court recognised transgender persons as a “third gender” and affirmed the right to self-identification.
 - Directed governments to provide reservations and welfare measures.
- **Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019**
 - First dedicated law granting legal recognition, non-discrimination rights, and welfare provisions.
 - Allowed self-declaration of gender identity (criticised for lacking reservations and implementation gaps).
- **Post-2019 Developments**
 - National Council for Transgender Persons constituted.
 - Several states (Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala) introduced welfare schemes and reservations.
 - Persistent demands for horizontal reservations, better healthcare access, and anti-discrimination enforcement.

Implications

- **For Transgender Community**
 - Increased medical gatekeeping and bureaucratic hurdles → potential denial of identity documents for many.
 - Exclusion of trans men and non-binary persons from the redefined category.



- Heightened vulnerability to harassment and denial of rights.
- **Legal & Constitutional**
 - Direct challenge to the NALSA judgment's core principle of self-identification.
 - Possible violation of fundamental rights (equality, dignity, privacy).
- **Social & Political**
 - Deepens distrust between the community and the government.
 - Opposition parties (TMC, Congress, DMK) have strongly criticised the Bill as "draconian".
 - May delay welfare implementation and fuel further marginalisation.
- **For Policy & Governance**
 - Highlights gaps in consultation with affected communities.
 - Tests the balance between "precise identification" and inclusive rights-based approaches.

UPSC CSE & State PCS Relevance

Prelims

- Key terms: Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2019, NALSA Judgment (2014), Self-Identification, Horizontal Reservation
- Data: Bill introduced 13 March 2026; 24 languages covered by Sahitya Akademi (unrelated but similar institutional context)
- Related: Article 14, 15, 21; National Council for Transgender Persons

GS-1 (Society)

- Gender identity, marginalised communities, social justice

GS-2 (Polity & Governance)

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- Judicial-legislative interplay (NALSA vs. new Bill)
- Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections

GS-2 (Social Justice)

- Rights of transgender persons and implementation challenges

Essay / Interview

- “From Self-Identification to Medical Gatekeeping: The Evolution of Transgender Rights in India”
- “Balancing Legal Precision and Human Dignity: The Transgender Amendment Bill 2026”

MCQs

1. With reference to the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026, consider the following statements:
2. The Bill removes the provision for self-perceived gender identity.
3. It introduces mandatory medical board certification for identity recognition.
4. It was introduced in the Lok Sabha on 13 March 2026.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (d)

2. The landmark Supreme Court judgment that first recognised transgender persons as a “third gender” and affirmed the right to self-identification was delivered in:

- (a) 2019



- (b) 2014 (NALSA case)
- (c) 2021
- (d) 2009

Answer: (b)

3. Which of the following is NOT a key change proposed in the 2026 Amendment Bill?

- (a) Introduction of horizontal reservations
- (b) Removal of self-identification
- (c) Medical board scrutiny
- (d) Narrowed definition of transgender person

Answer: (a)

4. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act was originally enacted in:

- (a) 2014
- (b) 2019
- (c) 2021
- (d) 2023

Answer: (b)

Mains Questions

1. "The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026 marks a regressive shift from self-identification to medical gatekeeping." Critically examine the provisions and their implications for transgender rights in India. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Discuss the evolution of transgender rights jurisprudence in India from the NALSA judgment (2014) to the 2026 Amendment Bill. What are the key concerns raised by the community? (10 marks / 150 words)



3. "True inclusion requires moving beyond legal recognition to substantive equality and dignity." Analyse this statement in the context of the ongoing debate on the Transgender Amendment Bill 2026. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** "From Recognition to Regression: The Struggle for Transgender Rights and Dignity in Contemporary India."

Maternity Leave for Adoptive Mothers: Supreme Court Seeks Centre's Response on Parity

Why in News?

- ❖ On **12 March 2026**, a Supreme Court bench headed by Justice Hima Kohli issued notice to the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment and the Ministry of Women and Child Development in a **Public Interest Litigation (PIL)** filed by a group of adoptive parents and child rights organisations.
- ❖ The petitioners have demanded **26 weeks of paid maternity leave** for adoptive mothers (and 12 weeks for commissioning mothers in surrogacy cases), arguing that the current provision of only **12 weeks** under the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017, is discriminatory and violates Articles 14, 15, and 21 of the Constitution.
- ❖ The Court observed that adoptive mothers face equal or greater challenges in bonding, childcare, and emotional adjustment, and directed the Centre to file a detailed response within eight weeks. The development has reignited national debate on gender-neutral and inclusive family leave policies, especially amid rising adoption rates and growing awareness of mental health needs of adoptive parents.

Key Details of the Current Legal Demand

- **Current Legal Position (Maternity Benefit Act, 2017)**
 - Biological mothers: 26 weeks paid leave (for first two children).
 - Adoptive mothers: 12 weeks paid leave (only if the child is below 3 months old).
 - Commissioning mothers (surrogacy): 12 weeks paid leave.



- **PIL Demands**

- Equal 26 weeks paid leave for adoptive mothers.
- Removal of the “child below 3 months” condition.
- Inclusion of paternity/adoption leave for fathers and non-birthing parents.
- Mandatory provision in all public and private establishments (including contractual and gig workers).

- **Supreme Court Observations**

- “Adoptive motherhood involves unique psychological and logistical challenges that deserve equal recognition.”
- Asked the government to examine international best practices (e.g., UK, Sweden, Canada).

Background: Evolution of Maternity Leave Policy in India

- **Maternity Benefit Act, 1961**

- Original law provided 12 weeks leave only for biological mothers.

- **2017 Amendment**

- Increased biological leave to 26 weeks.
- Introduced 12 weeks for adoptive and commissioning mothers for the first time.
- Extended coverage to contractual and gig workers (via social security code linkage).

- **Ongoing Gaps**

- No paternity leave mandate at central level (some states and private firms offer voluntarily).
- Adoptive parents often face workplace discrimination and inadequate bonding time.
- Rising adoption numbers (CARA data: ~3,500 adoptions in 2024-25) → growing demand for parity.



- **Global Practices**

- Sweden, Norway, Canada: Equal or near-equal paid leave for adoptive and biological parents (up to 12-18 months shared).
- UK: 52 weeks for adoptive mothers (shared parental leave).

Implications

- **For Adoptive Parents**

- Longer leave would enable better emotional bonding, reduced stress, and improved child outcomes.
- Current 12-week limit often forces early return to work, affecting mental health and adoption success.

- **For Gender Equality & Family Policy**

- Moves India toward gender-neutral and inclusive leave policies.
- Supports the vision of “family-friendly workplaces” under the Code on Social Security, 2020.

- **Economic & Organisational**

- Private sector concerns over cost and productivity (though studies show long-term benefits in retention).
- Potential for tax incentives or government reimbursement schemes (as in some European models).

- **Social Justice**

- Strengthens rights of adoptive families, single parents, and LGBTQ+ couples (where adoption is allowed).
- Aligns with UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Gender Equality).



UPSC CSE & State PCS Relevance

Prelims

- Key terms: Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017; NALSA judgment linkage; CARA (Central Adoption Resource Authority)
- Data: Current adoptive leave - 12 weeks; Proposed - 26 weeks
- Related: Article 14, 15, 21; Code on Social Security, 2020

GS-1 (Society)

- Changing family structures and adoption trends
- Gender-sensitive social policies

GS-2 (Polity & Governance)

- Judicial activism in social welfare legislation
- Centre-state coordination on labour laws

GS-2 (Social Justice)

- Rights of women, children, and marginalised family structures

Essay / Interview

- "From Biological to Inclusive Parenthood: The Case for Equal Maternity Leave for Adoptive Mothers"
- "Gender-Neutral Family Leave Policies: A Step Towards True Equality in the 21st Century"

MCQs

1. With reference to maternity leave provisions in India, consider the following statements:
2. The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017 provides 12 weeks of paid leave to adoptive mothers.



3. The Supreme Court issued notice in March 2026 on a PIL demanding 26 weeks of leave for adoptive mothers.
4. Commissioning mothers in surrogacy cases are entitled to 26 weeks of paid leave.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (b)

2. The Maternity Benefit Act falls under the purview of:

- (a) Ministry of Women and Child Development
- (b) Ministry of Labour and Employment
- (c) Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
- (d) Ministry of Law and Justice

Answer: (b)

3. Which international convention emphasises the rights of the child and indirectly supports inclusive family leave policies?

- (a) CEDAW
- (b) UNCRC
- (c) ICCPR
- (d) ICESCR

Answer: (b)

4. The current statutory maternity leave for biological mothers in India (first two children) is:

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- (a) 12 weeks
- (b) 26 weeks
- (c) 52 weeks
- (d) 6 months

Answer: (b)

Mains Questions

1. "Equal maternity leave for adoptive mothers is not just a labour rights issue but a question of substantive equality and child welfare." Discuss in the context of the ongoing Supreme Court proceedings and the 2017 Maternity Benefit Amendment. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Examine the gaps in India's current family leave policies and suggest measures to make them more inclusive for adoptive parents and non-traditional families. (10 marks / 150 words)
3. "The Supreme Court's intervention on adoptive mothers' leave reflects the evolving interpretation of Article 21." Analyse how judicial activism can strengthen social justice legislation in India. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** "From Biological Motherhood to Inclusive Parenthood: The Imperative of Gender-Neutral and Adoption-Friendly Leave Policies in India."

Exercise Sea Dragon 2026: US-Led Multinational ASW Drill in Indo-Pacific

Why in News?

- ❖ The **United States Navy** has kicked off **Exercise Sea Dragon 2026**, a high-intensity multinational anti-submarine warfare (ASW) exercise, on **9 March 2026** at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, in the Western Pacific.
- ❖ India is participating alongside the United States, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand – marking the first expanded "Quad+" format of the exercise. The Indian Navy has deployed

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a P-8I maritime patrol aircraft, joining US P-8A Poseidons, Japanese P-1, Australian and New Zealand P-8A aircraft for advanced ASW training, including live submarine tracking.

- ❖ The exercise assumes added strategic significance amid growing Chinese submarine activity in the Indo-Pacific and the ongoing West Asia conflict, highlighting Quad cooperation in maritime domain awareness and undersea warfare.

Key Details of Exercise Sea Dragon 2026

- **Participating Countries & Assets**
 - **United States:** Multiple P-8A Poseidon aircraft (VP-4 & VP-45)
 - **India:** One P-8I maritime patrol aircraft
 - **Japan:** One P-1 maritime patrol aircraft (Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force)
 - **Australia:** Two P-8A Poseidon aircraft + ~50 aviators (Royal Australian Air Force)
 - **New Zealand:** One P-8A Poseidon aircraft (Royal New Zealand Air Force)
- **Focus Areas**
 - Anti-submarine warfare tactics and procedures
 - Live submarine detection, tracking, and prosecution
 - Multi-aircraft coordination and data sharing
 - Interoperability between different maritime patrol aircraft platforms
- **Duration & Location**
 - Two-week exercise (March 2026)
 - Conducted from Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, with operations in the Western Pacific
- **Significance of Expansion**
 - First inclusion of New Zealand → broadens the “Quad+” maritime security footprint



- Demonstrates growing convergence among like-minded Indo-Pacific partners on undersea domain awareness

Background: Evolution of Exercise Sea Dragon

• Origin

- Started in 2019 as a bilateral US-Japan ASW exercise.
- Expanded in 2020 to include Australia (Quad format).
- India joined formally from 2022 onwards.

• Strategic Context

- Designed to enhance collective capability against growing submarine threats in the Indo-Pacific (primarily from China's expanding underwater fleet).
- Complements other Quad naval exercises like Malabar and the broader Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness initiatives.

• India's Participation

- Reflects deepening Quad naval cooperation and India's increasing role in Indo-Pacific maritime security.
- P-8I aircraft (Boeing 737-based) is one of the most advanced maritime patrol platforms in the Indian Navy.

Implications

• For India

- Strengthens operational interoperability with Quad partners.
- Enhances India's ASW capabilities and maritime domain awareness in the Indo-Pacific.
- Supports broader strategic goals of a free and open Indo-Pacific (FOIP).

• Regional Security

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- Sends a strong signal of coordinated naval posture against undersea threats.
- Improves collective deterrence and rapid response capability in contested waters.
- **Global Context**
 - Amid West Asia tensions and Red Sea disruptions, the exercise underscores the shifting focus of major navies towards the Indo-Pacific.
 - Reinforces the Quad as a practical security mechanism beyond diplomatic forums.

UPSC CSE & State PCS Relevance

Prelims

- Key terms: Exercise Sea Dragon, Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW), P-8I Poseidon, Quad, Indo-Pacific Maritime Security
- Data: First expanded Quad+ format (2026), Host location (Guam)
- Related: Malabar Exercise, QUAD, Indian Ocean Region (IOR)

GS-2 (IR)

- India's evolving Indo-Pacific strategy and Quad cooperation
- Multilateral maritime security initiatives

GS-3 (Security)

- Maritime domain awareness and undersea warfare capabilities
- Naval modernisation and interoperability

Essay / Interview

- "From Malabar to Sea Dragon: The Maturing of Quad Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific"
- "Undersea Domain Awareness: The Next Frontier of India's Maritime Security Strategy"



MCQs

1. With reference to Exercise Sea Dragon 2026, consider the following statements:
2. It is a US-led multinational anti-submarine warfare exercise conducted in Guam.
3. India participated with a P-8I maritime patrol aircraft.
4. New Zealand joined the exercise for the first time in 2026.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (d)

2. Which of the following countries did NOT participate in Exercise Sea Dragon 2026?
 - (a) Japan
 - (b) Australia
 - (c) New Zealand
 - (d) France

Answer: (d)

3. Exercise Sea Dragon primarily focuses on:
 - (a) Amphibious operations
 - (b) Anti-submarine warfare (ASW)
 - (c) Humanitarian assistance
 - (d) Cyber defence



Answer: (b)

4. The Indian Navy's maritime patrol aircraft deployed in Exercise Sea Dragon 2026 is:

- (a) Boeing P-8A
- (b) Boeing P-8I
- (c) Dornier 228
- (d) MiG-29K

Answer: (b)

Mains Questions

1. "Exercise Sea Dragon 2026 reflects the maturing of practical security cooperation within the Quad framework." Discuss its significance for India's Indo-Pacific strategy and maritime security. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Analyse the role of multinational anti-submarine warfare exercises like Sea Dragon in addressing undersea threats in the Indo-Pacific region. (10 marks / 150 words)
3. "Maritime domain awareness and interoperability are becoming central to India's naval diplomacy." Examine this statement in the context of India's participation in Exercise Sea Dragon 2026. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** "From Bilateral to Multilateral: The Evolution of India's Maritime Partnerships in the Indo-Pacific."