



# NEWS ANALYSIS

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BAJIRAO IAS ACADEMY

India-France defence cooperation is a cornerstone of their strategic partnership". Discuss the significance of defence ties between the two nations their impact on India's security.

# Ahead of PM's Paris trip, Rafale, Scorpene deals reach final leg

Modi has been invited to visit AI summit in France on February 10 and 11; government-to-government deals estimated at \$10 billion likely to be placed for approval before Cabinet Committee on Security in the next couple of weeks, sources say

**Dinakar Peri**  
NEW DELHI

**T**wo large defence deals between India and France are being finalised, amid expectations that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Paris in February for the Artificial Intelligence Action Summit to be hosted by French President Emmanuel Macron.

The deals, together estimated at over \$10 billion, will include the purchase of 26 Rafale-M fighter jets for the Indian Navy's aircraft carriers, and three additional Scorpene-class conventional submarines.

The two deals are expected to be put before the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) for approval in the next couple of weeks, sources said.

## Shopping list

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to be in Paris in February, India is looking to seal arms deals

### WHAT THE COUNTRY WANTS?

- 26 Rafale-M fighter jets for the Navy's aircraft carriers
- Three more Scorpene-class conventional submarines
- The two deals are expected to be put before the Cabinet Committee on Security for approval soon

It is just matter of completing the formalities of the acquisition process and we expect that if not this month, next month, hopefully, this [Scorpene submarines] and Rafale-M deals should be signed

Navy chief Admiral **DINESH K. TRIPATHI** in December

India needs the naval version of the Rafale for INS Vikrant

"The expectation is that PM Modi will visit Paris to attend the AI Summit and will also have a bilateral component. So both sides are working to tie up the two deals which are in the

final stages of conclusion," an informed source said. This was also independently confirmed by other sources.

The French President's office has already an-

nounced that Mr. Modi has been invited for the Artificial Intelligence Summit on February 10 and 11. France says the meet will focus on actions to ensure that the global AI sector can drive beneficial outcomes.

### Final stage

In response to a question at his annual press conference last month, Navy chief Admiral Dinesh K. Tripathi said that both deals are in the final stage and could be completed next month. "It is just a matter of completing the formalities of the acquisition process and we expect that if not this month, next month, hopefully, this [Scorpene submarine] and the Rafale-M deal should be signed," he had said.

On the Rafale-M deal, the Navy chief had said it

was "one level short of taking it to the CCS (Cabinet Committee on Security)" for clearance, which will be followed by the signing of the contract. As it is a government-to-government deal, it is expected to be implemented quickly.

The deal for three Scorpene submarines is a repeat order to the Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited, which is building them in partnership with the Naval Group of France. Of the six submarines from the earlier contract, five have been inducted.

The last one, *Vagsheer*, is set to be commissioned on January 15 in Mumbai, in the presence of Mr. Modi, along with two other frontline platforms.

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**India-France defence cooperation** forms a cornerstone of their strategic partnership, **fostering close military collaboration**, joint exercises, and significant defence procurements. **This robust cooperation not only strengthens India's defence capabilities** but also plays a crucial role in ensuring regional stability.

## **Significance of India-France defence ties**

1. France has played a key role in **modernizing India's defence forces by providing advanced technology and equipment.**
2. **Strategic Naval Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific:** With France's overseas territories in the Indian Ocean, the nations share a vested interest in **maritime security, reinforcing India's strategic presence in the Indo-Pacific.**
3. **Self-Reliance through Technology Transfers:** France's openness to technology transfer supports **India's Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative**, fostering domestic defence production and reducing reliance on imports.

4. **Counter-Terrorism and Intelligence Sharing:** Defence cooperation extends to counter-terrorism efforts, with both countries actively exchanging intelligence and enhancing operational readiness against terrorism threats.

5. **France's consistent diplomatic support at multilateral forums** strengthens India's global standing, particularly in areas like nuclear non-proliferation and defence.

### **Impact on India's Security**

1. The acquisition of Rafale fighter jets has **significantly enhanced India's aerial combat capabilities**, particularly in maintaining air superiority against regional adversaries.

2. **Maritime Security and Power Projection:** Joint naval exercises and the sale of Scorpene submarines have bolstered India's naval strength, essential for securing the Indo-Pacific region amid increasing tensions.

3. **Increased Readiness for Joint Operations:** Regular joint exercises, such as **Garuda (air force) and Varuna (naval)**, enhance interoperability between the armed forces of India and France, improving joint operational readiness.

4. The independence of India's defence partnership with France enables New Delhi to **maintain strategic autonomy without over-reliance on any single superpower.**

5. **Nuclear Deterrence and Strategic Stability:** France's support in civil nuclear cooperation and consistent backing in global nuclear forums enhance India's strategic deterrence, particularly in the context of South Asia's nuclear balance.

# India needs to prioritise preventive care

## India needs to prioritise preventive care

India is facing a healthcare crisis that is growing both in scope and cost. We face an alarming dichotomy today: while life expectancy of Indians is expected to increase further, many are facing disease burden earlier. As the country sees an alarming rise in non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and cancer, the financial burden on individuals and the healthcare system continues to escalate.

NCDs accounted for about 65% of all deaths in 2022, up from about 50% in 2010-13, as per the National Family Health Survey-5. The prevalence of risk factors for NCDs is worryingly high. One in four adult men are hypertensive. One in eight are diabetic. Further, breast, lung, and cervical cancer are on the rise, with the median age of diagnosis occurring earlier than global averages.

Millions of people who are facing these conditions could have been managed better, at often lower costs, had they been diagnosed earlier. In this context, shifting the focus from reactive treatment to proactive prevention is crucial, not only to improve health outcomes but also to control the ever-increasing healthcare expenses.

**A growing economic burden**  
The Union Budget for 2024 allocated ₹87,657 crore to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, marking a 13% increase from the previous year. While this is a step forward, experts agree that this allocation remains insufficient given the scale of India's health challenges.

The National Health Accounts show the total current health expenditure estimate in 2021-22 as ₹7.9 lakh crore, growing at a rate more than overall inflation. The share of household health expenditure, including insurance contributions, while decreasing over time, still drives nearly 50% of the spend. This remains one of the highest globally.



**Sathya R. Sriram**

CEO, Preventive Health, Apollo Hospitals



**Akshay Ravi**

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The World Health Organization (WHO) projects that the economic burden of NCDs in India will surpass ₹280 lakh crore by 2030 – a cost equivalent to ₹2 lakh per household. This escalating cost, driven by rising healthcare expenses and productivity losses, poses a severe threat to financial stability, particularly for middle and lower-income families.

Regular screenings, especially for high-risk individuals, could significantly reduce the incidence of serious, life-threatening and debilitating conditions and its resultant cascading economic and social effects. In a large hospital network, for every 1,000 people screened, at least three people are identified for pre-emptive cardiac or cancer interventions.

Targeted but periodic screening investigations for individuals such as mammograms for breast cancer, pap smears for cervical cancer, X-ray or low-dose computed tomography for lung cancer, ultrasound for liver disease, echo cardiography and treadmill stress test for heart disease beyond the physical vitals and blood tests enable early intervention.

Unfortunately, comprehensive health checks (which can cost anywhere between ₹8,000 and ₹15,000 in metro cities today) are perceived as expensive. If the government were to enable a step change in preventive health services adoption, it could significantly reduce the overall financial burden on individuals and the healthcare system.

Tax incentives, subsidised screenings, and public awareness are key policy tools that can enable this. As part of the Finance Act, 2013, the Union government made efforts to encourage preventive healthcare by offering a ₹5,000 tax deduction under Section 80D of the Income Tax Act for health checks. However, this amount has remained stagnant for the last decade, despite the 12-14% estimated healthcare inflation rate and the rising cost of healthcare services. Thus, it would be

prudent for our policymakers to consider revising the tax deduction limit to at least ₹15,000 in the Union Budget for 2025-26. This would incentivise more individuals to undergo preventive health checks, potentially saving the nation several thousand of crores in future healthcare costs. The incremental tax foregone to the exchequer from such a measure is estimated to be less than ₹5,000 crore, a worthy investment towards improving the health of the nation.

### The path forward

We need to prioritise preventive care to mitigate the increasing economic and financial burden of chronic diseases. A three-pronged approach can potentially drive a change in the adoption of preventive health services.

First, we need to strengthen early intervention capabilities through the Ayushman Health and Wellness Centres, including capturing trends effectively and enabling risk-driven targeted screening using AI-enabled imaging modalities to offer lower cost screenings at-scale.


Second, we need to improve the adoption of screening at private centres by encouraging insurers and private health providers to offer a subsidised minimum screening programme for every individual between 40-60 years. For example, for women after the age of 40, a mammogram is necessary annually or once in two years, based on her risk factors. Exploring part funding through allocations from proceeds from the healthcare cess or the proposed 35% GST slab on tobacco and sugar products can help reduce funding needs.

Finally, the increase in tax deduction limit can further incentivise people to complete comprehensive health checks. By prioritising preventive care over reactive treatments, India can pave the way for a healthier and more economically resilient future.

## Context

- ❖ India is facing a **healthcare crisis that is growing both in scope and cost.**
- ❖ We face an alarming dichotomy today: As the country sees an **alarming rise in non-communicable diseases (NCDs)** such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and cancer resulting in significant financial burden on individuals and the healthcare system.

By prioritising preventive care over reactive treatments, India can pave the way for a healthier and more economically resilient future.

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- ❖ **NCDs accounted for about 65%** of all deaths in 2022, up from about 50% in 2010-13, as per the **National Family Health Survey-5**.
  - ❖ **The prevalence of risk factors for NCDs is worryingly high**. Breast, lung, and cervical cancer are on the rise, with the median age of diagnosis occurring earlier than global averages.

### **Growing economic burden**

- ❖ The **Union Budget for 2024 allocated ₹87,657 crore** to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, marking a **13% increase**.
- ❖ This is a step forward, experts agree that this allocation remains insufficient given the **scale of India's health challenges**.
- ❖ The share of **household health expenditure**, including insurance contributions, while decreasing over time, but **still drives nearly 50% of the total spending**. This remains one of the highest globally.

- ❖ The World Health Organization (WHO) projects that the **economic burden of NCDs in India will surpass ₹280 lakh crore by 2030** — a cost equivalent to ₹2 lakh per household.

## Preventive measures

- ❖ **Regular screenings**, especially for high-risk individuals, could significantly reduce the incidence of serious, life-threatening and debilitating conditions and its resultant **cascading economic and social effects**.
- ❖ **Targeted but periodic screening investigations** for individuals such as mammograms for breast cancer, pap smears for cervical cancer, blood tests enable early intervention.
- ❖ **Tax incentives, subsidised screenings**, and public awareness are key policy tools that can enable this.

- ❖ As part of the Finance Act, 2013, the Union government made efforts to **encourage preventive healthcare by offering a ₹5,000 tax deduction under Section 80D** of the Income Tax Act for health checks.
- ❖ It would be prudent for our policymakers to consider revising the **tax deduction limit to at least ₹15,000 in the Union Budget for 2025-26**.
- ❖ This would **incentivise more individuals to undergo preventive health checks**, potentially saving the nation several thousand of crores in future healthcare costs.



## Prioritising preventive care

- ❖ we need to strengthen early intervention capabilities through the **Ayushman Health and Wellness Centres, including capturing trends effectively** .
- ❖ Enabling risk-driven targeted screening using AI-enabled imaging modalities to **offer lower cost screenings at-scale**.
- ❖ **The increase in tax deduction limit** can further incentivise people to complete comprehensive health checks.
- ❖ By prioritising preventive care over reactive treatments, India can pave the way for a **healthier and more economically resilient future**

# Protecting indigenous people



The Shompen people, a vulnerable tribal group of the Nicobar Islands. FILE PHOTO

## Empower the guardians of the earth, do not rob them

A unilateral decision to establish three wildlife sanctuaries in southern Nicobar will deprive the indigenous peoples of their ancestral territories. For millennia, these historically isolated indigenous have relied on these islands as resource reservoirs for sustenance and protected them

Alex Saini  
Munish Chandi

The 172,000-acre mega infrastructure project on Great Nicobar will now also have an international cruise terminal and a shipwrecking yard, as proposed by the Union Shipping Ministry. In this article, dated April 22, 2024, Ajay Saini and Munish Chandi talk about the rights of the indigenous communities over the Little Islands of the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago and how they have been able to protect and preserve the area's ecological balance.

In the southern expanse of the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago, off the shores of Little Nicobar, lie seven tiny islands. Classified as "uninhabited" in the government's records, these islands are nonetheless integral to the indigenous communities of the region. Two, officially called Merot and Menchal, are known as Pirali and Pngaravak, respectively, to the Puyuh, the indigenous southern Nicobarese peoples, who hold traditional rights over these and other islands.

For millennia, these historically isolated indigenous have relied on these islands as resource reservoirs for sustenance and protected them. Menchal is revered, used, and protected under the spiritual realm called Pngaravak (a spirit that is believed to reside on the island), prohibiting the overexploitation of resources or any further harm to its ecosystem. Similarly, Merot is believed to be the abode of a legendary islander community. Here, too, spiritual belief systems influence how the islanders use and protect natural resources.

Merot and Menchal are managed by community elders as guardians and

John FREE Whatsapp Channel <https://whatsapp.com/channel/0029/an2V3h8R6J0KH8d8f> Change. The A&N administration ensure the protection of the island's resources and sustainability. In today's world, this phenomenon goes by the name of "conservation" and "sustainable use", among other terms and phrases.

### Conservation colonialism

In May 2022, in complete disregard of the management systems, the Andaman and Nicobar (A&N) administration issued three public notices, announcing its intention to create three wildlife sanctuaries: a coral sanctuary at Merot Island, a megapode sanctuary at Menchal Island, and a leatherback turtle sanctuary on Little Nicobar Island.

In mid-July, the A&N administration issued an order asserting that it did not receive any claims or objections from any individual regarding the land and marine sanctuaries; that no individual enjoys any rights within the boundaries of the proposed sanctuaries; and, that there will be "restriction on the people of neighbouring area to enter into these islands... in the national interest".

Approximately 1,200 southern Nicobarese inhabit Patal Takaru (Great Nicobar Island) and Patal Vihl (Little Nicobar Island), holding traditional rights over both inhabited and ostensibly "uninhabited" islands. Yet, the A&N administration neither consulted nor informed the southern Nicobarese of its plans.

Despite verbal supplications and a letter in August 2022 from the Little & Great Nicobar Tribal Council that expressed the community's concerns to the A&N administration and the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate

Change, the A&N administration proceeded to issue official notifications in October 2022, designating the whole of Merot (2.73 square kilometres, including the surrounding marine area) and Menchal (1.29 sq. km), along with a 11.75 sq. km area (including 6.07 sq. km of water area within the baseline system) on Little Nicobar (0.40 sq. km), as wildlife sanctuaries.

### Masking an ecological disaster

The selection of Merot and Menchal islands as conservation reserves for coral reefs and Megapode birds is arbitrary. Menchal does not have more than a pair of the endemic Megapode birds. Similarly, questions arise regarding the actual diversity and abundance of corals on Merot Island.

Notably, the announcement of wildlife sanctuaries coincided with growing scrutiny and criticism from experts over the desertification of the Calabha Bay Wildlife Sanctuary for a 172,000-acre mega project on Great Nicobar, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

Establishing exclusionary conservation areas in a region, which is already a paradise for biodiversity, stems from the fact that the champions of the mega project are aware of the extensive environmental and social damage that the project will entail. It will devastate about eight to 10 lakh evergreen forest trees, smother and gouge out scores of coral reefs found along Galathea Bay, destroy the nesting site for the globally

endangered Leatherback sea turtle species, devastate hundreds of nesting mounds of Nicobar Megapodes, and kill as many crocodiles.

Furthermore, it will prevent the indigenous Great Nicobar Islanders from

returning to their pre-annular homeland where they husbanded pigs and chicken, cultivated coconut and betel nut trees, and lived simple and prosperous lives. Most importantly, it will uproot three or more settlements of the Shompen (a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group) and permanently destroy their foraging and hunting grounds.

The unilateral decision to establish wildlife sanctuaries disregards the islands' profound significance to the indigenous population.

Their ancestral lands are unjustly perceived as "no-man's land" to appease conservationists, investors, public opinion, and more.

### Support earth's guardians

Globally, governments blatantly violate indigenous people's rights by evicting them from their ancestral lands, often under the guise of development, national interest, conservation projects, among others. Approximately 476 million indigenous peoples, constitute about 6% of the global population. Indigenous territories cover roughly 22% of the planet's land surface and harbour 80% of its biodiversity.

Indigenous peoples are the original guardians of our earth. The world must learn from their wisdom. Reason and justice dictate that in southern Nicobar, we should support and empower the islanders to continue to steward their ancestral territories, rather than robbing them of their lands, resources, lifeways, and worldviews.

Ajay Saini (teacher at the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi. Munish Chandi is an independent researcher with over two decades of research experience in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

## Context

❖ A unilateral decision to **establish three wildlife sanctuaries in southern Nicobar will deprive the indigenous peoples of their ancestral territories.**

❖ For millennia, these **historically isolated indigenes** have relied on these islands as resource reservoirs for sustenance and protected them.

- ❖ In May 2022, the **Andaman and Nicobar (A&N) administration** issued three public notices, announcing its intention to **create three wildlife sanctuaries**: a coral sanctuary at Meroë Island, a megapode sanctuary at Menchal Island, and a leatherback turtle sanctuary on Little Nicobar Island.
- ❖ The A&N administration issued an order asserting that it **did not receive any claims or objections from any individual regarding the land and marine areas** within the three proposed sanctuaries.
- ❖ Approximately **1,200 southern Nicobarese inhabit Patai Takaru** (Great Nicobar Island), and Patai t-bhi (Little Nicobar Island), holding traditional rights over both inhabited and ostensibly “uninhabited” islands.

Tribe	Population (in 2011)	Per cent to total tribe population
<i>Tribes of Andaman Islands</i>		
Sentinelese (estimated)	15	0.05
Onges	101	0.36
Jarawas	380	1.36
Great Andamanese	44	0.16
<i>Tribes of Nicobar Islands</i>		
Shompens	229	0.83
Nicobarese	27168	97.25
<b>Total</b>	<b>27937</b>	<b>100</b>

## Ecological disaster

- ❖ The **selection of Meroë and Menchal Islands** as conservation reserves for coral reefs and Megapode birds is arbitrary.
- ❖ The announcement of wildlife sanctuaries coincided denotification of the **Galathea Bay Wildlife Sanctuary** for a **₹72,000-crore mega project on Great Nicobar**, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.
- ❖ It will devastate about eight to **10 lakh evergreen forest trees**, smother and gouge out scores of coral reefs found along **Galathea Bay**, destroy the nesting site for the **globally endangered Leatherback sea turtle species**, devastate hundreds of nesting mounds of **Nicobar Megapodes**, and kill as many crocodiles.
- ❖ It will uproot three or more settlements of the **Shompen (a 'Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group')** and permanently destroy their foraging and hunting grounds

# Avian Influenza Outbreak Kills 3 Tigers

## Zoos put on alert as avian flu kills 3 tigers, 1 leopard at rescue centre

SIDDHANT KONDUSKAR  
MUMBAI, JANUARY 3

THREE TIGERS and a leopard at a Nagpur rescue centre have succumbed to avian influenza, prompting the Union government to sound an alert for zoos across the country.

This is a rare instance of the highly contagious H5N1 virus affecting rescued wildlife in India.

In an advisory, the Central Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying directed zoos to comply with the action plan on prevention, control and containment.



One of the tigers that died at the Gorewada Rescue Centre in Nagpur.

"It is a highly contagious viral disease with zoonotic ramifications. It is, therefore, advised that

all zoos remain alert and vigilant for any symptoms among captive animals housed in zoos and incidence, if any, in nearby areas," stated the January 3 advisory issued by the department, which comes under the Union Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying.

The animals in question had been relocated to the Gorewada Rescue Centre in Nagpur from Chandrapur in December following instances of conflict with humans.

Within a week of their arrival, however, they began showing symptoms of ill-health.

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- ❑ Three tigers and a leopard at a Nagpur rescue center have died from **avian influenza (H5N1)**, a rare instance of the virus affecting rescued wildlife in India.
- ❑ In response, the Union government has issued an advisory, **urging zoos nationwide to remain vigilant, follow the action plan for prevention and containment, and monitor for symptoms in captive animals** or nearby areas. The advisory highlights the highly contagious and zoonotic nature of the disease.

## Avian influenza (H5N1)

- ❑ **Bird flu, or avian flu**, is an infectious viral illness primarily affecting poultry and wild birds.
- ❑ Various strains of the virus have circulated among at least 100 bird species, with wild waterfowl like ducks and geese often serving as carriers without severe harm.
- ❑ **H5N1 is a type of influenza virus** that causes a highly infectious, severe respiratory disease in birds called **avian influenza (or "bird flu")**.
- ❑ Basically, it is a **subtype of the influenza A virus**.
- ❑ **Human cases of H5N1 avian influenza occur occasionally**, but it is difficult to transmit the infection from person to person.
- ❑ When people become infected, the **mortality rate is about 60%**.

## Human Risk

- ❑ Although **humans rarely contract bird flu**, infections typically occur through **contact with sick birds at poultry farms**, where viral loads are high.

## Zoos put on alert

- ❑ **Maharashtra reported** India's first case of avian influenza (H5N1) among animals.
- ❑ Three tigers and one leopard have succumbed to the virus at a **Nagpur rescue center in late December 2024**.
- ❑ This marks the first instance of bird flu crossing the species barrier in India.

## Government Response and Guidelines

- ❑ The Union Animal Husbandry Ministry issued a circular urging all States to **quarantine infected or symptomatic tigers and other feline species** to prevent transmission to humans and other animals.
- ❑ The ministry plans to release detailed guidelines within a week.

## Enhanced Biosecurity Protocols

- Temporary closure of affected establishments to the public.
- Strengthening biosecurity measures** and restricting personnel movement between infected and healthy areas.
- Thorough disinfection of affected areas** and collection of samples for strain identification.

## Protection for Zoo Staff.

- Regular health screenings and hygiene education for zoo personnel have also been mandated.

## Call for a One-Health Approach

- The Ministry emphasized a **"One-Health" approach**, integrating efforts across human health, animal health, and wildlife sectors to comprehensively address the issue.
- Immediate attention is needed to mitigate risks to both animal and human health.





# Thank you

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