

REASON BEHIND AIR INDIA'S INTERNATIONAL FLIGHT CUTS

Air India has announced major cuts to its international flight schedule from June to August, including an almost 40% reduction in North American operations and substantial reductions in flights to SAARC and Southeast Asian destinations.

- Air India has removed 145 weekly international flights, resulting in an overall 27% reduction in international operations across multiple regions.
- **North America Hit Hardest**
 - North America, Air India's most important international market, has seen a major impact: Weekly flights reduced from 51 to 33 (39% decline).
 - Temporary suspension of routes such as:
 - Delhi–Chicago
 - Delhi–Newark
 - Mumbai–New York
 - However, Mumbai–Newark has received four additional flights, taking the route to seven weekly services
- **Europe Sees Moderate Cuts**
 - Air India has withdrawn about 34% of flights on several European routes, including: Paris, Copenhagen, Milan, Vienna, Zurich, Rome.
 - Unaffected routes: London, Manchester, Amsterdam.
- **Sharp Cuts in Asia-Pacific Routes**
 - The steepest reductions have been in Southeast Asia, SAARC, and the Far East, with about 57% of flights withdrawn to destinations such as: Kathmandu, Dhaka, Colombo, Bangkok, Shanghai, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Ho Chi Minh City.
- **Australia Routes Also Affected**
 - Flights from Delhi to:
 - Melbourne reduced from 7 to 4 per week
 - Sydney reduced from 7 to 4 per week

Why Air India Has Cut International Flights?

- Air India's flight reductions are mainly due to the **West Asia conflict**, which has forced airlines to avoid affected airspace for safety reasons, leading to significantly longer routes.
- Travel times to North America have increased by five to six hours, requiring refuelling stops in cities such as Vienna and Copenhagen.
- The situation has worsened for Indian carriers because Pakistan has barred Indian airlines from using its airspace since April 2025, following Operation Sindoor, placing them at a competitive disadvantage compared to foreign airlines such as Lufthansa.

Wider Impact on Indian Airlines

- The disruption is not limited to Air India. Other Indian airlines have also reduced international operations:
 - IndiGo: 21% reduction in international flights in April
 - SpiceJet, Akasa Air, Air India Express: Over 50% cuts, though on smaller international networks
 - Air India has faced the biggest impact because it is the **only Indian airline** operating North American routes and has a strong presence across several European destinations, unlike IndiGo, which is still expanding internationally.

Global Aviation Faces Disruptions and Cost Pressures

- The aviation disruption is part of a broader global trend triggered by regional conflict and soaring fuel prices.
- Gulf carriers have been hit the hardest, with the International Air Transport Association reporting a 61% decline in international passenger traffic in March.
- Beyond the Gulf, airlines are cutting operations to manage costs and improve efficiency.
- The Lufthansa Group has cancelled 20,000 short-haul flights until October to save jet fuel and streamline long-haul connectivity.
- Qantas has also reduced capacity, cutting domestic flights by 5% and international services by 2%, while withdrawing some routes.

INDIA REJECTS ARBITRATION AWARD ON INDUS WATERS TREATY (IWT) - ESCALATION IN INDIA-PAKISTAN WATER DIPLOMACY

- India has categorically rejected the recent “award” issued by the “illegally constituted” Court of Arbitration (CoA) concerning disputes with Pakistan under the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT).
- The development comes amid worsening India-Pakistan relations following the Pahalgam terror attack, after which India placed the Indus Waters Treaty in **abeyance**.

Official Position of India:

- Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson stated that:
 - The Court of Arbitration (CoA) was “illegally constituted”.
 - India has never recognised its jurisdiction.
 - Any award or decision issued by the CoA is “null and void”.
 - India’s decision to keep the IWT in abeyance continues to remain in force.
- The arbitration award reportedly concerns “**maximum pondage**” issues, and supplemental interpretations related to the treaty.

Indus Waters Treaty (IWT):

- **Historical background:** The treaty was signed on September 19, **1960** between India and Pakistan after nearly nine years of negotiations, with mediation by the World Bank.
- **Key features:**
 - The treaty, which contains 12 Articles, 8 Annexures (A to H), provides for **allocation of river water** between India and Pakistan.
 - **Eastern rivers – Allocated to India:** Sutlej, Beas, and Ravi. India enjoys “unrestricted use” of waters from these rivers.
 - **Western rivers – Allocated to Pakistan:** Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab. Pakistan receives the majority share of waters from these rivers, though India retains limited rights for -

- Hydropower generation,
- Non-consumptive use, and
- Irrigation under specified conditions.

Key Legal and Diplomatic Issues:

- **India argues that:**
 - Pakistan unilaterally approached the CoA.
 - The process violated the graded dispute-resolution mechanism under the treaty.
 - It instead prefers resolution through a NE mechanism.
- **Question of treaty continuity:** The current standoff raises larger questions regarding:
 - Whether a bilateral treaty can be kept “in abeyance” unilaterally,
 - The role of international arbitration in bilateral treaties,
 - The balance between treaty obligations and national security concerns.

Way Forward:

- **Modernisation of the treaty:** Possible areas for future renegotiation include climate resilience, data-sharing, hydrological changes, and modern dispute-resolution mechanisms.
- **Regional water diplomacy:** South Asia requires cooperative river basin management, confidence-building measures, and sustainable utilisation of shared water resources.

Conclusion:

- India’s rejection of the arbitration award and its decision to keep the IWT in abeyance highlights that the **dispute goes beyond water-sharing** and reflects deeper tensions involving terrorism, sovereignty, international law, and strategic security.
- While India seeks greater flexibility and accountability within the treaty framework, the long-term stability of the Indus basin ultimately depends on sustained diplomacy, institutional dialogue, and **cooperative water governance**.

CAPTAGON



Recently, the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), under Operation RAGEPILL, has successfully unearthed an international drug syndicate involved in the trafficking of Captagon.

- It is a highly **addictive amphetamine-type drug**, which is produced mainly in Syria.
- The original Captagon **contained fenetylline**, a synthetic drug of the phenethylamine family to which amphetamine also belongs.
- It is a synthetic drug which was **originally manufactured in Germany** in the 1960s and 1970s where it was intended to **treat attention deficit disorders**.
- It was commercially sold in several countries until the 1980s and was banned due to fears of its highly addictive nature.
- It was **made illegal in 1986** in most countries and discontinued in medical markets.
- It was later **placed under Schedule II of the UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances**.
- It is **commonly known as “poor man’s cocaine,”** has emerged as the drug of choice among young adults **throughout the Middle East and North Africa**.
- It contains fenethylamine, a synthetic **amphetamine, caffeine, and other stimulants**.
- It is **considered highly addictive and has become** a major source of illegal trafficking and funding in conflict-hit regions.

WESTERN HOOLOCK GIBBON



- It is the **smallest and fastest of all apes**.
- **Habitat:** It is found in a range of forest types, from **moist deciduous to evergreen**, sub-tropical to lowland.

- **Distribution:** It is found in all the states of the north-east, restricted between the **south of the Brahmaputra river and east of the Dibang river**. Outside India, it is found in **Bangladesh and Myanmar**.
- **Characteristics of Western Hoolock Gibbon:**
 - They are **diurnal and arboreal**, **brachiating** through the trees with their long arms.
 - They are **monogamous** (same partner throughout life).
 - They live in small families and communicate with other gibbons by vocalisation.
 - **Life span:** 25 years.
- **Threats:** Habitat destruction illegal logging presented the greatest threat.
- **Conservation Status**
 - **IUCN:** Endangered
 - **Wildlife (Protection) Act of India, 1972:** Schedule I

UNITED NATIONS FORUM ON FORESTS



- It is an **intergovernmental body established in 2000** by the **UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)**
- Its objective is to promote **sustainable forest management and conservation worldwide**.
- **Its mandate includes:**
 - Strengthening long-term political commitment to forests;
 - Facilitating policy dialogue among countries and stakeholders;
 - Promoting international cooperation, including financial and technical support; and
 - Considering future options for international forest policy, including legal frameworks.

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- The forum **holds annual sessions** at the UN Headquarters, **alternating between technical** discussions (odd years) and **policy-level dialogues** (even years).
- **Members:** It is **composed of all United Nations Member States** and States members of specialised agencies, participating on a full and equal basis.
 - **India is a founding member of the UNFF**, and continues to play a proactive role in shaping forest-related global policy.
- **Headquarters:** New York, United States
- It has established the **Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network (GFFFN)** to facilitate access to and effective use of funding for forests, to share data and best practices.

INDIA NETHERLANDS BILATERAL RELATIONS

- During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit, the Netherlands formally returned the **11th-century Chola-era copper plates**, an important cultural artefact linked to Tamil heritage.
- The return followed a 14-year diplomatic effort involving Indian authorities, historians, and Dutch institutions.
- The plates were brought to the Netherlands around 1712 by Florentius Camper, who was in India as part of a Christian missionary in the period when Nagapattinam was under Dutch control.
- Dating to the reign of Emperor **Rajaraja Chola I (985-1014 AD)** regarded as one of the greatest rulers in Indian history, one of the objects comprises 21 copper plates, weighing ~30 kilograms.
- The plates are divided into two sections: one in Sanskrit and one in Tamil. The other object being restituted comprises three copper plates containing a Tamil inscription. Both are bound together by bronze rings that bear the royal seal of the Chola dynasty.
- Such inscriptions are historically important because they contain details related to **land grants, governance, taxation, and socio-economic conditions** of the period.

- Prime Minister Modi described the return as a “**joyous moment for every Indian**”, highlighting the significance of preserving India’s civilisational heritage.
- The development also reflects India’s growing diplomatic efforts to repatriate stolen or illegally exported antiquities from foreign countries.
- In recent years, several nations, including the **United States, Australia, and European countries**, have returned ancient artefacts to India.

India-Netherlands Bilateral Relations

- India and the Netherlands share strong ties based on trade, investment, technology, water management, and cultural cooperation.
- Their partnership has gained momentum in recent years, especially in areas such as climate resilience, renewable energy, and semiconductors.
- **History of Bilateral Relations**
 - Relations between India and the Netherlands date back to the **17th century**, when the **Dutch East India Company** established trading links with India.
 - After India’s independence, diplomatic ties were formalised in **1947**. Over time, relations evolved from traditional trade to broader cooperation in agriculture, science, technology, water management, and climate action.
- In recent decades, the relationship has acquired a strategic dimension through high-level political engagement and growing economic interdependence.

Multilateral Cooperation

- India and the Netherlands cooperate closely in multilateral forums on issues such as:
 - **Climate change and sustainable development.**
 - **Maritime security and international trade routes.**
 - **Rules-based international order.**
- The Netherlands has supported stronger **India-European Union engagement**, including trade and technological partnerships.

VB-G RAM G TO TAKE EFFECT ON JULY 1

- The Union Government notified that from **1 July 2026**, all **rules, notifications, schemes, orders and guidelines** under **MGNREGA, 2005** will stand repealed and replaced by **VB-G RAM G**, signalling a major restructuring of rural employment policy.

Shift from Entitlement to Mission Mode

- MGNREGA functioned as a legal right enforceable by workers, whereas VB-G RAM G appears more programme-oriented, with greater executive discretion over budget and implementation.

Greater Role for States

- States will now bear a larger fiscal burden, increasing ownership but also potentially straining poorer States.

Digital Governance

- E-KYC, NMMS attendance, and digital job cards strengthen monitoring and reduce leakages, but may exclude vulnerable workers.

Comparison: MGNREGA vs VB-G RAM G

Feature	MGNREGA	VB-G RAM G
Employment Guarantee	100 days	125 days
Wage Funding	100% Centre	60:40 Centre–State
Nature	Rights-based	Mission-oriented
Attendance	Manual/NMMS	NMMS continued
Blackout Period	Not provided	Up to 60 days
Digital Compliance	Limited	Expanded e-KYC