



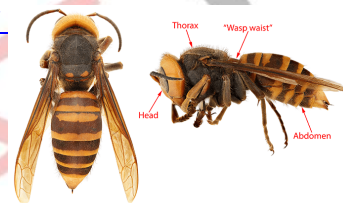
US Eradicated Northern Giant Hornet

[Source: IE](#)

The **Northern giant hornet**, nicknamed the **murder hornet**, has been **successfully eradicated** in the **US**.

▪ Northern Giant Hornet:

- The Northern giant hornet (*Vespa Mandarinia*) is the **largest hornet (wasp)** in the world, measuring **up to 2 inches long**.
 - A wasp is a type of **insect** belonging to the order **Hymenoptera**, which also includes **bees and ants**.
- It has a **large, solid yellow or orange head** with black eyes. //



- It is **native to Asia** and was first spotted in **Washington state** near the Canadian border in **2019**.
- It poses a significant **threat to insects and native pollinators** which can kill an entire **beehive (bees habitat) of honeybees** in just 90 minutes.
 - It can even **kill people** as it delivers **seven times more venom** than a honey bee and can **sting multiple times**.
- They usually **build their nests in forested areas**, often in an **underground cavity**.

Read More: [Whiteflies: Threat to Agriculture](#)

Undersea Cable Network

[Source: TH](#)

India is set to launch **two new cable systems** in the coming months namely **India Asia Xpress (IAX)** and **India Europe Xpress (IEX)**.


- **IAX** connects Chennai and Mumbai with **Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia** in Asia while IEX connects them with **France, Greece, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Djibouti**.
- **Undersea Cable (Submarine Cables):**
 - They are **high-capacity optic fibre cables** laid on the **ocean floor** that play a crucial role in providing **global connectivity for high-speed data exchange**.
 - Fiber optic cables that use **fast-traveling pulses of light** to transfer digital information. It relies on **total internal reflection** for their operation.
 - Lasers on one end fire at **extremely rapid rates** down thin glass fibers to receptors at the

other end of the cable.

- These glass fibers are wrapped in **layers of plastic** (and sometimes steel wire) for protection.
- They provide **unlimited bandwidth** and **very low latency** compared to satellite communication which face **risks** from **space weather, radiation, and debris**.
- As of 2023, India had **17 international subsea cables** landing in **14 distinct stations across five cities**, with a cumulative lit capacity of **138.55 terabits per second (tbps)** and activated capacity of **111.11 tbps**.

Project	Capacity (tbps)	Length (km)	Investors Include	Connecting
2Africa Pearls	180	45,000	Airtel, Meta, Saudi Telecom	Africa, Europe, Middle East, Asia
India-Asia-Express	200	16,000	Jio, China Mobile	Mumbai, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and Sri Lanka
India-Europe-Express	200	9,775	Jio, China Mobile	Mumbai to Persian Gulf and Europe

Total existing installed capacity 138.55 tbps



Read More: [Fibre Optic Cables](#)

Meat- Eating Squirrels

Source: [DTE](#)

A study led by the **University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire (US)** has discovered that **California ground squirrels** (*Otospermophilus beecheyi*), previously considered **herbivores**, exhibit **opportunistic omnivorous behavior**.

- Researchers observed the squirrels **hunting, killing, and eating voles (rodents)**, with 42% of 74 interactions involving active hunting.
- The squirrels' **carnivorous behavior peaked in early July**, coinciding with a surge in vole numbers, indicating their **hunting was triggered by an abundance of prey**.
- It revealed that **squirrels' diets are more flexible** than previously believed, helping them **adapt to changes in food availability** and survive in rapidly changing environments.
- **California Ground Squirrels:**
 - It is also known as the **Beechey ground squirrel** and commonly found in western US.
 - They have **mottled fur, with gray, light and dark brown, and white** present in their pelage.
 - They are commonly **preyed upon by rattlesnakes, eagles, raccoons, foxes, badgers, and weasels** and can **live up to 6 years** in the wild.

- [IUCN Red List](#): Least Concern
- [CITES](#): No special status
- The **Indian palm squirrel** (*Funambulus palmarum*) is commonly found in India and Sri Lanka.



Read More: [Malayan Giant Squirrel](#)

India's PM Visit to Kuwait

For Prelims: [Gulf nations](#), [International Solar Alliance](#), [United Nations](#), [Gulf Cooperation Council](#), Order of Mubarak Al-Kabeer

For Mains: India's Foreign Policy and Relations with West Asia, India-Kuwait Bilateral Relations, Energy Diplomacy in India's Foreign Policy

Source: [IE](#)

Why in News?

India and Kuwait have elevated their **bilateral relationship to a strategic partnership** during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's historic visit to the [Gulf nation](#), marking the second visit by an Indian Prime Minister since **Indira Gandhi's** visit in 1981.

- This visit signifies a renewed commitment to trade, defence, and broader cooperation between the two nations.



What are the Key Highlights of the PM's Visit to Kuwait?

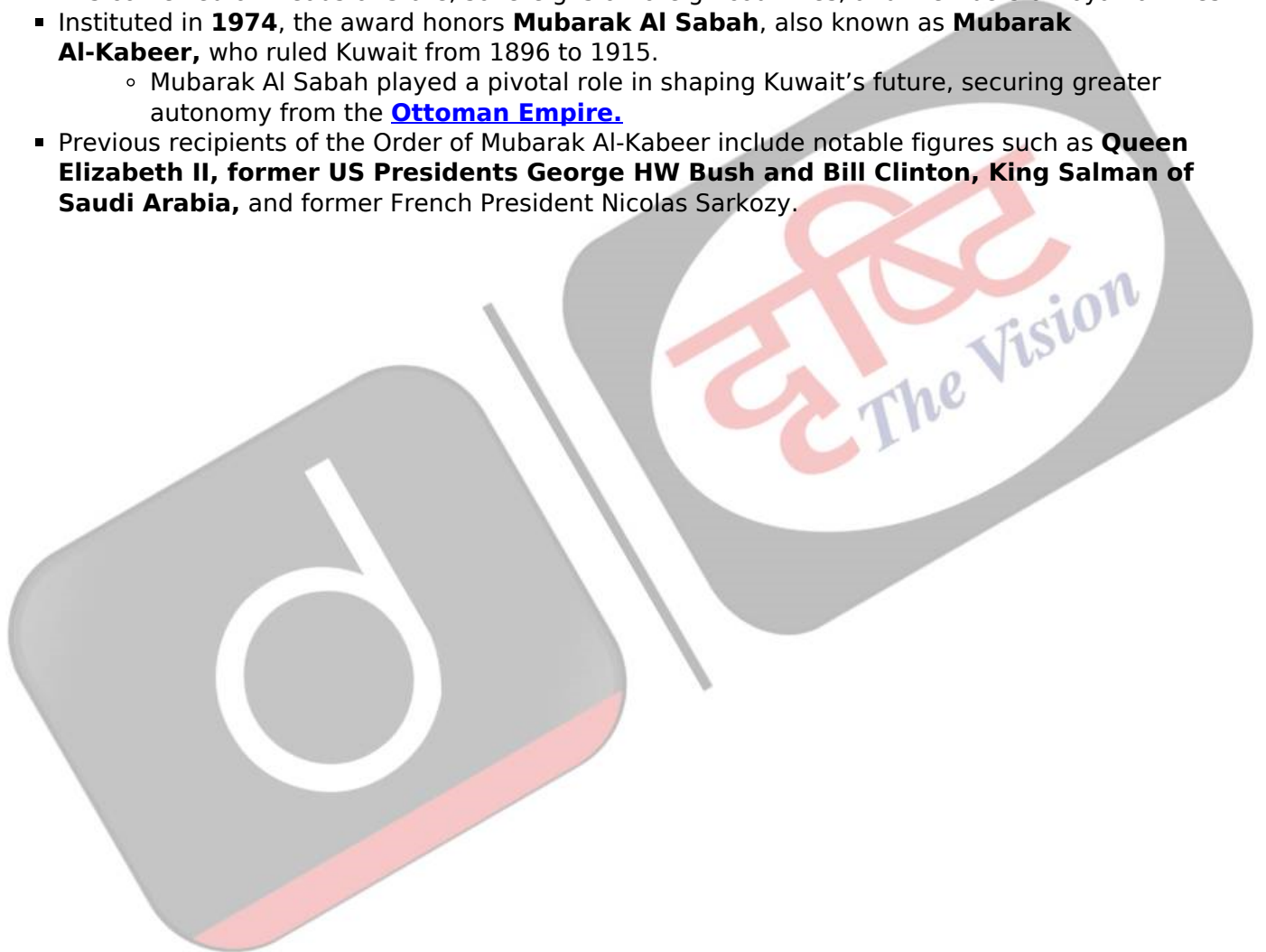
- **Order of Mubarak Al Kabeer:** PM Shri Narendra Modi was awarded the '**Order of Mubarak Al Kabeer,**' the **highest honor of Kuwait,** in recognition of his contributions to strengthening bilateral ties.
- **Strategic Partnership:** The two sides elevated their relationship to a '**Strategic Partnership,**' expanding collaboration across political, trade, defense, energy, and cultural domains.
- **Defence Cooperation:** Signed an MoU on Defence Cooperation, focusing on joint military exercises, training, coastal defense.
- **Cultural and Sports Cooperation:** India and Kuwait signed a **Cultural Exchange Programme for 2025-2029** and an Executive Programme on Sports Cooperation for 2025-2028.
- **Joint Commission on Cooperation (JCC):** A JCC was established to monitor bilateral relations, chaired by the **Foreign Ministers of both countries.**
 - New **Joint Working Groups (JWGs)** were set up in key areas such as education, trade,

investments, agriculture, and [counter-terrorism](#).

- **Technology and Emerging Sectors:** Emphasised collaboration in semiconductors, [artificial intelligence](#), [e-Governance](#), and sharing best practices.
- **Energy Cooperation:** Both sides agreed to move from a **buyer-seller relationship** to a **comprehensive partnership** in the energy sector, with a focus on oil, gas, refining, and [renewable energy](#).
- **Multilateral Cooperation:** Kuwait's membership in [International Solar Alliance \(ISA\)](#) was welcomed by India.
 - The PM of India congratulated Kuwait on its [Gulf Cooperation Council \(GCC\)](#) Presidency and emphasized the importance of concluding the **India-GCC Free Trade Agreement**.
 - Both leaders emphasized the need for a [reformed United Nations \(UN\)](#) to tackle **global challenges effectively**.

Order of Mubarak Al-Kabeer

- It is conferred on Heads of State, sovereigns of foreign countries, and members of royal families.
- Instituted in **1974**, the award honors **Mubarak Al Sabah**, also known as **Mubarak Al-Kabeer**, who ruled Kuwait from 1896 to 1915.
 - Mubarak Al Sabah played a pivotal role in shaping Kuwait's future, securing greater autonomy from the [Ottoman Empire](#).
- Previous recipients of the Order of Mubarak Al-Kabeer include notable figures such as **Queen Elizabeth II**, former **US Presidents George HW Bush and Bill Clinton**, **King Salman of Saudi Arabia**, and former French President Nicolas Sarkozy.





Kuwait's Highest Honour

The ORDER of MUBARAK Al KABEER



20 / GLOBAL HONOURS

ONE MOMENT OF GLORY FOR
140 CRORE INDIANS!

-  2024 - Guyana's The Order Of Excellence
-  2024 - Barbados's The Order of Freedom
-  2024 - Nigeria's Grand Commander of the Order
-  2024 - Dominica's Dominica Award of Honour
-  2024 - Russia's Order of St. Andrew the Apostle
-  2023 - Greece's Grand Cross of the Order of Honour
-  2023 - France's Grand Cross of the Legion
-  2023 - Egypt's Order of the Nile
-  2023 - Republic of Palau's honour Ebakl Award
-  2023 - Papua New Guinea's the Order of Logohu
-  2023 - Fiji's prestigious Companion of the Order of Fiji
-  2021 - Bhutan's Order of the Druk Gyalpo
-  2020 - US Government's Legion of Merit
-  2019 - Bahrain's King Hamad Order of the Renaissance
-  2019 - Maldives' the Order of the Distinguished Rule of Nishan Izzuddin
-  2019 - United Arab Emirates' Order of Zayed Award
-  2018 - Palestine's the Grand Collar of the State of Palestine Award
-  2016 - Afghanistan's the State Order of Ghazi Amir Amanullah Khan
-  2016 - Saudi Arabia's Order of King Abdulaziz

How are India-Kuwait Relations?

- **Historical Ties:** India and Kuwait share a long-standing relationship, dating back to **pre-oil times** when **maritime trade** formed the foundation of Kuwait's economy.
 - The **Indian Rupee was once the legal tender in Kuwait until 1961**, emphasizing their strong economic ties.
 - Historically, Kuwait traded goods like **dates, pearls, and Arabian horses** with India. However, after the **discovery of oil**, Kuwait's economy shifted, **with oil now contributing to about 94%** of its state income.
- **Economic Partnership:** Kuwait is one of India's top trading partners, with bilateral trade valued at **USD 10.47 billion** in 2023-24.
 - **Kuwait is India's 6th largest crude oil supplier**, fulfilling **3% of the country's energy needs**.

- Indian exports to Kuwait surpassed **USD 2 billion for the first time**, reflecting growing trade ties.
- **Kuwait Investment Authority's** investments in India exceed **USD 10 billion**.
- **Indian Diaspora in Kuwait:** With a population of around 1 million, the Indian community is the **largest expatriate group in Kuwait**.
 - The community plays a vital role in the Kuwaiti economy, particularly in sectors like healthcare, engineering, retail, and business.

What is the Importance of Kuwait in India's Foreign Policy in West Asia?

- **Economic Contributions:** The remittances from Indian expatriates in Kuwait inject billions of dollars into the Indian economy, which is crucial for **economic stability and growth**.
- **Economic Collaboration: Kuwait's Vision 2035**, aimed at diversifying its economy **beyond oil**, presents opportunities for India to collaborate in emerging sectors such as renewable energy, infrastructure, and technology.
 - This aligns with India's development goals, particularly the [Viksit Bharat 2047](#).
 - Additionally, the energy security from Kuwait is vital for India's industrial **growth and domestic needs**.
- **Geopolitical Influence:** Kuwait's location in the Middle East and its role in the **GCC** make it a key player in regional politics.
 - India's engagement with Kuwait helps it maintain a balanced and influential presence in West Asia
- **Labour and Skill Development:** Kuwait's demand for a **skilled workforce, as part of its Vision 2035**, aligns with India's strengths in skill development, offering a chance for **more Indian workers to contribute to Kuwait's growth** in various sectors, such as healthcare, technology, and infrastructure.

What is the Gulf Cooperation Council?

- **About:** The GCC, established in 1981, is a regional political and economic organization consisting of six Arab states: **Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates**.
 - The GCC was established in response to regional tensions, notably the [Iranian Revolution \(1979\)](#) and the [Iraq-Iran War \(1980-1988\)](#).
 - It aims to promote unity and address shared challenges in the Gulf region.
- **Organizational Structure:** The **Supreme Council** is the **highest decision-making** body of the GCC, consisting of heads of state from each member country.
 - The **presidency of the Supreme Council rotates annually** based on the alphabetical order of member countries.
- **Headquarters:** Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.
- **India's Relations with GCC:** The GCC is a key trading and investment partner for India, with significant investments from the UAE and Saudi Arabia.
 - In FY 2023-24, India-GCC bilateral trade stood at **USD 161.59 billion**. India's exports were USD 56.3 billion and India's imports were USD 105.3 billion.
 - The GCC remains a key market for India's exports, including oil, and hosts a large Indian workforce.
 - The **UAE ranks as India's 3rd largest trading partner** and **2nd largest export destination**.
 - Around **8.9 million Indian expatriates in the GCC** contribute significantly to **remittances**, which, despite a recent decline, remain a major income source for India.

Drishti Mains Question:

In what ways do the India-Kuwait bilateral relations impact India's energy security and economic interests in the Gulf region?

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question

Prelims

Q. Which of the following is not a member of 'Gulf Cooperation Council'? (2016)

- (a) Iran
- (c) Oman
- (b) Saudi Arabia
- (d) Kuwait

Ans: (a)

Mains:

Q. The question of India's Energy Security constitutes the most important part of India's economic progress. Analyse India's energy policy cooperation with West Asian countries. (2017)

55th GST Council Meeting

Source: [PIB](#)

Why in News?

Recently, the Finance Minister chaired the **55th [Goods and Services Tax \(GST\) Council](#)** meeting.

What are the Key Decisions Taken in the 55th GST Council Meeting?

- **Used Electric Vehicle (EVs):** GST council decided to **raise** the rate of tax to **18% from 12% on all used EV sales**, just as in case of non-electric vehicles.
 - GST will apply only to the **margin value** (difference between purchase and selling price, adjusted for depreciation if claimed) in case of **business sales**. **No GST** applies to **individual-to-individual sales**.
- **Bank's Penal Charges:** No GST applies to penal charges by **banks and [non-banking financial companies \(NBFCs\)](#)** for **loan term violations**.
- **Payment Aggregators:** [Payment aggregators](#) handling payments of **less than Rs 2,000** will be eligible for an exemption.
 - This exemption **does not** extend to [payment gateways](#) or other [fintech services](#)

unrelated to fund settlement.

- **Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF):** GST council **did not agree** on bringing [ATF](#) under the ambit of **GST** because states refused to accept it.
 - States see ATF as part of the **crude petroleum diesel basket**, saying that it alone **cannot be taken out**.
 - 5 products i.e., **crude oil, petrol, diesel, ATF and natural gas** were kept out of purview of GST. The central government levies **excise duty** on them and states **levy VAT**.
- **GST Exemption: Black pepper and raisins** supplied directly by **farmers** will be exempt from GST.
 - **Gene therapy** is **fully exempt** from GST, and [Integrated GST](#) exemption on **surface-to-air missiles** is extended.
- **Compensation Cess:** Reduced [compensation cess](#) rate to **0.1% on supplies to merchant exporters**.
 - This Cess is collected on the supply of select goods and or services to **compensate the states for any revenue loss** on account of implementation of GST.
- **Popcorn:** GST Council **clarified** (no new tax imposition) that **caramelized popcorn** is taxed at **18% GST**. Ready-to-eat popcorn with **salt and spices attracts 5% GST** if not pre-packaged and labeled, and **12%** if **pre-packaged and labeled**.
 - **Caramelised popcorn** is classified as **sugar confectionery**, and attracts **18% GST** while **salted popcorn** is a **namkeen** and subject to **5% GST**.

Note:

- **Payment Aggregator:** A payment aggregator is a **third-party service provider** that enables customers to make and businesses to accept payments online. E.g., **PhonePe, Paytm etc.**
- **Payment Gateways:** Payment gateways are termed as **technology infrastructure** providers for online payments.
 - It includes physical card-reading devices like [point-of-sale \(POS\) machines](#), [QR codes](#) or [Near Field Communication \(NFC\) technology](#) etc.
- **Fintech Services:** It refers to any **app, software, or technology** that allows people or businesses to digitally **access, manage, or gain insights** into their finances or make financial transactions. E.g., **WazirX** (Bitcoin and cryptocurrency exchange & trading platform).

GST Council

- **About:** The GST Council, a **constitutional body** under [Article 279-A \(101st Amendment, 2016\)](#)), makes recommendations on GST implementation.
 - GST is a **value-added (Ad Valorem)** and **indirect tax system** that is levied on the supply of goods and services in India.
- **Members:** The Council includes the **Union Finance Minister (Chairperson)**, Union Minister of State (Finance), and a finance or any other minister from each state.
- **Nature of Decisions:** In the **Mohit Minerals case, 2022**, the Supreme Court ruled GST Council recommendations are **not binding**, as Parliament and states have **simultaneous legislative powers** on GST.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. Consider the following items: (2018)

1. Cereal grains hulled
2. Chicken eggs cooked
3. Fish processed and canned

4. Newspapers containing advertising material

Which of the above items is/are exempted under GST (Good and Services Tax)?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1, 2 and 4 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Ans: (c)

Q. What is/are the most likely advantages of implementing 'Goods and Services Tax (GST)'? (2017)

1. It will replace multiple taxes collected by multiple authorities and will thus create a single market in India.
2. It will drastically reduce the 'Current Account Deficit' of India and will enable it to increase its foreign exchange reserves.
3. It will enormously increase the growth and size of the economy of India and will enable it to overtake China in the near future.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

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

Ans: (a)