DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 01-05-2026

Mapping Perspective

1. **Somalia**

Prelims Perspective

2. **Atacama Desert**
3. **Nahargarh WLS**

Mains Perspective

4. **UAE Exit from OPEC**
5. **India's Night-Time Energy Crisis**

Somalia

Syllabus: Prelims Bits –Maps.

Context:

- Suspected pirates have boarded a St. Kitts and Nevis-flagged general cargo vessel off Somalia's waters and were sailing it towards the Somali coastline → indicates persistence of maritime piracy in the western Indian Ocean region.

About Somalia

- Location: African country located in the Horn of Africa.
- Latitudinal Extent: The Equator passes through southern Somalia.
- Borders: Djibouti (Northwest), Ethiopia (West), Kenya (Southwest).

- Maritime Boundaries: Gulf of Aden (north) and Indian Ocean (east).
- Capital City: Mogadishu.

Geographical Features of Somalia

Climate

- Arid or semiarid climate with little seasonal change in temperature → reflects tropical desert and steppe conditions.

Relief

- Somali peninsula mainly consists of a tableland of young limestone and sandstone formations.
- In the extreme north along the Gulf of Aden: narrow coastal plain known as the Guban.

Rivers

- Major rivers: Jubba and Shabeelle → seasonal flow pattern, crucial for agriculture.

Highest Peak

- Mount Shimbiris (2,460 m) is the highest point in Somalia.

Natural Resources

- Includes iron ore, uranium, copper, tin, bauxite, gypsum, salt → limited exploitation due to instability.

Atacama Desert

Syllabus: GS-1: World Physical Geography – Deserts.

Context:

- Recently, it was observed that **light pollution is threatening the world's darkest skies in the Atacama Desert**.

Location & Extent

- It is the **driest desert in the world, located in northern Chile**.
- It is **nestled between the Andes Mountains (east) and the Pacific Ocean (west)**.
- It forms a continuous strip for nearly 1,000 km along the narrow coast of the northern third of Chile.

Boundaries

- It is **bordered by Argentina, Peru, and Bolivia**.

Physical Features

- It **hosts 12 volcanoes**, mainly located in the **western outliers of the Andes**.

Climate

- **Rainfall:** Average rainfall is **about 1 mm per year**; some locations have **never had any rainfall whatsoever**.
- **Temperature:** Temperatures are **comparatively mild throughout the year**, with an **average of about 63°F (18°C)**.

Natural Resources

- The region has the **largest natural supply of Sodium Nitrate**, used for **producing fertilizers and explosives**, amongst other uses.

Archaeological Significance

- **Chinchorro Mummies:** The **oldest artificially mummified human remains** have been found in the Atacama Desert.

Analytical Insight

- Extreme aridity due to **rain shadow effect of the Andes + cold Humboldt Current**.

- Ideal for **astronomical observations → now threatened by light pollution**, indicating human-induced environmental impacts even in remote ecosystems.

Nahargarh WLS

Syllabus:GS-3: Environment – Protected Areas – Wildlife sanctuary.

Context:

- The Rajasthan High Court recently set aside a National Board for Wildlife panel decision that denied wildlife clearance to Taj Amber, a five-star property located about 97 metres from the Nahargarh Wildlife Sanctuary boundary.

About Nahargarh Wildlife Sanctuary

Location & Extent

- It is located just 20 kilometres from Jaipur, Rajasthan.
- It's a small sanctuary of 52 sq.km. and is situated in the Aravalli Range.

Historical Linkage

- The sanctuary is named after Nahargarh Fort, a historic fort built in the 18th century by Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II, the founder of Jaipur.

Ecological Connectivity

- It connects ecologically with other forest areas like the Ranthambore Tiger Reserve.

Associated Conservation Area

- Within the sanctuary is the Nahargarh Biological Park, which covers 720 hectares and focuses on conservation, including species like Bengal tigers, Asiatic lions, and sloth bears.

Flora

- The sanctuary features a rugged terrain with hills, valleys, seasonal streams, and dry deciduous forests typical of the semi-arid region, including trees such as dhok, babool, khejri, and ber.

Fauna

Mammals

- Common species include leopards, wild boars, deer, lions, tigers, sloth bears, and several small mammals.

Avifauna

- It's a haven for bird watchers, with a variety of species, including peacocks, owls, and eagles.

Reptiles & Amphibians

- It is also home to reptiles like Indian rock pythons, monitor lizards, and amphibians like frogs and toads.

Analytical Insight

- Highlights issues of **eco-sensitive zone regulation and wildlife clearance** near protected areas.
- Reflects **judicial intervention in environmental governance** and role of statutory bodies like NBWL.
- Demonstrates importance of **Aravalli ecosystem connectivity** in wildlife conservation.

UAE Exit from OPEC

Syllabus: GS-2: International Relations – Global Events.

Context:

- The **United Arab Emirates** has announced its exit from the **Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)** and the wider **OPEC+ alliance**, effective May 1.
- The decision is linked to Abu Dhabi's long-term economic strategy, though it comes amid major disruptions in global oil markets triggered by the US-Iran conflict.
- After more than five decades in the grouping, the move signals a significant shift in global energy dynamics, raising questions about its impact on oil supply, pricing, and market stability.

OPEC and UAE Membership: Origins and Evolution

Formation of OPEC

- OPEC was founded in 1960 at the Baghdad Conference by five countries—Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela—to coordinate oil policies and ensure stable revenues for producing nations.
- It emerged as a response to the dominance of Western multinational oil companies (the "Seven Sisters"), which earlier controlled pricing.

Membership Profile

- OPEC currently has 12 members, including, aside from the UAE: Algeria, Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela.

UAE's Entry

- The United Arab Emirates joined OPEC in 1967, initially through Abu Dhabi, becoming part of the expanding group of oil-producing nations.

Emergence of OPEC+ and Global Role

- OPEC+ is a grouping formed in 2016 between OPEC and 10 major non-OPEC producers such as Russia, Mexico, and Kazakhstan.
- It coordinates oil production quotas to manage global supply and stabilise crude prices.
- This alliance today accounts for a large share of global oil production and trade, reinforcing its role in shaping energy markets.
- As per a report, OPEC+ produced roughly 40% of the world's crude oil and accounts for 60% of internationally traded petroleum.

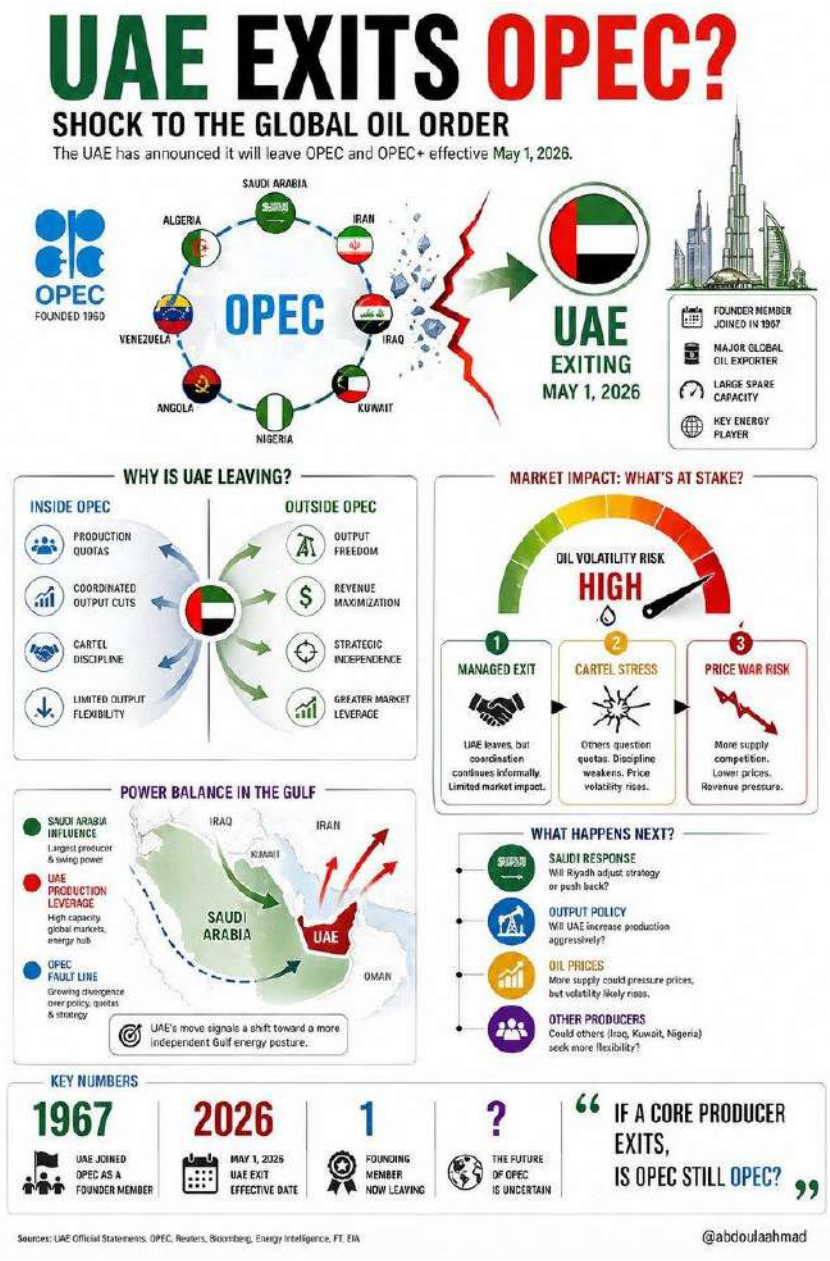
OPEC's Role in Global Oil Markets

- OPEC functions much like a central bank for the global oil market, using production controls as its primary instrument.
- By setting output quotas for member countries, OPEC regulates how much oil is produced collectively.
- These quotas prevent oversupply during periods of low demand, helping avoid sharp declines in oil prices.
- Member countries may have to produce below their maximum capacity to maintain market stability.
- In times of tight supply, OPEC can increase production, ensuring that oil prices do not rise excessively and disrupt global markets.
- Since many member nations rely heavily on oil revenues, this coordinated approach helps stabilise their incomes and domestic budgets, shielding them from sudden price volatility.

Iran War and UAE's Exit from OPEC

Security Risks and Disrupted Oil Flows

- The US-Iran conflict has heightened security concerns for the United Arab Emirates, especially around the Strait of Hormuz—a route that previously carried about one-fifth of global oil trade.



Constraints within OPEC Framework

- As Iran is a founding member of OPEC, the bloc's consensus-based decision-making limits the UAE's flexibility in responding to the crisis and securing its oil exports.

Shifting Security Dynamics

- Gulf nations have traditionally depended on the United States for regional security.
- However, the conflict exposed gaps in this arrangement, as the U.S. could not prevent spillover impacts on Gulf infrastructure and trade.

Strategic Autonomy through Exit

- By exiting OPEC, the UAE seeks to remove diplomatic constraints, enabling it to independently leverage its oil production, pursue new strategic partnerships, and explore alternative security arrangements beyond traditional Western alliances.

UAE's Economic Drivers Behind Exit from OPEC

Production Constraints and Capacity Underutilisation

- Beyond geopolitical factors, the UAE faced economic limitations within OPEC quotas, which capped its oil output below full capacity.
- Concerns over production policies influenced the decision to exit.

Balancing Oil Dependence and Economic Diversification

- At the same time, the UAE is pursuing a transition toward a knowledge-based economy, expanding into sectors like education and technology to attract global talent.
- Achieving this shift requires higher oil production in the short term to generate the financial resources needed for long-term diversification.

Impact of UAE Exit on Global Oil Prices

Weakening of OPEC's Collective Power

- A key concern is the erosion of spare capacity control—the unused oil production that can be quickly deployed—traditionally held by countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE.

Rise of Competition and Market Pressure

- UAE could emerge as a more aggressive independent producer, putting pressure on OPEC members to increase their own production.
- This shift introduces greater competition in global oil markets.

Downward Pressure and Volatility in Prices

- In line with basic economic principles, higher supply and competition are expected to push oil prices downward and increase market volatility, especially amid disruptions from the ongoing geopolitical tensions.

Implications for Oil-Importing Countries

- In the short term, lower oil prices could benefit import-dependent countries like India by reducing energy costs.
- Over time, increased competition may also expand the range of oil suppliers, improving energy security.

Risk of Further Fragmentation

- The UAE's move may set a precedent, raising the possibility that other members—such as Saudi Arabia—could reconsider quota commitments, potentially leading to further fragmentation of OPEC.

India's Night-Time Energy Crisis

Syllabus: GS-3: Industry – Power sector.

Context:

- India is facing an **unprecedented electricity demand surge**, with peak consumption hitting record highs due to early and intense heatwave conditions.
- Crisis is **most severe after sunset**, when solar power becomes unavailable, exposing grid vulnerability.

The Record Demand Surge

- As per Grid India data:
  - Peak demand reached **256 GW (25 April 2026)** with **~4.2 GW shortfall at 10:39 PM**.
  - Previous day: **240 GW peak at 10:34 PM** with **~5.4 GW shortfall** (steepest recorded).
- **Daytime peak (~3:45 PM)** was met without shortage → highlights structural issue:
  - Grid manages **solar-hours demand**, but **struggles post-sunset**.

The Solar Paradox

- India has **~150 GW installed solar capacity** → major clean energy achievement.
- However, leads to **sharp evening drop in generation ("duck curve" effect)**:
  - Supply falls steeply **just as residential cooling demand rises**.
- During **6 PM–6 AM**, grid depends on:
  - Coal, gas, hydro, nuclear, wind → to bridge supply gap.

Why Coal Plants Failed to Deliver

- Immediate cause: **Spike in forced & partial outages in thermal plants**.
  - Planned outages: ~3 GW
  - Forced + partial outages: **~26 GW**

- Coal plant outages alone: **~18 GW forced + 3–4 GW partial (~21 GW unavailable)**

- Generation gap:
  - Thermal output: **184–187 GW vs 227 GW installed capacity**
- Key reason:
  - **Extreme heat → thermal stress on equipment → reduced availability during peak demand**.

Price Shock in Spot Market

- As per Indian Energy Exchange (IEX):
  - **Night prices hit ceiling ₹10/kWh** (Day Ahead Market - DAM).
  - **Daytime prices fell to ~₹1.5/kWh**.
- Indicates **sharp intra-day volatility**:
  - Solar surplus (day) vs scarcity (night).

What Makes 2025–26 Different

- Traditionally peak demand: **June–July / Sept–Oct**.
- In 2026: **Peak arrived in April (early onset)** due to intense heatwave.
- Comparison:
  - April 2025: **235 GW**
  - April 2026: **256 GW** → steep year-on-year rise.
- Last similar early peak: **2022–23**.

Key Challenges

- **Evening demand surge + zero solar output** → daily vulnerability window.
- **Thermal reliability issue**: forced outages during extreme heat.
- **Absence of utility-scale battery storage** → no mechanism to store surplus solar.
- **Early heatwave seasonality** → compresses grid planning cycle.
- **High price volatility (₹1.5–₹10/kWh)** → stress on DISCOMs and consumers.

Way Forward

- **Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS)**: store excess afternoon solar → supply evening peak.
- **Demand-side management**: shift consumption away from **6–10 PM peak window**.

- **Thermal plant resilience**: heat-proofing equipment + predictive maintenance.
- **Pumped Storage Hydro**: expand large-scale, proven storage option.
- **Operationalising idle gas-based capacity**: support evening peaks with pricing reforms.
- **Transmission strengthening**: enhance inter-regional power transfer to avoid congestion.

Conclusion

- April 2026 crisis reflects a **structural transition challenge**:
  - Rapid solar expansion without matching **storage, grid flexibility, and backup reliability**.
- Issue lies at intersection of:
  - **Energy security + Climate adaptation + Grid infrastructure + Economic governance**.
- Indicates that **energy transition requires system-level synchronisation**, not just capacity addition.