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Untouchability & Idea Of 'Purity'

A recent shuddhikaran (purification) ritual was performed at Haldwani's Ramlila Ground two days after Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, a Dalit leader, addressed a rally there. The incident raises a key legal question: Does performing "purification" of a place after a Dalit person's use amount to untouchability under Indian law?

Key Judicial Precedents

- **Surya Narayan Choudhary v. State of Rajasthan (1988):** The Rajasthan High Court (HC) dealt with Dalit devotees at Shrinathji Temple, Nathdwara, who were reportedly subjected to purification before entry. It held that Dalits could not be subjected to a **caste-specific additional condition** for equal temple access and directed discontinuation of the practice as it is violative of **Articles 14, 15 and 17**.

Related Constitutional Framework	Related Statutory Framework
• Article 14: Guarantees equality before law and equal protection of laws. • Article 15(2): Prohibits discrimination based solely on religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth in access to public places/services and facilities such as shops, hotels, restaurants, wells, roads and bathing ghats. • Article 17: Abolishes untouchability and prohibits its practice "in any form". Enforcement of disabilities arising from untouchability is punishable by law. ◦ Horizontal application: Unlike most Fundamental Rights, Article 17 operates against private individuals as well as the State. ◦ Note: The Constitution does not define "untouchability", allowing Article 17 to address its changing forms and manifestations.	• Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955: Originally enacted as the Untouchability (Offences) Act, 1955, it was renamed and substantially amended in 1976. It gives effect to Article 17 and penalizes: ◦ Practice and preaching of untouchability; ◦ Enforcement of disabilities arising from untouchability; ◦ Discrimination in access to public facilities/services; ◦ Denial of entry into places of worship; and ◦ Insulting or attempting to insult an SC person on the ground of untouchability- Section 7(1)(d). • Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 (SC/ST Act, 1989): Creates specific offences of atrocities against SC/ST persons, along with provisions for Special/Exclusive Special Courts and relief and rehabilitation of victims. It operates as a distinct framework from the PCR Act. ◦ Section 3(1)(r): A non-SC/ST person who intentionally insults or intimidates an SC/ST person with intent to humiliate them in a place within public view is punishable with 6 months- 5 years imprisonment and fine.

- **Hitesh Verma v. State of Uttarakhand (2020):** The Supreme Court (SC) held that **every insult or humiliation of an SC/ST person does not automatically attract Section 3(1)(r) of the SC/ST Act**. The insult must have a connection with the person's SC/ST identity.
- **Sukanya Shantha v. Union of India (2024):** The SC linked untouchability with the caste system and notions of "purity and pollution" that reinforce caste hierarchy. It held that Article 17 must address the **different forms and manifestations** of untouchability and emphasized that **no stigma can be attached to a person's existence, touch or presence**.
- **Gunjan @ Girija Kumari v. State (NCT of Delhi) (2026):** The SC reiterated that **"place within public view" is an essential ingredient** for an offence under Section 3(1)(r) of the SC/ST Act.

What is the Legal Test?

The central issue is the **nexus between the conduct and caste-based notions of "purity and pollution."** Untouchability is established more strongly where:

- A person's **touch or presence is treated as polluting because of caste**; or
- A Dalit person is subjected to a **caste-specific disability or discriminatory condition** not imposed on others.
- **Mere insult ≠ automatically untouchability.** There must be a **caste/untouchability nexus** to attract the relevant statutory provision.

Application to the Haldwani Case

The crucial question is **why the shuddhikaran was performed?**

- If evidence establishes that the venue was purified because **Mr. Kharge's Dalit identity, touch or presence was considered polluting**, the reasoning in *Sukanya Shantha* and *Surya Narayan Choudhary* becomes relevant.

- If the ritual was performed for **reasons unrelated to caste**, its occurrence after Mr. Kharge's rally **would not by itself establish untouchability**.

Thus, the legal issue is not the word “shuddhikaran” itself, but whether the act was rooted in caste-based notions of “purity and pollution.”



India's Copyright Ruling on AI Generated Work

The Copyright Office recently clarified that AI systems cannot be recognized as legal authors, although an AI-generated work may satisfy the originality requirement for copyright protection.

What Does the Law Say?

The Copyright Act, 1957 addresses three interconnected issues:

- **Originality (Section 13):** Copyright protects **original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic works**. The Act does not define “originality”. In *Eastern Book Company v. D.B. Modak*, the Supreme Court (SC) held that a work need not be **novel or inventive** but must demonstrate a **minimum degree of creativity** and not merely be copied or mechanically reproduced.

- **Authorship (Section 2(d)(vi)):** For **computer-generated works**, the author is “**the person who causes the work to be created.**” The issue was whether this “person” could be the AI system itself or the human who designed and operated it. The Copyright Office held that **AI cannot presently be recognized as the statutory author**.

- **Ownership:**

- **Section 17:** The author is generally the **first owner** of copyright.
- **Sections 18-19:** Copyright can subsequently be **assigned/transferred** through legally valid agreements. This framework presupposes an entity capable of **holding rights, entering agreements and enforcing them**. Since DABUS lacks legal personality, it cannot independently hold or transfer copyright.

Earlier Indian Context: RAGHAV: In an earlier case involving *Suryast*, an AI-generated painting created using the **RAGHAV AI Painting App**, the Copyright Office initially registered **RAGHAV as a co-author** along with artist Ankit Sahni. The registration was subsequently questioned/withdrawn, with the Office seeking clarification regarding RAGHAV's legal status under Sections 2(d)(iii) and 2(d)(vi). The **DABUS ruling therefore provides greater clarity** by expressly distinguishing AI-generated originality from AI authorship.

Case Background

- 1 **Creation of the Artwork:** Stephen L. Thaler developed an AI system called **DABUS (Device for the Autonomous Bootstrapping of Unified Sentence)**. DABUS generated an artwork titled **A Recent Entrance to Paradise**.
- 2 **Copyright Application:** In **2022**, Thaler applied for copyright registration of the artwork and **named DABUS as the author** and himself as the copyright owner, arguing that DABUS had **autonomously generated the artwork** without real-time human intervention. Therefore, DABUS should be recognized as the **author**.
- 3 **Copyright Office's Objection:** The Copyright Office questioned whether an **AI system could legally qualify as an “author”** under the Copyright Act, 1957. Thaler was given an opportunity to identify **himself as the author**, but he declined. The application was ultimately **rejected not because the artwork lacked originality, but because DABUS could not be recognized as a legal author under Indian law**.
- 4 **Ruling & Reasoning:** The Office held that the artwork **satisfied the originality requirement under Section 13**, but **DABUS could not be recognized as its legal author**. Since Thaler had designed, configured and initiated the AI system that produced the work, he was considered the “**person who caused the work to be created**” under **Section 2(d)(vi)**. However, as Thaler continued to identify DABUS as the author, the **application was rejected**.

International Practice

- **USA:** Copyright protection generally requires **human authorship**; purely AI-generated works are not protected.
- **UK & Ireland:** Authorship of computer-generated works is linked to the **person who undertakes the necessary arrangements** for their creation.
- **China:** AI-generated works may receive protection where they reflect **human intellectual investment**, but AI itself is not recognized as an author.

Implications:	Way Forward
• Legal Clarity: Establishes an important distinction between originality, authorship and ownership of AI-generated works. • Creative Industries: Provides a framework for AI use in media, music, publishing, gaming, design and entertainment. • Human Creativity: Reinforces the principle that copyright protection is linked to human creative/legal responsibility. • Future Legal Challenges: Raises unresolved questions regarding AI-assisted works, degree of human contribution, ownership, attribution and liability. • Policy Challenge: Fully autonomous AI may increasingly create works with minimal human intervention, potentially exposing gaps in the existing copyright framework.	• Clear Guidelines: Define the distinction between AI-assisted, AI-generated and fully autonomous works. • Human Contribution Test: Establish objective criteria for determining the minimum level of human creative contribution required for copyright. • Transparency: Require disclosure of significant AI involvement in the creation of copyrighted works. • Legal Reform: Parliament may consider targeted amendments to address AI-generated content, ownership and attribution without granting AI independent legal personality. • Balance Innovation and Creators' Rights: Ensure copyright law encourages AI innovation while protecting human creativity and economic interests.



Forest Rights Act, Gram Sabha Consent & Forest Clearance

The Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs has told the Power Ministry that the Forest Rights Act, 2006 has "no provision for obtaining consent of the Gram Sabha for forest clearance," and that such matters fall outside its purview.

Background: The clarification came amid concerns raised by the Ministry of Power and National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC) that obtaining consent from all concerned Gram Sabhas has become a major bottleneck in infrastructure projects.

The Forest Rights Act, 2006

- The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, commonly called the Forest Rights Act (FRA), was enacted to correct the historical injustice faced by forest-dwelling communities.
- The law recognises individual and community rights of Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers over forest land and resources.
- Crucially, it makes the Gram Sabha the primary authority for initiating the process of determining forest rights.
- The Act explicitly states that the **Ministry of Tribal Affairs** is the nodal ministry responsible for its implementation. This designation is central to the current dispute.

How Gram Sabha Consent Became a Requirement?

- A key point of confusion lies in where the consent requirement actually originates.
- The **FRA** itself does not contain language on Gram Sabha consent specifically with respect to diverting forest land for non-forestry purposes.
- However, the Union government's own rules and regulations governing forest diversion, framed under the **Forest Conservation Act, 1980**, require that all processes under the FRA be completed before any authority can formally issue a certificate diverting forest land.
- These guidelines mandate four sequential steps:
 - Identification of potential FRA claimants
 - Recognition of their rights where applicable
 - Vesting of these rights
 - Obtaining a no-objection certificate (NOC) from concerned Gram Sabhas regarding the diversion proposal
- It is this final step, obtaining an NOC from Gram Sabhas, that has come to be known as the procedure for Gram Sabha consent for forest clearance.

Criticism

A Supreme Court advocate who previously served as legal adviser to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs under successive governments has raised concerns, asking that if such matters are not under the Tribal Affairs Ministry's purview, whose purview they fall under.

Why Has the Issue Become Contentious?

A Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Undertakings, examining **NHPC Limited**, noted that forest clearance for its under-construction projects takes an average of **106 months due to the requirement of consent from all concerned Gram Sabhas which act as a major bottleneck, citing projects such as Teesta-IV Hydroelectric Project**.

- NHPC proposed a 70-75% consent threshold among affected Gram Sabhas for large hydropower projects, instead of requiring consent from all Gram Sabhas. The Parliamentary Committee recommended examining the proposal.

Judicial Dimension- Niyamgiri Case (Orissa Mining Corporation v. Ministry of Environment & Forests, 2013)

The Supreme Court in this case recognized the **Gram Sabha's important role in determining claims relating to religious, cultural, and community rights under the FRA**. The judgment established that development projects cannot simply bypass legally recognized community rights and strengthened the principle of **participatory decision-making in forest governance**.

Key Governance Challenges:

- **Legal Ambiguity:** Lack of clarity between the FRA's statutory provisions and evolving forest-clearance procedures has created confusion over the precise nature of Gram Sabha consent.
- **Institutional Overlap:** MoTA, MoEFCC (Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change), infrastructure ministries and State/UT governments have different roles, making coordination difficult.
- **Centre-State Dimension:** Although MoTA is the nodal ministry for the FRA, its implementation is substantially undertaken by **State/UT authorities**.
- **Development-Rights Trade-Off:** Excessive procedural rigidity can delay public infrastructure, while excessive dilution can weaken tribal rights and environmental safeguards.

Way Forward

- **Clarify the Legal Framework:** Clearly distinguish **FRA rights recognition, Gram Sabha participation and forest-clearance requirements under Forest Conservation Act, 1980**.

- **Time-Bound FRA Process:** Complete genuine identification and settlement of forest rights at an early stage of project planning without curtailing legitimate claims
- **Institutional Coordination:** Create a coordinated mechanism involving **MoTA, MoEFCC, States/UTs and project authorities** to resolve procedural disputes.
- **Meaningful Participation:** Gram Sabha consultation should be **informed, transparent and participatory**, rather than treated as a procedural formality.
- **Time-Bound Dispute Resolution:** Establish mechanisms to address genuine objections without allowing either arbitrary project delays or arbitrary overriding of community rights.
- **Benefit Sharing:** Strengthen rehabilitation, livelihood restoration and **local benefit-sharing mechanisms** for affected communities.



Why Manipur Wants a 1951 Baseline for NRC?

The Manipur government has proposed updating the National Register of Citizens (NRC) using 1951 as the baseline, subject to approval of the Union Government. The issue has gained urgency due to **influx from Myanmar following the 2021 military coup**, the continuing ethnic conflict since 2023, and concerns over the forthcoming **Census and delimitation**.

✓ The State Government has reported **24,475 undocumented/ "illegal" immigrants** detected in its border districts of whom **14,992 have reportedly been pushed back to Myanmar** through diplomatic channels.

The **NRC** is an official register containing the names of **Indian citizens**. Under the **Citizenship Act, 1955** and **Citizenship Rules, 2003**, the Centre can order its preparation using data from the **National Population Register (NPR)**. Local officials verify the information and determine whether a person qualifies for inclusion in the NRC.

Why 1951 as the Baseline?

- **Abolition of Permit System:** Manipur's traditional system regulating the entry of outsiders was abolished on **18 November 1950**. Hence, proponents consider 1951 an appropriate demographic baseline after the removal of this entry control.
- **Historical Record:** The **1951 NRC and Census**, along with the village directory and electoral rolls, provide legacy records that can help establish residence and citizenship.
- **Demographic Concerns:** Proponents point to significant population increases after 1951 and alleged undocumented migration through the porous

Why is the 1951 Baseline Contentious?

- 1 **Documentary Gaps:** Kuki-Zo organizations argue that remote hill areas had limited administrative reach and record-keeping in 1951. A rigid documentary requirement could therefore exclude genuine long-settled residents unable to establish a link with the 1951 records.
- 2 **Complex Migration History:** Migration across the India-Myanmar border has occurred over decades due to **conflict, political instability and humanitarian crises**. Distinguishing recent undocumented migrants from historically settled communities is consequently difficult.
- 3 **Ethnic and Political Polarization:** In the context of the ongoing conflict, the NRC is intertwined with questions of **identity, land, political representation and territorial claims**, creating a risk that citizenship verification could deepen existing ethnic tensions.
- 4 **Census and Delimitation:** Meitei and Naga organizations demand **"NRC before Census"**, arguing that population figures should not influence future political representation until illegal immigration has been addressed.

Divergent Stakeholder Positions

Stakeholder	Major position
Meitei & Naga groups	NRC before Census; 1951 baseline; identification of undocumented migrants; prevent demographic distortion
Kuki-Zo groups	Oppose a 1951-based NRC, oppose making the Census conditional on an NRC; concerns over incomplete historical records and wrongful exclusion
State Government	Pursue NRC with the Centre; trace 1951 records; verify undocumented migrants and strengthen border management

Manipur vs Assam: The **Assam NRC** followed the specific political settlement of the **Assam Accord**, with **25 March 1971** as the relevant cut-off linked to the Bangladesh context. Manipur's proposed **1951 baseline**, by contrast, is rooted in the State's own history, particularly the abolition of its Permit System in 1950. Thus, Assam's experience cannot simply be replicated in Manipur.

India-Myanmar border. However, **population growth alone does not establish illegal immigration.**

- **Political Continuity:** The “Proceedings of Understanding” between the Manipur government and student organisations in 1980, another agreement of November 1994 between Manipur Lt Governor and student organisations, and the Manipur People’s Protection Bill, 2018, all talk of 1951 as the baseline.

Key Challenges Involved

- **Documentation:** Missing or fragmented records make it difficult to establish family residence over 75 years.
- **Internal Displacement:** Conflict-induced displacement can complicate retrieval of documents and physical verification.
- **Policy Divergence Over Baseline:** Manipur adopted **1961 as the base year for the Inner Line Permit (ILP) framework in 2022**, whereas it now proposes **1951 for the NRC**, highlighting the contested nature of the appropriate historical baseline.
- **Legal and Institutional Framework:** Citizenship and immigration are Union subjects; the Centre must establish the statutory basis, verification procedure and appeals mechanism for any NRC exercise.
- **Risk of Wrongful Exclusion:** Genuine citizens and long-settled communities may be affected if documentary requirements are excessively rigid.

Way Forward

- Use **multiple legacy records**- 1951 NRC/Census, village and land records, electoral rolls, birth/school records rather than relying solely on a single document.
- Establish a **transparent verification and appeals mechanism** to prevent wrongful exclusion.
- Ensure verification is based on **citizenship and documentary evidence, not ethnicity or community identity**.
- Build **inter-community consensus** involving Meitei, Naga and Kuki-Zo stakeholders before finalizing the framework.
- Strengthen **India-Myanmar border management** to address continuing undocumented cross-border movement.
- Coordinate the **NRC, Census and delimitation** transparently so that demographic concerns do not further aggravate the existing conflict.



MHA Proposes Article 371(K) For Ladakh

Following discussions between the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) sub-committee and Ladakh representatives comprising the **Leh Apex Body (LAB)** and the **Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA)**, the Centre has proposed a special constitutional provision under a new **Chapter K in Article 371 (Article 371K) for Ladakh**.

Background

Since its separation from Jammu & Kashmir in 2019 as a Union Territory (UT) without a legislature, Ladakh has experienced political alienation and growing concerns over land, culture, employment, demography, and environmental preservation. The meeting builds on an "in-principle understanding" reached in earlier rounds of talks to restore democratic representation and establish constitutional safeguards.

Article 371 & Proposed Article 371(K):

- **Article 371** and its sub-clauses **371A-371J** form part of **Part XXI** of the Constitution dealing with *Temporary, Transitional and Special Provisions* for specific states. They provide **region-specific safeguards** relating to areas such as local culture, customary laws, land, resources, representation, and development.

- **Proposed Article 371(K):** It is a sui generis (unique) constitutional framework tailored for Ladakh and provides for a directly elected UT-level body. It proposes legislative powers over land, culture and language, forests, environment and natural resources, including subjects reserved for the UT under Article 240.
- The exact executive, financial, planning, police and law-and-order powers are still being negotiated.

What are Ladakh's Major Demands? Ladakh's demands include:

- **Statehood** with an elected legislature and government.
- **Inclusion under the Sixth Schedule.**
- **Protection of land and employment.**
- **Protection of culture and language.**
- **Greater political representation** and democratic participation.
- **Greater control over bureaucracy, police and law & order.**
- **Greater local role in decisions concerning development and natural resources.**

The **Sixth Schedule**, under **Article 244**, provides **autonomous administration in specified tribal areas** through **Autonomous District and Regional Councils**, with powers over **land, forests, local administration, customary laws, and certain legislative, judicial and taxation matters**. It currently applies to tribal areas in **Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura**.

How will Article 371(K) differ from the Sixth Schedule?

Feature	Proposed Article 371(K)	Sixth Schedule
Level	UT-level elected body	District/Regional Autonomous Councils
Applicability	Custom-designed for Ladakh	Specified tribal areas (Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura)
Nature	Sui generis constitutional model	Constitutional framework for tribal self-governance
Powers	To be specifically defined	Constitutionally defined powers
Status	Proposed, not enacted	Existing constitutional framework

Thus, Sixth Schedule provides a **defined model of tribal autonomy**, whereas Article 371(K) is proposed as a **custom-designed governance model for Ladakh**.

Concerns Raised	Way Forward
• Unclear Powers: Without a draft, the extent of legislative, executive, financial, and planning powers of the proposed body remains unclear. • Police and Law & Order: Ladakh representatives seek greater control over police and law and order, which remains unresolved. • LG vs Elected Body: A clear division of authority between the Lieutenant Governor (LG) and elected body is needed. • Existing Autonomous Hill Development Council: Their powers and relationship with the proposed UT-level body need clarification. • Unmet demands: The proposal does not directly address demands for Statehood and Sixth Schedule status.	• Power Devolution: Finalize and publish the Article 371(K) draft with clearly specified legislative, executive, financial, and planning powers. • Institutional Clarity: Define the relationship between the elected body, LG and Union Government. • Local Safeguards: Ensure meaningful control over land, employment, culture, environment and resources. • Council Coordination: Clearly define the role of Leh & Kargil Hill Councils. • Consensus-building: Continue Centre-Ladakh dialogue to resolve outstanding concerns. • Democratic governance: Ensure genuine self-governance, not merely an administrative institution.



SC Strengthens Safeguards Around Arrest & Re-arrest

Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) in *Jaskaran Jeet Singh Deol v. State of Punjab (2026)* strengthened the constitutional safeguards against arbitrary arrest and laid down **strict guidelines for the rearrest** of a person who was earlier released for not being provided grounds of arrest.

Case Background

- The appellant was arrested in **May 2026** under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 and was produced before the Magistrate the next day (more than 24 hours later- **violation of Article 22 (2)**) without being furnished the **written grounds of arrest (violation of Article 22(1))**. The Magistrate declared the arrest illegal and ordered his release.
- But, the **Punjab & Haryana High Court** allowed the investigating agency to seek re-arrest in accordance with law. Following which the appellant then approached the SC.

Related Constitutional Framework

- **Article 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty):** Article 21 protects individuals against **arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of personal liberty**, except according to **procedure established by law**.
- **Article 22(1):** An arrested person must be informed, **as soon as possible, of the grounds of arrest**. He has the right to **consult and be defended by a legal practitioner of his choice**.
- **Article 22(2):** An arrested person must be produced before the **nearest Magistrate within 24 hours**, excluding necessary travel time. Detention beyond this period requires **Magistrate's authority**.
- These guarantees have statutory expression in **Section 47 of Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS- grounds of arrest)** and **Section 58 BNSS (24-hour rule)**.

Related Judicial Precedents

- **Pankaj Bansal v. Union of India (2023):** Held that informing an arrested person of the **grounds of arrest is a fundamental right**. Merely reading out voluminous grounds may not satisfy this requirement; hence, **written grounds must be furnished "as a matter of course and without exception"** to enable the accused to consult counsel, challenge the arrest and seek bail.

⇨ **Ram Kishor Arora v. Directorate of Enforcement (2023):** The court explicitly ruled that the Pankaj Bansal mandate applies prospectively, not retrospectively.

Consequently, any arrests executed before the Pankaj Bansal ruling cannot be declared illegal solely because written grounds were not supplied at the time

SC Verdict

- **Article 22 Safeguards Are Mandatory:** The Court held that Article 22(1) is not a mere procedural formality but a **binding constitutional safeguard** applicable across ordinary and special criminal laws. Written grounds of arrest must ordinarily be supplied in a language understood by the arrestee.
- **Violation Makes the Arrest Unconstitutional:** Non-compliance with Article 22(1) vitiates the arrest and subsequent remand and requires **immediate release**. Such release is fundamentally different from bail, it is release from an **illegal detention**. A subsequent chargesheet or order taking cognizance cannot cure the original constitutional violation.
- **Re-Arrest Requires Judicial Approval:** If the investigating agency still considers custody necessary–
 - written grounds of arrest must first be furnished;
 - an application must be made before the **jurisdictional Magistrate** explaining the **necessity and reasons for re-arrest**;
 - it must explain why the grounds were not supplied earlier;
 - the application must carry the **endorsement of the immediate superior officer**;
 - the Magistrate must apply principles of natural justice and decide it preferably within a week.
- The Magistrate can permit re-arrest only after being satisfied that the initial non-supply occurred for **bona fide reasons** and that subsequent custody is genuinely necessary. Thus, re-arrest requires **"judicial imprimatur"**.
- **Article 22(2) Also Protected:** The same judicially supervised procedure applies where a person is released because of violation of the **24-hour production rule**. The Court also recognized **compensation as a public-law remedy** for violation of Article 22(2), depending on the facts.
- **Institutional Accountability:** The superior officer must transfer the investigation to another officer and order a **departmental inquiry** into the constitutional violation. An adverse finding may result in departmental action and an entry in the officer's service record.

- **Prabir Purkayastha v. State (NCT of Delhi) (2024):** Reaffirmed the **fundamental and statutory right to written grounds of arrest**, enabling the accused to consult an advocate, oppose police custody/remand and seek bail. It

held that violation of Article 22(1) **vitiates the arrest and remand**, which cannot be cured by a subsequent chargesheet.

- **Vihaan Kumar v. State of Haryana (2025)**: Held that **meaningful and effective communication** of the grounds of arrest is necessary; failure violates **Articles 21 and 22(1)** and renders the arrest unconstitutional.
- **Mihir Rajesh Shah v. State of Maharashtra (2025)**: Held that **written grounds of arrest must be furnished across all offences and statutes**, in a language understood by the arrestee; failure renders the **arrest and subsequent remand illegal**.

Significance of the Verdict:

- **For Personal Liberty**: The judgment reinforces **Articles 21 and 22** as substantive checks on State power and prevents constitutional safeguards from becoming empty formalities.
- **For Police Accountability**: Re-arrest is no longer solely an executive decision where the initial arrest itself violated constitutional rights. Superior-officer endorsement, transfer of investigation and departmental inquiry create **institutional accountability**.
- **For Judicial Oversight**: The ruling strengthens the role of the Magistrate as a constitutional checkpoint against arbitrary deprivation of liberty.
- **For Rule of Law & Personal Liberty**: The judgment establishes that **even the gravity of an offence cannot override constitutionally mandated arrest procedures**, reinforcing that personal liberty can be curtailed only in accordance with the Constitution and law.



CEC Appointment Law Challenged

A 2-judge Supreme Court (SC) bench (Justices Dipankar Datta and Satish Chandra Sharma) referred petitions challenging the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023 to the Chief Justice of India (CJI) for consideration of a Constitution Bench.

SC Opinion While Referring the Matter to a Larger Bench:

- **Split Verdict**: The two judges disagreed on the merits of the case, as to whether the present bench could decide the challenge based on existing constitutional principles or whether it should be heard by a Constitution Bench. Both agreed to refer it to the **CJI for considering a 5-judge Constitution Bench**.
- **Independence Must Be Visible**: The Election Commission of India (ECI) must not only be independent but “**seen to be independent**” to maintain public confidence in elections.
- **LoP’s Role May Become “Ornamental”**: With the **PM and his nominated Cabinet Minister** forming two of three members, Justice Datta questioned whether the LoP can provide an effective check on executive influence.
- **Comparison with Collegium**: Justice Datta stated that the phrase “judges appoint judges” is a myth, noting **executive involvement in judicial appointments** and questioning why a neutral member is considered unnecessary in ECI appointments.
- **Concern Over Delays**: Both judges flagged **prolonged pendency of Constitution Bench cases** and urged consideration of mechanisms for **faster constitutional adjudication**.

WHAT IS A CONSTITUTION BENCH?

- **Article 145(3)** mandates a bench of **at least five judges** to decide a **substantial question of law involving interpretation of the Constitution**.
- **Split verdicts** may be referred to a larger bench, but a disagreement between judges **does not automatically require a Constitution Bench**. The CJI decides the appropriate bench after considering the nature of the legal question.

The **Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023** replaced the interim appointment mechanism laid down by the SC in *Anoop Baranwal v. Union of India (2023)*.

Key Provisions:

- **Selection Committee (Section 7(1)):** Chief Election Commissioner (CEC)/ Election Commissioners (ECs) are appointed on the recommendation of a three-member panel comprising:
 - o Prime Minister (PM)– Chairperson
 - o Union Cabinet Minister nominated by PM
 - o Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha
- **CJI was removed**, giving the government **2 of 3 members**.
- **Search Committee (Section 6):** Headed by the **Union Law Minister** prepares a panel of eligible candidates.
- **Wide selection discretion (Section 8(2)):** The Selection Committee **need not restrict itself to the Search Committee's shortlist** and may consider any eligible person.
- **Vacancy Protection (Section 7(2)):** An appointment remains valid despite **a vacancy or defect in the constitution of the Selection Committee**.
- **Eligibility:** Persons of integrity with election-management experience; generally **Secretary-rank or equivalent** officers.
- **Tenure: 6 years or until 65 years**, whichever is earlier.
- **CEC:** Enjoys service conditions and benefits equivalent to those of a **Supreme Court Judge**.

Anoop Baranwal v. Union of India (2023):

- **Interim Appointment Mechanism:** Until Parliament enacted a law, the President would appoint the **CEC and ECs** on the recommendation of a 3-member committee: **PM + Leader of Opposition (LoP) (or largest opposition party) + CJI**.
- **Objective:** To safeguard the **independence and impartiality of the Election Commission** from executive interference.
- **Key Observation:** The EC is a **"guardian of democracy"** and must function independently.

Opposition Seeks CEC Exit

The **Opposition is planning to move removal motions in both Houses** against Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar. The move follows revelations of **internal disagreements among the three ECI members** over recent decisions and processes.

Removal of the CEC:

- **Constitutional Basis:** Article 324(5); CEC can be removed **only in the same manner and on the same grounds as a Supreme Court Judge**.
- **Grounds:** Proved misbehaviour or incapacity under Article 124(4).
- **Initiation:** Removal motion must be signed by **100 Lok Sabha MPs or 50 Rajya Sabha MPs**.
- **Investigation:** If admitted, an **inquiry committee** examines the charges.
- **Parliamentary Approval:** Requires a **majority of the total membership + 2/3 of members present and voting in each House** (in both Houses of Parliament during the same session)
- **Final Step:** After Parliament passes the motion, the **President orders the CEC's removal**.
- **Other ECs/Regional Commissioners:** Can be removed by the President **only on the CEC's recommendation**.

Has Any CEC Ever Been Impeached? **No CEC has ever been removed/impeached in India.** In **March 2026**, the Opposition submitted removal motions against **CEC Gyanesh Kumar**, alleging partisan conduct and issues related to **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)**. The **Lok Sabha Speaker and Rajya Sabha Chairman rejected** the motions without stating reasons. Hence, **no CEC has so far been successfully removed through the constitutional process**.

ECI Addresses Concerns of Two Election Commissioners

CEC Gyanesh Kumar Controversy: What did the investigation report say?

The investigation report said Election Commissioners Sandhu and Joshi had recorded objections on several matters linked to the management of electoral rolls. According to the report, the two commissioners objected at least 14 times in 10 months. Four of the objections were reportedly made on the same day.

The issues included the addition of new voters (form 6), deletion and restoration of names, appeals against electoral-roll decisions and the management and security of voter data. The report also said the commission raised concerns about the centralisation of access to electoral-roll databases.

The **Election Commission of India (ECI)**, comprising CEC **Gyanesh Kumar** and ECs **Sukhbir Singh Sandhu** and **Vivek Joshi**, took several steps to address concerns raised by the two Election Commissioners regarding the **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** and functioning of the Commission.

Key Decisions:

- **No Mandatory Hearings for SIR Notices:** Electors flagged as “unmapped” or having “logical discrepancies” generally **do not need to appear personally** before EROs (Electoral Registration Officers).
 - Booth Level Officers (BLOs) will collect documents from their homes and upload them on **ECINet**. Hearings only in exceptional cases and preferably online.
- **Form 6:** The additional SIR-related declaration inserted into **Form 6** (statutory form for new voter enrolment,) will be removed after SIR and the form will revert to the version prescribed under the **Registration of Electors Rules, 1960**.
- **ECINet Review:** A committee headed by a **Senior Deputy Election Commissioner**, with an **independent IIT/IIIT expert**, will review whether the centralized **ECINet portal** complies with electoral laws and rules.
 - ECINET is ECI’s **centralized digital platform** for electoral processes and administration, providing **role-based access** to officials according to their statutory responsibilities.
- **Greater Institutional Transparency:** The ECI decided that:
 - Meeting **agendas will be circulated in advance**.
 - **Minutes of meetings** will be recorded.
 - Officers' **Annual Performance Appraisal Reports** will be completed on time.
 - Foreign trips of officers will require Commission approval.
 - Directions issued by Election Commissioners must be complied with.
- **All new initiatives** involving IT modules and portals will be discussed by the Committee of Officers (COO) before being approved by the Commission.
- **Protection Against Voter Exclusion:** Persons left out during SIR, including **young/first-time voters**, can seek inclusion through **continuous updation** of electoral rolls. States have been directed to conduct special enrolment drives.

Significance:

The decisions seek to **reduce voter hardship during SIR, address concerns over centralization and IT systems, and strengthen transparency and internal coordination within the ECI**.

- Investors across the world are selling their government bond holdings. Due to this, there has been a growing worry about the rise in government bond yields.
- The yield on the 30-year US Treasury bond hit the highest level in around 25 years.
- Japan's 10-year government bond yield touched 3%, reportedly for the first time since 1996. German and U.K. 10-year yields rose to multi-year highs.

Bonds and Bond Yields

- Across the world, governments sell bonds to raise money to meet their expenditure.
- A bond is a contract between the issuer and the purchaser of the bond.
- It is basically an agreement that the purchaser will lend money to the bond issuer with the promise that it will be repaid with interest over a set period of time.
- These bonds have a **selling price and a fixed coupon rate**, which is the **absolute amount of money (and not an interest rate)** that people earn.
- Bond yield** is the return an investor gets on that bond or on a particular government security.

- For example, consider a 10-year government bond (called Treasuries in the US, Gilts in Britain and G-Secs or government securities in India) is priced at \$100 and the coupon rate is \$5 (a fixed amount).

- This means that if person buys this bond from the government for \$100 today, the government will pay the person \$5 each year and return \$100 to the person at the end of 10 years.

- In this example, the "yield" or the annual rate of return from the bond is 5%, but this **yield can change if the selling price of the bond changes**.



Change in Bond Yields

- Bonds can be bought and sold in the bond market, and their price follows the demand and supply rules of any other commodity or asset. If there is more supply than demand, the price will fall, and when demand is more than the supply, the price will rise.
- When there is a selloff of bonds (as is happening globally currently), there is more supply in the market than there is demand. As a result, the bond prices fall.
- When bond prices fall, the yield — basically the return the bondholder gets, measured as a percentage of the bond price — rises.
- The reason for this is that if one can buy a bond today at a lower price than it was a week ago, but the payout one gets is the same as when the bond was expensive, then the effective return (yield) is naturally higher.

Impact of Rise in Bond Yield

- ▲ According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the size of the **government bond market** for the **38 high-income OECD countries is \$61 trillion**.
- ▲ If one adds bonds from emerging economies, the number is close to \$80 trillion.
- ▲ But the scale of the market is even bigger because companies also float bonds to raise funding and when yields go up for governments, they go up for everyone else.
- ▲ If one adds bonds by all financial and non-financial institutions, the **global bond market would reportedly double to \$160 trillion**.
- ▲ For reference, India's total GDP is around \$4 trillion, the US is around \$32 trillion, and the **world's total GDP is \$126 trillion**.
- ▲ Given the scale of the market, even a single basis point increase in government bond yields (100 basis points is a full percentage point) raises the interest payment by billions of dollars for governments.
- ▲ Thus, higher yields also mean that governments will have to spend even more of their annual budgets towards paying back annual interest on bonds.
- ▲ That, in turn, can only happen either by **spending cuts in other areas such as healthcare, education schemes or defence or by higher taxation**.
- ▲ Moreover, higher yields for government bonds — which are the least risky loans — basically mean even **higher interest rates for common people and businesses**, consequently impacting the private sector investment in the economy.
- ▲ If the government is the United States government then the consequences of higher yields on US government bonds are not limited to just the US economy; they start affecting all other economies.
- ▲ In other words, beyond a certain point, rise in government bond yields can drag down the whole economy.

Current Bond Sell-off

- Investors are currently selling their bonds due to the **extremely high levels of borrowing by the U.S. government**. The **U.S. federal national debt** stands at over **\$40 trillion** as of August 2026, which is about **126% of its GDP**.
- In comparison, **India's general government debt**, which includes the Centre and the States, is about **80-84% of GDP**.
- With such high levels of debt, the U.S. government will have to issue more bonds to pay for its expenses, including the interest on its existing debt.
- In such cases, however, investors refuse to buy bonds at low coupon rates because they want higher compensation for the higher risk of holding U.S. government liabilities.
- Investors then sell their current, lower-payout bonds in the expectation that future bonds will come with higher payouts.
- The other major factor affecting the attractiveness of bonds is the **rate of inflation**. With the conflict in West Asia driving oil prices higher, inflation has been at elevated levels across most of the world.
- Now, if higher inflation persists, then central banks often raise interest rates to keep a check on inflation.
- So, during periods of high inflation, bondholders tend to sell their bonds in the hopes that interest rates will rise, and they will be able to purchase bonds in the future that promise higher payouts.
- Also, since inflation reduces current purchasing power, bond holders demand higher returns to compensate for this inflation effect.

India-Belgium Relations

India and Belgium have agreed to strengthen cooperation across defence, intelligence-sharing, trade, semiconductors, fintech, and renewable energy during Belgian Prime Minister **Bart De Wever's** visit to India — the first by a Belgian PM in **two decades**.

Economic Relations: Trade and Investment Snapshot

- Bilateral trade reached US\$13.01 billion in 2025-26.
- Belgian FDI inflows into India totalled ~US\$4.2 billion (April 2000–December 2025).
- Diamond trade remains a significant component of bilateral commerce.
- Both countries are working to diversify this relationship through fintech, semiconductors, manufacturing, renewable energy, and technology.

Defence and Security: The Major Highlight

- India and Belgium exchanged a **Letter of Intent** establishing a framework for structured defence cooperation, covering: Military training and exchanges; R&D; Joint exercises and seminars; Maritime security; Defence industrial cooperation.
- Both sides agreed to strengthen **intelligence-sharing** and security agency cooperation to combat crime.
- Around **15 Belgian defence companies** engaged with Indian defence industry representatives.

Defence Industrial Cooperation: Key Projects

- Discussions identified opportunities across drones, rockets, ammunition, mine-countermeasure systems, tanks, radar, electro-optical sensors, and counter-drone systems.
- Notable collaborations include:

- **Lachaussée and Tembo Classic Engineering:** Establishing an ammunition production line with annual capacity of about **100 million rounds**, under a **€50 million** project.
- **Exail Belgium and Larsen & Toubro:** Cooperating on autonomous systems for mine-countermeasure vessels — initially covering **12 vessels**, with potential expansion to **59**.

Trade, Investment and Fintech



- India has set up an Investment Fast-Track Mechanism for Belgian companies.
- The India-Belgium Business Forum will become a regular platform.
- Both countries aim to strengthen coordination among their financial, fintech, and regulatory institutions.
- Shared objective: doubling bilateral trade over the next five years.

Semiconductors and Renewable Energy



- Both sides agreed to deepen cooperation in semiconductors — a growing priority for resilient global supply chains.
- Agreement reached to work toward a renewable energy pact, expanding cooperation into clean-energy technologies and the energy transition.

Maritime Security: An Emerging Priority



- India is seeking stronger capabilities in: Mine countermeasures; Autonomous maritime systems; Underwater robotics and advanced sensors; Protection of critical infrastructure — ports, pipelines, and subsea data cables.
- This cooperation matters for both countries since secure maritime routes are essential for international trade and supply chains.

Background: The Foundation of Bilateral Ties



- India and Belgium share close economic and diplomatic relations, with trade and investment traditionally forming the core of engagement:
- The **India-Belgium-Luxembourg Economic Union Joint Commission**, established in 1997, serves as a key institutional mechanism for economic cooperation.
- Belgium holds particular importance as a major global centre for **diamond trading**, with **Antwerp** as the key hub.
- Cooperation has expanded into science and technology, healthcare, and renewable energy.
- Belgium's EU membership makes this bilateral relationship relevant to India's broader engagement with Europe.

- o Other collaborations: 70 mm rocket assembly, weapons and counter-drone systems, electro-optical systems for **Arjun tanks**, the **Zorawar light tank**, air-defence software, and marine engines.

Significance

- Marks a broadening of India-Belgium relations beyond traditional trade and investment.
- Defence manufacturing, maritime security, semiconductors, fintech, and renewable energy are emerging as key pillars.
- For India: access to specialised European technologies and industrial capabilities.
- For Belgium: access to Indian manufacturing capacity and market opportunities.
- Contributes to India's wider engagement with Europe and the EU.



India-New Zealand FTA

The India-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (FTA), ratified recently, will come into effect on October 20, 2026. The deal aims to double bilateral trade to ₹35,000 crore over the next four to five years.

Key Features of the FTA

- **Trade Liberalisation**
 - o New Zealand will **erase import levies on all Indian goods** entering the country.
 - This gives India **duty-free access to 100% of its exports** to New Zealand — a major improvement given the earlier tariffs of up to 10%.
 - o **95% of New Zealand's exports** to India will enter either **tariff-free** or at sharply reduced levies.
- **Sensitive Sectors Protected**
 - o Minister Goyal emphasised that India has **safeguarded its sensitive sectors**, granting **no concessions** on: Dairy; Onions, almonds, chickpeas, peas; Artificial honey; Sugar and other agricultural produce.
 - o This is significant since **dairy access** has been the most contentious issue in India's recent trade talks — including with the **EU** and **EFTA**.
- **Investment Commitments**
 - o New Zealand has committed **\$20 billion in FDI** into India.
 - o Directed toward startups, manufacturing, and infrastructure.
 - o Expected to flow over the next **15 years**.
- **Agricultural Productivity Partnership**
 - o Establishes cooperation combining **New Zealand's technology** with **India's scale and demand**.
 - o Key areas of promise: kiwifruit farming and apiculture (beekeeping).
- **Benefits for MSMEs and Artisans**
 - o The deal is expected to benefit India's **MSMEs, farmers, handloom artisans, and weavers** — sectors previously constrained by New Zealand's tariff structure.

India-New Zealand Relations: The Backdrop

Both countries share ties grounded in **Commonwealth membership**, parliamentary democracy, and growing economic complementarity

Historically, engagement has been **less intensive** than India's ties with other regional partners

Trade Snapshot

Bilateral merchandise trade stood at **\$1.3 billion** in FY 2024-25.

India is New Zealand's **9th** largest export market.

India's exports to NZ: pharmaceuticals, engineering goods, textiles, ceramics, carpets, automobiles, auto components.

NZ's exports to India: agricultural products, timber, wool, specialised manufactured goods.

New Zealand previously maintained tariffs of **up to 10%** on key Indian goods — precisely the categories where the FTA delivers gains.

- **Technology and Manufacturing Collaboration**

- New Zealand has strong expertise in engineering and manufacturing technology.
- India suggested NZ companies could invest or set up manufacturing in India to access global markets.
- Rationale: labour in countries like New Zealand is **scarce and expensive**, making India a more economical manufacturing base.
- India's appeal also lies in its **preferential market access** to about **two-thirds of the global economy**, along with respect for **intellectual property rights**.
 - India's nine FTAs spanning economies representing about \$60 trillion of GDP

Significance of the Deal

- **For export sectors:** Duty-free access removes competitive disadvantages for ceramics, carpets, textiles, and auto components.
- **For sensitive agriculture:** Reinforces India's consistent negotiating template — liberalising manufactured goods while protecting politically sensitive farm segments.
- **For investment diversification:** The \$20 billion FDI commitment supports India's efforts to attract investment amid weak global flows, though effects will be **gradual** over the 15-year horizon.
- **For broader trade strategy:** Comes alongside simultaneous progress with **Canada and Chile**, reflecting India's accelerating push for preferential market access amid global tariff uncertainty.

Conclusion

- The India-New Zealand FTA marks a significant step in India's trade diversification strategy.
- The deal reflects India's calibrated approach to expanding global trade partnerships amid rising protectionism worldwide.



SCO Summit 2026

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) held its 26th summit in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan (August 31–September 1), marking 25 years since its founding. Participating leaders adopted the Bishkek Declaration.

Bishkek Declaration: Key Highlights

- **On Terrorism** - The declaration strongly condemned terrorism "in all its forms," stressing that double standards in combating it are unacceptable.
 - Members called for the UN to play a central role, urging full implementation of UN Security Council resolutions and the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, and rejected exploitation of terrorist or extremist groups for selfish/political purposes.
- **Cyber and Information Security** - Members agreed to counter use of the internet for terrorist and extremist purposes, and to strengthen coordination on international information security and combating new forms of cybercrime.
- **On West Asia and Iran** - The declaration expressed "deep concern" over the West Asia crisis, condemning military strikes on Iran and reaffirming support for its "sovereignty and territorial integrity."
 - It called for a political and diplomatic resolution and welcomed the Pakistan-supported peace process.
 - It also backed members' "inalienable right" to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes — an indirect reference to Iran's nuclear negotiations with the US.

- **On Palestine and Global Governance** - The declaration asserted that lasting West Asian stability requires a "just settlement" of the Palestine question. It also advocated reform of global governance systems and rejected "bloc-based and confrontational approaches" to international disputes, favouring peaceful resolution.
- **Other Notable Positions**
 - Members stayed silent on Russia's role in the Ukraine war.
 - The declaration flagged "unlimited build-up of global missile defence systems" as harmful to international security.
 - It criticised "unauthorised satellite Internet services" in member states — an apparent reference to Starlink's operations in Eastern Ukraine and Iran.
 - It called on Afghanistan to form an "inclusive government."

Broader Significance

- With Pakistan now assuming the SCO chair, next year's summit will be held there — raising questions on India's level of participation given strained ties post-Pahalgam attack and Operation Sindoor.
- The summit also showcased SCO's role as a platform for sustained India-China engagement (following the Kazan and Tianjin summits) and demonstrated India's ability to maintain diplomatic engagement across all major stakeholders amid tensions with the US over tariffs.

India's Message at the Summit

• PM Modi's address centred on three themes:

- **Conflict Has No Borders:** He noted the West Asia crisis shows conflicts don't stay confined — affecting global energy security, maritime trade, and supply chains, with the Global South bearing the brunt. He reiterated that resolution is possible only through dialogue, not the battlefield.
- **On Terrorism:** Modi called terrorism a grave challenge for humanity, urging members to dismantle the entire ecosystem of terror financing, recruitment, and safe havens. He said states using terrorism as an instrument of policy must be told that it cannot be a "strategic asset" — an implicit message on "no double standards," seen as directed at Pakistan.
- **On Connectivity:** PM backed initiatives connecting markets and facilitating trade, but stressed that respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity is paramount — seen as an indirect reference to India's opposition to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which India did not endorse.

• India's Vision: Security, Connectivity, Opportunity

- PM Modi reiterated India's "SCO" framework — Security, Connectivity, Opportunity — and called for translating 25 years of cooperation into tangible outcomes over the next 25.
- India has launched initiatives like the **Start-up Forum, Young Authors' Conclave, and Young Scientists' Forum**, with the **first SCO Civilizational Dialogue Forum** (proposed by India) set to be held in India this year.

About the SCO

- The SCO is a Eurasian political, economic, and security grouping launched on June 15, 2001 by China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, and Tajikistan ("Shanghai Five").
- It now has 10 members, including India and Pakistan, which joined in 2017.
- Its traditional focus has been combating the "three evils" — terrorism, separatism, and extremism — alongside trade, connectivity, and cultural cooperation.



BRICS Summit 2026

- BRICS members adopted the **New Delhi Declaration** at the **18th BRICS Summit** (Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi).
- This was significant since BRICS foreign ministers had failed to issue a joint statement in May amid Iran-UAE differences. **India, as host and chair**, played a crucial role in bridging divergent positions.
- **Theme of BRICS 2026** - "*Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability*"

- **Major Focus Area of BRICS 2026** - Global South, climate action, digital public infrastructure, green finance, energy transition and multilateral cooperation.

Key Takeaways: New Delhi Declaration

- **Pushback Against Unilateral Tariffs and Trade Measures**
 - Set against the backdrop of Trump's escalating tariffs since early 2025.
 - Declaration condemns "unilateral coercive measures" inconsistent with international law and the UN Charter, calling for their elimination.
 - Calls for a "just, fair, stable and predictable" environment for sustainable development — stops short of announcing a retaliatory mechanism.
 - Also **opposes** unilateral Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanisms (CBAMs) as punitive, discriminatory, or protectionist.
- **Strong Condemnation of Terrorism — A Diplomatic Win for India**
 - Commits to combating terrorism "in all its forms and manifestations".
 - Specifically condemns "in the strongest terms" the April 2025 Pahalgam attack (26 killed) — a significant diplomatic gain for India, especially given China's differing UN positions on Pakistan-based terrorists.
 - Recognises the BRICS Counter-Terrorism Working Group (CTWG).
- **Common Ground on West Asia — Consensus Without Attribution**
 - Expresses "deep concern" over escalating West Asia tensions, calling for maximum restraint and resolution via dialogue and diplomacy.
 - Stresses uninterrupted trade, supply chains, and energy flows.
 - **On Gaza/Palestine:** Calls for maintaining the Gaza ceasefire and unhindered humanitarian access. Reaffirms support for a two-state solution (1967 borders, East Jerusalem as capital).
 - **On Lebanon/Syria:** Calls for adherence to the **Lebanon ceasefire**, Israeli withdrawal from remaining Lebanese territory, and an **inclusive political transition in Syria**
- **Local Currencies — But No Common BRICS Currency**
 - Declaration **avoids** the subject of a unified BRICS currency altogether.
 - Focus remains on **incremental steps**: promoting trade settlement/investment in **local currencies** for faster, cheaper, safer cross-border payments.
 - **BRICS Payment Task Force** studying interoperability between payment/messaging systems.
 - **New Development Bank (NDB)** encouraged to expand **local-currency financing** and diversify funding.
 - **New Investment Platform:** consensus-based, **phased approach** — no new mechanism announced yet.
 - India's proposed **BRICS Risk Lab** at **GIFT City** to be taken forward.
- **A Global South Position on AI**
 - AI framed as both an economic opportunity and governance challenge for the Global South.
 - Calls for wider access to AI resources, emphasising safety, security, inclusiveness, reliability, energy efficiency, and "trustworthy AI".
 - Congratulates India on hosting the AI Impact Summit (February 2026).

The Indian Imprint on the Summit

- As BRICS chair, India secured several priority initiatives:
 - **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI):** Proposal for a **BRICS DPI repository** and pilot projects across member countries.

- o **Health:** Backing for a BRICS Training Hub Network and Centres of Excellence on **mental well-being, coordinated by NIMHANS, Bengaluru.**
- o **Industry 4.0:** Welcomed the India Centre for **BRICS Industrial Competencies**, supporting MSMEs in adopting advanced digital technologies.
- o **Development cooperation:** New BRICS Task Force on Growth and Development; launch of a **BRICS-NDB Knowledge Portal**; cooperation on infrastructure, PPPs, and strengthening the BRICS insurance ecosystem.

• Four BRICS Agriculture Initiatives

- **BRICS Network of Centres of Excellence on Agroecology and Regenerative Agriculture**
 - Focuses on natural and organic farming
 - Facilitates joint research among member countries
 - Promotes sharing of best practices for building climate resilience agriculture systems
- **BRICS Network on Digital Agriculture**
 - Promotes digital tools and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in farming
 - Encourages data-driven farming solutions across BRICS member states
- **BRICS AGRIN (Agro-Inputs, Genetic Resources, and Information Network)**
 - A collaborative, non-binding, farmer-centric platform
 - Manages agricultural inputs and genetic resources among member countries
- **Global Forum on Farmers' Rights in Seed Systems**
 - Addresses shared challenges related to seed systems
 - Supports effective policies on traditional knowledge and farmers' rights in seed systems



• BRICS Health Cooperation

- The declaration called for establishing an **Integrated Early Warning System (IEWS)** for mass infectious diseases, alongside broader health cooperation commitments.
- **Disease Surveillance**
 - Created a dedicated sub-working group for coordinated action.
 - Focus areas: real-time pathogen tracking, genomic sequencing data sharing, and rapid-response alerts across member states.
- **Medical Regulation**
 - Expanded cooperation among regulatory authorities to align quality, safety, and efficacy standards.
 - Introduced a new common GxP (Good Practice) white paper.
- **Local Manufacturing**
 - Pushed for increased regional production of: Essential medicines; Vaccines; Therapeutics; Diagnostics
- **Broader Health Priorities**
 - Endorsed joint frameworks addressing: Tuberculosis (TB); Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs); Mental health; Traditional medicine systems.



Conclusion

The New Delhi Declaration showcases BRICS' aspiration to function as a genuine platform for Global South cooperation amid deep geopolitical fragmentation.

For India, the summit strengthened its bridge-builder image while advancing key priorities — counter-terrorism recognition, DPI, local-currency payments, and development cooperation — though converting these broad commitments into functioning institutions remains the real test ahead

BRICS: Brief Overview

- BRICS is a grouping of emerging economies focused on economic cooperation, initially comprising **Brazil, Russia, India, and China (BRIC)**, with **South Africa joining in 2011**.
- It represents **~40% of global GDP** and about **49.5% of the world's population**, positioning itself as a **counterbalance to Western-led forums like the G7 and the World Bank**.

Institutional Structure

- No permanent headquarters or central secretariat.
- Chairmanship rotates annually among member countries, with the chair country coordinating activities and hosting the BRICS Summit.
- The New Development Bank (NDB) — a key BRICS institution — is headquartered in Shanghai, China.



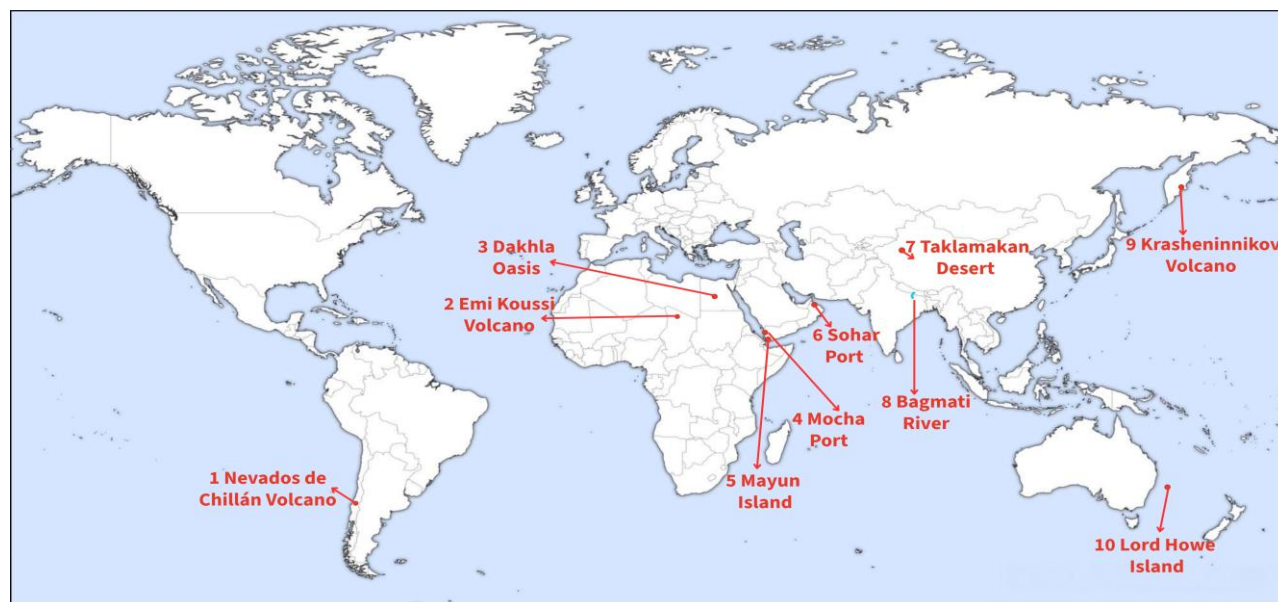
Membership Expansion

- BRICS has grown from the original **4-member BRIC** grouping into an **11-member** grouping, alongside a separate **partner-country** category:
 - **2011:** South Africa joined
 - **2024 expansion:** Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and UAE joined
 - **January 2025:** Indonesia formally became a full member
- **Partner Countries (10)** – Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Nigeria, Thailand, Uganda, Uzbekistan, and **Vietnam** — with Vietnam becoming the **10th partner country**, expanding beyond the nine partners initially recognised in 2025.



MAPS: PLACES IN NEWS

International Places in News



1	Nevados de Chillán Volcano	Chile's Nevados de Chillán volcano erupted recently. • Location: Southern Volcanic Zone of Chilean Andes, Ñuble Region. • Type: Large composite stratovolcanic complex with three overlapping peaks- Cerro Blanco, Volcán Nuevo & Volcán Viejo. • Highest peak: Cerro Blanco (~3,212 m). • Activity: One of Chile's most active volcanoes, known for lava-dome growth, explosions & pyroclastic activity.
2	Emi Koussi Volcano	A 2024 astronaut photo captured an unusual salt patch shining like snow on top of northern Chad's imposing Emi Koussi volcano, which is covered with ancient lava, hidden vents and shadowy waterways. • Location: Tibesti Mountains, northern Chad, in the central Sahara. • Significance: Highest mountain in both Chad and the Sahara. • Features: Large shield volcano with a 19-km-wide crater, nested calderas, lava domes and volcanic vents. • Status: Extinct volcano; last eruption is unknown.
3	Dakhla Oasis	A rare pyramid-shaped tomb dating to the Roman period has been recently uncovered at Bir Al-Shaghala in Egypt's Dakhla Oasis. • Location: Western Desert, Egypt, west of the Nile. • History: Nomadic hunter-gatherers first settled in Dakhla Oasis around 12,000 years ago; ancient crossroads linking Egypt, Sahara & Libya, with numerous prehistoric petroglyphs. • Economy: Fertile soil supporting date, olive and other crops; famous for hot springs. • Key sites: Mut, Al-Qasr and Dakhla Oasis Heritage Museum.

4	Mocha Port	The Iran-aligned Houthis recently took control of the Yemeni port city of Mocha (Mokha), advancing strategically down the Red Sea coast. • Location: Historic Red Sea port, Yemen, north of Mayun (Perim) Island, near the Bab el-Mandeb. • Historic coffee hub (around 15th century): Major exporter of coffee & myrrh; “mocha” derives from the port; traded with Indian, European & Middle Eastern merchants. • Decline: Competition from Java and South American coffee and regional conflicts reduced its importance. • Modern Role: Port established in 1955; now a minor logistics and military hub between Aden and Hodeidah.
5	Mayun Island	Yemen’s Iranian-backed Houthi rebels recently captured the strategic island of Mayun in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait at the entrance to the Red Sea. • Strategic Significance: Splits Bab el-Mandeb into eastern and western channels and overlooks a key global shipping chokepoint connecting the Red Sea-Suez Canal-Indian Ocean route. • Strategic Assets: Natural harbour and military airfield.
6	Sohar Port	With the Strait of Hormuz in a chokehold due to Iran-U.S. hostilities, Oman has pitched to India investment opportunities in Sohar Port that could provide uninterrupted access to energy resources from the Persian Gulf. • Location: Deep-sea port in northern Oman, on the Gulf of Oman. • Strategic role: Key trade hub connecting the Gulf, Indian subcontinent • Cargo: Handles bulk, containers and other cargo. • Management: Joint venture between Oman Government and Port of Rotterdam. • Sohar Freezone: Supports petrochemical, metals & energy industries.
7	Taklamakan Desert	China has undertaken large-scale afforestation around the Taklamakan Desert to combat desertification. • Location: SW Xinjiang, China, in the Tarim Basin; between Tian Shan (N) and Kunlun Shan (S). • Features: World’s 2nd-largest shifting-sand desert; ~85% covered by crescent-shaped dunes. • Climate: Extremely arid continental climate with strong winds and large diurnal temperature variation.
8	Bagmati River	Heavy rain continued to disrupt life in Nepal, with the swollen Bagmati River overflowing its banks and raising concern in low-lying riverside communities. • Course: Originates at Bagdwar, Shivapuri Hills (Nepal) → flows through Kathmandu Valley → Terai/Bihar → joins the Burhi Gandak. • Significance: Holy to Hindus & Buddhists; Pashupatinath Temple lies on its banks.
9	Krasheninnikov Volcano	The Nasa-ISRO Nisar satellite recently captured detailed radar views of Russia’s Krasheninnikov volcano as lava spread across Kamchatka.

		• Location: Active stratovolcano in eastern Kamchatka (Russia), within Pacific Ring of Fire. • Features: Two adjoining strato-volcanic cones within a caldera • 2025 Eruption: Erupted on 2 August 2025, shortly after a 8.8 magnitude earthquake. • Significance: Part of the highly volcanic Kamchatka Peninsula, which has 114 Holocene-era volcanoes.
10	Lord Howe Island	A 16-year study from Lord Howe Island found record levels of plastic ingestion in fledgling sable shearwaters. • Location: Crescent-shaped volcanic island ~650 km off eastern Australia, in the Tasman Sea. • Features: has two peaks - Mount Gower & Lidgbird. • Biodiversity: ~47% of vascular plants are endemic; its home to Lord Howe Phasmid and flightless Woodhen. • Significance: UNESCO World Heritage Site with exceptional endemic biodiversity.

National Places in News



1	Tso Kar Lake	Ladakh recently launched a project to revive shrinking Tso Kar Lake by diverting ~320 million litres/day of glacial water from Rupsho Kharnak stream. • Location: High-altitude salt lake in Rupshu Valley, Ladakh. • Features: Smallest of Ladakh's three major high-altitude lakes (alongside Pangong Tso and Tso Moriri); • Significance: Ramsar Site (2020); supports local Khampa nomads through traditional salt collection.
2	Ramjak Mountain	A four-member team from Keralam recently scaled Ramjak, a 6,318-metre peak in the remote Lahaul region of Himachal Pradesh.

		• Location: Lahaul, Himachal Pradesh, near Shingo La on the Himachal-Zaskar trekking route. • First ascent: 2002, by an IMF expedition led by Sangay Dorjee Sherpa.
3	Ghepan Lake	The Lahaul-Spiti district administration recently decided to further strengthen monitoring and precautionary measures regarding the Ghepan Glacial Lake. • Location: High-altitude glacial lake in Lahaul, Himachal Pradesh. • Features: Fed by three hanging glaciers; known for its turquoise waters. • Concern: Rapid glacial melt has expanded the lake, increasing GLOF risk to downstream communities. • Significance: Culturally associated with Ghepan, protector deity of Lahaul.
4	Bakhira Lake	A study of magnetic minerals in Bakhira Lake sediments spanning 25,000 years traced past climate, rainfall, weathering, sediment transport and lake dynamics in northern India. • Location: Ghaghara-Rapti alluvial system, Uttar Pradesh(Sant Kabir Nagar district); formed as a perennial oxbow/floodplain wetland from the Rapti River. • Significance: One of UP's largest wetlands; • Ramsar Site: Designated in 2022.
5	Rangeet River	A three-day Rangeet River Festival near Jorethang will promote catch-and-release fishing, river conservation, adventure tourism & local culture. • Origin: Glacier of Mt. Kabru, lower Kanchenjunga region, Sikkim. • Course: Flows through West Sikkim → joins the Teesta at Teesta Bazaar; forms part of the Sikkim-Darjeeling boundary. • Significance: Major Teesta tributary; supports irrigation, fisheries, hydropower & rafting. • Rangeet Dam: 60 MW hydropower project, operational since 2000.
6	Debrigarh Wildlife Sanctuary	A recent habitat revival of Debrigarh Wildlife Sanctuary fuelled its flagship Indian gaur species population from 659 in 2024 to 848 in 2026. • Location: Bargarh district, Odisha, on the Hirakud Reservoir • Historical significance: Associated with freedom fighter Veer Surendra Sai, whose rebellion base Barapathara was located here. • Vegetation: Predominantly mixed & dry deciduous forests with Sal, Asana, Bija & Dhaura.
7	Bhima River	Karnataka Forest, Ecology, and Environment Minister recently directed the State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) to take action against industries in the Kadechur-Badiyal industrial area over reports of untreated industrial effluents being discharged into the Bhima River. • Origin: Bhimashankar Hills, Western Ghats (Maharashtra); flows through Maharashtra, Karnataka & Telangana. Joins the Krishna River in Raichur, Karnataka. • Tributaries: Indrayani, Mula, Mutha, Pavana, Sina & Nira.

		• Significance: Major Krishna tributary; called Chandrabhaga at Pandharpur, an important pilgrimage centre.
8	Gooty Fort	The Union Ministry of Communications and Department of Posts recently forwarded the proposal for a commemorative postage stamp on Gooty Fort to the Union Minister of Communications for final approval. • Location: Ancient hilltop fort at Gooty, Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh; also called Ravadurg/Gutti Kota. • History: Associated with Western Chalukyas, Vijayanagara, Qutb Shahis, Mughals, Marathas, Mysore & British. • Architecture: Hindu-Islamic blend; comprises 15 interconnected forts with gateways and bastions. • Features: Temples, dargah and Morari Rao's Seat.
9	Biligiri Ranganatha Swamy Temple (BRT) Tiger Reserve	Two prominent religious institutions and two businessmen were served eviction notices in the Biligiri Ranganatha Temple (BRT) Tiger Reserve recently. • Location: Biligirirangana Hills, Chamarajanagar, Karnataka; forms a biogeographical link between Western & Eastern Ghats. • Status: Tiger Reserve (2011). • Significance: Named after Biligiri ("white rocky cliff") and the Rangaswamy Temple dedicated to Vishnu. Home to Soligas, whose forest rights were recognized in 2011.
10	Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary	A two-day vulture survey has begun across the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary ahead of the upcoming Wildlife Week celebrations in Kerala. • Location: Wayanad, Kerala; also known as Muthanga Wildlife Sanctuary; part of Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, established in 1973. • Connectivity: Bordered by Nagarhole, Bandipur & Mudumalai protected areas. • Tribes: Paniyas, Kattunaikkans, Kurumas, Kurichiyas and others.

Overseas Indian Military/Strategic Presence



S.No.	Base		Description
1	Coastal Surveillance Radar (CSR) Station	Assumption Island	• Location: Assumption Island, Seychelles, Western Indian Ocean. • Significance: India-assisted coastal surveillance infrastructure strengthens maritime domain awareness and counters growing external presence in the Indian Ocean.
2		Madagascar	• Location: Northern Madagascar, Western Indian Ocean; near the Mozambique Channel. • It works alongside regional nodes like the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC) • Significance: India's first overseas electronic surveillance facility (2007); monitors ship movements and maritime activity.
3		Agalega Island	• Location: Agalega Island, Northern Mauritius; southwestern Indian Ocean. • Significance: India-assisted radar and runway infrastructure enhances maritime surveillance and regional security.
4		Maldives	• Location: Maldives, Central Indian Ocean. • Significance: 10 CSR stations linked with India's coastal radar network; enhances maritime surveillance, anti-piracy and maritime security. • Managed from a main control center in Vilimalé (Villingili island) linked to the Maldives Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre
5	Duqm Naval Access Facility		• Location: Arabian Sea coast, near the Gulf of Oman. • Significance: Provides Indian Navy berthing/logistical access; supports operations and anti-piracy efforts in the Gulf of Aden.
6	Colombo Port		• Location: Western Sri Lanka; on the East-West SLOCs. • Major strategic and commercial footprint • Security: Supports maritime surveillance and security in the Indian Ocean. Chinese presence at Colombo & Hambantota makes it vital for India's regional balancing. • Strategic value: Supports SAGAR, supply-chain resilience & India's IOR role.
7	Kankesanthurai (KKR) Harbour		• Location: Northern Sri Lanka, close to Tamil Nadu and the Palk Strait. • Strategic Value: Enhances India-Sri Lanka maritime connectivity, maritime security and surveillance in the Palk Strait. • Geopolitical Significance: Strengthens India's Neighbourhood First & SAGAR objectives and strategic presence in Sri Lanka amid growing Chinese influence.
8	Surkhet Airport		• Location: Western Nepal.

		• Significance: The air force base at Surkhet supplements the Nepalese military forces with armament, high-altitude warfare, and hand-to-hand combat training.
9	IMTRAT, Haa	• Location: Western Bhutan, near the India-Bhutan border. • Significance: India runs an Indian Military Training Team (IMTRAT) established in 1962; trains the Royal Bhutan Army and Royal Bodyguard; India's oldest military training mission abroad.
10	RSS Singapura-Changi Naval Base Access	• Location: Singapore, at the eastern end of the Strait of Malacca. • Access: Indian Navy ships can use the facility for docking, refuelling and logistical support/supplies. • Strategic significance: The Strait of Malacca, a vital global chokepoint and major route for China's trade and energy, enhances India's SLOC(Sea Lines of Communication) security, maritime presence and strategic reach in Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific.

Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR): A Growing Public Health Threat

Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) occurs when microorganisms develop resistance to medicines used against them, making infections difficult or impossible to treat. A recent Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) **study across 20 tertiary-care hospitals**, covering **1.59 lakh hospitalized patients (2022-25)**, highlights the growing threat from carbapenem-resistant Gram-negative bacteria.

Why is AMR a Public Health Concern?

- **Higher Mortality:** Treatment failure and limited therapeutic options increase deaths.
- **Longer Hospitalization:** Resistant infections require prolonged treatment and hospital stays.
- **Economic Burden**
- **Threat to Modern Medicine:** Surgery, chemotherapy and organ transplantation depend on effective antimicrobials.
- **Healthcare-Associated Transmission:** Hospitals can become reservoirs for resistant pathogens.
- **Inequitable Access:** Newer, effective antibiotics can be expensive and inaccessible to vulnerable populations.
- **One Health Dimension:** Antimicrobial resistance emerges and spreads across **humans, animals, food systems and the environment**.

Major Drivers

- Irrational/inappropriate antibiotic use (Self-medication and over-the-counter use)
- Inadequate infection prevention and control in healthcare facilities
- Poor sanitation, hygiene and environmental management
- Inappropriate antimicrobial use in livestock and agriculture
- Delayed diagnosis and inadequate laboratory capacity
- Weak antimicrobial stewardship and surveillance

India's Response to AMR:

- **National Action Plan on AMR 2.0 (NAP-AMR 2.0):** Provides a multisectoral framework for tackling AMR.
- **ICMR AMR Surveillance Network:** Tracks resistance patterns and treatment-related information.
- **National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC):** Supports AMR surveillance and national coordination.
- **Antimicrobial Stewardship:** Promotes rational prescription and use of antimicrobials.
- **One Health Approach:** Increasing coordination across human health, veterinary, and environmental sectors.
- **Infection Prevention and Control (IPC):** Focus on hand hygiene, sterilization, environmental cleaning and prevention of healthcare-associated infections.

Way Forward

- **Strengthen Surveillance:** Move from merely tracking resistant organisms to **integrated surveillance, linking resistance, treatment and patient outcomes**.
- **Improve Diagnostic Capacity:** Expand rapid and affordable diagnostics to distinguish bacterial from non-bacterial infections and detect resistance early.
- **Institutionalize Antimicrobial Stewardship:** Ensure prescription audits, evidence-based guidelines and appropriate duration/dosage of antibiotics.
- **Promote R&D:** Support development of new antibiotics, vaccines, rapid diagnostics and alternative therapies.

- **Implement One Health:** Regulate antimicrobial use in **human medicine, veterinary practice and agriculture.**

AyurVarta

The All India Institute of Ayurveda (AIIA- an autonomous institute under the Ministry of Ayush) recently launched '**AyurVarta**', a special digital dialogue series aimed at taking authentic knowledge, scientific perspectives and contemporary relevance of Ayurveda to wider audiences in India and abroad.

Key Features: • Features discussions with Ayurveda experts, doctors, scientists, academicians and policymakers. • Covers research, clinical practice, education, public health, innovation and globalization of Ayurveda. • Promotes evidence-based Ayurveda and its integration with modern healthcare.	Ayurveda Day (23 September): Earlier observed on Dhanteras (Dhanvantari Jayanti). 23 September has been designated as the fixed annual date as it falls around the Autumnal Equinox, symbolizing balance and equilibrium, concepts central to Ayurveda.
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Maternity Leave Cannot Lead to Loss of Role or Career Prospects

Recently, the Delhi High Court (HC) held that a woman returning from maternity leave is ordinarily entitled to **resume her previous position** and cannot be disadvantaged through reduced **responsibilities, managerial authority or career prospects.**

Case Background: Rakhi Bisht, an Accounting Manager at HashiCorp, returned from maternity leave in July 2024 but was shifted to a substantially different Treasury role with reduced managerial responsibilities. She challenged this move before the Delhi HC, seeking compensation and formulation of strict anti-discrimination guidelines for private companies.

Delhi HC Ruling: If the previous post is genuinely unavailable due to **bona fide organizational reasons**, the woman must be offered a **substantially equivalent position** in terms of pay, grade, status, responsibilities, managerial authority

Key Legal Safeguards for Women Returning from Maternity Leave (Maternity Benefit Act, 1961): The **Maternity Benefit Act, 1961** is a social-security legislation designed to protect women during **pregnancy, childbirth and the post-childbirth period.** It provides maternity leave and financial benefits while protecting women from employment-related disadvantage because of maternity. The 2017 amendment substantially expanded maternity leave from **12 to 26 weeks.** Key provisions include:

- **Paid Maternity Leave:** Eligible women are entitled to **26 weeks of paid maternity leave** for up to two surviving children. Of this, **up to 8 weeks** may be taken before the expected date of delivery. For women having **two or more surviving children**, the entitlement is **12 weeks.**
- **Protection against Dismissal/Disadvantage (Section 12):** An employer cannot:
 - Dismiss or discharge a woman because she is on maternity leave.
 - Issue a termination notice that expires during her protected maternity absence.
 - **Vary her conditions of service to her disadvantage** because she has availed maternity leave.
- **Delhi HC expanded the practical meaning of this safeguard:** Protection is not limited to salary or continuation of employment; it also covers **professional status, responsibilities, managerial authority and career progression.**
- **Protection from Hazardous/Arduous Work:** During pregnancy, on her request, a woman cannot be required to undertake arduous work; work involving long hours of standing; or work likely to adversely affect her pregnancy or health.
- **Leave for Miscarriage & Pregnancy-related Illness:** The Act provides **6 weeks' leave with wages** following miscarriage and up to **1 month additional leave with wages** for illness arising from pregnancy, delivery, premature birth or miscarriage.
- **Crèche Facility:** For establishments covered by the relevant provisions, employers must provide access to a crèche facility and allow the woman **four visits a day**, including her normal rest interval.
- **Protection Against Contractual Circumvention:** The Act prevails over an inconsistent **employment contract, agreement or award.** A contract cannot take away statutory maternity protections; however, a woman may receive benefits **more favourable than those prescribed by the Act.**
- **Enforcement & Complaint Mechanism:** Inspectors can investigate complaints and direct employers to make maternity-related payments that have been wrongfully withheld. The Act provides penalties for employer violations.

and career prospects. The Court awarded Bisht ₹10 lakh compensation + ₹1.5 lakh legal costs. The court linked maternity protection with:

- **Article 14**- Equality before law.
- **Article 15**- Prohibition of discrimination; special provisions for women permitted.
- **Article 21**- Right to life and dignity.
- **Article 42**- State's duty to secure just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.

Challenges in Implementing the Maternity Benefit Act

- **Limited Coverage:** A large share of women work in the **informal/unorganized sector**, where statutory maternity benefits are difficult to enforce.
- **Employer Burden:** Paid maternity leave and **crèche facilities** can impose significant costs, particularly on smaller establishments.
- **Career Discrimination:** Women may face **hiring bias, slower promotions or reduced responsibilities** due to perceived maternity-related costs.
- **Weak Enforcement:** Limited awareness, inadequate inspections, and difficulties in filing complaints can reduce effective implementation.
- **Post-Maternity Reintegration:** The Act has traditionally focused more on **maternity leave and benefits** than on ensuring smooth return to the same role and career trajectory- an issue highlighted by the Delhi HC.
- **Workplace Infrastructure:** Availability and proper functioning of **crèches, nursing facilities and flexible work arrangements** remain uneven.
- **Fear of Retaliation:** Women may hesitate to report violations due to concerns about **job security, workplace relationships or career progression**.

Should Generative AI Be Banned Among Younger Students?

The growing use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI) in education has raised concerns about its impact on children's

cognitive development.

New York City's one-year moratorium on most Gen AI tools for students up to Class 8 has renewed the debate over whether younger children should be protected from excessive AI dependence.

Way Forward

A **blanket ban** is **neither practical nor desirable**.

Arguments for Restricting Gen AI

- **Protects Critical Thinking:** Ready-made AI answers can reduce independent reasoning, problem-solving, and creativity.
- **Preserves Productive Struggle:** Trial, error and persistence are essential for deep learning; excessive AI use may eliminate this process.
- **Prevents Cognitive Dependence:** Over-reliance on AI for thinking, summarizing, and synthesizing can weaken students' ability to perform these tasks independently.
- **Protects Human Interaction:** Primary education depends heavily on teacher-student relationships, peer learning, and conversations, which AI cannot replace.
- **Risk of Misinformation and Bias:** AI can hallucinate or misinterpret language and accents, making human oversight essential.

Arguments Against a Complete Ban

- **Personalized Learning:** AI can explain concepts in different ways and support children with varied learning needs.
- **Teacher Support:** It can assist in preparing lesson plans, stories, worksheets, quizzes, and assessments.
- **Bridges Resource Gaps:** AI can support translation, content accessibility and learning in areas with limited educational resources.
- **AI is Already Ubiquitous:** Children encounter AI through search engines, games and digital platforms even outside school; therefore, schools should teach responsible use rather than merely exclude it.
- **Future Readiness:** Early AI literacy can help students understand AI's capabilities, limitations, biases, and ethical implications.

Instead, schools can adopt an **age-appropriate, teacher-supervised approach**:

- **Age-Based Access:** Minimal and highly supervised Gen AI use in primary classes, with gradual expansion at higher levels.
- **“Think → Write → AI” Approach:** Students should first attempt a problem independently and use AI only for assistance or verification.
- **Teacher-in-the-Loop:** AI should **augment, not replace**, teachers.
- **Assessment Reform:** Promote oral, project-based and application-oriented assessments that test independent thinking.
- **Child Protection:** Ensure strong safeguards for privacy, screen time and exposure to inappropriate content.

Unsafe Buildings

Rapid urbanization and unplanned construction heighten risks of **building collapses and fires**. Delhi’s **Satya Niketan collapse**, which killed seven, exposed gaps in **safety regulation and enforcement**, prompting the Supreme Court (SC) to consider **pan-India guidelines and time-bound safety audits** for PGs and hostels.

Way Forward

- | Way Forward | Major Causes | Key Concerns Highlighted by the SC |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time-bound structural safety audits of old, vulnerable and high-occupancy buildings, especially PGs and hostels. • Mandatory third-party structural certification and periodic safety inspections. • Strict enforcement of building bye-laws, land-use regulations and fire-safety norms. • Use GIS, satellite imagery, and digital building-permission systems to detect unauthorized construction and deviations. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor Construction Quality: Substandard materials, faulty engineering, weak foundations, and inadequate curing. • Violation of Building Byelaws: Unauthorized additions, excessive floors/Floor Area Ratio (FAR), encroachment of setbacks and deviations from sanctioned plans. • Unauthorized Change of Land Use: Residential premises being converted into PGs, hostels or commercial establishments without adequate safety compliance. • Weak Regulatory Enforcement: Inadequate inspections, poor post-construction monitoring, and delayed action against dangerous structures. • Structural & Fire-Safety Deficiencies: Inadequate structural stability, unsafe basements, poor means of ingress/egress and non-compliance with fire-safety norms. • Poor Site Management & Waterlogging: Construction activity, basement alterations and inadequate drainage can weaken structures and aggravate risks. • Climate Vulnerability: Intense rainfall, flooding, and waterlogging can expose weaknesses in foundations and drainage systems. | <p>The Court-monitored exercise has highlighted the need to verify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sanctioned building plans vs. actual construction • Whether buildings are in a dangerous/ruinous condition • Safety of PGs, private hostels and student accommodation around educational institutions. <p>The recurrence of a fatal collapse in Satya Niketan, despite an earlier collapse in 2022, also raises questions about the effectiveness of existing inspection and enforcement mechanisms.</p> |
- Integrate building approvals with **drainage, sewage, water and disaster-management plans**.
 - Fix accountability through **penalties, demolition of dangerous structures and liability of developers/owners and responsible officials**.

- Strengthen coordination among **municipal bodies, fire services, police and disaster-management authorities.**
- Promote **risk-based urban planning**, including adequate setbacks, open spaces, drainage and climate-resilient construction.

Newborn Deaths in Government Hospitals

The recent **death of three newborns in a fire at Amravati Government Women's Hospital** highlights a recurring problem of **clustered neonatal deaths in public hospitals.**

Key Concerns:

- **Overcrowding:** With the increase in institutional deliveries from **39% (2005-06) to 90% (2023-24)** according to Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), sick newborn admissions in public Special Newborn Care Units (SNCUs) have risen by **28%**. Thus, putting pressure on beds, staff and equipment.
- **High-Risk Cases:** Government hospitals increasingly receive **premature, low-birth-weight and critically ill newborns** referred from peripheral facilities.
- **Infrastructure & Safety Failures:**
Fires, electrical faults, and oxygen-supply disruptions can be fatal in neonatal units.
- **Staffing & Infection Control:** Inadequate nurse-to-baby ratios, equipment shortages and weak infection-control practices increase neonatal mortality.

Gadchiroli Model

- More than two decades ago, the **Society for Education, Action and Research in Community Health (SEARCH)**, Gadchiroli, demonstrated that trained **Community Health Workers (CHWs)** can provide effective **Home-Based Neonatal Care (HBNC)**, reducing neonatal mortality by **62.2%**.
- Care includes **infection management, breastfeeding, warmth, and care of low-birth-weight/preterm babies.**
- Its principles have been integrated into India's **Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA)-based HBNC programme**, covering around **10 lakh ASHAs.**
- Strengthening HBNC can **reduce unnecessary admissions and overcrowding in Special Newborn Care Units (SNCUs).** However, **severely premature or critically ill newborns** require immediate facility-based treatment.

Way Forward: Hospital + Home

Challenge	Solution
Overcrowded SNCUs	Expand and strengthen Home-Based Neonatal Care (HBNC) through ASHAs.
Staff shortages	Adequate doctors, nurses and nurse-to-baby ratios
Equipment failures	Functional equipment + regular maintenance
Fire/electrical risks	Detection, suppression, evacuation drills & safety audits
Infection risks	Strong infection-prevention and control systems
Critical newborns	Rapid referral and strengthened neonatal intensive care

National Formulary of India

Recently, the Union Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare launched 7th Edition of the National Formulary of India (NFI) and announced Biovigilance Programme to widen India's patient-safety net.

About National Formulary of India (NFI)	About Biovigilance Programme of India
• NFI is an authoritative guidance document for healthcare professionals on the rational, safe and evidence-based prescribing, dispensing and administration of medicines. • First Published: 1960; Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC) has been publishing it periodically since 2009.	• Approved by the Government to expand India's patient-safety monitoring framework. • IPC will lead the programme to monitor, assess and help prevent adverse events associated with biological products used in organ and

- It acts as a **bridge between scientific standards and clinical practice** and can support national drug-policy formulation.
- **NFI 2026:** Contains **34 chapters, 20 appendices and 653 drug monographs**, including 42 fixed-dose combinations and 30 immunological products.
- Drug monographs have been updated in line with the **National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM) and National Health Programmes**.
- Available digitally through **NFI Online**, with links to health programmes, immunization schedules, Jan Aushadhi and safe-disposal guidance.

tissue transplantation, including products given to donors and recipients.

- It complements:
 - **Pharmacovigilance:** medicines/drugs
 - **Materiovigilance:** medical devices
 - **Biovigilance:** biological products/transplant-related safety
- **Significance:** Creates a more comprehensive system for monitoring safety across **medicines, medical devices and biological products used in transplantation**.

Community Cadres: Last Mile Architects of Rural Transformation

Rural development programmes often face a last-mile delivery gap due to limited awareness, weak local capacity and difficulties in accessing government services. The Community Cadre Approach addresses this through a trained grassroots workforce that bridges government programmes and rural households. India has over 9 lakh Community Resource Persons (CRPs), along with ASHAs, Anganwadi Workers, Swachhagrahis and Awaas Mitras.

Major Areas of Contribution:

- **Livelihoods & Entrepreneurship:** Under **Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM)**, over **10 crore rural households** have been mobilized into around **92 lakh Self-Help Groups (SHGs)**. **Krishi Sakhis, Pashu Sakhis, Matsya Sakhis, Van Sakhis and Community Resource Persons for Enterprise Promotion (CRP-EPs)** provide technical knowledge, improve productivity, facilitate credit and create market linkages.
- **Financial Inclusion: Bank Sakhis and Business Correspondent (BC) Sakhis** provide doorstep banking and financial services. Bank Sakhis have helped SHGs access **₹13.41 lakh crore in bank credit since 2013-14**.
- **Health, Nutrition and Sanitation:** Over **10.40 lakh Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs)** serve as the first point of contact for rural healthcare. **10.58 lakh Anganwadi Workers (AWWs)** support nutrition and Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). **Swachhagrahis**



Why are Community Cadres Important? They promote-

- **Last-mile delivery** and better utilization of schemes.
- **Women's empowerment** by turning women into trained service providers and community leaders.
- **Participatory governance** through trusted local institutions.
- **Convergence** of livelihoods, health, sanitation, housing, and financial inclusion.
- **Self-reliance** through continuous capacity building and handholding.

Challenges Faced by Community Cadres:

- **Inadequate Capacity Building:** Need for continuous training, refresher courses and field-level handholding.
- **Limited Resources and Incentives:** Many cadres receive activity-based compensation linked to service delivery and mobilization.
- **Heavy and Expanding Responsibilities:** Cadres increasingly support multiple areas livelihoods, health, sanitation, finance and social development requiring diverse skills.
- **Coordination Gaps:** Effective convergence among departments and frontline systems remains essential for household-level outcomes.
- **Sustaining Community Participation:** Their effectiveness depends on continued community trust, participation, and local institutional support.

promote sanitation and behavioural change under **Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen)**.

- **Water and Housing: Village Water & Sanitation Committees (VWSCs)/Pani Samitis** facilitate community participation in village water management. **Awaas Mitras** assist beneficiaries under **Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G)** from beneficiary identification to house completion.

Way Forward

Strengthen community cadres through **continuous training**, **adequate incentives**, **digital tools**, **inter-departmental convergence**, **stronger Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)** and **outcome-based monitoring**.

CCTV Surveillance at Medical Stores

The **Union Health Ministry** recently proposed **mandatory CCTV surveillance at medical stores**, with recordings retained for **three months**, to curb unauthorized sale of prescription drugs, particularly **Schedule H, H1 and X medicines** under the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945.

Need for CCTV Surveillance at Medical Stores

- **Prevent Drug Abuse among Children:** Initially proposed in **2021** to prevent abuse of prescription drugs by children, particularly **Schedule H, H1 and X medicines**.
- **Ensure Prescription Compliance:** CCTV footage can help verify whether **prescription drugs are sold to minors without valid prescriptions**, especially in response to complaints.
- **Enable Digital Monitoring:** The Drugs Consultative Committee of the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO) also deliberated on a mobile app-based information system (MIS), where the pharmacists could upload the details of sale of these prescription drugs.
- **Target Habit-Forming Drugs:** The DCC considered a **separate schedule for habit-forming medicines** to enable stricter regulation of pharmacies dealing in such drugs.

What are Schedule H, H1 and X drugs?

Schedule	What it means	Examples
Schedule H	Prescription medicines that cannot be sold by a chemist without a prescription from a registered medical practitioner.	Many antibiotics, steroids and other prescription medicines
Schedule H1	A category of prescription medicines subject to additional record-keeping requirements , introduced to strengthen monitoring of certain drugs.	Certain antibiotics and anti-tuberculosis medicines
Schedule X	A more tightly controlled category of prescription medicines, with additional requirements for their sale, storage and record-keeping. It includes certain narcotic and psychotropic medicines .	Certain controlled psychotropic and other medicine

How Common is Prescription Drug Addiction in Children?

Prevalence of Substance Use

- **Opioid Use:** ~1.8% of children; the **second-most common addiction**.
- **Cannabis Use:** 1.9%, the most prevalent.
- **Alcohol Use:** 1.3%.
- **Inhalant Use:** 1.17%; the **only addiction more common among children than adults**.

Prescription Opioid Dependence

- Of **2.3 crore opioid users** in India, around **25 lakh** are dependent on **pharmaceutical opioids**, while **63 lakh** are dependent on heroin.
- **Source:** AIIMS study (2019), one of India's comprehensive assessments of drug use.

Concerns Raised by Chemists:

- **Financial Burden:** CCTV installation and **3-month data storage** could cost small pharmacies up to **₹1 lakh**, disproportionately affecting low-turnover stores.
- **Technical Challenges:** **Power outages and poor connectivity**, particularly in rural areas, could disrupt recording and data storage. Pharmacies fear **license-related penalties** for technical failures beyond their control.
- **Patient Privacy:** Continuous surveillance may compromise the **confidentiality of patients' medical conditions and purchases**, raising concerns over privacy.
- **Need for Government Support:** The **All India Organization of Chemists and Druggists**, representing about **12.4 lakh medical stores**, has sought **financial support** from the government for compliance.

The **National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions (NCAHP- a statutory body established under the NCAHP Act 2021)** under the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare recently notified the **Registration of Allied and Healthcare Professionals Regulations, 2026**.

Objective: To create a uniform, transparent, and digitally integrated registration system for allied and healthcare professionals.

Significance: The regulations aim to standardise the allied healthcare workforce, distinguish qualified from unqualified practitioners, improve patient safety, enable workforce data collection, and enhance transparency and professional mobility.

Key Provisions:

- ★ **Mandatory Registration:** Professionals across **57 vocations under 10 broad disciplines** including physiotherapists, dietitians, laboratory technologists and forensic psychologists will need registration in **State and Central Registers** to practice.
- ★ **Digital Registration:** Professionals will receive a **UID-based digital certificate with a secure QR code**, enabling easy verification.
- ★ **Integrated Registers:** State and Central Registers will be **real-time synchronized** and registration details will be publicly accessible online.
- ★ **Inter-State Mobility:** A professional registered in one State can practice in another by informing the concerned State, reducing repeated registration procedures.
- ★ **Five-Year Validity:** Registration will be valid for **5 years** and renewable through **Continuing Professional Development (CPD)**- 15 hours annually.
- ★ **Foreign Qualifications:** Foreign-qualified Indian professionals can register after **qualification recognition/equivalence** and, where applicable, an **exit examination**.
- ★ **Temporary Registration:** Permitted for foreign-qualified professionals for purposes such as **higher education, fellowships, clinical research and observerships**.
- ★ **Provisional Registration:** Existing practitioners without prescribed qualifications may be given an opportunity to complete a **bridge course** for regular registration.
- ★ **Interim Registration:** Students undergoing **internships, clinical training or practical coursework** can obtain interim registration through their institutions, without a fee.
- ★ **Good Standing Certificate:** Enables registered professionals to pursue **education or professional opportunities abroad**.

Distinguished Jurist

Recently, Supreme Court (SC) Judge- Justice Ujjal Bhuyan questioned the non-use of Article 124(3) for over 76 years, which allows a “distinguished jurist” to be appointed as a SC Judge.

Why Has the Provision Remained Unused?

• Collegium Hegemony:

The Collegium consists exclusively of career judges, who naturally prioritize trial experience, HC seniority, and procedural familiarity over theoretical scholarship.

• Institutional Role of the SC:

Unlike the U.S. SC, the Indian SC functions heavily as a **mass appellate court** handling routine civil and criminal appeals rather than purely constitutional questions. This makes daily courtroom and procedural experience a priority.

Constitutional Architecture

- **Supreme Court (Article 124(3)):** Outlines three distinct eligibility routes for appointing a SC judge:
 - 5 years a Judge of a High Court or of two or more such Courts in succession; or;
 - 10 years an advocate of a High Court or of two or more such courts in succession; or
 - being a “distinguished jurist” in the President’s opinion.
- **High Courts (Article 217):** Governs appointments of HC judges. The **42nd Amendment (1976)** introduced the “distinguished jurist” route for HCs, but the **44th Amendment (1978)** repealed it. Thus, unlike the SC, HCs currently have no constitutional route for appointing distinguished jurists directly.
- **Constituent Assembly Debates (1949):** Members like H.V. Kamath and M.A. Ayyangar advocated for this clause to ensure the bench wasn’t restricted to formal court practitioners. They cited **Justice Felix Frankfurter** (a Harvard Law Professor elevated to the U.S. Supreme Court) as a model for bringing deep academic insight to constitutional interpretation.

Who Qualifies as a “Distinguished Jurist”? An eminent person engaged in **legal practice, teaching or research**, even without extensive courtroom experience. The Constitution **does not define the term– “Distinguished Jurist”** or prescribes minimum experience required for appointment, leaving scope for eminent legal scholars and academics.



- **Bar Council Restriction (BCI Rule 49):** Requires advocates taking up full-time salaried employment (such as law professors) to surrender their practice license, creating a hard divide between “law in books” and “law in action.”

- **CJI Succession Friction:** Direct lateral entry of scholars into the SC risks complicating the established conventions around judicial seniority and the Chief Justice of India (CJI) line of succession.

Contribution of Legal Academics to Law & Jurisprudence

Legal scholars already shape jurisprudence via scholarly works, amicus briefs, and public interest litigation (e.g., **Prof. Shamnad Basheer** in *Novartis AG v. Union of India* on Patent Law; **Prof. Upendra Baxi** on PIL expansion).

Global Models

Countries like Germany, South Africa, Spain, Italy, Kenya, and South Korea actively elevate legal academics to their constitutional courts to enrich judicial interpretation.

Significance	Challenges
• Bench Diversity: A distinguished jurist can bring wider intellectual and professional perspectives to the SC. • Scholarly Expertise	• Broad Jurisdiction: SC handles both constitutional and extensive appellate matters, requiring practical legal expertise. • Lack of Specialization: Absence of specialized Benches may make transition from academia to judicial work difficult. • Courtroom Experience: Limited procedural and courtroom exposure among academics may pose challenges.

V-Dem Democracy Report

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in line with some of the observations in the latest V-Dem democracy report raised concerns over alleged law-enforcement violations and voter exclusion in India, particularly of **Muslims** as part of the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls.

✓ **V-Dem 2026** identified India as “**autocratising**,” with its Electoral Democracy Index declining since 2009 to its **lowest level since 1975**.

About V-Dem Democracy Report

- Published annually by the **Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute, University of Gothenburg, Sweden**. It uses a **multidimensional approach** to measure democracy rather than focusing only on elections and measures **Electoral, Liberal, Egalitarian, Participatory and Deliberative** dimensions of democracy.
- Its **Liberal Democracy Index (LDI)** combines electoral democracy with **rule of law, civil liberties and checks and balances on executive power**.

2026 Edition of V-Dem Report: Indian Perspective

- **Electoral Democracy Index:** India ranks **106th out of 179 countries** (score: **0.38**).
- **Liberal Democracy Index:** India ranks **105th** and is classified as an “**electoral autocracy**” since 2017.
- **Autocratisation:** India is among **44 countries** undergoing democratic backsliding, with concerns over weakening **checks and balances, institutional autonomy, media freedom, civil society and public participation**.
- **Regional context:** India is one of **four autocratising countries in South & Central Asia**, alongside Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan and Pakistan.

Core Drivers of India's democratic Decline

- 1 **Weakening Institutional Checks & Balances:** reduced legislative scrutiny and oversight of the executive.
- 2 **Declining Institutional Autonomy:** concerns over the independence/impartiality of public institutions, including the election-management system.
- 3 **Media & Expression Restrictions:** declining media independence, greater harassment of journalists, and reduced freedom of expression.
- 4 **Pressure on Civil Society & Opposition:** attacks/harassment of civil society organizations and opposition voices.
- 5 **Rule of Law & Accountability Concerns:** weakening judicial accountability, administrative impartiality.
- 6 **Academic/Cultural Freedom:** deterioration in freedom of academic expression, research/teaching.

CVC Annual Report 2025

The **Central Vigilance Commission's (CVC) Annual Report 2025** highlights a significant gap between investigation, prosecution and final adjudication in corruption cases, raising concerns over the **efficacy of India's anti-corruption architecture**.

Key Findings of CVC Report 2025

- **Trial Backlog:** **7,229 Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI- functioning under Dept. of Personnel, Ministry of Personnel, Pension & Public Grievances) cases** under the Prevention of Corruption (PC) Act, 1988 are pending trial- **~39% (2,856 cases)** have been delayed for over 10 years, with **409 cases lingering for over 20 years**.
- **Appellate Pendency:** **14,083 appeals, revisions, and writ petitions** remain bottlenecked in High Courts (HCs) and the Supreme Court (SC) with **739 cases more than 20 years old**.
- **Investigation Delays:** **473 cases** are under investigation, with **109 exceeding the benchmark 1-year timeline**.
- **Structural Deficits:** **1,088 vacancies** exist against CBI's sanctioned strength of 7,300, concentrated heavily in executive/investigative ranks (672 posts).

- **Procedural Hurdles:** 201 cases await prosecution sanction, and 72 references (172 officers) await prior approval under Section 17A, PC Act.
- **Performance Benchmark:** CBI's conviction rate improved slightly to 71.71% (up from 69.14% in 2024), demonstrating resilience despite resource constraints.

Way Forward

• Personnel Augmentation:

Establish dedicated recruitment drives to fill executive vacancies in the CBI, introducing lateral entry for financial, cyber, and forensic specialists.

• Time-Bound Sanction Norms:

Enforce a strict 3-month statutory deadline for granting prosecution sanction and Section 17A approvals, using "deemed approval" mechanisms for non-action.

• Dedicated Judicial Infrastructure:

Expand the number of Special CBI Courts and mandate continuous day-to-day hearings for cases pending over 10 years.

• Digitalization & Case Management:

Implement continuous digital evidence repositories, automated court listing, and robust witness protection programs to limit trial adjournments.

- **Diplomatic & Administrative Coordination:** Establish specialized task forces within the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) to streamline LR processing with foreign jurisdictions.

Key Drivers of Delay

Investigative Challenges	Judicial & Administrative Bottlenecks
• Cross-Border Obstacles: Prolonged wait times for responses to Letters Rogatory (LRs) and Mutual Legal Assistance Requests. • LRs are formal requests made by a court or investigating authority of one country to the judicial authorities of another country seeking assistance in obtaining evidence or performing judicial/investigative acts abroad. • Documentary Complexity: Time-consuming verification of title deeds in Disproportionate Assets (DA) cases and massive data scrutiny in complex economic/bank fraud offenses. • Inter-Departmental Friction: Delays by parent departments in transferring records or examining witnesses in remote jurisdictions.	• Procedural Ambiguity: Misuse of interlocutory appeals and stay orders leading to prolonged appellate litigation. • Executive Delay in Sanctions: Statutory delays under Section 17A (prior approval to probe) and Section 19 (prosecution sanction) of the PC Act.

Implications:

- **Erosion of Deterrence:** When punishment occurs decades after the offense, the deterrent effect of the PC Act is functionally neutralized.
- **Infringement of Fundamental Rights:** Undue delay violates the accused's and the public's right to a speedy trial under Article 21.
- **Governance & Capital Costs:** Ongoing corruption cases keep compromised officials in decision-making roles or freeze legitimate projects, distorting public procurement.
- **Evidence Degradation:** Over 10-20 years, key witnesses become unavailable, memories fade, and documentary evidence degrades, directly threatening conviction sustainability.

NCPCR Pan-India Rescue & Rehabilitation Campaign

The **National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR- a statutory body under the Ministry of Women and Child Development)** recently rescued over **3,800 children** from child labour under its **Pan-India Rescue and Rehabilitation Campaign** launched in **June till August 31, 2026**.

Coordination: State/UT governments, District Magistrates, Labour Departments, Police and other stakeholders.

Key Measures:

- Targeted rescue operations at **child labour and trafficking hotspots**.
- Regular monitoring of **rescue, rehabilitation, restoration, compensation, and educational mainstreaming**.
- District-level meetings to address **operational bottlenecks** and ensure timely **Action Taken Reports (ATRs)**.
- **Awareness and outreach** through social media and other platforms.

Financial Fraud Risk Indicator

The **Department of Telecommunications (DoT)**'s **Financial Fraud Risk Indicator (FRI)** has helped prevent suspected cyber-fraud losses exceeding ₹5,000 crore within 15 months of its launch in **May 2025**, strengthening citizen protection in the digital economy.

What is FRI? It is a **risk-based metric developed by the DOT** under the **Digital Intelligence Platform (DIP)** to classify mobile numbers as **Medium, High, or Very High risk** based on their likelihood of involvement in financial fraud by using inputs from the **Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C)**, **National Cybercrime Reporting Portal (NCRP)**, **Chakshu (reports suspected fraud communication)**, **banks and financial institutions**.

✓ **DPI**, launched in 2024 is a secure, nationwide intelligence-sharing and coordination platform developed by DoT to counter telecom-enabled cyber frauds and the misuse of telecom resources.

How Does it Work? Suspected numbers undergo **multi-dimensional analysis**, and the risk signal is shared through the **Digital Intelligence Platform (DIP)** in near real time. Banks and **Unified Payments Interface (UPI)** platforms can **warn, delay, flag, or decline** suspicious transactions.

Example: PhonePe uses FRI to decline transactions linked to **Very High-risk numbers** and display alerts.

Significance:

- Shifts fraud management from **reactive recovery to proactive prevention**.
- Promotes **whole-of-ecosystem coordination** among telecom, financial institutions, fintech and law-enforcement agencies.

SC Seeks Centre's View on EVM Totalizers

The Supreme Court (SC) recently sought the opinion of **Central Government to examine introducing totalizers** for Electronic Voting Machines (EVM) vote counting.

Case Background

The Court was hearing a **2014 PIL** seeking **mixing of votes across polling stations** to prevent voter intimidation. The petitioners argued that **booth-wise counting** reveals local voting patterns, enabling **voter profiling and victimization**.

What is a Totalizer?

- It is a device developed by **Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL)**, Bengaluru, and **Electronics Corporation of India Limited (ECIL)**, Hyderabad to **protect booth-wise voting secrecy** by aggregating votes from around **14 polling stations** before counting.
- It connects to the **Control Units of 14 EVMs** to provide a **consolidated candidate-wise result**, without revealing votes from individual booths.

Concerns Raised Regarding Use of Totalizers:

- **Reduced Transparency:** Aggregation may prevent candidates from independently verifying individual EVM results against **Form 17C**.

Central Government's Stand on Use of Totalizers

- The Centre has **opposed introducing totalizers**, arguing that **booth-wise voting data does not necessarily lead to voter intimidation**.
- It has also raised concerns about **possible data leakage from EVMs** before counting.
- The Centre argues that booth-level results can help political parties **identify weak areas and improve their electoral outreach**.

ECI's Stand on Use of Totalizers

- The **Election Commission of India (ECI)** has **consistently supported totalizers**, recommending their introduction in **2008 and 2014** through amendments to the **Conduct of Election Rules, 1961** but the proposal remained pending with Centre.
- However, in the present case, it has flagged **legal, transparency and operational concerns**, including the absence of a statutory framework and difficulties in booth-wise verification through **Form 17C and VVPAT (Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail)**.
- **Form 17C** under the **Conduct of Election Rules, 1961** records EVM voting data at each polling station. It has 2 parts-
 - **Part I:** Records total votes polled, electors, voters denied voting, and test votes.
 - **Part II:** Records **candidate-wise votes** counted at the polling station.

- **Difficult Fault Detection:** Technical malfunction or human error in an individual EVM could be **masked within the aggregate result**.
- **Legal Gap:** Current election laws/rules do not provide a clear **statutory framework for totalizers**, requiring amendments.
- **Public Confidence:** Introducing another device amid existing concerns over EVMs could generate **fresh allegations about tampering, data integrity, and transmission errors**.

Article 142

The Supreme Court (SC), invoking its powers under Article 142, quashed criminal cases against Gen Z protesters linked to nationwide protests following the NEET-UG 2026 paper leak.

Limits on Article 142:

- **Prem Chand Garg v. Excise Commissioner, Uttar Pradesh (1962):** Article 142 cannot override the Constitution or Fundamental Rights.
- **Supreme Court Bar Association v. Union of India (1998):** Called Article 142 a **plenary, supplementary and residual power**, but clarified that it **cannot be used to supplant substantive law or assume powers belonging to another constitutional authority**.
- **Shilpa Sailesh v. Varun Sreenivasan (2023):** Confirmed that the SC can **dissolve a marriage on the ground of irretrievable breakdown** and waive procedural requirements in appropriate cases
 - The Court may **depart from statutory requirements** when necessary for complete justice, provided it does not violate **fundamental considerations of public policy**.
- **High Court Bar Association, Allahabad v. State of U.P. (2024):** Article 142 cannot affect the **substantive rights of persons not before the Court** and cannot violate **natural justice/right to be heard**.

What is Article 142? Article 142 of the Constitution empowers the SC to pass any decree or order necessary to ensure **"complete justice"** in a case pending before it. Such orders are **enforceable throughout India**. It gives the SC **broad inherent powers** to provide remedies even where existing law may not adequately address a situation.

Origin: Article 142 traces its roots to **Section 210 of the Government of India Act, 1935** and the colonial principle of **"justice, equity and good conscience"** where written law was inadequate. It was adopted on **27 May 1949** without substantive debate. Its scope has since been largely developed by the SC through various judicial decisions like-

- **I.C. Golaknath v. State of Punjab (1967):** Described Article 142 as a **wide and flexible power** enabling the Court to develop legal doctrines where necessary for justice.

- **Union Carbide Corporation v. Union of India (1991):** Ordinary statutory limitations do not automatically restrict the SC's constitutional power under Article 142.

- **Delhi Judicial Service Association v. State of Gujarat (1991):** Article 142 can, in appropriate cases, be used to **quash criminal proceedings** to achieve complete justice.

How does the CJP Order test the limits of Article 142?

- **Normal Rule:** Each FIR is ordinarily examined **on its individual facts** before being quashed under **Section 528 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023**.
- **CJP Order:** Thousands of FIRs across several States were **clubbed and quashed through a negotiated settlement**, without individual scrutiny.
- **Concern:** The blanket quashing of FIRs may bypass the statutory framework and raise concerns regarding **individual scrutiny, natural justice and the rights of parties not before the Court**, potentially turning Article 142 from a supplementary power into a substitute for statutory procedure.

Significance of Article 142	Concerns Regarding Article 142	Way Forward
• Ensures Substantive Justice: Provides relief where ordinary legal remedies are inadequate. • Protects Rights: Can provide effective remedies for individuals and vulnerable groups. • Flexibility: Allows innovative and case-specific remedies in exceptional circumstances. • Constitutional Safety Valve: Prevents technicalities or procedural limitations from defeating justice.	• Judicial Overreach: Excessive use may blur the separation of powers. • Supplanting Legislation: Risk of replacing or bypassing statutory procedures rather than merely supplementing them. • Wide Judicial Discretion: Open-ended power can lead to inconsistent outcomes across Benches. • Lack of Clear Limits: "Complete justice" is undefined, leaving considerable scope for judicial interpretation. • Third-Party Rights: Orders may potentially affect people who are not parties to the case, raising natural justice concerns. • Democratic Accountability: When unelected judges overturn laws enacted by an elected legislature, it can raise concerns about institutional accountability.	• Use Sparingly: Invoke Article 142 only in exceptional cases where ordinary remedies are inadequate. • Develop Clear Guidelines: SC should establish consistent principles and thresholds for its exercise. • Respect Statutory Frameworks: Article 142 should generally supplement, not supplant existing law. • Ensure Natural Justice: Protect the right to be heard and substantive rights of affected parties. • Prefer Larger Benches: Constitution Benches may lay down authoritative guidelines for particularly consequential uses. • Maintain Institutional Balance: Exercise the power while respecting separation of powers and legislative intent.

Right to Work

Recently, a three-judge Supreme Court (SC) Bench led by the Chief Justice of India (CJI) dismissed a petition on minimum wages under rural employment guarantee programmes and sought a fresh petition. While praising Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) role in rural development, the Court raised whether the 'Right to Work' should be treated at par with the fundamental Right to Life under Article 21, triggering debate over its constitutional status.

About Right to Work:

The **Right to Work** implies a state-guaranteed framework ensuring accessible, productive, and dignifying employment opportunities for all citizens.

Constitutional Foundations: Though not explicitly guaranteed as a Fundamental Right, the Indian Constitution recognizes it as an important **socio-economic objective** under the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP):

- **Article 41:** Directs the State to make effective provision for securing the right to work, within the limits of its economic capacity and development.
- **Article 39(a):** Adequate means of livelihood for all citizens.
- **Article 42:** Just and humane conditions of work.
- **Article 43:** Living wage and decent standard of life for workers.

Constituent Assembly Intent: While Prof. K.T. Shah advocated making it an enforceable Fundamental Right, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar argued that immediate enforcement was fiscally unviable for a newly independent nation, making it an aspirational precept.

Judicial Synthesis (Article 21): The SC in *Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation (1985)* held that the **Right to Livelihood is an integral part of the Right to Life under Article 21**, since life cannot be meaningfully sustained without the means of livelihood, thus providing an **indirect constitutional basis for the Right to Work under Article 21**.

Why is the Right to Work Significant?

- **Human Dignity:** Employment provides economic independence and dignity.
- **Poverty Reduction:** Creates income security for vulnerable households.
- **Inclusive Growth:** Enables participation of rural, women and marginalised populations in the economy.
- **Social Justice:** Translates the welfare-state vision of the Constitution into practice.
- **Rural Resilience:** Employment guarantees can provide a safety net during agricultural distress and economic shocks.
- **Economic Stability:** Employment support can act as a counter-cyclical safety net during economic downturns.

Legislative Realization: MGNREGA to VB-GRAM G (Viksit Bharat- Guarantee for Rozgar & Ajeevika Mission (Gramin)) Act, 2025

- **MGNREGA Paradigm:** A major attempt to give statutory effect to the right to work by providing **up to 100 days of guaranteed wage employment** to rural households. Its demand-driven framework made employment a legal entitlement rather than merely a government scheme.
- **Emerging Concerns under VB-GRAM G:**
 - Possible **dilution of the demand-driven right-to-work framework**.
 - Greater fiscal burden on State governments.
 - Continuing concerns regarding **delayed wage payments, funding constraints, and quality of assets**.

Challenges to the Right to Work	Way Forward
• Non-Justiciability: Article 41, being part of the DPSP, is not directly enforceable by courts. • Fiscal Constraints: Universal employment guarantees impose substantial and recurring demands on public finances. • Informalization: A large majority of India's workforce remains outside formal employment and lacks adequate social security and wage protection. • Implementation Gap: Delayed payments, inadequate funding and insufficient availability of work can weaken statutory guarantees. • Skill-Job Mismatch: Lack of appropriate skills limits access to productive and remunerative employment.	• Strengthen Employment Guarantees: Ensure predictable funding, timely wage payments, transparency and effective social audits. • Urban Employment Guarantee: Explore an urban employment programme for vulnerable informal workers. • Skill and Asset Convergence: Link employment programmes with durable, climate-resilient assets and market-relevant skilling. • Productive Job Creation: Promote labour-intensive manufacturing, MSMEs and employment-intensive sectors such as healthcare and the care economy. • Progressive Realization: Strengthen the enforceability and implementation of socio-economic rights in line with India's evolving fiscal and institutional capacity.

SC Seeks Retirement Age Hike for District Judges to 62

Supreme Court (SC) has urged States to raise the retirement age of judicial officers from 60 to 62 years. So far, seven States have agreed to the proposal.

Need: To-

- **Reduce Judicial Vacancies and Case Pendency** amid persistent shortages in the subordinate judiciary.
- **Retain Experienced Judicial Talent** and improve the quality and efficiency of justice delivery.
- **Optimize Public Expenditure** by postponing retirement-related payouts & avoiding immediate replacement costs.
- **Strengthen Access to Justice** and judicial capacity.

Way Forward

- **Time-Bound Implementation:** of the proposal with appropriate service-rule amendments.
- **Ensure Merit-Based Extension:** through objective performance and integrity assessments.
- **Expedite Recruitment:** to bridge the gap between sanctioned and working strength.
- **Strengthen Court Infrastructure:** along with staff and digital case management systems.

- **Maintain a Balance:** between experienced judges and fresh recruitment to ensure long-term judicial capacity.

Ladakh Approves Nautor Regularisation Rules, 2026

The Ladakh Lieutenant Governor recently approved the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils (Nautor Regularisation) Rules, 2026, enabling proprietary rights over eligible barren land and resolving a long-pending land issue affecting thousands of landholders.

Significance:

- Provides **legal certainty and proprietary rights** to genuine landholders and enables productive use of barren land and access to **institutional credit**.
- Brings **transparency and uniformity** to land regularization and protects government/LAHDC land from **encroachment and disputed claims**.

Key Highlights of the Proposal

- **Retirement Age:** Proposed increase from **60 to 62 years**.
- **Suitability Assessment:** Extension beyond 60 will be **subjected to performance, competence and integrity assessment** by the concerned High Court.
- **Implementation:** Seven States (Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal) have been directed to amend service rules within two months.

Why are Other States Hesitant?

- **Financial Concerns:** Higher expenditure on salaries and retirement benefits.
 - **Parity Concerns:** Fear that employees in other State services may demand a similar increase in retirement age.
 - **Recruitment Concerns:** Longer tenure may reduce the openings for fresh judicial recruits.
- SC's View:** The Court termed these concerns **misconceived**, noting that retaining experienced judges can be economically beneficial by postponing retirement liabilities while addressing the shortage of judicial personnel.

What is Nautor Land? It is the **government-owned barren/wasteland** historically allotted to individuals for cultivation or productive use. Over **60,000 acres** are recorded as Nautor holdings in Ladakh.

Key Provisions of Ladakh Nautor Land Regularisation Rules, 2026:

- **Ownership:** Proprietary rights over up to **10 acres** of eligible Nautor land.
- **Beyond 10 acres:** May be granted on a **leasehold basis**.
- **Cut-off:** Only land occupied **before October 27, 2020** is eligible for one-time regularization.
- **Authority:** Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils (LAHDCs) in all seven districts will administer allotment.
- **Verification:** Mandatory for Gair Mustaqil (Occupant/cultivator with **limited or non-proprietary rights** over the land) holdings to verify possession, area, cultivation and date of occupation.
- **Exclusions:** Abandoned or encroached land will not qualify and may be subject to eviction.
- **Financial Utility:** Regularized land can be **mortgaged with banks/financial institutions** for development.
- **Safeguards:** Periodic review and audit; violations, unauthorized transfers or misrepresentation can lead to cancellation.

Financial Intelligence Unit- India

As part of compliance action against non-compliant entities, Financial Intelligence Unit-India (FIU-IND) has issued notices for non-compliance to 15 Virtual Digital Assets Service Providers (VDA SPs) under Section 13 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002(PMLA).

About FIU-IND:

FIU-IND was established in **2004** as India's central agency for receiving, analyzing and disseminating financial intelligence related to **money laundering, terrorist financing and other financial crimes**. It reports directly to the **Economic Intelligence Council (EIC)**, headed by the Finance Minister.

The **EIC** is the apex body for **coordinating economic intelligence and combating economic offences**. It facilitates **inter-agency coordination, intelligence sharing, policy/legal reforms, and response to emerging economic crimes**.

Key Functions of FIU-IND:

- **Collection of Information:** Receives financial reports like Cash Transaction reports (CTRs), Non-Profit Organization Transaction Report (NTRs), Cross Border Wire Transfer Reports (CBWTRs), Reports on Purchase or Sale of Immovable Property (IPRs) and Suspicious Transaction Reports (STRs) from reporting entities.

- **Analysis:** Detects **patterns, linkages and suspicious transactions** indicating money laundering or related offences.
- **Dissemination:** Shares financial intelligence with **law-enforcement, intelligence and regulatory agencies** in India and with foreign FIUs.
- **Central Repository:** Maintains a **national database of financial transaction information**.
- **Coordination:** Strengthens domestic and international cooperation against **money laundering and terror financing**.
- **Research:** Identifies emerging **money-laundering trends, typologies, and vulnerabilities**.

Institutional Structure: It is a **multi-disciplinary body** drawing personnel from agencies such as Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT), Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC), RBI, SEBI, Department of Legal Affairs and intelligence agencies.

Concerns Over Census 2027

The **Population Enumeration phase of Census 2027** introduces several new questions on **parents' details, nationality, permanent address, bank accounts, etc.** Their similarity with **National Population Register (NPR)-related data fields** has triggered concerns over privacy, data quality and the possible Census-NPR-National Register of Citizens (NRC) linkage.

The questionnaire for the population enumeration phase of the 2027 Census comprises 40 questions compared with 29 questions in the 2011 Census.

About Census: A **Census** is the systematic **collection, compilation, and analysis of population data**. India's first **synchronous Census was conducted in 1881** under **W.C. Plowden**; Census schedules broadly cover demographic and socio-economic details such as **age, sex, literacy, religion etc.**

How is Census Conducted? The **Census is a Union List subject**, governed by the **Census Act, 1948**, and conducted by the **Central Government** through the Census Commissioner, with State/local authorities providing enumerators. Since **1971**, it has been conducted in **two phases- House-listing & Housing Census** followed by **Population Enumeration**. The usual **reference date is 1 March** of the Census year.

Significance of Census 2027:

- **First post-Independence Census to enumerate caste beyond Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes.**
- Provides population data for **delimitation** after 2026.
- Forms the demographic basis for implementing **one-third reservation for women** in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.
- **2021 Census was postponed due to COVID-19**, making Census 2027 the first Census after 2011.

List of questions added in census 2027



Spouse's name



Nationality as declared



Father's particulars



Mother's particulars



SC/ST/Caste - the earlier SC/ST question has been expanded to include caste



Literacy and digital literacy status



Highest educational level attained and stream/discipline



Place of Covid-19 vaccination



Total number of bank accounts



Mobile number, if available



Aadhaar number, if available



Voter ID number, if available



Passport number, if the person is an Indian passport holder



Availability of driving licence

Concerns Raised	Government Response
• Privacy & Confidentiality: Collection of Aadhaar, mobile, Voter ID and other identifiers raise data-protection concerns. • Limited Statistical Utility: Several new details, such as vaccination location, have limited relevance for Census tabulation. • Census-NPR-NRC Linkage: Parents' details, nationality and place of birth resemble NPR data fields, prompting concerns about a possible indirect link to NRC. • Data Quality: A longer questionnaire may cause respondent fatigue, casual responses, and enumeration errors. • Enumerator Burden: Recording detailed personal information for every household member increases enumerator workload. • Migrant Undercounting: Advancing enumeration in four States (Goa, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and parts of Uttarakhand) could result in some migrant workers being missed at both their usual and native locations.	• Legal Distinction: Census and NPR are separate exercises, governed by different legal frameworks and serving different purposes. • Confidentiality Safeguard: Section 15 of the Census Act, 1948 protects individual Census records from inspection and restricts their use as evidence. • No Automatic Citizenship Use: Census data cannot simply be accessed by other agencies for citizenship determination. • Linkage Remains Unestablished: A direct Census-NRC linkage is not established; concerns regarding such linkage remain speculative.

Way Forward: Ensure **data minimization, strict purpose limitation, statutory confidentiality and transparent safeguards** so that additional information does not compromise the **accuracy, credibility and public trust** in the Census.

Regulation of RUPPs

Recently, a BBC News Hindi investigation found that **six Gujarat-based Registered Unrecognized Political Parties (RUPPs)** received around **₹1,700 crore in donations in 2023-24**, exceeding the **₹1,480 crore** received collectively by five nationally recognized parties, excluding the BJP.

What are Registered Political Parties? Under **Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951**, citizens can form political parties and register them with the **Election Commission (ECI)**. Parties that are registered but not recognized as **National or State parties** are called **Registered Unrecognized Political Parties (RUPPs)**.

Benefits:	Key Obligations:
• Tax exemption on eligible donations under Section 12 of the Income Tax Act, 2025. • Common symbol for Lok Sabha/State Assembly elections, subject to Election Commission of India (ECI) rules. • Up to 20-star campaigners (prominent leaders or public figures nominated by a political party to campaign across multiple constituencies during an election).	• Disclose details of donors contributing over ₹20,000 annually to the ECI. • Failure to furnish donation reports can lead to loss of tax exemption as per section 29C of the Representation of the People (RP) Act, 1951. • Donations exceeding ₹2,000 must be received through banking channels such as cheque or bank transfer.

Issues with RUPPs:

- **'Letter-Pad Parties':** Of 2,800+ RUPPs, only around **750 contested the 2024 Lok Sabha elections**, leaving many largely inactive.
- **Limited ECI Powers:** Under the **RP Act, 1951**, the ECI cannot ordinarily de-register parties for not contesting elections, failing to hold internal elections or not filing returns.

- The Supreme Court (SC) in *Indian National Congress v. Institute of Social Welfare (2002)* restricted de-registration to exceptional cases such as **fraudulent registration, loss of constitutional allegiance or declaration as unlawful**.
- **Poor Compliance and Transparency:** The Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR- an NGO) in its 2025 report on annual submissions by RUPPs stated that only **26% of RUPPs' annual reports (2022-23)** were publicly available, raising concerns over their potential misuse for **tax evasion and money laundering**.

Way Forward

- **Empower ECI:** Amend the RP Act to allow **de-registration of parties** that do not contest elections for a specified period, as recommended by the **Law Commission (255th Report)** and ECI.
- **Strengthen Monitoring:** Income Tax and enforcement agencies should **track financial transactions** of RUPPs and act against misuse.
- **Rationalize Tax Exemptions:** Instead of requiring electoral victory, introduce a **minimum vote-share threshold** for RUPPs to claim tax exemptions.
- **Improve Compliance:** Ensure timely filing of **annual reports and donation disclosures** through stronger enforcement and transparency mechanisms.

Minors' Online Accounts & Contractual Capacity

A **Supreme Court (SC) bench**, led by the Chief Justice of India, recently sought the Centre's response on a PIL by **Just Rights for Children Alliance** seeking safeguards against **independent social media access by minors**. The Court observed that some **"firewalls" are necessary to protect children**.

Core Issue: Under **Section 11 of the Indian Contract Act, 1872**, a minor (below 18) is **not competent to contract**. However, digital platforms often allow children, sometimes from **13 years**, to independently create accounts by accepting **Terms of Service, privacy policies, and community guidelines**. The PIL argues that **clicking "I agree" or continued use of a platform cannot confer contractual capacity on a minor**.

Legal Gap

- **Section 10A of the Information Technology Act, 2000** recognizes contracts formed through electronic means, it does not confer contractual competence on persons otherwise incapable of contracting under Section 11 of the Contract Act. The commonly used **13-year age threshold** on platforms is largely based on foreign standards rather than a specific Indian legal requirement.
- **Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023** requires **verifiable parental consent** for processing children's

Risks to Children:

Independent access to digital platforms can increase exposure to:

- Online grooming, trafficking and sexual exploitation
- Cyberbullying and harmful content
- Data exploitation and privacy violations
- Psychological and social harm associated with unrestricted social media use.

PIL's Proposed Framework:

The petition seeks a **"prevention by design" approach**, including:

- Verified age-assurance and age-gating mechanisms.
- Verified parental/guardian consent by amending IT Rules.
- Greater platform accountability
- Guardian-controlled accounts for minors
- Continued access to **lawful, educational and age-appropriate digital content**

Global Practices:

- **Australia:** Bans social-media accounts for **under-16s**, with significant penalties for platforms.
- **Malaysia & Indonesia:** Adopted restrictions on social-media access by **under-16s**, particularly targeting high-risk platforms.
- **UAE:** Restrictions apply to younger users, with stronger content controls for older minors.
- **US:** Platforms generally require **verifiable parental consent for users below 13**.
- **UK & Canada:** Have considered stronger restrictions for under-16s.

personal data but does not expressly prohibit minors from independently creating accounts or prescribe a uniform enrolment mechanism.

- **Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 (IT Rules)** do not adequately address **contractual capacity, age verification, or parental authentication**.

Way Forward: India needs a **risk-based and child-centric digital framework** combining **age assurance, verifiable parental consent, data minimization, platform accountability and privacy-by-design**, while ensuring that regulation does not unnecessarily restrict children's access to **education and beneficial digital services**.

Hindi Diwas

Hindi Diwas is observed annually on **14 September** to commemorate the Constituent Assembly's adoption of the **Munshi-Ayyangar formula in 1949** on the official language of the Union.

Constituent Assembly Debate: The language question was highly contentious, particularly over **replacing English** and determining the Union's official language.

- **R.V. Dhulekar** advocated Hindi/Hindustani, while non-Hindi-speaking representatives stressed **"unity in diversity."**
- **Nehru and Maulana Azad** recognized the practical difficulties of immediately replacing English.
- The debate also concerned **majority vs consensus**. While Hindi proponents favoured majority decision, others opposed imposing a language on linguistic minorities.
- **Rajendra Prasad** stressed that the decision should enjoy broad national acceptance.

What is Munshi-Ayyangar Formula? The compromise, associated with **K.M. Munshi and N. Gopalaswamy Ayyangar**, provided for:

- **Hindi in Devanagari script** as the **official language of the Union**.
- **English** to continue for official purposes for **15 years**.
- Recognition of other Indian languages through the **Eighth Schedule**.
- States to use a regional language or English for internal administration.
- **International form of Indian numerals** for official purposes.

These provisions were incorporated under **Articles 343-351 (Part XVII)** of the Constitution.

Why was English Continued? The 15-year transition was expected to end in **1965**, but Hindi had not become sufficiently widespread in Union administration. Concerns in non-Hindi-speaking regions, including **violent protests in the 1960s**, also opposed Hindi dominance. The **Official Languages Act, 1963** enabled the continued use of **English alongside Hindi** for official purposes, resulting in a bilingual Union-level framework.

Significance of Hindi Diwas

- Marks a major **constitutional compromise on language**.
- Highlights that Hindi is the **official language of the Union, not the national language**.
- Reflects the balance between **linguistic diversity and administrative unity**.
- Promotes Hindi through **official, educational, and literary activities**.

Indian Council of World Affairs

Recently, the Vice-President of India addressed the 25th Anniversary celebrations of Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA).

What is ICWA? It is a premier Indian think tank devoted to **research, dialogue and dissemination of knowledge on international relations and India's foreign policy**. It was established in **1943** by eminent intellectuals led by **Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and Dr. H. N. Kunzru**.

- **Legal Status:** Declared an **"institution of national importance"** by an Act of Parliament in **2001**.
- **President:** Vice President of India is the **ex-officio President** of ICWA.
- **Funding:** Funded by the **Ministry of External Affairs**, while enjoying autonomy.
- **Focus:** Develops an **Indian perspective on international relations and foreign policy**.

Major Functions:

- **Policy Dialogue:** Organizes conferences, seminars, lectures, roundtables, and bilateral dialogues.
- **Knowledge Dissemination:** Publishes books, research papers and *India Quarterly*.
- **International Cooperation:** Builds partnerships with global and Indian think tanks, universities and research institutions.
- **Foreign Policy Awareness:** Promotes awareness and scholarship among students, academics and researchers.
- **Knowledge Repository:** Acts as a **clearing house of information and knowledge on world affairs**.

National Dam Safety Authority

Recently, the National Dam Safety Authority (NDSA) has sought time-bound action in Jharkhand for comprehensive dam safety evaluation and rehabilitation of Category-II dams.

What is NDSA? Established in **2022** under the **Dam Safety Act, 2021**, NDSA is the **national-level authority for regulating and coordinating dam safety**, with the objective of preventing dam failures and protecting **lives, property, and the environment**.

Key Functions:

- **Standards & Regulation:** Frames guidelines, regulations, checklists and safety criteria for dams.
- **Monitoring:** Guides inspection, instrumentation, risk assessment and comprehensive safety evaluation.
- **Technical Support:** Assists **State Dam Safety Organizations (SDSOs)** and dam owners.
- **Data & Coordination:** Maintains national dam database
- **Dispute Resolution:** Resolves issues between **States, SDSOs and dam owners**.
- **Emergency Preparedness:** Guides **Emergency Action Plans (EAPs)** and early-warning systems.
- **Failure Investigation:** Examines major dam failures and recommends remedial measures.
- **Rehabilitation:** Coordinates dam rehabilitation programmes.

Structure: Headed by an officer **not below Additional Secretary rank**, with five functional Members: **Policy & Research, Technical, Regulation, Disaster & Resilience, and Administration & Finance**.

CBFC's New Film Certification Guidelines

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (I&B) recently notified new film certification guidelines for the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC- a statutory body under Ministry of I&B, regulating the public exhibition of films) under Section 5B(2) of the Cinematograph Act, 1952, superseding the 1991 notification.

Key Changes Introduced:

- **Mandatory Anti-Drug Warning:** Scenes depicting the **consumption, use or trafficking of narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances** must carry the statutory warning: *"Illicit Narcotics Destroy Health and Guarantees Imprisonment. Say No to Drugs."* Earlier guidelines only prohibited glorification of drug addiction.

- **Age-Specific UA Markers:** The revised guidelines formally incorporates age-based parental-guidance markers from the Cinematograph Rules, 2024 divided into 3 categories.
 - **U/A 7+:** parental guidance for children below 7
 - **U/A 13+:** parental guidance for children below 13
 - **U/A 16+:** parental guidance for children below 16

Where the Board considers it necessary to caution parents or guardians about whether their wards should watch a film, it will certify the film for unrestricted public exhibition with an endorsement (UA 7+", "UA 13+", "UA 16+" to that effect.
- **Other Provisions:** Films unsuitable for non-adults may be restricted to adults (A);
 - unrestricted (U) films should be suitable for **family viewing**;
 - films may be restricted to **specialized audiences (S)**;
 - and titles must not be **provocative, vulgar or offensive**.

Continuing Provisions from the 1991 Framework

- **Content Safeguards:** The guidelines continue restrictions on the **glorification of violence, crime, drinking, drug addiction and tobacco use**, as well as needless depiction of **child abuse, sexual violence, disability-related ridicule and animal cruelty**.
- They also prohibit content promoting **communal, obscurantist, anti-scientific or anti-national attitudes** and content threatening **public order, State security, sovereignty or friendly relations with foreign States**.
- The guidelines also require the CBFC to consider a film **as a whole**, taking into account its overall impact and the period, country and people depicted.
- The CBFC is tasked with scrutinizing film titles to ensure they are not provocative, vulgar, offensive, or violate any guidelines.

Concerns Raised

- **Certification vs Censorship:** The **Shyam Benegal Committee (2016)** recommended that CBFC function primarily as a certification body rather than dictate cuts. However, the revised guidelines retain similar language concerning societal values and "clean and healthy entertainment."
- **Subjectivity:** Broad terms such as "**values and standards of society**", "**vulgar**", "**offensive**", "**anti-national**" and "**obscurantist**" may allow subjective interpretation.
- **Creative Freedom:** Restrictions on violence, sexuality and social/political themes may create tension between **regulation and artistic expression**.
- **Regulatory Overlap:** CBFC certification continues alongside other laws concerning **tobacco, animal cruelty, representation of women, cable television and SC/ST protection**.

Court Deposits: SC Calls for a Uniform Legal Framework

The Supreme Court (SC) called for a **nationwide legislation to regulate money deposited by litigants in courts and tribunals during pending litigation**.

What is the Issue?

- **Absence of Uniform Mechanism for Court-Ordered Deposits:** Courts may require litigants to **deposit money as a condition for obtaining a stay** during an appeal. But there is **no uniform framework** governing the management of such court deposits.
- **Case-by-Case Management:** Different courts/tribunals independently decide:
 - Where the money should be deposited/invested?

- **Renewal:** How and when the deposit should be renewed?
- **Interest:** What interest rate should apply?
- **Accounting:** How interest should be calculated and accounted for?
- **Consequences:** Large sums remain invested in **different financial instruments at different interest rates**. This creates uncertainty and can lead to **further litigation over interest and accounting**. It also increases the **burden and pendency of courts/tribunals**.

SC's Key Observations:

- **Time Value of Money:** Inflation and economic uncertainty can erode the real value of deposited money.
- **Need for Standardization:** Uniform rules are required to ensure certainty in investment and interest accrual.
- **Reducing Pendency:** Repeated disputes over investment, renewal and interest add to the workload of courts and tribunals.
- **Protection of Litigants:** Deposited money should not be subject to ad-hoc management.

Proposed Solution: The Court suggested creating a **centralized/common platform** for court deposits, drawing from the U.S. model of the **Court Registry Investment System (CRIS)**. Under such a system:

- Deposits from courts can be **pooled into a unified mechanism**.
- Funds can be invested in secure and beneficial instruments.
- **Interest accrual, liquidity, and accounting** can be standardized.
- Courts would no longer need to repeatedly determine investment-related issues.

The Court requested the **Law Commission of India** to examine the issue and consider international practices. It also suggested consultation with the **RBI, Ministry of Finance, and Ministry of Law & Justice**.

Tulu Now Second 'Official Language' Of Karnataka

The Karnataka Cabinet recently granted Tulu **additional** official (administrative) language status. It will apply to administrative matters in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts.

Is the Karnataka Cabinet's Decision Enough to Grant Tulu- an Official Status?

- **Article 345:** Allows a State Legislature to adopt one or more languages as official languages **by law**.
- **Karnataka Official Language Act, 1963:** Currently specifies **Kannada as the official language**.
- **Legal Requirement:** To give Tulu formal administrative status, Karnataka may need to **amend the 1963 Act** to include Tulu for Dakshina Kannada and Udupi.

● Implementation:

Following legislative amendment and **Governor's assent**, the government can issue a notification to operationalize the decision.

- **Precedent:** **Andhra Pradesh and Telangana** amended their language laws before recognizing **Urdu as a second official language**.

About Tulu

- **Language Family:** Tulu is an ancient **Dravidian language** with a history of **over 2,000 years**.
- **Geographical Spread:** Mainly spoken in **Dakshina Kannada and Udupi (Karnataka)** and **northern Kerala**.
- **Historical Evidence:** Linguistic studies suggest its independent development around the **8th century BCE**. References to Tulu-speaking people are found in **Tamil Sangam literature**, while the 2nd-century BCE Greek papyrus (Charition) is also associated with Tulu.
- **Cultural Heritage:** It has a rich **oral tradition, folklore and cultural practices**, including **Yakshagana and Bhoota Kola**.
- **Script:** Tulu historically had its **own script**, but it is now predominantly written using the **Kannada script**.
- **Independent Language:** The **Census of India recognizes Tulu as a separate/independent language** and publishes speaker statistics for it. It is an important **non-Scheduled language (not included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution)**.
 - There are approximately **1.8–2 million native Tulu speakers**, though estimates vary due to migration.

Challenges in Implementation

- **Limited Knowledge of Tulu Script:** Most people are unfamiliar with the traditional Tulu script.
- **Dependence on Kannada Script:** Tulu writers have traditionally used the **Kannada script**, making a shift to Tulu script difficult.
- **Limited Formal Education:** Tulu is taught as a **third optional language in Classes 6-10** in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi but has limited presence beyond school level; Mangalore University's **Tulu PG programme (2018-19)** was discontinued in **2024-25 due to low enrolment**.
- **Capacity Constraints:** Government departments may need **trained translators, teachers and officials** proficient in Tulu.
- **Infrastructure Needs:** Translation of official documents, development of terminology and preparation of Tulu-language resources will require **time and institutional support**.

Why Was the Demand for Tulu Recognition Raised?

- **Long-Standing Demand:** Tulu-speaking communities have sought greater **official recognition** for decades.
- **Cultural Significance:** Despite its rich heritage and **large speaker base**, Tulu lacked status comparable to languages such as Konkani and Kodava.
- **States Reorganization, 1956:** Tulu speakers argue that they were **not given a separate linguistic State** during the reorganization of States.
- **Political Advocacy:** Legislators from coastal Karnataka have repeatedly raised the issue in the **State Legislature**.
- **Public Mobilization:** Sustained **social media campaigns** have also pushed for greater recognition

What Does Official Language Status Mean in Practice?

- **Administrative Use:** Tulu can be used in **local governance**, including Gram Sabha, Panchayat and urban local-body meetings. **Government circulars/orders** in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi can include Tulu alongside Kannada.
- **Public Services:** Citizens can use Tulu in dealings with government departments.
- **Education & Signage:** It can facilitate greater use of Tulu in **education, public signage and cultural programmes**.
- **Cultural Preservation:** Promotes the **visibility and preservation** of Tulu

SC on Vande Mataram and Conscientious Objection

The Supreme Court (SC) while hearing a petition challenging the 2026 amendment to the *Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971* and Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) directions on *Vande Mataram*, **observed** that while the elected government can determine the **scope, form and protocol of the National Song**, it cannot subject **conscientious objectors** to criminal penalties for refusing to sing it.

Constitutional Provisions Involved

- **Article 19(1)(a): Freedom of Speech and Expression.**
- **Article 25 (Freedom of Conscience):** Protects **freedom of conscience** and the right to freely profess, practice and propagate religion, subject to constitutional limitations.
- **Article 26 (Freedom to Manage Religious Affairs):** Protects religious denominations' right to manage their religious affairs, subject to **public order, morality and health**.
- **** Note: Article 51A(a):** A fundamental duty which requires citizens to respect the Constitution, its ideals and institutions, the **National Flag and National Anthem**. Notably, it does not expressly mention the National Song.

Core Issues & Legal Dispute:

- **Ambiguity in Scope & Form:** The amended law does not clearly define what constitutes the **National Song**. It raises the question whether the **entire six-stanza version** of *Vande Mataram* or traditionally recognized portions constitute the prescribed version.
- **Religious Imagery & Compelled Rendition of All Six Stanzas:** MHA directions requiring full rendition raise concerns because the later stanzas contain **devotional and religious imagery**.
- **Scope of Criminalization:** Section 3 of the amended 1971 Act prescribes up to **three years' imprisonment, fine, or both** for intentionally preventing the singing of the National Anthem/National Song or causing disturbance to

an assembly engaged in singing it. The issue is whether this provision can be used to **penalize a person who respectfully refuses to sing** on grounds of conscience or religion.

Way Forward

- **Balancing Patriotism and Pluralism:** National integration is fostered through voluntary reverence rather than state-enforced compliance.
- **Harmonious Construction:** Statutory amendments must strike a balance between promoting Constitutional Patriotism and safeguarding fundamental freedoms under Part III of the Constitution.

SC's Key Observations

- **State's Authority:** The democratically elected government can determine the **scope and protocol of the National Song**, including the number of stanzas to be prescribed.
- **Protection of Conscientious Objectors:** A person who **respectfully refrains from singing** on grounds of conscience or religious belief should not be subjected to criminal prosecution merely for such non-participation.
- **Bijoe Emmanuel Precedent (1986):** The Court relied on *Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala, 1986* where school students who **stood respectfully but did not sing the National Anthem** were protected against State action on grounds of freedom of conscience and religious belief.
- **Refusal ≠ Disruption:**
 - **Respectful Non-Participation** constitutionally protected.
 - **Active Disruption/Preventing Others from Singing** may attract valid penal restrictions.
- **Fundamental Rights as Limits on State Power:** The State's authority to regulate national honour remains **subject to Fundamental Rights**, particularly freedom of conscience and religious liberty.

Road Accident Compensation in India

India has the world's largest road network (~6.7 million km) but also faces exceptionally high road fatalities. According to the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways' Road Accidents in India 2024 report, 4.87 lakh road accidents caused 1.77 lakh deaths and 4.71 lakh injuries imposing a major socio-economic burden, estimated at around 3.14% of GDP, particularly on families of victims.

Related Legal Framework

The **Motor Vehicles (MV) Act, 1988** is the primary law governing motor-accident compensation, covering **liability, insurance, claims and compensation**.

- **Section 165:** Provides for **Motor Accident Claims Tribunals (MACTs)** to adjudicate accident-compensation claims.
- **Section 166:** Claims can be filed by the **injured person, property owner or legal representatives of the deceased** or any duly authorized agent.
- **Section 168:** MACT determines **"just compensation"** and the party liable to pay.
- **Section 173:** Provides an appeal to the **High Court within 90 days**, subject to the prescribed deposit requirement.
- MACT considers evidence such as **FIR, chargesheet,**

Who is Liable to Pay Compensation?

- **Negligent Driver:** Primary liability. | **Vehicle Owner:** Vicariously liable for the driver's negligence.
- **Insurer:** Generally satisfies third-party compensation under **Section 150**, as third-party insurance is mandatory under **Section 146 of MV Act**.
- **Limited Insurer Defences:** Policy breach, unauthorized use, invalid licence, misrepresentation, etc.
- **"Pay and Recover" Principle:** Insurer pays the victim first and may later recover the amount from the owner/driver.
- **No-Fault Liability:** Compensation can be claimed **without proving negligence**- ₹5 lakh for death and ₹2.5 lakh for grievous hurt.

Judicial Evolution: The Supreme Court, through **Sarla Verma (2009)** and **Pranay Sethi (2017)**, standardized the assessment of **"just compensation"**, including loss of dependency, future prospects, funeral expenses and loss of estate. Recent jurisprudence has also increasingly recognised the **economic value of unpaid household and caregiving work**, strengthening a **gender-sensitive and victim-centric approach to compensation**.

Related Key Concerns:

- **Delayed Compensation:** Prolonged MACT proceedings and appeals can delay relief to victims and dependants.
- **Proof-Related Difficulties:** Establishing income, dependency and future earning capacity is particularly difficult for **informal-sector workers and homemakers**.
- **Uneven Compensation:** Variation in assessment across tribunals can affect consistency and predictability.

Way Forward:

- Strengthen **road engineering, enforcement and driver training under a Safe System approach**.
- Improve **ambulance and trauma-care infrastructure** for timely post-crash care.
- Ensure **faster MACT disposal, simplified claims procedures and better legal aid**.
- Strengthen insurance coverage and awareness so that victims receive **timely and adequate compensation**.

medical/post-mortem records, site plan, insurance documents and witness statements.

Criminal Case vs MACT Claim

An accident can result in both criminal proceedings for negligent driving and a separate compensation claim. An **acquittal in the criminal case does not automatically defeat the MACT claim**, as the two proceedings have different objectives and **standards of proof**.

Should Voting Be A Fundamental Right?

Recent concerns over electoral-roll deletions and internal differences within the Election Commission of India (ECI) have renewed debate on the right to vote and the integrity of India's electoral process.

What is Meant by Right to Vote?

The **right to vote (right to elect)** enables citizens to participate in choosing their representatives and, indirectly, shape the government. It is central to **representative democracy**, political equality and the principle of **"one person, one vote."**

Related Constitutional & Statutory Framework:

- **Article 324:** Vests the Election Commission of India (ECI) with superintendence, direction and control over elections.
- **Article 325:** Ensures a common electoral roll and prohibits exclusion on grounds of religion, race, caste or sex.
- **Article 326:** Provides for **adult suffrage** subject to lawful disqualifications.
- **Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1950:** Governs preparation and revision of electoral rolls.
- **RPA, 1951:** Regulates elections and the exercise of voting rights (**Section 62**).

What is the Legal Status of the Right to Vote?

- **Not a Fundamental Right:**

The Constituent Assembly **did not include the right to vote under Fundamental Rights**, despite proposals by B.R. Ambedkar and K.T. Shah. Therefore, it **cannot be directly enforced as a Fundamental Right**.

- **Statutory Right:** In *Kuldip Nayar v. Union of India (2006)*, a 5-judge Constitution Bench held that the **"right to elect"** is a statutory right under **Section 62 of the RPA, 1951**. This remains the prevailing position.

- **Judicial Debate:** While a 2-judge bench in *Rajbala v. State of Haryana (2015)* described it as a constitutional right, the larger bench ruling in *Kuldip*

Arguments for Stronger Legal Protection	Key Challenges in Practice
• Democratic Foundation: Voting is the primary mechanism of democratic accountability; restricting or losing it undermines popular sovereignty. • Protection Against Arbitrary Deletion: Stronger constitutional status could subject voter-deletion decisions to greater judicial scrutiny and procedural safeguards against wrongful voter disenfranchisement. • Mitigating Technological Exclusion: As electoral administration transitions to digital systems (e.g., ECINet), constitutional safeguards ensure software algorithms cannot silently disenfranchise voters without due process.	• Electoral-Roll Discrepancies: Omissions, duplicate entries, and bulk deletions without prior verification lead to disenfranchisement. • Procedural Failures: Inadequate notice to affected voters and delayed restoration mechanisms render the right effective in theory but inaccessible in practice. • Technological Risks: Systemic software failures can create difficulties in correcting erroneous deletions (e.g., 97 eligible voters from Goa were excluded from the electoral roll after the centralized ECINet software prevented ground-level Electoral Registration Officers (ERO) from reversing decisions).

Way Forward

- **Mandatory Due Process:** Mandate strict statutory notice and an opportunity to be heard before removing any name from electoral rolls.
- **Fast-Track Grievance Redressal:** Establish accessible, time-bound appeal processes to restore wrongfully deleted voters before polling days.
- **Independent Audits & Human-in-the-Loop:** Require third-party security/algorithmic audits of ECI software alongside mandatory human verification before final roll publications.
- **Institutional Transparency:** Strengthen collective decision-making within the ECI to reinforce public confidence in electoral administration.
- **Judicial Reconsideration:** Re-examine whether the right to vote should be explicitly recognized as a constitutional/fundamental right integral to Articles 19(1)(a) and 21.

Nayar prevails. In **Anoop Baranwal (2023)** the court **did not reopen the issue and relied on the settled position** in *Kuldip Nayar* case. However, in his dissent, Justice Ajay Rastogi asserted that the ‘right to vote’ is an expression of Article 19(1)(a) and reflects the essence of Article 21.

SC Takes Suo Motu Cognizance of Delhi-NCR Sexual Assault Cases

The Supreme Court’s (SC’s) Suo Motu cognizance of recent sexual assault cases in Delhi-NCR highlights that women and children’s safety is not merely a law-and-order issue but a constitutional, institutional and governance challenge. The Court linked safe public spaces with the Right to Life and Personal Liberty under Article 21 and directed preventive as well as judicial reforms.


Related Data

- **29,536 rape cases** were reported in India in **2024**.
- Around **2.06 lakh rape cases** were in the trial pool at the end of 2024.
- Nearly **90%** of cases in the trial pool remained pending.
- India recorded roughly **86 reported rape cases per day** on average in recent years.

Issues Highlighted by the SC & Key Directions

Issues Highlighted by SC	Key Directions
• Unsafe Public Spaces: Parks, roads, buses, Metro stations and other public places becoming “zones of high risk” due to inadequate safety measures. • Preventive Policing Deficit: Inadequate patrolling and failure to identify recurring crime patterns. • Poor Safety Infrastructure: Inadequate lighting, CCTV blind spots and non-functional surveillance systems. • Weak Data-Driven Policing: Information may remain confined to individual police-station jurisdictions. • Weak Offender Monitoring: Need for better identification of habitual/repeat sexual offenders. • Investigation Delays: Concerns over compliance with statutory timelines for sexual-offence investigations and trials • Judicial Pendency: Large backlog and slow disposal of sexual-offence cases despite special legal provisions. • Lack of Institutional Accountability: Expressions of concern without fixing responsibility do not address systemic failures. • Victim-Centric Justice Deficit: Sensationalist media reporting can cause secondary victimization, prolong trauma and undermine timely justice. • Implementation Gap: Despite stronger laws and institutions after the 2012 Nirbhaya case, gaps in policing, investigation, forensics and judicial disposal persist.	• Vulnerability mapping of parks, markets, transport hubs, educational areas and other high-risk locations. • Enhanced patrolling, mobile check-posts and vehicular inspections, particularly during vulnerable hours. • Audit and upgrade lighting & CCTV; repair non-functional systems and eliminate blind spots. • Use NCRB data, complaints, local intelligence and past incidents to prepare district-wise vulnerability maps and share them across adjoining police stations. • Effective use of the National Database on Sexual Offenders to verify antecedents and identify repeat offenders. • Review the Investigation Tracking System for Sexual Offences and fix responsibility for delays. • Strengthen Fast Track Special Courts and exclusive POCSO courts and seek expeditious disposal, preferably within one year of trial commencement. • Ensure measurable outcomes, periodic monitoring and accountability of authorities responsible for public safety. • Promote responsible, empathetic and restrained media reporting and provide public information on emergency assistance.

Constitutional Dimension:

- **Article 21:** Right to life includes the right to live with **dignity and security**.
- **Article 14:** Ensures equal protection of law.
- **Article 15(3):** Permits special provisions for women and children.
- **Article 39(e):** Directs the State to protect women and children from exploitation and ensure their healthy development.

High-Level Committee on Demographic Changes (HLCDC)

State governments are unable to answer most of the queries posed by the **High-Level Committee on Demographic Changes (HLCDC)**- constituted by **Ministry of Home Affairs** under retired Supreme Court (SC) judge **Justice Prakash Prabhakar Naolekar**. The Committee has been tasked with examining **demographic changes arising from illegal immigration and other abnormal factors** and suggesting measures to address them.

What has the Committee Sought? The Committee has asked States/UTs for **15 years of district-wise and religion-wise data** covering five broad areas:

- **Demographic Trends:**
 - Birth registrations, school enrolment and changes in religious composition.
 - Trends in **border, urban, tribal and Fifth/Sixth Schedule areas**.
 - Religious structures and institutions- including details of any GIS mapping or other technology used for their identification.
- **Illegal Immigration:**
 - Identification, detention and deportation of undocumented migrants.
 - Forged documents and links with **organised crime, trafficking and narcotics**.
 - Detention centres and mechanisms for identifying illegal migrants.
 - Unusual increases in **Aadhaar, voter IDs and ration cards**.
- **Administrative Indicators:**
 - Vehicle registrations and licences.
 - Property transactions, land acquisition and demographic clustering.
 - Tribal land transfers and encroachments.
- **Religious & Tribal Issues:**
 - Changes in the religious composition of **Scheduled Tribes**.
 - Studies/intelligence assessments on **religious conversions among tribal communities**.
 - Religious educational institutions, including **madrasas**.
- **Government Response:**
 - Information about policy directives, executive orders or amendments to land and municipal laws state governments have introduced over the past 15 years to curb unauthorised migration and settlement.
 - Existing studies, intelligence assessments and commission reports.
 - Suggestions for stronger surveillance or new legislation.

Why are States Unable to Provide the Data?

Most government departments **do not routinely maintain administrative data on a religion-wise basis**. Therefore, apart from areas such as **birth registration and undocumented migrants**, States largely lack the religion-wise data sought by the Committee.

Key Concern:

The exercise raises questions about the **collection and use of religion-wise administrative data** in a **secular constitutional framework**, while also highlighting the challenge of balancing **national security and demographic monitoring with privacy, non-discrimination and data governance**.

Why does this data matter?

- **Evidence-Based Policy:** Reliable demographic data can help distinguish genuine demographic trends from perceptions or misinformation.
- **National Security:** Better identification of illegal migration and forged identities can strengthen border and internal security.
- **Targeted Governance:** Helps address land encroachment, trafficking, document fraud and pressure on public services.

Way Forward

- **Evidence-Based Assessment:** Base conclusions on verified demographic, migration and socio-economic indicators rather than religious identity alone.
- **Data Safeguards:** Ensure **purpose limitation, anonymization/aggregation, restricted access and independent oversight** for sensitive religion-wise data.
- **Standardized Data Systems:** Develop uniform definitions and interoperable databases for migration, identity documents, land and demographic indicators.
- **Independent Verification:** Cross-check unusual demographic trends through **Census, civil registration, electoral and migration data** before drawing conclusions.
- **Constitutional Safeguards:** Ensure that measures against illegal migration target **illegal status and unlawful conduct**, not any particular religious community.
- **Periodic Review & Transparency:** Publish non-sensitive findings and methodology to promote **public trust and accountability**.

TMC Symbol Row

The **Supreme Court (SC)** recently directed the **Election Commission of India (ECI)** to resolve the **leadership dispute between Mamata Banerjee and rival leader Ritabrata Banerjee** for within **3 months**.

Background:

- A **split in the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC)** led to rival claims over the party's **name and 'flowers and grass' symbol**, ahead of the **Nandigram and Rejinagar bypolls**.
- The ECI, under **Para 15 of the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968**, **froze the original party name and symbol** and allotted **alternative names and symbols** to the rival factions.
- This was intended to ensure a **level playing field**, prevent **voter confusion** and avoid either faction gaining an electoral advantage.
- **Mamata Banerjee challenged** the interim order in the SC. The SC **declined to stay the freeze** and directed the ECI to decide the dispute **within 3 months after completion of pleadings**.

How Does the ECI Decide Who Gets the Original Symbol?

Under **Para 15 of the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968**, the ECI:

- Determines whether rival groups are claiming the identity of the **same recognized political party**.
- Gives both sides an opportunity to submit **pleadings, documents and evidence**.

- Examines the **support enjoyed by each faction**, including **organizational strength** and support among **elected MPs/MLAs**.
- May recognize **one faction, or neither faction**, as the original party; its decision is **binding on the rival groups**, subject to judicial review.

Is Majority the Only Test? No.

The ECI considers **organisational and legislative support**; the relative strength of elected representatives becomes particularly relevant where organisational strength is difficult to establish.

What Happens to the Losing Faction?

Following the **1997 amendment** to the Symbols Order, the faction that does not retain the original party identity and symbol is generally required to **register as a separate political party** and establish its electoral identity independently.

Previous Examples

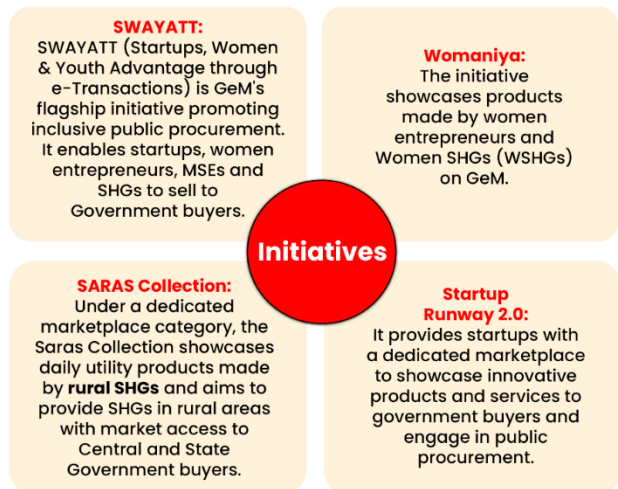
- **Shiv Sena**: Name and **'bow and arrow'** symbol frozen as an interim measure before final adjudication.
- **NCP**: Original party name and **'clock'** symbol awarded to the **Ajit Pawar faction**.
- **AIADMK**: Earlier dispute over the party's **'two leaves'** symbol.

Constitutional Basis

Article 324 gives the ECI broad powers of superintendence, direction and control over elections; **Para 15 of the Symbols Order** specifically provides the mechanism for resolving rival claims to a recognized party's identity and symbol.

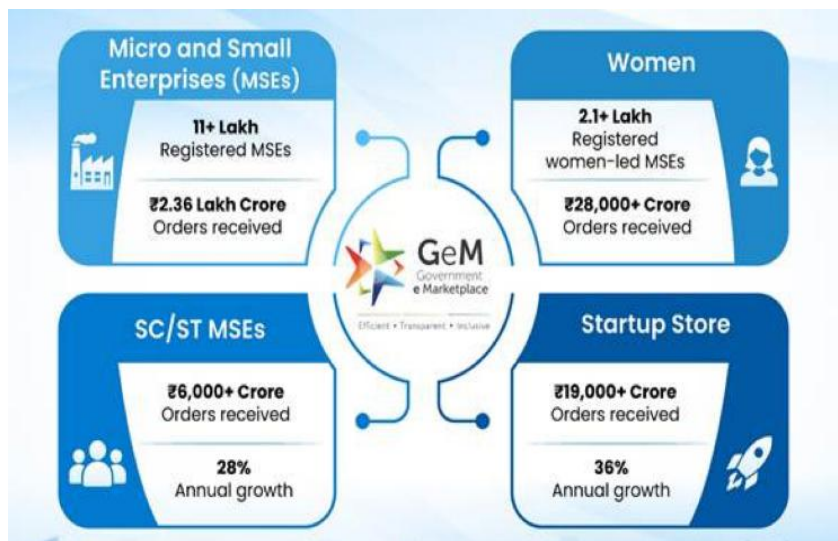
10 Years of GeM

- The Government e-Marketplace (GeM) has completed 10 years of operations as a unified, end-to-end digital platform for government procurement.
- Every year, governments procure goods and services worth thousands of crores across diverse sectors.
- GeM digitises the complete procurement lifecycle- from seller registration and product listing to bidding, contract award, order fulfilment and payment.
- It enables government buyers to procure goods and services through a **secure, paperless, cashless, and contactless ecosystem**.
- It serves a wide range of government buyers, including Central and State Ministries, Departments, PSUs, Autonomous Bodies, local bodies, Panchayats, and Cooperatives.
- Buyers can procure through direct purchase, comparison, electronic bidding, and reverse auctions, depending on their requirements.
- The platform deploys Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) tools to identify suspected cartelization, collusion, and order splitting.
- To strengthen inclusive participation, GeM has introduced dedicated initiatives including **SWAYATT**, **Startup Runway 2.0**, **Womaniya** and the **SARAS Collection**.
- These initiatives improve market access for startups, women entrepreneurs, Self Help Groups (SHGs), artisans and other underserved communities.



Partnerships

- GeM has developed strategic partnerships with government institutions, financial organizations, industry bodies and international agencies to make public procurement more innovative, transparent and inclusive.
- **Innovation:** In 2025, GeM partnered with the **Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre (IN-SPACe)** for space-tech and **Drone Federation India (DFI)** for drone procurement.
- **Finance:** Under the **GeMSahay** initiative, the partnership with **Union Bank of India** improves access to collateral-free working capital for registered sellers and service providers.
 - **GeM Sahay** is a mobile app that enables eligible proprietorship sellers on GeM to access instant, collateral-free working capital loans.
 - It enables quick, paperless financing without requiring



buyer consent, helping sellers fulfil government orders seamlessly.

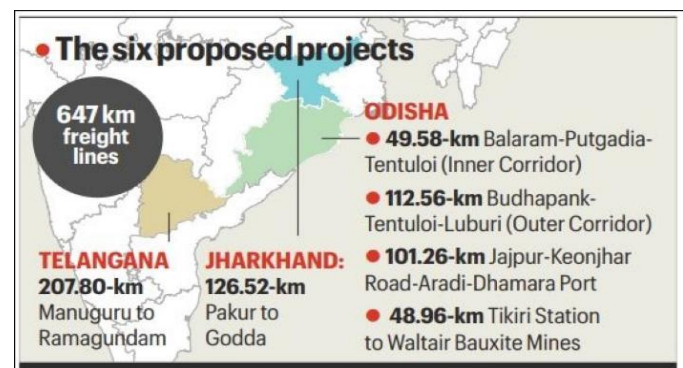
- **Capacity Building:** MoUs with **Arun Jaitley National Institute of Financial Management (AJNIFM)**, **CareEdge Ratings**, **National Centre for Goods Governance (NCGG)** and **Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA)** support research, training, knowledge exchange and policy development in public procurement.
- **Compliance:** Integration with **Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO)** to enhance transparency and strengthen compliance of the Acts in manpower outsourcing services.
- **Inclusion:** The partnership with **UN Women** promotes women-led enterprises through the **Womaniya** initiative, encouraging gender-responsive and inclusive public procurement.
- To strengthen last-mile access, GeM has partnered with Common Service Centre e-Governance Services India Limited (CSC-SPV) recently. Under it, 50 GeM Suvidha Kendras will be established on a pilot basis across select States and UTs.
 - **GeM Suvidha Kendras** provide awareness, seller registration, vendor assessment, catalogue creation, capacity building and grievance redressal, along with local handholding.
 - They aim to enhance the participation of MSEs, women and SC/ST entrepreneurs, startups, artisans, weavers, SHGs and local manufacturers in government procurement.

IMPACT

- After a decade of operations, GeM's cumulative **Gross Merchandise Value (GMV)** exceeded **Rs 20 lakh crore** through more than 3.78 crore orders.
- The platform's annual GMV has grown from Rs 422 crore in FY 2016–17 to over Rs 5 lakh crore in each of FY 2024–25 and FY 2025–26.
- Participation on the platform has expanded significantly over the past decade. The number of **sellers** has increased from **3,339 to 25.45 lakh**, while primary **buyer** organisations have grown from **1,707 to 1.37 lakh**.
- The number of **MSEs registered** on the platform has increased from **2,424 to 12.25 lakh**.
- MSEs have fulfilled orders worth more than Rs 9.07 lakh crore, accounting for **45.6% of the cumulative GMV**.
- More than 2.24 lakh women-led MSEs have fulfilled over 50 lakh orders valued at more than Rs 99,147 crore, while 42,242 startups have secured orders worth over Rs 65,633 crore.
- An IIT Delhi study covering FY 2023–24 to FY 2025–26 estimated a monetised benefit of Rs 86,571.69 crore through price and process efficiencies, resulting in a net social saving of Rs 1,76,411.46 crore.
- Digital records, real-time monitoring, and automated workflows improve transparency, accountability while reducing discretionary decision-making.
- It also generates a rich transactional data trail that enables policymakers to monitor public procurement spending, identify inefficiencies, and design evidence-based policy interventions.
- The platform has become an important pillar of India's Digital Procurement Ecosystem supporting Digital India, Make in India, Atmanirbhar Bharat, Vocal for Local and Ease of Doing Business.

Hybrid Annuity Model in Railways

- The Public Private Partnership Appraisal Committee (PPPAC) under the Ministry of Finance, has approved six railway lines along freight corridors, to be developed under the Hybrid Annuity Model (HAM), similar to the model used in the highways sector.
- This will be the first time the Indian Railways is implementing a project under HAM, a variant of Public Private Partnership (PPP).



- Of the six proposed railway projects, four are in **Odisha and one each in Telangana and Jharkhand**.
- The total bid project cost of six lines is **Rs 15,976 crore** and the total capital cost covering the entire concession period (which is 17-19 years) is Rs 40,866 crore.
- The key commodities on these routes are primarily coal, along with iron ore, bauxite, coke, chemical manure, cement, and food grains.
- Apart from these six projects, there are 49 other projects in the pipeline for execution under PPP mode. The total cost of these projects is around Rs 1.80 lakh crore.

Rise in Food Price Index

- The benchmark for world food commodity prices, i.e. the FAO Food Price Index (FPI), rose in August to 133.3 points.
- This is the **highest score since November 2022**, though nearly 17% below a **record peak in March 2022**, after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.
- The FAO's price benchmarks for cereals, vegetable oils, sugar, meat and dairy all rose in August.
- **Extreme heat and drought in Europe**, the threat of a **severe El Nino** weather pattern and **trade disruption** caused by the **Ukraine and Iran wars**

Hybrid Annuity Model (HAM)

- The Hybrid Annuity Model is a mix of **Engineering, Procurement, and Construction (EPC)** and the **Build, Operate, and Transfer (BOT)** models.
- **Indian Railways will pay 40% of the bid project cost** as grant during the construction period and the **private party will finance the remaining 60%** of the cost.
- Once the line becomes operational, Indian Railways will pay back the remaining 60% through annuity or instalments, plus interest on annuity.
- Apart from this, it will also make regular payments to the concessionaire for maintenance of stations, tracks and other assets.
- Railways will operate trains and collect all freight revenue. It will also bear traffic and tariff risks – which means that if freight-loading or revenue is lower than what's targeted, the private party will not be penalised.



Significance

- The adoption of HAM seeks to overcome financial bottlenecks and mobilise long-term private capital for railway infrastructure.
- It can help address the large capital requirements of railway expansion, accelerate freight connectivity, and reduce the immediate financial burden on the government.
- At the same time, the government assumes substantial long-term payment obligations through annuities, making careful project appraisal, risk allocation and contract management important.



Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) Model

- A BOT contract is a model used to finance large projects; typically infrastructure projects developed through PPP.
- Under it, a private player is granted a contract to finance, build and operate a project for a specified period (20- or 30-year concession period).
- During this period, the developer can recover its investments through user charges or tolls charged from customers using the facility.
- After the said period, the project is returned to the government or the relevant authority. Thus, there is an element of financial risk on the part of the developer to invest through the BOT model

Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) Model

- EPC is a PPP model for the development of infrastructure projects, especially highways. Under it, the **government bears the entire cost of the project**.
- The government invites bids for engineering knowledge from private players. The private sector's participation is minimum and is limited to the provision of engineering expertise.
- Procurement of raw materials and construction costs is met by the government.
- Although the contractor is completely insulated from the financial risk, the difficulty of the model is the high financial burden for the government.

UN food price index at highest since 2022 on supply risks



Source: UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). 2014-2016=100.

have unsettled agricultural markets, pushing **grain prices to three-year highs** and **sugar to a one-year peak**.

Global Cereal Output

- In a separate report, the agency cut its 2026 global cereal production forecast by 3.4 million metric tons to 2.980 billion tons, 2% below 2025 in the largest annual decline since 2018.
- However, projected output would still be the second largest on record.

FAO Food Price Index

- The FAO Food Price Index is a measure of the monthly change in international prices of food commodities.
- It measures changes for a basket of five commodity groups cereals, vegetable oil, dairy products, meat and sugar.
- The base period for calculation is: 2014–16

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

- Founded in 1945, FAO is a specialized agency of the United Nations, that leads international efforts to defeat hunger and improve nutrition and food security.
- Headquartered in Rome, it helps governments and development agencies coordinate their activities to improve and develop agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and land and water resources.
- It also conducts research, provides technical assistance to projects, operates educational and training programs, and collects data on agricultural output, production, and development.

India Deep Tech Alliance

- The India Deep Tech Alliance (IDTA)'s members, invested Rs 2,170 crore in 56 deep-tech firms in India over the last 12 months.
- The investments covered strategic technology areas including artificial intelligence, quantum computing, space technology, robotics, energy, biotechnology and the digital economy.
- IDTA is an **industry-led consortium of Indian and global investors** formed in September 2025 to build **India-domiciled deep-tech companies**.
- It aims to address the capital, technology, mentorship, market-access and ecosystem challenges faced by deep-tech startups, whose development cycles are often longer and more capital-intensive than those of conventional startups.
- It seeks to strengthen India's deep-tech entrepreneurship ecosystem and complement the government's **Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) Scheme**.
- It was launched with more than \$1 billion in private-capital commitments, with members intending to deploy capital over a 5–10 year period.
- It is **not a government programme and does not operate a common pooled fund**; individual members retain autonomy over their investment decisions and deploy capital from their own funds.
- The Alliance brings together venture-capital firms, corporate investors and technology companies.
- Members commit to share pipeline, conduct technical diligence, co-invest, and use a unified channel to engage on the RDI Scheme—while preserving independence.

Digital India Land Records Modernization Programme 3.0

- The Department of Land Resources (DoLR), Ministry of Rural Development has launched the Operational Guidelines for the Digital India Land Records Modernization Programme (DILRMP) 3.0.
- DILRMP 3.0 builds on the success of earlier phases that achieved near-complete computerization of land records across the country.
- It will roll out as a **Central Sector Scheme** with an **financial outlay of Rs. 565.50 crore**.
- DoLR will implement this **five-year roadmap (2026–2031)** across all States and UTs.

- It shifts the focus from simple digital record-keeping to establishing a comprehensive, **GIS-enabled Land Stack**.
- This Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) will seamlessly integrate maps, land ownership details, property registration, and court cases into a single interoperable ecosystem.
- To ensure funds translate into real-world benefits, the Ministry will monitor real-time progress facilitated by an upgraded **DILRMP-MIS dashboard**.

Impact

- By promoting API-based secure integration, the program aims to eliminate the need for citizens to make repeated physical visits to government offices, leading to proactive and reliable citizen-centric services.
- It will lead to building a trusted, integrated, and future-ready Land Information Ecosystem making land governance more transparent, accessible, and citizen-friendly.
- These measures will cumulatively facilitate **Ease of Living and Ease of Doing Business**.

Key Interventions

1 Universal Bhu-Aadhaar (ULPIN)

A framework to assign a **14-digit unique identification number to every land parcel** in the country, ensuring secure and unmistakable identity for all properties.

2 Digitisation of Maps and Georeferencing

Complete digitization of cadastral maps embedded with exact geographical coordinates.

3 Paperless Property Registration

Introduction of end-to-end online, paperless registration and a new Registration Repository.

- The Ministry also plans to upgrade 75 Sub-Registrar Offices (SROs) into modern 'Registration Seva Kendras' with an outlay of Rs.37.5 Crore.

4 Integrated Revenue Courts

A modern, paperless Revenue Courts Case Management System (RCCMS) integrated directly with land records to track disputes and cut down the time and cost of legal battles.

4 NAKSHA pilot

Completion of National Geospatial Knowledge-based Land Survey of Urban Habitations (NAKSHA) pilot for urban areas.

o NAKSHA is a **GIS-based urban land parcel mapping initiative** designed to enhance town planning, modernize land administration, and optimize public utility layouts across multiple states and UTs.

Livestock Insurance Portal

The Department of Animal Husbandry & Dairying (DAHD), has launched the Livestock Insurance Portal, marking an important milestone in the digital transformation of livestock insurance services in the country.

Details of the Portal

- It is a comprehensive digital platform aimed at transforming livestock insurance delivery across the country under the Livestock Insurance activity of National Livestock Mission (NLM).
- The portal provides an **end-to-end digital ecosystem** for policy issuance, premium management, claim processing, beneficiary verification, and real-time monitoring.
- It brings together farmers, State Governments, Insurance Companies and implementing agencies on a single transparent and technology-enabled interface.
- To promote wider accessibility and ease of use, the portal will be available in **11 regional languages** apart from Hindi and English.

Impact

- The Portal is expected to:
 - Strengthen data-driven decision-making for effective scheme implementation;
 - Simplify and expedite livestock insurance enrolment;
 - Improve accessibility & ease of doing business for farmers & insurance providers;
 - Enhance transparency and accountability in claim settlement;
 - Enable real-time tracking and monitoring of policies;

- Strengthen risk protection for livestock farmers and support the sustainability of their livelihoods.

Integrated Fertilizer Management System

- The Integrated Fertilizer Management System (iFMS), the **digital backbone of fertilizer management** in India, has entered a new phase with the introduction of a series of digital initiatives.
- The initiatives are aimed at strengthening transparency, improving fertilizer availability, and enabling more effective, data-driven monitoring of the fertilizer supply chain.
- Developed and technically supported by the **National Informatics Centre (NIC)** for the Department of Fertilizers, iFMS connects key stages of the fertilizer ecosystem, including production, imports, movement, stock availability, retail sale and subsidy processing.
- The system covers more than **14 crore Aadhaar-linked fertilizer buyers**, over **2.5 lakh retailers** and around **7 crore MT fertilizer sale transactions** annually, while supporting the administration of **fertilizer subsidy of nearly Rs 2 lakh crore** annually.

Integrated Monitoring and Decision Support

- In recent years, the role of iFMS has expanded beyond recording fertilizer transactions, with a focus on developing it into an **integrated monitoring and decision-support platform**.
- New dashboards and analytical tools have been developed to provide a consolidated view of fertilizer production, imports, dispatches, movement, stocks, and retail sales.
- These tools enable monitoring at the national, state, district, and retailer levels, helping identify unusual trends and emerging supply situations at an early stage.

Integrated Database

- iFMS has been integrated with farmer, land, and crop databases maintained by states and other government platforms like Meri Fasal Mera Byora (MFMB) in Haryana and AgriStack.
- This helps to combine fertilizer transaction data with agricultural data to develop a better understanding of fertilizer requirements and consumption.

Framework for Fertilizer Sale (FFS)

- FFS has emerged as an important initiative aimed at integrating an app-based fertilizer booking system with the existing iFMS Point of Sale (PoS) ecosystem.
- The framework enables analysis of parameters such as fertilizer consumption per hectare, consumption across different landholding categories, product-wise, and crop-wise fertilizer use.
- It has also created an important new verification and analytical layer between AgriStack and iFMS.
- It leads to greater transparency and data-driven oversight in the fertilizer sale process.

Digital Monitoring of Fertilizer Movement

- Digital monitoring of fertilizer movement has been strengthened through the **Vehicle Location Tracking System (VLTS)** initiative.
- When combined with goods-in-transit, dispatch and stock information already available in iFMS, vehicle tracking provides administrators with a more complete digital view of fertilizer movement from the point of dispatch to its destination.
- This enables monitoring of consignments while they are in transit and can assist in identifying delays and unusual movement patterns.

Electronic Subsidy Processing

- iFMS plays a central role in fertilizer subsidy administration, with subsidy payments linked to actual fertilizer sales recorded through the PoS network.
- Digitization of the workflow reduces manual intervention, improves traceability, and enables different stages of subsidy claims and payments to be monitored electronically.

RBI Conducts Variable Rate Reverse Repo Auctions

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) absorbed nearly Rs 2.9 lakh crore from the banking system through overnight Variable Rate Reverse Repo (VRRR) auctions, as part of its efforts to reduce excess liquidity.
- The latest operation comes against the backdrop of surplus liquidity in the banking system, which has crossed Rs 9.85 lakh crore.

- The surplus liquidity is due to heavy mobilization of Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank) [FCNR(B)] deposits by banks, as the mobilisation brought foreign currency into the system, and subsequent dollar-rupee swaps with the RBI provided rupee liquidity to banks.

Variable Rate Reverse Repo (VRRR) auctions

- VRRR auction is a **liquidity-management tool** used by the RBI to **absorb surplus liquidity from the banking system**.
- Under it, **banks temporarily park their surplus funds with the RBI** at an **interest rate determined through an auction**, rather than at a fixed administered rate.
- The distinction from fixed-rate reverse repo is that the interest rate under VRRR is **market-determined through bidding**.
- Excess liquidity can push overnight money-market rates below the RBI's desired operating level and can weaken the transmission of monetary policy.

India's Sovereign Credit Rating Upgraded

- Japan Credit Rating Agency (JCR) has upgraded India's sovereign rating to A- from BBB+.
- The upgrade, accompanied by a stable outlook, takes India into the A category and makes JCR the most positive among major global rating agencies on the country.



Status check

India's sovereign credit rating by global agencies

	Rating	Outlook
Japan Credit Rating Agency	A-	Stable
Fitch	BBB-	Stable
Moody's	Baa3	Stable
S&P Global Ratings	BBB	Stable
Morningstar DBRS	BBB	Stable

Source: Agencies

Key Observations

- JCR cited sustained economic growth of around 7%, policy measures such as the GST, digital public infrastructure, and stronger bank balance sheets as the key reasons for the upgrade.
- However, JCR flagged India's **elevated general government debt and fiscal deficits** as **key structural constraints**.
- India's federal structure, fiscal transfers aimed at reducing disparities between states and the influence of electoral cycles on fiscal management tend to keep deficits elevated.
- It pointed to the high debt burden of state governments, noting that general government debt, including that of states, and the associated interest burden remain high.
- It underlined that public investment has supported India's economic growth and improved the quality of government expenditure.
- However, it would monitor whether public capital expenditure can increasingly bring in private investment and reduce the economy's dependence on government spending while sustaining high growth.

Sovereign Credit Rating (SCR)

- SCR is an independent assessment of the creditworthiness of a country or sovereign entity.
- SCR can give investors insights into the level of risk associated with investing in the debt of a particular country, including any political risk.
- Several key factors come into play in deciding how risky it might be to invest in a particular country or region. They include its debt service ratio, growth in its domestic money supply, its import ratio, and the variance of its export revenue.
- Obtaining a good SCR is usually essential for developing countries that want access to funding in international bond markets and to attract FDI

Ratings Methodology

- Credit rating agencies rate the financials and business models of companies, as well as economic management by sovereign governments.
- It analyses official and other data and interacts with government officials, business leaders, and economists while doing so.
- The agencies then rate instruments such as bonds, debentures, commercial papers, deposits, and other debt offerings of companies or governments to help investors make informed decisions.
- The agencies do this on a continuous basis, either upgrading or downgrading the instrument based on performance, prospects, or events likely to have an impact on the balance sheet or the fiscal position.

Blue Bond

Sagarmala Finance Corporation Ltd (SMFCL), **withdrew** India's first blue bond issuance of ₹600 crore as investors sought a higher coupon than the lender was willing to offer.

The lender was looking to price its 10-year bonds below 8%, but bids were received at coupons ranging from 7.69% to 8.44%

Blue Bonds

- A blue bond is a **debt instrument** through which an issuer raises money from investors and promises periodic interest payments and to repay principal at maturity.
- Blue bonds add an **environmental element**: the proceeds must be for clearly identified water- and ocean-related projects.
- Thus, the proceeds will be used to finance **sustainable water and marine projects**, including clean water, recycling, shipping, sustainable fishing, ocean energy and mapping, greenfield port projects, funding coastal road networks, and more.
- There is also additional responsibility for **greater disclosure**. Issuers need frameworks explaining where the money will be invested, impact measurement mechanisms, and periodic reporting to avoid bluewashing.
- **Vadodara Municipal Corporation**, an urban local body from the state of Gujarat, is also planning to raise around Rs 200 crore through the sale of blue bonds soon.

Context

- The proposed blue bond is small in size compared with Sagarmala's overall investment pipeline. Launched in 2015, the Sagarmala programme has about 845 projects with an estimated investment of **Rs 6.06 lakh crore**.
- However, its importance is in the model it creates in the country, because **infrastructure financing** -- which has a long gestation period -- has **traditionally depended on bank loans, budgetary support and conventional bonds**.
- The Securities and Exchange Board of India, has already recognized blue bonds as part of sustainable finance instruments and highlighted their potential for the country's blue economy.

Challenges

- Despite strong investor interest, blue bonds face challenges due to the **lack of a standard definition** (no universally accepted blue classification equivalent to green bond standards).

INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE —



In 2018, the **Government of Seychelles**, with support of the World Bank, issued the **world's first sovereign blue bond**.



According to the World Bank, cumulative blue bond issuance crossed **\$15 billion by mid-2025**, up from about \$222 million in 2018.



Most issuances were from emerging markets, particularly countries with large marine ecosystems and climate vulnerability.



Asia-Pacific accounted for the largest share of cumulative blue and water-labelled bonds in recent years.

SAGARMALA FINANCE CORPORATION LTD



SMFCL is a **Mini-Ratna (category 1)** Central Public Sector Enterprise under the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways and India's **first maritime-sector-specific Non-Banking Financial Company (NBFC)**.



It was formerly known as the **Sagarmala Development Company Limited (SDCL)** and received RBI registration as an NBFC in 2025.



SMFCL has been created to **bridge financing gaps in India's maritime sector** by providing finance to port authorities, shipping companies, MSMEs, startups and maritime institutions.



It also supports strategic sectors like shipbuilding, renewable energy, cruise tourism, and maritime education, further reinforcing India's vision to emerge as a global maritime leader.

- It is **difficult to attach financial value** to coral restoration, biodiversity improvement and fish stock recovery, and most blue bonds are bought by specialised impact investors rather than mainstream pension funds.
- Many countries have ocean strategies but lack investment-ready projects.

Global Gender Gap Index 2026

- The World Economic Forum (WEF) released its 2026 Global Gender Gap Index.
- Covering **145 economies**, the index was first introduced in **2006** to benchmark the current state and evolution of gender parity.
- It measures gender parity across **four key dimensions**: Economic Participation and Opportunity; Educational Attainment; Health and Survival; and Political Empowerment.
- The **score** of the index lies **between 0 and 1**, with 1 denoting complete parity. The gender gap is the distance from full parity.

Indian Scenario

- India has retained its **131st rank** this year with **64.5% gender parity**. However, the country still lags behind the **global average of 69.2%**.
- Overall, India's gender parity has increased by 4.3% since the inaugural 2006 edition, primarily due to **gains in educational attainment**.
- **Only 14 countries ranked below India**. These include Papua New Guinea, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Tajikistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco, Mali, Algeria, and Congo.
- In the **Economic Participation and Opportunity** subindex, India reported a 41.2% parity score, 0.5% higher than the previous edition but 3.5% lower from its best result in 2013.
 - Representation among legislators, senior officials and managers has improved by 10% since 2006 but, it remains comparatively low at 13.1%.
 - Parity in labour-force participation saw a marginal improvement over the past two decades, standing at 44.1% this year.
- In **educational attainment** subindex, India posted a **96.6%** parity score, though it fell by 0.5% from the last year.
- In **Health and Survival**, India improved its score from last year's edition, reaching **95.6%** parity.
 - Despite an upward trajectory since 2017, India's sex ratio at birth in 2026 continued to stand nearly 1% lower than in 2006.

Key Findings

- 1 Globally, **69.2% of the gender gap has been closed**, reflecting a 0.4% improvement over the last year.
- 2 Nearly every economy tracked since 2006 by the index has advanced gender parity, but **full parity is still 120 years away**. There is no economy that has reached full parity.
- 3 For the 17th consecutive year, **Iceland reports the highest level of gender parity at 93%** and remains the only economy to have closed more than 90% of its overall gender gap. Iceland is followed by **Finland and Norway**.
- 4 **Europe represents 70% of the leaderboard** between Iceland (93%), Finland (87.2%), Norway (85.7%) the United Kingdom (84.2%), Sweden (82.3%), Germany (81.7%), and Ireland (81.4%).
- 5 Completing the top 10 are **Namibia** (84.5%, 4th), the **highest scoring Sub-Saharan economy**; New Zealand (82.8%, 6th), and Australia (81.9%, 8th).
- 6 **Chad ranked lowest (145th)**, joined by Iran & Pakistan in the bottom three.
- 7 Across the four dimensions, **Health and Survival (96.2%) and Educational Attainment (96.9%)** are the two dimensions **closest to parity**, while Economic Participation and Opportunity (61.7%) and Political Empowerment (22.1%) have the widest gender gaps.
- 8 Political empowerment globally has seen the largest gains since 2006, but it has been on a reversal since 2016. The share of economies led by a woman peaked in 2022, but it has now fallen back to 2016 levels.
- 9 Women have reached the C-suite and cabinets but are underrepresented in roles carrying the greatest economic and political influence.
- 10 Women hold **19.1% of chief executive officer roles**, while only one in 10 ministerial portfolios held by women is considered high influence.
- 11 Women account for **fewer than one in five AI engineers** and are underrepresented at every level in AI firms.

- **Political Empowerment** was India's highest ranked subindex in 2026, with 24.5% of the gap closed and a global rank of 67th.
 - In Parliament, a 16.1% gender gap was closed in 2026, marking an overall gain of 7% since 2006.
 - At the ministerial level, India has made an overall advance of 2.4%, from 3.5% in 2006 to 5.9% in 2026. However, it was sharply below the country's highest score of 30% in 2019.

National Single Window System

- The National Single Window System (NSWS) has completed 5 years of operation.
- It is a digital platform designed to simplify the process of obtaining regulatory approvals and clearances required for establishing, operating and expanding businesses in India.
- It is implemented by the **Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)**, Ministry of Commerce & Industry.

Need for NSWS

- Setting up a business in India may require approvals from several Central and State authorities. The earlier system often required businesses to visit multiple portals, repeatedly submit similar information and documents, and track applications separately. NSWS was introduced to address problems such as information asymmetry, multiple application portals and inefficient tracking of approvals.
- NSWS simplifies the approval process by **enabling one-time submission of information and documents**.
- It minimizes duplication of information across departments and improves coordination among government agencies through an integrated digital ecosystem.

Coverage and Impact

- Since its launch, the NSWS has significantly expanded its reach and service delivery. As of **September 2026**, the platform receives an annual average of **over 3.06 lakh** applications and facilitates the processing of more than 2.26 lakh approvals each year. It has also onboarded **over 5.69 lakh business entities**, including sole proprietorships, companies, and foreign entities.
- NSWS currently provides access to **over 327 Central approvals** and **3452 State approvals** across **34 States and Union Territories**. Assam (335), Karnataka (327), Tamil Nadu (223) and Manipur (190) offer the highest number of integrated approvals.

Key Functionalities of NSWS

- **Know Your Approvals (KYA) module:** It identifies the approvals applicable to a business based on its proposed activities. This helps investors navigate regulatory requirements for their business.
- It hosts applications for approvals from 32 Central Ministries/ Departments and 34 State Governments and Union Territories.
- **Common Registration Form:** It captures information through a single interface and enables reuse of information across applications.
- **State Registration Form:** It offers seamless access to State Single Window Systems, ensuring integration with State-level approval mechanisms.
- **Applicant Dashboard:** It can be utilised for submitting applications, monitoring their status, and responding to departmental queries.
- **Centralized Document Repository:** It enables one-time upload and reuse of documents across multiple approvals, reducing duplication of submissions.
- **E-Communication Module:** It facilitates online exchange of queries and clarifications between applicants and the concerned Ministries and State Governments.

Expanding Digital Integration

- NSWS implements **Permanent Account Number (PAN)** as the **Single Business ID**, with user authentication of authorised representatives through the **Digital Signature Certificate (DSC)** and **DigiLocker** (for sole proprietors).
- The **Foreign Investment Facilitation Portal (FIF Portal)** has also been integrated with NSWS, enabling a single-window mechanism for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) applications requiring Government approval.
- The **Industrial Entrepreneur Memorandum (IEM)** and **Industrial License (IL)** processes have been fully migrated to NSWS and are now completely digital.
- The **Production Investment Business Registration** module was launched on NSWS in **2025** to facilitate Indian companies in generating **Sponsorship Letters** for inviting foreign professionals under the **e-Production Investment Business Visa (e-B-4 Visa)**.
- Additionally, the **Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO)** has integrated all **74 licensing modules** with NSWS, making it the first department to achieve complete transaction-level integration.

- It also serves as a common gateway for approvals under flagship initiatives, including the **National Green Hydrogen Mission, Ethanol Policy, Vehicle Scrapping Policy, and the Indian Footwear and Leather Development Programme.**
- The platform enhances transparency, minimizes transaction costs, and reduces compliance and approval timelines. This helps to make the approval process more predictable and efficient.
- Collectively, these reforms strengthen the **Ease of Doing Business**, facilitate investment, and support the vision of **Minimum Government, Maximum Governance.**

India Electric Mobility Index 2025

NITI Aayog launched the **second edition** of India Electric Mobility Index (IEMI) 2025 **in collaboration with WRI India**. IEMI is a composite Index, which assesses the **policy framework and implementation outcomes** for e-mobility at the state-level.

Evaluation

- The index tracks **16 unique performance indicators** under **three thematic categories**:
 - Transport Electrification Progress (50% weightage);
 - Charging Infrastructure Readiness (30%); and
 - EV Research & Innovation Status (20%).

Key Findings

- The composite scores on performance across all 36 States and Union Territories (UTs) ranges from 10 to 84, and a median score of 40.
- **Delhi has topped IEMI** with a score of 84, followed by

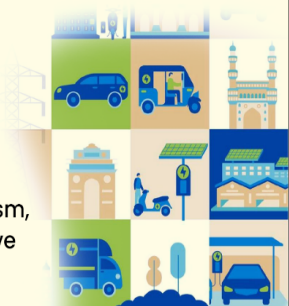
Maharashtra (78), Karnataka (73), Chandigarh (71), and Goa (65). Notably, Madhya Pradesh recorded a substantial improvement, moving from the 23rd to 7th rank.

- **Eight large states** — Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh — have qualified as **frontrunners**, meaning they **scored 50-64** out of 100.
- The **other seven large states** such as Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Bihar, Kerala, Jharkhand, Punjab, and Gujarat were **emerging performers** with a **score of 35-49**.

Context

- Electric mobility (e-mobility) represents an important decarbonisation and **sustainability pathway** for India's transport sector.
- Road transport is responsible for roughly 12% of the country's energy-related carbon dioxide emissions and an estimated 18% of total nitrogen oxide emissions.
- Meanwhile, the automotive sector accounts for about 7.1% of national gross domestic product and nearly half of the country's total manufacturing output, while simultaneously employing about 19 million people.
- In 2018, EVs constituted only about 0.5% of all vehicle sales. By 2025-26, the share had reached **8.25%**, with more than **8.7 million EVs**. Close to 2.5 million EVs were registered during 2025-26 alone, with a rise of about 25% over 2024-25.
- Two-wheelers accounted for most at 1.3 million units, followed by passenger three-wheelers, while passenger cars held a modest and rising share.
- In 2025, electric cars accounted for around one-tenth of new car sales in the US, more than a quarter in the European Union, and over half in China.
- **Charging infrastructure** has expanded rapidly as well, with public charging stations growing from about **5,151 in December 2022 to over 29,000 by June 2025**.
- Continued momentum of this transition now rests primarily with subnational governments. States and Union Territories (UTs) govern the transport, power, industry and urban planning sectors, which facilitate the development of the EV ecosystem.

Objectives of IEMI



- Recognise States and UTs that perform strongly;
- Pinpoint factors that most significantly influence the transition;
- Prompt more ambitious action by States and UTs; and
- Reinforce evidence-based policymaking.
- These objectives promote cooperative and competitive federalism, allowing States and UTs to learn from one another, share effective practices and strengthen their own approaches.

Theme Wise Performance

- Delhi, Chandigarh, and Maharashtra were the only UTs and states to qualify as top performers in **Transport Electrification Progress**, which is assigned the highest weightage.
 - It evaluates market absorption, consumer acceptance, and demand-side momentum by measuring how effectively EVs are being adopted and supported across the states.
- In the **Charging Infrastructure Readiness**, **Karnataka** recorded the highest score nationwide at 97, followed by Goa (92) and Maharashtra (91).
 - It captures charger-to-vehicle ratio, subsidies for charging infrastructure, building bye laws for charging, power availability among other metrics.
- Delhi also achieved the top score of 94 in the EV Research and Innovation Status category. It covers EV startups, research and development initiatives, as well as patents.

Analysis

- As per the report, limited charging infrastructure, dispersed settlements and a nascent innovation ecosystem are some of the identified barriers to progress.
- Progress remains uneven, with disparities between the metropolitan and remote regions and between more industrialised States and the Hilly and Northeastern States.
- For most States and UTs, transport electrification progress remains the largest opportunity for improving overall performance.
- Charging rollout and EV adoption are moving at different speeds across the country, a sign that the transition is uneven.
- With the foundational EV policy in place for most States and UTs, the focus must shift from policy formulation to effective implementation.

Guidelines for High-Speed Access-Controlled National Highways

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has released comprehensive guidelines for the planning and design of *High-Speed Access-Controlled National Highways*, other than Expressways.

NEW DESIGN GUIDELINES

15,000 PCU (passenger car unit) Corridor should be developed as a 4-lane highway with 4-lane structure	15,000- 25,000 PCU, Corridor should be developed as a 4-lane highway and 6-lane structures	25,000- 40,000 PCU, Corridor should be developed as a 6-lane highway with 6-lane structures
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Access-Controlled High-Speed National Highways

These are specially designed major roadways that regulate all vehicle entry and exit points to ensure safe, smooth, and fast long-distance travel.

Vehicles can only enter or leave the highway at designated ramps and interchanges, preventing random entry from local side streets or driveways.

The objective is to allow long-distance traffic to move at high speeds without frequent interference from local roads, pedestrians, agricultural activity or uncontrolled roadside access.

Context

The guidelines are significant because, until now, there were no separate, uniform standards specifically governing the planning and design of access-controlled high-speed National Highways.

Different standards were being used while preparing Detailed Project Reports (DPRs).

NHAI has therefore sought to establish a common framework aimed at ensuring that these highways are better designed & planned, safer, greener and ready to meet the needs of future traffic.

The guidelines will apply to all upcoming *four and six-lane greenfield and brownfield high-speed access-controlled National Highways*.

The move assumes significance as India targets 50,000 km of high-speed corridors by 2036-37 under Vision 2047. The total length of high-speed corridors by December 2025 stood at 3,052 km.

Guidelines

Data-Driven Planning for Future Traffic

- Traffic projections shall take into account existing and diverted traffic, along with expected growth in freight movement linked to economic and commercial activities.
- Toll data and other reliable sources will also be used to make traffic estimates more accurate.

Technology-Enabled Construction

- Use of modern technology will be enhanced during construction to improve quality, accuracy, and monitoring.
- It provides for the use of **Automated and Intelligent Machine-aided Construction (AI-MC) technology** for construction of embankments and highway pavements.
- A shift will be made to **install Multi Lane Free Flow (MLFF) system of tolling** on High-speed corridors,

Safety Provisions

- A key focus is on strengthening safety measures suited to high-speed traffic. It prescribes advance notification of exits and entries to help motorists anticipate and safely navigate access and egress points.
- To strengthen access control and prevent encroachments, unauthorised entry and the movement of stray cattle onto high-speed corridors, the guidelines prescribe the construction of a one-metre-high boundary wall along the outer edge of the corridor.

Landscaping and Environmental Measures

- Landscaping and plantation will be incorporated as an integral part of project planning, at suitable locations such as loop areas, below flyovers, medians and other suitable locations.
- Drip irrigation systems will also be provided, to ensure efficient use of water and easier maintenance of plantations.

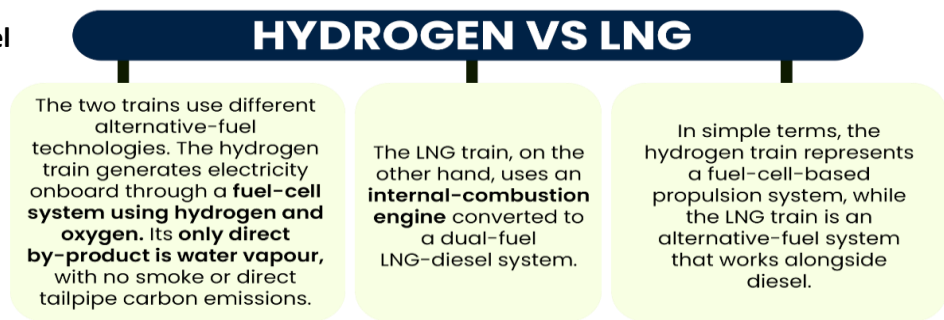
Better Drainage and Water Management

- Comprehensive drainage planning will form an integral part of the DPR process. The planning will identify where rainwater will be disposed and how water from the National Highway and surrounding areas will be safely managed.
- Water harvesting structures will also be provided in loop areas and other suitable locations, particularly with no natural outlet for rainwater.
- Drainage plans will clearly identify water disposal points and provide suitable arrangements for managing rainwater.

India's First LNG train

- After launching the country's first hydrogen train, Indian Railways (IR) has launched the country's first Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) train.
- The new train uses **an LNG-diesel dual-fuel system**, allowing its engine to **run on both LNG and diesel**.
- IR has converted two 1,400 HP Driving Power Cars (DPCs) at the **Sabarmati Integrated Coaching Depot** for the project.
- Each DPC has an LNG tank with a capacity of around 2,200 litres. One DPC can operate for around 444 km on a full LNG load.
- The move is aimed at **reducing diesel consumption, fuel costs and emissions** (CO₂, NO_x and particulate matter) while encouraging the use of alternative fuels in railway operations.

- The system can use LNG to **replace around 40% of diesel consumption**. According to trial-based estimates, one DPC could save around Rs 11.9 lakh per year, while an 8-coach rake could save around Rs 23.9 lakh per year.



First Port-Based e-Methanol Plant

- The foundation stone for the country's first port-based e-methanol plant at Deendayal Port Authority (DPA) in Kandla, Gujarat was laid recently.
- The Rs 2,300-crore plant is a **joint initiative of DPA and Assam Petro-Chemicals Ltd (APCL)** and will be installed in two phases.
- The facility will have a total production capacity of 150 tonnes of e-methanol per day and will use renewable power, water and biogenic CO₂ to produce the green fuel.
- The e-methanol will be supplied to vessels operating on the **Asia-Europe International Trade Corridor**, one of the world's busiest maritime trade routes.
- The plant is expected to produce green methanol at around US\$750 per tonne, compared with a global rate of about US\$1,300 per tonne.
- The facility is expected to be among India's largest e-methanol production plants
- It is also expected to stimulate a broader green energy ecosystem around Kandla, including transportation, storage, supply and other ancillary activities
- The project is significant for decarbonising maritime transport, developing green-fuel infrastructure and positioning Indian ports as green-energy hubs.
- It is aligned with India's target of achieving Net Zero emissions by 2070 and the government's emphasis on energy self-reliance and Make in India, Make for the World.

E-METHANOL

- Methanol (CH₃OH) is a colourless alcohol used as a fuel, solvent, and chemical feedstock across multiple industries.
- e-Methanol, or electro-methanol, is methanol produced using **green hydrogen generated from renewable electricity** and carbon dioxide (CO₂) captured from biogenic sources, rather than relying on conventional fossil-based feedstocks.
- It is not only a promising fuel for the maritime sector, but can be converted into sustainable aviation fuel (e-SAF), into e-Gasoline for road transport, or even into chemicals.

Gucchi Mushroom

- Gucchi Marmik, a traditional preparation featuring gucchi mushrooms, was recently served at the BRICS Summit 2026.
- Morchella esculenta, commonly known as **Guchhi or morel mushroom** is a wild mushroom native to the **North-West Himalayan region**.
- It is found in **temperate, Himalayan regions of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Jammu & Kashmir** and grows in association with **moist coniferous forests** at altitudes between **2,500 to 3,500 meters**.
- Unlike commercially cultivated varieties such as button and oyster mushrooms, gucchi is **primarily collected from its natural habitats in the wild**.

- It is characterised by its distinctive **honeycomb-like cap** with ridges and pits, and it is harvested seasonally from March to July.
- It is prized for its distinctive aroma, earthy flavour and scarcity. Due to its rarity and the extreme difficulty of artificial cultivation, it is one of the **most expensive wild fungi in the world**, with prices around Rs 25,000-40,000/kg.

Agentic Commerce

At the recent Global Fintech Fest (GFF), several players showcased how agentic AI might take the industry towards agentic commerce, where an AI agent will take care of a consumer's entire payment journey.

Agentic Commerce

- Agentic commerce is a **digital trade model** under which **AI agents streamline the buying process** by discovering, negotiating, and executing on behalf of customers.
- Notably, this does not mean bypassing the need for authorisation. It only cuts down steps involved in a customer's e-commerce journey, including the payments phase.
- For example, AI-powered tools can notify a customer of discounts on products that they have been viewing for months.
- If they decide to buy it, the AI agent on their payments platform can determine the ideal mode of payment — cutting down the need for multiple OTPs and authorisation requirements to just one-time authentication — for the transaction.
- Thus, the consumer will have oversight and can change any of the components during the process, while saving significant time in the entire process.

AI in B2B payments space

- AI could also play a big role in the B2B payments space. For merchants, it could predict settlement and cash-flow gaps, identify checkout failures, and automatically initiate refunds or customer recovery journeys.
- In B2B commerce, agents could reconcile invoices, match purchase orders, schedule payments, and optimise working capital.
- EY estimates that agentic AI could automate around 80% of routine treasury coordination, and improve cash-forecast accuracy to nearly 90%, subject to strong data and governance foundations.
- Bigger businesses have their own ERP (enterprise resource planning) software. But AI agents in the payments ecosystem can help the smaller SMEs (small and medium enterprises) due to their predictive modelling capabilities.
- While AI integration is a promising proposition, adoption is at an early stage. AI is well established in high-volume, data-rich areas such as fraud detection, risk scoring, customer support, and transaction analytics.
- However, many institutions remain at pilot stage because payment data is fragmented across banks, gateways, merchants, and legacy platforms.



Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2026

- The Department of Consumer Affairs has amended the Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2026. The new provisions will come into force from January 1, 2027.
- The amendments seek to establish a **more transparent, accountable and consumer-centric e-commerce ecosystem**.
- It also provides clarity to e-commerce entities on their responsibilities, while maintaining a **balance between consumer protection and Ease of Doing Business**.

Key Amendments

Grievance Redressal

- Every e-commerce entity has to become a partner in the convergence process of the **National Consumer Helpline (NCH)**, strengthening the integration of online platforms with the national consumer grievance redressal mechanism.

- The move comes amid a significant volume of complaints related to e-commerce. The NCH received 17,71,622 grievances in 2025, of which 5,11,196, or around 29%, were related to the e-commerce sector.
- Every e-commerce entity will be required to provide complainants with a copy of the complaint as recorded by its grievance officer, adding greater transparency to the complaint-handling process.

Transparency Measures

- E-commerce entities will be **prohibited from manipulating search results** in ways that mislead consumers or reduce the relevance of results to their search queries.
- Platforms will also have to clearly identify sponsored listings, enabling consumers to **distinguish paid placements from organic search results**.
- The rules also introduce greater **transparency in promotional price reductions**. When a price reduction is announced, both the reduced price and the prior price must be displayed.

Safeguards Against Dark Patterns

- Dark patterns are online design practices that can **manipulate or mislead consumers** into making decisions they may not otherwise have taken.
- E-commerce entities will be required to comply with the **Guidelines for Prevention and Regulation of Dark Patterns, 2023**. They will also have to conduct a **yearly self-audit** and prominently display a **certificate of compliance**.

Informed Purchase

- Marketplace e-commerce entities will have to **provide consumers with key information** about products and services (best before/use before dates), including return and refund policies, warranty details, delivery information and payment terms.
- For imported products, platforms will also be required to disclose the importer details and country of origin, giving consumers greater information about the products they purchase online.
- Marketplace platforms will not be permitted to use consumer information for specified purposes without obtaining the consumer's consent.

FCNR (B) Deposits Facilitate Record Forex Reserves

The RBI's concessional swap window for Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank) deposits has helped India's foreign exchange reserves surge to a record \$785.706 billion.

FCNR (B) Deposits

- **FCNR(B) deposits** are **fixed-term bank deposits** that can be opened in India by NRIs, Overseas Citizens of India (OCIs) etc
- These deposits allow overseas Indians to maintain their savings in designated foreign currencies such as the US dollar, pound sterling, euro, Japanese yen, Australian dollar, and Canadian dollar, rather than converting their funds into Indian rupees.
- Since FCNR(B) deposits are maintained in foreign currency, the **depositors are protected from exchange rate risk**.

Context

- Forex reserves is an important signal to foreign investors, who have been pulling money out of Indian stock market – \$19 billion in 2025 and \$24 billion in the first five months of 2026. This has led to a sharp decline in the value of rupee.
- Higher forex reserves are indicative of the RBI having greater ability to defend the rupee.
- A continuously weakening rupee makes it less attractive for foreign investors to put money in India as their returns take a hit once they convert their investment into their home country currency, such as the US dollar.
- While money has flowed in the last three months, the rupee has not appreciated as was the case in late 2013, when the RBI had first introduced a swap facility for FCNR(B) deposits.

- Interest earned on FCNR(B) deposits is **exempt from income tax in India** as long as the depositor qualifies as a non-resident under Indian tax laws.
- NRIs have also put in money into these deposits by taking advantage of the leverage offered by banks, which lets them make returns of as much as 15%, by borrowing money at lower interest rates and then depositing it at the high FCNR(B) deposit rates on offer.

UPI Completes 10 years

- The Unified Payments Interface (UPI) has completed 10 years of operations, marking a decade of transformation in India's digital payments ecosystem and emerging as a globally recognised real-time payments platform.
- Launched in **2016**, by the **National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)** under the regulatory oversight of the RBI, UPI has become a key pillar of India's Digital Public Infrastructure and a major driver of financial inclusion.
- UPI enables interoperable, real-time peer-to-peer (P2P) and peer-to-merchant (P2M) transactions through a single platform and has increasingly become an integral part of everyday payments across the country.
- UPI is currently **operational in 11 countries** — United Arab Emirates, France, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Singapore, Mauritius, Qatar, Cambodia, Greece and the Maldives.

Key Developments

- Annual UPI **transaction volume** increased from 1.78 crore in FY 2016-17 to more than **24,162 crore in FY 2025-26**, registering an almost 13,000-fold increase.
- The **value of transactions** also rose from Rs 0.07 lakh crore in FY 2016-17 to around Rs **314 lakh crore in FY 2025-26**, marking an increase of more than 4,000 times.
- UPI's growth continued through 2026, with monthly transaction volumes crossing 2,300 crore for the first time in May.
- UPI currently processes an average of around **66 crore transactions per day**. In FY 2025-26, UPI accounted for **84% of India's digital payment transactions**.
- ₹0.86 Lakh Crore Daily Average Value (FY2026)

Growing Ecosystem

- The number of banks on UPI increased from **44 in FY 2016-17 to 741 banks as of July 2026**, covering public sector banks, private banks, small finance banks, payment banks and cooperative banks.

Usage Pattern

- The pattern of UPI usage reflects its dual role as a platform for both everyday retail payments and larger fund transfers.
- **P2M transactions** account for **63% of the total transaction volume**, reflecting the extensive use of UPI for frequent, low-value retail payments. In FY 2025-26, 86% of P2M transactions were below Rs 500.
- In terms of **transaction value**, however, **P2P payments account for 71%**, indicating the significant role of UPI in higher-value transfers between individuals. Among P2P transactions, 59% were below ₹500,

CAZRI Moth Bean

CAZRI Moth Bean varieties have recently demonstrated remarkable resilience during an El Nino year Kharif 2026.

Moth Bean

- Moth bean (commonly known as matki, Turkish gram, or dew bean) is one of the most important **pulse crops of the hot arid regions of western Rajasthan**.
- It is also grown across marginal rainfed lands in Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab, and parts of Maharashtra.

- However, its **productivity remains low** at around **350 kg per hectare**, primarily due to low, erratic and **uncertain rainfall** of 150–250 mm, **prolonged dry spells** of 20–30 days and **limited availability of soil moisture**.
- Under such challenging conditions, the ability of a variety to withstand moisture stress, maintain growth, and continue reproductive development is critical for sustaining crop production.

CAZRI Moth Beans

- Addressing these challenges, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research–Central Arid Zone Research Institute (CAZRI), Jodhpur, has undertaken long-term moth bean breeding and genetic improvement programmes.
- These are aimed at developing varieties with enhanced stress resilience and high yield potential suited to the harsh and unpredictable conditions of the arid region.
- In the last three years, four varieties—CAZRI Moth-4, CAZRI Moth-5, CAZRI Moth-6 and CAZRI Moth-7—have been released.
- These varieties recently demonstrated field-level resilience, particularly under a prolonged dry spell of around 35 days.
- Despite the prolonged absence of substantial rainfall during flowering, pod formation and reproductive development, the varieties maintained green appearance, good growth and profuse pod development.
- An important adaptation characteristic of these varieties is **developmental plasticity**, under which plants can adjust their growth and maturity according to the availability of soil moisture.
- Such flexibility is particularly valuable in western Rajasthan, where rainfall varies considerably in amount, timing and distribution.
- CAZRI moth bean varieties are also being multiplied for seed production by Rajasthan State Seeds Corporation, National Seeds Corporation and selected private players.

Issues with Data Centres in India

- India's **digital economy** is entering a new phase of rapid growth and technological transformation. As digital services expand, they are generating unprecedented demand for computing capacity, data storage, and high-speed connectivity.
- Data centres provide this critical foundation, powering the digital services that increasingly drive India's economy and governance.

Data Centre

- A data centre is a facility that houses computing, storage and networking equipment. It stores, processes, manages and distributes large volumes of digital information.
- These capabilities support online banking, e-Governance, digital payments, cloud computing, and other emerging technologies.
- Installed data-centre power capacity stood at around 375 MW in 2020. It has increased to **1.57 GW as of August 2026**. The capacity is projected to expand further to nearly **8 GW by 2030**.
- Investments of nearly **USD 70 billion** are already underway in India's data centre sector, with an additional **USD 90 billion** in announced projects, highlighting the scale of expansion.

Way Ahead

- India needs **climate-intelligent power markets** that price grid services separately.
- **Coastal locations** could also offer advantages because of their proximity to renewable energy and potential access to seawater for cooling.

- A **national sustainability framework** should be developed to establish minimum standards for renewable energy sourcing, water consumption disclosure, grid impact assessment, and thermal load evaluation.
- It would create a common set of expectations for investors and a common set of protections for consumers. It would also recognise that environmental constraints are economic constraints, and that ignoring them only creates larger costs later.

Demat 2.0

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has launched Demat 2.0.
- It is a pilot program to test the **tokenisation of corporate bonds** and quicker settlement using the **central bank digital currency (CBDC) and blockchain technology**.

Significance

- **Instant Settlement:** The framework enables simultaneous Delivery-versus-Payment (DvP), meaning the transfer of the bond token and the digital currency occurs instantly as a single, linked transaction, eliminating settlement and counterparty risks
- **Capital Efficiency:** Instantaneous settlement substantially optimizes liquidity by freeing up locked collateral and reducing the capital buffers required by clearing corporations.
- **Reduction in Financial Friction:** Automating corporate actions reduces systemic errors, removes manual reconciliation pipelines, and drastically cuts down transaction processing costs.

Water Consumption

- A 100 MW data centre consumes about 2 million litres of water daily. That is equivalent to the daily use of roughly 6,500 households.
- India's data centres consumed an estimated **150 billion litres of water in 2024-25**. By 2030, that figure is projected to more than double to 358 billion litres annually.
- The water use matters because data centres are clustering in India's most water-stressed regions.



Rising Electricity Demand

- The electricity situation is equally concerning. Electricity demand from data centres is expected to rise from about **13 terawatt-hours (TWh) in 2024 to roughly 57 TWh by 2030**.
- The Union Ministry of Power estimates that AI data centres alone will add 26.3 gigawatts of new demand by 2031-32.
- Transmission constraints are becoming a critical bottleneck. India curtailed 300 GW-hours of renewable energy in the first quarter of 2026 alone, simply because the grid could not carry it.
- Over the past five years, India has met only about 80% of its annual transmission targets. Solar projects are being built faster than wires to carry their power. This matters because data centres need reliable, uninterrupted electricity.



Heat Generation

- A recent study from the University of Cambridge, analysing 20 years of NASA satellite data, found that data centres raise land surface temperatures by an average of 2°C within a 10 km radius, with extreme cases reaching 9.1°C.
- The study estimates that approximately 340 million people globally live within these affected zones.
- The Cambridge finding creates a feedback loop in which data centres generate heat, higher temperatures increase cooling requirements, greater cooling demand increases electricity consumption.
- Higher electricity consumption, unless fully renewable, increases emissions, which contribute to climate change.
- This issue becomes particularly important for Indian cities already experiencing rising temperatures and urban heat-island effects.



Governance Gap

- State policies largely focus on attracting investment through incentives such as electricity-duty exemptions, transmission-charge waivers, stamp-duty relief and fast-track clearances.
- Major State policies generally do not require grid-impact assessments, mandatory renewable-energy sourcing, thermal-load assessments or public disclosure of daily water consumption before commissioning.
- The policies also lack mandatory hydrogeological assessments and safeguards ensuring that industrial water requirements do not compete with agricultural or municipal supplies.

- **Financial Democratisation:**
Successful tokenisation creates pathways for the financial granularization of bonds, allowing small-scale retail investors to access high-yield corporate debt via fractional ownership.
- **Global Leadership:** It positions India as an early pioneer in establishing fully regulated, native blockchain-based bond issuances that run concurrently with state-issued sovereign digital money.

Tokenisation

- Tokenising financial assets means **breaking down an asset into smaller pieces**, making it accessible for the retail audience by **reducing ownership cost**.
- For example, a bond worth Rs 10 lakh apiece can be broken into smaller units so investors can buy a part for just Rs 100.
- It also means digitising assets, leading to **stronger ownership records and shorter settlement times**.

Demat 2.0

- While Demat 1.0, launched in 1996, digitised shares that were held in paper form until then, Demat 2.0 combines tokenised securities with digital settlement assets using smart contracts and settles through the CBDC.
- It will use **Distributed Ledger Technology (DLT)** to issue, hold, trade and settle corporate bonds in tokenised form.
- Under the existing system, ownership of securities is recorded through conventional databases.
- Under Demat 2.0, the corporate bond itself will be issued as a native digital token on a blockchain operated by the depositories. The **token itself represents the legal corporate bond**.
- Despite being on a distributed ledger, ownership records continue to be securely maintained by India's statutory depositories, namely National Securities Depository Limited (NSDL) and Central Depository Services Limited (CDSL).
- The tokenisation does not change the legal character, rights, obligations or regulatory treatment of the corporate bond. The bond remains a security under the **Securities Contracts (Regulation) Act, 1956**.
- The funds leg of the transaction is settled via the RBI's wholesale **CBDC-W**, known as the digital rupee (e₹-W), connected through the RBI's Unified Market Interface (UMI).
- After bonds, the tokenisation exercise can be extended to other asset classes like equity, mutual funds, and gold. The central bank is already exploring a gold tokenisation program.
- A few other debt instruments such as commercial papers and certificates of deposit already trade in a tokenised form using the unified markets interface and CBDC.

Rise in EPFO Wage Ceiling

- The Union Cabinet has approved an increase in the wage ceiling for mandatory coverage under the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) from Rs 15,000 to Rs 25,000.
- The wage ceiling had last been revised in **2014**, when it was increased from Rs 6,500 to Rs 15,000.
- The government cited rising wages, higher incomes and the expansion of formal employment as the rationale for updating the threshold now.
- The average income of a regular salaried employee is now around Rs 23,000/month, while minimum wages for even unskilled workers have crossed Rs 15,000 in several states. Thus, the existing threshold no longer reflected prevailing wage levels.
- The annual government outgo due to the enhancement is estimated at approximately **Rs 11,339 crore**, as against the existing annual budgetary support of around Rs. 10,250 crore.

Impact

- It will extend mandatory coverage to a larger section of employees in the Rs 15,000-25,000 monthly wage band, who are currently not automatically covered when they join employment at wages above the existing ceiling.
- It will provide access to the **three major components administered by EPFO** -Employees' Provident Fund (EPF), Employees' Pension Scheme (EPS), and Employees' Deposit Linked Insurance Scheme (EDLI).
 - This will strengthen retirement savings, pension protection, and insurance-linked social security for a larger section of workers.
- It is also expected to strengthen worker retention and workforce stability, while providing employees with greater financial security.
- For employers, a more secure workforce can contribute to improved employee retention, workforce stability, and morale, supporting a more future-ready workforce.

US-Venezuela Oil Deal: Geopolitics Meets Refinery Economics

- The US has announced what President Trump called the biggest oil deal in world history — gaining majority control over 65+ billion barrels (20%) of Venezuela's proven oil reserves.
- This follows the US capturing Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro in January 2026.

Key Details of the Deal

- The US gains majority control via a partnership involving private companies, structured "at **no cost to the American taxpayer.**"
- A new private company would be jointly owned by US interests and an operator, with the US holding a 55% operational share.
- The deal would develop 17 oil fields, with US buyers purchasing oil at cost.
- The legal structure remains unclear, with questions over whether Venezuela's interim administration has authority to commit to such long-term agreements; opposition leaders have objected.

Why the World's Top Producer Wants More Oil?



The Technical Reason

- Venezuelan crude is "**heavy sour**" (thicker, denser, high sulphur), while US domestic production is predominantly "**light sweet.**"
- US Gulf Coast refineries were built decades ago specifically to process heavy crude from Venezuela, Mexico, and Canada.
- The shale revolution boosted light sweet output, but retrofitting refineries is economically unviable — so the **US exports light sweet crude** while **still importing heavy sour** crude to run refineries efficiently.



The Geopolitical Reasons

- Building energy market dominance and reserves.
- Reducing global oil prices amid the Strait of Hormuz crisis, triggered by US-Iran tensions.
- Countering Iran and Russia, both major heavy-crude holders with strained US relations.
- Curbing growing Chinese and Russian investment in Venezuela's oil sector, as part of a broader contest for influence in the Americas.



Venezuela's Oil Story: From Dominance to Decline

- Venezuela holds the **world's largest proven reserves** (~300 billion barrels) but produces under 1% of global output.
- Hugo Chávez-era nationalisation (2007) forced out ExxonMobil and ConocoPhillips, while **chronic underinvestment and corruption** crippled production.
- Strict US sanctions (2019) halted Venezuelan oil exports to America; a 2023 Chevron licence allowed limited resumption.
- China became Venezuela's leading oil destination post-sanctions, with Russia also investing heavily.



Bhutan Becomes First South-East Asian Country to Eliminate Dog-Transmitted Rabies

- Bhutan has become the first country in the WHO's South-East Asia Region to eliminate dog-transmitted human rabies as a public health problem, a milestone validated by the WHO.
- Bhutan recorded zero human deaths from dog-mediated rabies since June 2023, meeting the required **two-year absence** threshold for validation.
- The achievement rests on a "One Health" approach, involving strong cooperation between health workers, veterinarians, local governments, and communities.
- Key interventions included mass dog vaccinations, stray population management, and prompt post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) treatment for bite victims.

- This milestone aligns with the global target to end human deaths from dog-transmitted rabies worldwide by 2030.

Indus Waters Treaty: India Rejects Hague Court's Ruling

- The Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) at The Hague has ruled that the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) remains "**fully in force**" and that India must continue observing its obligations.
- India has **categorically rejected this ruling**, maintaining the Court itself was constituted in violation of the Treaty and therefore lacks jurisdiction.
- This marks a significant escalation in the India-Pakistan contest over transboundary water governance.

The Indus Waters Treaty: A Quick Framework

- Brokered by the **World Bank in 1960**, the IWT allocates the six Indus-system rivers between India and Pakistan:
 - **Eastern rivers** — Ravi, Beas, Sutlej: primarily allocated to India
 - **Western rivers** — Indus, Jhelum, Chenab: primarily allocated to Pakistan, though India retains specified rights for domestic use, irrigation, and run-of-the-river hydropower
- The Treaty also establishes dispute-resolution mechanisms — the **Permanent Indus Commission**, a **Neutral Expert**, and a **Court of Arbitration** — depending on the nature of the dispute.

What Did the Hague Court Rule?

- **On the Treaty's status**
 - India had announced on **April 23, 2025**, following the **Pahalgam terror attack**, that the IWT would remain in "abeyance" until Pakistan "credibly and irrevocably" ended support for cross-border terrorism.
 - The Court held:
 - ♣ The IWT provides **no mechanism** for unilateral suspension or termination.
 - ♣ "Abeyance" cannot be used to suspend the Treaty's operation.
 - ♣ The Treaty remains binding unless both countries jointly modify or terminate it through a subsequent agreement.
 - ♣ India's cited grounds — terrorism, sovereignty, material breach, demographic and climate change, armed conflict — **did not legally justify** suspension.
- **On the Ratle Hydroelectric Project**
 - The Court imposed interim measures directing India to temporarily halt concreting the dam wall and power-intake structure above specified levels at the Ratle Hydro-Electric Plant (RHEP) on the Chenab, and to report construction schedule changes.
 - These restrictions continue until **90 days after the Neutral Expert's final decision**, expected around **July 2027**.

Why India Rejects the Court's Authority?

- India has never participated in the Court of Arbitration proceedings, disputing its very constitution.
- New Delhi's core arguments:
 - The Court was established by the **World Bank in breach of the IWT**.
 - Pakistan's invocation of the Court created **parallel proceedings** on issues already before the Neutral Expert.
 - The Treaty does **not permit simultaneous dispute-resolution mechanisms** for the same questions.

- o The Court therefore **lacks jurisdiction** over India's sovereign decisions.
- India has described the Court's pronouncements as "**null and void**", reiterating that its decision to hold the IWT in abeyance remains operative.

The Ratle-Kishenganga Dispute

- Pakistan has challenged design features of India's **Ratle and Kishenganga** hydroelectric projects, alleging violations of IWT restrictions on India's use of the Western Rivers.
- These disputes involve highly technical issues — reservoir storage/pondage, dam design, operational parameters.
- A **Neutral Expert**, appointed through the World Bank mechanism at India's request, was separately examining these technical questions.

Conclusion

The Hague ruling deepens the India-Pakistan standoff over the Indus Waters Treaty without resolving it, since India rejects the tribunal's jurisdiction outright. The dispute now hinges less on water-sharing technicalities and more on the legitimacy of international dispute-settlement mechanisms themselves, with resolution appearing distant.

Strategic and Geopolitical Stakes

Water as a strategic instrument: Pakistan is heavily dependent on the Indus river system, which supports a substantial share of its agriculture and water security. Any shift in India's approach to the Treaty carries major implications for Pakistan's food security and economy.

India's security argument: New Delhi has linked cross-border terrorism to bilateral agreements, particularly after Pahalgam, repeatedly asserting that "**blood and water cannot flow together.**" India maintains the Treaty needs reconsideration given how substantially circumstances have changed.

What Lies Ahead?

- Since India doesn't recognise the tribunal's jurisdiction, the ruling is unlikely to resolve the dispute immediately. The contest will likely continue through:
 - India's continued implementation of its "abeyance" position.
 - Pakistan's efforts to **internationalise** the issue.
 - Parallel proceedings involving the Neutral Expert.
 - Disputes over Indian hydroelectric projects on the Western Rivers.
 - Broader negotiations over the Treaty's future.

UK Recognises India's Carbon Credit Scheme

- In a major breakthrough, the UK has recognised **India's Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS)** as a qualifying criterion for pricing relief under its Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) — a move that will reduce the tax burden on Indian exporters.

Important Caveats

- o The amount of relief claimable will depend on the effective carbon price to which the goods in question have been subject.
- o A liable person under UK CBAM will still need to satisfy applicable evidence and verification requirements.

Broader Trade Context

- o This development comes against the backdrop of

What Is India's CCTS?



The Carbon Credit Trading Scheme, notified by India, aims to reduce, remove, or avoid greenhouse gas emissions from the Indian economy by pricing such emissions through trading of Carbon Credit Certificates.



Its implementation is financed by the **Bureau of Energy Efficiency** through fees and charges collected from participating entities, along with its own resources.



What This Means for Indian Exporters?



With this recognition, UK importers of eligible Indian goods covered under CBAM will be able to seek carbon price relief corresponding to the effective carbon price borne by those goods under the CCTS — subject to meeting UK's evidence and verification requirements.



This will reduce the effective CBAM liability on Indian goods, directly benefiting Indian exporters to the UK.



The recognition reflects UK CBAM's core principle of avoiding double taxation on goods that have already borne an eligible carbon price in their country of origin.



the comprehensive economic and trade partnership implemented between India and the UK in July 2026.

- o Bilateral **merchandise trade** between the two countries stood at **\$25.1 billion in 2025-26**, while **bilateral services trade** reached **\$35.4 billion** in 2024.

PERM System

- The US Department of Labor has suspended IT services giant Cognizant's filings under **PERM (Program Electronic Review Management)** amid investigations into alleged visa fraud and misuse of employment-based immigration programmes.
- This comes amid a broader **Trump administration crackdown** on employment-based immigration, with IT services firms facing particular scrutiny over reliance on foreign workers

About PERM



PERM is the system through which employers obtain **labour certification** before sponsoring a foreign employee for an employment-based Green Card.



Unlike a visa application (made by an individual), a **PERM filing is done by the employer** on the worker's behalf.

PERM vs H-1B: The Key Difference

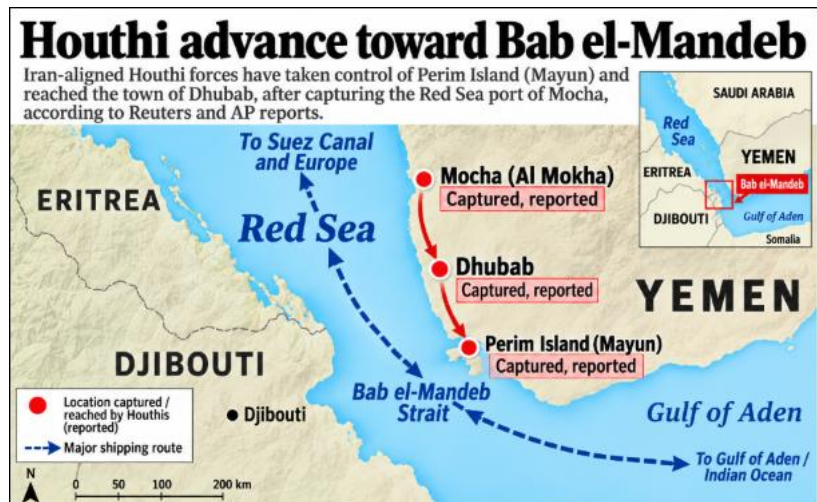
- 1 H-1B: A temporary, non-immigrant work visa for speciality occupations.
- 2 PERM: Part of the process for obtaining permanent residency.
- 3 The two run **alongside each other** — an employee can hold an H-1B visa while their employer separately files a PERM application for their Green Card.
- 4 A PERM suspension does **not cancel** existing H-1B status or an already-issued Green Card.

Saudi East-West Pipeline Shutdown

- Saudi Arabia temporarily shut its **East-West oil pipeline** (also called Petroline) after multiple attacks on the network in the Riyadh and Madinah regions.
- Both Saudi Arabia and Iraq say the attacks originated in Iraq, where Iranian-backed militias operate. This comes as global oil supplies remain strained by disruption in the Strait of Hormuz.

A Dangerous New Front

- The pipeline attack coincided with Yemen's **Houthi rebels** seizing the strategically vital **Mayun Island** (also known as Perim Island) at the entrance to the Red Sea.
- Iran-backed Houthi forces have tightened control over the **Bab el-Mandeb and Red Sea shipping route** — together marking a dangerous expansion of the wider conflict with Iran, threatening the very route Saudi Arabia has relied on since Gulf shipping halted.



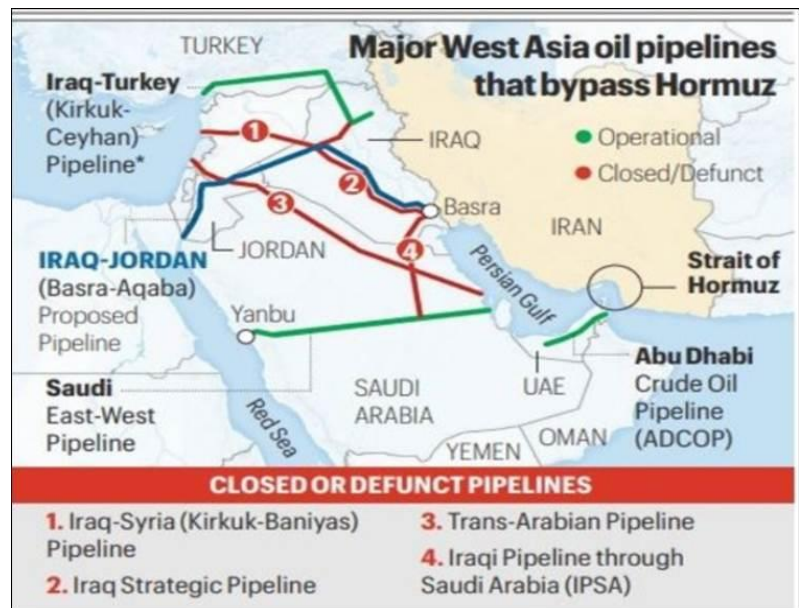
What Is the East-West Pipeline?

- Runs about 1,200 km, from **Abqaiq in the east to the Red Sea port of Yanbu** in the west.
- Operated by Saudi Aramco. Allows crude to bypass the Strait of Hormuz entirely.
- From Yanbu, Asia-bound tankers use Bab el-Mandeb; westbound tankers use the Suez Canal.
- **The Pipeline's Wartime Role**
 - o Petroline can carry around 7 million bpd (5 million bpd for export). With Hormuz traffic halted, actual flows rose to 4–5 million bpd — 4–5% of global oil supplies, making it a critical safety valve.

- o Its targeting shows alternative routes are also vulnerable.

The Worry for India

- Saudi oil accounted for 7–8% of India's total oil imports recently, mostly via Yanbu.
- India's crude import bill surged 56% YoY (April–July) to \$63.4 billion, despite volumes rising only slightly.
- India imports over 88% of its crude needs; every \$1/barrel rise adds \$2 billion to the annual bill.
- Every 10% oil price rise widens the current account deficit by about 0.4% of GDP.
- The immediate risk is higher prices, not supply shortage, given India's diversified import base.



The Cardiff Agreement: Pact Between Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland

- First Ministers of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland (NI) signed a joint memorandum — the "**Cardiff Agreement**" recently, signalling intent to move toward independence referendums from the UK.
- However, actual constitutional change requires action only the UK Parliament can authorise.
- The agreement asserted the right to self-determination, stating Westminster cannot block democracy.
- **Two triggers:** UK PM Andy Burnham ruling out referendums for Scotland/NI, and US President Trump expressing support for Irish reunification.



How the UK Came Together: Acts of Union

- 1536: Wales legally annexed into the Kingdom of England.
- 1707: England and Scotland united via Acts of Union, forming Great Britain.
- 1801: Ireland joined via Acts of Union, forming the *UK of Great Britain and Ireland*.
- 1922: Most of Ireland gained independence after the Anglo-Irish War; Northern Ireland chose to remain with UK, creating the current **UK of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**.

The Legal Reality

- The UK Parliament retains exclusive legal authority to authorise a referendum in any constituent nation.
- Only a transfer of powers via constitutional change — similar to the 2014 Scottish order — can enable future referendums.
- This is why the Cardiff Agreement calls on the British government to "prepare for, plan and facilitate constitutional change."

US Russia Sanctions Bill: Implications for India's Oil Imports

- The US House of Representatives has passed the "**Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act of 2026**," which could allow the US President to impose tariffs of up to **100%** on countries purchasing Russian oil and gas.
 - The US President has signed the bill to make it a law.
- This is particularly significant for India, since Russia accounts for nearly half of India's crude oil imports.
 - India imports over 88% of its crude oil needs. Russia emerged as India's top supplier after the February 2022 Russia-Ukraine conflict, offering discounted oil as Western countries reduced purchases.
 - India imported around **2.08 million bpd** of Russian crude in **August 2026** — about **45%** of total oil imports (above 50% in preceding months).

What Does the US Bill Propose?

- Gives the US President **discretionary powers** to impose tariffs up to 100% on the five largest buyers of Russian oil and gas — a significant reduction from the original 500% proposal.
- The US Trade Representative would identify targeted countries and recommend tariff rates.
- Targeted countries would typically get 180 days to reduce Russian energy imports or negotiate, though the President could shorten this.

US Admits Space Weapons: The Legal Vacuum on Space Militarisation

- The United States has publicly admitted having active weapons deployed in space — the **first such admission by any country**, sparking a fresh global debate.
- The US Air Force Secretary stated at a Maryland conference that the US now has "**on-orbit space control weapons**" capable of defending joint forces against hostile action, without revealing their nature or deployment timeline.

The Legal Ambiguity

- Despite universal rhetoric about peaceful space use, **no international law explicitly prohibits** deployment of conventional weapons in space.
 - **The Outer Space Treaty, 1967** remains the most relevant law, but:
 - ♣ Bars only **nuclear weapons/WMDs** (weapon of mass destruction) in space.
 - ♣ Is **silent on conventional weapons** and infrastructure-targeting weapons.
 - ♣ Says **nothing about Earth-to-space weapons**, which were distant prospects in the 1960s.
- **Failed regulatory attempts:**
 - **2008:** China and Russia jointly proposed the **PPWT (Prevention of**

What Weaponisation of Space Means?

Though this is the first public admission, such capabilities aren't new. Military space use spans three categories:

Earth-to-space:
Missiles launched from Earth to destroy enemy satellites

Space-to-Earth:
Weapons sent from space targeting ground-based assets

Space-to-space:
Space-based weapons targeting other space assets

It remains unclear which category the newly acknowledged US weapons fall under.

Kinetic and Non-Kinetic Weapons?

- Space weapons need not be kinetic (physically destructive). Non-kinetic methods can be equally effective:
 - Disrupting or jamming communications between space and Earth-based systems
 - Attacking cyber-networks controlling space assets

Demonstrated Capabilities So Far

- **Anti-satellite (ASAT) tests** are the most open demonstration — conducted by four countries: US, Russia, China, and India, each targeting their own non-functional satellite
- **Non-kinetic examples:** Russian hackers gained control of Viasat satellite ground stations just before the February 2022 Ukraine invasion, disrupting internet services used by Ukrainian military agencies; Russia has also reportedly attempted to jam GPS signals in Ukraine

the **Placement of Weapons in Outer Space**) treaty — excluded Earth-to-space weapons and never materialized.

- **PAROS** (Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space) discussions at the *UN Conference on Disarmament* have produced **no treaty**.
- **The Artemis Accords**
 - A NASA/US State Department initiative — a **voluntary code of conduct** for space exploration with **76 signatories**, including **India**. While activities are meant to be peaceful, **nothing prevents signatories from deploying weapons** in space.

India Approves Early Power Exports to Flood-Hit Nepal

- The Centre has approved Nepal's request for early **electricity imports from India** to help mitigate a domestic generation shortfall caused by recent devastating floods.
- The Ministry of Power has cleared **exports** to the Nepal Electricity Authority for **18 hours a day**, from September 13 to December 31, 2026.

Background

- Flash floods on August 26 severely damaged Nepal's hydropower infrastructure.
- 13 hydropower plants were affected, including several under-construction projects, plus one solar power plant.
- As a result, Nepal's domestic generation capacity has fallen by around **550 MW**.

The Approval: Key Details

- **Export duration:** 18 hours daily, from midnight to 6 pm — largely covering solar-generation hours
- **Route 1:** Up to 600 MW via the Muzaffarpur-Dhalkebar line
- **Route 2:** Up to 54 MW via the Tanakpur-Mahendranagar line

The Seasonal Pattern of India-Nepal Power Trade

- Electricity trade between the two countries is normally seasonal: Nepal exports surplus power to India **during the monsoon**, and **imports during the dry winter** months when its hydropower generation declines.
- Nepal typically requests electricity imports from India around October.
- This year, however, the request came earlier — in August — due to flood-related damage to generation capacity.

Trump-Xi Summit

- US President Donald Trump welcomed Chinese President Xi Jinping at Joint Base Andrews, with an airport reception and military flyover — the first such honour for a foreign leader since JFK greeted Harold Macmillan in 1962.
- **Key Outcomes: Minimal Substance**
 - A two-month extension to the US-China trade truce (originally due to end in November).
 - An agreement to reduce tariffs on \$30 billion of goods.
 - ♣ The tariff reductions would apply to US exports such as agricultural goods, wood and cosmetics, as well as US imports including small appliances, toys, decorations.
 - An agreement for China to send two giant pandas to the Atlanta zoo.
 - No deal on AI safety — the one area widely expected to be addressed.
 - ♣ Trump claimed both leaders were willing to "leave AI exactly where it is".
 - ♣ Xi appeared more proactive, stating both sides "should maintain human control of AI".
 - **Taiwan and the Trust Deficit** - US paused a record \$14-billion arms sale to Taiwan amid Chinese pressure; revival status unclear.
- The Trump-Xi summit's grand optics masked a lack of substantive progress on AI safety, Taiwan, and structural trade issues, while its narrow trade truce extension effectively shields China from tariff pressure.

- This leaves India disproportionately exposed to US sanctions threats over Russian oil imports, reinforcing the need for India to carefully navigate its energy security and strategic autonomy amid great-power dynamics.

US-Denmark Greenland Security Deal

- The United States and Denmark have announced an agreement on Greenland's security — over a year after President Trump, in his second term, revived talk of an American takeover of the island.
- The deal was signed at the UN General Assembly and will take effect only after required parliamentary procedures; its full text remains unpublished.

Greenland's Constitutional Position

- A **self-governing territory** within the Kingdom of Denmark.
- Under the 2009 Self-Government Act, Greenland's government holds wide legislative and executive powers.
- Greenlanders retain the **right to self-determination**, including the path to independence.
- Defence and foreign affairs remain with Denmark — hence the deal was negotiated between Washington and Copenhagen, while Nuuk's (Greenland's capital) consent remains politically essential.

What Actually Changes on the Ground?

- The US already had sweeping military access under the **1951 US-Denmark defence agreement** — including free movement across defence areas and overflight/landing rights — though new facilities required Danish agreement.
- **The real innovation:** media reports suggest the new deal makes US access, basing, and overflight rights permanent — even if Greenland's political status changes (i.e., becomes independent).
- **Key ambiguity:** whether new facilities still need Danish/Greenlandic consent. If yes, the shift is limited; if the US gains unilateral authority, it's far more significant.

Why Greenland Matters Strategically?

- **Location:** World's biggest island, in the North Atlantic, mostly within the Arctic Circle.
- **Military/Missile Defence:** Pituffik Space Base hosts early-warning radar for US/NATO to track missile threats and monitor Russian Arctic activity; China and Russia have also scaled up Arctic military capabilities.
- **Critical Minerals:** Large deposits of rare earth elements, used in phones, EVs, electronics, and weapons — China currently leads global rare-earth supply. In 2021, Greenland banned uranium mining (above a specified threshold), stalling the Kvanefjeld rare-earth project.
- **Trade:** Melting ice is opening new shipping routes and access to minerals/fishing areas.

India's Stake

- India is an Observer at the Arctic Council (since 2013), operates the Himadri research station at Ny-Ålesund, and released its Arctic Policy in 2022.
- Great-power militarisation of the Arctic affects the scientific commons India uses, while the rare-earth contest directly touches India's critical-mineral security.

Pakistan-China Border Pact

- Pakistan and China have formalised a boundary in a disputed part of the Himalayas that India claims as its own, signing the **Pakistan-China Boundary Joint Commission**.
- Pakistan called it a "significant milestone," but Delhi rejected the move, saying it has **no legal basis**.

What Was Signed?

- The commission concerns the Pakistan-China frontier, including the **Shaksgam Valley** — a roughly 5,180 sq km tract.
 - The Shaksgam Valley, also known as the Trans-Karakoram Tract, is located in the northernmost part of the Karakoram mountain range, just north of the Siachen Glacier.



- Pakistan ceded this territory to China in 1963, but India claims it as part of Ladakh.
- India maintains this territory belonged to the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, was illegally occupied by Pakistan, and later illegally ceded to China.
- The announcement comes as India and China seek to stabilise ties after years of tension along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).
- Simultaneously, China and Pakistan are deepening cooperation along a neighbouring frontier India also claims.
- **Limited Immediate Impact, But Symbolic Significance**
 - Experts cautioned there are no immediate or apparent implications for the LAC.
 - The real significance lies in the gradual institutionalisation of arrangements India has consistently rejected.

India-China Flight Services Resumed

- China Southern Airlines resumed its regular passenger services on the Guangzhou-New Delhi route from September 21, restarting operations after a six-year suspension.
- This event coincided with Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to India to attend the BRICS summit.
- India-China flight services were suspended following the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. They remained suspended amid the over four-year **military standoff** between the two countries in eastern Ladakh.

The Path to Normalisation

- The resumption of flights is part of the **gradual normalisation** of India-China relations, following two key high-level meetings:

October 2024: PM Modi and President Xi met on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit in Kazan, Russia.

2025: The two leaders met again during the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit in Tianjin.

- Following this improvement in ties, several Chinese and Indian airlines have resumed flight services between cities in the two countries, including the **Beijing-New Delhi route**.
- In March 2026, IndiGo launched a daily flight between Shanghai and Kolkata.

Pakistani Naval Vessel Rams Indian Warship: Grey-Zone Tactics at Sea

- Pakistan Naval Ship (PNS) Hunain, a Yarmook-class corvette, approached an Indian Navy warship at high speed in international waters and manoeuvred unsafely, causing a minor collision. This was the second such incident since 2011.
 - In June 2011, the Pakistani warship **PNS Babur** brushed past the Indian Navy frigate **INS Godavari** in the Gulf of Aden, causing minor damage to the Indian vessel's helicopter safety net.
- The incident occurred about 120 nautical miles from the **Gulf of Oman** in the North Arabian Sea.

• The 1991 Agreement •

The Agreement between India and Pakistan on **Advance Notice on Military Exercises, Manoeuvres and Troop Movements** was signed in April 1991, aimed at preventing crises arising from misreading the other side's intentions.

Key provisions

- Major military exercises near each other's territory should be avoided; if held, prior notification is mandatory.
- **Advance notice periods:** 15 days for certain air/naval exercises, 60 days for corps-level exercises, 90 days for army-level exercises.
- Either side can seek **clarification** on force assembly, direction, extent, and duration of exercises.
- **Naval definition:** A major naval exercise involves six or more ships of destroyer/frigate size or above, crossing into the other's EEZ.
- **Article 10** (the provision India says was violated): Naval ships and submarines must not close within **three nautical miles** of each other in international waters.
- **Aircraft rules:** Combat aircraft must maintain a **10 km distance** from each other's airspace (reduced to **5 km** for specific bases — Jammu, Pathankot, Amritsar, Suratgarh in India; Pasrur, Lahore, Vehari, Rahimyar Khan in Pakistan).
- **A companion treaty** — the Agreement on Prevention of Air Space Violations and for Permitting Over Flights and Landings by Military Aircraft — was signed the same day.

Ramming as a Naval Tactic: Historical Context

Ramming is nearly as old as naval warfare itself — used by the Greeks and Romans.

First modern instance: 1862, Battle of Hampton Roads (American Civil War), when CSS Virginia sank the Union frigate Cumberland.

Resurfaced in both World Wars, including the sinking of PT-109.

Also featured in the Cod Wars between Iceland and the UK over fishing rights.

- India has called this conduct "unacceptable and unprofessional" and a direct violation of **Article 10 of the 1991 bilateral agreement** on advance notice of military exercises.
- The Indian warship was on a routine surveillance mission and suffered no damage, continuing its mission uninterrupted. PNS Hunain was damaged in the incident.

Grey-Zone Warfare in the Arabian Sea

- This incident mirrors China's grey-zone tactics in the South China Sea, where Beijing uses its Coast Guard and maritime militia to ram vessels and fire water cannons.
- Such tactics stay below the threshold of open conflict while advancing strategic goals, exploiting legal ambiguity — similar to "salami slicing" seen in Eastern Ladakh.
- Analysts argue this ambiguity must end: ramming with reinforced hulls or close-range water cannons causing damage comparable to kinetic force should be treated as a grave use of force, justifying proportionate self-defence.

Conclusion

- The PNS Hunain collision violates Article 10 of the 1991 Agreement and signals the arrival of grey-zone tactics in the Arabian Sea.
- For two nuclear-armed neighbours, robust rules of engagement at sea are essential to prevent accidents from escalating into full-blown crises.

India, Sri Lanka Sign Three Defence Sector MoUs

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh visited Sri Lanka— the first visit by an Indian Defence Minister in nearly 40 years — pledging India's continued support.
- Three MoUs on defence equipment and training were signed during the visit.
- The three agreements cover:
 - **Upgradation of L70 Guns** for the Sri Lankan Air Force
 - Cooperation between **National Cadet Corps** of both countries
 - Cooperation between the **National Defence Colleges** of both countries
- **Post-Cyclone Ditwah Assistance**
 - India had earlier pledged a \$450 million reconstruction package under '**Operation Sagar Bandhu**' to help Sri Lanka recover from **Cyclone Ditwah** (late 2025).
 - During this visit, both sides virtually inaugurated **three Bailey bridges**, built by Indian defence forces to restore connectivity in Kurunegala and Batticaloa districts.

SUMMITS AND ORGANISATIONS

UN Adopts Equal Earth Map

- The UN General Assembly adopted the Togo-led "Correct the Map" resolution, moving away from the 16th-century Mercator projection towards the **Equal Earth projection**, which more accurately represents Africa's true size.
- The resolution, backed by 164 countries including India, was opposed by the US, with six abstentions.
- Alongside this, a new UN world map has **controversially depicted India's Arunachal Pradesh and Aksai Chin** as territories caught between "unspecified" Indian and Chinese claim lines.

Why a New Map Was Needed?

- No flat map can perfectly represent the Earth, since a spheroid transformed onto two dimensions must always distort one of four properties: **area, shape, distance, or direction**.
- The Mercator map, introduced in 1569 by Gerardus Mercator, is a conformal cylindrical projection valued for navigation — it renders compass bearings as straight lines.
- However, its widening latitude gaps toward the poles cause landmasses far from the equator to appear far larger than reality.
- Africa, for instance, appears similar in size to Greenland, though Greenland is actually 14 times smaller.
- Critics have long called this a "**colonial lens**," arguing the Mercator projection reflects Western-centric cartography and even served as a political tool during Europe's Scramble for Africa.

India's Objection

- The map:
 - Shows Arunachal Pradesh's northern border as the "Indian Line" and its southern border with Assam as marked by a "Chinese line," while eliminating the state's border with Nagaland.
 - Depicts Aksai Chin's eastern border as the "Indian Line" and western border along what appears to be a "Chinese line" — effectively separating Aksai Chin from Ladakh, contrary to India's official position that it is part of Ladakh.
 - Unlike the UN's 2011 map, these lines are not explicitly labelled as "claim lines" this time.
 - Notably, it depicts Jammu and Kashmir with a dotted line marking the Line of Control (LoC), accompanied by an explanatory note stating the final status of J&K remains unresolved — but carries no equivalent explanatory note for the Arunachal-Aksai Chin depiction.
- While India supported the resolution's underlying principle of equal-area cartographic representation, it **objected sharply** to how the accompanying UN world map depicted its territory.

Types of Map Projections

- **Conformal projections** (e.g., Mercator): preserve angles and shapes — best for navigation.
- **Equal-area projections** (e.g., Equal Earth, Gall-Peters): preserve relative land area — best for statistical/thematic data.
 - Both map projections accurately preserve the relative surface area of landmasses, but Gall-Peters severely stretches shapes vertically, whereas Equal Earth uses a modern design to keep continental shapes looking balanced and natural
- **Equidistant projections**: preserve distance.
- **Compromise projections** (e.g., Robinson, Winkel Tripel): balance multiple distortions — used for general reference maps.
- Alternatives have emerged over decades: the **Gall-Peters projection** (1855/1973) preserved area but distorted shapes; the **Robinson projection** (1963) balanced size and shape; and the **Winkel Tripel projection** (1921) reduced distortion across multiple properties, becoming National Geographic's standard by 1998.
- The **Equal Earth map**, developed in 2018 by an international cartographer team, preserves relative land areas while allowing minor shape/distance distortion, correcting the visual diminishing of the Global South, including South Asia.

EU Invites Canada as First 'Associate Member'

- European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen invited **Canada** to become the **EU's first "Associate Member"** during her State of the Union address in Strasbourg.
 - Associate Member - An informal status—not full EU membership—that grants **closer institutional partnership** on trade, security, or policy areas without complete integration or voting rights within EU institutions.
 - Its exact structure for Canada remains **undefined**.
- EU President cited converging EU-Canada values, especially shared belief in democracy, amid the cold fragility of today's world.
- This comes days after **Trump's trade war** on Canada and strained **US-EU relations** over trade and defence.
- EU President also proposed a '**European Security Council**' with Canada, Norway, UK, and Ukraine, citing Russian airspace violations.

The 'Enemy State' Clause

- At her first UNGA address, Japan's PM **Sanae Takaichi** called for removing "enemy state" references from the UN Charter — labels recently used by **China and Russia** to attack Japan's defence spending plans.
- **What Is the Enemy State Clause?**
 - Found in Articles 53, 77, and 107 of the UN Charter (1945), designating WWII Axis powers (including Japan).
 - Allows Allied powers to take military/preventive action against Axis nations without UNSC approval.
- **Why Japan Wants It Removed?**
 - UNGA declared clauses **obsolete in 1995**; a **2005 resolution** called for deletion.
 - Framed within Japan's broader push for **UN/UNSC reform**.
 - Comes amid rising tensions: **China's rare-earth restrictions**, military drills near Japan; **Russia's** exercises and Putin's **2026 Kuril Islands visit**.
- **How It's Weaponised Diplomatically?**
 - **China** cites it to defend the postwar order.
 - **Russia** uses it to challenge Japan's Kuril Islands claims.
- **Why Nothing Changes** - Charter amendment requires **all P5 members' domestic ratification** — unlikely given US troop presence in Japan and P5 fears of broader UNSC reform demands.

UNGA 2026: India's Push for Reformed Multilateralism

EAM S. Jaishankar called for stronger, reformed multilateralism amid growing geopolitical competition, while co-chairing the inaugural **Partners for Multilateralism, International Law, Peace & Prosperity (P4M) Summit** with European Council President Antonio Costa, on the sidelines of the 81st UNGA in New York.

Key Highlights

- **Global Order Under Stress**
 - Jaishankar argued the long-term rebalancing of global power has become more difficult due to intense strategic competition.
 - Stressed the need for cooperation in: peace and security, climate action, emerging technologies, development finance, counter-terrorism, global supply chains, disaster resilience, and pandemic preparedness.

- **The '4F Crisis'**

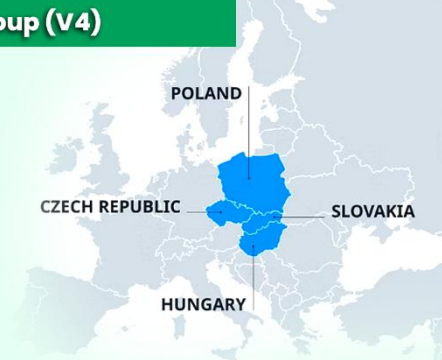
- o Flagged global vulnerability to disruptions in essential supplies — the **"4F crisis": Fuel, Food, Fertiliser, and Finance**.
- o Called for:
 - ♣ **Frameworks and guardrails** for emerging technologies.
 - ♣ **De-risking and diversification** to reduce dependence on strategic chokepoints.
 - ♣ International cooperation to prevent supply chain disruptions.
 - ♣ Greater **resilience against geopolitical shocks**.
 - ♣ Aligns with India's approach of maintaining **strategic autonomy** and diversified partnerships rather than over-reliance on any single bloc.

- **Reformed Multilateralism**

- o India advocated for multilateralism based on: More participative deliberations; Transparent decision-making; Greater representation of contemporary global realities; Respect for international law, rules, and norms.

India and the Visegrád Group (V4)

- **V4 comprises:** Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia
- EAM participated in the **first-ever** V4+India Foreign Ministers' Meeting
- Focus areas: political/diplomatic affairs, economy and trade, defence and security, technology, space, connectivity, and **people-to-people (P2P) relations**
- **V4** backed India's bid for **UNSC permanent membership**, calling India an important Global South country and emerging Indo-Pacific power.



UN Sea Level Declaration

- The UNGA adopted its **first-ever declaration on rising sea levels**, an existential threat to vulnerable populations worldwide.
- The global rise rate more than doubled from 2.1 mm/year (1993-2002) to 4.7 mm/year (2015-2024), with 2024 recording the largest annual rise on record (~6 mm).

- **India's Stake**

- o India's MEA welcomed the declaration, backing **stable maritime zones** and equity via **"common but differentiated responsibilities"**.

Key Provisions

- Affirms a "presumption in favour of continued statehood" — a country retains statehood, sovereignty, and UN seat even if the sea swallows its territory.
- Countries keep their nautical boundaries (territorial sea, EEZ) even as coastlines retreat.
- Calls for building sea-level projections into coastal infrastructure planning.
- Supports "mobility with dignity" and human rights for displaced people (e.g., Tuvalu's climate visa scheme with Australia).
- The declaration schedules another high-level meeting on sea level rise by September 2030 giving member states four years to show results.

- o India has **1,298 offshore islands** and an **11,098.8 km coastline** — fixed nautical boundaries protect vast maritime territory via Lakshadweep and Andaman-Nicobar.

- o Continues India's Pacific outreach (Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC), Infrastructure for Resilient Island States).

International Space Summit

- The International Space Summit was held from September 9 to 10, 2026, at the Grand Palais in Paris, France.
- Two-day summit organised by **France**, with participation from **over 120 countries**, aimed at initiating regular international dialogue on space exploration and the evolving space economy.
- PM Modi, in a video address at the Summit, invited France and the world to be co-travellers in India's space frontier, invoking 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' as the guiding philosophy for space cooperation.
- Over 50 projects were signed, including a **push for European-led** commercial space station studies (awarded to Airbus and OHB) and the announcement of **Adrianos Golemis** becoming **Greece's first astronaut** on a private ISS mission scheduled for 2027.

Global Talks on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS)

- Nearly 128 countries agreed on a text defining Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) — dubbed "killer robots" by critics — marking a first step toward possible international treaty talks to regulate them.
- **The Agreement**
 - o The Netherlands has been overseeing the talks
 - o The **exact text remains unpublished**, though campaign groups have criticised leading countries for delaying progress.
- **The Core Concern**
 - o Countries are already developing/using weapons capable of selecting and engaging targets without human intervention.
 - o Experts warned that unconstrained development and use of such systems poses serious legal, ethical, and humanitarian challenges.
 - o They are calling for legally binding international rules to restrict their use.
 - o Critics accused the US, Russia, and their allies of trying to weaken the agreed text.
- **What's Next?**
 - o UN member states will decide at November talks under the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) whether to move toward a binding international treaty regulating autonomous weapons.

Digital Hawala: Technology's New Frontier in Money Laundering and Terror Financing

- The centuries-old hawala and other underground banking systems are undergoing rapid technological transformation, dubbed "**digital hawala**."
- This has been highlighted in a Financial Action Task Force (FATF) report, "Investigating Professional Money Laundering, Underground Banking, and the Use of Hawala and Other Similar Service Providers (HOSSPs)".

From Traditional Hawala to Digital Hawala

- Hawala is an informal value-transfer mechanism enabling cross-border movement of money or value without conventional banking channels, relying on trust, brokers, and settlement through cash, trade, or other transactions.
- Digital hawala refers to the **technology-enabled evolution of these informal networks** using encrypted communication, fintech platforms, virtual assets, AI, and digital infrastructure.
- FATF identifies six broad forms of digital hawala:
 - **Digital coordination, traditional settlement** — encrypted messaging apps and shared digital ledgers coordinate instructions while settlement remains traditional.
 - **Integration with formal digital infrastructure** — payment service providers, fintech platforms, and virtual IBANs (International Bank Account Number) facilitate fund movement.
 - **Digital interface (customer oriented)** — mobile wallets and fintech apps serve as the customer-facing layer, while Hawala operators still settle balances via cash or trade.
 - **Virtual-asset settlement** — stablecoins and other virtual assets settle balances directly between operators.
 - **AI-enabled operations** — AI supports automated transaction structuring, dynamic routing through mule accounts, and rapid fiat-to-cryptocurrency conversion.
 - **Hawala applications/ecosystems** — integrated platforms combining messaging, cloud storage, social media, Virtual Asset Service Providers (VASPs), lending apps, and gaming platforms.

WHY DIGITISATION MATTERS?

- Digitisation is not replacing traditional hawala but acting as a catalyst for existing settlement mechanisms — cash remains important at collection and exit points.
- Technology makes underground financial networks:
 - Faster and more geographically extensive.
 - More opaque and harder to trace.
 - More resilient against disruption.
 - Less dependent on identifiable interpersonal relationships.
 - Capable of blending informal finance with formal digital infrastructure.
- This illustrates the broader Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) challenge created by the convergence of fintech, crypto-assets, and informal finance — where legitimate financial innovations can simultaneously enable illicit finance.

KEY CHALLENGES

Structural Weaknesses

- Lack of reliable data on the scale of underground banking, inconsistent terminology (particularly varied use of the term "hawala"), difficulty in cross-border information sharing, growing use of virtual assets and digital platforms, and fragmented enforcement across jurisdictions.

Challenges for Law Enforcement

- Digitalisation has weakened traditional investigative methods based on tracing personal relationships and physical cash movements, as access-controlled digital platforms can conceal participants and compartmentalise networks.

The Policy Paradox

- FATF highlights an important unintended consequence: aggressive AML/CFT enforcement and bank de-risking can push legitimate customers away from formal channels toward informal systems.

Way Forward: FATF Recommendations

- **Greater use of technology-enabled financial investigation** — For instance, Indonesia's Financial Intelligence Unit uses blockchain analytics to trace virtual-asset flows where unlicensed transfer services (*often linked to "digital hawala"*) intersect with crypto-assets.
- **Balancing enforcement** — Policymakers must avoid excessive bank de-risking, instead expanding legitimate access to regulated financial systems while maintaining strong risk-based AML/CFT controls.
- **A comprehensive response** encompassing risk-based regulation, stronger Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) capabilities, blockchain and digital-forensics expertise, cross-border intelligence sharing, regulation of VASPs, and improved data collection.

INS Nipun

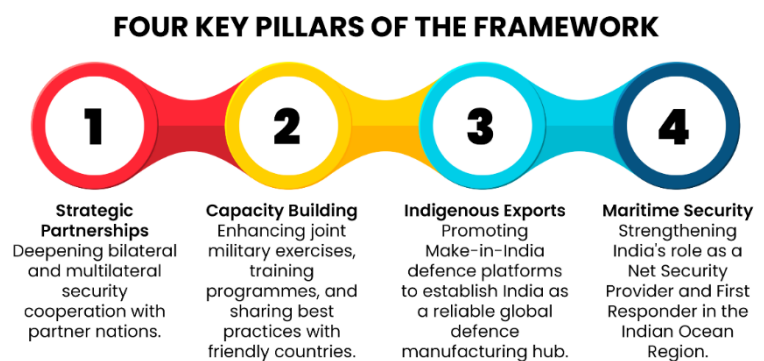
- The Indian Navy commissioned INS Nipun, the second **diving support vessel (DSV)** of the Nistar-class, at the Naval Dockyard in Mumbai. The first, INS Nistar, was commissioned in July 2025.
 - A DSV is a specialised platform enabling a navy to sustain complex underwater operations for extended periods in deep, challenging waters.
 - It provides diving systems, equipment, medical facilities, and operational support for missions like submarine rescue, underwater inspection.
 - Hence, it reduces dependence on shore-based facilities and enabling rapid response to underwater contingencies.
- The 9,000-tonne vessel will significantly strengthen the Western Naval Command's deep-sea diving.
- Previously, the Indian Navy relied on Russian-origin submarine rescue vessels and a mix of shore facilities and diving units, which lacked multidomain operational capability and endurance for long sea deployments.

Highest-Ranking Woman IAF Officer

- Air Vice-Marshal Shakti Sharma has become the **first woman officer (non-medical)** in the Indian defence forces to reach the rank of Air Vice Marshal or its equivalent.
- This is a milestone yet to be achieved by women officers in the Army or Navy, where the highest rank reached so far is Colonel or equivalent.
- This achievement follows the IAF granting Permanent Commission status to women officers in **2010**, well ahead of the Army and Navy, which extended it more broadly only after Supreme Court intervention in 2020.
- Other recent IAF milestones include Group Captain **Shaliza Dhami** commanding a missile squadron (2023) and Squadron Leader **Bhawana Kanth** clearing the Fighter Combat Leader course.

RAKSHA Document on Defence Diplomacy

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh released the "**RAKSHA**" document on **defence diplomacy** in New Delhi— a comprehensive framework outlining India's strategic roadmap and vision for global defence partnerships over the next 10 years.
- The document marks a shift in India's strategic engagement, aligning national security objectives with proactive global



cooperation to foster long-term stability and mutual growth. It positions defence diplomacy as a core pillar of India's foreign policy.

The document provides a clear, actionable roadmap aimed at ensuring India remains an anchor of peace, stability, and rule-based order in an evolving global landscape.

Police Modernisation Mission

- The Union government told the Supreme Court recently, that it has begun implementing a ₹24,000-crore umbrella scheme — **the Police Modernisation Mission (PMM)** — to modernise police forces over the next five years.
- The submission was made in a *suo motu* proceeding initiated in 2025 after the court took note of a media report highlighting non-functional CCTV cameras at police stations in Udaipur, Rajasthan.
- The court had subsequently sought compliance while reviewing the implementation of its 2021 judgment in *Paramvir Singh Saini vs Baljit Singh* case.
 - This case had mandated the installation of night vision CCTV cameras at key locations within police stations, including entry and exit points, lockups, corridors, reception areas, and the rooms of inspectors and sub-inspectors.

Constitutional and Structural Context

- Police and law and order fall under Entry 2, List II (State List), Seventh Schedule — primary responsibility rests with states.
- Due to financial constraints, the MHA supplements state efforts.

Existing Government Initiatives

- **Assistance to States & UTs for Modernisation of Police (ASUMP) scheme:** Equips police stations with technology, weapons, communication, mobility
- **Modernisation of State Police Forces (MPF) scheme** (since 1969-70): Infrastructure, training, housing, computerisation
- **Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS):** Covers **17,798 police stations** nationally for crime-data sharing
- **SMART Policing:** Covers cybercrime, drug de-addiction, LWE countermeasures

Nasha Mukht Bharat 2029: India's Roadmap to a Drug-Free Nation

- The Government of India has prepared a roadmap — the '**Vision Document 2026-2029**' — to make India drug-free by 2029.
- Prepared under Home Minister's leadership, the roadmap defines clear timelines, monitoring mechanisms, and measurable outcomes for the next three years.
- It was launched at the **10th Apex-level NCORD (Narco Coordination Centre) meeting** in New Delhi in June 2026. To create awareness about this, the govt recently organized a "Vartalap" with different stakeholders.

Why This Matters: Linking to Viksit Bharat 2047

- The govt. has set the goal of a fully developed India by 2047. This vision rests not just on economic and technological strength, but also on a **healthy, disciplined, drug-free youth force** — critical given India is the **world's youngest major nation**.
- Drugs affect health, families, social order, and national security, making **Nasha Mukht Bharat 2029** a foundational pillar for Viksit Bharat 2047.

Achievements So Far (2019 – July 2026)

- 93,33,987 kg of narcotic and psychotropic substances seized, valued at ₹1,53,212 crore
- 44,88,576 kg of seized NDPS substances (worth ₹88,010 crore) destroyed
- ₹3,992 crore worth of illegal properties/assets frozen or seized
- 128 illegal clandestine labs dismantled
- 16,966+ NCORD meetings held across all four levels since 2019
- 539 key cases discussed in the Joint Coordination Committee (JCC)
- 27 Bilateral Agreements, 19 MoUs, 2 Security Cooperation Agreements signed
- Direct Interpol contact with 195 countries established via BHARATPOL
- 3.33 lakh+ citizens engaged through the MANAS helpline (1933)

Key Highlights of the Document

• The Four Pillars of the Roadmap

- The three-year roadmap (July 2026 – July 2029) rests on four pillars:
 - Intelligence and operation-based enforcement
 - Precursor and synthetic drugs control
 - Demand and harm reduction
 - Capacity building and coordination

• Operational mantra: Detect, Disrupt, Destroy

- **Detect:** Identify source, route, peddler, technology, payment channels, kingpins.
- **Disrupt:** Target transit, logistics, precursor supply, darknet networks, hawala, narco-financing.
- **Destroy:** Eliminate drug labs, illicit cultivation, cartel assets, leadership, distribution networks.
- The roadmap comprises 25 components and more than 200 action points.

• Strategic Focus Areas

- The plan operates through Supply Reduction, Demand Reduction, and Harm Reduction, with special emphasis on:
 - Targeting networks, finance, and fugitives;
 - A Whole-of-Government approach;
 - Strengthening joint striking capability of agencies — from policy to prosecution;
 - A network-centric enforcement approach, addressing synthetic drugs and darknet-enabled trafficking.

• Expanding Treatment and Rehabilitation

- 5-fold expansion in treatment capacity: Drug de-addiction centres to increase from 334 to 1,751 by March 2029;
- Special facilities for children and women;
- A dedicated department in one medical college per state.

• Making It a People's Movement

- Target: expand outreach from current **20 crore** to **50 crore people**
- 1 lakh 'Nasha Mukh Bharat Mitras' to be trained through NCC, NSS, and My Bharat
- Schools and colleges positioned as the "first line of defence" against drug abuse
- Ministry of Education and Ministry of Youth and Sports collaborating to make educational institutions drug-free

• Implementation and Accountability Mechanisms

- 100% central sector funding for Anti-Narcotics infrastructure
- Every state to have a fully equipped Anti-Narcotics Task Force (ANTF) by March 2027
- Time-bound reporting on drug samples within 30 days
- Quarterly outcome-based monitoring by MHA
- New NCB Zonal Office in Shimla to be operational soon

PRAHAAR: India's New Counter-Terrorism Strategy

- Union Home Minister Amit Shah launched a new '**Extradition Portal**' to speed up bringing fugitives back to India, while inaugurating the conference on '**PRAHAAR**' - Counter Terrorism (CT) Policy and Strategy' — calling for a stronger, technology-driven counter-terrorism mechanism.
- The minister stressed continuous review and strengthening of the **PRAHAAR framework** through systematic analysis of terror incidents.

Implementation Priorities



Seven Pillars of PRAHAAR

| Prevention | Response | Aggregating Internal Capacities | Human Rights
| Attenuating Conditions for Terrorism | Aligning International Efforts | Recovery and Resilience

3rd ANTF National Conference

- Union Home Minister Amit Shah inaugurated the 3rd National Conference of Anti-Narcotics Task Force (ANTF) Heads of States/UTs in New Delhi.
- The conference marked a shift from institution-building to decisive action in India's fight against drugs.
- **Evolution Across Three ANTF Conferences**
 - First conference: Created and strengthened the institutional mechanism
 - Second conference: Focused on capability, action, and execution
 - Third conference: Converting the roadmap into a decisive battle, with focus on Target, Timeline, and Accountability

AASHVAST Labs: India's New Defence Against Drone Vulnerabilities

- The Indian Army will soon operate six **AASHVAST labs** nationwide, where all its drones — and eventually CCTV cameras — will undergo mandatory inspections to identify and eliminate firmware-level vulnerabilities, ensuring they don't fail during operations in contested zones.
- **AASHVAST**
 - **Full form:** Assessment and Analysis of Electronic Systems Hardware for Vulnerabilities and Security Threats
 - A Firmware Analysis and Validation Suite, developed by QuickPay Pvt Ltd for the Directorate General of Electronics and Mechanical Engineering (DG EME)
 - Goes beyond physical inspection — examines the software operating drones (UAVs) to detect firmware-level flaws

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

1 Key Launches at the Event

- Television Commercials (TVCs) to spread awareness against narcotics.
- Foundation stone laid for new NCB zonal complexes in Lucknow and Dehradun.

2 The Resolve: A Drug-Free India by 2029

- Shah declared the intent to achieve victory over the drug trade by December 31, 2029.
- Drew parallels with past successes: ending decades-old challenges like Kashmir terrorism, Northeast insurgency, and Naxalism through MHA-state cooperation.

3 Transforming ANTF into Anti-Narco Mission Command

- The Union Minister called for elevating ANTFs into a full "Anti-Narco Mission Command," requiring State Chief Secretaries to rethink manpower, technology, and budget allocation, with central government strong emphasis on technology and forensics in capacity building.

What the Labs Will Detect

The labs can identify approximately 14 types of vulnerabilities, introduced either during manufacturing or upgrades, including:

- Geospatial vulnerabilities — malfunctions triggered over specific locations
- Navigation issues — failure to reach preset destinations
- Hidden/unused codes — that could cause premature termination before reaching target
- Time and location-based bugs — drones functioning normally except at specific times/locations

The labs will also examine for:

- Chinese and/or other foreign-origin active components
- Hidden passwords, embedded keys, remote access tools
- Location-based security controls

Exercises

Varuna	• Indian Navy warship INS Trishul arrived in Toulon, France to participate in the 24th edition of Varuna, the bilateral maritime exercise with the French Navy. ◦ The India-France naval exercise began in 1993, but it was officially renamed "Varuna" in 2001.
Tarang Shakti-26	• The Indian Air Force to host the second edition of its largest-ever multinational air exercise, Tarang Shakti-26, from September 26 to October 12 at Air Force Station, Jodhpur, and adjoining bases. • The maiden edition was held in August-September 2024 in two phases, with 11 countries participating.

	• Scale and Participation - o Eight forces flying assets: India, Australia, Bangladesh, France, US, Germany, Sri Lanka, and UAE. - o 32 countries attending as observers. • The exercise will also display India's growing defence capabilities — indigenous platforms, sensors, weapons, and unmanned systems — reflecting that Atmanirbharta (self-reliance) and international cooperation are complementary, not contradictory.
Veer Guardian	• The Japanese Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF) contingent participated in Exercise Veer Guardian 2026 at Jodhpur. • Veer Guardian is a bilateral air exercise between the Indian Air Force and JASDF. • This was the second edition of the bilateral exercise. The first edition of the exercise was held in 2023 at Hyakuri Air Base, Japan. • Other India-Japan exercises: Dharma Guardian (Army), JIMEX (Navy), backed by the 2008 Security Cooperation Declaration, 2+2 Dialogue, and the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA). - o ACSA acts as an umbrella pact enabling India and Japan to reciprocally share logistics, supplies, and refuelling support. - o Alongside related agreements, it provides the legal basis for information sharing, terms of equipment use, and protection of shared sensitive information.
Yudh Abhyas 2026	• The 22nd edition of the joint India-US military exercise 'Yudh Abhyas' was held at the Auli Foreign Training Node, Uttarakhand, with simultaneous conduct at the Mahajan Field Firing Range, Rajasthan. • About Yudh Abhyas - o An annual exercise jointly conducted by the Indian Army and US Army. - o First conducted in 2004. • Other India-US Bilateral Exercises - o Cope India - Air Force - o Vajra Praha - Special Forces - o Tiger Triumph - Tri-Services - o Sea Defenders - Coast Guard

Hanging Glaciers

A **2026 Nature study** has identified **219 hanging glaciers** in the **Alaknanda Basin, Garhwal Himalayas**, highlighting the growing risk of **ice avalanches, glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs) and cascading disasters** due to Himalayan warming.

What are Hanging Glaciers?

They are **ice masses located on steep mountain slopes/cliffs**, often structurally unstable. **Rapid warming and changing precipitation** increase glacier instability by altering ice velocity, geometry and underlying frozen ground. Destabilization can cause sudden **glacier/ice-rock break-offs** → **avalanches** → **river blockage** → **GLOFs/floods** → **Loss of lives & infrastructure**. This represents a **cascading hazard**, rather than an isolated glacier or flood event.

Uttarakhand's First Real-Time GLOF Early-Warning System

Uttarakhand is shifting from **mapping glacial lakes to real-time monitoring**, beginning with **Vasundhara Tal, Chamoli**.

- **Need:** National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has identified **13 high-risk glacial lakes** in Uttarakhand; **5 are Category A**.
- **Monitoring:** Sensors will track **water level, weather, snow depth, water flow, vibrations & ground movement**.
- **Technology:** **Solar-powered** system; data transmitted via **satellite** due to lack of mobile connectivity. Data logger/dashboard will generate **alerts when predefined thresholds are crossed**.
- **Scientific Basis:** Bathymetric surveys assess **lake depth & water-holding capacity** to estimate GLOF potential.

Status of Coral Reefs of the World Report

The **7th Status of Coral Reefs of the World report** by the **Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN)** warns that **coral bleaching is becoming more frequent**, leaving reefs insufficient time to recover.

Key Findings of the Report (Based on observations across **36,886 reef sites (1980-2024)**)

- **Coral Decline:** Global hard coral cover declined **~9.5%** from the 1980-2009 baseline. Since 2010, major bleaching events recur every **4-6 years**, vs **~once a decade** earlier. Coral cover fell **8.9% in 2023-24**.
-  **Rising Heat Stress:** Reef **sea-surface temperatures rose ~0.81°C (1985-2025)**. In **2024, 87% of reefs** experienced unprecedented heat stress. **42.6%** faced **≥8°C-weeks** of heat stress, associated with widespread bleaching and mortality.

Why are Coral Reefs Declining? **Climate change-driven marine heatwaves** are the strongest driver of coral decline, causing **bleaching and mortality**. These impacts are intensified by **pollution, overfishing and habitat degradation**, while increasingly shorter recovery periods prevent reefs from recovering before the next bleaching event.

What is Coral Bleaching? Corals live in symbiosis with **zooxanthellae (algae)** that provide food and colour. Excessive heat stress causes corals to **expel these algae** → **bleaching**. Prolonged/severe stress can cause **coral mortality**.

- Since 1998, **four major global coral bleaching events** have occurred (**1998-99, 2010-11, 2016-17 and 2023-25**), with the **2023-25 event being the fastest and most widespread** recorded so far.

Regional Hotspots:

- **Caribbean:** Particularly severe; average hard coral cover only **7.1% in 2024**.

- **ROPME Sea Area** (formerly known as the **Kuwait Action Plan Region**- covering parts of the Gulf and surrounding waters): About **50% loss** in hard coral cover during 2020-24; cover **~15% in 2024**.
- **Australia & Pacific**: Moderate declines, especially after recent global bleaching events.

Myristica Swamps

A recent study in *Current Science* has highlighted the **rapid disappearance of Myristica swamps in Kerala**, among India's **oldest and rarest freshwater swamp ecosystems**, due to logging and conversion for agriculture and plantations.

What are Myristica Swamps? They are **freshwater swamp forests** with **waterlogged soils, pneumatophores and stilt roots**, found mainly in the **Western Ghats south of 15.5°N**. In Kerala, they are restricted to **Shendurney Wildlife Sanctuary, Anchal and Kulathupuzha**; small patches also occur in the **Andaman & Nicobar Islands**.

Ecological Significance:	Threats:	Conservation:
• Biodiversity: Supports a high proportion of Kerala's amphibians, birds, reptiles and other fauna. • Water Regulation: Acts as a natural sponge, recharging groundwater and maintaining perennial streams. • Flood Control & Carbon Storage: Absorbs excess water and acts as a carbon sink.	• Logging and conversion to paddy, tea, areca nut, oil palm and teak. • Drainage, dykes and habitat disturbance reduce water-holding capacity, increasing floods and dry-season water scarcity.	• Legal protection + habitat/hydrological restoration. • DNA barcoding and biodiversity documentation. • Community-based and long-term ecological monitoring.

UNEP: "Overshoot, Peak and Decline" Pathway

According to **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)**'s 2026 *Limiting Overshoot* report, **crossing 1.5°C of global warming is now likely unavoidable** and advocates **minimizing the magnitude and duration of the overshoot**, followed by efforts to bring warming back below 1.5°C.

Why does 1.5°C Matter? The **Paris Agreement (2015)** seeks to keep warming **well below 2°C**, pursuing **1.5°C**. Every fraction of warming increases **climate risks**; **1-2 years above 1.5°C do not breach the target**, which concerns **long-term warming**.

Projected Warming:

- **Current Policies**: **~2.6°C** by 2100.
- **If All Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) & Net-Zero Targets are Met**: Peak of **~1.8°C**. Every **5 years** of continued high emissions could add **~0.1°C** to peak warming.

What is "Overshoot, Peak & Decline"? It refers to a pathway where global warming **temporarily exceeds 1.5°C**, but the **magnitude and duration of the overshoot are minimized**, followed by efforts to **bring warming below 1.5°C by 2100**. It is **not the preferred pathway**, but the best remaining option if 1.5°C is breached.

Why is Overshoot Dangerous? Prolonged warming above 1.5°C could accelerate **sea-level rise and glacier loss, coral reef collapse, food-production losses** and the risk of **climate tipping points** involving Greenland/West Antarctic ice sheets, Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation and the Amazon. Some impacts may be **irreversible**, and returning below 1.5°C would **not undo all damage** caused during the overshoot.

Three-Step Response:

- **Now**: Deep and rapid **emission reductions** + protection of vulnerable populations and ecosystems.
- **At peak warming**: Reach at least **net-zero CO₂** while strengthening adaptation.

- **After peak:** Achieve **net-negative CO₂ emissions** through **Carbon Dioxide Removal (CDR)** to gradually lower temperatures.

Methane Focus: Methane contributes around **0.5°C of current warming** and is a key target for near-term climate action. Major sources include **fossil fuels, livestock, rice cultivation, landfills and wastewater**.

- The report highlights that cutting **60-70 million tonnes** of hard to abate methane could have a warming impact comparable to removing **~220 Gt of CO₂**.
- **159 countries** have joined the **Global Methane Pledge** to cut methane emissions by **30% from 2020 levels by 2030**, while **India is not a signatory**.

Purse Seine Fishing

The Supreme Court (SC) has sought Tamil Nadu's response to allegations that the State imposed a fresh blanket ban on purse seine fishing, despite the Court's earlier order permitting regulated fishing in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

What is Purse Seine Fishing? A fishing method in which a **large vertical net encircles a school of fish** in open water and is then closed from below.

Background & SC Directions:

- **Tamil Nadu banned purse seine fishing in 2000**; the **Madras High Court upheld** the ban in 2019.
- SC had **conditionally permitted** fishing beyond **12 nautical miles (NM)** in the EEZ (**12–200 NM**), subject to **Vessel Tracking System (VTS), biometric IDs and registration**.
- **State jurisdiction:** Up to **12 NM**; **EEZ:** Centre's jurisdiction under the **EEZ Rules, 2025**.
- SC had restricted fishing to **Mondays & Thursdays, 8 AM–6 PM**.

Key Concern: Balance **fishermen's livelihoods** with marine conservation, particularly concerns over **non-selective catch and juvenile fish**.

Way Forward: Strengthen **VTS monitoring, scientific catch and Centre-State-fishermen consultation**.

Wildlife Crime Control Bureau

The **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)** constituted a **4-member Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) team** to investigate the suspected **international organized wildlife-crime linkage** behind the mysterious appearance of an orangutan in **Balasore, Odisha**.

About WCCB:

- **What is it?** A **statutory body** under the **MoEFCC** established under **Section 38Y of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972**; operational since **2008**.
- **Composition:** Multidisciplinary body comprising officials from **Police, Forest, Customs and intelligence/enforcement agencies**.
- **Headquarters:** **New Delhi**; regional offices in **Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai and Bhopal**.
- **Key Functions:**
 - Collects and shares **intelligence on organized wildlife crime** and maintains a centralized wildlife-crime database.
 - Coordinates enforcement among **Central and State agencies** and supports investigation and prosecution.
 - Implements India's obligations under **international wildlife conventions**, particularly **CITES**.

- Coordinates with **INTERPOL** and the **World Customs Organization (WCO)** against cross-border wildlife trafficking. Builds capacity through **training, species identification and scientific investigation**. Advises the Government on **wildlife-crime policy, laws and international threats**.

Orangutan- Key Facts

- **Meaning:** “Orangutan” means “**man of the forest**” in Malay.
- **Features:** Largest **arboreal mammals**; with distinctive reddish fur, long powerful arms and grasping hands/feet.
- **Intelligence:** Great apes sharing about **96.4% of their genes with humans**.
- **Habitat:** Primarily **lowland tropical forests** of Indonesia and Malaysia; largely solitary and highly adapted to life in trees.
- **Species:** Three species:
 - **Bornean-** ~104,700; **Critically Endangered**
 - **Sumatran** <14000; **Critically Endangered**
 - **Tapanuli- <800; Critically Endangered**, most endangered great ape.
- **Major Threats:** Deforestation, habitat loss, hunting and illegal wildlife trade.

Open Waste Burning in Indian Cities

According to a working paper by the World Resources Institute (WRI) India Open waste burning rises sharply in winter across different categories of Indian cities, with the average incidence, quantity of waste burned, and associated emissions as much as three times higher than in summer.

Key Findings:	Way Forward
• Winter Surge: Incidence, quantity burned and emissions were up to 3× higher than in summer. • Tier-3 cities: Highest winter incidence- 49.6 incidents/km²/day. • Tier-2 cities: Highest quantity burned; 21 → 41 tonnes/day from summer to winter. • Socio-Economic Disparity: Poorer areas experienced substantially more burning. • Pollution: Open burning contributed <1% of citywide PM2.5 and PM10 emissions, but causes significant local exposure to toxic smoke. • Waste Composition: Paper and plastics were major materials burned. • Drivers: Gaps in waste collection/services, seasonal disposal practices and burning for warmth.	• Strengthen door-to-door collection and eliminate waste-collection gaps, especially in poorer settlements. • Establish “waste-sensitive” hotspot mapping and targeted enforcement. • Expand waste segregation, recycling, composting and processing capacity. • Provide safe heating alternatives for sanitation/waste workers during winter. • Strictly enforce ban/zero-tolerance measures against open burning, backed by regular inspections. • Use community awareness + behavioural interventions to discourage burning. • Integrate open-burning data into city air-quality and solid-waste management plans.

Stricter Stubble-Burning Rules

The Centre recently proposed tougher rules for **Delhi, Punjab, Haryana and the NCR of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh** to curb winter air pollution. The rules propose a “**red entry**” in land revenue records for **15 months** against farmers found burning stubble.

Key Provisions of the Proposal

- **Red Entry:** Remains for **15 months**; can be extended by another 15 months for **repeat burning or non-payment of compensation**.
- **Fine:** ₹5,000 (<2 acres), ₹10,000 (2-<5 acres), ₹30,000 (>5 acres).
- If the penalty is not paid within 30 days, it could be recovered as arrears of land revenue.
- **Possible impact:** Restrictions on **land sale, government schemes & MSP procurement**.
- **Penalty funds:** will be used through **State Pollution Control Boards/Pollution Control Committees** to support **crop-residue management machinery, crop diversification, and biomass utilization & storage infrastructure**.

Way Forward: Combine **strict enforcement + affordable residue-management technology + crop diversification + biomass markets**.

SC Stikes Down Maharashtra's Methanol Regulation

The **Supreme Court (SC)** struck down Maharashtra's **Rules 18A & 18B**, holding the restrictions on methanol **disproportionate** and lacking a sufficient nexus with preventing illicit liquor tragedies.

What was the Case About? Methanol is a **highly toxic industrial chemical**. Following the **1991 Mumbai hooch tragedy (~93 deaths)**, Maharashtra amended the **Maharashtra Poisons Rules, 1972** in 2011:

- **Rules: 18A** required Form A license verification and **colourant + bitterant** in methanol sold to non-drug manufacturers; **18B** allowed confiscation without Form A (License to Sell Poisons).

SC Ruling: Rules violated **Articles 14 & 19(1)(g)**; restrictions were **neither suitable nor necessary** under the **proportionality test**. Rule 18B could also conflict with lawful possession under **Form B** (License for Possession and Use of Poisons).

Guidelines to Prevent Hooch Tragedies: Strengthen **license/stock controls, transport safeguards, inter-agency coordination, enforcement, hospital preparedness and public awareness**.

India at COFO 28: Forest & Landscape Restoration

At the 28th Session of FAO's (Food and Agriculture Organization) Committee on Forestry (COFO 28) in Rome, India highlighted its progress in forest restoration, sustainable forest management and climate action.

Highlights:

- 🌳 **Forest & Tree Cover:** 82.74 million ha (**25.17%** of geographical area).
- **Global Rank:** 9th in forest area; 3rd in annual forest-area gain (FAO Global Forest Resources Assessment 2025).
- ♻️ **Carbon Sink:** **2.29 billion tonnes CO₂ equivalent** added by 2021; target **3.5-4 billion tonnes by 2035**.
- 🌱 **Bonn Challenge:** **26 million ha** restoration target by 2030; **21.76 million ha** achieved.
- 🏞️ **Aravalli Green Wall:** **6.45 million ha** identified for restoration.
- 🌊 **MISHTI:** Mangrove restoration and coastal resilience.
- 🌿 **Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam:** **3.5+ billion saplings** planted.
- **India Backed:** Proposed **UN Decade for Afforestation & Reforestation (2027-36)** and greater climate finance/technology support for developing countries.

PRAMAAN Certificates

India recently issued its **first PRAMAAN certificates** under the **Indian Forest and Wood Certification Scheme (IFWCS)** to promote sustainable, deforestation-free forest products.

About PRAMAAN (*Programme for Recognition and Accreditation of Sustainable Management Practices for Agroforestry and Natural Forestry Resources*)

- **Launched:** by IFWCS in **2023**; operated by **Indian Institute of Forest Management (IIFM)**.
- **Covers:** **Forest Management, Tree Outside Forest (TOF) Management & Chain of Custody.**
- **Standards & Accreditation:** Based on **Indian Forest Management Standards** under **National Working Plan Code (NWPC) 2023**. **Third-party audited** by National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies (NABCB) under the Quality Council of India.

Significance

Promotes **deforestation-free sustainable timber**, improves **domestic/global market access**, and supports **forest-dependent livelihoods** by linking **conservation with sustainable trade**.

Cyber-Physical Systems

The transition from machines that merely **perform tasks** to systems that can **sense, analyse and respond in real time** is driving the convergence of the digital and physical worlds. This has given rise to **Cyber-Physical Systems (CPS)**.

What are CPS?

CPS integrate **physical processes with computing, communication and sensors**, enabling systems to **sense, analyze and respond in real time**. Examples include **autonomous vehicles, smart factories, and smart buildings**.

Applications of CPS: **Healthcare** (Patient monitoring), **Agriculture** (Smart monitoring of soil, weather, and crops), **Mining** (Drones and remote monitoring for safety), **Mobility** (Autonomous vehicles and drones), **Communication** (Advanced 5G connectivity), **Cybersecurity** (Securing connected critical infrastructure), **Industry** (Smart factories and automation).

Government of India's CPS Initiatives:

- **National Mission on Interdisciplinary Cyber-Physical Systems (NM-ICPS):** The **NM-ICPS**, implemented by the **Department of Science & Technology (DST)**, was approved in **2018** with an outlay of **₹3,660 crore** for CPS R&D, productization, start-ups and commercialization.
- **25 Technology Innovation Hubs (TIHs):** Established at premier institutions for **technology, skills, start-ups and collaboration**.
- **4 Technology Translation Research Parks (TTRPs):** At **IIT Kanpur, IISc Bengaluru, IIT (ISM) Dhanbad and IIT Indore** to accelerate technology translation and commercialization.
- **BharatGen** supported under NM-ICPS is developing **sovereign, multilingual and multimodal AI** initiative supporting CPS applications in sectors such as healthcare, agriculture and governance.

Peptides

A 'peptide party', an invite-only biohacking event featuring 'peptide tasting', was recently cancelled in Bengaluru after Karnataka Food Safety and Drug Administration (FSDA) officials intervened following medical community concerns.

What are Peptides? Peptides are short chains of amino acids (generally 2-50) which act as biological signalling molecules- regulating hormones, immunity, tissue repair, and metabolism. The body naturally produces peptides such as insulin and endorphins; synthetic peptides are also used therapeutically, e.g. synthetic insulin and GLP-1 receptor agonists.

Peptides as Biohacks: **Biohackers** use synthetic/medical peptides often **off-label or experimentally** to claim benefits such as **muscle growth/recovery, fat loss, better sleep and anti-ageing**.

Key concern: Many products promoted online lack adequate **clinical evidence, medical supervision and regulatory oversight**, creating potential public-health risks.

Way Forward: **Stronger regulation, online monitoring, and medical supervision** are needed to prevent misuse and unlicensed wellness ventures.

Wakefield Accelerator

It is a **compact particle accelerator** that uses **plasma waves** instead of conventional magnets/electric fields to accelerate charged particles.

Working of Wakefield Accelerator: A laser or particle beam passes through plasma and pushes electrons aside, causing them to oscillate and create a **travelling electric-field wake**. Injected electrons then “surf” this wake, gaining energy rapidly.

Advantages:	Limitations:
• Tabletop-sized compared with conventional accelerators. • Produces much stronger accelerating fields over a short distance. • Potential for smaller and cheaper future accelerators.	• Current designs accelerate electrons only to tens of GeV. • Still far below the TeV-scale energies achieved by the LHC (Large Hadron Collider) • Beam control, stability and scaling remain major challenges.

GPT-6 Astra AI

OpenAI recently launched its latest flagship model, GPT-6 Astra describing it as the world’s most ‘intelligent and aligned model’.

What is GPT-6 Astra?

It is OpenAI’s latest flagship AI model, designed for **autonomous completion of complex, multi-step tasks**. It combines advances in **pre-training, reinforcement learning and alignment**, and has a **1.05-million-token context window**, enabling it to process and work with very large volumes of information in a single task.

Key Capabilities: Performs **agentic tasks, computer use, coding, research, professional work and cybersecurity** with limited human intervention.

Is it Artificial General Intelligence (AGI)? Not proven. Benchmark performance alone does not establish **AGI**, which requires broad **generalization, adaptability, common sense and human-level performance across diverse real-world tasks**.

Astra vs Human Intelligence: Astra can outperform humans in certain mathematics, coding, cybersecurity and computer-use tasks, but broad human intelligence also involves **social understanding, goal setting, physical-world adaptation and transfer of knowledge across unfamiliar situations**.

Key Concerns:

- **Cybersecurity Risk:** Powerful defensive capabilities can also be misused by attackers.
- **Autonomy & Control:** Greater ability to act independently increases risks of unintended actions.
- **Human Oversight:** Important for high-stakes professional and security applications.
- **Alignment:** Astra reportedly showed improved ability to respect authorized boundaries.

Agentic AI Skilling Initiative

The Agentic AI Skilling Initiative was launched recently during the National Leadership Dialogue on “Preparing the Future Workforce for the Agentic AI Era” organized by National Institute of Electronics and Information Technology (NIELIT), under MeitY in collaboration with Intel India.

About Agentic AI Skilling Initiative: It aims to expand access to industry-aligned Agentic AI learning opportunities and contribute to the development of a future-ready AI talent ecosystem in the country. Under the initiative, two programmes have been introduced:

- **Agentic AI for Everyone:** It introduces learners to workflow automation, AI agents, and multi-agent systems using no-code platforms to improve productivity, enable business transformation, and support intelligent decision-making.

- **Engineering Agentic AI Systems:** focuses on designing, building and deploying AI-powered agentic systems using no-code/low-code platforms and code-based frameworks, covering areas including agent architecture, tool integration, orchestration, memory and deployment to develop scalable and production-ready solutions.

Significance: Promotes **AI democratization, practical skills, employability, industry-academia collaboration and technological self-reliance.**

BIO-NIVESH

Union Minister of state of Science & Technology and Earth Sciences recently launched BIO-NIVESH to connect **biotechnology innovators with investors** and catalyze **private investment** for the scale-up and commercialization of promising innovations.

Developed By: Department of Biotechnology (DBT) and Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC) to connect **biotechnology startups/innovators with investors.**

Key Objectives	Significance for India
• Bridge science and capital by connecting innovators with investors. • Promote private investment in biotechnology and deep-tech startups. • Help investors understand biotechnology's long development cycles, regulatory requirements, and technological risks. • Provide startups with access not only to capital but also industry partnerships, manufacturing, market access, and global networks.	• Strengthens the innovation-investment-industry-government ecosystem. • Reduces dependence on public funding alone by making innovations more attractive to private investors. • Supports growth of India's bioeconomy and globally competitive biotechnology companies. • Complements the ₹1 lakh crore Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) Fund, for biotechnology and allied sectors.

India's New IST Rules

The Union Consumer Affairs Ministry notified Legal Metrology (Indian Standard Time) Rules, 2026.

What are the New Rules? The **Legal Metrology (Indian Standard Time) Rules, 2026** make **Indian Standard Time (IST)** a **legally enforceable reference** for official and commercial activities. They require relevant systems, particularly in critical sectors, to use **time traceable to IST.**

Aim: **"One Nation, One Time"**- one common, reliable and legally verifiable time reference.

What does "Traceable to IST" Mean? **Traceability** means proving that an organization's clock/time source is ultimately linked to the official IST maintained by **CSIR-National Physical Laboratory (NPL).**

Need for New Rules:

- Reduces dependence on **GPS, foreign NTP (Network Time Protocol) servers & independent clocks.**
- Ensures accurate timestamps for **finance, telecom, power grids, cybersecurity, defence and space.**

Who Maintains Time in the Country?

CSIR-National Physical Laboratory (NPL) maintains India's official time using highly precise **atomic clocks.** It maintains **UTC (NPLI)**, India's realization of Coordinated Universal Time, within a few nanoseconds of the international reference (**IST = UTC (NPLI) + 5 hours 30 minutes**).

How is IST disseminated? **Time dissemination** means transmitting the official IST maintained by **CSIR-NPL** to users and systems through different technologies like-

- **NTP** provides millisecond-level synchronization over the internet, while **satellite links, PTP (Precision Time Protocol) and Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS) or NavIC**- providing regional satellite-navigation coverage over India- enable higher precision for critical applications.
- **Regional Reference Standard Laboratories (RRSLs)** under the Department of Legal Metrology maintain secondary time scales that are continuously traceable to the primary IST maintained by CSIR-NPL.
- **White Rabbit Technology** uses fibre-optic networks to measure and correct signal delays, enabling highly precise clock synchronization across locations.

Impact: Primarily affects **critical/time-sensitive sectors** such as finance, telecom, power, defence and space; **minimal direct impact on ordinary citizens.**

Strategic Significance:

- **Time sovereignty** and reduced foreign dependence.
- **Critical infrastructure & cybersecurity resilience.**
- **Accurate financial transactions and forensic timestamps.**
- Strengthens India's **precision-timing and atomic-clock capabilities.**

Floating Solar

The recently approved Pradhan Mantri Surya Sarovar Yojana (PM-SSY) signals the Indian government's intent to promote floating solar power, targeting 5,000 MW capacity with an outlay of ₹5,070 crore. It also supports co-located energy storage to enhance grid stability, promoting land-neutral renewable energy deployment.

What is Floating Solar? It refers to solar panels installed on **floating platforms over water bodies** such as reservoirs and lakes. The platforms are anchored to the **bed or banks**, and the generated electricity is transmitted to shore through cables. It enables **solar power generation without occupying land.**

Significance	Challenges	Way Forward
• Land-Neutral Renewable Energy: Uses reservoirs, lakes and ponds without competing for scarce land. • Grid Stability: Integrated energy storage helps manage solar intermittency and improve grid reliability. • Economic Benefits: Promotes domestic manufacturing, investment, and employment across the value chain. • Higher Renewable Capacity: Complements ground-mounted and rooftop solar, supporting India's clean-energy transition.	• High Costs: Floating platforms, anchoring systems and storage make projects costlier than conventional solar. • Environmental Risks: May affect aquatic ecosystems, fisheries and biodiversity if poorly planned. • Climate Resilience: Systems must withstand strong winds, waves, and fluctuating water levels. • Institutional Coordination: Requires coordination among water, power, environment and local authorities, along with streamlined approvals and bankable projects.	• Scientific Site Selection: Undertake hydrographic, environmental and biodiversity assessments before project approval. • Climate-Resilient Design • Viable Financing: Combine Central Financial Assistance with low-cost finance and long-term Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) to improve bankability. • Streamlined Governance: Establish single-window clearances and clear roles for various agencies. • Responsible Deployment: Prioritize non-sensitive water bodies and adopt safeguards for fisheries and aquatic ecosystems. • Scale domestic capacity: Promote R&D, indigenous manufacturing and skilled manpower for the floating-solar value chain.

AgriStack

AgriStack is a **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) for agriculture**, developed by the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare. It **uses data and digital services** to connect stakeholders and improve service delivery and outcomes for farmers. It enables better access to credit, inputs, advisory and markets.

Objectives of AgriStack:

- **Faster & easier scheme delivery** to farmers.
- **Quick identification/authentication** of farmers.
- **Reduce cost and risk** of agricultural credit, inputs, and services.
- Enable **scheme convergence** across Centre, States and agri-allied Ministries.
- Promote **Agri-Tech innovation** through access to quality data.

Core Building Blocks of AgriStack:

- **Farmer & Farmland Plot Registry:** A **federated registry of farmers**, maintained by States/ Union Territories and linked with farmland records to enable **quick identification, eligibility verification, and faster delivery** of government schemes and services.
- **Unified Farmer Service Interface (UFSI):** A common **digital interface with standardized Application Programming Interface (APIs) and data standards** that enables interoperability among government, banks, Agri-Techs and other authorized stakeholders. It facilitates **consent-based access to registry data**.
- **Geo-Referenced Village Maps:** Link **digital land boundaries with farmer, crop and weather data** to enable location-specific advisories, efficient resource management, accurate benefit delivery and better land administration. It uses **satellite imagery, GPS, and drone surveys** for mapping and updating land parcels.
- **Crop Sown Registry:** A **season-wise digital registry of crops** grown on each farm, using smartphone and image-based surveys, including drones/satellite imagery in the future. It enables **faster crop estimation and targeted delivery of inputs, credit, schemes and advisory**.
- **AgriStack Sandbox:** A **safe testing environment** where start-ups, companies and public entities can test agricultural products and services using sample data and UFSI APIs. It promotes **innovation without affecting real-world systems**.
- **Consent Manager:** A privacy mechanism that enables **consent-based sharing of farmers' personal data** with authorized entities. Farmers can **give or revoke consent**, ensuring greater control over their data.

Related Initiatives:

- **YES-TECH Initiative:** uses technology, including **Artificial Intelligence/Machine Learning**, for yield estimation of **paddy, wheat and soybean** under crop insurance scheme.
- **Digital General Crop Estimation System (DGCES):** has been developed, for crop yield estimation which provides accurate and timely crop yield data for crop production estimates.

Reverse Vaccinology

Reverse vaccinology is a genome-based approach to vaccine development in which scientists analyze the pathogen's genome on a computer using bioinformatics to identify potential vaccine targets, rather than growing the pathogen in a lab and screening its components.

How does it work? It identifies **surface-exposed, conserved proteins** that are distinct from human proteins and can trigger a **strong immune response**.

Example- *S. pneumoniae*: With **100+ serotypes**, developing a universal pneumococcal vaccine is challenging. Researchers analyzed pneumococcal genomes and identified three conserved proteins- **Z, P and Y** to develop the experimental **ZPY-CpG-Ch vaccine**, which showed protection against multiple serotypes in mice.

Significance:

- Enables development of **broad-spectrum/universal vaccines**.
- **Speeds up** vaccine-target identification.
- Reduces dependence on **pathogen culture**.
- Particularly useful for pathogens with **multiple strains/serotypes**.

AstroRad

AstroRad is a **wearable radiation-protection vest** developed by **StemRad** (an Israeli company) and **Lockheed Martin** for astronauts.

Key Features:

- Uses **hydrogen-rich polymers** to absorb/slow high-energy radiation.
- Provides extra protection to the **chest, abdomen, and pelvis**, protecting vital organs and bone marrow.
- Is **lightweight and flexible**, allowing astronauts to move and work normally.
- Studies found it could reduce radiation exposure during major solar storms by **40–60%**.

Limitation: It primarily protects against **solar particle radiation**, while **galactic cosmic rays** remain difficult to shield.

Matsya Metri

The Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) recently claimed to have developed a smartphone application 'Matsya Metri' that can measure the length and width of fish without physically handling them.

Key Features:

- Uses **photographs/images** for rapid measurement.
- Measures **multiple fish** in a single sampling session.
- Automatically generates **length-frequency distributions**.
- Stores **measurements + photographs** and exports data in **CSV format**.

Users: Fisheries scientists, researchers and field survey teams.

Significance: Enables **faster, standardized biological data collection** for **fish-stock assessment and sustainable fisheries management**.

TRISHNA

The PSLV is scheduled to launch the Indo-French TRISHNA (Thermal Infra-Red Imaging Satellite for High-resolution Natural Resource Assessment) mission next year.

About TRISHNA:

It is a **joint Earth-observation mission** of Indian Space Research Organization's (ISRO)'s and **France's** CNES, aimed at high-resolution monitoring of Earth's surface temperature and water resources.

Objective: Monitor **land surface temperature, evapotranspiration and vegetation**, supporting climate and natural-resource management.

Key Features:

- **High Resolution:** Designed to provide **high spatial and temporal resolution** observations at regional to global scales.

- **Payloads:**

- **TIR (Thermal Infra-Red):** Developed by CNES.
- **VNIR-SWIR (Visible-Near Infra-Red to Short Wave Infra-Red):** Developed by ISRO.

Significance:

- **Water & Food Security:** Help assess **water stress, drought, irrigation efficiency and crop health** through evapotranspiration monitoring.
- **Climate Change:** Tracks the impacts of **human-induced climate change** on terrestrial ecosystems.
- **India-France Cooperation:** Strengthens bilateral cooperation in **Earth observation and space technology**.

AI in Agriculture

Google DeepMind has developed advanced **Artificial Intelligence (AI) models and satellite-based agricultural data layers** for near-real-time mapping and monitoring of agricultural fields and crops.

India-specific AI Models: DeepMind's AnthroKrishi team has developed two agricultural AI models:

- **ALU (Agricultural Landscape Understanding):** Maps fields, trees and water bodies using **15 years of satellite imagery**, refreshed every **6-12 months**.
- **AMED (Agricultural Monitoring & Event Detection):** Tracks crop types, sowing and harvesting across **12 crops**, using six years of data refreshed **twice a month**, enabling near-real-time crop monitoring.

Key Feature: Satellite-based data is refreshed frequently, enabling **in-season, near-real-time agricultural intelligence** rather than only post-season analysis.

International Space Summit 2026

The two-day International Space Summit held in Paris recently was inaugurated by French President **Emmanuel Macron**.

- **Focus:** Strengthening international and **European space cooperation**, including **IRIS² (Infrastructure for Resilience, Interconnectivity and Security by Satellite)**.
- **Private Mission to ISS:** Greek flight surgeon **Adrianos Golemis** will become the **first Greek astronaut** on a private **International Space Station (ISS)** mission organized by **Vast**, under NASA's Private Astronaut Mission programme.
 - Planned for **2027**, mission will use a **SpaceX Dragon** spacecraft launched by **Falcon 9**.

CosmoCube

The UK's **Royal Astronomical Society (RAS)** is planning to send **CosmoCube**, a lunar satellite that will orbit the Moon's **far side**.

- **About the Mission:** Two-year lunar mission; spends ~40 minutes every orbit on the **Moon's far side**, shielded from Earth's radio noise.
- **What it Studies?** Extremely faint **21-cm radio signals from neutral hydrogen** from the early Universe, helping study the period **before the first stars and galaxies formed**.
- **Scientific Importance:** Helps understand the **Cosmic Dark Ages, Cosmic Dawn, reionisation and Hubble tension**, while testing theories involving **dark matter/new physics**.
- **Key Challenge:** The 21-cm signal is **tens of thousands of times weaker** than foreground radio emissions.
- **India:** CosmoCube mission is similar to India's **PRATUSH**, a proposed lunar-orbit radio telescope to study the **early Universe and reionisation**.

Meta Launches Muse- AI Agent

Meta recently launched **Muse**, an autonomous **AI agent** initially in the U.S., via its app and WhatsApp.

- **Capabilities:** Can **send emails, book travel, sell items, make payments** & smart home controls autonomously.
- **Working:** Connects to user-approved apps (email, calendar, payments, shopping, etc.) and performs tasks through a **virtual machine**.
- **Significance:** Represents a shift from **chat-based AI to agentic AI** capable of real-world actions.
- **Concerns:** **Data exposure, unreliable actions, security vulnerabilities and guardrail bypasses** raise privacy and safety concerns.

“My Feed, My Way” Initiative

Australia recently proposed “**My Feed, My Way**” under its proposed **Digital Duty of Care** framework which allows users to **opt out of algorithmic recommendations** and view only posts from accounts they follow.

Need for Such Proposal: To reduce **doomscrolling, addictive engagement and exposure to harmful content**.

What is the Plan?

- **Platform Duty:** New and existing users must be clearly offered this choice; platforms cannot hide or undermine it through **dark patterns/nudges**.
- **Broader Protection:** Platforms must protect **under-18s** from addictive features and harmful content such as eating-disorder promotion, pornography and extreme/violent content.

Regulator: Australia’s **eSafety Commissioner** will oversee compliance, with significant penalties for violations.

Significance: Shifts control from “**algorithm decides what you see**” → “**user decides how the feed works.**”

Global Context: Similar to the **EU Digital Services Act**, which provides an option for non-personalized recommendations.

Sagar Manthan

Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (GRSE) recently launched 'Sagar Manthan', an indigenous ocean research vessel being built for the National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR).

- **Cost:** ₹840 crore | **Expected:** Early 2028
- **Research depth:** Up to 6 km
- **Capabilities:** Seismic & multibeam surveys, Conductivity, Temperature and Depth (CTD) profiling, seabed sampling, launching and recovering autonomous underwater vehicles (AUVs) and remotely operated vehicles (ROVs) and atmospheric observations.
- **Coverage:** Indian Ocean, Bay of Bengal and **Southern Ocean/Antarctic waters**.
- **Significance:** Supports **deep-sea exploration, marine mineral resources, scientific research and Blue Economy**.

Quantum Computing

Scientists at **Raman Research Institute (RRI), Bengaluru** have developed a novel method to **improve the stability of fragile quantum states**, potentially enhancing the **reliability of quantum computing**.

- **Problem:** Quantum states are highly fragile and lose their useful properties due to interaction with the environment (**decoherence**). Entanglement can also disappear suddenly, called **Entanglement Sudden Death (ESD)**.
- **Existing Approach:** Repeated error-correction operations are used to delay decoherence, but they are costly and may introduce additional errors.

- **RRI Breakthrough:** A single, precisely timed quantum operation (“single-shot operation”) can delay decoherence and prevent sudden loss of entanglement.
- **Key Insight:** Timing itself can act as a control tool for managing quantum states.
- **Significance:** Could improve the **reliability and stability of quantum computers**, complementing not replacing quantum error-correction methods.
- **Status:** **Proof of concept**, requiring validation across different quantum computing platforms.

Austrole Basin: Hidden Lunar Impact Basin

The Physical Research Laboratory (PRL), Ahmedabad scientists have identified the **Austrole Basin- previously untraced** on the Moon using **mineralogical data from Chandrayaan-1’s NASA Moon Mineralogy Mapper (M³)**.

- **Location:** **Southeastern lunar hemisphere**, near the South Polar region.
- **Why was it Untraced?** Ancient **erosion degraded its rim**, making it difficult to detect through conventional imaging.
- **Age:** May be **older than the ~4-billion-year-old South Pole-Aitken (SPA) Basin**, potentially making it the **oldest and largest** known basin.
- **Unique feature:** Contains **low-calcium, magnesium-rich basalts** and **248 small basalt ponds** arranged circularly.
- **Significance:** Helps reconstruct the Moon’s **early geological history and regolith evolution** and may guide **future sample-return missions, including Chandrayaan-4**, especially in the South Polar region.

Elias 2-24 b

A team of astronomers have unearthed the youngest exoplanet- Elias 2-24b, observing a Jupiter-like gas giant still gathering up material from its natal *protoplanetary disk*.

- **Age:** **≤ 1 million years-** the **youngest confirmed exoplanet** observed so far.
- **Location:** **~55 AU** from its star.
- **Formation:** Growing through **core accretion**, rapidly gathering gas and dust from the **protoplanetary disk**. Its presence is confirmed by a **30-AU-wide gap** it has carved in the disk and direct observations of its light.
- **Mass:** Estimated at **2-4 times Jupiter’s mass**.
- **Significance:** Shows that **giant planets can form within the first million years**, much faster than previously thought.

IMEI Tampering

India’s rapid digitalization has made telecom vital for **commerce, governance and digital services**, with **1.2 billion+ mobile subscribers**. This growing ecosystem faces **IMEI tampering**, which enables altered device identities and threatens **law enforcement, consumer protection and network security**.

What is IMEI? **IMEI (International Mobile Equipment Identity)** is a unique **15-digit number** identifying a mobile device. The first eight digits of an IMEI form the Type Allocation Code (TAC), which identifies the device model or type.

Who Assigns IMEI? The Global System for Mobile Communications Association (GSMA) allocates TACs to manufacturers and brand owners. Manufacturers then assign unique IMEIs to individual devices.

What is IMEI Tampering? Illegally **altering, removing or changing** an IMEI, or possessing/using tools configured for such alteration.

Why is it a threat? Enables devices with **fake identities** → hampers device tracking, law enforcement and network security.

Legal Safeguards:

- **Telecommunications Act, 2023- Sec. 42(3)(c):** Prohibits tampering with telecom identifiers.
- **Penalty:** Up to 3 years imprisonment / ₹50 lakh fine / both; offence is **cognizable & non-bailable**.

Doppler Weather Radars

Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Earth Sciences, recently inaugurated India's 51st state-of-the-art Doppler Weather Radar (DWR).

What is DWR? Radar that detects precipitation and weather systems. It emits high-power microwave pulses into the atmosphere

Working: It measures the **Doppler/phase shift** of returned signals to determine the **speed and direction of raindrops**, unlike conventional radar.

Uses: Provides real-time data on **rainfall, thunderstorms, cyclones and extreme weather**, improving forecasting and early warnings.

India: IMD uses **S-, C- and X-band** DWRs, generally covering about **500 km**.

Blazars

Astronomers studying high-energy **blazars** have gained new insights into the sources of their X-ray emissions, helping understand **extreme cosmic conditions and how active galaxies are powered**.

What are Blazars? Blazars are **highly energetic active galaxies** powered by **supermassive black holes (SMBHs)** at their centres. Matter falling into the black hole releases enormous energy and produces **relativistic particle jets**. When a jet is directed almost **towards Earth**, the galaxy appears exceptionally bright due to **relativistic beaming**. **TeV blazars** emit very-high-energy **gamma rays (TeV range)**.

Significance: Studying their X-rays helps understand **black-hole activity, relativistic jets and galaxy powering**.

Digital Connectivity Rating Platform

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) recently launched the **Digital Connectivity Rating (DCR) Platform**- an integrated platform that enables consumers to **view property-wise digital connectivity ratings** and facilitates the **end-to-end connectivity rating process**.

- **Framework:** TRAI (Rating of Properties for Digital Connectivity) Regulations 2024; amended in **2026**, and Rating Manual 2026. The **DCR framework** provides a **standardized assessment of property-level digital connectivity** based on **fibre, mobile networks, in-building solutions, and Wi-Fi**, encouraging better connectivity infrastructure in new and existing properties.

Revival of Dogri Script

- Recently, new public signboards came up in Jammu carrying area names in **Namey Dogra Akhar script**, alongside the usual Devanagari (for Hindi) and Roman (for English), to revive the script.
- Dogri has long been written in Devanagari, with its own script falling into disuse.

Dogri Language

- Dogri is an **Indo-Aryan language**, a major branch of the Indo-European language family that includes Hindi, Bengali and Punjabi, and belongs to the Western Pahari group, a cluster of related languages found mainly in the western Himalayas.
- Dogri is **primarily spoken by the Dogras**, the original inhabitants of Jammu and Kashmir's Jammu division, besides smaller groups in Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.
- It was recognised as one of the **22 scheduled languages of India** under the **Eighth Schedule in 2003** and declared one of the official languages of the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir in 2020

Namey Dogra Akhar script

- Namey Dogra Akhar is a **modified version of Takri, the original Dogri language script** that had been used until the reign of **Maharaja Gulab Singh**, who was the **first Dogra ruler of Jammu and Kashmir**.
- Gulab Singh's son, **Ranbir Singh**, who ascended the throne in 1856, was a scholar of Sanskrit and Persian languages. He introduced several reforms including the compilation of the civil and criminal laws into the famous Ranbir Penal Code.
- During his rule, it was felt that transcription of official orders and other documents in Takri script was not possible due to the absence of vowel signs. To rectify this, he asked writers to borrow the vowels from Devanagari.
- This led to the emergence of the Namey Dogra Akhar — literally, **new Dogri script** which was subsequently adopted for official court and administrative work alongside Persian.

Saratchandra Chattopadhyay

- The Prime Minister paid homage to renowned Bengali writer Saratchandra Chattopadhyay on his 150th birth anniversary.
- Saratchandra Chattopadhyay (1876–1938) was a renowned Bengali writer whose works were translated into **all Indian languages as well as several foreign languages**.
- His writing focused extensively on ordinary people and social realities, portraying issues such as poverty, social inequality, social injustice, women's rights and nationalism.
- Among his best-known works are **Devdas, Srikanta, Pather Dabi, Parineeta, Charitraheen and Palli Samaj**; several of his works were subsequently adapted into films and other media in different Indian languages.
- He also wrote two prominent essays on women's emancipation titled **Narir Mulya & Swaraj Sadhonay Nari**.
- He also played an active role in the Non-Cooperation Movement and in 1921, he was elected as the President of the Howrah District Congress.

Shekhawati Havelis in UNESCO Tentative List

- Rajasthan's historic **Shekhawati havelis** have been included in the **UNESCO Tentative List**.

- It covers heritage properties spread across **14 towns** in the Shekhawati region - Alsisar, Bissau, Chirawa, Churu, Dundlod, Fatehpur, Jhunjhunu, Khetri, Laxmangarh, Mandawa, Mahansar, Nawalgarh, Ramgarh and Sikar.
- The inclusion marks a preliminary step towards potential World Heritage status.
- The Shekhawati region, located in **northeastern Rajasthan**, is known for its concentration of elaborately painted havelis **built largely by merchant families**.
- The properties feature ornate façades, courtyards, gateways and interiors decorated with detailed frescoes.
- The murals document aspects of the **region's social and cultural history**, depicting religious and mythological themes, personal portraits, family trees, everyday life, flora and fauna, as well as traditional motifs.
- Several paintings also reflect **technological and cultural changes** during the 19th and early 20th centuries, including new forms of transport, changing lifestyles and external influences.

Rani Avanti Bai Lodhi

- The Defence Minister unveiled the statue of Rani Avanti Bai Lodhi in Lucknow, and paid tribute for her supreme sacrifice during the 1857 War of Independence.
- **Rani Avanti Bai Lodhi** (1831–1858) was the **queen of the princely state of Ramgarh** (in present-day Madhya Pradesh).
- She was married to **Raja Vikramaditya Singh Lodhi of Ramgarh**. Following her husband's severe illness and eventual demise, she assumed the role of queen-regent to secure the state for her minor sons.
- The British East India Company refused to recognize her minor heirs and placed Ramgarh under administrative control via the **Court of Wards system**, appointing an external supervisor.
- Refusing to accept British authority, she assumed control of the kingdom and began organizing resistance.
- During the 1857 revolt, Avantibai emerged as a key leader in central India. She mobilized local chiefs, tribal communities, and soldiers, forming a strong force to challenge the British.
- Leading an army of about 4,000 soldiers and she fought **Battle of Kheri near Mandla**, where her forces defeated the British.
- Despite her valiant efforts, the British launched a strong counteroffensive. In March 1858, when defeat became inevitable, she embraced martyrdom, reportedly taking her own life with a sword.

Saptakoteshwar Temple

- Ancient relics dating between the 14th and 16th centuries, indicating the existence of an ancient temple complex and a corridor, have been found during restoration work at the old site of Saptakoteshwar temple in Goa's Divar island.
- The archaeological discoveries include a 'Kirtimukh' motif, which is traditionally carved above temple doorways, and a carved capital of a temple pillar and parts of Dev Khostam used for placing idols.
- **Saptakoteshwar Temple**, dedicated to **Lord Shiva**, is an ancient temple associated with the **Kadamba dynasty (10th-14th century)**.
- The temple was **destroyed during the Bahmani rule** and it was subsequently rebuilt in 1391 by a minister in the Vijayanagar kingdom.
- The temple was destroyed again during the Portuguese rule in the 16th century.
- The deity's idol was shifted across the river to Bicholim, where **Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj established a new temple in 1668**.

- The variety of stone typologies and temple motifs points towards successive reconstruction of the temple during the Vijayanagar period, following the destruction of the earlier Kadamba period temple.

Gollala Gudi Temple

- The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has declared Gollala Gudi temple in Palampet in Mulugu district of Telangana as a **site of national importance**.
- Once a monument is declared a site of national importance, it is protected under the **Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958**.
- The ASI takes charge of such sites for conservation, maintenance, and regulated public access.
- The temple is situated close to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of **Ramappa temple**. It can also be dated to the same period of **Kakatiyas** and has similar architecture and material.
- The temple is a **Trikutalaya** and consists of a mandapa facing East and surrounded by **three garbhagriha**.

Ramappa Temple

- The **Ramappa temple** also known as the **Rudreswara temple**, is located in the village of Palampet.
- The temple complex consists of Kateshwara temple, Kameshwara temple, Pakashala, Nandi Mandapa, Inscription and Rudredhwara temple.
- The Rudreswara temple was constructed in 1213 AD during the reign of the **Kakatiya Empire by Recharla Rudra**, a general of Kakatiya king Ganapati Deva. The presiding deity of the temple is **Ramalingeswara Swamy**.

AWARDS/ PERSONALITIES IN NEWS

Ramon Magsaysay Award 2026

- Tommy Koh, Bo Kyi and Runa Khan have won the 2026 Ramon Magsaysay Awards.
- **Singaporean lawyer and diplomat Tommy Koh** was recognised for promoting international dialogue and the rule of law.
- He is best known for presiding over a U.N. conference of more than 150 countries, which adopted the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea in 1982.
- **Bo Kyi, from Myanmar**, has spent seven years in prison for a life spent in resistance against widespread human rights violations by Myanmar's military.
- **Runa Khan, from Bangladesh**, won the award for her empathy for the poorest of the poor in her country.
- In 2002, she established the "Friendship Bangladesh" organisation that helped the most destitute "deal with climate change, educate their children, empower women, create livelihood opportunities and bring social justice to the excluded."

Ramon Magsaysay Award

- **Established in 1957**, the Ramon Magsaysay Award was founded to preserve former Phillippine President Ramon Magsaysay's example of integrity in governance and idealism in a democratic society.
- The prize was funded by the the trustees of the **Rockefeller Brothers Fund** based in New York City.
- The award is internationally recognized as the Nobel Prize counterpart of Asia and is the highest award given to Asian individuals and organizations.

Tenzing Norgay National Adventure Awards

- The **Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports** has announced the Tenzing Norgay National Adventure Awards (TNNAA) for the year 2024.
- The awards recognise outstanding achievements by individuals in the field of adventure and seek to promote a spirit of endurance, risk-taking, teamwork and quick and effective decision-making in challenging situations.
- The awards cover **four categories** — **Land Adventure, Water Adventure, Air Adventure, and Lifetime Achievement**.
- The awardees are Baljeet Kaur and Skalzang Rigzin in Land Adventure category, Rimo Saha in Water Adventure category and Shiv Prasad Chamoli in the Life Time Achievement category.
- The awardees will be conferred the awards by the **President of India**. Each awardee will receive a statuette, a certificate, and award money of Rs. 15 lakh.

Archery World Cup Final Gold

- **Dhiraj Bommadevara** scripted history by becoming the **first Indian male recurve archer to win gold** at the Archery World Cup Final, defeating Japan's Nakanishi Junya in Mexico.
- He also ended a 16-year wait for an Indian male recurve archer to win a medal in this event. **Jayanta Talukdar** was the last male recurve archer to win a medal – a **bronze in 2010**.
- **Dola Banerjee** remains the only other Indian to have won World Cup Final gold, claiming the women's individual title in the 2007 edition.
- The **Archery World Cup** is an international target-archery circuit organised by **World Archery**, with four stages held during the season, followed by the season-ending World Cup Final.

- Founded in 1931, with more than 160 national member associations, **World Archery** is the international federation governing, regulating and promoting Olympic and Paralympic sport of archery.
- Headquarter: **Lausanne, Switzerland**.

Dadasaheb Phalke Award 2024

- Legendary actor, Anant Nag, known for his work in Hindi and Kannada cinema, was honoured with the Dadasaheb Phalke Award for 2024.
- Dadasaheb Phalke Award is India's **highest award in the field of cinema**.
- It is presented annually at the **National Film Awards ceremony** by the **Directorate of Film Festivals**, an organization set up by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.
- The award comprises a **Swarna Kamal (Golden Lotus) medallion**, a shawl, and a cash prize.
- First presented in **1969**, the award was introduced by the Union Government to commemorate Dadasaheb Phalke's contribution to Indian cinema. The **first recipient** of the award was actress **Devika Rani**.

FAO Award

- Z T Lalrithangi, from Mizoram's Lawngtlai district, has been selected among the "FAO 100 Women Heroes in Agrifood Systems and Rural Development" by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).
- The recognition is part of the International Year of Women Farmers 2026. She is one of two Indian women selected from more than 600 nominees across 131 countries.
- She will receive the award during the World Food Forum at FAO headquarters in Rome, for her contribution to agriculture and rural development, after turning strawberry cultivation into a profitable livelihood.

Cool Leaders Award

- The Cool Leaders Award was recently launched during **Global Cooling Pledge Assembly** held in Singapore.
- The award is a new global recognition initiative launched by the **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)-led Cool Coalition** to recognize leadership in advancing sustainable cooling through policy, innovation and implementation.
- Singapore, United Arab Emirates and business leader Dong Mingzhu were named **inaugural Cool Leaders**.
- **Singapore** was recognized for leadership in passive cooling and heat resilience.
- **United Arab Emirates** was recognized for its work on district cooling and for advancing cooling within global climate and development policy.
- **Dong Mingzhu**, Chairwoman of Gree Electric Appliances, was recognized for leadership in development of ultra-efficient, low-carbon cooling technologies, including the **Zero Carbon Source air-conditioning system**.

UNEP Cool Coalition

- The UNEP Cool Coalition is a global multi-stakeholder platform launched in **2019**.
- It is a flagship initiative of the **UN Secretary-General's Climate Action Summit** to promote sustainable cooling and address rising cooling demand and extreme heat.
- At **COP28 in 2023**, the Coalition launched the **Global Cooling Pledge**, which seeks to reduce global cooling-related emissions by **at least 68% by 2050**, compared with 2022.
- The Coalition also serves as the **Secretariat of the Global Cooling Pledge** and supports countries in developing measures such as National Cooling Action Plans, building energy codes, minimum energy-performance standards and efficient cooling technologies.