VAJIRAM & RAVI
Institute for IAS Examination

# the recitals




## CURRENT AFFAIRS

## 2026 October

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- Preventive Detention Based on Police Confession
- Legislative Privileges Vs Free Speech
- Jantar Mantar De-notified as Protest Site
- SC Bars Illegal Detention of Peaceful Protesters
- What Stopped Andhra Pradesh's 34% BC Quota In Local Bodies?
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- Internet Access as a Fundamental Right for Children
- Effect of Religious Conversion on Caste Based Reservation
- Trump's Russia Sanctions Pause
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# Medicine Price Regulation in India

The Supreme Court (SC), while hearing petitions on medicine pricing, recently described the huge gap between the Price to Retailer (PTR) and Maximum Retail Price (MRP) of medicines as "carnage", likening it to "broad daylight dacoity with patients". It also questioned the Centre on why the 16% retailer margin prescribed under the Drugs (Prices Control) Order (DPCO), 2013, should not apply to all essential medicines.

## How are Ceiling Prices Calculated?

The **NPPA** calculates the ceiling price by taking the **average PTR** of qualifying brands/generics with **≥1% market share** and adding a **16% retailer margin**. The ceiling price is revised annually on **1 April** based on the **Wholesale Price Index (WPI)**.

- MRP printed on the pack cannot be higher than this Ceiling price, apart from local taxes or GST.

### Legal & Regulatory Framework

- **Essential Commodities Act (ECA), 1955:** Empowers the Centre to regulate essential commodities, including medicines.
  - **Section 3(1):** allows Centre to regulate production, supply, and distribution "for maintaining or increasing supplies of any essential commodity or for securing their equitable distribution and availability at fair price.
  - **Section 3(2)(c):** allows for issuing orders controlling commodity prices.
- **Drugs (Prices Control) Order (DPCO), 2013:** Issued under the ECA is the main framework for **drug-price regulation** in India. It authorizes the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA), set up in 1997 under the Department of Pharmaceuticals to-
  - Fix/revise **ceiling prices** of scheduled medicines.
  - Fix retail prices of certain **new drugs.**
  - Monitor **overcharging and DPCO compliance.**
  - Recover excess amounts charged from patients.
  - In certain circumstances, regulate prices of medicines/medical devices outside the normal price-control mechanism.

#### Scheduled vs Non-Scheduled Medicines

- **Scheduled Formulations:** Listed in **Schedule I of DPCO,** based on the **National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM)** prepared by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare; **subject to price control.**
  - **NLEM:** Currently contains **384 medicines,** covering about **20% of total drug-market turnover.**
- **Non-Scheduled Formulations:** Not included in Schedule I; **generally outside ceiling-price control.**

## Key Issues Raised by the Petitioners:

- **Excessive PTR-MRP Gap:** An essential cancer drug supplied at around **₹2,700 PTR but carrying an MRP of nearly ₹27,000** raises concerns over excessive markups and medicine affordability {Not all cancer medicines are on NLEM}
- **Initial MRP Loophole:** Non-scheduled medicines have no ceiling price, allowing manufacturers to largely determine the **initial MRP**. Since the **10% incremental cap in a year applies to subsequent increases**, petitioners argue that an artificially high launch price can circumvent effective price control.
- **Retailer & Hospital Markups:** Petitions allege excessive margins by retailers/hospital pharmacies, citing antibiotic **Tigebax 50 mg-** ₹5,635 MRP in a corporate hospital versus ₹350 in the open market. Such differential pricing can increase **out-of-pocket healthcare expenditure**.
- **Generic Prescribing:** Petitions highlight the potentially lower cost of **generic medicines** compared with branded medicines, raising concerns about prescribing practices and affordability.
- **Right to Health:** Petitioners argue that unrestricted medicine pricing can undermine the **Right to Health under Article 21**, linking drug affordability with **health equity and social justice**.
- **Affordability vs Innovation:** Stronger price regulation must be balanced against the need to preserve incentives for **pharmaceutical R&D, innovation and availability of new therapies**.

## Way Forward:

- **Regulate unreasonable initial MRPs**, particularly for critical medicines outside the NLEM.

- Examine extending **appropriate margin/price controls to medicines** currently outside the ceiling mechanism.

- Strengthen monitoring of **PTR-MRP gaps and hospital-pharmacy pricing**.
- Promote **quality-assured generic prescribing** and strengthen **Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP)**.
- Improve transparency across the **manufacturer-distributor-retailer-hospital supply chain** prices.

# Preventive Detention Based on Police Confession

Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) in *Mulla Afroz v. State of Uttar Pradesh (2026)* quashed a preventive detention under the National Security Act (NSA), 1980, holding that a confession made to a police officer cannot, by itself and without independent supporting material, form the basis of preventive detention.

**SC Ruling in the Case:**

- **Police Confession Cannot Independently Sustain Preventive Detention: Section 23 of the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA), 2023** generally bars confession made to a police officer from being proved against an accused, subject to limited exceptions (If confession made in the immediate presence of a magistrate or the portion of information that distinctly leads to the discovery of a fact). The SC held that material which is legally unreliable/inadmissible for establishing guilt **cannot, by itself, become the basis for the "subjective satisfaction" required for preventive detention**. Independent and reliable material must support such a confession.

**What is Preventive Detention?**

Preventive detention means detaining a person without trial and conviction by a court. Its purpose is to prevent a person from committing an offence in the near future rather than punishing for a past offence.

- **Under NSA: Section 3(2), NSA** empowers the Centre/State to detain a person to prevent acts prejudicial to **State security, public order, or essential supplies/services.**
- **Safeguards under Preventive Detention:**
  - **Article 22(5):** Detenu must be informed of the **grounds of detention** and given the **earliest opportunity to make a representation** against it.
  - **Effective Representation:** Grounds must be **relevant, definite and legally sustainable;** irrelevant or unusable material can undermine the validity of detention.
  - **Judicial Review:** Preventive detention remains subject to **constitutional and judicial scrutiny** to prevent arbitrary deprivation of liberty.

**What was the Case About?**

- **Sambhal Violence:** Four people were killed in 2024 during violence amid a mosque survey in Sambhal, UP. Accused was arrested and police allegedly obtained a confession in custody.
- **NSA Detention:** Despite getting bail in one of the criminal cases, the accused was detained under **Section 3(2), NSA.**
- **Legal Challenge:** Allahabad HC rejected his plea. By then, Afroz had secured bail in all six criminal cases against him, yet he remained in prison under the NSA. He approached the SC, alleging that relevant material had not been supplied to him and confession was obtained through **torture/threats.**

- **Subjective Satisfaction is Subject to Judicial Review:** Although preventive detention is based on the detaining authority's **subjective satisfaction**, it is **not immune from judicial scrutiny**. Courts can examine whether the satisfaction is based on **relevant, reliable and legally usable material**.
- **Article 22(5) Safeguards:** are meaningful only when the grounds are **relevant, clear and legally sustainable**. Reliance on an irrelevant or undisclosed ground strikes at the heart of the protection guaranteed by Article 22(5)
- **Rejected Other Grounds for Detention:** Authorities claimed it identified Afroz as the "principal architect" of the violence based on a CCTV footage, but the footage was ***not supplied to him or produced before the courts***.
  - **Phone Communications:** Alleged messages identifying him as "boss" were relied upon, although the order itself indicated that the phone data had been erased.

- **Charge sheet:** The SC held that a charge sheet reflects the investigating agency's opinion/ allegations and **is not proof of guilt**.
- **Post-Bail Detention:** The State failed to demonstrate sufficient independent material showing a **future threat** warranting preventive detention.

**Significance of the Verdict:**

- **Strengthens Personal Liberty:** Reinforces **Article 21** by placing greater scrutiny on the State's power to detain without trial.
- **Checks Arbitrary Preventive Detention:** Prevents authorities from relying solely on **legally inadmissible or unreliable material** to justify detention.
- **Reinforces Article 22(5):** Strengthens the detenu's right to **know the grounds of detention** and make an **effective representation** against them.
- **Limits Executive "Subjective Satisfaction":** Clarifies that subjective satisfaction is **not absolute or immune from judicial review;** it must rest on relevant and legally sustainable material.
- **Preventive ≠ Punitive Detention:** Prevents the **NSA from being used as an alternative to criminal prosecution or a means to circumvent bail.**
- **Promotes Evidentiary Discipline:** Reinforces that **police confessions, undisclosed evidence and mere chargesheets** cannot substitute for reliable supporting material.
- **Strengthens Rule of Law:** Ensures that extraordinary powers remain subject to **constitutional safeguards, proportionality, and judicial oversight.**

- **Preventive vs Punitive Detention:** The Court stressed that preventive detention is meant to prevent **anticipated future conduct**, not punish **past conduct**. In this case, reliance on the **same incident and substantially the same material** used in criminal proceedings blurred this distinction. Using preventive detention merely to keep a person imprisoned *after grant of bail* would make it **punitive rather than preventive**.




# Legislative Privileges Vs Free Speech

Recently, a seven-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court (SC) headed by CJI Surya Kant disposed of the long pending reference in *N. Ravi v. Speaker, Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly* as **infructuous**. The 2003 resolution behind it had been withdrawn by the Assembly in 2004. The Court did **not** rule on merits and kept the questions of law open for a future case.

**Key Judicial Precedents:**

- ***Pandit M.S.M. Sharma v. Sri Krishna Sinha, 1959***: Commonly referred to as the **Searchlight case**, the court held that Assembly privileges under Article 194(3) included the power to prohibit publication. It said that because Article 19(1)(a) is a general provision and Article 194(3) is a special provision, free speech can be overridden by, the legislative privileges under Article 194(3)
- **Special Reference No. 1 of *Keshav Singh vs Speaker, Legislative Assembly, 1965:*** An advisory opinion under Article 143 (the President may refer a question of law or fact of public importance to the SC for its opinion). The court stated that Legislative privileges are not absolute and cannot override critical fundamental rights, such as Article 21, nor can they bypass judicial review
- ***Raja Ram Pal vs Speaker, Lok Sabha, 2007:*** arising from the cash-for-query sting, the court upheld Parliament's expulsion of 11 MPs under Article 105(3) but held that the exercise of parliamentary privilege is subject to judicial review.
- ***Amarinder Singh v. Special Committee, Punjab Vidhan Sabha, 2010:*** The court quashed the Punjab Assembly's expulsion of the former Chief Minister, saying that privilege cannot be used to punish conduct unrelated to the functioning of the House.
- ***Sita Soren vs Union of India, 2024:*** *A* seven-judge bench overruled *P V Narasimha Rao* (1998). In 1998 case the court granted immunity to MPs accused of taking bribes to vote.

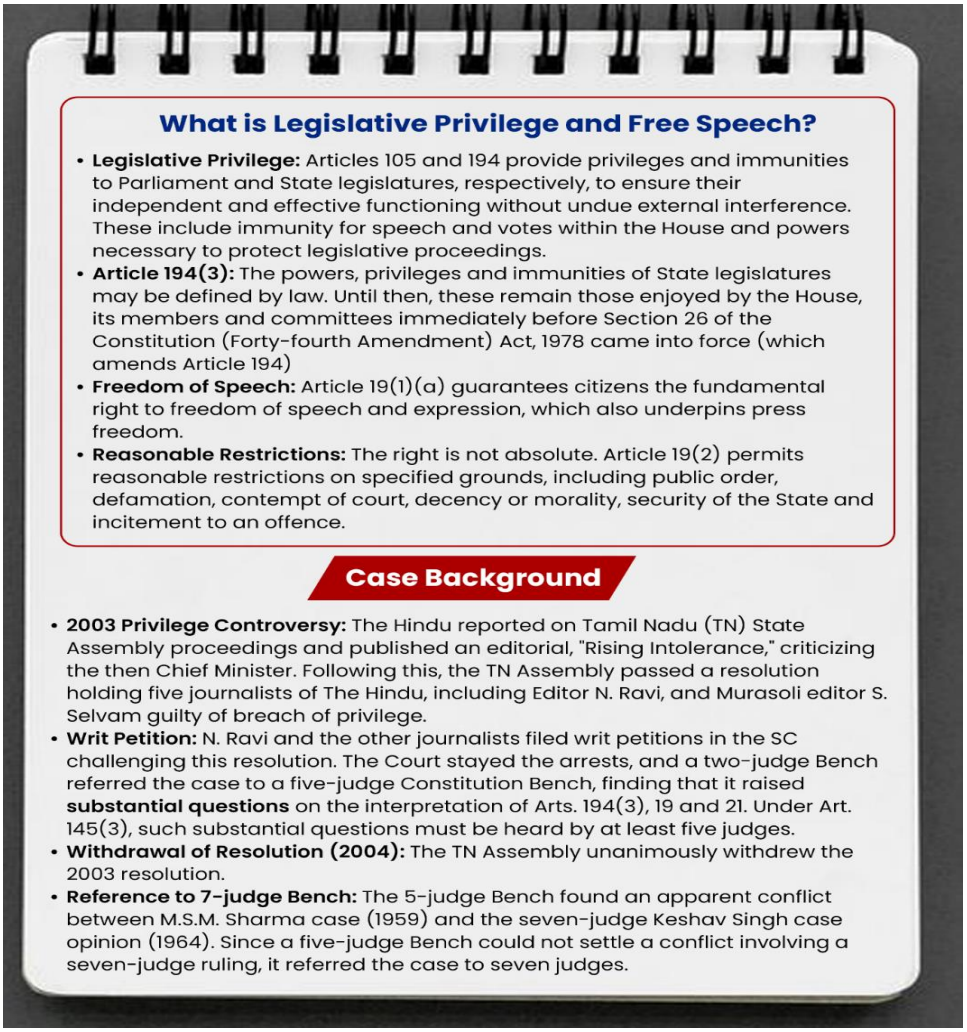
- The 2024 ruling: Lawmakers do not enjoy immunity from criminal prosecution for bribery connected to their speeches/ votes in Parliament or State Assemblies

**What Did the Court Say?**

- **Matter Disposed of as Infructuous**: A seven-judge Constitution Bench disposed of the case because the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly had withdrawn its 2003 resolution in July 2004.
- **No Ruling on Constitutional Questions**: The Court did not decide on the substantive issue concerning the scope of legislative privilege under Article 194(3) and its relationship with Article 19(1)(a).
- **Questions Left Open:** The constitutional issues were left open for consideration in an appropriate future case. Thus, the judgment did not settle the broader legal conflict between legislative privilege and press freedom.

**Way Forward:**

- **Codification of Privileges:** Define and delimit legislative privileges under Articles 105(3) and 194(3), consistent with constitutional guarantees. The National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRWC) recommended defining and delimiting privileges.

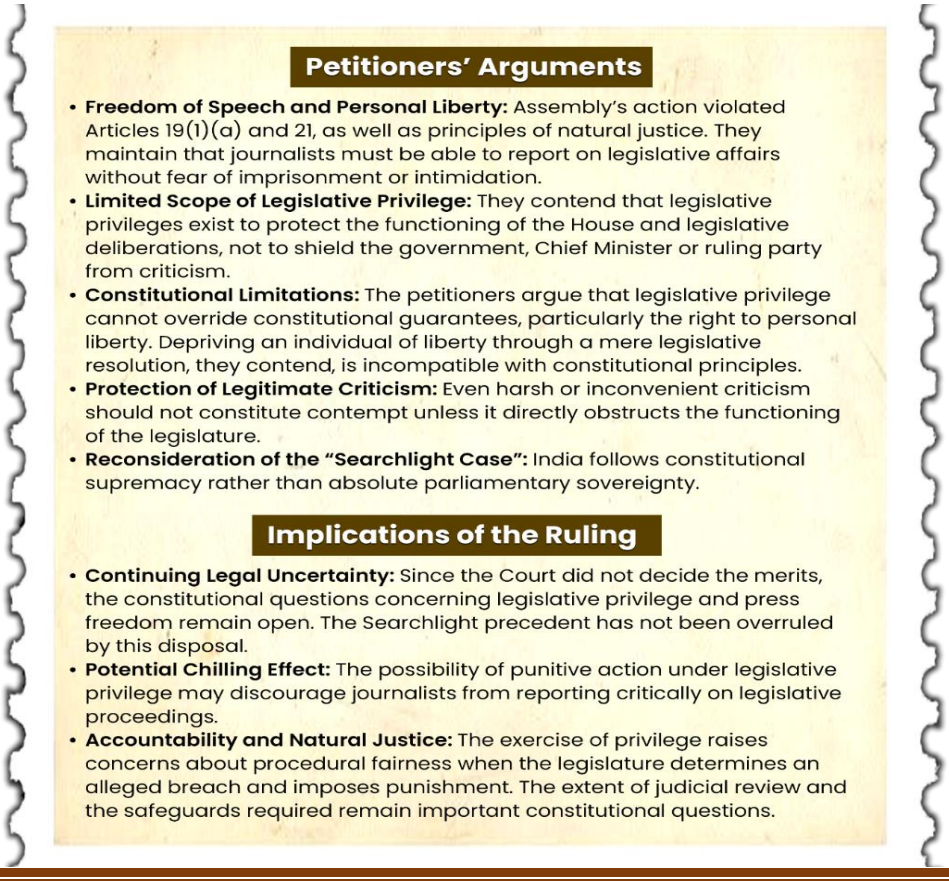


### What is Legislative Privilege and Free Speech?

- **Legislative Privilege:** Articles 105 and 194 provide privileges and immunities to Parliament and State legislatures, respectively, to ensure their independent and effective functioning without undue external interference. These include immunity for speech and votes within the House and powers necessary to protect legislative proceedings.
- **Article 194(3):** The powers, privileges and immunities of State legislatures may be defined by law. Until then, these remain those enjoyed by the House, its members and committees immediately before Section 26 of the Constitution (Forty-fourth Amendment) Act, 1978 came into force (which amends Article 194)
- **Freedom of Speech:** Article 19(1)(a) guarantees citizens the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression, which also underpins press freedom.
- **Reasonable Restrictions:** The right is not absolute. Article 19(2) permits reasonable restrictions on specified grounds, including public order, defamation, contempt of court, decency or morality, security of the State and incitement to an offence.

### Case Background

- **2003 Privilege Controversy:** The Hindu reported on Tamil Nadu (TN) State Assembly proceedings and published an editorial, "Rising Intolerance," criticizing the then Chief Minister. Following this, the TN Assembly passed a resolution holding five journalists of The Hindu, including Editor N. Ravi, and Murasoli editor S. Selvam guilty of breach of privilege.
- **Writ Petition:** N. Ravi and the other journalists filed writ petitions in the SC challenging this resolution. The Court stayed the arrests, and a two-judge Bench referred the case to a five-judge Constitution Bench, finding that it raised **substantial questions** on the interpretation of Arts. 194(3), 19 and 21. Under Art. 145(3), such substantial questions must be heard by at least five judges.
- **Withdrawal of Resolution (2004):** The TN Assembly unanimously withdrew the 2003 resolution.
- **Reference to 7-judge Bench:** The 5-judge Bench found an apparent conflict between M.S.M. Sharma case (1959) and the seven-judge Keshav Singh case opinion (1964). Since a five-judge Bench could not settle a conflict involving a seven-judge ruling, it referred the case to seven judges.



### Petitioners' Arguments

- **Freedom of Speech and Personal Liberty:** Assembly's action violated Articles 19(1)(a) and 21, as well as principles of natural justice. They maintain that journalists must be able to report on legislative affairs without fear of imprisonment or intimidation.
- **Limited Scope of Legislative Privilege:** They contend that legislative privileges exist to protect the functioning of the House and legislative deliberations, not to shield the government, Chief Minister or ruling party from criticism.
- **Constitutional Limitations:** The petitioners argue that legislative privilege cannot override constitutional guarantees, particularly the right to personal liberty. Depriving an individual of liberty through a mere legislative resolution, they contend, is incompatible with constitutional principles.
- **Protection of Legitimate Criticism:** Even harsh or inconvenient criticism should not constitute contempt unless it directly obstructs the functioning of the legislature.
- **Reconsideration of the "Searchlight Case":** India follows constitutional supremacy rather than absolute parliamentary sovereignty.

### Implications of the Ruling

- **Continuing Legal Uncertainty:** Since the Court did not decide the merits, the constitutional questions concerning legislative privilege and press freedom remain open. The Searchlight precedent has not been overruled by this disposal.
- **Potential Chilling Effect:** The possibility of punitive action under legislative privilege may discourage journalists from reporting critically on legislative proceedings.
- **Accountability and Natural Justice:** The exercise of privilege raises concerns about procedural fairness when the legislature determines an alleged breach and imposes punishment. The extent of judicial review and the safeguards required remain important constitutional questions.

- **Safeguard Fair Reporting**: Preserve the protection available under Article 361A for substantially true reports of legislative proceedings, subject to the Article's conditions and exceptions. Consider clearer safeguards against disproportionate action against journalists.
- **Ensure Procedural Fairness**: Provide notice, an opportunity to respond, reasoned decisions and proportionate sanctions in privilege proceedings.
- **Resolve the Constitutional Questions**: An appropriate case involving a live dispute may enable the Supreme Court to clarify the limits of legislative privilege, its application to non-members and the *continuing scope of the Searchlight precedent.*




# Jantar Mantar De-notified as Protest Site

Recently, the Delhi Police de-notified Jantar Mantar as a designated venue for protests and demonstrations in Delhi based on the recommendations of a committee set up by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). The denotification came amid protests against the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC).

**What Does the New Order Provide?**

- **De-Notification:** Jantar Mantar is no longer an officially designated protest venue. De-notification does not ban protests across the city; it changes where they may be held.
- **Alternative Venues:** Ramlila Ground (Central Delhi), Burari Ground (North Delhi) and CBD Ground (East Delhi).
- **Procedure:** A detailed, revised Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for protests at the three venues "will be issued separately".

**What Led to the Decision?**

- **SC's Suggestion:** During a recent hearing of a plea against Metro and train restrictions linked to the anti-CEC protests, a Supreme Court (SC) Bench led by Chief Justice of India (CJI) observed that a suitable protest site with *basic amenities* should be identified and left the decision to the competent authority.

**Who Decides Where Delhi Can Protest?**

- **Article 239AA(3)(a):** The Delhi Legislative Assembly can make laws on State and Concurrent List matters except Entries 1, 2 and 18 of the State List (public order, police and land).
- **Union Control:** As a result, the Delhi Police function under the MHA, and protest venues and permissions are regulated by the Police Commissioner through standing orders.
- **Article 19:** Guarantees freedom of speech and expression and peaceful assembly subject to reasonable restrictions including in the interests of public order.
- ***Himat Lal K. Shah v. Commissioner of Police, Ahmedabad,* 1972**: SC held that the police could require prior permission for public meetings on streets and there was "nothing wrong" with it. But the State "cannot by law abridge or take away the right of assembly by prohibiting assembly on every public street or public place."

**SC's View on 'Law-and-Order' Vs 'Public Order'**

- ***Ram Manohar Lohia v. State of Bihar, 1966*:** The court observed that an act may affect law and order without affecting public order. It described law and order, public order and security of the state as three concentric circles, with public order occupying a narrower category.
- ***Re: Ramlila Maidan Incident, 2012:*** The court said a restriction imposed to maintain law and order "would be least intruding into the guaranteed freedom", while public order "may qualify for a greater degree of restriction since public order is a matter of even greater social concern".

| Arguments in Favour of the Shift | Concerns Raised |
|---|---|
| • **Amenities and Safety:** Larger grounds can offer water, sanitation, medical support and emergency access.<br>• **Residents' Rights:** Reduces disruption to residents (govt. and MPs residences) and offices on Jantar Mantar Road. | • **Distance from Power:** Protest means bearing witness before those in power. Moving protests to the periphery like Burari Ground weakens that purpose.<br>• **Access to Basic Amenities: CBD Ground (Shahdara)** is a dense commercial area with reports of garbage at the site.<br>• **Cost and Access:** Jantar Mantar was free. Ramlila Ground costs ₹50,000 a day plus a ₹55,000 refundable deposit (about ₹1.21 lakh in all, with taxes). Its small free area, holding up to 150 people, is available, and only one party can book the ground at a time.<br>• **Opaque Process:** Former SC judge V. Gopala Gowda has questioned why the committee's reasons are not public and why the decision rests with the Police Commissioner.<br>• **Validity of Denotification:** Some reports note that Jantar Mantar may never have been formally notified, which raises the question of how it could be "de-notified".<br>• **Timing:** Critics, including Opposition parties and student groups, see the move as targeting the ongoing anti-CEC protests.<br>• **Interim Gap:** The venue is closed but the new SOP is yet to be issued, leaving organizers without a clear procedure. |

**Way Forward**

- **Publish the Reasons:** Place the MHA committee's report and the selection criteria for the new venues in the public domain.
- **Notify the SOP Quickly:** Set clear timelines for applications and decisions, and record reasons for any refusal.
- **Make Venues Usable:** Provide free or nominal-cost access, basic facilities and public-transport links at all three grounds.
- **Keep a Central Option:** Consider a regulated, small-group space near the seat of power as allowed by SC in *Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan v. Union of India, 2018*.
- **Consult Stakeholders:** Frame the protest framework with civil society, residents' groups and legal experts.

**Extra Mile: About Jantar Mantar**

- **Origin:** Built around 1724 by Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II, at the behest of Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah, as a naked-eye astronomical observatory. Delhi's was the first of five built, the others are at Jaipur, Ujjain, Varanasi and Mathura (the last no longer survives).
  - The Jaipur Jantar Mantar is a UNESCO World Heritage Site (2010).
- **Instruments:** Four principal instruments (Samrat Yantra, Ram Yantra, Jai Prakash Yantra and Mishra Yantra) and 14 geometric devices.
- **Earlier Regulation:**
  - **2003 Standing Order:** Jantar Mantar handled gatherings below 5,000; Ramlila Maidan up to 50,000; Burari above that, and Narela for even larger crowds.
  - **2017 NGT Order:** The National Green Tribunal (NGT) halted protests here over residents' complaints of noise and sanitation.
  - **Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan v. Union of India, 2018:** The SC while setting aside the NGT ban emphasized balancing protesters' rights with residents' interests and allowed a limited stretch of Jantar Mantar Road to remain open for regulated protests by smaller groups, recognizing its longstanding use as a protest site.

EDITOR'S CUT

# SC Bars Illegal Detention of Peaceful Protesters

Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) directed the Union government and the Delhi Police to stop illegal detention and allow free and smooth movement of people and traffic, as well as the operations of Metro and rail services subject to law and public order.

## Background

- **Protest and Curbs:** Delhi Police clamped down on a protest called by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) demanding the resignation of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC). The curbs included prohibitory orders under Section 163, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS- metro and train closures, and an internet suspension.
- **Detentions:** Delhi Police detained thousands of people. Individuals were even picked up from trains and from outside the 4-km prohibitory zone around Jantar Mantar.
- **SC Petition:** A petition was filed by lawyers seeking contempt action against authorities for allegedly violating an October 9 SC order which barred any "outright prohibition on the movement of Metro trains" and public transport on October 10.

## What Did the Court Direct?

- **No Illegal Detention**: Peaceful and unarmed gatherings must not be subjected to unlawful detention, particularly beyond areas covered by Section 163 orders.
- **Restoration of Services:** Metro and railway services must function normally, subject to lawful and necessary restrictions. Internet services must remain unhindered.
- **Free Movement**: Authorities must ensure movement of people, review road barricades and facilitate traffic.
- **Access to Justice**: Restrictions around the SC and other courts must not obstruct access. Lawyers, journalists and other professionals must be allowed to perform their duties.

## Concerns Raised Against Detention:

- **Chilling Effect**: Fear of arbitrary detention discourages lawful protests, undermining freedom of speech andpeaceful assembly.

## Arrest vs Detention vs Preventive Detention:

**Arrest:** Formal custody of a person in connection with an offence.
- **Legal Basis:** BNSS (e.g. Section 35) and other criminal laws.
- **Time Limit:** Production before a Magistrate within 24 hours.
- **Safeguards: Article 22(1)-(2):** guarantees the right to be informed of the grounds of arrest, to consult and be defended by a lawyer of one's choice, and to be produced before a magistrate within 24 hours.

**Short-Term Detention (Preventive Police Action):** Temporary stopping, removal or holding of a person to prevent an imminent offence; the term is not defined in the BNSS.
- **Legal Basis:**
  - **Section 170, BNSS:** Arrest to prevent a cognizable offence that cannot otherwise be prevented.
  - **Section 172(2), BNSS:** Detain or remove a person disregarding lawful police directions.
- Time Limit: Production before a Magistrate, or release in petty cases within 24 hours.

- **Preventive Detention:** Holding a person without trial to prevent future acts that threated public order or national security.

**When Does Detention Become Arrest?** Disobeying a Section 163 BNSS order is an offence under Section 223 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) which penalizes the disobedience of an order lawfully promulgated by a public servant. At that point a detention can turn into an arrest with an FIR.

## What Rights Do Detainees Have?

### Constitutional
- Liberty only by fair procedure (Article 21).
- Right to know the grounds of arrest and to consult a lawyer (Article 22(1)).
- Production before a Magistrate within 24 hours, excluding journey time (Article 22(2)).
- Protection against self-incrimination (Article 20(3)).
- Habeas corpus before the SC (Article 32) or a High Court (Article 226).

### Under the BNSS
- Arrest memo attested by a witness (Section 36).
- A designated officer (not below ASI) in each district to maintain arrest records (Section 37).
- Right to meet an advocate during interrogation (Section 38).
- Grounds of arrest and right to bail (Section 47).
- Informing a relative, friend or other person of one's choice (Section 48).
- Medical examination (Section 53).
- Women not to be arrested after sunset and before sunrise save in exceptional cases (Section 43(5)).

### Judicial Safeguards
- **D.K. Basu v. State of West Bengal (1997):** Established custodial safeguards (memos, notification to relatives, medical exams) now integrated into Sections 36-53 of the BNSS.
- **Rudul Sah v. State of Bihar (1983):** Established public law compensation as a remedy for illegal detention and violation of Article 21.
- **Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan v. Union of India (2018):** Affirmed the right to peaceful protest as a fundamental right under Article 19(1)(a) and (b), subject only to reasonable restrictions.
- **Vihaan Kumar v. State (2025):** Reaffirmed that failure to communicate the grounds of arrest/detention violates constitutional mandates and invalidates custody.

- **Acc ountability Gap**: Unrecorded detentions evade procedural safeguards, impede habeas corpus remedies and weaken judicial oversight.
- **Misuse of Preventive Powers**: Routine invocation of Section 163 of the BNSS without adequate justification may enable disproportionate restrictions on peaceful assemblies.
- **Collective Punishment:** Blanket restrictions on public transport, internet services and movement burden ordinary citizens and essential services beyond the immediate protest area.
- **Violation of Personal Liberty:** Detention without sufficient legal grounds or compliance with procedural safeguards undermines Article 21 and creates scope for arbitrary police action.

**Way Forward**

- **Record Every Detention:** Log each detention, inform families, & either produce detainees before a Magistrate or release them within 24 hours.
- **Regulate, Not Prohibit:** *Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, 2018* recognized peaceful protest as a fundamental right while permitting regulation. Section 163 orders should be limited in area and duration.
- **Balance Liberty and Public Order**: Ensure that restrictions on movement, transport and internet services are necessary, proportionate and subject to periodic review.




# What Stopped Andhra Pradesh's 34% BC Quota In Local Bodies?

Recently, the Andhra Pradesh (AP) High Court (HC) struck down the State government's orders raising Backward Classes (BC) reservation to 34% in rural local bodies and 33.33% in urban local bodies. The Supreme Court (SC) subsequently dismissed the State government's appeal upholding the HCs judgment.

**Key Judicial Precedents**

- ***Indra Sawhney v. Union of India, 1992*:** A 9-judge SC bench upheld 27% reservation for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and established the general 50% ceiling on reservation, permitting exceptions in extraordinary circumstances.
- ***K. Krishna Murthy & Others Vs. Union of India, 2010*:** A 5-judge SC bench recognized the constitutional basis for OBC reservation in local bodies and held that such reservation must satisfy

**Background:**

- **Enhanced Quota:** In August 2026, Andhra Pradesh raised BC reservation to fulfil a 2024 poll promise.
- **Reservation Ceiling:** Consequently, combined Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and BC reservation reached 61.08% in rural bodies and 49.24% in urban bodies. These are vertical reservations ordinarily subject to the judicially established 50% ceiling in local-body elections. Thus, the 34% BC quota pushed total reservation in rural bodies beyond the prescribed ceiling.
- **Survey Insufficient:** The Andhra Pradesh government relied on data from the Unified Family Survey to support its decision to enhance BC reservations. The courts held that the survey provided general household and socioeconomic data but lacked the focused, local-body-wise assessment of BCs' political backwardness and representation required under the triple test. Hence, it could not independently justify enhanced quotas.

**Vertical vs Horizontal Reservation and BC-E Classification**

- Vertical reservations cover SCs, STs and BCs, while horizontal reservations, such as those for women, operate across all these categories.
  - Women's quotas therefore do not add to the vertical reservation ceiling.
- BC-E groups (socially & educationally backward Muslim communities) classified as backward classes in Andhra Pradesh also fall under vertical reservation, subject to applicable ceilings and classification rules.

**Related Constitutional and Legal Framework:**

- **Articles 243D and 243T:** Mandate SC and ST reservation in panchayats and municipalities in proportion to their population.
- **Articles 243D(6) and 243T(6):** Enable States to provide BC reservation in local bodies, but fix no basis or quantum for it.
- **Vertical vs Horizontal Reservation:** SC, ST and BC quotas are vertical and together subject to the 50% ceiling. Women's quotas are horizontal, cutting across these categories.

specific constitutional requirements. The combined SC, ST and OBC reservation is ordinarily subject to the 50% ceiling.

- ***Birru Prathap Reddy v. The State of Andhra Pradesh, 2020:*** Andhra Pradesh HC **struck down the state's 34% statutory reservation for BCs in local bodies** as when combined with existing SC and ST quotas, it pushed the **aggregate vertical reservation to 59.85%**, breaching the strict 50% legal ceiling.
- ***Vikas Kishan Rao Gawali Vs. State of Maharashtra, 2021*:** A three-judge SC bench **institutionalized the "Triple Test" framework** as a mandatory constitutional prerequisite for providing Other Backward Classes (OBC) reservations in local bodies. The Court ruled that local body reservations cannot be granted arbitrarily or based on general data without meeting specific empirical criteria.

**What Is the Triple Test?** It determines BC reservations in local body elections.

- **Dedicated Commission:** must be established by the State to conduct a rigorous empirical inquiry into the nature and implications of political backwardness among BCs.
- **Local-Body-Wise Proportion:** The commission must determine the appropriate proportion of reservation for individual local bodies based on its findings. A uniform percentage cannot simply be imposed across the State without the required assessment.
- **50% Ceiling:** Combined SC, ST and BC reservation must stay within the 50% ceiling, subject to applicable constitutional exceptions.

- ***Suresh Mahajan v. State of Madhya Pradesh, 2022:*** SC Ruled that OBC reservation can only be provided if the "triple test" is fully met. If a state fails to complete this test, the seats must be notified as General Category seats. Reiterated that any reservation extended to OBCs in local bodies, combined with SC/ST quotas, cannot exceed the aggregate ceiling limit of 50%.




# Hookah Service Banned Even in Designated Smoking Areas

Allahabad High Court (HC) in M/s Aftek Foods and Beverages Pvt. Ltd. v State of UP held that restaurants in Uttar Pradesh (UP) cannot run hookah bars or serve hookah, even inside "Designated Smoking Areas" (**DSAs**).

**Why Did the HC Ban Hookah Service?**

- **Qualified to Absolute Prohibition:** The 2017 change turned a qualified restriction into an absolute bar, so the Narinder Chadha reading no longer applies.
- **DSA Is a Narrow Exception:** The general rule under

**What Led to the Case?**

- **COVID-era Ban:** In 2020, the HC, hearing a Suo motu PIL, directed UP to stop hookah bars over the risk of shared smoking devices. The State then banned them statewide.
- **Licensing Dispute:** In 2023, the HC observed that hookah bars were regulated under the Food Safety and Standards Act (FSSA), 2006, and restaurant owners were free to approach statutory authorities for grant or renewal of licence. When police later raided outlets, owners challenged the raids under Article 19(1)(g).

**Related Laws:**

- **Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA), 2003:** The act prohibits the advertisement of, and regulates trade & commerce and production, supply & distribution of, cigarettes and other tobacco products. Hookah tobacco is recognized as a tobacco product under the Act.
- **Section 4 of the Act:** It prohibits smoking in public places and allows DSAs in hotels with at least 30 rooms, restaurants seating 30 or more persons, and airports.
- **Prohibition of Smoking in Public Places Rules, 2008:** They set out the conditions for DSAs.
  - **Rule 4:** It requires DSAs to be segregated from the rest of the premises.
  - **Rule 4(3):** It earlier allowed smoking areas to be used only for smoking, with "no other service(s)" permitted. The **2017 amendment** by the **Union Government** dropped the word "other", so the rule now reads "no service shall be allowed in any smoking area or space provided for smoking".
    - The Supreme Court (SC) in Narinder S. Chadha v. Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (2014) interpreted the earlier version of Rule 4(3) to mean that while food and beverages could not be served in designated smoking areas, hookah facilities themselves were permissible.
- **Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006:** It regulates food meant for human consumption and provides the licensing framework for restaurants and food businesses. The Court also had to examine whether such licences have any bearing on running hookah bars.

COTPA is no smoking in public places. A DSA permits smoking, not a restaurant's hookah business.

- **Hookah Is a "Service":** Preparing, assembling, delivering, lighting, replenishing and maintaining a hookah for payment is a service. The Court rejected the "rental" and "self-service" arguments as a cigarette can be smoked without help, but hookah needs preparation and continuous staff involvement.
- **Herbal Hookah Included:** The ban is on the service itself, so it applies whether tobacco, nicotine or herbal mixtures are smoked.
- **No FSSA Licence for Hookah:** The FSSA covers food consumed for nutrition, and tobacco is not food. So, food safety departments and Municipal Corporations cannot license hookah bars.
- **Police Powers Upheld:** Sections 12, 13 and 15 of COTPA empower police to search, seize and confiscate in cases of violation.
- **Health Over Trade:** The State relied on Article 21 (protection from passive smoking) and Article 47 (duty to improve public health). The Court held that the right to trade under Article 19(1)(g) must yield to a non-smoker's right to clean air.

**Significance of the Verdict:**

- **Public Health:** It closes a loophole that let hookah lounges operate as DSAs. This protects staff and patrons from second-hand smoke.
- **Myth-Busting:** The Court said hookah is as addictive and harmful as cigarettes. It noted that a one-hour session involves about 200 puffs, roughly equal to 100 cigarettes.
- **Clarity for Enforcement:** It settles that police can act, while food and municipal authorities cannot license hookah bars.

**Implementation Challenges:**

- **Livelihoods:** Restaurants that invested in compliant DSAs and obtained food licences face losses, and their staff may lose jobs.
- **Regional Inconsistency:** The ruling binds only UP, while other States follow their own laws or none.
- **Underground Operations:** A blanket ban may push hookah service into unregulated, hard-to-monitor spaces.

**Way Forward:**

- **Clear Central Rule:** Parliament or the Union Health Ministry could amend COTPA to deal with hookah bars explicitly.
- **State Legislation:** The HC noted that Gujarat, Punjab, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Karnataka have hookah-bar laws with tougher penalties. It urged UP to consider stricter measures.
- **Fair Enforcement:** Police action should follow due process and clear guidelines to avoid harassment of compliant businesses.
- **Awareness:** Information, Education and Communication (IEC) campaigns under the National Tobacco Control Programme (NTCP) should target youth and debunk the myth that "hookah is safer"




# Internet Access as a Fundamental Right for Children

Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) in *Just Rights for Children Alliance v. S. Harish,* 2026 case held that the right to access and use the internet is a **fundamental right** of every individual under Article 21 read with Article 19(1)(a), and that children enjoy it irrespective of age.

✓**Article 21** guarantees the right to life and personal liberty. It has been read to include dignity, education, privacy and, since 2025, digital access.

✓**Article 19(1)(a)** guarantees freedom of speech and expression. This includes the right to know, receive and impart information, and the internet is now a primary medium for all three.

**Case Background:**

- **Madras HC Order:** The Madras High Court (HC) quashed a chargesheet, holding that privately downloading and viewing child sexual abuse material, without publishing or transmitting it, was not an offence.
- **Challenge:** Just Rights for Children Alliance, a coalition of NGOs, challenged the order before the SC. It also *sought directions to intermediaries on reporting such material.*
- **2024 Ruling** in Just Rights for Children Alliance v. S. Harish**:** A 2-judge SC bench overturned the HC order. It held that viewing, possessing and not reporting such material are offences under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and the Information Technology (IT) Act even without further dissemination.
- **Non-Compliance:** In later orders, the Court noted platforms' *lapses in following its directions*. News reports also showed paid promotion of Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Material (CSEAM) through redirect links.
- **Global Trend Considered:** While ruling on compliance, the Court examined the global trend of limiting children's social media access for their safety. It consciously chose not to endorse that trend.

**SC Verdict:**

- **Right Recognized:** The right to access and use the internet is a fundamental right that extends to children. For many children in remote areas, it is often the only source of learning and information.
- **Blanket Bans Rejected:** The Court rejected blanket curbs on children's internet access, calling them "unproven measures of proven disproportionality" and held that any restriction on a fundamental right must satisfy the three-pronged test-
  - The restriction must be through duly enacted legislation;
  - The law must demonstrate a legitimate state interest that has a nexus with the objective sought to be achieved by Parliament;
  - The encroachment on fundamental rights must be proportionate to that objective.
- **Victim is Not the Problem:** Safety measures must be directed at harmful material and those responsible for it. Keeping children offline would "mistake the victim for the problem".
- **Permissible Safeguards:** The Court favoured parental consent and oversight, and a "child mode" with private-by-default accounts, curbs on contact from unknown adults, and moderated content. The Union may also restrict inherently harmful content, such as adult websites.
- **Directions on CSEAM:**
  - **National Database:** A National Hash and URL List Database must be set up, with each entry confirmed by at least three trained human analysts. The Union must frame guidelines making hash-matching and URL listing mandatory for platforms.
  - **Reporting Timelines:** CSEAM removals must be reported "within two hours from such removal", and complaints acknowledged "within twenty-four hours from receipt". Appoint trained grievance officers and publish monthly compliance reports.
  - **Penalties:** The Union must consider exemplary fines, and revenue from CSEAM offered through paywalls must be disgorged and forfeited

- **Digital Safety and Education:** The Court directed the Union to add digital safety and age-appropriate sex education, covering consent, safe and unsafe touch, and reporting abuse, to the school curriculum through National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and State Councils of Educational Research and Training (SCERTs). It also called for training teachers, sensitizing parents and free counselling for victims.
- **Next Step:** The Union must frame guidelines, amend the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 and file an affidavit before the December 10, 2026 hearing.

**Key Judicial Precedents**

- **Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting v. Cricket Association of Bengal, 1995:** Held that Article 19(1)(a) includes the right to know and to receive and impart information and ideas.
- **Anuradha Bhasin v. Union of India, 2020:** Held that speech and trade through the internet are protected under Articles 19(1)(a) and 19(1)(g), and that internet curbs must be proportionate. It did not declare internet access itself a fundamental right, and the 2026 ruling settles that question.
- **Pragya Prasun v. Union of India, 2025:** Held that excluding persons with disabilities from digital KYC (Know Your Customer) verification violated Article 21, and that digital access is intrinsic to the right to life.

**Why Does Children's Online Safety Need Attention?** An Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR)-supported study, conducted in 2025, surveyed over 2,000 children aged 9-14 and about 500 parents in Delhi. It found:

- **Access, Use and Impact:** 97.6% of children access the internet from home, mainly on smartphones, and most spend about 4.5 hours a day online. Anxiety, sleep disturbances and mood changes are the most reported effects, and many show signs of addiction.
- **Risky Contact:** 47% of children talked to unknown people online in the past six months. Most do not report uncomfortable experiences to parents or teachers.
- **Gaps:** Children have strong technical skills but weak critical skills against algorithmic influence and manipulation. Boys face greater exposure to risk, while girls' restricted access limits their digital literacy.

**Significance of the Ruling**

- **Settles an Open Question:** Internet access moves from being a medium for other rights to a fundamental right in itself.
- **Shifts Accountability:** The burden of safety moves to platforms, regulators and law enforcement, not children.
- **Check on State Curbs:** Screen-time curbs that States such as Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh are reportedly planning, and internet shutdowns, must stay within constitutionally permissible limits.

**Concerns Raised**

- **Rights vs. Delivery Gap:** The expanding list of fundamental rights often outpaces the State's ability or willingness to provide the infrastructure those rights presuppose. The Anuradha Bhasin guidelines on shutdowns are often breached. Without accountability, new rights risk remaining doctrinal.
- **Health Harms Persist:** A rights framework alone does not address the screen addiction and anxiety that the ICSSR study found.
- **Implementation Capacity:** Two-hour reporting, trained grievance officers and hash-matching are costly, especially for smaller platforms.

**Way Forward:**

- **Codify Safeguards:** Amend the IT Rules, 2021 to mandate "child mode" defaults and hash-matching. Align this with Section 9 of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 on verifiable parental consent.
- **Safety by Design:** Make platforms accountable for age-appropriate design and algorithms that do not push harmful content to minors.
- **Proportionate State Action:** Target specific harmful content rather than age-wide bans and ensure takedowns meet the tests of legality and necessity.
- **Digital Literacy:** Adopt the ICSSR's "collaborative multi-stakeholder framework" linking schools, parents and children, building on the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.




# Effect of Religious Conversion on Caste Based Reservation

The Supreme Court (SC), in *The Secretary to Government v. Sameer Ahamed N.* (2026), upheld the Madras High Court's (HC) ruling that struck down a Tamil Nadu (TN) Government Order (G.O.) enabling converts to Islam to obtain Backward Class (Muslim) certificates

**What Did the G.O. Provide?** The 2024 Order allowed persons converting to Islam from Backward Classes (BC), Most Backward Classes (MBC), Denotified Communities (DNC) and Scheduled Castes to obtain Backward Class Muslim certificates upon conversion into any of seven recognised Muslim communities covered by a 3.5% quota. It was based on Tamil Nadu Backward Classes Commission (TNBCC), recommendation for issuing such certificates.

**About Backward Class (Muslim) Reservation in TN:**

- **Legal Basis:** The Tamil Nadu Backward Class Muslims (Reservation of Seats in Educational Institutions including Private Educational Institutions and of Appointments or Posts in the Services under the State) Act, 2007 provides 3.5% reservation.
- **Notified Communities:** Seven Muslim communities are recognized under Section 3(a) of the Tamil Nadu Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Reservation of Seats in Educational Institutions and of Appointments or Posts in the Services under the State) Act, 1993. They are Ansar, Dekkani Muslims, Dudekula, Labbais (including Rowthar and Marakayar), Mapilla, Sheik and Syed.

**What Did the SC Hold?**

- **Religion Is Not Community:** Conversion establishes religious affiliation, not membership of a historically formed social community. The recognized seven groups are social communities based on ancestry, endogamy and occupation, not theological sects.
- **Backwardness Not Transferable:** Backwardness rooted in the Hindu caste order cannot be transposed into a non-Hindu social order. Article 16(4) entitlements based on that order end on conversion to Islam, Christianity or another non-Hindu order.
- **Violation of Article 14:** The G.O. grouped BC, MBC, DNC and Scheduled Caste converts into Muslim communities without showing any common characteristic linking them.

## Constitutional Routes: Scheduled Caste Status vs Backward Class Identification

| Aspect | SC Status | BC Identification |
|---|---|---|
| Related Provision | Article 341; Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 | Articles 15(4) and 16(4) permit special provisions for socially and educationally backward classes and for their adequate representation in public employment. |
| Who Decides? | President notifies Scheduled Castes under Article 341; only Parliament may alter the list by law (Article 341(2)) | Article 342A(3) inserted by (One Hundred and Fifth Amendment) Act, 2021, recognizes States' power to maintain their own lists of socially and educationally backward classes for State purposes. |
| Religion Condition | Paragraph 3 of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 restricts Scheduled Caste status to persons professing Hinduism, Sikhism or Buddhism. | No religious bar; Occupational groups, sects and communities among non-Hindu may qualify if constitutional criteria are met |
| Effect of Conversion to Islam | Conversion to Islam or Christianity does not preserve Scheduled Caste status merely because of former caste identity. | Pre-conversion backwardness does not carry over; membership of a notified community must be independently established. |

## Related Commissions:

- **Second Backward Classes Commission (Mandal Commission, 1979):** Chaired by B.P. Mandal, it identified backwardness through 11 indicators: 4 social (3 points each), 3 educational (2 points each) and 4 economic (1 point each), for a maximum of 22. The lasting principle is a reasoned assessment of combined disadvantage, not reliance on caste names alone.
- **Sachar Committee (2005-06):** Chaired by Justice Rajindar Sachar, it documented Muslims' disadvantage in education, employment and access to credit, with wide variation across States. This shows that social position must be established through evidence, not inferred from religion.
- **National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities (Justice Ranganath Misra, 2007):** It recommended delinking Scheduled Caste status from religion by deleting Paragraph 3 of the 1950 Order. The recommendation has not been implemented, so the restriction remains.
- **Justice K.G. Balakrishnan Commission (constituted 2022):** It is examining whether Scheduled Caste status can be accorded to converts claiming historical Scheduled Caste origin.

- **No Role for Jamath:** Issuing community certificates is a public function. A Jamath may attest to conversion but cannot determine eligibility for **statutory reservation**.
- **Commission's Advice Not Enough:** An expert recommendation is not legislation. It cannot validate a classification that fails Articles 14, 15(4) and 16(4).
- **Certificate Is Declaratory:** Community certificate is declaratory and cannot be created or enlarged by an executive instruction
- **Reconversion:** A person who reconverts to Hinduism needs a fact-specific determination of whether the original caste identity has genuinely revived.

**Key Judicial Precedents**

- ***G. Michael v. S. Venkateswaran, 1951:*** Madras HC held that a Hindu converting to Islam ceased to belong to his original caste and became a Muslim, and that his position in Muslim society was not determined by the caste to which he had belonged before conversion. This was approved in *Kailash Sonkar v. Maya Devi, 1983* and *C. Selvarani vs. Special Secretary-cum-District Collector and Others, 2024.*
- ***Indra Sawhney v. Union of India, 1992***: the court in this case held that occupational groups, sects and denominations among non-Hindus may be backward classes under Article 16(4), but caste alone is not conclusive proof of backwardness. The Court distinguished it as it did not consider the effect of a change of religion.
- ***Ashoka Kumar Thakur v. Union of India, 2008:*** A five-judge Constitution Bench held that a "class" must share a common trait, such as social backwardness, that justifies preferential treatment, and not merely a historical or incidental circumstance. Applying this, the Court found that the G.O. linked a convert's pre-conversion backwardness to a notified Muslim backward class without identifying any common social characteristic connecting the two.
- **Chinthada Anand v. State of Andhra Pradesh, 2026:** Scheduled Caste status stands "eclipsed" on conversion to Christianity.

| Significance of the Verdict | Concerns Raised |
|---|---|
| • **Clarity on Identity:** It separates religious identity from membership of a notified community for reservation purposes.<br>• **Evidence-Based Classification:** It reaffirms that reservation attaches to a class with demonstrable backwardness, not to an individual as a transferable entitlement.<br>• **Checks Executive Action:** Executive orders cannot enlarge or dispense with statutory conditions for membership of a reserved class. | • **Protection Gap:** A Hindu MBC may continue to face inherited exclusion and social disadvantage even after conversion, yet the convert loses earlier benefits without gaining Backward Class Muslim status.<br>• **No Empirical Inquiry:** Neither the State nor the TNBCC studied whether converts from different Hindu classifications shared any characteristic with the seven Muslim communities. |

**Way Forward**

- **Evidence-Based Classification:** Converts from different BC, MBC and DNC backgrounds may differ in disadvantage, so their education, occupation, representation in public employment and social exclusion should be studied. Any new class must then be clearly defined, linked to existing lists and meet constitutional criteria, since numbers alone do not establish backwardness.
- **Clarity on Past Certificates:** The State should provide prospective clarity to protect those already provided with the certificates.

# Trump's Russia Sanctions Pause

- US President Donald Trump has waived key provisions of the ***Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act of 2026*** that authorised 100% tariffs on major buyers of Russian energy, offering relief to India — one of the top two destinations for Russian crude.
- The executive order takes effect via waiver, citing **US national interest**, and remains until the administration decides "further action is appropriate."
- The Act, signed in September 2026, aimed to pressure Russia over Ukraine by **penalising large buyers of Russian energy**. India had flagged concerns to Washington repeatedly, banking on the presidential waiver power.

**What the Waiver Changes?**

- Removes the **immediate tariff threat**, giving Indian refiners flexibility to assess Russian cargoes on price/logistics rather than penalty risk.
- **Not a blank cheque**: Washington retains monitoring powers and can reimpose action; existing Secondary sanctions remain unaffected
- Experts, however, noted the EU poses a bigger threat, already blacklisting Indian firms dealing with Russian oil.




**Trade Deal Prospects Improve**

- With India likely outside the **Section 301 "overcapacity"** tariff net (unlike China), Russian oil purchases were the last major friction point.
- India has already banned forced-labour-linked imports and joined G20 commitments against overcapacity in EVs, batteries, semiconductors, solar
- Easing this friction improves chances of a bilateral US-India trade pact.

**U.S.–Russia Diesel Deal**

- Less than a month after signing a law threatening 100% tariffs on major buyers of Russian oil and gas, President Trump struck a deal **allowing Russia** to **sell diesel** to the US and global markets.
- A day later, he also announced an "**energy ceasefire**" between Russia and Ukraine — developments with direct implications for India's energy sector and trade talks.

**Key Details**

- As per the US President: Russia would **immediately** supply **300,000 metric tonnes of diesel**, another 500,000 **metric** tonnes in November, 1 million **metric** tonnes shortly after, and eventually 3 million **metric** tonnes more.
- Trump framed it as a move to lower fuel prices — America First.

- The US issued a general licence, temporarily authorising transactions for Russian-origin diesel sale, delivery, and import until April 7 next year.

**Why the US Needs Russian Diesel Now?**

- Diesel powers long-haul trucking, agriculture, and construction, making price spikes both inflationary and politically sensitive — directly affecting consumer costs and campaign optics.
- **The Immediate Trigger**
  - US and European diesel prices have surged, driven by:
    - ♣ Constrained fuel flows through the Strait of Hormuz;
    - ♣ Attacks on Russia's oil and gas infrastructure.
  - This pushed US diesel prices to record levels of ~$6.5/gallon, adding pressure on the Trump administration ahead of the US midterm elections to visibly act on fuel costs.
- **Sequence of Events**
  - Trump initially pressured Europe to release diesel stockpiles and threatened a US diesel export ban.
  - The G7 agreed to release 100 million barrels of crude and petroleum products (including diesel) from emergency reserves.
  - Trump then reversed his export-restriction stance, announcing the Russia diesel deal instead — opting to bring Russian supply back into the market rather than restrict US exports.




# OCI Cardholders and the Law

- Actor Imran Khan, a US citizen and OCI cardholder, was directed by the Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO) to leave India by October 28. This came days after he joined an October 10 protest at Mumbai's August Kranti Maidan. The protest demanded CEC Gyanesh Kumar's resignation.
  - He has secured interim protection from the Bombay High Court, which stayed an FRRO "Leave India" notice until November 2, 2026
- The episode raises a key question: what powers does the government hold over OCI holders?

**OCI Registration Cancellation: A Separate, Stricter Process**

- This is governed by Section 7D of the Citizenship Act — distinct from a "Leave India" notice.
- **Grounds For Cancellation**
  - OCI obtained through fraud, false representation, or concealment.
  - Disaffection towards the Constitution.

**Who Is an OCI, and What Rights Apply?**

- Introduced in 2005, OCI status **does not confer dual citizenship** — holders remain foreign nationals with lifelong multiple-entry visas and FRRO exemption, plus parity with Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) in most economic, financial, and educational fields
- A March 2021 notification requires special permission for research, missionary work, journalism, and protected-area entry — but **political protests are not listed.**
- **Political Rights Denied to OCIs**
  - Under Section 7B of the Citizenship Act, OCIs cannot vote or contest elections.
  - Article 19 rights (freedom of speech, peaceful assembly) are guaranteed specifically to citizens, not OCIs.

**Can an OCI Be Asked to Leave for Protesting?**

- The **Immigration and Foreigners Act, 2025** treats OCIs as foreigners, granting wide executive discretion.
- Section **7(2)(c)** lets government bar a foreigner from staying in India; **Section 29** allows removal for violations or adverse security reports — powers delegated to FRROs, not just the MHA.
- Though protest isn't explicitly prohibited, executive orders can still target it.
- The **Kamil Siedczynski case** (2020) saw the Calcutta HC quash a similar notice against a Polish student for attending an anti-CAA (Citizenship Amendment Act) rally, holding mere participation insufficient grounds — though that ruling predates the 2025 Act.

- Helping an enemy during war.
- Conviction for serious crime (in specified circumstances).
- **Widest ground** — ***Section 7D(e):*** Cancellation where the government deems it necessary for sovereignty, integrity, security of India, friendly relations with foreign countries, or "the general public."

- **Key safeguard:** Unlike the power to direct a foreign national to leave India, cancellation expressly requires that the person be given a reasonable opportunity to be heard.

**Precedents: How Courts Have Handled OCI Cancellations?**

- Courts have consistently struck down cancellations where evidence wasn't disclosed or allegations were too vague to allow a fair defence.

**Conclusion**

| Case | Issue | Outcome |
|---|---|---|
| **Aatish Taseer** | OCI cancelled after critical TIME article on Modi; govt cited concealment of father's Pakistani nationality | Cancellation stood; Taseer disputed link to his writing |
| **Ashok Swain** | OCI cancelled over "anti-India" tweets/writings | Delhi HC struck down cancellation (March 2025) — evidence wasn't shared with him, denying fair hearing |
| **Christo Thomas Philip** | OCI cancelled over alleged missionary activity | Delhi HC (2019) restored OCI — government failed to prove threat to sovereignty/security |
| **Khalid Jahangir Qazi** | OCI cancelled over alleged pro-separatist activity | Delhi HC (Nov 2024) set aside cancellation — vague allegations denied meaningful defence; govt allowed to restart with specifics |

- The Imran Khan episode exposes a structural asymmetry in how Indian law treats OCI cardholders: while cancelling OCI status demands a fair hearing under Section 7D, the "Leave India" power under the 2025 Immigration Act offers no equivalent procedural safeguard, resting instead on broad executive discretion.
- Past precedents suggest courts are willing to intervene when vague allegations substitute for evidence, but each case turns on specific facts.
- Whether Khan's challenge succeeds will likely hinge on the same question: did mere participation in a protest justify invoking the law's broadest immigration powers?

# MAPS: PLACES IN NEWS

## International Places in News

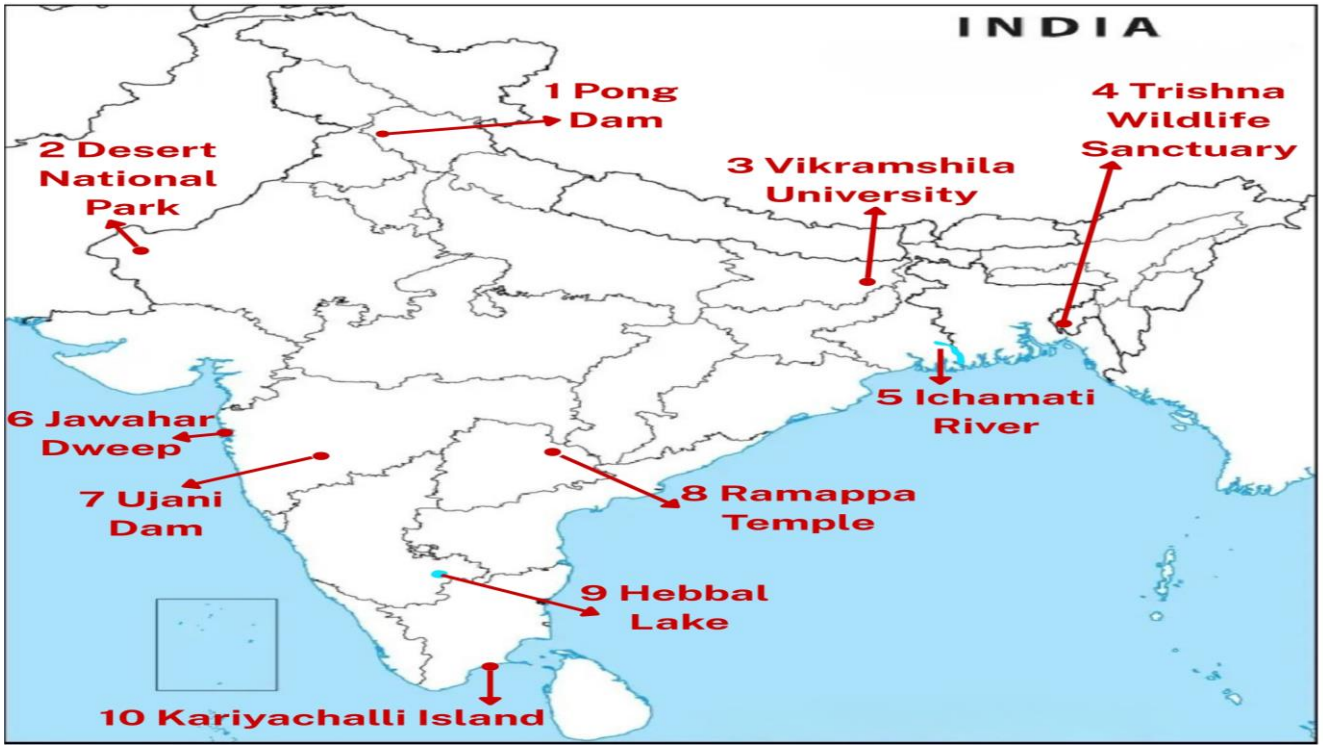



| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **1** | **Zavodovski Island** | According to research by the British Antarctic Survey (BAS), the number of breeding chinstrap penguins on the Zavodovski Island declined nearly 63% in 14 years.<br>• **Location:** Uninhabited volcanic island in the Traversay Islands subgroup of South Sandwich Islands, South Atlantic Ocean.<br>• **Features:** Active Mount Curry stratovolcano.<br>• **Significance:** Hosts one of the world's largest penguin colonies, mostly chinstrap penguins (IUCN: Least Concern). |
| **2** | **Ghana** | Ghana's Cabinet has approved a decision to seek BRICS membership.<br>• **Location:** West Africa, on the Gulf of Guinea; the Prime Meridian passes through it.<br>• **Borders:** Côte d'Ivoire (west), Burkina Faso (north) and Togo (east); capital Accra.<br>• **Plateaus & Escarpments:** Kwahu Plateau and Gambaga Scarp.<br>• **Mountains**: Mount Afadjato, Mount Djebobo and Mount Torogbani<br>• **Lake**: Lake Volta, one of the world's largest artificial lakes, formed by the Akosombo Dam.<br>• **Economy:** Gold, cocoa and oil. |
| **3** | **Lake Untersee** | A study detailed how a rare glacial flood in 2019 raised Lake Untersee by about two metres.<br>• **Location:** Isolated freshwater lake in Antarctica, fed by the Anuchin Glacier from the Gruber Mountains.<br>• **Features:** About 170 m deep and frozen all year; highly alkaline with high oxygen.<br>• **Life:** Large conical stromatolites built by cyanobacteria, one of Earth's oldest life forms; tardigrades are its largest creatures. |

| | | |
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| **4** | **Zuqar Island** | Yemen's Houthi rebels claimed that Saudi forces targeted a yacht carrying 14 Indian nationals near Zuqar Island in the southern Red Sea, prompting Houthi forces to launch a rescue operation<br>• **Location:** Yemeni island in the Hanish archipelago, near the Bab-el-Mandeb strait.<br>• **History:** Seized by Eritrea in 1995; awarded to Yemen by an international arbitral tribunal in 1998.<br>• **Features:** Volcanic island with a shield volcano and pahoehoe (smooth, ropy) lava flows. Lies on a key global shipping route |
| **5** | **Taleju Bhawani Temple** | The Taleju Bhawani Temple in Kathmandu opened (once a year) to devotees on Maha Navami during Dashain.<br>• **Location:** Kathmandu Durbar Square, part of the Kathmandu Valley UNESCO World Heritage Site, Nepal.<br>• **History:** Built in the 16th century by King Mahendra Malla; dedicated to Goddess Taleju, a form of Durga. The Malla dynasty ruled the Kathmandu Valley from the 12$^{th}$ to the 18$^{th}$ century.<br>• **Features:** Newar pagoda architecture style with a three-tiered roof and a 12-stage plinth |
| **6** | **Sankosh River** | Over 10,000 people were moved to safety in Alipurduar, West Bengal after a glacial lake outburst in Bhutan put the Sankosh river on red alert.<br>• **Location:** Transboundary river of Bhutan and India; known as the Puna Tsang Chu in Bhutan.<br>• **Course:** Rises in northern Bhutan, fed by Himalayan glacial melt and snow; formed by the confluence of the Phochu and Mochu rivers. Flows south into India and joins the Brahmaputra at Gauripur. In its lower course it forms part of the Assam-West Bengal boundary. |
| **7** | **Yenisei River** | Brown bear attacks have risen near Podtesovo, a settlement on the Yenisei River in Russia.<br>• **Location:** Flows south to north across central Siberia, Russia.<br>• **Course:** Formed by the Great and Little Yenisei at Kyzyl (Russia); empties into the Kara Sea (Arctic Ocean).<br>• **Features:** Largest river system draining into the Arctic Ocean; the Angara, which drains Lake Baikal, is its major tributary. |
| **8** | **Sakurajima Volcano** | Japan's Sakurajima volcano recently threw a thick ash plume into the sky.<br>• **Location:** Kagoshima Bay, southern Kyushu, Japan.<br>• **Features:** Andesitic stratovolcano (composite cone); Minamidake is its active volcanic peak. One of Japan's most active volcanoes.<br>• **History:** Was an island until lava from its 1914 eruption joined it to the Osumi Peninsula. |
| **9** | **Bonin Islands** | A magnitude 6.5 earthquake struck the Bonin Islands region of Japan.<br>• **Location:** About 30 volcanic islands in the western Pacific, roughly 1,000 km south of Tokyo; also called the Ogasawara Islands.<br>• **History:** Administered by the US after World War II; returned to Japan in 1968; now under Tokyo Metropolis.<br>• **Main Island:** Chichi (formerly Peel Island), with Omura as the capital and Futami-ko (Port Lloyd) as the chief harbour. |

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| | | • **Status:** UNESCO World Natural Heritage Site (2011). |
| **10** | **Macquarie Island** | Australia confirmed its first H5N1 bird flu case on Macquarie Island, in elephant seals.<br>• **Location:** Sub-Antarctic island in the southwestern Pacific, about 1,500 km southeast of Tasmania, roughly midway between New Zealand and Antarctica.<br>• **Features:** The only place on Earth where rocks from the mantle are being actively exposed above sea level; lies on the Macquarie Ridge, where the Pacific and Indo-Australian plates meet.<br>• **Status:** UNESCO World Heritage Site (1997). |

## National Places in News

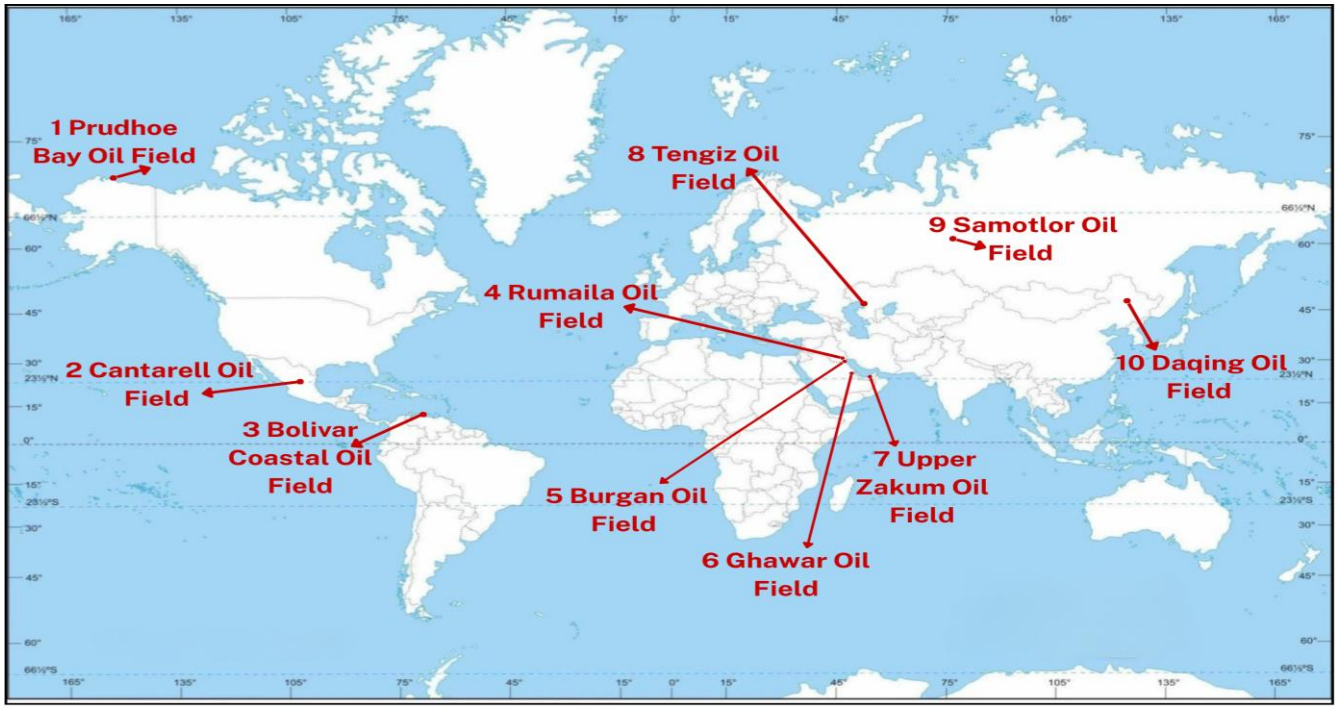



| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **1** | **Pong Dam** | Alleged movement of fishing boats in the restricted zone of the Pong Dam reservoir has raised security concerns.<br>• **Location:** Earth-fill dam on the Beas River, Kangra district, Himachal Pradesh; built 1961-1974.<br>• **Reservoir:** Maharana Pratap Sagar, declared a bird sanctuary in 1983 and a Ramsar site in 2002. |
| **2** | **Desert National Park** | Two captive-bred male Great Indian Bustards (GIBs) were released into the wild at Sam in Desert National Park.<br>• **Location:** Thar Desert, Jaisalmer and Barmer districts, Rajasthan.<br>• **Features:** Over 3,000 sq km of sand dunes, salt-lake beds and thorny scrub; rainfall below 100 mm a year.<br>• **Fauna:** Key habitat of the Critically Endangered GIB, Rajasthan's state bird.<br>• **Flora:** Khejri, rohida, ber and sewan grass. |
| **3** | **Vikramshila University** | The Centre and Bihar are moving to revive Vikramshila as a Central University near its ancient site. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | • **Location:** Antichak village, Bhagalpur district, Bihar<br>• **History:** Founded by Pala king Dharmapala (late 8th-early 9th century CE).<br>• **Significance:** Major centre of Vajrayana (Tantric) Buddhism; its scholar Atisha Dipankara helped spread Buddhism in Tibet.<br>• **Revival:** Central University approved in 2015. |
| **4** | **Trishna Wildlife Sanctuary** | A rare camera sighting of Phayre's leaf monkeys (spectacled monkeys) was recently recorded in Trishna Wildlife Sanctuary.<br>**Location:** South Tripura district, Tripura; established in 1988.<br>**Vegetation:** Tropical semi-evergreen, moist mixed deciduous forest and savannah woodland.<br>**Flora:** Medicinal plants such as Kurcha, Tulsi, Vasak, Sarpagandha, Rudraksha and Bel. The specific specie of bamboo locally called *Kaillai* is common.<br>**Phayre's leaf monkey:** Arboreal primate with white rings around its eyes; IUCN status Endangered. |
| **5** | **Ichamati River** | The traditional Durga immersion on the Ichamati at Taki has changed due to tighter border security.<br>• **Location:** Transboundary river between West Bengal (India) and Bangladesh.<br>• **Course:** A branch of the Mathabhanga, it rises at Majhdia in Nadia district, West Bengal, and flows through North 24 Parganas, forming part of the India-Bangladesh border. Near Bangaon, Ichamati and its tributaries form a large oxbow-lake complex.<br>• **Concern:** Heavy siltation and channel changes have weakened its flow. |
| **6** | **Jawahar Dweep** | The Jawahar Dweep **Marine Oil Terminal** was recently declared plastic-free by the Mumbai Port Authority becoming the first **Marine Oil Terminal** in India to eliminate single-use plastics.<br>• **Location:** Island in Mumbai Harbour, near the Gateway of India, Maharashtra; also called Butcher Island.<br>• **Significance:** One of Mumbai Port's key marine oil terminals, handling crude oil and petroleum products. |
| **7** | **Ujani Dam** | A community-led project in Solapur and Pune aims to remove invasive fish from the Ujani catchment and reintroduce native species.<br>• **Location:** On the Bhima River (a Krishna tributary), Solapur district, Maharashtra; also called Bhima Dam.<br>• **Features:** Earth-fill cum masonry gravity dam, completed in 1980<br>• **Use:** Irrigation, drinking water and a 12 MW hydropower unit.<br>• **Concern:** Pollution from Pune and other towns upstream. |
| **8** | **Ramappa Temple** | Heritage groups have raised concern that a proposed Singareni open-cast mine could threaten Ramappa Temple and Ramappa Lake.<br>• **Location:** Palampet, Mulugu district, Telangana.<br>• **History:** Built in 1213 AD by Recharla Rudra, a general of the Kakatiya king Ganapati Deva. It is named after its chief sculptor, Ramappa<br>• **Features:** Its presiding deity is Ramalingeswara Swamy. It stands on a star-shaped platform; its tower uses light, porous bricks that can float on water.<br>• **Status:** UNESCO World Heritage Site (2021). |

| | | |
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| 9 | **Hebbal Lake** | Environmentalists have raised concerns over a proposed tunnel road's impact on Hebbal Lake and over 1,000 trees around it.<br>• **Location:** Man-made-lake in north Bengaluru, Karnataka.<br>• **History:** Built in 1537 by Kempe Gowda, by bunding natural valleys.<br>• **Significance:** One of Bengaluru's oldest and largest urban lakes; supports resident and migratory birds. |
| 10 | **Kariyachalli Island** | Tamil Nadu is placing 8,500 artificial reef modules around Kariyachalli Island to halt its rapid erosion.<br>• **Location:** One of the 21 islands of the Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park, between Rameswaram and Thoothukudi.<br>• **Concern:** Shrank from about 20.85 ha in 1969 to ~3.14ha in 2025<br>• **Restoration:** Under the Tamil Nadu SHORE (Sustainably Harnessing Ocean Resources) project with World Bank support; reef modules designed by IIT Madras. |

**Major Oil Fields of the World**




| S.No. | Oil Field | Details |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | **Prudhoe Bay** | • **Location:** Onshore, on Alaska's North Slope along the Beaufort Sea (Arctic Ocean) coast, USA.<br>• **Facts:** Largest conventional oil field in North America; discovered in 1968; linked to the port of Valdez by the Trans-Alaska Pipeline. |
| 2 | **Cantarell** | • **Location:** Offshore, in the Bay of Campeche, Gulf of Mexico.<br>• **Facts:** Mexico's most important oil field; operated by Pemex; its reservoir rock was formed by the Chicxulub asteroid impact. |
| 3 | **Bolivar Coastal** | • **Location:** Eastern shore of Lake Maracaibo, Venezuela. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | • **Facts:** Venezuela's largest conventional oil field, largest oil field outside of the Middle East; mostly heavy oil. |
| **4** | **Rumaila** | • **Location:** Onshore near the Kuwait border, Iraq.<br>• **Facts:** Iraq's largest oil field; developed by British Petroleum (BP) and PetroChina with the Basra Oil Company. |
| **5** | **Burgan** | • **Location:** Onshore, south of Kuwait City, Kuwait.<br>• **Facts:** World's largest sandstone oil reservoir and the second largest in the world after Saudi Arabia's Ghawar field; discovered in 1938; the backbone of Kuwait's economy. |
| **6** | **Ghawar** | • **Location:** Onshore, Eastern Province, near Hofuf, Saudi Arabia.<br>• **Facts:** World's largest conventional oil field; discovered in 1948; operated by Saudi Aramco. |
| **7** | **Upper Zakum** | • **Location:** Offshore, Persian Gulf, north-west of Abu Dhabi, UAE.<br>• **Facts:** Discovered in 1963, it is the second largest offshore oil field in the world. Developed on four artificial islands; operated by the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC). |
| **8** | **Tengiz** | • **Location:** Onshore, north-eastern Caspian coast, Atyrau region, Kazakhstan.<br>• **Facts:** Ranks as the world's deepest producing supergiant oil field and the largest single-trap producing reservoir in existence; Discovered in 1979; operated by Tengizchevroil (a Chevron-led joint venture); exports through the Caspian Pipeline Consortium to the Black Sea. |
| **9** | **Samotlor** | • **Location:** Onshore, in Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug, Western Siberia.<br>• **Facts:** Russia's largest oil field; discovered in 1965; operated by Rosneft. |
| **10** | **Daqing** | • **Location:** Onshore, Songliao Basin, Heilongjiang province, China.<br>• **Facts:** China's largest oil field; discovered in 1959; operated by PetroChina. |

## WHO Issues First Global Guidelines on Child and Adolescent Obesity

The World Health Organization (WHO) recently released its first guidelines addressing the sharp rise in obesity among children and adolescents, setting out how health systems and health workers can deliver timely, evidence-based and people-centred care.

### Why is Childhood Obesity a Concern?

- **Rising Burden and Health Risks**: Early onset of type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, fatty liver and other metabolic disorders.
- **Mental Health & Social Impact**: Anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, bullying, stigma and discrimination, affecting overall well-being.
- **Major Causes:** Urbanization, unhealthy diets, sedentary lifestyles, and inadequate physical activity.

**Key Facts**

- **Global Burden (WHO, 2024):** 170 million children and adolescents aged 5-19 years were living with obesity. Prevalence quadrupled from 2% in 1990 to 8% in 2024.
- **India (World Obesity Atlas 2026):** 41 million children were estimated to have a high BMI, including 14 million living with obesity (2025 estimates, as provided).
  - **Age-Wise Burden:** 14.9 million children aged 5-9 years and over 26 million adolescents aged 10-19 years were overweight or obese in 2025.
  - **Global Ranking:** India ranked second after China in childhood overweight and obesity burden.
- **Global Trend:** 20.7% of children and adolescents aged 5-19 years worldwide were overweight or living with obesity, an increase from 14.6% since 2010, according to the Atlas.

**Major Recommendations**

| Age Group | WHO Recommendations |
|---|---|
| 0-9 years | No pharmacological treatment, bariatric surgery or weight-loss devices recommended. |
| 10-19 years | Medicines may be considered if supervised lifestyle interventions fail; bariatric surgery may be considered under strict conditions for severe obesity. |
| All Children and Adolescents | Structured dietary, physical activity and behaviour change interventions are strongly recommended. |
| Digital Interventions | Conditionally recommended with parental/caregiver supervision. |

**Way Forward:**

- **Preventive Approach**: Promote balanced diets and regular physical activity from early childhood.
- **Family and School Engagement**: Encourage healthy habits and nutrition education.
- **Policy Measures**: Improve access to affordable healthy foods and safe spaces for physical activity through coordinated action across health, education, urban planning, transport and social protection.

## *Lakshadweep Becomes 100% Literate Union Territory*

*Lakshadweep was declared a fully literate Union Territory (UT) recently under the ULLAS ((*Understanding of Lifelong Learning for All in Society)- New India Literacy Programme (NILP).

**About NILP:** It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme aligned with the National Education Policy 2020, from 2022-2027 to support all the States and Union Territories in promoting literacy among non-literates across the country. The Scheme targets non-literates aged 15 years and above who have missed formal schooling and provide educational opportunities to them to make them literate.

**What Is Meant By Literacy?** In context with ULLAS-NILP, Literacy is defined as the ability to read, write, and compute with comprehension, i.e. to identify, understand, interpret and create, along with critical life skills such as digital literacy, financial literacy, etc. The criterion for declaring a State/UT fully literate is achieving a literacy rate of 95% or above.

- **Fully Literate States**: Mizoram, Goa, Tripura, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Uttarakhand.
- **Fully Literate UTs**: Ladakh, Chandigarh, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Jammu & Kashmir, Lakshadweep.

## Elderly Care in India: Building a Trained Caregiving Workforce

Keralam Legislative Assembly unanimously passed the Keralam Senior Citizens (Care and Protection of Rights) Bill, 2026, to regulate elderly-care facilities and services. The Bill comes as India's ageing population sharply raises the demand for trained caregivers.

✓Keralam was among the first Indian States to adopt a dedicated elderly care policy, as early as 2006.

### Why Does Elderly Care Need Attention?

- **Rapid Ageing:** India's 60-plus population, about 149 million in 2022, is projected to reach 347 million, or nearly 20.8% of the total, by 2050.
- **Huge Informal Workforce:** According to NITI Aayog, about 10% of the population, roughly 146 million people, gives care without training or pay; 1.5 lakh trained caregivers is a drop in the ocean.
- **Gender Imbalance:** According to the National Statistical Office (NSO), women spend 299 minutes daily on unpaid domestic and informal family care work, compared to 97 minutes for men. Caregiving responsibilities must be shared equitably between both genders.

**Related Constitutional and Legal Framework**

- **Article 41 (DPSP):** Directs the State, within its economic capacity and development, to provide public assistance in cases of old age, among others.
- **Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007:** Provides for maintenance obligations of adult children towards parents and grandparents, and of specified relatives towards childless senior citizens.
- **Section 20, Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act, 1956:** Requires a Hindu to maintain aged or infirm parents who cannot support themselves from their own earnings or property.

**Government Initiatives**

- **Union Budget 2026-27:** Announced training of 1.5 lakh caregivers aligned to the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF), to build a formally certified care workforce.
  - **What is NSQF?** A national framework that grades skills by levels of knowledge and competence, so certified skills are recognised uniformly nationwide.
- **NITI Aayog Report "Reimagining Care: Strategies for Empowering Caregivers in Viksit Bharat@2047":** treats caregiving as an economic activity rather than mere welfare work, a first at the national policy level.

**Global Perspective: Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA), 2002**- a UN framework promoting older persons' participation, health and supportive environments;
- UN Principles for Older Persons (1991) 5 core themes: independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity.

- **Beyond Physical Care:** Conditions like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease bring emotional and behavioural challenges, requiring caregiver training in geriatric mental health and behavioural management alongside physical care.
- **Key Gaps**: Limited training coverage under programmes such as Kudumbashree's K4 Care (only 838 people trained) and the lack of publicly available data on ASHAs (Accredited Social Health Activists) trained in elderly care.
  - **Kudumbashree** is Keralam's State mission for poverty eradication and women's empowerment, working through a network of women's SHGs. Under its K4 Care training programme, its members qualify as certified geriatric/patient/disability care executives.

### Way Forward:

- **Recognize Family Caregivers:** Validate the skills of millions of unpaid family caregivers and upskill them into recognized, certified caregivers or train at least two family members in spotting warning signs, monitoring, emergency care and psychological support.
- **Train the Trainers:** Use trained Kudumbashree members and ASHA workers to train others and incentivize faster completion of programmes like K4 Care.
- **Broader Curriculum:** A national curriculum should cover geriatric mental health and behavioural management, not just physical care protocols.
- **National Caregiver Council:** An apex body, as proposed by NITI Aayog, to set benchmarks, standardize curricula and run a national portal of certified caregivers.

- **Care Economy and Employment Potential:** Professional care can create jobs, especially for women, and help India supply skilled caregivers to ageing societies abroad, while India's own elderly remain the priority.
- **Focus on Implementation:** The Budget announcement is only a seed; real success depends on how well training is rolled out on the ground.

## India's Poverty Declines

Recently, the World Bank in its *October 2026 Poverty and Equity Brief* said that India recorded one of the fastest poverty declines in the world between 2011 and 2023 in both monetary and non-monetary measures of poverty.

### About the Poverty and Equity Brief

A short country snapshot of poverty and inequality, published by the World Bank twice a year for the Spring and Annual Meetings of the World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

- **Data Basis:** The Consumer Expenditure Survey (CES) 2011-12 and the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) 2022-23 and 2023-24, with labour data from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS).

**Key Findings:**

- **Extreme Poverty:** Extreme poverty, measured at USD 3 a day, fell from 27.1% (2011-12) to 2.6% (2023-24), leaving about 7.5 crore people below this line in 2023.
- **Lower-Middle-Income Poverty:** Poverty at the USD 4.20-a-day line fell from 57.7% to 16.1%, lifting an estimated 49.6 crore people out of poverty in the same time period
- **Drivers:** Strong consumption growth, rising employment (especially among women) and larger social transfers, including food subsidies.
- **Multidimensional Poverty:** Poverty under the Oxford Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) fell from 53.8% (2005–06) to 16.4% (2019–21). The World Bank's own measure was 15.5% in 2022–23.
- **Outlook:** Poverty at the USD 4.20 line is projected to fall from 14.2% in 2026 to 12.1% by 2028. These are indicative estimates.
- **Rural–Urban Gap:** The gap narrowed, but at the USD 4.20 line, rural poverty (19.3%) is still more than double urban poverty (8.6%).
- **Geographic Concentration:** About 57% of India's poor live in a continuous belt of states from Uttar Pradesh to West Bengal.
- **Hard-Core Poverty:** The remaining poor have less education, fewer assets and unstable jobs. In 2022, 29.6% of people lacked basic sanitation.
- **Jobs:** Employment rose by about 13.4 crore between 2017 and 2023, led by rural women entering paid work. However, real earnings stayed flat, and most jobs were low productivity.
- **Youth Unemployment:** It rose from 14.6% to 15.9% between Q1 FY2026 and Q1 FY2027, mostly among rural young women.
- **Inequality:** The top 10% of workers earn about 13 times the bottom 10% in 2023

### Way Forward

- **Jobs in Lagging States:** Further poverty reduction will depend on productive jobs.
- **Rural Non-Farm Work:** Expand agro-processing, manufacturing and services to raise rural productivity and real wages.
- **Human Capital:** Close the gaps in sanitation, schooling and child welfare.
- **Youth and Women:** Link skilling to local job demand, especially for rural young women.
- **Updated Data:** Use the new Census frame and the monthly PLFS for accurate poverty and urbanization estimates.

## NMC Brings Doctors' Online Promotion Under Ethics Rules

In the context of a writ petition before the Supreme Court (SC) and the existing framework governing professional conduct, the National Medical Commission's (NMC) Ethics and Medical Registration Board issued Guidelines on Ethical Advertising and Public Communication by Hospitals/Medical Institutions and Registered Medical Practitioners (RMPs).

### Existing Framework

- **National Medical Commission (NMC) Act, 2019:** The law under which doctors are registered and their professional conduct is regulated.

- **Indian Medical Council (IMC) (Professional Conduct, Etiquette and Ethics) Regulations, 2002:** The existing code of conduct for doctors now governed by the NMC. The new guidelines are to be read with it.
- **Clinical Establishments (Registration and Regulation) Act, 2010:** Governs hospitals and clinics, along with the relevant State laws.
- **IT Act, 2000 and Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023:** Advertising that uses patients' personal data must comply with these laws and the DPDP Rules, 2025.

**What Do the New Guidelines Provide?**

- **Wide Coverage:** Websites, social media, messaging platforms, podcasts, influencers, sponsored content and online platforms are covered.
- **No Unverifiable Claims:** Claims like "best," "No. 1," "leading" or "most trusted" are barred unless objectively verifiable through a transparent, independent method. Rankings and awards must also be verifiable.
- **No Digital Manipulation:** Fake followers, likes, reviews and ratings, and manipulation of search rankings or algorithms, are prohibited.
- **No Referral Fees:** Commissions, referral or lead-generation fees for bringing in patients are banned. Agencies or influencers cannot be paid per patient referred.
- **No Testimonials:** Doctors cannot use celebrity, influencer or patient testimonials, or request and share patient reviews on social media for promotion.
- **AI Restrictions:** AI cannot be used to create or manipulate patient testimonials, images or voices, or to produce synthetic endorsements that misrepresent treatment or outcomes.
- **No Inducements:** Discounts, coupons, cashbacks and free procedures are barred where they encourage unnecessary tests or treatment.
- **What Is Allowed:** Hospitals may share *factual information* on facilities, services, accreditation and fees. Doctors may share professional information and take part in public health education.
- **Graded Penalties for Doctors:** First violation can attract warning and ethics training; second- censure and monetary penalty; third- suspension for 3-6 months. Serious violations may attract 6-12 months suspension, while repeated violations can lead to removal from the medical register for 1-3 years.
- **Hospitals:** Violations by hospitals are dealt with under the Clinical Establishments Act, 2010 or the relevant State law. Doctors involved can be examined separately.

**Need for These Guidelines**

- **Digital Gap:** To address the gap created by electronic media, which the existing conduct rules did not specifically cover.
- **Patient Protection:** To protect patients from false, exaggerated or unverifiable medical claims.
- **Preventing Commercialization:** To stop the solicitation of patients and promotion that induces unnecessary tests and procedures.
- **Professional Dignity:** To keep healthcare communication factual, ethical and evidence-based

**Concerns:**

- **Status of Guidelines:** They must be read with the NMC Act and 2002 regulations, and in any conflict, the statutory provisions prevail.
- **Enforcement by States:** Action against doctors rests with State Medical Councils, and against hospitals with State laws, so enforcement may vary.
- **Interpretation:** Terms such as "unnecessary" treatment and "promotional character" leave room for differing interpretations.
- **Online Platforms:** Platforms listing doctors must avoid paid rankings, but the guidelines do not say how NMC will enforce this against private companies.

**Way Forward**

- **Clear Procedures:** NMC can use its power to issue clarifications and standard procedures for uniform implementation.
- **Consistent Enforcement:** State Medical Councils should apply the graded penalties uniformly, with reasoned orders.
- **Awareness:** Train doctors on ethical digital communication and help patients identify misleading health claims.

**Regulation of AI-MedTech in India**

The growing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in healthcare, including its integration into the national telemedicine service e-Sanjeevani has raised concerns regarding patient safety, accountability and regulatory oversight. In this

context, the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization's (CDSCO) July 2026 guidance on medical device software assumes significance in *clarifying the regulatory framework for AI-enabled medical technologies in India.*

**What is MedTech?**

Instruments, implants, software or devices used for diagnosis, prevention, monitoring or treatment, whose primary action is not achieved through pharmacological, immunological, or metabolic means. E.g. glucometers, pacemakers, CT scanners and AI diagnostic tools.

**Existing Laws:**

- **Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940:** Parent law intended mainly to penalise spurious drugs. Its 1982 amendment allowed the government to classify **notified** medical devices as 'drugs'.
- Effective 1st April 2020, the Government of India officially regulated all medical devices as "drugs" under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, to ensure quality control and price monitoring
- National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) governs medical devices under the Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013 (DPCO, 2013).
- **Medical Devices Rules (MDR), 2017:** Classifies medical devices into four risk-based categories: Class A (low), B (low-to-moderate), C (moderate-to-high) and D (high risk).
- State licensing authorities regulate the manufacture of Class A and B devices, while the Central Licensing Authority regulates the manufacture of Class C and D devices and the import of all classes.
- In 2020, the framework was extended to all devices intended for medical use, **including software.**

**What Do the New CDSCO Guidelines Propose?**

- **Types of Software:** Software in a Medical Device (SiMD) runs hardware, e.g. a pacemaker's firmware. Software as a Medical Device (SaMD) works alone, e.g. an AI X-ray reader.
- **Scope:** Wellness apps and software that **only store or transfer** patient data are excluded, unless they perform a medical function.
- **Risk Classification:** Based on how serious the condition is and whether the output diagnoses, guides or only informs care. For example, AI diagnosing a critical condition is Class D.
- **Validation:** Developers must prove scientific validity, technical performance, and clinical performance in the intended setting. Developers must disclose training-data diversity and provide evidence on low bias across Indian sub-populations. Models trained abroad must justify their use in India.

**Need for these Guidelines:**

- **Patient Safety:** A false positive leads to needless tests, while a false negative can send a sick patient home.
- **Population Mismatch:** A model trained on other country population or hospital network may perform poorly on Indian patients.
- **Changing Products:** AI models are re-trained and updated after approval, so a one-time license cannot ensure safety.

**Concerns Raised:**

- **Not Binding Law:** The guidance only interprets the MDR, 2017, which limits the enforceability of AI-specific safeguards.
- **Outdated Parent Law:** Devices are regulated by stretching an 80-year-old law designed mainly for drugs.
- **Liability Gap:** It is unclear who is responsible for AI errors: the developer, the hospital or the doctor.

**Similar Initiatives:**

- **National:**
  - **National Strategy for AI (2018):** NITI Aayog's strategy named healthcare a priority sector for AI.
  - **ICMR Ethical Guidelines for AI in Healthcare (2023):** Indian Council of Medical Research's (ICMR) guidelines stressed accountability, fairness and patient autonomy.
  - **SAHI (February 2026):** The Health Ministry's **Strategy for Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare for India (SAHI)** covers governance, data, validation, deployment and monitoring of health AI.
- **International:** The US FDA uses Predetermined change-control plans (PCCPs) for AI updates. The EU classifies AI systems as high-risk, integrating data quality and human oversight to medical-device law.

- **Managing Updates:** Major updates, such as a new clinical claim, need approval, and minor ones need notification. An optional Algorithm Change Protocol (ACP) plans re-training and rollback if the new update underperforms or fails.
- **Post-Market Surveillance:** AI tools must be monitored for drift, bias and hallucination, and serious adverse events reported within 15 days.
  - Model drift is a fall in accuracy over time as patients or data change.
  - AI hallucination is a model that produces false data with high confidence.

### Way Forward

- **Dedicated Statute:** Make Indian validation mandatory for high-risk AI devices through law.
- **Clear Liability:** Define responsibility among developers, hospitals and doctors.
- **Public Registry:** List all approved AI devices for patients and clinicians.
- **Regulatory Capacity:** Set up a specialized AI unit within CDSCO with technical and clinical experts.

## Ban on Reuse of Single-Use Medical Devices

Recently, the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS under the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare) directed all public and private healthcare facilities of the country to strictly stop reusing single-use medical devices and disposable surgical items.

✓Single-use medical devices are designed, tested and labelled by the manufacturer for use on one patient during a single procedure, and are then discarded.

### What Does the Directive Say?

- **Strict Prohibition:** Reuse of single-use devices and disposable surgical items is prohibited in all healthcare facilities under the Centre, States and Union Territories (UTs).
- **Use as per Manufacturer:** Such items must be used strictly according to the instructions of the Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM).
- **Enforcement:** State and UT health authorities, the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI), State drug controllers and the Central Government Health Scheme (**CGHS**) are to inspect and monitor facilities and act against violations.

**Need for Such Directive**

- **Unsafe Practices:** DGHS had noticed some private and corporate hospitals sterilizing and reusing such items, and in some cases still charging patients the full cost or claiming reimbursement from government authorities.
- **Affected Specialties:** Cardiology, nephrology, oncology, cardiothoracic and vascular surgery (CTVS) and neurosurgery.
- **Reused items:** Cardiac catheters and guidewires used in angiography and angioplasty, dialysis equipment, surgical instruments, and disposable syringes and needles.

**Related Laws**

- **Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940:** This is the parent law regulating the import, manufacture, sale and distribution of drugs and notified medical devices.
- **Medical Devices Rules, 2017:** Framed under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, these rules require single-use devices to be clearly labelled as such. They contain no provision permitting reuse.
- **Clinical Establishments (Registration and Regulation) Act, 2010:** It provides registration and minimum standards of clinical establishments in the States that have adopted it.
- **Bio-Medical Waste Management Rules, 2016:** They govern the safe segregation and disposal of used medical items.
- **CGHS Office Memorandum, 2016:** Explicitly prohibiting the reuse of disposable and single-use items in hospitals empaneled under the Central Government Health Scheme.

### Why is Reuse Harmful?

- **Infection Risk:** Even after sterilization, devices may retain biological material and transmit Hepatitis B and C, Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and bacterial infections.
- **Device Failure:** These devices are not designed for repeated reprocessing, so they can deteriorate, malfunction or lose performance.

- **Lack of Consent:** Reuse often happens without informing patients, which undermines informed consent.
- **Financial Exploitation:** Patients or government schemes may be billed the full price for reused items.

| Significance of the Move | Challenges |
|---|---|
| • **Patient Safety**<br>• **Infection Control:** Especially in high-risk invasive procedures.<br>• **Consumer Protection:** It targets overcharging and protects public health schemes from paying for reused items.<br>• **Regulatory Clarity:** It gives State regulators a clear basis to inspect facilities and take action. | • **No New Penalty or Inspection Schedule:** The letter places enforcement on States and UTs but sets no new inspection schedule or separate penalty.<br>• **Cost Pressure:** High-cost devices such as cardiac catheters make single use expensive for patients and smaller hospitals.<br>• **Weak Enforcement Capacity:** Drugs Inspectors acting as Medical Devices Officers are limited, and several States have not adopted the Clinical Establishments Act, 2010.<br>• **Liability Gaps:** Responsibility for harm from reuse is unclear. Industry has asked that liability rest with the establishment that reuses a device, not the manufacturer. |

**Way Forward**

- **Regular Audits:** Inspections should be backed by traceable records of each device's use and disposal.
- **Affordable Alternatives:** Domestic manufacturing and price regulation can cut the cost of single-use devices, so that cost does not drive reuse.
- **Clear Liability and Penalties:** Accountability for reuse against labelling, and penalties for it, should be defined in law.
- **Staff Training and Awareness:** Train hospital staff in infection prevention and bio-medical waste handling and inform patients of their right to know.

## PRASHAST: Inclusive Education Sensitization Module

Recently, the Department of School Education & Literacy (DoSEL), Ministry of Education, organised a nationwide screening of a 30-minute Sensitization and Orientation Module on Inclusive Education for Children with Special Needs (CwSN) through the PRASHAST Portal.

**Objective**

To promotes a whole-school approach to inclusion, so that all school staff understand the needs of CwSN and help create a safe, accessible and supportive environment.

- **Target Group:** Heads of schools, teachers, special educators and non-teaching staff, including aayahs, drivers, clerical staff, receptionists, deans and wardens.
- **Features:** Uses practical examples and interactive activities and is available in 12 Indian languages.

**About PRASHAST (Pre-Assessment Holistic Screening Tool):** A school-based digital tool for identifying children with probable disability conditions covered under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. Teachers screen students based on observable signs, and special educators validate cases and refer children for medical assessment where required.

**Significance**

- **Shared Responsibility:** Treats inclusion as the duty of the entire school, since every interaction a child has, in the classroom, office or transport, shapes their experience.
- **Policy Alignment:** Strengthens equitable, accessible and inclusive education in line with the National Education Policy, 2020 and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016.

## Visa in Itself Does Not Guarantee Entry Into India

The Delhi High Court (HC) recently held that a valid visa does not confer an inherent or legally enforceable right on a foreign national to enter India.

### Related Legal Framework: Immigration and Foreigners Act, 2025

- **Section 3:** Requires foreigners entering India to possess valid passports/travel documents and visas, while allowing refusal of entry on specified grounds, including threats to national security, sovereignty, public order or public health.
- **Section 7**: Empowers the Central Government to regulate or restrict the entry, departure and presence of foreigners in India.

### Key Supreme Court Judgments

- ***Hans Muller of Nurenburg v. Superintendent, Presidency Jail (1955):*** Recognized the Central Government's broad powers under the Foreigners Act, 1946, including the power to expel foreigners.
- ***Louis De Raedt v. Union of India (1991)***: Held that foreigners are entitled to protection under Article 21, but the right to reside and settle in India under Article 19(1)(e) is available only to Indian citizens.

**Case background**

- **Case Facts:** A Turkmenistan citizen arrived at Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi, with a valid business visa issued by the Indian Embassy in Ashgabat. Despite travelling with her husband, who was allowed entry, she was denied entry and returned to Turkmenistan the same day. The petitioner sought reasons for the denial and permission to enter India. Alleged discriminatory treatment in violation of Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution.
- **Centre's Arguments:** Cited adverse inputs concerning the petitioner, invoking national security and public order.

**What Did the Court Rule?**

- **No Absolute Right of Entry:** A valid visa does not confer an inherent or legally enforceable right on a foreign national to enter India. Entry remains subject to applicable immigration laws
- **Sovereign Powers of the State:** Visa issuance, immigration clearance and refusal of entry involve sovereign functions and considerations of national security, foreign policy and administrative discretion.
- **Article 14 (Equality):** Allowing the petitioner's husband to enter India did not automatically establish discrimination, as adverse inputs specifically concerned the petitioner.
- **Article 226 (Writ Jurisdiction):** As no infringement of a legally enforceable right was established, the Court found no grounds to issue a writ and dismissed the petition.

## States Divided Over Mines and Minerals Amendment Act, 2026

The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2026, has reignited the debate over fiscal federalism and the constitutional division of powers between the Centre and States. By expanding central regulatory authority and restricting certain State-level mineral-related taxes, the amendment raises concerns about State fiscal autonomy.

### Key Provisions of the Amendment

- **Expanded Central Powers:** Extends the Centre's regulatory framework to mineral-bearing lands, besides mines and mineral development.
- **Restrictions on Taxation:** Limits States' ability to impose fresh taxes/ cess/levies on mineral rights and mineral-bearing lands, except under conditions prescribed by the Union government.
- **Cancellation of Past Dues:** Invalidates Unpaid or unrecovered dues of any such state levies imposed by States before the Act came into force.

### Constitutional and Federal Issues

The Constitution distributes legislative and taxation powers between the Union and States:

- **Entry 54, Union List:** Authorizes Parliament to regulate mines and mineral development in the public interest.
- **Entry 23, State List:** Empowers States to regulate mines and mineral development, subject to Union legislation.

- **Entries 49 and 50, State List:** Provide States with powers to tax lands and buildings, and mineral rights, respectively, subject to any limitations imposed by Parliament by law.

In its 2024 judgment in *Mineral Area Development Authority v. Steel Authority of India Ltd.*, the Supreme Court (SC) recognized States' power to tax mineral rights can be limited by an Act of Parliament, which may include a prohibition also (Entry 50 of State List). The Court noted that the MMDR Act, 1957 does not place any such restrictions. The Court also held that Parliament's regulatory power under Entry 54 cannot, by itself, curtail State taxation of land under Entry 49. Thus, the amendment raises a constitutional question regarding the extent to which central regulatory powers can restrict the independent taxation powers of States.

### Fiscal Implications

- **Revenue Dependence:** Mineral-related receipts constitute around **80% of non-tax revenue in Jharkhand and Odisha,** followed by Karnataka (48%), Madhya Pradesh (41%) and Rajasthan (39%). Restrictions on mineral-related levies and cancellation of eligible outstanding dues may reduce States' revenue, constrain welfare expenditure and increase dependence on Union transfers.
- **Constitutional Challenge:** Karnataka, Telangana, and Kerala have indicated plans to challenge the law in the SC, citing concerns over State taxation powers and federalism.

### Centre's Justification

- Multiple State-level levies increase domestic mineral costs, encourage industries to rely on imports and impose an additional burden on the exchequer. The amendment seeks to promote greater uniformity and efficiency in the mineral sector.

### Way Forward

- **Cooperative Federalism:** Consult States through the Inter-State Council and other appropriate institutional mechanisms.
- **Constitutional Clarity:** Ensure that mining regulation does not exceed the constitutional limits on central interference with State taxation powers.
- **Fiscal Safeguards:** Assess the revenue implications and consider appropriate transitional or revenue-sharing arrangements.
- **Transparent Governance:** Rationalize mineral-related levies while maintaining a fair share of resource revenues for producing States.

## Casteist Slurs on Social Media Can Attract SC/ST Act

The **Calcutta High Court (HC)** in Sri Sayan Mondal v. State of West Bengal held that casteist slurs on social media can attract the **Scheduled Caste (SC)/ Scheduled Tribe (ST) (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989**, as "**public view**" under Sections **3(1)(r) & 3(1)(s)** of the Act extends to the **digital domain**, not just physical spaces.

### What does the Law Say?

**Sections 3(1)(r) & 3(1)(s) of SC/ST Act:** Criminalize intentional caste-based insult, intimidation or abuse of an **SC/ST person** in a place **"within public view."** Key requirements include-

- Accused is **not SC/ST**.
- Act is **intentional and caste-based**.
- Incident occurs **within public view**.

**What did Calcutta HC Rule?**

- **Case:** Casteist abuse allegedly posted on **Facebook.**
- **Ruling:** "Public view" **extends into the digital domain.**
- Police must exhaust **specialized cyber-forensic/IP-log tracking** methods before concluding that the accused cannot be traced.
- **Key principle:** Each alleged offence must be assessed **independently on its facts and evidence.**

**Judicial Precedent-**

- **Hitesh Verma v. State of Uttarakhand (2020):** The Supreme Court (SC) held that "Public view" requires the alleged utterance to be **witnessed/heard by members of the public;** a private enclosed space generally does not qualify.
- **Ramkrishna Chauhan v. State of Uttar Pradesh (2026):** The SC held that "Public view" depends on whether members of the public could **witness or hear the utterance;** merely occurring on **school premises** does not satisfy the requirement.
- **Sooraj V. Sukumar v. State of Kerala (2022):** The Kerala HC held that SC/ST Act must be **dynamically interpreted** to accommodate technological advances. "Public view" can extend to the **digital sphere,** as online content may be accessed by anyone, anytime.

## Centre Notifies Rules to Standardize Recruitment to Various Tribunal Posts

The Union Government notified the National Tribunals Commission and Qualification, Selection, and Conditions of Service of Chairperson and Members of Tribunals Rules, 2026 under the Tribunals Reforms Act, 2026.

- The rules will enable the newly-created National Tribunals Commission appoint Chairpersons and Members to 16 tribunals and appellate bodies.

### Objective

Standardise recruitment and eligibility for various tribunal posts, establish a formal inquiry mechanism for misconduct complaints and prescribe service conditions and remuneration.

**Constitutional and Legal Background:** Tribunals derive their constitutional basis from **Articles 323A (Administrative Tribunals) and 323B (Tribunals for Other Matters)**, inserted by the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976. In *L. Chandra Kumar v. Union of India (1997)*, the Supreme Court upheld judicial review by constitutional courts as part of the basic structure.

### Significance

- **Judicial independence:** Reduces the risk of executive influence over adjudicatory bodies.
- **Administrative efficiency:** Advance recruitment and digital monitoring can reduce vacancies and delays.
- **Transparency:** Structured assessment and defined eligibility criteria promote merit-based appointments.
- **Access to justice:** Better staffing and administration can improve dispute resolution.
- **Accountability:** Formal misconduct inquiries balance institutional independence with ethical conduct.

### Key Provisions

- **Composition:** The National Tribunals Commission (NTC) comprises a Chairperson (Person must have been Retired SC judge or a retired chief justice of HC) and four Members, including two judicial and two technical Members, with its headquarters in New Delhi. This structure seeks to combine judicial oversight with technical and administrative expertise in tribunal administration.
- **Remuneration:** The Commission Chairperson receives a fixed monthly salary of ₹2.5 lakh, while each Member receives ₹2.25 lakh. A similar pay is applicable to tribunal chairpersons and members, subject to prescribed conditions. The Rules also specify related service benefits and conditions, including provisions concerning pension adjustment.
- **Timely Recruitment:** The process for filling tribunal vacancies must begin at least six months before the vacancies arise. This advance planning is intended to reduce delays in appointments and help tribunals maintain continuity in adjudication.
- **Merit-Based Selection:** Search-cum-Selection Committees assess candidates through expert evaluation of professional experience, judgments or orders, and other relevant contributions. Personal interaction and order-writing exercises may also be used to assess legal knowledge, analytical ability, judicial temperament and drafting skills.
- **Accountability:** The Rules prescribe formal procedures for investigating misconduct complaints against the Commission's Chairperson and Members, as well as tribunal Chairpersons and Members. These procedures provide for preliminary scrutiny, inquiry by designated authorities, adherence to principles of natural justice and submission of reports within specified timelines.
- **Digital Governance:** The National Tribunals Data Grid will serve as a repository of case-related information for the 16 specified tribunals. The Commission's Secretariat will also maintain vacancy records, facilitate online applications, manage recruitment-related activities and support annual reporting and performance review.
- **Service Safeguards:** The Rules prescribe qualifications, service conditions, leave and financial- disclosure requirements for relevant office-holders. They also provide safeguards against conflicts of interest through restrictions on paid assignments and post-tenure legal practice before the concerned tribunal, subject to the applicable provisions.

### Challenges

Executive influence may persist in appointments and disciplinary processes. Procedural reforms alone cannot eliminate pendency or infrastructure shortages. Excessive uniformity may also overlook the specialized expertise required by individual tribunals.

### Way Forward

Ensure transparent selection, meaningful judicial participation, time-bound recruitment, impartial misconduct inquiries, adequate financial autonomy and tribunal-specific expertise. Regular performance audits should monitor vacancies, pendency and disposal rates without compromising adjudicatory independence.

*{For more about Tribunals Reforms Act, 2026 refer The Recitals-August 2026}*

## Supreme Court Judges Appointment

The Centre appointed three High Court (HC) Chief Justices to the Supreme Court (SC) following the recommendation of the SC Collegium.

### About the Newly Appointed Judges:

- **Justice Sunita Agarwal**: Chief Justice of the Gujarat HC.
- **Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya**: Chief Justice of the Delhi HC;
- **Justice Aparesh Kumar Singh**: Chief Justice of the Telangana HC.

### SC Strength

SC's working strength is 37 judges after these appointments against a sanctioned strength of 38, leaving one vacancy.

## Supreme Court Expands Scrutiny of DGP Appointment Laws Nationwide

The Supreme Court (SC) is examining Jharkhand's Selection and Appointment of DGP and IGP (Head of Police Force), Regulation, 2025, following a challenge by the Union Government alleging non-compliance with the SC's *2006 Prakash Singh v. Union of India* judgment on police reforms.

✓The case concerns the appointment of Tadasha Mishra, Jharkhand's first woman Director General of Police (DGP), and has raised questions about uniform enforcement of DGP appointment rules across States.

**Prakash Singh Judgment, 2006: Key Directives**

- **Transparent Selection:** The State government must appoint the DGP from a panel of eligible three senior IPS officers recommended by the UPSC.
- **Eligibility**: Officers must have at least six months of residual service before normal retirement.
- **Minimum Tenure**: The DGP should ordinarily have a minimum tenure of two years, subject to specified exceptions.
- **Timely Process**: States must send the service records of eligible officers to the UPSC at least three months before the incumbent's retirement.

### State's Stand (Jharkhand)

Jharkhand accused the Centre of selective action, citing West Bengal's DGP appointment in March 2026, shortly before the officer's retirement and questioned why similar legal action had not been initiated against other States.

**SC's View**The Bench indicated that Jharkhand's 2025 Regulation appeared inconsistent with the Prakash Singh judgment but allowed DGP Tadasha Mishra to present her case. The Court asked amicus curiae (a person, organization, or group that is not a party to a legal case,) Raju Ramachandran, with UPSC assistance, to examine nationwide State police laws and DGP appointments for compliance with the 2006 directives.

### Significance

- **Police Reforms**: Reinforces judicial oversight of police leadership appointments.
- **Cooperative Federalism**: Raises questions about the respective roles of State governments, the Centre and the UPSC.

- **Rule of Law**: Seeks uniform implementation of SC directives irrespective of the political party in power.
- **Police Autonomy:** Promotes merit-based appointments and seeks to reduce political interference.

## Census 2027: Mizoram to Enumerate Refugees Separately

Recently, Mizoram decided to record the details of refugees separately in Census 2027, aiming to be the first State to complete the process.

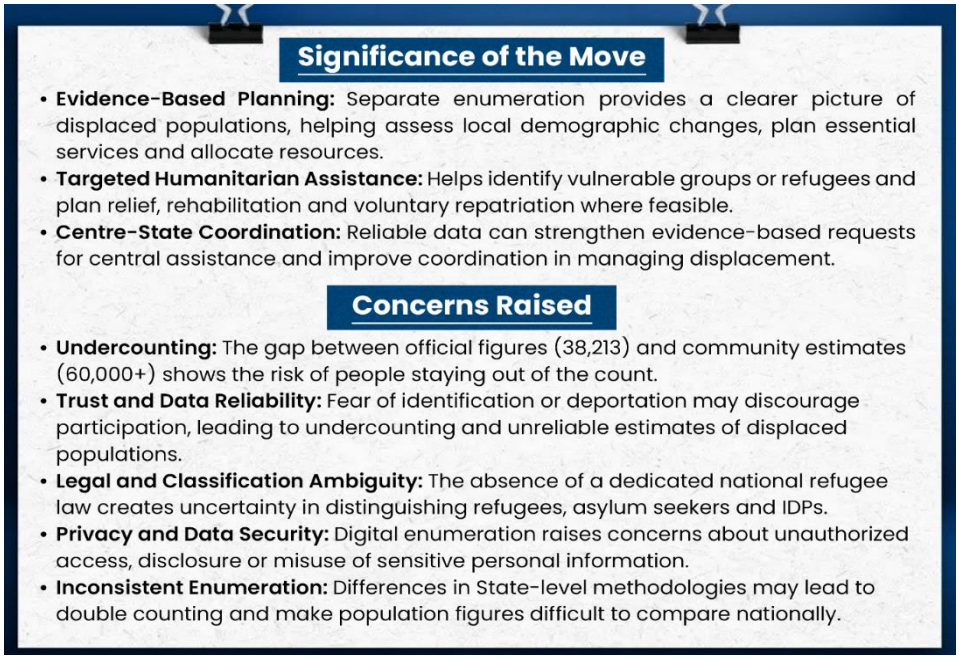
✓The State has officially recorded 38,213 refugees (from Myanmar (Chin People), Bangladesh (Bawm Refugees) and Manipur). Chin people and Bawms share ethnic ties with the Mizos.

✓People displaced from Manipur are internally displaced persons (**IDPs**) and Indian citizens, not refugees. Reports do not specify how they will be classified.

- **Constitutional Basis:** Census is a Union subject under Entry 69 of the Union List (Seventh Schedule). It is conducted under the **Census Act, 1948**
  - The Bhore Committee recommended that "The Population Problem should be the subject of Central study". Accordingly, the Census Act came into force in 1948
- **Ancient Roots:** Population counts find mention in the Rig Veda. Kautilya's Arthashastra treated Census as a tool for taxation, and Akbar's Ain-i-Akbari recorded population data.
- **Confidentiality:** Section 15 of the Census Act makes individual census records confidential. It also bars their use as evidence in civil proceedings.

### Way Forward

- **Standardized Guidelines:** The Registrar General should establish uniform procedures for enumerating refugees, asylum seekers and IDPs, preventing inconsistent classification and double counting.
- **Build Trust and Ensure Privacy:** Communicate the purpose and confidentiality safeguards of census data in local languages, alongside robust digital security and access controls to prevent unauthorized disclosure or misuse.




- **Inclusive Enumeration:** Use community outreach and trained local enumerators to reach remote, mobile and vulnerable populations and minimize undercounting.
- **National Refugee Framework:** Develop a comprehensive legal and policy framework clarifying refugee protection, documentation, humanitarian assistance and Centre-State responsibilities.
- **Data Integration:** Census figures could be reconciled with biometric and Home Department records to close data gaps.

## Is Entering Closed Public Land a Criminal Trespass?

Recently, Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) leaders were remanded to five days' judicial custody for jumping over locked gates and barricades to enter denotified- Jantar Mantar and unfurl the national flag. An First Information Report (FIR) was registered against them for criminal conspiracy, disobeying an order issued by a public servant, house trespass, and voluntarily causing hurt, among other offences.

**Key Judicial Precedents:**

- **Mathuri v. State of Punjab, 1963:** The Supreme Court (SC) ruled that knowing that an entry would annoy the person in possession does not by itself prove "intent to annoy".
- **Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation, 1985:** The case mainly concerned the right to livelihood under Article 21. The SC held that pavement dwellers on public land *lacked the intent required for criminal trespass,* because they occupied pavements out of helplessness and compulsion, not choice.

**What is Trespass?** Entering or staying on land in another person's possession without permission. Types-

- **Civil Trespass:** A tort (civil wrong). The act of entry alone is enough, and no intention to cause harm is needed.
- **Criminal Trespass:** Requires a guilty intention in addition to the entry.

**Related Legal Framework under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023:**

- **Section 329(1) (Criminal Trespass):** Defines criminal trespass as entering or unlawfully remaining on property in another's possession with intent to commit an offence or to intimidate, insult or annoy the person in possession. It is punishable with up to three months' imprisonment, a fine up to Rs 5,000, or both.
  - **Section 329(2):** Committed in a human dwelling, place of worship or building used for the custody of property, it becomes house-trespass, punishable with up to one year's imprisonment, a fine up to Rs 5,000, or both.
- **Lurking house trespass Section 330 (Aggravated Forms):** It is house trespass after taking steps to hide it from a person entitled to exclude the trespass, and
  - house breaking: entry/exit, like climbing over a wall or opening a lock.
  - Punishment depends on the Intention to commit an offence: It thus varies from imprisonment for life --> upto 2 years of imprisonment along with a fine.

- **Binu Thankappal v. State of Kerala, 2025:** The Kerala High Court (HC) ruled that a police station is a building used for the custody of property, so entering it unlawfully can be house trespass (Section 329(2) BNS). The court observed that protests cannot be a cover for taking the law into one's hands or destroying government property.
- **Damodaran K v. State of Kerala, 2026:** Kerala HC upheld a landlord's house trespass conviction for entering a room occupied by his tenant. It held that trespass is an *offence against possession*, not ownership, so even an owner cannot unlawfully enter premises in another's lawful possession.

## Special Summary Revision

Recently, the Election Commission of India (ECI) directed 14 States and 3 UTs to conduct a Special Summary Revision (SSR) of electoral rolls with 1 January 2027 as the qualifying date. The annual exercise had been skipped in 2026 because of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR).

**Coverage:** Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Gujarat, Kerala, Lakshadweep, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Puducherry, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and West Bengal.

**Timeline:** The draft roll will be published on 12 November 2026 and the final roll on 4 January 2027. The schedule for the remaining States will be announced later.

**What is SSR?** The SSR is the ECI's annual, time-bound update of the existing electoral roll. It adds newly eligible voters and removes deceased, shifted or duplicate entries through claims and objections.

- **Legal Basis:** Section 21(2) of the Representation of the People (RP) Act, 1950 provides revision of the electoral roll before each general election and if the ECI directs. Rule 25 of the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960 permits summary revision.

- **Constitutional Basis:** Article 324 empowers the ECI to prepare the electoral rolls for elections to Parliament and Assemblies. Article 326 guarantees adult suffrage.
- **Eligibility:** A person must be a citizen, aged 18 on the qualifying date and ordinarily resident in the constituency (Sections 16 and 19, RP Act).
- **Qualifying Dates:** To ensure maximum participation of the young and first-time voters, all prospective electors eligible on 1st January 2027 and those who become eligible on 1st April 2027, 1st July 2027, and 1st October 2027 can also send their advance applications for enrolment.

**How is SSR Different from SIR?**

| Basis | Special Summary Revision (SSR) | Special Intensive Revision (SIR) |
|---|---|---|
| **Nature** | Updates the existing electoral roll. | Undertakes fresh enumeration of electors. |
| **Existing Electors** | Automatically included in the draft roll, subject to prescribed verification and deletion procedures | Required to submit enumeration forms to be included in the draft roll. |
| **Documentation** | Generally required for new registrations, corrections or specific claims, as applicable. | Required under the applicable SIR instructions to establish eligibility; additional verification may follow. |
| **Claims and Objections** | Claims and objections are invited after publication of the draft roll. | Claims and objections are also invited, alongside the prescribed verification process. |
| **Frequency** | Normally annual and before elections, as directed by the ECI. | Special exercise undertaken when directed by the ECI. |

**Significance**

- **Restores the Annual Cycle**: Resumes routine electoral-roll revision after the 2026 exercise was skipped due to SIR.
- **Prevents Wrongful Exclusion**: Retains existing electors in the draft roll, reducing the risk of mass exclusion due to fresh enumeration requirements.
- **Youth Inclusion:** Four qualifying dates- 1 January, 1 April, 1 July and 1 October enable eligible first-time voters to register throughout the year.
- **Electoral Accuracy:** Removes deceased, shifted and duplicate entries while adding newly eligible voters.
- **Electoral Preparedness**: Helps ensure updated voter lists ahead of the 2027 State Assembly elections.
- **Access to Voting Rights**: Provides an opportunity for eligible electors omitted during SIR to seek inclusion through claims and objections.

**Concerns Raised**

- **Low Awareness**: Eligible voters omitted during SIR may not know that they need to apply afresh for inclusion.
- **Risk of Exclusion:** Migrants, homeless people, economically weaker sections and other vulnerable groups may struggle to file claims or respond to objections.
- **Bulk Objections:** Misuse of Form 7 (in case of Death, Duplication, Shifting of residence, Ineligibility) to challenge multiple entries may result in unnecessary notices and potential harassment.
    - Form 7 is the prescribed statutory form under the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960, used to file objections to the inclusion of a name in the electoral roll. Earlier, only persons from the same booth or polling station were permitted to file a Form 7 objection. However, in 2022, ECI amended the relevant rules to allow any voter in a constituency to file an objection.
- **Administrative Overload**: Booth-Level Officers (BLOs) may face excessive workloads due to overlapping revision drives and verification duties.

- **Uneven Implementation**: Different revision schedules across States may create confusion and inconsistent voter experiences.
- **Data Accuracy:** Outdated addresses, duplicate records and delayed reporting of deaths may undermine the accuracy of electoral rolls.

**Way Forward**

- **Targeted Outreach:** Conduct booth-level awareness drives, particularly among voters omitted during SIR, migrants, young voters and vulnerable groups.
- **Inclusive Registration**: Facilitate enrolment through accessible application channels, help desks and local outreach camps.
- **Due Process:** Ensure an opportunity to respond and a reasoned decision before deleting an elector's name, as required by law.
- **Transparent Verification:** Publish clear procedures for claims, objections and appeals, with accessible status tracking.
- **Accountability and Monitoring:** Audit bulk objections, monitor wrongful exclusions, and establish time-bound grievance redressal mechanisms.
- **Strengthen Field Capacity**: Provide adequate staffing, training and resources to BLOs and Electoral Registration Officers (EROs).

## SC Makes Insurance Mandatory for All Train Tickets

Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) directed Indian Railways to cover all tickets sold at railway station counters with travel insurance in the same manner as online tickets, with effect from 27 October 2026.

**Existing Mechanism:**

- **Optional Travel Insurance Scheme (OTIS):** An accident cover available only to online (IRCTC) ticket buyers with confirmed/RAC tickets. Passengers can opt in at 45 paise per passenger per journey (inclusive of taxes).
- **Coverage:** Death and permanent total disability ₹10 lakh each; permanent partial disability up to ₹7.5 lakh; hospitalization up to ₹2 lakh; transport of mortal remains ₹10,000.

**What Did the SC Direct?**

- **Mandatory Compliance:** The direction must be implemented mandatorily, failing which the responsibility shall be directly upon the Railway Board.
- **Safety Lapses Flagged:** The Railways' assurances had remained largely on paper and that budgets meant for passenger safety were not fully used.
- **Board Accountability:** The Railway Board must explain an annual shortfall of almost one-third in track-fencing targets.

**Need for Such Directives:**

- **Unequal Protection:** Passengers paying the same fare and facing the same risk got different protection based only on how they bought the ticket.
- **Exclusion of the Vulnerable:** Counter users are largely rural, low-income or digitally excluded passengers, who are the least able to absorb the financial shock of an accident.
- **Delays in Implementation:** Despite the Centre telling the Court in May 2026 that a decision had been taken, no mechanism for counter tickets was put in place.
- **Weak Safety Record on the Ground:** Underused safety budgets and missed targets for fencing, foot over-bridges and Kavach showed a gap between assurances and action.
  - **Kavach** is an indigenously developed Automatic Train Protection (ATP) system by Indian Railways (through the Research Design and Standards Organization) to help achieve zero-accident operations.

- **Nature of Liability:** The claim lies between the passenger and the insurance company. Children under 5 travelling without a berth are not covered.
- **Statutory Compensation:** Under Sections 124 and 124A of the Railways Act, 1989, Railways pay **no-fault compensation** for train accidents and "untoward incidents" (e.g., violent attack, robbery, accidental falling from a train). Death compensation is ₹8 lakh, and claims are decided by the Railway Claims Tribunal.

| Significance of the Move | Implementation Challenges | Way Forward |
|---|---|---|
| • **Equal Protection:** Ends the distinction between online and counter passengers in access to insurance.<br>• **Financial Security:** Provides families of accident victims *with an additional, contract-based payout beyond statutory compensation.*<br>• **Quicker Relief:** Insurance claims can offer faster support than proceedings before the Railway Claims Tribunal.<br>• **Accountability:** Fixing responsibility on the Railway Board turns repeated assurances into an enforceable deadline.<br>• **Wider Safety Focus:** Links compensation with prevention by pressing for progress on Kavach, fencing and foot overbridges. | • **Unclear Modalities:** The premium for counter tickets is not yet confirmed and may differ from the online rate. The processes for issuing certificates and settling claims are still to be notified.<br>• **Who Pays and Can One Opt Out?:** The direction binds the Railways, but it is unclear whether counter passengers will pay a premium or can decline the cover like online users.<br>• **Identity and Nominee Data:** Counter tickets often lack verified identity or nominee details, which may lead to disputed or rejected claims.<br>• **Scope Ambiguity:** It is unclear whether unreserved and suburban tickets are covered, since the existing scheme is limited to confirmed/RAC tickets.<br>• **Fiscal and Time Pressure:** Two weeks is short for changing counter ticketing systems and **insurer contracts**<br>• **Insurance Is Not Safety:** Cover compensates for harm but does not prevent it; slow progress on basic safety work remains the core issue. | • **Default Cover at Counters:** Build insurance into counter ticketing as a default by recording identity digitally at counters, as the Court suggested, to curb misuse without excluding passengers.<br>• **Clear Rules:** Notify the premium, scope (reserved and unreserved tickets) and claim procedure, and print them on the ticket.<br>• **Simpler Claims:** Ensure single-window, time-bound settlement, coordinated with Railway Claims Tribunal records.<br>• **Prevention First:** Speed up Kavach, fencing and foot overbridges, and publish how safety budgets are used. |

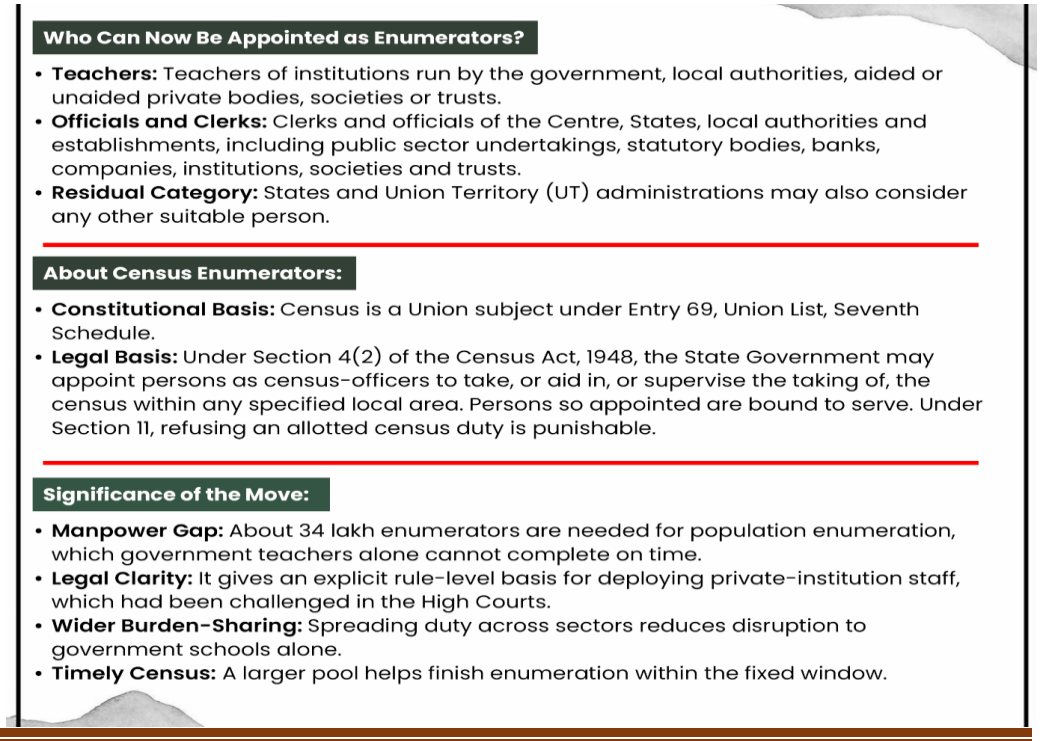
## Census Rules Amended to Widen Pool of Enumerators

Recently, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) notified the Census (Amendment) Rules, 2026 under Section 18(1) of the Census Act, 1948, expanding the categories of people eligible to perform duties as enumerators.

✓The original 1990 entry listed "Teachers, Clerks or any official or any person" as eligible enumerators. It did not name the institutions they could come from.

### Concerns Raised

- **Autonomy of Private Institutions:** Compulsory deployment without



consultation may be resisted by private managements and staff.

- **Data Quality:** A wider, less experienced pool needs adequate training to keep the data accurate.

**Way Forward:**

- **Prioritize Non-Teaching Staff:** Draw on officials and volunteers first to limit academic loss.
- **Fair Compensation and Safety:** Ensure timely honorarium and safe working conditions.
- **Uniform Training:** Provide standardized training for the newly eligible categories.
- **Consultation:** Coordinate with private institutions to schedule duties around academic calendars.

## PAC Questions Centre and States over CAG "Fraud Markers" in SC Scholarships

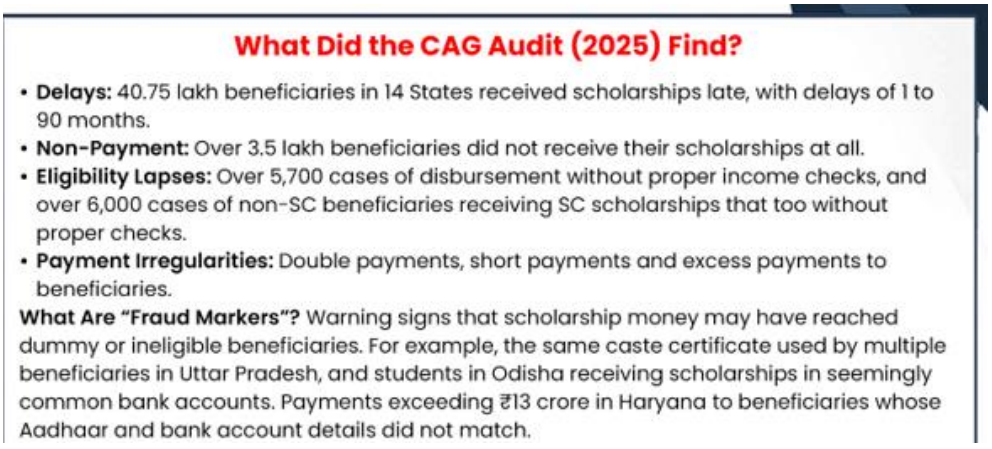
Recently, Parliament's Public Accounts Committee (PAC) questioned the Union and several State governments over gaps, including "fraud markers", in the Pre-Matric and Post-Matric Scholarship schemes for Scheduled Caste (SC) students. The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India had flagged these gaps in its 2025 report.

**About the Pre-matric And Post-matric Scholarship Schemes For Scheduled Caste (SC) Students:**

- **Nature:** Both are Centrally Sponsored Schemes of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- **Funding:** The Centre and States share costs in a 60:40 ratio, or 90:10 for northeastern States.
- **Coverage:** Post-Matric supports students after Class 10 for those with family income up to ₹2.5 lakh/year. Pre-Matric supports SC students before Class 10. Pre Matric Scholarship is divided into 2 components:
  - **Component 1:** Pre-Matric Scholarship for SC students studying in class IX and X on a full time basis. Family income up to ₹2.5 lakh/year
  - Component 2: Children of parents/guardians engaged in Unclean and hazardous Occupation. The students should be studying in classes I to X on a full time basis. Scholarship will be admissible to the children irrespective of their caste/religion. There is no family income ceiling under this component
- **Constitutional Basis:** Article 46 (Directive Principles of State Policy) directs the State to promote the educational interests of SCs and Scheduled Tribes (STs).

**Concerns Raised by PAC**

- **PAC's Question:** Why did fraud continue when Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) with the Aadhaar Payment Bridge System (APBS) was meant to weed out dummy beneficiaries?
- **Blame-Shifting:** The Centre funds and the States implement, so each points to the other for delays and fraud.




- **Exclusion after DBT:** The PAC noted that the shift to DBT led to sharp drops in beneficiaries. In 2025-26, the Post-Matric scheme reached only 36.07 lakh students against a target of 76.55 lakh.
- **Persistent Fraud:** Duplicate certificates and mismatched Aadhaar and bank details show verification gaps despite digital systems.
- **Weak Follow-Up:** Non-submission of action-taken reports weakens the audit and accountability cycle.

**Way Forward**

- **Time-Bound Disbursement:** Fix payment timelines, with penalties for delay.
- **Integrated Verification:** Link scholarship portals with caste and income certificate databases to detect duplicates.
- **Address DBT Exclusion:** Help students with Aadhaar seeding and bank linkage so eligible students are not left out.
- **Clear Accountability:** Make Centre-State monitoring and action-taken reporting mandatory and time-bound.

## Free and Fair Elections: Limits of Judicial Restraint

Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) in *Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party (*YSRCP) *v. The State Of Andhra Pradesh, 2026* held that constitutional courts, though ordinarily non-interventionist in elections, can step in when free and fair elections are polluted by illegal means such as muscle power.

**What Was the Case About?** YSRCP - the principal opposition party had alleged that violence during the filing of nominations for Andhra Pradesh's (AP's) urban local body elections obstructed its candidates from participation. The AP High Court (HC) declined its plea to extend the deadline for filing nominations. YSRCP then moved to the SC.

**What Did the SC Say?**

- **Basic Structure:** Free and fair elections are part of the basic structure, and filing nominations without hindrance is a facet of that process.
- **Judicial Review Not Excluded:** Judicial deference to the State Election Commission (SEC) grew from a "doctrine of necessity", so that elections finish within a timeline without intermediate interference. Courts' hands are not tied when widespread violence hampers the SEC's duty and skews the level playing field in filing nominations. The YSRCP's representations and video evidence made out a prima facie case for directions.
- **Directions:** The SEC must consider the complaints and decide on extending the nomination deadline. The SEC must take all steps to remove candidates' apprehensions about free and fair polls. The State Director General of Police (DGP) must provide adequate security to candidates and election offices. The Court clarified that it was not directly intervening in the election, only allowing the SEC to decide the grievance.

**Constitutional Framework and Precedents**

- **Article 243ZA:** Vests the superintendence, direction and control of municipal elections in the SEC.
- **Article 243ZG (Bar to Court Interference in Municipal Elections):** Laws relating to delimitation of constituencies or allotment of seats under **Article 243ZA** cannot be challenged in any court. Municipal elections can be challenged only through an election petition before the authority and in the manner prescribed by State law.
- **N.P. Ponnuswami v Returning Officer Namakkal, 1952:** The SC held that under Article 329(b) and the Representation of the People Act, 1951, courts cannot interfere once an election process has begun. "Election" means the entire process from notification to declaration of results, so any grievance, including the wrongful rejection of a nomination, can be raised only through an election petition after the polls conclude.
- **Mohinder Singh Gill v. Chief Election Commissioner, 1978:** The SC held that Article 324 is a wide reservoir of power for the Election Commission to ensure free and fair elections where the law is silent. However, the Commission must follow natural justice, and its orders must be judged only by the reasons they state.
- **UT of Ladakh v. J&K National Conference, 2023:** The SC ruled that constitutional courts are duty-bound to intervene when executive actions or administrative decisions arbitrarily disturb a fair level playing field during elections.

**Related Concerns:**

- **Delay:** Frequent mid-process intervention may delay polls and dilute Article 243ZG.

- **Weak SECs:** SECs depend on State Governments for staff and police, which limits their independence.

**Way Forward:**

- **Calibrated Intervention:** Courts should limit relief to enabling SECs where material shows serious obstruction.
- **Autonomous SECs:** Give SECs financial independence and dedicated police support.
- **Online Nominations:** Allow online filing to prevent physical obstruction.
- **Accountability:** Ensure time-bound grievance cells and prompt prosecution of electoral violence.

## Pradhan Mantri Viksit Gram Swaraj Yojana (PM VGSY)

Recently, the Union Cabinet approved the PM VGSY, a Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) to strengthen Panchayat governance in line with the Viksit Bharat vision.

- **Duration:** 2026-27 to 2030-31(co-terminus with the Sixteenth Finance Commission period).
- **Outlay:** ₹7,395.55 crore, of which the Centre bears ₹4,869.48 crore and the States ₹2,526.07 crore.
- **Coverage:** All States and Union Territories, including traditional local bodies in non-Part IX areas where Panchayats do not exist.
- **Beneficiaries:** Around 32 lakh elected representatives and Panchayat functionaries across over 2.55 lakh Panchayats and traditional bodies.
- **Key Features:**
  - **Holistic Planning:** Central and State departments will plan together on a common digital platform to produce 2.55 lakh Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs) a year on the eGramSwaraj portal.
  - **Unified Data View:** Schemes, beneficiaries, assets and resources of each Panchayat will be on one platform for better planning and monitoring.
  - **Awareness:** Gram Sabhas and PANCHAM (an AI-enabled two-way platform in 17 languages), will explain government schemes. Each awareness drive to each at least 1 crore citizens.
  - **Capacity Building:** Training and digital support for representatives in planning, communication and resource management, aimed at locally relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
  - **Financial Accountability:** At least 2.55 lakh online audit plans a year through AuditOnline. Online accounting, public disclosure and Own Source Revenue (OSR) collection will make Panchayats more self-reliant.
  - **Implementation:** States and Union Territories will submit Annual Action Plans, which a Central Empowered Committee will approve. No permanent posts will be created; only need-based contractual staff will be hired.
- **Significance:** The Sixteenth Finance Commission has recommended about ₹4.35 lakh crore in grants for rural local bodies for 2026-31. The scheme aims to equip Panchayats to use these funds well and turn national priorities into local development.

## PCI Issues Guidelines for Covering Protests

Press Council of India (PCI) adopted guidelines for journalists covering protests and demonstrations to enable orderly and effective coverage of protests, protect media personnel, promote responsible reporting and improve coordination with law enforcement.

**About PCI:** A statutory, quasi-judicial body constituted under the Press Council Act, 1978 to preserve press freedom and maintain and improve the standards of newspapers and news agencies.

**Concerns Raised**

- **Advisory Nature:** The guidelines bind journalists' conduct but place no corresponding obligation on police.
- **Burden on Freelancers:** Protective gear and kits may be costly for freelancers and small media houses.
- **Accreditation Gap:** Journalists without institutional cards, such as independent and digital reporters, may face difficulty proving press status.

**Key Provisions of the Guidelines**

- **Identification:** Visibly display a valid press card from the media organisation, a Press Information Bureau (PIB) accreditation card or Directorate of Information and Publicity (DIP) accreditation, and identify yourself calmly to police.
- **Neutrality:** Do not participate in demonstrations, take sides, provoke confrontations, or interfere with protesters, counter-protesters or police.
- **Compliance with Police:** Follow lawful instructions, especially those given for immediate safety, while calmly asserting press status when necessary.
- **Crowd Safety:** Keep a safe distance from confrontations, keep escape routes in mind, and do not attach equipment to police barricades or vehicles.
- **Hazards:** Do not touch tear-gas canisters, flash-bang devices or smoke grenades, and leave smoke-affected areas.
- **Emergency Preparedness:** Carry a compact kit with first aid, medication, water, a flashlight and eye protection, plus protective headgear or body armour where the threat warrants it.
- **Newsroom Coordination:** Newsrooms should designate a contact person to track journalists' locations. Freelancers should share their plans with a trusted contact.
- **Coordination with Authorities:** For planned protests, media organizations should coordinate with police and public information officers on communication protocols and media staging areas.
- **Responsible Reporting:** Separate verified facts from allegations, verify through multiple sources, and give equal scrutiny to claims by protesters, organisers, police and government.
- **Operational Security:** Do not broadcast real-time police positions, tactical movements or escape routes where doing so could compromise safety.
- **Privacy and Vulnerable Persons:** Take care when filming minors, injured or distressed persons, and do not let live-broadcast or exclusive-footage pressure override safety.

**Way Forward:**

- **Reciprocal Police Protocols:** Pair these guidelines with standard police procedures recognizing press cards and safeguarding journalists.
- **Newsroom Support:** Media organizations should fund safety training, protective gear and insurance for staff and freelancers.
- **Clear Definitions:** Of terms like "follow police orders" & "operational security" so it does not become a ground to restrict reporting.
- **Inclusive Recognition:** Create simple verification for freelance and digital journalists.

## Pendency and Punishment: Why India Needs a Sentencing Council?

Recently, legal experts called for a **statutory** Sentencing Council to end the wide judge-to-judge disparity in punishment for the same offence. The Centre has tasked the Law Commission of India with examining the issue, and its recommendations are expected soon.

**What is Sentencing?** The process of determining the appropriate punishment or penalty for a convicted person.

- **Forms of Punishment:** Fine, probation, community service, restitution or imprisonment. In grave cases it can extend to life imprisonment or, where law permits, the death penalty.
- **Guiding Principles:** Proportionality (punishment matching the offence and culpability), deterrence, rehabilitation and retribution.
- **Key Factors:** The nature and severity of the offence, the offender's role and criminal history, and any aggravating or mitigating circumstances (e.g. age, mental health).
- **Indian Position:** Statutes fix the maximum and sometimes the minimum punishment. No checklist guides how judges weigh these factors, so the decision rests largely on individual discretion of the judge.
- **Sentencing Council:** An independent statutory body that frames sentencing guidelines and monitors consistency, without deciding individual cases. It turns a statutory range (e.g. "up to ten years") into a specific penalty.

**Existing Legal Framework**

- **Statutory Ranges:** The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023 prescribes maximum and sometimes minimum punishments, but sets no aggravating or mitigating factors.
- **Hearing on Sentence:** Section 258(2) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023 requires a Sessions Judge to hear the convict separately on sentence.
- **Probation:** Sections 401-402 of the BNSS and Sections 3, 4 and 6 of the Probation of Offenders Act, 1958 require courts to consider non-custodial options in eligible cases.
- **Constitutional Basis:** Articles 14 and 21 bar arbitrary State action. Criminal law falls in the Concurrent List, while prisons fall in the State List.
- **Judicial View:** In *Soman vs State of Kerala* (2012), the SC called sentencing one of the weakest parts of criminal justice. In *Sunita Devi vs State of Bihar* (2024), it observed that "sentencing shall not be a mere lottery" and directed the Centre to examine the feasibility of a comprehensive national sentencing policy, potentially via a Sentencing Commission.

**Need for a Sentencing Council**

- **Ensuring Equal Justice:** Similar offenders now receive very different sentences depending on the judge. Common guidelines would bring consistency and uphold equality before law under Articles 14 and 21.
- **Structuring Judicial Discretion:** Judges would assess culpability and harm, start from an indicative point within the statutory range, and then individualize the sentence. This guides discretion without removing it, as under England's Sentencing Council (Coroners and Justice Act, 2009).
- **Excluding Irrelevant Factors:** Studies show sentences reduced on irrelevant grounds, such as a rape survivor's later marriage. Defined aggravating and mitigating factors would rule out such reasoning.
- **Reducing Appellate Pendency:** Appellate courts now correct harsh or lenient sentences case by case. A common yardstick would reduce such appeals and save judicial time.
- **Promoting Non-Custodial Options:** Probation is underused because nothing guides when to prefer it over custody. Clear criteria would encourage its use and ease prison overcrowding.
- **Ensuring Accountability:** Judges now need not explain why they chose a particular sentence within the statutory range. Under the guidelines, they would have to give written reasons whenever they depart from the recommended range, which keeps their discretion but makes it answerable.
- **Evidence-Based Policy:** An anonymized sentencing database on the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG) would show where disparity lies and whether guidelines are working.
- **Ending Legislative Neglect:** The Law Commission's 47th Report (1972) and the Malimath Committee (2003) flagged the problem, yet Parliament has never framed a sentencing policy.

### Concerns Raised

- **Penal Populism:** Public pressure may push guidelines towards harsher terms without evidence of deterrence.
- **Over-Centralization:** National guidelines may ignore State differences in court and prison capacity.
- **Tick-Box Compliance:** Judges may follow checklists in form without changing their reasoning.

### Way Forward

- **Statutory, Expert Body:** Create the Council by law, with judges, criminologists and social scientists as members.
- **Evidence-Based Approach:** Base guidelines on sentencing data and on their likely impact on prison capacity.
- **Cooperative Federalism:** Consult States, given their control over prisons.
- **Meaningful Sentencing Hearings:** Use the Section 258(2) BNSS hearing to record aggravating and mitigating factors and to consider probation first.

## Peace Bonds

The Delhi High Court (HC) recently dismissed All India Students' Association (AISA) leader Neha Bora's plea challenging a Special Executive Magistrate's notice to execute a personal bond of ₹10,000 with one surety to maintain peace during an inquiry, after she was detained during a protest.

**What are Bonds?** Chapter IX of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) 2023, allows "security proceedings". A person is asked to show cause why they should not execute a bond to keep the peace or maintain good behaviour.

- **Bond vs Bail Bond:** A bond is an undertaking without a surety. A bail bond is an undertaking with a surety, a person who takes on liability if the bond is broken.
- **Categories of Bonds:**
  - **Keeping Peace on Conviction (Section 125):** After a court finds a person guilty.
  - **Keeping the Peace (Section 126),** against a person likely to breach the peace or disturb public tranquillity.
  - **Good Behaviour (Sections 127-129)**, against those spreading certain prohibited material, suspected persons and habitual offenders.
- **Aim:** To prevent trouble before it becomes violence or a crime.
- **Difference from an FIR:** A First Information Report (FIR) starts an investigation after a cognizable offence. Security proceedings can begin before any offence and can run alongside an FIR.
- **Who Conducts Security Proceedings?** Executive Magistrates (EMs) or Sub-Divisional Magistrates (SDMs). In Commissionerate cities like Delhi, police officers appointed as Special Executive Magistrates (SEMs) conduct such proceedings.
- **How Are Security Proceedings Conducted?**
  - **Information and Opinion:** The EM examines the material (a police/news report, TV interviews or social media posts) and must form a reasoned opinion that the person is likely to breach the peace.
  - **Independent Assessment:** A Police report with recommendation and containing all relevant evidence is sent to the EM. They are not bound by the Police recommendation and must assess each case independently.
  - **Show-Cause Order:** The EM passes a preliminary written order stating the reasons and the substance of the information (Section 130). It asks the person to explain why they should not furnish a bond of a stated amount.
  - **Inquiry (Section 135):** The truth of the information is examined. An interim bond may be demanded during the inquiry only if the EM, for reasons recorded in writing, finds a breach of peace imminent. The inquiry must ordinarily end within six months, or the proceedings automatically lapse.

- **Final Decision (Sections 136-137):** After the inquiry, the EM either orders a bond or discharges the person.

- **Bond Amount and Sureties:** Signing a bond, say for ₹20,000, does not mean paying that money. The amount is taken only if the person breaks the promise and the bond is forfeited (Section 491 of BNSS).
  - A Surety is someone who also promises to pay if the person breaks the bond. The Magistrate can reject an unsuitable surety, such as a habitual offender.
- **On Default:** If the inquiry finds a bond necessary and the person does not give it, they can be sent to jail. The limit is one year under Sections 126-128 and three years under Section 129 of BNSS.
  - If the person gives the bond but then breaks its conditions, they can be kept in jail for the rest of the bond period, and the bond amount can be recovered.

**Related Safeguards and Constitutional Position**

- **Due Process:** A written order (Section 130), an inquiry with a chance to give evidence, and a reasoned decision (Sections 135-136) are required before any bond is ordered.
- **Right to Challenge:** Orders can be challenged through appeal (Section 414 of BNSS) or revision (Sections 438-442 of BNSS).
- **Constitutional Validity:** Free speech and peaceful assembly can be reasonably restricted for public order. The Supreme Court upheld these provisions on this ground in *Madhu Limaye v. Sub-Divisional Magistrate, Monghyr* (1970).
- **Expert Backing:** The Law Commission (1969) and the Second Administrative Reforms Commission (2007) recommended keeping them. Bonds are useful for festivals, rallies, elections, communal tension and fake-news-driven mobs.

**Security Proceedings vs Section 163 of BNSS:** Both powers aim to prevent imminent danger to public peace, but they work differently.

- **Under Section 163**, an EM, SDM or DM can restrict conduct or movement, such as large gatherings. Such orders can target an individual or the general public, and in emergencies can be issued without hearing them first.
- **Security proceedings**, in contrast, are always initiated against identified persons, after a show-cause notice and inquiry.

## Steel Industry Safety Council

- The Ministry of Steel has decided to set up a **Steel Industry Safety Council (SISC)** as an apex-level industry safety body under the administrative control of the **Ministry of Steel**.
- The initiative is aimed at strengthening safety standards, practices, accident prevention, and safety awareness across the steel industry.

### Membership

- **Chairman: Secretary, Ministry of Steel**
- Its members will be senior officials of the Ministry, Chief Executives of integrated steel producers.
- It will also have representatives of **key technical and statutory organizations** like Directorate General of Mines Safety (DGMS), Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO), National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and recognised steel technology institutions.

### Functions

- The SISC will assess the safety situation in the steel industry, facilitate studies and improvements in safety practices, approve industry safety standards and recommended practices, and review serious accidents and near-miss incidents.
- It will also provide directions for strengthening safety awareness, training, and preventive measures.

### Significance

- The establishment of SISC and SISD represents an important institutional step towards promoting a stronger safety culture, improving prevention of industrial accidents and advancing consistent safety practices across India's steel industry.




## India's First WASH Sector Social Bond

- **NABKISAN Finance Limited** has listed India's first Social Bond dedicated exclusively to the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sector on the National Stock Exchange (NSE).
- NABKISAN is a **subsidiary of the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD)**. Water.org acted as the Technical Advisor and Knowledge Partner for the transaction.
- A **social bond** is a type of financial instrument issued by governments, international organisations, or corporations to raise funds for projects and initiatives that have a positive social impact on society.
- These bonds are designed to finance projects that address various social issues, such as healthcare, education, affordable housing, poverty alleviation, and environmental sustainability.

- The **five-year bond** carries a coupon rate of 8.10%, matures in September 2031, and has been assigned the highest domestic credit ratings of CRISIL AAA (Stable) and CARE AAA (Stable).
- The **Rs 180 crore** raised will be used to expand access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene solutions across rural and underserved communities, contributing to improved health, livelihoods and quality of life.
- The bond issue is significant because it creates a dedicated capital-market financing avenue for WASH infrastructure and services, rather than relying solely on government expenditure or conventional institutional lending.
- The success of WASH Bond demonstrates the potential of capital market instruments to mobilise resources for development sectors while delivering measurable social impact.
- The strong investor response reflects growing confidence in sustainable finance as a means to advance inclusive and sustainable rural development.

## Ayush Service Sector Report

The Ministry of Ayush has released the Ayush Service Sector Report, a study by Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS).

**Key Findings**

- The Ayush services economy, covering Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Sowa-Rigpa and Homoeopathy, was estimated at **US$36.92 billion in FY2024-25**, registering a robust 16.91% CAGR since FY2022-23.
- The sector directly supports an estimated **1.76 million livelihoods** across healthcare, wellness, education and allied services.
- **Women** account for **43%** of the overall **Ayush services workforce.** Female representation exceeds 60% in spas and wellness resorts, stands at 58% in educational institutes, 57% in day-care centres and 53% in hospitals.
- **Standalone clinics** remain the **largest revenue-generating segment,** contributing an estimated US$16.21 billion, while day-care centres account for another US$10.13 billion.
- Together, the two segments contribute more than **70% of the sector's revenue.**
- **Ayurveda** remains the **largest individual system,** accounting for US$17.73 billion, or around 48% of the total Ayush services revenue.
- The sector is also gaining traction in **Medical Value Travel (MVT),** generating an estimated US$1.77 billion in FY2024-25.
- International patients, accounting for around 5% of patient volumes, contribute approximately 15-25% of hospital segment revenue.

### Significance

The growing representation of women across organised Ayush establishments, alongside the sector's expanding economic and employment footprint, highlights its potential to contribute to women's economic participation, inclusive growth and India's broader development journey.

## Rebate of State and Central Taxes and Levies (RoSCTL)

- The **Ministry of Textiles** has extended the **RoSCTL Scheme** for exports of apparel/garments and made-ups for a further period of three months, from 1 October to 31 December 2026, at the existing rates and under the prevailing guidelines.
- Operational since **2019**, the scheme provides **rebate of eligible embedded State and Central taxes and levies** that are not refunded through other mechanisms.
- It is based on the principle of **zero-rating of exports**, and seeks to ensure that domestic taxes do not burden exported products, thereby **strengthening the global competitiveness** of India's apparel and made-ups sector.
    - Articles other than garments, made out of fabrics are called made-ups. These include finished textile articles such as bed linen, curtains, towels and other household textile products.
- During **2025–26**, the scheme benefited more than **15,400 exporters across over 444 districts**, with the beneficiary base comprising **predominantly MSMEs**.
- The extension will ensure **policy continuity and predictability for exporters**, while sustaining the competitiveness of India's labour-intensive and value-added apparel and made-ups sector in an increasingly competitive global trading environment.

## Annual Survey of Industries

- The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) has released the results of the Annual Survey of Industries (ASI) for FY 2024-25.
- ASI is conducted to provide a meaningful insight into the dynamics of change in the composition, growth and structure of various manufacturing industries in terms of output, value added, employment, capital formation, and such other parameters.
- It serves as an important **input for policymaking**, supporting compilation of **National Accounts Statistics**, and meets the information needs of various Ministries, enabling informed decision making.
- The **results are prepared at state and major industry level.**

### Coverage

- The Annual Survey of Industries broadly covers the following:
  - Factories registered under the **Factories Act,1948**;
  - Bidi and cigar manufacturing establishments registered under the **Bidi & Cigar Workers (Conditions of Employment) Act,1966**;
  - Electricity undertakings engaged in generation, transmission and distribution of electricity, **not registered with the Central Electricity Authority (CEA)**.
  - **Units with 100 or more employees** registered in the **Business Register of Establishments (BRE)** prepared and maintained by the State Governments.

**Key Findings**

- The **total number of establishments** in registered manufacturing increased from **2.60 lakhs in 2023-24 to 2.67 lakhs** in 2024-25, representing a **growth of 2.64%.**
- The **highest number of establishments** were reported in **Tamil Nadu (41,221), followed by Gujarat (33,084) and Maharashtra (27,379).**
- During the same period, **Gross Value Added (GVA)** increased from Rs 2458.3 thousand crore to **Rs 2694.2 thousand crore,** indicating sustained **growth (9.59%) in industrial value addition.**
- **Maharashtra recorded the highest GVA** in 2024-25, followed by **Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh.** Collectively, these **five States accounted for more than 54% of the total manufacturing GVA** of the country.
  - These five States accounted for **53.3% of total establishments** at all India level.

**Employment**

- The estimated number of persons engaged in registered manufacturing saw a significant increase from 1.96 crore in ASI 2023-24 to **2.10 crore** in 2024-25 with a growth of 7.19%.
- Total emoluments paid to the workforce also increased by 12.08 % in 2024-25 as compared to 2023-24.
- **Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana** were the five leading States in terms of the number of **persons engaged in the manufacturing sector** in 2024-25.
- Together, these States accounted for **~56% of total manufacturing employment during the year.**

## Integrated Transport & Logistics Authority

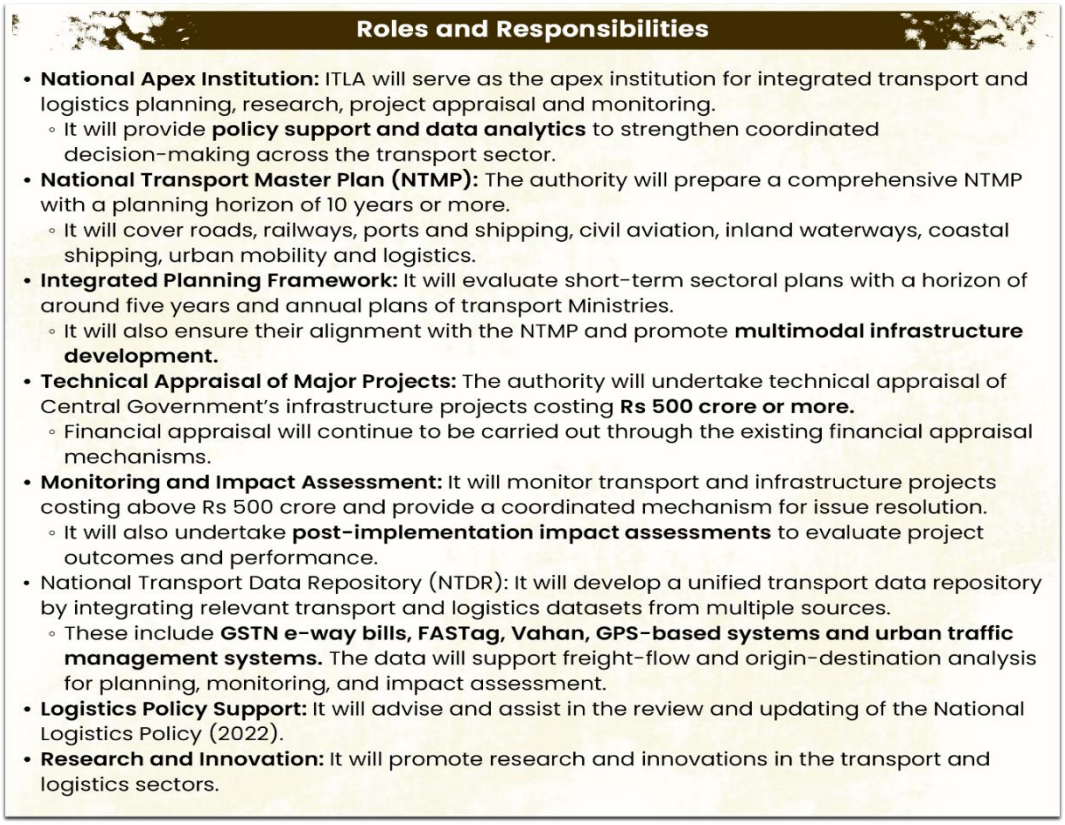
- The Union Cabinet has approved the setting up of Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV), namely **Integrated Transport & Logistics Authority (ITLA)**.
- With the expansion of the transport and logistics networks, ITLA will serve as a specialised institutional mechanism for **research, planning, project appraisal, monitoring and impact assessment across transportation and logistics**.
- It will complement existing initiatives such as the **PM GatiShakti National Master Plan** and the **National Logistics Policy**.

### Key Benefits

- **Unified infrastructure planning:** ITLA will serve as a central institutional mechanism for research, planning, appraisal, monitoring and impact assessment in transport and logistics.

- This approach follows **global practice** in line with other countries such as Korea, Japan, US, China and Australia.

- **Inter-ministerial coordination** dealing with transport and logistics.
- **Integrated data repository** will support evidence-based planning, research and innovation.
- **Institutional capacity building** in research, planning, big data integration, project monitoring, and evaluation. It will also promote the adoption of international best practices.
- The authority will contribute to India's Vision 2047 and a more competitive logistics ecosystem.




**National SARAS Mela**

- The National Saras Mela was recently organized in **Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh**. It is the first time to be organised outside the Delhi-NCR region.
- The **decentralisation of the Mela** reflects a wider development approach: taking national platforms closer to producers and consumers across India.
- Around 1,500 women Self Help Group (SHG) entrepreneurs and Lakhpati Didis from **34 States and UTs** participated in the event. The Mela features **regional textiles, handicrafts, natural and processed foods**, and other rural products.
- It is organised by the government under the **Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM)**.
- The platform strengthens DAY-NRLM's efforts to promote sustainable livelihoods and supports the Lakhpati Didi vision of income growth.
- A 16-foot installation titled "**SHAKTI - The Spirit of Lakhpati Didi**" forms a signature feature of this Mela.
- It symbolises the collective strength of women who preserve traditional craftsmanship and turn their skills into livelihoods, independence and prosperity.
- It is supported by government partners, including the **National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development** (NABARD) and the **National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj** (NIRDPR).
- The first National SARAS Mela was organised in **1999** in Delhi. Since then, the platform has expanded to national, regional, state and district levels. States and Union Territories also organise a minimum of two State-level SARAS Melas a year.

## World Bank's First Digital Strategy

The World Bank Group has launched its first digital strategy, to help developing countries expand affordable digital access, improve services, and create jobs.

### Four Areas of Action

- **Reliable Connectivity**: The World Bank Group will help countries address gaps across the network, from international cables and national connections to the networks serving homes, businesses, schools, and clinics.
    - It will support shared infrastructure, encourage competition, and use public finance and guarantees to help attract private investment into underserved markets.
    - Where electricity and connectivity are both missing, the strategy supports planning them together.
- **Affordability**: The strategy supports efforts to lower the cost of entry-level smartphones and broadband services that increase the cost of staying connected.
    - Partnerships with manufacturers, mobile operators, financial institutions, and refurbishment businesses can help lower prices and expand responsible options for paying over time.
- **Digital Services and Skills**: It will support reliable systems for digital identification, payments, and secure information sharing that make public and private services easier to access.
    - It will also help countries strengthen digital literacy and training linked to employment, enabling more people and small businesses to use technology safely and productively.
- **AI readiness**: It will help countries strengthen connectivity, access computing resources, develop usable local data, and build skills.
    - It emphasizes practical applications of small AI—tools adapted to specific tasks and local conditions, such as helping farmers identify crop disease, supporting health workers, or helping businesses manage inventory.

**Context**

- The launch comes in the backdrop of **twin challenges** faced by developing countries: **limited resources and a growing need for jobs.**
- Over the next 10 to 15 years, **1.2 billion** young people **will reach working age in developing countries,** while their economies are projected to **create only 420 million jobs.**
- Over **2 billion people were offline** globally in 2025. Only **23% of people in low-income countries** used the internet, **compared with 94% in high-income countries.**
- Many people live within network coverage but cannot afford a smartphone or data, lack digital skills, or have limited access to services relevant to their needs.
- Digital technology can support job creation across the **World Bank Group's five priority sectors:** infrastructure and energy, agribusiness, health care, tourism, and value-added manufacturing.
- The strategy brings together the World Bank Group's financing, policy advice, private investment, and guarantees around country priorities.
- It also provides a basis for working with governments, technology companies, development partners, and philanthropy to extend digital opportunities to more people and businesses.

### AI Infrastructure and Readiness Initiative

- Alongside the strategy, the World Bank Group announced the AI Infrastructure and Readiness Initiative.
- It will help emerging-market governments **access affordable computing capacity** and put small AI to productive use through shared, pay-as-you-go GPU infrastructure (specialized computing power used to develop and run AI applications).
- The initiative will have an initial focus on Africa and Latin America, with knowledge partners including Cassava Technologies and NVIDIA.

### Challenges

- Implementation will depend on sustained investment in infrastructure, affordable electricity, competition in telecom markets, and effective digital-skills programmes. Connectivity alone will not eliminate the digital divide if people cannot afford devices or lack useful services and the skills to use them.

- AI adoption also raises concerns about data privacy, cybersecurity, unequal access to computing resources and the ability of local institutions to deploy technology responsibly. These challenges make local capacity-building and appropriate safeguards essential.

## Organic Palmyra Jaggery Powder

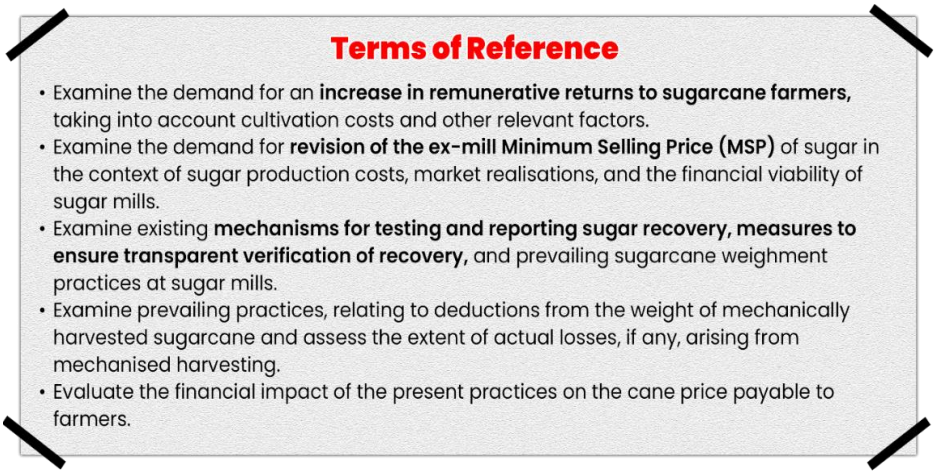
- India has exported its first consignment of organic Palmyra Jaggery Powder to Bulgaria, marking a step towards expanding international markets for the country's traditional agricultural products.
- The Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, facilitated the export.
- The product is certified under India's National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP) and European Union organic standards.
- The initiative aims to strengthen market linkages for Tamil Nadu's traditional Palmyra-based products and create new opportunities for producers engaged in organic cultivation.
- The initiative covers 137 acres under organic cultivation and is expected to benefit farmers through improved market access and export-oriented value chains.

### Palmyra

- Palmyra Jaggery Powder is derived from the nectar of Palmyra palm blossoms.
- **Pathaneer (palm nectar)** is the sap extracted from the flower clusters of the Palmyra trees. The sap makes for a refreshing drink and can also be processed to make **panakarkandu (palm candy)** and **karupatti (palm jaggery)**.
- If left to ferment, the sap can also produce **alcoholic beverages**, so collection and processing methods affect the final product.
- Palmyra is the **State tree of Tamil Nadu**.

## Ramesh Chand Committee

- The Central Government has constituted a committee under the **chairmanship of Prof. Ramesh Chand,** to examine issues raised by sugarcane farmers and recommend appropriate measures.




- Prof. Ramesh Chand has served as a Member of NITI Aayog; as Director of Indian Council of Agricultural Research- National Institute of Agricultural Economics and Policy Research (ICAR-NIAP); and Member of the Fifteenth Finance Commission.
- The Committee will consult all stakeholders, including farmers' representatives, sugar mill associations, State Governments and other experts or organisations.

## Improved Soybean Varieties

- The ICAR–National Soybean Research Institute, Indore, under the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), organised a Soybean Harvest Day on 9 October 2026.
- The primary objective was to assess the yield potential of improved varieties and establish a scientific basis for enhancing productivity through the systematic collection of yield data.
- On the occasion, the yield potential of the improved soybean Varieties **NRC 268 and NRC 270**, developed by the institute, was assessed.
- Preliminary data indicates encouraging yields of approximately **20 quintals per hectare**, despite adverse weather conditions this year. Under favourable conditions, yields may potentially reach approximately 22–25 quintals per hectare.
- **At present**, the average soybean productivity in India is approximately **10–11 quintals per hectare**.
- Systematic collection and analysis of data over several years will help understand changes in productivity across different regions, varieties and production conditions
- Thus, the initiative will help strengthen coordination among soybean research, agricultural extension services, and the dissemination of scientific knowledge to farmers.

### Soybean Production

- Soybean (Glycine max) is a **legume native to East Asia.** It is a **kharif crop** cultivated mainly under **rain-fed conditions** and contributes to edible-oil production, animal feed and the food-processing industry.
- Traditional unfermented food uses of soybeans include **edamame,** as well as **soy milk,** from which **tofu** is made.
- Fermented soy foods include soy sauce, fermented bean paste, nattō, and tempeh.
- Soybean cultivation is concentrated in central and western India, particularly **Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan.**
- **Brazil and the United States** lead the world in modern soy production.

## Growth in Investment Infrastructure Trusts

- India's infrastructure investment trusts (InvITs) are attracting more investors, creating a potential avenue to channel domestic savings into roads, power transmission networks and other income-generating infrastructure assets.
- The **number of investors** in listed InvITs rose to **Rs 6.53 lakh** in the first quarter of FY27, while **assets under management (AUM) increased to Rs 7.3 lakh crore**.
- Distributions to unit holders during the quarter stood at Rs 5,923 crore, taking **cumulative payouts** since the sector's inception beyond **Rs 97,000 crore**.
- The sector has expanded considerably since its early years. India had two InvITs in FY17, compared with 28 by FY26.

### Infrastructure Investment Trusts

- InvITs are investment instruments similar to mutual funds. Its objective is to **facilitate investment into the infrastructure sector in India**.
- InvITs collect investment from various categories of investors and invest them mainly into **completed and revenue-generating infrastructure projects**.
    - At least 80% of the value of a **public** InvIT to be invested in 'completed and revenue - generating' infrastructure projects. A maximum of 20% of the value of InvIT's assets can be allocated to other eligible investments, which include:
        - Under-construction infrastructure projects (capped at 10%).

- Listed or unlisted debt of infrastructure sector companies (excluding debt of the holding company/SPV).
- Equity of listed companies in India that generate at least 80% of their income from the infrastructure sector.
- Government securities (G-secs), money market instruments, liquid mutual funds, or cash equivalents

  - Privately placed InvITs can have any mix of under construction and completed infrastructure projects.

- It thus enables investment of money from **individual and institutional investors** in infrastructure projects to earn a small portion of the income as return.

### Structure of InvITs

- There are **four important parties** to an InvIT — sponsors, investment managers, project managers and the trustee.
- **Sponsors** are promoters of the company that set up the InvIT. In case of public–private partnership (PPP) projects, it refers to the infrastructure developer or a special purpose vehicle developing the project.
- The **investment manager** is given the task of supervising the assets and investments of the InvIT and the **project manager** is responsible for the execution of the project.
- The **trustee** (certified by SEBI) has the responsibility to ensure that the functions of the InvIT, investment manager and project manager comply with SEBI rules.

### Benefits of InvITs

- A retail investor or even large financial investors may not be able to invest in infrastructure projects such as roads, power, energy etc. InvITs enable these investors to buy a small portion of the units being sold by the fund.
- Since such trusts mostly include completed and operational projects with positive cash flow, the risks of investments are low.
- The model also helps developers monetise completed, revenue-generating assets, freeing up capital for new projects.

### Funding India's Infrastructure Growth

- The growth comes as India faces rising financing requirements for infrastructure expansion.
- While government spending and foreign investment remain important, household savings and investments held by mutual funds, insurers and pension funds could provide a larger pool of long-term capital.
- InvITs offer a route to connect these savings with operational infrastructure assets.
- According to experts, there is an incremental asset opportunity of ~Rs 21.8 lakh crore between FY26 and FY30.
- Mobilising even a modest additional share of domestic institutional savings could help fund this expansion.

- Investors buy units in trusts that own such assets and receive distributions from the income generated, **without directly financing or managing the underlying infrastructure**.
- InvITs are **regulated by SEBI**. SEBI had notified the SEBI (Infrastructure Investment Trusts) Regulations, 2014 for registration and regulation of InvITs in India.

## Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) Growth Fund

- The Union Cabinet has approved a government commitment of **Rs 10,000 crore** towards establishing the **SME** Growth Fund (SGF).
- The fund aims to mobilise growth-oriented capital for SMEs across manufacturing, services, technology, innovation-driven sectors and strategic value chains.
- It forms part of a broader package of Budget 2026-27 measures providing equity, liquidity and professional support to the MSME ecosystem.

### Details of the Fund

- The fund will provide **patient equity** capital to high-potential businesses with demonstrated viability and scalability.

- It is intended to support enterprises at critical stages as they scale capacity & operations, innovate, adopt advanced technologies, undertake acquisitions and expand internationally.
- The fund is designed as a **direct equity investment fund** and will operate in the form of **Alternative Investment Fund (AIF)**.
    - An AIF is a **privately pooled fund** established in India that raises money from investors and invests it according to a defined policy.

**Need for a Dedicated Growth Fund**
- While measures to improve access to credit have supported the sector, the availability of long-term capital remains a constraint for businesses seeking to grow.
- Despite the wide presence of MSMEs across the economy, existing equity funds largely focus on early-stage enterprises and cover majorly micro enterprises.
- Thus, a structural gap exists for equity growth capital for small and medium enterprises.

**India's MSME Ecosystem**
- According to the Economic Survey 2025-26, MSMEs account for **31.1% of GDP, 35.4% of manufacturing output and 48.58% of exports.**
- As of September 2026, **total registered MSMEs are 9.78 crore,** with 43.28 crore employment opportunities.
- **Female-owned** enterprises account for **37.6%** of total registrations.
- Trading accounts for around 4.08 crore registrations, followed by services at 3.77 crore and manufacturing at 1.93 crore.

**Classification of SMEs**
- Enterprises are classified as micro, small or medium based on investment in plant and machinery or equipment, and annual turnover.
- Under the latest criteria (effective from April 2025), a **small enterprise** has investment of up to Rs **25 crore** and turnover of up to **Rs 100 crore.**
- A **medium enterprise** has investment of up to **Rs 125 crore** and turnover of up to **Rs 500 crore.**

- The **majority of the fund's allocation** will go towards ***manufacturing-focused*** SMEs.
- It will also consider **businesses operating in industrial clusters in Tier-II and Tier-III cities.**

**Impact**

- The fund will complement existing reforms, digitalisation initiatives, credit support, ease of doing business measures, public procurement reforms, startup promotion and production-linked incentive programmes.
- Investments in industrial clusters, including those in smaller cities, are expected to support **balanced regional industrial development**, **strengthen local supply chains** and generate high-quality employment.
- It is expected to support enterprises operating in **sectors of national importance**.
- By catalysing investments, the Fund will **promote innovation-led industrialisation**

**Bharat Rice**

- The Indian Army has launched Bharat Rice, a new initiative to improve the quality of rice supplied to defence personnel.
- The initiative is spearheaded by the **Directorate General of Supplies and Transport**.
- The rice will be milled to prescribed defence specifications and supplied through National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing

**Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)**
- An MoU has also been signed between the Indian Army and Food Corporation of India (FCI) for utilisation of its infrastructure during operational contingencies.
- The MoU draws upon operational lessons, including those from Operation Sindoor, which highlighted the requirement for resilient logistics arrangements during contingencies that may arise at short notice and extend over prolonged periods.
- It provides the Indian Army a formal framework to utilise identified FCI warehousing infrastructure, labour resources and material-handling equipment during operational contingencies.
- It will strengthen supply chains, enable additional storage, rapid mobilisation, dispersion and forward positioning of rations, stores and equipment closer to operational areas, thereby strengthening the responsiveness and resilience of military logistics.
- The initiative reflects a **whole-of-government approach** aligned with the vision of **PM Gati Shakti.**

Federation of India Limited **(NAFED)** during financial year 2026-27.

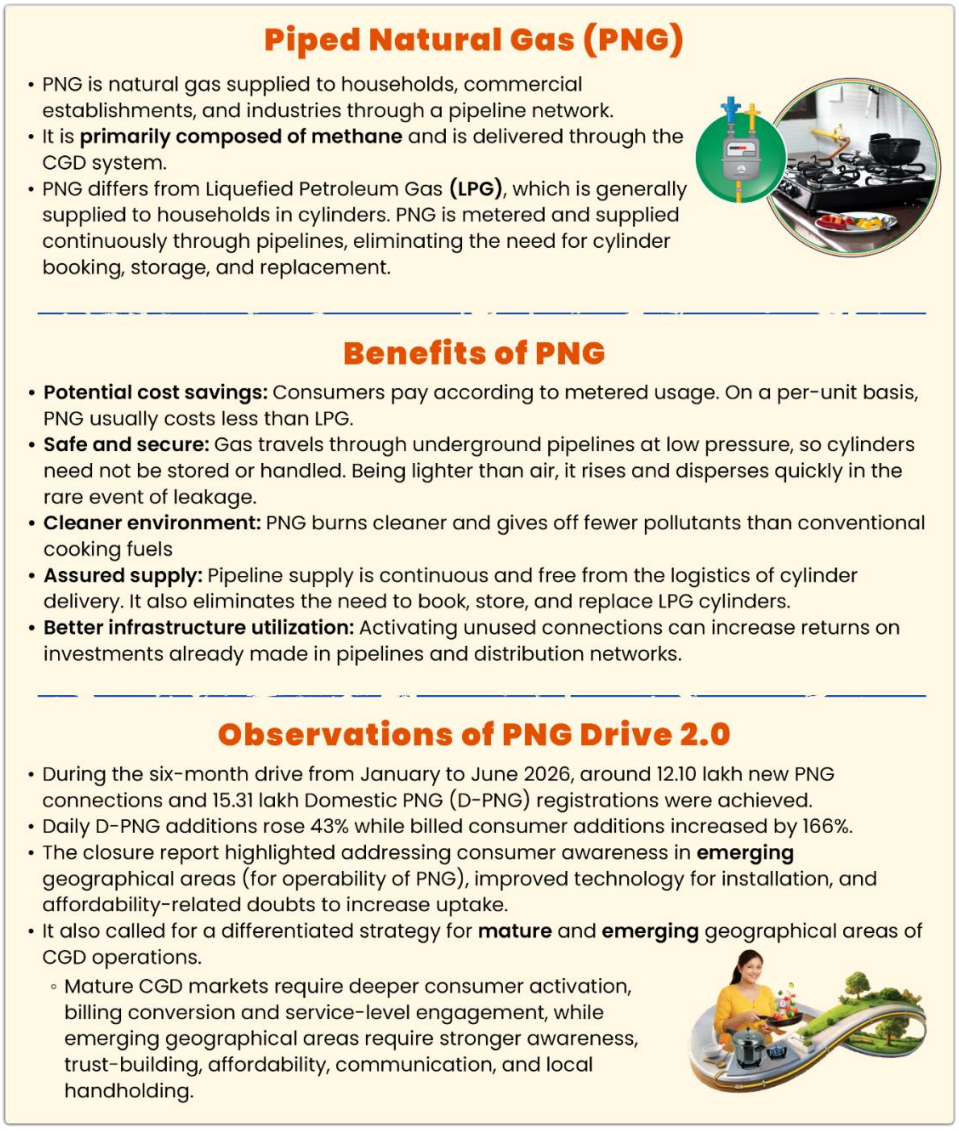
- It will undergo requisite quality-control checks and will be free from foreign matter and impurities, with minimal broken, damaged and discoloured grains.
- Bharat Rice will be **supplied directly to Army supply depots**, including those in remote areas of Ladakh and the Northeast, instead of requiring the depots to collect supplies from local FCI facilities.

## PNG Drive 3.0

- The Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) has launched the National PNG Drive 3.0.
- The drive will be organised from October 1 to March 31, 2027, in collaboration with the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, City Gas Distribution (CGD) entities, public sector oil marketing companies, and other stakeholders.

### Details of Drive 3.0

- The objective is to accelerate the adoption of PNG, facilitate transition from LPG to PNG, and further ensure the existing infrastructure for PNG is effectively utilized to attain these objectives.
- The drive targets **50 lakh new domestic PNG connections**, **40 lakh conversions to active users,** and another **50 lakh domestic PNG registrations**.
- As of June 2026 India has ~1.74 crore PNG consumers of which ~1.15 crore are billed consumers. With **~6.9 lakh inch-kms of pipeline already laid**, there is **potential for another 1.30 crore connections**.
- Focus will be on activating dormant connections, maximizing existing CGD networks, expanding PNG in semi-urban and rural areas, and connecting new consumers.
- It would also look to expand infrastructure in residential complexes and government colonies on a priority basis.




### Other Initiatives for PNG Expansion

- To expand PNG coverage further, the **Incentive Scheme for Promotion of Domestic PNG Connections** was launched recently.

- It provides eligible CGD entities with an **additional allocation of 200 Standard Cubic Metres (SCM) of domestically produced, lower-priced Administered Price Mechanism (APM) gas** for each incremental billed domestic PNG connection beyond the prescribed threshold.

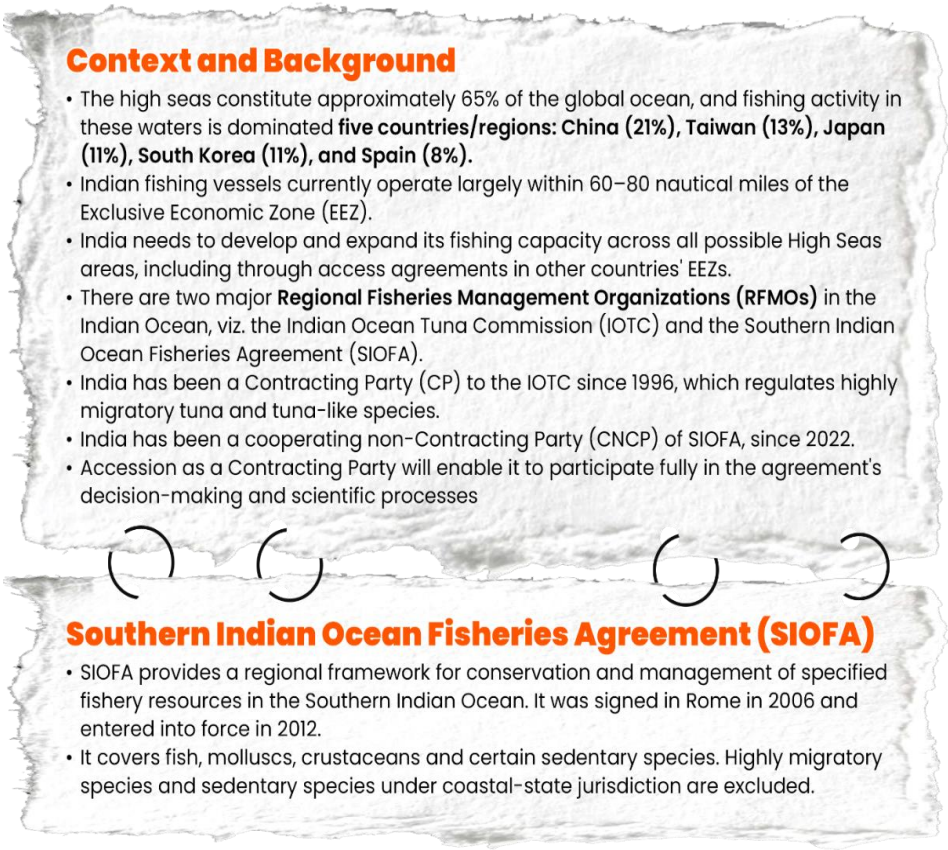
- An **Accelerated Approval Framework** has been issued under the **Natural Gas and Petroleum Products Distribution (Through Laying, Building, Operation and Expansion of Pipelines and Other Facilities) Order, 2026**.
  - The Order introduces **uniform charges for pipeline Right-of-Way (RoW)**, which cover permission to use land or public areas for laying PNG pipelines. Applications will be processed on priority and within defined timelines.
- States are being encouraged to **lower VAT** on natural gas to 5%. Several States have already done so, making piped gas cheaper for consumers.
- **MyPNG Portal**: A unified, national digital consumer portal has been launched to streamline PNG services, improve access to information, and strengthen interactions between consumers and CGD entities

## India Approves Accession to SIOFA

- The Central Government has approved India's accession to the **Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement (SIOFA)**
  - SIOFA headquarters is located in Le Port, Reunion Island
- The move aims to expand India's participation in high-seas fisheries, enable access to high-value marine resources and strengthen its role in international fisheries governance.

### Benefits from accession

- With India's accession to SIOFA, Indian-flagged fishing vessels and enterprises will be able to undertake authorised fishing of squids, toothfish, alfonsino, and other **non-migratory fish stocks** within SIOFA's jurisdiction.
- Currently, India, as a CNCP has limited participation in decision-making, including in key bodies such as the Scientific Committee and the Compliance Committee.
- Accession as a CP would enable India to participate fully in these bodies and provide access to scientific data, research programmes, and stock assessments.
- Better information about fish populations, breeding patterns and marine ecosystem health can help India formulate evidence-based fisheries policies and reduce the risk of overexploitation



- It will enable India to collaborate with other Cooperating Parties to advance the objectives of the Agreement.
- This includes **scientific understanding** and **sustainable harvest** of High Seas resources, participation in the scientific assessments of the resources, and **prevention of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing**.
- It will also advance India's strategic regional priorities and **strengthen national coastal security** through active involvement in the **High Seas Boarding and Inspection (HSBI) Scheme**.
- India's active contribution to sustainable fishing practices in the SIOFA region will also play a key role in preserving marine resources, ensuring their long-term viability and supporting the livelihoods of Indian fishing communities.

## Agri Welfare Portal

- The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare has launched the upgraded Agri Welfare Portal.
- It is developed in accordance with the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology's Digital Brand Identity Manual 3.0 and Guidelines for Indian Government Websites 3.0.

### Key Features

- It provides farmers with single-window access to government schemes, financial assistance and reliable agricultural information through a mobile-friendly digital platform.
- The portal aims to simplify access to services, **reduce procedural hurdles and intermediaries**, and bring key agricultural initiatives under one roof.
- It will also connect Farmer Producer Organisations, Primary Agricultural Credit Societies, agricultural scientists, researchers and startups on a common digital platform.
- A special training campaign will be conducted through Krishi Vigyan Kendras across the country to help farmers use the portal and other digital tools effectively.
- It supports screen readers and simple navigation, enabling visually impaired users and other persons with disabilities to access its services more easily.

**Benefits**

- Information on the Ministry's schemes, subsidies, rules and digital services will be available on a single portal, reducing the time and effort farmers spend navigating multiple government offices and platforms.
- Online eligibility checks, direct application facilities, and the transfer of financial assistance through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) will make processes **more transparent and reduce the role of intermediaries.**
- Designed for **rural connectivity,** the portal is lightweight and user-friendly, enabling smooth operation on basic smartphones and in areas with weak internet connectivity.
- Farmers will be able to access **authentic information** on weather conditions, scientific farming practices, the availability of seeds and fertilisers, and prevailing market prices for agricultural produce.

## International Committee of Legal Metrology Meeting

- India hosted the 61st Meeting of the International Committee of Legal Metrology (CIML) in New Delhi, marking the first time the country is hosting this prestigious international meeting.
- The meeting brings together delegates and technical experts from across the world to advance cooperation in measurement standards, consumer protection and fair trade.
- It was organised by the **Department of Consumer Affairs**, in association with the **International Organization of Legal Metrology (OIML).**

## India's Legal Metrology Reforms

- The Secretary, DoCA, highlighted the **Jan Vishwas reforms of 2023 and 2026**.
- These reforms introduced measures like decriminalisation of specified offences, improvement notices and graded penalties, promoting a more proportionate and business-friendly regulatory framework while retaining essential consumer safeguards.
- **Government Approved Test Centres (GATCs)** have been expanded to augment verification capacity and the development of the **e-Maap National Portal** to provide integrated digital services in legal metrology.
- India has been recognised as an **OIML-Certification System Issuing Authority**, an important step towards facilitating international acceptance of test results and supporting Indian manufacturers in accessing global markets.

## One Nation, One Time Initiative

- The Secretary further highlighted the **National Time Dissemination Project**, One Nation, One Time, which aims to provide accurate, reliable and traceable Indian Standard Time across the country.
- The initiative is expected to **strengthen time synchronisation in critical sectors**, including banking, telecommunications, 5G networks, navigation, digital infrastructure and power systems.

### Legal Metrology

- Metrology is the **science of measurement.** Legal metrology is the application of legal requirements to measurements and measuring instruments.
- The objective of legal metrology is to **ensure public guarantee** from the point of view of security and accuracy of the weights and measurements.

### International Organization of Legal Metrology (OIML)

- The **OIML** is an intergovernmental organisation that was **created in 1955** to promote the global harmonisation of the legal metrology procedures that facilitate international trade.
- Such harmonisation ensures that certification of measuring devices in one country is compatible with certification in another, thereby facilitating trade in the measuring devices and in products that rely on the measuring devices.
- It develops international recommendations, standards and related documents for measuring instruments used in trade, industry, healthcare, safety and environmental protection.
- The International Committee of Legal Metrology (CIML) is the **principal decision-making body** responsible for guiding the technical and administrative activities of the OIML.

## Farmers' ID

- The Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare has reached its target of creating 11 crore Farmer IDs, five months ahead of the scheduled deadline in March 2027.
- The Farmer ID is an Aadhaar-like **unique digital identity** that is **linked dynamically to the State's land records**, and has information like demographic, crop sown, ownership details, etc.
- The database created through the Farmer IDs is known as **Farmers' Registry**.
- It serves as one of the three core registries under the **Agri-Stack** component of the **Digital Agriculture Mission** –

### Benefits

- Earlier, farmers often had to provide documents repeatedly to access various benefits, resulting in a loss of both time and money.
- The ID system would significantly reduce the need for farmers to repeatedly visit government offices and banks or submit the same documents for different schemes.
- It is expected to enable transparent, efficient, and timely access for farmers to several key services.
- The **loan process** through banks or Kisan Credit Cards will become easier, reducing the need for repeated document verification.
- In the event of **crop losses,** the assessment of **compensation and its disbursement** will be carried out through a more transparent process, with payments made directly into farmers' bank accounts.
- **Disaster relief assistance** during emergencies will reach genuine and eligible farmers more quickly.
- The digital system will help **eliminate the role of intermediaries in crop procurement** at Minimum Support Price (MSP) and ensure that farmers receive the full value due for their produce.

a digital public infrastructure initiative for the farm sector.

- The other two registries under the Agri-Stack are **Geo-referenced Village Maps** and **Crop Sown Registry**.

## National Household Travel Survey

- The National Statistics Office (NSO) of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation has conducted the **first-ever National Household Travel Survey.**
- The survey covered 14,274 villages and 10,377 urban blocks and collected information from around 4,92,000 households, covering over 20,34,300 people.
- The **primary objective** of the survey is to generate data-driven insights into domestic travel patterns and dynamics to support regional transport planning, infrastructure development and evidence-based policy formulation.
- The findings will also help to identify gaps in existing transport systems, assess accessibility, optimise transport routes and improve service frequency and scheduling.

### Key Findings

- 57.6% of workers aged 15 years and above undertook work-related trips exceeding one kilometre. 61.9% of male workers undertook such daily work trips, compared with 41.9% of female workers.
- **Public transport** is a relatively small part of the national commuting picture, as only **9%** of Indians primarily use public transport to go to work.
- **Two-wheelers** are the **predominant mode of transport** for commuting to fixed workplaces, accounting for **42.6%** of workers. A mere 3% use cars.
- Among **urban women, buses** play a particularly important role, with **21.7% relying on them** for their commute. For urban males, this figure is just 6.9%.
  - This data point justifies the decision made by several states to offer free bus travel for women.
- Monorail, metro, suburban rail, and trams account for 5% of urban worker commutes.
  - Its share was much higher in Maharashtra (20.7%), West Bengal (16.5%) and Delhi (14.4%), reflecting the importance of rail-based systems in regions with established networks.
- Around 66.4% of **students** aged six years and above travelled more than 1 kilometre to reach their educational institutions.
- **Walking was the leading mode** nationally, accounting for 37% of student commutes, followed by buses at 29.5% and bicycles at 15.8%.
  - This underlines the importance of safe walking routes, footpaths, cycling infrastructure, school transport, and reliable bus services.
- Morning travel is concentrated within a relatively short time window. About 82% of students departed between 7 a.m. and 10 a.m. Among workers travelling to fixed workplaces, 94.9% departed before 10 a.m.
  - These patterns can be used for bus scheduling, traffic management, staggered work hours and the planning of transport capacity during peak periods.
- The average monthly expenditure on commuting to a fixed workplace is Rs 785 per worker. Urban workers incur a higher average monthly cost of Rs 1,044, compared with Rs 612 for rural workers.

- The survey captures key aspects of domestic travel, including:
  - **Purpose of travel** covering employment, education, social engagements, cultural and leisure activities, tourism, domestic work, caregiving and other purposes.
  - **Modes of transport** used by different demographic groups for undertaking trips.
  - **Average time taken and distances** travelled during trips.

## RBI's Data Centre and Cybersecurity Training Institute

- The Prime Minister inaugurated the Reserve Bank of India's Rs 169-crore data centre and Cybersecurity Training Institute in Bhubaneswar, Odisha.
- Bhubaneswar was selected for its geographical separation from the RBI's three existing data centres in Maharashtra.

- It was also selected for its **geographical stability**, as it is at a distance from seismically active zones and high-risk international border areas.
- This is expected to reduce the facility's exposure to natural disasters and geopolitical vulnerabilities.

**Data Centre**

- The data centre is designed to **host mission-critical payment and settlement systems**, along with other flagship initiatives of the RBI.
- It will support the RBI's payment systems, such as the **National Electronic Funds Transfer (NEFT) and Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS)**, which operate continuously.
- While the **Unified Payments Interface (UPI)** is managed by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), its final settlements occur through the RBI's data centres.
- Other vital applications, including the **e-Kuber platform** used by the Centre, state governments, and banks, will also run on this infrastructure.
- It will support the reach, efficiency, and reliability of digital financial services by providing secure computing infrastructure.

**Cybersecurity Training Institute**

- It will provide a dedicated platform for cybersecurity and enterprise-technology training, research and capability development across the financial sector.
- The initiative comes as financial services increasingly depend on digital systems for payments, settlements and other operations, making the security and resilience of technology infrastructure an important consideration.
- Its curriculum covers emerging technologies and cybersecurity, including AI, big data analytics, quantum technology, and blockchain.

## UDAN completes 10 years

- The **Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS),** also known as **UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik)** has completed 10 years.
- Connecting remote, unserved & underserved areas remains important for ensuring wider access to air travel.
- Recognising this need, the National Civil Aviation Policy 2016 prioritised affordable **regional connectivity through financial support and infrastructure development.**
- In line with this objective, RCS-UDAN was launched in 2016.

**Transitioning to Next Phase of UDAN**

- Building on the achievements under it, the next phase of the scheme has been **launched in 2026**. The scheme will be implemented in **ten years**, from **FY 2026-27 to**



**FY 2035-36,** with a total outlay of **Rs 28,840 crore**. The scheme now places greater emphasis on **Centre-State/UTs partnerships**.

- The focus is now on building an ecosystem towards facilitating Made in India Civil aircraft.
- The Modified UDAN Scheme introduces targeted measures to support sustainable growth and long-term viability of regional aviation.
- **Development of Aerodromes (Challenge Mode framework):** 100 airports will be developed from existing unserved airstrips, with an outlay of Rs 12,159 crore over eight years. This amounts to a proposed allocation of Rs 100 crore per airport.
- **Operation and Maintenance (O&M) of Aerodromes:** Three years of O&M support will be provided for approximately 441 aerodromes, with an estimated outlay of Rs 2,577 crore. The financial support is capped at Rs 3.06 crore per airport per year and Rs 0.90 crore per heliport or water aerodrome per year.
- **Development of Modern Helipads:** 200 modern helipads to be developed at an estimated cost of Rs 15 crore each. The total projected outlay is Rs 3,661 crore over eight years.
- **VGF for Airlines:** Rs 10,043 crore allocated over ten years to support airlines operating regional routes. Funding is available for up to five years, with tapered support from the third year and route exclusivity limited to three years.
- **Indigenous Aviation Capacity:** An allocation of **Rs 400 crore** is proposed for two Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) Dhruv helicopters for Pawan Hans and two HAL Dornier aircraft for Alliance Air.

These measures seek to address the infrastructure and viability challenges of regional air travel and aim to create a stronger foundation for connectivity across India.

## Global Initiative on AI for Agri-Food Systems

- The UN Global Initiative on AI for Agri-Food Systems (GI-AI4FS) recently held a meeting alongside the India Mobile Congress 2026 in New Delhi.
- The meeting was jointly hosted by the Telecommunication Engineering Centre (TEC), under the Department of Telecommunications, and the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).
- Participants examined how AI, connected devices, and digital connectivity could improve agricultural practices and strengthen food systems.
- Connected sensors, weather stations, drones, satellite-based systems and AI-enabled analytics can support precision agriculture, improve resource utilisation, detect crop diseases early and help farmers make informed decisions.
- It also highlighted opportunities to improve traceability, reduce post-harvest losses and enhance efficiency across agricultural supply chains.

### GI-AI4FS

- GI-AI4FS is a UN Global Initiative, coordinated by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in close collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the World Food Programme.
- It seeks to integrate digital technologies across the food value chain; promote knowledge sharing; develop collaborative partnerships; and strengthen interoperability and standards.

## Green Energy Corridor Phase-III

- The Union Cabinet has approved the Green Energy Corridor Phase-III (GEC-III) scheme.

- The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) is implementing the GEC in phases to augment transmission lines and transformation capacity through intra-state transmission (InSTS) and inter-state transmission (ISTS) networks.
- The GEC Phase-III scheme is exclusively aimed to **strengthen India's Intra-State Transmission System** to **enable evacuation of up to 135 Gigawatts (GW) of renewable energy** across states/UTs.

**Challenges in the Renewable Energy Sector**

- **Transmission bottlenecks** are one of the biggest challenges faced by the renewable energy sector.
- Renewable energy generation capacity is growing rapidly, but the transmission network has not expanded at the same pace, resulting in **electricity evacuation constraints**.
- Curtailment leads to a substantial loss of clean electricity at a time when India plans to expands renewable energy capacity to meet its clean energy targets of 500 GW by 2030 from the present 308 GW.
    - ***Curtailment****: Grid operators have to ask renewable energy plants to reduce generation to maintain system stability.*
- During April-June, when the peak power demand touched a record high of 270 GW, the grid operators had to curtail 8,133 GWh of electricity generated by solar power sources due to transmission bottlenecks and to maintain grid security.
- Around 21 GW is transferred from plants through **temporary grid connections** while awaiting dedicated transmission infrastructure.
    - Of this, around 12 GW faces restrictions on evacuation of electricity during periods of peak solar generation, exposing developers to **revenue losses** and raising **concerns over the financial viability** of several projects.

**Key Points of GEC-III**

- The scheme is aimed at facilitating **better integration of renewable energy into the power grid** and **improving power evacuation** within States and UTs.
- It is targeted for completion by **FY 2032-33** and has a total project outlay of **Rs 1,86,405 crore.**
    - Of this, **Rs 1,36,378 crore** has been allocated for **development of Intra-State Transmission Systems** under GEC-III, while **Rs 50,000 crore** will be allocated for deployment of **50 GWh of Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS).**
- The scheme includes **Central Financial Support (CFA) of Rs 54,082 crore.** The CFA will help **offset intra-state transmission charges** and help to keep power costs down for end users.
- BESS will be deployed at renewable energy developer or generator locations, or at other locations considered important for grid flexibility.
- The storage systems will help address challenges related to renewable energy intermittency, transmission congestion and peak-hour curtailment, while supporting electricity demand during non-solar hours.
- All greenfield projects under the InSTS component will be implemented through **Tariff Based Competitive Bidding (TBCB),** while brownfield upgradation and network strengthening works will be undertaken on a **Cost Plus Basis (CPB).**
- State Transmission Utilities will be the overall implementing agencies, while Transmission Service Providers will participate under the TBCB mechanism through a **Build-Own-Operate-Maintain (BOOM) model.**

**Impact**

- The scheme is expected to help in achieving the target of **900 GW installed Non-Fossil capacity by 2035**.
- It is also expected to contribute to **long-term energy security** and promote sustainable growth by reducing the carbon footprint.
- The manufacturing and deployment of BESS will further create employment opportunities in the domestic energy storage industry.
- It will also generate long-term skilled employment in areas including operation, maintenance and grid management across participating States

## Trade and Development Report 2026

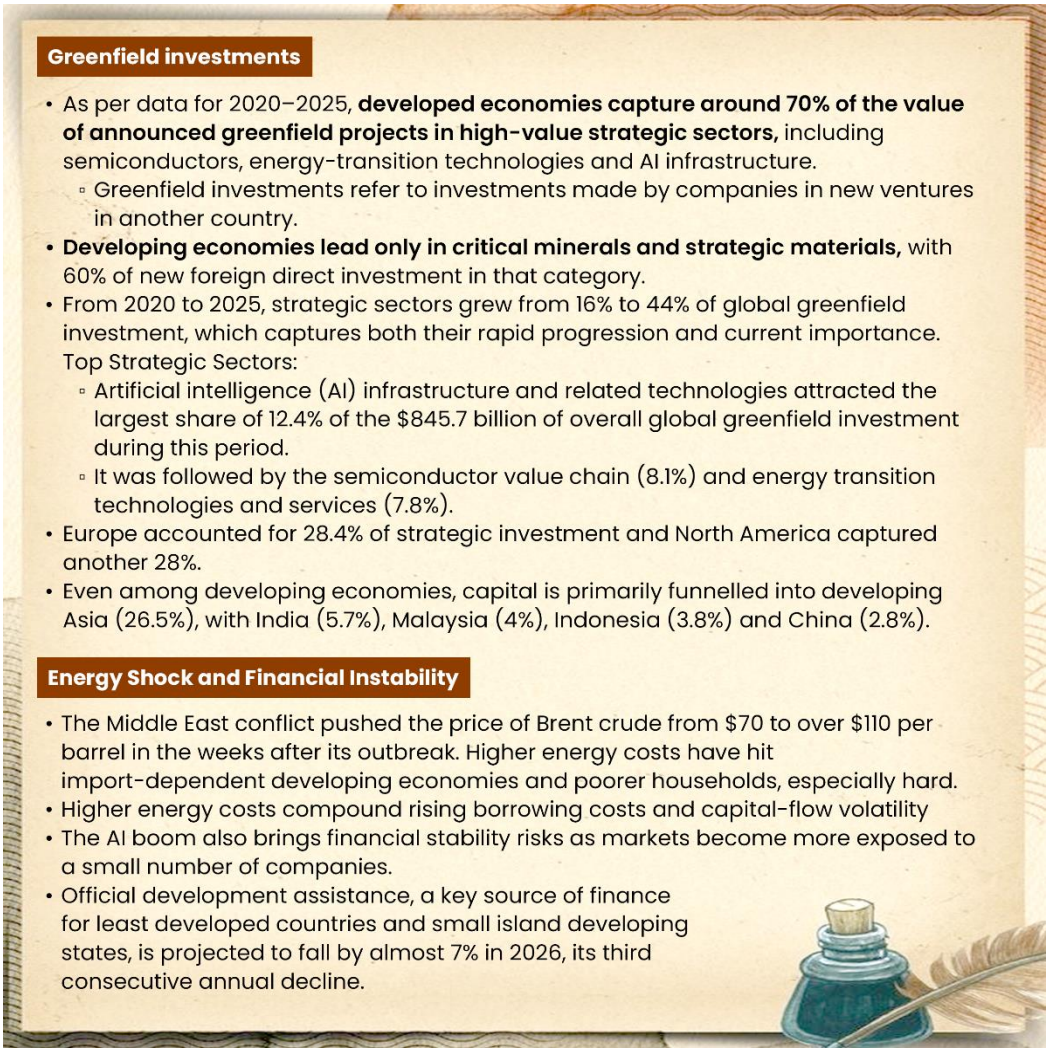
The UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) released the **Trade and Development Report 2026 - The Geoeconomics of development**.

### Key FIndings

- The report projects **global growth of 2.6**% for 2026, down from 2.9% last year, even as trade in goods and services is expected to expand by about 4% at constant prices driven by higher energy prices. Developing economies are projected to grow by 4% this year, down from 4.7% in 2025.
- Asia is projected to contribute 59% of global growth in 2026, with India expanding at 7.3%, China by 4.5% and Indonesia by 5.2%.
- **Global trade** reached a record **$35 trillion** in 2025. In 2026, higher trade values are being driven by price increases amid the energy shock.
- The global trade map is shifting: trade between China and the United States has fallen by more than 20% since 2024, while East Asia has expanded trade with both China and North America.
- Export controls, investment screening and supply-chain conditions make strategic sectors harder for new entrants to access.
- East Asia is central to the surge in semiconductors and advanced computing manufacturing. AI products are now the main driver of merchandise trade.

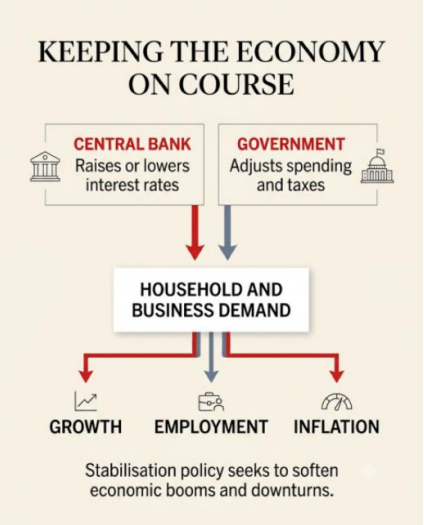
### Industrial Push

- India ranks high in terms of the number of industrial policies it has implemented over the last two decades. During 2008-21, India implemented **1,416** industrial policies, behind only China (4,201) and the U.S. (4,025).
- However, industrial policy implementation has since quickened globally as well as in India. In the much shorter period 2022-25, India implemented 707 industrial policy measures, about half the number it did in the 2008-21 period.
- Nevertheless, it fell in the rankings during this period, with the U.S., China, Australia,



and Brazil all implementing more industrial policies than India did.

## Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences




- The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences has awarded the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel 2026 — commonly called the Economics Nobel.
- This year, it has been awarded to two American economists: **Robert E Hall** of Stanford University and **Michael Woodford** of Columbia University.
- They have received the award for "**microeconomic foundations of macroeconomic stabilisation**".

### Stabilisation Policy

- Macroeconomic stabilisation refers to policies that governments and central banks use to stabilise economic fluctuations, ensuring steady economic growth and keeping unemployment to a minimum.
- In **fiscal policy**, the government intervenes by adjusting public spending or tax levels to influence aggregate demand, which is the total amount of spending on finished goods and services in an economy at a given price level and time over a given period.
- **Monetary policy** measures, by contrast, involve interventions by the central bank, such as adjusting the interest rate, reserve requirements, and conducting open market operations.
- In either route, the **aim is to reduce fluctuations in unemployment and economic growth** so that the economy does not enter or remain in a situation with very high unemployment or uncontrolled inflation.
- The **concept of stabilisation** was developed by economist **John Maynard Keynes** during the **Great Depression (1929-39)**.

**Hall and Woodford's Contribution**

- Through their work from the late 1970s onward, Hall and Woodford revitalised the Keynesian approach through their research.
- Keynes had assumed a linear or straight relationship between variables such as inflation and unemployment, and consumption and production.
- **Hall focussed on the demand side of the economy:** questions such as, how do people decide how much they would consume, and when and how do they choose to raise or cut consumption.
- A better understanding of these, based on household data, has informed policy choices.
- **Woodford's work focussed on the supply side:** how firms behaved and took decisions such as changing prices.
- The assumption is that markets find the ideal price based on supply and demand, but businesses don't change prices everyday.
- He found that businesses look to the future when fixing prices. This means that expectations about future interest rates are important for inflation.
- In turn, this had a tremendous policy implication: Central banks must clearly convey what they intend to do, which is important for firms when they fix prices.

**Significance**

- Hall and Woodford's work has helped transform how central banks understand and manage economic fluctuations.
- By accounting for how households and businesses form expectations and respond to policy decisions, their research has helped policymakers better anticipate the effects of interest-rate changes, communicate policy intentions and stabilise economies.
- According to the Nobel Committee, this framework has also helped central banks navigate crises, with inflationary episodes becoming less prolonged.
- Over the past few years, the global economy has faced an exceptional number of risks and challenges.
- From a global pandemic that brought all economic activity to a sudden halt, hurting incomes and businesses, to a growing number of wars that have spiked prices of essential commodities, to policy missteps like tariffs.
- And yet, instead of an economic recession, economic growth continues to surprise on the upside.
- A big reason why policymakers worldwide have been able to avoid worse outcomes is because their policies are informed by the work of academics such as Hall and Woodford.

- The period, regarded as one of the worst economic downturns in modern history, was marked by high rates of unemployment and poverty, as well as global bank and business failures.
- The dominant policy **before the Great Depression** was that **governments should not intervene**, letting markets resolve through forces of demand and supply instead.
- Keynes' call for interventionism, challenged the dominant principle of classical economics principle of the time — that free markets automatically correct themselves.
- Keynes provided a solution that seemed to work: Governments and central banks should "stabilise" the economy through policy interventions.
- When growth is slow (and unemployment high), policymakers should cut interest rates and taxes, and the governments should spend more, even at the cost of borrowing money itself and having a budget deficit, thus incentivising economic activity.
- When the economy starts overheating and the inflation rate starts rising fast, the policymakers should slow down the economy by policies like raising interest rates.
- Thus, government intervention could save economies from suffering from wild fluctuations.
- This broad policy formula worked until the experience of the **1970s**. This was a decade when economies faced **high inflation and high unemployment** both at the same time, due to repeated oil price shocks.
- Efforts to boost a slowing economy only increased inflation. Efforts to contain inflation further worsened unemployment.
- The situation became so bad that the Keynesian mode of government intervention was seen as the problem, not the solution.

## Khelo India Sports Goods Manufacturing Scheme

- The Union Cabinet has approved the Khelo India Sports Goods Manufacturing Scheme.
- The scheme has been approved with a budgetary outlay of **Rs 1,856.67 crore** for the period from **2026 to 2033–34** to attract investment, expand domestic production and strengthen India's position in global sports goods markets.
- Aligned with the vision of Khelo Bharat Niti 2025, Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat

### Scheme Details

- A central feature is the development of dedicated **Sports Goods Manufacturing Zones (SGMZs)**, to promote cluster-based manufacturing.
- It will bring manufacturers, suppliers, testing facilities, design and prototyping centres, and ancillary enterprises together in integrated industrial clusters.
- These zones will be developed through convergence with existing infrastructure under the **BHAVYA** (Bharat Audyogik Vikas Yojna) **Scheme** and **NICDC** (National Industrial Corridor Development Corporation) **Industrial Parks** to improve manufacturing efficiency and strengthen industry linkages and enhanced competitiveness across the value chain.
- The scheme allocates a combined Rs 1,130 crore for **Anchor Investment Support** and **Turnover Linked Support.**
  - **Anchor Investment Support** will encourage leading domestic and global manufacturers, brands and retail chains to establish facilities in the designated zones.
  - **Turnover Linked Support** will incentivise higher production, capacity expansion and sustained manufacturing growth.
- Recognising the important role of MSMEs, the Scheme places emphasis on strengthening existing manufacturing clusters and **supporting the growth of smaller enterprises.**
- Assistance will be provided for the upgradation of existing sports goods manufacturing clusters, including the development of common facilities and shared infrastructure.
- To **improve access to international markets**, Rs 105 crore has been allocated to help manufacturers obtain and renew **certifications from International Sports Federations.**
- The assistance is intended to strengthen product quality and confidence in Indian-made sports goods.
- The scheme also provides for **Centres of Excellence at premier educational and research institutions,** focusing on sports equipment, material sciences, protective gear and advanced manufacturing technologies.
  - **Research activities** will be encouraged through convergence with the **Anusandhan National Research Foundation.**
  - **Startups will receive support** for developing, testing, validating and commercialising technologies, processes and products.
- Skill development programmes will be implemented with the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship and industry stakeholders to meet evolving workforce requirements.
- **Branding, outreach and market development** initiatives will draw on the **Export Promotion Mission** to improve the visibility of Indian sports goods and expand their international reach.

it will support technology adoption, research, innovation, skill development, quality certification and market expansion.

**Benefits**

- The scheme is expected to strengthen domestic manufacturing, reduce import dependence, enhance domestic value addition, facilitate private investment, generate employment opportunities, and improve India's competitiveness in global markets.
- It would also support athlete development and complement programmes such as Khelo India and Fit India.
- It is expected to position India as a globally competitive hub for the design, development and manufacture of sports goods, while supporting India's aspiration to emerge as a leading sporting nation.

## Third Phase of Corporate Average Fuel Economy Norms

- The Ministry of Power has notified the third phase of Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) Norms for passenger vehicles, effective from 1 April 2027 to 31 March 2032.
- It is a set of **fleet-level fuel-efficiency standards for passenger vehicles**. They were first introduced in 2017 under the Energy Conservation Act 2001
- CAFE norms require manufacturers to keep the **average fuel consumption** — and therefore $CO_2$ emissions — of all eligible passenger vehicles they sell **within a prescribed limit**, rather than requiring every individual model to meet the same number.
- The new norms will apply to new passenger vehicles manufactured or imported for sale in India.

**Significance**

- The new framework provides greater regulatory clarity and a stable policy framework for the automobile industry.



- It facilitates technological innovation and supports the continued evolution of India's passenger vehicle sector towards greater energy efficiency and lower fuel consumption.

## PM GatiShakti Completes 5 Years

The PM GatiShakti National Master Plan (NMP) has completed five years of operation.

### Background

- India is building infrastructure at a scale that requires coordination across sectors and modes of transport. Roads, railways, ports, airports, waterways, and utilities often intersect across the same regions.
- Planning these networks together can help in cost and time savings, coordinate projects, and use existing infrastructure more efficiently.

**Key Features**

- PM GatiShakti is guided by **six principles** that seek to make infrastructure planning more integrated, efficient, and coordinated.
- This includes integrated development, multimodal infrastructure, last mile connectivity, expedited land acquisition, expedited clearances, and reduced ecological impact.
- **Seven Infrastructure Engines:** Roads, railways, ports, waterways, airports, mass transport and logistics infrastructure form the core sectors of the plan.
- **Whole-of-Government Planning:** The National Master Plan (NMP) covers 58 Central Ministries and Departments and all 36 States and UTs, enabling infrastructure proposals to be planned and assessed across sectors.
- **Integrated Digital Planning:** The NMP brings together infrastructure, and geospatial information on a common **Geographic Information System (GIS)-based platform,** supporting spatial planning and decision-making.
- **Wider Data Access:** The **PM GatiShakti Public** platform provides access to **230 approved datasets,** enabling site suitability analysis, connectivity mapping, alignment planning and compliance checks.
- **Data Layers: Over 23,493 data layers,** as of October 2026, bring infrastructure and other relevant information onto the common GIS-based platform.

- This created a need for an approach that integrates different infrastructure networks into a common planning framework.
- To address this need, the **PM GatiShakti National Master Plan was launched in 2021**.

### Institutional Framework

PM GatiShakti has a **three-tier institutional framework** comprising:

- **Empowered Group of Secretaries (EGoS):** Chaired by the Cabinet Secretary, the EGoS oversees the implementation of PM GatiShakti and reviews, considers and approves changes in the Master Plan.
- **Network Planning Group (NPG):** The NPG brings together the Heads of Network Planning Divisions from infrastructure Ministries and Departments.
    - It examines infrastructure proposals and ensures unified planning, integration, and optimisation. It also monitors developments under the NMP for project planning.
- **Technical Support Unit (TSU):** The TSU comprises domain and subject-matter experts who support the evaluation process. It assists the Logistics Division in performing its role as the PM GatiShakti Secretariat.

As of **August 2026**, the NPG had **evaluated 396 infrastructure projects** with a total estimated cost of about **Rs 18.66 lakh crore**. Of these, **256 projects had been sanctioned, of which 198 were under implementation**. The institutional framework is supported by a digital platform that provides planners with **geospatial data, satellite imagery, and analytical tools**.

## IDBI Bank Stake Sale

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved Canada-based Fairfax Financial Holdings Ltd. as the strategic buyer for a 60.72% stake in IDBI Bank for approximately Rs 52,878 crore.

**Key Points Related to the Deal**

- The transaction comprises the sale of a 30.48% stake held by the Government of India and a 30.24% stake held by Life Insurance Corporation of India. Following the sale, the government will retain 15% and LIC 19% in the bank.
- Participation in the bidding stage required an **RBI fit-and-proper assessment** and security clearance from the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- IDBI Bank's market price was volatile and narrowly traded, and therefore market prices alone were not considered a reliable indicator of intrinsic value. Two professional agencies instead used independent methodologies:
    - **Market Multiple Method**: Compared IDBI Bank with other public sector banks using their financial accounts as of 31 March 2026.
    - **Asset Valuation Method**: Considered tangible and intangible assets, including land and properties, along with liabilities.
- The winning offer of Rs 81 per share exceeded the benchmark valuation of Rs 75.99 per share and the individual fair-value estimates of both independent valuation agencies.
- Fairfax already has a substantial holding in Kerala-based CSB Bank. Under RBI rules, it cannot keep controlling stakes in both indefinitely. So, Fairfax will eventually have to either exit CSB Bank or merge it with IDBI Bank into a single entity, within two years.

## Disinvestment

- The **Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM),** under the Ministry of Finance, is the nodal department responsible for managing the Government's investments in public sector enterprises and undertaking disinvestment.
- The Government's disinvestment policy comprises two categories: Strategic Disinvestment/ Privatization and Minority Stake Sale
- **Strategic disinvestment/privatisation**
    - Strategic Disinvestment implies the entire or substantial sale of Government shareholding in a Central Public Sector Enterprise (CPSE), along with the transfer of management control.
        - **Privatisation** is a subset of strategic disinvestment in which Government equity and management control are transferred to a **private** buyer.
        - In other strategic disinvestment cases, control may be transferred to another **public sector enterprise.**
- **Minority stake sale**
    - Under minority stake sale, the Government sells a portion of its shareholding **without transferring management control.** Common methods include:
        - Initial Public Offer (IPO);
        - Offer for Sale (OFS);
        - Buyback of Shares.

## Disinvestment Background

- The decision is the latest in a series of overseas investments in the country's **financial sector.** In June 2026, Emirates NBD completed its 60% purchase in private lender RBL Bank for nearly $3 billion.
    - Japan's Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group (MUFG) bought 20% of non-bank lender Shriram Finance for $4.4 billion.
    - Last year, Japanese financial giant, Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation (SMBC), bought 24.2% of YES Bank for a little under $2 billion.
- Prominent **disinvestment** in recent years is that of Air India and Neelachal Ispat Nigam Limited in 2022, Ferro Scrap Nigam Limited in early 2025, and Indian Medicines Pharmaceuticals Corporation Limited in May this year.

**Significance**

- The Centre has already raised Rs 55,757 crore from disinvestments so far in FY 2026-27 and will get Rs 26,544 crore from the IDBI Bank stake sale.
- This takes the disinvestment total to Rs 82,301 crore, exceeding the disinvestment target of Rs 80,000 crore for FY 2026-27.
- The transaction, once completed, is expected to become the largest FDI transaction in India's financial sector.

- A strategic investor could bring professional management practices, technology, risk-management capabilities and operational efficiencies, potentially improving the bank's competitiveness.
- The transaction will unlock the value of Government and LIC investments and allow capital to be deployed towards important public priorities.

**Concerns**

- The Government will no longer exercise management control over IDBI Bank. This raises questions about the extent of public influence over an institution that has historically played a role in India's development-financing ecosystem.
- Employee groups have raised concerns that the sale price is inadequate. Moreover, a change in ownership could lead to organizational restructuring, changes in work practices, and rationalization of operations.

## Oil Diplomacy in India-US Relations

- US Secretary of State Marco Rubio visited Reliance Industries' (RIL) Jamnagar refinery — the world's largest single-site refining complex — during his second India trip in six months.
- The visit underscores RIL's rising strategic weight in US energy diplomacy amid trade talks and friction over India's Russian oil imports.

### The Russian Oil Friction Point

- RIL remains a major buyer of Russian crude, a persistent irritant in US-India ties. Trump's law threatening 100% tariffs on Russian energy buyers was waived just before taking effect, with Rubio confirming the decision "took into account the India-US trade deal."
- India's Russian imports surged post-2022, with Russia overtaking West Asian suppliers as India's top source — justified by New Delhi as energy security, contested by Washington as funding Russia's war.

### Jamnagar: Scale and Strategic Value

- Jamnagar combines two refineries (1999 and 2008) with a total capacity of 1.4 million bpd — nearly 1.5% of global refining capacity — capable of processing 216+ crude grades, including **heavy, sulphur-rich crude.**
- With 35.2 mtpa (million tonnes per annum) dedicated to exports, **RIL is India's largest exporter of diesel and jet fuel,** acting as a **global swing supplier** valuable amid West Asia and Russia-linked disruptions.
- With US midterm elections approaching in Nov 2026, the Trump administration faces pressure over fuel prices, particularly diesel — making India's refining capacity strategically relevant to Washington.
- **The Texas Refinery Connection**
  - RIL is a partner in a proposed $300-billion refinery project in Brownsville, Texas, led by America First Refining — billed as the first new US refinery in five decades.
  - Deal Structure:
    - 1.2 billion barrels of US light shale oil (worth ~$125 billion) to be processed.
    - 50 billion gallons of refined products (worth ~$175 billion) to be produced.
    - Refinery capacity: 60 million barrels/year.
  - For the US, this showcases foreign investment in American energy infrastructure; for RIL, it offers a strategic foothold in the world's largest oil-consuming economy.

### Capital-Diplomacy Nexus

- Indian corporate capital — RIL, Tata, Adani — is increasingly woven into India's foreign policy, mirroring how American finance (JPMorgan) and Chinese firms ("go out" policy) shape their nations' diplomacy.
- Jamnagar's ability to switch crude suppliers and redirect refined products globally makes it a geopolitical asset, not just a commercial one.

### Conclusion

Jamnagar exemplifies how private energy conglomerates now double as instruments of strategic diplomacy, with Delhi facing the challenge of converting RIL's growing importance in Washington's calculations into leverage for broader India-US relations.

## India-Poland Bilateral Relations: Modi-Tusk Summit Outcomes

- Polish PM Donald Tusk visited New Delhi — his first visit since 2010 — holding talks with PM Modi to review and deepen the **Strategic Partnership**, established during Modi's August 2024 Poland visit.
- India and Poland established diplomatic ties in 1954, completing 70 years in 2024.
- Ties evolved through political dialogue, trade, education, and culture, culminating in the **2024 Strategic Partnership** upgrade covering trade, defence, emerging tech, renewable energy, and people-to-people exchanges.

### Key Outcomes of the Summit

- PM Modi announced agreement to deepen ties in defence, space, and nuclear energy, inviting Polish firms into co-development and co-production.
- Both sides launched:
  - A Defence Industry Dialogue and Counter-Terrorism Dialogue.
  - An India-Poland start-up bridge for AI, cyber, and fintech cooperation, plus youth tech hackathons.
  - Plans to **double bilateral trade** from the current ~$6 billion figure by 2030.
- No formal agreements were signed, but both sides are negotiating an **Agreement on Mutual Protection and Exchange of Classified Information** — needed before defence deals, given India's Russia ties and Poland's defence relationship with Pakistan.

**Defence and Security Cooperation**

- Poland has ramped up its defence industry amid the Russia-Ukraine war, with drone and satellite imagery capabilities proven in that conflict.
- Notably, Polish drones and loitering munitions were used by **India** during Operation Sindoor (May 2025) against Pakistan — Tusk called the two nations "real friends that can rely on one another in difficult times."
- Polish companies have indicated their willingness to supply equipment to India and collaborate with Indian partners on R&D.

**Trade and Economic Ties**

- Bilateral trade grew 192% — from $1.95 billion (2013) to $6.36 billion (2025).
- Indian investments in Poland exceed $3 billion.
- The upcoming India-EU FTA (expected December) will boost exports of machinery, chemicals, and engineering goods, while drawing Polish investment into railways, manufacturing, food processing, and biotech.
- Poland's GDP crossed $1 trillion; India posted 7.8% growth last quarter.

**Clean Energy, Space and Critical Minerals**

- Poland is pursuing nuclear power and Small Modular Reactors (SMRs), inviting Indian collaboration.
- Both sides discussed critical minerals cooperation to reduce dependence on China-dominated supply chains, alongside space tech (Polish firm ICEYE) and satellite cooperation — Tusk also visited Bengaluru with Polish Space Agency representatives.

### Geopolitical Dimension

- Tusk backed India's UNSC bid (non-permanent seat 2028-29, and permanent seat in a reformed UNSC).
- India signalled support for Poland's G20 aspirations. Both discussed India's four-point proposal and Black Sea ceasefire plan to ease the Russia-Ukraine conflict's impact on civilian infrastructure, grain/energy exports and seafarer safety.

### People-to-People Ties

- Over 30,000 Indians live in Poland; around 3,500 Indian students study there. Cooperation continues via the Indian Studies Chair in Krakow, with new focus on culture, sports, and tourism.

## India-Switzerland Summit

- Swiss President Guy Parmelin began his **first state visit to India** (a three-day trip, his second visit this year after February's AI Impact Summit).
- Talks with PM Modi produced five agreements, deepening cooperation across trade, investment, defence, nuclear energy, and infrastructure.

### Key Highlights

- **Defence and Nuclear Energy**
  - Both leaders discussed expanding military exchanges and defence production, and agreed to deepen nuclear energy cooperation — a notable strategic upgrade in the relationship.
- **Mobility and People-to-People Pacts**
  - **Migration and Mobility Partnership**: Eases movement while curbing irregular migration and trafficking; offers multiple-entry visas up to 5 years (6-month stays per visit) and renewable 1-year student permits.

- **Young Professionals Exchange**: Allows up to 300 participants annually per country (scalable to 500), aimed at temporary employment for skill and language development.
- A pact was also signed to promote cooperation in transportation technologies, mobility systems, and infrastructure development.

- **Research, AI, and Global Issues**
  - New joint research projects were announced across health, clean energy, space, and transport technology, including frameworks involving the Swiss National Science Foundation and the University of Zurich.
  - PM Modi congratulating Switzerland on hosting the next Geneva AI Summit, pledging cooperation toward "responsible, inclusive, and human-centric" AI.

- **Trade and Investment: Building on TEPA**
  - The Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) with European Free Trade Association (EFTA) states (Switzerland, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway) completed its first year in October.
  - PM Modi called it an "ambitious blueprint" targeting $100 billion in investment and 1 million direct jobs in India over 15 years.
  - Market access expansion will boost Indian exports of agriculture, pharmaceuticals, textiles, and engineering goods, while drawing Swiss investment into biotech, life sciences, banking, insurance, food processing, and sustainability.
  - Switzerland is already a major European partner, with over 330 Swiss companies operating in India across engineering, services, precision instruments, chemicals, and pharma.
- **Infrastructure Cooperation**
  - PM Modi cited Swiss involvement in the Varanasi ropeway, Jewar Airport (Noida), and Himalayan railway/tunnelling projects, inviting Swiss firms into large-scale investment, capacity building, design, and manufacturing in India.

## France in Crisis

- France faces its worst unrest in years — a month-long student protest movement has widened into nationwide demonstrations over cost of living and public services.
- Over half a million protesters have marched, with ~1,800 arrests.

### The Core Dilemma

- Every fix carries political cost: **higher taxes** → backlash; **spending cuts** → protests; **pension reform** → fierce resistance; **growth stimulus** → needs investor confidence undermined by instability — a near-impossible balancing act amid a fragmented Parliament.

#### Political Problem

- France is split between a **far right** (anti-immigration, national identity) and a **left** (public services, redistribution and workers' rights).
- President Macron's centrist camp has lost its parliamentary majority, causing **budget/reform gridlock** and a stalemate over who bears the fiscal pain.

#### Economic Problem

- **France persistently spends more than it earns:**
  - Budget deficit: 5.1% of GDP (2025)
  - Public debt: 115.5% of GDP
  - Growth since 2023: only ~1.4% — too weak to ease debt
- A vicious cycle: weak growth → high debt → squeezed living standards → unrest → more instability → less investment
- **Pensions at the Heart of the Crisis**
  - France has an ageing population, and people are living longer which strains pension funding. Macron's attempt to raise the retirement age from 62 to 64 stalled amid opposition from both extremes.
  - Generous pension spending has forced cuts to education — fuelling the student protests due to overcrowded, under-resourced schools.
- **Why France Can't Keep Borrowing?**
  - Rising debt concerns are pushing up borrowing costs.
  - As a eurozone member, France cannot print its own currency to meet obligations — a structural constraint unlike sovereign-currency nations.

## Europe's Protest Wave: Unpacking the Economics of Social Unrest

- A wave of unrest is sweeping **France, Albania, Belgium, Italy, and Portugal**. Many movements, like France's student protests, have broadened into a wider cost-of-living outcry.
- With France and Italy heading into 2027 elections, the timing is political — but the deeper drivers are economic, raising the question: what truly causes such unrest?

### Is Rising Inequality the Real Culprit?

- Using the World Inequality Report 2026's "Income Gap" metric (ratio of top 10% to bottom 50% income share):
  - The gap rose in France and Italy (2014-2024), but fell in the UK, Germany, and Spain.
  - France's inequality remains comparatively low — far below India's (38) or South Africa's (118).
- **Conclusion:** Rising inequality in France is real but not exceptionally severe — inequality alone is an incomplete explanation.

### Conclusion

- Inequality alone doesn't explain Europe's unrest — **economic grievances (especially prices) matter**, but the sight of protests elsewhere, amplified by digital connectivity, is the bigger trigger.
- Once unrest begins, its **economic cost is real and significant**. Fixing cost-of-living issues may not stop contagion, but **ignoring them deepens the eventual economic damage**.

**What Else Predicts Unrest?**

- IMF economists note inequality hasn't worsened enough recently to explain the current surge.
- Using machine learning on 340+ indicators, they found:
  - **Past turmoil —** domestic and in neighbouring countries — is by far the strongest predictor, roughly 10 times more informative than any economic/social factor.
  - **The "Bank Run" Analogy:** Visible protests elsewhere act as coordinating signals, encouraging people — especially in culturally similar neighbouring countries — to join in.
  - **Digital access and social media** penetration are key enablers of mass mobilization.
  - **Economic triggers** still matter: food and fuel prices are particularly important sparks.

**Economic Consequences of Unrest**

- Though not the top predictor, economic factors shape the aftermath significantly:
  - Major unrest events are followed by an average 1 percentage point GDP reduction, measured six quarters later.
  - **Nature of unrest matters:** Socioeconomic-driven unrest causes sharper GDP contractions than purely political unrest; unrest combining both socioeconomic and political causes produces the sharpest contractions of all.

## The Badr MoU

- **Pakistan, Turkey, Qatar, and Indonesia** signed the ***Badr*** MoU in Doha, Qatar.
- This MoU is aimed at strengthening defence cooperation, joint military production, R&D, and technical training.
- The agreement matters to India as it could bolster Pakistan's defence industry and reshape regional security partnerships.

### What Is the Badr MoU?

- A defence cooperation agreement pooling the four countries' technical expertise, industrial resources, and financial capabilities to strengthen defence manufacturing.
- Badr means full moon — symbolising the combined strength of participants. The pact remains open to future expansion to other friendly countries.

**Key Highlights**

- **Key Objectives**
  - **Joint defence production**: Collaborative manufacturing of military equipment
  - **R&D:** Development of modern defence technologies
  - **Technology cooperation**: Sharing technical and industrial expertise
  - **Technical training**: Upskilling defence personnel and engineers
  - **Defence exports**: Opportunities to sell jointly produced equipment
  - **Supply chain and cost-sharing**: Better access to components and distributed R&D costs
- **Role of Each Country**
  - **Turkey:** Defence tech, engineering expertise, drone/naval/armoured vehicle manufacturing.
  - **Pakistan:** Existing manufacturing facilities, technical personnel, production experience.
  - **Qatar:** Financial resources and investment support.
  - **Indonesia:** Joint manufacturing and tech cooperation to strengthen its domestic industry.

**Why It Concerns India?**

- Could strengthen Pakistan's defence manufacturing and maintenance capabilities.
- May boost Pakistan-Turkey defence industrial ties.
- Could introduce competition among defence suppliers to Indonesia — an important Indo-Pacific partner — though not necessarily reducing India-Indonesia cooperation.
- Signals a broader shift toward domestic manufacturing and diversified partnerships across West Asia.
- **Not a Military Alliance Against India**
  - The Badr MoU has **no publicly stated collective defence obligation.**
  - This distinguishes it from the **Makkah Joint Defence Agreement** (Pakistan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia; August 2026), which does provide mutual defence against armed attack.
- **What India Should Do?**
  - Accelerate indigenous defence production (aircraft, missiles, drones, naval systems).
  - Invest in R&D and advanced defence technologies.
  - Expand defence exports and international partnerships.
  - Strengthen regional cooperation with Indonesia and Southeast Asia.
  - Monitor actual technology transfers and projects under the Badr MoU.
  - Sustain diplomatic engagement with West Asian nations.

## China's TBM Export Curbs

- China has imposed fresh export restrictions on Tunnel Boring Machines (TBMs) and related components, effective November 18, 2026, adding to earlier **rare earth magnet curbs**.
- This threatens key projects like the Mumbai-Ahmedabad Bullet Train Corridor's undersea tunnel.
- TBMs enable safer excavation than blasting, vital for dense urban tunnelling. China now mandates export licences under its export control law on dual-use items.
- India has faced TBM delivery delays since 2024 (eased since March 2026), including blocked shipments of German-designed, China-made Herrenknecht machines.
- The curbs coincide with China's negotiations with the US and EU, amid its **$1.2 trillion trade surplus**, reflecting Beijing's pattern of **leveraging** critical-tech dominance in trade diplomacy — exposing India's need to diversify supply chains and build indigenous capacity.

## US Suspended Indian IT Firms from Green Card Filings

- The US government has suspended major **Indian IT firms** — *Cognizant, Infosys, TCS, Wipro, HCL, and Capgemini* — from the **PERM programme**, a key pathway to permanent residency, citing alleged fraud and claims that foreign workers displaced American jobs.

- **PERM** (Program Electronic Review Management) is the employer-driven process to obtain labour certification before sponsoring an employee's Green Card

- Cognizant was suspended first last month, with details undisclosed.

**Part of a Broader Crackdown**

- Reflects the Trump administration's intensified clampdown on foreign-worker programmes, with IT/tech firms facing heightened scrutiny.
- Authorities allege wage undercutting, fraudulent filings, and American job displacement under both H-1B and PERM.
- Indian professionals are disproportionately affected, being the largest beneficiary group of both programmes.
- Since 2009, the targeted firms sought Green Cards for ~3 million foreign workers, securing 230,000+ H-1B approvals and 100,000+ labour certifications — which the administration frames as jobs "taken" from Americans

*{Also refer the topic "**PERM System**" from The Recitals – September 2026}*

## Foreign Investment in India: Regulatory Barriers and Investment Climate

A **US Department of State report** on India's investment climate has flagged regulatory restrictions, foreign-domestic investor disparities, corruption risks, and import-related barriers affecting FDI.

**Key Concerns in the Report**

- **Regulatory uncertainty**
  - Frequent rule changes and unclear approval processes raise investment costs, especially in capital-intensive sectors.
  - The Import Management System (IMS) was flagged for opaque authorisation requirements on specialised equipment like servers and semiconductors.
- **FDI-FPI restrictions**
  - Investors entering via FDI pre-IPO face restrictions on using the FPI route until divesting FDI holdings — complicating large fund groups.
  - The existing 10% FPI cap further limits strategic stake-building.
- **Corruption and Governance**
  - The report cites perceived regulatory corruption as a barrier, despite the Companies Act, 2013's governance safeguards (independent directors, whistleblower protection), noting limited transparency

**India's FDI Performance**

- The report noted that US direct investment stock in India stood at $58.54 billion in 2024, representing a 3.37% decline from 2023.
- However, investment flows can fluctuate considerably from month to month. RBI data cited in the report showed that India's net FDI inflow reached $7.35 billion in July, its highest monthly level since May 2021, when it stood at $8.80 billion.
- Therefore, a single indicator should not be interpreted as representing the entire trajectory of India's foreign investment environment.

**Ease of Doing Business**

- Effective investment frameworks need predictability, transparency, efficient dispute resolution, consistent taxation, and strong governance.
- India's National Single Window System aids this by consolidating Central/State approvals digitally.

**Balancing Regulation and Investment**

- The core challenge is balancing strategic regulation (security, financial stability) against investment facilitation — since climate quality depends less on the number of restrictions than on whether rules are transparent, predictable, and consistently implemented.

on actual compliance implementation.

- **Taxation and Banking**
  - Foreign banks face a 38.22% effective tax rate — 4.63 percentage points higher than domestic banks.
  - At the same time, the report noted that India maintains stable correspondent banking relationships with major global and US banks.
  - It also recognised that India's tightly regulated banking and capital-market systems contribute to financial stability and continued access for foreign financial institutions.

## Israel's 2026 Knesset Elections

Israelis voted on October 27, 2026 — the first election since the October 7, 2023 Hamas attacks and the subsequent wars across Gaza, Iran, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen.

### The Electoral System

- Israel is a **parliamentary democracy** using **proportional representation** — voters elect party lists, not individual constituency candidates.
  - A "list" is a candidate slate sponsored by a party or group of parties.
- The **unicameral Knesset** has 120 members, elected every four years. Power is split across the Legislature (Knesset), Executive (PM), and Judiciary (Supreme Court).
- A government needs 61 seats to maintain confidence and govern; elections are overseen by the Central Elections Committee (CEC).
- Under **Section 7A of Basic Law: The Knesset**, the CEC or Supreme Court can **disqualify** a party/candidate for denying Israel's existence as a Jewish and democratic state, inciting racism, or supporting armed struggle against Israel.

**Electoral Threshold**

- Parties must cross a **3.25%** national vote threshold (set by Knesset legislation in 2014) to enter parliament.
- This balances representation with stability by curbing fragmentation, while incentivising ideologically similar factions to merge before elections.
- Votes for parties below the threshold are declared "wasted" and reallocated to successful parties.

**How Voting and Seat Allocation Work?**

- Since no single party has ever won an outright majority, every Israeli government has been a coalition.
- If no bloc reaches 61 seats, a minority government may form; failing that, fresh elections are called.
- Israel held **five elections between 2019–2022** due to repeated coalition failures, reflecting chronic instability under this system.

## Brazil Election 2026

- Brazil's leftist President Luiz Inácio **Lula da Silva** pulled off a stunning upset, winning for a historic fourth term.
- He secured 51.79% of the vote, narrowly defeating rival Flávio Bolsonaro, who polled 48.21%.

### Electoral System in Brazil

- Brazil is a **federal Presidential republic** with a **multi-party democracy**. Voting is **compulsory** for literate citizens aged 18-70 (optional for 16-18, over 70, and illiterate citizens).
- **Presidential Elections**
  - The President is elected via a two-round (runoff) system:
    - A candidate needs more than 50% of valid votes to win in the first round
    - If no one crosses this threshold, the top two candidates contest a runoff
    - President serves a 4-year term, with one re-election allowed

- **Legislative Elections**
  - Brazil has a bicameral National Congress:
    - **Chamber of Deputies (lower house):** Elected via **open-list proportional representation** — voters can vote for a party or an individual candidate, and seats are allocated based on combined party/coalition vote share, with the highest vote-getters within that list filling the seats
    - **Federal Senate (upper house**): Elected via majoritarian (first-past-the-post) system, 3 senators per Federal unit (26 states + Federal District), staggered terms

## Alberta Referendum

- Voters in Canada's oil-rich province of Alberta rejected a proposal to begin a process toward independence.
- This is a victory for PM Mark Carney and Canadian unity supporters, coming amid US President Trump's trade war and annexation threats against Canada.
- The vote was non-binding — not a direct independence referendum, but a step that could have set Alberta on a path toward a future separation vote.
- Alberta holds the **world's fourth-largest proven oil reserves** and is a **conservative stronghold** with a political culture often likened to the American West.
- **Resentment toward Ottawa runs deep**, but has historically not translated into strong independence support.

## UN Loss and Damage Fund's Nepal Payout

- The UN's Loss and Damage Fund approved a $21.6 million payout (~₹205 crore) to Nepal — its first-ever country-specific allocation — to aid recovery from devastating August 2026 floods.
- Nepal's recovery needs are estimated at $4.75 billion, making this payout a tiny fraction of actual damage, yet it signals the **fund's first real implementation**, arriving weeks before COP31 in Turkiye.

### Key Concerns About the Loss and Damage Fund

- **The Larger Climate Finance Shortfall**
  - Most pending FRLD requests cover both sudden disasters and slow-onset events (glacial melt, sea-level rise, desertification).

**What Triggered This?**

- On August 26, 2026, an ice-and-rock avalanche — linked to human-accelerated climate change — triggered flooding along the Bhotekoshi-Trishuli-Narayani river system.
- Nepal's estimated losses: at least $2.69 billion, with recovery needs of $4.71-4.75 billion.

**About Loss and Damage Fund**

- Formally the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD), it helps climate-vulnerable developing nations cope with economic and non-economic losses, operating under the UNFCCC.
- Agreed at **COP27 (2022),** Governing Instrument adopted at COP28 (2023).
- As of March 2026: 27 countries pledged $822.06 million; top donors include Italy, France, UAE, Germany, and UK.
- The first funding call drew 176 requests from 119 countries worth ~$2.8 billion — decisions deferred to December 2026. **India has also made three requests to the Fund.**

**Why the Nepal Decision Matters?**

- This marks the Fund's first country-specific earmark, decided at its first "extraordinary meeting" (virtual, October 2026).
- The Board approved a pilot mechanism letting Nepal submit its request outside the normal closed submission window; future exceptions need separate Board approval.
- Nepal's case is being treated as a template for how the mechanism should ideally work — **swift consideration and quick access to money** for disaster-hit nations.

Developed nations' $100 billion/year (2020-25) pledge was never fully met.

- In 2024, developing countries assessed actual need at $1.3 trillion/year, yet developed nations committed only $300 billion/year, starting from 2035 — mirroring their lag on emissions targets.

- **Credibility Concerns**
  - The Fund still runs an 11-step bureaucratic funding cycle, with the World Bank as interim trustee.
  - The US withdrew its board seat in January 2025 as part of its Paris Agreement exit. Nepal's payout, while historic, is less than 0.5% of its reconstruction cost, risking further delays.

**Conclusion**

The Nepal payout is a genuine procedural breakthrough, but exposes the persistent gap between developed nations' climate finance promises and delivery — a cautionary signal for Nepal and India's own pending claims.

## China Opens First Overseas Air Base in Laos

- China has opened its first overseas air base at Ban Keun Airport, Laos (~50 km north of Vientiane), operational since September 2026.
- Known as the China-Laos Joint Support and Training Centre, it features a 2,000-metre runway and has housed K-8 trainer/attack aircraft.
- Officially, it's a joint pilot-training and logistics facility. However, following China's Naval bases in Djibouti and Ream (Cambodia), this marks Beijing's first overseas air-power foothold.
- Neighbours like Vietnam and Western analysts are concerned as it gives the PLA a permanent staging ground in mainland Southeast Asia, despite limited immediate combat capacity.

## Pentagon Creates Autonomous Warfare Command

- US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth announced the creation of the **Autonomous Warfare Command** (AutoWARCOM).
- It is planned as a **new four-star functional combatant command** with **service-like authorities** to build, scale, and deploy **autonomous and robotic capabilities** across the entire US joint force.
- The command is slated to be **fully established by October 1, 2027**, pending **Congressional approval**.
- AutoWARCOM reflects a broader Pentagon pivot away from expensive conventional platforms toward low-cost, AI-driven, unmanned systems (like drones) — a shift directly influenced by lessons from the Ukraine conflict.
- It signals the institutionalisation of AI and drone warfare within US military structure, moving autonomous systems from experimental use toward a dedicated, scaled command — mirroring global trends toward cheaper, tech-driven combat capabilities.

## Oman Overtakes US as India's Top LNG Supplier

- India's LNG import list changed in September 2026. The US slipped from the top spot. Oman and Nigeria took the lead instead.
- **What Changed in September?**
  - Oman and Nigeria topped the supplier list in September. The **US came third**. In August, the order was different: US first, then Nigeria, Oman, and UAE.
  - US imports fell sharply — down 60.7% month-on-month to 0.34 million tonnes. Oman's imports rose 11.6% to 0.59 million tonnes.

- The shift happened because European buyers began competing hard for American cargoes ahead of winter.

- **Why India Needs So Much LNG?**
  - India depends on LNG for about half of its natural gas needs. Normally, **60% of these imports pass through the Strait of Hormuz**, mainly from Qatar and the UAE.
  - But the West Asia conflict disrupted this route. So India turned to non-Hormuz sources like Oman, Nigeria, and the US.
  - Oman's gas doesn't need the strait at all, which makes it a safer, steadier source.

## When Tariffs Become Weapons: India's Push for Economic Resilience

P K Mishra, Principal Secretary to the PM, spoke at the 5th Kautilya Economic Conclave.

- He said tariffs and export controls are no longer just commercial tools. They are now used for strategic goals. Sometimes, they are even weaponised.
- His message: the future belongs to ***nations that stay steady without being closed, careful without fear, and ambitious without naivety***.

### Conclusion

Trade tools once used only for commerce are now geopolitical weapons. India's answer isn't retreat, but smart diversification — more suppliers, more partnerships, stronger domestic buffers.

### Key Highlights

1. **Risk vs Uncertainty**
   - Mishra drew a key difference. The world now faces uncertainty, not just risk. He listed examples: pandemics, wars, shipping chokepoints, sanctions, and tariffs. Even critical minerals and financial systems have gained new strategic weight.
2. **Energy: A New Kind of Question**
   - For decades, energy importers asked one question: what's the price? Now, a second question matters more: will it even arrive?
   - A disruption in one shipping route can shift oil prices far away. Geography itself has become an economic variable.
3. **Rethinking Globalisation**
   - The old logic was simple: produce where costs are lowest. This logic still works.
   - But a new factor has entered the picture — **the cost of interruption.** A supply chain that works well normally can break down fast if one key supplier disappears.
4. **Critical Minerals: A New Risk**
   - Minerals like lithium, cobalt, and rare earths power batteries and clean energy. But their refining is highly concentrated.
   - Often, one country dominates the processing. Mishra warned: the clean energy shift meant to end oil dependence may create new dependence on mineral refining instead.
5. **The Real Policy Question**
   - Globalisation hasn't ended. The real question is different: how do we keep the benefits of openness while reducing exposure to shocks?
   - This isn't a choice between openness and protectionism. It's about openness paired with resilience.
6. **India's Response So Far**
   - India faces risk from routes like the Strait of Hormuz. Its response has three parts: build stocks, raise domestic output, and secure alternate suppliers.
   - One clear result: India's crude oil import sources have grown from 27 countries to 43.
7. **Diversifying Trade Ties**
   - India has expanded trade agreements with the UAE, Australia, ASEAN (ASEAN–India Free Trade Area), UK, Oman, New Zealand, and EU.
   - Mishra also stressed macroeconomic resilience — strong fundamentals that go beyond just having more trade partners.

## First International Cargo Vessel Leaves Eastern Assam

- A barge carrying 540 metric tonnes of methanol left the **Bogibeel Terminal** in Dibrugarh district **for Dhaka, Bangladesh** — the first international shipment from eastern Assam since Independence in 1947.
- The cargo is bound for Pangaon port in Dhaka — a journey of about 1,300 km, covering 768 km down the Brahmaputra (**National Waterway-2**) to the India-Bangladesh border, then along the Indo-Bangladesh Protocol Route (IBPR)

- The shipment is a test case for whether the Brahmaputra can become a commercially viable freight corridor linking the Northeast to overseas markets.
    - This shipment was enabled by newly set-up Customs and Immigration complexes at Bogibeel and Dhubri.

**The Bigger Push: Waterways Investment**

- National waterway cargo volumes rose from 18 million tonnes (2013-14) to 218 million tonnes (2025-26).
- Over ₹68 billion (~$770 million) is being invested in Northeast waterways, including NW-2 development, a ship repair facility at Pandu, and last-mile connectivity.
- Waterway transport cuts fuel use and highway congestion. India is building regional waterway links with Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and Myanmar.

## India-China Border Tensions

- The MEA attributed recurring border disturbances to Chinese forces deviating from established patrolling patterns, following the ITBP chief's remarks on **ongoing face-offs at multiple locations in Arunachal Pradesh**.
- Arunachal Pradesh is central to the dispute — China calls it "Zangnan" (Southern Tibet), while India asserts it is an integral part of the country.
- Differing LAC perceptions cause opposing patrols to enter contested areas, risking face-offs.

### Historical Background

- India and China share a disputed ~3,488-km Line of Actual Control (LAC) — not an internationally demarcated border but areas of actual control, with differing perceptions fuelling confrontations.
- Key milestones:
    - 1993 Agreement: Principles for peace and tranquillity along the LAC
    - 1996 Agreement: Confidence-building measures (CBMs) restricting military activities near the LAC
    - 2005 Agreements: Political principles for implementing CBMs
    - 2020 Eastern Ladakh Crisis: Galwan Valley clash disrupted relations, led to sustained deployments
    - 2024 Disengagement: Patrolling arrangements agreed in parts of eastern Ladakh, though the broader dispute remains unresolved

**Border Management Mechanisms**

- Border Personnel Meetings: Direct communication between local commanders.
- Corps Commander-level talks (High-level military leadership): Negotiate troop deployments and disengagement.
- Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC): Diplomatic platform for border affairs.
- Diplomatic engagement & CBMs: Reduce misunderstanding and unintended escalation.

**ITBP's Shaurya Commandos and Arunachal Face-offs**

- Recently, ITBP DG said that the newly raised Shaurya commando teams performed well in face-offs with the PLA in Arunachal Pradesh, calling confrontations "ongoing."
- ITBP is expanding these teams for high-altitude combat capability, alongside drone and counter-drone modernisation.
- This follows Corps Commander talks in September 2026 at the Wacha-Damai meeting point amid tensions in Taksing (Upper Subansiri district)

## India's Trade Deficit with China

- India's trade deficit with China has **crossed $100 billion in 2026**, as per China's General Administration of Customs (GAC).
- Two-way trade (Jan-Sept) rose **25.4%** to **$144.45 billion**; imports from China grew **23.3%** to **$125.19 billion**; the deficit stood at **$105.93 billion** — on track to exceed 2025's record of $116.12 billion.

- Separately, India's own data shows a $69 billion deficit in H1 FY27 — **27% higher** than the same period last year.
- **India Flags Market Access Barriers**
  - Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the imbalance is "growing exponentially," with India's market access requests denied for a decade.
  - She identified **non-tariff barriers** — like phytosanitary restrictions — as the biggest hurdle, blocking Indian exports of generic drugs, bovine meat, vegetables, and other perishables despite huge potential.
  - Unlike the global trend of tariffs and punitive measures, India prefers to sit and talk, avoiding countervailing duties despite the tiresome process.




## India Names 28 Strategic Locations in Ladakh

- The MEA asserted that Ladakh is an "integral and inalienable part of India" after China objected to New Delhi assigning standardised names to 28 strategic locations in the Union Territory.
- Beijing called the move "illegal," claiming the areas in the western sector have "always belonged to China."
- **The 28 Locations Named**
  - The list covers mountain peaks, glaciers, passes, valleys, and other features.
  - Notably, it includes **Gogra and Hot Springs** — two key friction points along the LAC which were central to the 2020 border standoff — a likely reason for China's irritation.
  - Other locations include Kanishka Peak, Zorawar Peak, Parpik Glacier, Skamri Glacier, Rinchen Zangpo, Milarepa Kangri and Shamal Lungpa (described as a 1950s-era patrol and staging route) among others.
- **Background: The 2020 Standoff**
  - The crisis began with the Galwan Valley clash near Pangong Lake, where India lost 20 soldiers (China's casualties remain undisclosed).
  - Disengagement began in 2022 after sustained diplomatic talks.
  - Relations have since improved, highlighted by President Xi Jinping's visit to India for the BRICS Summit in August — his first in seven years.
  - Despite apparent bonhomie between Modi and Xi at the BRICS Summit, border tensions continue to cast a shadow over bilateral ties — underscoring that political-level warmth has not resolved underlying territorial disputes along the LAC.

## India's SCO Visit to Pakistan

- India sent a senior official (Alok Dimri, a 1998-batch IFS officer) to Pakistan for the **SCO Council of National Coordinators' meeting** in Islamabad — the first visit by an Indian official delegation since Operation Sindoor last year.
- Pakistan assumed the **SCO's rotational chair** after the Bishkek summit (August 31-September 1), hence hosting the meeting.

### Key Takeaways

- **The Trump Factor**
  - Ongoing Russia-Ukraine and US-Iran wars have consumed global attention.
  - Trump's unpredictability and support for Pakistan Army chief Asim Munir have emboldened Rawalpindi.
  - India must tread carefully on any future conflict with Pakistan while Trump remains in office (until January 2029); limited diplomatic engagement keeps a communication channel open.

**A Diplomatic Tightrope for India**

- India is in a tough spot: the US has appeared to side with Pakistan even as Delhi frames Pakistan as a state sponsor of terrorism;
- China (Pakistan's "all-weather friend") aided it during Operation Sindoor with weapons and live satellite intelligence.
- Engaging via SCO is a pragmatic, calculated move — for situational awareness of Pakistan's SCO-related activities.
- India will watch whether Pakistan hosts SCO meetings in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, and scrutinise SCO maps/documents for misrepresentation of Indian territory.

**PM Modi's Potential Visit to Pakistan**

- Pakistan is set to invite PM Modi to next year's SCO leaders' summit in Pakistan (dates not yet announced).
- India boycotted the SAARC summit in Pakistan previously, and Modi hasn't visited since 2015 — any decision to attend remains a political call.

**India Will Respond Firmly to Pakistan's Claims**

- Delhi will not let provocative Pakistani statements go unanswered, as seen at the SCO foreign ministers' meeting in Goa and at this year's UNGA
- Any Pakistani statement on Kashmir or terrorism will draw a strong Indian response

- **The China Challenge Is More Consequential**
  - The border standoff since May 2020 with China remains the bigger strategic threat for India
  - Keeping both fronts (China and Pakistan) calm is a key objective — multilateral engagement helps defuse tensions on both

*[Also refer the topic "SCO Summit 2026" from The Recitals – September 2026]*

## G7's Oil, Diesel Release

- The **Group of Seven (G7)** agreed to release **100 million barrels** of crude oil and petroleum products from emergency reserves — including substantial diesel volumes.
- This decision was taken amid apparent pressure from US President Trump.
  - Trump had threatened a **US diesel export ban** as American pump prices hit record highs ahead of the November midterm polls.
- This release will be coordinated through the International Energy Agency (IEA).
- US and European diesel **prices surged** due to constrained flows through the Strait of Hormuz and attacks on Russia's oil and gas infrastructure. Analysts believe this release would lower the diesel price.

- **Implications for India**
  - **Positives:**
    - ♣ Lower international diesel prices would benefit bulk/industrial buyers who pay global rates. It would ease under-recoveries for public sector fuel retailers subsidising retail diesel.
    - ♣ A decline in bulk diesel rates would ease inflationary pressure on the economy.
  - **Negatives:**
    - ♣ Higher global supply could squeeze margins of standalone Indian refiners and major diesel exporters like Reliance Industries and Nayara Energy.




## BIMSTEC Adopts Delhi Declaration to Counter Terrorism

- India hosted the **first-ever BIMSTEC Home Ministers' Meeting** in New Delhi, where the bloc adopted the "Delhi Declaration" to counter radicalisation, violent extremism, terror financing, and the misuse of emerging technologies for terrorism.
- Bangladesh, the **current BIMSTEC chair**, sent Senior Secretary instead of Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed — notable since Bangladesh was also unrepresented at India's BRICS Summit in September.

### Key Provisions of the Delhi Declaration

- Signed by all seven members, the declaration:
  - Strongly condemns terrorism and violent extremism "in all its forms," including cross-border terrorism
  - Calls for effective implementation of UNSC sanctions, including the 1267 Sanctions Committee
  - Demands curbing terror financing via international anti-money laundering standards
  - Prioritises information sharing, mutual legal assistance, extradition, and capacity building
  - Emphasises protecting victims of human trafficking linked to online scams
  - Expresses solidarity with terror attack victims across member states
- **Other Outcomes**
  - The declaration called for early finalisation of conventions on extradition, transfer of sentenced persons, and trafficking in persons, plus SOPs for rescue, repatriation, and reintegration of trafficking victims.

### India's Position

- Union Home Minister Amit Shah outlined **five cooperation areas**: drug control, counter-terrorism/legal cooperation, repatriation of fugitives, cyber-security/cybercrime, and institutional capacity building.
- He noted that criminal networks exploit encrypted communication, drones, cryptocurrency, and the dark web, calling for **real-time intelligence-sharing** and a **"whole-of-region" approach**.

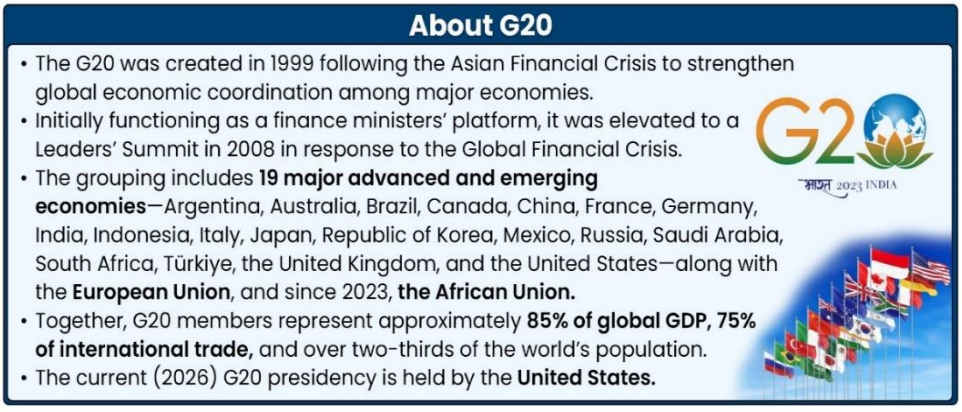
- He termed drug trafficking "**death trafficking**", rejecting any "golden" framing of the Golden Triangle (Thailand-Myanmar region), and flagged human trafficking and cyber slavery as grave concerns.
- He also welcomed the proposed BIMSTEC national security database and information-sharing centre.

## G20 Trade Ministers Meeting

The G20 Trade Ministers Meeting took place in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It was hosted by U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer ahead of the G20 Leaders' Summit in Florida.

### Key Outcomes & Agreements

- **Food Trade Coercion**
  - All G20 members reached consensus condemning the weaponization of food through coercive trade actions.
  - This was the one area where the full grouping found common ground.
- **Excess Manufacturing Capacity: A Divided G20**
  - 15 economies — including the US, EU, **India**, Japan, and Canada — signed a joint ministerial statement addressing global **structural overcapacity** in sectors like autos, EVs, batteries, and steel.
    - Global manufacturing overcapacity refers to a situation in which an economy or industry produces more goods than domestic and international markets can absorb at prevailing prices.
    - It may lead to price distortions, trade tensions, industrial disruption, trade protectionism.
  - Notably, China, Brazil, Indonesia, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and South Africa did not sign — reflecting the statement's implicit targeting of China's manufacturing overcapacity.
  - The countries committed to meeting before December 2026 to develop terms of reference, exchange non-confidential information and identify gaps in available data.




- **Forced Labour**
  - A separate statement committing to eliminate forced labour in global supply chains was signed only by the US, Mexico, and Argentina. It did not achieve full G20-wide consensus.

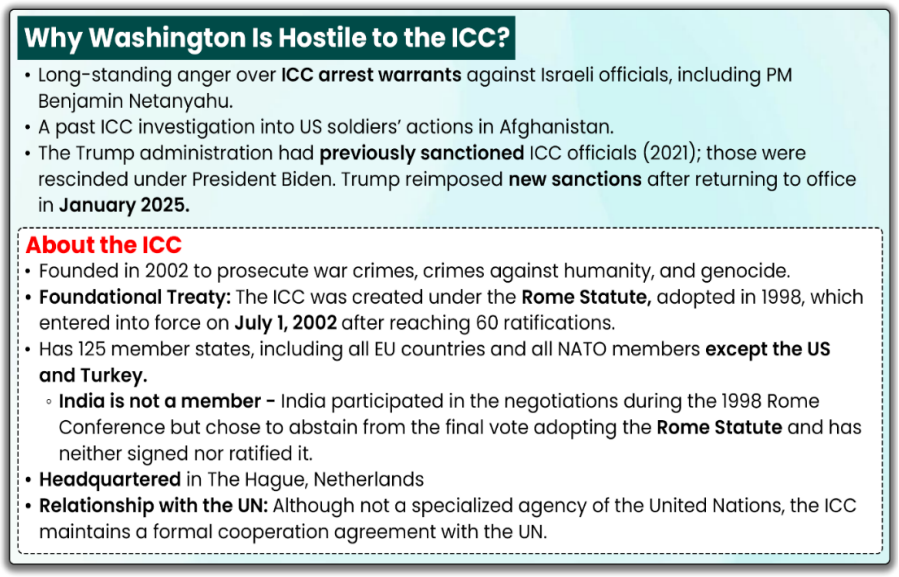
## ICC Wins Sakharov Prize

- The European Parliament awarded the International Criminal Court (ICC) and its staff the 2026 **Sakharov Prize** for Freedom of Thought, recognising its work in upholding international law, human rights, and multilateralism.
- The award came shortly after **President Trump** announced fresh **financial sanctions and pressure** against the ICC.
- **About Sakharov Prize**

- The Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought is the European Union's **highest human rights honour**, awarded annually by the European Parliament.
- Named after Soviet physicist, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, and political dissident Andrei Sakharov.
- The prize was established in 1988, with the first award jointly given to Nelson Mandela and Anatoli Marchenko.
- Winners receive a monetary endowment of €50,000.
- The prize is presented annually in December during a plenary session at the European Parliament hemicycle in Strasbourg, France.

## US Sanctions the ICC

- The Trump administration imposed **sanctions** on the International Criminal Court (ICC), hours after former ICC judge **Navi Pillay** won the 2026 Nobel Peace Prize for her work in international criminal justice.
  - Navi Pillay, born to Indian parents of Tamil descent, is a South African jurist who served as an ICC Appeals Chamber judge (2003-2008).
- The US has announced that it will ban transactions with this rogue court, cutting off their resources and crippling its ability to operate.
- This move goes further than past sanctions — it could potentially punish companies providing services to the court itself.




## 153rd Assembly of the IPU

- The 153rd Assembly of the **Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)** was held at the Arusha International Conference Centre, Tanzania.
- Theme - Focused on enhancing good governance and community empowerment.
- **Participation** - The Assembly convened nearly 700 delegates from over 130 countries, with a record **39.4% female representation**. India's delegation was led by Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman Harivansh Singh
- **Leadership and Membership**
  - **Nauru** was welcomed as the 184th IPU member
  - Milton Dick of Australia was elected the 32nd IPU President for a 2026-2029 term.
- **Key Outputs**
  - Arusha Communiqué on inclusive governance;
  - A resolution on the empowerment of persons with disabilities.

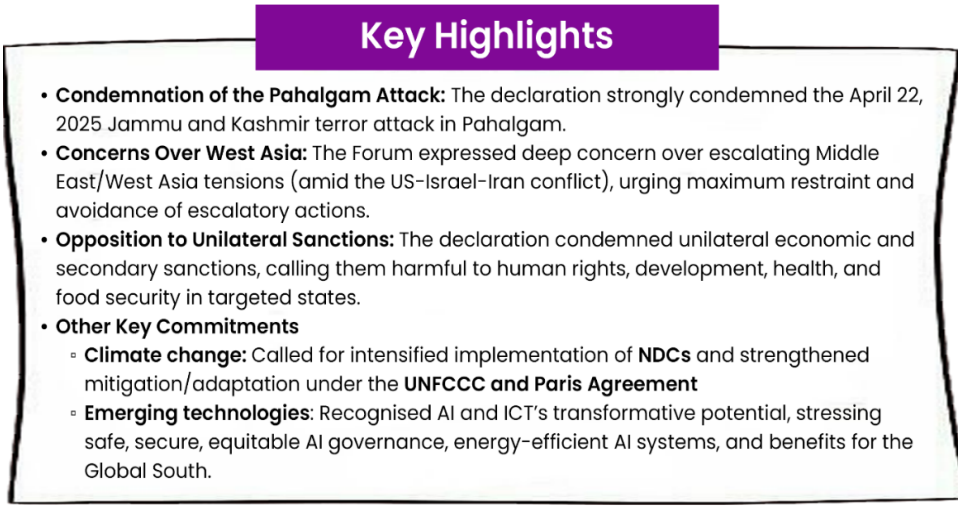
### Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU): An Overview

- IPU is the global organisation of national parliaments, founded in June 1889, in Paris, France.

- **Mission** - It promotes peace, democracy, human rights, gender equality, youth empowerment, climate action, and sustainable development through parliamentary diplomacy.
- **Headquarters** - Based in Geneva, Switzerland, with offices in New York (USA) and Vienna (Austria).
- **Membership:** Comprises 184 Member Parliaments and 15 Associate Members.

## 12th BRICS Parliamentary Forum

- The 12th BRICS Parliamentary Forum, held in New Delhi, concluded with a joint declaration.
- The declaration strongly condemned the Pahalgam terror attack, flagged concerns over West Asia tensions, and called for comprehensive UN reforms, including the Security Council.
- **Participants:** The forum, opened by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, drew participation from all BRICS members: Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, and the UAE.
    - Iran's Parliament Speaker Ghalibaf did not attend the meeting, though an Iranian delegation participated.
    - This follows tensions over India refusing direct Iran Air flights for collecting medicine shipments to Tehran, fearing US sanctions.
    - India insists Iran route supplies **via third countries like Armenia**.
    - Iranian officials argue medicines qualify as "humanitarian assistance," exempt from sanctions, and that transit through Armenia damages temperature-sensitive medicines.
    - Iran urged India to prioritise the direct Delhi-Tehran air route given their BRICS and civilisational ties.




## 25th SCO Council of Heads of Government Meeting

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh addressed the 25th SCO Council of Heads of Government meeting in **Dushanbe, Tajikistan**, calling for member states to dismantle the entire ecosystem of terrorism.
- India welcomed the establishment of the **Universal Centre (Tashkent)** and **Anti-Drug Centre (Dushanbe)** as permanent SCO bodies.
- The meeting reviewed cooperation on trade, transport, finance, digital economy, and social development, and adopted: A joint communiqué; The SCO budget for 2027; The trade and economic cooperation action plan (2026-2030).
- Indian side also invited member states to the first SCO Civilisational Dialogue Forum, to be hosted by India in November 2026.

**13th ADMM-Plus**

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh led the Indian delegation at the 13th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) held in **Cebu, Philippines**.
- **Theme**: "*Navigating Our Future, Together*" (under the Philippines' Chairmanship)
- Participants: Representatives from **11 ASEAN member** states and **8 dialogue partners** (including India, US, China, and Russia).
- During the meeting, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said India is ready to share its battle-tested counterterrorism expertise with ASEAN countries.

**Key Proposals: India**

- **Operational Sharing** - India offered its real-world experience through joint military exercises, capacity-building programmes and intelligence sharing.
- **Operation Sindoor as a Model** – Indian Minister cited Operation Sindoor (May 2025) as proof of India's proactive approach. He said it showed how terrorist infrastructure can be dismantled and strict limits enforced against state-sponsored terrorism.
- **Defence "Youth Bridge" -** India proposed a Youth Bridge initiative. It aims at people-to-people links, digital innovation and youth capacity-building between India and ASEAN.
- **Counterterrorism Leadership** - India and Malaysia co-chair the ADMM-Plus Experts' Working Group (EWG) on Counter-Terrorism for the 2024-2027 cycle.
- **Maritime Cooperation**
    - India reaffirmed its role as a net security provider in the Indo-Pacific.
    - It stressed freedom of navigation and maritime law enforcement.
    - 2026 has been designated the ASEAN-India Year of Maritime Cooperation.

# DEFENSE AND SECURITY

## CAPF Leadership Tussle

- The Supreme Court recently heard contempt petitions over the alleged non-compliance with its May 2025 judgment on CAPF career progression and IPS deputation.
- Through this case, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is required to explain why it had inducted 46 new IPS officers despite the court's directions.
- This has brought a decade-old institutional dispute back into focus.

### The May 2025 SC Judgment

- The Supreme Court held CAPFs must be treated as OGAS for all cadre purposes, ordered a cadre review, and directed that deputation posts up to Senior Administrative Grade level (SAG) {DIG/IG} be progressively reduced within two years.
- The Centre's review petition was dismissed in October 2025.

**The Core Dispute**

- Five forces are involved — **CRPF, BSF, CISF, ITBP, SSB.** Each has its own **Group A cadre** (Assistant Commandant upward), but senior posts have long been filled via **deputation,** mainly by **IPS officers.**
- Before 2026 law, recruitment rules reserved **20% of DIG** and **50% of IG** posts for deputation, which cadre officers say **narrows promotion chances** at senior levels.
  - CAPF cadre officers argue that this creates a structural bottleneck. The number of posts decreases at higher levels of the hierarchy.
  - Reserving senior posts for deputation further limits promotion opportunities for officers who have spent their entire careers in the CAPFs.

**Background: The NFFU Battle**

- Cadre officers fought for Non-Functional Financial Upgradation (NFFU) — higher pay without actual promotion.
- Delhi HC (2015) ruled in their favour; SC upheld it (2019); Cabinet granted Organised Group A Service (OGAS) status and NFFU benefits to Group A executive cadre officers of the CAPFs.
- **Problem Persisted**
  - CAPF officers argue that the NFFU scheme has only partly addressed stagnation.
  - This is because it operates under **existing Recruitment Rules,** which require officers to complete a prescribed number of years in each rank before becoming eligible for the next grade.
  - Under NFFU, an officer may receive the pay of a higher rank without being formally promoted. However, the service period required for the next financial upgradation may not begin until the officer receives an actual promotion.
  - CAPF officers argue that this defeats the purpose of NFFU. They have therefore sought **separate Service Rules** that allow career progression based on overall qualifying service rather than promotions dependent on the availability of vacancies.

### MHA's Justification for IPS Deputation

- CAPFs' operational role differs from civilian services.
- IPS officers provide an institutional link between Centre and state police during deployments.
- Ironically, states have been reluctant to release IPS officers, leaving central deputation posts hard to fill.

### New CAPF Law (2026)

- The **Central Armed Police Forces (General Administration) Act**, passed by Parliament in April 2026:
  - Creates a uniform framework for the five forces' Group A officers.
  - Empowers the Centre to frame rules notwithstanding contrary court orders.
  - Protects deputation: 50% of IG, ≥67% of Additional DG, and 100% of Special DG/DG posts reserved for deputation.
- **Current Legal Status**
  - CAPF officers have separately challenged the new law in the SC.
  - Two overlapping matters — the contempt petitions (2025 judgment compliance) and the Act's constitutional challenge — are now before the same bench.

## INS Mangrol

- The Indian Navy commissioned **INS Mangrol**, the third *Mahe-class* Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow Water Craft (ASW-SWC), at Mumbai's Naval Dockyard.

- Built by Cochin Shipyard Ltd (CSL), it is named after Mangrol, a fishing harbour in Gujarat's Junagadh district.
- **Strategic Significance**
  - With an 11,000 km coastline, 12 major ports and 1,197 islands, India needs shallow-water platforms to detect stealthy diesel-electric submarines near shore.
  - These vessels will guard harbours, shipping lanes and naval bases, freeing larger warships for deep-sea missions and strengthening India's layered, indigenous ASW capability in the Indian Ocean Region.

**Programme Background**

- In total, 16 ASW-SWCs are being constructed together by the CSL and the Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (GRSE), Kolkata - with over 80% indigenous content.
  - The 16 vessels are divided into two classes.
  - GRSE is building the **Arnala-class**, comprising INS Arnala, Androth, Anjadip, Amini, Abhay, Agray, Ajay and Akshay.
  - CSL is constructing the **Mahe-class**, comprising INS Mahe, Malvan, Mangrol, Malpe, Mulki, Magdala, Manapad and Machilipatnam.
  - The entire fleet is expected to be inducted into the Navy over the next two to three years.
- Together these ASW-SWCs will replace the decommissioned Abhay-class corvettes.
- The DAC approved the Rs 13,000-crore procurement in 2013.

**Key Features**

- **78m length,** 896-1100 tonnes displacement
- 25-knot speed, 1,800 nautical mile range
- Diesel engine-waterjet propulsion — reduces underwater noise, boosts manoeuvrability
- Indigenous sonar systems, torpedoes, anti-submarine rocket launcher, radar

## INS Samarthak

- The Indian Navy commissioned INS Samarthak, the first of two **multi-purpose vessels** built by Larsen & Toubro (L&T), at Karwar.
- Designed and built by L&T Shipyard, the vessel has over **75% indigenous content**, underscoring the Navy's deepening partnership with the private sector in defence manufacturing.
- It uses modular construction and pre-outfitting techniques, cutting build timelines while boosting domestic employment and industrial capability.
- Conceived as a **trials and evaluation platform**, INS Samarthak will:
  - Test and validate indigenously developed sensors and weapons before operational deployment
  - Reduce India's dependence on foreign facilities for evaluating naval technologies
  - Support maritime surveillance, reconnaissance, offshore patrolling, and HADR (humanitarian assistance and disaster relief) operations
- The induction reflects the Navy's twin push toward self-reliance (Atmanirbharta) in defence and a resilient domestic industrial ecosystem, giving India a dedicated, home-grown platform to validate new naval technologies.

## Fleet Support Ship Surya

- Defence Minister launched FSS-1 "*Surya*" — the Navy's **first indigenously built** Fleet Support Ship (FSS) — and laid the keel for FSS-5 at Hindustan Shipyard Limited (HSL), Visakhapatnam.
- An FSS transfers fuel, stores, food and personnel to warships/submarines at sea enabling a carrier battle group or surface action group to stay deployed without returning to harbour.
- **Surya: Key Specifications**
  - Fuel/water capacity - 20,000t diesel, 2,500t aviation fuel, 1,000t fresh water, 250t feed water
  - Cargo - Up to 8 × 20-ft containers (ammunition, spares, provisions)

- Endurance - 60-day missions

**HSL: Eight Decades of Shipbuilding**

- Founded 1941 as Scindia Shipyard; became HSL in 1952 — India's first greenfield shipyard.
- Built 203 ships, completed 2,045 repairs, refitted 6 submarines.

- **Existing Fleet Tanker Strength**
  - The Navy currently operates four fleet tankers:
    - ♣ Eastern Naval Command (Vizag): INS Shakti, INS Jyoti
    - ♣ Western coast: INS Deepak, INS Aditya
  - These refuel and resupply warships at sea, avoiding the need to return to port.
- **Towards Self-Reliance**
  - Five FSS vessels are being built under one contract with 82% indigenous content.
  - HSL used integrated modular construction to cut build times.

## Section 163 BNSS

- Ahead of the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) protests (October 10-11) demanding CEC Gyanesh Kumar's resignation, Delhi Police denied permission and imposed Section 163 BNSS in New Delhi district.
- It was similarly invoked in July during protests against then-Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

**About the Provision**

- Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) replaced **Section 144 of the CrPC** when BNSS came into force in 2024.
- A colonial-era provision empowering an **Executive Magistrate** to act via written order where immediate prevention or speedy remedy is desirable.
- Meant to prevent obstruction, danger to life/safety, disturbance of public tranquillity or riots.
- Designed as a **specific, time-bound** response — lapsing within two months.

**Application of Section 163**

- A 2023 RTI-based study ("The Use and Misuse of Section 144 CrPC") examining ~5,400 Delhi orders (2021-22) found:
  - Only **1.5%** of orders restricted unlawful assemblies.
  - **25.6%** mandated CCTV installation (hotels, banks, ATMs, liquor vends).
  - **43%** required businesses to maintain customer records.
  - Remainder covered miscellaneous bans (metallic kite strings, drones, paan shops near schools).

**Judicial Precedents**

- ***Babulal Parate v. State of Maharashtra* (1961):** Upheld validity but held the power is not "unlimited or untrammelled".
- ***Ramlila Maidan case* (2012):** SC held the power applies only in "grave circumstances," requiring a "sudden" emergency.
- ***Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan v. UOI* (2018):** Struck down a blanket protest ban near Jantar Mantar, directing a regulated permission mechanism instead.

## SAREX-2026: India's Largest Maritime Search & Rescue Exercise

- The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) conducted the 12th National Maritime Search and Rescue Exercise (SAREX-2026) off Paradip, Odisha, under the National Maritime Search and Rescue Board (NMSARB).
- The **theme** — "*Leveraging Technology to Strengthen SAR Preparedness and Maritime Safety*" — aimed to test operational readiness, interoperability and coordinated response to mass rescue situations at sea.
  - 32 observers from 30 countries participated, reflecting growing international cooperation in maritime SAR (Search and Rescue) and reinforcing India's position as a reliable regional SAR partner.
- SAREX-2026 reaffirmed India's commitment to a faster, technology-enabled, coordinated SAR framework, aligned with the vision of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and the spirit of MAHASAGAR, reinforcing that every distress call deserves a coordinated life-saving response.

## Operation Trident: Crackdown on Northeast's Narco-Hawala Network

- Operation Trident, a multi-agency anti-drug and financial crackdown in Northeast India, exposed a ₹100 crore hawala network linked to cross-border narco-terrorism.
- Home Minister Amit Shah has hailed the operation and said India will hammer drug cartels.
- **The Cross-Border Drug Cartel**
  - The network trafficked heroin, brown sugar and yaba pills from **Myanmar**.
  - The entry route was via **Zokhawthar and Champhai** in Mizoram.
  - The drugs moved through Northeast India into **Bangladesh**.
- **Hawala and Money Laundering Methods**
  - Proceeds were laundered through direct cash transfers and a "drugs-for-goods" system.
  - Funds were channelled into local businesses such as:
    - petrol pumps and grocery stores
    - footwear and cloth traders
    - medicine wholesalers
    - money exchanges
- **Significance**
  - It shows a "follow the money" approach that targets the financial backbone of drug networks as well as the carriers.
  - It highlights the Golden Triangle route risk and the vulnerability of the porous India-Myanmar border.

## Army Commanders' Conference 2026

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh addressed the Army Commanders' Conference in New Delhi. He asked the Army's senior leadership to monitor geopolitical and regional developments closely and stay prepared for future challenges.
- He released the **Land Warfare Doctrine** and asked the Army's leadership to build a long-term strategic vision for the next 20-30 years.
  - **Land Warfare Doctrine** - It gives an overarching framework for preparing the Army for the evolving character of warfare and future conflicts.

### Key Highlights

- **Lessons from Operation Sindoor**
  - He commended the forces for adapting to evolving operational circumstances.
  - Innovative thinking, synergy, superior coordination and advanced weaponry contributed to the operation's success.
- **Modernisation and Technology**
  - He appreciated the Army's restructuring, especially its use of drones and modern technology.
  - He urged faster progress in artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, data analytics, cybersecurity and secure communication networks.
- **Multi-Domain Warfare**
  - Challenges in the air, maritime, space and cyber domains are growing.
  - Even so, land warfare and ground forces remain indispensable.

- Success will depend on multi-domain capabilities and seamless coordination in joint operations.

- **Self-Reliance in Defence**
  - India's growing defence manufacturing capability is the result of concerted effort by all stakeholders.
  - In FY 2025-26, defence production reached a record ₹1.78 lakh crore.
  - Defence exports hit an all-time high of about ₹38,000 crore.
- **Reforms**
  - He referred to 2025 as the "Year of Reforms".

## Restrictions on Moving Prisoners Out of Jail

After the Tiger Shroff firing, Mumbai Police are probing the Lawrence Bishnoi gang's role. Yet they have never obtained custody of Lawrence (Sabarmati Jail) or Anmol (Tihar Jail), even though Anmol is named the head of the syndicate behind Baba Siddique's murder.

### Legal Provisions

- **Section 303, BNSS:** The Centre or a state may order that a prisoner **not be removed from prison**. The grounds are the **nature of the offence**, the likelihood of **public-order disturbance**, and **public interest**. It replaced **Section 268, CrPC**.
- **MHA orders:** Lawrence's order began in **August 2023** and is extended yearly. Anmol's order was issued in **December 2025**.
- **Effect:** Court production warrants become ineffective. Agencies can question them only **inside jail**, with court permission.

## CISF Overhauls Its Operational and Administrative Structure

- The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) is reorganising its administrative and operational structure from 1 November 2026.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has approved the move. It aims to strengthen specialised security management at critical infrastructure and strategic establishments.

### Key Highlights of the Reorganisation

- **Objectives**
  - Align the supervisory structure with the specific security needs of each sector.
  - Improve operational oversight and build sector-specific expertise.
  - Bring greater uniformity to security practices.
  - Strengthen coordination with Ministries, Departments and installation managements.
- **Key Changes**
  - **Functional Supervision**: The restructure transitions geographical sectors into functional commands tailored for specific industries.
    - Earlier, there were different sectors based on geography - National Capital Region; North Sector (New Delhi); Central Sector (Bhilai) etc.
    - Now, it has been reorganized based on **functional approach** in selected sectors: Power, Coal, Steel etc.
    - Industrial & Energy Commands: Coal Sector (Ranchi), Steel Sector (Bhilai), Petroleum & Natural Gas Sector (Guwahati), Power Sectors (New Delhi & Kolkata).

- **Commands and Port Security**: Establishing consolidated coastal port jurisdictions. (West Coast Port Sector (Mumbai) and East Coast Port Sector (Chennai).
- **Additional Mandates**: The force assumes designated maritime security responsibilities while maintaining current frameworks for specific strategic assets.

## French Supermarket Cyberattack: Lessons for India

- A cyberattack hit about 700 of 10,000 supermarket sites in France. Hackers manipulated refrigeration control systems, pushing some fridges up to 50°C overnight and spoiling food worth millions of euros.
- **What Happened?**
  - Attackers altered **temperature and defrost settings**.
  - **CERT-FR** named equipment from **Danfoss**, Copeland and Dixell as affected. It warned the attacks may be **ongoing**.
  - Experts say the cause was probably **unpatched software** and **internet-exposed device interfaces**.
  - No group has claimed responsibility, which is unusual because no ransom was demanded. French prosecutors have opened an investigation.
- **Response**
  - CERT-FR advised disconnecting units from the internet, resetting them and reconnecting only through a secure VPN.
- **Lessons for India**
  - Operational technology now runs power grids, metros, hospitals, smart cities and supply chains, so all are potentially vulnerable.
  - Compromised cold chains could damage food, medicines, vaccines and blood products.
  - CERT-In and the National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC) exist, but security must cover individual devices, older equipment and third-party systems.
  - Remove needless internet exposure, apply updates and replace insecure equipment.

## Integrated Logistics Structure for Tri-Service Theatre Commands

- India is developing an Integrated Logistics Structure under the Department of Military Affairs (DMA). It will unify the separate supply chains of the Army, Navy and Air Force.
- It is meant to support the planned integrated theatre commands.
- **Rationale**
  - **Logistics is now fragmented**: the Army Service Corps, naval logistics and Air Force maintenance systems work separately.
  - The move is inspired by proposals based on the US Defense Logistics Agency (DLA).
  - The aim is a streamlined tri-service framework.
- **Key Components**
  - **Tri-services Logistics Management Application (TLMA)-** A digital platform to give real-time inter-service inventory visibility. It will integrate each service's ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) software.
  - **National Defence Codification System (NDCS) -** It is modelled on NATO's stock number system. Every military item gets a single name and stock number.

- **PM Gati Shakti Defence Portal -** It aligns with the National Logistics Policy and the Unified Logistics Interface Platform (ULIP). It helps optimise multimodal transport and infrastructure.
- **AI and Predictive Analytics -** Limited deployment of AI and machine learning for predictive maintenance and automated supply chain tracking. {Sarvam AI signed a five-year MoU with the Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff (HQ IDS)}
- **Physical Infrastructure Roadmap-** Plans include: joint logistics nodes; joint ammunition depots; air stores supply parks; unified material organisations.

- **Significance**
  - It reduces duplication and improves resource use across services.
  - It builds common standards and gives a shared view of stocks.
  - It is a key enabler for jointness and theatreisation.

## Swavlamban 2026

- The fifth edition of the Indian Navy's flagship Swavlamban seminar was held at the Manekshaw Centre, New Delhi.
- The two-day event had the **theme** "*Strength & Power through Innovation and Indigenisation*". It brought together the armed forces, industry, start-ups, MSMEs, academia and investors.
- **Key Takeaways**
  - The seminar showed operational needs, technology and indigenous industry converging.
  - The priority is to move beyond prototypes to **testing, certification, manufacturing, scaling and induction**.
  - Stronger domestic supply chains, **industry-academia collaboration** and more space for **start-ups and MSMEs** are the key priorities.

## ASEAN-India Maritime Exercise

- The second edition of the ASEAN-India Maritime Exercise (AIME-2026) was held at Subic Bay, Philippines. The inaugural edition was hosted by Singapore in 2023.
- **Theme:** "Anchored in Trust, United at Sea"
- **Participants and Organisers**: It was co-hosted by the Indian and Philippine navies. India was represented by INS Sahyadri and INS Kulish.
- **Strategic Significance**
  - It aligns with India's MAHASAGAR vision and Act East Policy.
  - It builds interoperability and trust with ASEAN navies.
  - It supports a free and open Indo-Pacific.

## India's Next Chief of Air Staff

- Air Marshal Ashutosh Dixit has been appointed as the next Chief of the Air Staff (CAS). He will take charge following the retirement of incumbent Air Chief Marshal AP Singh on October 31.
- Dixit participated in Operation Safed Sagar, Operation Rakshak, and Operation Sindoor across a four-decade career.

## Emissions Gap Report 2026

Recently, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) released the "*Emissions Gap Report 2026- The Point of Return*", (17th edition of the global assessment of GHGs) ahead of the 2026 UN Climate Change Conference (COP31) in Antalya, Türkiye. It warns that limiting warming to 1.5°C without overshoot is no longer possible and adopted a "lowest possible" overshoot benchmark: warming peaking at 1.7-1.8°C around mid-century and returning to 1.5°C by 2100.

**About the Emissions Gap Report:** It is UNEP's annual assessment of the gap between where global emissions are headed and where they need to be to meet the Paris Agreement goals.

- **Legal Basis:** It tracks the Paris Agreement, 2015. Article 2 sets the "well below 2°C, pursue 1.5°C" goal, and Article 4 requires Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

**Key Findings:**

- **Emissions in 2025:** Global emissions stood at 58.4 gigatons of $CO_2$ equivalent (Gt $CO_2e$), down 0.1 Gt$CO_2e$ from 2024. Fossil-fuel $CO_2$ kept rising, but the rise was offset by a fall in Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) emissions.
- **Cuts Needed:** Emissions must fall 18% by 2030, 45% by 2035 and 69% by 2040, relative to 2025 levels.
- **NDCs Fall Short:** Full NDC implementation would cut emissions only 5-8% by 2030 and 11-15% by 2035, limiting warming to 2.6°C (by 2100). Current policies point to 2.8°C. (by 2100)
- **G20 Share:** G20 members (excluding the African Union) account for 76% of global emissions.
- **Cost of Delay:** Every five years of $CO_2$ emissions at current levels raises peak warming by about 0.1°C. A return to 1.5°C requires removing and permanently storing roughly 320 Gt of $CO_2$ this century.

**India-Specific Findings:**

- **Emissions Fell in 2025:** India's emissions fell in 2025, breaking a long period of rapid growth. UNEP attributes this partly to weather and partly to structural shifts towards renewables.
- **Low Per Capita Burden:** India is the third-largest emitter, after China and the USA. Its per capita emissions are less than half the global average.
- **On Track, But Emissions Rising:** India is among six G20 members likely to meet their 2030 targets, and is the only G20 member whose total emissions are set to rise between 2030 and 2035. This is because India's NDC targets emissions intensity (a 47% cut per unit of GDP by 2035 from 2005 levels), which allows total emissions to rise with economic growth. The NDC also targets 60% non-fossil installed electricity capacity and an additional carbon sink of 3.5-4 billion tonnes through forest and tree cover.

**Way Forward:**

- **Fossil Fuel Transition:** Implement the first Global Stocktake's call to transition away from fossil fuels.
- **Non-$CO_2$ Gases:** Prioritize methane cuts for quick temperature gains.
- **Finance and Technology:** Deliver climate finance to developing countries, in line with Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC).
- **India's Pathway:** Build on renewable expansion so that emissions peak early, while balancing development needs.

## WWF Living Planet Report

Recently, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) released its biennial Living Planet Report (LPR) 2026, which recorded a 73% average decline in monitored wildlife populations between 1970 and 2022.

**About the Living Planet Report:** It is WWF's flagship report on global biodiversity, published every two years. The 2026 edition is subtitled "The Science of Hope".

- **Living Planet Index (LPI):** It is the core indicator of the report, produced by the Zoological Society of London (ZSL). It tracks average changes in the relative abundance of wild vertebrate populations over time.

**Key Findings of the Report:**

- **By Ecosystem:** Freshwater ecosystems recorded the strongest decline (85%- reflecting severe pressure on rivers and wetlands), followed by terrestrial (69%) and marine (59%).
- **By Region:** The steepest declines were in Latin America & the Caribbean (95%), Africa (80%) & Asia-Pacific (49%).
- **Main Threats:** Habitat loss and degradation is the most reported threat, followed by overexploitation, climate change, pollution, invasive species and disease.
- **Systemic Drivers:** The food system is the leading cause of habitat loss and the single largest driver of biodiversity loss. The energy system fuels climate change, and the finance system funds harmful activities.
- **Mixed Trends:** Half of the monitored populations are stable or increasing, but the declines are larger in magnitude, so the overall trend stays negative.
- **Global Recoveries:** Green turtles, bluefin tuna, tigers and southern African elephants have recovered.
- **Positive Tipping Points:** These occur when a system crosses into a healthier state and the change becomes self-reinforcing, that is faster, cheaper and harder to reverse.
  - **Energy:** This tipping point has been passed. The shift to renewables is accelerating, led by India and China. India met its 50% non-fossil electricity capacity target five years ahead of 2030.
  - **Food:** This is showing early progress through regenerative agriculture, sustainable diets and reduced food loss and waste.
  - **Finance:** This is still at an early stage, with an annual US$1.3 trillion biodiversity financing gap.

**Way Forward**

- **Transform Food Systems:** Scale up regenerative and nature-positive farming, sustainable diets and reduction of food loss and waste.
- **Sustain the Energy Shift:** Build on India's early achievement of its NDC target through faster renewable deployment and electric mobility.
- **Redirect Finance:** Stop financing harmful activities and close the biodiversity financing gap.
- **Beyond Protected Areas:** Frame landscape-level strategies for species in grasslands & other non-protected habitats.
- **Protect Freshwater Ecosystems:** Prioritize river flows, wetland conservation and pollution control.
- **Address Conflict:** Ensure timely compensation, community participation and benefit-sharing so that local communities support conservation.

## India's Ramsar Site Tally Reaches 103

Recently, India's Ramsar site tally reached 103 after Sukhna Wetland in Chandigarh and Sauj Jheel in Uttar Pradesh were designated as Wetlands of International Importance.

- **Sukhna Wetland:** It is Chandigarh's first Ramsar site, a human-made reservoir created in 1958 at the foothills of the Shivalik hills. It shelters Pallas's fish eagle, the common pochard and the black pond turtle, and supports migratory birds on the Central Asian Flyway.
- **Sauj Jheel:** It is a shallow floodplain lake in Mainpuri district, near Saman Bird Sanctuary, that regularly hosts over 30,000 waterbirds, including the sarus crane and greater spotted eagle. Mainpuri is now the only district in India with two Ramsar sites.

**National Initiatives:**

- **Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017:** Notified under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986- they set up State and UT Wetlands Authorities and prohibit encroachment, waste dumping and untreated effluent discharge. Every Ramsar site is deemed notified under these Rules.
- **National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Ecosystems (NPCA):** Centrally sponsored scheme launched in February 2013 that Merges the national lake Conservation Plan and National wetland conservation programme.
- **Amrit Dharohar (2023):** promotes species conservation, nature tourism, wetland livelihoods and carbon assessment at wetland sites.
- **Mission Sahbhagita (2022):** Promotes people's participation in wetland conservation. Under its Save Wetlands Campaign **(2023)**, volunteers have mapped over 1.7 lakh wetlands.

## AATAL: World's First Integrated Air Pollution Analysis Facility

The Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) recently inaugurated the Integrated Atmospheric Chemistry and Aerosol Toxicity Analysis Laboratory (AATAL) for Delhi-NCR at Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), Delhi. It has been set up under Mission Mausam.

**About Mission Mausam**

- **Launched By:** Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES), with an outlay of ₹2,000 crore approved by the Union Cabinet. Phase I: 2024-26 and Phase II: 2026-31.
- **Implementing Agencies:** India Meteorological Department (IMD), National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF) and Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM).
- **Goal:** Make India "Weather-ready and Climate-smart" through next-generation radars and satellites, High-Performance Computing (HPC), Artificial Intelligence/Machine Learning (AI/ML)-based Earth system models, and last-mile delivery of forecasts.

**What is AATAL?** It is a first-of-its-kind integrated facility in the world which shows not just how much air pollution is present, but also what the pollution is made of, where it comes from, and how harmful it may be, in real time. Its key features include:

- **Real-Time Source Apportionment:** Estimates the share of each source, such as vehicles, industry, crop-residue burning, construction and road dust, and pollution from nearby regions.
- **Chemical Analysis:** Studies gases and aerosols, including fine particulate matter (PM2.5), metals and toxic elements.
- **Toxicity Assessment:** Assesses the potential health risk of pollutants, not just their concentration.
- **Integrated with AIRWISE:** Linked to the Air Quality Warning and Integrated Decision Support System for Emissions (AIRWISE), which gives locality-level forecasts at 400-metre resolution for the next 72 hours.

**Significance:**

- **Targeted Interventions:** Shifts the response from general measures to action against the specific sources causing pollution at a given time.
- **Support to CAQM:** Gives the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM), a statutory body under the Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas Act, 2021, evidence to prioritise sectors and locations and to judge whether its measures work.
- **Stronger GRAP:** Combined with forecasts, it supports timely preventive steps under the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP).
- **Public Health:** Toxicity data helps health authorities understand the risks of different types of pollutants.

- **Scalability and Coordination:** The model can be extended to other cities, and it reflects a whole-of-government approach that links science with policy.

### Cyclone Arnab

Recently, the very severe cyclonic storm "Arnab" (pronounced "Ornab") crossed the Andhra Pradesh and Yanam (Puducherry) coasts between Bapatla and Visakhapatnam. It was the first cyclone over the Bay of Bengal (one of the world's major tropical-cyclone regions) in 2026.

- **Name:** The name was proposed by Bangladesh and comes from the Bengali word for "ocean" or "sea."
- **Naming System:** North Indian Ocean cyclones are named in sequence from a list contributed by 13 countries and adopted in 2020. India Meteorological Department (IMD) as the Regional Specialised Meteorological Centre (RSMC), New Delhi, assigns the names.

### India to Mandate 1% Sustainable Aviation Fuel Blending for International Flights

India is set to introduce a 1% Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) blending requirement for international flights from January 2027, rising to 2% in 2028 and 5% in 2030. The move comes as international aviation prepares for tighter emission obligations under the International Civil Aviation Organization's (ICAO) Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA).

**About Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF):** SAF is a cleaner alternative to conventional jet fuel that can be blended with aviation turbine fuel (ATF).

- **Production:** It can be produced from alternative feedstocks, including agricultural and other biological residues and waste materials such as used cooking oil.
- **Legal Basis:** The Aviation Turbine Fuel (Regulation of Marketing) Order, 2001 was amended in April 2026 to permit SAF-blended ATF. The indicative blending targets were set by the National Biofuels Coordination Committee (NBCC- constituted under National Policy on Biofuels-2018), chaired by the Union Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas (P&NG).
- **Benefits:** When it meets the relevant sustainability criteria, SAF can reduce lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions by up to 80% compared with conventional jet fuel, depending on the feedstock. It also helps airlines meet their CORSIA obligations.
- **Concerns Raised:**
  - Absence of a comprehensive national SAF policy and a clear carbon-credit framework.
  - Scaling up production, ensuring reliable supplies and managing SAF's higher cost, which is two to five times that of ATF.

### Mining Project Threatens Rare Jeypore Ground Gecko

Recently, only four individuals of the endangered Jeypore ground gecko were documented over the past year in Odisha's Balda hills, which is the site of a proposed bauxite mine.

- **About the Proposed Bauxite Mine:** It is a opencast mine within the Nageswari reserve forest, Koraput district. The Bondo and Porja Adivasis have protested the project for two years, asserting it is their ancestral land.

**About Jeypore Ground Gecko:** It is a small, nocturnal, ground-dwelling gecko that lives in boulder crevices and leaf litter.

- **Distribution:** It is range-restricted, found only in high-elevation (900-1,400 m) forests of the northern Eastern Ghats in Odisha and Andhra Pradesh.

- **Rediscovery:** It was first described in 1878 then presumed extinct for 130 years and was rediscovered in 2010 in Koraput.
- **Protection Status:**
  - It is listed as Endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List.
  - It is placed in Schedule I of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.
  - It is listed in Appendix II of CITES.
- **Threats:** Its habitat is shrinking due to coffee plantations, hydropower projects and mining. At Potangi, where it was first recorded, the habitat has been lost to bauxite mining by the National Aluminium Company Limited (NALCO), and the gecko is believed to be locally extinct there.

## India's Water Treatment Plants Are Failing to Remove 'Forever Chemicals'

Recent studies have found per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in water sources across India.

**What are PFAS?** PFAS are synthetic chemicals with strong carbon-fluorine bonds, used in coatings, textiles and industrial products. They resist degradation and can contaminate the environment for a very long time which is why they are also called "forever chemicals."

**Key Findings:** An IIT-Madras study found PFAS were 5-103% higher in treated water than in raw water, likely because precursors turned into stable PFAS inside the plant.

| Concerns: | Way Forward: |
|---|---|
| • **Health Risk:** The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classifies perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) as carcinogenic to humans. Both PFOA and PFOS ((perfluorooctane sulfonic acid) are types of PFAS materials.<br>• **No Drinking-Water Limit:** The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) standard, IS 10500:2012, sets no PFAS limit. A BIS working group is examining limits, but which PFAS will be covered is not yet final.<br>• **No Manufacturing Ban:** No specific regulation bans PFAS manufacturing, and there is no clear legal pathway to penalise polluters.<br>• **Ineffective Treatment:** Conventional biological treatment cannot remove PFAS, and low-cost removal materials are still under development.<br>• **Lack of Exposure Data:** India lacks baseline data on human exposure, making it hard to assess the actual health risk. Municipal sewage and industrial discharges mix, making it difficult to identify and hold specific polluters accountable. | • **Precautionary Interim Limits:** Set limits for well-studied PFAS such as PFOA without waiting for complete exposure data.<br>• **Group-Based Regulation:** Regulate PFAS as a class, including precursors and transformation products, rather than through a fixed list of named chemicals.<br>• **PFAS Inventory:** Map which PFAS are manufactured, imported and used in India.<br>• **Harmonised Monitoring:** Standardise testing methods and use high-resolution mass spectrometry to detect PFAS beyond fixed lists.<br>• **Source Tracking and Accountability:** Use source-specific sampling to separate sewage from industrial inputs, and create a legal mechanism to penalise polluters.<br>• **Advanced Treatment:** Develop affordable adsorption materials and add advanced polishing steps at water treatment plants.<br>• **Baseline and Health Studies:** Expand baseline data on PFAS in water and consumer products, and carry out toxicological studies to assess exposure. |

## Right to Life Includes Right to Pollution-Free Water and Air: CJI

Recently, Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant, addressing the National Human Rights Commission's 33rd Foundation Day and its conference on the right to water, said that Article 21 includes the right to enjoy pollution-free water and air.

**What Did the CJI Say?**

- **Life with Dignity:** Article 21 has evolved into a guarantee of a dignified life. The State must therefore not only refrain from harm but also ensure the conditions for a dignified life.
- **Safe Water, Not Just Taps:** A tap alone is not access. A pipe that runs dry, or water contaminated with arsenic or fluoride, is a threat to life and health.
- **Rights for the Powerless:** A right that fails the powerless is merely a privilege. Institutions should be judged by whether they reach those least able to be heard.
- **Institutional Roles:** Courts must intervene when rights are violated. Human rights commissions must investigate complaints and identify systemic failures.
- **Future Generations:** Every depleted aquifer or polluted river shifts a burden to future generations, so rights protection must extend across time.

**Constitutional Basis:**

- **Article 21:** Right to life, judicially expanded to include a clean environment and safe drinking water.
- **Article 47 and Article 48A (Directive Principles of State Policy):** The State's duty to improve public health and to protect the environment.

**Key Judicial Precedents:**

- **Subhash Kumar vs State of Bihar, 1991:** Held that the right to life includes the right to enjoy pollution-free water and air.
- **Narmada Bachao Andolan vs Union of India, 2000:** Recognised the right to water as part of Article 21.
- **A.P. Pollution Control Board v. Prof. M.V. Nayudu (2001):** Held that access to clean and safe drinking water is an indispensable component of the right to life guaranteed under **Article 21** of the Constitution.

**Way Forward:**

- **Outcome-Based Monitoring:** Measure whether water is safe, reliable and available, not just the number of connections.
- **Accessible Redress:** Strengthen State Human Rights Commissions, which can hear complaints locally and in the local language.
- **Institutional Coordination:** Align the work of courts, governments and commissions to fix systemic failures.
- **Intergenerational Equity:** Protect aquifers and rivers as a constitutional duty to future generations.

## Kigali Amendment at 10

As the Kigali Amendment turns 10, India's cooling demand is projected to more than double by 2035, making India's choices central to its next phase.

**About Kigali Amendment:** A legally binding amendment to the Montreal Protocol (1987) to phase down hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs). It was adopted in Kigali, Rwanda, in 2016 and entered into force in 2019.

- **Why HFCs:** They replaced ozone-depleting chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) but are potent greenhouse gases, with up to thousands of times the warming impact of carbon dioxide (over a century, weight for weight)
- **Benefit:** Full implementation could avoid 0.3°C- 0.5°C of warming by 2100.
- **India's Commitment:** India ratified it in 2021. It must freeze HFC production and consumption in 2028, cut 10% below that baseline by 2032 and reach an 85% reduction by 2047.

**Why Cooling Matters for India?**

- **Twin Emissions:** Cooling warms the climate both through leaking refrigerants and through fossil-fuel electricity. Pairing the HFC shift with energy efficiency could roughly double the climate benefit.

| Challenges: | Way Forward: |
|---|---|
| • **Inefficient Legacy Equipment:** Appliances bought before the 2032 cuts will run into the 2030s, raising electricity bills and the need for new power capacity.<br>• **Dumping Risk:** Low-efficiency appliances rejected by stricter markets may find buyers in countries with weaker standards.<br>• **Leakage from Existing Equipment:** Refrigerants escape during servicing and disposal, which cannot be prevented by limits on new production.<br>• **Transition Costs:** Indian manufacturers need finance and technology to switch production. | • **Raise Efficiency Standards Early:** Tighten appliance norms before the treaty deadlines arrive.<br>• **Refrigerant Recovery:** Build systems to recover, reuse or safely destroy refrigerants.<br>• **Access to Finance:** Use the Multilateral Fund for factory conversion and for training service technicians.<br>• **Extend the Model:** Apply the Montreal Protocol's "start and strengthen" approach to other super pollutants such as methane. |

## COP17 of the Convention on Biological Diversity

Recently, the 17th Conference of the Parties (COP17) to the Convention on Biological Diversity **(CBD)** concluded in Yerevan, Armenia with the adoption of "Yerevan Pathway," in response to the first global review of progress under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF).

✓**CBD** is a legally binding treaty adopted at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. Its three goals are conservation of biological diversity, sustainable use of its components, and fair and equitable sharing of benefits from genetic resources. Its Conference of the Parties meets every two years.

✓**KMGBF:** Adopted at COP15 in 2022, it sets 23 targets for 2030, including conserving 30% of the world's land and seas and restoring degraded ecosystems. The first review found that collective efforts are insufficient to meet these targets on time.

**Key Outcomes of COP17:**

- **Yerevan Pathway:** It sets priorities until 2030- reforming harmful subsidies, aligning national budgets with conservation goals, increasing support to developing countries, and strengthening monitoring.
- **Indigenous Participation:** COP17 adopted the "Sevan Guidelines," the operating rules for the permanent body on Article 8(j). This gives indigenous peoples a formal voice in biodiversity negotiations.
- **Finance:** Nearly $2 billion in new funding was announced, including $560 million under the Global Environment Facility.
- **Other Decisions:** Decisions were also adopted on protected areas, forest biodiversity, invasive alien species, synthetic biology and living modified organisms.
- **Next COP:** COP18 will be held in Ecuador in 2028.

**India's Stand:** India's updated National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) has 23 national targets and 142 indicators. India called for implementing the KMGBF in line with national priorities and circumstances, backed by adequate finance and technology from developed countries.

**Concerns Raised:**

- **Finance Gap:** Developed countries missed their commitment to provide $20 billion a year by 2025, against a target of $30 billion a year by 2030.
- **Cali Fund:** The fund for benefit-sharing from digital sequence information (DSI), meaning digital genetic data such as DNA sequences, has received **pledges** of only about $10,565. Rules on who pays and how much were deferred.
- **Permanent Financial Mechanism:** Whether there will be a new fund or existing arrangements will be used was deferred to COP18.

# SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

## 2026 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine

A trio of scientists- **Karl Deisseroth, Peter Hegemann & Georg Nagel** have been awarded the 2026 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for discovering optogenetics, a technique that uses **light to switch individual nerve cells on or off**.

**Key Discovery:**

- **Peter Hegemann & Georg Nagel** identified **channelrhodopsins-** light-gated ion channels in the algae *Chlamydomonas*.
- **Karl Deisseroth** introduced the channelrhodopsin gene into **neurons**, enabling their activity to be controlled precisely using light.

**Significance of Optogenetics:**

- Enables precise mapping of neural circuits involved in **memory, emotions, behaviour and bodily functions**.
- Improves understanding of **neurological & psychiatric disorders** such as Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, and epilepsy.
- **Potential therapeutic applications:** Restoration of **vision** and development of other neural therapies.

## 2026 Nobel Prize in Physics

**Francis Halzen** (University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA) has been awarded the **2026 Nobel Prize in Physics** *"for decisive contributions to the IceCube Neutrino Observatory and the discovery of high-energy neutrinos of astrophysical origin."*

**Key Discovery:** Francis Halzen pioneered the use of **Antarctic ice at the South Pole to detect neutrinos**, leading to the **IceCube Neutrino Observatory-** a **cubic-kilometre detector equipped with thousands of light sensors**. IceCube detects flashes of light produced when neutrinos interact with atoms in the ice, enabling researchers to study **high-energy processes in the distant universe**.

**Significance:** IceCube has opened **neutrino astronomy**, enabling scientists to investigate **violent cosmic phenomena and previously unknown astrophysical sources**.

## 2026 Nobel Prize in Chemistry

French chemist Henri Kagan and Japanese chemist Kenso Soai have won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry for 2026 for the "discovery of non-linear effects and autocatalysis in asymmetric organic synthesis."

**Key Concepts & Discoveries:**

- **Chirality**: Some molecules exist in two mirror image forms(non-superimposable), like left and right hands, called enantiomers. These forms can interact differently with biological molecules and produce different effects.
- **Biological Significance**: Two enantiomers of the same drug may produce different effects, with only one having the desired therapeutic effect.
- **Scientific Puzzle**- **Homochirality**: Why do living organisms predominantly use only one mirror-image form of certain molecules? This remained a longstanding mystery.
- **Henri B. Kagan (1986)**: Discovered non-linear effects that can amplify differences between enantiomers during chemical reactions.
- **Kenso Soai (1995-2003)**: Demonstrated autocatalysis, in which a chiral molecule promotes the formation of more molecules with the same handedness, potentially amplifying a tiny initial imbalance.

**Significance**

- **Pharmaceuticals**: Enables selective production of the desired enantiomer of a drug.
- **Origin of Life:** Helps explain how a small initial imbalance between mirror-image molecules could have led to the dominance of one form in living systems.

## Nuclear Reactors on the Moon

NASA plans to install a 20 kW nuclear reactor near the Moon's south pole by 2030, while Russia is planning a 10 kW reactor for the China led International Lunar Research Station (ILRS).

**Need for Nuclear Power on the Moon:**

- **Long Lunar Nights**: Most lunar locations experience around 14 days of daylight followed by 14 days of darkness, limiting solar power.
- **Extreme Temperatures**: Permanently shadowed craters can experience temperatures below -200°C. Nuclear reactors can provide reliable power for heating, life-support systems, habitats and lunar rovers, irrespective of sunlight.

**Why the Lunar South Pole?**

- **Water Ice**: Permanently shadowed craters preserve water ice.
- **Rocket Fuel:** Electrolysis can split water into hydrogen and oxygen, which can be used as rocket propellants.
- **Strategic Locations**: Elevated ridges and mountain peaks near the south pole receive near-continuous sunlight, making them ideal locations for power generation and lunar bases right next to shadowed ice reserves.

**Geopolitical Significance:** The U.S.-led Artemis programme and the China-led ILRS aim to establish long-term lunar bases. The Outer Space Treaty, 1967, prohibits national appropriation of the Moon. The Artemis Accords envisage temporary safety zones to prevent harmful interference with lunar activities. Establishing reactors, landing sites, mines and habitats at scarce, resource-rich locations could give one country a strategic advantage and restrict others' practical access.

**Key Challenges:**

- **High Launch Costs**: Transporting reactors, shielding and other equipment to the Moon is expensive.
- **Infrastructure**: Remote reactors require robotic deployment systems and power cables.
- **Waste Heat**: Large radiators are needed to dissipate heat and must be protected from lunar dust.
- **Safety Risks**: Reactor failure could contaminate valuable lunar sites.

## TAPAS-1

Ahmedabad-based space-tech startup Satleo Labs recently launched TAPAS-1 aboard SpaceX's Transporter-18 rideshare mission.

**What is TAPAS-1?** TAPAS-1 (Thermal Access Platform for Analytics & Solutions) is India's first commercial private thermal-imaging payload which uses a thermal infrared camera to capture heat emitted by the Earth's surface. The images can be analyzed using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to identify temperature variations and generate useful insights.

**Key Features:**

- **Orbit**: Low Earth Orbit (LEO), approximately 500 km above Earth.
- **Weight**: ~1.5 kg; belongs to the CubeSat category of small, modular satellite systems.
- **Operational Life:** Expected to remain in orbit for three years.

**Applications:**

- **Agriculture**: Monitoring crop conditions, agricultural stress and water requirements.
- **Urban Planning:** Mapping temperature variations across cities to help manage urban heat stress.
- **Disaster Management**: Detecting and monitoring forest fires and other thermal anomalies.
- **Defence**: Supporting surveillance and defence-related thermal intelligence.
- **Climate and Weather**: Monitoring land and ocean temperatures, studying climate patterns and supporting storm prediction and extreme weather warnings.
- **Geology and Archaeology:** Helping identify mineral deposits and potential underground archaeological structures.

## 3D Concrete Printing

Andhra Pradesh recently launched a national-level pilot under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G) to construct 177 rural houses using 3D Concrete Printing.

**What is 3D Concrete Printing?** It is a construction technology that uses a computer-controlled robotic printer to build walls by depositing specially formulated concrete in successive layers based on a digital design.

**Key Advantages:**

- **Unprecedented speed, reduced material waste, and elimination of traditional timber or steel formwork.**
- **Affordable Housing:** Supports rapid construction of rural homes and disaster-relief shelters.
- **Improved Thermal Comfort:** Can provide cooler indoor spaces through suitable design and materials.

**Challenges:**

- **Conventional methods are still needed** for foundations, reinforcement, roofing, plumbing and electrical work.
- **High equipment costs.**
- **Material durability, structural safety standards and regulatory approvals** remain concerns.

**Way Forward:** Combine robotics, AI and digital design with conventional engineering, while ensuring structural safety, affordability and long-term durability before large-scale adoption.

## India-Specific Severity Score for Sickle Cell Anaemia

Scientists at CSIR-Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) have developed an India-specific severity score for sickle cell anaemia (SCA), based on clinical data from Indian children.

✓SCA is an inherited blood disorder caused by a mutation in the beta-globin gene. It produces abnormal haemoglobin, making red blood cells sickle-shaped, which can cause anaemia, severe pain and organ damage. India is among the countries with the highest burden of the disease,

**Objective:** To improve disease assessment and treatment decisions, as international scoring systems may not accurately reflect the clinical patterns of Indian patients.

**Limitation Of Existing Score:** The international Paediatric Severity Score (PSS) matched expert clinical assessments in only 67% of cases.

- **India-Specific Severity Score 1 (ISS1)**: Built by adding four clinical parameters to international PSS. Improved agreement with expert clinical assessments to nearly 83%.
- **India-Specific Severity Score 2 (ISS2)**: Uses *observable clinical indicators* instead of laboratory tests from **ISS1**, achieving 85% agreement, correctly identifying all mild cases and improving assessment of moderate cases.

**Significance:** Enables quicker disease assessment, reduces dependence on laboratory investigations for treatment decisions.

## LEO Satellites Interfering with Radio Astronomy

A study published in Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society under a satellite radiation monitoring programme called SNIFFLES found that Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellites interfere with radio astronomy through electromagnetic emissions.

### Key Findings:

- **Satellites Studied:** Starlink, OneWeb and China's Guowang, monitored for nearly 376 hours in 2024.
- **Types of Emissions:**
  - **Intended**: Included direct-to-cell(mobile phones) signals from Starlink satellites.
  - **Unwanted**: Included emissions from transmitters, including signals at multiples of the transmission frequency (harmonics).
  - **Unintended**: Included stray emissions from electronic components, such as power converters and computers.
- **Impact**: Some signals were 100 billion times brighter than typical astronomical sources, potentially overwhelming **radio telescopes.**

### Way Forward:

- Regulate both licensed transmissions and stray emissions.
- Continuously monitor satellite radiation.
- Apply international radio-emission standards to satellite operations.

## Open-Weight Models

Recently, United States (US) and European firms released open-weight Artificial Intelligence (AI) models, including Meta's Muse Spark Open, NVIDIA's Nemotron and Mistral's Timestral.

**What is an Open-Weight Model?** It is an AI model whose trained parameters (weights- **numerical values**), which help it process information and generate responses, are available for download. Users can run, customize and integrate it into their own applications, reducing dependence on a single provider. However, open-weight models are not necessarily fully open-source, as their training dataset, code or usage rights may remain restricted.

### Why Is It Being Given Away Free?

- **Network Effect:** More developers building tools around a model makes it more attractive to others. Meta, for example, aims to make Llama an industry standard.
- **Indirect Revenue:** Firms earn from paid hosting, enterprise support and cloud services (Mistral, Alibaba) or from hardware demand (NVIDIA).
- **Geopolitics:** Chinese firms such as DeepSeek and Alibaba have intensified competition by releasing downloadable models like DeepSeek-R1 and Qwen, which developers can adapt and commercialize. Wider adoption creates ecosystems of applications and tools around them.

### Concerns Raised

- **Misuse:** Users can modify models and remove their safeguards.
- **Irreversibility:** Once distributed, weights cannot be withdrawn.
- **Loss of Oversight:** Unlike API access, downloaded models run beyond the developer's control.

### Relevance for India:

- **Local Adaptation:** Models can be tailored to Indian languages and run on domestic infrastructure.
- **Domestic Efforts:** Sarvam AI, AI4Bharat at IIT Madras and BharatGen have released Indian-language and domain-specific models.
- **Cost Caveat:** Hardware, maintenance, and licensing costs still matter.

## Caller Name Presentation (CNAP)

The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has directed telecom operators like Airtel, Jio, and Vodafone Idea to make caller name identification mandatory for mobile users from November 1, 2026.

**What is CNAP?** It displays the caller's name along with their phone number during an incoming call.

**How will it Work?** In case of a-

- **Saved Number**: The name saved in your contacts will appear.
- **Unsaved Domestic Number**: The name registered with the telecom operator will appear.
- **International Call**: It will be identified as an "International Call".

**Key Features:**

- **Automatic Service:** No separate request is required.
- **Privacy**: Names of users opting for Calling Line Identification Restriction (CLIR) will not be displayed.
- **Business Numbers**: Eligible businesses can display a verified trade name or registered trademark.
- **Availability**: Initially, for users on 4G and above; 2G, 3G and landlines will be considered separately.

**Significance:** Helps identify unknown callers and combat spam calls, online fraud and digital arrest scams. Improves caller identification and user safety.

## GSAT-7B: Army's First Dedicated Communications Satellite

In a major leap for India's military communication infrastructure, the ISRO is slated to launch the Indian Army's first dedicated communications satellite, the GSAT-7B, by mid-2028 (earlier launch was slated for November 2027).

**About GSAT-7B:**

- **Built By:** New Space India Limited (NSIL), ISRO's commercial arm will design and build it indigenously.
- **Features:** It is a five-tonne satellite placed in geostationary orbit to provide secure, jam-resistant, beyond-line-of-sight communication to forward troops, airborne platforms and weapon systems in high-altitude and border regions.
- **Resilience:** It will keep command and control networks working even if ground infrastructure is damaged or jammed. The Army has so far relied on the Indian Air Force's GSAT-7A.

**About GSAT-7 Series:**

- **GSAT-7 (Rukmini):** India's first multi-band military communication satellite, launched in 2013 by Ariane-5 from Kourou, French Guiana; it served the Navy.
- **GSAT-7A:** Launched in 2018; serves the Indian Air Force , Army Aviation Corps and supports Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) operations and provides communication capability to the users in Ku-band over the Indian region.
- **GSAT-7R (CMS-03):** Launched in 2025 to replace Rukmini; indigenously designed and developed weighing approximately 4,400 kg, it is India's heaviest communication satellite which strengthened the Navy's space-based communications and maritime domain awareness.

## New Compound for Storing Hydrogen and Methane

Recently, scientists at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Thiruvananthapuram, developed a chemical compound- *Magnesium Hydridomethylzincate* that releases hydrogen and methane when moderately heated.

**About Magnesium hydridomethylzincate:**

- **Composition:** It is an organometallic compound made of magnesium, zinc, hydrogen and carbon.

- **Gas Release:**
  - When heated in solution to 100°C, it releases hydrogen.
  - When its crystals are heated without a solvent under anaerobic conditions at 80-110°C, it releases both hydrogen and methane.
- **Reaction Mechanism and Yield:** Methane comes out before hydrogen, which shows the gases are released through successive chemical reactions. Each paired molecular unit produces two molecules each of hydrogen and methane.

**Significance:**

- **Clean Fuel Support:** Burning hydrogen does not directly release carbon dioxide, so better storage methods can help it become a mainstream fuel.
- **Safer Fuel Blend:** It releases hydrogen with methane. Blending the two lowers the risk of flames travelling back into burners (flashback) or of violent detonations.
- **Low Energy Need:** Only moderate heating is needed to release the gases.
- **New Research Platform:** It shows that organometallic compounds could store fuel gases and release them in a controlled way.

**Limitations:**

- **Moisture Sensitivity:** The compound is highly sensitive to moisture.
- **Reversibility Unproven:** It is not yet known whether the compound can be refilled after its gases are released.

## Japan's MMX Mission to Mars's Moon Phobos

Recently, the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) launched the Martian Moons eXploration (MMX) probe on an H3 rocket from the Tanegashima Space Center. It aims to be the first mission to bring back samples from a moon of Mars.

**About the MMX Mission:**

- **Nature**: It is an uncrewed probe and the first planned round trip to the Martian region.
- **Timeline**: It will reach Mars around August 2027 and spend about three years there.
- **Target**: It will land on Phobos to collect at least 10 grams of surface material. It will also observe Deimos, without landing.
- **IDEFIX Rover:** This French-German rover will be the first to travel across Phobos, studying the surface for a safe landing.
- **Collaboration**: United States and European space agencies are partners.

**Significance:**

- **Origin of Mars's Moons**: It will test two theories: that the moons formed from a giant impact on Mars, or that they are asteroids captured by Mars's gravity.
- **Origin of the Solar System**: It may also show how habitable conditions arose on the rocky planets.
- **Human Exploration**: It will test whether Phobos can serve as a "natural space station" for future crewed Mars missions.

## Centaurus X-3

Scientists at the Raman Research Institute (RRI- an autonomous institution of the Department of Science and Technology (DST)), discovered that one of the brightest X-ray pulsars, Centaurus X-3 is gobbling up material through an accretion disk, which is rare for pulsars of its kind.

An **X-ray binary pulsar** is a binary star system containing a magnetized neutron star (a pulsar) and a normal stellar companion, where the neutron star pulls material from its companion to emit powerful beams of X-rays

**About Centaurus X-3:** It is a High-Mass X-ray Binary (HMXB), meaning its companion is more than 10 times the Sun's mass. It was one of the first X-ray pulsars discovered and lies about 24,000 light years away in the Centaurus constellation.

- **Key Finding:** Four secondary emission lines varied with the pulsar's rotation. The cause was traced to a co-rotating accretion stream, which can exist only if an accretion disk is present.
- **Why Rare:** In HMXBs, accretion usually happens through direct capture of the companion's stellar wind, not through a disk.
- **Significance:** Future emission models of Centaurus X-3 must account for the disk, which also improves understanding of binary pulsars in general.

## Low Level Light Weight Radar

The Ministry of Defence recently signed a contract worth about ₹770 crore with Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) to buy Improved Low Level Light Weight Radars (LLLR-I) for the Army.

**What Is LLLR-I?** It is a light, low-level radar that can detect and track aerial targets ranging from fighter jets to mini and micro drones. It can also rank these targets by threat level so the Army knows which to tackle first.

**Significance:**

- **Air Defence:** It will strengthen the Army's defence against aerial threats, especially the growing threat from drones and other unmanned aerial systems (UAS).

## ESTIC 2026

Recently, the second edition of the Emerging Science, Technology and Innovation Conclave (ESTIC) was held at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi.

**What is ESTIC?** A flagship annual Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) platform bringing together ministries, scientists, industry, startups and global experts.

- **Objective:** To link research with industry and policy, turn scientific discoveries into practical solutions, and advance the vision of "Viksit Bharat 2047".
- **Organizer:** The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), under the guidance of the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser.

**Key Features of ESTIC 2026:**

- **Theme:** "Inspiring Minds, Catalyzing Science, Empowering Technologies". It highlights creativity and imagination as drivers of scientific innovation.
- **Thematic Areas (12):** These include Generative and Autonomous Artificial Intelligence (AI), Quantum Communication, Semiconductors, Advanced Manufacturing, Energy, Ocean Science, Space, Preventive Healthcare, and Agri-Tech

## NVS-03 Navigation Satellite

ISRO successfully launched the NVS-03 navigation satellite aboard the Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV-F18).

**What is NVS-03?** The third satellite in ISRO's next-generation navigation series to replenish and modernize the Navigation with Indian Constellation (NavIC).

- **NavIC:** India's independent regional system providing Position, Navigation and Timing (PNT) services. It covers India and a region extending about 1,500 km beyond its boundaries.

**Key Features of NVS-03:**

- **Mass and Orbit:** About 2,250 kg, placed in a Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit (GTO).
- **Atomic Clocks:** Carries an indigenous atomic clock along with procured (imported) atomic clocks.
- **Signals:** Adds the L1 signal to the existing L5 and S signals, improving compatibility with common smartphone chipsets.

**Significance:**

- **Restores NavIC:** Clock failures on older satellites and the orbit failure of NVS-02 had left only three working satellites. NVS-03 restores the minimum of four needed for navigation services.
- **Strategic Autonomy:** It reduces dependence on foreign systems like the U.S. Global Positioning System (GPS).

## Joint Squad for Health (JOSH) Teams for TB Elimination

Union Health Ministry announced the launch of Joint Squad for Health (JOSH) teams across 55 districts in 11 states to drive youth-led community mobilization against tuberculosis (TB).

- **Joint Initiative:** Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, and the Ministry of Defence.
- **Composition:** Class-I officers, MY Bharat volunteers and National Cadet Corps (NCC) cadets.
- **Focus (Phase I):** Engagement at the block, ward and community levels to spread awareness on TB symptoms, prevention, timely diagnosis and treatment completion, and counter myths and stigma.
- **Approach:** Builds on Jan Bhagidari (people's participation) as a pillar of the TB Mukt Bharat campaign

# CULTURE

## GI Tag for Mandar

- The traditional musical instrument Mandar, from Jharkhand, has received Geographical Indication tag.
- Mandar is a, double-headed **percussion instrument** deeply embedded in the folk music, tribal culture and community life of Jharkhand.
- Its distinctive features include a hollow, slightly bulging cylindrical body traditionally made using locally sourced red clay, leather membranes on both sides and indigenous manufacturing techniques.

## Sengol

- The Sengol has been included in the National Council of Educational Research and Training's (NCERT) newly released Class 9 social science textbook.
- Sengol was installed in the new Parliament building in 2023.
- Sengol is derived from the Tamil word **semmai, meaning righteousness**.
- Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru accepted Sengol on August 14, 1947, through the Adhinam of Tamil Nadu, it was a sign of the shift of power from Britishers to the people of the country.
- Before Independence, Lord Mountbatten, the last Viceroy, asked Nehru if there was a ceremony that should be followed to symbolise the transfer of power.
- Nehru consulted C Rajagopalachari, the last Governor-General, who suggested that the newly formed nation should follow a tradition of the Chola dynasty, where the transfer of power from one king to the other was sanctified and blessed by high priests.
- The symbol (for the transfer of power) used was the handover of the 'Sengol' from one King to his successor.

### Making of the Sengol

- Rajagopalachari reached out to various mutts in Tamil Nadu, and it was Thiruvaduthurai Atheenam (a well-known mutt in Tanjore district) that provided it.
- The leader of the mutt commissioned the manufacturing of the Sengol to Chennai-based Vummidi Bangaru Chetty jewellers, and it was built by Vummidi Ethirajulu and Vummidi Sudhakar.
- The sceptre is five feet in length and has a Nandi, Lord Shiva's sacred bull, on the top, symbolising justice.

## Kashi Tamil Samagam 5.0

- The Ministry of Education has launched the registrations for the fifth edition of Kashi Tamil Sangamam (KTS 5.0). The theme of KTS 5.0 is "**Thirukkural Payilvom – Thirukkural Abhyas Karen**"
- The programme will celebrate, reaffirm and strengthen the age-old civilizational bonds between Tamil Nadu and Kashi, the two ancient seats of learning, strengthening the spirit of Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat.
- The first Kashi Tamil Sangamam was held in 2022 and over the last four editions, it facilitated meaningful exchanges of knowledge, language, traditions and lived experiences between the two regions.
- The Event is organized by the Department of Higher Education, in collaboration with IIT Madras; Banaras Hindu University (BHU); Central Institute of Classical Tamil (CICT), Chennai; Uttar Pradesh Government and Central Govt Departments/Ministries.
- It seeks to bring the timeless ethical and moral wisdom of the classical Tamil text Thirukkural closer to the youth and learners across the country.

### Thirukkural

- Thirukkural is a classical Tamil literary work by Tamil poet and philosopher **Thiruvalluvar**. It is regarded as one of the most important **ethical and philosophical texts** in Indian literature.
- It is divided into three books: **Aram (virtue), Porul (wealth) and Inbam (love)**.
- It consists of **1,330 couplets or kurals of seven words each**. It is organised into 133 chapters of 10 couplets each.

## SAMHiTA

- India and Sri Lanka are strengthening their cultural cooperation through the preservation of their shared Buddhist heritage, with the launch of the SAMHiTA Project at Colombo's Gangaramaya Temple.
- The word samhita in Sanskrit means **collection or compilation**.
- The SAMHiTA (South Asian Manuscript Histories and Textual Archive) Project aims to **digitise ancient manuscripts** and preserve their historical, religious and cultural knowledge for future generations.
- The information collected will be shared on **PANDiT**: Prosopographical Database of Indic Texts and Records, a database on South Asian intellectual history.
- The initiative is being undertaken by the **India International Centre** in New Delhi, with grant assistance from the Government of India.
- Gangaramaya Temple has become the first institution in Sri Lanka to partner with the project.
- SAMHiTA is the first attempt to bring together repositories from outside India and South Asia on a common platform.

## Centres of Excellence for Classical Languages

- The Ministry of Education has approved the establishment of the five Centres of Excellence (CoE) for classical languages.
- The five CoEs are for studies in **Classical Assamese, Classical Bengali, Classical Marathi, Classical Pali and Classical Prakrit**.
- The CoEs will be established at Tezpur University in Assam (for Classical Assamese), Visva-Bharati University in West Bengal (Classical Bengali), Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute in Pune (Classical Marathi), Central University of Odisha (Classical Pali), and Central University of Gujarat (Classical Prakrit).
- The initiative will provide dedicated institutional support for advanced academic research, preservation and digitisation of linguistic and literary heritage, and wider dissemination of knowledge relating to these Classical Languages.

### Classical Languages in India

India has **11 recognised Classical Languages**: Tamil (2004), Sanskrit (2005), Telugu (2008), Kannada (2008), Malayalam (2013), Odia (2014), Marathi (2024), Bengali (2024), Assamese (2024), Pali (2024), and Prakrit (2024).

### Criteria

- **High antiquity** of its early texts or recorded history, spanning a period of 1,500-2,000 years.
- A body of **ancient literature or texts** that is considered heritage by generations of speakers.
- **Knowledge texts**, especially prose texts, in addition to poetry, epigraphical and inscriptional evidence.
- The Classical Language and its literature may be **distinct from its current form** or show discontinuity with later forms derived from the original.

# AWARDS/ PERSONALITIES IN NEWS

## Nobel Peace Prize

- South African judge Navanethem "Navi" Pillay has won the Nobel Peace Prize for her efforts to promote peace and international law.
- The Nobel Committee said Pillay held states and national leaders accountable and brought hope to victims of violence and conflict and demonstrated a firm moral compass in her long career.
- Born in 1941 in Durban, to Indian parents of Tamil descent, Pillay **grew up under apartheid** and experienced discrimination herself.
- Pillay became the first woman to open a law practice in South Africa's Natal province. She defended anti-apartheid activists, including **Nelson Mandela**, fought against the mistreatment of political detainees and helped to advance human rights and equality.
- Pillay became the **first Black woman appointed to South Africa's High Court** in 1995, following the end of apartheid.
- As a **judge at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda**, she contributed to the landmark **Akayesu case**
    - The case established that rape and sexual violence could constitute acts of genocide under certain circumstances. It was the **first genocide judgment by an international court**.
- Pillay subsequently served as a **judge at the International Criminal Court** from 2003 to 2008.
- She was then appointed **United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights,** serving from 2008 to 2014 and advocating for human rights, equality, protection of vulnerable populations and accountability for serious violations.
- Pillay was **chair of the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory** that concluded last year that Israel has committed genocide in Gaza.

## Asian Para Games 2026

- The Asian Para Games 2026 began in **Aichi-Nagoya, Japan**.
- Theme, "WABI: We Are Beautiful Individuals".
- The fifth edition of the event brings together athletes from 45 Asian nations under the motto '**Imagine One Heart**'.
- Para-badminton player Pramod Bhagat and sprinter Simran Sharma led the Indian contingent as flag-bearers.
- The previous edition of the games was held in 2023 in **Hangzhou, China**.

## Smriti Mandhana named UNICEF Celebrity Advocate

- Indian cricketer Smriti Mandhana has been appointed a celebrity advocate by UNICEF India on the International Day of the Girl (11th October).
- In her new role, she will raise awareness around initiatives promoting equal rights and opportunities for children and young people, and advocate for an environment in which girls can participate in sports and realise their potential.
- She has previously supported UNICEF and International Cricket Council campaigns focusing on gender equality and life skills, besides lending her support to UNICEF's Promise to Children campaign.

- An **Arjuna Award recipient**, Mandhana was appointed captain of the Indian women's cricket team recently.

## Nobel Prize in Literature 2026

- The 2026 Nobel Prize in Literature has been awarded to Canadian poet, essayist and classicist **Anne Carson**.
- She became the **second Canadian woman** to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature, following **Alice Munro** (2013).
- As per the Swedish Academy, she received the award for her “bold and inventive oeuvre (body of work) that, in playful dialogue with the classical tradition, has created new forms for contemporary literature”.
- Born in Toronto, Canada, Carson is known for her experimental literary style, which blends poetry, prose, literary criticism, translation and classical scholarship.
- In 2001, she became the first woman to win the **TS Eliot prize**, for her collection **The Beauty of the Husband**.
- Her writings draw upon ancient Greek literature, mythology and philosophy, reinterpreting classical narratives through contemporary literary forms.
- Her notable works include **Autobiography of Red, Eros the Bittersweet, Men in the Off Hours and Nox**.