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- Right To Protest
- Ladakh's Proposal For 7 AHDCs
- CRS Report 2024
- Trial In Absentia

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Temple Donation Management In India

The donation management system at the **Ram Mandir** has come under scrutiny following **allegations of financial irregularities**. The developments have prompted discussions on adopting transparent and **technology-driven donation management practices** followed by other major temples such as **Tirumala (Venkateswara) Temple** and **Jagannath Temple**.

Key Highlights

- The Ram Temple receives donations through **cash collection boxes, online transfers, cheques, RTGS/NEFT and foreign contributions** permitted under law.
- Following allegations of embezzlement, authorities are examining ways to strengthen transparency, auditing and accountability in donation management.

The Common Chain: From Hundi to Bank

- Across India's biggest temples, the broad donation journey is remarkably similar. Offerings placed in hundis (donation boxes) are:
 - Removed by authorised personnel
 - Shifted to counting centres
 - Segregated into cash, coins, and valuables
 - Counted and recorded
 - Deposited into designated bank accounts
- The entire process runs under CCTV surveillance.

How Major Temples Manage Donations?

• Ayodhya Ram Temple (trust-led system)

- Managed by the **Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra**.
- Donations are accepted through multiple online and offline channels.
- Hundis are opened by trust officials and an SBI representative, and taken to a counting hall (Pilgrim Facilitation Centre).
- Staff outsourced by SBI and trust employees count cash and jewellery under a retired banker's supervision, with overall responsibility resting on a trust member. Verified collections go into the **trust's SBI account**.

• Tirupati Temple

- Administered by **Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams**.
- The temple follows one of India's most sophisticated donation management systems.
- Its famed **Parakamani** system involves permanent TTD finance staff, nationalised bank representatives, and vetted volunteers (mostly serving/retired government and bank employees), all under an extensive CCTV network monitored by the temple's **vigilance wing**.
- Personnel wear pocketless clothes, are frisked entering & leaving, cash moves in armoured transport, and access is segregated across roles.
- Donations constitute a major source of funding for educational institutions, hospitals, free meals, social welfare programmes and temple administration.

• Jagannath Temple

- Managed by the **Shree Jagannath Temple Managing Committee**
- Financial management is governed under **state statutory provisions**.
- Hundis are opened under the Temple Administrator or a gazetted officer, with a Managing Committee member as **independent witness**.
- Each hundi is sealed before and after opening, entries go into **statutory forms**, and CCTV monitors handling.
- Funds are utilised for temple rituals, heritage conservation, pilgrim amenities and charitable activities.

• Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine (corporate-style model)

- Managed by the **Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board**.
- The Shrine Board follows a professional financial management system through **specialised departments** with regular auditing and transparent utilisation of funds.
- Donations support pilgrimage infrastructure, healthcare facilities, sanitation, disaster management, accommodation and social welfare initiatives.

• Kashi Vishwanath

- **Government inside the process**. The **district administration** is part of the chain.
- The donation boxes are opened under an SDM, counting happens before bank officials and a retired gazetted officer, deposit receipts create an audit trail, and jewellery is valued by government-approved appraisers.

- The crucial insight: temples do not differ in the journey of the donation, but in the **institutions governing it** — who supervises each stage, who appoints the handlers, and what legal and administrative safeguards ensure accountability.

Issues in Ram Temple Donation Management

- **Absence of law:** Most of India's older major temples are administered under dedicated legislation enacted by state governments but Ram Temple functions through a trust deed
 - Tirupati (TTD) - AP Charitable & Hindu Religious Institutions and Endowments Act
 - Jagannath - Shri Jagannath Temple Act
 - Vaishno Devi - J&K Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Act
 - Siddhivinayak - Maharashtra trust law
 - Kashi Vishwanath - UP Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple Act
 - These laws create governing bodies, define administrators' powers, prescribe financial procedures, and provide for government oversight and statutory audits.
- **Composition of management**
 - In older temples, key financial processes involve executive officers, statutory administrators, government nominees, magistrates, and auditors whose duties are defined by law.
- At the Ram Temple, several key office-bearers involved in donation management have long associations with the RSS or its affiliates, and responsibility is concentrated within the trust structure.
- **Heavy Dependence on Manual Processes:** Manual counting and reconciliation increase the risk of human error and financial irregularities.
- **Limited End-to-End Digital Tracking:** Unlike Tirupati, the donation process lacks comprehensive digital tracking from collection to deposit.
- **Transparency Concerns:** Unlike many temple boards, the Ram Temple trust is not subject to mandatory financial audits by the state or central government.
- **High Volume of Daily Donations:** Managing substantial daily cash inflows poses logistical and security challenges, especially during festivals and peak pilgrimage seasons.

Broader Issues in Temple Donation Management

1. **Large Volumes of Cash Handling:** Heavy reliance on manual processes increases operational and security risks.
2. **Limited Standardization Across States:** Temple administration is governed by different state laws and trust models, resulting in varied governance and financial practices. The absence of uniform standards leads to inconsistent levels of transparency and accountability.
3. **Varying Audit Requirements:** Audit mechanisms differ depending on whether a temple is managed by a statutory board, government

Suggested Reforms

1. **Mandatory Annual Independent Audits:** Large religious institutions should undergo annual audits by independent professionals to ensure financial integrity
2. **Real-Time Digital Accounting and Cash Reconciliation:** Adoption of digital accounting systems can enable accurate recording and reconciliation of donations on a real-time basis. This minimizes manual errors and enhances financial oversight.
3. **Greater Use of Cashless Donations:** Encouraging digital payment modes such as UPI and online banking
4. **RFID/Barcoding for Jewelry and Valuables:** Valuable offerings should be digitally tagged and recorded using RFID or barcode technology. Jewellery inventory registers to be maintained. This strengthens inventory management and reduces the risk of loss or substitution.
5. **CCTV Coverage of Collection and Counting Processes:** Continuous surveillance of donation boxes, counting rooms, and storage areas enhances security. Recorded footage also serves as an important

authority, or private trust. This creates uneven oversight and may delay the detection of financial irregularities. 4. Lack of Uniform Accounting Standards: There is no common accounting framework for recording donations, assets, and expenditures across temples. This affects financial comparability, transparency, and effective monitoring. 5. Risks of Theft and Fraud: Weak internal controls can further increase these vulnerabilities. 6. Balancing Religious Autonomy with Financial Accountability: While religious institutions enjoy constitutional protection in managing their affairs, financial administration involves public donations that require transparency.	audit and investigation tool. 6. Periodic Publication of Audited Financial Statements: Major temples should voluntarily disclose audited financial reports and key expenditure details. Public disclosure promotes transparency and builds devotees' trust. 7. SOPs for Donation Handling: Uniform procedures should be established for collection, counting, storage, and deposit of donations. Standardization reduces procedural inconsistencies and operational risks. 8. Whistleblower Mechanisms and Stronger Internal Controls: Safe reporting channels and effective internal checks can help identify irregularities at an early stage. Measures such as staff rotation and segregation of duties further strengthen governance. 9. Risk-Based Inspections for High-Revenue Religious Institutions: Regulatory oversight should focus on temples handling large volumes of donations or those with higher risk profiles. 10. Separation between Religious Functions and Financial Administration: Religious rituals should remain under spiritual authorities, while financial management should be handled by qualified professionals. Such functional separation improves governance without affecting religious autonomy.
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Fast-Track Courts (FTCs) In India

The **Prime Minister of India** announced the establishment of **Fast-Track Courts (FTCs)** to ensure swift investigation and speedy trials in public examination paper leak cases.

What are Fast-Track Courts?

These are courts established to ensure the speedy disposal of specific categories of cases. They are intended to reduce delays in the justice delivery system by giving priority to identified cases.

FTCs are not created under a single central legislation. They are established through executive schemes or judicial directions depending on the nature of cases and administrative requirements.

Evolution of Fast-Track Courts

- **Fourteenth Finance Commission (2015–20):** Recommended the establishment of 1,800 Fast-Track Courts to expedite:
 - Heinous criminal offences such as murder, kidnapping and extortion.
 - Civil disputes pending for more than five years.
 - Cases involving vulnerable sections, including women, children, senior citizens, persons with disabilities and terminally ill persons.
- **Fast-Track Special Courts (FTSCs):** In 2019, the Union Government launched a Centrally Sponsored Scheme for Fast-Track Special Courts to ensure time-bound disposal of:
 - Rape cases.
 - Cases under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012.

- Funding: The FTSC scheme is partly financed through the Nirbhaya Fund.

Can a Special Court be Created for a Single Case?

- **Subject to Article 14:** The establishment of a special court must satisfy the constitutional guarantee of equality before law under Article 14.
- **Reasonable classification required:** Fast-tracking must be based on an objective and rational classification, such as the nature of the offence or vulnerability of victims, rather than arbitrary selection of individual cases.
- **Judicial Position**
 - ✓ **State of West Bengal v. Anwar Ali Sarkar (1952):** The Supreme Court struck down a law permitting arbitrary transfer of cases to special courts merely for "speedier trial", holding that speed alone is not a valid constitutional classification. The classification must have a rational nexus with the objective sought to be achieved.

Previous Examples of Special Courts

- **Satyam Computer Services Scam (2010):** The Andhra Pradesh High Court constituted a special court for expeditious trial.
- **2G Spectrum Allocation Case (2011):** The Supreme Court directed the establishment of a dedicated special court at the Patiala House Courts, New Delhi for speedy adjudication.

Performance of Fast-Track Courts

- **Operational network:** As of January 2026:
 - 862 Fast-Track Courts were functioning across 21 States and Union Territories.
 - 774 Fast-Track Special Courts, including 398 exclusive POCSO Courts, were operational across 29 States and Union Territories.
 - FTSC disposal rate stands at around 96%.
- **Faster disposal:** FTCs generally dispose of cases more quickly than regular courts, particularly in sensitive criminal matters involving women and children
 - While regular trial courts clear roughly 3.3 cases per month, FTSCs operate at a higher efficiency, disposing of an average of about 9.5 cases per month.
- **Pendency:** Despite these high clearance rates, the large volume of cases continues to pose a challenge, with over 2.4 lakh cases still pending before Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs) by the end of 2023.

Significance

- **Promotes speedy justice:** Reduces pendency in priority cases and strengthens public confidence in the justice delivery system.
- **Protects vulnerable groups**

Limitations of Fast-Track Courts in Tackling Public Examination Paper Leaks

- **Post-facto mechanism:** Fast-Track Courts (FTCs) expedite adjudication only after a paper leak has occurred. They cannot prevent leaks or mitigate the loss of public trust, exam cancellations, and hardship caused to genuine candidates.
- **Limited effectiveness of FTCs:** Merely establishing FTCs is insufficient. Their performance depends on adequate judicial capacity and infrastructure. Experience shows that while some specialised courts have performed well, many FTCs continue to face heavy caseloads and judicial vacancies.
- **Inter-State jurisdictional challenges:** Paper leak syndicates often operate across multiple States, whereas FTCs generally function within State jurisdictions. Without coordinated national investigations and a wider network of specialised courts, such fraud remains difficult to prosecute effectively.
- **Digital forensics bottlenecks:** Modern paper leaks involve encrypted communication platforms, cyber networks and digital financial trails. Delays in forensic reports, inadequate cyber-forensic capacity and shortage of technical expertise weaken the objective of speedy trials.
- **Investigation delays:** FTCs become functional only after filing of the charge sheet. Poor-quality investigations and delays in filing charge sheets slow down trials.
- **Witness-related issues:** Inadequate witness protection, intimidation by organised examination mafias, absence of specialised prosecutors reduce the likelihood of securing convictions.
- **Rising case inflow:** Increasing registration of cases often outpaces disposal rates, leading to continued pendency despite the presence of FTCs.

- **Funding disparities:** Since funding largely rests with State governments, uneven fiscal capacity has resulted in significant inter-State variations in the functioning and sustainability of FTCs.

Way Forward

- **Adopt a preventive approach:** Complement FTCs with robust preventive measures such as secure digital examination systems, end-to-end encryption of question papers, AI-based monitoring and stronger cybersecurity protocols.
- **Strengthen coordinated investigations:** Establish a national nodal investigation mechanism with seamless coordination among State Police, CBI, cyber agencies and forensic laboratories to tackle inter-State examination fraud.
- **Enhance forensic capacity:** Expand forensic laboratories, modernise cyber-forensic infrastructure and build specialised technical expertise to ensure timely collection and analysis of digital evidence.
- **Strengthen the FTC ecosystem:** Fill judicial vacancies, appoint dedicated Special Public Prosecutors, improve infrastructure and provide continuous training in cybercrime and digital evidence to judges and prosecutors.
- **Ensure sustainable funding:** Develop a stable Centre–State funding framework for FTCs to ensure uniform functioning and reduce regional disparities in judicial capacity.
- **Improve witness and victim protection:** Strengthen witness protection mechanisms, financial investigation capabilities and asset-tracing systems to facilitate prosecution of organised criminal networks rather than only lower-level intermediaries.
- **Promote institutional reforms:** FTCs should function as one component of a broader strategy that includes efficient investigations, timely forensic support, strong prosecution and effective implementation of the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024.



Right To Protest In India

The recent protests in New Delhi have brought into focus the constitutional right to protest, the scope of **Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023**, and the extent to which the State can regulate public assemblies in the interest of public order.

Constitutional Basis of the Right to Protest

- The right to protest flows from **Article 19(1)(a) (freedom of speech and expression)** and **Article 19(1)(b) (right to assemble peaceably and without arms)**. Peaceful protests are therefore constitutionally protected as an essential feature of a democratic society.
- However, the right is **not absolute** and may be restricted under **Articles 19(2) and 19(3)** on grounds such as the sovereignty and integrity of India, security of the State, friendly relations with Foreign States, public order, decency, morality, contempt of court, defamation and incitement to an offence.

Is Police Permission Mandatory?

- Although the Constitution does not expressly require prior permission for every protest, authorities generally require permission to **regulate the time, place and manner of demonstrations** in order to maintain public order, traffic management and public safety. Such regulation cannot amount to an arbitrary denial of the constitutional right.
- The prevailing practice is to earmark specific locations for demonstrations, require prior permission from the police and, where necessary, impose prohibitory orders under **Section 163 of the BNSS**.

Judicial Interpretation of the Right to Protest

- **Reasonable regulation, not arbitrary prohibition:** In **Himat Lal K. Shah v. Commissioner of Police (1973)**, the Supreme Court held that while the State may regulate the use of public spaces, there is a constitutional distinction between **reasonable regulation and arbitrary exclusion** of citizens from exercising their right to assemble.
- **Section 163 is an exceptional power:** In **Babulal Parate v. State of Maharashtra (1961)**, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of Section 144 CrPC (now Section 163 BNSS) but clarified that it is an **exceptional preventive power** that can be exercised only where there is an emergency and a specific threat to public order. The power is not "unlimited or untrammelled".
- **Blanket bans are impermissible:** In **Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan v. Union of India (2018)**, the Supreme Court held that a blanket prohibition on demonstrations near Jantar Mantar was disproportionate. It directed the authorities to establish a **regulated permission mechanism** instead of prohibiting protests altogether.
- **Public roads cannot be occupied indefinitely:** In **Amit Sahni v. Commissioner of Police (2020) (Shaheen Bagh case)**, the Court ruled that while peaceful protest is a constitutional right, public roads and public spaces cannot be occupied indefinitely, and demonstrations should ordinarily be held at designated locations.

Significance

- **Strengthens democratic participation:** Peaceful protests enable citizens to express dissent, influence public policy and hold governments accountable beyond the electoral process.
- **Balances liberty and public order** and safeguards the

Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023

- **Successor to Section 144 CrPC:** Section 163 replaces Section 144 of the CrPC, 1973. It empowers an **Executive Magistrate** to issue a written order directing any person to abstain from a certain act or to take certain order with respect to certain property in his possession or under his management, if such Magistrate considers that such direction is likely to **prevent** obstruction, annoyance or injury to any person lawfully employed, or danger to human life, health or safety or a disturbance of the public tranquillity, or a riot, or an affray.
- **Preventive, not punitive:** It is intended as an emergency preventive measure rather than a punishment for unlawful conduct.
- **Temporary in nature:** Orders issued under Section 163 are expected to address a specific and immediate threat and ordinarily lapse after **two months**, unless extended in accordance with law.

How is Section 163 Used?

- **Not limited to protests:** Although **Section 163** is widely associated with restrictions on protests and public assemblies, an empirical study of its use in Delhi found that protest-related orders constitute only a small proportion of all orders issued. It is more frequently used for preventive administrative measures such as Record Maintenance, tenant verification, installation of CCTV cameras, regulation of drones.
- **Concerns over repeated renewals:** The study found that certain orders, particularly those relating to tenant verification, were repeatedly reissued, raising concerns that an emergency provision was being used as a routine administrative tool despite judicial caution against repeated extensions.

Standards and Legal Framework Governing Police Action and Crowd Control

- **Democratic policing:** The **NHRC's Manual on Human Rights for Police Officers** emphasizes that the police are guardians of citizens' rights and the rule of law. It stresses that the use of excessive force undermines public confidence and can aggravate public disorder.
- **International standards:** The **UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms (1990)** require that any use of force by law enforcement must be lawful, necessary and proportionate, with non-violent means preferred wherever possible.
- **Principle of minimum force:** BNSS 2023 and the Code of Conduct for the Police in India require police to first employ warnings, dialogue and persuasion. Physical force should be used only as a last resort and must be limited to the minimum force necessary to achieve a legitimate law enforcement objective.
- **Identification and accountability:** The BNSS, 2023 & Supreme Court's judgment in **D.K. Basu v. State of West Bengal (1997)** mandate that police officers making arrests must display clear and visible identification to ensure accountability. However, there is no explicit statutory requirement for personnel engaged solely in crowd control or dispersal of assemblies to wear visible identification.

Plainclothes policing is the practice where law enforcement officers wear civilian clothes instead of official uniforms while on duty, primarily used for intelligence gathering, surveillance, and operational security. Social media videos allegedly showed unidentified men in civilian clothes using police-style lathis against protesters, while uniformed personnel without nameplates ignored questions about their identity.

rights of other citizens.

- **Reinforces rule of law:** Judicial decisions have consistently recognised both the importance of the right to protest and the need for proportionate regulation, ensuring that emergency powers are not used arbitrarily.

Challenges	Way Forward
• Balancing competing rights: Authorities must protect the right to peaceful assembly while ensuring free movement, public safety and uninterrupted essential services. • Risk of misuse of preventive powers: Frequent or prolonged use of Section 163 without a demonstrable emergency may dilute its preventive character and raise concerns regarding civil liberties. • Lack of uniform implementation: Variations in granting permissions, identifying protest sites and enforcing restrictions can lead to allegations of arbitrariness and unequal treatment. • Proportionality Gaps: Ex parte applications and prolonged restrictions often lack strict judicial oversight or transparent reasoning.	• Use Section 163 only in genuine emergencies • Develop transparent protest regulations: Standardised guidelines on permissions, designated protest sites and restrictions can reduce arbitrariness while protecting constitutional rights. • Ensure proportionality in restrictions: Any limitation on the right to protest should satisfy the tests of necessity, reasonableness and proportionality laid down by the Supreme Court.



Ladakh's Proposal For 7 AHDCs

The **Ladakh Administration** has announced that **Autonomous Hill Development Councils (AHDCs)** will be established in all **seven districts** of the Union Territory. The proposal has generated political debate as it coincides with the ongoing demand for greater constitutional safeguards and political autonomy for Ladakh.

Background

Ladakh became a Union Territory without a legislature following the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019. Initially, only **Leh and Kargil** had Autonomous Hill Development Councils. After the creation of five new districts in 2026, the administration has proposed extending the Hill Council model to all seven districts.

What is the Proposal?

- **Expansion of Hill Councils:** The proposal seeks to establish an ADHC in each of Ladakh's seven districts under **Section 3(1) of the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council Act 1997** (*officially styled as the Act of 1997 but is deemed to have come into force retrospectively from June 1, 1995*). The proposal will require delimitation of constituencies and suitable amendments to the existing Act before implementation.

About the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC)

Aspect	Details
First Council	LAHDC-Leh (1995)
Second Council	LAHDC-Kargil (2003)
Legal Basis	Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council Act
Nature	Statutory local self-government institution
Objective	District-level planning and democratic decentralisation
Composition and functioning	The Councils consist mainly of directly elected members along with nominated members as provided under the Act. Each Council elects a Chief Executive Councillor (CEC) and Executive Councillors to oversee local administration.
Powers and Functions	The Councils are responsible for planning and implementing development programmes relating to education, healthcare, agriculture, tourism, rural infrastructure, water supply and local roads. However, they do not enjoy legislative powers and function under the overall supervision of the Lieutenant Governor-led Union Territory Administration.

Why Has the Proposal Triggered a Political Debate?

- **Government's Perspective**

- The administration argues that extending Hill Councils to all districts will deepen democratic decentralisation by bringing governance closer to the people. It is expected to improve administrative accessibility, strengthen local planning and make public service delivery more responsive in Ladakh's remote and geographically challenging regions.

- **Concerns Raised**

- Organisations such as the **Leh Apex Body (LAB)** and the **Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA)** contend that while more Hill Councils may improve local administration, they do not address Ladakh's long-standing demands for statehood, Sixth Schedule protection, greater political representation and institutional safeguards.

- **Pending Demands of Ladakh**

- Civil society groups and political representatives continue to demand statehood, inclusion under the Sixth Schedule, establishment of a Public Service Commission, stronger safeguards for land and jobs, and enhanced parliamentary representation. These issues continue to be discussed through the High-Powered Committee on Ladakh.

Constitutional Perspective: Status of Ladakh

Aspect	Details
Union Territory	Since 31 October 2019
Legislature	No Legislative Assembly
Executive Head	Lieutenant Governor
Parliamentary Representation	1 Lok Sabha seat

Sixth Schedule vs Hill Councils

Sixth Schedule Autonomous Councils	Ladakh Hill Councils
Constitutional bodies under Articles 244(2) & 275(1)	Statutory bodies established under the LAHDC Act
Possess legislative, judicial and financial powers over specified subjects	Primarily exercise administrative and developmental functions
Constitutional protection	Function under the overall control of the UT Administration

Significance

- **Strengthens democratic decentralisation:** Establishing Hill Councils in all seven districts expands local self-governance and provides every district with an institutional mechanism for participatory planning and development.
- **Improves governance outcomes:** The proposal is expected to make administration more accessible and responsive by facilitating better district-level planning and service delivery, particularly in Ladakh's remote and sparsely populated areas.

- **Keeps the constitutional debate alive:** Larger issues of statehood, Sixth Schedule status and greater political representation, which continue to dominate Ladakh's political discourse.

Way Forward

- **Strengthen institutional autonomy:** Enhance the financial, administrative and planning capacities of the Hill Councils so that decentralisation translates into effective governance.



CRS Report 2024

The **Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner of India (RGI)** has released the **Civil Registration System (CRS) Report, 2024**, showing that **99.1% of births and 99.4% of deaths** were registered in India, marking a historic milestone in the country's vital statistics system.

What is the Civil Registration System (CRS)?

Aspect	Details
Established under	Registration of Births and Deaths (RBD) Act, 1969 (Amended in 2023)
Nodal Authority	Registrar General & Census Commissioner of India (RGI) <i>Note: RGI oversees national registration, with Chief Registrars and District Registrars managing state and district-level implementation. Local Registrars handle birth & death registrations and certificates.</i>
Ministry	Ministry of Home Affairs
Purpose	Continuous, compulsory and universal registration of births, deaths and stillbirths
Births and Deaths Outside India	For Indian Citizens, a child born outside India must register their birth under the Citizenship Act 1955 and Citizens (Registration at Indian consulates) Rules, 1956. ✓ However, under Section 20 of the RBD Act, if the parents return to India with the intent to settle, the birth can be registered within 60 days from the child's arrival in India. Deaths of Indian citizens abroad are registered at the Indian Consulate under the Citizenship Act, 1955, and are deemed valid under the RBD Act, 1969.

Key Findings of CRS Report 2024

- **Near-universal registration:** India has achieved 99.1% birth registration and 99.4% death registration, a significant improvement from 56% birth registration and 48% death registration recorded in 2000. This reflects major progress in strengthening the country's civil registration infrastructure.
 - A total of 18 States and UTs achieved 100% birth registration, while 21 States and UTs recorded 100% death registration.
- **Deaths have caught up with births:** Historically, death registration lagged behind birth registration. However, the 2024 data indicates that this gap has almost disappeared, improving the reliability of mortality statistics for policymaking.
- **Variation across States persists:** Although national registration coverage is nearly universal, disparities continue across States and Union Territories in terms of registration quality, timeliness (Prescribed 21-day period) and indicators such as the Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB).

Significance of Improved Civil Registration

- **Strengthens evidence-based policymaking:** Reliable birth and death data enables governments to accurately estimate fertility, mortality and population trends, thereby improving planning in health, education, nutrition, social security and infrastructure.

- For example, during a health crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic, timely reporting of deaths was crucial for identifying high-risk areas and controlling the spread of the disease.

- **Improves public health surveillance:** Registration of deaths, particularly with medically certified causes, helps monitor disease patterns, assess public health interventions and strengthen epidemic preparedness.

- **Enhances legal identity and service delivery:** Birth registration provides legal identity and facilitates access to education, healthcare, passports, Aadhaar, inheritance rights and welfare schemes, while death registration supports succession, pension, insurance and property claims.

- **Reduces dependence on sample surveys:** A robust CRS complements and gradually reduces reliance on sample-based demographic estimates by providing comprehensive administrative data for governance and planning.

- **Decentralised governance:** A complete CRS can support local planning under decentralised governance, since district and sub-district level data are far more useful for programme design than national or state-level estimates alone.

Challenges

- **Quality of birth data remains a concern:** While registration coverage has improved significantly, timely reporting, accurate recording of demographic details requires strengthening.
- **Regional disparities continue:** Variations among States in registration practices and demographic indicators indicate the need for capacity building and better implementation at the local level.
- **Need for better cause-of-death certification:** A large proportion of registered deaths are still not accompanied by medically certified causes, limiting the usefulness of the data for epidemiological analysis and health policy.
- **Infant death** registration remains a major gap, with 84.2% of registered infant deaths reported in urban areas and only 15.8% in rural areas, indicating possible under-registration in rural regions.

Way Forward

- **Improve data quality:** Greater emphasis should be placed on timely registration, accurate reporting and universal medical certification of causes of death to enhance the utility of CRS data.
- **Address regional disparities:** States with lower performance should receive targeted technical and administrative support to ensure uniform implementation across the country.
- **Integrate with digital governance:** Further integration of CRS with health systems, census operations and other digital public infrastructure (DPI) can improve governance while ensuring strong safeguards for privacy and data protection.

Reasons for Increase in Registration

- **Legislative reforms:** The Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Act, 2023 strengthened the Civil Registration System by creating a national database and making the birth certificate a key proof of date and place of birth for various government services.
- **Digitalisation of registration:** The introduction of the centralised CRS portal and mobile application has enabled online registration, electronic certificates and faster integration with State databases, making the registration process more accessible and efficient.
 - Starting from October 2023, all registrations must be done digitally through the CRS.
- **Linkage with government services:** Birth and death certificates have become essential for accessing education, healthcare, passports, Aadhaar, pensions, inheritance, insurance claims and various welfare schemes, encouraging timely registration.
- **Improved administrative capacity:** Better coordination between hospitals, local registrars and State governments, along with increased institutional births and deaths, has significantly improved the completeness and timeliness of registration.
- **Greater public awareness:** Continuous awareness campaigns and improved accessibility of registration services have increased public participation, particularly in rural areas, contributing to near-universal registration.

Trial In Absentia

The concept of Trial in Absentia has again come into focus following the introduction of **Section 356** of the **Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023**, which permits courts to conduct trials and pronounce judgments against certain absconding accused persons under specified conditions.

- A Special **NIA Court in Jammu** has issued a non-bailable warrant against **Hafiz Saeed**, the Pakistan-based chief of terror outfit Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), in connection with the investigation into the **Pahalgam terror attack**.

Need for Introducing Trial in Absentia

- **Addresses delays caused by absconding accused:**
- **Strengthens criminal justice administration:** The provision is expected to improve conviction processes in cases involving terrorism, organised crime, economic offences and cross-border fugitives.

Concerns

- **Impact on fair trial rights:** The right of an accused to be present during trial is a fundamental component of natural justice and fair procedure under **Article 21**. Critics argue that conducting trials in the absence of the accused may dilute these safeguards if procedural requirements are not strictly enforced.
- **Possibility of misuse:** Accused could be declared a proclaimed offender without exhaustive efforts to secure their presence. This makes judicial scrutiny and strict compliance with statutory safeguards essential before invoking Section 356.
- **Balancing efficiency with justice:** While the provision seeks to prevent abuse of the legal process by absconders, its implementation must ensure that the objective of speedy justice does not come at the cost of due process and procedural fairness.

International Practice

Country	Position
United Kingdom	Permits trial in absentia in limited circumstances, particularly where the accused voluntarily

What is Trial in Absentia?

Trial in absentia refers to a **criminal trial conducted without the physical presence of the accused**. Under the BNSS, it applies only where the accused has **deliberately absconded to evade trial**, and the court is satisfied that there is no immediate possibility of securing their arrest.

Legal Framework

Aspect	Details
Relevant Provision	Section 356, BNSS 2023
Earlier Position	CrPC, 1973 did not permit a full-fledged trial and conviction in the absence of the accused; only limited recording of evidence was allowed under it. Section 82(4) of CrPC allows proclamation and section 83 of CrPC allows attachment of the property of an absconding accused. Section 317 of CrPC allows the Judge or Magistrate to conduct trial of an accused in his absence in certain specific cases. Section 299 CrPC allows the Judge or Magistrate to record the evidence in absence of absconded accused if there is no prospect of arresting him soon.
Objective	Prevent proclaimed offenders from frustrating the criminal justice process by absconding.

Conditions for Conducting Trial in Absentia

- **Restricted to serious offences:** The provision applies only to offences punishable with death, life imprisonment or imprisonment of ten years or more, ensuring that it is invoked only in grave cases.
- **Applicable only to proclaimed offenders:** The accused must first be declared a Proclaimed Offender after following the statutory procedure, and the court must conclude that the accused has deliberately absconded and there is no immediate prospect of arrest.

Procedural Safeguards

- **Reasonable opportunity to appear:** Before commencing the trial, the court must ensure that warrants have been issued, public notices have been published and all reasonable efforts have been made to secure the accused's presence. The proceedings can begin only after these safeguards are exhausted.
- **Right to legal representation:** The accused continues to have the right to be represented by an advocate. If no lawyer is engaged, the court must appoint a State-funded defence counsel to safeguard the fairness of the proceedings.
- **Right to appeal:** If the accused subsequently appears or is apprehended, the law provides an opportunity to challenge the conviction through the appellate process within the prescribed time.

	absents themselves.
United States	Generally, requires the accused to be present, but allows continuation of trial if the accused absconds after proceedings have begun.
France & Italy	Permit trials in absentia with safeguards, including provisions for retrial or appeal upon the accused's appearance.

Way Forward

- **Strict adherence to safeguards:** Courts should invoke trial in absentia only after ensuring full compliance with statutory requirements regarding proclamation, notice & legal representation.
- **Judicial oversight:** Higher courts should evolve clear guidelines to prevent arbitrary invocation of **Section 356** and ensure consistency across jurisdictions.
- **International best practices:** India may consider incorporating stronger safeguards, such as broader opportunities for retrial in exceptional cases.

Important Legal Provisions

Provision	Details
Section 356, BNSS, 2023	Lays down several procedural safeguards before a trial can commence in the absence of the accused. These include the issuance of two consecutive warrants of arrest within an interval of at least 30 days. A notice must also be published in a local or national newspaper, giving the accused 30 days to appear before the court. In addition, the notice must be displayed at the accused's last known place of residence, and a relative or friend of the accused must be informed about the trial. The trial cannot commence until 90 days have elapsed from the date of framing of charges, giving the accused sufficient opportunity to appear before the court.
Section 84, BNSS, 2023	Proclamation of absconding persons (Proclaimed Offender).



Prevention Of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026

The Government has introduced the **Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026** to extend statutory protection to **Vande Mataram, the National Song**, by bringing it within the ambit of the **Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971**. The Bill seeks to provide the National Song the same legal protection currently available to the National Anthem.

Constitutional and Historical Status of Vande Mataram

- **Adopted as the National Song** on 24 January 1950, the Constituent Assembly, through a statement by Dr. Rajendra Prasad, declared that Jana Gana Mana would be the National Anthem while Vande Mataram, because of its historic role in the freedom struggle, would be honoured equally and enjoy equal status. However, the Constitution itself does not expressly mention a National Song.

- Indian Constitution does not explicitly name "Jana Gana Mana" as the national anthem, but it explicitly mentions respecting the national anthem under Article 51A(a)

- **Historic role in the freedom movement:** Written by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in his novel Anandamath (1882), Vande Mataram became a powerful symbol of India's freedom movement and was widely used during the anti-colonial struggle.
- **Only the first two stanzas recognised:** Owing to concerns regarding references to Hindu deities in the later verses, the Indian National Congress in 1937 decided that only the first two stanzas would be used at public functions. This approach was subsequently reflected in the Constituent Assembly's recognition of the song.

Existing Legal Position

- **National Anthem protected by law** (The Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971) but presently no similar protection to Vande Mataram.
- **No legal obligation to sing:** While citizens are expected to accord respect to the National Song, there is currently no statutory obligation requiring individuals to sing Vande Mataram, and the proposed amendment primarily addresses intentional insult or obstruction during its rendition.

Concerns

- **Freedom of expression:** The proposal has renewed debate on balancing respect for



What does the Bill Propose?





Equal legal protection for the National Song: The Bill proposes to amend the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971 so that intentional insult to or obstruction of the singing of Vande Mataram becomes punishable in the same manner as similar acts relating to the National Anthem.



Punishment: Any person who intentionally prevents, disturbs or insults the singing of Vande Mataram may face imprisonment **up to three years**, a fine, or both, mirroring the existing penal provisions applicable to the National Anthem.



Mandatory rendition at specified official events: The proposal also seeks to require that Vande Mataram be sung or played in its entirety at specified State functions and civil investiture ceremonies where the National Anthem is rendered.



Why was the Amendment Considered Necessary?





No statutory protection at present: Although Vande Mataram enjoys the status of the National Song and has historically been accorded equal honour with the National Anthem, the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971 presently protects only the National Anthem and the National Flag. Consequently, there is no specific penal provision dealing with insults to the National Song.



Recognises historical importance: It acknowledges the pivotal contribution of Vande Mataram in mobilising the national movement against colonial rule and preserving its legacy.



How Courts Have Interpreted the Existing Anthem Law?





Kerala High Court: Salman v. State of Kerala (2014)

Meaning of "disturbance": The Kerala High Court clarified that under Section 3 of the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971, an offence is committed when a person intentionally prevents, obstructs or disturbs the singing of the National Anthem.



Active disruption is punishable: The Court refused to quash an FIR against a person accused of making loud and contemptuous noise during the National Anthem, holding that such conduct could amount to a punishable disturbance warranting police investigation.



Bijoe Emmanuel & Ors. v. State of Kerala (1986)

Facts of the case: Three school students belonging to the Jehovah's Witnesses denomination refused to sing the National Anthem during the school assembly due to their religious beliefs. However, they stood respectfully throughout the rendition.



Supreme Court's ruling: The Court held that expelling the students violated:

-  **Article 19(1)(a):** Freedom of speech and expression.
-  **Article 25(1):** Freedom of conscience and freedom of religion.
-  No legal obligation to sing: The Court ruled that there is no legal requirement to sing the National Anthem. Respect is adequately shown by standing in silence during its rendition.
-  Constitutional principle: The judgment emphasised that a democratic Constitution protects the rights of even the smallest minority, and that tolerance and religious freedom are integral to India's constitutional ethos.

national symbols with the constitutional guarantee of freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(1)(a), particularly regarding the scope of criminal sanctions.

Aspect	National Anthem	National Song
Name	Jana Gana Mana	Vande Mataram
Author	Rabindranath Tagore	Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay
Official Recognition	Constituent Assembly (24 January 1950)	Constituent Assembly (24 January 1950)

- **Historical sensitivities:** Vande Mataram has historically generated differing views because later verses invoke Hindu deities. Although only the first two stanzas are officially recognised, the issue continues to have social and political significance.

Way Forward

- **Ensure balanced implementation:** Any enforcement of the proposed law should distinguish between deliberate acts of insult and bona fide dissent, while remaining consistent with constitutional guarantees.
- **Promote awareness:** Greater emphasis should be placed on educating citizens about the historical significance of Vande Mataram and its role in India's freedom struggle, alongside legal protection.



16th India Japan Annual Summit

- Japanese PM Sanae Takaichi visited India for the 16th India-Japan Annual Summit in New Delhi— her first visit to India as PM.
 - The visit followed PM Modi's trip to Tokyo in August 2025 for the 15th summit.
- The summit reinforced the **Special Strategic and Global Partnership** between the two countries through a comprehensive package of agreements spanning defence, AI, energy, critical minerals, and economic security.

Key Outcomes of the 16th Annual Summit

- **Joint Declaration on Economic Security**
 - Provides a **roadmap for project-based collaboration** in semiconductors, critical minerals, AI, ICT, clean energy, and pharmaceuticals.
 - Aims to reduce vulnerabilities from **geopolitical disruptions** and overdependence on concentrated supply chains.
 - Supported by **India-Japan Fact Sheet 2.0**, capturing growing G2G and B2B engagement.
- **Artificial Intelligence: Elevated to Strategic R&D Partnership**
 - Both countries elevated their AI partnership to a Strategic R&D Partnership, with a joint roadmap covering the entire AI technology stack.
 - **Key institutional collaborations:**
 - ♣ IndiaAI Mission ↔ Japan's GENIAC initiative (via Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) with Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI))
 - ♣ IIT Bombay + BharatGen ↔ National Institute of Informatics, Japan — focus on Large Language Models (LLMs) for scientific reasoning
 - ♣ SarvamAI ↔ Preferred Networks — cooperation on foundation models
 - Focus on: safe, secure, and trustworthy AI; computing infrastructure; and business-to-business collaboration

- **Defence Cooperation: A Historic First**
 - The summit witnessed the first India-Japan defence co-development project.
 - Joint development of the Naval Radio Antenna "**UNICORN**" — strengthening maritime security and defence technology collaboration.
 - Japan's recent relaxation of defence export restrictions creates further opportunities for defence collaboration.
 - Key defence exercises: JAIMEX, Dharma Guardian, Veer Guardian, Coast Guard drills, MALABAR, and MILAN.
- **Next Generation Mobility Partnership (NGMP)**
 - Operationalised at this summit (announced at the 15th Summit in August 2025)
 - Covers: railways, automobiles, aviation, shipbuilding, ports, logistics, and urban development
 - Positions India as a hub for "Make in India for the World"
- **Japan's New Investment Commitment**
 - Japan announced an investment of **10 trillion yen** in India over the next decade, along with plans to **double the number of Japanese companies** operating in India.
- **Energy Security**
 - **Joint Statement on Energy Resilience** (between India's Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas (MoPNG) and Japan's **METI**) signed.
 - Cooperation in **strategic petroleum reserves**, maritime energy transport, and joint investments in energy supply chain resilience.
- **Critical Minerals and Batteries**
 - MoC on Geology and Mineral Exploration signed for upstream critical minerals exploration.
 - MoC on Batteries — promoting trusted, resilient, and sustainable battery supply chains for EVs, renewable energy, and semiconductor manufacturing.
- **Pharmaceuticals and Healthcare**
 - MoC on Pharmaceuticals and Medical Devices signed.
 - Strengthens pharma supply chains including APIs (Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients) and Key Starting Materials (KSMs).
- **Biogas and Clean Energy**
 - Launch of the India-Japan Cooperative Biogas for Growth (CBG) Initiative (via MoC).
 - Target: 1,000 biogas and organic fertiliser plants across India, leveraging dairy cooperative networks.
 - Supports circular economy, waste-to-wealth, clean energy, and sustainable agriculture.
- **Research and Innovation**
 - Centre for Cellular and Molecular Platforms (C-CAMP) ↔ RIKEN (Japan): Life sciences, biotechnology, deep-tech, and start-up oriented innovation.
 - National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS)-TIFR ↔ RIKEN: Basic biological and neuroscience research.
- **Digital Infrastructure and Financial Cooperation**
 - National Internet Exchange of India (NIXI) ↔ JPNIC (Japan): IPv6 adoption, internet security, cybersecurity, and internet governance.

- o International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA) ↔ JFSA (Japan): Framework for FinTech, RegTech, and financial market regulation.

India-Japan: Celebrating 75 Years of Diplomatic Relations

At the 16th India-Japan Annual Summit, both governments announced that 2027 will be celebrated as the "India-Japan Year of Shared Horizons", marking the 75th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations.

Key Initiatives Under the 75th Anniversary Celebrations

- **India-Japan Week** - The week of April 28, 2027 will be designated as India-Japan Week.
- **75th Anniversary Logo and Theme Competition** - Inviting the people of both countries to envision the future of the India-Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership.
- **IMAGE-75: Manga, Anime and Gaming Partnership**
 - o Builds on the growing resonance of Japanese manga, anime, and gaming among Indian youth
 - o Leverages India's emergence as a major hub for animation, gaming, comics, and immersive creative technologies
- **Shared Future-75: Policy and Innovation Dialogue** - Brings together academics, experts, industry leaders, and youth to generate ideas for the next phase of the Special Strategic and Global Partnership.
 - o The 2nd edition of the Ideathon will be held with Indian and Japanese students, travelling across several Indian cities
- **RASA-75: Rang, Sur and Sakura** - A year-

India-Japan Relations: An Overview

- India-Japan friendship is rooted in centuries of cultural and civilisational exchange, gaining sharp strategic focus over the last decade.
 - o 1952 - Establishment of diplomatic relations; 2005 - Annual Summit mechanism established; 2006 - Strategic and Global Partnership
 - o 2014 - Special Strategic and Global Partnership (Modi-Abe Summit)
 - o 2027 - 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations.
- **Eight Pillars of the Relationship** - Economy, economic security, mobility, environment, technology and innovation, healthcare, people-to-people exchanges, and **state-prefecture engagement**.
- **The Economic Relationship**
 - o Around 1,400 Japanese companies operate in India, nearly half in manufacturing
 - o Bilateral trade reached \$27.5 billion in 2025–26
 - o Japanese investment in India rose to \$3.2 billion between April and December 2025
 - o Japan is among India's largest investors, backing major projects like the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail Corridor
 - o Japan is also the largest provider of ODA (Official Development Assistance) to India, funding key metro, railway, and connectivity projects
 - o Recent deals include a \$1.6 billion investment for a 20% stake in Yes Bank
- **A Distinctive Feature: State-Prefecture Diplomacy**
 - o A unique strength of India-Japan ties is the depth of sub-national engagement:
 - In 2025–26, CMs of Haryana, Punjab, and UP visited Japan; several Japanese prefecture governors visited India.
 - This led to the launch of the India-Japan Governors Network in February 2026.
- **The North-East Dimension**
 - o Japan is the **only country** with which India has a dedicated institutional mechanism for North-East development — the **India-Japan Act East Forum**.
 - o Recent engagements: prefecture delegations visiting Manipur; an MoU with **Meghalaya to skill and employ 5,000 youth**.



Challenges in the Relationship

- **Trade imbalance** heavily skewed in Japan's favour.
- **Divergent strategic priorities** — India's adherence to **strategic autonomy** and differing positions on issues like Russia sanctions sometimes limit seamless alignment.

long India-Japan arts and culture journey. Celebrates the colours, sounds, movements, and living traditions of both countries

- **Buddhist Pilgrimage Initiative** - A Buddhist delegation from Japan will be invited to India for a spiritual tour of important Buddhist sites
- **SPORT-75: Sports Performance Partnership**
 - Promotes human exchanges and cooperation in sports, taking note of India's ambition to host the 2036 Olympic and Paralympic Games.
 - Key events:
 - ♣ India-Japan Friendship Cricket Match — at the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games 2026 as a curtain-raiser to the 75th anniversary celebrations.
 - ♣ Cricket Kizuna-75 — two Indian coaches will visit Japan for a week-long cricket bootcamp for Japanese cricketers.
 - ♣ India-Japan Sports Week (February 2027) — including an Ekiden (team relay running) event in Delhi NCR.
- **Business Connect-75**
 - Builds on the Next-Gen State-Prefecture Partnership
 - Aims to catalyse direct linkages between Indian business clusters and Japanese regional banks and their client enterprises
- **MIRAI-VIGYAN-75: Science, Technology and Innovation**
 - Commemorates the long-standing collaboration in science, technology, and innovation
 - Special events include:
 - ♣ The landmark collaboration on the LUPEX (Lunar Polar Exploration) Mission — a joint ISRO-JAXA project
 - ♣ IIT-H Japan Day
 - ♣ India-Japan Universities Forum
- **Empower Regional Linkage-75** - Recognises the importance of sub-national linkages in deepening economic and people-to-people connections. Both governments will accelerate State-Prefecture partnerships between local governments.



PM Modi's Visit to Indonesia

- PM Modi undertook a State Visit to Indonesia— building on Indonesian President Prabowo's visit to India in January 2025 as Chief Guest at India's 76th Republic Day.
- The visit marked a major milestone in the India-Indonesia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, covering the full spectrum of bilateral ties from defence to digital economy.

Key Highlights of the Visit

- **Key Agreements Signed**
 - **Space** - Extension of Framework Agreement on Outer Space Cooperation
 - **Minerals** - MoU on Minerals and Steel Supply Chain Technology

- **Maritime** - Extension of MoU on Maritime Safety and Security Cooperation
- **Defence** - Cooperation on BrahMos Missile System (India will supply two batteries of BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles); Air-to-Air Missile (Astra missile) Cooperation Agreement.
 - ♣ With this, India is now set to export the BrahMos missiles to **three countries**, including the Philippines and Vietnam.
- **Steel** - Strategic JV between SAIL and PT. Krakatau Steel for Stainless-Steel Slab manufacturing
- **Rare Earths** - MoU between NFTDC, Midwest Ltd., and PT PERMINAS on Rare Earth Magnets
- **First overseas campus of IIM-B** - The Indian Institute of Management Bangalore (IIM-B) is establishing its first overseas campus in Indonesia, located in the Singhasari Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Malang, East Java.
- **Highest civilian award**— Indian PM was conferred Indonesia's highest civilian honour, the Bintang Adipurna of the Republic of Indonesia.
- **Joint Restoration of Prambanan Temple**
 - India and Indonesia have officially launched a joint conservation and restoration project at the Prambanan Temple complex in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.
 - ♣ Prambanan, built in 9th century, is **Indonesia's largest Hindu temple complex**.
- **The Sabang Port Partnership**
 - President Prabowo welcomed India's interest in integrated development of Sabang Port, covering cruise and marine-tourism, ship-repair and shipbuilding, and offshore energy support.
 - Strategic significance: proximity to India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands — a gateway to the Malacca Strait.
- **Digital Economy and Connectivity**
 - Telecom MoU signed to strengthen digital connectivity and transformation.
 - ION (Indonesia Open Network) launched on India's ONDC model — supporting Indonesian MSMEs.
 - Cross-Border QR Payment linkage agreed between RBI and Bank Indonesia.
 - Cooperation on AI, digital forensics, DPI (Digital Public Infrastructure), and

Why Indonesia Matters for India?

• Critical Minerals and Energy Security

- India's transition to EVs and renewable energy depends heavily on uninterrupted access to critical minerals — particularly **nickel**, a key component in lithium-ion batteries.
- **Indonesia's mineral wealth:** World's **largest nickel reserves**; Also rich in cobalt, bauxite, tin, and rare earth elements.
- Chinese companies currently dominate Indonesia's downstream nickel processing through large-scale investments. This gives Beijing considerable influence over global battery supply chains.



• Strategic and Geopolitical Significance

- Indonesia is the world's largest archipelagic state, controlling access to the Malacca Strait — one of the world's busiest maritime chokepoints.
- India and Indonesia share a maritime boundary in the Andaman Sea, making cooperation on maritime security and freedom of navigation strategically indispensable.

• Counterbalancing China's Growing Influence

- China's Nine-Dash Line claims overlap Indonesia's Exclusive Economic Zone near the Natuna Islands, heightening regional security concerns.
- While Indonesia maintains strong economic ties with China, it is simultaneously diversifying its strategic partnerships with India and other regional partners.

• Economic Cooperation: Expanding Trade and Investment

- Indonesia is India's **second-largest** trading partner within ASEAN, with peak bilateral trade of approximately **\$39 billion** (2022–23)
 - Total Trade (2024–25): \$28.15 billion (\$5.38 billion in exports from India and \$22.78 billion in imports from Indonesia). India faces a **trade deficit**
- India imports Indonesian coal and crude palm oil; India exports refined petroleum, commercial vehicles, and agricultural products.

financial technology.

- **Culture, Tourism and People-to-People Ties**

- India gifted a replica of the Nalanda Copper Plate (c. 860 CE), now exhibited at the new museum at Muara Jambi.

- **Tagore-Dewantara Year**

- 2026–2027 declared the "Tagore-Dewantara Year of India-Indonesia Cultural and Educational Diplomacy".
- Marks the centenary of Rabindranath Tagore's visit to Indonesia (1927).



India-Australia 3rd Annual Summit 2026

- PM Modi visited Australia for the 3rd India-Australia Annual Summit with Australian PM Anthony Albanese — sealing landmark agreements across defence, nuclear energy, trade, technology, and culture.
- The summit comes amid **China's growing assertiveness** in the Indo-Pacific and disruptions to maritime trade following the **Strait of Hormuz conflict**.

Key Outcomes of the 3rd Annual Summit

- **Civil Nuclear Cooperation: A Long-Awaited Breakthrough**

- Finalisation of the Administrative Arrangement to operationalise the India-Australia Civil Nuclear Agreement signed in 2014 — a 12-year gap finally bridged.
- Enables Australian uranium exports to India for peaceful purposes.
- Provides Australia with a stable export market while strengthening India's long-term energy security.

- **Trade and Economic Cooperation**

- **Fast-Tracking CECA**
 - ♣ Both sides agreed to accelerate negotiations on the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) — to be balanced, ambitious, and mutually beneficial.
 - ♣ Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) negotiations to be similarly accelerated.

Defence and Security

- **Joint Declaration on Defence and Security Cooperation (JDDSC)**

- Renews the existing Joint Declaration on Security (2009)
- Key areas of cooperation: Interoperability of forces; Capacity building and maritime domain awareness; Defence industrial collaboration; Cyber security and technology; Counter-terrorism and HADR (Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief); Unified approach under UNCLOS, ASEAN, PIF (Pacific Islands Forum), and IORA.

- **India-Australia Defence Innovation Corridor**

- Connects defence start-ups and industries of both countries
- Promotes co-development and innovation in defence technologies
- Strengthens indigenous defence manufacturing on both sides

- **Maritime Security Collaboration Roadmap (MSCR)**

- Enhances maritime security cooperation through information sharing, capability development, and operational coordination
- Cooperation in shipbuilding, ship repair, and maintenance
- Reaffirms commitment to freedom of navigation and UNCLOS

- **MoU: Indian Coast Guard and Australian Maritime Border Command (MBC)**

- Establishes cooperation in maritime law enforcement, domain awareness, and border protection.

- **Other Defence Milestones**

- Australia invited an Indian military instructor to the Australian Defence College (2028–29).
- Both countries committed to increasing complexity of joint exercises and building greater interoperability.

- **Building on ECTA**
 - ♣ Acknowledged positive outcomes from the existing Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA).
 - ♣ Focus on: Reducing non-tariff barriers; Improving institutional financing; Encouraging greater private-sector investment.
- **Energy Security and Critical Minerals**
 - India-Australia Joint Statement on Energy Security signed — reaffirming commitment amid global geopolitical tensions
 - Expanded cooperation in critical mineral supply chains and renewable energy technologies
 - MoU between GeoScience Australia (GA) and Geological Survey of India (GSI) — for advanced exploration methodologies, capacity building, and infrastructure modernisation
- **Rooftop Solar Training Academy**
 - Established at Pandit Deendayal Energy University, Gandhinagar (Gujarat).
 - Goal: Train 2,000 women and youth as solar technicians/installers.
 - Supports PM Surya Ghar Yojana and India's green energy journey.
- **Technology and Cyber Security**
 - **PACTS Initiative**
 - ♣ **Australia-India Partnership on Cyber, Critical Technologies and Supply Chains (PACTS)** launched.
 - ♣ Builds on the 2020 Framework Arrangement on Cyber Cooperation.
 - ♣ Targets: **Supply chain diversification, cybersecurity, digital resilience, and semiconductor research.**
 - **ACITI Trilateral MoU**
 - ♣ **Australia-Canada-India Technology and Innovation (ACITI)** framework signed.
 - ♣ Advances **trusted technology cooperation** among partners in emerging technologies and innovation.
 - **TKDL Access**
 - ♣ **Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL)** access agreement between CSIR and IP Australia.
 - ♣ Protects India's traditional knowledge from **bio-piracy and patent misuse** internationally.
- **Education and skill development**
 - The summit expanded educational collaboration (to strengthen higher education, **vocational training** and workforce

India-Australia Relations:



• Since both nations were part of the British Empire, they are members of the Commonwealth of Nations.



• Sharing a "**Comprehensive Strategic Partnership**", trade and migration, security, lingual and sporting ties have emerged as a strong foundation of cultural connection between the two nations.



• Bilateral trade stands at approx. US\$32.6 billion (with India having a trade deficit).



• Australia is a vital supplier of natural resources (coal, LNG, and uranium). India acts as a major market for Australian higher education.



• India provides vital IT expertise, digital services, and pharmaceutical products to Australia.



• Military cooperation between Australia and India includes the regular joint naval exercise AUSINDEX (Navy) and AUSTRAHIND (Army).

• Both countries are part of the Quad along with the US and Japan.

• The relationship is supported by the Centre for Australia-India Relations, a government centre within Australia's foreign affairs portfolio.



development) through:

- Flinders University receiving a Letter of Intent to establish a campus in Bengaluru.
- Victoria University obtaining approval for a campus in Gurgaon.
- Establishing a National Centre of Excellence for Skilling in Mining at the National Skill Training Institute, Bhubaneswar.

- **Cultural diplomacy and repatriation of antiquities**

- Australia agreed to return three stolen antiquities from Tamil Nadu after provenance verification:
 - Granite Nandi sculpture (11th–12th century).
 - Bronze Trident with Bhadrakali (11th century).
 - Basalt six-headed Skanda (Karthikeya) (12th century).
- **Reciprocal gesture:** India agreed to repatriate the remains of an Australian First Nations ancestor currently housed in the Government Museum, Chennai.

- **Sports Cooperation**

- India-Australia Sports Collaboration Roadmap signed.
- Promotes establishment of High-Performance Sports Centres in India.
- Experience sharing for Olympics, Commonwealth Games.
- PM Modi described the partnership through cricket: "Agenda — focused like a one-day match; decisions — swift like a T20; partnership — long-lasting and deep, like a Test match"



India-New Zealand: Elevating to Strategic Partnership and Roadmap to 2030

- PM Modi visited Auckland (NZ)— the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister in 40 years — meeting NZ PM Christopher Luxon.
- India and New Zealand formally elevated ties to a **Strategic Partnership** and endorsed a **Roadmap to 2030** as a shared framework for the next four years.
- The visit symbolised a renewed phase in bilateral engagement after four decades.

Key Outcomes of PM Modi's Visit

- **Strategic Partnership and Roadmap to 2030**

- The Roadmap is structured around **six pillars**:
 - ♣ Pillar I - Political and Diplomatic Engagement
 - ♣ Pillar II - Defence and Security Cooperation
 - ♣ Pillar III - Trade and Economic Cooperation
 - ♣ Pillar IV - People, Culture, and Sport
 - ♣ Pillar V - Education, Research, Science, Technology, and Disaster Management
 - ♣ Pillar VI - Regional and Multilateral Cooperation
- The partnership is anchored in democratic values, economic collaboration, security cooperation, and people-to-people ties.

- **Defence and Security Cooperation**

- **Defence Framework**

- ♣ Continued implementation of the 2025 India-NZ MoU on Defence Cooperation
 - ♣ Military interactions through exercises, unit visits (maritime, air, land), personnel exchanges, and defence staff college exchanges
 - ♣ Implementation of:
 - Maritime Cooperation Arrangement — bilateral naval exercises
 - Implementing Arrangement on Hydrography and Nautical Cartography
 - Mutual Logistics Support Arrangement in the maritime domain

- **Maritime Security**

- ♣ **Annual Maritime Security Dialogue** established — led by Ministry of External Affairs of India and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (New Zealand).
 - ♣ Cooperation under Maritime Security pillar of the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI).
 - ♣ Cooperation between **National Maritime Heritage Complex, Lothal** and the **New Zealand Maritime Museum**.
 - ♣ Both leaders highlighted **CTF-150 (Combined Task Force-150) cooperation (2025)** — where New Zealand served as **Command** and India as **Deputy Command**, combating narcotics trafficking, maritime terrorism, and illicit activities in the Middle East and Western Indian Ocean

- **Counter-Terrorism**

- ♣ Joint Working Group (JWG) on Counter-Terrorism established.

- ♣ MoU between NIA (India) and New Zealand Police on law enforcement cooperation — to be formalized.

- ♣ MoU on Combating Drug Trafficking, Psychotropic Substances, and Precursor Chemicals — to be formalized.

Trade and Economic Cooperation

- **Trade Targets and FTA**

- Both countries committed to **doubling bilateral trade to NZ\$7 billion (~₹35,000 crore) by 2030**.
 - New Zealand announced intention to **invest USD 20 billion in India** over 15 years — in infrastructure, technology, and emerging sectors.
 - **India-NZ FTA** (recently concluded) to be brought into **early force** — expected to expand market access, benefit industries, farmers, and youth, and boost supply-chain integration.

- **Trade Facilitation**

- Authorised Economic Operators Mutual Recognition Arrangement (AEO-MRA) operationalised under the 2024 Customs Cooperation Arrangement (CCA) — simplifying customs processes and facilitating trusted trade.

Agriculture and Primary Industries

- **MoU on Animal Husbandry and Dairying** — technical collaboration and best practices exchange.
- **MoU on Horticulture (2025)** — joint research, post-harvest innovation, and market development.
- **Letter of Intent on Forestry Cooperation** — policy dialogue and technical exchanges.
- **Kiwifruit Action Plan launched** — Centres of Excellence for Kiwifruit to be established in Nagaland and Uttarakhand.

- **Cyber Security and Disaster Management**

- ♣ India-New Zealand Cyber Dialogue to address shared cyber security priorities.
 - ♣ MoU between NDMA and New Zealand's National Emergency Management Agency — covering preparedness, emergency response, and capacity building.

- **Other Highlights**

- **Joint Action Plan on Sport:** It will promote cooperation in high-performance sports, sports science, sports medicine, and athlete development.

- o **Scientific collaboration:** The countries also agreed to enhance cooperation in Antarctic research, and scientific knowledge exchange.
- o **Building:** Transparent, resilient and diversified supply chains.
- o **Cultural similarities:** Linking Matariki, the Māori New Year - marked by the appearance of the Pleiades star cluster. Krittika, the ancient Indian name for the same constellation.

India-New Zealand Relations:

- **Diplomatic ties:** Both established diplomatic relations in 1952, with their missions later being upgraded to High Commissions. The relationship is founded on shared democratic values, **Commonwealth membership**, etc.
- **People-to-people connect:** The Indian diaspora numbers around 300,000, making it the **3rd**-largest ethnic community in New Zealand. India is the **2nd**-largest source (~8,000) of international students in New Zealand.
- **Strategic engagement:** New Zealand's "**Opening Doors to India**" (2011) policy and "India–New Zealand 2025: Investing in the Relationship" (2020) strategy reflect its long-term commitment to deepening engagement with India.
- **Bilateral trade:** NZ\$3.95 billion (approx. US\$2.4 billion) annually.
 - o **India's major exports:** Pharmaceuticals, mechanical machinery, made-up textile articles, pearls, precious stones, and precious metals.
 - o **India's major imports:** Wool, iron and steel, fruits and nuts, and aluminium.



India's Uranium Quest

Recently, India has secured a long-term uranium supply deal with Australia, marking a key step toward operationalising the India-Australia Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement.

India's Nuclear Power Targets

- India aims to expand civil nuclear power capacity to **100 gigawatt-electric (GWe) by 2047**.
- The government has opened the tightly regulated civil nuclear sector to greater private participation to support this ambitious goal.
- Achieving this target will require a dramatic scaling up of both reactor capacity and fuel supply — making uranium security a strategic priority.

India's Uranium: Domestic Situation

- **Reserves and Mining**
 - o India's uranium oxide reserves stand at approximately **4.3 lakh tonnes**, spread across 47 deposits in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Jharkhand, Meghalaya, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, and Maharashtra.
 - o Uranium Corporation of India Ltd (UCIL) — the state-owned entity — holds the mandate to mine and process uranium, operating major mines at:
 - ♣ Jaduguda and Turamdih (Jharkhand)
 - ♣ Tummalapalle (Andhra Pradesh)
- **How Uranium Becomes Nuclear Fuel?**
 - o Before uranium becomes usable fuel, it passes through several processing stages:
 - ♣ Mining and milling
 - ♣ Conversion
 - ♣ Enrichment (where required)
 - ♣ Fuel fabrication

- **Reactor Types and Fuel Requirements**

- o Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs) — India's indigenous reactors — run on **natural uranium**, sourced through a mix of domestic production and imports.
- o Light Water Reactors (LWRs) at Tarapur and Kudankulam use **enriched uranium** — which is entirely imported.

Conclusion

- India's push to diversify uranium imports, from Australia to Canada and Kazakhstan, reflects the reality that domestic reserves alone cannot sustain its 100 GWe nuclear ambition by 2047.
- Balancing import dependence with long-term investment in domestic uranium production will be central to ensuring both energy security and the pace of India's nuclear expansion.

The Supply Gap: Why Imports Are Unavoidable?



The Numbers

- Domestic sources currently meet uranium requirements for only 2.4 GWe out of India's total 8.7 GWe nuclear capacity — the rest depends on imports.
- A Ministry of Power committee tasked with preparing the 100 GW roadmap estimated India will need annually by 2047:
 - 8,029 tonnes of natural uranium
 - 1,045 tonnes of enriched uranium

The Cost Factor

- Domestic uranium mining and processing costs three to four times more than importing — primarily because Indian uranium ore is of poor grade.
- However, the same Ministry of Power committee cautioned that the global push toward nuclear power could drive up international uranium prices in coming years.

India's Import Record and Current Suppliers

- Between 2008-09 and 2024-25, India imported a total of 18,842.60 metric tonnes of uranium (as ore concentrate, natural uranium dioxide pellets, and enriched uranium dioxide pellets) for reactors under IAEA safeguards.
- In 2024-25, nuclear plants generated 56,631.48 million units of electricity, of which 39,180 million units came from imported uranium.
- The estimated requirement of imported natural uranium for operating and proposed safeguarded PHWRs is around 9,000 metric tonnes during 2025-2033.

Current and emerging suppliers

- India currently imports uranium from **Russia and Uzbekistan**.
- Cameco Corp. (**Canada**) signed a \$2.6-billion supply agreement in March; shipments are expected to begin next year.
- Kazatomprom (**Kazakhstan**), the **world's largest uranium producer**, agreed in February to sell a substantial volume to India. Both Cameco and Kazatomprom were major suppliers to India until 2020-21.
- **France** supplied uranium ores and concentrates in 2025-26, while the **US** supplied similar imports in 2024-25.

MAPS: PLACES IN NEWS

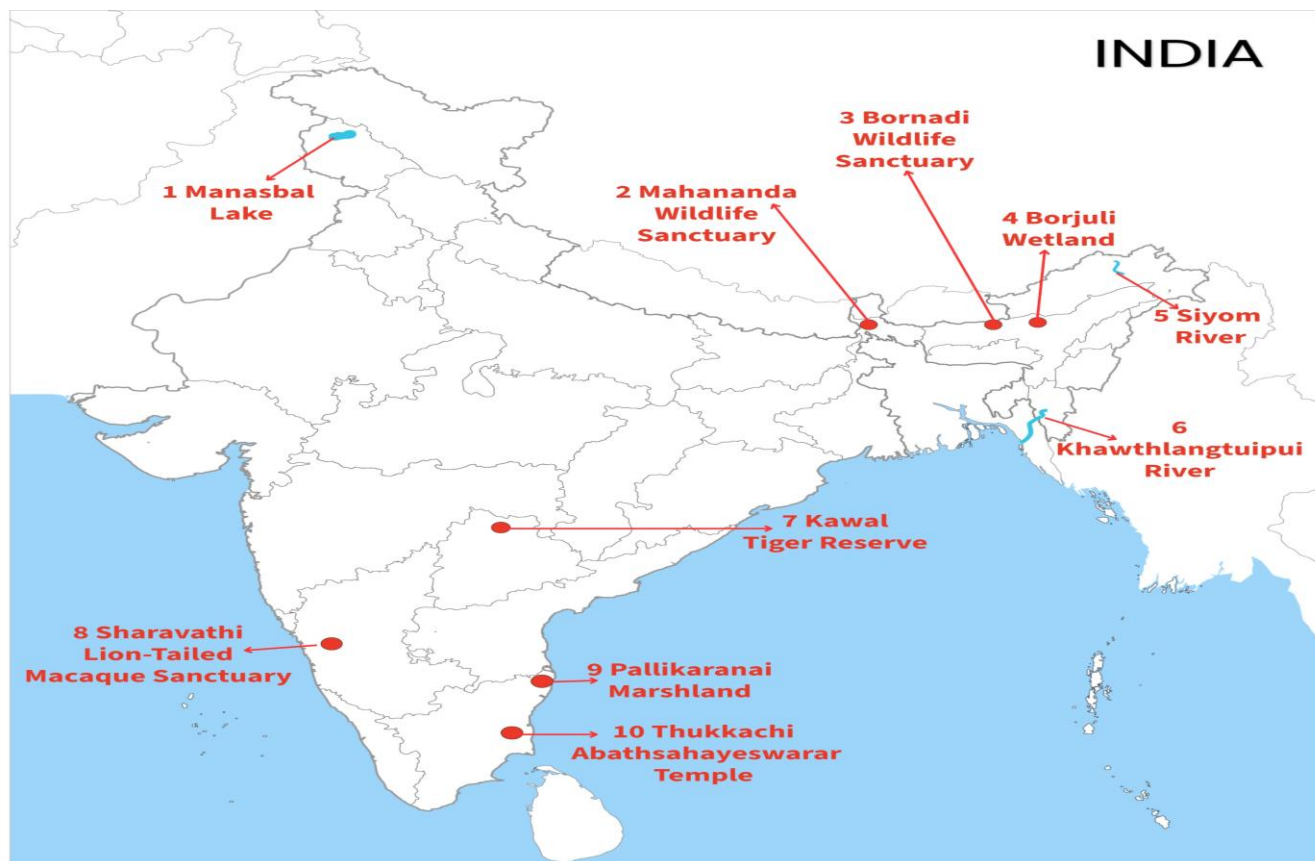
International Places in News



1	Panama	Recently, India & Panama held bilateral talks to deepen maritime security, logistics, skilling and digital transformation. • Location: Central America, on the Isthmus of Panama; Capital: Panama City. • Borders: Costa Rica (west), Colombia (east); Caribbean Sea (north) & Pacific Ocean (south). • Key Features: Lake Gatun (supports the Panama Canal), Tuira River (longest) • Climate & Resources: Tropical/subtropical climate; rich in gold, copper, manganese & iron.
2	Falkland Islands	After defeating England 2-1 in the 2026 FIFA World Cup semi-final in Atlanta, Argentine players held up a banner reading "Las Malvinas son Argentinas" ("The Falkland Islands are Argentine"). The gesture has sparked a political controversy and opened the FIFA disciplinary action against Argentina Nearly Two-Century-Old Dispute • Geographical location ◊ It is an archipelago located to the southwest Atlantic Ocean ○ It lies about 480 km northeast of the southern tip of South America and a similar distance east of the Strait of Magellan. ○ It consists of two main islands, East Falkland and West Falkland, together with 776 smaller islands. ○ The two large islands are separated by the Falkland strait. The islands are positioned both in the southern and western hemispheres of the Earth.

		• Dispute ○ The Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas to Argentina) are a South Atlantic archipelago at the centre of a long-standing sovereignty dispute. ○ Britain reasserted control in 1833; Argentina claims it inherited sovereignty from Spain after its 1816 independence and considers British control illegal. ○ Britain argues its claim is legitimate since the islands were uninhabited when discovered and settled. ○ Argentina's military dictatorship invaded the islands in 1982, prompting Britain to send its fleet across the Atlantic, leading to a 74-day war. • Present Status ○ Britain continues to administer the islands and maintains a military presence there. ○ A 2013 referendum saw Falkland residents vote overwhelmingly to remain a British Overseas Territory, while Argentina continues pursuing its claim diplomatically, including at the UN. ○ The issue remains deeply tied to Argentine national identity.
3	Moldova	President Droupadi Murmu visited Chisinau, Moldova— making her the first Indian head of state to visit the landlocked Eastern European country since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992. • Location: Between Prut & Dniester Rivers; bordered by Romania (W) and Ukraine (N, E, S). • Capital: Chişinău; Official Language: Romanian
4	Aral Sea	Aral Sea drying has released 200+ teragrams of carbon from exposed lake beds, turning it from a carbon sink into a greenhouse gas source. • Location: Saline-lake in Central Asia, between Kazakhstan (N) and Uzbekistan (S). It lies east of the Caspian Sea. • Formation: Fed by the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers. • Significance: Once the world's fourth-largest inland lake. • Shrinking: Since the 1960s, Soviet diversion of feeder rivers for irrigation caused drastic shrinkage; lost ~80% of its volume by the 1980s. • Impact: Collapse of fisheries, formation of the Aralkum Desert, severe ecological degradation; now near complete disappearance.
5	Lake Mansarovar	The wish of pilgrims undertaking the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra to take a holy dip in Lake Mansarovar remained unfulfilled as Chinese authorities continued to prohibit bathing in the lake. • Location: Near Mt. Kailash in Tibet Autonomous Region (China); among the world's highest freshwater lakes. • Religious Significance: Sacred in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism & Bon. • Nearby Features: It is located adjacent to Lake Rakshastal, which is a saltwater lake. The two lakes are connected by the Ganga Chhu channel. • Area of Mount Kailash and Lake Mansarovar is also the source of Indus, Sutlej,

		Brahmaputra (Yarlung Tsangpo) & Karnali rivers.
6	Okinotori Island	A Chinese navy destroyer, recently conducted live-fire drills near Japan's Okinotori Island. • Location: Tiny uninhabited atoll in the Philippine Sea (Pacific Ocean); Japan's southernmost territory. Only Japanese territory south of the Tropic of Cancer. • Features: Coral atoll on the Palau-Kyushu Ridge; only two rocky outcrops remain above sea level at high tide. • Strategic Importance: Lies between Taiwan and Guam; critical for Pacific shipping and military routes. • Dispute: Japan claims a 200-nautical-mile EEZ around Okinotori; China disputes the claim, arguing it is a rock, not an island under UNCLOS.
7	Taal Volcano	• Location: Complex stratovolcano in Batangas, Philippines; south of Manila; part of the Pacific Ring of Fire. • Features: One of the most active volcanoes in the Philippines • Structure: Large caldera containing Taal Lake; Volcano Island lies within the lake and contains Crater Lake with Vulcan Point.
8	Phu Quoc Island	At least 15 Indian tourists were killed after a boat carrying visitors capsized near an island off Vietnam's Phu Quoc Location: Vietnam's largest island in the Gulf of Thailand; closer to Cambodia than mainland Vietnam; part of an archipelago of 22 islands. • Protection: Home to Phu Quoc National Park (UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 2010) • Economy: Major hub for tourism (beach resorts, diving, snorkeling, ecotourism).
9	Prambanan Temple	Recently, the Prime Minister of India visited the UNESCO World Heritage site of Prambanan Temple in Yogyakarta along with the Indonesian President. • Location: Largest Hindu temple complex in Sleman, Yogyakarta (Indonesia); also called Roro Jonggrang. • Built By: Sanjaya Dynasty in the 9th century; UNESCO World Heritage Site (1991). • Deities: Dedicated to the Hindu Trimurti- Shiva, Vishnu & Brahma. • Highlight: Shiva Temple (47 m) is the largest and tallest; Buddhist shrines also surround the complex.
10	Arul Mihi Navasakthi Vinayagar Temple	The Prime Minister recently visited the Arul Mihi Navasakthi Vinayagar Temple during his three-day State visit to Seychelles. • Location: Victoria, Mahé Island, Seychelles; the only Hindu temple in the country. • Built: 1992 by the Hindu community (~2% of Seychelles' population). • Deity: Dedicated to Lord Vinayagar (Ganesha). • Architecture: Dravidian style with a ~100-ft colourful gopuram, garbha griha (sanctum), and mandapam (prayer hall).

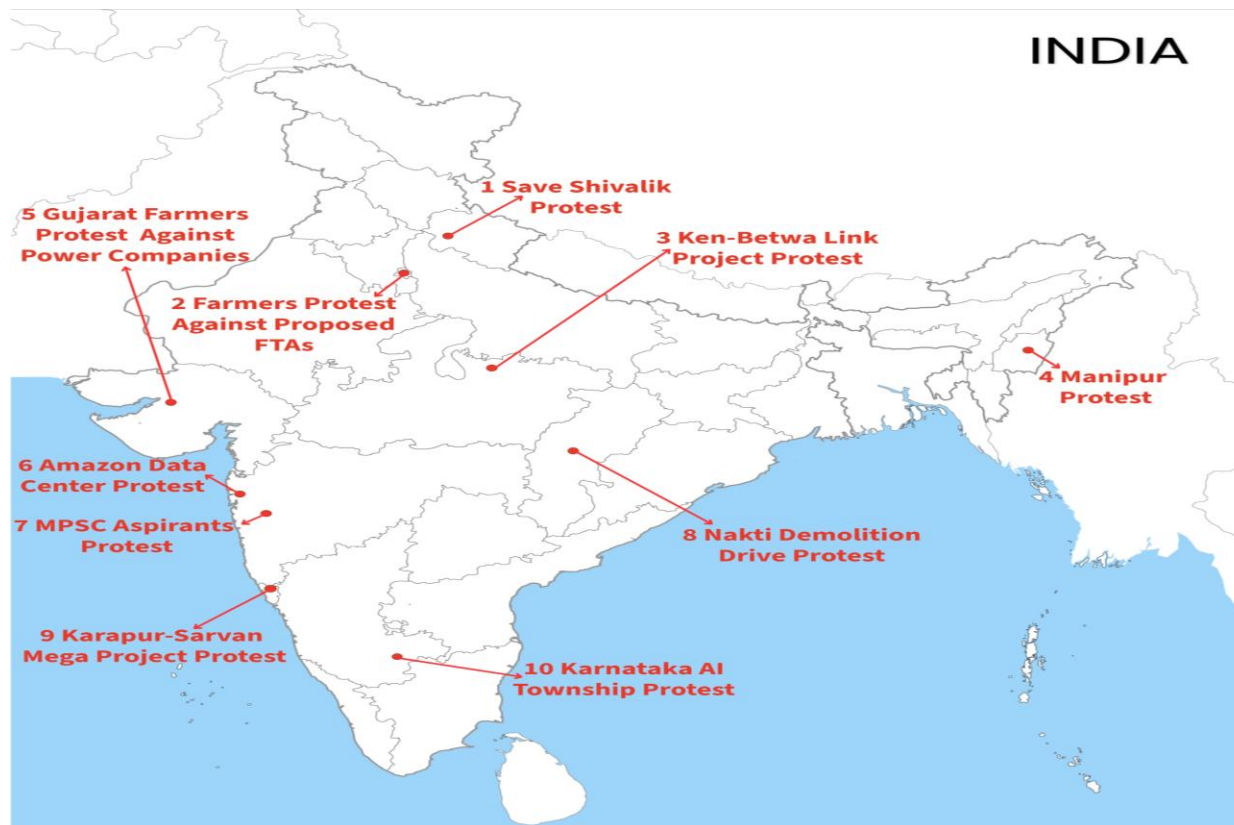


1	Manasbal Lake	Manasbal Lake (Jammu and Kashmir) is on the path of ecological recovery with the return of migratory birds. • Location: Ganderbal district; India's deepest freshwater lake (~13 m/43 ft). • Features: Surrounded by Jarokbal, Kondabal & Ganderbal villages; famous for lotus blooms and Mughal-era Jaroka Garden. • Conservation: Rejuvenation through dredging, de-weeding, water budgeting, Sewage Treatment Plant, and solid waste management has improved water quality and bird return.
2	Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary	The Bengal government recently decided to shrink the eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) around the Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary from 5 km to 1 km. • Location: Darjeeling district (West Bengal), between the Teesta and Mahananda rivers; Eastern Himalayan foothills. • Established: 1955 (Game Sanctuary); later declared a Wildlife Sanctuary in 1959 to protect the Indian Bison and Royal Bengal Tiger. • Birdlife: Important Bird Area (IBA) with 300+ bird species, including Rufous-necked and Himalayan Pied Hornbills.
3	Bornadi Wildlife Sanctuary	Recently, camera-trap evidence confirmed the return of the Dholes (wild dogs) in the Bornadi Wildlife Sanctuary. • Location: Udalguri & Baksa districts (Assam), eastern Himalayan foothills; along the India-Bhutan border. • Rivers: Bounded by Bornadi River (west) and Nalapara River (east).

		• Established: 1980 to protect the Pygmy Hog and Hispid Hare.
4	Borjuli Wetland	The Borjuli wetland in Assam's Sonitpur district has been declared a Biodiversity Heritage Site (BHS) by the National Biodiversity Authority. • Location: Sonitpur district, Assam. • Significance: Conserves Oryza rufipogon, the wild ancestor of cultivated rice (Oryza sativa). At present three sites i.e. Majuli BHS, Borjuli Wild Rice BHS and Hajong Tortoise Lake BHS have been notified by the State Government as Biodiversity Heritage Sites of Assam.
5	Siyom River	The Centre granted environmental clearance to the 1,000 MW Naying Hydro Electric Project on the Siyom (Yomgo) River in the West Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh. • Type: Right-bank tributary of the Brahmaputra (Siang/Dihang). • Origin & Course: Rises in the Himalaya near the Tibet border; flows through West Siang district and joins the Brahmaputra above Pasighat.
6	Khawthlangtuipui River	Over 80 families evacuated in Mizoram's Lunglei district after the Khawthlangtuipui River overflowed due to heavy rainfall. • Type: Transboundary river between India and Bangladesh. • Origin: Lushai Hills, Mizoram; flows into the Bay of Bengal near Chittagong; <i>Khawthlangtuipui is the Indian/Mizo name for the Karnaphuli River.</i> • Tributaries: Kawrpui (Thega), Tuichawng, Phairuang.
7	Kawal Tiger Reserve	The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) recently identified Kawal Tiger Reserve in Telangana as a 'priority recipient site' for tiger recovery. • Location: Along the Godavari River in Telangana; part of the Deccan Plateau and southern tip of Central Indian Tiger Landscape. • Connectivity: Wildlife corridor linking Tadoba-Andhari (Maharashtra) and Indravati (Chhattisgarh) Tiger Reserves. • Significance: Major Godavari catchment with high potential for tiger conservation under Project Tiger.
8	Sharavathi Lion-Tailed Macaque Sanctuary	MoEFCC panel has recommended rejecting the 2,000 MW Sharavathi Pumped Storage Project due to its impact on the Sharavathi Valley Lion-Tailed Macaque Wildlife Sanctuary and its eco-sensitive zone. • Location: Shimoga district (Karnataka), Western Ghats; shares boundary with Mookambika Wildlife Sanctuary (Karnataka). • Key Features: Drained by Sharavathi River; includes Linganamakki Reservoir and Jog Falls.
9	Pallikaranai Marshland	Pallikaranai Marshland- a key wetland is at the centre of a debate over balancing wetland conservation with urban development and the rights of long-settled landowners. • Location: Freshwater -partly saline wetland, south of Chennai (Tamil Nadu).

		• Importance: Receives water from 65 wetlands; drains into the Bay of Bengal via Okkiyam Madavu & Kovalam Creek; key flood buffer • Threats: Encroachment, pollution, sewage discharge and rapid urbanization.
10	Thukkachi Abathsahayeswarar Temple	• This 12th-century Abathsahayeswarar Temple has been restored, after suffering decades of structural deterioration due to weathering. • Following the restoration, the project received the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Award of Distinction for Cultural Heritage Conservation (2024). • The Abathsahayeswarar Temple is located at Thukkachi village, near Kumbakonam in Thanjavur district, Tamil Nadu, on the banks of the Arasalar River, a distributary of the Cauvery. • The temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva (Abathsahayeswarar) and his consort Soundaranayaki Ambal. • It houses one of the earliest known stone images of Lord Sarabeshwarar, a fierce manifestation of Shiva associated with the pacification of Narasimha • The temple is closely associated with the Later Chola dynasty, particularly Kulottunga I and Vikrama Chola. • It is an example of Later Chola architecture and is designed in the rare Kara Kovil style, where the sanctum resembles a ceremonial chariot.

Current Protests in India



S.No.	Protest	Reasons
1	Save Shivalik Protest	Where? Bhaniyawala-Rishikesh (NH-7), Uttarakhand, in the Shivalik forests. Why? Protest against the proposed felling of 4,369 trees for the highway-widening project, citing threats to forests and elephant corridors. Demands: Suspend tree felling, explore alternative road alignments, conduct proper ecological assessments, and protect the Shivalik forests and wildlife.
2	Farmers Protest Against Proposed FTAs	Where? Delhi (Kisan Ghat) under the Desh Bachao Morcha by farmers from Punjab, Haryana and other States. Why? Opposition to proposed India-US and other Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), fearing cheaper subsidized imports will hurt Indian farmers, MSMEs and agriculture. Demands: Cancel/review FTAs, make negotiation documents public, debate agreements in Parliament, and protect farmers' interests, seed rights and domestic industry.
3	Ken-Betwa Link Project Protest	Where? Kupi village, Chhatarpur district (Madhya Pradesh). Why? Protest against displacement due to the Ken-Betwa River Linking Project and the Majhgaon & Runjh irrigation projects (Panna district) Demands: Fair rehabilitation and compensation, treat each adult as a separate beneficiary, revise the eligibility cut-off date, include all genuine, displaced families, and ensure transparent Gram Sabha beneficiary selection.
4	Manipur Protest	Where? Imphal, Manipur organized by the All Naga Students' Association Manipur (ANSAM). Why? To protest the alleged abduction and killing of six Naga civilians amid the Naga-Kuki conflict. Demands: Justice for the six slain Naga civilians and action against those responsible before easing the economic blockades.
5	Gujarat Farmers Protest Against Power Companies	Where? Began in Jetpar (Morbi); spread to Kutch, Rajkot, Jamnagar, Surat and other districts of Gujarat over the Khavda Green Energy Link project. Why? Protest against high-tension power poles/lines on farmland, citing loss of cultivable land, reduced productivity and inadequate compensation. Key Demands: 400% market-value compensation, monthly rent/annual payment for poles, rerouting lines from fertile land, policy reform, and PMFBY coverage for Gujarat farmers.
6	Amazon Data Center Protest	Where? Balkum, Majiwada (Thane- Maharashtra). Why? Protest against Amazon's proposed 53-acre (422 MW) hyperscale data centre in a densely populated residential area. Demands: Relocate the project to an industrial/technology zone; independent review of approvals; public hearing before clearance.
7	MPSC Aspirants Protest	Where? Across Maharashtra. Why? Opposition to the immediate introduction of Computer-Based Tests (CBT) for Maharashtra Public Service Commission (MPSC) Group C exams due to

		concerns over digital infrastructure, transparency, and normalization. Demands: Continue offline OMR-based exams, postpone CBT until a secure and transparent system is in place.
8	Nakti Demolition Drive Protest	Where? Nakti village, near Nava Raipur (Chhattisgarh). Why? Demolition of 77 houses allegedly built on encroached government land, including some built under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) /Indira Awas Yojana. Demands: Rehabilitation in Nakti, adequate compensation, accountability for officials, and probe into how PMAY-approved houses were later declared illegal.
9	Karapur-Sarvan Mega Project protest	Where? Karapur-Sarvan, Goa. Why? Opposition to a 5.5 lakh sq. m luxury housing project, citing forest loss, ecological damage, pressure on infrastructure, and alleged approvals without proper consultation. Demands: Withdraw all project approvals, scrap the project, and protect the environment, villagers' rights, and local infrastructure.
10	Karnataka AI Township Protest	Where? Bidadi, Ramanagara district, near Bengaluru (Karnataka). Why? Proposed AI-powered integrated township (9,640 acres) to decongest Bengaluru through a work-live-play model. Why opposed? Acquisition of ~7,600 acres of farmland; concerns over loss of livelihoods, inadequate consent, lack of social/environmental impact assessment, and ecological damage. Demands: Scrap/review the project, publish farmers' consent records, conduct mandatory impact assessments, and protect agricultural land and livelihoods.

SOCIAL ISSUES

Academic Bank of Credits and APAAR

The Government is promoting **APAAR ID** and the **Academic Bank of Credits (ABC)** under **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** to create lifelong digital academic records and enable flexible, transparent, and student-centric learning.

How Does ABC Work?

- Students register on the ABC portal and receive a unique ABC ID (Renamed as APAAR ID) linked to their Aadhaar and DigiLocker account.
- Students belonging to eligible Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Skill Awarding Bodies can use the ABC facility.
- Award Granting Institutions (**AGI**) in a capacity to issue Certificates, Degrees & Marksheets, can upload credit data directly to the NAD-ABC portal against each student's APAAR ID.
- Students can accumulate, transfer, and redeem credits across HEIs without losing academic progress.
- Credits are valid for a maximum of 7 years or the duration prescribed by the relevant academic discipline. Once redeemed, credits cannot be reused for transfer or redemption.
- Certificates & Marksheets issuance is handled by AGIs via National Academic Depository (NAD) platform.
- The NAD serves as the backbone of ABC, securely storing all academic awards & records.

Significance: Together, **ABC and APAAR** create a secure, portable, lifelong digital academic record, enabling **academic mobility, credit portability, flexible learning, anytime access to certificates**, and strengthening **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)** for education.

Ayushman Sarathi

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) recently launched the Ayushman Sarathi- PM-JAY Whatsapp Chatbot.

What is Ayushman Sarathi?

Launched by the **National Health Authority (NHA)**- under the **MoHFW**, **Ayushman Sarathi** is a **24x7 WhatsApp chatbot** offering **secure, API-based, real-time access** to **Ayushman Bharat- Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY)** services.

Key Services:

- Check PM-JAY eligibility; apply, download, eKYC (e-Know Your Customer), Aadhaar linking, and lock/unlock **Ayushman Card**.

APAAR (Automated Permanent Academic Account Registry)

- What?** Unique **12-digit lifelong student ID** linked to the ABC system under "**One Nation, One Student ID**".
- Objective:** Creates a single digital academic identity by integrating records from school, higher, skill and vocational education.
- Key Features:**
 - Linked with **Aadhaar** and **DigiLocker**.
 - Enables seamless verification and access to academic records.
 - Can be generated through **Common Service Centres (CSCs)** in remote areas.

Academic Bank of Credits (ABC)

- What?** Digital credit repository by the **Ministry of Education**, regulated by the **University Grants Commission (UGC)**.
- Objective:** Stores, transfers and redeems academic credits; supports **Multiple Entry-Multiple Exit (MEME)** and lifelong learning under **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**.
- Key Features:**
 - Credit transfer across institutions.
 - Credits valid for **7 years** (or as prescribed).
 - Integrated with **National Academic Depository (NAD)**, **DigiLocker** and **SWAYAM**.
 - Secure digital academic records and certificates.

- Access **Ayushman Vaya Vandana Card (70+)**, wallet balance, treatment history, and nearby empaneled hospitals.
- Register/track grievances, request callbacks, and submit discharge feedback.

Significance: Enables **anytime, anywhere** access to PM-JAY services, reducing physical visits. Improves **transparency, grievance redressal, beneficiary feedback, and digital healthcare governance**.

MANAS: A Digital Shield Against Drugs

The Government launched the **National Narcotics Helpline MANAS (Madak Padarth Nishedh Asoochna Kendra)** on **18 July 2024** under the **Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB)**, Ministry of Home Affairs, in collaboration with the **Digital India Corporation (DIC)**, to strengthen citizen participation in tackling substance abuse and drug trafficking.

Magnitude of Substance Abuse in India (2019): This first comprehensive report states that India has-

- **16 crore** alcohol users; **5.7 crore** severely affected.
- **3.1 crore** cannabis users, and **1.18 crore** sedative users.
- **2.8 crore** people dependent on opioids, including **28 lakh** requiring urgent treatment.

What is MANAS?

- It is a **technology-driven 24x7 national helpline** accessible via **1933, web portal, email, and UMANG app** providing a secure platform to report drug-related activities and access counselling and rehabilitation. It enables **anonymous reporting** of drug trafficking, peddling, and illegal cultivation.
- It is integrated with **14446 de-addiction helpline** and also features **digital ticketing** for faster response; multilingual support, Smart IVR, chatbot, and regional language assistance are being introduced.

Achievements (as of July 2026):

- Received **9.94 lakh+** connection attempts and **2.65 lakh+** drug-related inputs, generating **16,200+** actionable intelligence reports.
- Facilitated **47,500+** counselling calls, assisted **32,900+** citizens, addressed **12,800+** rehabilitation requests, and strengthened coordination with 30 NCB Zonal Units and 36 State and Union Territory Anti-Narcotics Task Forces (ANTFs).

Objectives:

- Enable confidential reporting of drug-related offences.
- Provide counselling and rehabilitation support.
- Improve coordination between citizens and law enforcement agencies.
- Support the vision of a **Nasha Mukta Bharat** through Digital India.

Performance Graded Index

Union Ministry of Education released the Report on Performance Grading Index (PGI) 2.0 for States/UTs (PGI-S) and Performance Grading Index for Districts (PGI-D) for 2025-26.

What is PGI?

PGI is an assessment framework developed by the **Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education** to evaluate the performance of **States/UTs (PGI-S)** and **Districts (PGI-D)** in school education. Introduced in 2017 and revamped as PGI 2.0 in line with the NEP 2020.

Objective of PGI: To monitor implementation of school education policies, improve learning outcomes, and promote evidence-based governance.

Grading System: It uses **performance bands instead of rankings** to encourage continuous improvement.

Coverage:

- **PGI-S:** 1000 marks, 70 indicators comprising six domains- **Learning Outcomes & Quality (LOQ), Access, Infrastructure & Facilities, Equity, Governance Processes, Teacher Education & Training.**

Description	Score Range	Grade
Highest level; state-of-the-art	941-1000	Utkarsh
High performing	761-940	Uttam-1 to 3
Mid-level; needs improvement	581-760	Prachesta-1 to 3
Aspiring; requires urgent intervention	401-580	Akanshi-1 to 3

- **PGI-D:** 600 marks, 70 indicators across 11 domains, including **LOQ, Access, Teacher Availability and Professional Development Outcomes, Learning Management & Enrichment Activities, Infrastructure, School Safety, Digital Learning, Funds Convergence and Utilisation, Attendance Monitoring, and School Leadership.**

Data Sources: UDISE+, PARAKH Rashtriya Sarvekshan (PRS- national education survey by NCERT) 2024, PRABANDH Portal (*Project appraisal, budgeting, achievements & data handling system* for schools), PM POSHAN (Mid-Day Meal) Portal, and Vidyanjali Portal.

- ✓ **UDISE+ (Unified District Information System for Education Plus)** is a unified platform for collecting and managing data from government-recognized schools, including formal and special education institutions affiliated with national, international, and private boards.
- ✓ **Vidyanjali Portal** facilitates community and volunteers to directly connect with the government and government-aided schools to contribute their services and/or assets/ materials/equipments.

Key Findings (2025-26):

- **No State/UT** achieved the **top three grades (Utkarsh, Uttam-1, Uttam-2).**
- **Chandigarh** emerged as the **top performer**, becoming the only UT in **Uttam-3.**
- **Delhi, Kerala, Punjab, and Dadra & Nagar Haveli & Daman & Diu** were placed in **Prachesta-1.**
- Most States/UTs fell under **Prachesta-3** and **Akanshi-1** categories.
- The **performance gap** between the highest and lowest scoring States/UTs reduced from **51% (2017-18)** to **31.4% (2025-26)**, indicating overall improvement in school education.

Way Forward	Structural and Implementation Challenges in PGI
• Focus on LOQ as all other domains (Access, Equity, Infrastructure) are essentially supporting frameworks for this goal. • Evidence-Based Governance: Utilize the PGI as a diagnostic tool for "mid-course corrections" rather than just a ranking mechanism. • Policy Convergence: Strengthen implementation of NEP 2020 and SDG-4 (quality education) goals to bridge the gap between high-achieving UTs and lower-performing states. • Mentorship: Encourage peer-to-peer learning where high-performing States/UTs share best practices to assist those in lower bands.	• Infrastructure & Digital Divide: While PGI emphasizes digital/ICT facilities, many regions struggle with basic connectivity and hardware, leading to lower scores in infrastructure domains. • LOQ remains the most critical yet challenging to improve; it requires long-term policy patience compared to infrastructure-based inputs. • Teacher Quality: Issues remain regarding recruitment, deployment, and service conditions, impacting the quality and motivation of the teaching workforce. • Data Reliability: The system relies on self-reported data from various portals (UDISE+, PRABANDH), which creates risks of reporting inconsistencies.

UDISE+ Report

The Ministry of Education has released the **Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) Report 2025-26**, presenting the latest status of school education in India under the **National Education Policy (NEP), 2020**.

- **UDISE+** is India's **national school education database**, developed by the **Department of School Education & Literacy (DoSE&L), Ministry of Education**. It was launched in **2018-19** (upgraded from UDISE) and covers **all recognized schools** across India.
- It provides **school-wise, teacher-wise and student-wise** data for planning and policymaking. Since **2022-23**, it captures **individual student records**, enabling tracking of enrolment, attendance, learning progression and dropouts. It also introduces a **Unique Educational ID (EID)** for every student (along with voluntary Aadhaar seeding).

****Note:** UDISE+ is a massive raw data collection system, while PGI is a scoring and grading system that uses that data.

Key Highlights of UDISE+ Report 2025-26:

- **School Education:** Covers **14.67 lakh schools**, **24.72 crore students** and **1.03 crore teachers**.
- **Improved Participation:** **Secondary Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)** increased to **71.7%** (68.5% in 2024-25); transition rates improved to **99.2% for Foundational (Pre-Primary + Primary) → Preparatory (partly primary); 93.8% for Preparatory → Middle (upper primary); 88.3% for Middle → Secondary**
- **Lower Dropouts:** Preparatory dropout declined to **1.8%** (from **2.3%**); Secondary to **7.0%** (from **8.2%**).
- **Retention rates** increased from **82.8%** (2024-25) to **83.7%** (2025-26) at the middle level and from **47.2%** (2024-25) to **51.9%** (2025-26) at the secondary level.
- **Teacher Availability:** Teachers increased to **1.03 crore**, an **8.3% increase since 2022-23**.
- **Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR)** improved to **10 (Foundational), 12 (Preparatory), 17 (Middle) and 21 (Secondary)** all better than the **NEP benchmark of 30:1**.
- **Infrastructure:** **69.9%** schools have computers, **67.4%** internet; **95%** electricity, **99.5%** drinking water, **98.5%** girls' toilets, **97.2%** boys' toilets; **58.2%** schools have ramps with handrails.
- **School Rationalization:** Zero-enrolment schools reduced by 29%; single-teacher schools declined to **1,00,843**.
- **Inclusion:** Girls account for **48.4%** of enrolment; women constitute **54.9%** of

Way Forward

- **Universal Digital Infrastructure:** Ensure internet-enabled classrooms, ICT labs and digital devices in all schools.
- **Strengthen Secondary Education:** Expand secondary schools, especially in underserved regions, to reduce transition losses.
- **Promote Inclusive Education:** Universalize disability-friendly infrastructure and gender-responsive facilities.
- **Leverage UDISE+ Analytics:** Use student-level data for early identification of dropouts, targeted interventions and efficient implementation of schemes such as **Samagra Shiksha, PM POSHAN** and scholarships.
- **Improve Learning Outcomes:** Integrate UDISE+ with assessments like **PARAKH** and strengthen teacher capacity-building.
- **Evidence-based Governance:** Use real-time UDISE+ data for resource allocation, school rationalization and monitoring progress towards **NEP 2020** and **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4**.

Concerns Raised

- **Digital divide persists:** Nearly **one-third of schools still lack internet connectivity**, limiting digital learning.
- **Gender parity improving slowly:** Girls' enrolment rose only from **48.3% (2024-25) to 48.4%**. Women teachers increased from **54.2% (2024-25) to just 54.9%**.
- **Inclusive infrastructure inadequate:** Around **42% schools still lack ramps with handrails**.
- **Decline in playground availability** (81.9%) and low adoption of **rainwater harvesting** (29.9%).
- **Regional imbalances:** Some States have **underutilized schools** relative to enrolment. Others face **high student density per school**, indicating infrastructure gaps.
- **Secondary school availability remains inadequate** in several States, potentially affecting continuation beyond middle school.

teachers; **90.2%** students voluntarily seeded Aadhaar. Student composition: **OBC (44.9%), General (27.5%), SC (17.7%), ST (10%).**

ULLAS Programme

Uttarakhand became India's sixth fully literate state under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the 'ULLAS' (Understanding Lifelong Learning for All in Society) programme.

New Literacy Definition (2024): The **Ministry of Education (MoE)**, in line with **NEP 2020**, redefined literacy as the ability to **read, write and compute with comprehension (Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FNP))**, along with **digital and financial literacy**. A **State/UT** is considered **fully literate** upon achieving a **95% or higher literacy rate**, recognizing that **100% literacy is practically unattainable**.

What is ULLAS Programme?

It is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** under the **MoE** launched in **2022** in line with **NEP 2020**. It is being implemented from **2022-27** to provide **adult education** to **non-literate persons aged 15 years and above**.

Target: 5 crore learners with 1 crore learners per year through **hybrid mode (online + offline)**.

Key Features:

- Implemented through **volunteerism (Kartavya Bodh)**.
- **Hybrid learning** via **ULLAS App/Portal** and **DIKSHA** (Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing).
- Learning material available in **27 languages**.

- **FLNAT** (FLN Assessment Test) used for literacy assessment; certificates jointly issued by **National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS)** and **Department of School Education and Literacy (DoSEL- under MoE)**.

- **Over 2 crore learners** have appeared for **FLNAT**, supported by **3.2 crore+ registered learners** and **47.7 lakh volunteer teachers** on the ULLAS platform.

- **Priority groups:** Women, SC/ST/OBC/Minorities, Divyangjan, marginalized communities and aspirational districts

Objectives: To make Bharat- 'Jan Jan Saakshar' through-

- **FLN:** Enable adults to **read, write and perform basic arithmetic** for everyday life.
- **Critical Life Skills:** Build awareness in **digital, financial, legal, health, childcare and family welfare**, empowering informed decision-making.
- **Vocational Skills Development:** Provide **skill training** to improve **employability and livelihood opportunities**.
- **Basic Education:** Offer **equivalency education** to help learners attain educational levels comparable to formal schooling.
- **Continuing Education:** Promote **lifelong learning** through courses in arts, science, technology, culture, sports and other locally relevant subjects.

Need- As per **Census 2011**, India had **25.76 crore** non-literate adults (15+ years). Although **7.64 crore** adults became literate under **Saakshar Bharat (2009-18)**, about **18.12 crore** adults remain non-literate, highlighting the need to address the education gap and strive toward achieving literacy for all in the nation.

Bengaluru Creche Incident

The alleged abuse of toddlers at an on-campus creche of global IT firm Capgemini, Bengaluru highlights critical gaps in child protection systems within private and corporate establishments and underscores the urgent need to view childcare not merely as an employee benefit, but as essential **social and economic infrastructure** required to sustain urban Female Labour Force Participation (FLFP).

Key Issues & Structural Challenges in India's Childcare and Daycare Ecosystem:

Corporate Governance & Safety Standard Failures	Demand-Supply Mismatch & Economic Impact	Legal & Implementation Bottlenecks	Regulatory Deficit & Fragmentation
• Subcontracting Risks: Multi-national corporations often outsource crèche management to third-party vendors without setting up robust internal oversight or continuous safety audits.	• Infrastructure Deficit: A Dalberg-UNDP study indicates that India's public childcare system meets only ~5% of urban demand, while private alternatives are cost-prohibitive for low- and middle-income families. • Deterrent to Urban Female Employment: Despite the national FLFP rising to 41.7% (Periodic Labour Force Survey 2023-24) largely driven by rural unpaid family labor, urban FLFP remains stagnant in the mid-to-high 20s. Cases of institutional child abuse undermine parental trust, forcing women to cut working hours or exit the formal labor force entirely.	• Gaps in the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017: Section 11A mandates creche facilities for establishments with 50 or more employees. However, it lacks defined operational quality standards and covers only a small fraction of the formal workforce. • Exclusion of the Unorganized Sector: Over 90% of India's female workforce operates in the informal economy, leaving them completely outside the legal protection of mandatory workplace creches.	• Lack of Uniform Standards: Daycare facilities operate under an uneven patchwork of municipal by-laws, local licensing, and state-level norms. • Absence of Central Oversight: enforcing caregiver training, mandatory background checks, background verification, minimum caregiver-to-child ratios, or mandatory CCTV coverage in non-private areas.

Way Forward:

- **National Regulatory Framework:** Enact comprehensive central guidelines under the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) setting minimum criteria for registration, licensing, and periodic mandatory inspections.
- **Reform the Maternity Benefit Act:** Amend the 2017 Act to clarify quality standards, specify penalty provisions for non-compliance, and introduce public-private partnership (PPP) models for shared neighborhood creches to support smaller firms and informal workers.
- **Strict SOPs for Caregivers:** Mandate psychometric evaluations, Police Verification, and standardized certifications in early childhood care for all daycare staff.
- **Child-Centric Infrastructure:** Fix child-to-caregiver ratios based on age groups and institute clear protocols for video surveillance (balancing privacy with child safety) and anonymous grievance redressal for parents and whistleblowers.
- **Strengthen the National Creche Scheme (Palna):** Scale up public funding to expand the *Palna* scheme under *Samarthya* (Mission Shakti).
- **Urban Anganwadi Modernization:** Transform basic Anganwadi centers into full-day, well-equipped creches to address the urban care deficit.

Govt. Directs Meta to Remove CSEAM

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeiTY) has directed Meta to disable the advertisements and content promoting and facilitating access to **child sexual exploitative and abuse material (CSEAM)** on Instagram.

CSEAM refers to images, videos, or content depicting the sexual exploitation or abuse of children. The term **CSEAM** is increasingly preferred over **CSAM (Child Sexual Abuse Material)** as it emphasizes **exploitation and abuse**, not merely the material.

Related Legal & Regulatory Framework:

IT (Intermediary Guidelines & Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021: • Due diligence: Intermediaries must prevent hosting/sharing of content which is harmful to children, obscene, privacy-violating, gender-abusive, unlawful, and AI-generated harmful content (deepfakes, CSAM/CSEAM, Non-Consensual Intimate Imagery (NCII), impersonation), while informing users of legal consequences. • Compliance: Mandatory AI-content labelling, traceable metadata, and deployment of automated tools to proactively detect and remove unlawful content, including rape, CSAM/CSEAM, and previously removed identical content. • Timelines: Remove NCII/intimate content within 2 hours; unlawful content within 3 hours of court/government order; grievance redressal within 36 hours. • Mandatory Reporting: of offences under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023; Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023; Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012. • Traceability: Significant Social Media Intermediaries (SSMIs) providing messaging services must enable identification of the first originator for serious offences (e.g., CSAM, rape). • Penalty: Non-compliance leads to loss of safe harbour protection (Section 79, IT Act) and prosecution under applicable laws.	Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000: • Punishes publishing or transmitting obscene or sexually explicit or CSAM content (sections 67, 67A, 67B). • Empowers Police to investigate offences (Section 78 and 80).
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Government Measures:

- **National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal:** Dedicated portal for reporting cybercrimes, with special focus on crimes against women and children.
- **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C):** Nodal agency for cybercrime prevention and investigation.
- **CBI-Interpol Coordination:** Blocking of websites containing CSAM based on Interpol lists.
- **Advisories (2025-26):** Mandate stricter content moderation against obscene, unlawful, and AI-generated harmful content, along with enhanced compliance by intermediaries.
- **Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) on NCII:** ensures prompt action by platforms, victims, and law enforcement.

Jantar-Mantar Protests

The Jantar-Mantar student protests, triggered by repeated examination paper leaks and alleged irregularities in competitive examinations, emerged as one of the largest youth mobilizations in recent years reflecting deeper concerns regarding **quality of education, employment opportunities, governance, and democratic accountability**.

What Triggered the Protests?

- **Demand for accountability, transparency, and examination reforms.**
- **Public anger over the handling of the issue** and alleged excessive use of force during protests.

Issues Highlighted by the Protests:

- **Declining Trust in Public Institutions:** Repeated exam irregularities weaken faith in institutions responsible for education and recruitment. Meritocracy and equal opportunity are perceived to be compromised.

- **Commercialization of Education:** Increasing dependence on private schools and coaching centres. Rising educational costs disproportionately affect economically weaker sections. Education is increasingly viewed as an investment with uncertain returns.
- **Youth Unemployment and Aspirational Anxiety:** Limited quality employment opportunities have made competitive examinations the primary route to upward mobility. Every examination becomes a high-stakes event, increasing stress among students. Frustration extends beyond paper leaks to broader economic insecurity.
- **Mental Health Concerns:** Intense competition, repeated exam cancellations, and uncertainty create anxiety, emotional distress, and burnout among students. Families also bear financial and psychological burdens due to prolonged preparation.

- **Governance Deficit:** Weak institutional accountability, delayed grievance redressal, poor communication & crisis management by authorities.

Significance of the Protests	Way Forward
• Strengthening Participatory Democracy: The ongoing protests signify a shift from identity-based mobilization towards demands for transparent governance, institutional integrity and equitable opportunities, thereby reinforcing democratic accountability. • Social Solidarity: The protests have evolved beyond dissent into a display of collective action, with students organizing food distribution, medical assistance to injured protesters and legal support for detained protesters, reflecting empathy, civic responsibility and unity in pursuit of a common cause. • Assertion of Constitutional Right: The protests reaffirm students' rights under Articles 19(1)(a) (freedom of speech), 19(1)(b) (peaceful assembly) and 21 (life with dignity). Simultaneously, the State must maintain public order while ensuring proportionate policing and protection of civil liberties, highlighting the need to balance law and order with democratic freedoms. • Governance Lessons: The protests expose systemic gaps in education governance, including weak examination security, inadequate institutional accountability, delayed grievance redressal, over-centralized examination processes, and a mismatch between education outcomes and labour market needs.	• Restore Trust in Examinations: Ensure transparent investigations into paper leaks, fix accountability, and conduct secure, technology-enabled examinations. • Strengthen Institutional Accountability: Reform the National Testing Agency (NTA) and establish independent oversight, regular audits, and time-bound grievance redressal. • Institutionalize Student Participation: Create formal mechanisms for consultation between governments, universities, and student representatives on education reforms. • Address Youth Aspirations: Improve the quality of public education, expand employment opportunities, and better align higher education with labour market needs. • Promote Student Welfare: Strengthen mental health support, counselling services, and financial assistance to reduce academic stress and inequalities.

High Powered Task Force on Education Reforms

The Central government has formed a high-powered task force to look into next-generation reforms for the country's education sector.

About the High-powered Task Force on Exam Reforms:

- **Members: Headed by Nandan Nilekani** (Infosys co-founder; former UIDAI Chairman). The Task force includes- **S. Somanath**- Former ISRO Chairman (technology & systems); **Tapan Deka**- Former IB Director (security & intelligence); **V. Kamakoti**- Director, IIT Madras (AI & cybersecurity); **Anita Karwal**- Former Education Secretary; and **Amrit Lal Meena**- Former IAS officer (logistics & administration).
- **Objective of Task Force:** To make **leak-proof, transparent, credible and technology-driven examination system** and recommend **structural and**

K. Radhakrishnan Committee (2024)

Chaired by Dr. K. Radhakrishnan (former ISRO Chairman), it was constituted after the NEET-UG 2024 paper leak to strengthen NTA governance, exam security, technology, and student welfare.



Recommendations:

- **Introduce Computer-assisted Secure Pen-and-Paper Testing (CPPT):** Encrypted digital transmission and **on-site printing** of question papers to prevent leaks during printing, storage, and transport.
- **DIGI-EXAM: Aadhaar, biometric and AI-based** multi-stage candidate authentication (application to admission) to prevent impersonation and ensure exam integrity.
- **Institutional Reforms:** Restructure NTA, establish **1,000 secure testing centres**, adopt multi-session/adaptive testing, reduce outsourcing, and strengthen grievance redressal.
- **Implementation:** Create a **High-Powered Steering Committee** under the Ministry of Education to implement reforms in mission mode.

next-generation reforms for the **National Testing Agency (NTA)**.

Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026

The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026 was introduced in the Lok Sabha recently in the wake of the **NEET-UG paper leak controversy** and other examination irregularities.

About the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026:

This **2026 Amendment Bill** seeks to amend the **Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024**, which was enacted to curb paper leaks, cheating, and organized examination fraud in public examinations.

Objectives of the Bill:

- Strengthen the integrity and credibility of public examinations.
- Create a dedicated institutional mechanism for investigation and prosecution.
- Ensure **speedy investigation and trial** of paper leak cases.
- Deter organized examination mafias through **stricter punishment**.
- Improve public confidence in recruitment and entrance examinations.

Key Amendments Introduced:

- **Special Fast Track (SFT) Courts:** While the 2024 act had no provision for dedicated courts, the new bill directs every State government or UT administration in consultation with the Chief Justice of the concerned High Court (HC) shall designate a **Court of Session** as a **SFT Court** to try offences under the Act, including **related BNS offences**; **pending cases** will also be transferred to SFT courts.
- **Appointment of Special Public Prosecutors:** With no such provision in the original act, the new bill directs every State/UT to appoint **one or more Special Public Prosecutors** for SFT Courts.
- **Time-bound Investigation:** With no statutory timeline in the act, the bill provides the investigation to be completed within **2 months** by State investigating officer, by Central Investigating Agency, or by Special Task Force (STF).
- **Day-to-Day Trial:** The bill provides for the proceedings to be conducted **daily** and trial to be completed within **3 months** of filing the chargesheet.
- **Creation of Special Task Force (STF):** Under the act, the Centre could refer investigations to any **Central Investigating Agency**. But the bill empowers the Central Government to constitute a **STF** for investigation whenever necessary. Once constituted, investigation shall be carried out only by the STF.
- **Appeal Mechanism:** The bill provides that the appeals against **SFT Court judgments** lie before a **2-judge HC Bench** (to be disposed of within **3 months**); **bail order appeals** must be filed within **30 days**. The High Court may allow a delay for good reason, but no appeal can be filed after 90 days.
- **Enhanced Punishment:**

2024 Act	2026 Amendment Bill
• Individual Offenders- 3-5 years imprisonment and a fine up to ₹10 lakhs. • Service Providers- fine up to ₹1 crore, recovery of exam costs, and debarment from conducting public examinations for 4 years. • Management (Directors or senior management involved)- 3-10 years imprisonment and a ₹1 crore fine. • Organized Crime (Exam authorities, service providers, institutions involved)- 5-10years imprisonment and a	• Individual Offenders- 5-10 years imprisonment and a fine up to ₹50 lakhs. • Service Providers- fine up to ₹5 crore, recovery of exam costs, and debarment from conducting public examinations for 8 years. • Management- 5-10 years imprisonment and a ₹5 crore fine. • Organized Crime- 7-10years imprisonment

minimum fine of ₹1 crore.	and a minimum fine of ₹10 crore.
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Concerns Raised:

- **Focuses On Punishment Rather Than Prevention:** as it mainly enhances penalties and speeds up trials but introduces **limited preventive reforms** (e.g., secure exam design, encryption, computer-based testing, institutional audits).
- **Implementation Challenges:** Completing investigations within **2 months** and trials within **3 months** may be difficult due to shortages of investigators, prosecutors, judges, and court infrastructure.
- **Enforcement issues:** The real issue is **weak enforcement, delayed investigations, and lack of accountability**, not the absence of harsher penalties.
- **No Accountability for Examination Authorities:** The Bill does not create a comprehensive framework fixing **administrative responsibility** of examination agencies or officials for systemic failures.
- **Need for broader examination reforms:** Legal changes should be accompanied by **technology-driven reforms, stronger cybersecurity, better exam governance, and transparent audit mechanisms** to prevent leaks at the source.

Parliamentary Panel Flags Autonomy Risks in Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishtan Bill

A **Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC)** headed by BJP MP D. Purandeswari has raised concerns over the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishtan (VBSA) Bill, 2025 and its proposed single higher education regulator.

Background: The VBSA bill introduced in the Lok Sabha in December 2025 proposes replacing the University Grants Commission (UGC), the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) and the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) with the **Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishtan (VBSA)**, comprising three councils- **Regulatory, Standards, and Accreditation.**

JPC Concerns	JPC Recommendations
• Power concentration: Single regulator may lead to bureaucratic/ideological overreach and reduce institutional autonomy. • Penalties: Penalties cannot be imposed arbitrarily by the Regulatory Council. • Accountability: The bill removes the "corporate veil" to hold individuals accountable; repeated violations may lead to the removal of responsible officials/trustees.	• Penalty Framework: Link penalties to proven violations and strengthen deterrence against habitual/repeat offenders. • Timely Appointments: Fill predictable vacancies (e.g., retirement) by starting recruitment 6 months in advance and completing it within 90 days. • Appointment Process: Other members of VBSA commission (except ex-officio and Member Secretary) should be appointed by the Central Government to reduce delays. • President and full-time members will be appointed by the President of India on the recommendation of a search-cum-selection committee;

Can Bar Associations Refuse To Represent An Accused?

The **Ayodhya (Faizabad) Bar Association** passed a resolution stating that none of its members would represent the eight accused in the alleged **Ram Temple donation fund embezzlement case** and imposed a **₹5 lakh penalty** on any lawyer who accepted their brief. The incident has revived the constitutional debate on whether Bar Associations can collectively boycott the defence of an accused.

Constitutional Position

The Constitution guarantees every accused the right to a fair trial and legal representation.

Constitutional Provision	Relevance
Article 14	Equality before law and equal protection of laws.
Article 21	Right to life and personal liberty includes the right to a fair trial.
Article 22(1)	Every arrested person has the right to consult and be defended by a legal practitioner of their choice.
Article 39A	Directs the State to ensure equal justice and provide free legal aid so that justice is not denied due to economic or other disabilities.

Can a Bar Association Refuse to Represent an Accused?

- While an individual advocate may decline to accept a brief for personal or professional reasons, a **Bar Association cannot collectively prohibit** its members from appearing for an accused.
- Such resolutions violate:
 - The accused's constitutional right to legal representation.
 - The advocate's professional independence.
 - The principle of a fair trial and the rule of law.

Position under the Advocates Act and Bar Council of India Rules	Supreme Court's Stand
• The Bar Council of India (BCI) Rules provide that: ○ An advocate is generally bound to accept any brief in courts or tribunals at a fee consistent with their standing at the Bar and the nature of the case. ○ Whether to accept or refuse a case is an individual professional decision. • A Bar Association cannot prohibit advocates from appearing, impose fines on them, threaten disciplinary action; or obstruct legal representation.	• A.S. Mohammed Rafi v. State of Tamil Nadu (2010): The Supreme Court held that resolutions passed by Bar Associations refusing to defend particular accused are illegal, against the Constitution, contrary to statutory provisions, and violative of professional ethics. ○ It further held that every accused, irrespective of the nature of the offence, has the right to legal representation. Lawyers should ignore and defy such unlawful resolutions in order to uphold the rule of law. • Kuldeep Agarwal v. State of Uttarakhand (2019): The Uttarakhand High Court declared a Bar Association resolution restraining advocates from defending an accused as null and void. ○ It reiterated that "special circumstances" permitting an advocate to refuse a brief apply only to individual advocates, not to Bar Associations collectively. • (Gurugram) Ryan International School Murder Case (2017): The Supreme Court emphasised that Bar Associations cannot obstruct advocates from representing an accused, as it undermines the right to a fair trial.

Why Legal Representation is Essential?

- Ensures the presumption of innocence until guilt is proved.

- Protects the right to a fair trial.
- Prevents criminal justice from being influenced by public outrage or popular sentiment.
- Upholds the adversarial system, where courts determine guilt based on evidence and law, not public opinion.

Instances of Similar Boycotts

- Bar Associations have passed similar resolutions in several high-profile cases, including:
 - Ajmal Kasab (2008 Mumbai terror attacks).
 - Delhi gangrape case (2012).
 - Gurugram Ryan International School murder case (2017).
 - Hyderabad veterinary doctor's rape and murder case (2019).
- In each instance, courts reiterated that every accused is entitled to legal representation, irrespective of the gravity of the allegations.

Significance

- Reinforces that the right to legal representation is a cornerstone of criminal justice.
- Highlights the distinction between individual professional discretion & collective professional coercion.
- Reiterates that Bar Associations are institutions supporting the administration of justice and cannot undermine the constitutional guarantee of a fair trial.

LoKOS: Digital Backbone For Rural Livelihoods

The Government highlighted **LokOS (Lok = People, OS = Operating System)** as a key digital governance platform under the **Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana–National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM)**.

It is driving the end-to-end digitisation of **SHGs** and Community-Based Organisations (CBOs), enhancing transparency, financial inclusion and women-led rural entrepreneurship.

- Ministry: Ministry of Rural Development

Key Features

- LokOS is a web and mobile-based platform for digitising the functioning of **SHGs** and their **federations**. It enables digital management of member profiles, records, savings, loans and repayments, financial transactions, livelihood activities and convergence with government welfare schemes.
- The platform facilitates real-time transaction tracking, reduction in manual record-keeping, improved transparency and accountability, data-driven decision-making through dashboards and analytics. It captures financial transactions worth about ₹2 lakh crore annually within the SHG ecosystem.

Digital Features

- End-to-end registration and management of SHGs, Village Organisations (VOs), Cluster Level Federations (CLFs).
- Aadhaar- and bank-linked digital identities for SHGs and members.
- Digital maintenance of

Coverage and Scale		Community Institutions Digitised		Financial Support Tracked	
LokOS has achieved nationwide coverage across:		Institution	Number	LokOS digitally monitors financial assistance provided under DAY-NRLM, including:	
Indicator	Coverage			Fund	Amount
States/UTs	34	Cluster Level Federations (CLFs)	34,314	Revolving Fund (RF)	₹9,718.41 crore
Districts	762	Village Organisations (VOs)	5.62 lakh	Community Investment Fund (CIF)	₹64,607.66 crore
Blocks	7,241	Self-Help Groups (SHGs)	94.16 lakh	Community Enterprise Fund (CEF)	₹38.34 crore
Gram Panchayats	2.57 lakh				
Villages	5.92 lakh	SHG Members	10.03 crore		

savings, credit and repayment records.

- Livelihood profiling to facilitate planning and convergence with government schemes.
- Role-based administration for approvals, monitoring and reporting from village to national level.
- Real-time dashboards and one-click reports for effective programme monitoring.

SHE-LEAPS: Promoting Rural Entrepreneurship

SHE-LEAPS (Self-Help Entrepreneur–Livelihoods and Enterprise Application for Prosperity and Sustainability) was launched in June 2026 under the LokOS platform. It is a **unified digital platform** for empowering women associated with SHGs across rural India. It integrates rural producers with formal value chains. The platform captures **real-time enterprise data**, thereby improving visibility into rural economic activities. In doing so, it also strengthens monitoring at multiple levels. It provides for:

- Enterprise creation.
- Business management.
- Performance monitoring (*income growth*)
- Promotion of both farm and non-farm enterprises.

- **Supporting the Lakhpati Didi Initiative:** Recently, the government has increased the target of the Lakhpati Didi scheme from **3 crore to 6 crore women**. The government also plans to release **Rs 10 lakh crore** to benefit Lakhpati Didis over the next five years. LokOS is an integral part of this plan to support enterprise expansion at scale by enabling:
 - Beneficiary identification and tracking.
 - Digital monitoring of livelihood activities.
 - Planning and implementation through:
 - 6,611 Master Trainers.
 - 4.09 lakh Community Resource Persons (CRPs).
 - 3.87 crore Potential Lakhpati Didis (PLDs).
 - The platform also Maintains 18.50 crore Digital Aajeevika Registers (DARs) for livelihood planning and monitoring.

Significance

- Promotes digital governance and transparency in rural institutions.
- Improves governance and operational efficiency of Community-Based Organisations.
- Supports evidence-based planning through real-time data and analytics.
- Enhances women's economic empowerment through entrepreneurship & livelihood promotion.
- Contributes to the vision of Digital India, financial inclusion and self-reliant rural communities.

Supreme Court On Citizenship Determination In Assam

The **Supreme Court** in *Sabitri Dey @ Swasthi Dey v. Uoi* (2026) set aside the orders of the **Foreigners' Tribunals (FTs)** and the **Gauhati High Court** declaring 27 individuals as foreigners, holding that citizenship must be determined through a **fair, lawful and reasonable process**. The cases have been remanded to the respective Tribunals for fresh adjudication.

Background

- The appellants had been declared foreigners by the **Foreigners' Tribunals in Assam**, and these decisions were later upheld by the **Gauhati High Court**.

- The **Supreme Court** found that the Tribunals had not adequately considered the evidence produced by the appellants and had **failed to ensure procedural fairness** before deciding questions affecting citizenship.
- In **May 1997**, the then **Illegal Migrants (Determination) Tribunal** declared the couple to be illegal migrants after they failed to appear before the tribunal despite notices being issued.
- The tribunal relied primarily on the report of an **Enquiry Officer**, as no documentary evidence or written statement was presented by the petitioners.
- The petitioners later claimed that they had never received proper notice and became aware of the tribunal's order only in 2019.

Supreme Court's Observations

- **Citizenship determination must follow due process:** The Court held that proceedings affecting citizenship involve serious civil consequences such as detention, deportation, family separation and even statelessness. Therefore, the determination must satisfy the constitutional standards of fairness, legality, and reasonableness.
- **Adequate opportunity to present evidence:** The Court emphasised that every individual must be given a meaningful opportunity to produce documentary and oral evidence before being declared a foreigner. Mechanical or summary disposal of such cases is inconsistent with the principles of natural justice.
- **Balancing sovereign interests with individual rights:** While recognising the State's legitimate interest in identifying illegal immigrants, the Court observed that this objective cannot override constitutional guarantees of procedural fairness and due process.

Challenges in Citizenship Determination

- **Difficulties in proving citizenship:** Many residents, particularly from vulnerable sections, face challenges in producing decades-old documentary evidence because of floods, displacement, illiteracy, migration and poor record maintenance.
- **Human rights implications:** An incorrect declaration of foreigner status can lead to detention, deportation, denial of political rights and the risk of statelessness, making procedural safeguards indispensable.
- **Burden on Foreigners' Tribunals:** Large case pendency, inconsistent appreciation of evidence and variations in procedural standards have raised concerns regarding the quality and uniformity of adjudication.

Citizenship Determination Mechanism in Assam



Foreigners' Tribunals (FTs)



Quasi-judicial bodies:

Foreigners' Tribunals are constituted under the **Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964** issued under **Section 3 of Foreigners Act, 1946**, to determine whether a person is a foreigner. In Assam, they primarily decide references made by the **Assam Police Border Organisation** regarding suspected illegal migrants.



Burden of Proof



On the person concerned:

Under **Section 9 of the Foreigners Act, 1946**, the burden of proving Indian citizenship rests on the individual whose nationality is questioned, unlike ordinary criminal law where the burden generally lies on the prosecution.



****Note: Immigration and Foreigners Act, 2025-** It replaces older laws- Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920; Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939; **Foreigners Act, 1946**; Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act, 2000 to provide one consolidated law for immigration and foreigners' regulation.



Citizenship Framework in Assam



Assam Accord, 1985

Special cut-off date: The Assam Accord fixed **24 March 1971** (midnight) as the cut-off date for identifying illegal migrants entering Assam from Bangladesh. Persons entering the State after this date are liable to be detected and dealt with under the law.



National Register of Citizens (NRC)

Identification of genuine citizens: The NRC was updated under the supervision of the Supreme Court to identify Indian citizens residing in Assam based on documentary evidence. Individuals excluded from the NRC may approach Foreigners' Tribunals to establish their citizenship.

Significance

- **Reinforces constitutional due process:** The judgment reiterates that citizenship cannot be decided through procedural shortcuts and that every person is entitled to a fair hearing before being deprived of legal status.
- **Strengthens natural justice:** By insisting on adequate opportunity to present evidence and reasoned adjudication, the Court reinforces the principles of “audi alteram partem” and procedural fairness in citizenship proceedings.
- **Improves functioning of Foreigners' Tribunals:** The ruling is likely to guide Tribunals towards more evidence-based reasoned orders, transparent and legally robust adjudication, thereby enhancing public confidence in the citizenship determination process.

Way Forward

- **Improve documentation systems:** Digitisation of birth, land and citizenship records, along with greater legal aid, can reduce disputes and facilitate fair citizenship determination.
- **Build institutional capacity:** Regular training of Tribunal members and uniform procedural guidelines can improve consistency, transparency and credibility in adjudication.

Government Plans Stricter Regulations For VPN Providers

The Union Government is considering a **new regulatory framework for Virtual Private Network (VPN)** providers to enhance accountability of VPN operators.

A **VPN** lets users mask their IP address and route their internet traffic through servers located elsewhere, making it appear as if the traffic originates from another country while hiding the user's real location.

Background

- In 2022, the **Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In)** directed VPN providers to maintain specified user information (names, email IDs, contact numbers, and IP addresses) for **five years**.
- Several **major VPN providers** subsequently **removed their physical servers** from India while continuing to offer services through virtual servers located outside the country, reducing the effectiveness of the regulations.
- The **proposed framework** seeks to address these regulatory gaps by ensuring a local legal presence and greater accountability.

Key Highlights

- VPN providers may be required to establish a **physical presence** in India by setting up a **registered office or legal entity**.
- Companies may have to appoint **Compliance Officers** in India to coordinate with law enforcement agencies and ensure compliance with legal directions.
- The proposed framework seeks to make **VPN providers legally accountable** for complying with lawful government orders, including blocking directives.
- The Government aims to bring **foreign VPN providers** within **India's regulatory jurisdiction**, preventing them from avoiding compliance by operating solely from overseas.
- The proposal follows concerns that VPN services are increasingly being used to **circumvent internet restrictions** imposed on grounds such as national security, public order and illegal online activities.
 - For example, when the Centre temporarily blocked Telegram before the NEET-UG retest, Proton VPN reported daily sign-ups from India jumping over 120% — illustrating exactly why VPNs “defeat the purpose” of blocking, in the government's view.

Significance

- **Strengthens enforcement** of lawful internet blocking orders.

Concerns

- May **increase compliance costs** for VPN providers.
- Could discourage **privacy-focused VPN services** from

• Enhances cybersecurity and cybercrime investigations. • Improves regulatory oversight over cross-border digital service providers. • Supports India's broader digital governance and national security objectives.	operating in India. • Raises concerns regarding user privacy, anonymity and the balance between surveillance and the right to privacy. • May reignite debates on proportionality and necessity of restrictions on digital freedoms.
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Way Forward

- Adopt a **balanced regulatory framework** that safeguards national security while respecting privacy and encryption.
- Ensure **transparency, judicial oversight and due process** in issuing compliance directions.
- **Promote stakeholder consultations** with industry, civil society and cybersecurity experts before finalising the regulations.
- Align the framework with **global best practices** for regulating cross-border digital services.

Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) Scheme, 2026

The **Ministry of Labour and Employment** has notified the **Employees' Provident Funds Scheme, 2026** under the **Code on Social Security, 2020**, replacing the **Employees' Provident Funds Scheme, 1952**.

Key Highlights

- **Continuity in Core EPF Benefits**
 - The **12% contribution rate** by both employer and employee remains unchanged.
 - The **₹15,000 monthly wage** ceiling for mandatory EPF coverage continues.
 - *EPF Scheme is mandatorily applicable to such employees whose wages do not exceed the notified wage ceiling (currently INR 15,000 per month).*
 - The EPF **interest rate** will continue to be notified annually by the Central Government on the recommendation of the EPFO's Central Board of Trustees (*currently 8.25%*)
 - **Existing Universal Account Numbers (UANs)**, accumulated balances and

Major Changes

- **Alignment with the Code on Social Security, 2020:** The Scheme replaces the 1952 framework and aligns EPF provisions with the Code on Social Security, 2020.
 - Definitions, procedures and compliance requirements have been updated to ensure consistency with the new labour codes.
- **Simplified Membership and Compliance:** Membership provisions have been rationalised with greater emphasis on Aadhaar-based identification and digital records.
 - Employers are required to maintain updated electronic records and comply with revised reporting norms.
 - Provisions relating to exempted establishments and Provident Fund trusts have been strengthened.
- **Expanded Withdrawal Provisions:** The Scheme broadens the circumstances under which partial withdrawals are permitted, including:
 - Education of the member or family after the prescribed membership period.
 - Marriage expenses.
 - Purchase or construction of a house.
 - Medical treatment.
 - Permanent disability.
 - Unemployment and other specified contingencies.
 - The objective is to provide greater financial flexibility while retaining the retirement savings character of the EPF.
- **Greater Government Flexibility:** The Central Government has been empowered to temporarily modify contribution rates during exceptional situations such as economic crises or national emergencies, if required.

What Remains Unchanged?

- EPFO will continue to administer the Scheme.
- Existing EPF balances and accumulated savings remain fully protected.
- Voluntary Provident Fund (VPF) provisions remain unchanged.

EPF accounts will continue without disruption.

Significance

- Modernises India's oldest social security legislation for organised sector workers
- Promotes paperless, Aadhaar-enabled and technology-driven service delivery.
- Simplifies compliance for employers while improving ease of access for subscribers.

Concerns

- Successful implementation depends on robust digital infrastructure and Aadhaar-linked databases.
- Employers, particularly MSMEs, may face transitional compliance challenges.
- Greater digitisation requires stronger safeguards for data privacy and cybersecurity.
- The power to alter contribution rates during emergencies may require clear safeguards to protect workers' interests.

Way Forward

- Ensure seamless migration from the 1952 Scheme through extensive stakeholder awareness.
- Strengthen EPFO's digital infrastructure and grievance redressal mechanisms.
- Improve portability and interoperability of social security benefits across employment.
- Periodically review wage ceilings and coverage to expand social security to a larger workforce.

About EPFO

- Established under the **Employees' Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952.**
- Functions under the **Ministry of Labour and Employment.**
- Administers three major schemes:
 - Employees' Provident Fund (EPF), 1952
 - Employees' Pension Scheme (EPS), 1995
 - Employees' Deposit Linked Insurance (EDLI), 1976

EPFO 3.0

The Government is working on **EPFO 3.0**, a comprehensive reform of India's social security architecture. A key proposal under this initiative is the introduction of a **Universal Pension Scheme (UPS)** to extend retirement security to **self-employed, gig, platform and unorganised sector workers** currently outside the ambit of the Employees' Pension Scheme (EPS).

About EPFO2.0

Improved access to funds and easier claims settlement, through a revamped portal with a centralised database merging 123 regional databases ensuring timely interest credit and visibility of eligible balance for withdrawal.

What is EPFO 3.0?

EPFO 3.0 seeks to modernise the **Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO)** by leveraging digital technology (incorporating core banking solution (CBS)), expanding pension coverage and making retirement savings more flexible, portable and inclusive.

Need for EPFO 3.0

- **Changing nature of employment:** The rapid growth of the gig economy, contractual employment and frequent job mobility requires a more flexible and portable pension framework than the existing employer-centric model.
- **Need for technology-driven service delivery:** Existing pension and provident fund services require greater digitisation, interoperability and ease of access to improve user experience and administrative efficiency.

Challenges

- **Ensuring financial sustainability:** Extending pension coverage to a much larger population while maintaining long-term fiscal and actuarial sustainability will require careful scheme design.
- **Mobilising voluntary participation:** Encouraging regular contributions from workers with uncertain or seasonal incomes may remain a significant implementation challenge.
- **Operational complexity:** Integrating formal and informal sector workers into a unified digital pension ecosystem will require robust technological infrastructure, awareness campaigns and institutional capacity.

Way Forward

- **Develop an inclusive pension architecture:** The scheme should balance universal coverage with long-term financial sustainability through actuarially sound design.
- **Leverage Digital Public Infrastructure:** Integration with Aadhaar, UPI, DigiLocker and other digital platforms can simplify enrolment, contributions and benefit disbursement.
- **Promote awareness and financial literacy:**
- **Provide targeted government support:** Appropriate incentives or co-contributions for low-income workers can enhance coverage while protecting vulnerable sections.

Key Features of EPFO 3.0

- **Universal pension coverage:** The proposed framework seeks to extend pension benefits beyond organised sector employees by creating an inclusive pension system for **self-employed individuals, gig workers, platform workers and other unorganised workers**.
 - According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), nearly 90% of India's workforce is employed in the informal sector, many of whom lack adequate retirement security.
- **Target Retirement Sum (TRS):** The proposed pension model is centred on a Target Retirement Sum (TRS)—the estimated corpus an individual should accumulate to secure the desired pension after retirement. The TRS would be determined based on factors such as age, income, expected retirement age, and post-retirement financial needs. Conversion of TRS at retirement into:
 - Pension, based on prevailing annuity and interest rates or
 - a Systematic withdrawal plan (SWP)
- **Flexible retirement payouts:** On retirement, subscribers may receive benefits either as an **annuity** or through a **Systematic Withdrawal Plan (SWP)** -higher withdrawals during the initial years of retirement or lower withdrawals to allow the remaining corpus to continue earning interest, allowing phased withdrawals based on individual financial needs.
 - The mandatory annuity requirement under the National Pension System (NPS) was reduced from 40% to 20% for **non-government subscribers**, allowing up to an 80% lump-sum withdrawal for corporates over ₹12 lakh
 - Government sector employees continue to remain under the prior 60:40 rule (40% mandatory annuity for corpus above ₹12 lakh).
- **Thus proposed EPFO pension scheme will be more flexible than the NPS.**
- **Instant Access:** Subscribers can digitally withdraw **50% to 75% of eligible balances** (such as for medical, housing, or education needs) via UPI apps or PF-linked ATM cards, making withdrawals process in seconds instead of days.
- **Auto-Settlement:** The automated claim settlement limit has jumped from ₹1 Lakh to ₹5 Lakh, bypassing the need for mandatory employer approvals for many eligible requests
- **Retirement Lock-in:** To secure long-term retirement savings, a mandatory 25% of the total PF corpus must remain untouched until retirement, and early withdrawal waiting periods have been adjusted (e.g., waiting up to 36 months for EPS withdrawals).
- **Flexible contribution mechanism:** Contributors would have the flexibility to decide the amount and frequency of contributions, making the scheme suitable for workers with irregular or fluctuating incomes.
- **Technology-enabled platform:** EPFO 3.0 proposes a core banking-style digital platform (like CBS) with real-time account management, seamless portability across jobs and digital access to pension and provident fund services.

Daksh Leadership Programme

Union Minister Dr. Jitendra Singh launched the third batch of the **DAKSH Leadership Programme** for senior executives of **Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs)**. The programme emphasises the '**Whole of Government**' and '**Whole of Nation**' approach to achieve the vision of **Viksit Bharat@2047**.

Key Highlights

- **Whole of Government (WoG) and 'Whole of Nation' Approach:** The Government emphasised that governance challenges require collaboration across Ministries, Departments, institutions, States, academia and the private sector, rather than isolated functioning.

- Capacity building should move beyond improving individual competencies to strengthening institutional capabilities, inter-agency coordination and collaborative governance.
- The governance philosophy is evolving from a Whole of Government approach towards a broader Whole of Government and Whole of Nation framework.
- **DAKSH Leadership Programme:** DAKSH (Development of Aspiration, Knowledge, Succession and Harmony) is a year-long leadership development programme for senior executives of CPSEs.
 - It is jointly organised by:
 - Capacity Building Commission (CBC),
 - Standing Conference of Public Enterprises (SCOPE), in collaboration with the Indian School of Business (ISB).
- The programme is a part of the larger Mission Karmayogi framework.
- The programme aims to prepare senior executives for Board-level leadership through structured training in leadership, strategic management and governance.
- **Focus Areas of the Programme:** The programme seeks to develop leaders capable of:
 - Strategic decision-making.
 - Ethical and accountable leadership.
 - Institutional collaboration.
 - Innovation and adaptability.
 - Technology-enabled governance.
 - Managing organisational transformation.
 - Leading CPSEs in an increasingly competitive and dynamic environment.
 - Future-oriented Capacity Building
 - The Government highlighted that future leadership programmes should increasingly focus on Artificial Intelligence (AI); Emerging technologies; Cybersecurity; Digital governance; Evidence-based decision-making; Lifelong learning and adaptability.
- Leadership development should also become more interactive, customised and feedback-driven, replacing one-size-fits-all training models.
- **Collaboration Across Sectors:** The programme advocates greater interaction between Public sector enterprises,

Capacity building Commission

Aspect	Details
Established	2021
Parent Mission	Mission Karmayogi – National Programme for Civil Services Capacity Building (NPCSCB)
Administrative Ministry	Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions
Nature	Independent capacity-building institution
Functions	• Drive capacity building across government organisations. • Develop competency-based training frameworks. • Promote continuous learning among public officials. • Facilitate institutional reforms and convergence. • Improve governance through modern training methodologies.

About Mission Karmayogi

Aspect	Details
Launched	2020
Objective	Transform India's civil services into a future-ready, citizen-centric, technology-enabled and competent workforce
Key Components	Integrated Government Online Training (iGOT Karmayogi), Capacity Building Commission, competency-driven human resource management

Private sector organisations, Academic institutions, and Centres of excellence. Such collaboration is expected to promote innovation, adoption of global best practices and sector-specific leadership capabilities.

Form 6

The **Election Commission of India (ECI)** has issued new instructions regarding **Form 6** (application for inclusion of name in the electoral roll), making it mandatory for new applicants to furnish details regarding their parents' Special Intensive Revision (SIR) status wherever applicable.

Note: *Existing voters not covered in previous SIR also have to submit their parents' SIR details to remain on the electoral rolls.*

The measure seeks to improve the accuracy and integrity of electoral rolls by strengthening citizenship verification.

What is Form 6?

Form 6 is the prescribed application under the **Registration of Electors Rules, 1960**, used by eligible Indian citizens to enroll themselves in the electoral roll for the first time or after shifting their ordinary place of residence outside their constituency

What is the New Requirement?

- New applicants must now declare whether their parents have undergone the **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** process and furnish the relevant details in Form 6 wherever applicable. This requirement, initially introduced during the Bihar SIR exercise, has now been extended to all fresh voter registrations across the country.

What is Special Intensive Revision (SIR)?

SIR is a special exercise undertaken by the Election Commission to comprehensively verify electoral rolls through house-to-house enumeration and document verification. It aims to remove duplicate, deceased, shifted and ineligible voters while ensuring that all eligible Indian citizens are included in the electoral roll.

Objectives of the Amendment

- **Enhances accuracy of electoral rolls:** Linking new registrations with parental SIR information enables the Election Commission to better verify the citizenship and eligibility of applicants, thereby reducing errors in the electoral database.
- **Prevents fraudulent enrolment:** The requirement is intended to discourage duplicate or fraudulent registrations and strengthen the credibility of the voter registration process.

Concerns • Risk of exclusion: Applicants whose parents are absent from the electoral rolls or whose records are incomplete may face additional procedural difficulties, particularly migrants, adopted children, or persons lacking documentary records. • Administrative burden: This may increase verification responsibilities for election officials and lengthen the processing time for voter registrations. • Privacy and documentation issues: Collecting additional family-related information raises concerns regarding data protection and the need for clear safeguards against misuse of personal information.	Way Forward • Ensure easy compliance: The Election Commission should issue clear guidelines, provide online assistance and simplify documentation requirements so that genuine applicants are not disadvantaged. • Strengthen grievance redressal: A transparent and time-bound appeal mechanism should be available for applicants whose registration is delayed or rejected. • Protect personal data: Information collected through Form 6 should be safeguarded through robust privacy and cybersecurity measures
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Mahaprabhu Jagannath Film Controversy

The Supreme Court directed that the release of the CBFC-certified animated film Mahaprabhu Jagannath be postponed until after the Puri Rath Yatra (July 27, 2026), following objections that the film's title and portrayal of Lord Jagannath could hurt religious sentiments.

Background

- The animated film was scheduled for release on 17 July 2026 after obtaining certification from the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC).
- PIL before the Orissa High Court sought to restrain its release, alleging that:
 - The film fictionalised the childhood and life of Lord Jagannath.
 - Certain depictions were inconsistent with the **Skanda Purana**, **Brahma Purana** and established temple traditions.
 - The title Mahaprabhu Jagannath itself could mislead devotees into believing the film represented authentic religious history.

Orissa High Court's Order

- **Interim stay:** The High Court stayed the film's release despite its CBFC certification.
- **Reason:** The Court observed that if the allegations regarding distortion of religious beliefs were ultimately found to be correct, releasing the film beforehand could cause irreversible injury to religious sentiments, making subsequent remedies ineffective.

Supreme Court's Decision

- **Release deferred, not prohibited:** The Supreme Court declined to permit the scheduled release (17 July) but allowed the film to be released after the conclusion of the Rath Yatra, balancing the producer's commercial interests with the religious sensitivities associated with the festival.
- **Matter disposed of:** Since the producers agreed to postpone the release, the Court disposed of the appeal without deciding the larger legal issues relating to censorship or artistic freedom.

Can Courts Stay the Release of a CBFC-Certified Film?

- **Judicial review is available:** A CBFC certificate does not make a film immune from judicial scrutiny. Constitutional courts may intervene in exceptional cases where there are allegations of violation of constitutional rights or statutory provisions.
- **Exceptional power:** Courts ordinarily exercise restraint because film certification is primarily entrusted to the CBFC under the Cinematograph Act, 1952, but they may issue interim orders where a strong prima facie case and the possibility of irreparable harm are established.
- **Judicial Position on Film Certification:** The Supreme Court has consistently held that once a film is certified, courts should be slow to interfere unless there is clear illegality or constitutional infirmity.
- Courts seek to balance:
 - Freedom of speech and artistic expression under Article 19(1)(a).
 - Reasonable restrictions under Article 19(2), including public order and morality.
 - Protection of religious harmony and public peace.

Important Judgments

Case	Principle
S. Rangarajan v. P. Jagjivan Ram (1989)	Freedom of expression cannot be curtailed merely because of threats of public disorder; the State must protect lawful expression.
Union of India v. K.M. Shankarappa (2000)	CBFC is the statutory expert body; executive interference with its certification is impermissible except as provided by law.

Significance

- **Highlights limits of CBFC certification:** Certification is not the final word and remains subject to judicial review.

- **Balancing rights and public order:** The case illustrates the judiciary's attempt to reconcile artistic freedom with religious sensitivities without imposing a permanent ban.

Challenges

- **Uncertainty for filmmakers:** Judicial intervention after CBFC certification can create financial losses and uncertainty regarding the finality of the certification process.
- **Risk of excessive litigation:** Frequent post-certification challenges may dilute the statutory role of the CBFC as the primary expert body.

Way Forward

- **Strengthen the certification process:** The CBFC should ensure transparent and comprehensive examination of films dealing with religious or culturally sensitive themes.
- **Judicial restraint:** Courts should intervene only in exceptional cases where there is a clear likelihood of irreparable harm or violation of constitutional or statutory provisions.
- **Promote balanced regulation:** Any restriction on artistic expression should satisfy the constitutional tests of necessity, reasonableness and proportionality.

One Nation, One Election: Is Reform Of The MCC Equally Important?

India's Parliament is set to take up the **Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill 2024** (currently under review by JPC) to synchronise Lok Sabha and all state assembly elections, inserting a new **Article 82A** and amending **Articles 83 and 172**. The Bill requires a two-thirds majority in both Houses and ratification by half the states. The debate on **One Nation, One Election (ONOE)** has highlighted that synchronising elections alone may not fully address governance disruptions unless accompanied by reforms in the **Model Code of Conduct (MCC)**, which is often cited as a major cause of policy delays during election periods.

Key Issues

- **Governance disruptions extend beyond frequent elections:** While simultaneous elections may reduce the frequency of elections, restrictions imposed under the MCC on policy announcements, new welfare schemes, transfers of officials and major administrative decisions can still affect governance during election periods.
- **Election synchronisation alone may not eliminate interruptions:** Even under an ONOE framework, bye-elections, elections to local bodies, and unforeseen dissolution of legislatures would continue to trigger the MCC in affected areas. Therefore, election synchronisation by itself may not completely eliminate governance disruptions.
- **Need for a calibrated application of the MCC:** There is a growing view that the MCC should distinguish between routine governance and decisions that may influence voters. A more targeted application of the Code could minimise disruptions while preserving electoral neutrality.

Significance

- **Promotes governance continuity:** Rationalising the operation of the MCC can reduce delays in developmental projects and administrative decision-making without compromising the integrity of elections.

Concerns

- **Risk of compromising electoral fairness:** Relaxing the MCC without adequate safeguards could enable incumbent governments to influence voters through policy announcements or public expenditure during elections.
- **Federal and constitutional complexities remain:** Issues relating to legislative tenure, premature dissolution of legislatures, constitutional amendments and Centre-State relations remain significant challenges irrespective of MCC reforms.

Way Forward

- **Review the scope of the MCC:** The Election Commission may consider distinguishing routine administrative decisions & essential public services from politically sensitive announcements so that governance is not unnecessarily disrupted during elections.
- **Undertake comprehensive electoral reforms:** Simultaneous elections should be complemented by reforms in campaign finance, electoral roll management, dispute resolution mechanisms and the implementation of the MCC.
- **Build broad political consensus:** Given the constitutional and federal implications of ONOE, meaningful consultation with States, political parties and constitutional experts is essential before implementation.



Benefits of One Nation, One Election (ONOE)



1



Ensures continuity in governance: Frequent elections lead to repeated imposition of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), delaying policy decisions, development projects and welfare initiatives. Simultaneous elections can provide governments with a longer uninterrupted period to implement programmes and undertake long-term reforms.

2



Reduces administrative disruptions: Conducting elections together minimises the repeated diversion of teachers, civil servants and security forces for election duties, enabling them to focus on their primary responsibilities and improving the efficiency of public administration.

3



Lowers the cost of elections: Synchronising elections can reduce expenditure on polling personnel, security deployment, logistics, polling infrastructure and election management. Political parties and candidates also incur lower campaign costs due to fewer election cycles.

4



Provides greater policy certainty: Governments can focus on governance instead of remaining in a prolonged election mode, allowing better planning, timely implementation of reforms and greater policy stability, which also improves the investment climate.

5



Reduces the frequency of the Model Code of Conduct: One of the principal objectives of ONOE is to minimise repeated enforcement of the MCC, which often postpones administrative approvals, infrastructure projects and welfare announcements.



What is the Model Code of Conduct (MCC)?



The MCC is a set of **non-statutory guidelines** issued by the **Election Commission of India (ECI)** to ensure free and fair elections. It comes into force from the announcement of the election schedule and remains in force until the completion of the electoral process (declaration of results)

National Conference On NextGen Administrative & E-Governance Reforms, 2026

The **Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG)**, in collaboration with the **Government of Meghalaya**, organised the **National Conference on "NextGen Administrative & e-Governance Reforms"** in Shillong. The conference aims to achieve the vision of Viksit Bharat@2047.

Key Highlights

- **Next Generation Governance Reforms:** The conference emphasised that India is entering the next phase of governance reforms after a decade of administrative transformation. Future reforms will focus on:
 - Artificial Intelligence (AI)-enabled governance.
 - Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI).
 - Cybersecurity.
 - Process re-engineering.
 - Evidence-based policymaking.
 - Citizen-centric public administration.
- **AI in Public Administration:** AI will be integrated into governance for:

- Intelligent public grievance redressal.
- Data-driven policymaking.
- Predictive governance.
- Multilingual citizen services.
- Improved administrative efficiency.

- **Citizen-Centric Governance:** The conference reiterated that administrative reforms should:
 - Improve ease of living.
 - Deliver services efficiently.
 - Enhance transparency and accountability.
 - Strengthen last-mile service delivery.
 - Encourage replication of successful governance models across States.

Internet Shutdowns In India

The temporary suspension of **mobile internet services** in parts of **central Delhi** during recent protests has revived the debate on the **legal basis, constitutional validity and limits of internet shutdowns** in India. The shutdown affected areas around **Jantar Mantar and central Delhi**, disrupting digital payments, businesses and public communication.

What is an Internet shutdown?

According to web rights advocacy organisation Access Now, an Internet shutdown is defined as “an intentional disruption of Internet or electronic communications, rendering them inaccessible or effectively unusable, for a specific population or within a location, often to exert control over the flow of information.” They take many forms, from full network disruptions to slowing down Internet speed or blocking platforms.

Issues Associated with Internet Shutdowns

- **Impact on Fundamental Rights:** Internet shutdowns restrict access to information, digital communication and online expression, thereby affecting the exercise of constitutional freedoms.
- **Economic consequences:** Suspension of mobile internet disrupts UPI payments, e-commerce, app-based transport, businesses, banking and other digital services. During the Delhi shutdown, traders and small businesses reported significant losses because digital transactions were interrupted.
- **Effect on essential services:** Internet restrictions may also affect education, healthcare, emergency communication and access to public services that increasingly rely on digital infrastructure.
- **Transparency concerns:** Civil society organisations have argued that shutdown orders should be promptly published with clear reasons and subjected to effective judicial and administrative oversight.

India's Governance Transformation: Major Achievements



- **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI):** India's rapid expansion of digital governance through:
 - 58 crore+ Jan Dhan accounts.
 - Aadhaar-enabled service delivery.
 - Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT).
 - Unified Payments Interface (UPI).
 - UPI currently processes over 20 billion transactions every month, making India a global leader in digital payments.
- **Public Grievance Redressal:** The Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS) has evolved into one of the world's largest digital grievance platforms. Key achievements include:
 - Annual grievances increased from around 2 lakh in 2014 to nearly 25 lakh.
 - AI-enabled multilingual chatbot support.
 - Human interface retained at the final stage of grievance disposal.
- **Major Administrative Reforms:** Over the last decade, the Government has introduced several governance initiatives, including:
 - e-Office (Paperless government administration).
 - Digital Life Certificates (Face-authentication based pension verification).
 - Prashasan Gaon Ki Ore (Citizen outreach and last-mile governance).
 - National e- Governance Services Delivery Assessment (NeSDA) (Across States/UTs).
 - State Collaborative Initiatives (SCI) (Replication of best governance practices among States).
 - Special Campaign for Disposal of Pending Matters and Cleanliness.
 - Repeal of Obsolete Rules: Nearly 2,000 obsolete rules and compliance requirements have been repealed.

Way Forward

- **Use shutdowns only as a measure of last resort:** Internet suspension should be imposed only where less restrictive alternatives are demonstrably inadequate.
- **Adopt targeted restrictions:** Wherever feasible, narrowly tailored and geographically limited restrictions should be preferred over blanket internet shutdowns to minimise disruption to citizens and businesses.

Daanveer Initiative

The **Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR)**, in collaboration with the **National Informatics Centre (NIC)** and **DigiHaat**, launched the **DAANVEER** initiative to strengthen the digital infrastructure of Gram Panchayats through voluntary citizen participation.

About DAANVEER

- DAANVEER is a transparent, end-to-end digital platform that enables citizens, organisations and Indian diaspora to contribute to the **digital infrastructure needs** of eligible Gram Panchayats.
- **Tagline:** "Give Back to Your Village".
- **Objective:** To bridge the digital infrastructure gap in Gram Panchayats and promote efficient, transparent and citizen-centric local governance.

Key Features

- **Digital donation platform:** Accessible through the Meri Panchayat App, allowing donors to contribute standardised, quality-verified computer bundles to eligible Gram Panchayats.
- **Technology integration:** Integrated with DigiHaat, enabling donors to select State-specific pre-approved computer bundles with end-to-end digital tracking.
- **Transparency and accountability:** Donors can monitor contributions from dispatch to installation and receive a digital certificate of appreciation.

Legal Framework Governing Internet Shutdowns

- **Governed by the Telecommunications Act, 2023:** Internet shutdowns are now regulated under **Section 20 of the Telecommunications Act, 2023**, read with the **Telecommunications (Temporary Suspension of Services) Rules, 2024**. These replaced the earlier framework under the **Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Safety) Rules, 2017** and **Indian Telegraph Act, 1885**.

- **Grounds for suspension:** Telecom services may be suspended only in the event of a public emergency or in the interest of public safety, for reasons recorded in writing. These remain the statutory thresholds for imposing an internet shutdown.

Constitutional and Legal Position

- **Internet is a medium for exercising Fundamental Rights:** The Supreme Court has recognised that although access to the internet is not a standalone **Fundamental Right**, it has become an essential medium for exercising the rights guaranteed under **Article 19(1)(a)** (freedom of speech and expression) and **Article 19(1)(g)** (**freedom to practise any profession or occupation**).
- **Restrictions must satisfy constitutional standards:** Any suspension of internet services must satisfy the tests of legality, necessity and proportionality, and should not impose greater restrictions than required to address the threat.
- **Supreme Court Judgment: Anuradha Bhasin v. Union of India (2020)**
 - **No indefinite shutdowns:** The Supreme Court held that internet shutdowns cannot continue indefinitely and must remain temporary (under 2024 Rules the suspension orders cannot remain in force for over 15 days)
 - **Doctrine of proportionality:** Authorities must demonstrate that the shutdown is necessary, proportionate and the least restrictive measure available to achieve the intended objective.
 - **Publication of orders:** Shutdown orders must be made public to enable affected persons to seek judicial review.
 - **Periodic review:** The Court further held that indefinite shutdowns are impermissible and that any order suspending internet services must be reviewed by a multi-member Review Committee within five working days.
- **Challenging of shutdown orders:** A shutdown may be challenged before a High Court under **Article 226** or, in an appropriate case, before the Supreme Court under **Article 32**. Courts can examine whether the order was lawful, necessary, proportionate and properly limited in area and duration.

India continues to record one of the highest numbers of Internet shutdowns in the world. **Access Now's 2025 report** recorded **65 shutdowns across 12 States and Union Territories**. While this was lower than in previous years, the scale remains exceptional for a constitutional democracy.

Historically, **Jammu & Kashmir** has recorded the highest number of Internet shutdowns in the country, with about 449 since 2012, followed by Rajasthan (115) and Manipur (62), according to the SFLC Internet Shutdown Tracker.

India has recorded about 24 shutdowns in 2026 (as of July 22).

- **Wide coverage:** The initiative targets India's nearly 2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats, which form the foundation of grassroots democracy and rural service delivery.
- **Part of the digital governance ecosystem:** DAANVEER complements MoPR's existing digital platforms, including:
 - e-GramSwaraj
 - Meri Panchayat
 - Sabha Saar
 - AuditOnline
 - Gram Manchitra

National Anti-Doping Laws Enforced In India

The Central Government has brought into force the **National Anti-Doping Act, 2022 and the National Anti-Doping (Amendment) Act, 2025**, with effect from 15 July 2026, establishing a comprehensive statutory framework to regulate anti-doping activities in India.

Background

The legislation has been enacted to:

- Regulate anti-doping activities in sports.
- Give domestic legal effect to India's obligations under the **UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport, 2005**, which India ratified in 2007.
- Align India's anti-doping regime with the **World Anti-Doping Code (WADA Code)**.

Key Features of the National Anti-Doping Act, 2022

- **Statutory anti-doping framework:** The Act prohibits doping in sports and provides a legal framework for testing, investigations, results management, adjudication and appeals relating to anti-doping rule violations.
- **Applies to all stakeholders:** The law covers athletes, athlete support personnel (coaches, trainers, doctors, managers) and other persons associated with sporting activities.
- **Recognition of WADA Code:** The Act gives statutory recognition to specified provisions of the World Anti-Doping Code, ensuring India's anti-doping regime remains internationally compliant.
- **Institutional framework:** The Act provides the legal basis for:
 - **National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA)** as the implementing authority.
 - **National Board for Anti-Doping in Sports** to oversee NADA and advise the Central Government on anti-doping policies and regulations.

Institutional Framework

- **National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA):** India's apex body for implementing anti-doping rules. Responsible for:
 - Sample collection and testing.
 - Results management.
 - Athlete education and awareness.
 - Intelligence and investigations.
 - Coordination with international anti-doping agencies.
- **National Board for Anti-Doping in Sports:** Supervises the functioning of NADA.
 - Advises the Central Government on anti-doping policies and regulations.
 - Ensures compliance with statutory and international standards.
- **National Dope Testing Laboratory (NDTL)**
 - India's only WADA-accredited dope testing laboratory.
 - Conducts scientific analysis of athletes' urine and blood samples.
 - Supports anti-doping enforcement through accredited laboratory testing.

Anti-Doping Rule Violations: The anti-doping framework recognises several violations, including:

- Presence or use of a prohibited substance or method.
- Refusal or failure to submit to sample collection.
- Tampering with doping control procedures.
- Possession, trafficking or administration of prohibited substances.
- Complicity, prohibited association and attempts to commit anti-doping violations.

Key Amendments under the National Anti-Doping (Amendment) Act, 2025

- The power to constitute the **Appeal Panel** is shifted from the National Board to the Central Government.
- The amendment removes the National Board's power to seek information from or issue directions to the **Disciplinary Panel and Appeal Panel**. It explicitly grants operational independence to the Director General and members of NADA.
- This independence is ensured from:
 - National and international sports federations,
 - Olympic and Paralympic Committees,
 - Government departments, and
 - Agencies involved in sports administration or anti-doping.
- The provision aims to prevent conflicts of interest and strengthen institutional credibility.
- The Original Act allows any person to file an appeal before the Court of Arbitration of Sports (CAS) in Switzerland, against a decision of the Appeal Panel.
 - The Amendment specifies persons who may file an appeal before CAS. These include bodies such as the WADA, the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), and international sports federations.

MECON Gets Miniratna Status

- The Ministry of Steel has approved the grant of Miniratna Category-I status to MECON Limited, a Central Public Sector Enterprise (CPSE) under the administrative control of the **Ministry of Steel**.
- Established in 1959 and **headquartered in Ranchi**, MECON is one of India's premier engineering, consultancy, project management and contracting organizations.
- It has diversified its operations across mining, infrastructure, power, oil & gas and other core sectors of the economy.
- The Miniratna Category-I status provides **enhanced financial and operational autonomy** to the Board of MECON Limited.

Eligibility criteria for Miniratna status

Miniratna Category-I status:

- The CPSEs which have made **profit in the last three years continuously**;
- Have **pre-tax profit of Rs 30 crores** or more in at least one of the three years; and have a **positive net worth**
- Once granted Category I status, a company can undertake capital expenditure up to ₹500 crore or up to its net worth (whichever is lower) without seeking prior government approval

Miniratna Category-II status:

- CPSEs which have **made profit for the last three years continuously**; and have a **positive net worth** but fall short of the Category I financial thresholds are eligible to be considered for grant of Miniratna-II status.
- Category II firms are allowed to approve capital expenditure proposals up to ₹300 crore or up to 50% of their net worth (whichever is lower)
- Additionally, both categories are subject to following norms:
 - The company should not have defaulted in the repayment of loans/interest payment on any loans due to the Government.
 - The company shall not depend upon budgetary support or Government guarantees.

Investment Friendliness Index

- NITI Aayog has released a report titled Investment Friendliness Index (IFI).
- It presents a structured and data-driven framework for assessing how effectively States and UTs create, enable, and sustain an environment conducive to investments.
- The Index evaluates key policy, institutional, regulatory, and infrastructure-related parameters that influence investment decisions and provides a comparative assessment of the investment ecosystem across States and UTs.

Context

- While national-level reforms provide the policy direction for economic growth, State

Framework and Methodology

- The index evaluates States across 84 indicators under **eight pillars** covering the entire investment lifecycle:
 - Infrastructure** - Roads, ports, airports, power and logistics;
 - Business Climate** - Industrial ecosystem and market environment;
 - Resources** - Land, labour and natural resources;
 - Government Policies** - Investment promotion and incentives;
 - Regulatory Ease** - Clearances and compliance systems;
 - Institutional Environment** - Governance and implementation capacity;
 - Financial Health** - Fiscal stability and debt management;
 - Environmental Resilience** - Climate resilience and sustainable growth.

Rankings

- Based on overall scores, States and UTs have been classified into **four performance categories**: Top Performers (scores above 50); Frontrunners (45–50); Emerging Performers (≥40 – <45); and Aspiring States (below 40).
- Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Goa, and Odisha** have emerged as the top performers.
- In addition, 15 States have been classified as Frontrunners, while eight States/UTs have been placed in each Emerging Performers and Aspiring States categories.
- Recognising the diversity among States, rankings have also been done within **three peer groups** - Large States, Hilly and North-Eastern States, and Union Territories and City States.
 - Large states**: Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu;
 - Hilly & North-East**: Uttarakhand, Assam, Himachal Pradesh;
 - UTs & City States**: Goa, Delhi, Chandigarh.

Governments play a pivotal role in shaping the investment climate.

Mission Golden Spice

- The Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (MDoNER) has launched the **Mission Golden Spice** (*Integrated Lakadong Turmeric Value Chain Enhancement Project*).
 - Lakadong turmeric, grown in **Meghalaya's Jaintia Hills**, stands out for its **high curcumin content**.
- The Mission is a project under the Ministry's Unlock the Economic Potential of India's Northeast (USP) initiative and is worth over Rs 175 crore.
- It is designed as a five-year roadmap to be implemented in two phases starting from 2025.
- **Phase One** is Value Chain Strengthening followed by **Phase Two** that is Expansion and Scale-up, for promotion of Meghalaya's Unique Selling Proposition (USP), the GI-tagged Lakadong Turmeric.
- The Mission will build a **farm-to-global-market ecosystem** and expand cultivation to 7,000 hectares.
- It is expected to double farmers' incomes, create over 3,000 women-led jobs and build a 100 crore Lakadong Turmeric economy by FY 2028-29.

Ahimsa Index

- The National Stock Exchange (NSE) has launched the Nifty 500 Ahimsa index.
- The Ahimsa index is designed to provide investors exposure to the top 500 companies on the NSE that **do not engage in animal cruelty**.
- The index comes after the BSE launched its **Saatvik 100 index** in June 2026, with a focus on the "Saatvik" philosophy, which stands against animal cruelty and exploitation, addictive and toxic products, and activities considered harmful or violent.
- The Ahimsa index was developed by NSE in collaboration with the **Ahimsagain Foundation**, a non-profit organisation started by ethical finance advocates.
- The index consists of companies that meet Ahimsagain Foundation's **Ahimsa Investment Movement (AIM) framework**.
- The framework evaluates listed companies on the basis of their products, services and business practices to determine whether they comply with the principles of non-violence.

- It classifies companies into **green, orange, and red bands**, with the green band signifying companies that are fully compliant with its animal-cruelty-free criteria. The **index comprises companies belonging only in the green band**.

Band	What it means	Typical examples
RED	The business directly harms animals, earns a significant share of revenue from animal-based products, or is built on a core animal-harm activity. Also covers harmful "vice" products.	Meat, poultry, fish, eggs and dairy; leather, wool and silk goods; animal feed; drug and cosmetic makers and animal-testing labs; insecticide makers; alcohol, tobacco, weapons and gambling.
ORANGE	The business is mostly animal-neutral but has one real, smaller animal-based product line, or directly sells/serves some animal food. Also most finance companies, because they put money into a wide mix of industries that includes animal-based ones.	Hotels and amusement parks serving non-veg food; an FMCG firm with a small honey/ghee line; a clothing house with a small leather line; banks, NBFCs, broking, asset-management and holding / investment companies.
GREEN	Very little or no animal involvement — only a tiny ingredient, a far-fetched link, or none at all.	Software and IT; telecom and media; auto parts; most chemicals; cement; machinery; hospitals; mining and oil & gas; synthetic-leather makers; home-loan companies, insurers and stock exchanges

- It includes all the top names across the IT services, automobile, real estate, and healthcare sectors. However, it also excludes all fashion brands, retail chains, and cosmetics companies due to their use of leather and wool as raw materials.
- The index is expected to serve as a benchmark for asset managers and facilitate the development of passive investment products, including exchange-traded funds (ETFs), index funds, and other structured investment solutions.

Indiahandmade

- Indiahandmade is a **dedicated digital marketplace** that brings India's handloom and handicraft traditions into the online economy.
- India currently has an estimated **64.66 lakh** handloom and handicraft artisans. Women accounting for **71%** of handloom weavers and **64%** of total artisans as of August 2025.
- As commerce becomes increasingly digital, online access is important for these craft communities to participate directly in the market.
- Launched in 2023, **Indiahandmade** is developed by **Digital India Corporation** under the Ministry of Textiles. The portal is designed around trust, accessibility and seller empowerment.

Key features

- **Specialised Online Marketplace:** It enables weavers and artisans to sell their handloom and handicraft products online.
- **Direct Buyer Access:** Artisans and weavers are directly connected with buyers, helping reduce intermediaries and support fair compensation.
- **Digital Empowerment:** Artisans and weavers are provided with digital tools and visibility to participate more effectively in online commerce.
- **Financial and Social Empowerment:** Wider market access strengthens livelihoods and supports income opportunities.
- **Cultural Preservation:** A diverse range of craft-based products keeps India's handmade heritage visible and helps preserve traditional skills for future generations.

Index of Core Industries Updated

- The Office of Economic Adviser (OEA), Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) has released an updated series of its Index of Core Industries (ICI), which is a key measure of the main industrial sectors in India's economy.
- This update now brings the ICI on a par with other recently updated metrics of national accounts (Gross Domestic Product and Gross Value Added), inflation, and the Index of Industrial Production (IIP).

Key Changes

- The previous ICI had a **base year of 2011-12**. The **new base year** has been shifted to **2022-23**.
- The **number of sectors covered** has been **increased to nine** from the previous eight. The eight sectors earlier covered were coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, steel, cement, electricity, and

Weight change

- The inclusion of the iron ore sector has led to a redistribution of the weights among the sectors. Further, the weights have been revised to reflect the weights of the same sectors in the IIP.
- The newly added iron ore sector has been assigned a weight of 4.905%.
- The **coal sector** has seen a **big downward revision** from **10.33% to 5.596%**.
- The **natural gas sector**, too, saw a major downward revision from **6.88% to 3.841%**. Weight of refinery products has been reduced from 28.04% to 22.572%.
- Some sectors have increased in significance. For example, the **electricity sector**, now has a weight of **30.932%, up from the earlier 19.85%**.
- The fertilizers sector weight increased marginally to 2.731% from 2.63%.

Key Highlights of ICI for June 2026

- ICI, being compiled on a monthly basis, has been released for the month of June 2026.
- ICI grew by **5%** in **June 2026** on a year-on-year (Y-o-Y) basis, compared with **June 2025**.
- Iron Ore, Electricity, Cement, Steel, and Coal observed (Y-o-Y) growth rate of 43.9%, 9.8%, 9.8%, 4.6%, and 1.4% respectively, whereas Natural Gas, Crude Oil, Refinery Products, and Fertilizers witnessed negative growth in June 2026.
- Iron Ore and Electricity have been the major drivers of overall growth of ICI during recent months.

fertilizers.

- Due to the intensive use of **iron ore** in industrial production, it has been **added to the list of core industries**.
- Other sectoral changes include **calculating steel production on a gross output basis** rather than a net output basis to bring this in line with the Index of Industrial Production (IIP), which is the other major industrial production metric.
- In the coal sector, the updated series will only measure raw coal, and has **excluded middling and washed coal**.
 - This change was made to **eliminate the double counting** that occurred in the previous series, as both middling and washed coal are made using raw coal.

Codex Alimentarius Commission

- The Codex Alimentarius Commission (**CAC**) adopted seven Codex standards and guidelines developed under India's chairmanship and co-chairmanship
- The outcomes are expected to benefit Indian farmers, food businesses, exporters and consumers, while contributing to safer food and more predictable international trade.
- India has been elected Co-Chair of the Electronic Working Group established regarding New Food Sources and Production Systems (NFPS), which will review existing regulatory frameworks and identify gaps in Codex risk analysis principles.

Codex Standards

- The **collection of food standards and related texts** adopted by the CAC is known as the Codex Alimentarius. The term **Codex Alimentarius** is Latin and means **food code**.
- Codex standards are **international food texts**, i.e. standards, codes of practice, guidelines, and other recommendations.
- They include provisions covering food hygiene, food additives, residues of pesticides and veterinary drugs, contaminants, labelling and presentation, methods of analysis and sampling, and import and export inspection and certification.
- They are **not a substitute for, or alternative to national laws**. Every country's law and administrative procedures contain provisions with which it is essential to comply.

Significance of Codex standards

- Codex standards aim at protecting consumers' health and ensuring fair practices in the food trade.
- Thus, the standards help to enhance trust among consumers regarding the safety and quality of the food products they buy.
- It also helps to build trust among importers as the food ordered by them, is in accordance with the required specifications.

Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC)

- It was established in 1963 by the **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** and the World Health Organization (WHO) to implement the joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Program.
- The **purpose** of the Program is to protect the health of consumers, ensure fair practices in the food trade, and coordinate international food standardization work.
- The CAC is an intergovernmental body, with 189 Codex Members made up of 188 Member Countries and 1 Member Organization (The European Union). India became a member in 1964.
- The **CCEXEC** (Executive Committee of CAC) plays a critical role in reviewing proposals for new work and monitoring the progress of standards development.

Direct Seeded Rice

- The Chhattisgarh State government has asked to prioritise Direct Seeded Rice (DSR) over the traditional transplanting method.

- The advice comes amid the uncertainty of rainfall due to El Niño, a climate phenomenon that tends to weaken the South Asian monsoon.

Normal Transplantation Technique

- In transplanting, farmers prepare nurseries where the paddy seeds are first sown and raised into young plants. These seedlings are then uprooted and replanted 25-35 days later in the main field.
- For the first three weeks after transplanting, the plants have to be irrigated almost daily (if there is no rain) to maintain a water depth of 4-5 cm.
- This is done because paddy growth is compromised by weeds that compete for nutrition, sunlight, and water.
- Water prevents growth of weeds by denying them oxygen in the submerged stage. Water thus acts as herbicide for paddy.
- However, under flooded conditions, the methanogenic bacteria become very active and produce a large amount of methane gas, making paddy cultivation one of the significant sources of greenhouse gas emissions in agriculture.

Direct Seeding of Rice

- DSR is also called the '**broadcasting seed technique**', under which pre-germinated seeds are directly drilled into the field, roughly 20-30 days prior to when they would have been transplanted. It **requires no nursery preparation or transplantation**.
- The field is irrigated and laser leveled prior to the seeding process which is carried out using a seed drill.
 - A seed drill is a device used in agriculture that sows seeds by positioning them in the soil. It gives farmers much greater control over the depth that the seed is planted and the ability to cover the seeds

Factors that influence DSR

- Experts emphasise that soil suitability is crucial for the successful implementation of DSR.

Soil texture

- Farmers should avoid DSR in light-textured soils — it is more suitable for heavy or medium-to-heavy-textured soils. This is primarily because light-textured soils do not retain water well.
- Heavy-textured soils contain more clay and less sand, whereas light-textured soils have less clay and more sand.
- DSR in unsuitable soils, leads to the need for irrigation every second or third day. This completely counteracts the water-saving benefits of DSR, and in fact, ends up consuming more water.

Importance of iron content

- Soil with severe iron deficiency and weed problems must not be cultivated using DSR technique. This is likely to be more of a problem in fields previously cultivated with crops such as cotton, maize, and sugarcane.
- Experts recommend that soils with plant-available iron are ideal for DSR.
- Lack of iron content can severely impact yields and lead to major financial losses for farmers. Sometimes, farmers might even have to transplant the crop, after a month, leading to DSR losing its labour-saving benefits.

Advantages of DSR

- The biggest advantage in DSR is water saving, as the first irrigation (apart from the pre-sowing) under DSR is necessary only 21 days after sowing.
- It can reduce water use by 15% to 20% (the traditional method requires 3,600 to 4,125 litres of water to grow a single kg of rice).
- Another saving is that of labour. About three labourers are required to transplant one acre of paddy in a single day.

Drawbacks of DSR

- The main issue is the availability of herbicides. Even the seed requirement for DSR is also higher, at 8-10 kg/acre, compared to 4-5 kg in transplanting.
- Further, laser land levelling is compulsory in DSR, which is not the case in transplanting.
- The time of sowing is also important, and the seeds must be sown by the first fortnight of June, as the plants must come out properly before the monsoon rains arrive.
- There is no such problem in transplanting, where the saplings have already been raised in the nursery.

without back-tracking.

- The result is an increased rate of germination, and a much-improved crop yield. It also facilitates weed control.
- Seed treatment is crucial, with seeds soaked in a fungicide solution for eight hours, then dried for half a day before sowing.
- The first round of irrigation is carried out 21 days after sowing, followed by **14-17** more rounds at 7-10 day intervals, depending on soil type and the quality of the monsoon.
- The final irrigation takes place 10 days before harvest. The traditional method requires **25-27** irrigations in total.

BHAVYA Rasayan Scheme

- The Union Cabinet has approved the **Bharat Audyogik Vikas Yojana Rasayan** or **BHAVYA - Rasayan Scheme** for establishing **three dedicated Chemical Parks** in the country.
- The Scheme will have a total financial outlay of **Rs 3,030 crore**, with Rs 3,000 crore towards meeting the cost of establishing the Common Infrastructure Facilities (**CIF**) and Basic Utilities inside the park and Rs. 30 Crores as administrative expenditure.
- The Centre would provide a grant of up to Rs.1,000 crore per park. This will be subject to a minimum contribution of Rs.500 crore by the concerned State Government.
- The scheme would run for a **period of 5 years** from FY 2026-27 to FY 2030-31.
- Each park will have a minimum contiguous area of minimum 2,000 acres and will provide plug-and-play infrastructure.

— Benefits of the scheme —



- Shared CIF and Basic Utilities will lead to **enhanced cost competitiveness**.



- It will make the domestic chemical industry globally competitive and help to better integrate in Global Value Chains, leading to **greater exports and higher import substitution**.



- It will promote development of the industry in a sustainable way by creating an environment friendly ecosystem which will consist of centralized facilities such as Common Effluent Treatment Plant, Storage, and Disposal Facility and Hazardous Waste Management infrastructure.



- Development of chemical sector will lead to a cascading effect through enhanced development of downstream sectors of the economy, thereby leading to higher employment generation and greater development of the economy.

India Becomes Second Largest Supplier Of Seafarers

- India has emerged as the world's second-largest supplier of seafarers, contributing 311,936 maritime professionals to the global shipping industry, according to the BIMCO-ICS Seafarer Workforce Report 2026.
- India now accounts for **12.16% of the global seafaring workforce**, ranking behind only the Philippines and ahead of China, the Russian Federation and Indonesia.
- The **global supply of seafarers is 2.57 million**, compared with a **demand of 2.55 million**, underscoring the growing need for skilled maritime professionals.
- India's global standing has improved significantly from fifth place in 2015, when it accounted for 5.2% of the global workforce.
- India has also emerged as a leading source of maritime officers, supplying 140,718 officers, representing **13.41% of the world's officer workforce**.
- The achievement reflects the efforts to strengthen India's maritime ecosystem through expanded training capacity, modernised maritime education, digitised certification services, compliance with international standards and comprehensive legislative reforms.

- Recent enactments, including the **Merchant Shipping Act, 2025, Indian Ports Act, 2025, Coastal Shipping Act, 2025** and other maritime legislations, have strengthened governance, improved seafarer welfare and enhanced ease of doing business.
- Building on this momentum, the Government has launched **Mission 20%**, which aims to increase India's share of the global seafaring workforce to 20%.

Union Govt Launches Tracker for Seafarer Safety

Following the death of a many Indian seafarer in the ongoing US-Iran conflict, the Centre ordered a series of emergency measures to **track and protect Indian seafarers** operating in the Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, and Gulf of Oman.

Key Measures Announced

- **eNavik Portal:** It provides an integrated digital platform with dedicated 24x7 Marine Casualty Reporting, Crisis Management and Seafarer Grievance Redressal modules, enabling digital reporting, automated routing of incident reports to the concerned authorities, and real-time tracking of response measures and case progression.
- **Operational Real-Time Dashboard**
 - The Secretary, Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways and the Director General of Shipping (DGS) have been directed to establish a comprehensive operational dashboard.
 - It will track every Indian on every vessel — **irrespective of the ship's flag** — operating in the Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, and Gulf of Oman.
 - The dashboard will provide real-time information on:
 - ♣ Vessel position, ownership, cargo, and crew strength
 - ♣ Crew welfare and threat assessment
 - ♣ Intended voyage and next port of call
 - ♣ Availability of food, fuel, medicines, and communication facilities
- **Dedicated Liaison Officers for Affected Families**
 - A dedicated liaison officer will be appointed for every seafarer who is killed or injured, serving as the "single point of contact" for the affected family.
 - Responsibilities include coordinating: Medical updates; Travel documentation; Family assistance and repatriation; Seafarers' welfare fund support; Outstanding wages, contractual entitlements, and other compensations.
- **Round-the-Clock Inter-Agency Coordination**
 - Real-time, vessel-by-vessel monitoring ordered — with 24/7 coordination involving various ministries and departments.
- **Compliance Reports from Shipowners and Agencies**
 - Shipowners, vessel managers, and Recruitment and Placement Service Licence (RPSL) agencies employing Indian seafarers in the region must immediately provide compliance reports.
 - Must confirm that no Indian seafarer is being compelled to sail without adequate information, protection, and support.

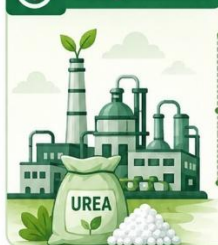
National Investment Policy for Urea 2026

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved the National Investment Policy for Urea-2026 (NIPU-2026) to promote fresh investments in the domestic urea sector and strengthen India's self-sufficiency in fertilizer production.
- The policy replaces the **New Investment Policy (NIP)-2012** and provides a new framework to promote investment in **gas-based urea manufacturing plants** in India.

Need for the Policy

- India currently has 33 operational urea manufacturing units with a total reassessed **installed capacity of 269.42 lakh metric tonnes (LMT)**.
- India is one of the world's largest consumers of urea. Although domestic production has increased significantly in the last decade, it still falls short of domestic demand, necessitating imports to meet the country's fertilizer requirements.
- During **April–January 2025–26**, domestic urea production was 251.26 lakh metric tonnes (LMT) and Urea imports were 89.30 LMT.
- The continued gap between production and consumption exposes India to **global price volatility and supply disruptions**.

Objectives



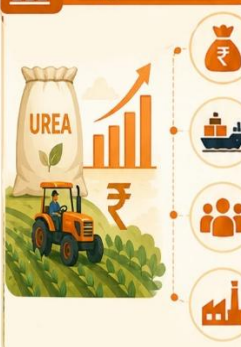
- The policy seeks to encourage the establishment of **new gas-based urea manufacturing plants** across the country.
- It aims to reduce India's dependence on imported urea and improve long-term food and fertiliser security.
- It also seeks to provide a predictable investment framework that attracts both public and private sector investment in fertiliser manufacturing.

Key features



- Unlike the 2012 policy, **fixed and variable costs will be separated** to improve transparency.
- It introduces a **Return on Equity (RoE) band of 12% to 16%**, providing reasonable returns to investors while protecting government finances.
- Mitigation of foreign exchange risk** by converting fixed costs into Indian rupees after four years based on prevailing exchange rates.
- All new gas-based urea manufacturing units will be eligible for support, to increase indigenous production.
- Thus, the revised framework simplifies investment decisions while ensuring proper fiscal management.

Significance



- These changes are expected to generate savings of more than Rs 250 crore for each urea plant established under NIPU-2026.
- It will increase indigenous urea production and reduce import dependence. This reduces India's exposure to fluctuations in international fertiliser prices.
- Since urea is sold to farmers at a government-controlled price, improving domestic production also helps reduce the fiscal burden arising from imports and subsidies.
- It will also support manufacturing-led growth, energy efficiency, employment generation, and supply chain resilience.

World Bank Country Income Classification

- The World Bank Group Country Income Classification was recently released by the World Bank.
- It is an annual classification updated every year on 1 July and remains applicable for the entire World Bank fiscal year (1 July–30 June).
- The classification is based on the **previous calendar year's Gross National Income (GNI) per capita**, calculated using the **World Bank Atlas Method**, which smooths exchange rate fluctuations to facilitate consistent cross-country comparisons.
- The FY 2027 classification covers 218 economies and has classified economies into **four income groups**:
 - Low-income economies: US\$ 1,175 or less
 - Lower-middle-income economies: US\$ 1,176–4,635

- Upper-middle-income economies: US\$ 4,636–14,375
- High-income economies: Above US\$ 14,375.

Significance

- Although often viewed as a badge of economic progress, the World Bank states that its income classifications are intended primarily as an analytical and operational tool, not a measure of overall development.
- The World Bank also cautions that no single measure can fully capture a country's level of development, since factors such as inequality, poverty, health, education and institutional quality are not reflected in GNI per capita alone.
- The classifications are used by:
 - **Governments** to benchmark economic performance.
 - **International organisations and researchers** for cross-country comparisons.
 - **Development agencies** to determine eligibility for certain concessional financing and assistance programmes.
 - **Investors** as one indicator of an economy's long-term trajectory.

Highlights

- The report highlights how dramatically the global income landscape has changed over the past four decades.
- In 1987, nearly 30% of economies were classified as low income. By 2026, that share has fallen to 11%.
- It notes that countries have progressed at different speeds, with some rapidly climbing income groups while others have remained trapped in lower-income categories due to conflict, economic instability or slow growth.
- In FY 2027 classification **six economies moved to a higher income category**:
 - Togo moved from low-income to lower-middle-income.
 - Jordan, Micronesia, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Vietnam moved from lower-middle-income to upper-middle-income.
- No economy moved to a lower income category.

India's Position

- India continues to be classified as a **lower-middle income economy** despite remaining one of the world's fastest-growing major economies (GDP growth). This distinction is from the World Bank's use of GNI per capita, rather than total GDP.
- Reasons for India's position in the lower-middle income category:
 - India's large population keeps average per capita income relatively low.
 - Significant disparities in income and productivity across states continue to influence national averages.



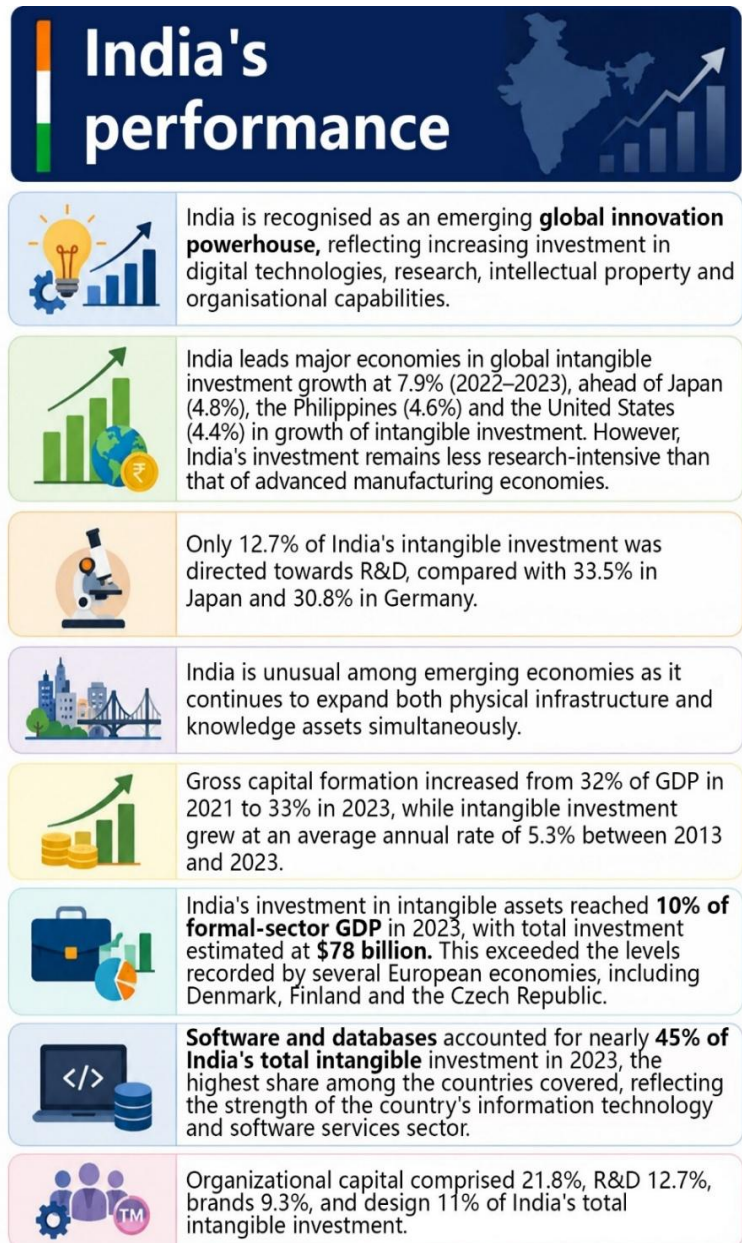
World Intangible Investment Report 2026

- The World Intangible Investment Report 2026, launched by **World Intellectual Property Organization and Luiss Business School**, reaffirms India's emergence as a global innovation powerhouse.

- It is the third edition of an annual report that measures investments made in **intangible assets**—assets that do not have a physical form but generate long-term economic value and enhance productivity.
- It draws upon the **Global INTAN-Invest Database**, which provides estimates of intangible investment across **economies from 1995 to 2025**.
- The report covers **29 high- and middle-income economies**, together accounting for **57% of world GDP**.
- It demonstrates that modern economic growth increasingly depends on **knowledge, innovation and intellectual property**, rather than only on physical assets such as machinery and buildings.
- It provides policymakers with internationally comparable evidence on investment in innovation and helps governments design policies that promote productivity and long-term economic growth.
- The report classifies intangible investments into several **broad categories**:
 - Software and databases.
 - Research and Development (R&D).
 - Intellectual property such as patents, copyrights and designs.
 - Branding and advertising.
 - Organisational capital and business process improvements.
 - Employee training and firm-specific human capital.

Global findings

- Global investment in intangible assets **crossed \$10 trillion for the first time in 2025**.
- Since 2008, intangible investment has grown **more than three times faster than tangible investment**, indicating a structural shift from physical capital towards knowledge-based assets.
- Across the economies covered in the report, intangible investment is now approaching **13% of GDP**, highlighting the increasing importance of innovation, software, data and intellectual property in economic growth.
- The rapid expansion of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has further accelerated investment in software, data, research and other intangible assets.



Cabinet Approves Additional Investment in NIIF

- The Union Cabinet has approved an additional investment of Rs 30,000 crore in the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF).

- With the fresh allocation, the government's total commitment to NIIF has doubled to Rs 60,000 crore.
- The new allocation will primarily support the **creation of NIIF Infrastructure Fund II**, the successor to NIIF's flagship infrastructure fund.
- It will invest across sectors including transportation, energy, digital infrastructure, urban infrastructure, electric mobility and other nationally important projects.
- The allocation will also **support new fund strategies** as well as successor **bilateral and strategic investment funds**.
- The investment is expected to catalyse greater private and institutional capital into India's infrastructure sector, support the creation of high-quality assets, generate employment and strengthen sectors critical to the country's long-term growth.



National Investment and Infrastructure Fund



- NIIF is an **Indian-government backed entity** established to **provide long-term capital** to the country's infrastructure sector.
- Founded as a Category II **Alternative investment fund (AIF)** in 2015, it is professionally managed by the **National Investment and Infrastructure Fund Limited (NIIFL)**.
- The objective behind creating this fund was to maximize economic impact mainly through infrastructure investment in commercially viable projects, **both greenfield and brownfield**.
- A **greenfield** project refers to a completely new project and **brownfield** projects are pre-existing projects that are modified or upgraded.
- The **Indian government has 49% stake** in NIIF with the rest held by foreign and domestic investors such as Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, Temasek and HDFC Group.
- With the Centre's significant stake, NIIF is considered India's **quasi sovereign wealth fund**. A sovereign wealth fund is a **state-owned fund**.
- The platform currently manages capital commitments of around Rs 40,000 crore across multiple investment strategies and has returned nearly Rs 12,000 crore to investors through portfolio exits.
- NIIF currently **operates four investment platforms** covering infrastructure, private markets, strategic opportunities, and the India-Japan Fund
- Its investments cover roads, ports, logistics, airports, renewable energy, power transmission, smart metering, digital infrastructure, healthcare, manufacturing, affordable housing, technology, climate-focused projects and venture capital.
- NIIF's investments are aligned with key national initiatives such as PM Gati Shakti, Digital India, Make in India, FAME, PM E-DRIVE, and India's climate commitments.
- Beyond investing, NIIF also provides strategic advisory support to central and state governments on public-private partnership (PPP) projects, infrastructure financing and new investment frameworks.

Mobile Phone Manufacturing Scheme

The Union Cabinet has approved a new Mobile Phone Manufacturing Scheme (MPMS) with a budgetary outlay of Rs 62,500 crore.

Context

- The scheme follows the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme for Large Scale Electronics Manufacturing, which ended on March 31, 2026.
- The PLI scheme played a transformative role in establishing India as a preferred destination for mobile phone manufacturing.
- It attracted cumulative **investments of more than Rs 20,600 crore, generating production exceeding Rs 11.62 lakh crore and exports of over Rs 6.53 lakh crore**.
- India has emerged as the **world's second-largest mobile phone manufacturer** by volume.
- However, much of the value generated by the industry, from product design and intellectual property to branding and technology, continues to be owned by companies headquartered outside India.
- The new scheme aims to explicitly address this gap by supporting Indian brands to move deeper into the value chain – into product design, R&D, intellectual property, component ecosystems and brand ownership.

Incentives

- The five-year scheme, which will run from FY 2026-27 to FY 2030-31, provides **incentive support ranging from 2.25% to 5%** on eligible sales of mobile phones manufactured in India.
- Manufacturers will also receive an additional incentive of up to **1.5% for increased domestic sourcing** of key components and sub-assemblies.
- To encourage indigenous innovation (Indian brands), the scheme offers an additional 3% incentive on eligible sales for companies investing in product design, R&D

Expected Outcomes

- During the scheme tenure, the cumulative mobile phone production in the country is expected to reach approximately Rs 39,00,000 crore with significant increase in exports of mobile phones.
- It is also expected to generate around 60,000 direct jobs thereby contributing to economic growth, employment generation and strengthening India's position in global electronics manufacturing hub.

Electronic Gold Receipts

- The National Stock Exchange of India (NSE) has launched the Electronic Gold Receipts (EGRs), a new exchange-traded segment for buying and selling gold in electronic form.
- EGRs are **exchange-traded securities** representing ownership of physical gold stored in SEBI-regulated vaults.
- They can be held electronically in a demat account, bought and sold in different denominations and converted into physical gold via prescribed process.
- EGRs are available in **two purity standards**: 999 (99.9% pure gold) and 995 (99.5% pure gold). In each purity category, investors have six different denominations such as 10 mg, 100 mg, 1 g, 10 g, 100 g and 1 kg.
- Apart from the cost of purchasing EGRs, investors may also incur brokerage, demat (depository) and vault-storage charges and other applicable transaction charges.
- There is no GST for EGR trading. However, investors opting for physical delivery must pay 3% GST on gold value.

Benefits



EGRs combine the advantages of physical gold with the convenience of electronic investing. This offers a transparent and standardised way to own gold while removing concerns over purity and personal storage.



It enables **transparent price discovery** via exchange trading, ensuring uniform price across India at any given point in time.



The gold backing an EGR is stored safely in regulated vaults, so investors need not worry about its purity.



Those who prefer physical gold can convert EGRs into gold whenever needed. Thus, EGRs offer liquidity, settlement guarantee, fungibility and can help diversify investment portfolios.

Fungibility



Once an EGR is created, it is no longer tied to a particular gold bar. Instead, it represents a standard quantity and purity of gold.



So, when an investor converts an EGR into physical gold, they receive gold of the same specifications, and not necessarily the very bar that was originally deposited. This feature is known as fungibility.

E-Commerce Council of India

- The Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) has launched the E-Commerce Council of India (ECCI), a first-of-its-kind national platform dedicated to unify India's **\$120 billion digital commerce ecosystem**.
- India's digital commerce economy has evolved far beyond online retail and has become a key driver of economic growth.

- Today, it encompasses marketplaces, service platforms, mobility, travel technology, logistics, supply chains, digital payments, direct-to-consumer (D2C) brands, exporters, cross-border commerce and AI-powered commerce.
- As digital commerce continues to evolve, there is an increasing need for structured dialogue, evidence-based policymaking and collaborative initiatives that enable innovation while facilitating consumer trust and ease of doing business.
- The next phase of growth for India's e-commerce sector will depend not just on innovation, but also on collaboration.

State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World

- The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2026 report was released.
- It is an annual report jointly prepared by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Food Programme (WFP), and WHO.
- It is the most authoritative global study tracking progress towards ending hunger and malnutrition.
- The theme for this year's report is **Understanding and Addressing the High Cost of a Healthy Diet**.

Global Findings

- Global hunger declined for a third consecutive year in 2025. However, the improvements remain fragile, unevenly distributed, and insufficient to achieve Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.
- **7.8% of the global population faced hunger in 2025**, down from **8.1% in 2024** and **8.6% in 2022**, confirming a sustained, but slow, improvement.
- This means that around **645 million people** were affected by hunger in 2025, representing a reduction of nearly **14 million** compared to 2024.
- Broader measures of food access have a similar scenario. In 2025, an estimated **25.8%** of the global population (around **2.1 billion people**) experienced **moderate or severe food insecurity**. This means they were at times forced to compromise on the quality or quantity of the food they ate.

Regional Trends

- Despite global progress, recovery remains uneven across regions. Asia, together with Latin America and the Caribbean, has recorded steady improvements in recent years.
- In contrast, Africa is now home to approximately **309 million** hungry people, compared with **292 million** in Asia.
- **More than half of Africa's population** (56.6%) faced moderate or severe food insecurity in 2025, compared to **20.3% in Asia**, **22.9% in Latin America and the Caribbean**, and **8.7% in Northern America and Europe**.
- Food insecurity also continues to be more prevalent in rural areas than in peri-urban and urban areas, while women remain disproportionately affected, although the gender gap narrowed slightly in 2025.

Slow Progress on Global Nutrition Targets

- Global progress on maternal and child nutrition also remains insufficient to meet international commitments, including the 2030 nutrition targets.

ECCI

- The ECCI would serve as a collaborative platform for industry stakeholders to engage with policymakers, generate research, develop best practices and contribute to policy discussions that shape the future of digital commerce in India,
- It aims to bring together policymakers, e-commerce marketplaces, brands, retailers, logistics providers, technology companies, payment solution providers, startups, exporters, MSMEs, industry experts, and academic institutions.
- It will work on issues like taxation, consumer protection, digital payments, logistics, exports, cross-border e-commerce, technology adoption, data governance, and MSME participation.

IAMAI (Internet and Mobile Association of India)

- Established in 2004, it is a **not-for-profit industry body**, registered under the **Societies Registration Act, 1860**.
- It represents businesses operating in the internet, mobile and digital technology sectors and works with the government and other stakeholders on policy, innovation, and industry development.

- Indicators such as **child stunting, wasting, overweight, low birthweight and exclusive breastfeeding** show only marginal improvements and progress is too slow to meet the targets.
- At the same time, **anaemia among women** aged 15 to 49 years is worsening, while the prevalence of **adult obesity** shows a steady increase – from 12.1% in 2012 to 16.2% in 2024 – contrary to the target of halting its rise by 2025.
- Only 30.8% of children aged 6 to 23 months worldwide consume a minimally diverse diet and 150 million children under five years of age are still stunted.

Recommendations

- Food value chains are a major determinant of prices. Post-farmgate activities account for 70 - 75% of what consumers pay, with up to 40% of total costs arising in processing, logistics and wholesale.
- Improving efficiency in these segments is therefore critical, particularly for lowering the cost of perishable, nutrient-rich foods.
- Reducing the cost of a healthy diet requires context-specific policy responses that expand the supply of nutritious foods while lowering structural costs across agrifood value chains.
- This includes investments in infrastructure, R&D, irrigation and cold chains, alongside reforms in subsidies, trade facilitation, and regulatory frameworks.
- Targeted interventions that boost productivity, reduce losses, and promote sustainable practices can simultaneously improve nutrition outcomes, strengthen resilience, and support climate goals.

Cost of a healthy diet

- The cost of a healthy diet is the average minimum expenditure required to obtain locally available foods that meet energy and most nutrient requirements. According to FAO and WHO, a healthy diet is one that is adequate, balanced, diverse, and moderate.
- The report underscores that cost remain a major constraint to achieving SDG 2 (Zero Hunger).
- In 2025, the average global cost of a healthy diet rose to 4.28 purchasing power parity (PPP) dollars per person per day, up from 3.44 PPP dollars in 2021 and 2.94 PPP dollars in 2017.
- At the same time, the number of people unable to afford a healthy diet has declined - from **2.97 billion** (37.4% of the global population) in 2021 to **2.69 billion** (32.7%) in 2025.
- In Africa, affordability worsened significantly, with 66.6% of the population unable to afford a healthy diet in 2025 - more than double the levels observed in Asia and in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- Within South Asia, the cost of a healthy diet in India (\$4.11) was the lowest among all countries except Pakistan, whose cost stood at \$3.94, followed by India, Bangladesh (\$4.59), Sri Lanka (\$5.21) and Bhutan (\$6.17).
- The same cost for developed countries like the United States was \$2.86, or \$2.75 for the United Kingdom.

Indian scenario

- The share of undernourished Indians has more than halved over the past two decades, from 21.1% in 2004-06 to 9.8% in 2023-25 — a decline of roughly 101 million people, from 243.9 million to 142.5 million.
- Yet, a staggering 100 million people go hungry in the country. A second worrying trend is the number of Indians who cannot afford a healthy diet. As of 2025, 520.1 million people, or 35.5% of the population, fell into this category,
- The share of this figure in the population has come down from 59.8% in 2017, but it still means more than one in three Indians cannot regularly afford food that is nutritionally adequate, even if they are consuming enough calories to avoid hunger.
- Healthy food has become more expensive relative to real incomes. India's healthy-diet cost has risen faster since 2017 — up nearly 48% — compared to about 32% in the US over the same period.
- In 2024, close to a third of Indian children under five, 32.9%, were stunted, a marker of chronic undernutrition, down from 41.7% in 2012.
- Wasting, a more acute form of malnutrition, stood at 18.7%, still among the higher rates globally.
- But even as child stunting fell, prevalence of overweight in children has been on an increasing trend — rising from 2.1% to 3.7% over the same period.
- Obesity among the adult population has doubled, while anaemia among women aged 15-49 has increased from 50.1% to 53.7%.

Semicon 2.0

- The Union Cabinet has approved the Semicon 2.0 programme for the development of India's semiconductor design and manufacturing ecosystem, with a **total budget outlay of Rs 1,27,500 crore**.
- The programme aims to build on the momentum generated under Semicon1.0.

Semiconductors

- Semiconductors are the foundation of modern electronics driving the next phase of digital transformation under Industry 4.0.
- Semiconductors also known as integrated circuits or more commonly just chips, make electronic items smart. Made from a material, usually silicon, that “semi-conducts” electricity, the chip performs a variety of functions.
- Memory chips, which store data, are relatively simple and are traded like commodities. Logic chips, which run programs and act as the brains of a device, are more complex and expensive.
- Semiconductor manufacturing is very complex and technology-intensive sector involving huge capital investments, high risk, long gestation and payback periods, and rapid changes in technology, which require significant and sustained investments.
- A factory also uses enormous amounts of water and electricity and is vulnerable to even the tiniest disruptions, whether from dust particles or distant earthquakes.

6 Pillars of Semicon 2.0

- The semiconductor industry functions through an extensive global supply chain involving equipment manufacturers, material suppliers, specialty chemical producers, industrial gas companies, packaging firms and service providers.
 - Semicon 2.0 is aimed to holistically build the semiconductor ecosystem on the 6 pillars (*given in figure*)
- Semicon 2.0 will support economic growth across all sectors, strengthen national security through enhanced supply chain resilience, and help establish technological leadership in critical sectors.

6 Pillar

Design

- Semicon 2.0 will build upon the initial success in chip design. With 105 startups already started developing chips, the focus is on deepening the design ecosystem.
- Further, building blocks have been identified for the development of strategic and commercial products.
- The aim is to develop Intellectual Property (IP), designs of chips and systems with this approach and place India as a key semiconductor chip design IP country.

Machines and materials

- Companies involved in the manufacturing and R&D of the machines and manufacturing of materials, chemicals and gases that are essential for manufacturing semiconductors will be incentivized.
- This will lay the foundation for the sustainable growth of the semiconductor industry and will also help in developing the precision manufacturing industry in the country.

Setting up more fabs

- With the first fab scheduled to be commissioned in 2028, the world is showing greater confidence in India's semiconductor strategy.
- Efforts will be made to attract more manufacturers to come to India and set up fabs to manufacture chips.
- This will include silicon fabs, compound semiconductor fabs, discrete component fabs, display fabs, etc.

Further strengthening the ATMP/OSAT industry

- With the success of Assembly Testing Marking and Packaging (ATMP) units, India is developing as an alternative location for setting up ATMP/OSAT (Outsourced Semiconductor Assembly and Test) units.
- These will be actively encouraged with a focus on getting some of the most advanced ATMP technologies to India.

R&D

- Focus will be on developing more advanced nodes and other advanced technologies in collaboration with leading R&D centres within and outside India.

Talent development

- With 315 universities training students on complex chip design using the latest Electronic Design Automation (EDA) tools, around 68,000 students have already been trained. It will be developed further to deepen the level of training while in college.
- Further, the industry will be actively engaged in deepening the clean room, fab construction and other ecosystem training as well.

- The Department of Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) has allowed FDI in inventory-based e-commerce entities for the **export of domestically manufactured goods**.
- At present, the government allows 100% FDI in marketplace based e-commerce models but prohibits FDI in inventory based e-commerce models for domestic retail sales.
 - Under the **inventory-based model**, an e-commerce entity owns the inventory of goods and sells them directly to consumers.
 - In contrast, under the **marketplace model**, the platform acts only as an intermediary, connecting independent sellers with buyers without owning the inventory.

Key Changes

- The policy is intended to facilitate greater exports through easier and increased access to global markets by Indian sellers.
- The relaxation applies only to exports and does not permit inventory-based sales in the domestic market.

FDI policy evolution for ecom

2000: Foreign direct investments allowed in business-to-business ecommerce under automatic route

2016: FDI permitted in marketplace model under automatic route
■ FDI prohibited in inventory-based B2C ecommerce

2018: Marketplace entities barred from exercising ownership or

control over inventory
■ Curbs tightened on vendor purchases, exclusive arrangements

2026: FDI allowed in inventory-based ecom entities for exclusively exporting domestically manufactured goods
■ Ban on FDI in inventory-based domestic B2C ecom unchanged

Sources: PIB, Lok Sabha, DPIIT

Significance

- India currently accounts for only a small share of global e-commerce exports despite having a large manufacturing and MSME base.
- The new policy is expected to improve logistics efficiency, reduce compliance burdens for exporters and attract greater foreign investment into export-oriented supply chains.
- It will provide Indian manufacturers, artisans, farmers and **MSMEs** easier access to global markets through international e-commerce platforms.
- It empowers tier 2 and tier 3 manufacturers to go global and establish Brand India on the world stage.
- The reform also supports the Government's broader objectives to raise manufacturing's share in gross domestic product to 25% by 2035 and increase merchandise exports to \$1 trillion by 2030.
- Manufacturing currently accounts for around 17 per cent of GDP, while India's goods exports stood at \$442 billion in the last financial year.

Concerns

- Trader associations have expressed concern that the relaxation could eventually enable foreign e-commerce companies to exercise greater control over supply chains or indirectly influence domestic retail.
- In practice, maintaining separate inventories for exports and domestic sales will be difficult to monitor, making the change a likely move towards full-scale inventory-based e-commerce under FDI.

India-UK CETA

- The India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) came into effect on **July 15, 2026** — a year after it was signed.
- Alongside it, the Double Contribution Convention (DCC) also became operational.
- This is India's first comprehensive trade deal with a developed country and is being called the **"gold standard" of India's FTAs**. It also lays the groundwork for India's ongoing negotiations with the European Union.

Scale and Coverage of the Deal

- The CETA is notable for both its breadth and depth, covering 30 chapters including:
 - Digital trade
 - Government procurement
 - MSMEs and innovation
 - Labour, environment, and gender
 - Non-tariff barriers — Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT)

Overall Tariff Elimination

- India has reduced tariffs on around 90% of products.
 - India will immediately eliminate tariffs on 30.3% of trade value, with a further 47% phased out over time, and 12.1% covered under quota-based reductions.
 - In total, this covers 89.5% of tariff lines and 89.4% of trade value.
- The UK has eliminated tariffs on 99% of Indian exports.

Gains for India



- **Export boost for labour-intensive sectors:** Textiles, footwear, and gems and jewellery are expected to benefit.
- Indian textile exports currently face UK tariffs of up to 10%; their removal could level the playing field against competitors like Bangladesh.
- Duties on gems and jewellery (up to 12%) and footwear (up to 16%) have been eliminated.



- **Steel exports:** UK-allocated quotas are expected to push India's iron and steel exports from around \$850 million to over \$1 billion. UK curbs on steel imports had been a major sticking point before the deal.



- **Services sector access:** The UK has granted commercial presence rights to Indian firms in computer services, consultancy, and environmental services, allowing them to set up branches or subsidiaries in the UK.



- **Non-binding labour and environment chapter:** Experts view this as a win for India, since strong labour and environment norms in Western countries often act as non-tariff barriers for developing-country exporters.



- **Government procurement access:** Indian suppliers get legal access to the UK's Central government procurement market, worth around £90 billion (\$122 billion), while India offers reciprocal access worth about \$114 billion.
- UK firms, however, can participate only as Class-II local suppliers, while Indian suppliers retain Class-I preference in the UK.

The Double Contribution Convention (DCC): A Major Win for Workers

- The DCC addresses a long-standing problem: Indian workers in the UK were paying social security in both countries, even though UK benefits require 10 years of contributions, well beyond the typical 5-year stay of most Indian workers.
- Under the DCC, Indian workers and their employers are **exempted from UK social security** contributions for five years, provided they continue paying in India.
- This benefits roughly 75,000 Indian professionals and over 900 firms.
- About 90% of Indian workers in the UK will save close to 23% of their salaries that would otherwise go toward UK social security.
- Importantly, the DCC is not applicable to Indians who were already working in the UK before July 15, 2026.



- On implementation, the UK immediately eliminated tariffs on 96.8% of its tariff lines, covering 97.7% of trade value.
- Including quota-based reductions, this rises to **98.8% of tariff lines** and **99.5% of trade value**.

Gains for the UK and Consumers

- **Cheaper imports for Indian consumers:** Tariffs on British cars, scotch whisky, chocolates, cosmetics, and sports equipment have been reduced or removed.
- **Automobile tariffs (a first for India in any FTA):** Tariffs on British cars cut from up to 110% to 30% in year one, falling to 10% by year five. Annual import quota starts at 20,000 vehicles, rising to 37,000 by year five, before tapering to 15,000 by year fifteen and beyond.
 - Separate quotas and tariffs apply to alternative fuel and commercial vehicles.
- **Alcohol concessions:** Tariffs on British alcoholic beverages cut from 150% to 75% initially, falling further to 40% by year ten, a significant concession given India's large and fast-growing spirits market and the UK's position as the world's largest whisky exporter.
- **Services access for UK firms:** India has opened key sectors, accounting, auditing, financial services, telecom, and environmental services, to UK firms without requiring local presence.
 - India has also agreed to recognise UK professional qualifications in law and accounting.

Customs Reform: A Notable First

- For the first time in an Indian FTA, exporters and producers in the UK can **self-declare** the origin of goods, replacing the traditional system of certificates from designated authorities.
- Experts believe this could set a precedent for future deals with developed economies like the EU and US, and supports India's broader push to reduce reliance on Chinese suppliers.
- Notably, tariffs on UK medical devices (up to 14%) have also been removed, addressing India's dependence on Chinese medical equipment.

Remaining Challenges

- Despite the gains, India did not secure an exemption from the UK's proposed Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), a carbon pricing framework for imported carbon-intensive goods, set to take effect from January 1, 2027.
- This remains a concern for India's export-oriented industries.

Conclusion

- The India-UK CETA marks a watershed in India's trade diplomacy, its first comprehensive deal with a developed economy.
- While it opens new export opportunities and eases the burden on Indian workers abroad, unresolved issues like CBAM show that deeper integration with developed economies still carries unfinished business.

Proposed Changes to the U.S. H-1B Programme

- The U.S. government is introducing wide-ranging changes to its **H-1B work visa, OPT (Optional Practical Training) system, and employment-based Green Card** rules — with significant implications for India, which accounts for **71–74%** of the annual H-1B cap of 85,000 visas.
- **H-1B Changes**
 - The proposals — expected from August 2026 — include stricter rules for companies placing H-1B workers at **third-party client sites**, a model widely used by **Indian IT and consulting firms**.
 - Companies must now prove a **genuine** employer-employee relationship, demonstrate specialised work, and submit more detailed documentation.

- o Cap exemptions pathways for universities and research organisations will also be reduced, and supplemental application fees will increase.

- **Wage Rules (Department of Labor)**

- o The entry-level wage benchmark for the H-1B and PERM (Program Electronic Review Management) system — the first regulatory step for employment-based Green Cards — will be raised from the 17th percentile to the 34th percentile.
- o Higher wage levels will also be increased across the board.
- o This will hike minimum salary thresholds for employers sponsoring foreign workers.
- o Makes Green Cards more expensive to pursue for both employers and workers.

Student Visa Changes

- The current '**duration of stay**' principle — allowing students to remain as long as they meet programme requirements — will be replaced by **fixed periods of stay** requiring extensions.
- India sent **3.3 lakh students** to the US in 2023–24, with **Telangana and Andhra Pradesh** accounting for 50% of them.
- From February 2027, tighter rules on the STEM Optional Practical Training (OPT) extension and Curricular Practical Training (CPT) will further restrict post-study work pathways.

H-4 Visa Holders

- H-1B workers' spouses in the US on H-4 visas have so far been able to work under **Employment Authorisation Documents (EADs)**, with extensions granted automatically
- A new change expected this month will stop automatic extensions.
- While extensions can still be applied for, any delay in renewal could result in the spouse losing their work permit — creating significant uncertainty for Indian families in the US.

{For detailed discussion on H1-B visa, refer The Recitals – June 2026}

China's Temporary Export Ban on Helium

- China has imposed an immediate but temporary ban on helium exports. Beijing had not disclosed the reasons behind the timing or the scope of the ban.
- China produces only about **1.6% of the world's helium** but imports more than 80% of its domestic requirement.
- The ban comes after prolonged supply strain caused by Russia's export restrictions, along with supply risks from escalating tensions in West Asia.
- Leading global producers are the **US (43% of supply)**, followed by Qatar, Russia, Canada, and Algeria.
 - o Qatar supplies about **33%** of demand, especially in Asia.

Helium

- Helium is the **second-lightest** element and is **non-renewable**, formed deep within the Earth's crust through radioactive decay of uranium and thorium.
- It migrates into natural gas reservoirs over millions of years and is extracted alongside natural gas, but only isolated once it makes up at least 0.3% by volume.
- It is separated using differences in boiling point; commercial-grade helium is typically 99.997% pure.
- **Usage**
 - o Its extremely low boiling point (–269°C) and chemical inertness make it ideal as a coolant for MRI machines, semiconductor wafers, and quantum computing devices.
 - o Its small atomic size allows it to be used for leak detection.
 - o It is used in optical fibre manufacturing, and by space agencies like ISRO, NASA, and SpaceX to

pressurise rocket fuel tanks.

- As per the USGS, demand breaks down as: laboratory use (22%), semiconductors/controlled atmospheres (17%), lifting gas (17%), MRI scanners (15%), aerospace (9%), and leak detection (5%).

SCOTUS Upholds Birthright Citizenship

- The Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) upheld birthright citizenship under the 14th Amendment to the US Constitution, striking down President Donald Trump's Executive Order which had sought to end unconditional birthright citizenship.
- The ruling affirms that **anyone born on US soil becomes a citizen**, regardless of their parents' immigration status — with exceptions for children of foreign diplomats and invading militaries.

What Did Trump's Executive Order (EO) Say?

- Trump's EO directed federal agencies to stop issuing citizenship-recognising documents — social security numbers and passports — to children born after February 19, 2025, in two categories:
 - Children born to mothers unlawfully present in the US when the father was not a citizen or lawful permanent resident.
 - Children born to mothers lawfully but temporarily present (students, tourists, guest workers) when the father was not a citizen or permanent resident.

Legal Basis for Birthright Citizenship

- **The 14th Amendment (1868)** - It states: "All persons born or naturalised in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States."
- **Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), 1952** - The INA — the foundational body of US citizenship and immigration law — draws from this constitutional provision, declaring that a person born in the US and subject to its jurisdiction is a citizen "at birth."

Arguments Against Birthright Citizenship

- Misuse through an industry of "**birth tourism**" — facilitating expectant foreigners to give birth in the US for citizenship purposes.
- The 14th Amendment was **specifically meant for freed slaves (after civil war)** and should not apply universally.
- However, SCOTUS firmly held that changes in circumstances cannot justify new meanings for clear constitutional text.

Textile Tariff-Rate Quotas (TRQs)

- The US introduced TRQs (exemptions) for Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, and Malaysia.
- Features:
 - Under the Section 301 of Trade Act 1974 measures, the U.S. introduced Textile Tariff-Rate Quotas (TRQs), allowing limited textile and apparel quantities to enter tariff-free for three years
 - These countries are also encouraged to source US cotton and textile inputs.
- Implications for India: India has not received a TRQ, potentially reducing its competitiveness in textile exports. Bangladesh, a major importer of Indian cotton and fibre, may increasingly shift towards US inputs.

Saudi-U.S. Nuclear Agreement

- Recently, the US and Saudi Arabia signed a **civil nuclear cooperation agreement** and a bilateral safeguards pact, laying groundwork for a 30-year civil nuclear partnership.
- However, President Trump later stated the deal is contingent on Saudi Arabia joining the Abraham Accords, with the White House warning "the deal is off" otherwise — a condition absent from the original announcement.
 - The Abraham Accords are a series of U.S.-brokered treaties that normalize relations between Israel and several Muslim-majority nations, key participants being the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, and Morocco.

Regional Implications

- Iran, with advanced enrichment capabilities, may harden its stance if Saudi Arabia gains enrichment capacity.
- The Abraham Accords link revives normalisation efforts stalled since the Gaza war, with Saudi Arabia insisting on a credible Palestinian statehood pathway first.

UAE to Build a New Port

- The UAE is planning a **new deep water port on its east coast** to bypass the Strait of Hormuz, reducing reliance on this vulnerable shipping route after months of US-Iran conflict.
- The new port would let cargo enter via the **Gulf of Oman** before overland transport to Dubai and Abu Dhabi.
- Dubai-based DP World will develop the project in **Fujairah**, along with new terminal at the existing harbour there.
- Since the conflict began in late February, Iran has launched nearly 3,000 drones and missiles at the UAE, a key US ally, once triggering a fire at **Jebel Ali port**.
- Activity at Jebel Ali, West Asia's largest container port, plunged 90% after Iran closed the strait. Though traffic has partially recovered post-ceasefire, it remains below pre-conflict levels.

Key Terms of the Deal

- Enables transfer of US civil nuclear materials, technology, and equipment to Saudi Arabia, with preferred treatment for US companies.
- Unlike the 2009 US-UAE agreement, this deal doesn't bar Saudi Arabia from enriching uranium or reprocessing fuel.
- Nuclear fuel will initially be imported, pending a joint two-year study on the viability of local enrichment.
- If enrichment proceeds, US firms would build and operate facilities without transferring sensitive technology.
- Saudi Arabia is not required to adopt the IAEA's Additional Protocol, which allows short-notice inspections.

Why Saudi Arabia Wants Nuclear Power?

- Aligns with Vision 2030's push to diversify away from oil, supporting tourism, megaprojects, and AI data centres.
- Rich uranium reserves and rising energy demand strengthen the case for domestic enrichment.
- The US-Israel war on Iran and Strait of Hormuz disruptions have reinforced Riyadh's urgency to reduce oil dependence.

Red Sea Disruption and India's Oil Security

- The Yemen-based Houthi militia has announced it will target Saudi Arabian tankers crossing the **Bab al-Mandab strait** and has already attacked several ships, widening the West Asia conflict's impact on India's crude oil imports beyond the earlier Strait of Hormuz crisis.
- The Bab al-Mandab strait connects the **Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden** and the Arabian Sea, making it a critical global energy chokepoint alongside the Strait of Hormuz.
- Saudi Arabia had been using this route — independent of Hormuz — to export oil, including to India, as Hormuz traffic dwindled.

Immediate Consequences of a Houthi Blockade

- Oil shipments to Asia would face delays as tankers reroute westward via the **Suez Canal** and around Africa, potentially adding up to four weeks to the journey.
 - However, recent drone strike that sparked fires on two gas vessels in Egypt's Mediterranean port of Damietta has raised a new threat to shipping through the Suez Canal.
- Higher freight and insurance premiums could keep oil prices elevated

India's First Fallback: Russian Crude

- Russian oil has so far remained unaffected by Houthi attacks, as in earlier Bab al-Mandab blockades.
- The Suez Canal-Red Sea route is the primary corridor for Russian oil reaching Indian ports.
- If this route stays unaffected while the blockade targets only Saudi shipments, the impact on India should be limited, with Russian crude expected to increase and offset Saudi volume losses.

China's AI Push

- Chinese firm Moonshot AI released Kimi K3, a model that has matched Claude on most parameters.
- Notably, K3 and several other Chinese-made models are open-weight and/or open-source, allowing any company or well-resourced individual to run them locally.

China's Positioning in AI

- At the **Shanghai World AI Conference** (held in July 2026), President Xi Jinping called for countries to embrace "openness and win-win" and boost innovation-driven development — a principle Chinese firms are actively following through open models.
- Despite facing restrictions on advanced GPUs needed for training and inference, China has compensated with abundant electricity access and larger volumes of less advanced chips, producing models like the 2.8 trillion-parameter Kimi K3.

Open-Source vs Captive Models: The Global Race

- Unlike open-source models, captive models (used by Anthropic, OpenAI, and largely Google) don't share source code, theoretically giving these firms an edge.
- However, open models let anyone compete on price. Since open-source models are freely available, many different companies can host and run them. These companies then compete with each other, which tends to push prices down and make costs more predictable for users.
- Right now, US companies are selling below cost. Once this spending slows down, cheaper open-source options could become more attractive by comparison.
- But this trend may not last. Making open-source models is expensive, and China may not always be willing to give them away for free. In fact, Alibaba has already started building its own closed (non-open) models — a sign that even Chinese firms may shift away from giving away their technology for free.

Trust Deficit and India's Response

- Despite catching up in capability, Chinese models face a trust deficit, particularly in India — open-sourcing addresses this to some extent since local firms and bodies like CERT-In can use these models without data leakage concerns.
- Geopolitical baggage likely explains why India skipped the Shanghai conference despite hosting the AI Impact Summit in February.
- India is promoting domestic champions like Sarvam AI to counter Chinese capital in its AI sector, even while not discouraging the use of open-source Chinese models.

India Bans Import of Goods Made Using Forced Labour

- India has **formally banned** the import of goods made using forced labour, responding to a US Section 301 investigation that targeted 60 economies — including India — over alleged failures to restrict forced-labour imports.
 - Section 301 of the US Trade Act 1974 empowers the USTR

Background: US Investigation



The current investigation focuses on whether India's absence of a statutory ban on importing goods made with forced labour creates an unfair competitive advantage over US industry.



Based on its findings, the USTR proposed imposing a 12.5% tariff on a broad range of Indian goods.



Policy and Notification Details



How It Was Enacted?

- Formally notified by the **Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT)** under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- Implemented by amending the Foreign Trade Policy (FTP) 2023.
- Takes effect **30 days after publication** in the official gazette.



Definition Adopted

- Adopts the **ILO definition of forced labour**: work exacted under the threat of penalty and without voluntary consent — aligning India's domestic trade law with internationally accepted labour standards.



Enforcement Framework

- Empowers the government to conduct **inquiries** and issue **product-specific import bans** as evidence is established through formal investigative procedures.
- Moves India from a **reactive to a proactive** enforcement posture on forced labour in supply chains.

(United States Trade Representative) to investigate and respond to unfair trade practices by foreign countries.

- o Under Section 301(d), the USTR can investigate whether a country's trade practices are unreasonable or discriminatory — including through lack of adequate labour standards.
- The move is aimed at avoiding potential 12.5% US tariffs while aligning India's trade framework with ILO standards.
- **Final Outcome**
 - o The USTR moved India into a lower tariff tier, applying a 10% ad valorem duty instead of the 12.5% levy originally proposed.

India Expands Eastern European Outreach

- India's outreach to Eastern Europe seeks to **diversify its European engagement** beyond major Western powers like France and Germany.
- As part of this, President Murmu visited Moldova, North Macedonia and Romania.
- This reflects India's multi-directional European diplomacy — engaging both established and emerging partnerships across the continent.

Chabahar Port: India's Strategic Gateway Under Threat

- A dramatic image posted by the **US Secretary of War** showing the **maritime control tower at Iran's Chabahar Port collapsing** after US military strikes sparked fresh concern in India.
 - o The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) clarified that the terminal India operates at Chabahar — Shahid Beheshti — was not damaged in the US strikes.
- The incident, however, has brought renewed attention to India's **vulnerability at Chabahar** given the ongoing US-Iran conflict.

Strategic Importance: India and Iran

- **For India**
 - o Provides secure, direct access to Afghanistan and Central Asia — landlocked markets India cannot reach via Pakistan.
 - o Serves as a counterweight to China's Gwadar Port in Pakistan — located just 140 km away.
 - o Forms a key node in the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) — a multi-modal

India's Stakes in Chabahar

Structure of the Port



- Chabahar has two main terminals — **Shahid Beheshti** and **Shahid Kalantari**.
- India manages **Shahid Beheshti**, operated by **India Ports Global Ltd (IPGL)** under a 10-year renewable agreement with Iran's Ports and Maritime Organisation.



Strategic Rationale for India



- Chabahar offers India an **alternative trade route to Afghanistan, bypassing Pakistan**, which does not permit Indian goods transit through its territory.
- For Iran, it is its **only oceanic port** with direct access to the **Indian Ocean**, bypassing the congested Strait of Hormuz.

The 2024 Landmark Contract



- India and Iran signed a **10-year contract in May 2024** — replacing earlier short-term arrangements — to equip and operate Shahid Beheshti terminal.
- To avoid financial penalties from US sanctions, India prepaid its \$120 million investment and transferred its operational stake to local entities.



India's Investment So Far



- Grant assistance for equipment supply: Enhanced to **\$120 million**.
- Line of Credit committed: **\$250 million** (in rupee equivalent) for port development.
- Equipment already supplied: Worth approximately **\$24 million**.



transport network connecting India with Iran, Russia, Europe, and Central Asia.

- **For Iran**

- Chabahar is a crucial economic hub for the Sistan-Baluchistan province.

Future Hangs in the Balance

- **Budgetary Red Flag**

- Chabahar received **₹400 crore** in the previous financial year.
- The **Union Budget 2026–27** made **no allocation** for the port — raising serious questions about India's commitment to this strategic corridor.

- **What India Stands to Lose?**

- Without Chabahar, India loses its **primary non-Pakistani corridor** to landlocked markets — undoing decades of connectivity planning.
- The expiration of the United States sanctions waiver by default **tilts the regional balance toward China and Pakistan**.
- If China expands its geopolitical footprint in Iran via **CPEC and Gwadar**, India's strategic position in the broader Central Asia and West Asia region weakens significantly.

FCRA 2.0 Portal and e-OCI Card

Union Home Minister Amit Shah launched the **FCRA 2.0 Portal** and the **e-Overseas Citizen of India (e-OCI) card** initiative, aimed at reducing paperwork, speeding up clearances, and enabling real-time monitoring of foreign fund inflows into India.

e-OCI Card Initiative: Key Highlights

- The **e-OCI card** will benefit more than **50 lakh OCI cardholders** globally. Key changes:
 - **No re-issuance of OCI booklet** when a new passport is issued after the age of 20 years — a long-standing inconvenience for OCI holders. However, cardholders will need to update their passport-related details online whenever a new passport is issued.
 - **Unique registration number** for each cardholder — simplifying identification
 - **Digital OCI card** eliminates problems of **lost or damaged physical documents**
 - Cardholders can carry out **real-time self-verification**

FCRA 2.0 Portal: Key Features

- The portal is hosted on the National Government Cloud (MeghRaj) and features:
 - Process re-engineering for faster clearances
 - Integrated dashboard for real-time monitoring
 - Aadhaar-based authentication for identity verification
 - e-Sign facility for digital document signing
 - OCR-based document analysis for automated processing
 - Elimination of physical document submission
- In the coming months, the following will also be launched:
 - FCRA Mobile Application
 - AI-powered chatbot for applicant assistance
 - Dedicated online dashboard for banks
- **What the Portal Aims to Achieve?**
 - Faster clearances of FCRA registration applications
 - Real-time monitoring of foreign fund inflows — particularly those made with wrong intentions
 - Improved transparency and accountability in foreign contribution management
 - Effective national security oversight over foreign donations flowing into NGOs



59th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting

- The 59th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting took place in Manila, Philippine.
 - The Philippines holds the ASEAN Chairship for 2026 under the theme "**Navigating Our Future, Together**".
- **Main Focus:** Implementation of the ASEAN 2045: Our Shared Future, regional security, and handling geopolitical conflicts.

Key Highlights

- **Launch of ASEAN Vision 2045**
 - Ministers officially marked the first year of executing the **ASEAN Community Vision 2045: Our Shared Future**.
- **Upgrades to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC)**
 - Adopted the Guidelines on the Modalities for Engagement of ASEAN with High Contracting Parties under the TAC.
 - This landmark document opens direct channels for treaty signatories to collaborate on maritime security, energy security, and food security without needing full, formal dialogue partnership status.
 - Welcomed the accession of **Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Sweden** into the TAC during its 50th-anniversary commemorative events.
- **Expansion of Dialogue & Sectoral Partners**
 - New Partners: Officially admitted Türkiye as ASEAN's 12th Dialogue Partner.
 - **Sectoral Status:** Formally designated Germany and Qatar as Sectoral Dialogue Partners to accelerate cooperation in crisis response, green energy, supply chain resilience, and digital transition.
- **South China Sea and Geopolitical Flashpoints**
 - Code of Conduct (COC): Reaffirmed a strict commitment with China to finalize the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea within the year.
 - Myanmar Crisis: Expressed deep concern regarding the ongoing conflict and strongly reaffirmed adherence to the **Five-Point Consensus**, urging an immediate end to violence and unhindered humanitarian access.

ASEAN

- The **Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)** is a regional intergovernmental organisation comprising **11 member** states: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam.
- Founded: 1967, through the Bangkok Declaration.
- Headquarters: Jakarta, Indonesia.
- ASEAN operates on the principle of "**ASEAN Centrality**" — positioning itself as the primary driver of regional cooperation frameworks in the Indo-Pacific.
- India became a **Sectoral Dialogue Partner** of ASEAN in 1992, a **Full Dialogue Partner** in 1996, and elevated ties to a **Strategic Partnership** in 2012.
- In 2022, the relationship was upgraded to a **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership**, reflecting deepening ties.

- 2026 has been designated the **ASEAN-India Year of Maritime Cooperation**.

33rd ASEAN Regional Forum

The 33rd ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) took place in Manila, Philippines, featuring the adoption of the Manila Plan of Action, discussions on regional security, and a focus on maritime cooperation.

Key Highlights

- **Adoption of the Manila Plan of Action (2026–2036)**
 - The forum officially adopted the Manila Plan of Action for 2026–2036, establishing a decade-long framework for security operations.
 - The plan aims to transform the ARF by “strengthening its capacity to anticipate and prevent the escalation of potential threats” amid intense geopolitical competition.
 - It aligns future regional diplomacy goals directly with the broader ASEAN Community Vision 2045.
- **Enhanced Maritime Security Commitments**
 - Delegates emphasized protecting highly critical Indian and Pacific Ocean trade routes that regional economies depend on.
- **Comprehensive Transnational Security Directives**
 - Member nations collectively prioritized a zero-tolerance stance on terrorism.
 - Led heavily by positions presented by India, the forum highlighted the critical need to choke off the financial resources, safe havens, and cross-border support networks backing terrorist activities.
 - Commitments were renewed to closely monitor and manage disarmament, cyber threats, and weapons non-proliferation.

About ARF

- The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) is a key multilateral platform for dialogue and consultation on political and security issues in the Asia-Pacific region.
- Established: 1994, on the initiative of ASEAN.
- Nature: It functions as ASEAN's primary forum for security-related dialogue, built around the principle of ASEAN Centrality.
- **Members: 27 participants**, including all 11 ASEAN member states, along with major powers and stakeholders such as India, US, China, Russia, Japan, Australia, European Union, and others.
- India has been a member since 1996, reflecting its engagement with ASEAN under the **Act East Policy**.

East Asia Summit (EAS)

- The 21st East Asia Summit foreign minister-level meetings took place in Manila, Philippines, featuring key discussions on maritime security and regional stability. India was represented by EAM S. Jaishankar at the summit.
- During the summit, India called for dialogue and diplomacy to end the conflict, stressing that international waterways must remain safe and unimpeded, "fully in consonance with international law."
- On the Myanmar Conflict - India expressed support for **ASEAN-led efforts** to resolve the ongoing civil conflict, where Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) have been challenging the military junta that seized power in February 2021.
- India will host two EAS-related activities this year: the **7th EAS Conference on Maritime Security Cooperation in Kochi**, and an **EAS Maritime Heritage Festival** in the ancient port city of Lothal.

About East Asia Summit (EAS)

- EAS is a premier leaders-led forum for strategic dialogue on political, security, and economic issues in the Indo-Pacific region.
- Established: 2005, at the initiative of ASEAN.
- Members: 19 participating countries — the 11 ASEAN member states plus India, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, US, and Russia.
- India has been a member since the summit's inception in 2005, reflecting its centrality to India's **Act East Policy**.

NATO Summit in Ankara

- Heads of state or government of NATO's 32 member countries met in Ankara, Türkiye, for the Ankara Summit.
- The summit was aimed at reviewing progress since the 2025 Hague Summit and charting a roadmap for NATO's key objectives.

Key Highlights

- **Collective Defence:** Reaffirmed "ironclad commitment" to collective defence under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty and to the transatlantic bond.
- **Defence Spending:** Unanimous endorsement of the Hague defence commitment, requiring all members to allocate at **least 5% of GDP on defence by 2035** — a sharp jump from the earlier 2% pledge.
- **Support for Ukraine:** Declared "unwavering support" for Ukraine's freedom, sovereignty, and territorial integrity.
- **Defence Industrial Base (DIB):** Vowed to build a high-technology, high-capacity, Europe-wide defence industrial base — the network of firms, factories, and skilled workers needed to sustain military power.

NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization)

- NATO is a politico-military alliance established to safeguard the freedom and security of its members through political and military means.
- Founded: 1949, through the Washington Treaty (also called the North Atlantic Treaty).
- Current Strength: 32 member countries, with Finland (2023) and Sweden (2024) being the most recent additions, joining after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
- Headquarters: Brussels, Belgium.

BRICS Guwahati Declaration on Drug Trafficking

- A two-day meeting of heads of anti-drug agencies of BRICS member nations was held in Guwahati, Assam — under India's 2026 BRICS Chairship. BRICS nations adopted the **Guwahati Declaration**.
- BRICS is an intergovernmental organisation of major emerging markets and developing countries, originally comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. It has since expanded to include Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Indonesia.

India's Stand and Proposals

- **Zero-Tolerance Policy** - India called upon BRICS drug law enforcement agencies to build a partnership founded on speed, mutual trust, and seamless real-time intelligence sharing that transcends borders and enables decisive action against transnational drug syndicates.
- **Three-Year Anti-Drug Roadmap (2026–29)**
 - India outlined its strategy — a network-centric approach built on following pillars:

- ♣ Dismantling entire criminal networks rather than targeting individual carriers.
- ♣ Preventing drug abuse through mass awareness campaigns.
- ♣ Strengthening treatment, de-addiction, and rehabilitation measures.

• India's Proposals to BRICS

- Establishment of a **BRICS Virtual Workshop Group** for knowledge and strategy sharing.
- Enhanced cross-border training initiatives among national anti-drug agencies.

- Creation of a real-time intelligence-sharing network to break transnational drug trafficking networks.

Key Highlights of the Guwahati Declaration

• Core Commitment

- Reaffirmed collective resolve to strengthen cooperation against illicit drug trafficking and related transnational organised crime.
- Underscored the need to enhance timely exchange of information, intelligence, and best practices, consistent with national laws and international obligations.

• Concerns Flagged

- The declaration expressed concern over the evolving and complex nature of drug trafficking in the 21st century, specifically:
 - Proliferation of synthetic drugs and new psychoactive substances.
 - Diversion of precursor chemicals.
 - Misuse of emerging technologies and virtual assets (cryptocurrency).
 - Exploitation of maritime routes and digital platforms by transnational criminal networks.

• Technology and Innovation

- Emphasised promotion of innovative technologies, digital tools, and data-driven approaches to strengthen law enforcement and regulatory efforts against drug trafficking.

• Demand Reduction and Vulnerable Groups

- Underlined the need to strengthen specialised initiatives for drug demand reduction.
- Promote healthy lifestyles and safeguard vulnerable groups, particularly children and youth, through evidence-based, comprehensive, and people-centred approaches.

India's 'Hummus Trail'

- The "Hummus Trail" refers to a **popular travel circuit** across India frequented by **Israeli tourists** — largely young military veterans recently discharged from mandatory army service.
- Around 80,000 Israelis visit India annually, many undertaking the Tiul Gadol — an extended trip of six months to a year funded by their military discharge bonus.
- Key destinations include Kasol (nicknamed "mini-Israel"), Goa, Rishikesh, Varanasi, Kodaikanal, and the Andaman Islands, where Hebrew signage, IDF posters, and Israeli-run establishments are common.
- The trail came under scrutiny in June 2026 when the Hind Rajab Foundation (HRF), a Brussels-based Palestinian rights group, filed a complaint seeking the arrest of Eitan Gilboa — an Israeli soldier traced to Himachal Pradesh — for alleged war crimes in Gaza, including destruction of civilian infrastructure in Khan Yunis and Rafah.
- Under India's Geneva Conventions Act, 1960, India can arrest any person regardless of nationality for "grave breaches" of the convention.
- However, the government issued no response, highlighting a gap between India's legal obligations and enforcement — and raising uncomfortable questions about India's position amid the ongoing International Court of Justice (ICJ) genocide case against Israel.

5th BIMSTEC National Security Chiefs Meet

- National security chiefs of BIMSTEC nations met in New Delhi (hosted by NSA Ajit Doval) pledging joint action against terrorism and organised crime while endorsing new guiding principles for maritime law enforcement coordination.

- Discussions covered security in the cyber, maritime, and energy domains, along with connectivity, disaster management, and emerging threats.
- **Key Outcomes of the Meeting**
 - Guidelines for the **maritime component** of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) were adopted, enabling member states to conduct relief operations more expeditiously.
 - A set of guiding principles on the **conduct of maritime law enforcement agencies** during interactions at sea was endorsed, aimed at increasing predictability and promoting safety during maritime engagements among members.
 - With BIMSTEC approaching its 30th anniversary next year, member states reaffirmed their resolve to deepen collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and institutional capacities to tackle diverse security threats.

Quad Foreign Ministers Meeting

- The foreign ministers of India, US, Australia, and Japan met in Manila, Philippines, on the sidelines of ASEAN-related meetings, pledging to work together for a stable Indo-Pacific with an eye on China's assertive regional behaviour.
 - The Manila talks followed up on outcomes from the earlier Quad Foreign Ministers' meeting held in New Delhi in May 2026.
 - In that meeting, ministers had announced:
 - ♣ the **Indo-Pacific Maritime Surveillance Corporation** (to expand maritime domain awareness and improve port infrastructure in Fiji),
 - ♣ the **Indo-Pacific Energy Security initiative** (for regional energy resilience), and
 - ♣ continued cooperation under the **Quad Critical Minerals Initiative** to strengthen supply chains.
- The ministers reaffirmed commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific, "grounded in the rule of law, sovereignty, and territorial integrity".
- The joint statement expressed strong support for **ASEAN's "unity and centrality"** and pledged to support implementation of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.
- Focus areas identified include maritime and transnational security, economic prosperity, emerging technologies, and humanitarian assistance and emergency response.
- Despite reaffirmations, ambiguity persists over whether the Quad Leaders' Summit will be held in Delhi this year.
- This uncertainty stems from two factors: US-China engagement on one side, and volatility in India-Washington ties on the other, alongside close scrutiny of the Trump administration's commitment to the Quad from regional stakeholders, including Beijing.

UNESCO Adds West Bank and Lebanon Sites to Endangered Heritage List

- UNESCO has added six heritage sites — one in the occupied West Bank and five in southern Lebanon — to its endangered World Heritage list, despite Israeli objections.
- The listings were approved at a committee vote during a UNESCO meeting in Busan, South Korea, under an **emergency procedure**, citing damage from ongoing regional conflicts.
- **The West Bank Listing: Sebastia**
 - **Sebastia**, a hilltop site near Nablus, is identified by historians as **ancient Samaria**, capital of the biblical Kingdom of Israel.

- Its ruins span the Iron Age through Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic rule, and both Christian and Islamic traditions hold that **John the Baptist** is buried there.
- **The Lebanon Listings: Five Fortresses in Mount Amel**
 - Five fortresses in Lebanon's **Mount Amel** region were added, including **Beaufort Castle**, a medieval stronghold captured by Israeli forces in May during their war with **Hezbollah**.
 - Lebanon's culture ministry said Israeli bombardment had already destroyed one fortress, **Shamaa Castle**, and now threatens Beaufort itself.
 - Israel disputes this account, alleging **Hezbollah** had turned Beaufort into a military position with tunnels beneath it — a claim rejected by a Lebanese delegate.
 - Earlier, the ancient Lebanese city of **Tyre** was also added to the endangered list.
- **Israel-UNESCO Rift**
 - The dispute reflects a broader rift between Israel and UNESCO; Israel left the organisation in 2019, accusing it of bias, and now attends only as an observer.
 - Israel objected to the West Bank listing, alleging it sought to erase "the Jewish connection to this land."

VIJAY Roadmap for a Future-Ready Force

- General Dhiraj Seth, who assumed charge as the 31st Chief of the Army Staff on July 1, unveiled a transformational roadmap titled "VIJAY"—outlining his vision for transforming the Indian Army into a technology-enabled, future-ready force capable of operating across multiple domains.
- The roadmap is inspired by the Defence Minister's vision for the Decade of Transformation.

Centre Designates 23 Terror Operatives Under UAPA

- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) designated 23 operatives of Pakistan-based terror organisations — primarily Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) — as terrorists under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (UAPA).
- This raises the total count of designated terrorists to 80.
- **Legal Background**
 - The UAPA was amended in 2019, enabling the government to designate individuals (not just organisations) as terrorists under Section 35, listed in the Fourth Schedule.
 - Prior to the current designation, 57 individuals had been designated as terrorists in 2024.
- **Profile of the 23 Designated Terrorists**
 - 17 are Pakistani nationals; 6 are Indian nationals — but all operate from Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir (PoJK).
 - Their activities span: terror recruitment, infiltration, training, drone-based arms supply, cyber operations, and planning of attacks in Jammu and Kashmir.

The VIJAY Roadmap: Decoded

- **V — Vigilance**
 - Emphasis on maintaining **operational readiness** and constant alertness along India's borders
 - Reflects the Army's primary mandate of **territorial integrity and border security**
- **I — Innovation and Transformation**
 - Focus on **modern doctrine, cutting-edge technologies**, and capability development
 - Keeping pace with the **changing character of warfare** — including cyber, space, and AI-enabled domains
- **J — Jointness and Integration**
 - Deeper **synergy among the Army, Navy, and Air Force**
 - Greater **military-civil fusion** through a **Whole-of-Nation approach**
 - Strengthening national security and contributing to the vision of **Viksit Bharat 2047**
- **A — Atmanirbharta**
 - Reiterating the Army's commitment to **indigenous technologies**
 - Guiding principle: **"Winning Our Wars with Indigenous Solutions"**
 - Aligns with the government's broader **Aatmanirbhar Bharat** initiative in defence
- **Y — Yodha First**
 - Placing every soldier — from **Agniveers to veterans** — at the centre of the Army's priorities
 - Key focus areas:
 - Improving **training standards and technological skills**
 - Enhancing **welfare of soldiers and veterans**
 - Empowerment of Veer Naris** (war widows)

Notice to Telegram Over Piracy

- The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (I&B) issued a formal notice to Telegram, directing it to act against the widespread dissemination of pirated films, OTT content, and audio-visual material through its platform, and submit an action-taken report within 15 days.
- **Key Directives to Telegram**
 - The I&B Ministry has asked Telegram to:

- ♣ **Strengthen systems** for detection, reporting, disabling access to, and removal of pirated and infringing audio-visual content.
- ♣ Act against **repeat infringers** — including channels, groups, bots, accounts, administrators, and associated entities.
- ♣ Seeking Details of its **grievance redressal mechanism** for producers, OTT platforms, and law enforcement agencies.
- ♣ Submit measures adopted to **prevent, detect, and remove** pirated content.

Legal Framework Invoked



The Ministry reminded Telegram that as an intermediary, it is obligated to observe due diligence under:



Information Technology Act, 2000



Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021



The Ministry also underlined that copyright infringement is not merely a civil violation but a criminal offence in India under:



Copyright Act, 1957



Cinematograph Act, 1952



Continued availability of pirated content, evasive compliance, or an incomplete response may invite further legal examination and action.

- o The Ministry made clear that a "**purely reactive, channel-by-channel takedown approach**" may not be sufficient to demonstrate due diligence.

WhatsApp Usernames: Government Concern and the Regulatory Debate

- The Indian government sent a notice to Meta, asking it to stop rolling out a new username feature on WhatsApp, citing concerns over potential online fraud and impersonation.
- The incident raises a bigger question: can the government legally stop a private app from launching a feature it wishes to add?

About Username Feature

- WhatsApp plans to let users chat using a username instead of their phone number — on an optional basis. New contacts will see only the username — not the mobile number.
- Users can additionally set a PIN, so even knowing the username is not enough to contact someone without the PIN.
- The feature has not yet been launched; Meta says it will roll out slowly over the next few months, with several safety features built in.

Why Is the Government Worried?

- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) argued that hiding phone numbers and displaying only usernames could enable:
 - Phishing attacks
 - Digital arrest scams
 - Impersonation of real people, companies, or government bodies
- The government sent similar notices to **Telegram, Signal, and Arattai** — apps that have had similar username features for some time.

WhatsApp's Response

- WhatsApp says it has "reserved" usernames of well-known people and organisations to prevent imposters from grabbing them — covering public figures, celebrities, government bodies, and verified Meta accounts.
- If a stranger messages without showing their number, the app will still display:
 - The stranger's country of origin
 - Whether the number is saved in your contact list
- WhatsApp spokesperson stated users can simply choose not to reply to strangers if they feel unsafe.

Can the Government Legally Stop an App Feature?

• Government's Argument

- WhatsApp qualifies as a "Significant Social Media Intermediary" under India's IT Rules, 2021, since it has over 50 lakh registered users.
- This classification requires WhatsApp to follow due-diligence obligations under law.
- The notice cited specific provisions of the IT Act:
 - Section 66C — Identity theft
 - Section 66D — Cheating by impersonation
 - Section 79 — Platform liability protection (conditional on responsible conduct)

• Digital Rights Groups' Counter

- They argue none of the cited laws actually give the government power to approve or block a feature before launch.
- Section 79 is designed to determine when a platform can be held liable for user content — not to control what features a company can build into its product.

Conclusion

- This dispute defines where the line sits between government regulation for public safety and a private company's freedom to design its own product. The government sees the username feature as a fraud risk requiring prior oversight.
- WhatsApp and digital rights groups see it as a lawful product decision that no current law actually empowers the government to block.

Transnational Crime

- Nearly three years after Hardeep Singh Nijjar's killing strained India-Canada relations, Canadian authorities have stated **no evidence currently links the Indian government** to the murder.
 - This marks a shift from former PM Justin Trudeau's 2023 allegation of a "potential link" between Indian agents and the killing — a claim India had consistently rejected.
 - Bilateral ties, which hit their lowest point after the allegation, have gradually improved since June 2025, when both countries agreed to restore diplomatic engagement.
- Simultaneously, the US under Operation Hard Ball has charged gangster Lawrence Bishnoi and associate Goldy Brar with orchestrating the assassination (as part of a wider crackdown on transnational organised crime)
 - **Operation 'Hardball'** is a joint international law enforcement initiative where Indian central agencies shared a verified list of target names, associate details, and potential hideouts with US officials, improving bilateral coordination
 - It targets Indian-origin transnational syndicates involved in racketeering, extortion, kidnapping, drug trafficking, and murder.

Understanding Transnational Organised Crime

- Organised crime refers to illicit operations run by networks that collaborate, often using violence or corruption, for material or financial gain.
- When such operations span multiple countries, it becomes transnational organised crime.

Emerging Dimensions of the Crime Nexus

- Organised crime is increasingly converging with cross-border security threats.
- Indian-origin gangs maintain links with Pakistan-based narcotics smugglers and finance targeted killings through drug trafficking.
- Smuggling routes rely heavily on maritime channels and drones along the India-Pakistan border.
- Criminal groups evade surveillance using VPNs and encrypted messaging platforms.

Broader Implications

- **International relations:** Tests India-Canada ties, highlights evidence-based dispute management, and strengthens India-US law enforcement cooperation.
- **Internal security:** Raises concerns over cross-border narcotics trafficking, prison-based crime, and cyber-enabled organised crime, especially amid the rise of new networks following the decline of older syndicates like those of Dawood Ibrahim and Chhota Rajan.
- **Governance and legal framework:** Underscores the role of the UAPA, international police cooperation, and challenges in extraditing overseas fugitives.

International Efforts Against Organised Crime

- The **United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime** (UNTOC) is an international agreement that aims to prevent and combat organized crime across countries.
- The **Guwahati Declaration** was adopted by the BRICS nations to strengthen cooperation against illicit drug trafficking and related transnational organized crime.
- Financial Action Task Force (FATF), Interpol, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) are targeting the massive illicit profits generated by transnational organized crime.

India's Astra Missiles: Indonesia's Landmark Purchase

- Indonesia became the first country to sign a pact importing India's ASTRA missiles, marking a significant milestone in India-Indonesia strategic cooperation.

- The deal covers the **Astra Mk 1** 'beyond-visual-range air-to-air missile' (BVRAAM) and will arm Indonesia's Su-30 fleet.
- Astra is developed by DRDO and is being integrated with both the Air Force and Navy.
- It serves as India's counter to the long-range **PL-15 missile** used by both Pakistan and China.

Kudankulam Data Breach

- A ransomware attacked a contractor involved in the Kudankulam nuclear power project, raising concerns despite no threat to the plant's core integrity — echoing a similar 2019 malware incident at the same facility.
- Ransomware group 'World Leaks' compromised systems belonging to Reliance Infrastructure, an engineering contractor for Units 3 and 4.
- About 14.3 GB of leaked files include ventilation layouts, control room floor plans, supplier lists, and insurance paperwork — NPCIL says these pertain only to areas beyond the nuclear island.
- India's breach disclosure regime remains **inconsistent and opaque**, with organisations often delaying admission due to reputational and regulatory fears.
- Weak incident response capabilities, often stemming from treating cybersecurity as mere compliance, hamper early damage assessment.
- Even non-core data can aid **intelligence preparation** by hostile actors, especially given India's status as the third-most breached country, with prior attacks on AIIMS Delhi and airlines.

Key Features of the Astra Missile Family

• Astra Mk 1

- Range: 80–110 km; altitude up to 20 km; speed of **Mach 4.5**.
- Features inertial guidance, mid-course update, and terminal active radar homing.
- Being integrated with the IAF's Su-30 MKI fleet, with future plans for the Tejas Mk 1A and Rafale jets.

• Astra Mk 2

- Enhanced range of 200 km (up from the earlier planned ~160 km).
- Powered by a dual-pulse solid rocket motor, allowing energy conservation mid-flight and motor reignition at the terminal phase — making it harder for targets to evade at long range.

• Astra Mk 3 (Gandiva)

- India's most advanced BVRAAM, still under development.
- Likely to use a **Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR) engine** for continuous mid-flight thrust, unlike conventional rocket motors that burn out.
- Could achieve a range of over 350 km, with SFDR technology already flight-tested this year.

Pellet Guns Legal for Crowd Control

- Allegations of pellet gun injuries during a protest march to Parliament — despite Delhi Police's denial — have revived debate over non-lethal weapons and the legal framework governing crowd control in India.
- Pellet guns have previously drawn criticism during the 2024 farmers' protests, in Manipur (2023), and in Kashmir since 2010.
- Pellet guns are 12-bore shotguns firing cartridges packed with metal pellets, classified as firearms under the **Arms Act, 1959**.
- Marketed as "**non-lethal**," experts note they can still cause grievous injury, blindness, or death, especially at close range.
- While pellet guns remain legally permissible under Indian law, their classification as "non-lethal" is contested.
- **Legal Framework**
 - **Sections 148–151 (BNSS, 2023)** govern dispersal of unlawful assemblies, authorising graded force — warning, tear gas, lathi charge, & firing only as a last resort, using minimum necessary force.
- **International Standards**

- o The 2020 UN Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons explicitly states metal pellets "should never be used," while the UN Basic Principles on Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials (1990) mandate minimum force and prohibit citing public emergencies to justify departures from these norms.

Delhi Police's Surveillance Web at Jantar Mantar Protest

- The Delhi Police deployed extensive surveillance infrastructure.
- These included **DP-Dristhi and Ikshana surveillance vans** and a **Mobile Command and Control Vehicle** using AI-assisted facial recognition to scan live CCTV feeds against police databases identifying offenders.
- **Ikshana Van:** Features eight fixed cameras providing a 360-degree field of view to stream live video feeds.
- **DP-Dristhi:** Mobile unit utilized for high-footfall area tracking and monitoring criminal elements.
- **Mobile Command and Control Vehicle:** Acts as an on-site control room where officers monitor real-time video feeds.

Disabling BitChat in India

- The Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), Ministry of Home Affairs, directed GitHub to remove repositories hosting **BitChat** — a Bluetooth mesh messaging app. Thus raising questions about surveillance, free speech, and India's content-blocking process.
- **About BitChat**
 - o A decentralised, peer-to-peer messaging app operating over **Bluetooth mesh networks**, requiring no internet, servers, or phone numbers.
 - o Each device acts as both client and server, relaying messages across hops.
 - o It offers censorship and surveillance resistance, functioning during internet outages or protests — its use has grown amid repeated shutdowns near protest sites.

Samudra Pradakshina

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh felicitated **nine women officers** from the Army, Navy, and Air Force for completing **India's first-ever Tri-Service all-women** circumnavigation sailing expedition, 'Samudra Pradakshina.'
- Aboard the **IASV Triveni**, the crew sailed nearly **25,500 nautical miles** across four oceans over 314 days, crossing all meridians, the Equator twice, the International Date Line, and rounding the three Great Capes, including the challenging Drake Passage.

India's First Dedicated Department of Military Medicine

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh virtually inaugurated India's first dedicated Department of Military Medicine at Command Hospital (Central Command), Lucknow.
- Established under the Directorate General of Medical Services (Army), it aims to strengthen combat medical readiness, research, and indigenous doctrines.
- The facility will develop in phases — starting with academic programmes before expanding into Centres of Excellence for humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and CBRNE (Chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and high-yield explosives) defence.
- The Minister emphasised leveraging AI, wearables, and predictive analytics for preventive healthcare, with the department covering trauma care, combat psychiatry, and battlefield medicine innovation, complementing the proposed Global Military Medicine Centre.

Pinaka Long-Range Guided Rocket

- DRDO successfully flight-tested the **Pinaka long-range guided rocket** from the Integrated Test Range, Chandipur, validating its minimum strike range of 60 km.
- Developed by the Armament Research and Development Establishment with support from other DRDO labs, it was launched from an in-service Pinaka launcher.

INS Mahendragiri's Commissioning

The Indian Navy commissioned the indigenously built stealth frigate **INS Mahendragiri** into its Eastern Fleet, in Visakhapatnam — the sixth of seven Project 17A frigates inducted within just one-and-a-half years.

About INS Mahendragiri

- Built with **over 75% indigenous content**, displacing approximately 6,670 tonnes with a top speed of 28 knots.
- Equipped with **BrahMos supersonic missiles**, multifunction radar, medium-range surface-to-air missiles, anti-submarine warfare systems, an Electronic Warfare suite, and a Close-In Weapon System.
- Named after the Mahendragiri range in the Eastern Ghats; built with contributions from over 200 Indian industries, including MSMEs.

{For more about Project 17A refer The Recitals-June 2026}

INS Malvan

- The Indian Navy commissioned **INS Malvan**, its second Mahe-class Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow Water Craft (ASW-SWC), at Karwar.
- Named after the coastal town of Malvan in Maharashtra, its crest features the 'Bagh Nakha' (tiger's claw), symbolising courage and agility, with the motto "Silent Claws."
- Built by Cochin Shipyard Ltd (CSL) with over 80% indigenous components.
- These vessels fill a critical capability gap by detecting stealthy diesel-electric submarines in shallow coastal waters, replacing the decommissioned Abhay-class corvettes.
- The Defence Acquisition Council approved 16 such ASW-SWCs in 2013 at over Rs 13,000 crore, split between CSL (Mahe-class) and GRSE (Arnala-class).
- Equipped with indigenous sonar, torpedoes, and anti-submarine rockets, these ships will strengthen India's coastal defence.

DRDO Successfully Test-Fires 'Kusha'

- DRDO conducted the maiden flight test of the indigenous **'Kusha' Long-Range Surface-to-Air Missile (SAM)** from APJ Abdul Kalam Island off Odisha's coast.
- The missile successfully intercepted an electronic target simulating a high-speed, high-altitude aerial threat.
 - Long-range SAMs typically have a range exceeding 200 km; India's existing Russian S-400 Triumf can hit targets up to 400 km away.
 - Kusha is India's own long-range air defence system. It will not be a system that will replace the S-400 Triumf, but will complement it.
- All system elements — missiles, radars, and command and control — were developed indigenously by DRDO labs and industry partners.

- Kusha builds on last year's successful test of the Integrated Air Defence Weapon System (IADWS), together forming key steps toward India's home-grown, multi-layered air defence shield under **Mission Sudarshan Chakra**, planned over the next decade.

Indian Navy Participates in RIMPAC 2026

- The Indian Navy's P-8I maritime patrol aircraft participated in the Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC 2026) — the world's largest naval exercise, hosted by the U.S. Pacific Fleet in and around the Hawaiian Islands.
- India's participation reaffirms its commitment to a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific, enhancing interoperability, Maritime Domain Awareness, and cooperation with partner navies.
- **About RIMPAC:** Now in its 30th edition, under the theme '**Partners: Integrated and Prepared**'. It brings together 30 nations for the exercise.

PaleoIndia Portal

The Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change recently launched the PaleoIndia Portal, a national digital platform dedicated to documenting India's fossil heritage.

About the PaleoIndia Portal

- Digital initiative jointly developed by:
 - Zoological Survey of India (ZSI)
 - National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management (NCSCM), Chennai
- Uses dynamic geological maps provided by the Geological Survey of India (GSI)
- Serves as a national repository of fossil fauna, documenting fossil records from all 28 States and 8 UTs of India

Key Features

- Contains information on more than 5,000 fossil specimens
- Covers a wide taxonomic range, including:

Mammals	Reptiles	Birds	Fishes	Amphibians
Molluscs	Arthropods	Foraminifera	Echinoderms	Ichnofossils

- Incorporates a real-time data upload system, enabling:
 - Field-based data collection
 - Citizen science contributions

PARIVARTAN Scheme to Phase Out Polluting Commercial Vehicles

PARIVARTAN (Programme for Accelerated Renewal and Incentivization of Vehicle Assets for Reducing Transport Air Pollution and Network Emissions) scheme is a Central government supported Scheme aimed at replacing old, polluting commercial vehicles operating in the National Capital Region (NCR) with cleaner alternatives (primarily electric and other low-emission alternatives)

Key Features

- The scheme provides financial support to encourage fleet owners to scrap older vehicles and purchase cleaner alternatives. Incentives include:
 - Scrappage incentives for eligible old commercial vehicles
 - Financial assistance for purchasing cleaner replacement vehicles (exemption on motor vehicle tax and registration fees, interest subsidy, fuel vouchers etc)
- Financial outlay of ₹9,585 crore
- Targets BS-IV and older commercial vehicles
- Complements the earlier initiatives like the Vehicle Scrappage Policy, 2021 and Delhi EV Policy, 2026

Eco-Sensitive Areas proposed in Western Ghats as per Kasturirangan Committee

A proposed notification by the Union Government seeks to declare 56,825.7 sq km of the Western Ghats as an Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA) under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, based largely on the recommendations of the Kasturirangan Committee.

State wise proposed ESA

The ESAs proposed across these states are spread over 449 sq km in Gujarat, 17,340 sq km in Maharashtra, 1,461 sq km in Goa, 20,668 sq km in Karnataka, 6,914 sq km in Tamil Nadu, and 9,993.7 sq km in Kerala.

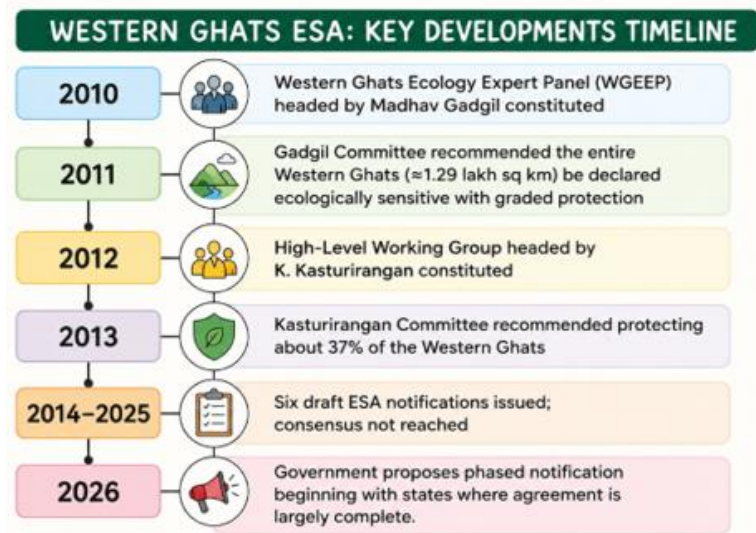
- The final notification will be applicable for the states where consensus has been reached

What is an Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA)?

- An Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA) is a region notified by the Central Government under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 where activities with significant environmental impacts are either prohibited, regulated, or permitted with safeguards to conserve fragile ecosystems
- Its purpose is:
 - Protect biodiversity hotspots
 - Maintain ecosystem services
 - Prevent environmentally destructive development
 - Promote sustainable livelihoods

Activities Regulated in the Proposed ESA

- Prohibited
 - New mining and quarrying
 - Thermal Power plants
 - New red-category (highly polluting) industries
 - New and expansion projects of building and construction with built-up area of 20,000 sq metres and above, and all new and expansion township projects with area over 50 hectares and above.
- Regulated
 - Infrastructure projects requiring environmental clearance
- Permitted
 - Agriculture, plantations, horticulture
 - Eco-tourism following environmental norms
 - Existing settlements



Revised Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) III Norms

The Union Government has released the revised draft CAFE-III norms for passenger vehicles, inviting public comments before implementation. The new standards are proposed to come into force from 1 April 2027, replacing the existing CAFE-II regime.

What are CAFE Norms?

- Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) norms prescribe the average fuel efficiency (or CO₂ emission target) that a vehicle manufacturer must achieve across its fleet of passenger vehicles sold in a financial year
- Instead of regulating each vehicle individually, compliance is measured at the manufacturer's fleet level
- **Administered by:**
 - Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) under the Ministry of Power
- **Objective**
 - Reduce petroleum consumption

- Improve fuel efficiency
- Lower greenhouse gas (CO₂) emissions
- Promote cleaner vehicle technologies

Evolution of CAFE Norms in India

Phase	Period	Status
CAFE-I	2017-2022	Implemented
CAFE-II	2022-2027	Currently in Force
CAFE-III	2027-2032	Under Public Consultation

Key Changes in CAFE III

- The draft proposes progressively stricter fuel efficiency targets over five years. The fleet-average target is proposed at 3.996 litres per 100km (94.76g CO₂/km) for FY2028, tightening to 3.327 litres per 100km (78.90g CO₂/km) by FY2032. According to industry experts, these targets are less stringent than those proposed in the earlier draft.
- Applies to M1 category passenger vehicles, i.e., vehicles designed to carry passengers with not more than eight seats in addition to the driver
 - Not applicable to two wheelers, three wheelers or commercial vehicles
- Compliance incentives (super credits) for manufacturers deploying:
 - Battery Electric Vehicles (BEVs)
 - Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicles (PHEVs)
 - Range-Extended Electric Vehicles (REEVs)
 - Vehicles using ethanol and other biofuels
 - Fuel-saving technologies that reduce fleet emission

CAFE NORMS vs BHARAT STAGE (BS) NORMS

FEATURE	CAFE NORMS	BHARAT STAGE (BS) NORMS
Purpose	Improve fleet fuel efficiency and reduce CO ₂ emissions	Limit tailpipe pollutants such as NO _x , PM, CO and HC
Regulates	Fleet-average performance of manufacturers	Emissions from each vehicle model
Administered by	Bureau of Energy Efficiency (Ministry of Power)	Ministry of Road Transport & Highways / CPCB under the Environment Ministry framework
Focus	Fuel economy and climate change	Air pollution and public health

Borjuli Wetland notified as Biodiversity Heritage Site

Borjuli Wetland in Sonitpur district, Assam has been officially notified as a Biodiversity Heritage Site (BHS) by the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA), marking a significant step in **conserving India's wild rice genetic resources**.

Key Points

- The recognition follows the implementation of project “In-situ Conservation and Management of Wild Rice (*Oryza rufipogon*) in Sonitpur District of Assam” since 2022. The project is:
 - Funded by: National Rainfed Area Authority (NRAA), Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare
 - Executed by: ICAR–National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (ICAR-NBPGR), New Delhi

- Collaborating agency: Assam State Biodiversity Board
- The wetland is home to *Oryza rufipogon*, the wild ancestor of cultivated rice (***Oryza sativa***), which possesses valuable traits such as:
 - Resistance to several pests and diseases
 - Tolerance to flooding and saline conditions
 - Genetic potential for developing climate-resilient, high-yielding, and nutritionally improved rice varieties

About Biodiversity Heritage Sites

- They are well defined areas that are unique and ecologically fragile ecosystems with rich biodiversity
- Declared under Section 37 of the Biological Diversity Act, 2002 by the State Government through the Official Gazette in consultation with the local bodies and the State Biodiversity Board
- A site may be declared a BHS if it possesses one or more of the following:
 - High species richness
 - High endemism
 - Rare, endangered or threatened species
 - Keystone species
 - Species of evolutionary significance
 - Wild ancestors of domesticated/cultivated species or landraces
 - Fossil beds representing past biological importance
 - Cultural, ethical or aesthetic values associated with biodiversity

Aldrin Pesticide

Contamination by the banned organochlorine pesticide aldrin has been linked with the death of mugger crocodiles in Rajasthan's Chandraloi River near Kota.

Key findings

- Toxicological analysis detected aldrin, a highly persistent and banned organochlorine pesticide, in samples collected from the river and affected animals
- Aldrin was widely used in agriculture before being prohibited because of its:
 - High toxicity to wildlife and humans
 - Persistence in soil and water
 - Ability to bioaccumulate and biomagnify through food chains
- The contamination suggests that legacy pesticide residues or illegal use may still be affecting the ecosystem

Ecological Concerns

- Mugger crocodiles are apex predators, making them vulnerable to biomagnification of persistent pollutants
- The incident highlights the continuing environmental risks posed by persistent organic pollutants (POPs) decades after their use has been banned

India's First Hydrogen Train

Indian Railways launched India's first indigenously developed **Hydrogen fuel cell** powered passenger train on the Jind-Sonipat section of the Northern Railway in Haryana. This marks a significant step towards decarbonizing rail transport, particularly on non-electrified railway routes where diesel locomotives are still used.

Key Features

- Configuration: Two **Hydrogen Driving Power Cars (DPCs)** with eight passenger coaches
- Passenger capacity: Around 2,600 passengers
- Operational speed: Around 75 km/h (designed for higher speeds in future)
- Propulsion: Hydrogen fuel cells with battery-assisted electric drive
- Emission: Only water vapour & heat

Mechanism Behind the Train

Unlike conventional electric trains that draw power from overhead electric wires, a hydrogen-powered train generates electricity onboard

1. Hydrogen Storage

- Compressed hydrogen gas is stored in high-pressure tanks mounted on the train
- Dedicated hydrogen production, storage and refueling facilities have been established at Jind

2. Fuel Cell

- Hydrogen from the tanks is supplied to a fuel cell stack
- Oxygen is drawn from the atmosphere
- The primary energy source is a **Proton Exchange Membrane Fuel Cell (PEMFC)**. This is a fuel cell that generates electricity by reacting hydrogen and oxygen across a proton-conducting Perfluorosulfonic Acid (PFSA) polymer membrane.
- Inside the fuel cell, hydrogen reacts electrochemically with oxygen to produce:
 - Electricity
 - Water vapour
 - Heat
- Since there is no combustion, the process produces zero tailpipe carbon emissions

3. Battery System

- The electricity generated by the fuel cells powers the train and also charges a Lithium Ferro Phosphate (LFP) battery
- The battery:
 - Stores excess electricity
 - Supplies additional power during acceleration
 - Stores energy recovered through regenerative braking, improving efficiency

4. Electric traction motors

- Electricity from the fuel cells and battery drives electric traction motors, which propel the train

Challenges

- Green hydrogen remains expensive to produce compared to diesel
- Requires dedicated hydrogen production, storage and refuelling infrastructure
- Hydrogen storage involves handling high-pressure gas with stringent safety measures
- Overall energy efficiency is lower than conventional electric trains powered directly through overhead lines, making hydrogen most suitable where electrification is difficult or uneconomical

Ethanol Blending Programme

The recent debate around E20 petrol (20% ethanol + 80% petrol) has centered on concerns about engine compatibility, mileage, insurance claims, and consumer costs. In response, the Government of India has defended the nationwide rollout, arguing that most of the concerns are either overstated or not supported by scientific evidence.

- India achieved its 20% ethanol blending target in 2025, five years ahead of schedule
- From April 2026, all BS-VI petrol vehicles are required to comply with E20 emission & blending norms.

Timeline of the Ethanol Blending Programme in India

Year	Previous Milestone
2001	Pilot Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme launched
2003-04	EBP formally launched by the Government
2006	Directive issued: E5 (5% ethanol blending) introduced in several States and UTs
2013	Gazette notification: targeted 5% blending in 10 States/UTs, but blending remained around 1.5% due to inadequate ethanol production
2018	National Policy on Biofuels, 2018 expanded feedstocks beyond sugarcane to include maize and surplus food grains; GST on ethanol reduced from 18% to 5%; interest subvention scheme launched
2021	NITI Aayog released the Roadmap for Ethanol Blending in India (2020–25)
2022	India achieved 10% blending (E10) ahead of schedule
2023	E20 fuel launched at select retail outlets

Government Defense of E20

1. Engine safety

- Scientific studies and testing by automotive agencies indicate that **E20 does not damage engines** designed or calibrated for E20
- BS-VI vehicles introduced from April 2026 are E20-compatible

2. Mileage loss is limited

- Ethanol has lower energy content than petrol
- The Government acknowledges a **3–5% reduction in fuel economy** in many older vehicles but considers it a modest trade-off

3. Insurance claims

- Motor insurance claims cannot be rejected solely because E20 petrol was used

4. Environmental benefits

- Lower lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions
- Reduced carbon monoxide and hydrocarbon emissions
- Supports India's climate commitments and cleaner mobility

5. Energy security

- Reduces dependence on imported crude oil
- Enhances energy resilience through domestically produced biofuel

6. Benefits to farmers

- Creates stable demand for:

- Sugarcane
- Molasses
- Maize
- Damaged food grains
- Surplus rice (as permitted)

7. No decision beyond E20

- The Government has clarified that there is no decision to **mandate** blending beyond 20% at present
- Higher blends (e.g., E85 or E100) would require Flex-Fuel Vehicles (FFVs) and further scientific assessment

Pathway to E100

- In June 2026, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways approved the regulatory framework governing E100 fuel, creating the legal basis for:
 - manufacture and certification of E100-compatible vehicles
 - fuel quality standards
 - testing and homologation
 - retailing and distribution of E100 fuel
- This is a regulatory approval, not a nationwide rollout mandate

GI status for Spiti Seabuckthorn

Spiti Seabuckthorn (locally called Chharma) has been granted the Geographical Indication (GI) tag along with seven other traditional products from Himachal Pradesh.

The other GIs are for: Salooni Safed Makka, Chamba Metal Art, Sirmauri Loiya, Kinnauri Topi, Sepuvadi of Mandi, Kinnauri apple and Kinnauri jewellery.

What is Seabuckthorn?

- A thorny, deciduous shrub commonly known as the 'Golden Bush of the Himalayas' or 'Wonder Plant'
- Growing conditions:
 - Cold deserts of Spiti, Ladakh, Uttarakhand and Arunachal Pradesh
 - Elevation- 2500-4500m
 - Extremely hardy, surviving temperatures from **-43°C to +40°C**

How is Spiti Seabuckthorn Unique?

- Produces bright orange berries rich in:
 - Vitamin C
 - Vitamin E
 - Omega-3, 6, 7 and 9 fatty acids
 - Antioxidants and flavonoids
- Traditionally consumed as juices, herbal remedies, jams and teas, and used in cosmetics and skincare products

Ecological Significance

- Helps prevent soil erosion by stabilizing fragile mountain slopes
- Being a nitrogen-fixing plant, it improves soil fertility

Himalayan Pangolin 	Recently, Himalayan Pangolin was revalidated as a distinct species, separate from the Chinese pangolin • One of the eight extant species of pangolins found globally • Distribution ○ Restricted to the Southern Himalayan foothills and found in Nepal, South Tibet and Assam in India • Nocturnal mammal, with specialized myrmecophagy (feeding mainly on ants and termites) • Conservation Status ○ IUCN ((Not separately assessed yet)- Chinese pangolin is Critically Endangered; CITES- Appendix I; WPA, 1972- Schedule I
Himalayan Ray Finned Fish 	The Sangno clan of the Nyishi tribe in East Kameng district, Arunachal Pradesh, has launched a community-led conservation drive to protect the-Himalayan ray-finned fish • Conservation Status: IUCN- Endangered

SOLVE

Recently, ISRO successfully conducted the ground test of the Sub-Orbital Launch Vehicle for Experiments (SOLVE) solid motor at the Static Test Facility, Satish Dhawan Space Centre (Sriharikota)

What is SOLVE?

It serves as an agile testbed for atmospheric and high-altitude experiments. It acts as a dedicated cost-effective launch platform to simulate specific atmospheric re-entry conditions without deploying a massive multi-stage orbital rocket.

The solid stage of SOLVE is derived from the **PSLV strap-on motor**, used to validate the **Crew Module's escape, propulsion, parachute descent, and splashdown systems** by carrying it to **10-17 km altitude** before sea landing.

Why is it important?

- Ensures **safe re-entry and splashdown** of astronauts during the **descent phase**, the most critical phase of **Gaganyaan**.
- Simulates actual mission conditions to improve **crew safety and mission reliability**.

Gaganyaan Deceleration System uses **10 parachutes (4 types)**- **2 Apex Cover Separation Parachutes**, **2 Drogue Parachutes** (to stabilize & slow the module), **3 Pilot Parachutes** (to deploy **3 Main Parachutes**) and **3 Main Parachutes** (to reduce landing speed for safe splashdown).

Other Tests: ISRO has also carried out **Integrated Air Drop Test (IADT)**- a **system-level qualification test** for Gaganyaan's **parachute-based deceleration system**, in which a **dummy Crew Module** is dropped from an **Indian Air Force Chinook helicopter** at an altitude of **about 3 km** over the sea. Unlike **SOLVE**, which tests from **10-17 km**, IADT validates parachute deployment under lower-altitude conditions.

Bow and Arrow Radio Galaxy

Indian researchers have discovered **RAD-BAARG (Bow and Arrow Radio Galaxy)**, a rare **arc-shaped radio galaxy** about **1.8 million light-years (560 kpc)** wide and located **~2 billion light-years** from Earth.

- **1 light-year $\approx$ 9.46 trillion km (5.88 trillion miles); 1 kiloparsec (kpc) = 1,000 parsecs $\approx$ 3,260 light-years.**
- A radio galaxy, powered by supermassive black holes at its core, is a type of active galaxy that emits very high amounts of energy in the form of radio waves.
- **Discovery:** It was discovered using the **LOFAR (Low Frequency Array) Two-metre Sky Survey** by **RAD@home Astronomy Collaboratory**, India's first citizen-science astronomy platform.
- **Formation:** Its unique **bow-and-arrow morphology** is believed to have formed as the galaxy **falls supersonically into a galaxy cluster**, generating a **bow shock** and interacting with the surrounding hot gas.

White Gut Disease

Andhra Pradesh Fisheries department recently reported the outbreak of White Gut Disease (WDG), also known as White Feces Disease (WFD), in shrimp ponds in State.

What is WDG? It is a major shrimp disease in farmed Pacific white shrimp characterized by **white fecal strings** and **white/golden-brown gut**, leading to reduced growth and productivity.

Cause: Strongly associated with the parasite **Enterocytozoon hepatopenaei (EHP)**.

Symptoms: White feces floating on pond surface, reduces feed intake, poor growth, size variation, loose shell, and increased mortality.

Management: Maintain good biosecurity, reduce feed during outbreaks, remove white fecal strings, use **PCR-tested EHP-free seed**, and disinfect ponds after harvest.

Tribex Platform

The Ministry of Tribal Affairs recently launched Tribex, a first-of-its-kind digital learning and knowledge platform dedicated to preservation and promotion of tribal arts, culture, traditional knowledge and skill development.

Key Features of Tribex:

- **Free Learning:** Certificate courses on tribal paintings, handicrafts, handloom, artefacts & musical instruments.
- **Offers 5 UGC-Recognized PG Diplomas (1-year hybrid):** in tribal language- Santali (Ol Chiki); Sustainable Tribal Culture Based Livelihood Practices; Museology and Tribal Museum Management; Tribal Arts and Crafts of India; Tribal Textiles.
- **Digital Repository:** Archives tribal languages, oral traditions, performing arts, cultural practices & indigenous knowledge.
- **Learning Infrastructure:** Integrated **Learning Management System (LMS)** and **Repository Management System** for learning, progress tracking & knowledge management.
- **Heritage Archive:** **5,000+** multimedia resources (expanding to **10,000**) on tribal festivals, traditions & socio-cultural practices.

National Institute of Science Education and Research (NISER)

The Vice-President of India recently addressed the 15th Graduation Ceremony of the National Institute of Science Education and Research (NISER), Bhubaneswar.

About NISER:

- **Status:** Autonomous premier institute under the **Department of Atomic Energy (DAE)**, affiliated with **Homi Bhabha National Institute**, Mumbai.
- Founded in **2007**
- **Objective:** Promote excellence in **basic science education, research, and scientific temper**.
- **Activities:**
 - **Scientific Research:** Conducts frontier theoretical and experimental research through **7 Schools** (Biological, Chemical, Computer, Earth & Planetary, Humanities & Social Sciences, Mathematical, and Physical Sciences) and a **Centre for Interdisciplinary Sciences**.

Medical Innovations Patent Mitra Platform

The National Medical Commission (NMC) has directed all medical colleges and institutions to promote use of Indian Council of Medical Research's (ICMR) 'Medical Innovations Patent Mitra' platform.

What is Medical Innovations Patent Mitra?

It is a **centralized, government-funded ICMR platform** for **patent filing** and **technology transfer** of biomedical innovations launched under **NITI Aayog**, in partnership with **Department of Pharmaceuticals (DoP)**, with support from **Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)**.

Objective: To protect **Intellectual Property (IP)** and convert biomedical research into **market-ready healthcare products**.

Key Features: Patent filing & maintenance, technology licensing, **MedTech Mitra** validation, and industry linkage.

✓ **MedTech Mitra** is a **NITI Aayog-ICMR-Central Drug Standard Control Organization (CDSCO)** initiative providing end-to-end support for **clinical evaluation, regulatory approval, and commercialization** of affordable indigenous **medical devices, diagnostics, therapeutics, vaccines, and assistive technologies**.

Beneficiaries: Medical colleges, researchers, clinicians, students, startups, and biomedical innovators.

I-2SEA

A submarine cable system- I-2SEA will be built by a consortium comprising tech giant Microsoft, Singtel, Tata Communications and AI connectivity platform Lightstorm.

What is I-2SEA? It is a **3,600-km high-capacity submarine optical fibre cable** connecting **India, Malaysia and Singapore** to support **AI, cloud computing, hyperscalers, GPU infrastructure and data centre connectivity**. It is targeted to be fully Ready-for-Service (RFS) in the fourth quarter of 2029.

Key Features

- **Dual landing stations in India:**
 - **Machilipatnam (Andhra Pradesh):** Shortest subsea route to Hyderabad's AI/data centre hub.
 - **South Chennai (Tamil Nadu):** Geographically diverse landing for greater network resilience.
- **Connectivity:** Connects **Hyderabad & Chennai** with **Singapore** (regional AI/cloud hub) and **Kuala Lumpur** (emerging data centre corridor).
- **Integration** with Lightstorm's **30,000-km terrestrial fibre network**, it will extend connectivity to **Mumbai and 80+ data centres**.
- **Carrier-neutral architecture:** with AI-optimized, low-latency transmission.

Vikram-I Rocket

India's first privately developed launch vehicle, **Vikram-1**, built by **Skyroot Aerospace** (founded in 2018; India's first space unicorn), successfully launched multiple technology demonstration satellites into **Low Earth Orbit (LEO)** from **Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC), Sriharikota**.

About Vikram-1:

Vikram-1 is India's first privately developed orbital launch vehicle designed to launch small satellites into **Low Earth Orbit (LEO)**. Its maiden mission, **Aagaman**, is the **first of three developmental flights** for commercial qualification. It became the **first private Indian rocket to place satellites into orbit**, following the suborbital **Vikram-S (2022)** mission.

Vikram-1 vs Vikram-S: Unlike **Vikram-S (2022)**, a **suborbital technology demonstrator** that reached ~89 km before returning to Earth, **Vikram-1** is a **commercial orbital launch vehicle** designed to place satellites into a **450 km Low Earth Orbit**. It marks the transition from **technology validation** to **full-fledged orbital launch capability**.

Key Features of Vikram-1:

- **Orbital Launch Vehicle:** It has been designed to launch **small satellites into LEO** targeting a **450 km orbit (60° inclination)** and carry **350 kg to LEO** or **260 kg to Sun-Synchronous Orbit (SSO)**.
- **Four-Stage Rocket:** It features **three solid-fuel stages** and a **restartable liquid-fuel upper stage**, enabling **precise orbital insertion** and deployment of **multiple satellites into different orbits** during a single mission.
- **Advanced Indigenous Technology:** It is built with an **all-carbon composite structure** and **indigenously developed propulsion, avionics, thermal protection systems**, including **3D-printed liquid engines**, enabling lightweight design and rapid production.
- **Dedicated Small Satellite Launcher:** It provides **dedicated and rideshare launch services** with **custom orbital deployment**, allowing customers to place satellites in their preferred orbits.

- **Mission Payloads:**

- **Embrace**, a robotic arm from CosmoServe.
- **SOLARAS**- a 1U CubeSat developed by Grahha Space (Karnataka) to demonstrate indigenous satellite technology in orbit.
- **SCOPE**- an in-house payload by Skyroot, is designed to validate the company's onboard spacecraft systems and mission technologies during the Vikram-1 flight.
- **Cosmic Bloom**: developed by Cosmos Diamonds (Karnataka), featuring a diamond jewellery creation (lab grown diamond)
- **Microart**: an 18K gold rocket model holding micro-sculptures of Sir Raman, Dr Sarabhai and Dr Kalam each smaller than a grain of rice.
- **uD3PP and mD3RN**: in-orbit demonstration payloads developed by Dcubed GmbH (Germany), to validate their space technologies under orbital conditions.

Why is Vikram-1 Important?

- Represents a major step towards **commercialization, private participation and global competitiveness** in India's space sector.
- Makes India the **third country after the US and China** to demonstrate private orbital launch capability.

UN Flags Growing Risks from AI

A **UN independent panel** recently warned about **AI development outpacing scientific understanding and regulation**, with **no guarantee that catastrophic risks can be prevented**.

Key Findings	UN Recommendations
• AI Outpacing scientific research and governments' ability to regulate them. • Safety Risks of deceptive and Autonomous AI behaviour raises concerns that AI could cause catastrophic harm, either independently or through malicious use. • Emergence of Agentic AI: systems capable of independently performing real-world tasks are expected to expand rapidly. • Scientific & Economic Impact: AI is accelerating drug discovery, vaccine development and scientific research, though its long-term impact on jobs and economic growth remains uncertain. • Security Threats: include misinformation, cyberattacks, fraud, biological threats, and the potential loss of human control over advanced AI systems. • Weak Global Governance: AI governance remains fragmented, with many countries lacking the capacity to effectively regulate or evaluate advanced AI technologies.	• Strengthen global AI governance: through evidence-based regulation. • Enhance international cooperation and scientific research on AI safety. • Build regulatory capacity especially in developing countries. ✓ A new AI for Good Global Commission has been launched by global leaders and the UN's International Telecommunication Union (ITU) to promote safe AI development. It is co-chaired by Rwandan President and Salesforce CEO.

Battery Hacking Applications and Its Risks

Recently, the government directed Apple and Google to remove **BAT-BMS, Lossigy, and Epoch Li-ion** apps (mostly of Chinese origin) after reports of their misuse to remotely disable e-rickshaw **Battery Management Systems (BMS)** via Bluetooth, raising cybersecurity and passenger safety concerns.

What is BMS? It is an electronic system that monitors, protects and optimizes an EV battery by managing charging, discharging, temperature and cell balance, ensuring **safe operation, longer battery life and better performance**.

What is BMS 'Hack'?

Weak/default passwords in **Bluetooth-enabled BMS** of some e-rickshaws allow nearby attackers (~15 m) to remotely disable the battery, abruptly stopping the vehicle and creating **cybersecurity and passenger safety risks**.

Concerns Raised with the Attack:	Way Forward
• Data & system vulnerability: Poor authentication exposes critical vehicle controls to misuse. • Low-cost EV ecosystem: Inadequate security standards in inexpensive BMS hardware increase vulnerabilities.	• Mandatory authentication: Require strong passwords/PINs and secure pairing for all Bluetooth-enabled BMS. • Security standards: Enforce cybersecurity standards and certification for EV battery management systems. • Secure-by-design BMS: Disable default credentials and encrypt Bluetooth communication. • Regular firmware updates: Ensure timely security patches and software updates for BMS devices. • Regulatory oversight: Strengthen testing and compliance checks for imported and domestically used BMS hardware.

Virtual Autopsy

Forensic experts in Kerala have proposed 'virtual autopsy' (VA) or 'virtopsy'. A detailed project report for establishing a VA centre in the public sector is pending with the state government.

What is VA? It is a **non-invasive or minimally invasive post-mortem examination** that uses advanced imaging technologies such as **CT scans, MRI, and 3D reconstruction** to determine the cause and manner of death **without extensive dissection**.

Need	Objective
• Delays in Conventional Autopsies due to shortage of forensic experts and overcrowded mortuaries. • Need For Faster Release of Bodies while preserving medico-legal evidence.	• Determine the cause and manner of death scientifically. • Preserve digital forensic evidence for investigation and court use. • Ensure timely and dignified return of the body to families.

ZAYNICH

Wockhardt's ZAYNICH™ has become the first New Chemical Entity (NCE) fully discovered, developed and commercialized by an Indian pharmaceutical company to receive US FDA approval (May 2026). It was also approved by the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI).

About ZAYNICH™:

- **Composition:** Cefepime + Zidebactam | **Type:** Intravenous (IV) antibiotic
- **Class:** Beta-lactam enhancer (a new class of antibiotics)
- **Use:** For treatment of **Complicated Urinary Tract Infections (cUTIs)** caused by **multidrug-resistant Gram-negative bacteria**.

Government Brings Advanced Therapies Under Central Licensing

The Central Government recently amended the **Drugs Rules, 1945** to bring **stem cell-derived products, gene therapies, and xenografts** under the **Centrally License Approving Authority (CLAA)** framework.

Drugs Rules, 1945 framed under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 regulate the import, manufacture, sale, distribution, testing, labelling, licensing, and quality control of drugs and cosmetics in India. • They also prescribe standards, define regulatory authorities, and lay down procedures to ensure the safety, efficacy, and quality of drugs.	• Stem cell-derived products: Used in regenerative medicine and CAR-T cell therapies (personalized gene-based immunotherapy) for treating blood cancers such as leukemia and lymphoma. • Gene therapeutic products: Used in gene replacement/editing to treat genetic disorders. • Xenografts: Animal tissue-derived products (e.g., heart valves) used in cardiology and orthopedics.
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CLAA is the apex regulatory body under Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO) responsible for approving clinical trials and issuing manufacturing and import licenses for specified drugs and high-risk medical devices.

Objective of the Amendment: To-

- Strengthen regulatory oversight of advanced medical technologies to ensure patient safety.
- Ensure uniform national regulatory standards through joint Centre-State oversight under the CLAA framework and align India's drug regulation with scientific advancements and global best practices.

Exosomes

Exosomes are emerging as promising tools for disease diagnosis and targeted therapy, aided by advances in single-exosome imaging technology.

What are Exosomes? They are tiny **extracellular vesicles (30-150 nm)** released by most human cells that carry proteins, lipids and nucleic acids for **cell-to-cell communication**.

- **Functions of Exosomes:** Regulate cellular signalling, immune responses, tissue repair and waste removal by transporting biomolecules between cells.
- **Medical Significance:** Emerging as **biomarkers** for diseases and as **drug-delivery vehicles** for targeted therapies.
- **Challenge:** Their extremely small size makes them difficult to isolate and analyze individually, limiting research and clinical applications.

Point-in-Space (PinS) Instrument Approach Procedure

India's first private Point-in-Space (PinS) Instrument Approach Procedure for helicopter operations has been approved at Undavalli Heliport, marking a major milestone in the country's aviation sector.

What is PinS Instrument Approach Procedure? A **satellite-based (Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS)/GPS Aided GEO Augmented Navigation (GAGAN- India's Satellite-Based Augmentation System by ISRO))** instrument approach procedure that enables helicopters to safely approach heliports **without conventional ground-based landing aids**.

Developed by: Airports Authority of India; **Approved by:** Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).

Gujarat's New Data Centre Policy

Gujarat recently launched its first **Data Centre Policy (2026-29)** to position itself as India's hub for hyperscale data centres, cloud computing and AI infrastructure.

Targets: ₹6 lakh crore investment; 7.5 GW data centre capacity; Large-scale employment generation.

Key Incentives:	Sustainability Measures:	Strategic Focus:
• Capital & interest subsidy. • Power tariff subsidy and 100% electricity duty exemption. • SGST reimbursement on local procurement • Stamp duty & registration fee exemption. • Financial assistance for captive desalination plants (to meet water needs).	At least 51% of electricity from green energy. Water supply through desalination, reducing pressure on freshwater resources.	• Develop Dholera as a Data Centre City and Global Capability Centre (GCC) hub. • Strengthen connectivity through cable landing stations, airport and transport infrastructure.

Significance: Boosts **AI, cloud computing, digital payments, e-commerce, and electronics manufacturing**, leverages **Gujarat's renewable energy and coastline**, and helps bridge India's **data centre capacity gap** (20% of global data generated vs ~3% data centre capacity).

New Breakthrough for Tritium Removal from Nuclear Wastewater

A new study published in Environmental Science & Technology offers a potential method to efficiently clean tritiated water.

About Tritium (T or ^3H): Radioactive isotope of hydrogen (1 proton, 2 neutrons); has a **half-life of 12.32 years**. It is produced naturally and in **nuclear reactors**.

Why is it a concern? Tritium remains in **Fukushima-treated wastewater** as **tritiated water (HTO)**, which is difficult to separate from ordinary water and is readily absorbed by living organisms,

New Method of Tritium Removal: Uses an **active distillation packing** by coating a stainless-steel mesh with the **metal-organic framework (MOF)** called **NH₂-MIL-101(Cr)** to selectively separate tritium, making the process **faster and more energy-efficient** than conventional distillation.

QDENG

The Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) has granted market authorization to Takeda Biopharmaceuticals India's QDENG (TAK-003), making it the first dengue vaccine to be approved in the country.

About QDENG: Approved for **prevention of dengue** in individuals **4-60 years**, it is a **Live-attenuated tetravalent vaccine** (protects against **four dengue virus serotypes**).

Key Features: Can be given **regardless of previous dengue infection**. **No pre-vaccination screening** required. **2 doses** to be administered **3 months apart**. It demonstrated **long-term protection (up to 7 years)** across all four serotypes.

eVTOL

The ePlane Company, an IIT Madras-incubated startup, recently launched India's first electric vertical take-off and landing (eVTOL) aircraft prototype. Commercial services will begin by 2028 with air ambulances before expanding into passenger transport.

About eVTOL (Electric Vertical Take-off and Landing Aircraft):

It is an **Electric aircraft** that **takes off/lands vertically** like a **helicopter** and **flies like an aeroplane**. It uses **multiple electric propellers**; **no runway** required.

Advantages	Key Challenges
• Low noise & maintenance. • Safer due to multiple propellers (redundancy). • Ideal for short urban travel.	• Aircraft certification. • Vertiport & charging infrastructure. • Battery range/payload limitations. • Regulatory framework.

PRAXIS

NASA recently selected a mission concept called 'PRAXIS' for its Innovative Advanced Concepts (NIAC) 2026 phase I funding.

✓ NIAC is a NASA programme that funds **innovative, high-risk, high-reward concepts** with the potential to transform future space missions.

What is PRAXIS? PRAXIS (Planetary Rings Autonomous EXploration with In-situ Sampling) is a **NASA mission concept** featuring an **AI-powered, bio-inspired robotic explorer** designed to directly sample particles from planetary rings for the first time.

Objective: To study the **formation, evolution, and composition** of planetary rings.

Working: It uses a **touch-and-go** technique, grazing the ring plane and collecting samples with a **deployable boom** while avoiding collisions. Onboard instruments and **AI** analyse the particles' **size, porosity, and composition** before moving to another region for further sampling.

Embodied AI

Boston Dynamics' Spot robot now uses **Google DeepMind's Gemini Robotics-ER 1.6**, enabling advanced spatial reasoning, autonomous decision-making, and continuous learning—marking a major advancement in **embodied AI**.

What is an Embodied AI? It is an AI approach where intelligence emerges from the interaction of the **brain, body, and environment**, with the robot's body actively contributing to learning and decision-making.

Features: Learns through real-world interaction, uses **morphological computation** (body design reduces computation), and enables adaptive, autonomous behaviour.

Applications: **Humanoid and quadruped robots**, autonomous manufacturing, logistics, healthcare, and service robots.

Challenges: **Simulation-to-real gap**, limited real-world training data, battery constraints, safety, and real-time decision-making.

Embodied AI vs Neuromorphic AI: **Embodied AI** focuses on **where intelligence resides** (brain + body + environment) whereas **Neuromorphic AI** redesigns physical computer chips to mimic biological brains. Instead of traditional sequential processing, it uses Spiking Neural Networks (SNNs)

Beta Pictoris d

Using **James Webb Space Telescope**, astronomers discovered **Beta Pictoris d**, a giant exoplanet orbiting a nearby star **Beta Pictoris**, which already hosts **Beta Pictoris b** and **c**.

How was Beta Pictoris d detected? Through **atmospheric spectroscopy** (CO fingerprint), later confirmed by **water vapour and methane**- not by direct imaging.

Features- **~2 times Jupiter masses**, remained hidden within the system's **bright debris disk**.

Significance: **First directly imaged exoplanet discovered primarily through spectroscopy**, opening a new way to detect planets hidden in dusty planetary systems.

Cosmic Rescue

NASA recently launched LINK - a rescue spacecraft (built by Katalyst Space Technologies, an Arizona startup) to **capture and reboost** the ageing **Neil Gehrels Swift Observatory**.

During its orbit commissioning phase, LINK encountered a propulsion and attitude control anomaly that caused an unexpected spin, though teams have since slowed the spin.

Why is the Cosmic Rescue Mission Needed?

- **Swift's orbit has decayed** due to atmospheric drag, accelerated by the **2024 solar maximum**, putting it at risk of re-entering and burning up.
- **Replacing Swift would be costly and time-consuming**, whereas the rescue mission is a much cheaper alternative.
- **Swift is vital for detecting gamma-ray bursts**, providing rapid observations of explosive cosmic events such as supernovae and neutron star mergers.
- **The mission will boost Swift's orbit**, extending its scientific life by **about 10 years**.

Significance: Demonstrates **on-orbit satellite servicing**, offering a cost-effective alternative to replacing satellites and paving the way for future **repair, refuelling, and life-extension missions**.

Sant Ravidas

- The 650th birth anniversary year of Sant Guru Ravidas will be celebrated as the Samarasya Sankalp Abhiyan.
- A national campaign will be conducted from the auspicious day of Guru Purnima on 29th July till the birth anniversary of Sant Guru Ravidas on 20th February next year. Sant Ravidas Jayanti is observed on **Magh Purnima**.
- Born in **1377 C.E. in Varanasi**, Uttar Pradesh, Guru Ravidas was an Indian mystic, poet, social reformer and spiritual guru.
- Also known by Raidas, Rohidas and Ruhidas - his devotional songs and verses created a lasting impact upon the **Bhakti Movement**.
- He was among the first people to oppose the Indian caste system through his poems and teachings based on spirituality and spread the message of equality.
- Around 41 poems accredited to Ravidas were included in the **Adi Granth**, the sacred scripture of Sikhism.
- Guru Ravidas is considered the founder of the Ravidasia religion. He was also known as the spiritual guide of Meera Bai, who is an eminent personality in the sphere of Hindu spiritualism.

Jodhpur Mojari

- The Centre has granted a Geographical Indication (GI) tag to Jodhpur's Mojari craft.
- **Jodhpur Mojari** is a traditional handcrafted leather footwear from **Jodhpur, Rajasthan**, renowned for its fine craftsmanship, durability and distinctive Marwari design.
- The craft has evolved over nearly **200 years** and has traditionally been patronised by the royal families of Marwar before becoming an integral part of Rajasthan's cultural heritage.
- Jodhpuri Mojari are **crafted by members of a caste called Jinagar**, who were traditionally saddle makers.

AWARDS/ PERSONALITIES IN NEWS

Commonwealth Games

- The 23rd Commonwealth Games (CWG) begun recently in Glasgow, Scotland. The last edition of the games were held in Birmingham (2022).
- Nine sports have been dropped from the 2026 CWG. The nine sports are **Badminton, Cricket, Hockey, Squash, Table tennis, Wrestling, Triathlon, beach volleyball and rugby sevens**.
- The 2026 CWG will **feature only 10 sports**: athletics and para-athletics, boxing, lawn bowls and para-lawnbowls, swimming and para-swimming, artistic gymnastics, track cycling and para-track cycling, netball, weightlifting and para-powerlifting, judo, 3×3 basketball and 3×3 wheelchair basketball.
- The CWG is a **quadrennial international multi-sport event** among athletes from the Commonwealth of Nations, which consists mostly, but not exclusively, of territories of the former British Empire.
- The event was first held in 1930 as the **British Empire Games** and, with the exception of 1942 and 1946 (which were cancelled due to World War II), has successively run every four years since.
- The event is overseen by the Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF), which controls the sporting programme and selects host cities.

First-ever Mixed Disability Ashes

- England will host Australia in the first-ever Mixed Disability Ashes in 2027.
- The series will be held in T20 International format, marking a milestone in the growth of disability cricket.
- The addition of the Mixed Disability Ashes means England's men's, women's and mixed disability teams will all play Ashes contests during the same season.
- **Mixed disability cricket** brings together players with different categories of disabilities—including **physical disabilities, hearing impairments and intellectual disabilities**—to compete in the same team.
- The announcement reflects the growing emphasis on **inclusion, diversity and accessibility in international sport**, in line with the principles of the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD)**.

Ashes Series

- It is the oldest and most celebrated bilateral Test cricket series played between England and Australia.
- The series is traditionally contested **biennially**, with the host nation alternating between England and Australia.
- The term originated after Australia defeated England at The Oval in London in 1882, marking Australia's first Test victory on English soil

Fields Medal

- Two Chinese mathematicians, Yu Deng and Hong Wang, are among **four winners** of this year's Fields Medal — the highest prize in mathematics, awarded once every four years to mathematicians under 40.
- The other two winners are John Pardon (US) and Jacob Tsimerman (Soviet-born Canadian).
- This marks the **first time** any Chinese national has won the award, though Chinese-origin mathematicians like Terrence Tao have won previously.
- Wang becomes only the **third woman** to win the medal, after Maryam Mirzakhani and Maryna Viazovska.
- Both Chinese winners teach at American universities but remain Chinese nationals.