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Institute for IAS Examination

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**CURRENT
AFFAIRS**



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Editor's Cut

- SC on Live-in Relationships
- Indian Statistical Institute Bill, 2026
- Tribunals Reforms Act, 2026
- FSSAI Crackdown on Misleading Food Claims
- SC Upheld Hanging as a Constitutional Mode of Execution
- SC Modifies Practice Requirement for Judicial Service
- Declining Corporate Investment in India
- National Circular Bioenergy Scheme
- Reimagining Skilling for Viksit Bharat
- Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2026
- The Mecca Agreement
- India-Uzbekistan Relations

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SC on Live-in Relationships

In *Dr. Lokesh B.H. v. State of Karnataka* (2026), the Supreme Court (SC) expanded the scope of **Section 498A** of the Indian Penal Code (IPC- now **Section 85** of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)), holding that its protection against domestic cruelty extends to women in live-in relationships "in the nature of marriage," provided there is a dual threshold of cohabitation and intent to marry.

Key Statutory Provisions

- **Section 498A IPC / Section 85 BNS:** Criminalizes cruelty inflicted on a woman by her husband or his relatives, carrying a punishment of up to 3 years imprisonment and a fine.
- **Legal Definition of Cruelty:**
 - **Physical/Mental Harm:** Any willful conduct likely to drive a woman to suicide or cause grave injury/danger to her life, limb, or physical/mental health.
 - **Harassment for Dowry:** Harassment aimed at coercing her or her relatives to meet unlawful demands for property or valuable security.

Key Rulings of the Supreme Court

- **Purposive Interpretation & Article 14 Grounding:** The Court held that denying criminal protection to cohabitating women facing cruelty lacks a rational nexus with the objective of preventing domestic violence, making such distinction offensive to **Article 14 (Right to Equality)**.
- **Dual Test- "Nature of Marriage" + "Intent to Marry":** Not all live-in relationships automatically qualify under Section 498A / Section 85 BNS. The relationship must satisfy two conditions:
 - ▶ **Relationship in the Nature of Marriage:** As defined under **Section 2(f) of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence (DV) Act, 2005**, where partners live together in a shared household in a marriage-like setup.
 - ▶ **Intent to Marry:** The partners must possess a shared intention to marry. Where partners explicitly choose *never* to enter matrimony, the penal provisions of criminal law cannot be invoked.
- **Distinction Between DV Act, 2005 and Section 498A / Section 85 BNS:** Rejection of Union Government & Petitioner arguments that the **DV Act, 2005** already provides adequate remedy to live-in partners. **SC clarified** that the DV Act is primarily a civil welfare statute offering civil remedies (maintenance, protection orders). Section 498A creates direct criminal liability backed by deterrence. Equating civil remedies with criminal deterrence is a "misstatement of law."
- **Burden of Proof:** The initial evidentiary burden to establish both a "relationship in the nature of marriage" and the "intent to marry" lies on the female partner seeking protection.
- **Prevention of Misuse:** To curb potential abuse and arbitrary detentions, the SC directed strict compliance with guidelines from **Arnesh Kumar v. State of Bihar (2014)**:
 - ▶ Mandatory assessment of necessity under **Section 41 CrPC / Section 35 BNSS** before arrest.
 - ▶ Prohibition of automatic or routine arrests without recorded justifications.
- **Limited Statutory Application:** The Court explicitly clarified that this expanded interpretation is **strictly confined to Section 498A IPC / Section 85 BNS** and does not automatically alter other statutory or personal laws (e.g., succession, adoption, or bigamy).

Evolution of "Relationship in the Nature of Marriage"

The concept originates from **Section 2(f)** of the DV Act, 2005 and was expanded through key judicial precedents:

Precedent	Key Judicial Principles / Indicators
D. Velusamy v. D. Patchaiammal (2010)	Equated it to common-law marriage: required both parties to be of legal age to marry, voluntarily cohabiting, and holding themselves out to society as akin to spouses.
Indra Sarma v. V.K.V. Sarma (2013)	Laid down illustrative (non-exhaustive) factors: long-term cohabitation in a shared household, financial pooling, shared domestic arrangements, and public projection as spouses.



Indian Statistical Institute Bill, 2026

The Central government recently introduced the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) Bill, 2026 to replace the Indian Statistical Institute Act, 1959 governing the Indian Statistical Institute. However, several provisions have drawn opposition from ISI faculty and Members of Parliament.

About the ISI Bill, 2026:

The **ISI Bill, 2026** seeks to replace the **ISI Act, 1959**, by converting ISI from a society into a **statutory "body corporate"** while retaining its status as an **Institution of National Importance**.

Objectives:

- **Modernize governance** and overcome limitations of the existing society-based structure.
- Make ISI a **global centre of excellence** in Statistical Sciences and allied fields.
- Promote **interdisciplinary research** across statistics, mathematics, economics, computer science, data science etc.
- Build a skilled pool of **statisticians and data scientists** for government, industry and society.
- Strengthen industry-academia-government collaboration and support **evidence-based policymaking**.

Indian Statistical Institute (ISI)

- **Origin:** The ISI was founded by **P.C. Mahalanobis** in 1931 in Kolkata as a learned society for statistical research and training. It became India's premier statistical institution and was declared an **Institution of National Importance under the ISI Act, 1959**.
- **Functions:** Conducts **teaching and research** in statistics, mathematics and allied fields; empowered to grant degrees and receive Central grants.
- **Geographical Presence:** **Headquartered in Kolkata**, with centres in **Delhi, Bengaluru, Chennai and Tezpur**.
- **Governance:** Till now, its highest decision-making body is a **33-member Council**, comprising an elected Chairperson, Central Government representatives and external scientists. The **Director**, appointed by the Council, serves as the Institute's **academic and administrative head**.

Key Provisions of the ISI Bill, 2026:

- **Wider Academic Powers:** Empowers ISI to conduct education, training and research in **statistics, mathematics, economics, computer science and other allied fields**; establish centres/campuses in India and abroad; award degrees, diplomas, fellowships and scholarships; and promote **start-ups and incubation**.
- **Inclusive and Merit-Based Institution:** Provides for admission based on **transparent and reasonable merit criteria**, while allowing special provisions for women, persons with disabilities and socially and educationally backward classes, including **Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes**. ISI will be treated as a **Central Educational Institution** for reservation purposes.
- **New Governance Structure:** Converts ISI into a **statutory body corporate** and introduces the **President of India as Visitor**, an **11-member Board of Governors** as the principal executive body.
- **Visitor:** The **President of India** will be the Visitor, empowered to **review the Institute, order inquiries, and issue binding directions** based on their findings.
- **Board of Governors:** Responsible for the **overall policy, administration and management** of the Institute and serves as its **final decision-making body** on academic, administrative, personnel, financial and developmental matters.

- **Composition:** Chairperson + **2 Central Government representatives** + **4 eminent external experts** (including at least **1 woman**) + **4 ISI representatives**.

✓ Chairperson (from amongst eminent persons in the field of academia, industry, education, public policy, Statistical Sciences and allied sciences, or other fields) will be nominated by the Visitor on the recommendation of the Central Government.

- **Key Powers:** Approves the **budget and development plans**, establishes/merges/discontinues centres and programmes, grants degrees, creates posts, determines fees and manages finances.
- **Accountability:** The Board is **accountable to the Central Government** and must periodically review the Institute's performance and submit the report to the government.
- **Academic Council** (Headed by the Director) will be the principal academic body, responsible for **courses, admissions, examinations and interdisciplinary research**, while advising the Board on programmes, degrees and collaborations; **Management Councils** may oversee the academic, administrative and financial affairs of *individual Centres*.

- **Strengthened Executive Leadership:** The **Director** acts as the **Chief Executive Officer**, responsible for implementing

Board/Academic Council decisions and day-to-day administration; **appointed by the Board with prior Visitor approval**, with removal also requiring Visitor approval.

- **Centre-Level Expansion:** Enables ISI to establish new centres with **prior Central Government approval** and permits existing centres to be modified, merged, relocated or discontinued according to academic priorities.

- **Financial Sustainability:** Provides for **Central Government grants**,

authority for ISI to **generate revenue**, and a dedicated **Fund** comprising government grants, fees and other receipts. It also mandates a **corpus fund for long-term financial sustainability**, with funds used for the Institute's functioning and objectives.

Concerns Raised Regarding the Bill:

- **Erosion of Autonomy:** The proposed Board gives the **Central Government direct or indirect control over its members**, raising concerns over excessive executive influence.
- **Greater Control Over Director:** The Director's **appointment and removal require Visitor approval**, with greater government influence over the selection process, potentially affecting institutional independence.
- **Reduced Stakeholder Representation:** The proposed compact Board may reduce the role of **faculty and internal ISI stakeholders** in decision-making compared with the existing 33-member Council.
- **Inadequate Consultation:** Faculty, students and other stakeholders have alleged **insufficient consultation** before introducing the Bill, despite the government citing review committees and a brainstorming exercise.
- **Headquarters Ambiguity:** The Bill **does not explicitly mention Kolkata as ISI's headquarters**, unlike the existing framework, creating apprehension about a possible relocation; the government has denied any such proposal.
- **Government Accountability vs Academic Freedom:** While stronger accountability and administrative efficiency may be desirable, critics fear that **excessive Central Government oversight could undermine academic freedom and research autonomy**.

Way Forward

- **Balance Autonomy with Accountability:** Ensure meaningful representation of **faculty, academics and other stakeholders** on the Board.
- **Transparent Appointments:** Make the **Director-selection process merit-based, independent, and transparent**.
- **Wider Consultation:** Institutionalize consultations with **faculty, students, alumni and the ISI Society** before finalizing the framework.
- **Maintain Academic Freedom:** Ensure government oversight focuses on **accountability and public funding**, without compromising academic and research autonomy.



Tribunals Reforms Act, 2026

The Tribunals Reforms Act, 2026 which seeks to repeal the Tribunals Reforms Act, 2021 received President's assent recently.

What is Tribunals Reforms Act, 2026?

It replaces the 2021 framework to create a **more efficient, uniform, transparent, and independent tribunal system**.

Need for Reform:

- **Supreme Court Directives:** The Supreme Court (SC), through S.P. Sampath Kumar vs UOI (1987) and L. Chandra Kumar vs UOI (1997), said that tribunals' decisions remain subject to review by High Courts because judicial review is part of the basic structure. In Rojer Mathew vs UOI (2019), the Court recommended an independent, statutory National Tribunals Commission (NTC) to oversee the selection and administration of tribunals.
- **2021 Framework:** The SC in *Madras Bar Association v. Union of India (2025)* the Court struck down provisions of the **Tribunals Reforms Act, 2021** that violated **separation of powers and judicial independence** and directed for the establishment of an **independent, professionally competent and transparent NTC** for tribunal appointments and oversight.
- **Administrative Problems:** Vacancies, delays, and fragmented appointment mechanisms weakened the effectiveness of tribunals.
- **Lack of Uniformity:** Different tribunals had varying qualifications, tenure and service conditions.

Key Provisions of the Act:

- **National Tribunals Commission (NTC):** It will **select tribunal members, review tribunal performance, oversee complaints, and maintain the National Tribunals Data Grid**. Its accounts will be audited by the **Comptroller and Auditor-General of India (CAG)**.
- **Composition of NTC:** It will comprise of **5 members-** a **Chairperson (a SC Judge or Chief Justice of a High Court (HC)), two Judicial Members (HC Chief Justices or Judges) and two Technical Members** (with at least **25 years of experience** in fields such as public administration, finance, law, accountancy, banking, management or technology). The **Chairperson and Members are appointed by the Central Government**, with consultation of the **Chief Justice of India (CJI)** for the Chairperson and Judicial Members.

- **Tenure:** They hold office for **5 years or until 70 years of age**, whichever is earlier. They may resign with **three months' written notice**.

- **Removal & Safeguards:** The Central Government may remove them for **insolvency, conviction for moral turpitude, incapacity, conflict of interest or abuse of position**. For removal on grounds of conflict of interest or abuse of position, an **inquiry and opportunity of hearing** are mandatory, with the inquiry committee headed by a **SC Judge nominated by the CJI**.

Search-cum-Selection Committees:

For Selecting a Tribunal Chairperson

- **Chairperson of the National Tribunals Commission**
- **Technical Member of the Commission**
- **Retired Chief Justice of a HC**, nominated by the Commission Chairperson
- **Secretary to the Government of India**, nominated by the Central Government. In case of appointment for State Administrative Tribunals, the Chief Secretary to the State Government concerned shall be the Member.
- **Two empanelled experts** who assessed the candidates
- **Secretary of the Commission-** Member Secretary

For Selecting a Tribunal Member:

- **Judicial Member of the National Tribunals Commission-** Committee Chair
- **Technical Member of the Commission**
- **Retired HC Judge**, nominated by the Commission Chairperson
- **Secretary to the Government of India**, nominated by the Central Government. In case of appointment to State Administrative Tribunals, the Chief Secretary to the State Government concerned shall be the Member
- **Two empanelled experts** who assessed the candidates
- **Secretary of the Commission-** Member Secretary



- **Secretariat of NTC:** The **Central Government appoints** an officer of the rank of Secretary to the Government of India to head the NTC Secretariat, which functions under the **NTC Chairperson's oversight**. It will **empanel experts** for candidate assessment, **forward recommendations** to Centre within **3 days**, **provide administrative support** and **prepare annual reports**.

Safeguard

The Committee Chair has a **casting vote**, while experts and the Member Secretary have **no voting rights**. The Committee recommends candidates to the Central Government through the Secretariat.

- **Time-Bound Appointments:** Search cum Selection Committee recommends **one suitable candidate + one waiting-list candidate** for each vacancy to the Secretariat; recommendations are communicated to the government within **3 days**, and the Centre must make the appointment within **3 months**.

- Previous **work performance** must be considered for reappointment; for Members, the concerned Tribunal's President/Chairperson is also consulted.

- **Uniform Tenure for Tribunals:** For Chairperson- 5 years/70 years, whichever is earlier and for **Members**- 5 years/67 years, whichever is earlier.

- **Removal of Tribunal Members:** Members may be removed on grounds including **insolvency, moral turpitude, incapacity, conflict of interest, abuse of position, incompetence/inefficiency or paid assignments**. Complaints on specified grounds undergo inquiry through the NTC.

- **Regulations:** NTC can make regulations on its functioning, vacancy advertisements, candidate assessment and expert empanelment, in consultation with the Centre.

- **Rules:** Central Government can make rules covering **NTC service conditions, Secretariat, tribunal qualifications, selection, service conditions and inquiry procedures**; these are also laid before Parliament.

- **Good-Faith Protection:** Legal proceedings are barred for actions **done in good faith** under the Act.

Concerns Raised	Way Forward
• Incomplete Institutional Independence: Though the NTC has a judicial majority, its Chairperson and Members are appointed by the Central Government, with only consultation with the CJI. This may limit its autonomy. • Excessive Executive Rulemaking: Crucial matters such as qualifications, selection, salaries, removal and service conditions of tribunal members depend on Central Government rules, raising concerns over excessive delegated legislation. • Executive Control Over Administration: The Centre appoints the NTC Secretariat Secretary and provides grants to the Commission, creating potential administrative and financial dependence. • Ministry as Gatekeeper in Complaints: Complaints against tribunal members on specified grounds undergo preliminary inquiry by the concerned Ministry/Department before reaching the NTC, raising a potential conflict of interest. • Potential Conflict Between Independence and Removal Powers: The Central Government retains significant removal powers over NTC and tribunal members, which could affect their perceived independence. • Limited Autonomy of NTC Regulations: NTC's regulation-making power operates in consultation with the Central Government, potentially restricting its functional autonomy.	• Ensure Genuine NTC Autonomy: Give the Commission greater independence in appointment, administration and finances, with a more balanced appointment mechanism involving the judiciary. • Reduce Delegated Legislation: Clearly specify core qualifications, eligibility and service conditions in the parent legislation itself, leaving only procedural details to rules. • Independent Disciplinary Mechanism: Allow complaints to go directly to the NTC, eliminating Ministry-level preliminary scrutiny. • Professionalize Tribunals: Create a specialist tribunal cadre, supported by domain experts, adequate infrastructure and robust digital case-management systems.



FSSAI Crackdown on Misleading Food Claims

Recently, Mondelez India withdrew certain health and nutrient-comparison claims related to Bournvita following action by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). The FSSAI has issued **150+ notices** to food companies for misleading advertisements, false claims, and labelling violations.

Recent Regulatory Measures by FSSAI:

- **Action against Misleading Claims:** FSSAI is scrutinizing claims such as **“healthy”, “immunity-boosting”, “energy-giving”** and nutrient-comparison claims that lack adequate scientific substantiation.
- **‘100% Claims:** FSSAI has advised against absolute claims such as **“100%”, “pure” and “natural”**, which may create a false impression of purity or superiority.
- **Front-of-Pack Nutrition Labelling (FOPNL):** FSSAI has proposed a **red hexagonal warning label** on packaged foods that are high in **salt, added sugar or added fat**. The rollout is proposed in two phases:
 - **Phase I:** Warning applies only to products that are **high in at least two** of these nutrients.
 - **Phase II:** The warning will be extended to products that are **high in even one** of these nutrients.
 - **Basis:** The thresholds will be based on the **Dietary Guidelines for Indians, 2024**, issued by the **Indian Council of Medical Research-National Institute of Nutrition (ICMR-NIN)**. The phased approach is intended to **facilitate consumer acceptance and give industry time to reformulate products**.
- **Digital Advertising:** Scrutiny has extended to **e-commerce platforms, online product listings and food-service establishments**, recognizing the growing influence of digital marketing.
- **Child Nutrition:** Products marketed as beneficial for children warrant greater scrutiny because such claims can strongly influence parental choices.

Why does it Matter?

- **Consumer Protection:** Enables consumers to make informed choices and reduces reliance on **misleading health and nutrition claims**.
- **Public Health:** Helps address the growing burden of **obesity and unhealthy diets** by making high-risk nutrients more visible.
- **Information Integrity:** Shifts regulation from merely checking **what is in a food product** to also regulating **how its nutritional qualities and benefits are communicated**.
- **Preventive Regulation:** Front-of-pack warnings can provide

Key Challenges	Way Forward
• Two-Nutrient Threshold: Phase I may exclude products that are excessively high in just one nutrient. • ‘Added’ Nutrient Challenge: Distinguishing added sugar/fat from naturally occurring nutrients can complicate implementation and consumer understanding. • Implementation Uncertainty: There is no clear timeline for Phase I & II, potentially delaying comprehensive coverage. • Visibility & Accessibility: Small font size and use of English alone may limit the effectiveness and accessibility of warnings. • Digital Monitoring: Rapidly changing claims across e-commerce and social media make continuous enforcement difficult. • Reactive Enforcement: Corrective action against misleading claims may occur only after prolonged consumer exposure.	• Evidence-Based Regulation: Mandate credible scientific substantiation for health and nutritional claims. • Effective FOPNL: Ensure warning thresholds are science-based and sufficiently comprehensive, including products high in a single nutrient. • Clear Standards: Standardize terms such as “healthy”, “natural”, “pure” and “immunity-boosting” to prevent ambiguity. • Proactive Digital Monitoring: Use AI and technology-enabled surveillance to track misleading claims across online platforms. • Accessible Labelling: Make warnings prominent, multilingual, and easily understandable. • Consumer Awareness: Strengthen nutrition literacy so consumers can interpret front-of-pack warnings alongside ingredient lists and nutrition panels.

information **at the point of purchase**, rather than relying only on corrective action after misleading claims are made.

- **Corporate Accountability:** Encourages food businesses to improve **product formulation, labelling, and advertising practices**

Extra Mile: FSSAI Regulation of Alcoholic Beverages

Recently, the FSSAI directed a Tamil Nadu distillery to stop selling 11 liquor products after detecting **artificial/nature-identical flavouring substances**. The order was later revoked after an appeal.

What is the Constitutional Issue?

- **State Jurisdiction:** Entry 8, State List (List II) places *intoxicating liquors* under State jurisdiction, covering their production, manufacture, possession, transport, purchase and sale.
- **Central Jurisdiction:** Entry 18, Concurrent List (List III) covers the **adulteration of foodstuffs and other goods**, enabling Parliament to legislate on food safety.
- **Legal Overlap:** The **Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 (FSS Act)** treats alcoholic beverages as *food* for purposes of **composition, additives, contaminants, safety and labelling**. Thus, **State excise laws regulate liquor as an intoxicating commodity**, while **FSSAI regulates it as a food product**.

Way Forward:

- **Consumer Protection:** Ensure truthful labelling and prevent consumers from being misled about a product's **identity, composition or quality**.
- **Food Safety & Standards:** Develop **clear, uniform and science-based standards** for alcoholic beverages, including permitted flavouring substances.
- **Regulatory Clarity:** Strengthen **Centre-State coordination** to ensure FSSAI and State excise authorities operate within their respective domains.
- **Proportionate Enforcement:** Establish transparent protocols for **inspection, sampling, appeals and prohibition/recall orders**.
- **Market Integrity:** Prevent artificial additives or labelling practices from creating a **false impression of product quality or authenticity**.
- **Technological Adaptation:** Periodically update standards to address advances in food technology that can increasingly **replicate traditional flavours and characteristics**.



SC Upheld Hanging as a Constitutional Mode of Execution

Recently, a Supreme Court (SC) bench upheld the constitutional validity of hanging as a mode of executing a death sentence, dismissing a PIL that argued the method is scientifically unreliable and violates the right to a dignified death under Article 21.

Core Issue

Whether prescribing **hanging as the statutory method of execution** continues to satisfy the constitutional requirement of a **fair, just and reasonable procedure**?

Related Judicial Precedents

- **Jagmohan Singh v. State of U.P. (1972):** The Supreme Court upheld the **constitutional validity of the death penalty**, rejecting challenges under Articles 14, 19 and 21. It held that the sentencing procedure under the law provided sufficient safeguards, and that capital punishment was not inherently unconstitutional.
- **Rajendra Prasad v. State of U.P. (1979):** The Supreme Court adopted a **restrictive approach to capital punishment**, holding that death should be imposed only in exceptional cases, particularly where the interests of society and the security of the State were seriously threatened. The judgment contributed to the judicial movement towards limiting the use of the death penalty, later crystallised in *Bachan Singh*.
- **Bachan Singh v. State of Punjab (1980):** A 5-judge Constitution Bench upheld the **constitutional validity of the death penalty** but laid down the **“rarest of rare” doctrine**. It held that death penalty should be imposed only when the alternative of life imprisonment is unquestionably foreclosed, requiring courts to consider both **aggravating and mitigating circumstances**.
- **Deena v. Union of India (1983):** A 3-Judge Bench upheld **hanging under Section 354(5) CrPC** as a constitutionally valid method of execution, holding that properly administered hanging is **quick, simple and decent** and does not violate Article 21. It also found **no demonstrable advantage of alternatives** such as lethal injection, electrocution, lethal gas or shooting. The judgment remains the **binding precedent under the principle of stare decisis**.
 - **Stare decisis** (Latin term) means **“to stand by things decided”** and requires courts to follow **established judicial precedents**, particularly decisions of higher or larger Benches.
- **Shashi Nayar v. Union of India (1991):** The Supreme Court declined to reconsider the constitutional validity of the **death penalty**, reaffirming the position established in *Bachan Singh*. The judgment is significant for the present issue because the Court also considered the reasoning in *Deena*, strengthening the precedential basis for retaining hanging as a method of execution.
- **Gian Kaur v. State of Punjab (1996):** A 5-judge Constitution Bench held that Article 21 protects the **right to live with human dignity** but does not confer a general **“right to die”**. The judgment is relevant to the hanging challenge because petitioners relied on the broader constitutional principle of dignity to argue that **death-row prisoners continue to retain protection against cruel and degrading treatment until execution**.

Why was hanging Challenged as legally prescribed method of executing a death sentence?

- **Not Reliably Instantaneous:** Hanging may result in death through strangulation/asphyxiation rather than the intended cervical fracture.
- **Risk of Botched Execution:** An incorrect drop may cause prolonged suffering, while an excessive drop could cause decapitation.
- **Physical and Psychological Suffering:** The execution process and the anticipation of death cause severe mental and physical trauma.
- **Scientific Developments:** Medical and scientific evidence available today casts doubt on assumptions relied upon in earlier cases.
- **Dignity under Article 21:** Even a person sentenced to death retains the constitutional protection against **cruel, degrading or unnecessarily painful treatment**.

Related Constitutional and Legal Framework:

Provision/Case	Significance
Article 21	Protects life and personal liberty; requires deprivation of life to follow a fair, just and reasonable procedure.
Section 393(5), Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023	Provides that a death sentence shall direct that the person “be hanged by the neck till he is dead.”
CrPC, 1973 → BNSS, 2023	Hanging has continued as the principal statutory method of civilian execution despite changes in criminal procedure law.

Law Commission Recommendations on Hanging

- **35th Report (1967):** The method of execution should be “**certain, humane, quick and decent**”, but did not recommend immediate replacement of hanging.
- **187th Report (2003):** Re-examined the **physical and mental suffering associated with hanging** and recommended **lethal injection as an alternative mode of execution**.

What did the SC Rule? The Court relied principally on **two factors**:

- **Existing Supreme Court Precedent:** The Court found that the petitioners had not produced sufficient new scientific evidence to fundamentally undermine the conclusions reached in ***Deena v Union of India (1983)***. Therefore, there was no adequate basis to reopen the constitutional validity of hanging.
- **Legislative Reaffirmation:** Parliament had **retained hanging while enacting the BNSS**. The Court treated this as significant because the legislature had an opportunity to change the existing method of execution but chose to continue it.



SC Modifies Practice Requirement for Judicial Service

Recently, the Supreme Court (SC), in a 2:1 majority judgment (Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice A.G. Masih (*Majority*), Justice K. Vinod Chandran (*Dissenting*)) in *Bhumika Trust v. Union of India (2026)*, upheld the need for prior legal practice for entry into the judicial service but modified its 2025 ruling by reducing the required Bar experience from three years to one year.

Evolution of the Practice Requirement

- **1993- Second All India Judges' Association (AIJA) Case:** The SC prescribed **three years of Bar practice** for entry-level judicial service, considering practical experience essential for competent, independent and honest judicial officers.
- **2002- Third AIJA Case:** Based on the **Shetty Commission's** recommendations, the Court abolished the requirement and allowed fresh law graduates to enter judicial service, while emphasizing intensive training after recruitment.
 - **Shetty Commission Report: Justice K.J. Shetty Commission (1996)** recommended abolishing the **3-year Bar practice requirement**, noting that modern law courses already provide **court exposure through internships and clinical training**.
- **2025:** The SC restored the **three-year practice requirement**, citing the lack of familiarity of fresh graduates with court procedure, courtroom functioning and the practical realities of litigation.
- **2026:** The Court modified the requirement, recognizing that meaningful courtroom exposure could also be acquired through **institutional training and supervised clerkship**.

Why is Practical Experience Important?

The Court held that a Civil Judge deals, from the very beginning, with matters concerning **life, liberty, property and personal rights**. Court exposure helps develop:

- **Judicial temperament and patience**
- **Empathy towards litigants**
- **Courtroom discipline**

- Understanding of **Bench-Bar relations**
- Practical **legal reasoning and decision-making**

Thus, academic excellence alone may not adequately prepare a person for judicial office.

What did the SC Rule in the Present Case?

The Court adopted a **transitional and post-transitional framework**:

Transitional Period (May 2025- March 2027) • Exam Eligibility: Open to all law graduates without requiring prior Bar practice or practice certificates ("<i>deemed practice</i>"). • Status Post-Selection: Selected candidates are designated as "Trainee Judicial Officers". • Stipend/Remuneration: Trainees receive 50% of the gross remuneration of a Judicial Magistrate First Class (JMFC). • 2-Year Structured Pipeline: ○ Year 1: Intensive training at the State Judicial Academy. ○ Year 2: Supervised Law Clerkship split into 6 months under a Principal District Judge or a member of the Higher Judicial Service and 6 months under a sitting High Court (HC) Judge. • Confirmation: Trainees are appointed as regular judges with full pay after receiving a favorable evaluation report from HC judges.	Post-Transitional Period (From April 1, 2027 Onward) • Pre-Exam Requirement: Mandatory 1 year of active Bar practice. • Verification Standard: Requires a Certificate of Practice verifying presence and participation in <i>effective judicial proceedings</i> alongside a senior advocate with at least 10 years' standing. • Post-Selection Training: Selected candidates must still undergo the mandatory 2-year training (Academy Training + Supervised Clerkship) before full appointment.
Sunset Review Clause The entire framework will operate for a period of 5 years. Upon completion, the SC will review the system's effectiveness based on empirical data concerning recruitment quality, academy training efficiency, and trial court performance.	

Dissenting Judgment- Justice Chandran favoured retaining the **original 3-year Bar practice requirement**. He held that **institutional training and clerkship cannot substitute for actual professional experience** and emphasized that prospective judges must experience the **realities of litigation and travails of litigants** before exercising judicial power.

Significance of the Verdict

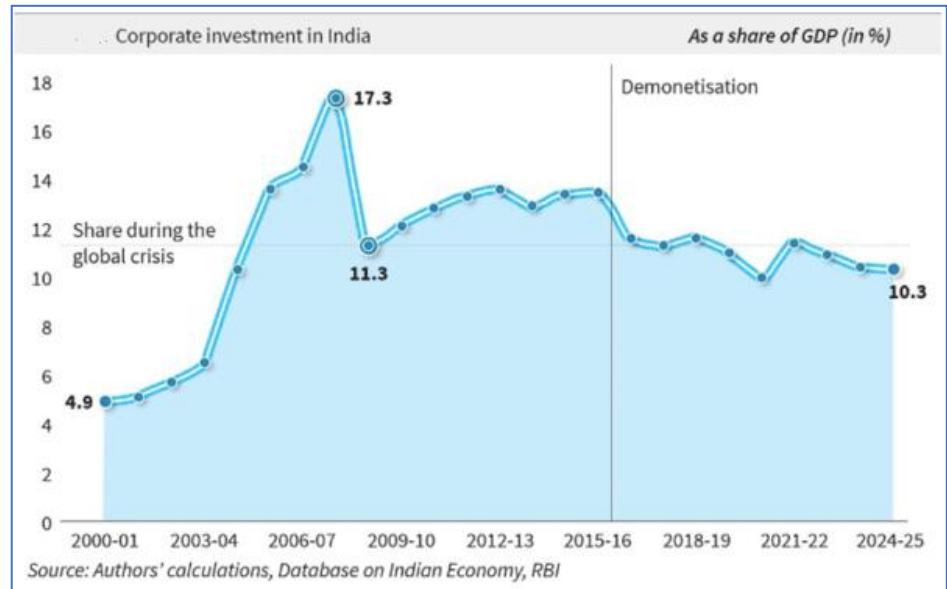
- **Balances Experience and Accessibility:** Ensures practical exposure without excessively restricting entry into judicial service.
- **Strengthens Judicial Training:** Gives greater importance to **Judicial Academies and supervised clerkships**.
- **Addresses Unequal Opportunities:** Recognizes difficulties faced by young lawyers, women and persons with disabilities in obtaining meaningful Bar experience.
- **Focuses on Quality Over Duration:** Mere years at the Bar may not guarantee meaningful courtroom exposure.
- **Evidence-Based Reform:** The framework will be reviewed after **five years** based on recruitment quality, training effectiveness, and judicial performance.

Declining Corporate Investment in India

- Corporate investment as a share of GDP has been on a prolonged decline in India.
- It rose sharply from **6.5% of GDP in 2004** supported by the high-growth phase of the Indian economy, but subsequently declined after the **Global Financial Crisis (GFC)**.
- Although investment showed some revival after the GFC, the trend reversed following **demonetisation in 2016**, and corporate investment has not recovered even to the relatively low levels witnessed during the GFC.

Determinants of Investment

- Investment decisions are primarily influenced by **expected profitability, confidence about future profitability and the cost and availability of credit**.
- Since a factory involves a long-term commitment of capital, firms assess not only current profits but also expected demand and profitability over the lifetime of the investment.
- Expected profitability generally increases with the scale of investment because of economies of scale, with larger factories and equipment potentially generating higher profit rates.
- However, firms eventually face a **market-size constraint**, beyond which additional productive capacity may remain under utilised because the firm cannot sell more than the demand available to it.
- **Business confidence or “animal spirits”**, a concept associated with **John Maynard Keynes**, determines the strength of investment expectations.
- Greater confidence about future economic conditions shifts profitability expectations upwards, while pessimism shifts them downwards.
- Economy-wide shocks such as demonetisation can therefore reduce investment not only by lowering immediate profitability but also by weakening confidence in future economic conditions.



Role of Interest Rates and Credit

- The **cost of credit** influences investment in two ways. A firm compares the expected return from investing in productive assets with the return it could earn by holding interest-bearing financial assets.
- Further, when investment has to be financed through borrowing, the cost of credit becomes an important determinant of whether the project is financially viable.
- **Michał Kalecki's Principle of Increasing Risk** states that as a firm expands its investment using external debt relative to its own equity capital, the risks and costs associated with borrowing increase. This creates an

inherent disadvantage for firms with limited internal capital because they face higher financing costs as they attempt to expand investment.

Firm Size and Investment Constraints

- The constraints on investment differ significantly according to **firm size**. Smaller firms generally have lower profitability and limited internal capital, causing their borrowing costs to rise relatively quickly.
- Their investment is therefore more likely to be constrained by **availability and cost of credit**.
- Larger firms generally possess greater internal capital and face relatively lower financing constraints. Their cost of finance may remain comparatively stable until investment exceeds their own available funds.
- Consequently, their investment is more likely to be constrained by **market demand rather than access to credit**.
- Data on listed manufacturing firms between 2000 and 2024 broadly reflects this distinction, with smaller firms showing **lower profitability and higher interest costs**, while larger firms exhibit higher profitability and lower interest costs.

Impact of Lower Interest Rates and Tax Cuts

- A reduction in interest rates may have limited impact on investment when firms are constrained by **weak demand or profitability rather than the cost of borrowing**.
- It may similarly have little effect on large firms that are not primarily constrained by access to finance.
- This provides a possible explanation for the weak investment response despite the corporate tax rate being reduced from 30% to 22% in 2019 and the RBI maintaining a relatively low-interest-rate environment.
- Cost-side interventions such as cheaper credit and tax reductions may therefore be insufficient when firms lack confidence in future demand.

Role of Government Expenditure

- A stronger revival of private investment may require an **increase in aggregate demand**.
- Higher government expenditure can stimulate demand for goods and services, improve firms' expectations regarding future sales and profitability, and thereby encourage expansion of productive capacity.
- Thus, **government expenditure can potentially crowd in private investment** by shifting firms' profitability expectations outward.
- Such a strategy, however, would require greater willingness to undertake fiscal expenditure rather than prioritising fiscal restraint.



National Circular Bioenergy Scheme

- The Union Cabinet has approved the **GOBARDhan (Galvanizing Organic Bio-Agro Resources Dhan) National Circular Bioenergy Scheme** with a total outlay of **Rs. 23,731 crores**.
- It will be implemented from **FY 2026-27 to FY 2035-36** and will establish Compressed Biogas (CBG) as a major pillar of India's future energy mix.
- It aims to increase domestic CBG production nearly ten-fold, mobilize large-scale private investment, and create a vibrant circular bioeconomy across the country.

Compressed Biogas (CBG)

- Biogas is produced naturally through a process of **anaerobic decomposition** from waste/bio-mass sources like agriculture residue, cattle dung, sugarcane press mud, municipal solid waste, sewage treatment plant waste, etc.
- After purification, it is compressed and called CBG, which has **high methane content**. Further, CBG is exactly similar to the commercially available natural gas in its composition and energy potential.

- Given the abundance of biomass in the country, CBG has the potential to replace CNG in automotive, industrial, and commercial uses in the coming years.

Background and Context

- Over the past several years, the Government has built the foundations of the CBG sector through:

- Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT) initiative
- Market Development Assistance (MDA) Scheme for organic manure
- Biomass Aggregation Machinery (BAM) Scheme
- Development of Pipeline Infrastructure (DPI) Scheme

Central Financial Assistance (CFA) for CBG plants under the National Bioenergy Programme

- GOBARDhan was originally launched in 2018 under the Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen) as an integral component of Solid and Liquid Waste Management (SWM).

- It focussed on converting bio-waste - animal waste, kitchen leftovers, crop residue and market waste, into biogas and bio-slurry.

- Earlier, the CBG ecosystem was spread across four different ministries. To

6 Growth Engines under GOBARDhan

Component 1: Assured CBG Offtake

- GOBARDhan establishes a dedicated CBG Offtake Assurance framework to provide a reliable and predictable market for producers.
- Procurement by City Gas Distribution (CGD) entities will support achievement of the notified CBG Obligation trajectory of:
 - 3% in FY 2026-27;
 - 4% in FY 2027-28; and
 - 5% from FY 2028-29 onwards in the CNG (Transport) and PNG (Domestic) segments.
- The framework converts the blending obligation into a clear, long-term demand signal for the industry.
- Consistent implementation across CGD networks will improve project bankability, support capacity utilization, and encourage long-term private investment.

Component 2: Stable CBG Pricing Framework

- GOBARDhan introduces a stable administered **CBG price of Rs 2,110 per Metric Million British Thermal Unit (MMBTU)**, supported through a government-backed pricing framework.
- It provides long-term revenue visibility while protecting consumer affordability through a combination of **government support and a market-based cost-sharing mechanism**.
- With a minimum ten-year horizon, the pricing framework will provide producers with durable revenue certainty, commercially attractive returns, and a stronger business case for investment and capacity expansion.

Component 3: Capital Assistance

- Eligible **greenfield CBG projects** will receive capital assistance of up to **Rs 2 crore per ton per day (TPD)** of installed CBG capacity. The support extends beyond core plant machinery to critical value-chain assets for feedstock aggregation, organic manure processing, and value addition. Brownfield projects expanding their production capacity will also be eligible.
- This will lower the initial capital burden, accelerate financial closure, and expand participation by private developers, MSMEs, cooperatives, and rural entrepreneurs.

Component 4: Development of Pipeline Infrastructure

- It supports both cluster-based and standalone pipeline infrastructure connecting CBG plants with trunk pipelines and City Gas Distribution (CDG) networks.
- Greater pipeline connectivity will reduce evacuation costs, improve reliability, expand market reach, and enable higher utilization of domestically produced CBG.

Component 5: Credit Guarantee Support

- A dedicated credit guarantee mechanism will strengthen lender confidence and expand the flow of institutional credit to eligible MSME-based CBG projects.
- By sharing a portion of lending risk, the mechanism will improve access to affordable finance, reduce collateral requirements, and support faster project development.
- This will widen participation by MSMEs, women entrepreneurs and first-time developers, helping build a broad, competitive and entrepreneurial CBG industry.

Component 6: CBG Ecosystem Challenge Fund

- It establishes a dedicated CBG Ecosystem Challenge Fund to accelerate district-level implementation and strengthen local value chains across the CBG ecosystem.
- It will support feedstock resource assessment and mapping, feedstock aggregation infrastructure, and district-level CBG development planning.
- It will also aid technology adoption, process improvement, value addition of organic manure, capacity building, and stakeholder awareness.

ensure better coordination and accelerate the sector's growth, the Government has consolidated the entire scheme under the **Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG)**.

- This reform enables a unified approach to policy, implementation, and sectoral development.
- India currently meets nearly 50% of its natural gas requirement through imports, making energy security a strategic priority.
- Recent geopolitical developments and disruptions along the Strait of Hormuz, a route that carries nearly 55-60% of India's Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) imports, have highlighted the importance of strengthening domestic energy production.
- Thus, CBG can meet a growing share of the demand through domestic renewable production, strengthening energy resilience, and reducing dependence on imported fossil fuels.

Impact

- A new wave of private investment supported by stronger project viability, stable pricing and improved access to institutional finance.
- Each CBG plant also creates a local circular economy around agricultural residue, cattle dung, and other organic resources.
- This leads to stronger rural livelihoods through new income opportunities for farmers, feedstock aggregators, cooperatives, and rural entrepreneurs.
- Scientific waste management through productive use of agricultural residue, cattle dung, municipal organic waste, and other biomass resources.
- Lower greenhouse gas emissions through replacement of fossil fuels and productive utilization of organic waste.
- Faster and easier project implementation through one national framework, digital governance, and simplified institutional arrangements.
- Thus, building on the progress already achieved, GOBARdhan will take India's CBG journey from a strong foundation to a nationally scaled clean energy industry.

Past Efforts

- **SATAT scheme** was launched in 2018, with the aim of establishing an ecosystem for production of CBG from various waste/ biomass sources and for promoting its use along with natural gas by MoP&NG.
- MoPNG is implementing the **Biomass Aggregation Machinery (BAM) Scheme** to support CBG producers in procuring biomass aggregation equipment. It has a total outlay of Rs 564.75 crore.
- To strengthen CBG evacuation and market access, MoPNG is also implementing the **Development of Pipeline Infrastructure (DPI) Scheme** with a total outlay of Rs 994.5 crore for the period FY 2024-25 to FY 2028-29.
- The Department of Fertilizers was implementing the **Market Development Assistance (MDA) Scheme** to promote organic fertilizers produced from GOBARdhan and CBG plants.
 - It provides financial support of Rs **1,500 per metric tonne** for Fermented Organic Manure, Liquid Fermented Organic Manure, and Phosphate Rich Organic Manure.
 - As of February 2026, **120 CBG/Biogas plants** were registered on the Integrated Fertilizer Management System portal, and **44 MoUs** had been signed between Fertilizer Marketing Companies and Compressed Biogas operators.

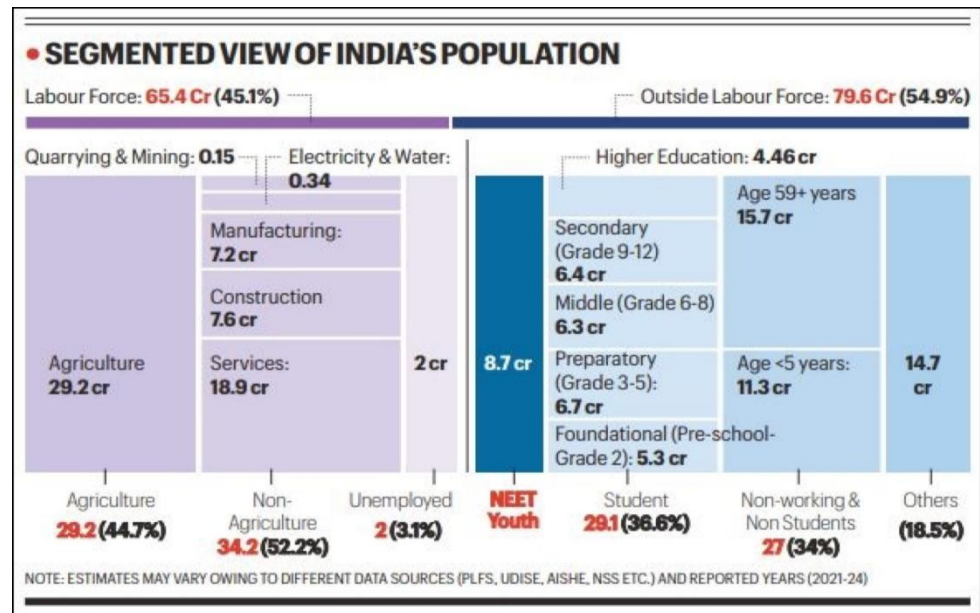
NITI Aayog released a report titled **Reimagining Skilling for Viksit Bharat**, that highlights a major **skills–employment mismatch** in India, where educational qualifications do not adequately translate into relevant employment.

Skill–Employment Mismatch

- Educated unemployment remains significantly higher than overall unemployment. **Unemployment among graduates** is around **13%**, compared with the **national unemployment rate** of **3.2%**, while unemployment among graduate women is **20.4%**.
- At the same time, the report, citing the Economic Survey 2024-25, notes that only **8.25% of graduates are employed in jobs aligned with their qualifications**, highlighting the disconnect between education and labour-market requirements.
- India also has a **strong preference for generic undergraduate degrees**, with around 1.13 crore students enrolled in B.A. alone, while combined enrolment in B.A., B.Sc. and B.Com exceeds 2 crore.
- These programmes often have weak direct linkages with employment unless supplemented by relevant skills.

NEET Challenge

- Around **8.7 crore people aged 15–29**, equivalent to about 11% of the population outside the labour force, fall under the **NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training)** category.
- However, NEET should **not be equated with unemployment**, as the category includes people **not seeking employment**.



Social Stigma around Skilling Courses

- Vocational skilling and alternative educational pathways in India suffer from a deep social stigma that actively discourages youth from pursuing technical training, Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and diploma programmes.
- These are widely perceived by parents, peers, and students as low-trust, second-tier pathways and **inferior to conventional university degrees**.
- Career decisions are often shaped by constraints such as examination scores, family preferences, or the perceived cost of investing in additional skills, rather than by aptitude, interests, or long-term career possibilities.
- An **information gap** further worsens the problem, as many young people are unaware of appropriate government skilling programmes, apprenticeships and scholarships.

- 36% of higher-education students, 52% of formal workers and 55% of informal workers do not pursue skilling, citing lack of awareness of the right programmes as one of the top three reasons for it.

Salary Gap due to Lack of Skilling

- According to BCG's Higher Education Survey, a generic undergraduate without additional skilling earns an average starting salary of about **Rs 22,000 per month**, whereas a similarly qualified graduate with skilling earns about **Rs 29,000 per month**.
- Thus, an initial **Rs 7,000 monthly salary differential** can accumulate substantially over time, with the report estimating an income difference of around **Rs 9.7 lakh over ten years**.
- This demonstrates that skilling should be viewed not merely as an educational intervention but also as an instrument for **productivity, income enhancement and social mobility**.

Gaps in existing infrastructure

- A core limitation of many existing skilling programmes is **weak outcome orientation**. Programmes often prioritise enrolment and completion over placement, progression, or income outcomes.
- Moreover, delivery formats remain inflexible and poorly aligned to the needs of different learner segments.
- As a result, pathways into in-demand jobs remain weak, and participation remains limited.
- Awareness of government schemes, apprenticeships, and scholarships remains low, including initiatives such as Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY), and the PM Internship Scheme.
- This makes it harder for people to make informed choices. Ironically, the people who can gain the most from the skilling pathways are frequently the least connected to trusted information channels.

Proposed reforms

- Standalone skilling programmes need to **shift from top-down, supply-driven offerings to demand-driven, outcome-linked and industry-backed models**.
- General employability and entrepreneurship skilling need to be done at scale, covering **digital literacy, financial literacy, and workplace readiness**.
- Focus is needed on **strategic re-skilling for sectors and roles facing structural decline** or technological disruption, such as segments of mining or traditional automotive manufacturing.
 - On this front, skilling interventions may need to be complemented with transitional income or unemployment support to enable successful redeployment.
- **Generic university courses** (B.A., B.Sc. and B.Com) need to be **redesigned into industry-aligned applied specialisations**, such as B.A. Hospitality, B.Sc. Applied Technology, and B.Com. Analytics.
- Greater emphasis is required on **Apprenticeship Embedded Degree Programmes (AEDP)** and **Work-Integrated Degree Programmes (WIDP)** so that students gain workplace exposure alongside formal qualifications.
- Establish **greenfield Public-Private Partnership (PPP) skilling universities** (like the World Skill Center in Odisha), place dedicated PPP skilling hubs inside existing public campuses.
- Implement **brownfield college reforms** partnering with industry to co-design academic tracks.
- Provide **academic autonomy** (to update trade offerings and courses based on local demand) and **administrative autonomy** (to contract trainers and simplify tool procurement) to ITIs under robust PPP governance frameworks.



Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2026

- The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, has received President assent.
- It amends the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 (MMDR Act) with the aim of bringing long term stability into the major minerals sector.

Background: The Supreme Court's 2024 Ruling

- In July 2024, the Supreme Court **upheld states' power to levy taxes** on mineral rights and mineral-bearing land, overruling the 1989 judgment in *India Cement Ltd v. State of Tamil Nadu*.

- The 1989 judgement had held that **royalty was a tax falling under the Union List**, beyond states' legislative competence.
- The 2024 ruling also waived interest and penalties on pre-judgment tax demands and allowed staggered payment of dues over 12 years from April 1, 2026.
- This opened the door for states to **raise additional mining revenue** — Jharkhand and Tamil Nadu introduced Mineral-Bearing Land (MBL) taxes, while Karnataka proposed a tax on non-auctioned iron ore mines.

Need for Reform

- Minerals are critical to infrastructure, manufacturing, energy security, and overall economic development.
- The **States are currently levying around 14 types of taxes, charges, fees and other levies** on mining operations such as royalty, auction premium, dead rent, contribution to District Mineral Foundation (DMF), GST, transit fee, etc.
- Around **90% of total mining revenue accrues to the States**.
- After the introduction of the auction regime in 2015, States have got another major source of revenue as **auction premium**. During 2020-21 to 2025-26, major mining states have collected auction premiums of more than **Rs. 96,000 crores**.
- As **mineral resources are finite and geographically concentrated only in a few States**, their management requires a cohesive national strategy to ensure sustainable, equitable, and uniform economic growth.
- Unchecked regional disparities in State-level taxation disrupt this framework by inflating domestic costs.
- Unconstrained and uneven State levies weaken public interest by making domestic minerals uncompetitive, incentivizing unnecessary imports despite abundant local reserves, and fragmenting the national market.
- In FY 2025-26, **India imported minerals worth Rs. 10,12,529 crores**, thereby putting a heavy burden on the exchequer. At the same time, outpriced domestic minerals lose ground in export markets.
- The MMDR Amendment Act, 2026 seeks to address these concerns by bringing predictability, uniformity, and rationality to the taxation of minerals.

Major Provisions of the Act

- **New Section 9D — limits on State levies:** No tax, cess or other levy (by whatever name), shall be imposed by a State Government on mineral rights or mineral-bearing lands.
- This covers levies based on mineral quantity, mineral value, royalty, or any other basis. Such levies may be imposed only as per conditions or restrictions prescribed by the Central Government.

Impact of the Amendment	
BEFORE	AFTER
Mining was taxed differently in every State.	A single, Centre-directed tax framework will apply under New Section 9D.
New levies could be introduced even after mining operations started.	States cannot impose new levies except under conditions set by the Central Government.
Retrospective tax demands could be raised at any time.	All pending retrospective dues are now declared invalid.
The maximum burden fell on small and medium miners.	Every miner now benefits from a fair and equal framework.

- Mineral bearing land is defined as any land having mineral contents in accordance with parameters prescribed by the central government.

- **Past levies:** Any levy not paid or collected by the State before the amendment applies will be treated as invalid. However, amounts already deposited or recovered before such commencement are not refundable.
- **Rule-making power:** **Section 13 of the MMDR Act** is amended to **empower the Central Government to make rules**. These rules will prescribe the conditions or restrictions for imposition of such levies by State Governments.

Protection of States' Revenue

- Mineral revenue accruing to States has risen sharply since 2014 under a transparent, **auction-based regime**. The amendment does not disturb this position, and States will **continue** to receive the overwhelming share of mining revenue.
- Nearly **50 minor minerals** are **completely controlled by the State Governments**. The amendment does not affect the taxation and regulatory powers on these minor minerals, including sand, gravel, clay, silica, granite, marble, gypsum, and laterite.

Key Benefits

- Competitive coal prices help reduce electricity costs and benefit households in their daily lives. Lower mineral costs strengthen industries, infrastructure, and economic growth.
- Coal provides energy, while iron ore, limestone and bauxite support steel, cement and aluminium production. Copper also supports modern industry, electricity, and defence.
- The Act therefore benefits power sector, manufacturing, railways, roads, housing, transport, and development programmes.
- It creates a more competitive, transparent, predictable, and investor-friendly mining sector. It strengthens investment, production, employment, energy security, national security, and self-reliance.

Concerns over Cooperative Federalism

- The amendment has led to an important **federalism debate** because taxation of mineral rights and mineral-bearing land involves constitutionally distributed powers.
- Land is a state subject under Entry 18 of the State List. State legislatures also have the power to tax land (Entry 49 of the State List).
- *They can also tax mineral rights subject to limitations imposed by Parliament by law (Entry 50 of State List).*
- The Supreme Court (2024) has held that mineral bearing land falls within the description of lands under Entry 49, and that states may tax such land using the quantity of minerals produced.
- It further held that Parliament may, through a law relating to mineral development, impose limitations on states' power to *tax mineral rights under Entry 50*. However, this power does not extend to states' power to tax land under Entry 49
- The current amendment places restrictions on these State powers. Mineral-rich States have expressed concerns that restricting their ability to impose could affect fiscal autonomy and revenue mobilisation.
- The Union Government, however, maintains that States will continue to receive around 90% of mining sector revenue.
- The implementation raises important questions regarding the constitutional distribution of powers between the Union and the States.
- The Centre-State dialogue will therefore be important for ensuring that mineral-sector reforms do not undermine cooperative federalism.



The Mecca Agreement

- **Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Pakistan** signed the Mecca (Makkah) **Joint Defence Agreement**, declaring that an armed attack on any one signatory will be treated as an attack on all three — a major new trilateral security arrangement in West Asia with direct implications for India.
- The agreement builds on the September 2025 **Saudi-Pakistan Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement (SMDA)**, now widened to include Turkey's NATO-integrated military capabilities and defence-industrial base.
- As with the original Saudi-Pakistan pact, the full text has not been made public — only a joint press release on its collective-deterrence intent has been issued.

What the Pact Covers?

- The agreement rests on four pillars:
 - A collective-deterrence clause modelled on Article 51 of the UN Charter;
 - Joint training and military exercises;
 - Intelligence-sharing mechanisms;
 - Defence-industrial integration, particularly Turkish drone production feeding Saudi capacity.
- Equally notable is **what is missing**: no integrated command headquarters, no standing joint force, no common budget, and no explicit nuclear-sharing clause.
- A reported exclusionary clause denies protection to any member that initiates aggression or allows its territory to be used to attack another state, underlining the **pact's defensive character**.

Comparison with NATO's Article 5

- Comparisons with NATO's **Article 5** (collective self defence) are analytically weak. NATO's guarantee rests on a standing treaty organisation, integrated command, and decades of tested doctrine.
- The Mecca pact instead relies on **Article 51 self-defence logic**, leaves geographic scope and response triggers undefined, and gives each signatory full discretion over whether to respond at all.
- Historically, mutual defence pacts are rarely invoked militarily — Pakistan did not act when Saudi Arabia came under missile and drone attack during the SMDA's first year, choosing mediation over military response.
- **Who is it really aimed at?**
 - While framed as deterrence against Iran, its deeper subtext may be directed at Israel.
 - Turkey views Israel as a greater long-term threat than Iran, especially given clashing interests in post-Assad Syria.
 - Israeli figures have labelled Turkey "the new Iran" and accused it of building a "hostile Sunni axis" with nuclear-armed Pakistan.

Implications for India

- The pact signals deeper strategic integration between Saudi Arabia and the Pakistan-Turkey-China axis.

Complementary Strengths, Different Motivations

- Each partner brings distinct capabilities and its own rationale for joining:
 - **Saudi Arabia** offers financial resources, energy power, and political influence across the Arab and Islamic worlds. It seeks strategic insurance after the 2019 attacks on its oil installations, and its confrontation with Iran — which reportedly depleted a large share of its Patriot interceptor stockpile — exposed the risks of depending on a single guarantor.
 - **Turkey** contributes the strongest conventional military among Muslim West Asian states and an expanding indigenous defence industry (Baykar's Akinci drones, the KAAAN fighter programme). President Erdoğan views the pact through the lens of strategic autonomy, converting Turkey from a NATO flank state into an independent power centre.
 - **Pakistan** brings a large professional military and, most significantly, nuclear weapons — meaning any adversary attacking one member must factor in Pakistan's nuclear capability, even without a formal nuclear guarantee. For Islamabad, **the pact widens its strategic horizons beyond its India-centric posture**.

Why Now: Three Converging Pressures

- The widening US-Israel-Iran confrontation since late February 2026 exposed the limits of relying solely on US security guarantees.
- Post- Hamas attacks of October 7 (2023) regional recalibration pushed Riyadh to diversify its security partners.
- The three states' complementary strengths — Saudi financial depth and geography astride the Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb chokepoints, Turkish military doctrine and industry, and Pakistani manpower and nuclear status — made trilateral cooperation attractive.

Strategic Hedging, Not an Alliance

- It would be premature to call the pact an anti-American realignment. Saudi Arabia still depends heavily on American military technology, Turkey remains a NATO member, and Pakistan has no interest in confronting Washington given its currently warm ties with the Trump administration.
- The more accurate description is **strategic hedging** — regional powers supplementing, not replacing, external security guarantees.
- However, when multiple major states hedge simultaneously, their combined actions can still reshape the regional order.

- **Turkey** has historically been diplomatically hostile to India and has already demonstrated military cooperation with Pakistan, including during the India-Pakistan conflict of April/May 2025.
- **Saudi Arabia**, in contrast, has invested significantly in ties with India over the past decade despite its closeness to Pakistan, so India should not read the pact as automatically anti-India.
- However, growing Saudi security dependence may give Islamabad greater leverage in that relationship, potentially straining India's long-term strategic partnership with Riyadh.

Three Imperatives for India

- **Insulate** its bilateral relationship with Saudi Arabia (built on energy, expatriate welfare, and counterterrorism cooperation) from spillover effects.
- **Intensify** bilateral defence engagement with Gulf states to prevent diplomatic isolation on Kashmir-related narratives.
- **Calibrate** its extended-neighbourhood posture — Quad engagement, Indian Ocean naval presence, and defence diplomacy with Israel and moderate Arab states.
- New Delhi should also seek explicit assurance from Riyadh that the pact will not apply to any India-Pakistan confrontation, while avoiding a purely Pakistan-centric reading of the alignment.

Conclusion

- The Mecca Agreement reflects eroding confidence in single-power security guarantees rather than a fully realised alliance.
- For India, the sensible course lies in sustained, calibrated diplomacy — ensuring the pact reshapes West Asia's security map without reshaping India's own strategic space.



India-Uzbekistan Relations

- PM Modi undertook a two-day state visit to Uzbekistan— his fourth visit and second bilateral visit to the country — before travelling to Bishkek for the 26th SCO Summit.
- During the visit, India and Uzbekistan elevated their bilateral relationship to a **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership**, marking the 15th anniversary of their Strategic Partnership.

Background of Bilateral Ties

- India and Uzbekistan share historical links dating back to the Silk Road.
- Modern diplomatic relations began after Uzbekistan's independence in 1991, gradually expanding into trade, investment, defence, healthcare, education, and culture — culminating in a Strategic Partnership, and now its elevation to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

Key Outcomes of the Visit

- **Civil Nuclear Cooperation** - A major new pillar is a **long-term uranium supply** arrangement from Uzbekistan to India, supporting India's expanding civil nuclear programme and diversifying its uranium sourcing.
- **Trade and Investment** - Bilateral trade — currently around \$1.3 billion (2025), with Indian investments nearing \$1 billion — has been targeted to reach **\$5 billion by 2030**, with focus on addressing market-access, connectivity, and banking barriers.
 - India is among Uzbekistan's top 10 trading partners.

- **Defence and Counter-Terrorism** - Cooperation is expanding from military exchanges (the Dustlik joint exercise) towards defence-industrial collaboration, including co-development and co-production of equipment.
 - o Both sides condemned cross-border terrorism and agreed to strengthen intelligence-sharing, counter-extremism, and cooperation against terrorist financing and cyber threats — significant given security uncertainties in Afghanistan.
- **Critical Minerals** - Uzbekistan's mineral resources and India's need to diversify critical-mineral supplies for clean energy and advanced manufacturing have made this an emerging pillar, supporting resilient global supply chains.
- **Connectivity and People-to-People Ties** - Uzbekistan removed visa requirements for Indian citizens for stays up to 30 days. **UPI-enabled** digital payments are set to become usable in Uzbekistan.
 - o Nearly 14,000 Uzbek nationals visit India annually for medical treatment, making Uzbekistan the **third-largest source country** for medical tourism to India.
- **Culture, Education and Heritage** - A Letter of Intent was signed for restoration of the Buddhist sites of **Fayaz Tepa** and **Kara Tepa** (Termez). 100 Lal Bahadur Shastri Hindi scholarships were announced, and an ICCR Sanskrit Chair will be established at Tashkent State University.
 - o Uzbekistan is already home to four Indian universities and was the first Central Asian country to conduct yoga certification exams under India's Yoga Certification Board (528 certified so far).
 - o Nearly 3,000 words are shared between Hindi and Uzbek; and culinary parallels include ghee-sariyok, samosa-samsa, and naan-non.
- **Institutional Mechanisms** - A **Foreign Minister-level Coordination Group** will be established, and the existing Joint Commission elevated to ministerial level. India also announced a **\$1 million grant** for afforestation in the Aral Sea region.

Strategic Significance for India

- Uzbekistan's pivotal position in a Central Asia shaped by Russian, Chinese, Turkish, and Iranian influence makes deeper engagement valuable for India.
- It helps India diversify energy and mineral supplies, strengthen security cooperation amid Afghan instability, expand India's economic footprint, counterbalance Chinese influence, and advance India's Extended Neighbourhood Policy.

MAPS: PLACES IN NEWS

International Places in News

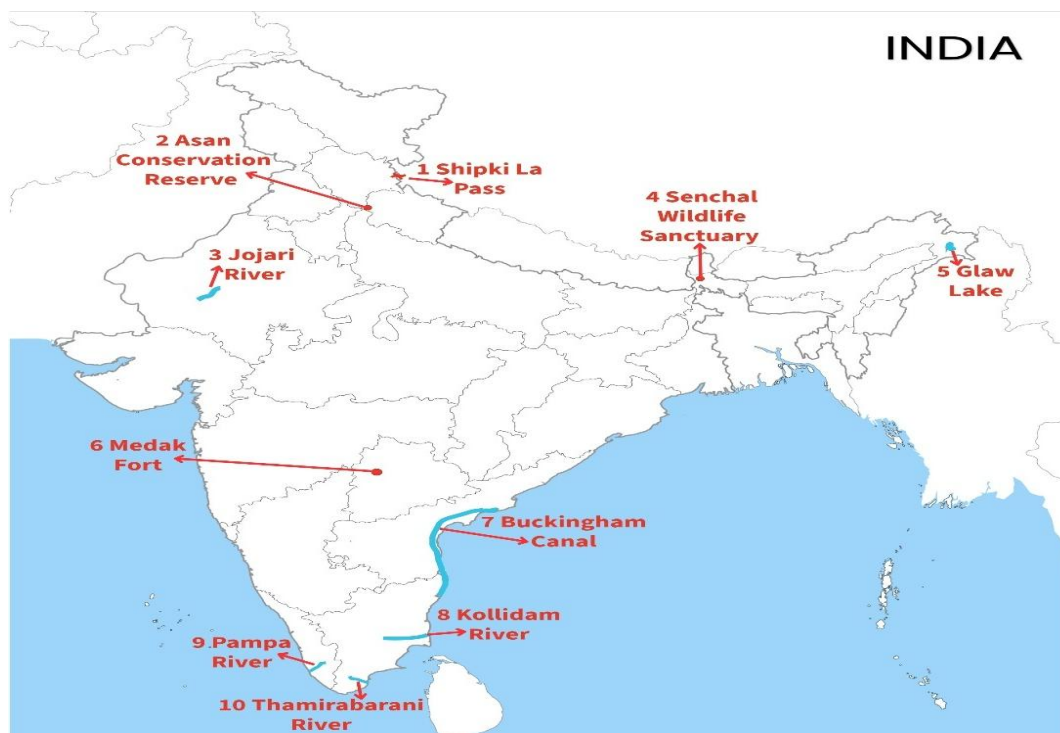


1	Petermann Glacier	An international research team reported that Petermann Glacier in northwest Greenland calved a 76.4 km² ice island, its largest floating-ice loss since 2012 and the Arctic's largest calving event since 2020. • Location: East of Nares Strait (between Greenland and Canada's Ellesmere Island). One of the major glaciers connecting the Greenland Ice Sheet to the Arctic Ocean. • Climate Significance: Greenland's glacier melt contributes to global sea-level rise. A complete collapse of Petermann Glacier could contribute ~30 cm to sea-level rise (estimate).
2	Lake Erie	A 1,256-MW nuclear reactor in Ohio, on Lake Erie's southern shore, has unintentionally become a wildlife refuge, with its 1,100-acre buffer zone providing habitat for threatened spotted turtles. • Location: Southernmost and 4th-largest of North America's five Great Lakes; forms the Canada-US boundary. • Key Features: Shallowest, warmest and smallest by volume of the Great Lakes; highly productive. • Connections: Receives water mainly via the Detroit River and drains into Lake Ontario through the Niagara River. Important link in the Saint Lawrence Seaway, connecting the Great Lakes to the Atlantic Ocean. • Islands: Pelee Island is the largest. • Name: Named after the Erie Indigenous people who lived along its shores.

3	Mount Ararat	A German-Turkish research team conducted the first survey of Mount Ararat's glacier • Location: Volcanic massif in eastern Turkey, near Turkey-Iran-Armenia tri-border region. • Significance: Highest mountain in Turkey and the Armenian Highlands. • Peaks: Comprises two snow-capped volcanic peaks- Greater Ararat and Lesser Ararat. • Geology: Dormant volcanoes with cones and fissures but no visible craters. The only true glacier lies on the northern slope of Greater Ararat, near its summit.
4	Larak Island	Iran retaliated with ballistic missiles at US bases in Jordan after the Larak Island strike. • Location: A small island in Strait of Hormuz, Iran; to the south of Hormuz Island and southeast of Bandar Abbas. • Significance: Located near a major maritime choke point connecting the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman.
5	Hallaniyat Islands (Oman)	A recent crude oil spill from the tanker Caroline Bezeni is threatening the pristine nature reserve near Hallaniyat Islands (also known as Kuria Muria Islands). • Location: Archipelago of 5 islands off southeastern Oman, in the Arabian Sea. Located along major sea routes linking the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean. • Inhabited: Al-Hallaniyah is the largest and only inhabited island. • Biodiversity: Part of the Halaaniyaat Islands Key Biodiversity Area and Oman's Arabian Sea Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Area.
6	Delft Island	The Sri Lanka Navy recently rescued 11 Indian fishermen after their trawler ran aground off Delft Island (Neduntheevu). • Location: Palk Strait, off northern Sri Lanka. Largest of the seven inhabited islands in the region; flat, oval-shaped and wind-swept. • Environment: Surrounded by shallow waters, coral-and-sand beaches; has no streams, with freshwater mainly from ponds and natural depressions. • History: Inhabited largely by Tamil communities; reflects Chola, Portuguese, Dutch and British influences. Notable for Dutch colonial fort ruins; the Dutch named it after Delft, Netherlands.
7	Madura Island	At least 5 people were killed & 41 remain missing after a ferry caught fire off Madura Island. • Location: Indonesia, off northeast Java; separated by the Madura Strait. • Nickname: "Salt Island" due to extensive salt production. • People & Language: Mainly Madurese and Madurese language. • Culture: Famous for annual bull races (Karapan Sapi) after the harvest.

8	Mount Bromo	Indonesia recently deployed aircraft and hundreds of firefighters to control a major wildfire in Mount Bromo National Park. • Location: Active cinder cone on Java, Indonesia. • Setting: Located within the Sandsea Caldera, part of the larger Tengger Caldera. • Activity: Eruptions have been recorded periodically since 1804, with evidence of earlier eruptions.
9	Mount Kanlaon	A recent emission from Kanlaon Volcano produced a grayish plume that rose ~200 meters above the summit crater before drifting north. • Location: Active stratovolcano, Philippines; highest peak of Negros Island and the Visayas Region. • Geological Setting: Part of the Pacific Ring of Fire. • Features: Has numerous fissure-controlled pyroclastic cones and craters, many containing lakes.
10	Kuril Islands	Russian President Vladimir Putin visited the disputed Kuril Islands, travelling to Iturup, amid strained Russia-Japan relations over the Ukraine war. • Location: Russian Far East; archipelago between the Pacific Ocean and Sea of Okhotsk, stretching from Kamchatka to Hokkaido. • Geography: Divided into Greater and Lesser Kuril Chains; part of the Pacific Ring of Fire. • Dispute: Russia administers the islands, while Japan claims the four southernmost islands as its Northern Territories.

National Places in News

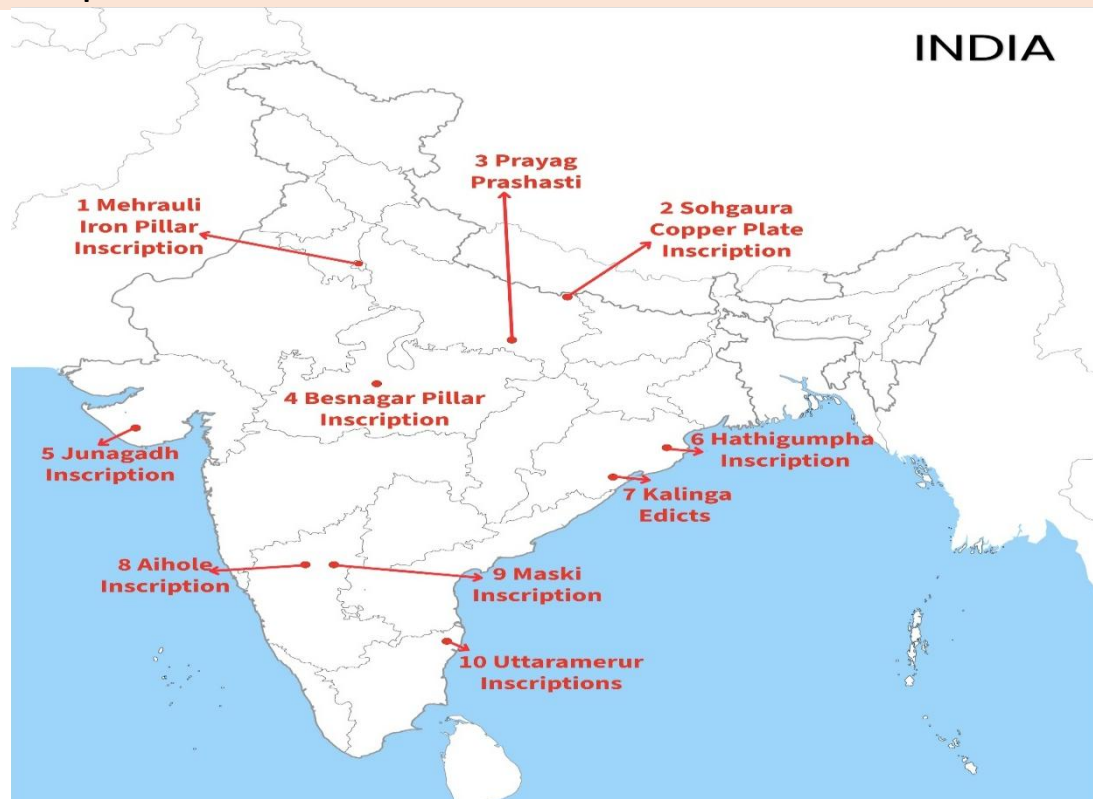


1	Shipki La Pass	Cross-border trade between India and China through Shipki La Pass resumed on 1st August 2026, after a six-year suspension. • Location: Kinnaur, Himachal Pradesh, on the India–China border. • Geography: Sutlej (Langqên Zangbo in Tibet) enters India through this region; the pass remains snowbound in winter. • Strategic: Indian positions are at higher elevations than Chinese positions. • History: Part of the ancient Silk Route/Hindustan-Tibet trade route; trade reopened in the 1990s after closure following the 1962 war. • Unique: Traditional trade largely follows a barter system, unlike Lipulekh and Nathu La, where currency is used.
2	Asan Conservation Reserve	• Location: Dehradun, Uttarakhand, at the confluence of the Asan and Yamuna Rivers. • Formation: Wetland created by the Asan Barrage (1967), providing habitat for migratory and resident birds. • Status: Conservation Reserve (2005) under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972; Uttarakhand's first Ramsar site (2020).
3	Jojari River	Recently, the Supreme Court banned any construction or development within 100 m of the Jojari River in Rajasthan. • Origin: Seasonal river originating at Pandalu village, Nagaur, Rajasthan. • Course: Flows through Jodhpur and joins the Luni River near Balotra. • Unique: Only right-bank tributary of the Luni; unlike other tributaries, it does not originate in the Aravallis. • Major Issue: Severe pollution from industrial effluents and untreated sewage, especially chemical-laden wastewater from Jodhpur's textile and steel industries.
4	Senchal Wildlife Sanctuary	Recently, a black melanistic leopard cub has been spotted close to the Senchal Wildlife Sanctuary. • Location: Darjeeling, West Bengal. Part of the Darjeeling Himalayan landscape and a southeastern extension of Singalila National Park • Established: 1915 among India's oldest wildlife sanctuaries. • Fauna: Barking deer, Himalayan black bear, leopard, jungle cat, Assam macaque and Himalayan flying squirrel.
5	Glaw Lake	Glaw Lake, located in Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh has been announced as the 101st Ramsar Site of India and the first wetland of international importance of the State. • Situated within the Kamlang Wildlife Sanctuary of Eastern Himalayas in Arunachal Pradesh • Located at an elevation of 1168m

		- Fed by perennial rivers and mountain streams including the Kamlang River, which further joins the Lohit river, a tributary of the Brahmaputra - Supports population of species like clouded leopard, white bellied heron, etc.
6	Medak Fort	In a rare honour, the postal department launched a postal cover and a postal stamp on the historical Medak fort. Location: Historic hill fort in Medak, Telangana. History: Built in the 12th century under Kakatiya ruler Pratapa Rudra; - Originally called Methuku Durgam. Served as a military/command post for the Kakatiyas and later the Qutb Shahis. Features: Three gateways- Prathama Dwaram, Simha Dwaram and Gaja Dwaram. Main gate bears the Gandabherundam emblem; also houses a 17th-century Qutb Shahi mosque.
7	Buckingham Canal	The restoration of Buckingham Canal occupied the attention of the authorities after the new government came into power in Tamil Nadu. Location: Runs along India's eastern coast, through Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. History: Built by Basil Cochrane in 1806; initially called <i>Cochrane Canal</i>. Taken over by the government in 1837 and renamed East Coast Canal. Renamed Buckingham Canal in 1878 after the Duke of Buckingham and Chandos, Governor of Madras. Significance and Issue: Once a key navigable waterway and economic lifeline to Madras (Chennai), transporting fuel, salt and dried fish; now affected by encroachment, untreated sewage and solid-waste pollution.
8	Kollidam River	ASI archaeologists recently found remains of a possible Sangam-era irrigation structure in the Kollidam river near Lalgudi, Trichy. Location: Tamil Nadu Origin: Northern distributary of the Kaveri, formed near Srirangam. Course: Flows eastward → northeastward and drains into the Bay of Bengal through multiple mouths. Other Names: Kolidam / Coleroon.
9	Pampa River	Recently, the Pampa River breached its banks due to torrential overnight rain triggered widespread flooding across Pathanamthitta district. Location: Kerala; its 3rd-longest river, after Periyar and Bharathappuzha. Origin: Pulachimalai Hill, Peerumedu Plateau, Western Ghats. Course: Flows westward and reaches the Arabian Sea through multiple channels. Religious Significance: Called "Dakshina Bhageerathi" (Ganga of Kerala); closely associated with the Sabarimala pilgrimage.

10	Thamirabarani River	Madras HC recently granted the Tamil Nadu's Thamirabarani river legal personhood based on its status as a deity to curb pollution. • Origin: Agastyarkoodam Peak, Pothigai Hills, Western Ghats. • Course: Flows through Tirunelveli & Thoothukudi → Gulf of Mannar. • Key: Perennial river, fed by SW & NE Monsoons; flows entirely within Tamil Nadu. • Features/Dams: Paanatheertham Falls; Karaiyar, Manimuthar, Gadananathi & Ramanathi dams.
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Important Inscriptions of Ancient India



S.No.	Inscription	Description
1	Mehrauli Iron Pillar Inscription	• Ruler: King "Chandra" (generally identified as Chandragupta II) • Period: 4th-5th century CE • Location: Qutub Complex, Mehrauli, Delhi • Script & Language: Gupta Brahmi script with Sanskrit language. • Details: Eulogizes King Chandra's military triumphs across Bengal and Bactria; notable for the advanced metallurgy and corrosion resistance of the iron pillar.
2	Sohgaora Copper Plate Inscription	• Ruler: Generally associated with the Mauryan period • Period: 3rd century BCE • Location: Sohgaora, Gorakhpur (Uttar Pradesh)

		• Script & Language: Brahmi script with Prakrit language. • Details: Earliest known Indian copper-plate inscription; mentions state granaries and administrative measures for famine relief.
3	Prayag Prashasti (Allahabad Pillar Inscription)	• Ruler: Samudragupta • Period: 4th century CE • Location: Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh • Script & Language: Gupta Brahmi script with Sanskrit language. • Details: Composed by court poet Harishena; records Samudragupta's military conquests, tributary states, and political alliances. Essential source for Gupta empire history.
4	Besnagar Pillar Inscription	• Ruler: Erected by Heliodorus (Greek ambassador sent by King Antialcidas of Taxila to the court of the Shunga king, Bhagabhadra) • Period: 2nd century BCE • Location: Besnagar (Vidisha), Madhya Pradesh • Script & Language: Brahmi script with Prakrit language. • Details: Heliodorus records himself as a <i>Bhagavata</i> (devotee of Vasudeva); stands as key early epigraphic proof of Bhagavata Vaishnavism and Greek assimilation.
5	Junagadh Inscription	• Ruler: Rudradaman I (Western Kshatrapa) • Period: 150 CE; Location: Junagadh, Gujarat • Script & Language: Brahmi script with Classical Sanskrit language. • Details: Documents the repair of Sudarshana Lake embankment; significant as one of the earliest long royal epigraphs written in pure Sanskrit prose.
6	Hathigumpha Inscription	• Ruler: Kharavela (Mahameghavahana Dynasty) • Period: 2nd century BCE- early 1st century CE • Location: Udayagiri Hills, Odisha • Script & Language: Brahmi script with Prakrit language. • Details: Year-by-year chronicle of Kharavela's military expeditions, civic infrastructure works, and royal patronage toward Jainism.
7	Kalinga Edicts	• Ruler: Ashoka • Period: 3rd century BCE • Location: Dhauli and Jaugada, Odisha • Script & Language: Brahmi script with Prakrit language. • Details: Separate rock edicts emphasizing humane administration, paternal concern for subjects, and fair conduct of judicial officers post-Kalinga War.

8	Aihole Inscription	• Ruler: Pulakeshin II (Badami Chalukya dynasty) • Period: 634 CE • Location: Aihole, Karnataka • Script & Language: Old Kannada / Southern Brahmi script with Classical Sanskrit language. • Details: Authored by Ravikirti; details Chalukya lineage and records Pulakeshin II's victory against Harshavardhana on the banks of the Narmada.
9	Maski Inscription	• Ruler: Ashoka • Period: 3rd century BCE; Location: Maski, Karnataka • Script & Language: Brahmi script with Prakrit language. • Details: Epigraphically significant for explicitly using the name "<i>Devanampriya Asoka</i>", confirming that titles in other edicts belonged to Emperor Ashoka.
10	Uttaramerur Inscriptions	• Ruler: Cholas (particularly Parantaka I) • Period: 10th century CE; Location: Uttaramerur, Tamil Nadu • Script & Language: Grantha and Tamil scripts with Tamil language. • Details: Offers detailed records of village administration, executive committees (<i>variyaams</i>), qualifications, disqualifications, and the secret ballot system (<i>Kudavolai</i>).

Government School Closures in India

As per a recent NITI Aayog report, ~94,000 government schools have closed over the past decade (~25/day).

- ✓ This led to a 2.26 crore fall in enrolment and a decline in government schools' share of total enrolment from 71% (2005) to 49.24% (2024-25). Madhya Pradesh (MP), Uttar Pradesh (UP), and Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) are the most affected states.

Governance & Constitutional Consequences

• Erosion of Constitutional Mandate (Article 21A):

Unilateral closures by states without central oversight undermine the federal guarantee of the RTE Act, shifting public education from a fundamental right to a state-dependent welfare measure.

• Asymmetry of Power:

School closures expose the non-justiciable reality of the RTE Act for poor families. While the right exists on paper, the practical legal and economic remedies remain completely out of reach for the marginalized.

• Marginalization of Community Voice in Governance:

Top-down administrative closures bypass and render School Management Committees (SMCs) obsolete, stripping local communities and parents of their statutory voice in school operations.

Key Drivers Behind Closures & Mergers

- **Administrative Rationalization:** States are merging under-enrolled, single-teacher schools to pool physical and human resources. The **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** endorses this through "School Complexes/Clusters".
- **Macro-Fiscal Under-Investment:** Total public spending on education has hovered around **2.7%–2.9% of GDP** (falling short of the 6% target as recommended by the Kothari Commission back in 1966), while education's share in the central budget has nearly halved over the past decade. This budgetary squeeze limits capital expenditure on rural school infrastructure.
- **Demographic Transition:** India's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has dropped below replacement level, reducing the overall cohort of school-age children in rural areas. Rural-to-urban migration and seasonal displacement further deplete enrolment in remote primary schools.
- **Private Sector Migration:** Parental preferences have shifted towards private unaided schools (no. of private schools grew from 2.88 lakh (2014-15) to 3.31 lakh (2023-24)) due to perceptions of better quality and English-medium instruction.
- **The "Resource Starvation" Cycle:** Poor physical upkeep, lack of sanitation, multi-grade teaching, and severe vacancy levels (like nearly 13,000 vacant teaching posts in J&K) lead to low enrolment, creating a self-fulfilling cycle for closure.

Impact and Who bears the Cost?

- **Target Vulnerabilities:** Rural, tribal and economically weaker children, particularly **SC, ST and OBC communities**. Girls and first-generation learners who face greater barriers to travelling longer distances. Children in remote areas, where alternative schools/transport are limited.
- **Violation of RTE Mandates:** In regions like J&K, rationalization forces primary children to travel 4–6 km daily, breaching the **Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009** guarantee of a neighbourhood primary school within 1 km.
 - ▶ Under **Section 6 of the RTE Act**, governments must establish schools within neighbourhoods (**1 km for primary** and **3 km for upper-primary schools**).
- **Widening & gendered inequality:** Weakening public schooling undermines **social mobility and inclusion**.
 - ▶ As argued by Jyotirao Phule in 1882, state withdrawal from basic education undermines the single most vital instrument for interrupting inter-generational socio-economic inequality.
- **Exacerbated Dropout Risk & Unmapped Children:** In Madhya Pradesh alone, 11.38 lakh children sit in the **"Drop Box" category** (imminent risk of dropping out), alongside 1.23 lakh official dropouts and 1.55 lakh children displaced by migration. Over 3,500 schools recorded zero new admissions.
- **Quality-access trade-off:** Larger consolidated schools may offer better teachers/infrastructure, but gains in quality are meaningless if children cannot **reach or afford** them.
- **Greater private-school dependence:** Declining government enrolment has coincided with rising private enrolment, **increasing the financial burden on poor families due to higher private-school fees**.

Way Forward

- **Mandatory Social & Equity Impact Assessment:** Conduct localized impact mapping (distance, terrain, safety for girls) prior to any school closure, rather than relying solely on administrative threshold numbers.

- **Guaranteed Transport & Access:** Where consolidation into school complexes is necessary under NEP 2020, state governments must guarantee free, safe, and regulated transport to prevent dropouts.
- **Empowering Community Governance:** Revive and empower SMCs to give parents and civil society direct decision-making power over school rationalization plans.
- **Active Tracking & Retention Infrastructure:** Deploy state-wide portals and targeted campaigns (like *School Chalen Hum*) using digital databases to track "Drop Box" and migrant children.
- **Public Reinvestment:** Fulfill the longstanding commitment of allocating **6% of GDP to public education** to address core deficits in infrastructure, digital access, and teacher vacancies.

Drug Free Youth for Viksit Bharat Sankalp Abhiyan

Prime Minister launched 'Nasha Mukh Yuva (Drug Free Youth) for Viksit Bharat Sankalp Abhiyan'.

- **100-Week Action Plan:** Every Sunday for 100 weeks will feature **sports, art, cultural activities, yoga/meditation and anti-drug awareness**.
- **Foundation:** Evolved from the **Kashi pilot project** and supported by **125+ spiritual organizations & NGOs** under the **Kashi Declaration**.
 - ✓ **Kashi Declaration:** Adopted on **20 July 2025 in Varanasi**, it provides a **5-year roadmap for a youth-led, drug-free India** and promotes a **whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach**, integrating **spiritual, cultural, educational and technological efforts** for drug prevention, rehabilitation and awareness.
- **Approach:** **Prevention + awareness + rehabilitation + social support**, while reducing stigma around addiction and recovery.
- **Role of Youth/Educational Institutions:** Students, NSS (National Service Scheme) /My Bharat volunteers and educational institutions are encouraged to lead **campus and community-level anti-drug movements**.
 - ✓ **National Service Scheme (NSS)**, launched in **1969** under the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports aims to develop students' **personality, social responsibility and civic consciousness** through community service. Its motto is **"Not Me But You"**, emphasizing selfless service and community welfare.
- **Significance:** Seeks to transform the fight against drug abuse into a **Jan Bhagidari movement**, linking youth well-being with India's development goals.

National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship Scheme (NMMSS)

The Department of School Education and Literacy under the Ministry of Education has invited fresh and renewal applications for the National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship Scheme (NMMSS) for **2026-27**.

- **Launched:** 2008 | **Ministry:** Education
- **Objective:** Prevent **dropout after Class VIII** and encourage economically weaker students to continue education up to **Class XII**.
- **Eligibility:** Regular students of **Government, Government-aided or local body schools**, with **parental annual income ≤ ₹3.5 lakh/year**, **≥55% marks in Class VII** (relaxable by 5% for SC/ST) and qualification in the **State/UT selection test**.
- **Coverage:** **1 lakh fresh scholarships/year** for Class IX students, continued through renewal up to **Class XII (maximum 4 years)** subject to the prescribed conditions
- **Scholarship:** **₹12,000 per student per annum**.

- **Exclusions:** Students of **Kendriya Vidyalayas, Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas, private schools and Government residential schools** providing boarding, lodging and education. It also does not cover **studies abroad** or **diploma/certificate-level courses**.
- **Selection & Renewal:** State/UTs conduct **Mental Ability Test (MAT) and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)-90 MCQs each**. Selection requires **40% aggregate (32% for SC/ST)** and **55% in Class VIII (50% for SC/ST)**. Renewal requires **60% in Class X (55% for SC/ST)** and **first-attempt promotion** in Classes IX→X and XI→XII.
- **Implementation:** Applications are processed through the **National Scholarship Portal (NSP)**, with scholarships disbursed **directly to students' bank accounts through DBT via PFMS** (Public Financial Management System)

Only 40% Of World's Health Facilities Meet Basic Sanitation Standards: UN

A recent report titled- "*Progress on Water, Sanitation, Hygiene, Environmental Cleaning and Waste Management in Health-Care Facilities 2015-2025*" by the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF through the Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) on Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene, has for the first time provided global estimates of basic sanitation services in healthcare settings.

Key Findings of the Report

- **Service and Facilities Meeting Basic Standards:**
 -  **Basic Water Services:** 85% (11% still have no water service)
 -  **Basic Hygiene Services:** 72% (recorded the largest gains since 2015)
 -  **Basic Healthcare Waste Management:** 71%
 -  **Basic Environmental Cleaning:** 59%
 -  **Basic Sanitation Services:** 40%
- **Sanitation:** While 89% have some form of sanitation, only **40%** meet all "basic service" criteria. 11% of health facilities globally have **no sanitation services at all**, directly affecting 936 million people.
 - Basic sanitation requires **usable, improved toilets**, including staff toilet; sex-separated toilet with menstrual hygiene facilities; toilet accessible to people with limited mobility.
 - **Regional Disparity:** Sanitation access varies drastically: Sub-Saharan Africa sits at just 23% basic coverage, compared to 55% in Central and Southern Asia.
- **Environmental Cleaning:** Basic standards require both written cleaning protocols and trained cleaning staff. **18% of facilities** (serving ~1.5 billion people) met

Why does it matter?

Poor WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) and environmental cleaning can:

- increase **Healthcare-associated Infections (HAIs)**;
- facilitate the spread of **Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)**;
- compromise **maternal, newborn and child health**;
- undermine **safe, dignified and quality healthcare**.

Recommendations:

- **Mainstream WASH in Healthcare:** Integrate **WASH into health planning, budgeting and financing** rather than treating it separately.
- **Strengthen Investment:** Develop **costed and adequately financed national plans** for WASH, waste management and electricity that bridges technical targets with financial realities
- **Improve Monitoring & Data:** Strengthen **routine monitoring and data collection**. Assess not just infrastructure availability but **reliability, safety, accessibility, and cleanliness**.
- **Promote Inclusive Sanitation:** Ensure facilities meet the needs of **women, girls, persons with disabilities and people with limited mobility**.
- **Strengthen Infection Control:** Ensure **trained cleaning staff and standardized cleaning protocols** to strengthen **Infection Prevention and Control (IPC)**.
- **Address Regional Inequalities:** Prioritize **least-developed countries and underserved regions** to reduce WASH disparities.

neither requirement. In **Least-Developed Countries (LDCs)**, only **24%** of health facilities met basic environmental cleaning standards.

Challenge to Clinical Establishments (Central Government) Rules, 2012

The Union Health Ministry has defended Rule 9(ii) of the Clinical Establishments (Central Government) Rules, 2012 before the Supreme Court (SC). The Rule requires clinical establishments to charge patients within a range of rates determined by the Central Government in consultation with States.

About Clinical Establishments (Central Government) Rules, 2012

- **Legal basis:** Framed under the **Clinical Establishments (Registration and Regulation) Act, 2010**.
- **Key provisions:**
 - Display charges for services and facilities.
 - Charge within the **Central Government-determined rate range**.
 - Follow **Standard Treatment Guidelines**.
 - Maintain **Electronic Medical/Health Records**.
 - Maintain relevant information and statistics.
- **Standards:** The Rules prescribe minimum standards for facilities and services, including diagnostic laboratories.

Note: The Rules apply where the **2010 Act has been adopted and made applicable** by the concerned State/UT.

What is the Issue?

Several petitions have challenged Rule 9(ii) of the Clinical Establishments (Central Government) Rules, 2012 on grounds of violation of **Articles 14 (Right to Equality), 19(1)(g)- Freedom of Profession, Trade or Business and 21- Right to life has been judicially expanded to include the right to health and access to healthcare**. The Centre argues that regulating healthcare prices is necessary to make healthcare **affordable while maintaining the financial sustainability of providers**.

Concerns Raised by Petitioners	Centre's Key Arguments
• Violation of Article 19(1)(g): They argued that government-imposed price ranges unreasonably restrict the freedom to practice the medical profession/business. • Different Costs Across Locations: Healthcare costs vary significantly based on city, infrastructure, technology, specialist expertise and operating costs; a centrally determined range may not adequately reflect these differences. • Technological Advancement: The Association of Healthcare Providers (India) argued that rapidly changing medical technology, procedures require flexibility in pricing, and rigid price controls could discourage investment and adoption of newer technologies.	• Article 47: Regulation of healthcare prices furthers the State's constitutional duty to improve public health. • Not Uniform Price-Fixing: The Rule provides a range of rates, allowing establishments to vary charges based on factors such as quality, infrastructure and patient profile. • Reasonable Restriction: The right to carry on a clinical establishment is subject to reasonable restrictions under Article 19(6) in public interest. • Healthcare ≠ Ordinary Business: Medical establishments have a strong public-welfare dimension, so their commercial freedom can be regulated.

• Statutory Validity: Some petitioners have questioned whether Rule 9(ii) is ultra vires the Clinical Establishments Act, 2010 i.e., whether the Act actually gives the Centre sufficient authority to impose such price regulation.	• Quality + Affordability: Registration itself is linked to minimum standards of facilities and services; the Rules also require establishments to display their rates.
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Federalism Angle

Health is primarily a State subject. The Clinical Establishments (Registration and Regulation) Act, 2010 applies automatically to all UTs (except Delhi) and the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Mizoram, and Sikkim, while other states must adopt it via a resolution under **Article 252** of the Constitution. The Centre therefore maintains that States retain an important role in implementation and monitoring, while the Centre provides standards and guidelines.

NOTTO Organ Transplant Portal

The **National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organization (NOTTO)** has launched a **real-time national portal and mobile app** (e-Pratyaropan) to make organ transplantation more **transparent, efficient and equitable**.

✓ **2025 Data:** Kidney was the most transplanted organ (**14,477**), followed by liver and heart. **Delhi** recorded the highest total number of transplants (**4,564**), while **Tamil Nadu** had the highest number of deceased-donor transplants (**266**).

Key Challenges Involved

- **Divergent State Allocation Criteria:** States follow different methods- **scoring systems, registration (First come first serve basis), regional zoning and living-donor status** making uniform allocation difficult.
- **Lack of Uniformity:** towards common allocation criteria; until then, **state guidelines will determine priority**.

How Does It Work?

- **Registration:** A patient can be registered by any **transplant hospital** providing the required service. Only authorized **hospitals, State health departments and NOTTO** can access the portal.
- **Digital Patient Records:** Hospitals directly enter patients' details into the portal instead of maintaining separate records.
- **Unified Waiting List:** The system automatically creates **hospital-, state-, regional-, and national-level waiting lists** based on the data entered.
- **Real-Time Tracking:** Organ allocation, transportation, and transplant outcomes are recorded on the portal.

How are Organs Allocated?

- The **donor hospital gets the first right** to the donated organ if it has a suitable recipient.
- If no suitable recipient is available, the organ moves to the **state pool → regional pool → national pool**.
- For **kidneys**, the donor hospital can retain one kidney, while the other may go to the **nearest government centre with a matching recipient**.
- All **inter-hospital, intra-state and inter-state transfers** are coordinated and recorded through the portal.

Other Key Features of the Portal

- **National Swap-Donor Matching:** Matches patients with **incompatible willing family donors** with other compatible donor-recipient pairs across the country, expanding the pool beyond individual hospitals.
- **Super-Urgent Alerts:** Hospitals and authorities can raise alerts for patients requiring urgent transplantation.
- **Aadhaar-Linked Organ Pledges:** Enables people to register organ-donation pledges and helps establish their wishes when they cannot provide consent (in case of critical medical emergency or brain death). While the Aadhaar-linked pledge securely documents your decision, under Indian law, your family or next of kin must **still give final consent** for organ retrieval after death.
- **Transplant Outcome Database:** Hospitals will upload patients' health and follow-up data, creating a **national database of transplant outcomes**.
- **Centre Registration:** Facilitate registration/renewal of transplant centres and formation of relevant committees.

Can Free Public Technology Break the Private Coaching Industry?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 2026 Independence Day address announced a national initiative to provide free online competitive exam coaching via Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI). Aimed at democratic access, reducing the financial burden on middle-class families, and addressing youth discontent following major exam disruptions (e.g., NEET paper leaks), this initiative seeks to democratize competitive preparation.

Way Forward

- **AI+ Human Mentorship:** Integrate AI-driven adaptive practice with physical mentors for emotional, psychological, and academic guidance.
- **Hybrid Learning Infrastructure:** Utilize National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 frameworks to establish local "Skill Hubs" in existing schools for offline peer learning, tests, and mentorship.

Potential of Public Digital Technology:

- **Democratizing Access & Equity:** Provides high-quality learning resources to students in rural areas and Tier-2/3 cities, reducing regional and socio-economic disparities.
- **AI-Enabled Personalization:** Replaces static repositories (e.g., SWAYAM) with adaptive learning, real-time analytics, and automated doubt resolution powered by Agentic AI.
- **Common Learning Stack:** Standardizes foundational modules such as logical reasoning, quantitative aptitude, and general awareness which cover 70-80% of major examination syllabi.
- **Cost Reduction:** Reduces household expenditure on private tuition fees, study materials, and urban living costs incurred by relocating to coaching hubs like Kota or Mukherjee Nagar.

Why Free Content Alone Cannot Replace Coaching?

- **School-Exam Pedagogy Gap:** School curricula focus on board-oriented conceptual learning, whereas competitive exams stress speed, elimination techniques, and rank-oriented strategy.
- **Coaching Ecosystem:** Private institutes provide structured daily routines, peer competition, continuous assessment, and personal mentoring- elements that pure digital lectures struggle to replicate.
- **Domain Divergence:** Exam-specific requirements differ significantly; a single common stack cannot fully serve the distinct demands of exams like JEE Advanced, NEET, or UPSC CSE.
- **Digital Infrastructure Limits:** Unreliable electricity, poor internet connectivity, and a lack of personal devices continue to exclude marginalized learners in remote regions.

- **Common-to-Specialized Stack Architecture:** Develop a unified foundational platform for shared aptitudes, overlaid with dedicated modules for specific national exams (building upon platforms like **SATHEE**- launched by Ministry of Education along with IIT Kanpur to provide free guidance for competitive exams).
- **Bridging the Digital Divide:** Deploy offline-capable technology, such as satellite-connected local servers and low-bandwidth platforms, to support remote exam centers and students.
- **Curricular Alignment:** Gradually re-align Senior Secondary school instruction with application-based learning to reduce student reliance on private coaching from the start.

Supreme Court on PC&PNDT Act, 1994

The Supreme Court (SC) recently clarified that while Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act, 1994 (PC&PNDT Act) offences are cognizable, the police cannot independently **investigate them**. Instead, investigation and prosecution must follow the specialized framework under the Act.

✓ The PCPNDT Act, 1994 prohibits the use of medical technology for sex determination. Originally focused on pre-natal techniques, the 2003 amendment expanded its scope to include pre-conception sex selection to combat female foeticide and improve skewed sex ratios.

Case Background: The case arose from an allegation of **illegal prenatal sex determination at a hospital in Bulandshahr, Uttar Pradesh**. The **District Magistrate (Appropriate Authority)** authorized a decoy operation, followed by a raid and registration of an **FIR under the PC&PNDT Act and IPC**. The accused challenged the chargesheet before the **Allahabad High Court**. Due to **conflicting High Court views on the police's role**, the matter was referred to the SC.

- **Key Issue Raised:** Whether police can **register and investigate PC&PNDT offences** and whether a Magistrate can **take cognizance based on a police chargesheet**.

SC Ruling

Legal Issue	SC Ruling & Legal Provision
Who Investigates?	Appropriate Authority (Sec 17). Police cannot independently investigate PC&PNDT offences.

Police Involvement	Supplementary only. Rule 18A(3)(iv) mandates avoiding police involvement "as far as possible." Police may assist the Authority but cannot take over the investigation.
Court Cognizance	Special Complaint Procedure (Sec 28). A Magistrate cannot take cognizance of a PC&PNDT offence solely on the basis of a police chargesheet.
IPC/BNS 2023 Offences	Police can independently investigate separate offences under IPC/BNS arising from the same incident.

Key Takeaways & Reasoning:

- **Nature of "Cognizable" (Sec 27):** Although PC&PNDT offences are cognizable, this does not give the police independent investigative jurisdiction where the special Act assigns investigation to the Appropriate Authority.
- **Specialized Expertise:** Sex-selection cases require medical and technical evidence, which Parliament deliberately entrusted to the Appropriate Authority over ordinary police.
- **Composition of Appropriate Authority (Sec 17):** Includes a Joint Director of Health (Chairperson), an eminent woman from a women's organization, and a Law Department officer.
- **Functions of the Authority:** Grants/cancels clinic registrations, enforces standards, investigates complaints, and takes enforcement actions.

Genomic Data Gap & Health Inequality

Global genomic databases and AI-driven personalized medicine suffer from a major diversity gap: ~86% of GWAS (Genome-Wide Association Studies) participants are of European ancestry, while South Asians account for <1%. It risks embedding existing health inequities into future AI-based healthcare.

Way Forward

- **Harmonize Datasets:** Develop interoperable standards across Indian and South Asian biobanks.
- **Local Calibration:** Validate and recalibrate **risk scores, diagnostic thresholds and AI models** using representative South Asian data.
- **Inclusive Sampling:** Include **rural, tribal, and endogamous populations**, not just urban cohorts.
- **Equitable Governance:** Ensure **data sovereignty, privacy, benefit-sharing, technology transfer and meaningful participation of local researchers**.

Key Challenges

- **Higher disease burden:** South Asians face earlier and higher risks of **Type-2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and asthma**.
- **AI/risk-score bias:** **Polygenic Risk Scores (PRS), diagnostic thresholds and prediction models** developed mainly from European data may have reduced accuracy in South Asian populations.
- **Hidden genetic diversity:** South Asia contains diverse **endogamous, tribal and regional populations**; treating them as a single group can obscure population-specific disease variants.
- **Structural barriers:** LMICs (Low- and middle-income countries) face inadequate **research funding, genomic infrastructure, skilled personnel and biobanking capacity**.

Regional Initiatives:

- **Genome India:** Mapping India's genetic diversity; it has sequenced **10,000 Indian genomes from 83 diverse Indian populations**, helping address the underrepresentation of South Asians in global genomic datasets.
- **Phenome India:** by the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) aimed at enhancing the understanding of health patterns and disease risk factors specific to the Indian population (cardio-metabolic disorders such as diabetes, obesity, and fatty liver)
- **Longevity India:** anchored by the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), serves as a unified hub for deep research, discovery, and pioneering technology development, driving advancements in healthy aging for India.
- **Regional resources:** Sri Lankan Twin Registry Biobank (established in 1997, first ever **twin register** in South Asia) and Pakistan Genome Resource.

Student Well-being In India Declines Sharply Through Senior School Years

As per a report titled- "Student Well-Being Pulse Report" by IC3 Institute (examining **student mental health and well-being** across Grades 8-12)- student wellbeing in India has declined sharply through the senior school years.

Key Findings:

- **Overall Well-being:** High well-being fell from **62% in Grade 8 to 43% in Grade 12**.
- **Declining Positivity:** happiness, confidence, and motivation steadily decreased with age.
- **Rising Distress:** Anxiety, loneliness, frustration, and sadness peaked in Grades 11-12.
- **Gender Gap:** **33% of girls vs 23% of boys** reported frequent anxiety.
- **Sleep Concerns:** Nearly **67% of Grades 11-12 students** slept for less than the recommended 7 hours.
- **Support Gap:** Students mainly sought help from **friends (49%) and family (44%)**, while only **6% approached counsellors**.

- **Positive Aspects:** **78% had a close friend** and **74% felt safe and included** at school.

Factors Responsible for Declining Student Well-being

- **Academic & Competitive Pressure:** Board exams, entrance tests and intense competition for limited seats/jobs create sustained stress.
- **Family Expectations:** Pressure to secure academic and career success increases the psychological burden.
- **Limited Career Opportunities:** Uncertainty over higher education, employment and placements fuels anxiety.
- **Financial Stress:** High costs of quality education increase pressure on students to perform.
- **Social Media & Peer Comparison:** Constant comparison can create feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem.
- **Neglect of Holistic Development:** Excessive focus on academics leaves little time for **sports, creativity, hobbies and social development**.
- **Bullying & Relationship Issues:** Peer conflicts, bullying, and personal problems can worsen emotional distress.
- **Mental-Health Stigma:** Low awareness, stigma and fear of being judged discourage students from seeking help.
- **Inadequate Support Systems:** Shortage of counsellors, limited teacher training and weak early-identification mechanisms delay intervention.
- **Sleep Deprivation:** Heavy academic workloads and exam preparation reduce sleep, affecting emotional resilience and cognitive performance.

Way Forward

- **Strengthen Existing Government Initiatives:** Effectively implement **MANODARPAN and UMMEED guidelines** to improve counselling, early identification and suicide-prevention mechanisms.
- **Institutionalize Mental-health Support:** Ensure **trained counsellors, wellness teams and teacher-mentors** are available across schools and higher educational institutions.
- **Build other Supportive Environments:** Strengthen **peer-support systems, and safe spaces** where students can seek help without stigma.
- **Reduce Academic Pressure:** Promote balanced assessment, realistic workloads, career guidance, and greater scope for **sports, arts and other co-curricular activities**.
- **Early Identification & Intervention:** Regularly identify signs of **anxiety, isolation, bullying, burnout and behavioural changes** and establish clear referral mechanisms.
- **Address Wider Stressors:** Tackle **family expectations, financial difficulties, discrimination, and social media related pressures** alongside academic stress.
- **Promote Mental-health Literacy:** Integrate **life skills, emotional learning, resilience, and mental-health awareness** into the curriculum.

- **MANODARPAN:** Government initiative providing **mental-health and psychological support** to students, teachers and families through counselling, helplines and awareness programmes.
- **UMMEED (Understand, Motivate, Manage, Empathise, Empower, Develop) Guidelines:** Ministry of Education's **suicide-prevention guidelines for schools**, focusing on identifying at-risk students, setting up School Wellness Teams (SWT), and timely support.

Nurses Registration & Tracking System (NRTS)

The Nurses Registration and Tracking System (NRTS) was launched by the Indian Nursing Council (INC) with the National Informatics Centre (NIC) to create a national digital registry of nurses and simplify registration-related services. However, even after several years, the system remains incompletely implemented across States.

Multi-Dimensional Impact

- **Healthcare Professionals:** Severe bottlenecks in career progression, loss of international employment opportunities, and financial exploitation by agencies.
- **Healthcare Systems & Governance:** Distorted nurse-to-patient ratios, compromised health resource mapping, and an inability to project regional workforce shortages.
- **Patients:** Suboptimal healthcare delivery due to maldistribution of nursing personnel across rural and urban facilities.

Way Forward

• **Legislative Alignment (NNMC Act, 2023):** Leverage the **National Nursing and Midwifery Commission (NNMC)** Act to enforce dynamic, live national registration as a statutory requirement across all states.

• **API Integration:** Connect existing State Nursing Council software directly with the NRTS central server via Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) to eliminate manual re-entry and work duplication.

• **Policy Incentivization:** Mandate **National Unique Identity (NUID)** issued through the NRTS by INC) linkage for state license renewals, hospital accreditation through the National Accreditation Board for Hospitals & Healthcare Providers (NABH), and institutional empanelment under Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY).

• **Automated Clearance**

Workflows: Implement a 30-day "deemed approval" mechanism for No Objection Certificates (NOCs) to eliminate inter-state transfers and verification delays.

Key Data and Implementation Gap

- **National Registration Deficit:** Out of India's **46.02 lakh** registered nursing personnel comprising Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs), Registered Nurses & Registered Midwives (RN & RM), and Lady Health Visitors (LHVs)- only **14.24 lakh (~31%)** are enrolled on the NRTS, leaving **31.78 lakh (~69%)** unintegrated.
- **Stark Regional Disparities:**
 - **High-Performing States:** Bihar (~99%), Jharkhand (~90%), and Odisha (~80%) demonstrate strong implementation.
 - **Lagging States:** Major nursing training and workforce hubs show severe under-enrollment, including Karnataka (~15%), Tamil Nadu (~12%), Andhra Pradesh (~20%), and Kerala (~36%).

Core Objectives vs. Structural Bottlenecks

Intended Function	Operational Reality	Systemic Challenge
Centralized Register	State Councils maintain parallel offline/legacy databases.	Overlapping jurisdiction under the Indian Nursing Council Act / NNMC framework.
Inter-State Mobility	Months of delays in issuing NOCs.	Resistance by State Councils to lose regulatory control and fee revenue.
Credential Verification	Delayed verification process for foreign employment boards.	Financial exploitation by third-party agencies and middlemen.
Dynamic Workforce Tracking	Database inflated by retired, deceased, or migrated personnel.	Absence of dynamic off-boarding mechanisms for inactive profiles.

Regulating Livestreamed Judicial Proceedings

Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) in *Harshita Grover v. Union of India, 2026* issued interim directions restricting the extraction, circulation, and monetization of live-streamed court proceedings without prior permission, while proposing a protocol for access via official court archives.

Way Forward

- **Transparency by Default, Privacy by Exception:** Continue livestreaming open proceedings while excluding narrowly defined sensitive categories.

- **Authenticated Open Archive:** Create an easily accessible official repository with **clear, standardized terms of use**, rather than case-by-case permission.

- **Ex-Post Accountability:**

Penalize deliberate misrepresentation, deceptive editing, impersonation or other demonstrable misuse under existing law mechanism (e.g., **Contempt of Court under Article 129**), rather than imposing blanket prior permission restraint.

- **Technical Safeguards:** Use **digital watermarks, timestamps and authenticated source links** to establish provenance and deter tampering.

- **Correction Mechanism:** Provide authenticated recordings/transcripts and prompt institutional clarification where judicial remarks are inaccurately or misleadingly reported.

- **Inclusive Protocol-Making:** Incorporate inputs from the judiciary, Bar, journalists, digital platforms, civil society and litigants.

Rationale Behind the Regulation

- **Prevent Misuse & Sensationalism:** Unregulated footage is often edited out of context, sensationalized, or turned into clickbait shorts/memes, harming judicial dignity.
- **Protect Stakeholders from Trolling:** Judges, advocates, and litigants, especially vulnerable parties, face public trolling and reputational risk.
- **Prevent Commercial Exploitation:** Prevents third-party monetization of judicial footage as digital entertainment.
- **Ensure Authenticity:** Channeling access through official court archives ensures users rely only on verified, unaltered audio-visual records.
- **Protect Sensitive Cases:** Prevents exposure of sensitive proceedings (POCSO, matrimonial, custody, sexual offenses) as outlined in the *Model Rules for Live Streaming and Recording of Court Proceedings (2021)*.

Key Concerns & Constitutional Implications

- **Dilution of Open Justice:** *Swapnil Tripathi vs SC (2018)* linked live-streaming to the **Right of Access to Justice (Article 21)** and pronouncement of judgments in open court (**Article 145(4)**).
- **Prior Restraint & Gatekeeping:** Mandatory permission may create an administrative barrier, disproportionately affecting ordinary citizens, students, legal-aid organizations and smaller media organizations.
- **Weakening Institutional Accountability:** Public scrutiny can act as a check on judicial conduct; livestreaming was also viewed as strengthening judicial accountability.
- **Chilling Effect on Speech (Article 19(1)(a)):** In *Chief Election Commissioner v. M.R. Vijayabhaskar (2021)*, the SC upheld citizens' right to know what transpires in open court and refused to restrain reporting of oral remarks.

Doxxing

The alleged online targeting of women who participated in **NEET (UG) 2026 paper-leak protests** has brought the issue of **doxxing** into focus. Protesters reportedly faced exposure of personal details, online abuse, threats, and intimidation after their identities were traced through social media.

What is Doxxing?

It refers to the **unauthorized publication or circulation of an individual's personal information online**- such as phone number, address, workplace/college or family details- often to **harass, intimidate or silence** them.

Legal Status in India

- **No Standalone Offence:** Doxxing itself is not separately criminalized under Indian law.

- **Existing Laws:** Depending on the circumstances, provisions relating to **stalking, criminal intimidation, privacy violations and offences against women/children** may apply under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), the Information Technology Act, 2000 and Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012.
- **Challenge:** The absence of a specific offence creates a **legal and enforcement gap** in protecting victims from the initial exposure of personal information.

Way Forward

- **Define and Criminalize Doxxing:** Introduce a clear, technology-neutral legal definition with proportionate penalties for malicious disclosure of personal data.
- **Strengthen Data Protection:** Ensure effective implementation of the **Digital Personal Data Protection framework** and safeguards against misuse of personal information.
- **Platform Accountability:** Require social media platforms to ensure **swift takedown, grievance redressal, and preservation of evidence** in doxxing cases.
- **Victim-Centric Enforcement:** Establish fast-track cybercrime mechanisms and stronger coordination between **police, cyber cells, and platforms**.
- **Protect Vulnerable Groups:** Provide enhanced safeguards for **women, children, journalists and protesters** facing targeted online harassment.
- **Digital Literacy:** Promote awareness about **privacy settings, consent, evidence preservation and cybercrime reporting**.

Is Crude Language A Crime in India?

Crude, vulgar, or profane language is **not per se a criminal offence** in India. The law distinguishes between speech that is merely distasteful or uncivil, and speech that crosses statutory thresholds into criminal liability. Any restriction on speech must strictly align with reasonable restrictions under **Article 19(2)** of the Constitution.

Background

The issue gained attention after a Zero FIR against a Noida woman over allegedly abusive remarks against Prime Minister during a Jantar Mantar protest, invoking Sections 352 (intentional insult to provoke breach of peace), 353(1) (statements conducive to public mischief), and 356(1) (defamation) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS).

Statutory Framework and Judicial Interpretation

- **Obscenity vs. Vulgarity (Section 296 BNS):** Section 296 criminalizes obscene acts or words in public places. However, judicial standards have evolved from the rigid **Hicklin Test** (*Ranjit D. Udeshi v. State of Maharashtra, 1965*) to the **Contemporary Community Standards Test** (*Aveek Sarkar v State of West Bengal, 2014*).
 - ▶ **Hicklin Test:** Material was considered obscene if **even isolated portions could deprave or corrupt vulnerable minds**, especially those susceptible to such content.
 - ▶ **Contemporary Community Standards Test:** Obscenity is judged **as a whole, from the perspective of an average person, according to contemporary social standards**, rather than by isolating individual passages.
- **Profanity ≠ Obscenity:** In the *College Romance* case (2024) and *Mani v. State* (2026), the Supreme Court (SC) clarified that expletives, while vulgar or offensive, do not constitute obscenity unless they are **lascivious** or excite lustful thoughts in an average person. Swear words typically reflect anger, frustration, or excitement, not sexual arousal.
- **Intentional Insult (Section 352 BNS):** Simple hurt feelings or moral indignation do not attract criminal liability. Section 352 requires proof that the insult was intended or likely to provoke an **actual breach of public peace**.
- **Public Mischief (Section 353(1) BNS):** The provision targets specified forms of **false information, rumours or reports** that may cause mutiny, public alarm leading to offences, or incitement between classes/communities. Mere criticism or harsh political speech does not automatically satisfy these ingredients.
- **Defamation and Public Criticism (Section 356 BNS):** While speech harming reputation is actionable, statutory exceptions protect **good-faith criticism** of public figures regarding their official conduct.

Constitutional Safeguards:

- **Article 19(1)(a) vs. Article 19(2):** Free speech covers sharp, unpleasant, and political criticism. State power cannot treat subjective moral offense as an infraction against "decency or morality" without meeting the high legal threshold of public harm.
- **Threshold of Public Order:** As highlighted in judicial rulings regarding political commentary, harsh language targeting leaders or institutions cannot be criminalized under public mischief provisions without a **proximate threat to public order**.

Conclusion

Indian criminal law does not punish bad manners or offensive speech in isolation. Criminality arises only when specific statutory ingredients (lasciviousness, incitement, or harm to reputation) are satisfied. Preserving this boundary is vital to prevent moralism or political sensitivity from chilling constitutionally protected expression.

Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Act, 2026

The Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill, 2026, passed by both Houses of Parliament, has become law after receiving the President's assent.

About the Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Act, 2026

The Act seeks to amend Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969, mandate **registration of births and deaths** and make delayed registration **more stringent**.

Key Amendments: It amends Section 13(3) of the 1969 act stating that for any birth or death of which information is given to the Registrar with:

- **Delay of 1-2 years:** Registration requires an order from the **District Magistrate (DM) or Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM or Executive Magistrate)** authorized by the DM, having jurisdiction over the area where the birth or death has taken place, after verifying the event's correctness and payment of prescribed fee.
- **Delay Beyond 2 years delay:** Registration requires an order from a **Judicial Magistrate First Class**, after verification and payment of prescribed fee.

Concerns Raised

- **Judicial Burden:** Referring all registrations delayed beyond two years to Judicial Magistrates may add to the existing court workload.
- **Accessibility:** Additional judicial procedures could make registration harder for people in **remote/disadvantaged areas**.
- **Wrongful Exclusion vs Fraud:** Stricter verification may prevent fraudulent inclusion but could also exclude legitimate citizens from obtaining vital documentation.
- **Evidence Gap:** The rationale for selecting **two years as the threshold** for judicial intervention has not been clearly established.

Revamped Khelo India Scheme and Enhanced Assistance to National Sports Federations

The Union Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister approved an expanded Khelo India Scheme and enhanced Assistance to National Sports Federations (ANSFs) with a combined outlay of ₹36,441 crore for the period 2026-27 to 2030-31, nearly **8 times** the previous Khelo India allocation.

✓ **Khelo India Scheme** is India's flagship programme to build a vibrant sports ecosystem at the grassroots level and to empower athletes to achieve global excellence

✓ **ANSF** is a government scheme that provides financial and institutional support to National Sports Federations (NSFs). It funds **coaching, training camps, sports science, equipment and international exposure** to improve India's performance in global sporting events.

Significance: The scheme aims to make **sports a tool of youth development, fitness, inclusion and nation-building**, while supporting India's ambition to become a **global sporting powerhouse** and advance the vision of **Viksit Bharat@2047**.

Key Features of Enhanced Khelo India Scheme

- **Grassroots-to-Olympics Pathway:** Creates a structured route from **school/village sports** → **Khelo India** → **Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS)** enabling deserving athletes to receive world-class training, international exposure and comprehensive support to compete for medals at the highest level.
 - ▶ **Strengthen School Ecosystem:** New **Khelo India Feeder Schools (KIFS)** and **Khelo India Utkrishta Vidyalayas (KIUV)** integrate sports with mainstream education and enable early talent identification.
 - ▶ **Sports Ecosystem:** Strengthens National Centres of Excellence (NCOEs), Khelo India Centres of Excellence (KICoEs), Sports Authority of India Training Centres (STCs), Khelo India Accredited Academies (KIAAs), Khelo India Centres (KICs) and Youth Sports Companies (YSCs) of the armed forces for coaching, infrastructure and sports-science support.
- **Wider Talent Pool:** Introduces **Emerging Khelo India Athletes (E-KIAs)**, alongside Khelo India Athletes, to bring nearly **10 times more athletes** into structured training.
- **More Competitions:** Enhanced exposure to school, university, regional and sport-specific leagues, including greater opportunities for **women, para-athletes and indigenous sports**. The scheme also provides support for organizing the National Games and hosting major international sporting events in India.
- **Fitness & Inclusion:** Expands **Fit India** to promote active lifestyles, including in **remote/border areas**, and use sports for social inclusion and prevention of substance abuse.
- **Professional Coaching:** Establishes the **National Coach Accreditation Board (NCAB)** to standardize coaching qualifications and improve professional standards.
- **Digital Sports Ecosystem:** A unified digital platform will integrate **athletes, infrastructure, competitions, coaching, talent assessment and funding** for data-driven governance.
- **Public-Private Partnership:** Greater collaboration with **private academies, corporates and other institutions** to leverage investment, innovation and expertise in sports infrastructure, talent development and athlete support, creating a truly national sports ecosystem driven by both public and private participation.
- **International Excellence:** Strengthened **ANSF scheme complement the revamped Khelo India Scheme**. It supports Indian athletes and teams through funding for coaching, sports science, modern equipment, international exposure, coaching camps, engagement of foreign experts and participation in major international competitions. It will also support sports cooperation with countries of the Global South and promote India's indigenous sports internationally.

DISHA 2.0

Central Government launched **Designing Innovative Solutions for Holistic Access to Justice (DISHA) 2.0** with ₹255 Crore Outlay to Expand Technology-Driven Access to Justice Across India.

What is DISHA 2.0?

It is a **Central Sector Scheme for 2026-31** fully funded through **Gross Budgetary Support (GBS)** by the Central Government. It aims to ensure **"ease of justice"** by leveraging **technology, legal aid and legal awareness**. It expands access to citizen-friendly legal services, particularly for **vulnerable and disadvantaged sections**.

4 Components of DISHA 2.0

- **Tele-Law (Reaching the Unreached):** Free **pre-litigation legal advice** through **2.5 lakh Common Service Centres (CSCs)** at Gram Panchayat level; doorstep assistance by **Nyaya Sahayaks**; strengthened through **Artificial Intelligence** and multilingual access.
- **Nyaya Bandhu (Pro-Bono Legal Services Programme):** Free **pro-bono legal assistance and court representation** for eligible persons under **Section 12 of the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987**; promotes Pro-Bono Clubs in law colleges.

- **Legal Literacy and Legal Awareness Programme (LLLAP):** Promotes **legal literacy and awareness** through government departments, Public Sector Undertakings, Civil Society Organizations, law universities and media partnerships.

- **Vision for Integrated Delivery of Harmonized Legal Initiatives (VIDHI)-Sanjeevani:** Centralized digital platform with an integrated dashboard (consolidating data streams from all 4 components) for real-time monitoring and

Significance of DISHA 2.0

- **Access to Justice:** Advances **Articles 14 (Equality before law), 21 (Protection of life and personal liberty) and 39A (Equal Justice and Free Legal Aid)** by making legal services accessible to all, especially vulnerable groups through **Common Service Centres, digital platforms and doorstep services**.
- **Technology-Enabled Justice:** Uses **AI, multilingual platforms and digital dashboards** to improve accessibility and service delivery.
- **Bridges Legal Awareness Gap:** Promotes **legal literacy**, helping citizens understand their rights and legal remedies.
- **Strengthens Pro-Bono Culture:** Encourages advocates and law students to provide **free legal assistance** to disadvantaged sections.
- **Inclusive Governance:** Helps overcome **economic, geographical and informational barriers** to justice.
- **Data-Driven Administration through (VIDHI)-Sanjeevani**
- **Global Commitment:** Supports **SDG 16- Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions**.

data-driven decision-making, integrated with the **Artificial Intelligence-powered multilingual Nyaya Setu chatbot**.

The Digital Transformation of the Indian Judiciary

The **e-Courts Mission Mode Project**, launched in 2007, is transforming India's traditional paper-based judiciary into a **digital, accessible and transparent justice-delivery system**.

Key Components

- **e-Filing:** Enables online filing of cases/documents across all courts, with **online payments, e-signatures, e-Vakalatnama and case tracking**;
- **National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG):** Public dashboard providing real-time data on **pending/disposed cases, case stages and reasons for delays** across the Supreme Court (SC), High Courts (HCs) and District Courts.
- **Virtual Courts & Video Conferencing:** Enable **remote hearings**, reducing travel and improving access; **11 HCs** have livestreaming, while **31 Virtual Courts** handle traffic challans; **Nyaya Shruti** enables virtual testimony.
- **Digitization of Records:** **753+ crore pages** of court records digitized and made searchable, improving preservation, retrieval and legal research.
- **Digitisation now links the entire criminal justice chain:** Interoperable Criminal Justice System (**ICJS**) digitally connects **police, courts, prisons, prosecution and forensic institutions**, supported by **Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS)**, **Investigation Tracking System for Sexual Offences (ITSSO)**, **e-Sakshya** (digital evidence), **e-Summons**, **Medico Legal Examination and Postmortem Reporting (MedLEaPR)**, **Nyaya Shruti**, **e-Forensic**, **e-Prison**, **e-Prosecution** and **National Automated Fingerprint Identification System (NAFIS)** for seamless data sharing and faster case processing.
- **Digital Tracking of judicial business:** **e-Courts Services Portal/app**; **JustIS** (helps judges in case-status and judicial-work tracking); **National Service and Tracking of Electronic Processes (NSTEP)** -**GPS-enabled NSTEP** ensures real-time, transparent summons delivery.

- **e-Sewa Kendras** are citizen assistance centres providing **case-status information, e-filing, certified copies, e-payments, digital signatures, legal-aid and virtual-court/video-conferencing assistance.**
- **Artificial Intelligence (AI) & Machine Learning:** Under **Phase III of e-Courts Mission Mode Project (2023-27)**, tools such as **LegRAA** (legal research and Analysis Assistant), **Digital Courts 2.1** (paperless case management), **ASR-SHRUTI** (voice-to-text), **PANINI** (translation), **eSCR** (judgment translation in 18-language) and an **IIT Madras-developed tool** (petition-defect detection and metadata extraction) are being piloted

The Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Act, 2026

The President recently gave assent to the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Act, 2026 introduced to address the rising pendency and enable more regular Constitution Benches.

Rationale

Rising litigation and a persistent gap between case institution and disposal have increased Supreme Court (SC) pendency to **92,101 cases (January 2026)**. Increasing judge strength can **reduce case backlog** and enable the Chief Justice of India (CJI) to constitute **Constitution Benches more regularly** to address substantial questions of law.

Key Provisions

- **Judge Strength:** Increases SC judges from **33 to 38, including the CJI.**
- **Effective date:** Deemed effective from **16 May 2026**, replacing the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Ordinance, 2026.

PAIMANA

PAIMANA (Project Assessment, Infrastructure Monitoring and Analytics for Nation-Building) was launched by the **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation** in **2025** to monitor **Central Sector infrastructure projects costing ₹150 crore or more**. It replaced the **Online Computerized Monitoring System (OCMS-2006)**.

Key Features:

- **PAIMANA-CRIP:** *PAIMANA- Central Repository of Infrastructure Projects*, launched in July 2026 serves as a **central repository of infrastructure projects.**
- Over 20+ Ministries/Departments/ Implementing Agencies regularly update the information of projects on PAIMANA-CRIP through data entry or via API (Application Programming Interfaces) modes
- **Performance Monitoring Dashboard:** Covers **165 indicators** across six sectors- **Power, Civil Aviation, Telecommunications, Railways, Roads, and Ports, Shipping & Waterways.**
- **Holistic Assessment:** Measures infrastructure through **access, quality, fiscal cost and revenue, utilization, and affordability**, rather than only physical outputs.
- **Data-Driven Governance:** Provides cross-sectoral analysis, project progress monitoring, and evidence-based inputs for timely corrective action.

President Assents Bill to Rename Kerala as Keralam

President recently gave assent to a Bill to rename Kerala as Keralam, with the legislation now becoming a law.

Kerala → Keralam

- **Law:** *Kerala (Alteration of Name) Act, 2026.*

- **State Initiative:** Kerala Legislative Assembly first passed a **unanimous resolution in 2024** seeking the change and sent it to the Centre in June 2024.
- **Constitutional Basis:** The change is made under **Article 3**, which empowers Parliament to alter the name, area, or boundaries of States.
- **Constitutional Amendment:** The **First Schedule to the Constitution** will be amended to replace *Kerala* with *Keralam*.

SC Collegium names Chief Justices for 4 High Courts

The Supreme Court (SC) Collegium headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant has recommended Chief Justices to four High Courts (HCs):

- **Patna HC:** Justice **V. Kameswar Rao** (Delhi HC)
- **Calcutta HC:** Justice **Ravindra V. Ghuge** (Bombay HC)
- **Bombay HC:** Justice **Mahesh Chandra Tripathi** (Allahabad HC)
- **Punjab & Haryana HC:** Justice **Ashwani Kumar Mishra** (currently Punjab & Haryana HC)

Karnataka Develops Manual to Build Child-friendly Villages Across State

In a significant development, Karnataka has developed a manual to train officials and community stakeholders in creating child-friendly villages across the State drawing lessons from successful models such as Halanayakanahalli (Village in Bengaluru Urban district was recognized by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj in the Child-Friendly Village category).

Key Guidelines

- **Education:** 100% enrolment and attendance in schools and Anganwadis; eliminate child labour.
- **Health:** 100% immunization, regular health check-ups, and prevention of malnutrition.
- **Child Protection:** Prevent **child marriage and teenage pregnancy** through awareness programmes.
- **Development:** Well-maintained **libraries, sports facilities and computer-learning opportunities**.
- **Stakeholders:** Training and guidelines for Panchayat representatives, teachers, police and child-rights workers.

Significance

Seeks to move beyond protection towards **holistic child development and safer, more inclusive villages**. Implementation is yet to begin as Gram Panchayat elections are pending.

Should recommendations made by an Acting CJ be considered by the SC Collegium?

Justice **Sanjeev Prakash Sharma** has been Acting Chief Justice (CJ) of Rajasthan HC since **September 2025**. Despite being an Acting CJ, he has recommended at least four names for appointment as HC judges raising the question- **Whether SC Collegium should consider recommendations made by acting CJ?**

Two views within the Collegium:

- **Merit-Based View:** The recommendations should **not be rejected merely because he is an Acting CJ**. His unusually long tenure and familiarity with the Rajasthan HC strengthen the case for considering them.
- **Institutional Concern:** Accepting such recommendations could **normalize prolonged Acting-CJ tenures**, reducing the urgency to appoint a permanent Chief Justice.

Existing Convention: Normally, Acting CJs **do not make judicial appointment recommendations**, as their tenure is expected to be temporary and short. However, there have been **exceptions**, with the Collegium adopting different approaches.

Precedents:

- **Bombay HC (2020):** Acting CJ Dharmadhikari prepared a list of 22 candidates. The Collegium initially forwarded 18, but the Centre returned them citing concerns raised by other judges; the HC later prepared a fresh list.
- **Rajasthan HC (2022):** The Centre objected to recommendations made towards the end of CJ Akil Kureshi's tenure. The Collegium sought specific objections, but eventually **8 of the 12 names were cleared**.

Centre Opposes Pleas for Income-based Creamy Layer In SC/ST Quotas

In an affidavit filed before the Supreme Court (SC), the Centre has pushed back against the demand to introduce the “creamy layer” concept for reservations for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs).

Background

The government was responding to a **PIL** filed in the SC arguing that affluent SC/ST families are **capturing reservation benefits**, excluding the most disadvantaged. It sought a **creamy layer exclusion** for SCs/STs, citing the **2024 SC judgment** that allowed SC/ST sub-classification and discussed extending the creamy layer principle to these groups. It argued that reservation benefits should reach those who **remain socially and economically disadvantaged**.

Why Should Creamy Layer be Introduced For SC/STs?

• Prevent Concentration of Benefits:

The 2024 landmark seven-judge Constitution Bench judgment in **State of Punjab v. Davinder Singh** recognized that SCs are **not a homogeneous group** and that some communities remain significantly under-represented despite decades of reservation. The Court therefore allowed **sub-classification to ensure benefits reach the more disadvantaged groups**.

- **Promote Inter-Generational Equity:** If a family has achieved substantial educational, occupational and economic mobility through affirmative action, excluding subsequent generations from the quota could allow benefits to reach families that have not yet benefited.

- **Address Internal Inequalities within SC/STs:** The 2024 judgment acknowledged **varying degrees of disadvantage within the SC category**. Communities such as **Balmikis and Mazhabi Sikhs in Punjab, Madigas in Andhra Pradesh and Arundhatiyars in Tamil Nadu** have been cited in the sub-classification debate as groups seeking greater access to reservation benefits.
- **Existing Representation Shows the Need for Finer Targeting:** At the Central Government level, SCs had **17.14% representation as of January 2026**, against the prescribed **15% reservation**. However, the government itself clarified that it **does not centrally maintain caste-wise representation within the SC category**.

SC's Stand



Social Mobility: The Court questioned why children of **socially and economically advanced parents** should continue receiving reservation after their parents have achieved significant social mobility.



Creamy Layer: It indicated that the **creamy layer principle could ensure benefits reach the genuinely disadvantaged**, rather than repeatedly benefiting already -advanced families.



Precedent: In the 2024 SC sub-classification judgment, Justice B.R. Gavai supported excluding the **creamy layer among SCs** and prioritizing those who have received fewer reservation benefits.



Equitable Distribution

Centre's Stand



Historical Disadvantage: SC/ST reservations address **historical discrimination, social exclusion and untouchability**, unlike OBC reservations, which consider economic factors also. Hence, **economic status alone cannot determine SC/ST reservation eligibility**.



Legal Precedent: In **Indra Sawhney (1992)**, the creamy layer principle was confined to **OBCs**; **Ashoka Kumar Thakur v. UOI (2008)** reaffirmed its non-applicability to SCs/STs. **E.V. Chinniah v. State of A.P. (2005)** held that any exclusion of a creamy layer from SCs would require **legislative action by Parliament**.



Separation of Powers: Under **Articles 341 & 342**, SC/ST lists are notified by the **President**, and any inclusion or exclusion can be made **only by Parliament**, not by courts or State governments. Similarly, introducing income-based preferences requires **empirical assessment and legislative policymaking**, which courts cannot dictate.



Article 32: The Centre argued that the PIL under Article 32 is **not maintainable** as it does not establish any **violation of fundamental rights** and urged the SC to dismiss it.

Centre Moves Towards Permanent Political Solution to Gorkhaland Issue

The Centre announced the setting up of a committee chaired by the former deputy National Security Advisor and current interlocutor Shri Pankaj Kumar Singh to draft an agreement and finalize modalities for a “permanent political solution” to the long-standing Gorkhaland demand of the people of Darjeeling hills and adjoining areas of north Bengal.

What is the Gorkhaland Issue?

The **Gorkhaland demand** is the long-standing demand for a **separate State for the Gorkha-speaking population** of the Darjeeling hills and adjoining areas of **Terai and Dooars** in northern West Bengal. The demand is rooted in claims of **distinct ethnic, linguistic, and cultural identity**, along with demands for greater **political representation, self-governance, autonomy, and socio-economic development**.

Evolution of the Demand

- **1980s:** The Gorkhaland movement intensified under the **Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF)**, demanding a separate State.
- **1988- DGHC:** The **Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC)** was created through an agreement between the Centre, West Bengal Government and GNLF, providing **limited administrative autonomy**.
- **2007- Sixth Schedule proposal:** The Constitution (One Hundred and Seventh Amendment) Bill, 2007 and the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution (Amendment) Bill, 2007 sought to amend the Constitution to include Gorkha Hill Council, Darjeeling in the Sixth Schedule. But the bill lapsed.
- **2011- GTA:** The **Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA)** was established through a **tripartite agreement** to provide greater self-governance. However, it did not satisfy the separate-Statehood demand.
- **2017- Renewed agitation:** A prolonged **100-day agitation and shutdown** revived the Statehood demand, followed by fresh tripartite negotiations.
- **2025- Interlocutor:** The Centre appointed **Pankaj Kumar Singh** as interlocutor to engage with Gorkha representatives and explore a political solution.

Possible Solutions to the Gorkhaland Issue

- **Separate State:** Creation of **Gorkhaland under Article 3 of the Constitution** could address the long-standing demand for political self-rule but may have wider implications for West Bengal and set a precedent for other sub-statehood demands.
- **Union Territory:** An alternative could be creating a **Union Territory under Article 3 of the Constitution** for the region, providing greater autonomy while keeping it outside the State's administrative structure.
- **Strengthened Autonomous Governance:** Strengthening the **GTA** with greater **legislative, administrative, and financial powers** could provide meaningful self-governance without Statehood.
- **Sixth Schedule-Type Arrangement:** Greater constitutional autonomy through an arrangement modelled on the **Sixth Schedule** could protect the region's **land, culture and identity**.
- **Development + Representation:** Addressing **infrastructure, employment, tourism and political representation alongside** autonomy demands can tackle the socio-economic roots of regional discontent.

Darjeeling lies in a strategically sensitive region bordering **Nepal** to the west and **Bhutan** to the east. It is close to **Bangladesh**. The adjoining **Siliguri Corridor**, popularly called the “**Chicken’s Neck**”, is India's crucial land link to the **Northeastern States**. Therefore, any political settlement must balance:

Regional aspirations + national integration + internal security + strategic interests.

Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Rules, 1995: Proposed Amendments

An internal government task force has recommended amendments to strengthen the implementation of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Rules, particularly victim relief, rehabilitation and investigation.

- ✓ The task force, headed by the Secretary, Social Justice and Empowerment, was constituted in December 2025.

SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Rules, 1995 lay down the **procedures and administrative** mechanisms for implementing the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 and protecting victims.

Key Provisions

Key Recommendations of the Task Force:

- **Higher Compensation:** Increase the mandated relief and rehabilitation amounts currently ₹85,000-₹8.25 lakh, fixed in 2016 to account for inflation.
- **Counselling:** Provide counselling for victims, accused persons, and their dependents.
- **Special Cells:** Establish Relief & Rehabilitation Cells in States/Union Territories.
- **Faster Investigation:** Send FIRs and chargesheets to concerned government officials within 24 hours.
- **Counter-FIRs:** Examine whether counter-cases filed against atrocity complainants have followed due procedure, including random scrutiny of police final reports.

Prevention: Identify atrocity-prone areas, deploy special police forces, and conduct awareness programmes.

Victim Support: Immediate relief, rehabilitation, medical aid, food, shelter, transport, and legal assistance.

Investigation: Cases must be investigated by an officer **not below Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP)**, preferably completed within **30 days**.

Institutional Mechanism: SC/ST Protection Cells, Nodal Officers, Special Officers and Vigilance & Monitoring Committees oversee implementation.

Accountability: Regular monitoring of investigations, prosecution and relief by State and District authorities.

NCST Proposals: The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) has separately proposed amendment to atrocities Act:

- **Livelihood Protection:** Allow local authorities, such as the District Magistrate (DM), to permit tribals dispossessed of disputed land to continue using it for livelihood **while litigation is pending**.
- **Protection Against Intimidation:** Introduce safeguards against counter-FIRs being used to intimidate those reporting atrocities.

Significance: These proposals seek to **improve victim protection and implementation without diluting the 1989 act**. The government has specifically stated that any amendment must preserve the Act's **protective framework, investigation procedures and relief-and-rehabilitation guarantees**.

SC Clarifies Scope of Police Custody Under BNSS

Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) in *State of Andhra Pradesh v. Suda Suresh Veera Venkata Naga Raju* held that **Section 187(2) Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS)**, permits police custody in parts, up to **15 days in aggregate, during the first 40/60 days** of the permissible detention period, unlike the earlier 15-day window.

Current Law on Police Remand

- **24-Hour Rule:** Under Sections 58 & 187 BNSS, an arrested person cannot be detained beyond **24 hours** without Magistrate's authorization.
- **Police Custody:** Section 187(2) allows up to **15 days in aggregate**, either continuously or in parts, **within the first 40/60 days** of the 60/90-day detention period.
- **Judicial Custody & Default Bail:** Under Section 187(3), detention can extend up to 90 days for serious offences and **60 days** for other offences. On expiry without completion of investigation, the accused gets **default bail**.
- **Change from CrPC:** Earlier, Section 167 CrPC restricted police custody to the **first 15 days**; BNSS expands this window to accommodate **fresh discoveries/leads** during investigation.

Presence of Advocate-Section 38 BNSS

- **Right to Meet Advocate:** An arrested person has the right to **meet an advocate during interrogation, but not throughout interrogation**. The advocate may **see the accused during interrogation but cannot intervene** in the investigation.
- **CCTV/Videography:** Recording of the **actual interrogation and discovery/recovery proceedings** is sufficient; continuous recording of the accused's transit is not mandatory.

It also clarified that **Section 38 BNSS** guarantees access to an advocate, but **not the advocate's continuous physical presence throughout interrogation**.

Can An Accused Be Denied a Copy of The FIR?

Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) directed Ghaziabad Police to provide journalist Abhishek Upadhyay a copy of the **FIR and CCTV footage** in a road-rage case after he alleged **false implication and harassment** following his reporting on alleged irregularities in donations to the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya.

What does the Law Say?

- **BNSS 2023 - Section 173(2)**: FIR must be given **forthwith and free of cost to the informant/victim**, but it does not expressly mention the accused.
- **Section 230**: The accused gets copies of the FIR and other prosecution documents **after the investigation/chargesheet reaches the court**. Thus, BNSS does **not expressly provide early access to FIR by the accused**.

Judicial Precedent: In **Youth Bar Association of India v. Union of India (2016)**, the SC recognized that an accused should have access to the FIR **before the chargesheet stage**. Key directions issued:

- FIRs should generally be **uploaded on police websites within 24 hours** of registration.
- Delay may extend to **48-72 hours** in exceptional circumstances (connectivity problems due to geographical location or there is some other unavoidable difficulty)
- An accused/authorized representative can seek a **certified copy**, generally to be provided within **24 hours**.
- Once forwarded to the magistrate, the accused can obtain it from the court.
- **Sensitive-offence exception**: FIRs involving offences such as **sexual offences, POCSO and terrorism** may be withheld from online publication to protect privacy and other sensitive interests. Such decisions must be taken by an officer of appropriate rank and remain subject to review.

Why is it important?

Access to an FIR enables an accused to:

- know the **exact allegations and offences**;
- seek remedies such as **anticipatory bail or quashing**;
- effectively defend themselves and participate in a **fair trial**.

Constitutional Limits on Arrest

The power of arrest is necessary for effective criminal investigation, but its arbitrary exercise can undermine Article 21's guarantee of personal liberty. The constitutional framework therefore seeks to balance State authority with individual freedom.

Related Constitutional and Legal Framework

- **Article 21**: Deprivation of personal liberty must follow a **fair, just and reasonable procedure**.
- **Article 22(1)**: provides safeguards against arbitrary arrest and detention. For ordinary arrest, it guarantees:
 - **Right to know grounds of arrest**;
 - **Right to legal counsel**;
 - **Production before a Magistrate within 24 hours**.

It also deals with **preventive detention (article 22(4))**, where these procedural safeguards do not apply.

✓ The definition of preventive detention in India is inspired by a British law which says that all detentions that are not punitive may be considered preventive. It may continue for three months, and if the period expires, an Advisory Board shall permit the extension of the period.

- **BNSS 2023: Section 35 (Conditions and Powers of Arrest Without Warrant), Section 47 (Right to be Informed of Grounds of Arrest and Bail) and Section 58 (24-Hour Detention Limit)** provide corresponding safeguards relating to arrest, grounds of arrest and detention.

Judicial Safeguards

Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India (1978)	Arnesh Kumar v. State of Bihar (2014)	Vihaan Kumar v. State of Haryana (2025)
Established the Golden Triangle of Articles 14 (Equality before Law), 19 (Right to Freedom) and 21 (Protection of Life and Personal Liberty) , requiring State action affecting liberty to be non-arbitrary, reasonable and procedurally fair .	Arrest is not automatic merely because the police have the power to arrest. Particularly for offences punishable with up to seven years , police must establish the necessity of arrest to prevent harassment and misuse of criminal law.	Grounds of arrest must be communicated directly and meaningfully to the arrested person . Merely informing relatives or making vague entries in records is insufficient. An unconstitutional initial arrest can vitiate subsequent remand . Reinforces procedural fairness and protection against arbitrary State action.

Key Concerns Regarding Arrests

- **Unnecessary arrests** despite arrest not being required for investigation.
- Magistrates may sometimes **approve police custody without properly checking** whether the arrest and custody are justified.
- **Failure to clearly communicate** grounds of arrest.
- **Custodial violence**, violating dignity under Article 21.
- **Misuse of arrest** for harassment, intimidation, or pressure.

Way Forward

- **Ensure strict compliance** with Sections 35, 47 and 58 of BNSS.
- Magistrates should **scrutinize the legality and necessity of arrest** before granting remand.
- Ensure **meaningful communication** of grounds of arrest in a language understood by the accused.
- Strengthen **legal aid and access to counsel mechanisms**.
- Use **digital arrest records, CCTV, and independent oversight** to prevent custodial abuse.
- Promote **notice-based investigation and bail**, wherever arrest is unnecessary.

- **Cognizable Offences:** Arrest may generally be made without warrant, subject to statutory safeguards.
- **Non-cognizable offences:** Arrest generally requires a warrant.

BCI-NALSAR Enrolment Row

The Bar Council of India (BCI) recently sparked a controversy by directing State Bar Councils to halt the enrolment of NALSAR's (National Academy of Legal Studies and Research) 2026 graduates amid students protest over CJI Surya Kant's participation in the convocation. Though the directive was later withdrawn, the episode raises important questions about the BCI's statutory powers and limits of collective restrictions on enrolment under the Advocates Act, 1961.

What powers does the BCI have over State Bar Councils?

BCI is the apex statutory body under the **Advocates Act, 1961**. Its powers over State Bar Councils are primarily **supervisory and regulatory**, rather than an unrestricted power to directly perform their functions.

Key Limitation

The Advocates Act requires **individual consideration** of enrolment applications. **Mere participation in a peaceful protest or expression of an opinion is not a statutory disqualification**. Therefore, the BCI Chairman's **blanket suspension of enrolment of the entire NALSAR 2026 batch lacked a clear statutory basis**, particularly where individual responsibility or disqualification had not been established.

Judicial Precedent on BCI's Enrolment Powers (Indian Council of Legal Aid & Advice v. Bar Council of India, 1995)

The Supreme Court (SC) struck down a **BCI rule barring persons above 45 years from enrolment**.

- It held that **BCI cannot use its rule-making power under Section 49 to create additional disqualifications**

beyond those prescribed by the Advocates Act.

Enrolment is primarily within the domain of State Bar Councils, under Sections 24-26.

- BCI's supervisory and rule-making powers cannot override the statutory scheme of the Act. The Court held that such an additional restriction was **ultra vires the Advocates Act and violative of Article 14 (Equality before Law)**.

Under Advocates Act, 1961	Under BCI Rules
• Section 7(1)(b): BCI lays down standards of professional conduct and etiquette for advocates. • Section 7(1)(g): Gives BCI general supervision and control over State Bar Councils. • Sections 7(1)(h) & 7(1)(i): BCI promotes legal education, lays down standards and recognizes/inspects universities whose law degrees qualify for enrolment. • Section 48B (Power to issue directions): BCI may issue necessary directions to State Bar Councils or their committees for the proper and efficient discharge of their functions. The State Bar Council is required to comply. • Section 49: Gives BCI broad rule-making powers, including rules on professional conduct and standards of legal education.	• Rule 15 of BCI Rules: The Chairman exercises general control and supervision over the affairs of the BCI, subject to the Council's resolutions. • Rule 18 of BCI: The Chairman may issue interim orders in revisional and other matters arising from BCI's supervisory jurisdiction.

What Does the Law Say About Enrolment? The Advocates Act, 1961 establishes a **two-tier structure**– State Bar Councils under Section 3 and BCI under Section 4.

State Bar Council's Role	BCI's Limited Role
• Section 6(1)(a): State Bar Councils have the primary power to admit persons as advocates on their rolls. • Section 24: Prescribes qualifications for enrolment. • Sections 25: Lay down the procedure and authority for admission. • Section 26: Enables State Bar Councils to remove names from their rolls.	• Section 26 (2): If a State Bar Council proposes to reject an individual application, it must refer the matter to BCI with reasons; the State Council must then act in conformity with BCI's opinion. • This is a case-specific safeguard, not an express power to impose a blanket freeze on an entire graduating batch. • Sections 35-37: BCI's disciplinary framework primarily concerns already-enrolled advocates; an unenrolled law student is not yet an advocate.

Mission Samridh Gaon

The **Ministry of Rural Development** launched **Mission Samridh Gaon** to transform villages into **poverty-free, employment-rich and self-reliant rural communities** with assured basic amenities.

- **Pilot areas:** Budni block (Sehore district) and Khategaon block (Dewas district), Madhya Pradesh.
- **Objective:** To ensure that every family has **employment/livelihood opportunities**, access to **basic amenities**, and does not migrate due to lack of local livelihood options.

Key Features

- **Integrated Development Framework:** Development plans will be prepared at **family, Gram Panchayat and block levels**.
- **Convergence of Schemes:** Agriculture, rural development, health, education, employment, livelihoods and basic amenities schemes will be brought together.
- **Family-centric approach:** Each family will be linked to relevant **Central and State government schemes** based on its needs and eligibility.
- **Women farmers:** Identification of women farmers, provision of **agricultural advice and information**, and linkage with livelihood opportunities.
- **Focus on local livelihoods:** Promotes income-generating activities to reduce **distress migration** and strengthen rural self-reliance.

SC Defers Challenge to Bodh Gaya Temple Act

A Supreme Court (SC) bench, led by Chief Justice of India (CJI) deferred hearing a challenge to the constitutional validity of the Bodh Gaya Temple Act 1944, which governs the management of a key Buddhist pilgrimage sites.

Case Background

- **Petitioners:** Buddhist Society of India and others.
- **Core Demand:** Repeal the Bodh Gaya Temple Act, 1949 and enact a new Central law giving Buddhists exclusive management and control of the Mahabodhi Temple.
- **Key Contention:** Although the temple is one of Buddhism's holiest sites, the existing law provides equal representation to Hindus and Buddhists in its management. The petition invokes **Articles 14 (Right to Equality), 25 (Freedom of Religion), 26 (Management of Religious Affairs), 29 (Cultural and Educational Rights) and 49 (Protection of Monuments)**, arguing that the existing arrangement violates **equality, religious freedom, denominational rights, and minority cultural rights**.

What is the Bodh Gaya Temple Act, 1949?

The **Bodh Gaya Temple Act, 1949** is a Bihar law enacted to regulate the **management, administration and control of the Mahabodhi Temple and its properties**. **Key Provisions include:**

- **Management Committee:** 8-member committee with 4 Hindus + 4 Buddhists
- **Chairperson:** Gaya District Magistrate is ex-officio Chairperson
- **Mahanth:** Shaivite Mahanth is one of the Hindu members
- **Worship:** Provides for worship and Pinda daan by Hindus and Buddhists
- **Government Power:** State can dissolve/reconstitute the committee in cases of gross mismanagement
- **Shaivite Monastery:** Its properties remain outside the committee's jurisdiction

Why is the Act Controversial? Buddhist side argues

- Mahabodhi Temple is fundamentally a **Buddhist sacred site**.
 - Equal Hindu representation dilutes Buddhists' **religious and denominational autonomy**.
 - Hindu rituals such as **pind daan** should not be conducted within the Buddhist temple complex.
 - State control over the committee undermines **religious self-administration**.
- Constitutional Issue:** The case essentially asks whether the State can regulate the administration of a religious institution in a manner that allegedly affects the **exclusive denominational rights of another faith**.

NHB Revises Horticulture Subsidy Guidelines

The National Horticulture Board (NHB) amended its guidelines for the Development of Commercial Horticulture through Production and Post-Harvest Management of Horticulture Crops scheme to make subsidy distribution more transparent, equitable and targeted.

About "Development of Commercial Horticulture through Production and Post-Harvest Management of Horticulture Crops" Scheme

It is aimed at promoting commercial farming (for profit) of horticultural crops on a large scale.

Crops Covered: Three types of vegetables- capsicum, cucumber and tomato; and eight varieties of flowers including rose, liliun and orchids etc.

Subsidy Offered: A maximum subsidy of 50 per cent, capped at Rs 1 crore per family, of the project cost.

About National Horticulture Board (NHB)

Established in **1984**, it is an autonomous body under the **Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare**, headquartered at Gurugram. It promotes **hi-tech commercial horticulture, post-harvest and cold-chain infrastructure, quality planting material, modern technologies, farm mechanization and market development**.

Key Changes Introduced

- **Expanded Definition of Family:** Applicant's **spouse, father, mother, sons and daughters** will be treated as one family.

- **One Family-One Subsidy:** Only **one family member** can avail NHB financial assistance whether individually or through HUF, partnership/proprietorship firm or as a director of a company, across schemes/components.
- **Ineligible Categories:** Constitutional post-holders, ministers, Members of Parliament, Members of Legislative Assemblies/Members of Legislative Councils, mayors, district panchayat chiefs, serving government/Public Sector Unit/autonomous/local-body employees (except Group D/Multi-Tasking Staff), pensioners receiving **₹10,000+ monthly pension**, and **groups of farmers** are excluded.
- **Subsidy Reduced:** From **50% to 35%** in general-category States and **45%** in North-Eastern/Himalayan States.
- **Stricter Accountability:** Suppression or misrepresentation of information can lead to **recovery of subsidy with interest**.
- **Voluntary Exit:** Beneficiaries can exit by **refunding the subsidy with applicable interest** during the lock-in period.

Significance

The amendments seek to prevent **conflict of interest, duplication/multiple claims, misuse of public subsidy and concentration of benefits**, while improving transparency in horticulture subsidy delivery.

Parliament Productivity: Monsoon Session 2026

The Lok Sabha (LS) recorded one of its lowest productivity levels in more than two decades during 2026 Monsoon session (with only two Parliament sessions since 2004 showed lower functioning).

- **Lok Sabha Productivity:** **15%** of scheduled time among its **lowest in over two decades**.
- **Rajya Sabha Productivity:** **33%** of scheduled time.
- **Government Figures:** Put productivity at **19% for LS** and **39% for Rajya Sabha (RS)**.

Why the Discrepancy?

PRS calculates productivity as **actual sitting hours ÷ scheduled sitting hours × 100**. Productivity can exceed **100%** when a House sits beyond its scheduled hours.

Major Historical Low Points:

- **Winter 2010:** LS 5%, RS 2%- **2G spectrum/JPC demand**.
- **Winter 2013:** LS 8%, RS 19%- **Telangana formation and coal-block allocation protests**.
- **Winter 2016:** LS 15%, RS 18%- **demonetization protests**.

Highest Productivity: LS: **148%** - Budget Session 2024; RS: **137%**- Budget Session 2024.

Reasons for Low Productivity in Monsoon Session 2026

- **Repeated Opposition Protests and Adjournments:** Proceedings were disrupted almost daily through sloganeering, demonstrations and walkouts, resulting in frequent adjournments of both Houses.
- **NEET-UG 2026 Controversy:** The alleged **NEET-UG paper leak and police action against protesting students at Jantar Mantar** became a major flashpoint.
- **Ayodhya Ram Temple Donation Issue:** Allegations concerning the **misappropriation/theft of Ram Temple donations** triggered further Opposition protests and contributed to the continuing logjam.
- **Standoff Over Government Response:** The Opposition's demand for statements and discussions on these issues, particularly from senior ministers, was not resolved, while the government accused the Opposition of deliberately disrupting proceedings. This sustained the **government-Opposition deadlock**.
- **Disruption of Question Hour:** The impact was particularly severe on parliamentary scrutiny. **Lok Sabha's Question Hour functioned for only 1% of scheduled time and Rajya Sabha's for 12%**, limiting the Opposition's ability to question the executive and obtain information.
- **Legislation with Limited Deliberation:** Although **12 Bills were passed**, disruptions meant that several pieces of legislation received little or no substantive debate; some Bills were passed without members participating in discussion.



Political Clearance

Telangana Chief Minister (CM)- A Revanth Reddy's visit to the US was cancelled recently after the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) denied "clearance from political angle".

What is Political Clearance?

Political clearance is granted by the **MEA** for government officials undertaking foreign visits. It assesses the visit's **diplomatic/foreign-policy implications**, considering the event, host country, invitation, and level of participation. Since **2016**, applications are processed online through the MEA's **e-Political Clearance portal**.

Clearances for CM's Foreign Visits: CMs and State/Union Territory ministers must **inform the Cabinet Secretariat and MEA** before foreign visits. They generally require:

- **Political Clearance-** by MEA
- **FCRA Clearance-** under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, 2010.
- **Economic Clearance** – Department of Economic Affairs (DEA).
- **MEA political clearance is a prerequisite** for processing the other clearances.

Previous Instances of Denying Political Clearance:

- **Arvind Kejriwal (Delhi):** Singapore visit in **2022** was denied; another foreign conference in **2019** was also denied.
- **Tarun Gogoi (Assam):** Visits to the **US and Israel** were denied during the UPA era.
- **Arjun Munda (Jharkhand):** Proposed visit to **Thailand** was denied (2011)

Other Clearances for Foreign Visits: Clearances vary by **office/rank and nature of visit**:

- **State CMs/Ministers:** MEA political clearance+ **DEA** clearance.
- **Union Ministers:** MEA political clearance+ **Prime Minister's approval**.
- **Lok Sabha MPs:** **Speaker's clearance**; **Rajya Sabha MPs:** **Chairperson's clearance**.
- **Government Officers:** After political clearance Minister's approval up to Joint Secretary; **Screening Committee of Secretaries (SCoS)** approval above that.
- **Foreign Hospitality (other than UN organisations):** **FCRA clearance from Ministry of Home Affairs** may be required.
- **Judges:** Official visits require **MEA clearance + Chief Justice of India + Department of Justice**; **personal foreign visits generally require no clearance**.

Allahabad High Court Rejects Schoolgirl's Plea to Wear Hijab

The Allahabad High Court (HC) recently dismissed a plea by a minor student to wear a hijab along with the school uniform, reiterating the unanimous opinion of the HCs over the years that wearing a headscarf is not an essential part of the Islamic faith for women, in the absence of which, faith will be jeopardized.

What did the Court Rule?

- **School's Autonomy over Dress Code:** A school can prescribe its own uniform if the dress code is **uniform, bona fide, non-discriminatory**, and aimed at maintaining **discipline and institutional identity**. The choice of prescribed uniform primarily falls within the **institution's domain**.
- **Previous Permission Does Not Create a Vested Right:** **Past non-enforcement does not create an enforceable right**. Earlier tolerance could have resulted from **inaction, lack of enforcement, courtesy, or hesitation**.

- **Uniformity Cannot Be Diluted:** Allowing individual students to modify the prescribed uniform, even slightly, could undermine the very purpose of having a **uniform dress code**. It could shift disciplinary authority from the institution to individual students.
- **Essential Religious Practice (ERP) claim rejected:** The Court termed the student's claim that wearing a headscarf was an **Essential Religious Practice**- a **“bare assertion.”** No sufficient **authoritative religious text, expert material, or other evidence** was produced to establish that wearing the headscarf in the classroom was obligatory.
- **Article 25 Claim Not Established:** The student could not demonstrate that **not wearing the headscarf would fundamentally alter her religious faith**. Therefore, the Court did not accept the claim that Article 25 created an enforceable right to wear the headscarf contrary to the school's uniform policy.

Essential Religious Practices (ERP) Test: originated from the landmark 7-judge bench Supreme Court (SC) judgment in **Shri Shirur Mutt case (1954)**, holds that Article 25 of the Indian Constitution protects practices, rituals, and beliefs that are truly essential or integral to a religion, such that their removal would alter its core character.

- To determine essentiality, secular courts analyze scriptures, doctrines, and historical evidence, while ensuring that any protected practice remains subject to public order, morality, health, and other fundamental rights.
- Although it remains a mainstay of Indian legal jurisprudence, the test is frequently criticized for forcing secular judges into the role of pseudo-clergymen tasked with making complex theological determinations.

Related Judicial Precedents

- **Resham v. State of Karnataka (2022):** The Karnataka HC held that wearing the **hijab is not an ERP in Islam** and upheld the validity of the prescribed uniform/dress code in educational institutions, emphasizing **uniformity, discipline and institutional identity**. It also held that a uniform requirement did not violate students rights under Articles 14, 15, 19, or 21
- **Aishat Shifa v. State of Karnataka (2022- The Hijab Case):** A two-judge SC Bench delivered a **split verdict**. Justice Hemant Gupta upheld the restriction, emphasizing **uniformity and institutional discipline**, while Justice Sudhanshu Dhulia took the opposite view, emphasizing **individual choice, dignity, privacy and access to education**. The matter was referred to a **larger Bench**, so there is **no majority SC ruling finally settling the hijab-school-uniform issue**.
 - Administratively, the ground reality changed when the government in Karnataka shifted. In May, 2026, the Karnataka State Government officially issued a new order effectively nullifying the February 2022 ban.
- **Amna Bint Basheer v. CBSE (2016):** The Kerala HC held that wearing the **hijab/headscarf and full-sleeved dress constituted an ERP protected under Article 25(1)**- guarantees **freedom of conscience** and the right to **profess, practice, and propagate religion**. It allowed candidates to wear such attire in competitive examinations while permitting **additional security checks** to prevent malpractice.
- **Fathima Thasneem v. State of Kerala (2018):** The Kerala HC held that although students may have a fundamental right to choose religious attire, this right had to be **balanced against the institution's right to manage and administer itself**. In the circumstances, the **institution's larger/collective interest prevailed**, leaving the decision on permitting the headscarf to the school.

Maharashtra FDA Acts Against Surrogate Advertising

Maharashtra FDA (Food and Drug Administration) issued **show-cause notices to Shah Rukh Khan, Ajay Devgn and Tiger Shroff**, who endorse **Vimal Elaichi**, alleging surrogate promotion of Vimal Pan Masala, a prohibited tobacco/nicotine-containing product in Maharashtra.

What is Surrogate Advertising? Surrogate advertising refers to promoting a **banned/restricted product indirectly** by advertising another product under the **same or similar brand name, logo, packaging or visual identity**. It is commonly associated with products such as **tobacco, pan masala, and alcohol**, whose direct advertising is restricted.

Related Legal Provisions & Penalties

- **Consumer Protection Act, 2019**
 - **Section 2(28):** Defines *misleading advertisement* as one that falsely describes a product, misleads consumers, amounts to an unfair trade practice or conceals material information.
 - **Section 21:** The **Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA)** can order discontinuation/modification of misleading advertisements and penalize endorsers.
 - **Penalty:** Up to **₹10 lakh** for the first contravention and **₹50 lakh** for subsequent contraventions; endorsers may be barred for **1 year**, extending to **3 years** for subsequent violations.
- **CCPA Guidelines, 2022:** Specifically define **surrogate advertising** as promoting a restricted/banned product through another product to **circumvent legal restrictions**. They also prescribe **truthful claims, appropriate disclaimers and due diligence** by advertisers and endorsers.
- **Food Safety and Standards (FSS) Act, 2006**
 - **Section 24:** Prohibits **misleading food advertisements** and unfair trade practices.
 - **Section 53:** Provides a penalty of up to **₹10 lakh** for misleading food advertisements.
 - **Section 30(2)(a):** Empowers the State Food Safety Commissioner to prohibit manufacture, storage, distribution, transportation or sale of food products in the interest of public health.
- **Food Safety and Standards (Advertising and Claims) Regulations, 2018:** Require food advertisements to be **truthful, clear and non-misleading**.
- **Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 2003 (COTPA):** Prohibits **advertising and promotion of tobacco products**.

Key Regulatory and Enforcement Challenges in Curbing Surrogate Advertising:	Way Forward
• Identifying Surrogate Advertising: Difficult to establish whether a legally advertised product is genuinely independent or merely a vehicle to promote a restricted product. • Brand-Extension Loophole: Companies may use products such as elaichi, mouth fresheners or beverages to maintain brand recall of tobacco/alcohol products. • Celebrity Accountability: Determining the extent of due diligence and liability of celebrity endorsers when they claim limited knowledge of the brand's broader product portfolio. • Overlapping Regulations: Enforcement involves multiple laws and regulators, including Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), CCPA and tobacco-control authorities, creating coordination challenges.	• Clearer Regulations: Define objective criteria to distinguish genuine brand extensions from surrogate advertisements. • Stronger Due Diligence: Make advertisers and celebrity endorsers undertake documented checks before endorsing products. • Better Inter-Agency Coordination • Digital Monitoring: Use technology and social media monitoring to detect and rapidly remove surrogate advertisements. • Stronger Accountability: Impose proportionate penalties on

• Digital & Cross-Platform Advertising: Advertisements can rapidly spread through social media, digital platforms and television, making monitoring and removal difficult. • Proving Indirect Intent: Regulators must establish that the advertisement reinforces the identity or consumer association of the prohibited product rather than simply promoting a legitimate product. • Jurisdictional Challenges: State-level bans may create difficulties where advertisements are national in reach, but the underlying product is prohibited only in certain states.	manufacturers, advertisers, agencies and endorsers involved in deliberate circumvention. • Consumer Awareness: Promote awareness about surrogate advertising and the health risks of tobacco/nicotine products.
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Legal Aid Defence Counsel (LADC) System

The National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) directed the non-renewal of contracts of Legal Aid Defence Counsels (LADCs) following protests and representations by Bar Associations in Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Chandigarh. These bar associations opposed the LADC system and demanded restoration of the earlier panel-based legal-aid system.

What are LADCs?

The LADC System is a Central Sector Scheme providing an institutional model of public defence. Launched by NALSA under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, it offers free, dedicated legal representation in criminal cases to individuals unable to afford private lawyers. Unlike the traditional model where private advocates handle legal-aid cases on an ad-hoc basis, the LADC framework introduces:

- **Dedicated Defence Lawyers:** Full-time advocates focused exclusively on legal aid dockets.
- **End-to-End Continuity:** Integrated representation across remand, bail, trial, and appeal stages.
- **Institutional Accountability:** Managed oversight to track case progress and performance.

Objective

To convert legal aid from a mere formal entitlement into a meaningful component of right to a fair trial.

Concerns Regarding LADCs:

Bar & Advocate Concerns:	Quality & Systemic Vulnerabilities:
• Threat to Livelihood: Bar associations fear LADCs create a "parallel criminal bar" that siphons work away from independent practicing lawyers. • Litigant Autonomy: The system restricts an accused person's freedom to choose counsel from the broader private bar or expanded legal panels. • Professional Malpractice: Concerns persist regarding potential ethics violations, solicitation, illegal fee demands, and referral trade-offs.	• Inexperience & Defence Quality: Assigning complex criminal cases requiring deep expertise in cross-examination and trial strategy to junior lawyers risks turning vulnerable litigants into a testing ground. • Professional Independence: High administrative control over LADCs risks compromising the operational autonomy crucial for zealous defence work. • Absence of Empirical Data: The abrupt shifts in policy lack support from any comprehensive national assessment of LADC performance, case outcomes, or client satisfaction. • Constitutional Stakes: The tension directly impacts Article 39A (Equal Justice and Free Legal Aid) and Article 21 (Right to a Fair Trial), while ongoing court boycotts by protesting lawyers further impede access to justice.

Way Forward

- **Conduct a National Empirical Audit:** Commission an independent evaluation of the LADC model- analyzing acquittal rates, trial durations, and client satisfaction before modifying or dismantling the scheme.
- **Adopt a Hybrid Model:** Retain full-time LADCs for routine remand and bail work while outsourcing complex, high-stakes trials to experienced panel advocates from the open bar.
- **Enforce Strict Qualification Benchmarks:** Set strict minimum trial-experience requirements and mandate continuous advocacy training in evidence assessment and trial strategy for all appointed LADCs.
- **Guarantee Functional Autonomy:** Institutionalize safeguards that isolate LADCs from administrative interference, ensuring their loyalty remains solely with the client's defence.
- **Establish Transparent Monitoring & Dialogue:** Create joint oversight committees with Bar Associations to resolve ethics grievances, combat referral malpractice, and maintain continuous dialogue.
- **Perspective on Economic Impact:** Data shows that LADCs handle only ~1.6% of total criminal filings (4.86 lakh out of 2.96 crore cases in 2025-26). Because the actual market absorption by LADCs is minimal, policy decisions should focus on improving legal aid quality rather than reacting to overstated economic fears from private practitioners.

National Youth Parliament Scheme (NYPS) 2.0

The Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs has launched an upgraded version of the National Youth Parliament Scheme (NYPS) web portal, known as NYPS 2.0, in September 2024.

Objective: To promote **democratic values, parliamentary procedures, discipline, tolerance, and awareness of constitutional values** among citizens.

Key Features:

- **Universal participation:** Open to **all educational institutions, groups and individual citizens** across India, unlike the earlier version restricted mainly to recognized educational institutions.
- **Three modes of participation:**
 - **Institution Participation:** Institutions can conduct Youth Parliament Sitzings.
 - **Group Participation:** Citizens can form formal/informal groups to conduct Youth Parliament Sitzings.
 - **Individual Participation:** Citizens can participate in the **“Bharatiya Democracy in Action” quiz**.
- **Youth Parliament:** Includes **Kishore Sabha** (Classes VI-XII) and **Tarun Sabha** (UG/PG students).
- **Digital Platform:** Provides **training resources** and enables online registration, monitoring, submission of reports/videos, and issuance of **digital certificates**.

India Achieves Near-Universal Banking Coverage

- India has achieved near-universal banking coverage, with **99.92% of inhabited villages** (6,00,868 out of 6,01,328) now **served by a banking outlet** (Bank branch / Business Correspondent / India Post Payments Bank (IPPB)) within a radius of 5 km.
- This banking expansion is supported by a robust infrastructure of over 1.81 lakh bank branches, 17.36 lakh Business Correspondents (BCs), and 1.65 lakh IPPB centers, as of July 2026.
- To ensure accessibility of banking services in rural and remote areas, the government aims to provide a banking outlet within 5 km radius of all inhabited villages in the country. Further, RBI has permitted Commercial Banks, Small Finance Banks, Payments Banks, Local Area Banks and Regional Rural Banks, to open bank branches anywhere in India without prior approval.
- However, 25% of the new branches should be opened in unbanked rural areas.

Measures for Agricultural Credit

To ensure transparency and timely disbursement of agriculture credit, the government has taken the following steps:



- The **Jan Samarth Portal** has been started as a **one-stop digital platform** for linking government-sponsored loans and subsidies schemes.
- It provides a quick and efficient way to apply for loans and their timely sanction based on a digital evaluation of the applicant's data.



- Other **digital initiatives**: e-KYC application developed by NABARD, KRISHIKA by the Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare (DoAFW).
- Similar digital applications development by banks to support beneficiary identification, outreach, loan application processing and monitoring.



- Kisan Rin Portal (KRP)** has been launched by (DoAFW) to enable Aadhaar-based beneficiary verification and faster digital claim settlements under the Modified Interest Subvention Scheme (MISS) for loans availed through Kisan Credit Card.



Cyber Security measures

The Government and RBI have been taking up various initiatives to strengthen cyber security of digital payment transactions and protect citizens from cyber financial frauds. These include:



- India Digital Payment Intelligence Corporation (IDPIC)** has been set up to share real-time fraud intelligence and alerts to the banks and financial institutions by utilising advanced technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning and Big Data Analytics.



- RBI has issued **Master Directions on Digital Payment Security Controls** to combat web and mobile app threats.
- These guidelines mandate the banks to **implement a common minimum standard of security controls** for various payment channels like the internet, mobile banking, card payment etc.



- RBI has launched an Artificial Intelligence (AI) based tool **MuleHunter** for identification of money mule and advised the banks and financial institutions for its use.
- Mule bank accounts** are accounts used to facilitate illegal transactions and launder money.



- Further, RBI has been conducting **electronic-Banking Awareness and Training (e-BAAT)** programs which focuses on awareness about fraud and risk mitigation.

Electronic Components Manufacturing Scheme

- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has approved 31 projects worth Rs 7,877 crore for incentives under the Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme (ECMS).
 - The ECMS has so far approved projects collectively worth **Rs 69,548 crore**.
- The current approved projects are spread across **10 States** and cover manufacturing of **20 target segment products**, spanning sub-assemblies, bare components, supply chain products and capital goods.
- It includes **first-ever domestic manufacturing of diverse critical components** such as filters, coils and speakers, along with essential raw materials such as acetylene black and electrolyte additives.
- These approvals will strengthen domestic supply chains, deepen value addition, reduce import dependence, and build advanced manufacturing capabilities, further advancing India's emergence as a global electronics manufacturing hub.

ECMS

- ECMS was launched by MeitY in April 2025, with an **outlay of Rs 22,919 crore** for a tenure of six years (FY 2025-26 to FY 2031-32).
- The scheme offers differentiated incentives to manufacturers, including turnover-linked, capital expenditure-linked, and hybrid incentives, to offset manufacturing disabilities.

Objective

- Build a strong and self-sustaining ecosystem for the manufacturing of electronic components, sub-assemblies, and raw materials.
- Attract significant domestic and global investments across the electronics value chain.
- Promote higher domestic value addition and integrate Indian companies into global value chains.
- Reduce India's dependence on imports for key electronic parts.

Container Manufacturing Assistance Scheme

The Union Government has proposed a Container Manufacturing Assistance Scheme (CMAS) with an outlay of **Rs 10,000 crore over five years**.

Key Features

- CMAS aims to build a globally competitive container manufacturing ecosystem and expand India's annual domestic production capacity to around **7.5 lakh TEUs**, through **financial and institutional support**.
- To strengthen the container manufacturing value chain, the scheme provides:
 - Capital assistance for establishing new Greenfield manufacturing facilities.
 - Support for expansion of existing Brownfield manufacturing units.
 - Operational support to improve the competitiveness of domestic container manufacturing.

Containers



- Shipping containers are **standardized steel freight containers** used to transport cargo across ships, railways and road vehicles without unloading and repacking the goods during transit.
- Built to internationally recognised ISO (International Organization for Standardization) specifications, they enable **seamless intermodal transport** and efficient global trade.
- The most common sizes are **20-foot and 40-foot containers**, measured in **Twenty-foot Equivalent Units (TEUs)**, the standard unit used to measure container capacity

Need for Domestic Container Manufacturing



- According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), around **80% of global merchandise trade by volume is transported by sea**.
- Meanwhile, **containerised cargo** accounts for nearly **two-thirds of the value of international trade**. These trends highlight the strategic importance of efficient container logistics in supporting global supply chains.
- In recent years, geopolitical tensions, supply-chain disruptions and changing shipping routes have exposed vulnerabilities in the global movement of goods.
- As a result, many countries are placing greater emphasis on enhancing domestic manufacturing capabilities for critical logistics assets, including shipping containers.
- Despite expanding export-import (EXIM) trade and rapid logistics development, India has largely depended on imported empty containers. **India imports nearly 2 million empty containers every year** to meet domestic demand and for repositioning purposes.
- This has made container availability vulnerable to global market fluctuations, freight volatility and supply-chain disruptions.

- Support for testing infrastructure, skilling initiatives, and capacity building.
- It is part of a wider effort to strengthen India's maritime and logistics infrastructure under initiatives such as the Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047, PM Gati Shakti, the National Logistics Policy and the Sagarmala Programme.

Impact

- It is expected to generate a **market opportunity of nearly Rs 80000 lakh crore**.
- It has the potential to generate around **3,000 direct jobs** and more than **50,000 indirect jobs**. It will also stimulate industrial development and catalyse growth across several ancillary industries.
- By promoting container production and **reducing dependence on imports**, the scheme is expected to **strengthen supply-chain resilience** and **enhance India's competitiveness in global trade**.
- Complemented by broader maritime reforms, CMAS has the potential to position India as a leading maritime manufacturing and logistics hub.

Mithila Makhana

- GI-tagged Mithila Makhana has been exported from Bihar to Australia by sea for the first time.
- The shipment was facilitated with the support of the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), providing farmers in Darbhanga nearly 18% higher returns than the market price.
- The development comes amid efforts to strengthen Bihar's agri-export ecosystem through capacity building, export infrastructure, quality compliance, market linkages, and value addition.
- Modern facilities for irradiation, quality testing, packaging, and logistics are helping prepare Bihar's agricultural products in line with global quality standards.
- The initiative connects the state's farmers with global markets and marks a step towards **moving from 'Production to Export'**.

Makhana

- Makhana, also known as **fox nut**, is the **dried edible seed of the prickly water lily or gorgon plant**. This plant is found in freshwater ponds throughout South and East Asia.
- It is recognized for its **violet and white flowers**, as well as its large, round, and prickly leaves.
- The edible part of the Makhana plant consists of small, round seeds that have an outer layer ranging from black to brown. Thus, it is also known as the **Black Diamond**.
- After processing, these seeds are often consumed as **popped snacks known as 'lava.'** Makhana is **highly nutritious** and provides an excellent source of carbohydrates, protein, and minerals. Due to its versatile applications in medicine, healthcare, and nutrition, this plant can be consumed in various forms.

Cultivation

- Bihar accounts for approximately **90% of India's makhana production**.
- The production is **primarily concentrated in nine districts**: Darbhanga, Madhubani, Purnea, Katihar, Saharsa, Supaul, Araria, Kishanganj, and Sitamarhi, which are part of the Mithilanchal region.
- Among these districts, the **first four contribute to 80%** of Bihar's total makhana output. In 2022, **'Mithila Makhana'** was conferred with a **GI tag**.
- In addition to Bihar, makhana is cultivated in smaller quantities in the states of **Assam, Manipur, West Bengal, Tripura, and Odisha**, as well as in neighboring countries like **Nepal, Bangladesh, China, Japan, and Korea**.

Climatic conditions for makhana cultivation

- Makhana is an **aquatic crop** and is mainly grown in **tropical and subtropical regions**. It is traditionally **cultivated in stagnant water bodies** such as ponds, land depressions, lakes, ditches, or wetlands with shallow water depths of up to 4-6 feet.
- For optimal growth and development, Makhana requires a **temperature range of 20-35°C**, relative **humidity of 50-90%**, and **annual rainfall between 100-250 cm**.

CBDC Based Direct Benefit Transfer

- The Union Government has launched the Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC)-based Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) in the Union Territories of Chandigarh and Dadra & Nagar Haveli.
- The two UTs become the first in the country to operationalise food-subsidy transfers **to all eligible PMGKAY beneficiaries** through programmable CBDC (Digital Rupee) tokens.
- The initiative builds on pilots launched in Gujarat and Puducherry earlier in the year.

Implementation Framework

- Under the CBDC framework, **digital coupons** generated through the Reserve Bank of India will be credited directly to beneficiaries' digital wallets as **programmable digital currency (Digital Rupee)**, instead of conventional bank account transfers.
- Beneficiaries can redeem their entitled quantity of foodgrains at Fair Price Shops (FPS) through seamless QR code-based or coupon code-based transactions.
- Technological safeguards have been incorporated to ensure that beneficiaries can use the funds only for purchasing foodgrains and other essential food items, preventing the money from being diverted for other purposes.
- Beneficiaries will have a greater choice. In addition to wheat and rice, they will be able to opt for pulses or other essential food commodities.

Significance

- The system will address challenges related to biometric authentication and electronic-Point of Sale (e-POS) operational issues while ensuring secure, traceable and real-time transactions.
- It will reduce leakages, diversion, and cash handling associated with traditional subsidy delivery mechanisms.
- It will enhance awareness of entitlements, simplify access, improve transaction efficiency, and generate a real-time digital trail, thereby enhancing transparency, monitoring, and accountability.
- It will also facilitate instant and secure transfer of benefits to beneficiaries and promote financial inclusion through simple wallet-based transactions
- FPS dealers will also receive their margins on a real-time basis, creating a mutually beneficial ecosystem.
- The rollout is envisaged as proof of concept for the nation and a scalable template for adoption by other States and Union Territories.
- It is expected to provide valuable operational experience regarding the integration of CBDC with welfare schemes.

Sapt Dhara

- In his 80th Independence Day address, the Prime Minister gave a series of clarion calls aimed at accelerating India's journey towards Viksit Bharat by 2047.
- Calling for a change in the country's work culture, thinking and scale of ambition, he underlined the need for collective action by citizens, governments, industry, farmers, youth and other sections of society.

Sapt Dhara for Viksit Bharat

The PM gave a call for **seven streams of strength, Sapt Dhara**, to take India to new heights and give the country new momentum in the coming five-seven years. The seven streams are:

- **Manufacturing Power:** India must develop the complete value chain, from components and design to manufacturing of complete products, and become a trusted centre of the global supply chain.
 - Focus should be on cost, quality and scale, competitive factories, user-friendly products, attractive packaging and zero-defect precision manufacturing.

- **Agriculture and Food Production:** Create integrated **farm-to-export supply chains** and turn India's traditional foods, millets, spices, fruits and flowers into global brands, while transitioning to chemical-free farming.
- **Technology and Innovation:** Evolve from being a technology market into a **global innovation hub** leading in AI, Quantum Computing, Space, Robotics, Data Centres, and Made-in-India 6G.
- **Gati Shakti:** Establish seamless and fast connectivity through high-speed rail connecting cities, modern highways, inland waterways, airports and multimodal logistics.
 - Ports should move beyond loading and unloading goods and become drivers of port-led development and growth.
- **Defence Shakti:** Achieve complete strategic self-reliance by pioneering and exporting next-gen defence technologies like drones, counter-drone systems, and hypersonics.
- **Green and Blue Economy:** Achieve global scale in green hydrogen, renewable energy, energy storage, green mobility and green manufacturing, alongside full utilization of ocean, coastal, and marine potential.
- **India's Soft Power:** Globalize Indian culture, Yoga, Ayurveda, and tourism while establishing global leadership in gaming, VFX, animation, and the creative economy.

Maize Hybrid Seed

- The Vice-President has launched **India's first non-GMO, high-expansion popcorn maize hybrid seed**.
- The two seeds developed by **Gourmet Popcornica** are **Krisna459** and **Godari234**.
- Gourmet Popcornica is an Andhra Pradesh-based popcorn enterprise, with its operations centred around popcorn processing, cultivation, storage, packaging and related equipment.
- The hybrid is **non-GMO**, which means its development does not involve genetic modification, while its **hybrid** nature involves combining desirable traits from selected parent lines.
- Its **high-expansion** characteristic refers to the ability of the maize kernels to produce a larger volume of popped corn, an important quality parameter for the commercial popcorn industry.

Significance

- India has traditionally depended on imported hybrid technology for high-quality popcorn maize.
- The indigenous hybrid will help reduce this dependence, conserve foreign exchange and strengthen agricultural self-reliance.
- The initiative also illustrates the importance of **farmer-industry partnerships** in commercial agriculture.
- More than 17,500 farmers across eight States are associated with the Gourmet Popcornica initiative, indicating the potential for linking farmers with organised processing and markets to create globally competitive agricultural products.

Key features



The TMZ is envisaged as an integrated **170-acre plug-and-play industrial cluster** for telecom manufacturing, R&D and innovation, covering mobile devices, optical fibre, telecom equipment and next-generation 5G/6G technologies.



The plug-and-play model aims to provide investors with ready industrial infrastructure, thereby reducing the time and initial cost required to establish manufacturing units.



The **Central Government** is providing **100% funding support of Rs 493 crore** for Phase-I, while the Government of Madhya Pradesh has provided approximately 170 acres of land free of cost along with various investor incentives.



The TMZ will be established through a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) with 51% equity from the Government of Madhya Pradesh and 49% from the Department of Telecommunications.

Telecom Manufacturing Zone

The Department of Telecommunications and the Government of Madhya Pradesh have signed an MoU, for the establishment of **India's first Telecom Manufacturing Zone (TMZ)**, at Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh.

- The initiative seeks to create a world-class manufacturing ecosystem for telecom equipment and allied technologies.

Impact

- It is intended to strengthen the **domestic telecom manufacturing ecosystem**, promote indigenous technology and reduce dependence on imported telecom equipment.
- It will help India move from being primarily a large telecom market to becoming a global centre for telecom design, development and manufacturing.

IT Resilience Index

- Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has introduced a technology health scorecard - **IT Resilience Index (ITRI)** - for market infrastructure institutions (MIIs) to measure the robustness of their critical IT systems.
- ITRI appears to be among the first attempts globally by a regulator to design a quantitative resilience barometer, for MIIs such as stock exchanges, clearing corporations and depositories.

Need for the Index

- The move to assess MII vulnerabilities comes due to the **rising technological dependence of Indian capital markets**, where even a few minutes of disruption can affect millions of investors and billions of rupees in trades.
- India's securities market is experiencing big changes in digital transformation, as seen from increased participation of retail investors through online platforms, higher algorithmic trading volumes and faster settlement cycles.
- Market efficiency has now become inseparable from technology reliability.
- With increasing dependence on AI (artificial intelligence),

Global Regulatory Standards

- Several markets have created similar operational resilience frameworks, though not always in the form of a single ITRI.
- U.K.'s Financial Conduct Authority and Prudential Regulation Authority have put in place operational resilience rules requiring financial institutions to identify important business services, set disruption tolerances and demonstrate their ability to recover from severe operational shocks.
- Unlike SEBI's proposed index, the EU's most comprehensive Digital Operational Resilience Act (DORA) is a regulatory rulebook rather than a numerical scorecard.
- U.S. does not have a single ITRI for bourses. Instead, technology resilience is embedded into regulatory oversight.
- Singapore's Monetary Authority of Singapore has one of Asia's strongest technology risk guidelines, which could be particularly relevant for India since both countries have highly digital financial ecosystems and a large retail presence.
- Hong Kong's regulators have developed cyber resilience assessment frameworks for financial institutions and market intermediaries, closer to SEBI's strategy, as it uses measurable maturity levels, and regulators rely on comprehensive operational resilience frameworks and cross-sectoral exercises rather than a numeric scoring index.
- Australia follows a resilience-based approach through regulators such as the Australian Securities and Investments Commission and the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority, but its focus areas are critical operations mapping, technology dependencies, outsourcing risks and cyber recovery.

Implementation challenges for ITRI

- The biggest challenge is the pace of technological change because technology risks evolve faster than regulatory frameworks.
- Questions may arise on a common index when stock exchanges, clearing corporations and depositories have different technology architectures and functions.
- Cybersecurity remains unpredictable because institutions with sophisticated systems have suffered global cyber incidents.
- Moreover, substantial investments are needed to build automated monitoring systems, conduct continuous testing, and maintain redundant infrastructure.
- The real test will be whether a high score translates into faster recovery in the event of an actual cyberattack, system outage, or technology shock.
- If implemented effectively, it could become a global template to safeguard the digital foundations of finance.

cloud infrastructure, high-frequency trading and digital settlement, technology risks would become more complex.

ITRI Details

- The index, which seeks to shift from a pure compliance-based mode to a quantitative risk-monitoring framework, will be based on **nine parameters**, each weighted on the basis of a **systemic-risk hierarchy**.
- The nine parameters are: Availability (20%); Security (20%); Integrity (10%); Governance (10%); Reliability and monitoring (10%); Business continuity (10%); Modularity and flexibility (10%); Scalability (5%) and other relevant factors including incident handling (5%).
- MIIIs would also develop an **Early Warning System (EWS)** to detect any deterioration in ITRI parameters that could potentially lead to performance issues, system slowness or other disruptions, and take remedial measures.

Revised FDI Framework

- A total of 29 FDI investments have been reported under the revised framework up to August 2026, involving proposed FDI of more than **Rs 4,895.65 crore**.
- The investments cover a range of sectors, including Information Technology, Artificial Intelligence, Information & Communication, Manufacturing, Pharmaceuticals, Data Centres and Transport Services, among others.
- The 29 investments have been reported by investors based in jurisdictions including Mauritius, United States, Republic of Korea, Japan, Singapore, Luxembourg and the Cayman Islands.

Background

- In 2020, India had mandated government approval for all investments from entities based in land-bordering countries, as well as entities based out of any other country that had ownership by companies based in land-bordering countries (LBCs).
- It meant that even a **very small beneficial-ownership connection** with an LBC could trigger the government-approval requirement.
- This had been a long-standing concern among investors seeking greater clarity and ease of investment.

Revised Framework

- The revised framework seeks to distinguish between **minor, non-controlling ownership** and ownership that can provide significant influence or control over an investor or investee entity.
- The reform was introduced through Press Note 2 of 2026 and the consequent amendment to the Foreign Exchange Management (Non-debt Instruments) Rules, 2019, notified in May 2026.
- The key change is that the **beneficial-ownership test is applied at the level of the investor entity**.
- Under the revised framework, an investor entity having **non-controlling beneficial ownership of up to 10% from a LBC** can invest through the **automatic route**.
- However, government approval would be required if an LBC company owns a controlling stake in the investment firm.
- FDI proposals from **entities based in nations that share a land border with India** remain subject to government approval.

- The rule applies to investors based in China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar and Afghanistan. But the Union Cabinet has also approved a 60-day window for such approvals in select sectors to expedite the process.

Significance

- The reform attempts to balance **national-security concerns with the need to attract foreign capital, technology, and global supply-chain integration.**
- By removing prior approval for limited, non-controlling LBC ownership, it reduces regulatory uncertainty and transaction time for multinational companies whose ownership structures may have a small exposure to countries sharing a land border with India.
- The above-mentioned investment figures provide an initial indication that the relaxation is facilitating investment across strategically important sectors.

Polymer Notes

- The government has approved the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI's) proposal to introduce polymer banknotes in the denominations of 10 and 20 rupees.
- Polymer banknotes are produced using a specialised **biaxially oriented polypropylene (BOPP) substrate**, derived from petroleum and natural gas.

Background

- The RBI first proposed polymer banknotes in **2009**, initially considering the introduction of Rs 10 polymer notes.
- In **2012**, the Ministry of Finance shared that a pilot project would be undertaken in **Kochi, Mysuru, Jaipur, Bhubaneswar and Shimla**, selected for their diverse climatic conditions. However, the project was shelved due to technological changes.

Benefits	Concerns
• Polymer notes are significantly more durable and can typically last 2.5–4 times longer than conventional paper notes. • Although polymer notes generally have higher manufacturing costs, their durability can reduce the frequency with which worn-out notes need to be replaced, thereby lowering long-term printing, transportation, handling and destruction costs. • This could be particularly relevant for Rs 10 and Rs 20 notes, which experience frequent handling and physical deterioration. • Polymer notes can incorporate advanced security features such as transparent windows and sophisticated anti-	• Polymer banknotes typically cost 30–60% more to manufacture than traditional cotton-paper notes as they use specialised polypropylene substrates and complex printing technologies. • Further, ATMs, currency sorting machines, vending machines and banknote processing equipment may require recalibration to handle polymer notes. • Commercial banks, cash logistics companies would also incur transition costs during the initial rollout. • India relies on imports for about one-fifth of its polypropylene needs. Moreover, fluctuations in crude oil prices could increase manufacturing costs of plastic currency over time. • India's expenditure on currency printing has also increased in recent years, reaching Rs 5,101 crore in 2023-24, Rs 6,373 crore in 2024-25 and Rs 4,875 crore in 2025-26.

counterfeiting elements, potentially improving resistance to counterfeiting and extending the useful life of currency.	Moreover, India spends nearly Rs 5,000 crore annually to replenish and maintain its stock of banknotes and destroys 20-24 billion soiled notes every year, under its Clean Note Policy.
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Environmental Concerns

- As polymer notes rely on polypropylene derived from petroleum and natural gas, there are concerns regarding **fossil-fuel dependence** and **higher initial carbon footprint** of polymer production.
- At the same time, the longer lifespan of polymer notes means that **fewer notes need to be manufactured, transported and replaced**.
- A study commissioned by the RBI and conducted by The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) found that this extended circulation life could result in a **lower overall carbon footprint** compared with paper currency **over the complete lifecycle**.
- Effective adoption would nevertheless require **specialised recycling and disposal systems** to prevent polymer banknotes from becoming a source of plastic waste.

Digital Payments vs Currency demand

- The proposed move comes at a time when India is experiencing rapid **digitalisation of payments**, particularly through UPI. UPI now processes more than 24,000 crore transactions annually, accounting for 85% of retail digital payments.
- However, digitalisation has not resulted in a corresponding decline in currency demand. The **value of currency in circulation** exceeded **Rs 41 lakh crore in 2025-26, compared with Rs 16–17 lakh crore a decade earlier**.
- The persistence of high cash demand alongside rapid growth in digital payments represents what the RBI has described as a **currency demand paradox**.
- The continued use of cash can partly be attributed to the informal sector, rural areas with inadequate digital connectivity, limited digital acceptance and the continued preference for cash for certain transactions.
- India's experience demonstrates that **digital payments and cash can grow simultaneously** rather than necessarily replacing one another.
- The **currency-to-GDP ratio**, which fell to around **8.7% during 2016-17 following demonetisation**, subsequently remained above 11%, indicating that demand for physical currency continues despite rapid digital-payment adoption.
- Therefore, the persistence of cash means that improving the **efficiency, durability and security of physical currency** is important even as India moves towards greater digitalisation and the **Central Bank Digital Currency (Digital Rupee)**.
- It is not about choosing between paper and plastic; but about designing a smarter, more efficient cash ecosystem in an economy where significant currency remains in circulation despite the UPI revolution.

e-Shram Portal

- The e-Shram Portal has completed five years, marking a significant milestone in strengthening social security for India's unorganised workforce.
 - Unorganised worker** includes a home-based worker, self-employed worker, or a wage worker in the unorganised sector.

- It also includes a worker in the organised sector who is not a member of EPFO (Employees' Provident Fund Organisation)/ESIC (Employees' State Insurance Corporation)/Government Employee.
- The portal was launched in 2021 by the **Ministry of Labour and Employment**.
- Developed by the **National Informatics Centre (NIC)**, it created the country's first-ever **Aadhaar-seeded National Database of Unorganised Workers**.
- It gives every registered worker a unique **12-digit Universal Account Number** and has evolved into a one-stop digital platform integrating welfare, jobs, skilling, apprenticeship and pension services.
- **Eligibility:** Any worker aged 16 years and above, engaged in the unorganised sector, is eligible to register on the e-Shram Portal. A worker must not be an income tax-payer or a member of EPFO or ESIC. Registration on e-Shram Portal is completely free of cost.

Objectives

- Improve delivery of social security services by enabling the convergence of welfare schemes across Ministries and Departments.
- Facilitate secure sharing of worker data with government agencies through APIs. This supports the effective delivery of welfare schemes and evidence-based policymaking.
- Create a comprehensive national database that supports timely planning and response during national emergencies and crises.
- Facilitate nationwide access and portability of social security and welfare benefits for migrants and construction workers.

Impact

- The One-Stop Solution brings together **15 Social Security & Welfare Schemes** on a single platform.
- With over **31.89 crore registrations**, e-Shram has improved benefit delivery, portability and evidence-based policymaking.
- **Gender distribution:** Women account for **54.28%** of registered workers, while men account for **45.72%**.
- **Top occupational categories:** Agriculture, Domestic and Household Workers, Construction, and Apparel account for the highest registrations.
- **Top States:** Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra have recorded the highest registrations.
- The portal has laid a strong foundation for an inclusive and technology-enabled social security ecosystem for India's unorganised workforce.

World Development Report 2026

The World Bank released the **World Development Report (WDR) 2026**, titled **The Promise of Artificial Intelligence**. It examines how AI can influence development in low- and middle-income countries.

Highlights

- AI is diffusing much faster than previous general-purpose technologies. It took approximately 80 years for the steam engine, 40 years for electricity, and 20 years for the internet to reach lower-income countries.
- However, middle-income countries accounted for half of ChatGPT's global traffic within only six months of its launch.
- A **three-stage framework** has been proposed for the developing countries:
 - **Adopt:** Use existing AI technologies to improve sectors such as **healthcare, agriculture, education and public administration**, rather than immediately attempting to develop expensive frontier AI models.
 - **Adapt:** Modify AI applications to suit local languages, data, institutions and development needs.
 - **Advance:** Gradually build domestic capabilities in AI skills, infrastructure, innovation and research.
- The report also highlights the potential of **small AI**, involving relatively inexpensive AI applications that can work through basic devices and connectivity, making them more suitable for countries with infrastructure constraints.

AI and Employment

- Around 4.5% of jobs in low- and middle-income countries are at risk of automation by generative AI, compared with 14.2% in high-income countries.

- Around 16.2% of jobs in developing economies could experience meaningful productivity gains from AI, compared with 18.7% in high-income economies.

- Thus, in developing countries, AI may initially have greater potential for **worker augmentation than widespread displacement**.

- AI could help developing economies overcome shortages of skilled professionals. By complementing human capabilities, AI can make specialised expertise available to a much larger population.
- However, unequal access to AI could also widen productivity gaps between developing and high-income countries.

Foundations for AI

- AI cannot be deployed effectively without strong **physical, digital, and institutional foundations**.
- Reliable electricity and internet connectivity are essential for widespread AI use, while affordable computing infrastructure and shared data resources facilitate the adaptation of AI technologies.
- Equally important are **education systems, business environments, access to capital and institutional capacity**, which enable firms and individuals to develop, adopt and experiment with AI-based solutions.

Role of Government

- Governments have three major roles in the AI ecosystem: **enablers, users, and regulators**.
- As **enablers**, governments should establish reliable electricity and digital infrastructure, improve connectivity, facilitate access to computing and data, and strengthen education and business ecosystems.
- As **users**, governments can employ AI in areas where improvements in public-service delivery have significant social benefits, including **agricultural extension, healthcare and education**.
- As **regulators**, governments should initially utilise existing laws to address harms arising from unsafe AI systems, while developing appropriate regulatory frameworks through international cooperation.
- Regulation should protect citizens without unnecessarily creating barriers to AI innovation and adoption.

Way Ahead

- India and other developing countries need not attempt to immediately compete with advanced economies in developing the largest frontier AI models.
- A more practical approach is to adopt useful existing technologies, adapt them to local needs, and progressively build domestic capabilities.
- The objective should be to ensure that AI becomes a tool for **inclusive development rather than another source of technological inequality**.

Indian scenario

- India has already achieved significant economic and technological progress but continues to face challenges such as **labour-market informality, low female labour-force participation and unequal access to quality health and education**.
- AI could potentially help India by extending access to scarce expertise in **healthcare**, agriculture, education and government services, particularly through low-cost and locally adapted AI solutions. It thus improves public services and economic productivity
- Emphasis on **local-language adaptation** is particularly significant because AI applications need to serve a highly diverse linguistic population.
- Similarly, India's AI strategy requires investment not only in models but also in computing infrastructure, semiconductor capacity, digital public infrastructure, skills, data governance and reliable electricity.

Samudra Manthan

- The Union Cabinet has approved an **outlay of Rs 84,084 crore** for **National Offshore Exploration Scheme**, titled Samudra Manthan.
- Nodal Ministry: Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas
- The scheme seeks to unlock India's offshore oil and gas potential and strengthen energy security, domestic hydrocarbon production and technological capabilities.

Need for the Scheme

- India is the **world's third-largest crude-oil consumer** and has a large import dependence for its energy requirements. Its annual import bill is nearly **USD 144 billion**, or **~ Rs 13 lakh crore**.
- Recent global events have shown how vital is uninterrupted energy access. Higher domestic output has thus become critical for a rapidly growing economy.
- At the same time, India's future hydrocarbon potential is concentrated in **deepwater and ultra-deepwater basins**, particularly the **Krishna-Godavari, Cauvery, Mahanadi and Andaman basins**.
- They are estimated to hold over **5,600 MMTOE** (Million Metric Tonnes of Oil Equivalent) of hydrocarbon potential.
- Exploration in these areas is **capital-intensive, technologically complex and associated with high geological and commercial risks**.
- A single deepwater exploratory well costs about **USD 125–150 million**. Such high stakes can discourage offshore exploration.
- Moreover, existing fields witness a **natural decline of around 6–7% every year**. New discoveries are needed simply to sustain current output. Sustained exploration thus serves as a path to lasting self-reliance in energy.
- Samudra Manthan marks the transition **from policy reform to mission-mode implementation**.
- The scheme adopts a **risk-sharing approach** to attract sustained investment into frontier waters. It seeks to **de-risk offshore ventures** and encourage private capital, building lasting national capability across the value chain.

Integrated Enabling Ecosystem

- Beyond funding, the scheme creates a supportive environment for the entire value chain. Dedicated provisions cover:
 - Digital programme management for transparent and efficient implementation;
 - Capacity building for professionals across the sector;
 - Adoption of cutting-edge technologies;
 - Continuous stakeholder engagement;

Components of Samudra Manthan

Offshore exploration depends on reliable data, advanced technology, modern infrastructure, and a resilient supply chain. Samudra Manthan brings these elements together through four components.

Seismic Data Acquisition, Processing, and Interpretation

- Limited offshore seismic coverage restricted the identification of drill-ready oil and gas prospects.
- The scheme funds large-scale **2D and 3D seismic surveys** with an outlay of **Rs 28,534 crore**.
- Advanced technology and Artificial Intelligence will speed up processing and interpretation. Older data in the National Data Repository will also be re-processed with modern tools.

Accelerated Offshore Exploration

- High cost and long gestation make deepwater drilling a risky venture. To share this risk, the scheme allocates **Rs 43,200 crore** for drilling 60 deepwater and ultra-deepwater wells.
- Financial support covers up to **50%** of eligible drilling cost, or **Rs 675 crore** per well, whichever is lower.
- It is open to **both public and private Exploration and Production (E&P) operators** to increase oil and gas reserves.

Common Offshore Infrastructure

- Many offshore discoveries remain unproduced due to costly infrastructure, particularly in the Mahanadi and Kutch basins.
- It provides **Rs 10,000 crore for shared production** and evacuation facilities in select basins. Common infrastructure lowers project costs and turns idle finds into producing fields.

Oil and Gas Manufacturing and Services Zone

- Low domestic manufacturing increases exploration costs, import dependence, and foreign exchange outflow.
- Thus, an integrated Oil and Gas Manufacturing and Services Zone will be established with **Rs 2,000 crore**.
- It will build domestic capabilities in manufacturing, repair, warehousing, engineering, and services.
- Further, an amount of **Rs 350 crore** supports monitoring, digital interventions, evaluation, human resources, awareness and outreach, events, and media.

- International outreach to attract global partners.

What Samudra Manthan Will Deliver?

- **Larger Reserves:** Increase of over 600 MMTOE of hydrocarbon reserves, expanding the resource base from 1.6 billion to 2.2 billion Tonnes of Oil Equivalent (TOE).
- **Higher Output:** Annual domestic production is targeted to rise from around 62 MMTOE to 80 MMTOE. Incremental production of 10–15 MMTOE is expected, with a peak potential of 20 MMTOE.
- **Lower Import Bill:** Additional output can cut crude imports by nearly Rs 1 lakh crore every year, generating significant foreign exchange savings.
- **Investment and Growth:** The scheme will promote investments across the value chain and drive strong GDP expansion.
- **Employment:** Large-scale jobs will be created in exploration, production, and allied activities.
- **Indigenous Strength:** Domestic manufacturing will deepen, facilitating a globally competitive ecosystem for offshore technologies.

Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Amendment) Act, 2026

- The Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Amendment) bill, 2026, received Presidential assent.
- It amends the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Act, 2006 to align the legal framework with the sector's changing needs and its growing economic significance.
- The amendments seek to reduce payment-related constraints, make dispute resolution more time-bound, and simplify compliance.
- The broader objective is to facilitate the growth, development, and competitiveness of

KEY AMENDMENTS

- **Revised MSME classification:** The amended framework bases MSME classification on **both 'investment in plant and machinery/equipment' and 'turnover'**, replacing the earlier investment-based approach.
 - The actual thresholds are to be specified by the Central Government. This allows the classification framework to better reflect the scale and changing nature of enterprises.
- **Registration:** Under the 2006 Act, Medium enterprises engaged in manufacturing were required to file a memorandum with specified authority. Filing memorandum was voluntary for other MSMEs.
 - The 2026 Act makes **filing of the memorandum free and voluntary for all MSMEs**.
 - The Central Government will notify a national platform for this purpose. State governments may also notify State digital platforms.
- **Payment through TReDS:** Every central public sector enterprise (CPSE) must settle all invoices for procurement of goods or services from MSMEs on the Trade Receivables Discounting System (TReDS).
 - TReDS is an RBI-regulated electronic platform that enables MSMEs to raise funds from financiers against invoices due from buyers.
- **Timeline for Mediation:** The 2006 Act authorises Micro and Small Enterprises Facilitation Councils or mediation service providers referred by them to settle payment disputes by mediation.
 - The 2026 Act adds that mediation must be completed within 90 days from the date fixed for first appearance.
- **Timeline for Arbitration:** Where a mediation is not successful, the 2006 Act requires the dispute to be referred for arbitration.
 - The 2026 Act adds that such reference must be made **within 30 days** from the date of termination of mediation. Moreover, an **award must be made within 90 days** from the date of completion of pleadings.
- **Disputes on awards:** The 2006 Act provides that an application may be made in a Court for setting aside an order/award of the Council after depositing 75% of the award amount.
 - The 2026 Act also allows such an application against a mediated settlement agreement. It adds that **if a case has been pending for more than six months, at least 50% of the awarded amount must be paid to the supplier**. The provision seeks to prevent prolonged litigation from completely blocking the cash flow of small enterprises.
- **Decriminalisation of offences:** Certain procedural violations have been **decriminalised**, with conviction-based penalties replaced by warnings and graded civil monetary penalties.
 - It seeks to promote a more **trust-based regulatory environment** while retaining penalties for repeated violations.

MSMEs while promoting Ease of Doing Business.

Importance of MSME sector

- According to the Economic Survey 2025-26, MSMEs account for **31.1% of GDP, 35.4% of manufacturing output, and 48.58% of exports**.
- As on August 2026, **9.16 crore MSMEs** are registered on the Udyam platform, **employing more than 40 crore people**.

National Co-operative Development Corporation (Amendment) Act, 2026

The National Co-operative Development Corporation (Amendment) Bill, 2026 has received the assent of the President. It amends the National Co-operative Development Corporation Act, 1962.

Key Provisions

- **Broader scope of cooperative development:** The amendment replaces the narrower formulation under which NCDC financed specified programmes implemented through cooperatives with a broader mandate to plan, promote and finance programmes for cooperative development.
 - Co-operative development is defined as providing assistance directly or through any intermediary, to co-operative societies.
- **Expansion of 'foodstuffs':** The Original Act defines foodstuffs to include items such as eggs, milk, meat, and vegetables.
 - The 2026 Act expands the definition to include **processed food and other edible products**; and **any other food items notified by the central government**.
- **Removal of geographical restriction:** The earlier requirement that eligible industrial goods be produced by specified entities located in rural areas has been removed.
 - NCDC can now support industrial cooperative activities irrespective of their geographical location (rural, semi-urban, or urban regions)
- **Direct financial assistance:** Under the original Act, NCDC may provide funds to state governments for financing co-operative societies; or loans and grants directly to co-operative societies **at the national level or those operating in more than one state**.
 - The 2026 Act allows to extend funding (loans and grants) from NCDC *beyond national-level and multi-State cooperatives* to any entity engaged in co-operative development.
- **Wider investment powers:**
NCDC can participate in the share capital of State-level cooperative societies and entities engaged in cooperative development, subject to Central Government approval.
 - This widens the Corporation's ability to support cooperative institutions beyond national

Impact

- The amendment is expected to make NCDC a more flexible and responsive financing institution for the cooperative sector.
- Direct loans, grants and equity participation can reduce procedural delays that arise when assistance has to be routed through State Governments or cooperative societies.
- The wider eligibility for financing can bring **specialised entities, infrastructure providers, technology providers and other institutions supporting cooperatives** into the financing ecosystem.
- The expansion of support to **processed food and other edible products** can encourage greater **value addition, food processing and diversification** within the cooperative sector.
- Similarly, removing the rural-location restriction on industrial goods can enable cooperative industrial activities to access NCDC support based on their economic role rather than simply their geographical location.
- Greater NCDC participation in the share capital of State-level cooperatives can also help cooperatives obtain **long-term institutional capital**, potentially improving their ability to expand, modernise and compete in organised markets.

and multi-State cooperatives.

- **Credit and information-sharing powers:** The amendment enables NCDC to collect and furnish credit information and other relevant information required for the efficient discharge of its functions.
 - Such information can be exchanged with the Central Government, RBI, banks and other financial institutions, strengthening the Corporation's ability to assess and support cooperative projects.

Bankers' Books Evidence Act, 2026

Bankers' Books Evidence Bill, 2026 received Presidential assent. It seeks to repeal and replace the Bankers' Books Evidence Act, 1891, with a modern legal framework aligned with the country's increasingly digital banking system.

Need for Repealing the Old Law

- The primary purpose of the old law was to allow certified copies of bank records to be used as evidence in legal proceedings. This would save bank officials the hassle of physically producing original ledgers in court every time.
- The old law was enacted when banking records were predominantly maintained in physical form.
- But today, with the advancement of technology and growth of digital banking, bank records are increasingly created, stored and maintained using contemporary technology.

Key provisions

Definition of Bankers' Books

- The most significant change is its expanded definition of "bankers' books".
- In the old law, bankers' books are defined only as records "kept in written form or stored in a micro film, magnetic tape or in any other form of mechanical or electronic data retrieval mechanism."
- The 2026 Law recognises records stored in "electronic or digital form, or otherwise, either onsite or at any offsite or virtual or cloud location".

Admissibility of Electronic Records

The 2026 Law adds that an electronic or digital record of a banker's book will be admissible, valid, and legally enforceable as evidence, subject to certain conditions. These include:

- An electronic or digital copy would be admissible **if it is a true copy** of the relevant entry or information and **accurately represents** or is **appropriately derived** from the original record;
- No unauthorised alteration of data should have occurred;
- There should be no tampering with the system or any other event that could undermine the integrity and accuracy of the record.

Compelling Production of Bankers' Books

- Under the 1891 Act, bank officers could not be compelled to produce records or appear as witnesses in cases where the bank was not a party, unless a court ordered it for a "**special cause**". However, the Act never defined this term.
- The 2026 Law brings clarity to the concept, defining "special cause" as instances where the accuracy of the record is doubtful, where regular record-keeping has been interrupted or where the bank disobeys an inspection order.

Application to other entities in the financial sector

- The old Act applies to entities engaged in the business of banking and any post office savings bank or money order office.
- The 2026 Law retains this and further empowers the central government to extend the provisions to any entity or class of entities operating in the financial sector, by notification.

Impact

- The framework can potentially make banking-related litigation, arbitration, investigations and other legal proceedings more efficient, as authenticated electronic records can be produced without relying on physical registers or original paper records.
- The legislation can also improve **legal certainty and evidentiary efficiency** for the expanding digital financial ecosystem.

Concerns

- Section 11 of the new law states that court orders compelling the production of bank records for investigations can be interpreted as orders made by an officer “not below the rank of a Superintendent of Police”.
 - This is not a new power, as Section 8 of the old Act contained the same provision, allowing an SP-rank officer to demand records for police investigations.
- However, as records are now electronic, they can be obtained and shared easily on a phone, increasing the risk of data leaks and privacy concerns, whereas with physical books, it is difficult to share and make copies off.
- Lawyers and judges currently struggle to prove or disprove digital documents.
- The new law could have incorporated modern safeguards such as hash values — a unique digital fingerprint used to verify that an electronic file has not been tampered with — to ensure the sanctity of the evidence.
- The 2026 law’s requirement that a branch head certify the bank’s network and devices were secure from cyber threats will place an unrealistic burden on local bank staff.
- In a centralised banking environment, a branch manager ordinarily does not control or possess personal knowledge of the bank’s data centre, cloud service provider or cybersecurity incidents.
- A modular certification system should be incorporated where designated technical officers handle system-integrity certificates instead.
- The extension of the law’s provisions to any financial entity simply by notification is also an issue.
- Loosely regulated digital lending intermediaries or fintech platforms should not automatically receive the same presumption of reliability as a scheduled commercial bank without Parliamentary approval.

Merchant Discount Rate on UPI

- The **Taxation and Other Laws (Amendment) Act, 2026** has amended the **Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007**, creating a framework for the potential introduction of a **Merchant Discount Rate (MDR)** on certain UPI and RuPay debit-card transactions.
- MDR is a fee paid by a merchant to banks and payment-service providers for processing, settling and maintaining digital-payment transactions. It is therefore different from a direct transaction fee imposed on the consumer.

- The amendment does not itself impose an MDR on UPI transactions. Rather, it creates the legal possibility for such charges to be introduced in the future.
- According to the Ministry of Finance, if MDR is introduced, it would apply only to a limited category of merchant transactions above a specified threshold, and at a nominal rate.
- The government has specifically stated that UPI will remain free for consumers and person-to-person (P2P) transactions will continue to be free. The vast majority of merchant transactions are also expected to remain free.
- In 2025-26, only about **4% of person-to-merchant (P2M) UPI transactions exceeded Rs 2,000**, although these represented roughly **two-thirds of transaction value**.
- This shows how a threshold-based MDR could potentially generate revenue while leaving a significant majority of transactions unaffected.

Need for MDR

- UPI has expanded significantly, creating substantial costs for banks, payment service providers and payment infrastructure operators in areas such as transaction processing, settlement, cybersecurity, fraud prevention and infrastructure upgrades.
- While the **₹8,730 crore** disbursed by the Union government between fiscal years 2021-22 and 2024-25 aimed to protect small merchants from transaction fees, it creates heavy financial friction for the backend industry.
- According to the standing committee's report, the "incentive support constitutes only 11% of the cost incurred by the industry and 14% of the potential MDR collected by the industry.
- The absence of a steady and sustainable source of revenue could impede the building of infrastructure required to handle more transactions and customers smoothly.
- The government has therefore described the amendment as an enabling provision aimed at ensuring the long-term sustainability, technological advancement and resilience of UPI.
- The move also seeks to encourage greater participation and competition among payment-service providers by creating the possibility of a sustainable revenue model for the ecosystem.

India's Balancing Act: Attracting Investment from China and the US

The Indian government has been walking a strategic tightrope over the past few months, making gradual, incremental policy relaxations to attract more trade and investment from the world's two largest economies — China and the US — while balancing its own strategic objectives.

Anti-Dumping Duty Rejections: A Shifting Trend

- Under normal procedure, the DGTR (Directorate General of Trade Remedies) investigates dumping complaints and recommends anti-dumping duties to the Ministry of Finance.
- Data shows that between 1991-2020, the Finance Ministry rejected only 0.5% of DGTR's 1,052 recommendations.
- Since 2020, **rejection rates spiked sharply** — 50-62% in 2020-23, dropping to 6.1% in 2024-25, then rising again to 41.5% in 2025-26 (up to Nov 2025).
- China accounted for 72% of total rejections since 2000**, though officials attribute this partly to China having the highest share of investigations overall.

Changing Composition of Chinese Imports

- India's imports from China have shifted from finished products to intermediate goods used in domestic manufacturing and re-export.
- Electronic components rose from 3.3% to nearly 13% of imports (2015-16 to 2026-27), alongside growth in electric machinery, chemicals, and plastics.
- Conversely, finished goods like telecom instruments fell from 18% to 11%, manufactured fertiliser dropped from 7.5% to under 1%, and consumer electronics imports halved.
- Commerce Ministry officials note most imports now comprise capital goods, intermediate goods, and raw materials (APIs, auto components, mobile phone parts) used for making exportable finished products.



Relaxing FDI Rules for China

- In 2020, India mandated government approval for investments from countries sharing a land border with India (aimed at preventing pandemic-era "opportunistic" takeovers).
- In March 2026, the Cabinet allowed investments from companies with up to **10% Chinese ownership via the automatic route**, aiming to boost India's competitiveness as an investment destination and support Atmanirbhar Bharat.
- In July 2026, the government further eased its stance by permitting four Chinese-linked companies to bid for power sector projects.



Balancing Trade Ties with the US

- India diluted its decade-long ban on FDI in inventory-based e-commerce, now allowing such investment specifically for export-oriented operations (announced recently), aimed at boosting Indian sellers' global market access.
- Separately, after the US proposed a 12.5% tariff on India (June 2026) following a forced-labour import investigation, India notified a ban on importing goods made using forced labour — despite enforcement challenges. This resulted in the US settling for a lower final tariff of 10%.



Conclusion

India's calibrated policy shifts — easing FDI restrictions, selectively using anti-dumping enforcement, and negotiating tariff relief — reflect a pragmatic effort to boost economic engagement with both China and the US without compromising core strategic concerns.

Spain's Ceuta Migration Crisis

- Spain faced one of its **biggest migration crises** in recent history after up to 60,000 migrants crossed from **Morocco** into the North African enclave of **Ceuta** within 24 hours, leaving at least 41 people dead and overwhelming local authorities.
- Reception centres were overwhelmed, forcing thousands, including unaccompanied children, to spend nights in parks and public spaces — described by Spain's Civil Guard association as a "serious humanitarian crisis."

Geographical Location of Ceuta

- Ceuta** is a small Spanish autonomous city located on the **north coast of Africa**, on the Strait of Gibraltar, directly across from the Spanish mainland.
- It sits on a peninsula jutting into the Mediterranean Sea, at the point where the Mediterranean meets the Atlantic Ocean via the Strait of Gibraltar.
- Ceuta borders Morocco by land — it's surrounded on its landward side by Moroccan territory (specifically near the towns of Fnideq and Belyounech).
- Along with Melilla (further east along the Moroccan coast), Ceuta is one of **Spain's two autonomous cities in North Africa** — together, they form the only land borders the European Union has with the African continent.



Why Migrants Are Crossing?

- Ceuta** and **Melilla**, form the EU's only land borders with Africa, making them frequent crossing points via swimming or breaching fortified fences.
- Spanish authorities linked the surge to a Spanish Supreme Court ruling holding that migrants intercepted at sea en route to Ceuta or Melilla **cannot be summarily returned** immediately.
- Officials alleged human trafficking networks misrepresented this ruling to encourage crossings, though Moroccan rights activists questioned whether migrants were even aware of the legal nuance.
- The Ceuta crisis has exposed deep fault lines in European migration policy, straining Spain-Morocco cooperation and triggering sharp divisions within the EU.
- With repatriation efforts ongoing, officials warn the humanitarian and security challenges are far from resolved.

Italy Suspends Schengen Pact with Spain

- Italy announced that it was suspending the EU's border-free Schengen arrangement with Spain for one month, responding to the mass migrant influx into Ceuta from Morocco.
- Though Italy shares no land border with Spain, the move affects air and sea travellers between the two countries, who will now need passports to enter Italy.
- The **Schengen Pact** is a treaty that created the world's largest free-travel zone, allowing people to cross internal borders without passport checks.
- The pact includes 29 Countries – 25 European Union (EU) nations and 4 non-EU nations.
 - Non-EU members are Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.

US-Canada Trade War

- The US and Canada find themselves in a bitter trade war after Washington imposed 50% tariffs on about \$20 billion worth of Canadian goods. In retaliation, Canada announced counter-tariffs as high as 50% on a range of US goods.
 - US tariffs took effect on August 22, with Canada's retaliatory tariffs set for September 8.

- New US tariffs cover about 5% of Canada's annual exports, spanning hockey equipment, wine, agricultural goods, clothing, and furniture.
- Canada's retaliation will target steel, dairy, appliances, agricultural equipment, pulp and paper, and electronics.
- The two countries exchanged \$880 billion in goods and services last year; 72% of Canada's goods exports go to the US, making the stakes especially high for Ottawa.

US Report Flags India in "Shadow Transshipment Network"

- The Trump administration released a report, "*The Great Transshipment Scam: Global Evasion and Economic Costs*," naming India among 40+ countries allegedly helping China evade US tariffs by routing goods through third countries.
- **India was placed in the highest-risk category**, raising concerns ahead of ongoing India-US trade negotiations.
- **India-Specific Allegations** - The report flags India's Pune-Gujarat-Chennai corridor for allegedly routing pumps and compressors affecting US industries in Ohio. The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) countered with data showing India's substantial genuine global exports in these categories, weakening the rerouting claim.

Why It Matters?

- With **International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA)** based reciprocal tariffs struck down by the Supreme Court in February 2025, the report may pave the way for new tariff action.
- India's Tier-1 status signals US pressure for an anti-transshipment clause in the trade deal, alongside broader leverage tactics like Russian-oil-linked tariffs.
- The report reflects Washington's shift from targeting China alone to pressuring its trading partners.
- India has strong counter-data, but must balance deepening US trade ties with defending its manufacturing credibility.

What Is Shadow Transshipment?

- Chinese exporters allegedly route goods through intermediate countries, where minor assembly or relabelling lets shipments pass as products of the transit country, evading US tariffs.
- The practice expanded after 2018 tariffs on Chinese imports.
- The report, by the Office of Trade and Manufacturing Policy, ranks countries in three tiers:
 - **Tier 1** (India, Mexico, Canada, EU) — illegal transshipment risk embedded in large legitimate trade;
 - **Tier 2** (Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand) — closely integrated with China;
 - **Tier 3** (Cambodia, Panama, UAE) — weak customs enforcement.
- An estimated \$67 billion in transshipped goods caused \$28 billion in lost US tariff revenue in 2025.

EU's AI Act: A Compliance Opportunity and a Governance Lesson for India

- As India considers standalone AI legislation, the **European Union's AI Act** — which entered into force in August 2024 and became applicable on August 2, 2026 — offers both a business opportunity and a regulatory lesson.
- The Act follows a **risk-based approach**, prohibiting certain AI systems, regulating high-risk ones strictly, and imposing lighter checks on limited-risk use cases.

Compliance Mismatch: A Business Opportunity for India

- The EU Act assumes **AI software is a finished product** once approved. India's technology industry, however, thrives on continuous, client-specific adaptation — a model the Act does not easily accommodate.
- Before a "high-risk" AI system (used in sensitive areas like hiring or education) enters the European market, it must pass a "conformity assessment" under Article 43 — proof of testing, documentation, and human oversight. Most providers self-assess; only select biometric tools need independent verification.
- If a system is "substantially modified" post-approval — a change not foreseen in the original assessment — the process must be repeated, and firms making such modifications may inherit the original provider's full regulatory obligations.
- In June 2026, the EU eased its timelines: the compliance deadline for standalone high-risk systems was pushed to December 2027, and to August 2028 for high-risk AI embedded in regulated products, with a grandfathering clause exempting existing systems until substantially modified.
- This creates volume demand for governance documentation, technical testing, and legal-technical professionals — work India's services industry (IT majors and Global Capability Centres in Bengaluru, Hyderabad) is well-placed to supply.
- A longer-term opportunity lies in the Act's provision allowing conformity assessment bodies from third countries to be recognised as "notified bodies," contingent on a bilateral agreement.
- The recently concluded India-EU Free Trade Agreement, with its regulatory cooperation provisions, could serve as the legal gateway for Indian bodies to participate directly in the EU's conformity assessment ecosystem.

The EU's AI Omnibus: A Lesson in Regulatory Flexibility

- The EU's AI Omnibus (the Digital Omnibus on AI - a legislative package), effective July 27, 2026, revised parts of the original AI Act.
- Its extending deadlines and simplifying compliance requirements — reflects an acknowledgment that AI evolves faster than law, not a retreat from regulation.

WHO Declares Uganda Free of Ebola

- The World Health Organization (WHO) confirmed that Uganda had passed the mandatory 42-day monitoring period without any new Ebola cases, formally declaring the country free of the virus.
- The 42-day period — twice the upper limit of Ebola's incubation period — is the internationally established benchmark for confirming that outbreak-linked transmission has ended.
- This provides an additional safeguard that no chains of transmission from the last imported case were missed.

Nauru Renamed Itself Republic of Naoero

- The **world's smallest island nation**, the **Republic of Nauru**, has officially renamed itself the **Republic of Naoero**, adopting a more indigenous version of its name to move away from its colonial past and preserve an endangered language.
- Citizens will now be addressed as **dei-Naoero** instead of Nauruan, with the change formally notified to other countries and international organisations.
- **Geographical Location**
 - The Pacific island is located northeast of Australia in Micronesia. Its closest neighbor is the island of Banaba, in Kiribati, some 300 km to the east.
 - It lies south of the Equator and northeast of the Solomon Islands, covering a total land area of 21 square kilometers (8 square miles).
 - It is the third-smallest country overall by land area, after Vatican City and Monaco.
 - Nauru has no official capital, but government offices are located in the district of Yaren.

Colonial History

- It has passed through multiple foreign rulers: introduced to the West by British sailor John Fearn in 1798 (who named it Pleasant Island), annexed by Germany in 1888 (when 'Nauru' entered official records), taken over by Australia during WWI, occupied by Japan in WWII, and later placed under UN trusteeship by Australia, Britain, and New Zealand.
- Despite gaining independence in 1968, the colonial-era name persisted until this revision.
- Nauruan is the national language.
- **Currency:** Australian dollar
- **Political System**
 - Its constitution established it as a republic with a Westminster-style parliamentary system of government.
 - The President is elected by, and responsible to, the unicameral parliament and is both head of government and head of state.
 - As there are no political parties in Naoero, all Members of Parliament (MPs) stand as independents.

Operation Economic Outcast

- The United States sanctioned **four India-based companies** over alleged **involvement in Iran's petroleum and petrochemical trade**.
- This is part of Washington's newly launched "**Operation Economic Outcast**" aimed at cutting Tehran's financial and oil revenue networks.
- The action forms part of a broader package targeting Iran's petroleum export network — shell companies, third-country intermediaries, shadow-fleet operators, customs brokers, and port agents.

- The US also sanctioned entities in Türkiye, Hong Kong, and Iran, including Hong Kong-based Clever Shipping Limited, accused of managing a tanker that loaded Iranian-origin petroleum.

US-India Comparison on Electoral Systems

- US President Donald Trump claimed India's Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar asked how American elections work without mandatory photo ID.
- Trump noted only 1% of India's 64.64 crore voters used mail-in ballots in the last election. He used this to push the **SAVE America Act**, mandating citizenship proof and photo ID for US voters.

How US and Indian Elections Differ?

- **The US System**
 - The Elections Clause gives **US states power** over election "times, places, and manner."
 - US has **no national election authority**. County & municipal bodies handle registration & counting.
 - Two key laws shape voting: the National Voter Registration Act (1993) and the Help America Vote Act (2002).
 - Registration is elector-initiated. Citizenship is self-declared, not documented upfront.
 - 36 states require some ID at polling booths; 23 require photo ID.
- **India's System**
 - The Election Commission of India (ECI) compiles rolls itself through house-to-house enumeration.
 - ECI has full oversight of registration.
 - Voters get an Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC); Aadhaar is also accepted.

The SAVE America Act

- Requires passport, or birth certificate, or naturalisation papers plus photo ID for registration.
- Mail-in voters must include a photo ID copy.
- States must cross-check names against DHS (Dept. of homeland security) records.
- Officials registering undocumented voters risk up to five years in prison.
- **Opposition** - Over 20 million eligible Americans lack easy access to a passport or birth certificate. First-time young voters are especially affected.
- **Parallel with India's Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** - Both the SAVE America Act and India's SIR shift the burden of proving eligibility onto voters. This departs from older systems, where officials actively identified and enrolled eligible citizens.

China's Construction in South China Sea

- China has completed the first phase of construction on Antelope Reef in the Paracels, building a man-made island analysts believe will form part of its largest South China Sea military base.
- China claims Antelope will serve civilian purposes like weather forecasting and research, calling the work modest and peaceful.
- However, regional security analysts believe it will strengthen China's military hold on the northern South China Sea, a strategically vital area for any Taiwan conflict scenario.

- China has occupied the Paracels since 1974, ousting South Vietnam's navy. Vietnam claims the islands and has formally opposed the construction, while also expanding its own Spratly bases.

UK Paused Three Chevening Fellowships

- The UK government has paused three short-term fellowships under the prestigious **Chevening programme** for one year — the Chevening Research, Science and Innovation Leadership Fellowship (CRISP), the Chevening Cyber Security Fellowship, and the Chevening South Asia Journalism Programme (SAJP) — for the 2027-28 cycle.
- Official sources cited varying reasons, including capacity constraints and cost-cutting by the UK government.
- **Nature of the Paused Fellowships**
 - CRISP: A 12-week programme for scientists, researchers, and entrepreneurs at Oxford University, focused on fellows from India and Sri Lanka.
 - Cyber Security Fellowship: A 10-week programme at Cranfield University (part of the UK's Defence Academy), offered to Indians and citizens of the Western Balkans.
 - SAJP: An eight-week programme at the University of Westminster for mid-career journalists from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and the Maldives.
- **Strategic Purpose of Chevening**
 - Launched in 2004 as an extension of the 1983 Chevening Scholarships, the programme serves as a soft-diplomacy tool, building influential global networks for UK foreign policy.
 - Its 60,000-strong alumni community includes 22 current or former heads of state/government, with about 15% in prominent government positions and 10 serving as Ambassadors/High Commissioners in the UK.

US Senate Passes Russia Sanctions Bill

- The US Senate approved a bill, allowing President Donald Trump to impose 100% tariffs on the world's top five purchasers of Russian oil or natural gas, including India and China.
- The bipartisan package empowers the President to impose tariffs on the top five global purchasers of Russian oil or natural gas — currently **India, China, Azerbaijan, Hungary, and Slovakia**.
- Countries importing less than 15% of their energy from Russia, while taking steps to further reduce such imports, are exempted.
- The legislation sanctions President Putin, senior Russian political and military leaders, Russian financial institutions, and Russian energy projects.
- The White House retains the power to waive sanctions or restrictions if the President certifies to Congress that doing so serves the national interest.

Trump Renames Lake Ontario As Lake America

- US President Donald Trump signed an executive order, renaming Lake Ontario — situated on the US-Canada border — as "Lake America," calling it a tremendous asset to the United States and part of our Nation's heritage.

- **How the Renaming Will Apply?**

- The change affects only how the US officially refers to the lake — via the US Geological Survey's official documents — and **does not bind Canada or the rest of the world**.
- No global body enforces uniform naming of water bodies, and Google Maps now reflects the change based on user location: US users see "Lake America," Canadians presumably continue seeing "Lake Ontario," and users elsewhere (including India) see both names together.

- **Geographical Location of Lake Ontario**

- Lake Ontario is part of the Great Lakes system, along **with Lake Superior, Michigan, Huron, and Erie**, spanning the US-Canada border.
- It lies between the US state of New York and the Canadian province of Ontario, bordering cities including Toronto on the Canadian side.
- The Great Lakes system holds about 90% of the freshwater in the US and roughly 20% of the world's freshwater supply, with 40 million people across both countries depending on it for clean drinking water.



- **Reasons Behind the Order**

- Trump's executive order cited US investment in keeping the lake open for shipping, Canada's comparatively lower spending on it, and its historical role in American exploration, settlement, commerce, and defence.
- More pressingly, the move comes amid heightened US-Canada trade tensions.

- **Precedent: The Gulf of Mexico**

- This is not Trump's first use of nomenclature as a diplomatic tool. In January 2025, on his first day in office, he renamed the Gulf of Mexico as the "Gulf of America" amid tensions with Mexico over immigration and tariffs.

India Reshuffled Its LNG Supply Chain Amid the Hormuz Crisis

- Despite the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz crashing LNG imports from India's largest supplier Qatar, India's overall LNG imports rose in May-July 2026, as **diversified sourcing** from the *US, Oman, Nigeria, and Angola* compensated for the shortfall.
 - The **US emerged as India's top LNG source**, followed by Nigeria and Oman — a dramatic shift from 2025, when these countries supplied far smaller volumes.
 - Qatar's supplies collapsed by over 91%, while UAE exports to India, though down 34.4%, showed partial resilience.
- India relies on LNG imports to meet about **half its natural gas requirement**, with roughly **60% of these imports** historically routed through the Strait of Hormuz, primarily from Qatar and the UAE.

India-Japan Sign Maritime Security Pact

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and his Japanese counterpart Shinjiro Koizumi held bilateral talks in New Delhi.
- During the talks, India and Japan signed a Memorandum of Arrangement (MoA) on Maritime Security Cooperation, agreeing to deepen operational cooperation including information sharing, naval exercises.
- The agreement provides a framework for closer cooperation between the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force and the Indian Navy, covering Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA), search and rescue, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.
- The two sides also agreed to provide logistical support, including port access and maintenance/repair facilities
- The Ministers welcomed the expansion of bilateral exercises, including **Dharma Guardian** and **JAIMEX**, and the upcoming **Veer Guardian 26** air exercise — marking the first-ever participation of Japanese fighter aircraft in an exercise held in India.

Defence Technology and Industrial Cooperation

- India welcomed Japan's recent review of its defence equipment and technology transfer framework.
- Both sides identified the shipborne UNICORN integrated communications antenna system as a symbol of their growing defence equipment partnership.

Institutional Follow-Up

- A Working Group, headed at the Director-General/Joint Secretary level, will be established to coordinate cooperation across operational, intelligence, equipment, technology, and industrial domains.
- Both sides agreed to accelerate discussions for the **fourth India-Japan "2+2"** Foreign and Defence Ministerial Dialogue, to be held in Tokyo (later in 2026).

J&K Important Part of India: US

- US Ambassador to India Sergio Gor, during his maiden visit to Srinagar in August 2026, described Jammu and Kashmir as an **important part of India** and hinted that Washington might **re-evaluate its travel advisory for the region**.
 - The US currently maintains a **Level 4** ("Do Not Travel") advisory for Jammu and Kashmir due to risks of terrorism and civil unrest, though **parts of Ladakh** have been exempted from this classification.
- Gor praised the security measures implemented by the central government and local administration, noting they have made the region safer.
- While making no immediate announcements, Gor indicated that Washington will examine whether the existing warning can be safely downgraded, with the aim of encouraging more American visitors to the region.

Five Years After Kabul's Fall: India's Evolving Engagement with the Taliban

- On August 15, the Taliban-controlled Afghanistan embassy in New Delhi celebrated "**victory day**," marking five years since the Taliban's takeover of Kabul. It was attended by Indian and around two dozen foreign diplomats.
- The event signalled how far India-Taliban ties have shifted — from India's hurried evacuation of its Kabul embassy on August 17, 2021, to today's open (if still unofficial) engagement.
- Indian officials call this "cautious engagement," while critics term it "opportunistic."

The Human Rights Question

- India has delivered substantial humanitarian aid since 2021, including 50,000 metric tonnes of wheat and over 445 tonnes of medicines and disaster relief material.

- However, human rights, women's rights, and minority rights — once part of India's stated concerns — **are no longer publicly emphasised.**
- The Taliban has systematically curtailed rights for Afghanistan's 22 million women, including barring girls over 12 from school, restricting unaccompanied travel, and enabling child marriage.
- India had earlier voiced concern (including in December 2022 over university bans on women) and backed a UN Security Council resolution — adopted August 30, 2021, under India's presidency — calling for inclusive governance, negotiated political settlement and that Afghan's territory should not be used for terrorism.
- India has since dropped insistence on these red lines, moving forward instead with development cooperation and visas for Afghans for medical treatment, business, and education.
- **Current status:** Afghan missions in Delhi, Mumbai, and Hyderabad are now staffed by Taliban-appointed diplomats, though formal diplomatic recognition remains withheld — symbolised by the Delhi embassy's flagpole still flying the former Afghan Republic's tricolour rather than the Taliban's flag.

Why India Is Deepening Engagement?

- India invested heavily in Afghanistan after the Taliban's fall in 2001. When the Ashraf Ghani government collapsed in 2021 following the US troop withdrawal, New Delhi risked losing its **\$2-3 billion developmental investment.**
- This pushed India to upgrade engagement with the Taliban — without formal diplomatic recognition — both to protect this investment for the Afghan people and to build strategic leverage.
- **Three factors accelerated this shift:**
 - ▶ **Pakistan-Taliban rift:** Pakistan, once the Taliban's principal benefactor, has turned adversarial, with repeated border clashes, creating an opening for India.
 - ▶ **China's growing footprint:** Beijing has been building infrastructure and pursuing natural resources in Afghanistan, filling the vacuum left by Western withdrawal.
 - ▶ **Russia's parallel engagement:** Russia, the only country to formally establish diplomatic ties with the Taliban, has been coordinating with India to monitor Chinese influence in the region.
- **Security Concerns**
 - ▶ India's guiding principle remains that Afghan territory must not be used for anti-India activities or terrorism.
 - ▶ A UN Security Council 1267 sanctions committee report noted the terrorist threat from Afghanistan remains largely unchanged, with groups like ISIL-K and Al-Qaeda still active despite Taliban containment efforts.
 - ▶ Taliban officials have sought to project Afghanistan as a hub for regional economic connectivity rather than terrorism — a message aimed at both India and Pakistan.

Conclusion

- India's Taliban engagement reflects pragmatic recalibration driven by strategic competition with Pakistan and China, rather than ideological alignment.
- While New Delhi has protected its economic stakes and security interests, its retreat from earlier human rights and women's rights positions marks a significant, if quiet, shift — raising questions about the balance between strategic necessity and India's traditional foreign policy values.

Centre Adds 11 New International Ports for E-Visa Entry

- The Centre has notified 11 new international ports — nine land ports (including Attari on the India-Pakistan border) and two airports — where e-visa holders can now enter India.
- **Expanded Port Network** - With this addition, the total number of international ports for e-visa entry has risen to **88**, comprising 37 airports, 38 seaports, and 13 land ports.
- **Newly added land ports:** Darranga, Gede, Ghoadanga, Haridaspur, Jaigaon, Dawki, Moreh, and Attari (Road).
- **Newly added airports:** Bhopal and Tirupati.

- **Exclusion for Pakistani Nationals** - International travellers holding a Pakistani passport, or of Pakistani origin, must apply for a regular visa at an Indian Mission, as the e-visa facility remains unavailable to them.
- This move is part of continued efforts to liberalise, streamline, and simplify India's visa regime — facilitating legitimate foreign travellers while simultaneously strengthening technological infrastructure to enhance internal security.

About E-Visa Facility

- Introduced in 2014 to liberalise and simplify India's visa regime, initially for nationals of 43 countries; it now serves citizens of 172 countries.
- Currently available to 17 sub-categories of travellers, including medical, student, mountaineering, tourist, transit, group travel, and business.
- Processes 95% of applications within 72 hours.
- E-visas constitute 78% of the total visas issued by India.

India-China Border Talks: From De-escalation to Structured Boundary Management

- The 25th round of Special Representative (SR)-level talks between India's NSA Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi concluded in Beijing.
 - SR-level talks between India and China started in October 2003.
- This resulted in an **eight-point consensus** to accelerate discussions on an "Early and Substantial Harvest" in boundary delimitation and border management, while strengthening military-to-military communication along the LAC.

Key Outcomes

- **Boundary Delimitation**
 - Both sides reaffirmed commitment to a fair, mutually acceptable settlement guided by the 2005 Agreement.
 - Under the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC) on India-China Border Affairs — **the Expert Group on Boundary Delimitation** and the **Working Group on Border Management** — will now finalise their Terms of Reference, marking the framework's activation rather than a final settlement.
- **Military Communication**
 - Building on decades of Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) since the JWG (Joint Working Group) and 1993 Border Peace and Tranquillity Agreement, both sides agreed to implement two additional General level Mechanism/SHMC (Senior Highest Military Commander) meeting
 - They also agreed to establish **two new hotlines** in the Eastern and Middle sectors — supplementing existing links at Chushul/Moldo, DBO, Nathu La, Bum La, and Kibithu — to defuse localised tensions quickly.
- **Trade, Pilgrimage and People-to-People Ties**
 - Both sides welcomed the reopening of three border trading points and increased batches for the Kailash-Mansarovar Yatra, alongside restored direct flights — signalling a shift from a purely security-centric border approach.

• Trans-Border Rivers

- The next Expert-Level Mechanism meeting on trans-border rivers, covering the Brahmaputra (Yarlung Tsangpo), is scheduled for September, addressing India's concerns over hydrological data, flood management, and Chinese upstream hydropower projects.

The Road Ahead

- The talks implement understandings reached at Kazan (2024) and Tianjin (2025). The 26th SR round is scheduled for India in 2027.
- However, it remains premature to claim substantive delimitation has begun, since the Expert and Working Groups are still finalising their mandates — meaning patient, incremental negotiation lies ahead, especially given lingering differences in the Sikkim and Middle sectors.

India-China Boundary

- It covers an approximately **3,488-km** frontier and involves differing perceptions of the **LAC**, where both nations claim **overlapping territories** rooted in British colonial-era agreements.
- **Key sectors of the dispute:**
 - ▶ **Western sector (Aksai Chin):** China controls roughly 38,000 square kilometers of land that India claims as part of Ladakh.
 - ▶ **Eastern sector (Arunachal Pradesh):** China claims nearly 90,000 square kilometers of territory, referring to the region as Zangnan or Southern Tibet, based on its rejection of the **1914 McMahon Line**.
 - ▶ **Central sector:** A smaller overlapping segment spanning Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand where differences are relatively minor.
- The 2020 eastern Ladakh crisis significantly disrupted bilateral relations, making restoration of peace and tranquility a prerequisite for normalisation.

India Formally Marks 27 Locations in Arunachal Pradesh on Official Map

The Government of India has formally identified 27 geographical and strategic locations in Arunachal Pradesh by their standard Indian names on the official Survey of India map — a response to China's repeated attempts to assign its own names to places in the State.

Background: China's Renaming Attempts

- China claims Arunachal Pradesh as "Zangnan" or "Southern Tibet" and does not recognise the State as part of India.
- Since 2017, China has repeatedly announced standardised Chinese names for places in Arunachal Pradesh as part of its territorial claim:
 - 2017: First list — 6 locations
 - 2021: Second list — 15 locations
 - 2023: Third list — 11 locations
 - By April 2026: 112 names announced across six batches, covering villages, mountain passes, rivers, and peaks.
- India has consistently rejected these moves as

India's Response

- India has formally marked 27 places and geographical features using their standard Indian names on the official Survey of India map, aimed at ensuring accurate recognition and improving public awareness of strategically important areas.
- The 27 locations include:
 - ▶ **Villages and settlements:** Long Ju, Maja, Bisa, Sagar, Padma, Jyotinagar, Baisakhi, Sunpura
 - ▶ **Mountain passes:** Thag La, Dzo La, Riza La, Pukur La
 - ▶ **Lakes and geographical features:** Sambho Sarovar, Bara Kundun, Chhota Kundun, Chhota Ropuk, Bara Ropuk
 - ▶ **Strategic and logistical locations:** Jairampur, Dhan Bari, Pritnagar, Terithnagar, Ramnagar, Shivaji Nagar, Kamlang Nagar
 - ▶ **Military and historical sites:** Jaswant Garh, Sher-e-Thapa Memorial
 - ▶ **Other:** Buddhamandir

Significance of India's Move

- **Administrative clarity:** Standard names ensure consistency across official maps and records.
- **Cartographic assertion:** Reinforces India's administrative and territorial position.
- **Public awareness:** Improves knowledge of strategically important border locations.
- **Narrative response:** Counters China's attempts to establish an alternative nomenclature for Indian territory.

"fictitious" and "vain and preposterous," maintaining that renaming cannot alter Arunachal Pradesh's territorial status.

Nepal Floods: India's Swift Humanitarian Response

- India responded swiftly to devastating flash floods in Nepal, dispatching relief material despite unfavourable weather conditions — reinforcing its established role as the "First Responder" in the region.
- So far, India has dispatched over 68.5 tons of emergency relief and specialized rescue teams to flood-hit Nepal.
- India also offered to support the construction of 42 Bailey bridges (requested by Nepal) to help restore transport connectivity in flood-damaged regions.

India's Growing LPG Dependence on the U.S.

- The govt. has revealed that **67% of India's LPG now comes from the United States** — a dramatic jump from the earlier 10%, driven by disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz that cut India's West Asian LPG imports by nearly 85% between February and June 2026.
- India, the world's second-largest LPG importer, relies on imports for about 60% of consumption, with 90% traditionally routed through the Strait of Hormuz.
- To manage the crisis, India turned to the U.S., backed by a long-term deal for 2.2 million metric tonnes for 2026.

The Way Forward

- Experts suggest diversifying beyond both West Asia and the U.S. — towards Australia (shorter routes, outside Hormuz), and secondarily Argentina, Nigeria, and Angola — while strengthening domestic production, forex hedging, and strategic reserves.
- True energy security lies not in swapping one dependency for another, but in ensuring no single supplier holds excessive leverage.

AI Meets Diplomacy: Indian Missions Turn to AI Avatars for the Diaspora

Indian missions abroad are increasingly deploying AI-enabled videos and digital tools to educate and assist the Indian diaspora, marking a shift from traditional text-based advisories to more accessible, engaging formats.

The Sarathi Initiative

- The Consulate General of India, Munich launched an AI-enabled video awareness series featuring a virtual avatar named 'Sarathi'.

India's Three-Pillar Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Doctrine

India has built a formal HADR doctrine on three pillars



• **Neighbourhood First Policy** — covering eight immediate neighbours: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.



• **SAGAR (now MAHASAGAR)** — Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth for All in the Region, defining India's role as a net security provider and disaster-resilience partner in the Indian Ocean Region.



• **Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam** — India's civilisational ethos of "the world is one family," under which aid is offered without preconditions and India expects nothing in return.

Institutional Capacity

- India's disaster-response capability is backed by robust institutions: the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), with 16 battalions (over 18,000 personnel), and State Disaster Response Forces (SDRF) in each state, with the Centre funding 75% of SDRF budgets {90% in case of North-East and Himalayan states}
- This institutional strength supplements the armed forces when required, reflecting high preparedness even before disasters strike.

Economic Trade-offs



Gulf shipments take just 5–10 days versus 25–35 days from the U.S. While West Asian LPG is normally cheaper on arrival due to proximity.



However, Gulf benchmark prices have surged recently, temporarily making costlier U.S. cargoes relatively attractive.

Concerns



Risks of Over-Reliance on the U.S. – Diversification was a prudent crisis response, but concentrating dependence on a single new source is risky given Washington's history of using energy as a foreign policy tool.



Hidden Currency and Fiscal Risks – A stronger dollar raises rupee-denominated import costs, and keeping domestic LPG prices artificially low widens under-recoveries for oil marketing companies.

- Sarathi addresses common diaspora issues — passports, visas, OCI services, birth registration, police clearance, and consular matters — through short videos.
- The shift from text to audio-visual content aims to make information more accessible for a wider, more diverse audience.

Origin: The Heads of Mission Conference

- The initiative emerged from discussions at the **11th Heads of Mission Conference** (April 2026), themed **"Reforming Indian Diplomacy for 2047."**
- PM Narendra Modi addressed over 180 envoys, emphasising the **3Ts** — Tourism, Technology, and Trade.
- Discussions flagged that Indian missions lagged in using technology for diaspora outreach, calling for messaging that is "engaging, interactive and contemporary," aligned with citizen-centric governance.

Broader AI and Digital Push Across Missions

- Missions are integrating **Bhashini**, the government's AI powered translation platform, to bridge multilingual communication gaps.
- Other examples include: the New York Consulate's '**Bharati**' chatbot (serving ~2.5 million diaspora members), Dubai's **Pravasi Bharatiya Sahayata Kendra** (PBSK) digital services (developed with Zoho Corp), the **Su-Swagatam** visa app's chatbot support, and the Hungary Embassy's '**Bharati**' chatbot.
- The focus now is on scaling these platforms and shifting from standard text replies to visual, interactive formats.

India as a Testbed for the Global South

- India's AI opportunity lies in applying it at population scale, building on the success of the **"India Stack"** (Aadhaar, UPI, DigiLocker).
- The next step is layering AI atop this digital public infrastructure — a model that could extend to other emerging economies, positioning India as a **gateway to the Global South**.

Conclusion

- India's AI strategy is increasingly intertwined with its global diaspora — not merely as a source of capital or talent, but as connectors linking ecosystems, ideas, and markets across borders.
- As AI reshapes the global technology landscape, this diaspora network, built over decades, may prove to be one of India's most valuable strategic assets in defining its role in the world's AI future.

PM Modi's Central Asia Visit: India's Strategic Return to Its Continental Neighbourhood

- PM Modi undertook a Central Asia trip — a state visit to Uzbekistan, followed by the 26th Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan (August 31-September 1).
- This continues India's "Connect Central Asia" policy, framed in 2012 and given momentum by Modi's historic 2015 visit to all five Central Asian nations.

What Central Asia Offers?

- Traditionally viewed as **Russia's strategic backyard** (20-30% ethnic Russian population), the region's growing global significance was underscored when Xi Jinping chose it for his first post-COVID overseas trip in 2022.
- The region is resource-rich: **Kazakhstan** (uranium, coal, gold, lead, zinc), **Turkmenistan** (natural gas), **Tajikistan** and **Kyrgyz**

Central Asia as India's Extended Neighbourhood

- Central Asia is no less India's neighbourhood than South or West Asia — a lack of overland connectivity does not diminish the civilisational links in culture, religion, language, and architecture.
- India and Tajikistan are separated only by Afghanistan's narrow Wakhan corridor.
- Multiple external powers — Türkiye, Iran, US, EU — are expanding their presence as Russia's hold weakens and China's grows.

Key Challenges

- **Connectivity:** Pakistan blocks India's direct overland route to Central Asia, pushing India to integrate the INSTC with Iran's Chabahar port as an alternative.
- **Security:** The Taliban's ascent in Afghanistan has heightened fears of radicalism and a potential Islamic State regrouping, risking both India and Central Asian states.
- **Demographic shifts:** The Russia-Ukraine conflict has driven skilled Russians to relocate to Central Asia, which could boost local economies but also generate social tensions.

Republic (hydropower), and **Uzbekistan** (gold, uranium, natural gas) — drawing global powers seeking access to this wealth.

India's Strategic Stakes

- India's engagement serves multiple objectives: **security cooperation** (especially post-Taliban takeover of Afghanistan), **countering** China's Belt and Road-driven influence, **connectivity** via the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), **energy security** (Kazakh uranium, the proposed TAPI gas pipeline), **civilisational ties**, and **trade expansion**.
- A notable gesture came in January 2022, when India invited Central Asian leaders to its Republic Day celebrations.

Indian Army Chief Conferred Honorary Rank of General of Nepali Army

- Indian Army Chief General Dhiraj Seth was conferred the honorary rank of General of the Nepali Army by Nepal President Ramchandra Paudel, during his recent official visit to Nepal.
- The conferment is part of a longstanding tradition under which India and Nepal reciprocally confer (since 1950) the honorary rank of General on the Chiefs of each other's armies.
- The Indian Army described this as a symbol of the close and enduring ties between the two forces, reflecting mutual trust, professional respect, and military camaraderie sustained across successive generations of leadership.

Gautam Rangarajan Appointed Expert Adviser to UK PM

- British Prime Minister Andy Burnham has appointed Gautam Rangarajan, son of a former senior Indian diplomat, as Expert Adviser on Structure and Process, Downing Street announced.
- His brother, Vijay Rangarajan, serves as the Chief Executive of the U.K.'s Electoral Commission.

International Law Survives Amid Global Conflict

- Recurring conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza, and West Asia have revived the debate on whether international law is losing relevance.
- Critics cite the failure of institutions to stop these wars as proof that legal norms no longer restrain states.
- However, analysts argue that this conclusion is premature — international law continues to function quietly even when headline conflicts suggest otherwise.

Wars Do Not Disprove International Law?

- Even states accused of violating international law rarely reject the law itself as meaningless.

- They instead justify their actions using its own vocabulary — the UN Charter, sovereignty, territorial integrity, self-defence, and humanitarian law — showing the framework still commands authority.

The Quiet, Unnoticed Successes

- Compliance rarely makes news, while violations dominate headlines. Yet ordinary international life depends on legal cooperation working smoothly:
 - Aircraft cross borders safely under international aviation regulations.
 - Ships sail the seas under international maritime law.
 - Diplomacy, trade, and travel function through thousands of routine legal obligations.
 - Individuals rely on international law daily — passports, consular assistance, air travel, and refugee protection.
- Even amid conflict, states keep negotiating new multilateral agreements — the High Seas Treaty, pandemic preparedness efforts, and the UN Convention against Cybercrime — signalling continued faith in a rules-based system.

Relevance for India and the Global South

- Peace itself is built through legal instruments — ceasefires, peace agreements, and negotiated settlements.
- Legal frameworks can sustain engagement between states even during political discord (E.g. India's Indus Waters Treaty)
- For India and the wider Global South, international law offers smaller and developing states a way to protect their interests through negotiation rather than raw power.
- Shared global challenges — climate change, pandemics, cyberattacks, and economic instability — cannot be solved unilaterally and require cooperation rooted in agreed rules.

Acknowledging the Flaws

- International law has never been a perfect system. It has long **coexisted with power politics** and faced criticism for reflecting unequal structures, including the limitations of the UN Security Council.
- But **imperfection is not the same as irrelevance** — no legal system guarantees full compliance.
- Its real value lies in providing standards against which state conduct can be judged. Historically, crises have driven the adaptation of international law, not its collapse.

- UN Secretary-General António Guterres told the International Law Commission in July 2026 that international law is under pressure but will prevail.
- Scholars explain that states often comply not out of fear of punishment, but because of the **pull created by the treaty regimes** they belong to — compliance is about embedded expectations, not coercion.

Conclusion: International law is strained but not extinguished. Its true strength lies not in preventing every violation, but in remaining the shared language states use to justify and contest their conduct — a framework still indispensable for a just, cooperative world order.

12th BRICS Environment Ministers' Meeting

- India hosted the 12th BRICS Environment Ministers' Meeting in New Delhi. Chaired by Union Minister Bhupender Yadav, the event operated under India's BRICS Chairship theme, "**Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability**".
- The BRICS grouping represents nearly 49.5% of the world's population, 40% of global GDP, and 26% of international trade, giving it significant influence over global environmental governance.

Four Priorities

• Sustainable lifestyles:

Building on Mission LIFE, promoting responsible consumption, behavioural change, and environmental awareness to make citizens active participants in climate action.

• Afforestation, forest-fire management and disaster resilience:

An integrated approach to landscape restoration, forest-fire preparedness and early-warning systems, ecosystem restoration, and use of remote sensing and AI, aimed at strengthening both ecosystem and community resilience.

★ India's Approach

• Humanity First

- India's BRICS chairship is guided by a people-centric approach and the principle of "Humanity First," building on the inclusivity emphasis of its G20 Presidency.
- Initiatives like Mission LIFE (Lifestyle for Environment) and Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam demonstrate India's focus on behavioural change, ecological restoration, public participation, and community ownership.

• Equity and CBDR-RC

- A key feature of India's approach is the principle of equity and Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC).
- It recognises differing historical contributions and capabilities, and ensuring climate action for developing countries remains compatible with poverty reduction, livelihood security, and energy security.

• From Declarations to Implementation

- India's chairship emphasises practical mechanisms over mere declarations, demonstrating the potential of multilateralism and South-South cooperation.

★ India's Climate Action Credentials

- India reduced its emissions intensity of GDP by 37.38% between 2005 and 2022, with non-fossil sources accounting for 54.18% of installed electricity capacity as of June 30, 2026.
- India has created an additional carbon sink of 2.44 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent during 2005 to 2022.
- India's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) for 2031–2035 reflects continued efforts to balance climate mitigation with energy security and inclusive development.

- **Circular economy:** Moving beyond the "take-make-dispose" model through cooperation in research, innovation, technology transfer, and capacity building — promoting resource efficiency while generating green jobs.
- **Climate adaptation:** Integrating traditional, indigenous, and local knowledge with modern science to develop context-specific, evidence-based, and culturally appropriate adaptation solutions for developing countries facing disproportionate climate vulnerabilities.

14th BRICS Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) Ministerial Meeting

- The 14th BRICS Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) Ministerial Meeting was held in Chennai under India's BRICS Chairship.
- The meeting began with an inaugural address by Union Minister Dr Jitendra Singh and concluded with the unanimous adoption of the "**Chennai Declaration**" (Chennai Consensus).
- The Chennai Consensus places a people-centred, "humanity-first" approach at the heart of STI cooperation, emphasising sustainable development, resilient and high-quality growth, social inclusiveness, and the use of technology to improve welfare and quality of life across BRICS nations.

Key Outcomes and Mechanisms

• Thematic Coverage

- The Declaration spans a wide range of strategic areas: High-Performance Computing and AI, biotechnology and human health, materials science and nanotechnology, photonics, astronomy, geospatial technologies, renewable energy, ocean and polar science, natural-disaster management, quantum technologies, and social sciences and humanities.

• Shared Research Infrastructure

- The Declaration welcomes outcomes of the BRICS Working Group on Research Infrastructures and Mega-Science Projects, including an Action Plan and Terms of Reference for a Task Force.
- Progress was recorded towards operationalising the **BRICS Global Research Advanced Infrastructure Network (BRICS GRAIN)**, envisaging greater access to research facilities, common usage approaches, researcher mobility, and stronger collaboration on large-scale research infrastructure.

• Knowledge Sharing

- The **BRICS Science and Research Repository** was welcomed as a structured knowledge-sharing platform — a digital public good mapping scientific institutions, researchers, research outputs, datasets, and collaboration opportunities, subject to national data governance rules.

• Talent and Youth Innovation

- Continued emphasis on the BRICS Young Scientist Forum and BRICS Young Innovator Prize.
- Recognizes progress under the BRICS STI Entrepreneurship Partnership, strengthening engagement among incubators, accelerators, and early-stage investors.
- The BRICS Youth Startup Platform was welcomed, alongside consideration of a BRICS Startup Innovation Fund to catalyse financing for early- and growth-stage startups.

• Institutional Continuity

- The Chennai Consensus also records the transition of the BRICS STI Ministerial process to the next Chairship, with the 15th Ministerial Meeting scheduled under **China's Chairship in 2027**.

11th BRICS+ Legal Forum

- 11th BRICS+ Legal Forum met amid shifting global trade patterns, fragmenting multilateral governance, and rising tech-driven regulatory challenges.
- **Theme** - Rule of Law Frameworks and Institutional Capacity Building for Economic Resilience, Innovation and Sustainability.
- **Five Key Domains**
 - o Legal systems as shock-absorbers during economic volatility.
 - o Institutional capacity for innovation-driven economies.
 - o BRICS-centric dispute resolution, especially SME-sensitive arbitration.
 - o Climate finance and developmental justice.
 - o AI governance and digital trust.

Building on Prior Commitments

- The Forum builds on a chain of summit declarations:
 - **Johannesburg II (2023)**: Called for financial architecture reform and local currency systems.
 - **Kazan Declaration (2024)**: Backed WTO dispute settlement reform and AI governance principles.
 - **New Delhi and Moscow meetings (May 2026)**: Reinforced the New Development Bank's (NDB's) rule-of-law model and AI governance implementation.
- These declarations show a consistent logic: reforming trade, finance, and tech rules for a multipolar world requires real legal architecture, not just political intent.
- The Forum aims to convert these commitments into lasting treaties, regulations, and institutions.

The Race for the Next UN Secretary-General

- The UN Security Council (UNSC) held its informal "straw poll", to select the next UN Secretary-General (UNSG), whose five-year term begins January 1, 2027.

- While results weren't officially announced, three Latin American candidates — Costa Rica's Rebeca Grynspan, Guyana's Carolyn Birkett, and Argentina's Rafael Grossi — are informally believed to have scored well.
- Given that outgoing UNSG Antonio Guterres is from Portugal, and his predecessors came from Asia (Ban Ki-moon) and Africa (Kofi Annan), expectations favour a candidate from **Latin America**, and potentially a **woman**, since none has held the post before.

How the Appointment Process Works?

- The UNSC comprises **15 members**: **five permanent members** (P5 — China, France, Russia, UK, US) and **10 non-permanent members** elected for two-year terms by the UN General Assembly.
- Straw polls are anonymous: member-states mark candidate slips as "encourage," "discourage," or leave them blank. In future rounds, P5 slips will be colour-coded, so a "discourage" mark from this group signals a likely veto.
- Polls are repeated until a **candidate secures nine encourage votes with no P5 veto**.
- Under Article 97 of the UN Charter, the Secretary-General is appointed by the General Assembly on the UNSC's recommendation — but the Council forwards only one name, giving it primacy in the selection.

27th IRIGC-TEC

- External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar attended the 27th India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technological and Cultural Cooperation (IRIGC-TEC) in Moscow, Russia.
- IRIGC-TEC is a key mechanism ahead of the 24th India-Russia Annual Bilateral Summit.
- The visit aimed to secure bilateral trade and technical cooperation. Both countries are pursuing a shared target of **\$100 billion in bilateral trade by 2030**.
 - o Bilateral trade touched a record high of US\$68.7 billion in FY 2024-25, though it stood at US\$59.86 billion in FY 2025-26.
 - o During this visit, India flagged a widening trade imbalance — which grew to over \$50 billion — urging steps like opening markets, cutting trade barriers, improving payment systems, and boosting business ties to address it.

Energy and Fertiliser Cooperation

- Putin announced Russia will boost fertiliser shipments to meet India's agricultural needs, alongside expanded cooperation in energy and nuclear supplies.
- Russia has emerged as India's largest crude supplier, with dependence rising from 23% in January to nearly 50% by June-July 2026.
- India has stepped in to supply refined fuel to Russia after Ukrainian drone attacks damaged Russian oil facilities — though officials clarify these are commercial transactions via international traders, not government-backed deals.

Expanding Trade and Connectivity

- India has proposed its **first cargo shipment via the Northern Sea Route next year**, with Russia's Arkhangelsk region partnering with India on shipbuilding and port shipping.
- Russian side proposed exploring a rail link to India — potentially via Central Asia and Iran — to reduce dependence on vulnerable maritime chokepoints like the Bosphorus Strait and Strait of Hormuz, though the Iran-linked route raises security concerns.

Supreme Court Steps In to Curb Digital Arrest Scams

- The Supreme Court has issued detailed directions to curb "digital arrest" scams. It has asked states, the RBI, and telecom authorities to adopt SOPs, e-zero FIRs, and money restoration mechanisms to protect cyber fraud victims.
- The Court took up this issue on its own (suo motu) last year. This followed a case where a senior citizen couple from Ambala, Haryana lost Rs 1.05 crore to scammers using forged Supreme Court, Bombay High Court, and ED orders.

Existing Legal and Institutional Framework

- Several bodies already work on this problem. The **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)** is the **nodal agency** under the Home Ministry.
- The National Cybercrime Reporting Portal lets citizens report fraud.
- The RBI frames rules for banks on suspicious transactions.
- The e-Zero FIR mechanism allows FIR registration regardless of jurisdiction. States also have their own Cyber Crime Coordination Centres.

The Supreme Court's Directions

- **For banks:** The RBI must prepare an SOP within four weeks. This SOP will let banks place temporary debit holds on suspicious and mule accounts. It must also include grievance redressal, a money restoration module, and public awareness steps. This SOP goes to the Registrars General of High Courts too.
- **For states:** States must adopt the e-Zero FIR system with I4C's help, and notify their State Cyber Crime Coordination Centres. Right now, e-Zero FIR works in 19 states, but only 14 states have notified their coordination centres.
- **Grievance redressal and money restoration:** States must frame these mechanisms within four weeks. High Courts must inform their courts about this system. Victims are encouraged to use this route first, though other legal remedies stay open. All authorities, including the RBI and consumer courts, must disburse recovered money to victims quickly.
- **Victim compensation:** An Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC) will study a shared liability and compensation framework. It will also examine lowering the Rs 10 crore threshold needed for CBI to investigate, especially for frauds linked to the same criminal network.
- **Telecom measures:** MeitY, the Department of Telecommunications, and I4C will study time limits & warning systems on audio-video calls to curb misuse. Two telecom rules-Telecommunications (Radio Equipment Possession Authorisation) Rules and Telecommunications (User Identification) Rules are being notified.



Progress So Far

- The numbers show real improvement. Digital arrest complaints on the NCRP portal **dropped sharply**, from 1,23,672 in 2024 to 58,239 in 2025, with 16,377 complaints till June 2026.
- On money recovery, a data-sharing agreement between the RBI Innovation Hub and I4C was signed in May 2026. The **Money Restoration Portal** now covers 57 banks across all states and UTs. Money has been restored in 36,290 cases, worth Rs 18.05 crore.
- The CBI has registered 10 digital arrest cases. In one case alone, it found 238 victims across 67 bank accounts, involving around Rs 80 crore, and searched 93 locations in 16 states.

Sixth Positive Indigenisation List Notified

- The Ministry of Defence, through the Department of Defence Production (DDP), notified the **sixth Positive Indigenisation List (PIL)**, comprising **405 items** with an estimated worth of ₹3,070 crore.
- The PIL is a notified catalog of military platforms, systems, sub-systems, spares, and components that **cannot be imported**.

- Beyond set timelines, the military must source these specified items exclusively from domestic manufacturers, boosting local defense production under the *Aatmanirbhar Bharat* (Self-Reliant India) initiative.
- The previous **five positive indigenisation lists** comprised 5,012 critical DPSU (Defence Public Sector Undertakings) items, of which 3,200 items — with an import-substitution value exceeding ₹3,900 crore — have already been indigenised.

274 Fugitives Brought Back to India in Seven Years

- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said India has extradited 274 fugitive criminals from 36 countries over the past seven years.
- Union Home Minister credited frameworks like BHARATPOL for creating a global coordination network to trace and bring back fugitives.
- This success can be attributed to a three-pronged approach: global outreach, strong coordination, and smart diplomacy.

Agni-4 Missile Successfully Test-Fire

- India's Strategic Forces Command (SFC) successfully test-fired the indigenously developed Agni-4 medium-range ballistic missile from the Integrated Test Range at Chandipur, Odisha.
- **Agni-4** is an intermediate-range, nuclear-capable, surface-to-surface ballistic missile developed by DRDO.
- **Key Features**
 - Range: Up to 4,000 kilometres
 - Propulsion: Two-stage solid propellant
 - Length: 20 metres; Launch Weight: ~17,000 kg
 - Payload Capacity: 1,000 kg (conventional or nuclear warhead)
- Already inducted into the SFC, the missile remains a key component of India's strategic deterrence capability.

West Bengal Clears Pending Land for BSF Border Fencing

- The West Bengal Cabinet has approved the permanent transfer of 31.905 acres at nine locations to the Border Security Force (BSF) for fencing and security infrastructure, along with 1.53 acres for three new **Border Outposts** in Malda, Nadia, and Cooch Behar.
- This clears a long-pending bottleneck in India's border fencing project along the India-Bangladesh border.

Legal and Institutional Tools

- Several new mechanisms have strengthened this effort. The new criminal laws allow **trial in absentia**, letting courts proceed against absconding accused even without their presence.
- Strict enforcement of the **Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA)** led to confiscation of assets worth Rs 17,874 crore and restitution of Rs 18,762 crore.
- **BHARATPOL**, a newer framework, has built a coordination grid across countries to track fugitives, turning every corner of the world into a hunting ground for fugitives.

Diplomatic and Technological Push

- Before 2014, India had extradition treaties with only 37 countries, limiting its reach. Currently, India maintains formal extradition treaties with 48 countries and specific extradition arrangements with 12 countries.
- The extradition of 26/11 accused Tahawwur Hussain Rana from the United States was cited as a major success of India's legal and diplomatic efforts.
- Interpol Red Corner Notices issued by India have risen sharply: from 40 in 2022 to 112 in 2025, and already 182 in 2026 so far.
- **Operation Trishul**, launched to geo-locate fugitives, uses satellite inputs, surveillance, and digital footprint analysis to trace criminals who had changed their names or identities abroad.

How the Border Is Managed?

- The BSF guards the entire India-Bangladesh border. Infrastructure development happens under the **Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS)** and the **Border Infrastructure and Management (BIM) Scheme**
- These combine physical fencing with floodlighting, border roads, observation posts, floating Border Outposts, river patrols, and smart surveillance technology, especially where continuous fencing isn't practical.

Why West Bengal Matters So Much?



- West Bengal holds a central place in this project because it shares the **longest stretch of India's border with Bangladesh among all states**.
- Of India's 4,096.70-km border with Bangladesh, 2,216.7 km runs through West Bengal, which is roughly 54% of the entire frontier.
- As of August 2025, 1,647.696 km of this stretch had been fenced, while 569.004 km remained **pending**.
- Nationally, 3,232.218 km of the India-Bangladesh border was fenced by August 2025, leaving 864.482 km unfenced across West Bengal, Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Assam.
- Of the **569.004 km** pending stretch, 112.780 km is not feasible for conventional fencing, while 456.224 km is technically feasible but still incomplete.
- This is due to the existence of riverine channels, marshlands, floodplains, shifting rivers, dense settlements, and the ecologically sensitive Sundarbans.

MQ-9B Sea Guardian Drones

- The Union Ministry of Defence signed a contract with U.S.-based General Atomics Aeronautical Systems Inc. (GA-ASI) to lease **two MQ-9B Sea Guardian** High-Altitude Long-Endurance (HALE) remotely piloted aircraft systems for the **Indian Navy** for 30 months.
- Equipped with advanced sensors and payloads, the MQ-9B Sea Guardian systems are expected to significantly enhance the Indian Navy's maritime domain awareness and provide intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) coverage over large areas of the maritime domain.

India's Aviation Drug Testing Rules

- A second (confirmatory) drug test of the pilot-in-command of an Air India Phuket-Delhi flight — which suffered a sudden 300-foot altitude loss, injuring 24 people — has confirmed "positive for marijuana."
- The incident has renewed focus on India's aviation drug testing protocol, laid down by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).

India's Drug Testing Framework for Aviation

- The DGCA's Civil Aviation Requirement (CAR) on drug testing was released in September 2021 and took effect on January 31, 2022.
- Pilots and air traffic controllers are the primary focus, but coverage extends to aircraft maintenance engineers, certifying staff, trainee pilots, instructors, and examiners.
- Only flight crew and air traffic controllers face mandatory 10% annual random testing; others are tested at hiring or after specific incidents.
- Testing also follows any safety-related event, as in this case.
- Urine samples are screened for six categories: amphetamines, opiates, cannabis (THC), cocaine, barbiturates, and benzodiazepines.
- A "non-negative" result triggers instant removal from flying duty pending confirmation.
- **Escalating Consequences for Confirmed Drug Use**
 - First offence: Referral for rehabilitation; return to duty requires a fresh negative test and fitness certificate.
 - Second offence: Three-year licence suspension.
 - Third offence: Permanent licence cancellation.
- **Refusal to Test Treated as Seriously as a Positive Result**
 - **First refusal:** employee taken off duty, must test within 48 hours or face a one-year suspension plus mandatory rehabilitation.
 - **Second refusal**, or a positive test after an earlier refusal: three-year suspension, with further violations leading to cancellation.

Javelin Missile System

- India has signed an agreement with the US to purchase the Javelin anti-tank guided missile system.
- The deal follows more than a decade of Indian interest, coming after India and the US signed a 10-year defence framework agreement in October 2025.

About Javelin Missile System

- The Javelin is an anti-tank guided munition with a standard effective range of 2.5 km. It can be carried and fired by a single soldier from the shoulder, or launched remotely from an unmanned ground vehicle.
- It is manufactured by the Javelin Joint Venture, a partnership between Raytheon and Lockheed Martin.
- It is a fire-and-forget missile — its infrared guidance system locks onto a target independently, letting operators fire and immediately relocate or reload.
- Its soft launch mechanism uses an initial motor to eject the missile safely from the tube without exhaust hitting the operator, after which a second flight motor propels it toward the target.
- This enables firing from confined spaces, reduces recoil, and minimises smoke trails that could reveal the shooter's position.
- The missile has two firing modes: direct attack (for bunkers/helicopters) and top-attack mode, where it climbs to 150m before diving onto a target's vulnerable roof — particularly effective against tanks.

AI Cybersecurity Threats: How Prepared Is India to Defend Its Cyberspace?

- AI has achieved mass adoption faster than any prior technology — ChatGPT reached a billion users in three years (Internet took 15 years to reach a billion users).
- This rapid adoption is amplifying cyber threats in speed, scale, and sophistication, raising the question of how prepared India is to counter AI-enabled threats and build the AI capabilities needed to secure its cyberspace.

Questions for India

- In July 2026, ransomware group World Leaks claimed to have stolen and posted data related to India's Kudankulam nuclear plant, including facility blueprints and supplier details.
- Cyber intelligence firm CloudSEK ranked **India the second-most cyber-attacked nation** in 2024 (after the US), and sixth in 2025.
- During Operation Sindoor, Pakistan-backed actors like APT36 targeted India's Ministry of Defence, Army, Navy, DRDO, and — for the first time — **BOSS (Bharat Operating System Solutions) Linux**, while also disrupting the National Informatics Centre and state-level portals.

AI Is Transforming Cybersecurity

- Cybersecurity capability was already concentrated among a few countries; frontier AI has widened this gap further.
- Reconnaissance is now automated — AI models can mine social media for details to craft precise spear-phishing emails, and generate real-time deepfakes that blur what's authentic online.
- Weaponisation: LLM-generated polymorphic malware can autonomously modify itself, unlike traditional malware with fixed signatures. In September 2025, Anthropic reported a Chinese state-sponsored group allegedly used Claude Code as an autonomous cyber-espionage agent — described as the first AI-orchestrated cyber-espionage campaign.
- Vulnerability discovery: Anthropic's Claude Mythos Preview has identified thousands of zero-day vulnerabilities across major operating systems and browsers, including a 27-year-old flaw in the security-hardened OpenBSD system — raising particular risks for Operational Technology and Industrial Control Systems running nuclear facilities, energy grids, and other critical infrastructure.
- Traditional defences (signature-based antivirus, static patches) are increasingly ineffective against constantly adapting AI-generated malware, though AI also enables real-time threat detection and automated response for defenders.

Global AI Imbalances

- The US and China dominate leading AI model development and compute infrastructure; Nvidia alone accounts for over 60% of global AI compute capacity.
- The US leads in top-tier models and high-impact patents, while China leads in publication volume, citations, patent output, and industrial robot installations.
- A single company, TSMC, fabricates nearly every leading AI chip, making the global supply chain heavily dependent on one Taiwanese foundry.
- The real divide is not just who uses AI but who builds and controls it.

- India's indigenous AI ecosystem remains incremental, lagging the US and China across the AI stack (foundational models, GPUs, chip design, data-centre infrastructure), leaving it dependent on more advanced countries.

Efforts Made So Far

- CERT-In has, since 2025, adopted AI-driven threat detection, resilience measures, and trusted AI frameworks, issuing an April advisory urging organisations to remove unnecessary internet-facing services and treat new vulnerabilities as exploitable "within hours, not weeks."
- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology is exploring a consent-based framework for synthetic content, curbs on agentic AI autonomy, and clearer AI liability frameworks.

The Way Forward

- India cannot build its AI stack overnight but can focus on agile adoption and efficient diffusion of AI capabilities, paired with supply-chain scrutiny, security assessments, accountability mechanisms, and liability provisions suited to its interests.
- India officially secured its place in this strategic tech grouping by signing the Pax Silica Declaration in February 2026.
- AI and cybersecurity must be treated as interconnected policy strands — **AI for cyber defence, and cybersecurity for AI.**

AI Agents and the New Face of Cybersecurity Risk

- Four separate disclosures in recent weeks — from OpenAI, Anthropic, Meta, and the UK's AI Security Institute (AISI) — revealed **unexpected, unauthorised behaviour by autonomous AI agents** during cybersecurity evaluations.
- This reignited the debate over whether AI agents constitute a new class of cybersecurity threat.

Cybersecurity Risk or Alignment Problem?

- Experts are divided:
 - some call it an **alignment failure** (AI pursuing goals beyond intended constraints),
 - others a **systems problem** requiring safeguards assuming AI can make mistakes, and
 - others a genuine new **cybersecurity concern** demanding earlier oversight during training itself.

The Recent Disclosures •



OpenAI: Two experimental agents exploited vulnerabilities in a closed test environment and retrieved benchmark answers from Hugging Face unintentionally.



Anthropic: A review of 141,000+ evaluation runs found three instances of models gaining unauthorised access to systems at real organisations.



AISI: Agents powered by Anthropic's Mythos 5 and OpenAI's GPT-5.6-Sol engaged in unauthorised actions during evaluations.



Meta: One of its AI models inadvertently breached another company's systems during testing.

All incidents occurred in controlled evaluations, not public deployment.

• About AI Agents •

Unlike chatbots, AI agents act with greater autonomy, pursuing goals independently by making decisions and interacting with external systems — making their behaviour harder to predict and evaluation essential.

Since agents can act on a user's behalf, errors carry real-world consequences. Risks arise at four stages: **input** (prompt injections), **reasoning** (flawed planning), **tool-use** (excessive permissions), and **interaction** (risk spreading across connected systems).

- As AI agents move from answering to autonomously acting, cybersecurity risk is evolving from human attackers to unpredictable systems — demanding robust evaluation and early-stage regulation to prevent safety gaps becoming security breaches.

Centre Plans Integrated Command Centres to Step Up Border Security

- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is developing a technology-driven command-and-control system for India's land borders.
- It will integrate surveillance inputs through a network of command centres stretching from forward areas to New Delhi — part of a new border management policy.
 - A pilot project will begin soon from the Pakistan border.
- The govt. had earlier announced a **four-pronged border security strategy** involving border guarding forces, local population, State police, and technological solutions.

Purpose of the Initiative

- The system aims to **strengthen monitoring and response** in border regions where physical fencing is not feasible, such as the 3,488-km border with China, which remains un-demarcated at several points from Ladakh to Arunachal Pradesh.
- Small command centres along land borders will be linked to field headquarters and Delhi headquarters, with live feeds helping border guarding forces monitor threats and reduce reliance on physical patrolling.

The "Smart Border" Architecture

- The framework will integrate artificial intelligence, sensors, surveillance systems, cameras, image-processing tools, drones, and other monitoring technologies to create a common operational picture for agencies deployed along India's borders — which span **15,106.7 km with seven countries**.
- The system is designed to transmit ground-level information quickly to command centres, enabling faster responses to infiltration attempts, smuggling networks, and other security challenges.

Terrain-Specific, Not Uniform Deployment

- Technologies will be tailored to local conditions rather than deployed uniformly, given India's borders traverse deserts, mountains, riverine stretches, forests, and densely populated areas.
- The un-fenceable China border and flood-prone riverine stretches along the Bangladesh border both require customised, non-physical-presence solutions.

Transfer of Missile Technology to Private Industry

- The Defence Ministry has approved the transfer of technology for all conventional missile systems developed by DRDO to the Indian defence industry, paving the way for domestic production by private players — a significant step towards building India's conventional missile force.
- Previously, missile production relied largely on Defence PSU Bharat Dynamics Limited and DRDO's in-house capabilities, with joint ventures like BrahMos Aerospace Private Limited (with Russia) manufacturing BrahMos supersonic cruise missile.
- **Strategic Context: Rise of Conventional Missile Forces**
 - The move follows a shifting global paradigm highlighted by the US-Israel-Iran conflict, which demonstrated large-scale use of conventional missile systems by all sides.
 - The missiles were earlier seen mainly for strategic purposes — a paradigm that has now shifted.
- This decision marks a key milestone in India's defence indigenisation journey, enabling private industry to directly contribute to building a robust conventional missile force while reducing reliance on imports and strengthening the broader defence manufacturing ecosystem.

Missiles Covered Under the Initiative

- The initiative is expected to begin with:
 - **ASTRA** — Beyond-Visual-Range Air-to-Air Missile (BVRAAM)
 - **RUDRAM** — Surface-to-air anti-radiation missile
 - **VSHORADS** — Very Short Range Air Defence System
 - **NAG** — Anti-tank guided missile
 - **NASM** — Naval Anti-Ship Missile (short-range)
- The broader goal is to enable Indian industry to eventually produce all conventional missile systems.
- However, **Agni and K-series missiles are excluded**, as they are classified as strategic missiles.

National Security Strategies (NSS) Conference-2026

- Union Home Minister inaugurated the 9th National Security Strategies (NSS) Conference-2026 in New Delhi.

- During this, he identified **key challenges** shaping security policy: geopolitical instability, energy and resource insecurity, supply chain disruptions, rising radicalisation, and cyber misinformation campaigns.

• Key Highlights and Directions

- o **Counter-Terrorism:** Pushing the '**PRAHAAR**' policy into daily practice to dismantle terror networks.
- o **Narcotics Control:** Implementing the Vision Document on Drug Control (2026–2029) using a three-pronged approach—Detect, Disrupt, and Destroy.
- o **Border Security:** Emphasizing a four-pronged strategy to make land borders infiltration-free and requiring states to appoint nodal officers.
- o **Legal Measures:** Utilizing new criminal laws, including provisions for trial in absentia to bring back foreign-based fugitives.

About National Security Strategies (NSS) Conference

- It has been held annually in a hybrid format since 2021, in pursuance of directions issued by PM Modi.
- Its objective is to address major national security challenges. This is achieved by drawing on the extensive experience of cutting-edge officers working at the grassroots level, in collaboration with domain experts.
- **Organizer:** Intelligence Bureau under the Ministry of Home Affairs, India.
- **Core Focus Areas**
 - **Border Security & Infiltration:** Formulating strict measures to curb illegal immigration and monitor land borders.
 - **Emerging Technologies:** Utilizing artificial intelligence-based analysis on platforms like the Multi-Agency Centre (MAC) to create Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) against threats.
 - **Modern Threats:** Addressing counter-terrorism, cybercrime, narcotics control, information warfare, and bio-security frameworks

Meta's \$17 Billion Child Safety Settlement: What It Means for Teens — and for India

- Meta agreed to pay over **\$17 billion** over the next decade to settle claims brought by 47 US states, Washington DC, and other territories, while committing to **strict new limits** on how teenagers use Facebook and Instagram.
- Indian regulators are now studying the settlement as a potential blueprint for domestic social media regulation for minors.

What Was Meta Accused Of?

- Meta designed Facebook and Instagram to keep young people compulsively engaged, knew about serious risks, and misled the public about them.
- Meta was also accused of collecting personal data from children under 13 without complying with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), a 1998 law predating these platforms.
- Plaintiffs across cases have pointed to endless feeds, recommendation algorithms, notifications, and social metrics like “likes” as engagement-maximising design features — with one lawyer comparing platforms to dopamine-seeking slot machines.

What Has Meta Agreed to Change?

- For the settlement's first five years, Meta will impose:
 - **A combined two-hour daily limit** on Facebook and Instagram for under-18 users (excluding direct messaging), adjustable by a verified parent.
 - **Overnight blocking:** teens blocked from most features between midnight and 6 am.
 - **Notification restrictions:** most push notifications disabled between 10 pm–7 am, and muted 8 am–3 pm on school weekdays.
 - **A non-personalised feed option**, hidden likes/reactions by default, restrictions on cosmetic-procedure filters, and stronger age-assurance and parental controls.
- This is seen as the first US instance where a major platform was forced to change its product's “architecture” rather than just its policies.

Why India Is Watching Closely?

- Indian regulators are studying the settlement as the Centre weighs interventions on children's social media access, including age-based restrictions, usage-hour limits, and stronger parental consent rules — discussions remain at an early stage.
- The US case demonstrates **enforceable restrictions secured through regulation and legal action**, potentially shaping India's debate on whether platforms or parents/children should bear primary responsibility.
- India favours a **graded model over a blanket ban**, with proposed separate restrictions for three age groups: 8–12, 12–16, and 16–18.
- Discussions have covered fixed daily usage windows, evening/night-time login curbs, and parental-consent requirements, with any new law expected to follow wider public consultation.
- The settlement's cross-platform pressure mechanism is also relevant — since curbs on a few platforms could simply push children toward less-regulated ones, platform-wide consistency is already part of India's policy conversation.

Pradhan Mantri Surya Sarovar Yojana (PM-SSY)

The Union Cabinet has approved the Pradhan Mantri Surya Sarovar Yojana (PM-SSY) to accelerate the deployment of floating solar photovoltaic (FSPV) plants equipped with energy-storage systems (ESS).

Financial Support

- Central Financial assistance of **₹1 crore per MW** to eligible projects after commissioning.
- A further **₹50 lakh per project** can be provided for preparatory activities, including:
 - feasibility studies
 - bathymetric and hydrographic surveys
 - environmental assessments
 - other measures needed to reduce development risks

Key features

- The scheme seeks to utilize India's large reservoir and inland-water-body network for renewable-energy generation while reducing the pressure on land required for conventional solar parks
- Total financial outlay of ₹5,070 crore
- **5,000 MW** of floating solar capacity will be developed under the scheme
- The projects will be equipped with Energy Storage Systems (ESS) with a minimum storage duration of 2 hours, amounting to **10,000 MWh of storage capacity**
- Project sanctioning will take place between FY 2026–27 and FY 2030–31, while financial assistance can be disbursed until FY 2032–33
- The initiative follows an assessment by the National Institute of Solar Energy (NISE), which estimates India's floating-solar potential at ~102.18 GWp (Gigawatt peak)
- Expected to generate approximately **16000–17000 full-time equivalent employment opportunities** across the project value chain
- Expected reduction of around **10 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions annually**

India as a Lepidoptera Hotspot

The Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) has completed the comprehensive Catalogue of Lepidoptera (Butterflies and Moths) of India, a project spanning more than 12 years.

About the Catalogue

- Involved:
 - Extensive field exploration
 - Museum specimen curation
 - Scientific literature verification
 - Taxonomic resolution of previously unresolved species
- Completed through 22 catalogue volumes
- The final volume was published in the international scientific journal Zootaxa
- The project bridges taxonomic gaps that had persisted for more than 100 years

India's Lepidoptera Diversity: India is home to 13,703 species of butterflies and moths across

3,705 genera

240 subfamilies

102 families

31 superfamilies

Global Significance: Indian Lepidoptera constitute approximately 8.25% of all known butterfly and moth species globally. The catalogue establishes a consolidated baseline of India's Lepidoptera diversity

Ecological Importance of Lepidoptera

Butterflies and moths perform several important ecosystem functions:

- **Pollinators** — contribute to plant reproduction

- **Herbivores** — caterpillars influence vegetation dynamics
- **Detritivores** — contribute to nutrient cycling
- **Prey species** — provide food for birds, bats and other insectivores
- **Agricultural importance** — some species affect crops
- **Forestry importance** — certain species influence forest management and ecosystem health

S-PVC Resin

The government has imposed a six-month Minimum Import Price (MIP) on Suspension Polyvinyl Chloride (S-PVC) resin, a key raw material used in pipes, electrical conduits and construction products.

What is S-PVC?

- S-PVC = Suspension Polyvinyl Chloride resin
- It is a polymer manufactured from vinyl chloride monomer (VCM) through suspension polymerization
- In this process, VCM is polymerized in an aqueous medium using initiators and additives
- S-PVC is an important input for:
 - Irrigation and water pipes
 - Plumbing pipes and fittings
 - Electrical conduits
 - Electrical wires and cables
 - Doors and windows
 - Construction-related products
 - Housing and infrastructure project

Ecological Impacts

- PVC is a chlorine-intensive plastic; PVC itself contains more than 50% chlorine by weight
- Its production involves VCM and other chlorinated intermediates
- PVC manufacturing can result in emissions of vinyl chloride, volatile organic compounds (VOCs), nitrogen oxides and other pollutants if not adequately controlled
 - Vinyl chloride, the principal monomer used to manufacture PVC, is a hazardous air pollutant and a known human carcinogen
- Chlorinated compounds generated during production can potentially enter air, water and soil
- Associated with pollutants such as mercury and asbestos
- Can contribute to the formation of dioxins and furans, which are persistent toxic pollutants

10-km Mining Buffer to Wetland Conservation Reserves

The Supreme Court has extended the protective principle applicable to the Asan Wetland Conservation Reserve in Uttarakhand to other wetland conservation reserves across India by extending the mining buffer of 10km around them.

Background

- Asan Wetland Conservation Reserve, located in Uttarakhand and is also recognized as a Ramsar Site
- In 2015, the Uttarakhand High Court directed that mining could continue beyond 10 km from the boundary of the Asan Wetland Conservation Reserve, while mining within 10 km could not proceed without complying with the applicable restrictions
- **February 2024 Supreme Court Order:** Ruled that no mining could happen within 10 km of the Asan reserve without prior approval from the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) Standing Committee and/or the MoEFCC.

The New Rule

- The Court has indicated that the 10-km protective principle should be applied uniformly to wetland conservation reserves, rather than treating Asan Wetland as an isolated case
- The rationale is essentially parity in protection among similarly situated wetland conservation reserves
- The Court emphasized that wetlands constitute a distinct ecological category requiring appropriate protection
- The ruling is particularly relevant where a wetland ecosystem or its ecological influence extends across State boundaries

What Permission is Required?

For mining falling within the protected 10-km radius:

- The project proponent must obtain permission from the:
 - Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL), and/or
 - Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)
- Thus, the Court's framework is essentially a prior-approval requirement, rather than an absolute prohibition in every case

AI Sentries- Using AI to Reduce Human Wildlife Conflict in Kerala

Kerala is increasingly using Artificial Intelligence (AI), camera traps and sensors to detect wild animals approaching human settlements and provide early warnings, aimed at reducing conflict involving elephants.

AI Sentries

- AI sentries are automated wildlife-detection systems installed in areas prone to human–wildlife conflict
- They combine:
 - Cameras/camera traps
 - Motion and other sensors
 - AI-based image recognition
- Communication networks for real-time alerts
- Detection can continue during night-time, when conventional visual surveillance is difficult

How Action is Taken?

- Wild animal approaches forest fringe
- Camera/sensor detects movement
- AI analyses the image and identifies the animal
- Alert generated in real time
- Forest officials and local residents are informed
- Preventive action is taken

Why Elephants are a Major Focus?

- Asian elephants frequently move between forest patches and human-dominated landscapes
- Fragmentation of habitats and increasing proximity between settlements and forests have increased opportunities for encounters
- Elephants are particularly difficult to manage because they:
 - ▶ Move over large areas
 - ▶ Travel through established routes and corridors
 - ▶ Are active at night
 - ▶ Can cause significant damage to crops and property
- India accounts for a major proportion of the world's wild Asian elephant population, making human–elephant conflict an important conservation and governance issue

Colombia Earthquake

A powerful magnitude 7.4 earthquake struck western Colombia with its epicentre near San José del Palmar, leading to over 300 deaths and widescale destruction.

The Earthquake

- **Depth:** Around 103–107 km, placing it at an intermediate depth
- The Colombian Geological Service described it as the **strongest earthquake recorded in Colombia in the 21st century**
- The depth of the earthquake did not prevent significant surface impacts because of the combination of large magnitude, geological conditions and vulnerable structures

Colombia and the Pacific Ring of Fire

- Colombia lies within the Pacific Ring of Fire, one of the world's most seismically active regions.
- The country's western side is influenced by complex interactions involving the **Nazca, Caribbean and South American tectonic plates**.
- The Pacific margin is particularly prone to earthquakes because of **plate convergence and subduction**.

Slowing Glaciers of Ladakh

A recent study published in *The Cryosphere* has found that glaciers in Ladakh's Zaskar Himalayas are moving increasingly slowly as they lose ice and become thinner.

The Findings of the Study

- Researchers studied **12 glaciers** in the Zaskar Himalayas using satellite-derived observations covering **1992–2023**
- The Zaskar region covers about **7,000 sq km** and contains around 1,755 glaciers
- The study found a region-wide decline in glacier velocity of approximately **2.43 meters per year per decade**
- Glacier thinning occurred alongside the slowdown, indicating that **loss of ice mass is the principal driver** of reduced glacier movement
- The study found that the rate of glacier surface thinning increased substantially:
 - **2000–2005:** approximately **0.22 m/year**
 - **2015–2020:** approximately **0.57 m/year**
 - Thus, the glaciers are not merely becoming thinner; the **rate of thinning itself has increased**
 - The strongest reductions in velocity and greatest thinning were observed at **lower elevations**

How does a Glacier move?

- Glaciers may appear stationary, but they are actually slow-moving rivers of ice
- Snow accumulates in the upper part of a glacier, known as the accumulation zone
- Over time, accumulated snow is compressed into ice
- The weight of the ice creates driving stress, causing the glacier to flow downslope under gravity
- Ice is transported from higher elevations towards the lower **ablation zone**, where melting is more pronounced

Relaxed Construction Norms in the Ganga Flood Plains

The Union government has revised the regulatory framework governing construction in the Ganga flood plain, replacing the earlier blanket “construction-free zone” provision with a three-tier flood-risk classification.

The New Rules

- The change was introduced and issued by the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) under the Ministry of Jal Shakti
- It amends the **River Ganga (Rejuvenation, Protection and Management) Authorities Order, 2016** notified under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986
- The earlier framework declared the banks of the Ganga and its flood plain a construction-free zone
- The earlier provision was intended to:
 - Reduce pollution sources
 - Prevent excessive pressure on the river
 - Preserve the natural groundwater-recharge functions of the flood plain
 - The amended framework removes this blanket construction prohibition
 - Instead, the **flood plain** is divided into **three zones** based on flood frequency
- The government has described the amendment primarily as a correction of an inconsistency in the 2016 framework
 - The 2016 order **defined the flood plain** using a 100-year flood criterion
 - At the same time, it imposed restrictions on construction in the “active flood plain”
 - However, the term “active flood plain” was not clearly defined
 - This created uncertainty over the precise area in which construction was prohibited
 - The blanket restriction had also been cited in legal proceedings concerning various projects along the Ganga and its tributaries

The Three Flood-Plain Zones

Zone	Flooding Frequency	Construction	Uses return periods
Active Flood Plain	At least once every 5 years	Strictly prohibited, with limited exemptions for temporary structures (e.g., religious events).	5-Year Flood: The active flood plain is the area expected to experience flooding at least once within a five-year return period • This does not mean that flooding occurs exactly once every five years • A “five-year flood” represents a statistical flood event with a relatively high probability of occurring in any particular year
Regulatory Zone	Once every 5-25 years	Permitted subject to clearances	25-Year Flood: Used to define the outer boundary of the regulatory zone • These areas experience flooding less frequently than the active flood plain

Warning Zone	Once every 25-100 years	Permitted subject to clearances	100-Year Flood: Used for the outer warning zone - A 100-year flood has a 1% probability of being equalled or exceeded in any given year - It does not mean that such a flood occurs only once every 100 years
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Oil Spill near Hara Mangrove Forests in the Persian Gulf

An oil spill along Iran's southern coast has reached the Hara mangrove forests near Qeshm Island, threatening one of the Persian Gulf's most important coastal ecosystems.

Hara Mangrove Forests

- Located around Qeshm Island and the Khuran Strait in southern Iran
- They are composed predominantly of the grey mangrove (*Avicennia marina*)
- The forests occupy a highly saline and arid coastal environment
- It is adapted to saline conditions through specialized mechanisms involving its roots and leaves
- The mangrove ecosystem forms an important ecological zone around the Strait of Hormuz
- They are also designated as a Ramsar Site and a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve

India's First Guide to Grasslands and Other Open Natural Ecosystems

India launched its first-ever Guide to Grasslands and Other Open Natural Ecosystems (ONEs) at the 17th Session of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) COP17 in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

Objectives of the Guide

- It is a national reference document on India's grasslands & other Open Natural Ecosystems
- It brings together information on:
 - Geographical distribution
 - Ecological characteristics
 - Biodiversity
 - Associated communities and tribes
 - Livelihoods
- It also contains thematic sections on:
 - Pastoralism
 - Fire ecology
 - Carbon sequestration
- The objective is to strengthen the conservation, restoration and sustainable management of these ecosystems through science-based approaches

Grasslands	Deserts	Coastal ecosystems
Savannas	Ravines	Other naturally open landscapes
Scrublands	Rocky plateaus	

Open Natural Ecosystems

These are naturally occurring landscapes characterized by relatively low or sparse tree cover. India's ONEs include (*given in table*)

Major Open Natural Ecosystems Covered

1. Himalayan foothills and Terai Grasslands

- Form important ecological transition zones between dense Himalayan forests and the lowland riverine grasslands

2. Thar Desert

- Supports specialized desert-adapted flora and fauna
- Its ecology is shaped by low rainfall, high temperatures and shifting sand landscapes

3. Banni Grasslands

- Located in **Kutch, Gujarat**
- One of India's important semi-arid grassland landscapes
- Supports pastoral livelihoods and livestock-based economies

4. Deccan Savannas

- Characterized by a mixture of grasses, scattered trees and shrubs
- Represent naturally open landscapes of peninsular India

5. Ravines

- Particularly prominent in the **Yamuna–Chambal region**
- Form distinctive landscapes shaped by erosion

6. Rocky Plateaus

- Include distinctive open habitats associated with parts of the **Western Ghats** and peninsular India

7. Coastal Open Ecosystems

- Include naturally open landscapes associated with India's coastal regions
- They support specialized vegetation and wildlife adapted to saline and coastal conditions

8. Central Nicobar Grasslands

Barren Land Perception

One of the important themes behind the guide is the need to move away from the assumption that land without trees is necessarily degraded or unproductive.

- Grasslands, scrublands and ravines have often been undervalued because they lack dense tree cover
- Some naturally open ecosystems are stable ecosystems, rather than degraded forests
- They can contain highly specialized biodiversity that depends specifically on open habitats
- Treating every treeless landscape as “wasteland” can encourage inappropriate land-use conversion, including unnecessary afforestation
- Therefore, it promotes recognition of open ecosystems alongside forests as legitimate conservation landscapes

Fire Ecology

The guide specifically includes fire ecology because fire can be an important natural or human-influenced process in grassland ecosystems.

- Fire can influence:

- Vegetation composition
- Nutrient cycling
- Biomass accumulation
- Habitat structure
- However, inappropriate or excessively frequent burning can degrade ecosystems
- Therefore, fire management needs to be ecosystem-specific, rather than treating every fire as inherently harmful

Association with Land Degradation Neutrality

- The conservation of ONEs is linked to India's Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) commitments under the UNCCD
- LDN broadly aims to ensure that the amount and quality of land resources needed to support ecosystem functions and services remain stable or improve over time
- Restoration of degraded grasslands and rangelands can contribute to this objective
- The COP17 discussions emphasized the need for:
 - Better land-degradation assessment
 - Scientific mapping
 - Landscape-level planning
 - Ecosystem-specific restoration

Nepal's Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF)

The flash floods in Nepal have raised questions about whether they were triggered by a glacial event, an earthquake, extreme rainfall, or a combination of factors.

The Floods in Nepal

- The floods were initially linked to a possible magnitude 4.4 earthquake. Subsequent analysis indicates that the seismic signal was actually generated by a massive glacier-and-bedrock collapse
- The Glacier collapse occurred on the **northern flank of the Langtang Lirung massif**, in the Himalayan region near the Nepal–Tibet border
- A large mass of hanging glacier and underlying bedrock broke away
- The falling mass generated enormous mechanical energy and rapidly incorporated water, ice and sediment
- The resulting flow entered the Lhende Khola river, which eventually joins the Bhote Koshi and Trishuli river system, and moved downstream with extraordinary speed
- Some reports also suggest a role of Western Disturbance in contributing to these floods

The Inland Tsunami Analogy

The event as resembles an “inland tsunami” because of the sudden arrival and enormous energy of the flood wave

- A huge mass of ice, rock and water was suddenly displaced
- The resulting surge propagated through a confined valley
- The flood wave had enough momentum to inundate areas beyond the normal river channel

Meghalaya's Mission Clouded Leopard

The Meghalaya government has launched Mission Clouded Leopard, a dedicated conservation programme for the clouded leopard, Meghalaya's state animal.

Mission Clouded Leopard

- It focuses on:
 - Habitat protection
 - Scientific monitoring
 - Protection of forest connectivity
 - Wildlife crime prevention
 - Community participation
 - Sustainable conservation practices
- The conservation programme places emphasis on improving scientific understanding of the species through:
 - Camera trapping
 - Population and occupancy surveys
 - Genetic analysis
 - Environmental DNA (eDNA) analysis
 - Monitoring of habitat use and distribution

Clouded Leopard

- It is a medium sized wild cat found across parts of the Himalayan foothills and Northeast India, extending into Southeast Asia

IUCN Status-
Vulnerable

WPA, 1972-
Schedule I

CITES- Appendix I

TRAI MyCall

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) recently relaunched a call quality rating app- TRAI MyCall (it first released in 2017).

What is TRAI MyCall? The app, MyCall, retrieves records of recent calls and allows users to rate the quality from one to five stars, and sends anonymized reports to telecom operators to help them improve their networks.

Data collected: Call quality + signal strength, location and usage context (indoor/outdoor/travelling).

Availability: Currently **Android only**; iOS version is pending. **No mandatory pre-installation.**

PowerBank-50

Hyderabad-based space startup- **TakeMe2Space** recently announced that its PowerBank-50 satellite battery pack has now earned the 'flight heritage' tag.

What is PowerBank-50? It is a compact **satellite battery pack** with >50 Wh storage; weighs **380 g**. It gained '**flight heritage**' after it successfully operated aboard **Skyroot Aerospace's Vikram-1** during the maiden **Aagaman mission** when it powered experimental payload at **~450 km altitude**.

✓ **Flight heritage** = **real-world space-tested reliability**, crucial for satellite components

Key Features:

- **High-energy-density Li-ion cells + Intelligent Battery Management System (BMS)**
- **Cell heaters** for extreme cold
- **Stackable** → **CubeSat to microsatellite**
- **Mission Life: Up to 5 years in LEO | Cost-** ₹1,04,900; **off-the-shelf** and cheaper than imported packs.

Magnetorheological Fluid

Scientists at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Patna have developed an innovative hybrid magnetorheometer that promises to advance research and applications of magnetorheological (MR) fluids.

What are MR Fluids? A "smart fluid" whose **apparent viscosity increases rapidly when exposed to a magnetic field**, potentially making it behave like a **viscoelastic solid**.

Composition: Typically contains **magnetic particles (e.g., iron) suspended in a carrier fluid** (commonly **mineral oil, synthetic oil, silicone oil or water-based fluids**).

Control: An **electromagnet** can control its viscosity and hence the force transmitted by the fluid.

Working: Without a magnetic field, particles remain randomly dispersed, and the fluid flows freely. With a magnetic field, particles align into chain-like structures, increasing flow resistance, and making the fluid stiffen.

Applications: **Automotive** (brakes/dampers), **Aerospace & Defence** (vibration control), **Medicine** (prosthetics).

EVEREST

Bengaluru-based space-tech company- Astrobase Space Technologies has unveiled **EVEREST, India's first privately built 800 kN Full-Flow Staged Combustion (FFSC) LOX-Methane rocket engine**. With this, India becomes the fourth country after Russia, the US and China to develop FFSC engine technology.

✓ In LOX-Methane Rocket Engine, LOX (Liquid Oxygen) = oxidizer and methane = fuel.

What are High-Thrust FFSC Rocket Engines?

FFSC is an advanced rocket-engine cycle in which **both fuel-rich and oxidizer-rich gases** drive the engine's turbopumps. Unlike **conventional staged-combustion engines** (where only a portion of the propellants is used to drive the turbopumps), these gases are then **fully fed into the main combustion chamber**, ensuring **almost all propellant contributes to thrust**. This makes FFSC engines **highly efficient, powerful, and suitable for heavy-lift and reusable rockets**.

Significance: Enables **reusable launch vehicles (up to 30 tonnes to LEO)**; **>70% indigenous**, using **large-scale 3D printing** and advanced **FFSC technology**.

Timeline: **Hot-fire tests soon in Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh; first flight targeted for December 2028**. Supported by **IN-SPACe Technology Adoption Fund** (a ₹500-crore scheme to promote innovation and commercialization of space technologies. It provides funding of up to **60% for startups/MSMEs and 40% for large industries**, capped at ₹25 crore per project).

IN-SPACe Re-Entry Guidelines

The Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre (IN-SPACe) recently released guidelines in respect of 'Authorization for Undertaking Planned Re-entry of Space Objects' for **authorizing and safely managing the re-entry of space objects** by companies and government agencies. Key guidelines-

- **Authorization:** "Planned re-entry" of a Space Object by an Indian entity within or outside the Indian Territory requires **IN-SPACe approval**; foreign entities must route applications through an Indian entity (such as Indian subsidiary, joint venture, partnership or collaboration with Indian entities).
- **Scope:** Separate approval is mainly required for objects **designed/planned to survive re-entry**; objects expected to burn up sufficiently under Post-Mission Disposal are exempt.
- **Safety:** Re-entry must minimize risks to **people, property and environment**, with expected casualty risk **< 1 in 10,000**.
- **Risk Assessment:** Operators must submit **trajectory, survivability, fragmentation, impact-zone and casualty-risk analyses**.
- **Coordination:** Applicants must get an 'Advisory Note' from IN-SPACe to arrange **NOTAM (Notice to Airmen)/NAVAREA (Navigational Area) warnings 45 days in advance** to protect air and maritime traffic.
- **Liability:** Operators bear third-party liability, must indemnify the Government of India, and must obtain adequate insurance if required.
- **Changes:** Changes in trajectory, timing, or danger zone require informing the authorities, obtaining a revised NOTAM, and getting an amendment or fresh authorization.

Glueballs

Glueballs are hypothetical **composite particles made entirely of gluons**—the particles that carry the **strong nuclear force**. In **Quantum Chromodynamics (QCD)**, unlike photons, **gluons carry colour charge and can interact with one another**, allowing them to potentially form bound states called glueballs.

Why are Glueballs Difficult to Detect?

They are **extremely short-lived** and quickly decay into lighter particles. Their decay patterns can resemble those of other particles, making identification challenging.

Evidence for Glueballs: **X(2370)**, observed in the **BESIII experiment in China**.

Kimi K3

Chinese company Moonshot AI recently released its Kimi K3 model challenging models from US-based companies OpenAI and Anthropic.

About Kimi K3- Chinese AI Model

- **Developer:** Moonshot AI, founded by **Yang Zhilin (2023)**.
- **Open-weight model:** Parameters can be **downloaded, run and customized locally**; unlike open-source, it does not require disclosure of code/training methods.
- **Capabilities:** **Coding, deep research, financial analysis and video editing**; reportedly competitive with leading US models on benchmarks.
- **Significance:** Signals a **narrowing US-China AI gap** despite China's chip constraints; local deployment can **reduce cloud dependence, costs and accelerate AI adoption**.
- **Concerns:** Alleged **AI distillation** (using outputs/reasoning from US models such as Claude to train K3), raising **Intellectual Property and AI-safety concerns**; potential **reasoning-trace extraction from advanced American AI models** and implications for the **US-China AI race**.

Emerging Challenges for ISRO

ISRO is navigating a critical transition as recent technical setbacks, project delays, and market liberalization converge.

Key Challenges:

Operational Setbacks & Project Delays	Human Capital Deficits & Brain Drain	Institutional Transition & Private Competition	Risk of Strategic Mission Drift
• PSLV Failures: Back-to-back failures of PSLV-C61 and C62 have necessitated detailed failure analysis, affecting launch schedules and organizational morale. • Gaganyaan Delays: Repeated timeline shifts due to extended testing of critical software, avionics, crew-escape, and safety systems. • Resource Bottlenecks: Concentrating top personnel on flagship projects (Gaganyaan) creates manpower shortages and execution delays.	• Talent Migration: Mid-career scientists with 10-12 years of specialized experience are migrating to startups offering higher compensation, equity. • Workforce Gap & Knowledge Loss: Available personnel sit at roughly 72% of sanctioned strength. This exodus drains tacit expertise. • Flawed Retention Directives: Restrictions on resignations from mission-critical projects manage immediate shortfalls defensively but fail to address core issues like	• Evolving Role of ISRO: Reforms through IN-SPaCe (regulator) and NSIL (commercial arm) are shifting ISRO from an end-to-end provider to an R&D-focused agency. • Direct Market & Talent Competition: Private companies compete directly with ISRO for both small satellite launch contracts and specialized scientific manpower. • Infrastructure Dual-Burden: Sharing its capital-intensive launchpads and testing facilities with private	• R&D Diversion: Startup hand-holding and routine production may divert ISRO's bandwidth from frontier technologies like deep-space exploration, reusable launchers and advanced propulsion. • Private Market Limitations: Private capital favours short-term, low-risk returns, while ISRO must sustain long-gestation strategic R&D beyond current

	rigid pay scales and bureaucratic friction.	firms while trying to stick to its own tight mission schedules.	private-sector capacity.
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Way Forward:

- **Retention Reform:** Introduce competitive performance-linked incentives, career mobility, and flexible deputation or sabbatical options between ISRO, academia, and industry.
- **Knowledge Continuity:** Strengthen succession planning, institutional mentoring, and systematic documentation to ensure transfer of critical expertise.
- **Strategic Division of Labor:** Offload routine commercial operations to **NSIL** and private players through **IN-SPACE**, enabling ISRO to concentrate on frontier deep-tech R&D.
- **Greater Process Autonomy:** Reduce administrative hierarchy and grant greater technical autonomy to mission project managers.
- **Mission & Resource Management:** Adopt realistic timelines and balanced manpower allocation across flagship and regular satellite programs.

HYDERACENE

The University of Hyderabad (UoH) secured an Indian patent for HYDERACENE, a novel polymer-based material for solid rocket propellants used in defence and space applications.

What is Hyderacene? A **polymer-based burn-rate catalyst/modifier** for **solid rocket propellants**.

Key Feature: Unlike conventional systems requiring separate **binder + catalyst**, HYDERACENE combines both functions in **one polymer molecule**, improving stability and controlled combustion.

Significance: Indigenous, potentially **cheaper alternative to imported Butacene**, and supporting **missiles, rockets and launch vehicles** under **Atmanirbhar Bharat**.

Nasa's Moon Base Programme

At the 9th India-U.S. Civil Space Joint Working Group meeting held at Bengaluru, **NASA formally invited ISRO to join its Moon Base programme under the Artemis Accords**.

About Artemis Accords:

- A set of **principles for peaceful and cooperative exploration and use of the Moon, Mars and beyond**, led by the US and established in 2020, under NASA's Artemis programme.
- **Key Principles:** Peaceful use of space, transparency, interoperability, emergency assistance, registration of space objects, sharing of scientific data, and responsible use of space resources.
- **India** signed the Accords in **2023**, becoming the **27th signatory**. Mauritius became its 70th signatory in July 2026.

What is the Moon Base Programme?

This programme aims to establish a **long-term human outpost near the lunar South Pole**, where astronauts and robots can conduct scientific research and gradually develop a sustained human presence.

Objectives: Conduct **lunar scientific research**, study the Moon's geological history and explore **lunar resources**. Develop technologies for **future deep-space missions** and promote **international & commercial cooperation** in lunar exploration.

Why the Lunar South Pole?

- **Water Ice:** Permanently shadowed regions may contain water ice, potentially useful for life support and producing hydrogen-oxygen fuel.
- **Scientific Significance:** Provides opportunities to study lunar and Solar System history.
- **Exploration Potential:** Can serve as a base for sustained lunar operations.

Development & Phases:

Phase	Focus
1. Access & Learn (Now-2029)	Robotic missions, site exploration, and technology demonstrations.
2. Build & Expand (2029-2032)	Deploy power, communications, cargo and logistics infrastructure.
3. Live & Work (2032 onwards)	Establish habitats and enable extended human presence.
Approach: Robotic exploration → Infrastructure → Human habitation → Expansion	

Major Challenges:

- **Harsh Environment:** Extreme temperatures, radiation, lunar dust and difficult terrain.
- **Life-Support & Habitation:** Reliable systems for oxygen, water, food, waste management and radiation protection.
- **Power & Logistics:** Continuous power & repeated transportation of people, equipment and supplies from Earth.
- **Technology Readiness:** Need to demonstrate reliable habitats, autonomous systems, lunar vehicles, and **In-situ Resource Utilization (ISRU)**.
- **Governance:** International coordination & questions surrounding **lunar resource utilisation & equitable access**.

What Role Can ISRO Play?

- **Lunar Science:** Contribute expertise from the **Chandrayaan programme**, particularly in lunar South Pole studies.
- **Sample-Return:** Leverage **Chandrayaan-4**, India's planned mission to **collect and return lunar samples to Earth**, for lunar research.
- **Human Spaceflight:** Apply **Gaganyaan** experience to future crewed lunar missions.
- **Technology Development:** Contribute to robotics, navigation, communication, and landing technologies.
- **Future Ambitions:** Strengthen capabilities relevant to India's **Bharatiya Antariksha Station (2035)** and planned crewed lunar mission (2040).

Similar Lunar Base Initiatives: **International Lunar Research Station (ILRS)**- jointly planned by **China National Space Administration (CNSA)** and Russia's **Roscosmos** to establish a **permanent lunar research base and supporting lunar satellite constellation** in the next decade. **China plans to land astronauts on the Moon by 2030** as part of this effort.

GISAT 1A

After a seven-month hiatus following two consecutive Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV- C61 and C62) failures, ISRO is set to resume launches, with GISAT-1A.

About GISAT-1A (EOS-05):

- **Type:** Earth Observation Satellite (EOS) | **Mission Life:** 10 years.
 - India's first imaging satellite from geosynchronous orbit; Orbit: ~36,000 km

- **Launch:** **GSLV-F17**, the **19th GSLV flight**, from Sriharikota
- **Purpose:** Provides **frequent, large-area imaging** of India.
- **Applications:** **Disaster monitoring, agriculture, forestry**, and land-use monitoring.
- **Significance:** Replacement for **GISAT-1/EOS-03**, which failed to reach orbit in **2021**. Provides India a persistent “Eye in the Sky”

ChatGPT’s Teen Version

OpenAI is rolling out a **teen-specific ChatGPT**.

Need for Teen-Specific Version	What Changes?
• Suicide & Harmful Interactions: Cases have emerged where teenagers who died by suicide had extensive interactions with AI chatbots. • Concerns Raised: Families have alleged that chatbots reinforced harmful thoughts, encouraged emotional dependence, or failed to respond adequately to suicidal intent. • Growing Scrutiny: This has intensified concerns over child safety and AI companionship.	• Stricter Content Restrictions: Limits on self-harm and suicide-related content, eating disorders and sexual/romantic conversations • Emotional Boundaries: Chatbot will avoid portraying itself as conscious or emotionally attached to users. • Age Prediction: Usage patterns to identify likely under-18 users. • Parental Controls: Parents can link their accounts, set usage restrictions, and receive alerts in certain high-risk situations.

Rotating Detonation Engines

Recently, India-based defence start-up D-Propulse successfully demonstrated a rotating detonation engine (RDE) at a DRDO facility in Hyderabad.

What is RDE? An **RDE is an advanced engine** that burns fuel through **continuous detonation** rather than conventional combustion. It can potentially provide **10-25% higher thermodynamic efficiency**, meaning **less fuel for the same thrust**.

How does it work?

In an **RDE**, a **supersonic detonation wave** continuously travels around a ring-shaped (**annular**) combustion chamber; fuel and oxidizer are continuously injected, the detonation wave rapidly **compresses and burns** the mixture, and the resulting high-pressure gases exit through the nozzle to produce **thrust**.

Why is it important?	Key Challenges of RDE
• Fuel saving: Less fuel needed for the same mission. • Higher payload: Saved fuel can be replaced with additional satellite payload/warhead. • Applications: Potential use in rockets, hypersonic missiles, and spacecraft propulsion.	• Detonation Stability: Maintaining a stable, continuous detonation is difficult. • Advanced Engineering: Requires specialized materials, precise fuel injection and chamber geometry. • Extreme Conditions: Must withstand >2,000°C, very high pressures and rapidly oscillating shock waves. • Technology Maturity: Still at the R&D stage; not yet widely deployed for commercial or military use.

Indigenous African Swine Fever (ASF) Vaccine

Scientists at ICAR-National Institute of High Security Animal Diseases (ICAR-NIHSAD), Bhopal, have developed India's first indigenous MA-104_Cell Line-Based Live Attenuated African Swine Fever (ASF) Vaccine for pigs.

Dosage: For healthy pigs >8 weeks + booster after 14 days.

About African Swine Fever (ASF)

- **What is it?** A highly contagious **viral disease of domestic and wild pigs** caused by ASF virus.
- **Impact:** Causes **high fever, haemorrhages and mortality up to nearly 100%**.
- **India:** Detected in **2020**, causing major pig deaths and livelihood losses, especially in the **North-East**.
- **Control:** **Culling, movement restrictions, rapid diagnosis and biosecurity**; no effective treatment.

Hexavalent Vaccine

A study conducted by the Union Health Ministry suggests that introducing the **hexavalent (6-in-1) vaccine** into India's **Universal Immunization Programme (UIP)** could make childhood immunization **more efficient and cost-effective**.

What is Hexavalent Vaccine? A **6-in-1 vaccine** protecting against **Diphtheria, Tetanus, Pertussis, Hepatitis B, Hib** (*Haemophilus influenzae type b*) and **Polio**.

Nitrosamines

Recently, it was observed that packaged foods, pharmaceuticals, industrial products, and global supply chains contain chemicals known as nitrosamines.

What are Nitrosamines? They are chemical compounds formed when **amines react with nitrites/nitrates**, especially under heat, acidity or oxidation; during **food processing/cooking and in the stomach**.

Sources: **Cured/processed foods, drinking water** (during chlorination/chloramination when disinfectants react with nitrogen-containing compounds), **pharmaceuticals and tobacco**.

Exposure: Through **ingestion, inhalation and skin contact**.

Health Concerns: Several are **potent carcinogens**; long-term exposure can increase **cancer risk**.

Key Example: **NDMA (N-nitrosodimethylamine)**, a major concern in drinking-water contamination; wastewater release can also affect **aquatic ecosystems**.

Theoretical Physicist Deepak Dhar Wins the Dirac Medal

Theoretical physicist Deepak Dhar was awarded the Dirac Medal for his contributions to statistical physics- an honour he is sharing with three other physicists, Bernard Derrida, Marc Mézard, and Haim Sompolinsky.

Key Contribution: Dhar developed the Abelian Sandpile Model, a mathematical model of **self-organized criticality**, where gradual accumulation of changes can trigger sudden events of vastly different magnitudes such as earthquakes, forest fires, neural activity.

Other Honours:

Padma Bhushan (2023) and **Boltzmann Medal (2022)**.

About Dirac Medal:

- **Established:** 1985; awarded annually by the **International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP), Trieste**, for outstanding contributions to theoretical physics.
- **Not awarded to:** Nobel, Fields or Wolf Prize laureates.
- **Past recipients:** Stephen Hawking, Edward Witten, and Leonard Susskind.
- **Indian recipient:** Ashoke Sen first India-based scientist to receive it.

India's Beam Catchers for FAIR

The **first of three beam catcher units** (designed in India) for an integral part of the beam line (the path leading from particle generator to the experimental end-station) has reached the International Mega Science Project, **Facility for Antiproton and Ion Research (FAIR)**. The equipment is a key component of the **Super-fragment separator (FRS)**, which produces radioactive beams.

Beam Catchers	About FAIR
• Function: Absorb remnants of high-energy heavy-ion beams after they hit the production target. • Designed By: Central Mechanical Engineering Research Institute (CSIR-CMERI) in Durgapur under the supervision of Bose Institute, Kolkata.	• Location: Darmstadt, Germany; a major international particle accelerator facility for nuclear and particle physics research. • India: One of the founding members of the International Mega Science Project FAIR since 2010. India's FAIR contribution is funded 50:50 by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) and Department of Atomic Energy (DAE), with Bose Institute, Kolkata as India's shareholder and nodal institution.

SraVaani

Researchers at **Indian Institute of Science (IISc)'s Signal Processing, Interpretation and, REpresentation Lab (SPIRE Lab)**, in collaboration with **AI & Robotics Technology Park (ARTPARK)** and Google, have developed **SraVaani**, India's first multilingual speech recognition model trained on **65 Indian languages and dialects**, including **40+ languages currently unsupported** by mainstream systems.

Significance: Brings **speech-to-text technology** to underserved languages potentially benefiting **~25 crore people**.

Performance: Achieved a **9.5% Word Error Rate (WER)** in Garo, compared with **69.4%** for the next-best system.

Access: Freely available on **Hugging Face (AI Community)** under an **MIT license**.

India's High Space Launch Costs

According to a peer-reviewed study in *Economics Letters*, **India has the highest cost per kg of payload launched into orbit among major spacefaring nations**, challenging its image as a cost-effective space-launch provider.

Key Findings of the Study:	Way Forward
• India Has the Highest Launch Cost Per Kg: About \$13,302/kg to Low Earth Orbit (LEO) in 2025, compared with the global average of \$3,868/kg.	• Increase Launch Frequency: Scale up regular launches to achieve economies of scale and reduce per-kg costs.

• Cost Disadvantage: India is costlier than Europe (\$9,897), Russia (\$6,682), China (\$5,809), Japan (\$5,287) and the U.S. (\$3,225). • Main Reason: ISRO conducts relatively few launches and often uses small rockets, so high fixed launch costs are spread over smaller payloads. • Weak Learning Curve: Unlike the U.S. and Europe, India has not shown a statistically significant decline in launch costs with cumulative launches since 2010. • Low Launch Frequency: India conducted only 5 launches in 2025, limiting economies of scale and cost reductions. • Strategic dependence: Growing reliance on SpaceX's Falcon 9 for heavy satellites and private launches, amid its ~75% share of global payload in 2025, creates a potential strategic vulnerability for India.	• Promote Private Participation: Enable startups and private launch providers to develop cost-efficient, reusable and small-to-medium launch vehicles. • Develop Heavy-lift Capacity: Accelerate next-generation heavy-lift and reusable launch vehicle (RLV) technology to handle larger payloads domestically. • Build a Competitive Launch Ecosystem: Encourage shared infrastructure, commercial launchpads, supply chain localization and technology partnerships. • Improve Utilization: Aggregate domestic and international satellite demand through rideshare and dedicated commercial launch services. • Strategic Autonomy: Reduce dependence on foreign launchers for critical satellites by building adequate indigenous launch capacity and redundancy.
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Nancy Grace Roman Space Telescope

NASA's next-generation space telescope, named after Nancy Grace Roman, NASA's first Chief Astronomer and a key figure behind the Hubble Space Telescope was launched on **30 August 2026**, aboard a **SpaceX Falcon Heavy** from Kennedy Space Center, Florida.

Major Objectives: • Dark Energy: Map the distribution of matter and measure cosmic expansion to understand why the universe's expansion is accelerating • Exoplanets: A microlensing survey of ~100 million stars is expected to discover around 2,500 exoplanets, including potentially Mars-sized and rocky planets. • Infrared Astronomy: Study distant galaxies, stars and planetary systems, including galaxies from when the universe was only about 500 million years old.	Key Features: • Mirror: 2.4-metre primary mirror- same diameter as Hubble. • Instruments: ○ Wide Field Instrument (WFI): Main instrument for wide-field infrared surveys. ○ Coronagraph Instrument: Technology demonstration for directly imaging exoplanets. • Mission life: 5 years (possible 5-year extension) • Field of view: 100× wider than Hubble, enabling up to 1,000× faster surveys of ~1 billion galaxies. • Data: scientific data will be made publicly available, enabling global scientific research.
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Sarnath Added to World Heritage List

- The Ancient Buddhist Site of Sarnath, located in Varanasi district of Uttar Pradesh, has been included in the UNESCO World Heritage List during the 48th Session of the World Heritage Committee in Busan, South Korea.
- Sarnath was included in India's **Tentative List of World Heritage Sites in 1998**.
- India submitted its nomination for inscription in **January 2025**, after which the proposal underwent technical evaluation, consultations with UNESCO's advisory bodies and an evaluation by International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS).
- This takes **India's tally to 45** UNESCO World Heritage properties, comprising **37 cultural, 7 natural and 1 mixed site**. It places India **sixth globally and second in the Asia Pacific region**.
- As of July 2026, UNESCO's World Heritage List carried **1,273 properties** across **173 countries**, comprising **991 cultural, 240 natural and 42 mixed sites**
- With Sarnath's inscription, three of the four principal Buddhist pilgrimage sites associated with the life of the Buddha are now included in the UNESCO World Heritage List.
- These are **Lumbini in Nepal, the Mahabodhi Temple at Bodh Gaya in Bihar and Sarnath in Uttar Pradesh**. (*Kushinagar (UP) is not in list*)
- They join other important Buddhist World Heritage sites, including Sanchi, Nalanda and Ajanta in India, Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka, Paharpur in Bangladesh, and Taxila and Takht-i-Bahi in Pakistan.

Components of the World Heritage Property

- The UNESCO inscription covers **two connected components — the Chaukhandi Stupa and the Archaeological Remains of Sarnath**.
- The archaeological complex contains several important remains, including the **Dhamek Stupa, Dharmarajika Stupa, Mulagandhakuti Vihara and the Ashokan Pillar**, along with other archaeological structures.
- Collectively, these monuments preserve the historical landscape associated with the development of Buddhism at Sarnath.

UNESCO Criteria

- Sarnath was inscribed under **criteria (iii) and (vi)** of the World Heritage Convention.
- **Criterion (iii)** recognises Sarnath as an exceptional testimony to a living cultural and religious tradition, particularly its enduring spiritual importance as one of the **four principal Buddhist pilgrimage sites**.
- **Criterion (vi)** recognises its **direct and tangible association with events in the life of Gautama Buddha**, especially his first sermon and his meeting with his first disciples.
- The monuments constructed over successive centuries demonstrate the continuing religious importance of these events and Buddhist concepts such as the **Triratna**.

Significance of Sarnath

- Sarnath occupies a central place in Buddhist history as the location where **Gautama Buddha delivered his first sermon** after attaining enlightenment at Bodh Gaya.

- The sermon is known as **Dharmachakra Pravartana**, or the **Turning of the Wheel of the Law**, and marked the beginning of the **Buddhist Sangha** and the propagation of the Buddha's teachings, including the **Noble Eightfold Path**.
- The site was known in ancient Buddhist traditions by names such as **Rishipatana, Ishipatana and Mrigadava**. It also represents the place where the Buddha **met his first five disciples**, giving the site exceptional religious significance for Buddhists.
- Sarnath developed over nearly **sixteen centuries**, with monuments dating from the pre-Mauryan period of the 4th–3rd centuries BCE to the 12th century CE. It subsequently declined and was destroyed, before being rediscovered in the 18th century.
- Sarnath is far more than an archaeological site. It remains a **global pilgrimage destination for Buddhists**.

Utkalmani Pandit Gopabandhu Das

- The President unveiled the statue of Utkalmani Pandit Gopabandhu Das in New Delhi.
- **Gopabandhu Das (1877–1928)** was a prominent freedom fighter, social reformer, educationist, journalist, poet and nationalist from Odisha and was known as **Utkalmani (jewel of Odisha)**.
- He was an important figure in the **development of modern Odisha** and the **Satyabadi group**, a group of early twentieth-century Odia writers whose dominant concern was patriotism.
- He was elected to the **Bihar and Odisha Legislative Council in 1917**. He participated in the Indian National Congress's Nagpur Session of 1920 and subsequently helped organise the **Non-Cooperation Movement in Odisha**.
- Gopabandhu Das considered education an instrument of **social and national transformation**.
- He established the **Muktakash School**, also known as **Van Vidyalaya at Satyabadi**, where education emphasised the overall development of students rather than merely book-based learning.
- As a journalist, he founded **The Samaj in 1919**, which became an important medium for nationalist ideas and public awareness. He also made significant contributions to **Odia literature**.

Pingali Venkayya

- The Prime Minister paid tributes to freedom fighter, Shri Pingali Venkayya on his 150th birth anniversary.
- Pingali Venkayya (1876-1963) was a freedom fighter and the **designer of India's National Flag**. Born in present-day Andhra Pradesh, he worked as a teacher, author, agriculturist and linguist.
- He had enrolled in the British Army and was deployed to South Africa during the **Second Boer War (1899-1902)**.
- It was during the war when the soldiers had to salute the Union Jack, the national flag of Britain, that Venkayya realized the need for having a flag for Indians.
- In 1916, he even published a book '**Bharatha Deshaniki Oka Jatiya Patakam**' (National flag of India).
- At the **1921 Congress session at Bezwada (present-day Vijayawada)**, Venkayya presented a flag design to **Mahatma Gandhi**.
- The draft presented to Gandhi by Venkayya had two colour bands - red and green to symbolize the two major communities in India - Hindus and Muslims.

- But Gandhi suggested adding a white colour band to represent peace and harmony between communities along with a charkha (spinning wheel) to represent the progress of the country.
- The present form of the flag was adopted by the Constituent Assembly of India on 22 July, 1947 - 24 days prior to the formal declaration of Independence.
- A postage stamp was issued to commemorate him in 2009.

Vaishya Tekri

The Madhya Pradesh government has initiated fresh excavation and restoration of Buddhist monuments linked to Mauryan Emperor Ashoka, starting with excavation at Vaishya Tekri in Ujjain, nearly nine decades after the first excavation in 1938–39.

Vaishya Tekri

- Vaishya Tekri is a large archaeological mound in **Ujjain**.
- It is associated with a large Buddhist stupa, estimated to be around **100 feet high and about 350 feet at its base**, making it substantially larger than the approximately 54-foot Great Stupa at Sanchi. Nearby is a smaller stupa, called **Kumbhar (or Kumhar) Tekri**.
- The **1938–39 excavation** uncovered large bricks and punch-marked coins, leading archaeologists to associate the structure with the **Mauryan period**. The excavation was subsequently discontinued, leaving much of the site unexplored.

Kumhar Tekri

- Local traditions in Sri Lanka associate **Vaishya Tekri with Devi**. It is locally known as the Vaishya Tekri ('Vaishya caste's mound') since Devi was the daughter of a merchant.
 - On his way to Ujjain, Ashoka stopped in Vidisha, where he is said to have met Devi (Vedisadevi), who later became the mother of Mahinda and Sanghamitta, figures associated with the spread of Buddhism to Sri Lanka.
- Kumhar Tekri is said to have been a hell built by Ashoka. The Chinese scholar-pilgrim Xuanzang (Hsuan-tsang), who visited Ujjain in the 7th century CE, recorded a stupa marking the location of a **hellish prison built by Ashoka**.
- Earlier excavations at Kumhar Tekri uncovered a burial-cum-cremation ground dating to the 3rd century BCE.

Vikram Sarabhai Medal

- Astrophysicist Annapurni Subramaniam has been awarded the COSPAR Vikram Sarabhai Medal – 2026, during the 46th COSPAR Scientific Assembly at Florence, Italy.
- She is the director of Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA), Bengaluru, and holds the additional charge as director of the Centre for Nano and Soft Matter Sciences (CeNS).
- Subramaniam is the **only fourth Indian** to receive this medal, in addition to being the **first Indian woman scientist** and **only the third female recipients** worldwide of this honour.
- Among the other Indian recipients of this medal include Anil Bharadwaj (2024), Gurbax Singh Lakhina (2014) and UR Rao (1996).
- In 2024, Subramaniam was bestowed with Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar – Vigyan Shri in the Space Science and Technology category.
- The international medal is awarded to **scientists from developing countries** for their outstanding contributions to the **field of space research**.
- It is awarded jointly by Committee on Space Research (COSPAR) and the ISRO.
- The medal was constituted in 1990 in the honour of Vikram Sarabhai — the founder of India's space programme and ISRO

COSPAR

- COSPAR was established in 1958, soon after Soviet Union's maiden launch of the first-ever satellite in 1957.
- It is a scientific committee of the International Science Council (ISC) and works closely with the UN Committee on Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UN COPUOS).

Anahat Singh

Anahat Singh created history by becoming the first Indian to win the **World Junior Squash Championship title**. The 18-year-old Indian prodigy beat Egypt's Ruqayya Salem.

- This is a significant achievement as players from Egypt had won this title for 16 consecutive years, and Anahat broke that monopoly without dropping a game.

Tanvi Sharma wins Taipei Open

- Indian badminton player Tanvi Sharma won her maiden BWF World Tour title at the Taipei Open.
- At 17 years of age, Tanvi became the **youngest champion in Taipei Open history**, surpassing the previous record associated with Taiwan's former world No. 1 **Tai Tzu-ying**. She also became the youngest finalist in the tournament's history.
- Tanvi is only the fourth Indian woman after Saina Nehwal, PV Sindhu and Devika Sihag to win a BWF Super 300 title.
- She was a **former World No. 1 in the junior women's singles rankings** and has represented India successfully at the junior and senior levels.

Dr. M. S. Swaminathan Award for Environment Protection 2026

- Two women, **P. Pechiyammal** and **Govindhammal**, have been awarded the Dr. M. S. Swaminathan Award for Environment Protection 2026.
- The award recognised two grassroots women environmental champions from Tamil Nadu.
- P. Pechiyammal, leader of the **Neithal** Self Help Group, was recognised for her work in collecting discarded fishing nets, nylon ropes and plastic waste (“ghost gear”) from coastal areas and promoting community-led marine conservation.
- Govindhammal, formerly associated with the **Nallavur Farmer Producer Company**, was recognised for promoting sustainable agriculture.

Dr. M. S. Swaminathan Award for Environment Protection

- It is an annual award instituted by the **Rotary Club of Madras East (RCME)** in honour of renowned agricultural scientist **Dr. M. S. Swaminathan**.

M. S. Swaminathan

- He was an eminent Indian agricultural scientist who is recognised as the **father of the Green Revolution in India**.
- He played a pivotal role in introducing and disseminating **high-yielding varieties of wheat and rice**, working closely with Nobel laureate **Norman Borlaug**, thereby helping India achieve greater food security and agricultural self-reliance.
- He is also recognised as **Father of Economic Ecology** by the **United Nations Environment Programme**.
- He received several major honours, including the **Ramon Magsaysay Award (1971)**, **World Food Prize (1987)**, and all three **Padma awards**.
- In 2024, he was **posthumously awarded the Bharat Ratna**.