



**VAJIRAM & RAVI**  
Institute for IAS Examination

# the recitals

**CURRENT AFFAIRS - July 2024**



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- Annual Survey of Unincorporated Enterprises
- Should Education be Brought Back on the State List?
- Expunction Powers in Parliament
- Rules Governing Civil Servants
- Caste Census
- Right of States to Tax Mineral Rich Lands
- Anti-reservation protests in Bangladesh
- PM Modi's Visit to Russia
- PM Modi's Visit to Austria
- ICJ's Observation about Israel's Occupation of West Bank & East Jerusalem
- Defence Production Hits Record High in 2023-24
- Wayanad Landslide

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## BUDGET 2024-25

The Union Minister of Finance and Corporate Affairs recently presented the Union Budget 2024-25 in the Parliament. The Budget is divided into two parts: Part A and Part B

### Part A

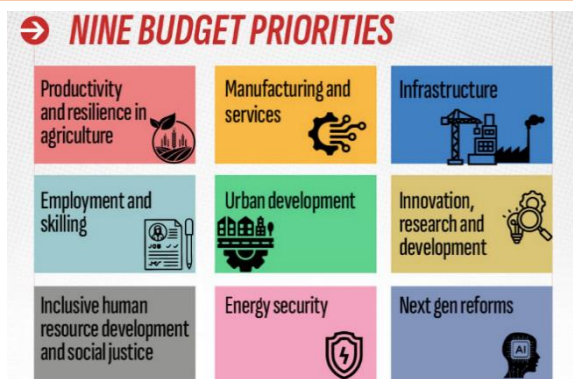
- The first part of the budget provides an overview of the economy of the previous and current years, and also gives Budget estimates for the next financial year.
- Part A provides the **broad framework** of expenditure in detail for different sectors, introduces new schemes, and explains the priorities of the government.
- It provides a brief overview of total funds raised by the government through taxes or borrowing, and discusses how the money is to be spent on Budget deficit/surplus. It also presents a complete breakdown of the expenditure of each ministry.

### Part B

- The second part of the Budget highlights the government's tax proposals for the next financial year.

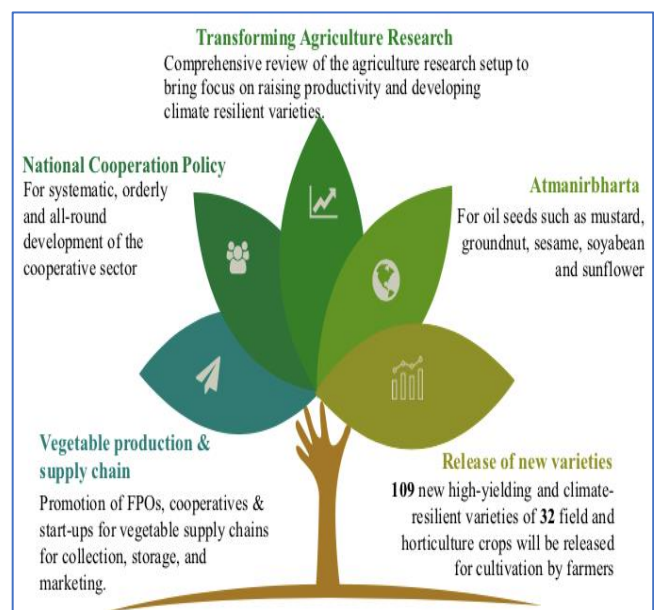
### PART A

- **Budget Theme:** The focus of the budget is on **Employment, Skilling, MSMEs, and the Middle class.**
- As mentioned in the interim budget, the focus is on 4 major castes, namely 'Garib' (Poor), 'Mahilayen' (Women), 'Yuva' (Youth) and 'Annadata' (Farmer).
- This budget aims for sustained efforts across **nine key priorities** to generate opportunities for all, in pursuit of 'Viksit Bharat'.



#### Priority 1: Productivity and Resilience in Agriculture

- Allocation of Rs 1.52 lakh crore for agriculture and allied sectors.
- In the next two years, 1 crore farmers across the country will be initiated into natural farming supported by certification and branding.
- 10,000 need-based bio-input resource centres will be established for natural farming.
- For achieving self-sufficiency in pulses and oilseeds, government will strengthen their production, storage and marketing
- Large scale clusters for vegetable production will be developed closer to major consumption centres.
- Financial support for setting up a network of Nucleus Breeding Centres for Shrimp Broodstocks will be provided.
- Financing for shrimp farming, processing and export will be facilitated through NABARD.
- Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) for agriculture to be implemented for coverage of farmers and their lands in 3 years.



- During this year, digital crop survey for Kharif using the DPI will be taken up in 400 districts. Details of 6 crore farmers and their lands will be brought into the farmer and land registries.
- Issuance of Jan Samarth based Kisan Credit Cards will be enabled in 5 states.

### Priority 2: Employment & Skilling

- A Prime Minister's package of 5 schemes and initiatives to facilitate employment, skilling and other opportunities for **4.1 crore youth over a 5-year period** with a central outlay of **Rs. 2 lakh crore** has been announced.
- This year, Rs. 1.48 lakh crore has been allocated for education, employment and skilling.

#### Scheme A: First Timers

- It will provide **one-month wage** to all persons **newly entering the workforce** in all formal sectors. The eligibility limit will be a salary of Rs. 1 lakh per month.
- Direct benefit transfer of **one-month salary will be up to Rs. 15,000 in 3 installments** to first-time employees, as registered in the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO).
- This subsidy would be vital for employees and employers in hiring of first timers, by supporting their learning curve before they become fully productive.
- The employee, in turn, **must undergo compulsory online financial literacy course** before claiming the second instalment.
- Further, the subsidy would have to be refunded by the employer if the employment to the first timer ends within 12 months of recruitment.
- The scheme is expected to benefit 2.1 crore youth over 2 years.

#### Scheme B: Job Creation in Manufacturing

- Aiming at substantial hiring of first time employees in manufacturing, this scheme will incentivize additional employment in the manufacturing sector. It is expected to benefit 30 lakh youth entering employment, and their employers.
- An incentive will be provided at specified scale directly both to the employee and the employer with respect to their EPFO contribution in the first 4 years of employment.
- The subsidy would have to be refunded by the employer if the employment to the first timer ends within 12 months of recruitment.

#### Scheme C: Support to Employers

- It will cover all additional employment within a salary of Rs. 1 lakh per month in all sectors. New employees under this scheme need not be new entrants to EPFO.
- The government will reimburse to employers up to Rs. 3,000 per month for 2 years towards their EPFO contribution for each additional employee.
- It is expected to incentivize additional employment of 50 lakh persons.

#### Scheme D: Skilling

- A new **centrally sponsored scheme** for Skilling has been announced as the **4th scheme** in collaboration with state governments and industry.
- The scheme, with a total outlay of Rs. 60,000 crore, aims at skilling **20 lakh youth over a 5-year period**.
- To achieve this target, **1,000 Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs)** will be upgraded in hub and spoke arrangements with outcome orientation.

## **Scheme E: Internship**

- The **5th scheme** aims to provide internship opportunities in **500 top companies** to 1 crore youth in 5 years (*participation of companies is voluntary*).
- It will provide exposure for **12 months** to real-life business environment, varied professions and employment opportunities.
- An **internship allowance of Rs. 5,000 per month**, along with a one-time assistance of Rs. 6,000 will be provided.
- Companies are expected to bear the training cost and 10% of the internship cost from their **CSR funds**.
- **Youth aged between 21 and 24**, who are not employed and not engaged in full time education, will be eligible to apply.

### **Measures for Women Employment**

To facilitate higher participation of women in the workforce:

- Working women hostels and crèches to be established with industrial collaboration;
- Women-specific skilling programmes to be organized;
- Market access for women Self Help Group (SHG) enterprises to be promoted.

### **Other Initiatives**

- With regard to skilling loans, the **Model Skill Loan Scheme** will be revised to **facilitate loans up to Rs. 7.5 lakh**. It is expected to help 25,000 students every year.
- Financial support for **loans up to Rs 10 lakh for higher education** in domestic institutions to youth who have not been eligible for any benefit under government schemes and policies.
- E-vouchers for this purpose will be given directly to 1 lakh students every year with annual interest subvention of 3%.

## **Priority 3: Inclusive Human Resource Development and Social Justice**

As India moves towards its goal of becoming a developed nation by 2047, Priority 3 focuses on Inclusive Human Resource Development and Social Justice.

- It outlines several key initiatives aimed at **uplifting marginalized communities** and **promoting balanced regional development**.

### **Purvodaya: Development of the Eastern Region**

The eastern states of Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha, and Andhra Pradesh are rich in resources and cultural heritage. The Purvodaya initiative aims to transform this region into a growth engine for the nation through:

<b>Industrial Development</b>	<b>Road Connectivity Projects</b>
<i><b>Industrial node at Gaya</b> to be developed along the Amritsar-Kolkata Industrial Corridor. It aims to blend cultural heritage with modern economic growth, showcasing the model of "<b>Vikas bhi Virasat bhi</b>" (Development along with Heritage).</i>	<i>Several road connectivity projects will be undertaken to improve infrastructure and facilitate economic activities in the region</i>

### **Power and Infrastructure Projects**

- Power projects, including new **2400 MW power plant at Pirpainti**.
- Additional infrastructure projects include new airports, medical colleges, and sports facilities in Bihar.



## Andhra Pradesh Reorganization Act

- Special financial support for capital development through multilateral development agencies (₹15,000 crore in the current financial year).
- **Polavaram Irrigation Project:** Ensuring the timely completion of this vital project to support the state's farmers and enhance food security.
- Investments in infrastructure for Koppaerthy node on the **Visakhapatnam-Chennai Industrial Corridor** and Orvakal node on the **Hyderabad-Bengaluru Industrial Corridor**.
- **Grants for backward regions** of Rayalaseema, Prakasam, and North Coastal Andhra.

## Pradhan Mantri Janjatiya Unnat Gram Abhiyan

- To improve the **socio-economic conditions of tribal communities**, the government will launch the Pradhan Mantri Janjatiya Unnat Gram Abhiyan.
- It will adopt saturation coverage for tribal families in tribal-majority villages and aspirational districts covering 63,000 villages and **benefitting 5 crore tribal people**.

## Expansion of Banking Services in the North-East

- More than 100 branches of **India Post Payment Bank** will be set up in the North East region.
- It aims to provide accessible, affordable, and trusted banking services to the underserved and unbanked populations. It also supports the vision of a Digital India, **promoting a less cash economy**.

## Rural Development and Infrastructure

An allocation of **Rs. 2.66 lakh crore** for rural development, including rural infrastructure projects. It aims to enhance the quality of life in rural areas through improved connectivity, healthcare, education, and economic opportunities.

## Women-Led Development

Total allocation of over Rs. 3 lakh crore for schemes benefiting women and girls.

### Priority 4: Manufacturing & Services

- The budget provides special attention to MSMEs and manufacturing, particularly labour-intensive manufacturing.
- A package has been formulated that covers financing, regulatory changes and technology support for MSMEs to help them grow and also compete globally.

## Credit Guarantee Scheme for MSMEs in the Manufacturing Sector

- A credit guarantee scheme for facilitating **term loans to MSMEs for purchase of machinery and equipment without collateral or third-party guarantee**.
- A separately constituted **self-financing guarantee fund** will provide, to each applicant, guarantee cover up to ₹100 crore, while the loan amount may be larger.
- The borrower will have to provide an upfront guarantee fee and an annual guarantee fee on the reducing loan balance.



### **New Assessment Model for MSME Credit**

- Public sector banks will build their in-house capability to assess MSMEs for credit, instead of relying on external assessment.
- It will be a significant improvement over the traditional assessment of credit eligibility based only on asset or turnover criteria. It will also cover MSMEs without a formal accounting system.

### **Credit Support to MSMEs during Stress Period**

- New mechanism to facilitate continuation of bank credit to MSMEs during their stress period. It will be supported through a guarantee from a government promoted fund.

### **Mudra Loans**

- The limit of Mudra loans under ‘**Tarun**’ category to be enhanced to **Rs. 20 lakh from Rs. 10 lakh** for those who have successfully repaid previous loans.

### **Enhanced scope for TReDS onboarding**

- For facilitating MSMEs to unlock their working capital by converting their trade receivables into cash, the budget proposed to **reduce the turnover threshold** of buyers for mandatory onboarding on the TReDS platform **from Rs. 500 crore to Rs. 250 crore**.
- This measure will bring 22 more Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) and 7,000 more companies onto the platform. Medium enterprises will also be included in the scope of the suppliers.

### **MSME Units for Food Irradiation, Quality and Safety Testing**

- Financial support for setting up of **50 multi-product food irradiation units** in the MSME sector will be provided.
- Setting up of **100 food quality and safety testing labs** with National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories (NABL) accreditation will be facilitated.

### **E-Commerce Export Hubs**

- E-Commerce Export Hubs to be set up under public-private-partnership (PPP) mode for MSMEs and traditional artisans to sell their products in international markets.
- These hubs, under a seamless regulatory and logistic framework, will facilitate trade and export related services under one roof.

### **New SIDBI branches**

SIDBI will open new branches to expand its reach to serve all major MSME clusters within 3 years, and provide direct credit to them. With the opening of 24 such branches this year, the service coverage will expand to 168 out of 242 major clusters.

### **Critical Mineral Mission**

- Critical Mineral Mission to be set up for domestic production, recycling of critical minerals, and overseas acquisition of critical mineral assets.
- Its mandate will include technology development, skilled workforce, extended producer responsibility framework, and a suitable financing mechanism.

### **Offshore mining of minerals**

Auction of 1<sup>st</sup> tranche of offshore blocks for mining, building on the exploration already carried out.

### **Industrial Parks**

- Investment-ready plug and play industrial parks with complete infrastructure in or near 100 cities, in partnership with the states and private sector.
- 12 industrial parks sanctioned under the National Industrial Corridor Development Programme.

## Urban Housing

Under the **PM Awas Yojana Urban 2.0**, housing needs of **1 crore urban poor and middle-class families** will be addressed with an investment of **Rs 10 lakh crore**. This will include the central assistance of **Rs 2.2 lakh crore** in the next 5 years.

### Rental Housing

- Rental housing with dormitory type accommodation for industrial workers will be facilitated in PPP mode with Viability Gap Funding (VGF) support and commitment from anchor industries.
- Enabling policies for efficient and transparent rental housing markets with enhanced availability will also be put in place.

### Cities as Growth Hubs

- The Union Government will work with States to facilitate development of 'Cities as Growth Hubs'. This will be achieved through economic and transit planning, and orderly development of peri-urban areas utilising town planning schemes.
- For **creative brownfield redevelopment of existing cities** with a transformative impact, the Government will formulate a framework for enabling policies, market-based mechanisms and regulation.
- **Transit Oriented Development** plans for 14 large cities with a population above 30 lakh along with an implementation and financing strategy will be formulated.

### Water Supply and Sanitation

- In partnership with the State Governments and Multilateral Development Banks, government will promote water supply, sewage treatment and solid waste management projects and services for 100 large cities through bankable projects.
- These projects will also envisage use of treated water for irrigation and filling up of tanks in nearby areas.

### Street Markets

New scheme to support the development of 100 weekly 'haats' or street food hubs every year for the next 5 years in select cities, to build on the success of PM SVANidhi Scheme in transforming the lives of street vendors.

### Stamp duty

The Union Government will encourage States which continue to charge high stamp duty to moderate the rates for all, and also consider further lowering duties for properties purchased by women.

## Energy Transition

A policy document on appropriate energy transition pathways that balance the needs of employment, growth and environmental sustainability will be developed.

### Pumped Storage Policy

A policy for promoting pumped storage projects will be brought out for electricity storage and facilitating smooth integration of the growing share of renewable energy with its variable nature in the overall energy mix.

### Research & Development

- Nuclear energy is expected to form a very significant part of the energy mix.
- Towards that pursuit, the government will partner with private sector for R&D of Bharat Small Modular Reactor and newer technologies for nuclear energy, and to set up Bharat Small Reactors.

## Advanced Ultra Super Critical (AUSC) Thermal Power Plants

- Joint venture proposed between NTPC and BHEL to set up a full scale 800 MW commercial plant using AUSC technology. The government will provide the required fiscal support.
- Development of indigenous capacity for the production of high-grade steel and other 15 advanced metallurgy materials for these plants will result in strong spin-off benefits for the economy.

## Roadmap for 'hard to abate' industries

- A roadmap for moving the 'hard to abate' industries from 'energy efficiency' targets to 'emission targets' will be formulated.
- Appropriate regulations for transition of these industries from the current 'Perform, Achieve and Trade' mode to 'Indian Carbon Market' mode will be put in place.
- Hard to abate industries are those that have greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions that are difficult to reduce. Sectors include heavy-duty trucking, shipping, aviation, iron and steel, and chemicals and petrochemicals.

## Support to Traditional Micro and Small Industries

- An investment-grade energy audit of traditional micro and small industries in 60 clusters, will be facilitated.
- Financial support will be provided for shifting them to cleaner forms of energy and implementation of energy efficiency measures.
- The scheme will be replicated in another 100 clusters in the next phase.

## PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana

- In line with the announcement in the interim Budget, PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana has been launched to install rooftop solar plants to enable 1 crore households obtain free electricity up to 300 units every month.
- The scheme has generated a remarkable response with more than 1.28 crore registrations and 14 lakh applications, and the government will further encourage it.

### Priority 7: Infrastructure

## Infrastructure Investment

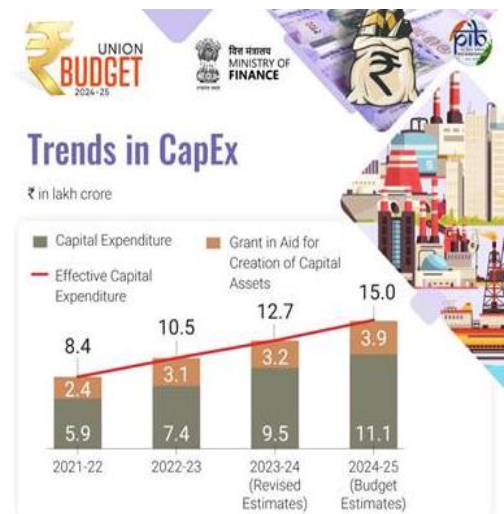
- Acknowledging the strong multiplier effect of building and improving infrastructure on economy, the Budget announced a capital expenditure of Rs. 11,11,111, which is 3.4 percent of GDP.
- A provision of **₹1.5 lakh crore for long-term interest-free loans** has been made this year to assist states in their resource allocation for infrastructure.
- Investment in infrastructure by the private sector will be promoted through viability gap funding and supportive policies and regulations.

## Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY)

- **Phase IV of PMGSY will be launched** to provide all-weather connectivity to **25,000 rural habitations** which have become eligible due to their population increase.
- Launched in 2000, PMGSY aims to provide all-weather access to eligible unconnected habitations and is a **100% Centrally Sponsored Scheme**.
- As of July 2024, 8,10,083 km of road has been sanctioned, with 7,65,530 km completed.

## Irrigation and Flood Mitigation

- Financial support of Rs. 11,500 crore to projects such as the Kosi-Mechi intra-state link and other schemes in Bihar, through Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme and other sources.



- Assistance to Assam, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Sikkim for flood management, landslides and other related projects.

### Tourism

- Comprehensive development of Vishnupad Temple Corridor, Mahabodhi Temple Corridor and Rajgir.
- Assistance for development of temples, monuments, craftsmanship, wildlife sanctuaries, natural landscapes and pristine beaches of Odisha.

### Priority 8: Innovation, Research & Development

- The government will operationalize the **Anusandhan National Research Fund** for basic research and prototype development.
- A mechanism for **encouraging private sector-driven research and innovation** at commercial scale with a **financing pool of Rs. 1 lakh crore** in line with the announcement in the interim budget.

### Space Economy

Venture capital fund of Rs. 1,000 crore to be set up for expanding the space economy by 5 times in the next 10 years.

### Priority 9: Next Generation Reforms

### Economic Policy Framework

The government will formulate an Economic Policy Framework to lay down a comprehensive approach to economic development and set the scope of next generation of reforms for facilitating employment opportunities and sustaining high growth.

### Land Reforms

- Land-related reforms and actions, both in rural and urban areas, will be incentivized for completion within the next 3 years through appropriate fiscal support.
- The reforms will cover land administration, planning and management, urban planning, usage and building bylaws.

### Rural Land Related Actions

- Assignment of Unique Land Parcel Identification Number (**ULPIN**) or **Bhu-Aadhaar** for all lands;
- Digitization of cadastral maps;
- Survey of map sub-divisions as per current ownership;
- Establishment of land registry; and
- Linking to the farmer's registry.

### Urban Land Related Actions

- **Land records** in urban areas will be **digitized with GIS mapping**.
- An IT based system for property record administration, updating, and tax administration will be established. It will also help in improving the financial position of urban local bodies.

### Labour Reforms

- Government will facilitate a wide array of services to labour, including those for employment and skilling.
- A comprehensive **integration of e-shram portal with other portals** to provide one-stop labour services solution.
- It will also include mechanism to connect job aspirants with potential employers and skill providers.
- Shram Suvidha and Samadhan portals will be revamped to enhance ease of compliance for industry and trade.

## **Financial Sector Vision and Strategy**

The government plans to release a strategy document outlining the future vision for the financial sector, addressing its size, capacity, and skills.

## **Taxonomy for Climate Finance**

Development of a taxonomy for climate finance to facilitate capital availability for climate adaptation and mitigation, supporting India's green transition and climate commitments.

## **Variable Capital Company Structure**

Legislative approval will be sought for a Variable Capital Company structure, providing a flexible financing mode for leasing aircraft and ships and supporting private equity pooled funds.

## **FDI and Overseas Investment**

Simplification of rules and regulations for FDI and Overseas Investments to facilitate foreign investments, prioritize key sectors, and promote the use of the Indian Rupee for overseas investments.

## **NPS Vatsalya**

NPS-Vatsalya, a plan for contribution by parents and guardians for minors will be started. On attaining the age of majority, the plan can be converted seamlessly into a normal National Pension Scheme account.

## **New Pension Scheme (NPS)**

A solution that addresses the relevant issues, protects the common citizen and maintains fiscal prudence will be formed.

## **Use of Technology and Digitalization**

The government has effectively utilised technology to enhance productivity and reduce inequality within the economy. It plans to further accelerate the adoption of technology, driving the digitalization of the economy.

## **Data and Statistics**

- To enhance data governance and improve the processes of data collection, processing, and management, the government will utilize various sectoral databases, including those developed under the Digital India mission.
- Use of advanced technological tools, aiming to streamline and optimize the handling of data and statistics across different sectors.

## **Ease of Doing Business**

- Work is being done on the **Jan Vishwas Bill 2.0**.
- States will be incentivized to implement **Business Reforms Action Plans** and digitalization measures.

## **Strengthening the IBC Eco-System**

- An **Integrated Technology Platform** will be set up for improving the outcomes under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), thereby ensuring the consistency, transparency, timely processing and better oversight for all stakeholders.
- Appropriate changes to the IBC, reforms and strengthening of the tribunal and appellate tribunals will be initiated to speed up the insolvency resolution.
- Proposal for **establishment of additional tribunals** out of which, some will be notified to **decide cases exclusively** under the Companies Act.

## **Voluntary Closure of LLPs**

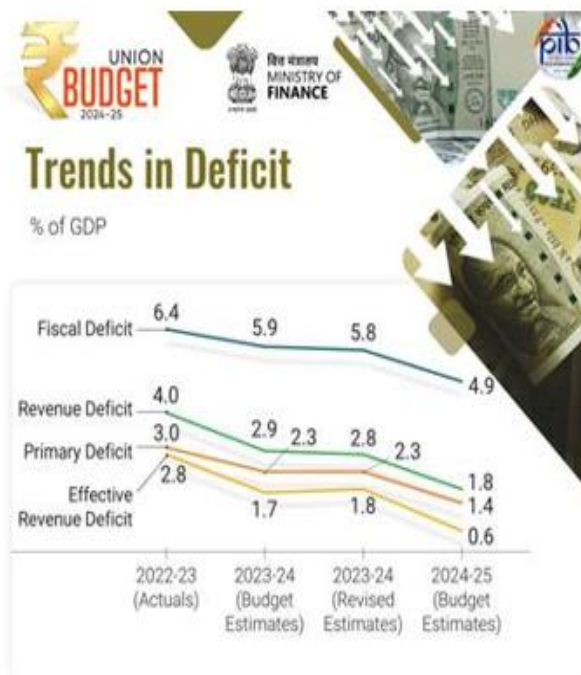
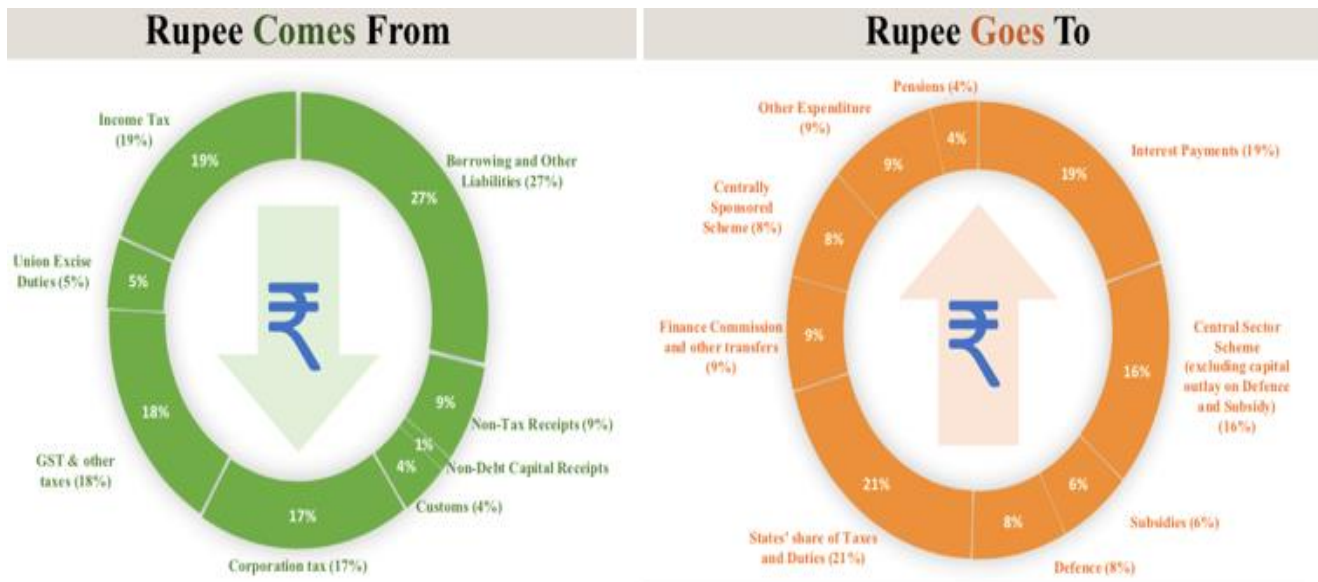
The services of the **Centre for Processing Accelerated Corporate Exit (C-PACE)** to be extended for voluntary closure of Limited Liability Partnerships (LLPs), thereby **reducing the closure time**.

## Strengthening Debt Recovery

Steps for reforming and strengthening debt recovery tribunals will be taken and **additional tribunals** will be established to speed up the recovery.

## Budget Estimates 2024-25

- For the year 2024-25, the **total receipts other than borrowings** and the **total expenditure** are estimated at Rs 32.07 lakh crore and Rs 48.21 lakh crore respectively.
- Gross market borrowings through dated securities are estimated at ₹14.01 lakh crore and net market borrowings at ₹11.63 lakh crore during 2024-25. Both will be less than that in 2023-24.
- The **net tax receipts** are estimated at Rs 25.83 lakh crore.
- **Fiscal Deficit** for 2024-25 has been estimated to be 4.9% of the GDP.
- Moreover, the government would pursue a broad path of fiscal consolidation to attain a Fiscal Deficit lower than 4.5% of GDP by 2025-26.



## Part B

- The Budget seeks to comprehensively review the direct and indirect taxes in the next six months, simplifying them, reducing tax incidence and compliance burdens and broadening the tax nets.
- It proposed a review of the Custom Duty rate structure to improve the tax base and support domestic manufacturing.
- A comprehensive review of IncomeTax Act is targeted at reducing disputes and litigations and to make the act concise and easy to read.
- Simplification of tax regimes without exemptions and deductions for corporate and personal income tax has been appreciated by tax payers as over 58% of corporate tax came from simplified tax regime in 2022-23.
- Further, more than two third tax payers have switched over to the new personal income tax regime.

### INDIRECT TAXES

**Goods and Services Tax (GST):** Buoyed by GST's success, the Budget proposed that the GST tax structure will be simplified and rationalised to expand GST to remaining sectors.

#### Sector Specific Customs Duty Proposals

##### Medicines and Medical Equipment

- Three cancer drugs namely Trastuzumab Deruxtecan, Osimertinib and Durvalumab fully exempted from custom duty.
- Reduction in Basic Customs Duty (BCD) on x-ray tubes & flat panel detectors for use in medical x-ray machines under the Phased Manufacturing Programme.

##### Mobile Phone and Related Parts

BCD on mobile phones, Printed Circuit Board Assembly (PCBA), mobile chargers reduced to 15%

##### Telecommunication Equipment

To incentivize domestic manufacturing, BCD on PCBA of specific telecom equipments increased from 10 to 15 %.

##### Critical minerals

To give a push to processing and refining of critical minerals, Budget fully exempted custom duties on 25 rare earth minerals like lithium and reduced BCD on two of them.

##### Solar Energy

Capital goods for use in manufacture of solar cells and panels exempted from customs duty.

##### Marine Products

- BCD on certain broodstock, polychaete worms, shrimp and fish feed reduced to 5%.
- Various inputs for manufacture of shrimp and fish feed exempted from customs duty.

##### Leather and Textile

BCD reduced from 7.5% to 5% in Methylene Diphenyl Diisocyanate (MDI) used for manufacture of spandex yarn.

##### Precious Metals

Customs duties on gold and silver reduced to 6% and that on platinum to 6.4%.

##### Plastics

BCD on PVC flex banners increased from 10 to 25 per cent considering the hazard to environment.

### DIRECT TAXES

- Efforts to simplify taxes, improve tax payer services, provide tax certainty and reduce litigation to be continued.

- Enhance revenues for funding development and welfare schemes of government.

### Simplification for Charities and of Tax Deducted at Source (TDS)

- Two tax exemption regimes for charities to be *merged* into one.
- 20% TDS rate on repurchase of units by mutual funds or UTI withdrawn.
- TDS rate on e-commerce operators reduced from one to 0.1 per cent.
- Delay for payment of TDS up to due date of filing statement decriminalized.

### Simplification of Reassessment

- To reduce tax-uncertainty and disputes, a thorough simplification of reassessment has proposed.
- Assessment can be reopened beyond three years from the end of the assessment year, only if the escaped income is Rs 50 lakh or more, up to a maximum period of 5 years from the end of the assessment year.
- In search cases, time limit reduced from ten to six years before the year of search.

### Simplification and Rationalisation of Capital Gains

- **Short term gains** on certain financial assets to attract a tax rate of 20 per cent.
- **Long term gains** on all financial and non-financial assets to attract a tax rate of 12.5 per cent.
- For the benefit of the lower and middle-income classes, it has been proposed to increase the limit of exemption of capital gains on certain financial assets from Rs 1 lakh to **Rs 1.25 lakh** per year.
- Listed financial assets held for more than a year will be classified as long term, while unlisted financial assets and all non-financial assets will have to be held for at least two years to be classified as long-term.

### Tax Payer Services

- All remaining services of Customs and Income Tax including rectification and order giving effect to appellate orders to be digitalised and made paperless over the next two years.

### Litigation and Appeals

- For dispute resolution and to dispose-off backlogs, the Budget proposed **Vivad se Vishwas Scheme, 2024** for resolution of certain income tax disputes pending in appeal.
- The monetary limits for filing appeals related to direct taxes, excise and service tax in High Courts, Supreme Courts and tribunals has been increased to Rs 60 lakh, Rs 2 crore and Rs 5 crore, respectively.
- Further to reduce litigation and provide certainty in international taxation, scope of safe harbour rules to be expanded and transfer pricing assessment procedure to be streamlined.

### Employment and Investment

- **Angel tax** for all classes of investors to be **abolished**. This move is aimed to strengthen the Indian start-up eco-system, boost the entrepreneurial spirit and support innovation.
- **Corporate tax** rate on foreign companies to be **reduced from 40% to 35%** to attract foreign capital for India's development needs.
- Simpler tax regime for foreign shipping companies operating domestic cruises to promote cruise tourism in India.
- Safe harbour rates for foreign mining companies selling raw diamonds in the country. This will promote

**UNION BUDGET 2024-25**  
वित्त मंत्रालय  
MINISTRY OF FINANCE

**Tax Relief and Revised Tax Slabs in New Tax Regime**

0-3 lakh rupees	Nil
3-7 lakh rupees	5 per cent
7-10 lakh rupees	10 per cent
10-12 lakh rupees	15 per cent
12-15 lakh rupees	20 per cent
Above 15 lakh rupees	30 per cent

- Income tax saving of up to ₹ 17,500/- for salaried employee in new tax regime

**Income Tax Relief for around Four Crore Salaried Individuals and Pensioners**

- Standard deduction for salaried employees to be increased from ₹ 50,000/- to ₹ 75,000/-
- Deduction on family pension for pensioners to be increased from ₹ 15,000/- to ₹ 25,000/-

development of diamond cutting and polishing industry which employs a large number of skilled workers.

#### **Deepening Tax Base**

- Security Transactions Tax on futures and options of securities increased to 0.02 per cent and 0.1 per cent respectively.
- Income received on buy back of shares in the hands of recipient to be taxed.

#### **Tax implication of Proposals**

Revenue of about Rs 37,000 crore – Rs 29,000 crore in direct taxes and Rs 8,000 crore in indirect taxes – will be forgone while revenue of about ₹ 30,000 crore rupees will be additionally mobilized. Thus, the total revenue forgone is about Rs 7,000 crore annually.

# Annual Survey of Unincorporated Enterprises

Annual Survey of Unincorporated Enterprises (ASUSE) results for 2021-22 and 2022-23 are released.

## Unincorporated Enterprises

- These are enterprises in the unorganised or informal sector, comprising MSMEs, household units including those with hired workers, and own-account enterprises.
- The surveys were carried out for unincorporated non-agricultural establishments in **three sectors: manufacturing, trade, and “other services”**.
  - ✓ Manufacturing units other than those covered under the Factories Act, 1948 and the organised manufacturing sector’s Annual Survey of Industries (ASI), have been surveyed.
  - ✓ Under trade and other services, proprietary and partnership establishments (excluding Limited Liability Partnership establishments), society/ trust/ association/ club/ body of individuals etc., co-operatives, self-help groups, and non-profit institutions are included.
- The unincorporated non-agricultural sector plays a pivotal role in the Indian economy contributing significantly to employment, GDP and the overall socio-economic landscape.
- The sector also supports the incorporated sector by acting as suppliers and service providers, thereby forming an integral part of the domestic value chain.

### What the numbers show



### TYPES OF ENTERPRISES IN INFORMAL SECTOR (in crore)

	Hired worker enterprises	Own account enterprises	Total number of establishments
2010-11	0.89	4.88	5.77
2015-16	1	5.34	6.34
2021-22	0.84	5.13	5.97
2022-23	0.97	5.5	6.5

## Headline Trends

- The informal sector registered a decrease in employment, though the number of enterprises increased over the previous round both in 2022-23 and 2015-16.
- Overall, the number of workers employed in the informal sector in 2022-23 dropped by 16.45 lakh (1.5%) to **10.96 crore** from 11.13 crore in 2015-16.
- Out of the total workers, 5.72 crore were from urban areas, whereas rural workers stood at 5.24 crore.
- The number of unincorporated enterprises increased by 16.56 lakh to 6.50 crore in 2022-23 from 6.33 crore in 2015-16.
- Own-account enterprises increased nearly 4% during the seven-year period, even as hired-worker enterprises contracted by 3.2%.
- This indicates a deterioration in the quality of employment as units shifted to self-owned units, that is, households or one-person units rather than hired-worker units, which are typically a source of labour-intensive enterprises, especially in manufacturing.
- As the economy moved to more capital-intensive manufacturing, the data indicate a dent in employment in labour-intensive manufacturing in the unorganised sector.

## Sectoral Trends

- **Manufacturing** units were the worst hit, contracting 9.3% between 2022-23 and 2015-16 to 1.78 crore. The number of workers in manufacturing fell 15% to 3.06 crore during this period.

- Units in the **trade sector** contracted to a lesser extent — to 2.26 core, a 2% decline in 2022-23 from 2015-16. The number of workers increased marginally by 0.8% to 3.90 crore in this period.
- **Services sector** establishments, recorded increases in numbers of both units and workers — by 19.1% to 2.46 crore and by 9.5% to almost 4 crore respectively.


### Output Data

- At current prices, the Gross Value Added (GVA) per enterprise increased to Rs 2.38 lakh in 2022-23 from Rs 1.82 lakh in 2015-16, while the GVA per worker rose to Rs 1.42 lakh from Rs 1.04 lakh.
- In real terms, however, growth was much slower. The real GVA of unincorporated sector enterprises grew by 6.9% in 2022-23, which was still lower than the pre-pandemic level.

### Informal Employment Across States

- Sixteen out of the 34 states/ Union Territories (J&K and Ladakh don't have comparable figures) recorded a decline in informal sector workers in 2022-23 compared with 2015-16.
- The share of informal sector workers increased in most states in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic, an indication of economic distress and a shift away from the formal sector.
- **Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Maharashtra** had the **highest share of informal sector enterprises** in both rural and urban areas in 2022-23.

STATES WITH HIGHEST SHARE OF INFORMAL SECTOR ENTERPRISES		
	2022-23	2021-22
Uttar Pradesh	13.83%	12.99%
West Bengal	12.04%	12.31%
Maharashtra	9.37%	8.81%
Tamil Nadu	6.50%	6.80%
Bihar	5.69%	5.25%
Gujarat	5.37%	6.17%
Karnataka	5.34%	5.72%
MP	5.03%	5.35%
AP	4.93%	4.87%
Odisha	4.53%	4.08%



*\*Total includes data for 13 other regions; Source: Annual Survey of Unincorporated Enterprises 2022-23 & 2021-22*

- The share of women owners and workers in unincorporated enterprises was relatively high in the southern States.
- To an extent, in some eastern States too, the share of women in the sector was high; however, it remained low in the western, northern, and central States.



## Should Education be Brought Back on the State List?

As the NEET-UG exam is embroiled into controversies, there is growing pressure to bring education back to the State List.

### Education Related Provisions-

- **Constitutional-**
  - Article 15(1)(3)- Education for Women
  - Article 21A- Right to Education
  - Article 25- Religious Education
  - Article 30- Right of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions.
  - Article 51A- Fundamental duty to provide opportunity for education
  - Article 350A- Instruction in mother-tongue at the primary stage
- **Legal:** Right to Education Act 2009- provides for free and compulsory education for children between 6 and 14 years of age.

# Historical Background of Education Status



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**01** *Inclusion in Provincial List-* The Government of India Act, 1935 created a federal structure under which the legislative subjects were distributed between the federal legislature (present day Union) and provinces (present day States) and education, an important public good was kept under the provincial list.

**02** *Under State List Post Independence-* Education was a field which the framers of the Constitution felt should be the sole domain of state legislatures. Therefore, it was placed as Entry 11 of the State List under the seventh schedule.

- The Seventh Schedule deals with the division of powers between the Union government and State governments which is notified through three kinds of list:
  - Union List – List I
  - State List – List II
  - Concurrent List – List III

**03** *Recommendations of Swaran Singh Committee, 1976-* It recommended placing 'education' in the concurrent list to evolve all-India policies on the subject.

**04** *42nd Constitutional Amendment, 1976-* shifted 'education' from the State list to the Concurrent list enabling both the Centre as well as the States to enact laws on the subject.

- The Janata Party government led by Morarji Desai tried to reverse the controversial changes made through the 42nd amendment by the 44th constitutional amendment in 1978. One of these amendments was to bring 'education' back to the State list but it failed to pass through the Rajya Sabha.

**05** *Current Status (CONCURRENT LIST)-* Education is placed in **Entry 25 of List III of Schedule 7 of the Constitution.**

## Arguments Related To Inclusion Of Education In State List

<i>Favour</i>	<i>Against</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>One Size Doesn't Fit All-</i> Moving 'education' back to the State list would allow the states to frame <b>tailor-made policies</b> for syllabus, testing and admissions for higher education including professional courses like medicine and engineering.</li> <li>2. <i>Greater Expenditure by States-</i> According to 2022 report titled 'Analysis of Budgeted expenditure on Education' by the Ministry of Education, out of the total revenue expenditure by education departments for 2020-21, 15% was spent by the Centre while 85% was spent by the States.</li> <li>3. <i>Recent Paper Leak Cases-</i> The recent NEET and NET controversies prove that centralization does not solve the issues of corruption and paper leaks.</li> <li>4. <i>Inclusive and Broad Outlook of States-</i> Only the States can ensure that education reaches the grassroots level as they are directly in touch with the people.</li> <li>5. <i>Allow the states to regulate admissions-</i> to institutions and universities established by the state, at its own cost. Many states have been heavily investing in medical and technical education since independence and have achieved high</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Uniform Education Policy-</i> Education should remain under concurrent list for a uniform education policy, improvement in standards and synergy between Centre and States.</li> <li>2. <i>Lack of Professionalism-</i> and corruption at state levels leads to paper leaks, exam delays etc. impacting the whole system of education.</li> <li>3. <i>Education is Primary Source of Human Development-</i> therefore, State and Central governments should jointly prioritize it in budgetary allocations and funding plans.</li> <li>4. <i>Development, Promotion and Growth of Education-</i> The central government can take such measures under concurrent list. For example, enactment of Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, establishment of several reputed medical institutions like AIIMS and other such institutions.</li> </ol>

rates of literacy through dedicated investment in education infrastructure. For example- introduction of National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET), without the concurrence of states, takes away their regulating power.

5. *Standardization of Skills*- to make an individual employable in pan-India industries.

### Way Forward

- **Hybrid Model** - Regulatory mechanisms for higher education can continue to be governed by central institutions like the National Medical Commission (NMC), University Grants Commission (UGC) and All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) while policymaking autonomy regarding education can be given to states.
- **Collaborative Governance** -to achieve balanced educational reforms and efficient resource allocation.

#### Extra Mile: Government Initiatives for Strengthening Education

##### For Students-

1. *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)*- launched in 2001 was government's very first initiative to improve the quality of education by providing free elementary education to all the children in India in a time-bound manner.
2. *Mid-Day Meal Scheme*- launched in 1995 to provide mid-day meals to children studying in primary class (presently Classes 1 to 8). It aims to eliminate children's classroom hunger and increase attendance and enrolment of children at schools.
3. *Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA)*- launched in 2009 to provide universal access to secondary education by constructing new secondary schools, additional classrooms, toilets, providing drinking water facilities and appointing additional teachers.
4. Global Initiative of Academic Networks (GIAN): Launched in 2015 to provide opportunity for students and faculty to interact with the best academic and industry experts from all over the world.
5. *Samagra Shiksha*- Launched in 2018 to provide an integrated approach to school education and ensure inclusive and equitable quality education from pre-school to senior secondary level. It subsumes the three existing schemes- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and Teacher Education (TE).
6. Pradhan Mantri Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (PM-USHA): aims to improve the quality of higher education in State Universities while ensuring equity, access, and inclusion. It strives to address the key gaps and issues identified by NEP 2020.
7. *National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship Scheme (NMMS)*- Launched in 2008 to provide financial assistance to students from economically and socially disadvantaged groups studying in class 8 and 9 who excel in studies.
8. *National Achievement Survey (NAS)*- Launched in 2016 to provide an accurate picture of the learning levels of students in the country in different subjects, as well as the areas where students need improvement.
9. *National Curriculum Framework (NCF)*- Published by NCERT to provide framework and guidelines for the development of school curriculum and for the assessment & evaluation of students.  
\*\* The NCF has been revised four times in the past (in 1975, 1988, 2000, and 2005). If the new NCF of 2023 (based on NEP 2020) is implemented, the suggested modification would be the 5th one.
10. Scheme For Residential Education for Students in High Schools in Targeted Areas (SHRESHTA)- to involve the voluntary sector and reputed training institutions to improve educational and socioeconomic conditions of Scheduled Castes.

11. National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN Bharat), for ensuring that every child in the country necessarily attains Foundational Literacy and Numeracy by the end of Grade 3, by 2026-27.
12. *Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat (PBBB)*- Launched in 2018 to improve the reading, writing, and arithmetic skills of students in classes 3 to 5 and provide training to teachers, developing reading materials, and creating a culture of reading in schools.
13. Prerana (an experiential learning programme) launched in January 2024 to integrate principles of Indian education system and the philosophy of value-based education which is a corner stone of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.
14. Performing Grade Index (PGI): designed by the Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education, and launched in 2017 for helping States/UTs to identify specific interventions required to make transformational changes in school education.
15. In Sept. 2023, NCERT has been granted the deemed-to-be-university status by Ministry of Education.
16. SHREYAS (Scholarships for Higher Education for Young Achievers Scheme) to be implemented from 2021-22 to 2025-26 for OBCs and EBCs
17. NISHTHA (National Initiative for School Heads' & Teachers' Holistic Advancement)- for "Improving Quality of School Education through Integrated Teacher Training"

#### **For Girls-**

1. *'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' Abhiyan*- to enhance the sex ratio and the status of the girl child and improve girl education.
2. *National Program for Education of Girls at Elementary Education (NPEGEL)*- started in 2003, it is a significant component of the SSA to reach girls, especially girls that are not enrolled in a school, to break gender stereotypes and ensure girls get a good education at the elementary level.
3. *Swachh Vidyalaya*- committed to providing functional girl's toilet in every school and separate toilets for girls and boys in all Government schools.
4. *Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV)*- provides access to quality education to girls from disadvantaged groups in the age group of 10-18 years aspiring to study in Classes VI to XII; belonging to SC, ST, OBC, Minority communities and BPL families to ensure smooth transition of girls from elementary to secondary and upto class XII wherever possible.
5. *National Scheme of Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education (NSIGSE)*- to give incentive of Rs. 3000 to eligible unmarried girl students enrolled in class IX. It is deposited in the bank account upon enrollment and can be withdrawn along with interest upon reaching 18 years of age and passing Class X examination.
6. *Rani Laxmibai Atma Raksha Prashikshan*- Self-defense training is provided for three months to girls student from class VI to XII in Government schools having girls enrollment.
7. *CBSE Single Girl Child Merit Scholarship*- to provide scholarships to the meritorious Single Girl Students, who are the only child of their parents; and have passed the CBSE Class X Examination with 60% or more marks and are continuing their further school education of Class XI and XII.
8. *PRAGATI (Providing Assistance for Girls' Advancement in Technical Education Initiative)*- provides scholarship of 50000 Rs per annum to one girl per family with family income of less than 8 lakhs / annum on merit at the qualifying examination to pursue technical education.

#### **For Differently Abled**

1. *Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC)*- launched in 1974 to encourage integrating children with mild to moderate impairments into regular schools and to encourage the continued enrollment of disabled children in the regular education system.

2. **SAKSHAM**- AICTE awards scholarships of Rs. 50000 per annum to all eligible differently abled students to pursue technical education.

#### **For North-East**

1. **ISHAN UDAY** - Special Scholarship Scheme For North Eastern Region- envisages grant of 10,000 scholarships to students from North East Region whose parental income is below Rs. 4.5 lakh per annum and would be provided scholarship of Rs. 5400/- per month for general degree courses and Rs.7800/- per month for technical /medical /professional /paramedical courses.
2. **Ishan Vikas**- to bring selected students from the school and college levels from the North-Eastern states into close contact with the IITs, NITs and IISERs during their vacation periods.

#### **ICT enabled enhancement of learning opportunities**

1. **SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds) PROGRAMME**: to take the best teaching learning resources to all, including the most disadvantaged for free. Professors of centrally funded institutions like IITs, IIMs, central universities offer online courses under the scheme.  
\*\* Annual Refresher Programme in Teaching (ARPIT): Faculty Development Programme (FDP) for higher education faculty is being offered through MOOCs (*Massive Open Online Courses*) under SWAYAM platform.
2. **SWAYAM PRABHA**- is a group of 34 DTH channels devoted to telecasting high-quality educational programmes provided by NPTEL, IITs, UGC, CEC, IGNOU on a 24\*7 basis using the GSAT-15 satellite.  
\*\* Shiksha Vani- is a CBSE podcast for providing education through extensive use of radio.
3. **SATHEE (Self-Assessment, Test and Help for Entrance Examination)** portal to offer quality education to students preparing for competitive examinations.
4. **DIKSHA (Portal by NCERT)**- provides quality e-content for school education in States/UTs and QR coded Energized Textbooks for all grades (one nation, one digital platform).
5. **National E-Library**- launched in 2015 to ensure that quality content from central universities and premier educational institutions are available in a digital format



## **Expunction Powers in Parliament**

The first special session of the 18th Lok Sabha has witnessed heated discussions, with the Opposition clashing with the government over a range of issues, ultimately concluding with a war of words over the *expunction of the remarks* of the leaders of Opposition in both Houses.

#### **Background**

Significant portions of Leader of Opposition (LoP) in Rajya Sabha (RS - Council of States) Mallikarjun Kharge's speech which were critical of Prime Minister and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) were removed by the Rajya Sabha (RS) Chairman. The same followed in the Lok Sabha (LS- House of the People), where parts of Rahul Gandhi's remarks on the PM and the BJP were expunged from the records on the orders of LS Speaker.

#### **What is meant by Expunction?**

Parliament maintains a verbatim record of everything that is spoken and that happens during proceedings. When words, phrases and expressions which are deemed "defamatory, indecent, unparliamentary or undignified" in a speech delivered by the MPs in their respective House are removed from these parliamentary records, it is called expunction.

⦿ For this purpose, the Lok Sabha Secretariat maintains a comprehensive list of 'unparliamentary' words and expressions.

#### **Rules Related to Expunction Power-**

**Rule 380 and 381 of the Rules of procedure of LS & Rule 261 of RS** empower the presiding officers of respective Houses to expunge any words used in the debate which are defamatory, unparliamentary, undignified or indecent.

## How Are Remarks Expunged From Parliamentary Records?

- *Process*- When the Chair/ Presiding Officers holds that a particular word or expression is unparliamentary, the member should immediately withdraw such remarks without any attempt to raise any debate over it and failure to comply with the orders of the chair results in expunction.
- *Scope of 'Unparliamentary Words'*- is unlimited. The Speaker, at his discretion in the past, has also ordered the expunction of words-
  - deemed prejudicial to national interest; or
  - detrimental to maintaining friendly relations with a foreign State;
  - derogatory to dignitaries;
  - likely to offend national sentiments; or
  - affect the religious susceptibilities of a section of the community;
  - likely to discredit the Army; and
  - not in good taste or otherwise objectionable or likely to bring the House into ridicule or lower the dignity of the Chair, the House or the members.
  - *Continuous interruptions during speeches may also be expunged at the Speaker's discretion.*
- *Record of Expunged Portions*- The expunged portions are marked by asterisks with an explanatory footnote stating, 'expunged as ordered by the Chair.' If the Chair directs that nothing will go on record during a member's speech or interruption, footnote '**not recorded**' is inserted.
- *List of Expunged Words*- A comprehensive list of words and phrases is circulated to media outlets at the end of the day's proceedings. Once expunged, these words or phrases cease to exist on the official record.
- *Ban on Publishing Expunged Words*- Anyone who publishes expunged words thereafter is liable to face charges for breach of privilege of the House.

## Rules to be followed by a Member of Parliament (MP) during his Speech in Parliament- An MP should not-

- refer to any matter on which a judicial decision is pending, i.e., a matter which is sub-judice. If such an instance occurs, the Chair asks him not to do so or may ask him to discontinue his speech.
- make personal charges against other members.
- use offensive expressions about the conduct or proceedings of the Houses or any State Legislature.
- make any critical reference about debates in Lok Sabha.
- cast reflections on any decision or determination of the House except on a motion for rescinding such a decision.
- make allegations against or cast aspersions on persons in high authority unless the discussion is based on a substantive motion (A self-contained proposal made in reference to a subject).
- use the President's name to influence the debate or discuss the conduct of the President in the House.
- use words/expressions which are treasonable, seditious, defamatory, offensive and unparliamentary.
- use their right of speech for the purpose of obstructing the business of the House.
  - ✓ *Article 105 of the Constitution confers on MPs the freedom of speech in the House and immunity from interference by the court for anything said in the House.* However, this freedom is subject to other constitutional provisions and the rules of each house.
- read out a written speech except with the prior leave of the Chair or read the speech for another member in his presence in the House.
- make a personal reference by way of imputation of motive to or questioning the bona fides of any member, unless it is imperatively necessary for the purpose of the debate or is a matter in issue.
- refer to the proceedings of or matters raised during the meetings of Consultative Committees.

## Can Remarks Be Made Against A Fellow MP or a Minister of Government?

- As per Rule 353 of the Lok Sabha, remarks can be made against a fellow MP. If the allegations are defamatory or incriminatory, the MP needs to give advance notice to the Chair and the *minister concerned*. So, when the MP makes these allegations, the minister can present the facts to the government on the issue.
  - ✓ There is no need for advance notice if the allegations are neither defamatory nor incriminatory.

- Rule 353 does not **obviously** apply to allegations against a Minister as the Council of Ministers (CoM) is accountable to Parliament and the Members of the House have the right to question Ministers and make imputations against their conduct as Ministers. But if an MP accuses a minister of being a "liar", that is an unparliamentary word that the Chair will order to be expunged.
  - The MP making an imputation against a **Minister**, he/she should be sure about the factual basis of the allegations and must take responsibility for it. If these conditions are followed, then the allegations are allowed to remain on record.

Importance of Expunction	Implications of Expunction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Maintains Parliamentary Decorum</i>- It serves as a safeguard against the misuse of parliamentary privilege</li> <li>• <i>Upholds Dignity of House</i> and its members and ensures respectful, relevant, and accurate debates contributing to the overall integrity of the parliamentary process.</li> <li>• <i>Maintains Diplomatic Sensitivities</i>- and upholds the decorum of international relations within parliamentary debates.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Breach of Parliamentary Privilege</i>- Expunged remarks cease to exist in the official narrative of parliamentary discourse and any subsequent <u>publication of expunged content</u> could potentially lead to charges of breach of parliamentary privilege.</li> <li>• <i>Affects Transparency in Governance</i>- Expunction raises questions about the public's right to know what transpires in the halls of Parliament.</li> </ul>

### Issues Related to Expunction

- *Selective Expunction*- Most remarks that have been expunged until now have been of the opposition leaders.
- *Digital Age*- Remarks removed from official records often remain accessible through recordings of live broadcasts and social media shares. This raises questions about the effectiveness and relevance of expunction in modern times and creates a dichotomy between the official record and the public's access to information, potentially undermining the very purpose of expunction.
- *Hampers Freedom of Speech*- of elected representatives as their expressed views are expunged.
- *Defamation*- As per Section 499 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), any statement regarding the conduct of a public servant in the discharge of his public function, or his character is not defamation. A Minister is a public servant and if allegations are made against a Minister in a House, then it cannot be counted as 'mischief' under Rule 380. This means the presiding officers cannot expunge words in or portions of a speech on the ground that they are defamatory. So, it first needs to be ascertained if the speech contains defamatory or incriminatory statements or only critical comments (which an MP has the right to make).

### Way Forward

- *Implementing Advance Monitoring Tools* which automatically blur or mute expunged remarks in live broadcasts and recordings.
- *Public Awareness*- about expunction among the public to foster a more informed citizenry and encourage responsible reporting and sharing of parliamentary proceedings.
- *Using Powers Judiciously*- Presiding Officers should exercise their powers judiciously, ensuring that expunction enhances the quality of debate rather than stifling legitimate criticism or dissent.
- *Preserving Tradition with Modernity*- Efforts should be made for preserving the essence of expunction while ensuring its relevance and effectiveness in an era of instant communication and widespread information sharing.
- *Striking a Balance*- between Parliament's dignity and principles of transparency and freedom of speech

# Rules Governing Civil Servants

Union Public Service Commission has terminated the services of probationary IAS officer Puja Khedkar. She allegedly forged identity papers, misrepresenting and falsifying facts to obtain extra attempts in the Civil Services Examination-2022, beyond the prescribed limit.

## What Was The Case Regarding Puja Khedkar?

- Khedkar is a 2023-batch IAS officer who secured an all-India rank (AIR) 841 in the UPSC exam and was allotted the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) under the OBC and Physically Handicapped (PH) quotas.
- Questions were raised about her appointment under these categories along with allegations of-
  - misconduct, from seeking special privileges she is not entitled to as a probationer and “occupying” the ante chamber of the District Collector’s office, to using an unauthorized red-blue beacon on her private car, a luxury Audi sedan which she claims to have received as a “gift”.
  - Attempting the Civil Services Exam (CSE) 12 times after fraudulently obtaining Other Backward Classes (OBC) certificate and a Persons with Benchmark Disabilities (PwBD) certificate citing visual impairment and mental illness under Multiple Disability Criteria of The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016.
    - ✓ 27% of seats in IAS are reserved for the OBC category since 1995.
    - ✓ Physically Handicapped (PH) reservation of 3% seats is provided in every category (General, OBC, SC, and ST) since 2006. This 3% quota is divided into blindness or low vision, hearing impairment and locomotor disabilities or cerebral palsy, with each category receiving a per cent each.
    - ✓ According to UPSC, a minimum of 40 per cent disability should be present in a candidate to avail of these reservation benefits.

## What Rules Govern Puja Khedkar's Actions As A Civil Servant?

These actions are governed by two key rules:

1. *All India Services (Conduct) Rules, 1968*- All IAS, Indian Police Service (IPS) and Indian Forest Service officers are governed by the All-India Services (AIS) (Conduct) Rules, 1968 from the time they are allotted their service and begin training. As per the AIS rules every member should-
  - a. *Maintain Absolute Integrity and Devotion to duty (Rule 3(1))* and do nothing which is unbecoming of a member of the Service.
    - ✓ The word “unbecoming” as defined under Rule 4(1) means officers must not use their position or influence to secure employment for any member of his family with any private undertaking or NGO. (not misuse his/her position in order to derive financial or material benefits for himself, his family or his friends)
  - b. *Maintain High Ethical Standards*- The members are required to maintain integrity and honesty; political neutrality; accountability and transparency; responsiveness to the public, particularly to the weaker sections; courtesy and good behaviour with the public.
  - c. *Report Gifts (Rule 11(1))*- The officers are allowed to accept gifts only from near relatives or personal friends with whom they have no official dealings on weddings, anniversaries, funerals and religious functions. But they must inform the government about any gift whose value exceeds Rs 25,000 per Day.
2. *Indian Administrative Service (Probation) Rules, 1954*- These rules govern the conduct of officers during their probation period (of at least two years) after selection to the services including the period of their training at

the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA) in Mussoorie. At the end of probation period officers are required to clear an examination to be confirmed in their respective services. The Probation rules provide for:

- a. *Fixed Salary and Travel Allowance*- during the probation period, but are not entitled to other benefits that confirmed IAS officers receive such as an official car with a VIP number plate, official accommodation, an official chamber with adequate staff, a constable, etc.
  - b. *Discharge from Duty (Rule 12)*: A probationary officer is discharged from his duties if he/she-
    - i. is found ineligible for recruitment or unsuitable to be a member of the service;
    - ii. Willfully neglects the probationary studies or duties; and
    - iii. Lacks in qualities of mind and character needed for the service.
- ✓ The Centre holds a summary enquiry before discharging an officer from his/her duty. In Puja Khedkar's case, the Centre constituted a single-member committee under the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) to examine all documents submitted by her to secure her candidature in the civil services. The report will be submitted within two weeks.

#### **Extra Mile: The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016**

- The Act replaces the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995. It fulfills the obligations to the United National Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), to which India is a signatory.
- The types of disabilities have been increased **from existing 7 to 21** and the Central Government will have the power to add more types of disabilities. The 21 disabilities are given below: -

#### **1. Physical Disability**

- Locomotor Disability: Leprosy Cured Person; Cerebral Palsy; Dwarfism; Muscular Dystrophy and Acid Attack Victims
- Visual Impairment: Blindness; Low Vision;
- Hearing Impairment: Deaf; Hard of Hearing;
- Speech and Language Disability

#### **2. Intellectual Disability**

- Specific Learning Disabilities
- Autism Spectrum Disorder

#### **3. Mental Behaviour (Mental Illness)**

#### **4. Disability caused due to-**

- Chronic Neurological Conditions such as: Multiple Sclerosis; Parkinson's Disease
- Blood Disorder: Haemophilia; Thalassemia; Sickle Cell Disease

#### **5. Multiple Disabilities**

\*\* Persons with "benchmark disabilities" are defined as those certified **to have at least 40 per cent** of the disabilities specified above.

#### **Rights and Entitlements**

- Benefits such as reservation in higher education (not less than 5%), government jobs (not less than 4 %), reservation in allocation of land, poverty alleviation schemes (5% allotment) etc. have been provided for persons with benchmark disabilities and those with high support needs.
- Every child with benchmark disability between **the age group of 6 and 18 years** shall have the right to free education.

- For strengthening the Prime Minister's **Accessible India Campaign**, stress has been given to ensure accessibility in public buildings (both Government and private) in a prescribed timeframe.



## Caste Census

Peter Drucker's quote, "Only what gets measured gets managed" highlights the necessity of collecting data on group identities to address discrimination effectively and for informed policymaking and inclusive development.

### What is a Caste Census

It means inclusion of caste-wise tabulation of India's population in the Census exercise.

- The Census is a decadal exercise conducted by Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India (Under Ministry of Home Affairs) to provide basic statistics on the state of human resources, demography, culture, economic structure and conduct delimitation exercises at local, regional and national level.
- Occasionally, caste data has been collected through other surveys, such as the National Sample Survey (NSS), which provides periodic socio-economic data but is not as comprehensive as a full census.
- The Government of India in 2021 had stated in Lok Sabha that it has decided as a matter of policy not to enumerate caste-wise population other than SCs and STs in Census.

### Historical Background

- Caste census was first introduced under the British colonial administration in 1881 and continued till the 1931 census.
  - ✓ As per the 1931 Census, there were 4,147 castes in India apart from the depressed classes/untouchables.
- Independent India's governments abandoned full caste enumeration on the apprehension that it would strengthen caste divisions and perpetuate the caste system. Therefore, since 1951 census, India has counted and published caste data only of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and data related to religions, languages and socio-economic status.
  - ✓ Caste data was collected for the 2011 census but was never made public. As, The SECC 2011 collected data on caste but faced criticism for data accuracy and underreporting.
- All caste data are projected based on 1931 caste census which became the basis for quota caps under the Mandal formula.
  - ✓ The Mandal Commission set up by the Morarji Desai Government in 1979 under B.P.Mandal recommended 27% reservation for Other Backward Classes in all government services, technical and professional institutions.
  - ✓ Based on the caste/community-wise population figures of the 1931 census, the commission estimated the combined population of Hindu and non-Hindu OBCs to be 52% of total population and concluded that if the caste as a whole is socially and educationally backward, reservation can be given to such caste under Article 15(4) which empowers the State to make special provisions for the advancement of "socially and educationally backward classes of citizens.

### Constitutional/Legal Backing for Census

- Population census is listed in Union List (entry 69) of Seventh Schedule in Indian Constitution.
- Census is conducted under the provisions of the Census Act, 1948.
- Article 340 of the Constitution too Favours caste census by mandating the appointment of a commission to investigate the conditions of socially and educationally backward classes

- Collection of Statistics Act, 2008 allows States and local bodies to gather necessary data despite being a Union subject. For example- the caste census done in Karnataka (2015) and Bihar (2023).

### Why Is A Caste Census Required

<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Social</u></b></p> <p>To provide a comprehensive understanding of diversity in society as caste remains a key social structure in India as evidenced by-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low inter-caste marriages (only about 5% of marriages in India were inter-caste as of 2011-12);</li> <li>• Prevalent caste surnames and marks;</li> <li>• Residential segregation by caste;</li> <li>• Choices of candidates for elections and ministers for Cabinets which continue to be dictated by caste considerations.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Administrative</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To avoid/correct wrongful inclusions of undeserving castes and exclusions of deserving castes.</li> <li>• To guard against a few dominant castes in a reserved category crowding out others.</li> <li>• To sub-categorize castes within a reserved category.</li> <li>• To determine the income/wealth criterion for the creamy layer.</li> <li>• To design targeted welfare schemes and affirmative action policies based on accurate demographic data.</li> </ul> <p>For equitable distribution of resources based on their social and economic indicators like education level, employment and income etc.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Moral</u></b></p> <p>Lack of caste data has helped elites among upper castes &amp; dominant OBCs to disproportionately control national assets, income &amp; power and to fulfill constitutional mandates related to social justice, equality, and the promotion of welfare for all citizens.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ India's richest 1% enjoy 22.6% of national income while the poorest 50% get only 15% of national income.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Legal</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To effectively pursue constitutionally mandated policies of social justice like providing reservations in education and public employment etc.</li> <li>• To prove a class's backwardness in the court of law based on the data as the Supreme Court (SC) through its various rulings have held caste as a 'relevant criterion', 'sole criterion' or 'dominant criterion' for defining it backward.</li> <li>• To update and correct historical data on caste demographics, which may have changed over time.</li> </ul>

### Why Is There An Opposition To Caste Census?

1. **Fuels Demand for Increasing Reservation-** A nationwide caste census can reveal the exact population share of OBCs greater than or equal to 52%, as estimated by the Mandal commission. This could result in demands to increase the 27% reservation quota for OBCs.
2. **Non-Feasibility-** If a caste-related question is included in the census, the answers would include thousands of castes as the people use their clan/gotra, sub-caste and caste names interchangeably. As the data enumerators are part-timers and not investigators or verifiers, meaningful tabulation and classification of caste returns can be a difficult task resulting in further delays in releasing the census.
3. **Absence of Constitutional Mandate-** Unlike the case of SCs and STs, there is no constitutional mandate for the Registrar-General and Census Commissioner, India, to provide the census figures of the OBCs and the BCCs.
4. **Reinforcement of Caste Identities and Leads to Social Division-** Politicians can misuse the data for electoral gains and political maneuvering (leading to increased caste-based politics and vote-bank politics) and create further divisions in society along caste lines rather than promote integration and national unity.
5. **Privacy and Stigmatization:** Publicly identifying individuals by caste could perpetuate stigma and discrimination, especially for those belonging to lower or marginalized castes.
  - ✓ There are concerns that focusing on caste might contradict the **principle of treating all citizens equally** regardless of their social background.

## Previous Attempts At Conducting Caste Census

- In 2010, the Parliament passed a unanimous resolution (with both Congress and BJP on board) calling for caste to be enumerated as part of the 2011 Census.
- Therefore, the Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC)-2011 was conducted which gave a ludicrous figure of 46 lakh castes but the caste data was never released. It failed for following reasons-
  - It was not conducted under the Census Act, 1948 as no amendment was made to include caste as a parameter.
  - It was conducted through the Union Ministries of Rural Development and Urban Development which had no prior experience of conducting sociological/anthropological surveys.
  - Its questionnaire was poorly designed and asked open-ended questions about caste.
  - The enumerators couldn't distinguish between genuine castes, alternative caste names, larger caste groups, sub-castes, surnames, clan names, gotras, etc.

## Way Forward

- Taking lessons from SECC-2011's failure, the Census Act 1948 should be amended to make enumeration by caste mandatory.
  - ✓ Gradually integrate caste data collection with broader socio-economic surveys to create a comprehensive database that addresses multiple dimensions of social and economic inequality.
  - ✓ Some argue that existing surveys and data sources, such as the National Sample Survey (NSS) and Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC), provide sufficient information for policy making without the need for a full caste census.
- Caste data should be collected as part of the regular Census by the Census Commissioner only, with a few pertinent questions added to the questionnaire like names of the sub-caste, caste, larger caste group, and the caste surname of the respondent.
- Sociological/anthropological experts should be appointed to draw up a draft list of castes specific to each State, consult the public before giving the final list to the enumerators.



## Right of States to Tax Mineral Rich Lands

The Supreme Court (SC) in a significant judgment delivered in an 8:1 ratio by a nine-judge Constitution Bench headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) held that the power of State Legislatures to **tax mining lands and quarries** is **not limited** by the Parliament's Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act (MMDR Act) of 1957, thus allowing the states to generate additional revenues in the form of taxes on mining activities and on the land used to conduct these activities.

- MMDR Act, 1957 which governs the mining sector in India aims to ensure sustainable development and management of mineral resources while balancing economic and environmental concerns by regulating mineral extraction, classifying minerals into major and minor categories, and outlining procedures for granting mining rights.
- Under the Act, States also levy a dead rent on leased areas, which is a fixed annual amount paid by the leaseholder regardless of the quantity of minerals extracted.
- States have established District Mineral Foundation (DMF) under the MMDR Act to collect contributions from mining companies that are used for the welfare of affected communities & areas.
- National Mineral Exploration Trust (NMET) was Created to boost mineral exploration activities.

## Background

- **Origin**- The issue dates back to 1957 when the MMDRA was enacted bringing the control of mines and minerals under the Union government's jurisdiction.
- **Royalty Issue**- Section 9 of this Act mandated that mining lease holders should pay royalties for minerals extracted to the individual or corporation who leased the land to them. The royalty issue under this provision has been dealt with in following cases-
  - **India Cement Ltd v State of Tamil Nadu, 1989 Case**-
    - In 1963, the Tamil Nadu (TN) government granted a mining lease to India Cements Ltd for extracting limestone and kankar. For this purpose, the company had to pay royalty to TN government as per Section 9 of MMDRA. Concurrently, under Section 115(1) of the Madras Panchayat Act, a local cess was also levied on land revenue paid to the government in each panchayat development block.
    - India Cements contested the imposition of cess in the Madras High Court, arguing that the Tamil Nadu government lacked the legislative competence to levy cess on royalty.
    - The High Court ruled in favour of the state, stating that the cess was a charge on land under its legislative authority.
    - India Cements appealed to SC which held that-
      - States only have the power to collect royalties, not to impose taxes on mining activities.
      - Centre has overriding authority over “regulation of mines and mineral development” under Entry 54 of the Union List to the extent provided by MMDRA.
      - Royalty is a tax and any cess on royalty exceeded the state's legislative competence, as the MMDRA covered the domain comprehensively.
  - **State of West Bengal vs Kesoram Industries Ltd, 2004 case**- A 5-judge Constitution Bench held that there was a typographical error in the India Cement decision and that the phrase “royalty is a tax” should be read as “cess on royalty is a tax”. But due to its small size, the SC Bench in this case could not overrule and rectify the position.
  - **Mineral Area Development Authority v. Steel Authority of India, 2011**- The case dealt with a challenge to Bihar Coal Mining Area Development Authority (Amendment) Act, 1992 which imposed additional cess and taxes on land revenue paid to the government from mineral bearing lands. A three-judge bench heard the case and took note of the apparent conflict between the decisions in Kesoram Industries and India Cement cases over the alleged typographical error. It therefore referred the case to a nine-judge bench to decide whether a royalty is in fact a type of tax or if there was an error in the India Cements case judgment.

## Key Highlights of Recent SC Judgement

1. **Royalty is not a Tax**- The majority held that there is a “conceptual difference” between royalties and taxes as- (The court held that royalty is not within the nature of a tax and does not come under the MMDRA.)
  - a. Royalties are based on specific contracts or agreements between the mining leaseholder and the lessor where a payment is made to a lessor by the leaseholder in exchange “for parting with their exclusive privileges in the minerals”.
  - b. Taxes are meant for public purposes such as welfare schemes and creating public infrastructure.
2. **States have the Power to Tax ‘Mineral Development Activities’**- The majority held that-
  - a. State Legislatures derive their power to tax mines and quarries under Article 246 (deals with the power of parliament and state legislatures to make laws on subjects listed under 7<sup>th</sup> schedule) read with Entry 49 (tax on lands and buildings) in the State List of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution and “Mineral bearing lands fall within the description of ‘lands’ in Entry 49.

- b. The Parliament cannot limit the State’s power to legislate on the taxation of mines and quarries within their jurisdiction by using MMDRA.
- i. The Centre, in its arguments, said that Entry 50 in the State List had allowed the Parliament to impose “any limitations” on taxes on mineral rights through MMDRA.
  - ✓ Under the State List, entry 50 gives the state the exclusive power to make laws relating to “Taxes on mineral rights subject to any limitations imposed by Parliament by law relating to mineral development”.
  - ✓ The court responded to these arguments by noting that Entries 50 and 49 of the State List “deal with distinct subject matters and operate in different fields” and therefore the limitations imposed by the Parliament under the MMDRA did not operate on or influence State taxation of mining lands under Entry 49 in the State List as there is no specific stipulation in the Constitution to that effect.

**Why Did One Judge Dissent**

- Justice Nagarathna disagreed with the majority on both the key decisions. She held that royalty is a tax, and states have no right to levy it, endorsing the India Cements.
- Justice Nagarathna said non-extracting states starting to import minerals could affect foreign exchange reserves, potentially leading to a breakdown of the federal system envisaged under the constitution in the context of mineral development. This will lead to unhealthy competition to obtain mining licenses in states that are mineral rich and do not want to impose any other levy than royalty. This will ultimately undermine the purpose of MMDRA to spur mineral development and mining activities in country.
- On the decision of states power to impose taxes she said that these powers were “denuded” after the MMDRA was passed, as it gives states the power to collect taxes in the form of royalties, and gives Parliament and the Centre complete control over mineral development and that Entry 49 of the State List does not give states the power to tax mineral-bearing land.

**Significance and Implications of the Judgement**

<b>Significance</b>	<b>Implications</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Boost Revenues-</b> The verdict will result in greater revenues for mineral-bearing states, mostly in eastern India which can improve state’s financial health and be used in welfare measures.</li> <li>2. <b>Distinguishes between State vs Centre’s Power over Mineral Taxation-</b> by ruling that fiscal federalism which entails that the power of the states to levy taxes within the legislative domain carved out to them and subject to the limitations laid down by the Constitution must be secured from unconstitutional interference by Parliament.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Make Mining Less Attractive-</b> The judgement could make mining non-viable for domestic players and deter international mining companies from investing in India’s critical mineral mining sector as the states are now at liberty to impose additional taxes.</li> <li>2. <b>Hamper Sectoral Growth-</b> Low investment as a result of additional taxes by states could impede growth of the mining sector, particularly the critical minerals sector, which the central government is actively promoting.</li> <li>3. <b>Inflation-</b> Mineral resources are used by industries like gas, oil, and construction which may pass on the additional costs to their products. For example, cement, steel and other metal firms depend on mining leases for their raw materials sourced from multiple mineral-rich states of the country, newly imposed taxes could add up to the costs of final products.</li> <li>4. <b>Fear of Double Taxation-</b> The judgement could lead to double taxation by states and the Centre if the MMDRA is not amended to clarify rules regarding taxes.</li> <li>5. <b>Unhealthy Competition among States-</b> States could enter into an unhealthy competition to derive additional revenue, resulting in an uneven and uncoordinated spike in the cost of minerals.</li> </ol>

# Anti-reservation Protests In Bangladesh

- Protests against job quotas in Bangladesh have turned violent, resulting in many deaths and leading to a siege of Dhaka.
- New Delhi has refrained from commenting, considering it an internal matter for Bangladesh.
- Meanwhile, the Indian mission in Bangladesh has helped 978 Indians return home: The mission is also in contact with more than 4,000 Indian students still in Bangladesh, according to the Ministry of External Affairs.

## Background – Reservation Policy of Bangladesh

### Reservation system notified in 1972

- ▶ The system was notified on September 5, 1972, reserving 30% of government and semi-government posts for freedom fighters, and 10% for women.



### Situation after the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

- ▶ After the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founder of Bangladesh, in August 1975, however, the quotas were effectively frozen until 1996 – when Hasina became Prime Minister for the first time.
- ▶ Benefits of the freedom fighters' quota were subsequently extended to their sons and daughters.

### Situation after 2001

- ▶ After the Awami League lost power in 2001, the process of implementation of the quota slowed down again.
- ▶ But Hasina returned as Prime Minister in 2009 and, two years later, the quota benefits were also made available to the grandchildren of freedom fighters.

### Withdrawal of the quota in 2018

- ▶ In 2018, the then Hasina government decided to scrap the freedom-fighter and other quotas. This was subsequently challenged in the court.
- ▶ In its June 5 order, the High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh ruled the government's decision was arbitrary – and that the freedom fighters and their progeny remained one of the most backward sections of the country's citizens. It reinstated the 30% job quota.

## Why Are Students Protesting In Bangladesh?

- **Opposition to the return of a 30% quota in government employment**
  - The protests are led by youths of Bangladesh.
  - They are opposed to the return of a 30% quota in government employment at all levels for those who fought for the freedom of Bangladesh from Pakistan, as well as their children and grandchildren.
- **Statement Made By PM of Bangladesh**
  - The situation was inflamed by a statement from PM Sheikh Hasina, in which she seemed to equate the protesters with the descendants of razakars.

- Razakars were mercenary collaborators of the Pakistan military who led a brutal campaign of murder and rape in which up to 3 million Bangladeshis are estimated to have been killed in the space of a few months in 1971.
- Although the government has expressed agreement with the students' demands, it has appealed to the Supreme Court, which has suspended the High Court's ruling and will hear the case on August 7.
  - Since April, students and teachers have been protesting, demanding that quotas be capped at 10%.
  - These protests have involved clashes with police and the Bangladesh Chhatra League, the student wing of the ruling Awami League party.
- **Economy and employment**
  - As per the experts, the violence is now being driven by wider economic discontent, including high inflation, growing unemployment, and shrinking foreign exchange reserves.
    - More than two-thirds of Bangladesh's 170 million population is the working age group of 15-64.
    - As per official data, 1.8-1.9 million young people join the job market every year.
  - Besides the 30% quota for freedom fighters, there are 10% quotas each for women and backward districts, 5% for members of tribal communities, and 1% for persons with disabilities, taking the total reservation to 56%.
  - Government jobs in Bangladesh are highly sought after for their stability and guaranteed income.
  - The country's export-oriented enterprises are still recovering from disruptions caused by COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine.
  - Between 2019 and 2023, only 3.5 lakh government appointments were made, leaving over 5 lakh positions vacant.

Razakars

- In what was then East Pakistan, the Pakistan Armed Forces, along with radical Islamists, formed **three main militias**—Razakars, al-Badr, and al-Shams—to suppress civil liberties, target freedom fighters, and terrorize civilians.
- These militias, with the support of the Pakistan Armed Forces, subjected Bengalis to genocidal acts, including rape, torture, murder, and forced deportation.
- As per historians, the term "Rezakar" originated in Hyderabad (modern-day India) and referred to "volunteers."
  - In India, the Rezakars were a paramilitary force in Hyderabad that opposed integration with India after 1947.
  - They were founded by Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen leader Bahadur Yar Jung and led by Qasim Rizvi.
  - After their defeat by the Indian Armed Forces in Operation Polo in 1948, Rizvi emigrated to Pakistan.



## PM Modi's Visit to Russia

PM Modi concluded a two-day high-profile visit to Russia, where he attended the 22nd India-Russia annual summit with President Vladimir Putin. India-Russia annual summit has been ongoing since 2000.

### Key Highlights Of The Visit

- **Received Highest Civilian Honour:** The Indian PM was conferred with Russia's highest civilian honour - **Order of St Andrew the Apostle** - by the Russian President (announced in 2019, but presented now).
- **Bilateral Talks - A meeting of two close friends and trusted partners:**
  - It was held to review ties between the two nations, including in areas like **defence, investment, energy cooperation, education and culture.**
  - During the meeting, the Indian PM told the Russian President that **a solution to the Ukraine conflict is not possible on the battlefield** and peace talks do not succeed amidst bombs, guns and bullets.

- The Russian President accepted a direct request from the Indian PM to **expedite the discharge of all Indians** who have been recruited by the Russian military, many of whom are now at the war front.
- **Interactions with Indian community in Moscow:**
  - The Indian PM shared his thoughts on India's rising global profile and its perception as a 'Vishwa Bandhu'.
  - During the address,
    - He applauded the Indian community for their contribution in taking India - Russia relations to new heights.
    - He announced the opening of Indian Consulates in **Kazan and Yekaterinburg**.
- **Other highlights:** At the Rosatom Pavilion, the Indian PM saw the "**Atomic Symphony**" - a model of the VVER-1000 reactor used in India's Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant.

#### **A Joint Vision Statement on Trade and Economic Cooperation:**

- **A shift from previous Summits:** The focus on **economic issues** was a shift from previous Annual Summits where military supplies and the defence and strategic partnership between the two countries had been at the top of the agenda.
- **9 issues that need to be resolved by 2030:** It includes -
  - The elimination of non-tariff barriers,
  - The development of a **bilateral settlement system using national currencies**,
  - Ironing out customs procedures and using new connectivity routes, including -
    - Chennai-Vladivostok maritime route,
    - Northern Sea Route and
    - International North-South Transport Corridor via Iran.
  - Investments in the energy sector including nuclear energy,
  - Infrastructure development
  - Investment promotion
- **India and Russia signed a number of MoUs** between institutions on climate change, polar research, legal arbitration, pharmaceutical certification, etc.
- **Ambitious bilateral trade target:**
  - India and Russia agreed to increase bilateral trade to **\$100 billion dollars by 2030**, including the use of national currencies to circumvent Western sanctions.
  - The bilateral trade reached an all-time high of **\$65.70 billion in FY 2023-24**, mostly because of the surge in India's imports of Russian crude.
  - Achieving the target would take the business relationship to levels of trade India currently has only with bigger economies like the **U.S., China and the EU**.

### What Makes the Indian PM's Visit to Russia Special this Time?

- First since Russia's invasion of Ukraine:
- This will be the first bilateral meeting between the Indian PM and Russian President Vladimir Putin since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.
- The two leaders have met a total 16 times since 2014. The Indian PM last went to Russia for the Eastern Economic Forum meeting in Vladivostok in (Sept) 2019.
- The Russian President last visited India in December 2021 for the annual bilateral summit.

**Traditions broken**

- In choosing Russia for his first bilateral visit after being sworn in, the Indian PM has broken with the tradition of India's new PM travelling first to a neighbouring country.
  - **For example**, he visited Bhutan in June 2014 and Maldives and Sri Lanka in June 2019.
- He travelled to Italy last month, but that was for a multilateral meeting of **G7 leaders**.

## Key Areas of Engagement Between India And Russia

### ● Defence

- The USSR was India's main supplier of defence equipment during the decades of the Cold War.
- Today, **60 - 70% of India's defence equipment** is estimated to be of Russian and Soviet origin.
- The defence cooperation has evolved over time from a buyer-seller framework to one involving **joint R&D, co-development and joint production**.
- India and Russia have signed agreements for
  - The supply of **S-400 Triumf mobile surface-to-air missile systems**, MiG-29 fighter aircraft, and Kamov helicopters, and
  - The licensed production of T-90 tanks, Su-30MKI fighters, AK-203 assault rifles, and BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles.
- **The INS Vikramaditya**, one of the Indian Navy's two aircraft carriers, is the former Soviet and Russia warship Admiral Gorshkov.

### ● Oil Boost

- Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, **India has been buying large amounts of Russian oil at a discount** to cushion the inflationary impact of rising crude prices.
- In the face of international criticism, the Indian External Affairs Minister reiterated that India would continue to buy Russian oil in the interest of Indian consumers.

### ● Trade

- The purchase of Russian crude has pushed bilateral trade volumes beyond expectations and targets.
- **Before the war**, the bilateral trade target was set at \$30 billion by 2025. However, bilateral trade reached an all-time high of \$65.70 billion in FY 2023-24.

## Challenges for India in Maintaining its Ties with Russia

- **Balance of trade heavily in Russia's favour:** India's imports from Russia amounts to \$61.44 billion. These were mostly made up of Russian oil and petroleum products, fertilisers, mineral resources, precious stones and metals, and vegetable oils.
- **Walking diplomatic tightrope:**
  - New Delhi has not explicitly condemned the Russian invasion but expressed concern over threats of nuclear war issued by Russian leaders.
  - India has abstained from voting against Russia in several resolutions at the UNSC.
- **Maintaining ties with western nations:**
  - The Russia-Ukraine war has put India in a delicate diplomatic position with its Western allies.
  - This is evident from a series of meetings between India and the West, just before the Indian PM's visit to Russia.
- **Looked upon as mediator:** There is a perception that India is positioning itself as a neutral player that could be a mediator between Russia and Ukraine.
- **Presence of Indians in Russia:**
  - Some of the Indians in Russia are believed to have been "misled" into joining the war in Ukraine.
  - New Delhi has asked for their early discharge.

The summit's outcomes reflect a shared vision for regional stability, economic growth, and mutual respect on the global stage, reinforcing the enduring nature of the Indo-Russian relationship amidst evolving international dynamics.

# PM Modi's Visit to Austria

PM Modi visited Austria, marking the first visit by an Indian PM to Austria in over 40 years.

- During this visit, Indian PM met Austria's President Alexander Van der Bellen in Vienna to further expand bilateral cooperation in several sectors, including environment and combating climate change.
- The visit coincides with the **75th anniversary of diplomatic relations** between the two countries.

## Key Highlights Of The Visit

- **Shared Values and Goals:**
  - Emphasis on democracy, freedom, international peace, and a rules-based order.
- **Economic and Technological Cooperation:**
  - Focus on sustainable economic growth, digital infrastructure, and innovation.
  - Encouragement for business-to-business engagement and start-up collaborations.
- **Political and Security Cooperation:**
  - Importance of a free and open Indo-Pacific region.
  - Mutual commitment to counter-terrorism and adherence to international law.
  - Support for a peaceful resolution to the Ukraine conflict.
- **Multilateral Cooperation:**
  - Reaffirmed commitment to multilateralism and UN reforms.
  - Mutual support for each other's candidacies in the UN Security Council.
- **Cultural and People-to-People Ties:**
  - Promotion of cultural exchanges, tourism, and academic collaborations.
  - Recognition of the significance of yoga and Ayurveda in Austria.
- **Climate and Sustainability:**
  - Joint efforts towards climate neutrality and the development of green hydrogen technologies.
  - Focus on environmental (green) technologies

### India-Austria Bilateral Relationship

- India and Austria share a friendly and cooperative bilateral relationship that spans several decades.
- The partnership is built on mutual respect, shared democratic values, and a commitment to enhancing economic, cultural, and political ties.
- **Political Relations:**
  - **Diplomatic Ties** established in 1949.
    - Over the years, the relationship has been strengthened through high-level visits, bilateral agreements, and participation in international forums.
  - **Cooperation in Multilateral Platforms** such as the United Nations, emphasizing issues like climate change, sustainable development, and global peace.
- **Economic and Trade Relations:**
  - **Trade Volume:**
    - The bilateral trade is balanced. According to the Statistik Austria, for 2021, **Indian exports to Austria were USD 1.29 billion** and **imports were USD1.18 billion**.

- **Indian key exports to Austria:** Electronic Goods, Apparels, Textile, Footwear, Rubber articles, Vehicles & Railways parts, Electrical machinery and Mechanical appliances.
- **India's key imports from Austria:** Machinery, Mechanical appliances, Railway parts, Iron and Steel etc.
- **Investment:**
  - Austrian companies have invested in India in sectors like engineering, renewable energy, and infrastructure.
  - Indian companies are exploring opportunities in Austria, particularly in IT and manufacturing.
- **Cultural and Educational Exchanges:**
  - **Cultural Programs:**
    - Initiatives like the Festival of India in Austria and Austrian cultural events in India help promote mutual understanding
  - **Educational Cooperation:**
    - Many Indian students pursue higher education in Austria, benefiting from scholarships and exchange programs.
    - Academic collaborations between universities in both countries are also on the rise.
  - There are an estimated **over 31,000 Indians (majority from Kerala and Punjab) living in Austria.**

The visit highlighted the robust and growing partnership between India and Austria, with a strategic approach to advance cooperation in various sectors.



## ICJ's Observation About Israel's Occupation of West Bank & East Jerusalem

- The International Court of Justice (ICJ) recently stated that Israel's occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem violates international law.
- The ICJ further asserted that Israel's presence in Palestinian territories should end as soon as possible. Israel has occupied the West Bank and East Jerusalem since the Six-Day War in 1967. Prior to this, the territories were under Jordanian control.

### ICJ's Opinion On Israel's Occupation: Background

- In December 2022, the *UN General Assembly* adopted a resolution seeking the ICJ's advisory opinion on the legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.
- This came well before Israel's assault on Gaza following the Hamas attacks of October, 2023.
- The recent opinion of ICJ came against this backdrop. It should be noted that the **ICJ's opinion is not binding or enforceable.**

### Opinion Rendered By the ICJ

- **On prolonged occupation**
  - The international law does not set a specific time limit for an occupation, so the legal status of an occupation cannot be determined by its duration.
  - Instead, the legality of an occupation is affected by the occupying power's policies and practices and the manner in which they are implemented and applied on the ground.

- **On settlement policy**
  - The ICJ examined Israel's settlement policy in the West Bank and East Jerusalem since 1967 and found it violated international law.
  - The court highlighted several issues:
    - The settlement policy and military measures have forced Palestinians to leave occupied territories, violating **Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention**. This convention prohibits the transfer of the occupier's population into occupied territories.
    - The policy breaches Articles 46 (protection of private property), 52 (general protection of civilian objects), and 55 (protection of the natural environment) of **Hague regulations** by expanding settlements through land confiscation.
    - The policy violates Article 43 of the Hague regulations, as Israel applies its own laws to settlements and East Jerusalem, disregarding existing local laws.
  - ICJ noted that the policy led to violence by Israeli settlers and security forces against Palestinians, which Israel failed to prevent or punish, creating a coercive environment against Palestinians.
- **On annexation of Palestinian territories**
  - The ICJ stated that annexation is the permanent control over an occupied territory.
  - It found that Israel's policies and practices in the West Bank and East Jerusalem are intended to be indefinite and create irreversible effects.
  - These policies include the maintenance and expansion of settlements, exploitation of Palestinian natural resources, proclaiming Jerusalem as Israel's capital, and applying Israeli domestic law in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.
  - The ICJ concluded that these actions violate the prohibition of the use of force in international relations, affecting the legality of Israel's occupation.
- **On discriminatory legislation and measures**
  - The court found that Israel's legislation in the occupied territories results in systemic discrimination against Palestinians based on race, religion, or ethnic origin.
  - This violates the International Covenants on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights 1954 and Civil and Political Rights 1954, as well as the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination 1965 (ICERD).
  - The court observed that Israel's policies maintain near-complete separation between settlers and Palestinians, violating Article 3 of ICERD, which obligates the eradication of apartheid and racial segregation practices.
- **On self-determination**
  - ICJ determined that Israel's occupation has violated Palestinians' right to self-determination.
  - It noted that the prolonged deprivation of this right undermines Palestinians' ability to exercise it in the future, contravening fundamental principles of international law.
- **On future course of action**
  - The ICJ said that Israel is under the obligation to:
    - immediately end its illegal occupation,
    - cease new settlement activities and evacuate settlers from the occupied territories, and
    - make reparation to all affected people for the damage caused.
  - The court said that other states should not recognise the occupied territories as part of Israel, and refrain from providing aid or assistance to Israel in maintaining this occupation.

# International Court of Justice (ICJ)



## About

- The ICJ is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations (UN).
- It was established in June 1945 by the Charter of the United Nations and began work in April 1946.
- The seat of the Court is at the **Peace Palace in The Hague** (Netherlands).
  - It is the only one of the six principal organs of the UN that is not located in New York City.
- **English and French** are the ICJ's official languages.

## Role

- to settle, in accordance with international law, legal disputes submitted to it by States and
- to give advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by authorized United Nations organs and specialized agencies.

## Judges

- The ICJ has 15 judges who are elected to nine-year terms by the UNGA and Security Council, which vote simultaneously but separately.
- The president and vice-president of the court are elected for three-year terms by secret ballot. **Judges are eligible for re-election.**

## Members and Jurisdiction

- All members of the UN are automatically parties to the ICJ statute. However, this does not automatically give the ICJ jurisdiction over disputes involving them.
  - The **ICJ gets jurisdiction only if both parties consent to it.**
- The judgment of the **ICJ is final and technically binding** on the parties to a case.
  - There is no provision of appeal. It can at the most, be subject to interpretation or, upon the discovery of a new fact, revision.
- The ICJ has no way to ensure compliance of its orders, and its authority is derived from the willingness of countries to abide by them.

## Meaning of occupation in international law

- The most widely accepted definition of occupation comes from Article 42 of the Hague Convention (IV) respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land and its annex, 1907.
- It states that a "territory is considered occupied when it is actually placed under the authority of the hostile army."
- An occupation must be temporary and cannot involve transferring sovereignty to the occupying power.
- Once a territory is seized, the occupying power has obligations towards the inhabitants, as outlined in the 1907 Hague regulations and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.
- These obligations include providing food and medical care to the population and prohibit transferring civilian populations and using or threatening force.

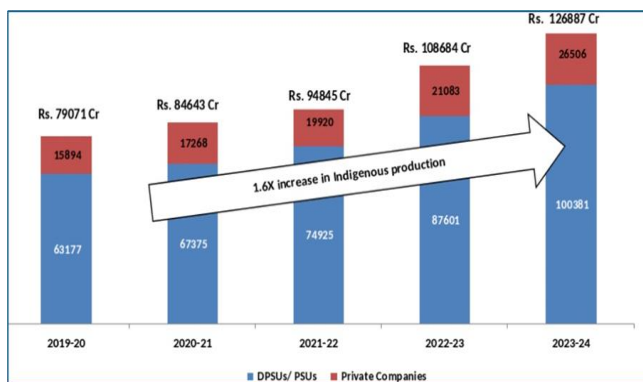


## Defence Production Hits Record High in 2023-24

- As per the Defence Ministry, India's indigenous defence production rose to a record high value of **Rs 1.27 lakh crore in 2023-24.**
- The 16.7% growth against the previous fiscal is attributed to government policies and self-reliance initiatives.

### Defence Manufacturing in FY 2023-24

- In the fiscal year 2023-24, Defense Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs) and other Public Sector Units (PSUs) contributed 79.2% of the total value of



production (VoP) in India's defense manufacturing sector, while the private sector accounted for 20.8%.

- Both public and private sectors have demonstrated steady growth in absolute terms.

### **Defence Export**

- India's defence exports have also seen remarkable growth, contributing to the overall increase in indigenous defence production.
- Defence exports reached a record high of Rs 21,083 crore in FY 2023-24, reflecting a 32.5 percent growth over the previous fiscal's Rs 15,920 crore.

### **Steps Taken By The Government To Increase Manufacturing In Defence**

- **Policy Reforms and Strategic Initiatives**
  - **Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP)**
    - The DPP has been revised to promote indigenous manufacturing and increase transparency and efficiency in the procurement process.
    - It includes a category called '**Buy (Indian-IDDm)**' which gives preference to products that are *designed, developed, and manufactured indigenously*.
  - **Defence Production and Export Promotion Policy (DPEPP) 2020**
    - This policy aims to achieve a turnover of ₹1.75 lakh crore in aerospace and defense goods and services by 2025, including exports of ₹35,000 crore.
  - **Strategic Partnership Model**
    - This model encourages collaboration between Indian private companies and foreign original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) to set up manufacturing facilities in India, fostering technology transfer and capability building.
  - **Negative import list/positive indigenisation list**
    - So far, five positive indigenisation lists have been released. The items mentioned on the lists cannot be imported by the Services and should be sourced from within the country.
  - **Defence Offset Policy**
    - The policy requires foreign defense companies to invest a part of their contract value in India, promoting technology transfer and local manufacturing.
- **Financial and Structural Support**
  - **Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)**
    - The FDI limit in the defense sector has been raised to 74% through the automatic route and up to 100% through government approval in cases involving access to modern technology or for other reasons to be recorded.
  - **Defence Corridors**
    - Two defense industrial corridors have been established in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu to create a conducive ecosystem for defense manufacturing.
    - These corridors aim to attract investments and generate employment.
  - **Budget 2023-24**
    - Government has earmarked 75 per cent of its defence capital budget for 2023-24 towards procurements from domestic sources
- **Infrastructure and Innovation**
  - **Innovation for Defence Excellence (iDEX)**

- iDEX is an initiative to foster innovation and technology development in defense and aerospace by engaging startups and MSMEs.
- It provides them with financial support and a platform to showcase their solutions.
- **Technology Development Fund (TDF)**
  - This fund supports the indigenous development of defense technology and products. It provides grants to MSMEs, startups, and academia for R&D projects.
- **Public-Private Partnership**
  - **Ordnance Factory Board (OFB) Corporatization**
    - The OFB has been restructured into seven new Defense Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs) to enhance autonomy, efficiency, and accountability.
  - **Increased Role of Private Sector**
    - The government has been actively encouraging private sector participation in defense manufacturing through measures like allowing private companies to bid for contracts previously reserved for DPSUs.



## Wayanad Landslide

Multiple landslides flattened some three villages in Vythiri taluk of the hilly Wayanad district of Kerala early on July 30, killing hundreds of people.

### Possible Reasons Behind Wayanad Landslide

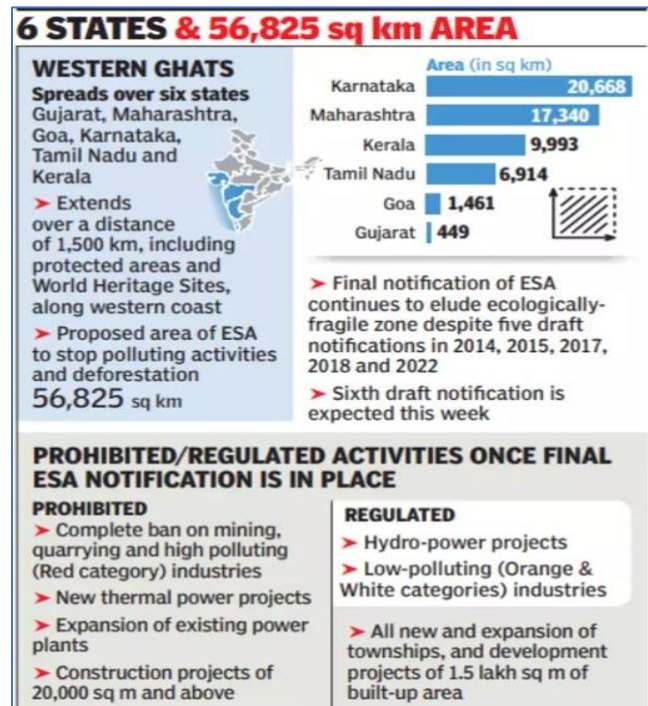
- **Heavy Rainfall:** Extremely heavy rainfall, a fragile ecology particularly vulnerable to landslides, and steadily increasing population pressures all combined to trigger multiple landslides.
  - The region received more than 140 mm of rainfall in the 24 hours between the mornings of Monday and Tuesday, about five times more than what is expected.
- **Hilly Terrain with Sharp Slopes:** According to the landslide atlas released by ISRO's National Remote Sensing Centre in 2023, 10 out of the 30 most landslide-prone districts in India were located in Kerala, with Wayanad ranked 13th.
  - The terrain here has **two distinctive layers**, a layer of soil sitting atop hard rocks.
  - When a lot of rain happens, the soil gets saturated with moisture and water reaches the rocks and flows between the soil and the rock layers.
  - This weakens the force that binds the soil to the rocks and triggers the movement.
- **Loss of Green Cover**
  - A 2021 study on landslide hotspots in India revealed that 59% of the total landslides in Kerala occurred in plantation areas.
  - Loss of forests increase the fragility of the terrain
- **Climate Change**
  - Climate scientists have pointed towards the warming of the Arabian Sea as one of the causes for the extremely heavy and unpredictable rain patterns in the state.



- The southeast Arabian Sea is becoming warmer, causing the atmosphere above this region, including Kerala, to become thermodynamically unstable.
- Scientists have noticed a trend of deep cloud systems forming due to the warming of the Arabian sea.

### ● Environmental Neglect And Mining

- Since 2011, the "**Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel**" set up by the government under ecologist Madhav Gadgil, has recommended that the Wayanad hill ranges be declared ecologically sensitive.
  - The panel recommended that 75% of the 129,037 sq km area of the mountain range be declared ecologically sensitive because of the presence of dense forests, a large number of endemic species and unique geology.
  - The panel also said that the region needed to be divided into zones based on their ecological sensitivity
- They recommended a ban on mining, quarrying, new thermal power plants, hydropower projects and large-scale wind energy projects in ecologically sensitive zone 1.
- The suggestions made by the panel have not been implemented even after 14 years due to resistance from state governments, industries and local communities.



### Landslides Prevention Measures

- **Banning/ regulating construction activities in ESZ:** For example, the Gadgil panel report of 2011 recommended that region of the Western Ghats, spanning 1,29,000 square km across six States, be declared an ESZ.
- **Upgrading institutional capacities and coordination:** For example, IMD must use new technologies for accurate weather predictions.
- **Engineering solutions:**
  - **Slope stabilisation:** It involves adding structural elements to the slope to increase its stability.
  - **Grading and terracing:** Modifying the slope's shape and gradient to reduce the risk of landslides.
  - **Soil reinforcement:** It involves adding materials to the slope to increase its strength and stability.
- **Natural solutions:**
  - **Vegetation control:** Planting trees, shrubs, or grasses can help stabilise the soil, absorb excess water, and reduce erosion.
  - **Mulching:** Mulch is a layer of organic or inorganic material applied to the soil surface. It helps retain moisture, prevent erosion, and stabilise the slope.
  - **Bioengineering techniques:** They combine the use of plants & engineering principles to stabilise slopes.
  - **Water management:** It slows down the flow of water, allowing it to infiltrate the soil gradually.
- **Early warning systems and monitoring for landslides:** They provide timely information and alerts.
- **Emergency preparedness for landslides:** Despite preventive measures, landslides can still occur. Being prepared and knowing how to respond during a landslide event is crucial for minimising the risks.

## Landslide Atlas of India

### • About

- Prepared by the National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC) of ISRO, it details landslide occurrences and damage assessments in landslide-prone areas of India.
- It covers 147 districts in 17 states & 2 UTs in the Himalayas and Western Ghats.
- The geospatial landslide inventory database includes approximately 80,000 landslides mapped from 1998 to 2022, categorized into three types: seasonal, event-based, and route-wise inventories.
  - The seasonal inventory documents landslides from the 2014 and 2017 rainy seasons.
  - The event-based inventory includes major events like the Kedarnath and Kerala disasters and the Sikkim earthquake.
  - The route-wise inventory covers landslides along significant tourist and pilgrimage routes.
- The mapping utilized high to very high-resolution satellite data, including IRS-1D, Resourcesat, Cartosat, Sentinel, Pleiades, and WorldView, as well as aerial images.

### • Key Findings

- Uttarakhand, Kerala, Jammu and Kashmir, Mizoram, Tripura, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh reported the highest number of landslides during 1998 – 2022.

- **Mizoram topped the list, recording 12,385 landslide events in the past 25 years**, of which 8,926 were recorded in 2017 alone.
- Mizoram is followed by Uttarakhand (11,219) and Kerala
- Likewise, 2,071 events of the total 2,132 landslides reported in Nagaland during this period occurred during the 2017 monsoon season.
- Manipur, too, showed a similar trend.

- Among all these states, an alarming situation is emerging from Uttarakhand and Kerala.

#### ▪ Uttarakhand

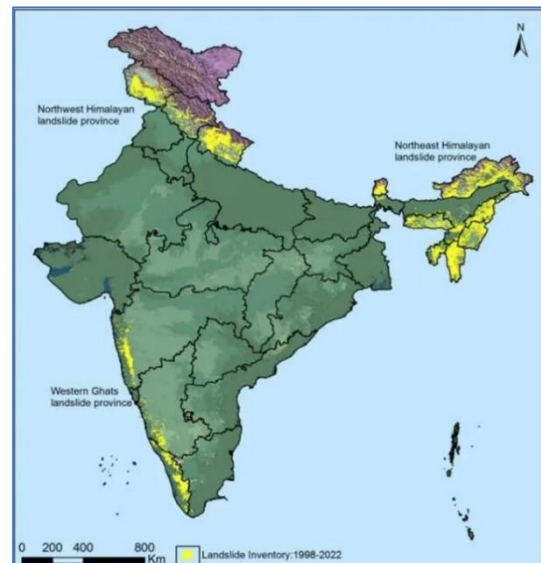
- Uttarakhand's fragility was recently exposed during the land subsidence events reported from Joshimath since January.
- The state has experienced the **second highest number (11,219) of landslides since 1998.**

#### ▪ Kerala

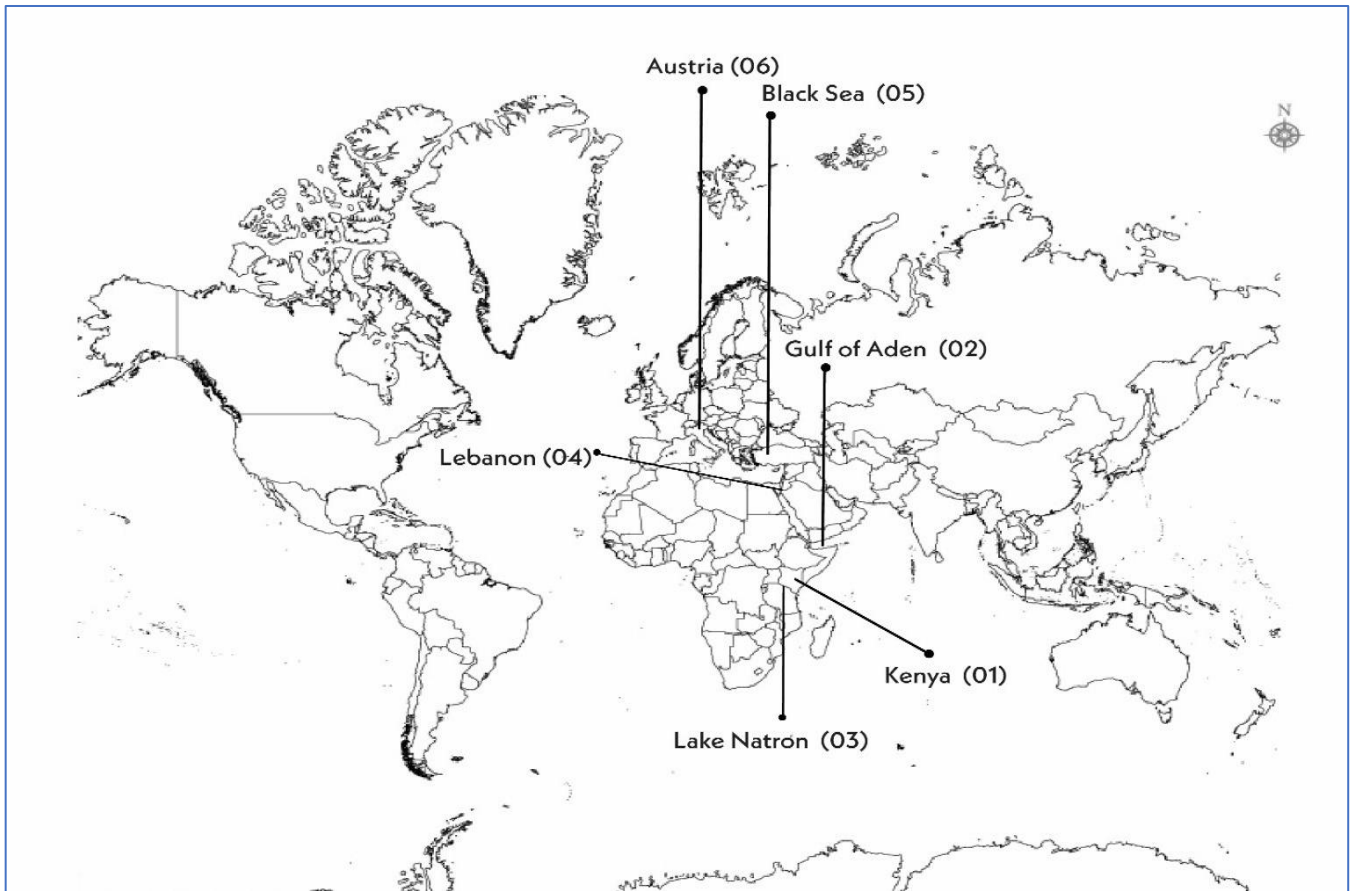
- Kerala has been consistently reporting massive landslides since it suffered the century's worst floods in 2018.
- The year-wise landslide events here are 2018 (5,191), 2019 (756), 2020 (9) and 2021 (29).

- **Most Vulnerable District**

- From the events and images obtained, the NRSC ranked **Rudraprayag** in Uttarakhand at the top of 147 vulnerable districts.
- It has the highest landslide density in the country, along with having the highest exposure to total population and number of houses.



## MAPS: PLACES IN NEWS

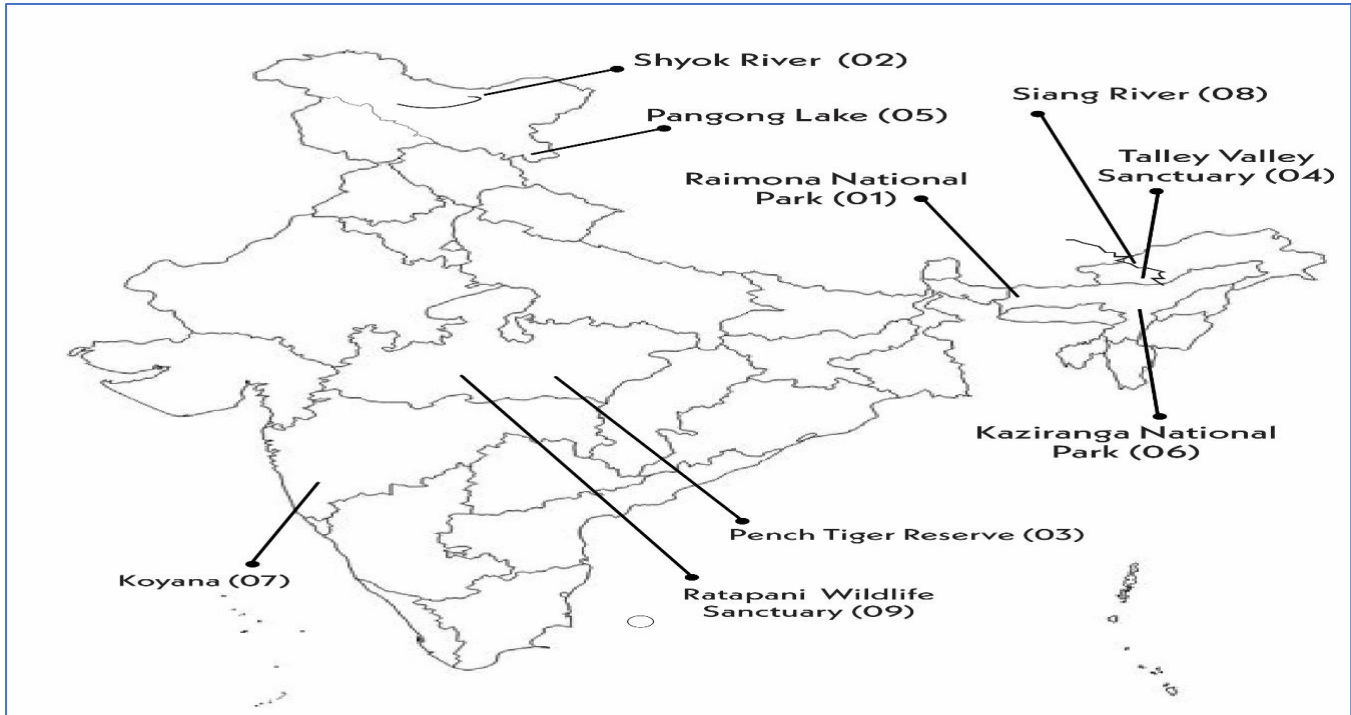


### International Places in News

<b>1</b>	<b>Kenya</b>	Kenya's Parliament had witnessed deadly protests. It lies on the equator and is bordered by Ethiopia to the north, Somalia to the east, Tanzania to the south, Uganda to the west, and Sudan to the northwest, with the Indian Ocean running along the southeast border. Its Capital is Nairobi, and is located in Eastern Africa.
<b>2</b>	<b>Gulf of Aden</b>	Houthi rebels targeted a ship in the Gulf of Aden. It is an extension of the Indian Ocean, situated between the Arabian Peninsula and the African continent. It connects the Red Sea to the Arabian Sea and ultimately to the Indian Ocean.
<b>3</b>	<b>Lake Natron</b>	Climate change impact is jeopardising delicate balance of Tanzania's Lake Natron. It is a salt or alkaline lake located in north Ngorongoro District of Arusha Region in Tanzania at the border with Kenya. It is in the Gregory Rift, which is the eastern branch of the East African Rift. The lake is within the Lake Natron Basin, a Ramsar Site wetland of international significance.
<b>4</b>	<b>Lebanon</b>	Israel has issued a strong warning against Lebanon. Lebanon is a small Middle-East-nation situated on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea in Western Asia. It shares land borders with two countries: Syria to the north and east, and Israel to the south.
<b>5</b>	<b>Black Sea</b>	Russia's Defence Ministry has ordered officials to prepare a response to U.S. drone flights over the Black Sea. It is also known as the Euxine Sea. It is one of the major water bodies and a famous inland sea of the world. This marginal sea of the Atlantic Ocean is located between Eastern Europe and Western Asia. It is surrounded by the Pontic, Caucasus, and Crimean Mountains in the south, east and north respectively.

6	<b>Austria</b>	Prime Minister of India paid an official visit to Austria. Austria borders eight countries: Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Italy, Switzerland and Lichtenstein. Its geographical position has long made it a crossroads for trade routes between the major European economic and cultural areas. Its Capital is Vienna and it is located in Central Europe.
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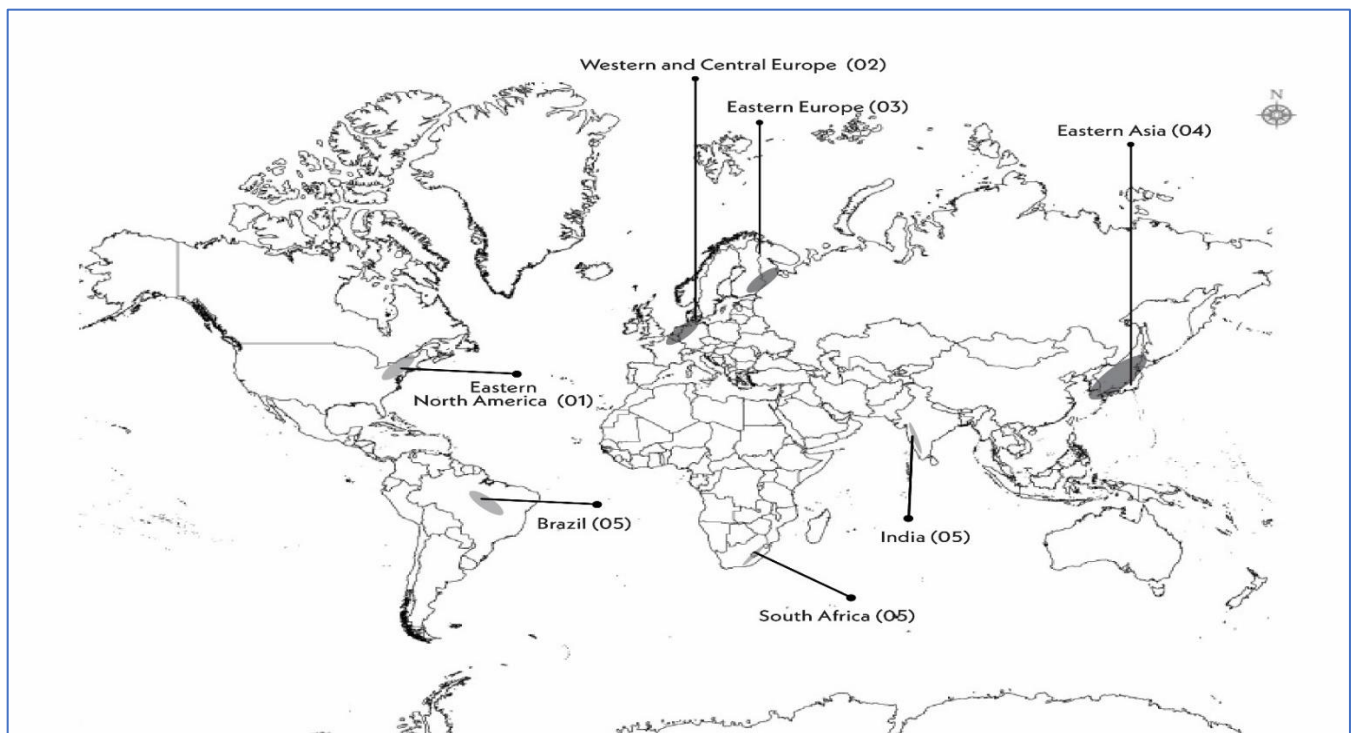
### National Places In News



1	<b>Raimona National Park</b>	The Mainland Serow, a vulnerable mammal species recognized by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), has been sighted in Assam's Raimona National Park. The park shares its northern border with Bhutan's Phibsoo Wildlife Sanctuary. The western part is marked by the Sankosh River, forming the inter-state boundary between West Bengal and Assam.
2	<b>Shyok River</b>	Indian army personnel died crossing the Shyok River at the Daulat Beg Oldie (DBO) area of eastern Ladakh. The River originates at the Rimo Glacier in the Karakoram Range in the Indian-administered union territory of Ladakh. It is a tributary of the Indus River.
3	<b>Pench Tiger Reserve</b>	The Pench Tiger Reserve recently launched an advanced Artificial Intelligence (AI) system for the early detection of forest fires. It is named after the Pench River. The reserve is located covering the two states of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. Teak, saag, mahua, and various grasses and shrubs thrive here. It is also India's first Dark Sky park.
4	<b>Talley Valley Sanctuary</b>	Zoological Survey of India recorded the forest-dwelling frog from the Talley Wildlife Sanctuary and named it as <i>Xenophrys apatani</i> . This Sanctuary is a protected area located in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. Notable species include the clouded leopard, Malayan giant squirrel, Indian muntjac, and Asian palm civet.

5	<b>Pangong Lake</b>	China's military presence near Pangong Lake in eastern Ladakh is escalating. Pangong Tso, also known as Pangong Lake, is a high-altitude lake situated in the Changthang region of eastern Ladakh. It spans both in India and China. Approximately 50% of the lake lies within Tibet (administered by China), while 40% is in Indian-administered Ladakh. The remaining 10% is a disputed buffer zone between India and China.
6	<b>Kaziranga National Park</b>	The recent floods in Assam's Kaziranga National Park have affected wildlife. It is located in the Golaghat, Karbi Anglong, and Nagaon districts of the state of Assam, India. It sits on the southern banks of the Brahmaputra River. This park hosts two-thirds of the world's Indian rhinoceroses and is recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
7	<b>Koyana</b>	India is undertaking a mission to drill a deep hole in the Koyna-Warna region of Maharashtra to study earthquakes and the earth's crust. This region has experienced frequent earthquakes since the Koyna Dam was impounded in 1962. It is located in Koyna Nagar, Satara district, in the Western Ghats.
8	<b>Siang River</b>	Locals are protesting against the proposed Upper Siang hydropower project in Arunachal Pradesh due to environmental and social concerns. The Tsangpo, which originates in China, is called the Siang after it enters India through the Upper Siang district in the north-eastern state. The Siang joins two other rivers the Lohit and the Dibang downstream to form the Brahmaputra.
9	<b>Ratapani Wildlife Sanctuary</b>	The Madhya Pradesh State Wildlife Board has accorded approval to declare Ratapani Wildlife Sanctuary, on the outskirts of Bhopal, as the eighth tiger reserve of MP. It is situated in the Vindhya ranges. The sanctuary features a diverse landscape with teak forests, hills, plateaus, valleys, and plains. It hosts over 150 species of birds, including the paradise flycatcher, which is the state bird of Madhya Pradesh.

### Major Industrial Regions Of The World



1	<b>Eastern North America</b>	It includes the Great Lakes region (Chicago, Detroit, Pittsburgh), the North-eastern states (New York, Boston), and the Southern states (Texas, Louisiana). It is known for iron and steel, automobile, chemical, and aerospace industries. It includes major cities such as New York, Chicago, and Toronto, which are centers of finance, technology, and manufacturing.
2	<b>Western and Central Europe</b>	It includes countries like Germany, France, UK, and Benelux. It is renowned for engineering, machinery, chemicals, and high-tech industries. Rhine Rhur is major region among them.
3	<b>Eastern Europe</b>	It includes countries like Russia, Ukraine, and Poland. They have a strong industrial base, particularly in heavy industries like steel, machinery, and mining. Katowice known as the "industrial heart" of Poland, with a focus on coal mining and heavy industry is one of the major Centre. Budapest the capital of Hungary with a diverse industrial base including pharmaceuticals, electronics, and machinery.
4	<b>Eastern Asia</b>	It includes countries like China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. It is Known for rapid industrialization, electronics, textiles, and shipbuilding. Among them Shanghai is a global financial and commercial hub, also a major manufacturing center. Nagoya is a key industrial center, specializing in automotive and machinery production.
5	<b>Other Notable Regions</b>	<p><b>Brazil:</b> Emerging industrial power with focus on agriculture, mining, and manufacturing.</p> <p><b>India:</b> Rapidly industrializing with strengths in IT, pharmaceuticals, and automobiles.</p> <p><b>South Africa:</b> Rich in mineral resources, with a focus on mining and related industries.</p>

## NCERT's New Report Card to Track Post School Plans, Life Skills

PARAKH, a standard-setting body under the NCERT, recently released a 'Holistic Progress Card' for secondary school students (Classes 9 to 12).

### About PARAKH

- National Assessment Centre- *PARAKH (Performance Assessment, Review and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development)* was set up in NCERT as an independent body in 2023.
- **Objective:** To fulfil the basic objectives of setting norms, standards, guidelines and implement activities related to student assessment along with other tasks as mandated by the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**.
- There are four major areas of focus for PARAKH:
  - **Capacity Development in Competency-Based Assessment: Project Vidyasagar –**
    - **PARAKH**, in partnership with the PhD Chamber of Commerce, is organizing workshops across India to familiarize educators with the new pedagogical and policy changes in the National Curriculum Framework 2023.
    - The goal is to bridge gaps in implementing competency-based learning and teaching.
  - **Large-Scale Achievement Survey:**
    - PARAKH conducted the State Educational Achievement Survey in November 2023, assessing students in Grades 3, 6, and 9 across 30 States/UTs.
    - The survey assess educational competencies in foundational literacy, numeracy, language, and mathematics.
  - **Equivalence of School Boards:**
    - PARAKH is working to standardize examination reforms across all Indian school boards.
    - Regional workshops were held to collect data on administration, curriculum, assessments, and infrastructure.
  - **Holistic Progress Cards**

### About Holistic Progress Cards

- The Holistic Progress Card, or HPC, will no longer depend on marks or grades to evaluate a student's academic performance. Instead, it will rely on a 360-degree evaluation.
- Under the HPC model, the **students will be regularly assessed through class activities where they are not just passive learners but active agents**.
  - The activities will prompt students to apply diverse skills and competencies that will demonstrate whether they have been able to grasp concepts.
- **Features**
  - The difficulty level they experience while performing a task will also be assessed.
  - Teachers will be able to register the strengths of a student, such as their ability to "collaborate", "follow instructions", show "creativity" or "empathy", etc.
  - Similarly, weaknesses like "lack of attention", "peer pressure", "lack of preparation" will help teachers identify areas where students need help.
  - The HPC allows students to evaluate their own and their classmates' performance with simple responses like 'Yes', 'No', or 'Do not know' to descriptive statements.

- Additionally, it connects home and school by incorporating parents' input on their child's homework abilities, classroom engagement, and balancing screen time with extracurricular activities.
- This approach makes parents an integral part of the child's learning process.

### NCERT's New Report Card to Track Post School Plans, Life Skills:

- As per the available information, the report card will not be used in the ongoing 2024-25 academic session. However, teachers and other officials will be trained on its implementation.
- States can take a call on whether to implement the HPC as released by the NCERT or adapt it to suit their needs.
- These report cards are expected to be factored in the results for those appearing for the Board exams in Classes 10 and 12.
- Some states, including **Jammu and Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Haryana** and **Himachal Pradesh**, have begun preparing to implement the HPCs for those up to class 8 from the 2024-25 academic session onwards.

### NITI Aayog's SDG Index

The government think tank NITI Aayog released its **fourth evaluation report** of India's progress on the 16 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in 2015 by all United Nations member countries.

#### About NITI Aayog's SDG Index

- Launched in **2018**, the index provides a comprehensive overview of the performance of states and UTs on various SDG indicators.
- **Comprehensive Framework:**
  - The index evaluates states and UTs based on **16 out of the 17 SDGs**, using 113 indicators derived from official national data sources.
- **Performance Categories:** States and UTs are classified into 4 categories based on their scores:

**Achiever (100)**

**Front Runner (65-99)**

**Performer (50-64)**

**Aspirant (0-49)**

- **Multi-Dimensional Approach:** The index covers a wide range of social, economic, and environmental parameters, ensuring a holistic assessment of development progress.
- **Promoting Competition and Collaboration:** By ranking states and UTs, the index fosters healthy competition, encouraging them to perform better. It also facilitates knowledge sharing and collaboration among states and UTs.
- **Data-Driven Decision Making:** The SDG Index is a crucial resource for policymakers, helping them to identify strengths and areas that need improvement.

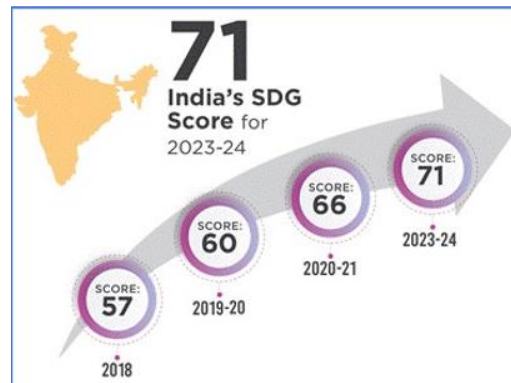
### SDG India Index 2023-24

- SDG India Index 2023-24 measures and tracks national progress of all States and UTs on 113 indicators aligned to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation's (MoSPI) National Indicator Framework (NIF).
- The SDG India Index computes goal-wise scores on the 16 SDGs for each State and UT.

#### Key Highlights from the 4th Edition of the SDG India Index:

- The composite score for India improved from 57 in 2018 to 66 in 2020-21 to further to 71 in 2023-24.
- Noteworthy advancements have been observed in **Goals 1 (No Poverty), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 13 (Climate Action)**.
- SDG India Index 2023-24 reports a positive trend in the performance of States and UTs in their SDG journey.

- The scores for States now range from 57 to 79, while UTs score between 65 and 77.
- This represents an improvement over the 2020-21 scores, where the range was 52 to 75 for States and 62 to 79 for UTs.



SUSTAINABILITY DEVELOPMENT SCORE		
States	2023-24 score	Improvement*
Uttarakhand	79	+7
Kerala	79	+4
Tamil Nadu	78	+4
Goa	77	+5
Himachal Pradesh	77	+3
Arunachal Pradesh	65	+5
Meghalaya	63	+3
Nagaland	63	+2
Jharkhand	62	+6
Bihar	57	+5
India	71	+5

Source: SDG India Index 2023-24 \*From 2020-21 scores

## Guidelines to Prevent Stereotyping and Discrimination of PwDs

The Supreme Court in a landmark ruling laid down comprehensive guidelines to prevent stereotyping and discrimination of persons with disabilities (PwDs) in visual media, including films and documentaries.

The SC issued guidelines while hearing a plea to ban the film *Aaankh Micholi* for derogatory portrayal of PwDs. However, the SC refused to interfere with CBFC's decision to clear movie for public screening.

### SC's Ruling Against the Insensitive Representation of PwDs

- The SC emphasised the **need for authentic and respectful representation** of individuals with disabilities in films and media.
- The bench highlighted the **importance of inclusivity and realism** in cinematic portrayals, underlining the societal impact of such representations.
- **The SC said that the creative freedom** of the filmmaker cannot include the freedom to lampoon, stereotype, misrepresent or disparage those already marginalised.
- The court recognised the **influential role of cinema in shaping public perceptions** and stressed that inaccurate or stereotypical portrayals can perpetuate harmful misconceptions.
- According to **Article 14** of the Indian Constitution, stereotyping is an antithesis of dignity and anti-discrimination rule.
- Therefore, there must be a clear distinction between '**disability humour**' which helps in understanding the disabled and '**disablement humour**' which denigrates it.

### Significance of the Ruling

- The ruling is a **crucial step towards changing the narrative around disability in India**.
- The ruling also aligns with the broader goals of the **Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act 2016**, which seeks to protect and promote the rights and dignity of PwDs in all spheres of life.
- The SC emphasised on the **human rights** model of disability rights, making the government and private parties obliged to facilitate full & effective participation of PwDs in society.
  - Models under which disability rights are looked at, are of two types - **medical and social models**.
  - **The human rights model** is an evolution of the social model and says that people with disability are a part of society and have the same rights as everyone else.

### Shortcomings of the Ruling

- The human rights model is an abstract idea and difficult to implement.
- The guidelines are limited to visual media.
- The judgement may go against the spirit of '**creative freedom**.'

## Way Forward - 7-Points Guidelines to Prevent Stereotyping and Discrimination of PwDs

The SC expects filmmakers to adhere to these 7-point guidelines while representing PwDs in the visual media. The 7-point guidelines are -

- To avoid words (like words crippled, etc) which lead to institutional discrimination and **negative self-image**.
- **To avoid language** which overlooks the social barriers.
- Creators must check for **adequate medical info** about an impairment like night blindness which may increase discrimination.
- **Such info should not be based on myths**. For example, stereotypes show that impaired persons have enhanced sensory superpowers.
- Creators must practice the principle of “**nothing about us, without us,**” and involve PwDs in the creation and assessment of visual media content.
- As per the convention to protect rights of PwDs, PwDs must be portrayed in the visual media after consultation with their **rights advocacy groups**.
- There must be **training and sensitisation programmes** for creators.

## ICAR to Launch ‘One Scientist, One Product’ Scheme

The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) launched its ‘One Scientist-One Product’ programme on July 16 to improve research in the field of agriculture and animal husbandry.

### About One Scientist One Product Program

- As per ICAR Director-General, **each of ICAR's 5,521 scientists will be tasked with developing a product, technology, model, concept, or notable publication**.
- Scientists will identify their project at the start of each year, with progress monitored quarterly at the institute level and biannually at the headquarters.
- This **program will run for five years**, with an initial focus on high-yielding oilseeds and pulses.

### ICAR's Aim to Develop High-yielding Seeds:

- **ICAR aims to develop 100 new seed varieties and 100 farm technologies within 100 days as part of the Centre's action plan**.
- In a recent update, ICAR noted that breeder seeds have helped cultivate about 16 million hectares (Mha) with bio-fortified crops like wheat, rice, pearl millet, lentil, and mustard in 2023-24.
- Since 2014-15, ICAR has released 2,593 high-yielding varieties, including 2,177 climate-resilient and 150 bio-fortified varieties. This effort has boosted production even during challenging years.

## Govt's U-Win Portal To Redraw Immunisation Map

U-Win, a digital platform set to launch on August 15, aims to transform maternal and child healthcare across India. By digitizing vaccination records, it will replace the current manual system used by ASHA and other healthcare workers, streamlining record-keeping and marking a significant shift in primary healthcare delivery.

### Universal Immunization Programme (UIP)

- **About**
  - UIP is one of the largest public health programmes targeting close of 2.67 crore newborns and 2.9 crore pregnant women annually.
  - It is one of the most cost-effective public health interventions and largely responsible for reduction of vaccine preventable under-5 mortality rate.

- A child is said to be fully immunized if child receives all due vaccine as per national immunization schedule within 1st year age of child.
- **Vaccines covered**
  - Under UIP, immunization is providing free of cost against 12 vaccine preventable diseases:
    - Nationally against 9 diseases - Diphtheria, Pertussis, Tetanus, Polio, Measles, Rubella, severe form of Childhood Tuberculosis, Hepatitis B and Meningitis & Pneumonia caused by Hemophilus Influenza type B.
    - Sub-nationally against 3 diseases - Rotavirus diarrhoea, Pneumococcal Pneumonia and Japanese Encephalitis.
- **2 major milestones of UIP:** elimination of polio in 2014 and maternal & neonatal tetanus elimination in 2015.

## U-Win


### ● About

- The U-WIN portal is a replication of the Covid-19 vaccine management system Co-WIN.
- It aims to maintain an electronic registry of routine immunizations.
  - Currently, U-WIN is in pilot mode across all states and UTs except for West Bengal.
- It captures every vaccination event for pregnant women and children(0-5 years) under the Universal Immunization Programme (UIP).

### ● Features

- The platform generates a uniform QR-based, **digitally verifiable e-vaccination certificate**, similar to Covid vaccination certificate.
  - This can be accessed anytime by the citizens through a single click.
- It will update vaccination status, and delivery outcome, among others, in real time.
- Citizens can self-register for vaccinations via the U-WIN web portal or its Android mobile application, select preferred vaccination centres, and schedule appointments.
- Automated SMS alerts inform citizens about registration confirmations, administered doses, and upcoming dose reminders, ensuring timely and age-appropriate vaccinations.
- It also facilitates the creation of Ayushman Bharat Health Account (ABHA) IDs for comprehensive health record maintenance.

**HOW DOES U-WIN WORK**



- Children between 0-5 years will be registered on U-Win. Vaccines given at birth are also recorded.
- A list of children, who are scheduled to receive their vaccine doses, is generated through U-Win.
- The e-record helps children get vaccinated in different places without carrying a booklet. The portal sends SMS alerts to parents.
- The portal also records birth weight and details of physical deformities, if any. This can be used for other government programmes.

### ● Benefits

- This real-time registration of children and the digital vaccination record on U-Win will help in reducing the number of “zero-dose” children (those who do not receive their first doses of vaccines for diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus).
- This will be beneficial for migrant workers
- Besides details of children and pregnant women who are due for vaccinations, the U-Win portal will have a record of health centres and community health workers.

## Status of Childhood Immunization In India

- As per the recently released WHO and UNICEF Estimates of national immunisation coverage (WUENIC), there was a slight dip in childhood immunisation in 2023 compared to 2022.

- There was a two-percentage point dip (from 95% in 2022 to 93% in 2023) in the coverage of the diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus (DPT) vaccine. The 2023 global average was 89%.
  - Coverage of the DPT vaccine is used as a proxy for the number of zero-dose children — those who have not received any routine immunisation.
- WUENIC shows that there were 1.6 million zero-dose children in India in 2023, up from 1.1 million in 2022.
- The data also show that the coverage of the **third dose of the DPT vaccine** — used as a proxy for under-vaccination — stood at 91% in 2023, a two-percentage point dip from the previous year, but much higher than the 2023 global average of 84%.
  - In absolute terms, 2.04 million children remained under-vaccinated in 2023, slightly lower than the 2.11 million children in 2019.

## Gender Gap Report

The World Economic Forum (WEF) report of 2024 on global gender gaps ranked India at **129 out of 146 economies**. This represents a drop from the previous year, where India had a perfect score in educational parity.

The **global** gender gap score in 2024 is **68.5%**, meaning 31.5% of the gap remains unaddressed. Progress has been extremely slow, with only a 0.1% point improvement from 2023.

### Global Gender Gap Report

- The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report is an annual publication that **evaluates the progress towards gender equality worldwide**.
- Established in 2006, this report offers a comprehensive analysis of gender-based disparities across 4 key areas:
  - **Economic Participation and Opportunity**
  - **Educational Attainment**
  - **Health and Survival**: This area examines life expectancy and sex ratio at birth.
  - **Political Empowerment**

### Global Gender Gap 2024 Report

Within South Asia, India ranked 5<sup>th</sup> after Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka & Bhutan. Pakistan ranked last in the region.

- **Key Findings and Statistics w.r.t Education Attainment:**
  - **Enrolment and Literacy Rates:**
    - Despite high enrolment rates for women in primary, secondary, and tertiary education, the literacy rate gap between men and women stands at 17.2 percentage points.
    - The latest figures show that girls constitute 48% of the school population, with a slight decline in secondary education but a higher retention rate at the higher secondary level.
  - **Higher Education:**
    - The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for women in higher education is 28.5%, slightly above the male GER of 28.3%.
    - Female enrolment has increased by 32% since 2014-15.
- **Influencing Factors:**
  - **Infrastructure Development:**
    - Building more schools, especially since the mid-90s, has significantly boosted girls' enrolment.
    - However, regional disparities persist, with some states lagging in secondary education infrastructure.

- **Female Teachers:**
  - The presence of women teachers positively impacts girls' enrolment.
  - Schools with only male teachers face lower enrolment of girls due to parental concerns.
- **Transportation and Sanitation:**
  - Free transport and the provision of cycles have helped increase enrolment.
  - However, inadequate sanitation facilities, particularly for menstruating girls, remain a major barrier.
- **Future Challenges:**
  - **Higher Secondary and College Education:**
    - While some states report higher enrolment of girls in higher secondary education, concerns are rising about boys dropping out.
  - **STEM Education:**
    - Women make up only 42.5% of students in STEM fields, highlighting the need for targeted encouragement.
  - **Adult Literacy:**
    - The 2011 Census data reveals a significant gender gap in adult literacy, with only 64.63% of women being literate compared to 80.88% of men.
- **Recommendations:**
  - **Improving School Infrastructure:** Continued investment in building and maintaining school facilities, especially in rural areas.
  - **Increasing Female Teacher Presence**
  - **Enhanced Sanitation Facilities**
  - **Focus on Foundational Literacy:** Strengthening foundational literacy programs and extending education to rural women to bridge the adult literacy gap.

### Govt Considers Rs 50,000 Crore Scheme for Agricultural Reforms

The Central Government is considering a new scheme with an outlay of Rs 50,000 crore to incentivize states to adopt agricultural reforms.

### Problems Faced by the Agriculture Sector in India

#### Pre harvest

- **Access to Credit & Finance:**
  - Small farmers struggle to get affordable loans, limiting their ability to buy modern equipment, quality seeds, and fertilizers, which affects their productivity.
- **Small Landholdings:**
  - **Many farmers have small, fragmented plots, making it hard to use modern farming techniques and reducing productivity.**
- **Outdated Farming Practices:**
  - Many farmers still use traditional methods due to limited information and resistance to change, hindering the adoption of available advanced techniques.
  - Farmers also have limited access to modern technologies and research, hindering the adoption of innovative practices. They need better knowledge, training, and affordable technology solutions.

- **Water Scarcity & Irrigation:**
  - Dependence on monsoon rains makes agriculture vulnerable to droughts and inconsistent rainfall.
  - Access to irrigation and water management is crucial, especially in areas with limited water resources.
- **Soil Degradation & Erosion:**
  - Use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, along with poor land use practices, degrades soil quality, leading to reduced fertility and productivity.

### Post harvest

- **Inadequate Agricultural Infrastructure:**
  - Lack of storage, cold chain facilities, good rural roads, and market access leads to post-harvest losses and higher production costs, limiting farmers' ability to get fair prices.
- **Market Volatility & Price Fluctuations:**
  - Farmers face unstable prices due to weak market links and lack of price information, making them **vulnerable to exploitation and uncertain returns.**
- **Climate Change & Natural Disasters:**
  - Unpredictable weather, climate change, and natural disasters like floods and droughts cause crop losses and increased risks for farmers.

### Policy Related

- **Lack of Farmers' Empowerment:**
  - Farmers often lack a voice in policy-making, leading to initiatives that may not address their specific challenges effectively.

### About NITI Aayog's Proposal

- **Proposal by NITI Aayog: Background**
  - Nearly three years after repealing its three farm laws in November 2021, the Union government is planning a new scheme with a budget of Rs 50,000 crore to encourage states to adopt agricultural reforms.
  - This initiative will provide **central funding for states to implement reforms in agriculture marketing, contract farming, and land leasing.**
  - The idea for this scheme was presented by NITI Aayog officials to the Prime Minister's Office.
  - The presentation, titled "**India's Amrit Kaal: Mobilising the nation to sustain fast growth,**" covered various economic sectors.
- **Various reform measures under consideration**
  - Other reforms under consideration include passing the long-pending Seed Bill and increasing public investment in agriculture to 5% of Agriculture GVA (Gross Value Addition).
    - This proposal revisits an idea suggested by the 15<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission in its 2020-21 report, which **recommended performance-based incentives for states implementing agricultural reforms.**
  - States could receive financial rewards if they adopted the Model Agricultural Produce and Livestock Marketing Act (2017), the Model Agricultural Produce and Livestock Contract Farming Act (2018), and the Model Agricultural Land Leasing Act (2016).
  - The 15<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission believed these reforms were essential to liberalize agricultural markets, promote competition, and attract private sector investment.
  - However, after the central government passed the three farm laws in 2020, the Commission revised its recommendations.

- Finance Commission's 2021-26 report emphasized **4 key areas for performance-based incentives**:
  - Land lease reforms,
  - Sustainable water use in agriculture,
  - Export promotion, and
  - Contributing to Atmanirbhar Bharat.
- It had proposed Rs 45,000 crore for states undertaking agricultural reforms during this period.

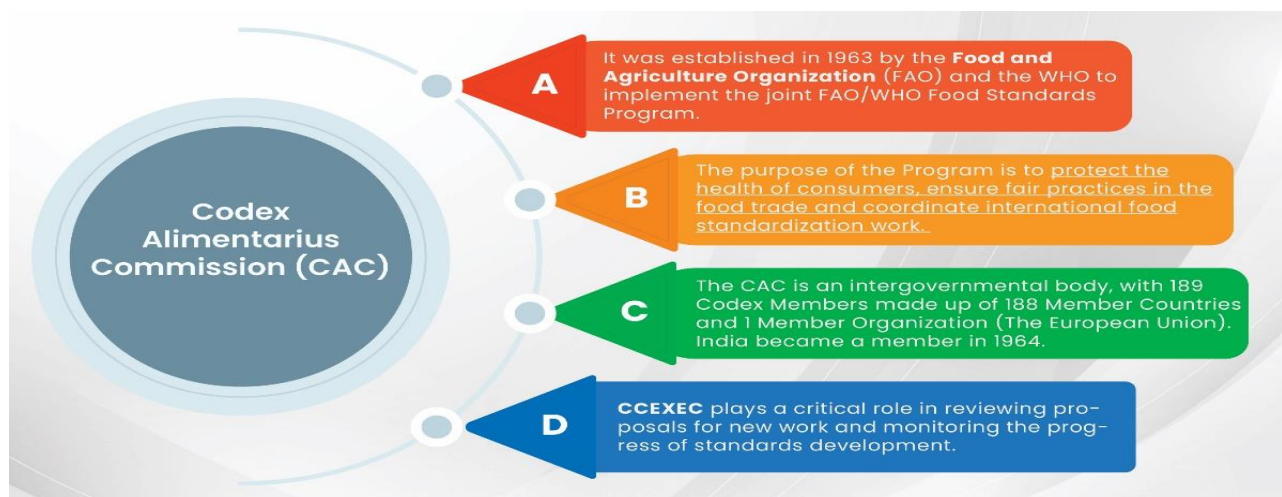
## ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

### Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC)

- India recently participated in the 86th session of the Executive Committee (CCEXEC) of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) in Rome.
- India strongly supported the advancement of standards development for various spices, including small cardamom, turmeric, and vanilla.
- This is particularly significant for India, as India is a major producer and exporter of these spices, and it would facilitate smoother international trade.
- India, also proposed for developing Codex guidance on *food safety considerations related to the use of recycled materials* in food packaging.
- This initiative is crucial in addressing global challenges such as climate change, environmental protection, and sustainability.

### Codex Standards

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



### Significance of Codex Standards

- These aim at protecting consumers' health and ensuring fair practices in the food trade.
- Thus, the standards help to enhance trust among consumers & importers regarding the safety and quality of the food products they buy.

### Digital Bharat Nidhi

- The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has released draft rules to operationalise the Digital Bharat Nidhi (DBN).

- DBN would replace the **Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF)**, which is a pool of funds generated by a 5 per cent Universal Service Levy charged upon all the telecom fund operators on their **Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR)**.
- This money would be used to **fund the expansion of telecom networks in remote and rural areas**, where private companies may otherwise resist offering their services due to low revenue-generation from such markets.
- The DBN shall also fund schemes and projects for providing targeted access to telecommunication services for underserved groups of society such as women, persons with disabilities and economically and socially weaker sections.

### Functioning of Digital Bharat Nidhi

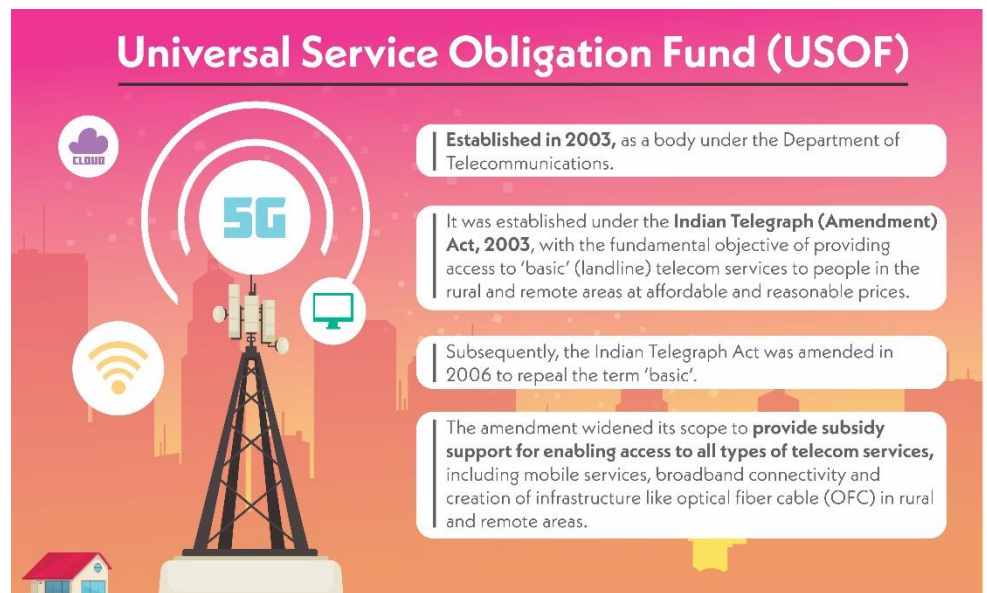
- As per the Telecom Act, contributions made by telecom companies towards the DBN will first be **credited to the Consolidated Fund of India (CFI)**.
- Funds collected under the DBN will be used to:
  - Support universal service through promoting access to and delivery of telecommunication services in underserved rural, remote and urban areas;
  - Fund R&D of telecommunication services, technologies, and products;
  - Support pilot projects, consultancy assistance and advisory support for improving connectivity; and
  - Encourage start-ups in the telecommunications sector including the manufacturing of telecom equipment.

### Administration

- The Centre will appoint an “administrator” who will select “DBN implementers” through bidding or invitation of applications from eligible persons.
- This administrator will determine the modalities of providing funding to DBN implementers on a case-by-case basis, including but not limited to full funding, partial funding, co-funding, market risk mitigation, and risk capital.

### Under-utilisation of USOF

- Since its establishment, a common criticism of the USOF has been its relative underutilisation.
- Between 2017 and 2022, the government had collected Rs 41,740 crore as part of contributions made by telcos towards the USOF, of which it had **utilised Rs 30,213 crore – about 72%**
- Most notably, in 2019-20, the collection was Rs 7,962 crore, of which the utilised amount was just Rs 2,926 crore.
- In the period specified, the government did not achieve complete utilisation even once.



- In fact, in FY23, the government revised the expenditure estimates from the USO fund to Rs 3,010 crore, which is 200% less than the budgetary estimate of Rs 9,000 crore.
- A key reason for the weak spending from the USOF can be attributed to the underspending of funds allocated for the BharatNet project for fibre connectivity to villages.

### Primary Agriculture Credit Societies

- The Union government has set a target to establish **multipurpose primary agricultural credit societies (PACS) in 200,000 panchayats** that have no cooperative institution in the next five years.
- The Centre will also ensure that each district in the country will have a co-operative bank and a milk producers' union.
- The cooperative sector is contributing 20% in the distribution of agricultural loans, 35% in the distribution of fertilisers and 21% in production, 31% in sugar production, 13% in the purchase of wheat and 20% in the purchase of paddy.

## PACS


- PACS are basically **credit societies** that are registered under the **Cooperative Societies Act of the State** concerned.
- They are the smallest unit in the cooperative sector and constitute the **lowest tier of the three-tier short-term cooperative credit (STCC)** in the country comprising of ~13 crore farmers as its members. A village can have multiple PACS.
- The **other two tiers** are - State Cooperative Banks (StCBs) and District Central Cooperative Banks (DCCBs).
  - Credit from the StCBs is transferred to the DCCBs, that operate at the district level. The DCCBs work with PACS, which deal directly with farmers.
- They are distinguished by their nature, as they are **grassroots-level institutions in villages** with **individual farmers, artisans, and other weaker sections** as member shareholders. Even office bearers are elected from within them.
- PACS account for 41% (3.01 crore farmers) of the kisan credit card (KCC) loans given by all entities in the country and 95% of these KCC loans (2.95 crore farmers) through PACS are to the small and marginal farmers.

### Functions of PACS

The main function is to **provide short and medium-term loans** to its members. They are expected to mobilize deposits from its members and use the same together with borrowings from higher tiers for providing loans to needy members.

They also **provide input services**, like seed, fertilizer, pesticide distribution, etc. to member farmers.

They also help the members by **providing storage and marketing facilities** that could enhance the sale of their agricultural products in the market at proper prices.



Significance	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their attraction lies in the <b>last mile connectivity &amp; timely access to capital</b> for the farmers. PACS have the capacity to <u>extend credit with minimal paperwork within a short time.</u></li> <li>• With other scheduled commercial banks (SCBs), farmers have often complained of <b>tedious paperwork and red tape.</b> In case of SCBs, farmers have to individually meet the requirement and often have to take the help of agents to get their loans sanctioned.</li> <li>• In case of PACS, most of the paperwork is done by the office-bearer of the PACS.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Shortage of trained workers and inefficient management.</u></li> <li>• Often, <b>political influence overrides financial discipline</b> which leads to corruption, and misallocation of resources. This hurts the recovery of loans creating a burden of <b>Non-Performing Assets (NPAs).</b></li> <li>• <b>Lack of financial and technological literacy</b> among its members</li> </ul>

## Rise in LNG Imports

- India imported 2.60 million tonnes (mt) of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) in June 2024, the **highest in as many as 44 months**. In June 2023, LNG volumes delivered to India stood at 1.77 mt.
- As per data from the Central Electricity Authority (CEA), power generation from gas-based units in June was 4.60 billion units (1 unit is 1 kilowatt hour), nearly 52% higher than 3.03 billion units in the corresponding month of last year.
  - At almost 25 gigawatts, India's gas-based power generation capacity accounts for 5.6 per cent of the country's overall installed generation capacity.
- Reasonable prices and ample availability of LNG, in the international spot market and the government's push on raising power production to meet high summer demand led to higher-than-usual electricity generation by gas-based units, thereby pushing LNG purchases higher.
- For the April-June quarter (Q1)—the peak summer quarter in most parts of India—power generation by gas-based plants jumped 62.5% year-on-year to 13.49 billion units.
- The overall **plant load factor (PLF)**—capacity utilisation of power generation units—for gas-based power plants in June this year was 25.8%, up from 17% in June 2023.
- In June 2023, over 53% of natural gas consumed by gas-based power plants was imported LNG.
- In April 2024—the last month for which detailed fuel consumption data for gas-based units is available—imported LNG accounted for nearly 56% of the total natural gas consumed by power plants.
- Domestic natural gas production is able to meet just around half of India's total gas consumption.
  - Thus, the cheaper local gas is allocated as per a priority list in which city gas distribution and fertiliser sectors have a higher priority than the power sector.

- As imported LNG is usually costlier than domestic gas, gas-based power plants have been operating at very low capacity use levels mainly due to unfavourable economics.
- Going forward, however, LNG imports to India are expected to be lower *than volumes seen in June* due to relatively higher spot prices of the fuel as well as expectations that power demand in the country will cool off slightly in the main monsoon months.

### Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG)

- ➔ **Odourless, colourless, non-toxic and non-corrosive**, LNG is natural gas that has been cooled to a liquid state, at about **-162°C (-260° Fahrenheit)**, for shipping and storage.
- ➔ The volume of natural gas in its liquid state is about **600 times smaller than its volume in its gaseous state**. In its liquid state, LNG does not ignite.
- ➔ This process makes it possible to transport natural gas in special tankers to places pipelines do not reach.
- ➔ At these terminals, the LNG is returned to its gaseous state and transported by pipeline to distribution companies, industrial consumers, and power plants.

### Cleaner fuel

- ➔ LNG is typically **85-95% methane**, which contains less carbon than other forms of fossil fuels. It also contains low amounts of ethane, propane, butane, carbon dioxide and nitrogen.
- ➔ LNG produces **40% less carbon dioxide than coal and 30% less than oil**.
- ➔ It emits significantly less soot, dust or particulates compared to coal/oil and produces insignificant amounts of sulphur dioxide, mercury and other compounds considered harmful to the earth's atmosphere.

## District Mineral Foundation

Ministry of Mines inaugurated the District Mineral Foundation (DMF) gallery in New Delhi.

- It showcases the products of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) formed under *Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana (PMKKKY)* and SHGs supported by mining companies under their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).
- DMFs are **non-profit trusts** that were formed under the **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) (MMDR) Amendment Act 2015**.
- Its objective is to work in the interest and benefits of persons and areas affected by mining-related operations, as prescribed by the State Government.
- The operation of DMFs falls under the **jurisdiction of the relevant State Government**.
- DMFs are funded through the contributions from miners. The fund for DMF is collected at the district level

**Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana (PMKKKY)** works for the welfare of people and areas affected by mining related operations with the help of the funds generated by DMFs.

### Objectives

- To execute different developmental and welfare projects/programs in areas affected by mining in a way that the projects/programs supplement the existing ongoing schemes/projects of State and Central Government.
- To reduce and control the unfavourable effects and consequences (during and after mining) on the environment, health and socioeconomics of people in mining areas.
- To secure long-term continuous source of income for the population affected in mining areas.

### Implementation

- It is **implemented by the DMFs of the respective districts** using the funds from DMF.
- 60% of the PMKKKY funds are to be utilised for high priority areas like drinking water supply, environment preservation, healthcare, education, welfare of women, children, aged and disabled people, skill development and sanitation.
- 40% of the PMKKKY funds are utilised for other priority areas like physical infrastructure, irrigation, energy and watershed development.

## Rise in Certificates of Deposit

- According to Clearing Corporation of India, commercial banks mobilised Rs 1.45 trillion through certificates of deposit (CDs) in June 2024, to strengthen their balance sheets ahead of the quarter-end.
- In the first quarter of the current financial year (FY 2024-25), banks raised Rs 2.6 trillion through CDs, compared to Rs 1.6 trillion in the first quarter of the previous FY (2023-24).
- The persistent **gap between credit and deposit growth rates**, has led the bank boards to rethink their business strategies. Since retail deposits in banks are stagnant, it has prompted banks to turn to bulk deposits and CD issuances for funds.



**Certificates of Deposit**

- A CD is a *fixed-income* financial instrument governed under the RBI issued in a dematerialized form.
- It pays a fixed interest rate on money held for an agreed upon period of time. Also, they are **fully taxable** under the Income Tax Act.
- A CD can be issued by **any All-India Financial Institution or Scheduled Commercial Bank (SCB)**.
  - Cooperative Banks & Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) are not eligible for issuing CD.
- There is a term period of 3 months to 1 year for CDs that are issued by SCBs, whereas the term period ranges from 1 year to 3 years for CDs issued by financial institutions.
- CDs can be issued for a **minimum deposit of Rs. 1 lakh** or in subsequent multiples of it.

### Clearing Corporation of India (CCIL)

- CCIL was established in 2001 to provide guaranteed clearing and settlement functions related to transactions in G-Secs, derivative markets and foreign exchange.
- It led to substantial advances in transparency, market efficiency, liquidity and risk management practices in these markets, along with savings with respect to settlement costs.

### FI-Index

- The Financial Inclusion Index (FI-Index), which captures the extent of financial inclusion across the country, stood at 64.2 in March 2024 from 60.1 in March 2023. The FI-Index is published annually in July every year.
- The improvement in the index was due to growth witnessed across all sub-indices.
- The index has been conceptualised by RBI as a comprehensive index incorporating details of banking, investments, insurance, postal as well as the pension sector in consultation with government and respective sectoral regulators.
- The index captures information on various aspects of financial inclusion in a single value ranging **between 0 and 100**, where **0 represents complete financial exclusion** and **100 indicates full financial inclusion**.
- The index comprises of **three broad parameters: Access (weight 35%), Usage (45%), and Quality (20%)** with each of these consisting of various dimensions, which are computed based on **97 indicators**.
- A unique feature of the index is the **Quality parameter** which captures the quality aspect of financial inclusion as reflected by financial literacy, consumer protection and inequalities and deficiencies in services.
- It has been constructed **without any base year** and thus reflects cumulative efforts of all stakeholders over the years towards financial inclusion.

### Araku Coffee

Prime Minister praised the flavour and significance of Araku coffee from Andhra Pradesh.

- The coffee takes its name from Araku Valley. The weather of the Araku Valley – with its hot days and cold nights along with the iron-rich soil allows the coffee to ripen slowly giving it its aromatic richness and taste.
- Araku Valley Arabica coffee is sourced from the **hilly terrains of Visakhapatnam district in Andhra Pradesh, and the Odisha region**. It is grown at elevations of 900-1100 metres above sea level.
- The coffee production by tribal communities **follows an organic approach**, emphasising practices such as the use of organic manures, green manuring, and organic pest management.
- Araku coffee received its **Geographical Indication (GI) tag in 2019**, which signifies products originating from a specific geographical area known for their unique qualities.

#### Indian coffees with GI tag

##### Coorg Arabica Coffee:

Grown exclusively in Kodagu district, Karnataka

##### Wayanad Robusta Coffee:

Cultivated in Wayanad district, Kerala.

##### Chikmagalur Arabica Coffee:

Produced in Chikmagalur district, Karnataka.

##### Bababudangiris Arabica Coffee:

Grown in Chikmagalur district Karnataka.

##### Monsooned Malabar Robusta Coffee:

A distinctive specialty from Kerala, renowned for its unique taste.

### GAINS 2024

- The *GRSE Accelerated Innovation Nurturing Scheme (GAINS 2024)* of Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers Limited (GRSE) was recently launched.
- The innovative scheme seeks solution to the problems related to the shipyards and promotes technology development using the country's MSMEs & Startups.

- The aim is to leverage the vast eco-system of MSMEs and Startups to address present and emerging challenges in the **ship design & construction** industry, while achieving the objectives of Atmanirbharta (self-reliance).
- It will enhance the strength of the country's armed forces and maritime security.
- The initiative is aligned with the Make in India and Start-up India policies.

### Public Sector Banks Raise MCLR

- Public Sector lenders, including SBI and Bank of Baroda have increased their marginal cost of funds based lending rates (MCLR).
- The move is likely to be followed by other lenders also, resulting in an increase in borrowers equated monthly instalments (EMIs).
- The hike in MCLR is between 5 to 10 basis points (bps) depending on the tenor of the loan. A basis point is one hundredth of one percentage point.

### MCLR

- In April 2016, RBI made MCLR as the benchmark rate for lending. It replaced the base rate system introduced in July 2010.
- MCLR is the **minimum interest rate** below which banks and non-banking finance companies (NBFCs) cannot lend. It is **an internal benchmark** (means a reference rate determined internally by the bank).
- Under the MCLR regime, banks decide on the interest rate at which they will offer to borrowers on the basis of the marginal cost at which they get funds, and by borrowing from RBI.
- MCLR is **based on four components**:



- MCLR is linked to the *actual deposit rates*. Hence, when deposit rates rise, it indicates the banks are likely to increase MCLR and lending rates will increase, and vice-versa.
- MCLR is applicable to fresh corporate loans and floating rate loans taken before October 2019.

#### Issues Related to Internal Benchmark Lending Rate (IBLR) Linked Loans:

- The problem with this regime was that when RBI cut the repo and reverse repo rates, banks did not pass the full benefits to borrowers.
- In the IBLR Linked Loans, the interest rate has many variables including *bank's spread, their current financial overview, deposits & NPAs etc.* Such internal benchmarks did little to facilitate any swift change in interest rates as per changes in RBI repo rate policy.

### EBLR

- From October 2019, the RBI introduced **external benchmark based lending rate (EBLR), which is linked to the repo rate**. All retail loans and floating rate loans to MSMEs are now linked to EBLR.
- The RBI has increased the repo rate by 250 bps since May 2022. In response to the cumulative 250 bps hike in the repo rate since May 2022, banks have revised their EBLRs upward by the same magnitude.

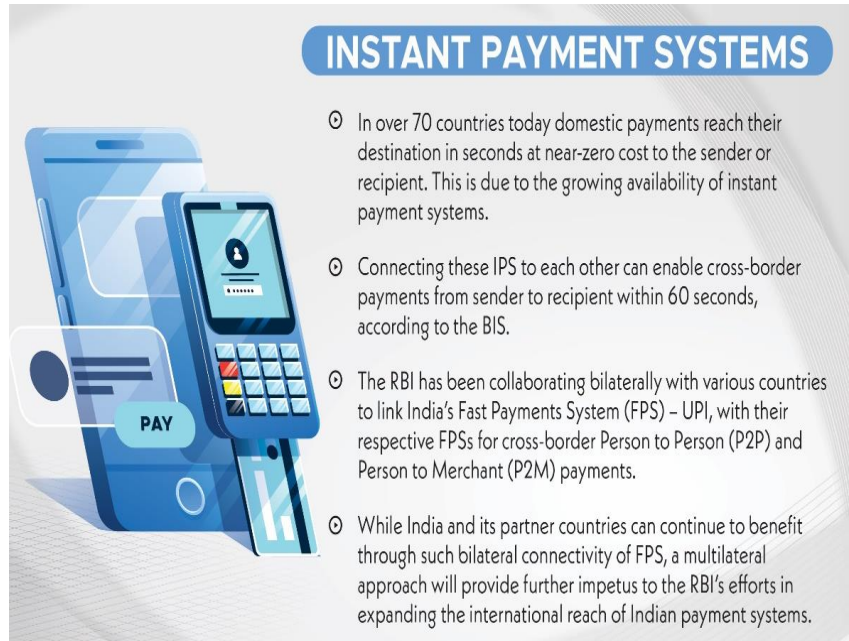
### Project Nexus

- RBI has joined Project Nexus, a multilateral international initiative to enable instant cross-border retail payments by interlinking domestic Fast Payments Systems (FPSs).
- Project Nexus is conceptualised by the **Innovation Hub of the Bank for International Settlements (BIS)**.

- It seeks to enhance cross-border payments by connecting multiple domestic instant payment systems (IPS) globally.
- It is the first BIS Innovation Hub project in the payments area to move towards live implementation.

### Benefits Of The Platform

- Project Nexus is designed to standardise the way IPS connect to each other. Instead of a payment system operator building custom connections for every new country that it connects to, the operator can make one connection to the Nexus platform.
- This single connection allows a fast payments system to reach all other countries on the network.
- The platform is expected to go live by 2026. Once functional, Nexus will play an important role in making retail cross-border payments efficient, faster, and more cost effective.



### Participating Countries

- Project Nexus aims to connect the FPSs of four Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) — **Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand**; and **India**, who would be the founding members and first mover countries of this platform.
- Thus, India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) and FPSs of Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand will be interlinked through Nexus. Going ahead, the platform can be extended to more countries.

### AI Tech for Pink Bollworm

- The *Central Institute for Cotton Research* under the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has launched a pilot project that uses Artificial Intelligence (AI) for real-time pest monitoring of pink bollworm in Punjab.
- For nearly four years now, the deadly pink bollworm (PBW) has destroyed cotton crops in the northern states of Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan.
- Cotton cultivation in these states has fallen from around 16 lakh hectares last year to only 10 lakh hectares this year.
- This project will be implemented in Rajasthan and Haryana after the pilot in Punjab is successful. This is the first time AI is being used for pest control in any crop in India.
- PBW known among farmers as **gulabi sundhi**, damages the cotton crop by burrowing its larvae and destroying parts of the developing cotton fruit, such as the square (flower bud) and the boll (rounded sac of seeds with cotton fibres).
- This results in the lint being cut and stained, making it unfit for use.
- PBW **primarily spreads through air**. Residue of infected crops, often left by farmers on the field to be used as fuel, can also have PBW larvae which can then infect future crops. Infected cotton seeds are another reason behind the pest's spread.

## Problems With Adoption

- The main issue is farmers' traditional conservatism regarding the adoption of new techniques and technologies.
- Moreover, there is also a significant lack of awareness and training among farmers about using the above-mentioned preventive techniques.
- Furthermore, the cost may make adoption unfeasible, especially for farmers with limited resources.

## Way Ahead

- Intensive training programs and awareness campaigns are necessary to ensure farmers understand and trust the new technology.
- Expanded field demonstrations, and government and private sector support in the form of subsidies or financial aid can make these technologies more accessible to farmers.
- Ultimately, effectively dealing with PBW will require a coordinated effort among states. Since it can travel through air, inadequate management in any one state can potentially destroy crops in the neighbouring states.

## CONTROLLING PBW SPREAD

- » Once PBW has been detected in the crop, experts advise spraying insecticides. Upon frequent application, these can save uninfested cotton bolls, but not those in which the pest has already entered.
- » To prevent future infestation, fields which saw PBW infestation should not be planted with the cotton crop, for at least one season.
- » Moreover, farmers are advised to burn residue at the earliest, and ensure there is no mixing between healthy and unhealthy seeds (or cotton).

## PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- » There are two primary techniques to prevent PBW outbreaks — both rely on **disrupting the insects' mating process**, and cost roughly Rs 3,300 to 3,400 per acre.
- » The first involves the application of a certain paste onto the stems of cotton plants, near the shoots. This paste releases synthetic pheromones that attract male insects.
  - Due to the widespread presence of these pheromones, these males are then unable to locate the females. This disrupts the mating process & reduces PBW population.
- » The second technology, known as the PBKnot Technology, also works on a similar principle. Here, thread knots with pheromone dispensers are placed strategically on the cotton fields to confuse male moths, and prevent them from finding females.

## Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA)

- The Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) for organic products between India and Taiwan was recently implemented.
- This is a landmark achievement as it is the **first bilateral agreement for organic products**.
- The implementing Agencies for the MRA are Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), Ministry of Commerce and Industry, India and Agriculture and Food Agency, Ministry of Agriculture (AFA), Taiwan.
- Under the pact, agricultural products produced and handled organically in conformity with the National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP) and with relevant documents are allowed for sale in Taiwan as organically-produced, including display of the 'India Organic' logo.
- The MRA will facilitate the export of major Indian organic products such as rice, processed food, green/black and herbal tea, medicinal plant products etc to Taiwan.
- Similarly, agricultural products produced and handled organically in conformity with Taiwanese regulation are allowed for sale in India as organically-produced, including display of the Taiwan Organic logo.

- The mutual recognition will ease the export of organic products by avoiding dual certifications; thus, reducing compliance cost, simplifying compliance requirement by adhering to only one regulation and enhancing trade opportunities in the organic sector.

## Trends In Remittance

In its latest Migration and Development Brief, the World Bank shared remittance data across the world.

### Remittance

- Remittances are the transfer of funds between parties as a bill, an invoice, or even a gift. However, "remittance" refers more broadly to the funds migrants send to their relatives in their home country while working and living abroad.
- Remittances are often crucial for recipient countries as they contribute to their economies through increased household incomes and foreign exchange reserves.
- It can be sent via wire transfer, electronic payment system, mail, draft, or cheque.

### Highlights Of The Report

- After a period of strong growth during 2021-2022, officially recorded remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) moderated in 2023, reaching an estimated \$656 billion.
- Looking ahead, remittances to LMICs are expected to grow at a faster rate of 2.3% in 2024, although this growth will be uneven across regions.
- Potential downside risks to these projections include weaker than expected economic growth in high-income migrant-hosting countries and volatility in oil prices and currency exchange rates.
- In 2023, remittance flows increased most to Latin America and the Caribbean (7.7%), followed by South Asia (5.2%), and East Asia and Pacific (4.8%, excluding China).
- Sub-Saharan Africa saw a slight decline of 0.3%, while the Middle East and North Africa experienced a nearly 15% drop, and Europe and Central Asia saw a 10.3% fall.
- Sending remittances still remains too costly. In the fourth quarter of 2023, the global average cost of sending \$200 was 6.4% of the amount being sent, slightly up from 6.2% a year earlier and well above the SDG target of 3%.
- Digital remittances had a lower cost of 5%, compared with 7% for non-digital methods, highlighting the benefits of technological advancements in reducing the financial burden on migrants.

### Remittances to India

- India remained the top recipient, followed by Mexico (\$66 billion), China (\$50 billion), Philippines (\$39 billion), and Pakistan (\$27 billion).
- India also remained the largest origin countries of emigrants (18.7 million), followed by Ukraine (11.9 million), China (11.1 million).
- Growth in remittances to India is likely to halve in 2024 to 3.7% from 7.5% in 2023.
- India received remittances **worth \$120 billion in 2023**, supported by strong labour markets in the United States and Europe.
- Reduced outflows from GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) countries, amid declining oil prices and production cuts, contributed to the slowdown.
- Remittances are projected to rise marginally to \$124 billion in 2024 and to \$129 billion in 2025.
- The report also noted **India's diversified migrant pool**, comprising highly skilled workers predominantly employed in OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) markets and less-skilled workers in GCC countries.

- This provides stability to remittance flows to India amid global economic fluctuations.
- Remittance flows to India from the **UAE**, which account for 18% and are the second-largest source of India's remittances after the **US**, benefited from the 2023 free trade agreement (FTA).
- Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman and Qatar account for 11% of India's total remittances.
- The FTA established a framework to promote the use of local currencies for cross-border transactions and cooperation for interlinking payment and messaging systems between India and the UAE.
- The use of dirhams and rupees in cross-border transactions is instrumental in channelling more remittances through formal channels.

### S&P Upgrades India's Sovereign Credit Ratings

- S&P Global Ratings has **upgraded India's sovereign rating outlook to positive from stable** while retaining the rating at 'BBB-' on robust growth and improved quality of government expenditure.
- S&P is considered one of the Big Three credit-rating agencies, which also include Moody's Investors Service and Fitch Ratings.
- As a credit rating agency (CRA), the company issues credit ratings for the debt of public and private companies, and other public borrowers such as governments and governmental entities.
- S&P issues both short-term and long-term credit ratings. The long-term credit ratings are issued on a scale from AAA to D and short-term credit ratings are issued on a scale from A-1 to D.
- BBB- is the lowest **investment grade** rating. The agency had last upgraded the rating outlook for India to stable from negative in 2014.
- All three major global rating agencies — S&P, Fitch and Moody's — have given the lowest investment grade rating to India.

### Ratings Methodology

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

### Significance Of The Ratings

- From a company's or a government's perspective, a better rating helps raise funds at a cheaper rate.
- It has an impact on companies planning to borrow overseas through bonds or foreign loans, as investors or banks abroad may well seek higher interest rates because of weak prospects.

## Sovereign Credit Rating (SCR)



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

## Observations By S&P On India's Scenario

- Continued policy stability, deepening economic reforms, and high infrastructure investment will sustain long-term growth prospects.
- The continued rise in public investment in infrastructure will lift economic growth, which combined with fiscal adjustments, could improve India's weak public finances.
- However, it cautioned about persistently high fiscal deficits, a large debt stock and interest burden.
- S&P may raise the ratings if India's fiscal deficits narrow meaningfully such that the net change in general government debt falls below 7% of GDP.
- The ratings could also improve if there is a sustained and substantial improvement in the central bank's monetary policy effectiveness and credibility, such that inflation is managed at a lower rate over time.
- S&P, however, cautioned that there could be a downside revision in India's outlook to stable if there is a decline of commitment to maintain sustainable public finances, which signifies a weakening of the country's institutional capacity.
- It could also revise the outlook to stable, if the current account deficit increases to weaken India's external position.

## SEHER Program

- The Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP) and TransUnion CIBIL recently launched the SEHER program for women entrepreneurs.
- SEHER is a **credit education program** that will empower women entrepreneurs in India with financial literacy content and business skills.
- Business growth is directly dependent on credit access, credit awareness and financial literacy.
- To get timely and better access to finance for business growth, entrepreneurs must gain knowledge on all aspects of finance, including their CIBIL Rank and commercial credit report.

## Women In Business

- According to the Udyam Registration Portal (URP) of the Ministry of MSMEs, India has 63 million MSME of which 20.5% are women-owned, employing as many as 27 million people.
- Rural areas have a slightly greater share of women-owned enterprises (22.24%) compared to urban areas (18.42%).
- Estimates suggest that by accelerating women's entrepreneurship, India could create more than 30 million new women-owned enterprises, potentially creating 150 to 170 million more jobs.

**WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAM (WEP)**

WEP is a **public-private partnership platform** incubated at Niti Aayog in 2018.

WEP aims to empower women entrepreneurs by providing support across pillars such as entrepreneurship promotion, access to finance, market linkages, training and skills development, mentoring and networking, and access to business development services.

**TransUnion CIBIL**

- Incorporated in 2000, TransUnion CIBIL Limited - formerly Credit Information Bureau (India) Limited - is **India's leading credit information** company with one of the largest collections of consumer information.
- Its customers include banks, financial institutions, NBFCs, housing finance companies, microfinance companies and insurance firms.

The infographic features a purple female symbol icon with hands holding it, and the TransUnion CIBIL logo.

## Revised Model Skill Loan Scheme

- The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) has launched a Revised Model Skill Loan scheme designed to provide financial support for skill development courses to the nation's youth.
- Under the scheme, education and upskilling opportunities will be provided to **25,000 students every year.**

- The revised scheme builds upon the **Credit Guarantee Fund Scheme for Skill Development (CGFSSD), launched in 2015**, and aims to ensure a steady flow of affordable finance for low-income youth to pursue specialized skill courses.
- CGFSSD saw low fund utilisation because individual loans were limited to Rs. 1.5 lakh, even as course costs and fees rose due to inflation, leaving many high-cost courses out of the scheme.
- As on March 31, 2024, loans amounting to ₹115.75 crore had been extended to just 10,077 borrowers.
- Under the new scheme, the **maximum loan limit** has now been **increased to Rs 7.5 lakh.**
- Earlier, only private, public and foreign banks — members of the Indian Banks' Association — were allowed to lend.
- The revamped scheme, **expands eligibility** to include Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs), NBFC-Micro Finance Institutions (NBFC-MFIs), and small finance banks.
- The revised scheme will now allow access to more skill courses, against only national skill qualification framework (NSQF)-aligned courses under the old scheme.
- Thus, non-NSQF courses will also come under the scheme, provided the courses are available on the Skill India Digital Hub platform.
- Aspiring candidates can choose from a range of courses in sectors such as healthcare, IT, AI, data science, cloud application, digital marketing, hospitality, animation, gaming, graphic designing, and drone technology.
- These courses, driven by changing industry dynamics, offer substantial placement opportunities and potential for international mobility.

### New Asset Class By SEBI

SEBI has proposed a new asset class aimed at bridging the gap between mutual funds (MFs) and portfolio management services (PMS), targeting investors ranging from Rs 10 lakh to Rs 50 lakh.

#### Portfolio Management Services (PMS)

- PMS are a category of professional financial services in which a skilled portfolio manager and stock market manager provides customised investment solutions to high net-worth individuals (HNIs), in instruments such as equity, debt, gold, etc.
- The **minimum investment limit in PMS is Rs 50 lakh.** PMS are different from MFs, where the minimum investment limit is just Rs 100, and a pool of money is managed by a professional fund manager.

#### Key Features of The New Asset Class

- The new category of products, which would be introduced under the mutual fund structure, would have a **minimum investment of Rs 10 lakh per investor** within the asset management company (AMC)/ MF.
  - An AMC is an institution which manages and oversees operations of mutual funds.
  - This means that an investor must invest a minimum of Rs 10 lakh, **across one or more investment strategies**, under the new asset class offered by an AMC/MF
- Like MF schemes, the new asset class will provide investors with an option of Systematic Investment Plan (SIP), Systematic Withdrawal Plan (SWP), and Systematic Transfer Plan (STP).
- It will have a **risk-return profile between that of MFs and PMS**, which means it will be aimed at investors who have greater risk-taking capabilities and higher investment amounts than in MFs, but lower than in PMS.
- The new asset class will be marketed as distinct from traditional mutual funds in both branding and advertising.

### Eligibility criteria

- There are two routes for the existing as well as newly registered MFs/ AMCs to be able to offer products under the new asset class.
- Under the **1<sup>st</sup> route**, all MFs that are in operation for a minimum of three years and have average asset under management (AUM) of not less than Rs 10,000 crore, in immediately preceding 3 years, can offer products under the new asset class.
- In addition, Sebi should not have initiated any action against the sponsor/AMC in the last 3 years.
- MFs not meeting these criteria can launch under the **2<sup>nd</sup> route**, if they appoint a Chief Investment Officer (CIO) with at least 10 years of experience managing AUM of Rs 5,000 crore;
- And an additional fund manager with at least seven years of experience managing AUM of Rs 3,000 crore.

### Need For Introducing A New Asset Class

- There was a gap between investment opportunities available in MFs and PMS.
- Due to which, investors in the segment are getting drawn towards unauthorised and unregistered investment schemes, promising unrealistically high returns, exploiting the expectation of investors for better yields, and leading to potential financial risks.
- By setting a minimum investment threshold of Rs 10 lakh, SEBI aims to discourage retail investors while attracting those currently drawn to unauthorized PMS providers.
- The new asset class is designed to provide a regulated product with greater flexibility, higher risk-taking capability, and a higher ticket size to meets the needs of an emerging category of investors.

### Significance

- It will help to **limit unregistered investment products** and offers a regulated yet flexible option for sophisticated investors.
- It allows for **innovative investment strategies**, potentially generating higher returns and managing risks effectively. Some investment strategies that may be permitted include:
  - **Long-short Equity Fund:** A fund that seeks to deliver returns by taking long and short positions in equity and equity-related instruments.
  - For example, the fund may be bullish (optimistic) on the automobile sector and bearish (expecting prices to fall) on the IT sector and may invest in both these sectors by going long on the automobile sector and short on the IT sector.
  - **Inverse ETF/ Fund:** A fund that seeks to generate returns that are negatively correlated to the returns of the underlying index.
- The broader eligibility would bring diverse expertise and enhance competitiveness, leading to better performance and lower costs

### Margin Trading

- The National Stock Exchange (NSE) has significantly reduced the list of stocks eligible for **collateral in margin funding**.
- Of the 1,730 stocks previously eligible, the NSE has removed 1,010, including notable companies like Adani Power, Yes Bank, Suzlon, Bharat Dynamics, and Paytm.
- Now, the exchange will only accept collateral for the securities traded at least 99 per cent of the days in the last six months with an impact cost of up to 0.1% for an order value of ₹1 lakh.

## Rationale Behind Delisting

- Financial institutions, such as banks and NBFCs, require collateral to secure loans. In case of a default, the lender can sell the collateral to recover the loaned amount.
- Common collateral includes assets like homes, cars, gold, and company stocks.
- In the context of margin trading, brokers offer short-term loans against the shares held by traders. *However, not all company shares qualify as acceptable collateral.*
- Regulatory bodies set specific criteria to determine which shares can be used as collateral. This recent regulatory tightening means **fewer shares will qualify in the future.**
- The impact of this new order will be a reduction in risk related to funding. The stocks remaining on the list have very high liquidity and are considered to be strong stocks.



## Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers

- The All-India Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers (CPI-IW) for May, 2024 increased by 0.5 point and stood at 139.9. Year-on-year inflation for the month of May, 2024 moderated to 3.86% as compared to 4.42% in May, 2023.
- The **Labour Bureau**, an attached office of the **Ministry of Labour & Employment**, has been compiling CPI-IW every month since 1944. The Index of the previous month is released on the last day of the ongoing month.
- It is compiled on the basis of retail prices collected from 317 markets spread over 88 industrially important centres in the country. The **base year** for calculation is **2016**.
- It measures the relative changes in retail prices of fixed basket of goods and services consumed by industrial workers over a period of time.
- It is utilized for regulation of wages & dearness allowance for millions of workers & employees in the country. It is also used for measuring inflation and other policy formulations.

## SEBI's Measures to Limit F&O Trading

- SEBI has proposed a series of steps to limit speculative trading in the **index derivatives** segment amid concerns about an exponential rise in the volumes of trading in futures and options (F&O) particularly by individual investors.
- In addition to this, the recent Budget 2024-25 proposed to double the Securities Transaction Tax (STT) on F&O.
- The proposed steps aim at enhancing investor protection and promoting market stability in derivative markets.

## Reasons For Introducing The Steps

- Derivatives markets assist in better price discovery, help improve market liquidity and allow investors to manage their risks better.

- Even though India's F&O market has seen an explosive growth in volumes post COVID, a vast majority of individual traders and proprietorship firms are ending up on the losing side.
- According to SEBI, **around 92.5 lakh such participants lost around Rs 51,700 crore** in FY23. Only 14.22 lakh investors (about **15 per cent**) made a net profit.
- The ones who have made profits are high-frequency algo-based proprietary traders and/or Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs).
- Thus, household savings are finding their way into F&Os and it is threatening to hurt capital formation, investment and growth.

### Types of Derivatives

- **Derivatives** are essentially financial contracts that derive their value from the underlying asset, such as stocks, commodities, and currencies. Index derivatives therefore derive their value from the underlying index.
- **Futures and Options** are two types of derivatives where investors, based on their expectation of future price movement, enter into a **contract to buy or sell the asset** in 'lots' or multiple units of the asset, by paying a small margin amount.
- In a **Futures contract** it is **mandatory for the buyer to purchase** an underlying asset, while the seller must deliver it at a predetermined price and date.
- In contrast, in an **Options contract** the **buyer has the right but not the obligation, to trade** the underlying asset at a specific price on the specified date. However, the **seller must honour the contract** if the buyer chooses to exercise their option.

### Certain Measures Proposed by SEBI

#### Minimum contract size

- SEBI has recommended to increase the minimum contract size for index derivatives contract between Rs 15 lakh to Rs 20 lakh. After six months, this can be increased between Rs 20 lakh to Rs 30 lakh.
- At present, the minimum contract size requirement for derivative contracts is in between Rs 5 lakh to Rs 10 lakh.

#### Upfront collection of option premium

- Brokers can collect option premiums on an upfront basis from the clients.
- Currently, there is a stipulation for **upfront collection of margin** for futures position (both long and short) as well as options position (only short options require margin whereas long options require payment of options premium by buyers).
- There is no explicit stipulation of upfront collection of options premium from options buyer by members.

#### Intraday monitoring of position limits

- The position limits for index derivative contracts should be monitored by Market Infrastructure Institutions (**MIIs**) such as clearing corporations or stock exchanges on an intraday basis.
- Currently, position limits for different categories of participants and products are specified by SEBI, and monitored at the end of the day.
- Particularly on the day of the expiry of the contract, there is a possibility of undetected intraday positions beyond permissible limits as end-of-day open positions would be NIL.

#### Rationalisation of weekly index products

- The market regulator has recommended providing weekly options contracts on a single benchmark index of an exchange.

- At present, weekly expiry index derivatives contracts are offered by stock exchanges in addition to monthly contracts.
- There is an expiry of such weekly contracts on all five trading days of the week across different indices/exchanges, resulting in speculative money moving from one expiry of the index to another every single day.

### India Grants Record Patents

- The number of patents granted in India has increased significantly over the last decade.
- Every 6 minutes one technology is seeking IP protection in India. Patent office granted over one lakh Patents in the last one year (Mar-2023 to Mar-2024). Every working day, 250 patents were granted.

#### Patent

- A **patent** is a type of intellectual property that gives its owner the legal right to exclude others from making, using, or selling an invention for a limited period of time in exchange of full disclosure of the invention.
- An invention relating either to a **product or process** that is **new, involving inventive step and capable of industrial application** can be patented.
- In India, the term of every patent granted is 20 years from the date of filing of application.
- The patent system in India is governed by the **Patents Act, 1970**. The Patent Rules are regularly amended to keep up with the changing environment.

#### Jurisdiction Of The Patent

- There is **no concept of a global patent**. As patent protection is a territorial right, therefore, a patent granted by the Indian government is only effective within the territory of India.
- Patents should be obtained in each country where the applicant requires protection of his/her invention.

#### Significance of Patents

- **Encouragement of Innovation:** Patents act as incentives, encouraging inventors to invest time, resources, and effort into R&D. The promise of exclusive rights serves as a catalyst for creativity.
- **Protection of Intellectual Property:** Patents prevent unauthorized use and exploitation of an invention.
- **Knowledge Sharing:** In exchange for exclusive rights, patent holders disclose the details of their inventions to the public. This sharing of knowledge contributes to the pool of human innovation, enabling others to build upon existing ideas.
- **Economic Growth:** A strong patent system can stimulate economic growth by creating an environment in which innovation flourishes. It attracts investors and facilitates a competitive edge in the global marketplace.

#### Patent Related Development In The Country

- **Geographical Indications:** There has been a notable rise in GI registrations, demonstrating a threefold increase compared to the previous year.
- **Copyright:** FY 2023-24 witnessed a record-breaking number of copyright registrations, totalling 36,378. Measures to further promote awareness about the strategic role of copyright in creative industry is planned.
- **Design:** In FY 2023-24, the highest number of design registrations to date, totalling 27,819, were recorded.
- **IP Awareness:** In the last 2 years, National Intellectual Property Awareness Mission (NIPAM) has offered IP Training to 24 lakh youths, especially students and teachers and has covered over 7000 institutions.

## Zombie Startups

- Amid the funding winter, several startups have shut down. However, a new threat in the form of Zombie Startups has emerged.
- Zombie startups are businesses that are unable to achieve significant growth, generate substantial revenue, or show signs of a successful exit.
- They are often characterized by their inability to cover their operating expenses or repay their debts. These companies may continue to operate, but their financial performance is weak, and they struggle to achieve profitability.
- These companies continue for an extended period without making substantial progress or reaching key milestones.
- Zombie companies can pose risks for investors, as they typically tie up capital without providing a return on investment.

## Kanwar Yatra - Supreme Court Extends Stay on Directives To Eateries To Display Names

Supreme Court has extended the interim order staying the directives of the Uttar Pradesh & Uttarakhand governments that the eateries along the Kanwariya pilgrim route must display the names of the owners and staff. The stay order will continue till August 5, the next hearing date.

### Background Of The Case

- **Directive issued by the Muzaffarnagar district Police**
  - On July 17, Uttar Pradesh's Muzaffarnagar district, directing hotels, dhabas, and shops on the route of the Kanwar Yatra to display the names of their owners and employees.
  - It said that while there is no intention of "religious discrimination," previous "law-and-order situations" have arisen due to shop names causing confusion among the Kanwariyas, who follow a strictly vegetarian diet.
- **Directive challenged in Apex court**
  - The petitioners argue that the directive targets Muslim-owned businesses by forcing them to disclose their religious identity, which could have economic consequences and lead to targeting of businesses and individuals.
  - They have requested that the directive be publicly withdrawn.

### Key Takeaways From The Hearing

- **No Government Order**
  - The Court noted that there was no government order empowering the police to give directions in this case.
  - In its order, the Bench observed that such directions could be issued under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 or the Street Vendors Act, 2014 to ensure shudh shakahari (strictly vegetarian) food is served to the Kanwar Yatris.
- **Limits to Police Action**
  - The Bench stated that the police cannot usurp the powers of the competent authority under these Acts without a legal foundation.
  - However, the court noted the petitioners' submissions that penal actions had been initiated against food business operators, indicating that the police's actions may have overstepped their legal authority.
- **Question of Discrimination**
  - The court did not address the petitioners' constitutional arguments.
  - Petitioners argued that the directions violated Article 15(1) by discriminating against individuals based on religion and supported the practice of untouchability, which is banned under Article 17.
  - This, he contended, led to an economic boycott of establishments hiring people from backgrounds including Muslims and Dalits.

### Legal Basis For The Directions Issued By Police

- **Police did not cite any specific law in their directions**
  - The Muzaffarnagar Police have not cited any specific law in their directions to shopkeepers, prompting the Supreme Court to consider which law might authorize such actions by the police and state governments.

- Typically, in urgent situations involving "nuisance or apprehended danger," orders are issued under Section 144 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860, which is largely mirrored in Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023.
- This provision allows a Magistrate, empowered by the state government, to direct individuals to refrain from certain acts to prevent public disturbances or danger to life and safety.
- **SC guidelines for exercising power under Section 144**
  - In 2012, the Supreme Court established guidelines for exercising power under Section 144 in the '**In Re: Ramlila Maidan Incident**' case.
  - This involved a protest organized by Baba Ramdev in 2011 against alleged corruption, where Section 144 was imposed, leading to police intervention at night.
  - The court held that actions by public authorities under statutory power must be tested on two grounds:
    - whether the action was within the legal authority conferred by law, and
    - whether it was reasonable.
- **Onus on apex court**
  - In the Kanwar Yatra case, the court must determine whether any law grants the police and state government the power to issue directions to shopkeepers and whether those directions were reasonable.

#### Police Directives And Shopkeepers' Right To Privacy

- In the Kanwar Yatra case, the court will consider if the police directions restrict the right to privacy.
- In the 2017 Right to Privacy judgment ('**Justice K S Puttaswamy v. Union of India**'), the Supreme Court recognized the fundamental right to privacy.
  - This included the "**privacy of the mind**," which covers religious faith and the freedom to express or withhold such choices.
- Justice D Y Chandrachud outlined a "**three-fold**" test for government restrictions on privacy:
  - There must be an existing law allowing such restrictions.
  - The restriction must serve a legitimate state aim.
  - The restriction must not be "disproportionate" to the government's objective, ensuring a rational nexus between the restriction and the objective.
- If a supporting law is found, the court will evaluate whether avoiding a "law and order situation" is a legitimate aim and if requiring businesses to display names is a proportionate measure to achieve this aim.

#### Police Directions And The Issue Of Discrimination

- Article 15(1) of the Constitution states, "The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them."
- The court will need to assess whether the requirement for individuals to disclose their names, potentially revealing their religious and caste identities, constitutes discrimination against shop owners and employees based on identity, particularly targeting Muslim-owned businesses.
- Additionally, the court may consider whether these directions violate the right to "practise any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade or business" under **Article 19(1)(g)**.

#### Sampoornata Abhiyan

The NITI Aayog recently launched the 'Sampoornata Abhiyan' (Campaign for Total Development) witnessing significant participation from citizens across the country.

## What is Sampoonata Abhiyaan?

Initiated by NITI Aayog, the *Sampoonata Abhiyaan* as a part of the Aspirational Districts Programme (ADP) and the Aspirational Blocks Programme (ABP) will focus on achieving saturation in few selected indicators across targeted districts and blocks to drive their rapid and effective development.

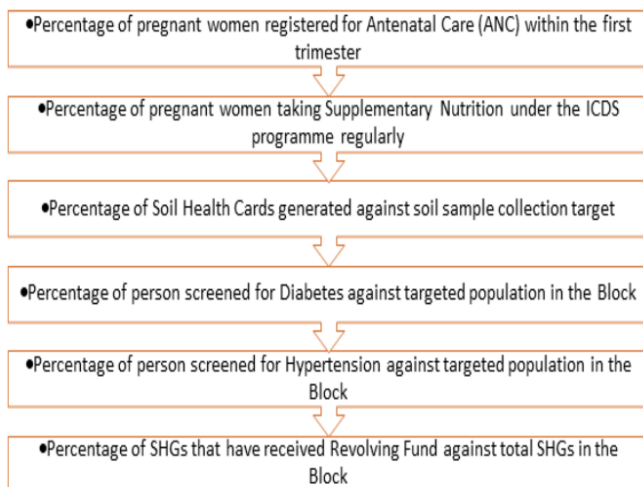
Aspirational Districts Programme	Aspirational Blocks Programme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>What?</b> Launched in 2018, to improve the socio-economic status of 117 districts from across 28 states based on three core principles i.e.-               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Convergence</b> (of Central &amp; State Schemes);</li> <li>○ <b>Collaboration</b> (among citizens and functionaries of Central &amp; State Governments including district teams); and</li> <li>○ <b>Competition</b> among districts through monthly <b>delta ranking</b>.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Objective-</b> Driven primarily by the States, it focuses on the strengths of each district, prioritizes attainable outcomes for immediate improvement and measures progress by ranking districts. (aimed at localizing Sustainable Development Goals)</li> <li>• <b>Themes-</b> The districts are ranked monthly based on 49 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) under 5 broad socio-economic themes:               <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-top: 10px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Health &amp; Nutrition (30%)</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Education (30%)</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Agriculture &amp; Water Resources (20%),</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Financial Inclusion (10%)</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Skill Development and Infrastructure (10%)</div> </div> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>What?</b> Launched in 2023, it focuses on improving governance to enhance the quality of life of citizens and service delivery in 500 remotest and less developed blocks (329 Districts) of country by converging existing schemes, defining outcomes, and monitoring them constantly to bridge gaps.</li> <li>• <b>Themes-</b> Each block will focus on monitoring key socio-economic indicators categorized under major themes: 1) Health and Nutrition, 2) Education, 3) Agriculture and Allied Services, 4) Basic Infrastructure and 5) Social Development.</li> <li>• <b>Role of Block Officials-</b> They are identified as Leaders of Change under the programme equipped with the right skills and competencies to steer and drive transformation in their blocks.</li> </ul>

**Objective-** To bridge developmental gaps and bring about transformative changes, ensuring a brighter future for the nation's aspirational districts and blocks by converging existing schemes, defining clear outcomes, and implementing constant monitoring.

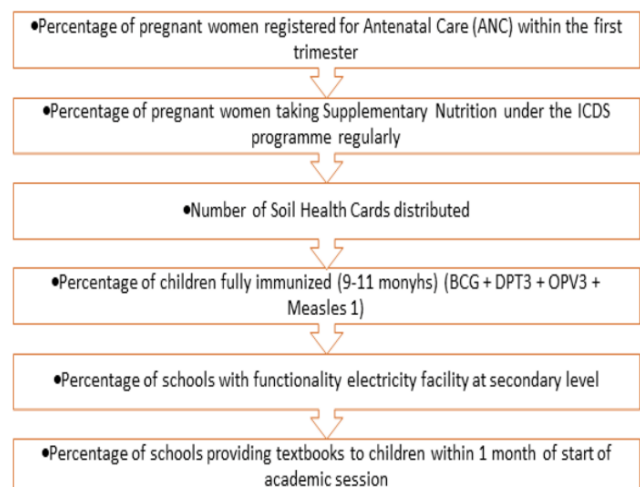
**Duration-** Sampoonata Abhiyaan will be in operation for three months from July to September.

**Focus Area-** It will focus on twelve indicators (six each) of Aspirational districts and blocks and ensure their complete saturation to achieve a quick and substantial impact and bring tangible improvements in health, nutrition, agriculture, and education, thus laying a strong foundation for long-term growth and development in these regions.

### Indicators in Aspirational Blocks Programme (ABP) for Sankalp Path:



### Indicators in Aspirational Districts Programme (ADP) for Sankalp Path:



## Benefits

- **Foster Sustainable Development**- By focusing on key indicators, the campaign will help deliver rapid and tangible improvements crucial for fostering sustainable development, enhancing the quality of life, and creating opportunities for economic growth.
- **Model for Holistic Development**

### EXTRA MILE: Indices Released by NITI Aayog

School Education Quality Index	Agricultural Marketing & Farmer Friendly Reforms Index	Composite Management Index	Water
Sustainable Development Goals India Index	Good Governance Index	Export Preparedness Index	
State Energy & Climate Index	Data Governance Quality Index	Good Governance Index	
India Innovation Index	State Health Index	e-Amrit Portal	

#### Important Initiatives of NITI Aayog:

- **Vocal for Local in Aspirational District Programme (ADP)**- for fostering grassroots entrepreneurship and self-reliance.
- **Sustainable Action for Transforming Human Capital (SATH)**- aimed at initiating transformation in two key social sectors (H-E)- Health & Education, by hand-holding States towards improving their social sector indicators and providing them technical support.
- **Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat** to make the country united, strong and promote excellence in all walks of life by means of long-term inter-state engagements through cultural exchanges and education.
- **Development Support Services to States (DSSS) for Development of Infrastructure** to de-risk projects and address key structural issues in project development and build institutional and organizational capacities.
- **Lifestyle for Environment (LiFE)**- announced at the 2021 UN Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC COP26) intends to nudge individuals to undertake simple acts in their daily lives that can contribute significantly to climate change when embraced across the world.
- **National Data and Analytics Platform (NDAP)**- facilitates and improves access to Indian government data and allows users to search, merge, visualize, and download datasets easily.
- **Atal Innovation Mission (AIM)** To promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship across India. Components of AIM are Atal Tinkering Labs (ATLs); Atal Incubation Centers (AICs) & Atal New India Challenges (ANIC)
- **E-Amrit**- a one-stop destination for all information on electric vehicles—busting myths around the adoption of EVs, their purchase, investment opportunities, policies, subsidies, etc.
  - ✓ Shoonya (Zero-Pollution Mobility) Campaign- promotes the use of EVs for urban deliveries and ride-hailing.
- **Women Entrepreneurship Platform**- empowering women not only to envision but also actualise their business aspirations with resilience, knowledge, and action. It is built on three core tenets: Iccha Shakti; Gyan Shakti; Karma Shakti.
- **Methanol Economy Programme**- for reducing India's oil import bill, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and converting coal reserves and municipal solid waste into methanol.
- **Transforming India's Gold Market**- to recommend measures for tapping into the potential of the sector and provide a stimulus to exports, economic growth and employment.
- **Strategy for New India at 75**- Released in December 2018 is a detailed exposition of 41 crucial areas.

## Right to Repair Portal

The Central Government asked the automobile companies to join the unified Right to Repair Portal India.

### What is Right to Repair Portal

- Launched by the Union Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution System on National Consumer Rights Day (24th December) in 2022, Right to Repair portal is a platform to provide easy access to consumers about necessary information on repair & maintenance of their products.
- World Consumers Rights Day- 15th March)
- This Portal seeks to combat planned obsolescence and the monopolization of repair services by manufacturers, promoting sustainability and consumer rights.
- Department of Consumer Affairs set up a committee to come up with a Right to Repair framework on the lines of the Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) initiative launched at Glasgow Summit of COP 26 of UNFCCC in 2021.

**Sectors Covered Under the Portal-** 1) Farming Equipments; 2) Mobile and Electronics; 3) Consumer Durables; and 4) Automobile Equipments.

### Features-

- *Focus on Repairs-* It provides information about the circular economy (Using Concept of 5R- Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Repurpose, Recycle) which is the new economic model that focuses on repairing at an optimal cost and reusing products, as opposed to throwing them away or buying new ones.
- *Single Platform for Information-* It provides easy access to information of products from different sectors, including automobiles, consumer durables, mobile and electronics, farming equipment related to warranty and post-sales service information.
- *Provides Multiple Repair Options-* It mandates manufacturers to share their product details with customers so that they can either repair them by self or by third parties, rather than only depending on original manufacturers.
- *Consumer Care Details-* It provides a consolidated list of consumer care contact details of all major consumer products manufacturers for your quick viewing.
- Some companies like TVS have shared their post-onboarding experiences on the portal. Companies including TATA Motors and TVS discussed how, based on complaints received from the National Consumer Helpline, they identified key repair issues and subsequently created repair videos accessible to consumers via their official YouTube channels.

### Benefits-

- *Harmonize Trade & Boost Local Economy* - It will help harmonize trade between Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs), third-party buyers and sellers and help create new jobs.
- *Reduce e-Waste & Save Money* - It will help reduce the vast mountain of electrical waste (e-waste) that piles up each year on the continent and will improve the life span and recyclability.
- *Allow Simple Repair Solution with Access to Multiple Services* - Users will have a simpler and more practical approach (product repair, replacement parts, and warranty) to fixing their products.

## Defamation Case Against Wikipedia

News agency Asian News International (ANI) recently filed a defamation case seeking damages of about Rs. 2 crores against Wikipedia for allowing allegedly defamatory content on ANI's wiki page.

## What Is The Case Against Wikipedia

ANI, the newswire agency that supplies video and text feeds to several news organizations in India in its suit against Wikimedia Foundation and its officials, alleged that Wikimedia on its page about ANI-

- Published palpably false and defamatory content with the malicious intent of tarnishing the news agency's reputation and aimed to discredit its goodwill.
  - Wikipedia page on ANI, in its introductory section blamed ANI for "pro-government bias and tendency to cite misinformation, criticized it for having served as a propaganda tool for the incumbent central government, distributing materials from a vast network of fake news websites, and misreporting events."
- Actively participated, through its officials, in reversing the edits made by the ANI reflecting its true and factual position.

## Which Laws Have Been Invoked In The Case

- *Definition under Section 2(1)(w) of the Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000*- ANI has argued that Wikipedia is a significant social media intermediary (SMI)
  - ✓ Section 2(1)(w) of the IT Act defines an "Intermediary" with respect to any particular electronic records as any person who on behalf of another person receives, stores or transmits that record or provides any service with respect to that record and includes telecom service providers, network service providers, internet service providers (ISP), web hosting service providers, search engines, online payment sites, online-auction sites, online marketplaces and cyber cafes.
  - ✓ Examples of SMIs include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, TikTok, Pinterest, YouTube, Snapchat, Amazon and Zomato etc.
- ANI has argued that Wikipedia is a significant social media intermediary (SSMI) under the meaning of Section 2(1)(w) of the Information Technology Act, 2000.
  - ✓ SSMI is a social media platform with more than 5 million registered users in India.
  - ✓ The term was introduced in the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.
- *Section 79 of IT Act (Applicability of Safe Harbour Clause)*-
  - *Section 79(1)* exempts intermediaries from liability for any third-party information, data, or communication link hosted on their platform in following cases-
    - *Non-Involvement (Section 79(2))*: The intermediary should not initiate the transmission, select the receiver of the transmission, or modify the information contained in the transmission.
    - *Compliance (Section 79(3))*: The intermediary must comply with the due diligence requirements as prescribed by the central government under the Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code of 2021.
  - *Non-Applicability of Safe Harbour Clause (Section 79(3))*- Exemption from liability won't be applicable if-
    - The intermediary has conspired or abetted or aided or induced an unlawful act.
    - The intermediary, despite being informed by the government or its agencies, does not immediately remove or disable access to the material in question.
  - *Loss of Safe Harbour*- As per Rule 7 of the IT Rules, 2021 non-compliance with the above rules results in the loss of safe harbour protection, exposing intermediaries to legal liability.

## Similar Judgements Which Involve Wikipedia

1. *Petition Filed by Ayurvedic Medicine Manufacturers Organization of India*- The petitions alleged the online content published about them in 2001 on Wikipedia was defamatory. SC responding in the case, allowed them to edit the Wikipedia article and to avail any other remedy available under the law.

2. *Hewlett Packard India Sales vs. Commissioner of Customs, 2023*- The SC held that online sources such as Wikipedia are based on a crowd-sourced and user-generated editing model that is not completely dependable and can promote misleading information. Therefore, such sources should not be used for legal dispute resolution.

#### **Extra Mile: Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021**

These rules were notified by the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology** in 2021 (which replaced the earlier 2011 Rules) (amended in 2022) and provide the due diligence to be followed by an intermediary (including social media intermediary) while discharging its duties, Grievance Redressal Mechanism (GRM) and Digital Media Code of Ethics.

#### **Key Provisions-**

1. **Due Diligence by an Intermediary**- The intermediary shall
  - a. prominently publish on its website (Web Portal), mobile based application (App) or both, as the case may be, the rules and regulations, privacy policy user agreement for access or usage of its computer resource by any person, ensure its compliance.
  - b. not host, store or publish any unlawful information related to the sovereignty and integrity of India; security of the State; friendly relations with foreign States; public order; decency or morality; contempt of court; defamation; incitement to an offence relating to the above.
  - c. not retain the user information collected for registration for a period of one hundred and eighty days after any cancellation or withdrawal of his registration.
  - d. report cyber security, threat incidents and share related information with the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-in).
2. **Grievance Redressal Mechanism (GRM) of Intermediary**-
  - a. The intermediary shall prominently publish on its website and mobile application the name of its Grievance Officer and his contact details as well as mechanism by which a user or a victim may make complaint.
  - b. The Grievance Officer shall acknowledge the complaint within twenty-four hours and resolve it within a period of fifteen days from the date of its receipt.
3. **Appeal to Grievance Appellate Committee (GAC)**-
  - a. Grievance Appellate Committees are established by the Central Government consisting of a chairperson and two whole time members of which one is a member ex-officio and two are independent members.
  - b. Any person aggrieved by the decision of the Grievance Officer may appeal to the GAC within thirty days from the date of receipt of communication from the Grievance Officer.
  - c. The GAC is required to resolve the appeal finally within thirty days from the date of receipt of the appeal through an online dispute resolution mechanism wherein the entire appeal process, from filing of appeal to the decision is conducted through digital mode.
4. **Additional Due Diligence to Be Observed by Significant Social Media Intermediary (SSMI)**- The SSMI should-
  - a. appoint a Chief Compliance Officer (CCO) to ensure compliance with the Act.
  - b. appoint a nodal contact person for 24x7 coordination with law enforcement agencies and officers to ensure compliance to their orders or requisitions.
  - c. Appoint a Resident Grievance Officer to publish a periodic compliance report every month mentioning the details of complaints received and action taken.

d. Identifying First Originator of Information- An SSMI which primarily provides messaging services (for example WhatsApp), must enable the identification of the first originator of information within India on its platform.

5. **Digital Media Publishers:** The 2021 Rules institute a three-tier structure for online publishers of: (i) self-regulation by publishers, (ii) self-regulation by associations of publishers, and (iii) oversight by the central government.
  - ✓ Digital Media Publishers includes news and current affairs content which includes online papers, news portals, aggregators and agencies.
6. **Code of Ethics:** For publishers of news and current affairs, the following existing codes will apply: (i) norms of journalistic conduct formulated by the Press Council of India, and (ii) programme code under the Cable Television Networks Regulation Act, 1995. For online publishers of curated content, the Rules prescribe the code of ethics.
  - ✓ This code requires the publishers to: (i) classify content in specified age-appropriate categories, restrict access of age-inappropriate content by children, and implement an age verification mechanism (Platforms must provide content descriptors and implement parental locks for content classified as U/A 13+ or higher)
  - ✓ OTT platforms must classify content into five age-based categories: U (Universal); U/A 7+ (7 years and above); U/A 13+ (13 years and above); U/A 16+ (16 years and above); A (Adult)
7. **Verification Of Online Real Money Game-** The Ministry may designate as many online gaming self-regulatory bodies as necessary for the purpose of verifying an online real money game as a permissible online real money game.
8. **Ensuring Online Safety and Dignity of Users:** Intermediaries shall remove or disable access within 24 hours of receipt of complaints of contents that exposes the private areas of individuals, show such individuals in full or partial nudity or in sexual act or is impersonation including morphed images etc. Such a complaint can be filed either by the individual or by any other person on his/her behalf.
9. **Oversight Mechanism-** The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting will: (i) publish a charter for self-regulating bodies, including Codes of Practices, (ii) issue appropriate advisories and orders to publishers; (iii) have powers to block content on an emergency basis (subject to review by the inter-departmental committee). Any directions for blocking content will be reviewed by a committee headed by the Cabinet Secretary.

### Karnataka's Domicile Quota In Jobs Bill

Recently, the Karnataka government approved and immediately withheld the Karnataka State Employment of Local Candidates in the Industries, Factories and Other Establishments Bill, 2024 which mandated factory or other establishments to appoint 50 per cent of local candidates in management categories and 70 per cent in non-management categories, has been temporarily put on hold.

- ✓ The bill defines "*local candidates*" as individuals born in the state or living in Karnataka for at least 15 years, and capable of speaking, reading, and writing Kannada.
- ✓ Similar attempts have been made by Haryana and Andhra Pradesh (AP) to provide jobs for locals by introducing reservations in the private sector. However, the laws passed in Haryana and AP have not been implemented — for legal and political reasons.

### Is Domicile-Based Reservation Explicitly Allowed Under The Constitution

No, The Constitution-

- Guarantees equality of opportunity in matters of public employment under Article 16 (1).

- Prohibits discrimination in public employment on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any of them under Article 16(2).
- Allows the state to frame laws for the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any backward class of citizens which are inadequately represented in the services under the State.
- Allows the state to prescribe a requirement of residence within that State for public employment. This is not the same as place of birth but only a certain length of residence during or before employment.

### **Why Is Then Reservation Provided On Other Grounds Such As Caste or Financial Status (eg. EWS Reservation by 103<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment) If Constitution Guarantees Equal Treatment To All?**

**Balancing Equality with Affirmative Action:** Equality as per the constitution is dependent upon two distinct aspects which together form the essence of equality law-

- (i) non-discrimination among equals; and
- (ii) affirmative action to equalize the unequal.

Therefore, the constitution allows the states to make laws regarding reservation for SCs/STs/OBCs/economically backward classes to ensure equal opportunity and proportionate representation in employment and education.

### **How Do Some States Then Have Laws That Reserve Jobs For Locals**

The Constitution of India **does not outright prohibit** reservation based on domicile, but it places significant restrictions and mandates adherence to the principles of equality and non-discrimination.

\*\*\*In fact, the Constitution has no manifest provision which allows states to make laws mandating **reservation in the private sector**. But states have argued that they can enter into the private sector domain as they provide several concessions for them including tax breaks and cheaper land.

- The Public Employment (Requirement as to Residence) Act abolishes all existing residence requirements in the states for employment purpose and enacts exceptions only in the case of the special instances of Andhra Pradesh, Manipur, Tripura and Himachal Pradesh.
- Andhra Pradesh under Section 371(d) has powers to have “direct recruitment of local cadre” in specified areas.
  - ✓ Several states have a linguistic criterion as a workaround to the ‘sons of the soil only’ rule — a working knowledge of the local language as a requirement to take up public jobs.
  - ✓ Additionally, Article 371 of the Constitution provides special concessions to several states, allowing relaxed rules for recruitment.
- In Uttarakhand, class III and class IV jobs are reserved for locals.
- States such as Maharashtra, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu conduct official business in their regional languages and therefore prescribe knowledge of the language as a criterion for local jobs by using Article 16(2). Thus, giving preference to local citizens.

### **Why Should Domicile-Based Reservation Not Be Implemented**

Even in the handful of cases before the SC, it has observed that domicile quotas foster “narrow parochial loyalties fostered by interested parties.” Domicile based reservation (especially in employment) should not be implemented because of following legal and constitutional issues-

1. **Balancing Equality with Affirmative Action:** The Constitution guarantees for equality before the law (Article 14), prohibits discrimination based on place of birth or residence but also allows for affirmative action to promote the interests of socially and educationally backward classes (Articles 15 and 16). Any legislation providing domicile-based reservation must balance these constitutional provisions to avoid being struck down by the courts.
2. **Violates Fundamental Right of Equality-** Domicile-based reservations might lead to unreasonable or excessive discrimination against non-domicile candidates thus, violating the right to equality guaranteed under the constitution and foster social disharmony.

- ✓ Favoring locals over non-locals can lead to social unrest and tensions between different regional communities, potentially disrupting harmony and cooperation.
3. **Economic Impact:** Reservations for domiciles may have economic implications, especially in regions with high inward migration by limiting job opportunities for migrants. The companies will also have to accommodate non-skilled domiciled candidates due to reservation compulsion rather than the skilled workers affecting the quality and quantity of production (affecting the natural flow of talent and labor across the country.).
    - ✓ Educational institutions and workplaces benefit from diversity. Domicile-based reservations might reduce the heterogeneity that fosters innovation, learning, and growth.
  4. **Judicial Review:** State government policies on domicile-based reservations are subject to judicial review, as the courts can evaluate if the policies are reasonable, meet the criteria of proportionality, and do not violate the basic structure of the Constitution.
  5. **50 % Upper Limit on Quota:** As held by the Supreme Court in Indra Sawhney case (1992), total reservations should not exceed 50 per cent of available seats or posts. Domicile reservations must also fit within this limit, alongside other categories of reservations. As this cap includes all categories of reservations, including those based on domicile.
  6. **Proving Inadequate Empirical Data about Representation of Locals in State Jobs-** For providing reservation based on domicile a state will have to first prove that there is no adequate representation of domiciled citizens in state jobs. This can be difficult as there are several ways of acquiring that domicile status like proof of continuous stay in state, proof of birth, proof of parents domiciles etc.
    - ✓ Managing and verifying domicile status can add administrative burdens, leading to potential bureaucratic inefficiencies and corruption.

#### Judicial Opinion on Domicile-Based Reservations

1. *DP Joshi vs The State Of Madhya Bharat, 1955-* This case dealt with a fee exemption for students of Madhya Bharat. While the court quashed the rule, it did not go into the larger “question as to the existence or admissibility of the concept of regional domicile as distinguished from Indian domicile.”
2. *Andhra Pradesh Domicile Quota for Jobs-* was introduced in 1970s for the Telangana region to curb the demand for a separate state. The law was struck down by SC as unconstitutional.
3. *Sunanda Reddy v. State of Andhra Pradesh, 1995-* SC struck down 100% reservation for domiciles in postgraduate medical courses, emphasizing that reservations should not compromise merit and efficiency.
4. *Arvind Dattatraya Dhande v. Maharashtra Government, 1997-* The Bombay High Court (HC) in this case ruled against absolute domicile requirements for government jobs in Maharashtra, asserting that such measures are unconstitutional unless they are within the framework of reasonable classification.
5. *Andhra Pradesh (AP) Employment of Local Candidates in the Industries/Factories Bill, 2019-* The bill mandated reservations of up to 75% for jobs with a monthly salary of Rs 30,000. It was challenged in court and the AP High Court made a prima facie observation that the move “might be unconstitutional”. It is yet to be decided on its merits.
6. *Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Act, 2020-* The Punjab and Haryana HC struck down the law as unconstitutional and violative of fundamental rights. State’s appeal against the decision is pending before the SC.

#### Neurorights

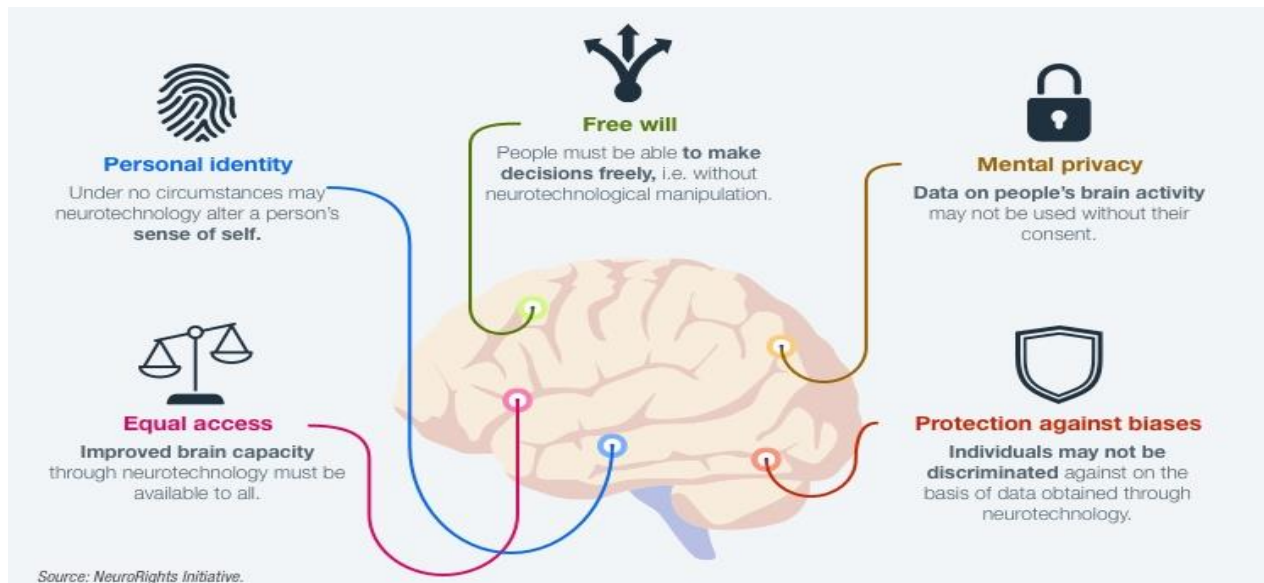
The right to safeguard one’s mental statuses and thoughts from surveillance are precious fundamental rights but with technological advancements as thoughts are becoming digitized there are growing concerns about the protection of one’s neurorights.

## What are Neurorights?

- Neurorights refers to a set of **proposed** ethical and legal principles aimed at protecting the rights and integrity of the human brain and mental experiences in the context of advancing neuroscience and neurotechnology.
- As technology progresses, particularly in the realm of brain-computer interfaces (BCIs), artificial intelligence (AI), and neuroimaging, Neurorights seek to safeguard human dignity, autonomy, and identity against potential abuses and unintended consequences.
- On World Platform, Neurorights is a new international legal framework for human rights developed by the Neurorights Initiative, which specifically aims at protecting the brain & its activity as neurotechnology advances.

## Types of Neuro Rights

There are following five neurorights:



## What Is The Need For Neurorights?

1. **Risk of Surveillance**- Digitization of neuro-data increases the risk of surveillance from multiple sources for different purposes. For example, a manager can monitor the movements and mental states of an employee to track alertness, fatigue, and other indicators.
2. **Governance and Regulation**- With increasing investment in Neurotechnologies there are concerns regarding its governance and regulation as these Neurotechnologies can probe individuals' physiological and psychological states.
3. **Impacts the right to think freely and mental privacy**- As Neurotechnology actively interacts with and alters the human brain, it will allow different entities to track and monitor the movements and behaviour of diverse sections of the population, individually and collectively. Thus, unauthorized access will violate an individual's mental privacy, freedom of thought and autonomy.
4. **Ensuring Mental Integrity & Prevention of Coercive Use**: Neurotechnologies have the potential to alter mental states and cognitive functions. It is crucial to protect individuals from harmful or non-consensual alterations. (Unethical treatments could lead to permanent changes in personality.)
  - ✓ **Example**: Military or law enforcement agencies using neurotechnology to manipulate suspects' thoughts or actions.
5. **Maintaining Psychological Continuity & Mental Health**: Neurotechnological interventions could disrupt an individual's sense of self and continuity of identity. Neurorights help preserve the integrity of personal identity.

- ✓ **Example:** Deep brain stimulation (DBS) treatments for psychiatric conditions could unintentionally alter personality traits. (misused neurofeedback systems could lead to anxiety)

### Global Initiatives Taken towards Recognizing Neurorights

- Chile is the first country in the world to legally recognise its citizens' neurorights when its Senate agreed to amend the constitution in 2021.
- Colorado enacted a law in April 2024 to protect individuals' neurological privacy while California is working on similar legislation.
- UNESCO has appointed an expert group to develop the "first global framework on the ethics of neurotechnology". It is expected to be adopted by 2025 and could have a major impact on governments' guidance documents and policy narratives.
- **The OECD** has made a series of declarations included in the "Recommendation on Responsible Innovation in Neurotechnology".
- While **the Council of Europe** has drawn up the "Strategic Action Plan", focusing on human rights and new biomedical technologies, which includes precisely the new changes in neurotechnology.

### Neurorights in India

- **Existing Legislations-** In spite of serious concerns posed by neurotechnology, experts suggest that for now, no additional legislation is required to protect neurorights as there are already some existing legal provisions to protect citizens against such dangers.
  - ✓ For instance, the Digital Personal Data Protection Act of 2023 allows the collection & processing of personal data only on the consent of the individual or other specifically permitted legitimate uses. As the government has the power to make laws in this matter, if there is any case of neural interference by private parties it would be subject to more institutional safeguards.
  - ✓ **Mental Healthcare Act, 2017:** Focuses on mental health rights and could be a foundation for neurorights legislation. (**Ministry of Health and Family Welfare** oversees medical applications of neurotechnology and related ethical standards. + **National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS)** focuses on clinical and research aspects of mental health and neuroscience.)
  - ✓ **Information Technology Act, 2000:** Addresses data protection and privacy, which can be extended to neural data.
  - ✓ **The National Bioethics Committee** has been exploring the ethical implications of neurotechnology, which could lead to formal recommendations.
- **Judicial View on Neurorights-** The Supreme Court (SC) through its decisions in *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy Vs. Union of India, 2017* and *Selvi v. State of Karnataka, 2010*, upheld the right to privacy. In the Selvi case, the court specifically held that a forcible intrusion into a person's mental processes is an affront to liberty and that narco analysis, polygraph examination, and similar techniques could not be administered forcibly as it violates a person's right to privacy, and their right against self-incrimination. Taking inference from these judgements, it can be concluded that a right to privacy in one's thoughts is implicitly protected under the Indian Constitution.

### Rahul Gandhi-Om Birla Face-off Over Parliament Microphone

Recently, the Leader of the Opposition (LoP) Rahul Gandhi claimed that his mic (Microphone) had been switched off in the House by the Speaker.

### How Do The Microphone (Mics) Work In Parliament?

- The Lok Sabha Secretariat manual of 2014 states that each MP is provided an individual microphone and a switch set at their specific desks (the desks are numbered based on the designated seat numbers of members).

- Each switchboard contains different coloured switches and when a member wants to request to speak, he needs to press the grey button on the switchboard and raise his hand to indicate the same to the Speaker.
- The request is then managed by the Speaker or Chairman. When the mic is activated, the microphones on the desks, with an LED, light up red.
- **Multilingual Support:** Given India's linguistic diversity, simultaneous interpretation services are provided. MPs can speak in any of the scheduled languages, and their speeches are interpreted in real-time for other members. The audio system supports this by channeling different languages through separate channels.
- **Live Broadcast:** Sessions are often broadcast live on television and online platforms, requiring the audio system to integrate seamlessly with broadcasting equipment.

### Who Administers The Parliament Mics?

The microphones are usually **controlled by** the Speaker in the Lok Sabha and the Chairman in the Rajya Sabha. They have the authority to turn the microphones on or off. The mics are **administered from** a control room which activates a mic when Speaker grants the member the permission to speak in the House.

### Can 'Turning Off The Mic' Be Considered As 'Breach Of Privilege'?

- Parliamentary privileges are intended to protect the independence and integrity of the legislative process and to allow lawmakers to speak and act freely without fear of reprisal or legal consequences. Whenever any of the rights and immunities of Parliament or its members are violated, it is termed as Breach of Privilege.

### The Constitution provides for following privileges-

- **Article 105:** There shall be freedom of speech in Parliament. No member of Parliament shall be liable to any proceedings in any court in respect of anything said or any vote given by him in Parliament or any committee thereof.
- **Article 122:** The validity of any proceedings in Parliament shall not be called in question in court on the grounds of any alleged irregularity of procedure.
- **Article 194:** There shall be freedom of speech in the State Legislature. No member of the State Legislature shall be liable to any proceedings in any court in respect of anything said or any vote given by him in the State Legislature or any committee thereof.
- **Article 212:** The validity of any proceedings in the State Legislature shall not be called in question in court on the ground of any alleged irregularity of procedure.

- **Potential Reasons for Turning Off the Microphone:** This can include impeding the work of parliament, obstructing a member from carrying out their duties, or disclosing confidential information discussed in parliament without authorization, make speeches or to print or publish libel reflecting on the character or proceedings of the House, or its Committees, or on any member of the House for or relating to his character or conduct as a legislator etc.
  - ✓ Turning off a microphone is usually done to maintain decorum, prevent disorderly conduct, or when an MP is not adhering to the rules of procedure.
- But these powers and privileges are not codified and there are no clear, notified rules to decide what constitutes a breach of privilege, and what punishment can it attract?
  - ✓ If the microphone is turned off arbitrarily or in a manner that unjustly prevents an MP from exercising their right to speak, it could be argued as a breach of privilege.
  - ✓ The context and reason for turning off the microphone are critical in determining whether it constitutes a breach of privilege.
  - ✓ If an MP believes that their privileges have been breached, they can raise the matter in the House. A Privileges Committee may be asked to examine the issue and report its findings.

- Therefore, it cannot be said if turning off the mic to stop a member from expressing his views in the house will be considered a breach of his parliamentary privilege or not.

### Conclusion

While the Speaker or Chairman has the authority to control the microphones, turning off an MP's microphone could be considered a breach of privilege if it unjustly impedes the MP's right to speak or perform their duties without valid reasons. Each case would be judged based on its specific context and the rules governing parliamentary proceedings.

### Tracking Accused on Bail by Agency Violates Right to Privacy

The Supreme Court (SC) recently held that courts cannot impose bail conditions that require accused persons to share their location on Google Maps.

#### Background

- This case concerns Frank Vitus, a Nigerian national who was arrested in 2014 and is being prosecuted under Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 (NDPS).
- In 2022, he was granted bail in this case by the Delhi High Court under certain bail conditions based on the directions passed by the SC in the *Supreme Court Legal Aid Committee Representing Undertrial Prisoners versus Union of India & Ors* (1994).
  - ✓ The *Legal Aid Committee case* dealt with a petition filed under Article 32 of the Indian Constitution seeking directions for speedy disposal of cases under NDPS involving foreigners.
  - ✓ The petition was later changed to seek directions for all undertrial prisoners who have spent a period exceeding two years languishing to be released on bail.
  - ✓ In this case, the court had directed that an accused, if there was a delay in disposing of cases under the NDPS Act, where the accused is charged with an offence punishable with 10 years' imprisonment or more, and if he has spent half of his maximum sentence, then he can be released on bail with surety on the conditions that-
    1. The accused must drop a PIN on Google Maps to ensure that his location is always available to the investigation officer(s);
    2. In the case of foreign nationals, the accused must obtain a "certificate of assurance" from the relevant Embassy stating that they will not leave the country.
- Both these bail conditions were challenged before the SC Bench.
- Concerning dropping PIN on Google Maps, the court formulated the issue as follows: "*Whether this condition will offend the rights of the accused under Article 21 of the Constitution of India.*"
- During the hearings, the court issued notices to Google India and then to Google LLC to explain the working of Google PIN.
  - ✓ Google LLC is the one that has manufactured the Google Maps product.
  - ✓ In its affidavit, Google LLC stated that dropping a PIN allows the user to mark or identify a location on the map without necessarily requiring access to the user's location data.
- Responding to this, the court remarked that the bail condition for dropping Google PIN is hit by Article 21.

#### What Did The Court Rule?

The SC, in this case has diminished the power of trial courts to grant a restrictive form of bail when the alternative was the denial of such bail by ruling that-

- Bail conditions cannot require the accused to constantly report their movements to the police as such surveillance, whether through technology or otherwise, infringes upon the accused's right to privacy under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution.
- Such conditions unlawfully encroach upon the accused's privacy, akin to confinement even after bail is granted.
- Ordered the removal of the condition regarding “certificate of assurance” as it is beyond the control of the accused if the Embassy does not grant him such a certificate within a reasonable time.
- A broader meaning could not be assigned to the words ‘interest of justice’ under Section 437(3) of CrPC, which governs the conditions that can be set for grant of bail by a Court.
  - ✓ Section 437(3) states that allows the court, while granting bail to an accused, to impose certain conditions in the interests of justice as it considers necessary to prevent the accused from tampering with the facts and proofs related to the case.

### Implications of the Judgement

1. **Denial of Bail-** The judgement narrows down the options available with the court to provide relief for the accused in difficult cases and compel it to deny the bail if the court is doubtful that the accused can flee from the country, thus, violates the right to liberty of the accused.
2. **Increasing Case Load-** The entire judicial machinery has become clogged with bail petitions being filed repeatedly by the accused to secure their liberty. The Supreme Court is burdened with the mounting number of bail cases due to the reluctance of subordinate courts in granting bail to accused or denying it to punish the accused before they are proven guilty.
3. **Delayed Judgement and Wasted Resources-** Mounting bail applications consume valuable time of courts leading to delayed judgment. Also, maintenance of undertrials lodged in prisons requires resources and due to availability of limited resources, the state fails to prioritize resources towards reforming convicts and investigating and preventing crimes.
4. **Ignores Technological Benefits-** in monitoring an accused on bail. Although the court held that constant surveillance breaches accused’s right to privacy, it has ignored the benefits of technological intervention in such cases which can be used to reduce fugitive rates and government expenditure on their maintenance. For example, Electronically Monitored Bail (EMB), incorporated by New Zealand into its law in 2013 allows the person bail on the condition that he needs to always stay at a specific residence unless a special permission to leave the house is granted. The accused needs to wear an electronic anklet 24\*7 for monitoring purposes.

### Conclusion

SC’s decision in this case is a significant step in protecting the right to privacy of the accused but at the same time it also poses challenges to the justice system's ability to balance individual liberty, public safety and the efficient administration of justice. Issues like overcrowded prisons, high percentage of undertrial prisoners, and systemic delays in the judicial process need to be addressed by exploring and adopting less restrictive yet effective alternatives to conventional bail conditions like house arrests or EMB in order to protect the rights of the accused and for an efficient criminal justice system.

### The Delhi Urban Land and Immovable Property Records Bill 2024

For the first time, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) is working on Delhi Urban Land and Immovable Property Records Bill, 2024 that will create an urban land and immovable property records system covering all urban lands, buildings, apartments, and flats for Delhi which will be maintained by a single authority headed by Delhi’s Lieutenant Governor (L-G).

**Present Scenario-** Delhi does not have any specific law or system for managing urban land records and the records are maintained by various authorities and under different laws. For instance-

- Revenue Department maintains the record of rights (RoR) containing all information about a land parcel like its ownership and extent, for villages;
- Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) maintain property tax records for their respective areas;
  - ✓ According to the Economic Survey of Delhi 2022-23, the National Capital Territory (NCT) sprawls over 1,483 sq km, of which 1,114 sq km is designated as urban.
- Delhi Development Authority (DDA) maintains records for the land acquired by it; and
- Land and Development Office (L&DO) of MoHUA manages the lands acquired by the central government when New Delhi was set up in 1911 and rehabilitation colonies.
- Rural land records are maintained under the Delhi Land Reforms Act, 1954 and the act does not apply to urbanized villages in Delhi, or to land owned by a municipal corporation (MCD or NDMC) and the Cantonment Board, or land acquired for public purposes.
- Punjab Land Revenue Act, 1887 is used for rural land records containing details such as khasra number or list of fields, and khatauni or list of cultivators, which only apply to agricultural land.

### Proposal Under the Delhi Urban Land and Immovable Property Records Bill, 2024

- **Delhi Urban Land and Immovable Property Records Authority (DULIPRA)**- Chaired by Delhi L-G, this authority will include officials from the DDA, MCD, NDMC, Delhi Cantonment Board, the L&DO and the Delhi government's Revenue Department as its members and will be responsible for-
  - framing guidelines for creating and maintaining urban land records;
  - appointing officers to survey all urban areas, including land, buildings, apartments, etc;
  - carrying out inquiries into property rights; and
  - imposing penalties for concealment of information under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023.
- ✓ Since land in Delhi is a central subject under Article 239AA of the Constitution, the proposed law will not fundamentally change who controls land policy in the capital.
- ✓ The 69th Amendment Act 1991 accorded special status to Delhi by adding Article 239AA of the Indian Constitution. It put the state of Delhi under the joint control of the lieutenant governor and chief minister in various matters.
- **Urban RoR**- It proposes an urban RoR having the names of all holders, occupants (other than tenants), owners, or mortgagees of the land, or assignees of the rent revenue from it along with the names of all government lessees or tenants, and the nature and extent of their interests and liabilities, if any, with respect to the land or immovable property.

#### Objectives of the Bill

- **Digitalization of Records & Dispute Resolution**: Digitizing all urban land and immovable property records to ensure the accuracy & reliability of property records (legal backing for digital records) to reduce disputes & fraud.
- **Efficient Management and Transparency & Accessibility**: Making property records easily accessible (Reducing bureaucratic delays) to the public through an online portal to enhance transparency in property transactions & ownership details.

#### Significance-

- **Better Planning and Management** - as detailed and robust land records with accurate maps are essential for proper urban planning. As per NITI Aayog's 2021 report titled 'Urban Planning Capacity in India' successful implementation of spatial plans depends largely on how well they stay in sync with the land records". Records managed by a single authority will result in better planning by providing quick access to land records.

- **Easy Dispute Resolution-** Clear and comprehensive records maintained by a single authority would make taxation and dispute resolution over lands easier.
- **One for All-** The bill once enacted will bring all notified urban areas within the geographical boundaries of the NCT of Delhi under the Delhi Urban Land and Immovable Property Records Authority (DULIPRA).

### Maharashtra Special Public Security (MSPS) Bill, 2024

The Maharashtra government recently introduced the Maharashtra Special Public Security (MSPS) Bill, 2024, to curb naxalism in urban areas.

- ✓ "Urban Naxals" refers to alleged sympathizers or supporters of the Naxalite movement residing in urban areas. They are accused of providing intellectual, logistical, or financial support to the Naxalite insurgents.
- ✓ During the period from 2018 to 2023 (till 15 July 23) there were 3,544 Left Wing Extremism (LWE) related incidents and 949 deaths.

#### Legal Provisions Related to Naxalism

- Section 196 of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS implemented on July 1, 2024)- It provides for an imprisonment of up to three years or a fine or both for promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc., and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony.
  - Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), 1967- It is invoked in cases related to *naxalism* and *terrorism* and provides for punishment for commission, funding, and support of "unlawful activities" and "terrorist acts". It also allows the investigating agencies an additional period to file chargesheet.
  - The Maoist-hit States of Andhra Pradesh (Andhra Pradesh Public Security Act, 2020), Telangana, Chhattisgarh (Chhattisgarh Special Public Security Act, 2005) and Odisha have already implemented Public Security Acts to prevent unlawful activities.
  - Government of India (GoI) approved 'National Policy and Action Plan to address LWE' in 2015 envisaging a multi-pronged strategy involving security related measures, development interventions, ensuring rights and entitlements of local communities etc.
- \*\* This policy has resulted in a consistent decline in LWE related violence & its geographical spread.

### About the Maharashtra Special Public Security (MSPS) Bill, 2024

**What is the MSPS Bill?** The MSPS bill 2024 aims to combat the increasing threat of Naxalism, especially in urban areas through Naxal-affiliated organizations by empowering the government and the police machinery.

\*\* This bill seeks to strengthen the legal framework for maintaining public order, preventing violence, and enhancing the overall security infrastructure.

**Objective-** To control and prevent the unlawful activities of Naxal organizations in the state through effective legal means.

#### Key Provisions-

1. **Defining Unlawful Activities-** The bill defines an "unlawful activity" as one which-

- constitutes a danger or menace to public order, peace and tranquility;
- interferes with maintenance of public order, administration of law or its established institutions and personnel;
- Involves indulging in or propagating acts of violence, vandalism, use of firearms, explosives or disrupting communications by rail, road, air or water;
- encourages or preaches disobedience to established law and its institutions";

- Involves collecting money or goods to carry out unlawful activities.
2. **Declaring Unlawful Organizations-** The Bill empowers the state government to declare any organization as “unlawful” which propagates their ideology of armed rebellion against the constitutional mandate”.
3. **Legal Review-**
- Within six weeks of declaring an organization as unlawful, the government will have to make a reference to the advisory board comprising of three qualified individuals (current/former/qualified High Court judges).
  - The board will then have to submit a report within three months after going through the evidence placed before it and hearing the people involved in the organization.
  - If the board fails to find sufficient cause for terming an organization as unlawful, the government will have to revoke the notification.
4. **Offences and Punishment-** All offences under this law will be cognizable and non-bailable and will be investigated by a police officer not below the rank of a Sub-Inspector. The punishment prescribed is-

Type of Member/Organization	Imprisonment and Fine Up to
1. For Members of Unlawful Organizations-	3 years and Rs 3 lakh.
2. For Non-members Contributing or Aiding Unlawful Organizations-	2 years and Rs 2 lakh.
3. For Management or Promotion of Unlawful Organizations-	3 years and Rs 3 lakh.
4. For Committing, Abetting, or Planning Unlawful Activities-	7 years and Rs 5 lakh.

- ✓ Cognizable offences are serious crimes for which police can arrest without a warrant and start an investigation.
  - ✓ Non-bailable offences are severe charges where bail is not a right and is granted only at the discretion of the court.
5. **Seizure and Forfeiture-** If an organization has been declared unlawful, the District Magistrate or Commissioner of Police can notify and take possession of any place used for its activities. This may include movable property like money, securities or other assets found. Government can forfeit money and assets intended for unlawful organizations. The bill allows filing a revision petition against the government’s action with the high court.

### How is MSPS different from UAPA?

UAPA	MSPS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UAPA has a broader national scope, covering various forms of terrorism and unlawful activities</li> <li>• Under UAPA, a tribunal led by a High Court judge verifies the State’s declaration</li> <li>• The state enforces the Maharashtra Control of Organized Crime Act, 1999 (MCOCA) along with UAPA to address perceived extreme situations involving individuals labelled as ‘urban Naxals’.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specifically targets 'urban Naxalism' &amp; related activities in Maharashtra</li> <li>• MSPS has an advisory body to review governments decision of declaring an organization unlawful.</li> <li>• There is no need to use MCOCA &amp; UAPA laws together as MSPS allows the State police &amp; security agencies to arrest individuals without a warrant &amp; often without informing them of the charges &amp; all offences under this Act would be cognizable &amp; non-bailable.</li> </ul>

## Why Is The Law Being Criticized?

1. **Unrequired Legislation-** With the newly enforced BNS which includes offenses like “terrorist activities” (Section 113), “organised crimes” (Section 111) and “petty organised crimes” (Section 112) into the criminal laws governing the country and centralises the provisions of UAPA and MCOCA, there was no need for MSPS.
2. **Vague Definition of Unlawful Activities-** Extremely vague, broad and problematic definition of unlawful activity in the bill is liable to malicious misuse. For instance, the interpretation of the phrase “menace to public order, peace and tranquillity” has been left open for interpretation of the authorities.
3. **Arbitrary Police Powers-** The power with the police to arrest any person without a warrant and to take possession of or seize any notified area and evict persons from that premise can result in misusing police authority.
4. **Advisory Board-**The Bill proposes constituting an advisory board of ex-judges or anyone who qualifies to be a judge this provision can be used by the government to appoint their own persons to the board as even an advocate eligible to become a judge can be appointed to the board.
5. **Prosecuting non-members-** The bill allows prosecution of those individuals who are not even members of ‘unlawful’ organizations. This can result in prosecution of innocent people as well.

## Illegal Coal Mining Issue

3 workers died of asphyxiation inside an illegal coal mine in Gujarat’s Surendranagar district.

### What are the Laws/Rules/Regulations that Governing Coal Mining in India?

#### The Coal Mines (Nationalization) Act, 1973

- This is the central legislation that determines eligibility for coal mining in India and ensures rational, coordinated & scientific development and utilization of coal resources consistent with the growing requirements of the country.
- It reserves coal mining exclusively for the public sector but allows-
  - captive mining by private companies engaged in the production of iron and steel;
  - sub-leasing isolated small pockets of coal mines not amenable to economic development and not requiring rail transport to private companies;
  - Private sector participation in captive coal mining for generation of power, for washing of coal obtained from a mine or for other end uses to be notified by Government from time to time.
  - The allotment of coal mines for captive use was based on the recommendation of a high-powered committee chaired by the Secretary, Ministry of Coal.

#### Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 (MMDR Act):

- This act regulates the mining sector in India and lays down the framework for the regulation of mines and the development of minerals, including coal.
- It provides for the granting of reconnaissance permits, prospecting licenses, and mining leases.

**\*\* Mineral Conservation and Development Rules, 2017 [MCDR]** amended in 2021 have been framed under the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 [MMDR Act] to provide rules regarding conservation of minerals, systematic and scientific mining, development of the mineral (including Coal) in the country and for the protection of environment.

#### The Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Act, 2015

- The act provides for the allocation of coal mines through a transparent bidding process, such as an e-auction. This aims to ensure the continuity of coal mining operations and the optimal use of coal resources.
- The act includes provisions for strong measures to compensate and rehabilitate displaced people.

- The act amends the Coal Mines (Nationalization) Act, 1973 and the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957. This removes the restriction that only certain coal blocks can be mined based on end use.
- \*\* Labour Laws:** Various labour laws apply to coal mining, including the Mines Act, 1952, which regulates the health, safety, and welfare of mine workers.

### Why Are Illegal Coal Mining Cases On The Rise?

Coal is the most abundant fossil fuel in India, accounting for 55% of the country’s energy needs. Illegal mining in India is mostly carried out in abandoned mines or shallow coal seams in remote or isolated places due to following reasons-

Factors	Description
<b>Coal Abundance and Poverty &amp; Unemployment</b>	Many people living in coal rich areas are struggling with poverty & unemployment. So, they resort to illegal mining to earn easy & lucrative profits. It translates into a high demand for coal because of Increased Value.
<b>Weak Mining Regulations &amp; Support from Political Leaders</b>	This creates illegal rat-hole coal mining and rises coal mafias. For example, in 2018, activist Marshall Biam of the Northeast Indigenous People’s Federation registered a complaint accusing a “police-backed” coal gang of Meghalaya threatening him.
<b>Complex Land Ownership Issues</b>	Disputes and complexities related to land ownership and tenure result in unauthorized coal mining on contested lands.
<b>Inadequate Penalties</b>	Lenient penalties and lack of stringent punitive measures fail to deter illegal coal mining effectively

### Why are Workers dying in Coal Mines?

The following factors collectively contribute to the tragic fatalities among workers in coal mines

Reason	Description
<b>Lack of Safety Equipment &amp; Violation of Safety Regulations</b>	Miners face increased respiratory risks by inhaling coal dust, and the lack of safety equipment significantly increases this risk. Mines in Bihar operate without adhering to safety standards resulting in accidents.
<b>Lack of Proper Structural Support coupled with incidents of Natural Hazards</b>	In illegal mines to carry out the extraction of coal, makes working conditions vulnerable to cave-ins, landslides & explosions. It also exposes workers to high levels of toxic substances like lead and mercury, which can cause acute poisoning or long-term chronic medical conditions.
<b>Lack of Training and Awareness</b>	Inadequate training for miners on safety protocols and emergency procedures.
<b>Overworking and Fatigue with Exposure to Toxic Gases</b>	Extended working hours without adequate rest leading to fatigue and accidents. Inadequate ventilation systems lead to exposure to hazardous gases like methane and carbon monoxide.

### Government Initiatives To Curb Illegal Mining

- 1. Coal Mines Special Provisions Act, 2015:** introduced transparent auction process, encouraged Private participation, generated revenue for the government, creating employment opportunities in coal mining.
- 2. Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act:** focused on enhancing transparency and efficiency in the allocation of mining licenses by allowing Composite Prospecting License-cum-Mining Lease (PL-cum-ML) specifically for coal.
  - ✓ This Amendment also introduced stringent penalties for illegal mining activities and extended the powers of state governments to curb illegal mining.

3. **Commercial Coal Mining:** auctions were launched for the entry of private players into the coal sector to attract investments, spur competition, increase efficiency and for faster project implementation.
4. **Single Window for E-auction of coal** enables the coal companies to sell coal through the market discovered price mechanism.
  - ✓ The National Mineral Exploration Trust (NMET) was established to enhance mineral exploration activities, NMET ensures that mining operations are conducted in an organized & lawful manner.
5. **Opening of abandoned/discontinued mines:** Amendments to the New Coal Distribution Policy (NCDP) now allow the sale of coal from Closed/Abandoned/Discontinued mines of CIL through transparent processes.
6. **Decriminalization to boost doing business:** The Ministry of Coal has amended the Mineral Concession Rules, 1960 (MCR) to decriminalize its provisions to promote and boost government's "Ease of Doing Business policy".
7. **FDI and Technological Advancement:** Allowing 100% FDI in coal mining has attracted global expertise and advanced technologies, further boosting efficiency and productivity. It has opened new avenues while contributing to economic growth.
  - ✓ Adoption of advanced technologies like drones and geospatial tools; Digitization of permits and transit passes for mining to ensure transparency and reduce illegal transportation of minerals.
8. **Coal Mines Surveillance and Management System (CMSMS) and Khanan Prahari App** enhances security for legal coal mining and protects natural resources. Khanan Prahari empowers citizens to report illegal mining, while CMSMS aids tracking and analysis, fostering transparency & coordination.
  - ✓ The Mining Surveillance System (MSS) uses satellite imagery to monitor mining activities and detect illegal mining activities.

### Supreme Court Delivers Split Verdict On Nod For GM Mustard

A two-judge Bench of the Supreme Court (SC) recently delivered a **split verdict** on the validity of Centre's 2022 decision granting conditional approval for environmental release of genetically modified (GM) mustard crops.

#### What are GM Crops?

- GM crops are the plants whose DNAs have been altered through genetic engineering techniques to introduce desirable traits in them like resistance to pests, diseases, or environmental conditions, improved nutritional content, or increased yield.
- GM crops are also known as genetically engineered (GE) plants, transgenic crops, living modified organisms (LMOs) or biotech crops.

**Evolution-** They were first introduced in the USA in the mid-1990s and are now globally cultivated. At present, a total of 16 GM crops are cultivated in various countries out of which corn, soybean, cotton and canola are the four largest acreages.

**Introduction in India-** In India, Bt cotton is the only GM crop approved for cultivation. It was first grown in 2002 & now occupies more than 90% of the cotton area in the country (India became the world's largest cotton producer.).

**\*\*Several more crops such as chickpea, pigeon pea, corn, sugarcane, etc. are in various stages of research & field trials.**

- ✓ Although Bt Brinjal is approved by GEAC in 2009, its commercial release has been put on hold due to public and political opposition.

**Regulated by-** In India, all GMOs (Genetically Modified Organisms) including GM crops are regulated as per the "Rules for the Manufacture, Use, Import, Export and Storage of Hazardous Microorganisms, Genetically Engineered Organisms or commonly Cells" referred to as Rules, 1989 under the Environment (Protection) Act,

1986 essentially cover entire spectrum of activities involving GMOs and products thereof including sale, storage, exportation, importation, production, manufacturing, packaging, etc.

\*\* Additionally, GM foods must comply with the regulations set by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI).

### Background

- In 2022 the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) recommended the environmental release of transgenic mustard hybrid DMH-11 (a variety of GM mustard). Centre approved the recommendation and allowed the release of GM mustard.
- Activist Aruna Rodrigues and the NGO 'Gene Campaign' filed PIL in SC seeking ban on the release of any GMOs into the environment until a comprehensive, transparent, and rigorous biosafety protocol is publicly available and conducted by independent experts.

### The Final Verdict

In their split decision, the judges disagreed on two key aspects:

1. Whether the GEAC's decision-making process was legal?
2. Whether it violated the "precautionary principle" for scientific innovations.

✓ The precautionary principle is a standard test in environmental litigation recognized as a facet of the right to a clean environment under Article 21 (fundamental right to life).

#### Justice Nagarathna

- She ruled against the release of GM Mustard and blamed the GEAC for clearing the project without relying on any indigenous studies on the crop's effect in India and its possible environmental ramifications.
- She emphasized on striking a balance between development and the environment and said that the approval for release was against "principles of accountability" as the panel failed to adequately assess the effect of GM mustard on public health and the environment and was in "gross violation of principle of intergenerational equity" as well as "public interest".

#### Justice Karol

- He upheld the GEAC's clearance for GM mustard's commercial release and did not find "any aspect of manifest arbitrariness" in the approval that was granted by GEAC, nor in its composition.
- According to him, the environmental release and following tests and trials were in line with "the development of a scientific temper" and abided by the precautionary principle.

- Both judges agreed and the court directed the Centre to consult all stakeholders and experts within four months to formulate a national policy with regard to GM crops for research, cultivation, trade and commerce in the country.
- The case was referred to the Chief Justice of India for placing it before a larger Bench.

### Extra Mile: About Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC)

#### What is GEAC?

It is the apex Regulatory Committee formed in 2010 and functioning under MoEF&CC constituted under the "Rules for the Manufacture, Use/Import/Export and Storage of Hazardous Microorganisms/Genetically Engineered Organisms or Cells (Rules, 1989)" framed under Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

#### Composition-

1. The Committee is chaired by Special Secretary / Additional Secretary of MoEF&CC and co-chaired by an Expert nominated by DBT.
2. It comprises 24 Members from the Ministry of Industrial Development, DBT, and Department of Atomic Energy. They meet every month to review the applications in the areas indicated above.

**Functions-**

1. It reviews, monitors and approves all activities involving large scale use of hazardous micro-organisms and recombinant research and industrial production including import, export, transport, manufacture, use or sale of GMOs and products from environmental angle.
2. It reviews, monitors and approves proposals relating to the release of GE organisms and products into the environment including experimenting field trials with specific conditions for containment.

## Geopolitical Events And Container Shortages Faced By India

- India and global traders are grappling with severe container shortages as the European Union's 37.6% tariffs on Chinese electric vehicle (EV) imports begin, preceding upcoming US tariffs.
- At a recent Commerce Ministry review, Indian exporters highlighted that container shortages, a persistent issue since the COVID-19 pandemic, are exacerbated by structural weaknesses.
- The Red Sea crisis and renewed US-China trade tensions have further increased ship voyage times, intensifying the shortages.

## Reasons Behind The Container Crunch

- **Steep US and EU tariffs on Chinese products**
  - Indian exporters face severe container shortages due to **heightened demand** from Chinese exporters aiming to beat steep US and EU tariffs on products like electric vehicles (EVs) and semiconductors.
  - The US tariffs, which can reach up to 100% on EVs and 50% on semiconductors, along with the EU's 37.6% tariffs, will become effective from **August 1.**
  - These have prompted a rush to ship goods, leaving fewer containers for Indian exporters.
    - Due to the scale of trade between the US and China, container demand has gone up leaving Indian exporters with fewer containers for exports.
- **Contribution of the Red Sea crisis**
  - The Red Sea crisis further exacerbates the shortage, with near-daily attacks by Yemen's Houthi rebels reducing traffic by 90% and forcing ships to take longer routes via the Cape of Good Hope.
  - This has increased port congestion, with global congestion hitting an 18-month high and 60% of ships waiting in Asia.
- **Continued and expanded tariffs**
  - Unlike past tariff hikes, the current situation is worsened by the continued and expanded tariffs under the Biden administration, targeting high-demand items like EVs.
  - Additionally, other countries like Canada and Indonesia are also imposing higher tariffs on Chinese goods, increasing global demand for containers.
    - Indonesia has also announced an import tariff of up to 200 percent on a range of Chinese goods.
- **Dependence on China for containers**
  - India's dependency on China for containers, which produces 95% of the global supply, is a significant issue.
    - China is the largest exporter of containers.
  - Much of the container manufacturing in China is done by a handful of highly subsidized state owned enterprises that has sparked security concerns in the US, EU as well as in India.
  - Efforts to mitigate this dependence began post-COVID-19, with India and the US initiating domestic container production to reduce reliance on Chinese manufacturing.

### Container production in India

In 2021 that state-owned wagon manufacturer Braithwaite, and engineering major Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited had received an order from Container Corporation of India (CONCOR) to develop and produce 1000 containers each. However, the production did not go as expected.

In 2023, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw told Parliament that CONCOR was facing problems in supply and procurement of domestic containers.

He told the Parliament that CONCOR had placed orders for 19,000 containers on seven indigenous container manufacturers located in Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Punjab, Maharashtra, and Gujarat. However, till 31 March 2023, about 500 containers had been delivered to CONCOR.

## UK General Election 2024

- In the 2024 UK general election held on July 4, **the Labour Party, led by Keir Starmer, achieved a landslide victory** over the ruling Conservative Party, which was led by Rishi Sunak.
- The election was held to elect 650 members to the House of Commons after the previous PM Rishi Sunak called a snap general election, even though the next election was not required until December 2024.

### Nature of the Governance System

- The United Kingdom operates under a constitutional monarchy and a parliamentary democracy. Key features include:

- **Monarch**

- The head of state is the monarch, currently King Charles III.
- The role is largely ceremonial, with real political power vested in elected bodies.

- **Prime Minister**

- The head of government is the Prime Minister, who is the leader of the majority party in the House of Commons.
- The Prime Minister is appointed by the monarch and is responsible for running the government, making policy decisions, and representing the UK domestically and internationally.

- **Cabinet**

- Comprises senior government ministers chosen by the Prime Minister.
- Ministers are typically heads of government departments and are responsible for implementing government policy.

### Nature of the Parliament of UK:

It is a bicameral legislature, consisting of two houses:

#### House of Commons

- The lower house, made up of 650 MPs elected by the public through FPTP.
- It is the primary legislative body, responsible for making and passing laws.
- The party (or coalition) with the majority of seats forms the government, and its leader becomes the Prime Minister.
- The opposition is made up of MPs from parties not in government.

#### HOUSE OF LORDS

- The upper house, which is unelected and includes life peers, bishops, and hereditary peers.
- It reviews and suggests amendments to legislation proposed by the House of Commons.
- While it can delay legislation, it cannot ultimately prevent bills passed by the Commons from becoming law.

### Voting System of the United Kingdom

- **Background**

- The House of Commons, Scottish Parliament, Welsh Parliament, Northern Ireland Assembly and UK local authorities use different voting systems.

- **First-past-the-post**

- The House of Commons, mayoral elections in England, Police and Crime Commissioner elections and local councils in England and Wales use the first-past-the-post system.
- Voters select their preferred candidate. The candidate with the most votes wins.

### ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE UK & NATIONAL ELECTIONS

#### KEY METRICS

Population <b>67 million</b>	Inflation <b>2%</b>
Unemployment <b>4.40%</b>	Median age <b>41 years</b>
GDP per capita (2022) <b>\$46,125</b>	Food inflation <b>1.7%</b>

#### Parliament seats in the UK's four constituents

Scotland	<b>59</b>
Northern Ireland	<b>18</b>
Wales	<b>40</b>
England	<b>553</b>

#### HOW UK VOTES

Voting age	18
Parliamentary seats	650
Parliamentary term	5 years
Seats required for majority	326

#### KEY PARTIES IN FRAY

SEATS IN PREVIOUS PARLIAMENT	
Conservative Party	345
Labour Party	206
Scottish National Party	43
Liberal Democrats	15
Reform UK	1

- **Formation of the government**

- If a single party wins a majority of the 650 seats, their leader will become the new Prime Minister.
- If no party achieves a majority, a hung parliament will be declared, and the largest party may attempt to form a coalition government.

**UK Elections: 28 with India roots in new UK House**

- Of the 28, a record 12 members from the Sikh community, including six women, were elected to the House of Commons.
  - With 12 Sikh MPs, UK is now second only to Canada, which is home to a sizeable Punjabi diaspora, and has 18 Sikh MPs.

**Sri Lanka To Lift Ban On Foreign Research Vessels Next Year**

Sri Lanka will allow foreign research vessels to dock at its ports starting next year. This decision comes after a previous ban on such vessels, which was imposed due to concerns over Chinese research ships. In January 2024, Sri Lanka banned the visit of foreign research vessels after India and the United States voiced concern over the visit of at least two Chinese research vessels, in the two preceding years.

- Sri Lanka aims to maintain neutrality and avoid favoring any particular country.
- The island nation has become a key site for strategic competition among major powers, with significant investments from China, the U.S., and Japan.
  - Recently, India has strengthened maritime cooperation with Sri Lanka, including the launch of a **Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre**.
  - Japan plans to assist Sri Lanka with a vessel equipped for underwater surveys to enhance its oceanographic capabilities.
  - Development Finance Corporation (DFC) of US announced a \$553 million investment in the Adani Ports-led West Container Terminal project underway at the **Colombo Port**.

**K P Sharma Oli Appointed Nepal's New Prime Minister**

- K P Sharma Oli was appointed Nepal's Prime Minister for the third time to lead the new coalition government that faces the daunting challenge of providing political stability in the country.
  - Oli becomes the new Prime Minister of the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML)-Nepali Congress (NC) coalition govt.
- Mr. Oli succeeds Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda who lost the vote of confidence in the House of Representatives.

**China, Russia Joint Naval Drills**

- China and Russia conducted a joint naval exercise in Guangdong province, China, despite recent NATO criticism of Beijing's role in the Ukraine conflict.
- The drills include anti-missile, sea strike, and air defense exercises and aim to showcase the navies' capabilities.
- This exercise follows heightened NATO scrutiny of China's support for Russia and recent encounters between Chinese military ships and a U.S. Coast Guard cutter in the Bering Sea.

## South Africa's New Law On Climate Change

- South African President Cyril Ramaphosa has signed a new law requiring major fossil-fuel industries to cut emissions and mandating climate-adaptation plans for towns and villages.
- This legislation aims to help South Africa meet its emissions reduction targets under the Paris Agreement.
- South Africa's National Assembly approved the Climate Change Bill last November, aiming to reduce emissions from its coal-dependent energy sector.

## East Coast Rail Link (ECRL)

- China is planning to work with Malaysia to study connecting the East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) with railway links in Laos and Thailand.
- The ECRL in Malaysia, a \$10 billion rail project, is part of China's Belt and Road Initiative.

## Israeli Military's Hannibal Directive

- As Hamas raided southern Israel on October 7, 2023, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) activated the "Hannibal Directive".
- It is a purported operational doctrine of using maximum force to ensure no soldiers are captured, even if it means sacrificing military and civilian lives.
- It aims to pre-empt politically painful prisoner swaps by immediately eliminating everyone in the vicinity of a captive Israeli soldier, even if it poses a risk to the soldier himself.

## India-Russia Trade Gap And Rupee Internationalization Efforts

- Since the Ukraine war in 2022, India-Russia trade dynamics have become skewed. Russia is now India's top oil supplier, but Indian exports to Russia have lagged, leading to a \$57 billion trade deficit out of a ~\$66 billion bilateral trade in FY24.
- The low exports to Russia have hindered India's goal to reduce dependence on the US dollar. Continued unbalanced trade might compel India to use the Chinese yuan, undermining efforts to internationalize the rupee.
  - China has capitalized on export opportunities in Russia amid Western sanctions and the exit of Western companies, with Chinese exports to Russia growing faster than imports of Russian oil.
    - In 2023, Chinese shipments to Russia increased by 47% year-on-year to \$111 billion, while imports grew by 13% to \$129 billion, leading to a record two-way trade of \$240 billion.
  - Consequently, the yuan has become the most sought-after currency in the Russian stock market, surpassing the US dollar.

### Challenges in Exports to Russia



» The primary challenge is the reluctance of private banks to engage due to fears of Western sanctions, as many have significant business interests and branches in Western countries.

To address this, a joint statement following Prime Minister Modi's visit emphasized the need to increase Indian exports to Russia by strengthening industrial cooperation.

» Indian exporters are also facing difficulties using the rupee settlement mechanism while trading with Russia.

Exporters initially complained that although the RBI had launched the mechanism, they were unable to use it due to the absence of a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for banks.

» Additionally, the volatility of the ruble and rupee, unlike the more stable yuan, further complicates trade in domestic currencies.

- Russian oil exports now request payments from Indian refineries in yuan, while the use of the rupee remains limited.

### Way forward

- India and Russia have doubled their payments in national currencies (rupee-rouble) since last year. The surge may rise further after PM Modi's visit to Moscow.
- During the recent visit of PM Modi, India and Russia agreed to eliminate trade barriers and initiate negotiations for a trade deal with the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), which includes Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia, representing a \$5 trillion economy.
- They decided to cooperate in manufacturing sectors such as transport engineering, metallurgy, and chemicals, and to implement joint projects in priority areas.

### India, Japan Plan Joint Carbon Crediting Mechanism

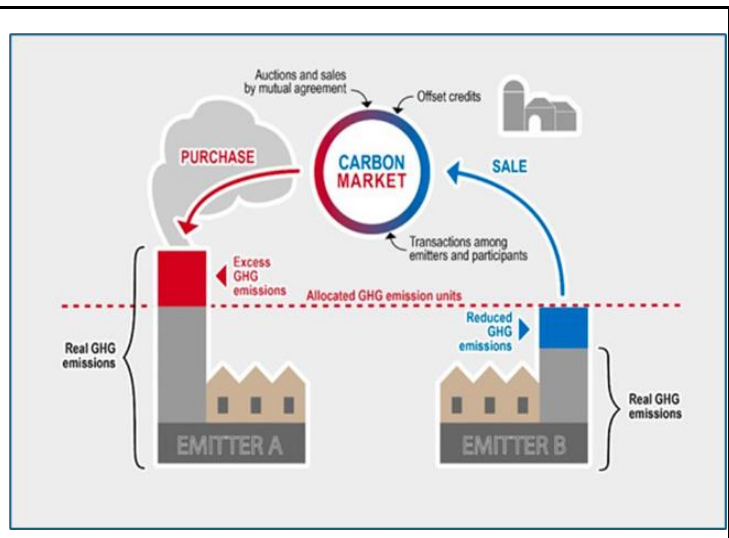
- India and Japan plan to sign a Memorandum of Cooperation for setting up a **Joint Crediting Mechanism (JCM)** with emission reduction credits being shared. The JCM will be formed under **Article 6.2 of the Paris Agreement**.
  - **Article 6** provides for the use of international carbon markets by countries to fulfil their nationally determined contributions (NDCs).
  - **Article 6.2:** Parties shall apply robust accounting to ensure the avoidance of double counting.

### Key Features

- A joint committee will be established to develop rules and guidelines for the JCM, covering project cycle procedures, methodologies, project design documents, monitoring, and designation of third-party entities.
- The **governments recognize that JCM credits from emission reductions and removals will contribute to NDCs of both countries**, ensuring no double counting occurs.
- Part of the JCM credits can also be authorized for international mitigation purposes.
- The two countries will confirm *project registration* before the joint committee makes a decision, and they will determine the percentage of credit allocation.
  - Carbon credits will be allocated through a structured process & a registry will track these credits.
  - Credits will be allocated to *respective registries* of India & Japan and used towards their NDCs.
- Additionally, **Japan will support technology transfer, finance, and capacity building for the JCM.**

### Carbon Markets

- Carbon markets are essentially a tool for putting a price on carbon emissions— they establish trading systems where carbon credits or allowances can be bought and sold.
- A **carbon credit** is a kind of tradable permit that, per United Nations standards, **equals one tonne of carbon dioxide removed, reduced, or sequestered from the atmosphere.**
- Carbon allowances or caps, meanwhile, are determined by countries or governments according to their emission reduction targets.



- A United Nations Development Program release this year noted that interest in carbon markets is growing globally, i.e., 83% of NDCs submitted by countries mention their intent to make use of international market mechanisms to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

### Two Types of Carbon Markets

- **Compliance Market:**
  - These are **set up by policies at the national, regional, and/or international level— are officially regulated.**
  - Entities in this sector are issued annual allowances or permits by governments equal to the emissions they can generate.
  - If companies produce emissions beyond the capped amount, they have to purchase additional permit, either through official auctions or from companies which kept their emissions below the limit, leaving them with surplus allowances.
  - The market price of carbon gets determined by market forces when purchasers and sellers trade in emissions allowances.
- **Voluntary Market (decentralized):**
  - These are markets in which emitters— **corporations, private individuals, and others— buy carbon credits to offset the emission of one tonne of CO2 or equivalent greenhouse gases.**
  - Such carbon credits are created by activities which reduce CO2 from the air, such as afforestation.
  - In a voluntary market, a corporation looking to compensate for its unavoidable GHG emissions purchases carbon credits from an entity engaged in projects that reduce, remove, capture, or avoid emissions.

### Carbon Market in India

- In the past, India has made investments in producing carbon credits and exporting them to international enterprises.
- **Between 2010 and June 2022, India issued 35.94 million carbon credits or nearly 17% of all voluntary carbon market credits issued globally.**
- However, the government now intends to forbid its exports, guarantee the expansion of a local domestic market for carbon credits, and increase its internal trade.
- Currently, **India's carbon market is a voluntary carbon market where private parties voluntarily exchange certified reductions of GHGs from the atmosphere for carbon credits.**

### Legislative Push

- The Parliament passed the **Energy Conservation (Amendment) Act, 2022** aimed at putting in place provisions to make the use of *clean energy (non-fossil sources)* mandatory and paving the way for the setting of carbon markets in the country.
  - Through the amendment of the Energy Conservation Act, the Central government aims to **develop India's Carbon market and boost the adoption of clean technology.**
- The Act empowers the central government to specify a **carbon credit trading scheme.**
- The central government or any authorized agency may issue carbon credit certificates to entities registered under and compliant with the scheme.
- The entities will be entitled to purchase or sell the certificate.

## Budget 2024 and Neighbourhood First in External Affairs' allocation

- The government of India has emphasized a focus on its neighborhood. This was demonstrated by the attendance of regional leaders at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's inauguration.
- Keeping this in mind, the Union Budget for the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) allocated significant funds to India-funded projects in neighboring countries.

Nepal	Received ₹700 crore, an increase of ₹150 crore from the previous year
Sri Lanka	Allocation rose by ₹95 crore to ₹245 crore
Seychelles	Received a boost from ₹10 crore to ₹40 crore
<b>Bhutan</b>	<b>The largest recipient</b> , saw a decrease of ₹332.02 crore, receiving ₹2,068.56 crore this year. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Despite the reduction, funding for Bhutanese projects remains robust, with 61 projects worth ₹4,958 crore approved.</li> </ul>
Myanmar	Dropped from ₹400 crore to ₹250 crore
Mauritius	Decreased by ₹90.79 crore to ₹370 crore
Mongolia	Dropped from ₹7 crore to ₹5 crore
Bangladesh	Reduced by ₹80 crore to ₹120 crore
Afghanistan and Maldives	Maintained their previous allocations of ₹200 crore and ₹400 crore, respectively

- Additionally, the MEA's 'Aid for Cultural and Heritage Projects' received an extra ₹5 crore, totaling ₹15 crore.
- It is no secret that despite India's growing global clout and ambitions, the budget allocated to the ministry of external affairs (MEA) has consistently remained below 1% of the overall budget.
  - However, with a 23% growth in the budget estimate when compared to that of last year, this budget has seen the highest-ever allocation for the MEA worth ₹22,155 crore.
  - With a significant focus on special diplomatic expenditure, guarantee redemption funds, embassies and missions, and assistance to neighbours, the budget places India's foreign policy on the right track.

## India And USA Sign The First Ever 'Cultural Property Agreement'

- India and the USA signed the first-ever **Cultural Property Agreement (CPA)** to combat the illicit trafficking of antiquities and facilitating the return of artifacts.
  - The signing event coincided with the 46th **World Heritage Committee** meeting in New Delhi.
  - Over 358 Indian antiquities have been repatriated since 1976, with 345 returned since 2014.
- The agreement followed year-long bilateral discussions and was highlighted during India's G20 Presidency.
  - In 2022, the Government of India and the Government of the USA came on one stage to explore the possibility of strengthening bi-lateral ties under **Article 9 of the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property**.
- The CPA restricts the importation of certain archaeological and ethnological materials into the USA and mandates the return of such items to India if seized by US authorities.
- This agreement is part of broader efforts to enhance cultural diplomacy and sustainable development by repatriating artifacts to their countries of origin.

## America Overtook UAE As India's Second Largest LNG Supplier In 2023

- The US displaced the UAE to emerge as India's second largest supplier of liquefied natural gas (LNG) in 2023, accounting for 3.09 million tonnes (MT).
  - Qatar remained India's largest LNG supplier for five years running (2019-2023). In 2023, shipments from Qatar rose to a high of 10.92 MT.
  - The US also emerged as the world's largest LNG exporter in 2023.
  - LNG is emerging as a substitute fuel in the transition towards green energy.
- **Factors responsible**
  - Weakening LNG prices in international markets;
  - India's proximity, via the Cape of Good Hope, to US LNG cargoes compared to North Asia.
- **Other development**
  - Decline in the share of African nations in India's LNG imports.
  - Nigeria and Angola, which supplied 2.7 MT and 2.9 MT LNG, respectively, to India pre-pandemic (2019), saw their cargoes shrink to 0.73 MT each in 2023.
  - The share of both African nations has been declining since 2021.

## Budget 2024 and Rule of Origin

The Union Budget 2024 has introduced amendments to the Customs Act, easing compliance with **value-addition norms** that are usually in place to prevent the misuse of concessions agreed upon in a trade agreement.

### Changes proposed w.r.t 'Rules of Origin' in Budget 2024

- **Amendment in Section 28DA of the Customs Act, 1962**
  - Through this, it has replaced the requirement for a "certificate" of origin with a broader "**proof**" of origin, which can be a certificate or a self-declaration in accordance with a trade agreement.
  - This change aligns with global customs practices and may be implemented if agreed upon in future trade agreements.
- **Impact**
  - Tax experts note that this amendment allows for greater flexibility in determining the origin of goods.
  - However, concerns are raised about potential breaches in self-certification and the need for high integrity in the exporting countries to prevent loss of customs revenue for India.
    - While developed countries have **robust tracking systems** and use self-certification in FTAs, India remains cautious due to past experiences with goods being diverted from countries like China via Indonesia and Vietnam.
  - The amendment could impact future free trade agreements (FTAs), such as the one with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), which includes provisions for self-certification.

### Rule of Origin



✓ Rules of origin are the criteria used to define where a product was made. They determine the economic nationality of a product in international trade.

#### ✓ Criteria for Determining Origin

- **Wholly Obtained or Produced** - Goods that are completely produced or obtained in a country, such as agricultural products, minerals, and fish.

- **Substantial Transformation** -

Products that have undergone substantial transformation in a country, typically defined by a change in tariff classification, a specific percentage of value added, or specific manufacturing processes.



## SUMMITS AND ORGANISATIONS

### 2nd BIMSTEC Foreign Ministers' Retreat

The 2nd Retreat of the Foreign Ministers of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) was held in New Delhi. It was hosted by India. Thailand hosted the 1st BIMSTEC Retreat in Bangkok in July, 2023.

#### About BIMSTEC (7 Member Countries)

- It is a regional organization founded in **1997** to promote economic cooperation and technical collaboration among countries bordering the Bay of Bengal.
- The BIMSTEC region is **home to more than 1.8 billion people** which constitute around 22% of the global population.
- **Objectives:**
  - Foster economic growth and development.
  - Enhance regional connectivity and integration.
  - Promote cooperation across sectors such as trade, technology, energy, & transportation.
- **Priority Sectors:**
  - **Trade and Investment:** Boosting intra-regional trade and investments.
  - **Technology:** Sharing technological advancements.
  - **Energy:** Collaborating on renewable and sustainable energy projects.
  - **Transportation:** Improving regional connectivity.
  - **Tourism:** Promoting cultural and tourism exchanges.
  - **Agriculture:** Enhancing agricultural practices and ensuring food security.
  - **Fisheries:** Ensuring sustainable fisheries management.
- **Trade Dynamics:**
  - According to industry insiders, Intra-regional trade among BIMSTEC countries is above US\$40 billion and the **potential trade opportunity evolving the BIMSTEC nations seems to be as high as US\$250 billion**.
  - Notably, BIMSTEC countries constitute around 4% of world trade meaning that it has an immense potential to be a game-changer of the global south economy.
  - Presently, about 60% of BIMSTEC's combined GDP at present comes from trade.
  - Currently, **India's export share in BIMSTEC is above 50% (US\$21 billion)**, followed by Thailand 30% (US\$12.2 billion) and Myanmar 14% (US\$6.1 billion).
  - **Over 40% of BIMSTEC's intra-regional trade is ocean-borne**, demonstrating the need for maritime connectivity.



#### Challenges for BIMSTEC as an Organisation

- Intra-regional trade and investment are relatively lower in the BIMSTEC region as compared to other regional blocs. This is mainly due to **inadequate infrastructure**
- Moreover, **lack of connectivity and information dissemination** in the region appears as a common barrier for BIMSTEC-led opportunities.

- Regarding border trade, lack of telecommunication links, parking space, warehouses and cold storage, accommodation facilities and power are major constraints.

### CITES Eases Export Of Agarwood From India

- India has successfully prevented inclusion of *Aquilaria malaccensis* (agarwood) in the Review of Significant Trade (RST) of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).
  - RST is a process, under the CITES, designed to ensure that trade in certain species is sustainable and does not threaten their survival.

## Aquilaria Malaccensis (Agarwood)

### About

- ▶ Commonly known as agarwood, it is a species of tree belonging to the Thymelaeaceae family.
- ▶ It is well-known for producing a fragrant resinous wood, which is highly valued for its distinct aroma.
- ▶ This resin forms in response to infection by a particular type of mold, and the resulting aromatic wood is known as agarwood, oud, or aloeswood.

### Uses

Agarwood has been used for centuries in various cultures for religious, medicinal, and perfumery purposes. Some of its key uses include:

- ▶ **Perfumes and Incense:** Agarwood is highly prized in the perfume industry for its unique and long-lasting fragrance.
- ▶ **Traditional Medicine:** Agarwood is believed to have medicinal properties and is used in traditional medicine systems like Ayurveda and Traditional Chinese Medicine for its potential to treat various ailments.
- ▶ The essential oil extracted from agarwood has anti-inflammatory, anti-rheumatic, analgesic and anti-oxidant properties.

**Spiritual Practices:** In many cultures, agarwood is used in spiritual rituals and meditation due to its calming and soothing properties.

### Conservation Status


It was listed in Appendix II of CITES for the first time in 1995 based on India's proposal at CoP9 in 1994. While it is not immediately threatened with extinction, trade must be controlled to avoid exploitation that could threaten its survival.

- The CITES also notified a **new export quota** of highly valuable and aromatic resinous wood and oil of agarwood from India from April 2024.

### Key Highlights

- **Inclusion of agarwood in the RST of CITES prevented**
  - This development is going to benefit lakhs of farmers in certain districts of Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, and Tripura.
- **Decision based on study by BSI**
  - India's removal from the RST for *Aquilaria malaccensis* was achieved through a study conducted by the Botanical Survey of India (BSI) under the MoEFCC.
  - This study, known as a **non-detriment finding (NDF)**, concluded that the species could be sustainably harvested under certain conditions.

## Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)



### About

- CITES is an international agreement aimed at ensuring that international trade in wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival.
- It was signed in 1973 & entered into force in 1975. It has 184 member parties
- Although CITES is legally binding on the Parties, it does not take the place of national laws.
  - ▶ Basically, CITES provides a legal framework to promote cooperation among its members, ensure sustainability, and regulate international trade.

### Structure

- The CITES Secretariat is administered by UNEP (The United Nations Environment Programme). It is located at Geneva, Switzerland.
- The Conference of the Parties to CITES, is the supreme decision-making body of the Convention.

### Three categories or appendices

- CITES works by placing species into three categories or appendices, each offering a different level of protection:
  - ▶ **Appendix I:** Includes species threatened with extinction. Trade in these species is permitted only in exceptional circumstances.
  - ▶ **Appendix II:** Includes species not necessarily threatened with extinction but for which trade must be controlled to avoid utilization incompatible with their survival.
  - ▶ **Appendix III:** Includes species that are protected in at least one country, which has asked other CITES Parties for assistance in controlling the trade.
- Species can be added to or removed from Appendices I and II, or moved between them, only by the Conference of the Parties.
- However, species can be added to or removed from Appendix III at any time by any Party unilaterally.

- **Various restrictions affected trade in agarwood from India**

- The absence of an export quota for a long period and other trade-related restrictions in India caused an increase in informal trade/export of agar chips, oil, powder etc. to the Middle East and other foreign countries.
- It also caused an increase in costs of agarwood chips and oil in the global market as India is a major agarwood trading nation.
- Though India had an export quota since November 2021, the growers and farmers were unable to trade agarwood legally due to imposing several legal restrictions that led them towards informal traders.

### Rajasthan's Tribal Communities Recognized for Tackling Global Challenges at U.N. Event

- Recently, a High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development was held under the auspices of the U.N. Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).
- The solutions offered by indigenous tribal communities in Rajasthan to global challenges, and their role in the execution of policies were highlighted at this forum.

**UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)**

**About**

- » It is one of the six principal organs of UN which was established by UN Charter (1945)
- » It is responsible for the direction and coordination of the economic, social, humanitarian, and cultural activities carried out by the UN.
- » Decisions are taken by simple majority vote. The presidency of ECOSOC changes annually.

**Members**

- » It has 54 members which are elected for 3-year terms by the General Assembly.
  - Four of the five permanent members of the Security Council have been continuously re-elected.
  - This is because they provide funding for most of ECOSOC's budget, which is the largest of any UN subsidiary body.

**Function**

- » ECOSOC is responsible for coordinating the social and economic fields of the organization, specifically in regards to the 15 specialized agencies, the five regional commissions under the jurisdiction, the eight functional commissions.

### Moidams Inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List as India's 43rd Entry

- “Moidams – the Mound-Burial System of the Ahom Dynasty” from Assam has been officially inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List under the category Cultural Property.
- The announcement was made during the ongoing **46th session of the World Heritage Committee at New Delhi**. This makes it the **43rd property** from India to be included in the list.
  - This is the third World Heritage Property from Assam, following Kaziranga National Park and Manas Wildlife Sanctuary (both inscribed under the **Natural category** in 1985).
- India became a member of the World Heritage Committee from 2021-25 and is currently hosting its first ever session since joining UNESCO's World Heritage Convention of 1972.

#### Moidams (Pyramids of Assam)

- The Moidams (also Maidams) are the **mound-burial system** of the Ahom dynasty (13th century-19th century).
- The mound-burial system of the royals of the Ahom dynasty in **Assam's Charaideo district** can be likened to the royal tombs of ancient China and the Pyramids of the Egyptians Pharaohs.
- **Location**
  - While Charaideo exclusively contains moidams of Ahom royals, other moidams of aristocrats and chiefs can be found scattered across Eastern Assam, in the region between the towns of Jorhat and Dibrugarh.
- **Features**
  - These structures feature one or more chambers in a vault, topped by a hemispherical earthen mound covered in grass.
  - A pavilion, called the chow chali, sits atop the mound, which is encircled by a low octagonal wall with one entrance.

- Unlike Hindus who typically cremate their dead, the Ahoms, who trace their origins to the Tai people, practiced burial.
- The height of a moidam reflects the power and stature of the person buried within.
- Within these chambers, the deceased king was interred alongside items needed for the "afterlife," as well as servants, horses, livestock, and even their wives.

### Ahoms

#### • About

- The Ahoms were one of India's longest-reigning dynasties, with a kingdom that stretched from modern-day Bangladesh to deep inside Burma.

- The Ahom rule lasted for about 600 years until the British annexed Assam in 1826.

- They were known for their administrative skills and valor in battle, with enduring cultural significance in Assam.
- Ahoms represented a time of unity for the Assamese people, especially in their resistance against the Mughal empire.

#### • Celebration In Recent Years

- Last year, the 400th birth anniversary of Ahom general and folk hero Lachit Borphukan was celebrated in New Delhi from November 23 to 25.
- PM Modi highlighted Borphukan's courage and leadership, noting his prioritization of the people's well-being.

- Although the Ahoms originated from South Chinese ruling dynasties, they are remembered today as local Indian rulers who left a lasting legacy.

### Significance of Charaideo

- The name "Charaideo" comes from the Tai Ahom words "Che-Rai-Doi," meaning "a shining town situated on a hilltop."

**'Moidams' earn Unesco World Heritage Site status**

### MOIDAMS & THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

- > Set in the **foothills of the Patkai Ranges** in eastern Assam, the property contains the royal necropolis of the **Tai-Ahoms** created for **600 years**, **accentuating the natural topography of hills, forests and water**, thus forming a sacred geography
- > **90 moidams – hollow vaults built of brick, stone or earth of different sizes** – are found within the site
- > These **moidams** contain the remains of **kings and other royals together with grave goods such as food, horses and elephants**, and sometimes **queens and servants**
- > **Banyan trees** and the trees used for **coffins and bark manuscripts** were planted and water bodies created
- > **Tai-Ahom** rituals of "**Me-Dam-Me-Phi**" and "**Tarpan**"



Coordinates of location  
**N26 56 28.229 E94 52 34.86**

Year of Inscription  
**2024**

Property  
**95.02 ha**

Buffer zone  
**793.7 ha**

CRITERIA

- > They bear a unique or at least **exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition** or to a **civilization** which is living, or which has disappeared
- > They are outstanding example of a type of **building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape** which **illustrates** (a) significant **stage(s)** in human history

### United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

- It is a specialised agency of UN, headquartered at the World Heritage Centre in Paris, France.
  - It was founded in 1945 as the successor to the League of Nation's International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation.
  - It was established with an aim to promote world peace and security through international cooperation in five key program areas - Education; Natural sciences; Social or human sciences; Culture; Communication/information.
  - UNESCO is a member of the **United Nations Sustainable Development Group.**
    - » Thus, UNESCO's programmes contribute to the achievement of the SDGs defined in the 2030 Agenda, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015.
- UNESCO's activities have expanded over the years.
- » It aids in the translation and dissemination of world literature, assists in the establishment and protection of **World Heritage Sites** of cultural and natural importance, works to bridge the global digital divide, etc.

- It was the first capital of the Ahom kingdom, established in 1253 AD by King Sukaphaa.
  - Sukaphaa was buried there in 1856, and it became the chosen resting place for subsequent Ahom royals.
- Though the Ahoms changed capitals several times, Charaideo remained a symbolic and ritual center due to its historical significance.

### Gaza's Tell Umm Amer in the World Heritage Site List

- The World Heritage Committee (WHC) decided to include the Palestinian site of Tell Umm Amer in both the UNESCO World Heritage Site List and the List of World Heritage in Danger during its 46th session in New Delhi.
- Also known as the 'Monastery of Saint Hilarion', the site lies in the Gaza Strip which continues to reel under Israel's relentless assault.
- The ancient Christian monastery was founded in the fourth century by Hilarion the Great (291-371 CE), considered by some to be the father of Palestinian monasticism.
- The World Heritage Convention of 1972, of which Israel is a party to, sets out duties for identifying, protecting, and preserving World Heritage sites.

World Heritage Committee

- ▼ Consisting of representatives from 21 States Parties elected by the General Assembly of UNESCO, it meets once a year.
- ▼ The Committee is responsible for implementing the **World Heritage Convention**, determining the use of the World Heritage Fund, and allocating financial assistance upon requests from States Parties.
- ▼ It decides whether a property is inscribed on the World Heritage List, examines reports on the conservation of inscribed properties, and requests action from States Parties if properties are not properly managed.
- ▼ The Committee also decides on the addition or removal of properties from the List of World Heritage in Danger.

World Heritage Sites

- ▼ These sites have been designated as having "outstanding universal value" under the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage 1972.
  - ▷ The convention provides a framework for international cooperation in preserving and protecting cultural treasures and natural areas throughout the world.

**Categorisation of Sites** in 3 types:

- ▷ **Cultural heritage sites** – It includes historic buildings and town sites, important archaeological sites, and works of monumental sculpture or painting
- ▷ **Natural heritage sites** – It includes those natural areas that have excellent ecological and evolutionary processes, endangered species etc.
- ▷ **Mixed heritage sites** – It contain elements of both natural and cultural significance.

- ▼ Till now India had 42 world heritage sites, including 34 cultural properties, 7 natural properties and 1 mixed site.
  - ▷ India ranks second in the Asia Pacific Region based on the numbers of the world heritage list.
  - ▷ India has 57 sites on the world heritage tentative list.
  - ▷ Italy has the maximum world sites at 59 followed by China (57), Germany (52), France (52) and Spain (50).

### Quad Ministerial Meeting

- Quad Ministerial Meeting was held recently in Tokyo. After the meeting, participating leaders released a joint statement.
  - Known as the 'Quadrilateral Security Dialogue' (QSD), the Quad is an informal strategic forum comprising four nations, namely -- USA, India, Australia and Japan.
  - One of the primary objectives of the Quad is to work for a free, open, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific region.
- Ministers reaffirmed that **India will host Quad Leaders' Summit in 2024** and USA will host the next Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting in 2025.
- The participating leaders expressed their deepest concern over the war raging in Ukraine, and flagged respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity.
  - This was a clear reference to Russian invasion of Ukraine.
  - Significantly, this formulation of respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity is not used by India in its national statements on the Russia-Ukraine war.

## 24th Meeting of the SCO Council of Heads of State

- The 24th Meeting of the SCO **Council of Heads of State** (SCO Summit) was held in Astana, under the presidency of Kazakhstan.
- India's representation at the meeting was led by EAM S. Jaishankar, who conveyed PM Modi's key messages and concerns.
- During the 2024 SCO summit, Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin set out their ambitions for creating a new **Eurasian security framework**.
  - This proposed security club aims to serve as a counterbalance to Western influence, particularly from the United States and NATO.
    - Russian President highlighted the need for a new regional security system that would eventually remove all external military presence from Eurasia, a clear reference to reducing U.S. influence in the region.
  - Both leaders emphasized the importance of strengthening political, economic, and security cooperation among Eurasian nations.
  - While the proposal for this new security system was a significant topic at the summit, it was not formally launched during the event. The discussions mainly revolved around setting the groundwork for future developments in this area.

The infographic provides a comprehensive overview of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). It begins with the SCO logo and title. The 'About' section details its founding in 2001, its purpose of regional security, and its founding members. It also notes its global reach, official languages, and secretariat. The 'Members, Observers and dialogue partners' section lists 10 member states, 2 observer members, and 9 dialogue partners, along with key milestones such as India and Pakistan's accession in 2017 and Iran's in 2023. The 'Organisational Structure of SCO' section describes the HSC, the Council of Heads of Government, the Council of Foreign Ministers, and the RATS.

### SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANISATION (SCO)

#### About

- ↳ SCO is a permanent intergovernmental international organisation, created in June 2001 in Shanghai (China).
- ↳ Founding members included Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan.
  - The five countries had come together to work on regional security, reduction of border troops, and terrorism in the post-Soviet era in 1996.
  - In 2001, the Shanghai Five inducted Uzbekistan into the group and named it the SCO outlining its principles in a charter that promoted what was called the **Shanghai spirit of cooperation**.
- ↳ This organization represents approximately 42% of the world's population, 22% of its land area and 20% of its GDP.
- ↳ Official working languages: Chinese, Russian
- ↳ SCO Secretariat: Beijing, China

#### Members, Observers and dialogue partners

- ↳ 10 member states – China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India, Pakistan, Iran and Belarus.
  - India and Pakistan became full members at the Heads of State Council meet in Astana in 2017.
  - Iran became the 9<sup>th</sup> member of the SCO in 2023 under the chairmanship of India.
  - During this year's summit (in 2024), Belarus became the 10<sup>th</sup> member of the organization.
- ↳ 2 Observer members – Afghanistan, Mongolia
- ↳ 9 Dialogue Partners – Azerbaijan, Armenia, Egypt, Cambodia, Qatar, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Sri Lanka.
  - In 2022, the procedure for granting the status of Dialogue Partners to Bahrain, Kuwait, Maldives, Myanmar and the United Arab Emirates was initiated at the SCO Summit in Samarkand.

#### Organisational Structure of SCO

- ↳ The Heads of State Council (HSC) is the supreme decision-making body in the SCO, it meets once a year.
- ↳ The Council of Heads of Government is the second-highest council in the organisation.
- ↳ The Council of Foreign Ministers hold regular meetings, where they discuss the current international situation.
- ↳ Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), based in Tashkent, is established to combat terrorism, separatism and extremism.

## India To Host 2nd Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference On Civil Aviation

- India will host the second Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference on Civil Aviation on September 11 and 12. The first conference was held in February 2018 in Beijing.
- The conference aims to build on the 2018 Beijing Declaration to advance sustainable, resilient, and responsive aviation travel.
- The event will see participation from 39 member states of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) from the Asia Pacific region.
  - This region is notable for recording 33.41% of global departures, the highest among all regions.

## India To Sign, Ratify High Seas Treaty

India has decided to sign and ratify the High Seas Treaty, a global agreement for conservation and protection of biodiversity in the oceans. The High Seas Treaty was negotiated in March 2023.

### Key Provisions Of The Treaty

#### • Demarcation of marine protected areas (MPAs)

- MPAs are where ocean systems, including biodiversity, are under stress, either due to human activities or climate change.
  - These can be called the national parks or wildlife reserves of the oceans.
- Activities in these areas will be highly regulated, and conservation efforts similar to what happens in forest or wildlife zones, will be undertaken.
- Only about 1.44 per cent of high seas are currently protected, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
- In December 2022, at the meeting of the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) in Montreal, Canada, countries had agreed to **put at least 30 per cent of degraded coastal and marine ecosystems under effective restoration by 2030**.
  - MPAs will be helpful in achieving this objective.

#### • Sustainable use of marine genetic resources and equitable sharing of benefits arising from them

- Genetic information from marine organisms is already being extracted, and their benefits are being investigated.
- The treaty seeks to ensure that any benefits arising out of such efforts, including monetary gains, are free from strong intellectual property rights controls, and are equitably shared amongst all.
- The knowledge generated from such expeditions are also supposed to remain openly accessible to all.

#### • Initiation of the practice of environmental impact assessments (EIA) for all major activities in the oceans

- Under the new treaty, commercial or other activities that can have significant impact on the marine ecosystem would require an EIA to be done.
- The results of this exercise have to be shared with the international community.

#### • Capacity building and technology transfer

- This will help small island states and landlocked nations, who do not have the resources or the expertise, to meaningfully participate in the conservation efforts.

#### • Creation of New body

- The treaty will create a new body to manage conservation of ocean life and establish marine protected areas in the high seas.

### Status Of The Treaty

The treaty would become international law 120 days after at least 60 countries submit their formal ratification documents. As of now, 91 countries have signed the treaty, but only eight of them have ratified and made the submission.

### ABOUT HIGH SEAS

- The high seas are the parts of the ocean that are not included in the exclusive economic zones, territorial sea or internal waters of a State.
  - Water beyond 200 nautical miles from the coast of a country is known as high sea.
- High seas are the areas of the ocean for which no one nation has sole responsibility for management.

### UN HIGH SEAS TREATY



- Agreed under the UNCLOS, this treaty is commonly known as the **agreement on biodiversity beyond national jurisdictions (BBNJ)**.
  - UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is an international treaty that establishes a framework for the use and management of the world's oceans and their resources. It was adopted by UN in 1982 and came into force in 1994.
- This treaty is the first international law to offer some protection to the nearly two-thirds of the ocean that is beyond national control.

**This treaty will be legally binding in nature.**

### 7th Apex Level Meeting of Narco-Coordination Centre (NCORD)

- While chairing the 7th apex level meeting of Narco-Coordination Centre (NCORD), Union Home Minister Amit Shah has called for ruthless action against drug smuggling syndicates.
- The Minister launched a toll-free helpline called **MANAS (Madak Padarth Nishedh Asuchna Kendra)** with the number 1933. Along with this, a web portal and a mobile app were introduced to allow citizens to connect with the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) 24/7.

#### Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB)

- **About**
  - NCB is the apex drug law enforcement and intelligence agency of India, established in 1986 under the **Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act (NDPS Act), 1985**.
- **Nodal ministry:** Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.

#### Narco-Coordination Centre (NCORD)

- **About**
  - The NCORD mechanism was formed in 2016 for better coordination between states and Ministry of Home Affairs.
  - It has been further strengthened through a four-tier system in 2019.
- **Aim**
  - NCORD has been established to enhance coordination among various central and state agencies involved in combating drug trafficking and abuse.
- **Structure**
  - Apex Level NCORD Committee, headed by Union Home Secretary;
  - Executive Level NCORD Committee, headed by Special Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs;
  - State Level NCORD Committees, headed by Chief Secretaries; and
  - District Level NCORD Committees – headed by District Magistrates.

#### Fight Against Drug Menace – India's Regulatory Framework

- **Article 47 of the Indian Constitution**
  - The National Policy on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances is based on the Directive Principles, contained in Article 47 of the Indian Constitution.
  - The Article directs the State to endeavour to bring about prohibition of the consumption, except for medicinal purposes, of intoxicating drugs injurious to health.
- **Signatory to international conventions:** India is a signatory to:
  - the single Convention on Narcotic Drugs 1961, as amended by the 1972 Protocol, the Conventions on Psychotropic Substances, 1971 and
  - United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1988.
- **Existing Laws**
  - The broad legislative policy is contained in the three Central Acts:
  - Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940,
  - The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985, and

- The Prevention of Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1988.

- **Institutions involved**

- The **Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB)**
- Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) and Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MSJE) are involved with alcohol and drug demand reduction policies and drug de-addiction programme.
- In order to prevent misuse of dual-use drugs, a **permanent inter-ministerial committee** has been formed with the ministry of health and family welfare and the ministry of chemicals.

- **Technological intervention**

- The NCORD portal has been launched as an effective mechanism for information exchange between various institutions/agencies.
- A toll-free helpline called **MANAS** with the number 1933

- **Other measures**

- The government aims to achieve **drug-free India by 2047** through a 3 points strategy - strengthening of institutional structure, coordination among all narco agencies and extensive public awareness campaign.
- As part of this strategy a number of steps have been taken which includes:
- Establishment of a dedicated Anti-Narcotics Task Force (ANTF) in each state/UTs.
- High priority to Drug Disposal drive.
- **Launch of NIDAAN Portal** for Narco offenders.
- Creation of canine squads for drug detection.
- Strengthening the forensic capabilities.
- Establishment of Special NDPS Courts and Fast Track Courts.
- **Nasha Mukh Bharat Abhiyan (NMBA)** for generating Awareness against drug Abuse.

### Indigenous Light Tank Zorawar

- India's indigenous light tank (under 25 tonnes), Zorawar, developed by DRDO and L&T, has its prototype ready and will soon undergo extensive trials.
- Zorawar is powered by a Cummins engine, although DRDO is working on developing a domestic engine.
  - DRDO is also developing a new 1400 HP engine for the Arjun Mk1A main battle tank.
- The tank is designed to operate in extreme weather and high-altitude conditions, particularly along India's northern border.
- The need for a light tank became evident during the standoff with China in Eastern Ladakh, where China deployed modern light tanks and other armored vehicles.
  - Zorawar is easily transportable by air, capable of firing at high angles, and versatile for future upgrades.
- The project involves collaboration with various MSMEs to promote indigenous defense development.

### Control of Nodal Cyber Security Watchdog CERT-IN

- Two ministries, Information Technology and Home Affairs, are making a strong pitch for the ownership of Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-IN), the country's nodal cybersecurity watchdog.
  - At present, Cert-In comes under the administrative control of the IT Ministry.

- MHA advocates for CERT-In to come under its control to enhance law enforcement capabilities, particularly in cyberspace, given CERT-In's technical expertise and the MHA's enforcement powers.
  - The MHA believes this integration would streamline cybercrime investigations.
- Ministry of Information Technology (IT) argues that CERT-In's role is technical and extends beyond law enforcement, focusing on incident reporting, malware alerts, and advising on security infrastructure improvements.
  - The IT Ministry emphasizes that CERT-In's technical functions are distinct from investigative powers, which the MHA holds.

#### **Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-IN)**

- The Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-IN) is an organization under the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology**. It has been operational since 2004.
- As per the Information Technology Amendment Act, 2008, CERT-In has been designated to serve as the national nodal agency responsible:
  - for responding to computer security incidents as they occur and
  - for enhancing the security of India's communications and information infrastructure.

#### **Few notable works of CERT-IN**

- CERT-In has been involved in high-profile investigations, such as the 2022 cyberattack on AIIMS Delhi.
- It issued a cybersecurity directive in 2022, requiring VPN and cloud service providers to store customer information for five years.
- CERT-In handled approximately 1.4 million cybersecurity incidents in 2022, with mitigation of vulnerable services being the most common.

### **Militancy On The Rise In Jammu**

On July 8, five Army soldiers were killed and five injured in an ambush by militants. This incident is part of a troubling trend, with five terror strikes in the **Jammu division** since June 9.

#### **New Pattern Emerging**

- **Attempts to revive militancy in the Jammu region since the past three years**
  - The recent attacks reflect a concerning pattern of renewed militancy in the Jammu region over the past three years, particularly in the Chenab Valley and south of the Pir Panjal.
  - Districts such as Doda, Kishtwar, Ramban, Kathua, Udhampur, Reasi, Rajouri, and Poonch have seen a resurgence in militant activity.
  - While the Kashmir Valley has historically experienced frequent terror incidents, the Jammu belt has been relatively peaceful for the past two decades.
  - This revival of militancy in an area that was a hotbed in the late 1990s and early 2000s has alarmed the security establishment.
- **Statistics**
  - Since 2021, the Jammu region has experienced 31 terror incidents, resulting in the deaths of 47 security forces and 19 civilians, along with 48 terrorists killed.
  - In contrast, the Kashmir Valley has reported 263 terror incidents, with 68 security forces and 75 civilians killed, and 417 terrorists neutralized.
  - While the number of incidents in Jammu is significantly lower than in the Valley, the increased frequency and targeted nature of attacks on pilgrims and security forces in Jammu are particularly concerning.

- **How is the infiltration happening?**

- The 192-km international border (IB) along Jammu is secured by the Border Security Force (BSF), while the 740-km Line of Control (LoC) in the Kashmir Valley and parts of Jammu is under Army control.
- Despite security measures, tough terrain, forested areas along the LoC, and vulnerable patches along the IB may have facilitated fresh infiltration.
- The recent attacks in the Kathua belt, including the July 8 ambush, occurred on an old infiltration route used by militants two decades ago.

### **Reasons Behind This New Emerging Pattern**

- **Thinning of the security grid after Galwan incident**

- After the 2020 Galwan clashes in eastern Ladakh, a significant number of Army personnel were redeployed from Jammu to the China border, weakening the security grid in Jammu.

- **India is being engaged at two fronts**

- Hostile elements aim to strain India on both the western (Pakistan) and northern (China) fronts. With heightened alert in the Kashmir Valley and reduced opportunities for state-sponsored terrorists there, Jammu, with its lowered guard, becomes a more convenient target.

- **Aftermath of the abrogation of Article 370**

- The government has touted successes in the Kashmir Valley, evidenced by zero stone-throwing incidents, no strikes, and a tourism boom.
- However, renewed terrorism in Jammu challenges this narrative and might aim to stabilize militant presence in the Valley while stirring insecurity in Jammu.

- **Demography of the region**

- The area's demography also raises concerns about potential communal tensions and social unrest due to these attacks.

- **Opportunities for terrorists in Jammu region**

- The Rajouri-Poonch area had a thinner concentration of security forces.
- This region is equidistant from Shopian and Kulgam in Kashmir, and the Line of Control with Pakistan, making it easier to move between the three regions.
  - It was highly unlikely that security forces and police from all three regions would simultaneously launch an operation against the militants.
- Areas in the Pir Panjal range and to its south are also easier to access.
  - Any militant crossing over from the lower heights of Jammu have to traverse through multiple high ranges like Pir Panjal before they reach Kashmir Valley.
  - This challenges their logistical preparations and motivation.
  - Hence shorter and intense contacts have become the norm in the Jammu region

- **Drying up of the human intelligence**

- Many security experts attribute the dried-up human intelligence to authorities taking the prevailing peace for guaranteed. As per them, the new officers who got transferred to the region didn't work as hard as they should have on their informer network.

### **Way forward**

- A whole generation that fought the terrorists are in their 60s and 70s now. There is no such connect with the younger generation, it will take time to build that trust with the civilians.
- The Village Defence Guards/Committees (VDGs) are also being revived since December 2022.

- The VDGs had to be discontinued amid allegations of crimes such as abduction and rape committed by the members.

### Stealth Frigates from Russia

- Two stealth frigates under construction in Russia for the Indian Navy are set for delivery soon, after delays due to COVID-19, the Ukraine war, and Western sanctions.
  - The first frigate, **Tushil**, is ready for acceptance and scheduled for delivery by September.
  - The second frigate, **Tamal**, is expected by February 2025.
- In October 2016, India and Russia agreed on an Inter-Governmental Agreement for four stealth frigates—two to be directly imported and two to be manufactured locally by Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL).
  - All four ships are powered by engines from Zorya-Mashproekt of Ukraine.
- A stealth frigate is a warship designed with advanced technologies to reduce its visibility on enemy radar and other detection systems.
  - These ships incorporate radar-absorbent materials, angular designs to minimize radar reflection, and other measures to evade detection.

### Aatmanirbharta in defence - MoD Notifies Fifth Positive Indigenisation List

- The Department of Defence Production (DDP), Ministry of Defence, has issued the fifth Positive Indigenisation List (PIL) containing 346 items to boost self-reliance in defence and reduce imports by Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs).
  - These items will only be sourced from Indian industries.
- DPSUs will indigenise these items through in-house development or the 'Make' procedure, involving MSMEs and start-ups, fostering economic growth and reducing import dependence.
- Previously, four PILs covered 4,666 items, with 2,972 items already indigenised
- Since 2020, over 36,000 defence items have been offered for indigenisation, with more than 12,300 items indigenised, leading to orders worth Rs 7,572 crore from DPSUs.

### Navy and Army Chiefs Receive Param Vishist Seva Medal

- Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi and Navy Chief Admiral Dinesh Kumar Tripathi were conferred the Param Vishisht Seva Medal (PVSM) by President Droupadi Murmu for their distinguished service to the nation.
- PVSM is a military award in India that recognizes exceptional service of the highest order during peacetime.
- It was established on January 1960 as the VSM Class-I, but was renamed PVSM on January 1967.

### Capt. Supreetha

- Captain Supreetha C.T., who hails from Mysuru, has become the first woman officer from the Corps of **Army Air Defence**, to be operationally deployed at Siachen Glacier.
- She is the second Indian Army woman officer to be deployed at Siachen Glacier. Before Captain Supreetha, Shiva Chouhan was the first female officer to be deployed in Siachen.

### INS Brahmaputra Severely Damaged In Fire

- INS Brahmaputra, an Indian Navy warship undergoing maintenance at the naval dockyard in Mumbai, caught fire.

- Commissioned in April 2000, INS Brahmaputra is the first of the indigenous 'Brahmaputra' class guided missile frigates in the Indian Navy.
- It is equipped with medium-range, close-range, and anti-aircraft guns, surface-to-surface and surface-to-air missiles, torpedo launchers, and various maritime warfare sensors.

### India Successfully Tests Phase-II ballistic Missile Defence System

- India successfully tested the second phase of its ballistic missile defence (BMD) system, showcasing its ability to defend against missiles with a range of 5,000 km.
  - India is pursuing its ballistic missile defence programme in two phases – the first phase has been completed while the second is underway for validating intercept systems in a new range category.
- DRDO conducted the test at the integrated test range (ITR) in Chandipur, Odisha.
- The Phase-II AD Endo-atmospheric missile, designed to neutralize enemy ballistic missiles within and slightly above the earth's atmosphere, was successfully launched.
  - The Phase-II Endo-atmospheric missile is an indigenously developed Two Stage solid propelled ground launched missile system.
  - It is meant for neutralising many types of enemy ballistic missile threats in the altitude bracket of endo to low exo-atmospheric regions.

### 21st Edition of Khaan Quest

- An Indian contingent participated in the 21st edition of Khaan Quest, a multinational **peacekeeping exercise**, which was held in Mongolia.
- The exercise had around 430 participants from 23 countries.
- Aim of Exercise Khaan Quest: increasing interoperability and military readiness in peace support operations under Chapter VII of United Nations Charter.
- The exercise started as a bilateral event between the U.S. and Mongolian armed forces in 2003 and graduated to a multinational peacekeeping exercise from 2006 onwards.

### Panel Finds Cracks That Help Hackers Target Jobseekers

- The Centre's high-level interministerial panel has identified three loopholes that enable cyber scams originating from Southeast Asian countries.
- These are:
  - Involvement of the senior bank managers of two nationalised banks to open mule accounts;
    - It was found that maximum accounts were allegedly opened with the connivance of senior bank managers/ staffers in several branches of State Bank of India and Punjab National Bank.
  - around 30,000 unreturned passengers travelling on visitor visa to Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar and Vietnam from January 2022-May 2024; and
  - misuse of bulk SIM cards.

#### Cybercrimes Originating from these Southeast Asian Countries

- As per various reports, over 5,000 Indians are suspected of being stuck in Cambodia and forced to carry out cyber fraud.
- According to government estimates, Indians have been duped of at least Rs 500 crore in the past six months.

- About 45% of cybercrimes originate from the Southeast Asia region, mainly Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos PDR.
- Around 1 lakh cyber complaints have been registered with the National Cybercrime Reporting Portal (NCRP) since January 2023, and 800 complaints from January to June 1 this year.

#### **Exercise Pitch Back 2024**

- Indian Air Force Participated in the Ex-Pitch Black 2024.
- Exercise Pitch Black is a biennial warfare exercise hosted by the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF).
- It is a multi-national large force employment exercise conducted primarily from RAAF Base Darwin and RAAF Base Tindal.

## People's Biodiversity Register (PBR)

Thazhakara, a gram panchayat in Alappuzha, Kerala has published the second volume of People's Biodiversity Register (PBR). Kerala was the first State to publish the first volume of the PBR across all local bodies

### About PBR (mandated by the Biological Diversity Act (2002))

- Its comprehensive record of biodiversity (Flora & Fauna), including habitats, domesticated animals, micro-organisms, and local biological knowledge
- Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs) oversee the development of PBRs across India,
- National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) provides guidance and technical support for creating PBRs.
- Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for the Environment) aims to create a PBR in every village in India.

## Paraguay Becomes Member of ISA

Paraguay has become the 100<sup>th</sup> member of the International Solar Alliance (ISA).

- ✓ Spain has joined as the 99<sup>th</sup> member of the International Solar Alliance

### About ISA

(Established: 2015, Headquarter- Gurugram (Haryana), 119 countries-signatories, 100 - Formal members)

- It is jointly launched by India and France during 21st Conference of Parties (COP21) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) held in Paris.
- At the initial stage ISA was opened to membership of countries lying fully or partly between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn with the amendment of its Framework Agreement in 2020. All member states of the United Nations are now eligible to join the ISA.
- The ISA is guided by its 'Towards 1000' strategy which aims to mobilise USD 1,000 billions of investments in solar energy solutions by 2030, while delivering energy access to 1,000 million people using clean energy solutions and resulting in installation of 1,000 GW of solar energy capacity. This would help mitigate global solar emissions to the tune of 1,000 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> every year.
- ISA Assembly (Headed by Director General) is the apex decision-making body of ISA, in which each Member Country is represented.
- The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) has granted Observer Status to ISA.

## Rhisotope Project

To curb poaching under the Rhisotope project South African scientists make rhino horns radioactive.

### About Rhisotope Project (Started in 2021 by Prof. James Larkin)

- It involves inserting measured quantities of radioisotopes into the horns of live rhinos to save rhinos from the very real threat of extinction.
  - ✓ There are thousands of radiation detectors installed at many strategic points across the globe. At places like harbours, airports, land crossings and elsewhere.
- It aims to render the horn "useless" and "poisonous for human consumption." and it becomes possible to track the horn's movement
- The radioactive material lasts five years, proving more cost-effective than dehorning every 18 months. At a later stage, the work will expand to elephants, pangolins and other fauna and flora.

## Murraya and Davana Flowers

The National Botanical Research Institute has undertaken scientific research to preserve and produce Murraya (Maurya) & Davana Flowers used in rituals of 12<sup>th</sup> century Shree Jagannath Temple, Puri, Odisha.

### About Davana (Family- Asteraceae)

- An aromatic herb, much prized in India for its delicate fragrance (in form of Davana oil).

✓ The essential oil of davana which is a brown viscous liquid with rich fruity odour has acquired considerable reputation in the international trade particularly in USA and Japan where it is being used for flavouring cakes, pastries, tobacco and beverages.

- It is commonly used in garlands, bouquets and religious offerings
- It grows wild in the temperate Himalayas. It is common in the Kashmir Valley, the Shimla & Nainital Hills.

#### **About Murraya (known as orange jasmine/orange jessamine/china box/mock orange)**

- It has ornamental, fragrance and medicinal uses and is also used as a living hedge.
- It grows up to 6 meters tall with a trunk up to 40 centimeters in diameter.
- It is primarily found in India, Sri Lanka, southern China, Thailand, and eastward over the Malesian region to northeastern Australia and Caledonia.
- The leaves, roots & bark are used in traditional medicine for their purported health benefits. They are believed to have antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, and anti-diabetic properties.

### **Global Conclave on Plastic Recycling and Sustainability (GCPRS)**

The Global Conclave on Plastic Recycling and Sustainability (GCPRS) was held in Delhi, India.

#### **About GCPRS:**

- Its jointly organized by the All-India Plastics Manufacturers' Association (AIPMA) and the Chemicals and Petrochemicals Manufacturers' Association (CPMA)
- Aligned with India's zero waste goal, the GCPRS showcases innovative recycling technologies, sustainable options like biodegradable and compostable plastics, and efficient waste management solutions.

#### **Extra Mile: Plastic Waste in India**

- India generates plastic waste – estimates range from 9.4 million tonnes to 26,000 tonnes per day. Only around 8% of plastic waste gets recycled in India
- Indian government has recently introduced amendments to the Plastic Waste Management (PWM) Rules, 2016, through the Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules, 2024 particularly by targeting microplastics and setting stricter criteria for biodegradable plastics.

\*\* The PWM Rules in 2016, which mandated extended producer responsibility (EPR), enforced stricter recycling package & banned specific single use plastic (SUP).

\*\* The Central government has banned the use of single-use plastic from July 1, 2022.

### **Biosphere Reserves**

UNESCO has approved the designation of 11 new Biosphere Reserves (BR) in 11 countries.

#### **About 11 new Biosphere Reserves (BR) of the World**

1. **Kempen-Broek Transboundary Biosphere Reserve (Belgium, Netherlands):** Featuring a mix of wetlands, farmlands, and bog forests. It highlights the transformation of historical wetlands into farmlands while preserving patches of marshes and ponds
2. **Darién Norte Chocoano Biosphere Reserve (Colombia):** known for its rich biodiversity, including mangrove forests and rainforests, which are home to numerous endemic species.
3. **Madre de las Aguas BR (Dominican Republic):** Encompassing 11 provinces, it features diverse ecosystems including plateaus, waterfalls, and forests.

4. **Niumi BR (Gambia):** Adjacent to Senegal's Delta de Saloum Biosphere Reserve, Niumi is characterized by its pristine mangrove forests, tropical forests, and savannah woodlands. It protects some of West Africa's last untouched mangroves.
5. **Colli Euganei Biosphere Reserve (Italy):** It is defined by volcanic hills and thermal waters, making it the largest thermal basin in Europe.
6. **Julian Alps Transboundary BR (Italy, Slovenia):** This transboundary reserve encompasses alpine mountains, karst plateaux, waterfalls, and lakes, supporting species like brown bears and lynxes.
7. **Khar Us Lake Biosphere Reserve (Mongolia):** It includes diverse ecosystems such as deserts, high mountains, and steppes.
8. **Apayaos Biosphere Reserve (Philippines):** This reserve is a blend of rugged terrain and flatlands, supporting diverse ethnolinguistic groups and Indigenous communities.
9. **Changnyeong BR (Republic of Korea):** it includes Mount Hwawang and the Upo Wetland.
10. **Val d'Aran Biosphere Reserve (Spain):** In the Catalan Pyrenees, this north-facing valley features a mix of Mediterranean and Atlantic climatic influences.
11. **Irati Biosphere Reserve (Spain):** This mid-mountain reserve in the western Pyrenees is dominated by beech and beech-fir forests, making it one of Europe's largest beech forests.

### Regional Analysis of Indian Ocean (RAIN) System

The Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) has upgraded its Regional Analysis of Indian Ocean (RAIN) system for gathering information on the health of the Indian Ocean.

#### About Regional Analysis of Indian Ocean System (RAIN)

- The recent upgrade incorporates sea surface height anomaly (SSHA- at depths ranging from 3 metres to 2,000 metres) in addition to the previous parameters of salinity & sea surface temperature (SST). This up gradation improves the accuracy of ocean current analysis
- **Applications:** Ocean Forecasting, Climate Research, Fisheries Management, Environmental Monitoring, Disaster Preparedness/Response, Shipping/Maritime Operations, Renewable Energy

### Injection Borewells

Citizens in Andhra Pradesh adopted the injection borewells to meet growing water needs

#### About Injection/ Recharge Borewells (Technique used to recharge groundwater aquifers)

- **Definition:** Injection borewells (Artificial recharge wells) are a sustainable water management solution designed to replenish groundwater levels. These systems involve injecting treated or untreated surface water directly into underground aquifers through borewells.
- **Benefits of Injection Borewells (a vital tool in modern water management):** Groundwater Recharge; Flood Mitigation; Improved Water Quality & Quantity.

#### Importance and Need for Injection Borewells

- **Groundwater Depletion:** Over-extraction of groundwater has led to significant depletion of aquifers, causing water scarcity in many regions.
- **Climate Change & Erratic Rainfall and Urbanization & Reduced Infiltration:** Urbanization & industrialization reduce natural infiltration due to impermeable surfaces like concrete & asphalt. This decreases the natural recharge of groundwater.

### Case Studies and Success Stories

- **In India**, the state of Gujarat has seen significant success with its Saurashtra Recharge Scheme, which has helped improve groundwater levels in arid regions.
- **In United States (California)**, injection borewells are used extensively for groundwater recharge as part of integrated water management strategies. The Orange County Water District's Groundwater Replenishment System is one of the largest projects, providing a sustainable source of drinking water for the region.

## Greenium

According to Economic Survey 2023-24, Indian sovereign green bonds have hardly received any 'greenium' from private investors.

### About Greenium (green + premium)

- Greenium is a word made from of "green" and "premium," referring to the premium or extra value investors are willing to pay for green bonds compared to traditional bonds because of their environmental benefits.
  - ✓ Green bonds are financial instruments designed to fund projects that have positive environmental benefits, such as renewable energy efficiency & sustainable agriculture.

### Benefits of Greenium:

- Due to the higher demand for green bonds, issuers can often borrow at a lower interest rate compared to traditional bonds.
- Many investors are increasingly conscious about environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors. Green bonds align with these preferences, making them more attractive.

### Challenges and Criticisms for Greenium

- **Greenwashing:** Concerns about greenwashing, where companies falsely market bonds as green, can erode investor trust and reduce the greenium.
- **Measurement and Verification:** Ensuring the environmental impact of green projects can be complex and costly, potentially affecting the greenium.
- **Market Liquidity:** Green bonds may have lower liquidity compared to conventional bonds, particularly in the secondary market. This can affect investor willingness to pay a premium.

## Taxonomy for Climate Finance

The 2024 Union Budget mentions developing a taxonomy for climate finance to enhance the availability of capital for climate adaptation and mitigation.

### About Taxonomy for Climate Finance

- A climate finance taxonomy is a classification system that defines which economic activities can be considered environmentally sustainable.
- It guides investors/banks in directing trillions toward impactful investments to tackle climate change. South Africa, Colombia, South Korea, Thailand, Singapore, Canada, and Mexico are some of the countries which have developed taxonomies.

### Why is taxonomy significant?

- With adverse effects of climate change exacerbating, countries need to transition to a net-zero economy. Taxonomies can play a pivotal role in doing this as they can help ascertain if economic activities are aligned with credible, science-based transition pathways. They can also give impetus to deployment of climate capital and reduce the risks of greenwashing.

- For India, a taxonomy could bring in more climate funds from international sources. Currently, green finance flows in India are falling far short of the country's current needs — they only account for around 3% of total FDI inflows to India, according to the Landscape of Green Finance in India 2022 report, published by Climate Policy Initiative.
  - ✓ One reason for abysmally low green finance flows has been a lack of clarity in what constitutes sustainable activity. A taxonomy would change that.
  - ✓ India has a climate-smart investment potential of \$ 3.1 trillion from 2018 to 2030, according to a report by the International Finance Corporation (IFC- Arm of World Bank Group).

#### **Core Elements Of A Climate Finance Taxonomy**

- **Clear criteria & Scientific basis:** Defining specific criteria for economic activities to be classified as environmentally sustainable ensuring the taxonomy can adapt to evolving climate science.
- **Global consistency:** Promoting harmonization with international standards and frameworks.

### **Bioplastics from Cassava**







Smallholder farmers from Nagaland are producing compostable bioplastic bags from cassava starch.

#### **Process of Bioplastic Production**

- **Starch extraction:** Cassava roots (Abundant starch content) are processed to extract starch. The cleaned roots are crushed to produce a pulp.
  - ✓ As a rapidly growing crop, cassava offers a sustainable and replenishable source of material. It serves as an eco-friendly alternative to petroleum-based plastics
- **Plasticization:** The starch is combined with plasticizers (like glycerol) to improve flexibility.
- **Molding:** The mixture is molded into desired shapes.
- **Drying:** The molded product is dried to remove moisture.

#### **Properties & Advantages of Cassava-Based Bioplastics**

- **Environmental Impact:** Cassava-based bioplastics are biodegradable, breaking down into natural substances like water, carbon dioxide, and biomass under composting conditions. Suitable for single-use items like shopping bags, cutlery, and straws to reduce plastic waste.
- **Water Sensitivity:** Cassava-based bioplastics can be sensitive to moisture, which can affect their mechanical strength and durability. Potential use in disposable medical items such as gloves, masks, and syringes.

Species in News		
1.	<b>Mainland Serow</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A vulnerable antelope-like mammal, it has been recorded at the lowest elevation in Assam's Raimona National Park.</li> <li>• Species of serow is native to the Himalayas, Southeast Asia and China.</li> <li>• <b>IUCN Status:</b> Vulnerable, <b>CITES:</b> Appendix I</li> </ul>
2.	<b>Senna spectabilis</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Kerala Forest Department and Kerala Paper Products Limited (KPPL) have decided to remove invasive species like Senna spectabilis from the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary.</li> <li>• It is a deciduous tree native to tropical regions of the America.</li> <li>• Its thick foliage inhibits the growth of native trees and grasses.</li> <li>• <b>IUCN status:</b> Least Concern</li> </ul>
3.	<b>Vaquita</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is moving towards the edge of extinction. A recent survey revealed only 6-8 individuals spotted compared to 8-13 just a year ago.</li> <li>• It is a shy member of the porpoise family.</li> <li>• They are the most endangered of the world's marine mammals.</li> <li>• It only lives in the northern part of the Gulf of California in Mexico.</li> <li>• <b>IUCN status:</b> Critically Endangered</li> </ul>
4.	<b>Pearl-Spot known as "Karimeen"</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Studies planning to do genome editing mission to boost Pearl Spot production.</li> <li>• It is an indigenous fish extensively found along the east and south-west coasts of Peninsular India.</li> <li>• It is a euryhaline species that inhabits mainly brackish water and river mouths.</li> <li>• <b>IUCN Status:</b> Least Concern.</li> </ul>
5.	<b>Dogfish shark (Squalus Hima)</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scientists from the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) have discovered a new species of deep-water dogfish shark, off the coast of Kerala in the Arabian Sea.</li> <li>• Species from the genus Squalus, along with Centrophorus, are harvested for their liver oil, which is rich in squalene.</li> <li>• It is in high demand for the pharmaceutical industry, particularly for making high-end cosmetic and anti-cancerous products.</li> </ul>
6.	<b>Kashmiri Willow (scientifically known as Salix alba)</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cricket bats made of Kashmiri willow have made appearance in international games.</li> <li>• It is a deciduous tree native to the Kashmir region of India where it was introduced and cultivated extensively during the British colonial era.</li> <li>• It possesses a remarkable ability to convert solar radiation into chemical energy, leading to high growth rates.</li> <li>• It forms beneficial relationships with mycorrhizal fungi, enhancing nutrient absorption and overall tree health.</li> </ul>

## Space MAITRI

ISRO is poised to launch the 450kg Optimus spacecraft (Australia's largest designed and built spacecraft) by 2026 on its Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV) under mission Space MAITRI.

### About Mission Space MAITRI (Mission for Australia-India's Technology, Research, and Innovation)

- It is a collaboration between New Space India Limited (NSIL- the commercial arm of ISRO) and Australia's Space Machines Company.
- It aims to foster closer ties among Private & governmental space organizations from both countries in the space domain to focus on sustainable space exploration & debris management.

## AI Washing

Startups and Tech companies marketing using AI, but not doing so leads to phenomenon AI Washing.

### About AI Washing (Term was popularised by the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC))

- AI washing is the practice of rebranding or falsely promoting products, services, or companies as utilizing artificial intelligence (AI) when they do not genuinely incorporate AI technologies or do so only minimally, often misleading consumers, investors, and other stakeholders.
  - ✓ AI washing takes its name from **greenwashing**, which is when companies make false or misleading claims about the positive impact they have on the environment.
  - ✓ AI washing can mislead by suggesting that a product or solution leverages AI capabilities, such as machine learning (ML) or deep learning, when in fact it may only use simple algorithms, or perhaps none.
- Working of AI Washing involves: Exaggeration, outright lies and Misleading jargon.

## Eco-friendly Supercapacitors

Researchers from Kerala have discovered the way to create eco-friendly **supercapacitors** using activated carbon derived from coconut husks, a prevalent agricultural waste in Kerala.

### Key Features Of Eco-Friendly Supercapacitors

- **Green Synthesis Methods: Electrodes** made from biomass materials like graphene derived from wood or activated carbon derived from coconut shells are being explored.
- **Recyclability and Renewable Sources:** In it both electrodes & electrolytes are biodegradable. This would allow them to be disposed of safely without harming the environment.

## Supercapacitors (ultracapacitors or electrochemical capacitors)

- ✦ They are energy storage devices that store electrical energy via electrostatic charge separation at the interface between electrode and electrolyte, offering a middle ground between traditional capacitors and batteries.
  - Common materials for electrodes include activated carbon, graphene, and metal oxides.
  - The electrolyte can be liquid, gel, or solid and serves as the medium for ion movement.
- ✦ They support batteries by providing bursts of power (ability to charge and discharge rapidly- making them ideal for applications like power backup) and extending battery life.
- ✦ They can store much larger amounts of charge per unit volume (high power density than traditional capacitors but lower than batteries)



### Applications

- **Automotive:** Used in electric and hybrid vehicles for regenerative braking systems, start-stop systems, and providing power boosts.
- **Consumer Electronics:** Provide quick power bursts for cameras, smartphones, and other portable devices, enhancing performance and battery life.
- **Grid Energy Storage:** Assist in stabilizing power grids, smoothing out supply-demand fluctuations, and providing backup power.

- **Non-Toxic Components:** Replacing organic solvents with water-based electrolytes eliminates the risk of toxic spills and makes the manufacturing process more sustainable.
- **Energy-Efficient Manufacturing:** Adoption of synthesis and fabrication methods that require less energy and produce minimal waste.

**Performance & Long Cycle Life:** capable of delivering rapid bursts of energy, making them suitable for applications requiring quick energy release.

### T Coronae Borealis (T CrB)

The star T Coronae Borealis is supposed to undergo a nova explosion.

#### A Nova Explosion

- It is a dramatic increase in brightness of a star in a binary system, often referred to as a “new star” though it’s not actually a new star being born.
- It happens due to a runaway thermonuclear reaction (Nuclear Fusion) on the surface of a white dwarf star (a dense remnant of a star that has exhausted its nuclear fuel and collapsed).
- Unlike a supernova, which destroys a massive star, a nova doesn’t destroy the white dwarf. It just sheds some of its accumulated material.

#### About T Coronae Borealis (also known as Blaze Star/ T CrB- last seen from Earth in 1946)

- It is a binary system situated in the Northern Crown some 3,000 light-years from Earth.
- The system consists of a white dwarf and an ancient red giant. White dwarf an Earth-sized remnant of a dead star with a mass comparable to that of the Sun and an ancient red giant slowly being stripped of hydrogen by the relentless gravitational pull of its hungry neighbour.
- **Accretion of Hydrogen:** A red giant star transfers some of its hydrogen-rich outer material onto the white dwarf via an accretion disk due to the strong gravitational pull of the white dwarf.
- **Thermonuclear Runaway:** Once the temperature and pressure at the bottom of the hydrogen layer become sufficiently high, a thermonuclear runaway reaction ignites. This is a rapid and uncontrollable fusion of hydrogen into helium, releasing an enormous amount of energy.
- **Explosion and Brightening:** The sudden release of energy blows off the accumulated layer of hydrogen into space, causing a dramatic increase in the star's brightness. This brightening can make the star appear thousands to millions of times brighter than usual.

### 3D Hologram Technology

Japan has incorporated 3D hologram technology in yen banknotes to combat counterfeiting.

#### 3D Hologram Technology (creates 3 dimensional images that can be viewed without any special glasses)

- 3D hologram technology is a method of creating three-dimensional images that appear to have depth and can be viewed from different angles, just like real objects. This technology leverages principles of light interference & diffraction to produce images that are lifelike and interactive.
  - ✓ **Interference:** When two beams of light intersect, they create an interference pattern. This pattern contains information about the light waves' amplitude and phase.
  - ✓ **Diffraction:** When light encounters an obstacle or slit, it bends & spreads out. This diffraction process is key to reconstructing the holographic image.

### Two Main Types

1. **Optical holography:** This traditional method uses lasers to record the light scattered from an object, creating a holographic image that can be reconstructed when illuminated with a similar laser.
2. **Digital holography:** This more modern technique uses computers to generate holograms from 3D models or other digital data.

### Applications

- **Education:** to create interactive learning experiences that allow students to see and interact with objects in 3D.
- **Medicine:** could be used for medical training, such as simulating surgery or other procedures, also for patient care, such as providing patients with a more realistic view of their anatomy.
- **Entertainment:** to create more immersive entertainment experiences, such as concerts or sporting events.

## Transposons

Researchers have highlighted the role of transposons in gene editing.

### About Transposons (also known as “junk” DNA / “selfish” DNA/ “jumping genes”)

- Transposons are a diverse and dynamic component of genomes, significantly impacting genetic variation, evolution, and gene regulation.
- They are “selfish” because their only function seems to make more copies of themselves & “junk” because there is no obvious benefit to their host.
- They are DNA sequences that move from one location on the genome to another.

### Positive Role Played by Transposons

- **Evolution:** Their movement can shuffle genes around, creating new combinations & potentially leading to beneficial adaptations, ensuring precise insertion and minimizing unintended effects.
- **Gene Regulation:** Transposons can land near genes and influence their expression, potentially in helpful ways by inducing mutations to study gene function by disrupting or activating genes.
- **Genetic Engineering Tools:** Scientists can utilize transposons as tools to insert new genes into specific locations within an organism’s genome creating genetically modified organisms.

### Two main classes of transposons

#### 1. Class I Transposons (Retrotransposons):

- ▶ Operate like a “copy-paste” mechanism. First, they transcribe their DNA sequence into RNA.
- ▶ Then, the RNA is converted back into DNA by an enzyme called reverse transcriptase.

#### 2. Class II Transposons (DNA Transposons):

“Cut and paste” their way around. They encode an enzyme called a transposase that directly cuts out the transposon & inserts it at a new location.

## Axiom 4 (Ax-4)

ISRO has selected two out of its four trained Gaganyaan astronauts for Axiom 4 mission.

### About AXIOM-4 (Organized by Axiom Space - a private space company with NASA & SpaceX)

- It is a 4<sup>th</sup> private spaceflight mission to the International Space Station (ISS) scheduled for launch
- **Spacecraft used:** SpaceX Crew Dragon & **Life Mission:** 14 Days
- Indian astronauts will be trained by NASA, international partners & SpaceX for their flight.
- **Objective:** These missions are instrumental in expanding commercial space activities and access to space for individuals and nations around the world as well as developing experience needed to normalize living and working in microgravity.

## Ortho-Chloro Benzylidene Malononitrile (OCBM)

Security agencies have seized a Chinese shipment of internationally banned chemicals Ortho-Chloro Benzylidene Malononitrile at a port in Tamil Nadu

### About Ortho-Chloro Benzylidene Malononitrile (known as CS gas/Tear Gas, Riot controlling agent)

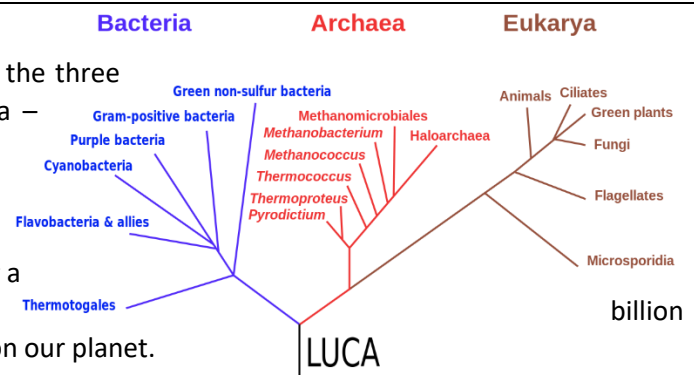
- It is a synthetic organic compound (white, crystalline solid with a peppery odor) primarily used in the manufacture of pepper sprays and other self-defense chemicals.
- When Human is exposed to CS gas, the eyes, nose, and skin experience intense irritation. This causes tearing, burning sensations, coughing, and difficulty breathing.
- It is a dual-use chemical listed under international agreements and India's export control list.
- India is a signatory to international conventions on disarmament and non-proliferation, viz. the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC).

## Last Universal Common Ancestor (LUCA)

Recently detailed genetic Profiling of Last Universal Common Ancestor (LUCA) have done.

### About LUCA (a single-cell, bacterium-like organisms)

- LUCA is the point in the *evolutionary tree* where the three domains of life – Bacteria, Archaea, and Eukarya – diverged.
- It is a theoretical entity representing the most recent organism from which all current life on Earth descends. It is not a single species but rather a population of organisms that lived around 3.5 to 4 billion years ago, during the early stages of life's history on our planet.



### Characteristics

- **Cellular organism:** LUCA was likely a single-celled organism. By studying LUCA, scientists can infer the earliest forms of life & the conditions under which life originated.
- **Genetic code:** It used DNA as its genetic material. This helps scientists to identify the core molecular and genetic components shared by all life forms. This includes understanding fundamental biological processes such as DNA replication, transcription, and translation.
- **Metabolism:** It probably relied on a complex metabolic system to survive. This could have included glycolysis or simple forms of respiration and photosynthesis.
- **Lipid bilayer:** A protective membrane likely enclosed LUCA.

## Chandipura Virus (CHPV)

Chandipura Virus has caused deaths in Gujarat Recently.

### About Chandipura Virus (Rhabdoviridae family, the same family as rabies virus)

- It is associated with an encephalitic illness (Related to Brain), known as Chandipura encephalitis or Chandipura viral encephalitis. First identified in 1965 in Chandipura village, Maharashtra, during a dengue outbreak.
  - ✓ Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES) is a group of clinically similar neurologic manifestation caused by several different viruses, bacteria, fungus, parasites, spirochetes, chemical/ toxins, etc.
- **Transmission & Vectors:** Primarily transmitted by sandflies & mosquitoes (such as *Aedes aegypti* (vector for dengue)). It can also be transmitted through direct contact with infected animals.

- **Symptoms:** Typically include fever, headache, convulsions (body muscles contract rapidly) & unconsciousness, rapidly progressing to coma and death in severe cases.
- **Impact:** Predominantly affects children under 15 years (especially in rural areas). Outbreaks often occur during the monsoon season
- **Treatment:** Currently, there is no specific antiviral treatment or vaccine available. Management focuses on supportive care.

## Uranium Contamination

A recent study conducted by BARC (Bhabha Atomic Research Centre) has observed that concentration of uranium up to 60 micrograms per liter (millionth of a gram per liter or  $\mu\text{g/l}$ ) in drinking water was entirely safe, as recently formulated “more stringent” national standard of 30  $\mu\text{g/l}$  could be counterproductive.

### About Uranium Contamination in India

- **Affected States:** Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Delhi
- **Health Risks:** Prolonged exposure to uranium-contaminated water can lead to kidney damage, bone toxicity, Increased risk of cancer, Bioaccumulation of uranium in plants and animals, leading to ecological imbalance and other health problems.
- **Causes:** Natural geological conditions (leaching into groundwater and surface water), overexploitation of groundwater, Improper disposal of radioactive waste from nuclear facilities and certain industrial activities are contributing factors.

### Case Studies

1. **Jadu Guda, Jharkhand:** Long-term uranium mining has led to widespread contamination and health issues in the local population.
2. **Punjab:** High incidence of cancer linked to uranium contamination in groundwater

**Government’s Directives:** Till now the acceptable level of uranium concentration in drinking water in India was 60  $\mu\text{g/l}$ . In 2021, the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), the custodian of standards and quality in India announced a new limit of 30  $\mu\text{g/l}$ , in line with recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO).

**\*\*Note: Finland and Slovakia** — two nations with considerable amounts of uranium consumption — have prescribed safety limits of 100 and 350  $\mu\text{g/l}$  respectively.

**Prevention, Control and Remediation Techniques:** Use of chelating agents to bind uranium in water and facilitate its removal; Phytoremediation using plants like sunflowers and Indian mustard to absorb uranium from soil and water

## NOvA

The latest data obtained from NOvA has deepened the mystery of subatomic particle’s mass i.e. neutrinos.

### About NOvA (NuMI Off-axis $\nu$ e Appearance)

- It was designed to determine the role of neutrinos in the evolution of the cosmos.
- It creates a beam of neutrinos that flies towards a 14,000-tonne detector. It is done by trying to understand which neutrino type has the most mass and which type has the least.
- The phenomenon of neutrino oscillation occurs when a neutrino created with one flavor changes to another flavor as it travels. Neutrinos come in three types or “flavors”: electron, muon, and tau neutrinos.
- **Neutrinos:** These are a type of subatomic particle. They don’t have an electric charge, have a small mass, and are left-handed (direction of its spin is opposite to the direction of its motion). They are the second-

most abundant particles after photons (particles of light) and the most abundant among particles that make up matter.

## Tinzaparin

Research suggests that tinzaparin is significantly effective to spitting cobra venom, which lead to a breakthrough in snakebite treatment, especially in regions with high snakebite morbidity.

### About Tinzaparin (Administered subcutaneously, typically in the abdominal area.)

- Tinzaparin is an anticoagulant medication, specifically a low molecular weight heparin (LMWH), used to prevent and treat blood clots.
- It works by inhibiting the formation of blood clots in the veins, thereby reducing the risk of conditions such as deep vein thrombosis (DVT) and pulmonary embolism (PE).
- Tinzaparin blocks venom's interaction with cell receptors, preventing damage. It mimics heparan sulphate, which the venom targets, thereby reducing toxicity.

## Lactic Acid Bacterium

A new strain of lactic acid bacterium, MCC0200 has been discovered with significant potential as a probiotic beyond the dairy industry.

### Key Findings about MCC0200 (Specific Strain Of Streptococcus Thermophilus)

- It is isolated from traditional Indian dairy products.
- Characteristics: Survival in the harsh conditions of the gastrointestinal tract, Adhesion to intestinal surfaces, Antioxidative properties, Ability to interact with pathogenic bacteria.

### Lactic Acid Bacterium (LAB- ferment carbohydrates primarily into lactic acid)

- LAB is a group of gram-positive bacteria that produce lactic acid as their primary metabolic product. They are commonly found in milk and fermented dairy products like yogurt and cheese. They are also present on the surfaces of vegetables and fruits.
- LABs are used in the production of various enzymes like lactase and proteases. They are involved in the production of bioactive metabolites, such as vitamins and exopolysaccharides.

### Characteristics of LAB (Gram-positive; Acid-tolerant and Anaerobic)

- **Digestion:** Aid in the breakdown of food and absorption of nutrients.
- **Microbiota Balance:** Help maintain a healthy balance of gut microbiota and inhibit pathogenic bacteria and can modulate the immune system, enhancing the body's natural defenses.
- **Natural Preservatives:** LAB produces organic acids, bacteriocins & antimicrobial compounds that can inhibit spoilage organisms & pathogens, extending the shelf life of food products.

## Dark Oxygen

Recently Dark Oxygen was discovered which is being produced in the deep ocean by metallic nodules on the seafloor.

### About Dark Oxygen (produced without Photosynthesis)

- **Formation:** Polymetallic Nodules (PMN), when submerged in seawater, undergo electrochemical reactions that produce oxygen.

✓ **Polymetallic Nodules (PMN)** are potato-sized lumps of minerals, rich in elements like manganese, iron, cobalt, nickel, and copper, found on the ocean floor.

- Discovery raises questions about the origin and evolution of life, as oxygen-producing processes might have existed in environments previously considered inhospitable.

## Ketamine

Reports have suggested that tablets that release ketamine slowly can improve symptoms of depression with fewer side effects.

- ✓ A derivative of ketamine, **esketamine**, has been developed and approved for treatment-resistant depression.

### About Ketamine

- Ketamine is a medication primarily used for anesthesia & pain relief.
- Ketamine works by blocking NMDA receptors in the brain (in both human and veterinary medicine), which are involved in pain perception, memory, and synaptic plasticity.
- Ketamine can be administered intravenously, intramuscularly, orally, or nasally.
- **Potential risks:** Excessive or improper use can lead to serious health problems, including psychological effects, organ damage, and addiction. Ketamine is a controlled substance in many countries due to its potential for abuse.

### Applications of Ketamine

#### Medical Uses:

- **Anesthesia:** Originally developed as a general anesthetic for surgical procedures, especially in situations where muscle relaxation isn't necessary.
- **Pain management**
- **Psychiatric Treatment:** Ketamine has shown rapid antidepressant effects, & in treating post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

#### Recreational Use:

- **Club drug:** Ketamine is often misused as a recreational drug due to its hallucinogenic and dissociative effects.

## Bal Gangadhar Tilak

- The Prime Minister, recently paid tributes to Bal Gangadhar Tilak on his birth anniversary.
- Tilak was one of the prime architects of modern India and one of the strongest advocates of Swaraj or Self Rule for India.
- His famous declaration "Swaraj is my birthright, and I shall have it" served as an inspiration for future revolutionaries during India's struggle for freedom
- The British Government termed him as the "**Father of Indian Unrest**" and his followers gave him the title of 'Lokmanya', which means, one who is respected by the people.

## Political Career

- Tilak joined the Indian National Congress in 1890 and soon started vocalizing his strong opposition to the moderate views of the party on self-rule.
- He maintained that simple constitutional agitation was not enough against the British. Instead, he advocated an armed revolt to fight the British.
- Following the partition of Bengal in 1905, by Lord Curzon, Tilak wholeheartedly supported the Swadeshi (Indigenous) movement and boycott of British goods.
- Due to this fundamental difference in outlook, Tilak and his supporters came to be known as the **extremist wing** of Indian National Congress Party.
- Tilak's views were supported by fellow nationalists Bipin Chandra Pal of Bengal and Lala Lajpat Rai of Punjab. The trio were popularly referred as Lal-Bal-Pal.

## Imprisonment

- Inspired by Tilak's articles, the Chapekar brothers carried out the assassination of Commissioner Rand and Lt. Ayerst in 1897. As a result of this, Tilak was imprisoned for 18 months on sedition charges for inciting murder.
- He openly supported the revolutionaries Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki's efforts to assassinate Chief Presidency Magistrate Douglas Kingsford in 1908.
- For this, he was charged with sedition and had to undergo six years (1908-1914) of rigorous imprisonment in **Mandalay Jail, Burma**.

## All India Home Rule League

- After completing his imprisonment Tilak returned to India in 1915 when the political situation was fast changing during the period of World War I. He then returned to politics with a less aggressive outlook.
- Deciding to re-unite with his fellow nationalists, Tilak founded the All India Home Rule League in 1916 with Annie Besant.
- The stated goal of the Home Rule League was to achieve self-government in India.
- Tilak found the first home rule league at Belgaum in April 1916 and Annie Besant founded the second league at Adyar Madras in September 1916.
- Tilak's league worked in areas like Maharashtra (excluding Bombay city), Karnataka, Central provinces and Berar, and Annie Besant's league worked in the rest of India.

## Social Reforms

- Throughout his life he advocated the cause of women education and women empowerment. He educated all his daughters & did not marry them till they were over 16.

- Tilak proposed grand celebrations on 'Ganesh Chaturthi' and 'Shivaji Jayanti'. He believed that these celebrations could bring a sense of unity and inspire nationalist sentiment among Indians.

### Literary Works

- Towards his nationalistic goals, Tilak published 2 newspapers: **Mahratta** (in English) & **Kesari** (in Marathi).
- He published the books **The Orion or Researches into the Antiquity of the Vedas** and **The Arctic Home in the Vedas**. During his imprisonment in Mandalay jail, he wrote the **Gita Rahasya**.

### Project PARI

- The Ministry of Culture has initiated Project PARI (Public Art of India) on the occasion of the 46th Session of the World Heritage Committee Meeting, held in New Delhi.
- Executed by **Lalit Kala Akademi and National Gallery of Modern Art** it seeks to highlight public art that draws inspiration from millennia of artistic heritage (lok kala/lok sanskriti) while incorporating modern themes and techniques.
- Project PARI aims to uplift the aesthetic and cultural outlook of Delhi while adding to the rich historical legacy of the national capital.
- **More than 150 visual artists from all over the country** have come together to create the various wall paintings, murals, sculptures and installations being prepared under this project.
- The artworks have been inspired by and/or drawn in styles of **Phad paintings** (Rajasthan), **Thangka painting** (Sikkim/Ladakh), **miniature painting** (Himachal Pradesh), **Gond art** (Madhya Pradesh), **Tanjore paintings** (Tamil Nadu), **Kalamkari** (Andhra Pradesh), **Alpona art** (West Bengal), **Cheriyal painting** (Telangana), **Pichhwai Painting** (Rajasthan), **Lanjia Saura** (Odisha), **Pattachitra** (West Bengal), **Bani Thani Painting** (Rajasthan), **Warli** (Maharashtra), **Pithora Art** (Gujarat), **Aipan** (Uttarakhand), **Kerala Murals** (Kerala), **Alpana art** (Tripura) and more.

### Kargil Vijay Diwas

- The 25th anniversary of Kargil Vijay Diwas was recently celebrated on 26th July.
- It is observed to pay tribute to the bravery of Indian soldiers who sacrificed their lives for the country during the Kargil War of 1999.
- Additionally, it also commemorates the country's **victory over Pakistan in the Kargil War of 1999** and marks the successful culmination of **Operation Vijay**.
- In this operation, the Indian Army managed to drive out Pakistani intruders and successfully recaptured **Tiger Hill** and other strategic positions.

### Kharchi Puja

- The centuries-old Kharchi Puja was celebrated in Tripura. Originally a tribal Hindu festival, it is now observed by all communities and religions.
- It is centered around the worship of Chaturdasa Devata, the ancestral deity of the Tripuri people.
- Also called the '**Festival of 14 Gods**', Kharchi Puja is observed annually on the Shukla Ashtami day, which falls on the eighth day of the lunar month of Ashadha.
- The 14 deities are -- Shiva, Durga, Vishnu, Laxmi, Saraswati, Kartik, Ganesha, Brahma, Abadhi (God of water), Chandra, Ganga, Agni, Kamdev and Himadri (Himalaya).
- The word 'Kharchi' is derived from two Tripuri words--'khar' or kharta meaning sin and 'chi' or si meaning cleaning.

- During the festival, the people of Tripura also worship the earth along with their 14 deities.
- It is believed that the Mother Goddess or Tripura Sundari, the presiding deity of the land who protects the people of Tripura, menstruates during the time of Ambubachi, which is observed in June.
- There is a popular belief that the Earth becomes impure during the menstruation period of the Goddess.
- Hence, Kharchi Puja is observed to ritualistically clean the Earth after her menstruation is over and wash away the sins of the people in the land,

#### **Rituals Of The Festival**

- An important ritual of the festival is the construction of the Chaturdasha Mandapa, which symbolises the royal palace of the Tripuri kings and is constructed by traditional artisans who craft the structure out of bamboo and thatched roofs.
- On the day of the main puja, the idols of all the 14 deities from the ancient Ujjayanta Palace are carried by the royal priest Chantai from the temple premises in Agartala to the holy Saidra river.
- There they are dipped in the holy waters of the river and carried back to the temple.

## AWARDS/PERSONALITIES IN NEWS

### Abhinav Bindra Awarded Olympic Order

- Abhinav Bindra, the first Indian to win an individual gold at the Olympics, has been awarded the Olympic Order by the International Olympic Committee, for his outstanding services to the Olympic Movement.
- Abhinav Bindra secured first place in the men's 10-metre air rifle event at the 2008 Beijing Games
- Bindra's success extends beyond the Olympics. He has won multiple medals at the Commonwealth Games and the Asian Games, including a gold at the 2006 ISSF World Championships, becoming the first Indian rifle shooter to win a World Championship title.
- He served as Chair of the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) from 2014 and was its member from 2010 to 2020.
- Besides this, he has been a member of the IOC Athlete Commission since 2018.

### Olympic Order

- It is the highest award presented by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Established in 1975, it **replaced the Olympic Diploma of Merit**.
- The honor can be given to IOC members, athletes, and other individuals who have made significant contributions to the Olympic Movement, promoting the ideals of unity, friendship, and fair play that the Olympics embody.
- The award comes in **three grades: gold, silver, and bronze**, with the gold medal being the most prestigious. The gold order is reserved for heads of state and exceptional circumstances.
- The recipients of the Olympic Order are chosen by the IOC's Executive Board.
- Notable recipients include athletes such as **Nadia Comaneci**, who received the order twice, as well as prominent figures like **Indira Gandhi and Nelson Mandela**.

### International Mathematical Olympiad (IMO)

- A six-member student team from India has secured the country its best performance ever in the International Mathematical Olympiad (IMO) 2024.
- The Indian contingent **ranked 4th out of 108 countries**, securing four gold medals, one silver medal and one honourable mention at the 65th IMO held at Bath, United Kingdom.
- India's previous best rank achieved until 2024 was rank 7, at IMO 1998 and IMO 2001.
- Globally, USA, China, and South Korea finished as the top three winners in that order.

### IMO

- The IMO is the World Championship Mathematics Competition for High School students and is held annually in a different country. It is the most prestigious mathematical competition in the world.
- The first IMO was held in **1959 in Romania**, with 7 countries participating. It has gradually expanded to over 100 countries from 5 continents.

### Durand Cup Tournament

- The President of India recently unveiled the trophies of the Durand Cup Tournament. The trophies unveiled include the **Durand Cup, the President's Cup and Shimla Trophy**.

- **First played in 1888**, the Durand Cup is **Asia's oldest existing football tournament** and the third oldest in the World.
- The Durand Cup is **organised by the Indian Army on behalf of the three Services**, and under the aegis of the All India Football Federation (AIFF).
- It initially began as an inter-department and inter-regiment tournament for the Indian Armed Forces.
- The tournament is named after its **founder Sir Henry Mortimer Durand**, who served as the foreign secretary of British India from 1884 to 1894.
- After the inaugural edition in Shimla, the tournament moved to New Delhi in 1940, where it was held till 2016.
  - The fact that the winning team gets three trophies, **two rolling (Durand Cup and Shimla Trophy) and one for permanent keep (President's Cup)**, makes Durand Cup unique.
- Mohun Bagan Super Giant are the defending champions, having won the tournament in 2023, for a record 17th time, the most by any team.

