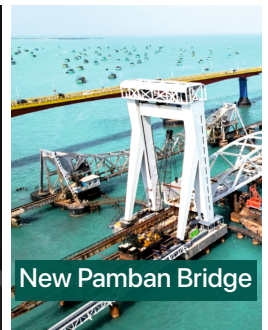
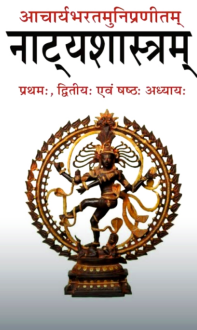




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Following a recent full court meeting, all Supreme Court (SC) judges, including the Chief Justice of India (CJI), have resolved to publicly declare their assets. The move follows the recent discovery of cash at Delhi High Court (HC) judge Yashwant Varma's residence.

- ✓ Judges are not legally required to disclose assets publicly, and most haven't. The recent decision signals a key shift, reaffirming the 1997 Restatement of Values of Judicial Life- a judicial code of ethics.

About Restatement of Values of Judicial Life

It is a code of ethics adopted by the SC in 1997 to guide judges on how to maintain integrity, impartiality, and public trust in the judiciary.

- It is not legally binding; It serves as a moral and professional compass for judges and forms the foundation for ensuring judicial accountability in India.
- This helps **internalize** ethical conduct in absence of a statutory Judicial Standards and Accountability Bill (introduced in 2010), which lapsed in 2014.
 - ✓ Articles 124(4) and 217 provide for the removal of judges on grounds of "proved misbehavior or incapacity", but do not lay down specific codes of conduct.

Objective

- To lay down clear expectations for judges' behavior- both inside and outside the courtroom.
- To provide a non-legislative & informal mechanism to deal with misconduct, as formal impeachment is rare and difficult.

What Does It Contain? It's a list of 16 ethical principles, covering:

- **Preserve Public Trust:** Judges must avoid any conduct that erodes public confidence. Justice must *be seen* to be done.
- **Maintain Impartiality:** Judges must stay professionally distant, avoid personal involvement in cases, and refrain from political commentary or media engagement.
- **Avoid Conflicts of Interest:** No close ties with lawyers; family members who are advocates cannot appear before them or use the judge's residence for work.
- **No Outside Roles or Influence:** Judges must not contest elections, hold positions in associations, accept gifts (except from close relations).
- **No Commercial Ventures:** Judges must not engage in speculative investments like stock trading or participate in business activities, except legal publishing or personal hobbies.
- **Disclose Financial Interests:** Judges must recuse themselves from cases involving companies they hold shares in, unless disclosed.
- **Act with Integrity:** Judges must uphold dignity, avoid undue financial gains, and act responsibly under public scrutiny.
- **Institutional Accountability:** A full court in 1999 adopted an in-house procedure to probe misconduct without impeachment.
- **Asset Declarations:** Judges must declare assets to the CJI upon taking office. Initially confidential, these became **voluntarily** public from 2009. In 2018, the SC held that judges' assets and liabilities are not exempt from RTI inquiries.

How has this Code Been Used?

The code was the basis for creating an “in-house procedure” in 1999 for investigating judges accused of misconduct. Over the years, the court has invoked this resolution in serious situations. For example:

- In 2014, during a sexual harassment allegation against a High Court judge.
- In 2025, when cash was found at the residence of Justice Yashwant Varma, prompting a fresh in-house inquiry.

Significance

- It fills the gap between **bad conduct** and **proven misbehavior**, which might not meet the strict standards for impeachment.
- It promotes internal accountability and ethical self-regulation within the judiciary.
- It has pushed the judiciary towards greater transparency, especially regarding judges' assets.

Way Forward

• Mandate Annual Declarations by Law:

The 2023 Parliamentary Standing Committee report on *Judicial Processes and their Reform* called for legislative changes to make annual asset declarations mandatory for all SC and HC judges.

➤ It emphasized that judges, as public functionaries drawing salaries from the exchequer, should follow the same disclosure standards as MPs, MLAs, and civil servants, replacing the current voluntary system with a legally binding one.

• **Institutionalize the Mechanism:** A permanent framework should be established within the judiciary to handle the **filing, verification, and publication** of judges' asset declarations in a time-bound and standardized manner.

Current Status of Asset Declaration by SC and HC Judges

HC Judges	SC Judges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As of April 2024, only 95 out of 769 sitting HC judges (12.35%) have publicly declared their assets. • Only six HCs have shown participation in disclosures with Kerala leading the list 93.18% compliance (41 of 44 judges) followed by Himachal Pradesh- 91.66% compliance (11 of 12). Other courts include- Delhi (7/38), Punjab & Haryana, Madras (5/56), Chhattisgarh- lowest (1/16). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 out of 33 serving SC judges, including CJI Sanjiv Khanna, have submitted their asset declarations. • A full court meeting on April 1, 2025 marked a major shift, with all 33 judges agreeing to make their assets public. • The declarations will be published on the SC website once technical processes are completed.

Benefits of Asset Declaration	Challenges Faced in Asset Declaration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transparency and Public Trust: Public disclosure enhances transparency, fostering public confidence in the judiciary's impartiality and integrity. • Deterrence Against Corruption: Mandatory asset declarations act as a deterrent to corrupt practices by subjecting judges to public scrutiny. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ In countries like South Korea, failure to declare assets leads to Judges disqualification or prosecution, ensuring a culture of zero tolerance. • Accountability of Public Servants: Judges, as public servants funded by taxpayer money, should be held financially accountable, like elected representatives who are required to disclose their assets. • Prevent Conflict of Interest: Asset declarations can reveal potential conflicts of interest, such as judges owning shares in companies involved in cases they preside over. • Setting Ethical Benchmarks: Public asset disclosures set an ethical precedent for other branches of government and reinforce institutional integrity. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ In UK and Canada, judges are subject to independent ethics committees, often linked to Parliament or Judicial Appointments Commissions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voluntary vs Mandatory Compliance: Only 12.35% of HC judges have disclosed their assets publicly due to its voluntary requirement. While SC's recent decision makes disclosure mandatory for its judges, extending this mandate across all courts remains a challenge. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ In countries like Kenya and South Africa, public officials—including judges—must submit annual declarations under statutory mandates: • Privacy and Security Concerns: Judges have expressed concerns about privacy and security risks associated with public asset disclosures. Fear of harassment or undue influence could potentially compromise judicial independence. • Lack of Verification Mechanisms: Asset declarations alone do not guarantee accuracy or honesty unless accompanied by independent oversight mechanisms to verify disclosures and monitor compliance. • Limited Scope for Accountability: Asset disclosure does not tackle broader issues such as performance reviews, grievance redressal mechanisms, or ethical violations unrelated to financial matters. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ A judge may declare modest assets but still engage in unethical conduct, such as favoritism in appointments or nepotism in promoting juniors. • Resistance by HCs: Most HCs remain resistant to public disclosure. In 2012, the Uttarakhand HC passed a resolution objecting to bringing asset disclosures under the RTI Act. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Lack of coordination between Supreme Court directives and HC administrative independence makes national-level judicial reforms difficult.

- ✓ Brings parity with institutions like the Lokpal and Lokayuktas, which maintain digital public records.
- **Revive the Judicial Standards and Accountability Bill, 2010:** The government should consider reviving this bill, which not only included mandatory asset declarations but also set **ethical standards** and laid down a **removal mechanism** through an Oversight Committee for errant judges.



Aircraft Objects Act, 2025

President assented the Aircraft Objects Bill, 2025 which seeks to modernize India's legal framework for aircraft-related transactions by aligning it with international standards like the Convention on International Interests in Mobile Equipment (also known as **Cape Town Convention (CTC)** of 2001) and Protocol to the Convention on International Interests in Mobile Equipment on Matters specific to Aircraft Equipment.

- ✓ The CTC and its aircraft protocol is an international treaty adopted by the United Nations aviation watchdog, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), in 2001. It standardizes transactions involving **aviation assets** such as aircraft and engines and provides remedies for creditors in cases of financial default by airlines towards the lessors they rent aircraft from.
- ✓ India signed CTC in 2008 but didn't ratify it, making it non-binding. The new Bill passed by Parliament addresses this gap.

Need for the Bill

India is the third-largest domestic aviation market. The aviation sector in India has shown substantial growth, with a 15% YoY (Year on Year) increase in total air passengers handled at Indian airports reaching 37.6 crore in FY24.

- ✓ According to a PwC report published in 2021, ~ 80% of India's total commercial aircraft are leased.
- ✓ Aircraft leasing is largely governed by international norms; lack of a domestic legal mechanism exposed lessors to legal uncertainty, e.g., under Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) proceedings.
- **Enhance Legal Clarity and Certainty:** To establish clear rules regarding the recording, registration, and execution of aircraft leasing and financing transactions. This clarity is intended to resolve disputes like those seen in past airline insolvencies like Kingfisher, SpiceJet, and GoFirst.
 - ✓ In May 2023, GoFirst filed for voluntary insolvency, and the NCLT granted a moratorium

Objectives of Aircraft Objects Act, 2025

- ◆ Implement International Treaties: by giving legal force to the CTC and its Aircraft Protocol in India to facilitate cross-border aircraft financing/leasing.
- ◆ Protect Creditor Rights: by establishing clear remedies for creditors (lessors/financiers) during defaults or insolvency.
- ◆ Harmonize Laws: by overriding inconsistencies between domestic laws (e.g., insolvency, aviation) and international obligations.

Key Provisions of Aircraft Objects Act, 2025

- ◆ **Legal Status of Convention & its Protocol (Section 3):** The CTC and Protocol have the force of law in India, subject to declarations made by India.
- ◆ **Registry Authority (Section 4):** The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) will be responsible for the registration and de-registration of aircraft, issuing directions for the convention's implementation, and ensuring proper record-keeping of dues by debtors (airlines).
- ◆ **Debtor and Creditor Obligations (section 5):** The legislation mandates that airlines (debtor) maintain detailed records of dues and submit these records to the DGCA. In parallel, creditors must notify the registry authority of any declared default before exercising their remedies.
 - The debtor must be an Indian-registered entity, or a person domiciled or primarily based in India.
- ◆ **Remedies for Insolvency (Section 6):** If an airline defaults on its obligations, the creditor (typically the lessor) will have the right to reclaim or repossess the aircraft. The law provides a mechanism to do so within two calendar months, or mutually agreed period whichever is earlier.
- ◆ **De-registration and Export (Section 7):** Subject to the provisions of the Bharatiya Vayuyan Adhiniyam, 2024, or any rules made thereunder, the provisions of Article XIII of the Protocol shall apply to the de-registration and export request.
- ◆ **Jurisdiction (Section 8):** High Courts in the relevant territorial jurisdiction will handle the disputes arising under the CTC, ensuring uniform judicial intervention.
- ◆ **Overriding Effect (Section 9):** The bill prevails over conflicting domestic laws, except for certain government rights to detain aircraft for unpaid dues.
- ◆ **Rule-making Powers (Section 10):** The Central Government can prescribe rules for debt/credit records, default notifications, and DGCA directions.

protecting it from actions by lessors and creditors. This blocked lessors from reclaiming their aircraft and led to difficulties in accessing and maintaining them, while also forcing them to cover the airline's unpaid dues to airport operators for expenses incurred on counter and office space, ground and cargo handling apart from aircraft parking costs.

- **Protect the Interests of Creditors and Lessors:** To provide legal remedies for creditors by ensuring that in the event of an airline's default, the lender's right to repossess and sell or otherwise control the aircraft can be swiftly and effectively enforced.
- **Reduce Financial Risks and Costs:** By tightening the legal framework, the bill aims to lower the leasing costs (8-10% reduction) which could indirectly benefit passengers through lower airfares over time.
- **Promote Domestic Leasing Infrastructure:** To support the development of a domestic aircraft leasing ecosystem, particularly through initiatives such as establishing a leasing hub at Gujarat's International Finance Tec-City (GIFT City).

Concerns Raised Regarding the Bill	Potential Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timing of Implementation: The Bill is perceived as reactive rather than preventive. Critics argue that the bill comes too late for cases like those of GoFirst or SpiceJet- effectively "closing the stable door after the horse has bolted." • Overstated Leasing Cost Reduction Claims: Some industry executives contend that the forecast 8-10% decline in leasing costs may be overly optimistic, arguing that an airline's creditworthiness, financial health, and order volume are more significant factors affecting leasing rates than merely having legal clarity. • Taxation and Regulatory Complexities: The bill does not address India's intricate taxation regime. Industry players have raised concerns about IT notices and other administrative hurdles related to Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs), especially since such structures may be treated unfavorably under current tax norms. • Push for Local Presence at GIFT City: There are perceptions that the government is forcing international lessors to set up local arms at GIFT City. This "arm-twisting" could face resistance if the local regulatory and tax environment is deemed unfavorable. • Limited Impact on Airfares: Although the bill is expected to lower financial risks and costs for airlines, many executives are skeptical about the trickle-down effect on airfares, which are primarily influenced by market forces of demand and supply for air travel. • Broad exemptions for government dues: The bill allows authorities to detain aircraft for unpaid dues to public service providers, potentially undermining lessors' rights. • Centralized Rule-Making: Rules prescribed by the government (<i>not Parliament</i>) may lack transparency and stakeholder consultation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boost to Investor and Lessor Confidence: in India's aviation sector by providing a stable, predictable legal framework. This increased confidence could attract more competitive leasing agreements. • Enhanced Global Competitiveness: With a stronger alignment to international legal standards, India can improve its standing on indices like the Aviation Working Group's (AWG) CTC Index, thereby making its aviation market a more attractive destination for asset-based financing. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ India current ranks 62 in AWG CTC index with a target of 90. • Strengthened Domestic Leasing Ecosystem: Building a robust domestic aircraft leasing structure, with GIFT City envisioned as a key hub could help retain more transactions within the country, fostering local industry development. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ireland is a global leasing hub due to its Cape Town-compliant laws, tax incentives, and legal certainty. • Improved Operational Efficiency in Insolvency Scenarios: Clear guidelines for asset repossession and temporary retention during insolvency proceedings will reduce the "black hole" risks faced by financiers. • Promote Ancillary Services (Infrastructure and Institutional Capacity): Will boost sectors like insurance, MRO (Maintenance,

• **Jurisdiction Limitations:** Restricting cases to High Courts could delay resolutions compared to specialized tribunals.

Repair & Overhaul), cargo, and legal consulting.



Supreme Court Ruling on T.N. Governor

In a landmark ruling, the Supreme Court (SC) set aside Tamil Nadu (TN) Governor R.N. Ravi's decision to withhold assent to 10 Bills, calling it illegal and erroneous. The verdict redefines the Governor's role, especially in Opposition-ruled states, and impacts similar pending cases, including one involving the Kerala Governor.

Case Background

- **Core Constitutional Question:** The case centered on a fundamental issue: *What happens when a Governor fails to act on Bills duly passed by a State legislature?*
- **Origin and Nature of the Bills:** The dispute involved 12 Bills, some dating back to 2020. Two Bills were passed under the earlier AIADMK government, and the rest under the DMK government.
 - Several Bills aimed to curb the Governor's powers, notably over appointing Vice-Chancellors to public universities- a major point of conflict between the Raj Bhavan and the State government.
- **Prolonged Inaction by the Governor:** For years, the Governor took no action on the Bills (neither granting, nor returning them).
- **Legal Challenge:** In November 2023, the State government approached the SC. Just before this, the Governor referred two of the Bills to the President.
- **Re-enactment of the Remaining Bills:** The Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly convened a special session to re-enact the other 10 Bills. These re-enacted Bills were again sent to the Governor, who swiftly forwarded them to the President, instead of granting assent- bypassing his constitutional duty to act. The State contended that this conduct obstructed the legislative process and violated democratic principles, prompting the Court's intervention.
 - The President assented to one Bill, rejected seven, and left two pending.

Constitutional Provisions Related to Governor's Role in Giving Assent to Bills Passed by the State Legislature

Article 163: Council of Ministers to Aid and Advise Governor	Article 200: Assent to Bills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Article 163(1): The Governor must act on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers, led by the Chief Minister, except in matters where the Constitution explicitly allows discretion. • Article 163(2): If there's a dispute over whether a matter falls under the Governor's discretionary powers, the decision of the Governor in his discretion shall be final and cannot be challenged. • Courts cannot inquire into what advice was given by Ministers to the Governor. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a Bill is passed by the State Legislature, the Governor has four options: 1) Grant assent; 2) Withhold assent; 3) Return the Bill (except Money Bills) for reconsideration; and 4) Reserve the Bill for the President's consideration. • If the Bill is not a Money Bill, the <u>Governor shall return it as soon as possible with a message requesting the House(s) to reconsider the Bill or any provisions and suggest possible amendments.</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ If the Bill is re-passed with or without amendments and presented again, the Governor must give assent and cannot withhold it. • The Governor must reserve a Bill for the President's consideration if, in his opinion, it would derogate from the powers of the High Court to such an extent that it would endanger the Court's constitutional role. <p>**Although the Governor must return the Bill "as soon as possible," the absence of a clear timeframe has allowed Raj Bhavans to delay action indefinitely effectively creating a "pocket veto" and stalling the legislative process.</p>
<p>Articles 163 and 200 are read together to determine the contours of the Governor's power on the issue relating to his assent to the bills passed by the state legislature.</p>	

What did the SC Rule in TN Governor's Case?

- **Time Limits Prescribed for Governor's Actions:** The SC set **specific deadlines** under Article 200:
 - **1 month** to act on a Bill when withholding assent or reserving it.
 - **3 months** to return a Bill if doing so **contrary to Cabinet advice**.
 - **1 month** to grant assent after a Bill is **re-passed** by the legislature.
 - Delays are allowed only on reasonable grounds.
- **Reservation for the President** after reconsideration and resubmission by the State legislature is allowed **only if the Bill has materially changed**. Such reservation must be based on grave constitutional concerns, not personal dissatisfaction or political expediency.
- **Curbing the Pocket Veto:** The Court held that the Governor **cannot sit on a Bill indefinitely**. The use of “shall” and “as soon as possible” in Article 200 **prohibits inaction**. **Withholding assent is not an absolute or discretionary veto**.
- **Use of Article 142 – Deemed Assent:** The Court invoked **Article 142** to declare the **10 Bills as having received assent**.
 - The Court held that invoking its extraordinary powers was justified due to the Governor's “scant respect” for prior rulings and his return of the Bills without reasons, violating the binding directive in *State of Punjab vs. Principal Secretary to the Governor of Punjab (2023)*.
 - ✓ **Article 142** empowers the SC to pass any order or decree necessary to ensure **complete justice** in any cause or matter pending before it. These orders are enforceable across India. It also grants the Court powers to **secure attendance, demand documents, and punish contempt**, subject to laws made by Parliament.
- **Judicial Review:** The Court affirmed that gubernatorial discretion is subject to judicial review i.e. whenever a Governor uses discretionary powers, it must be open to review by the courts
- **President's Role and Timeline:** The court set a **3-month deadline** for the **President** to act on reserved Bills from the day the reference is received. It directed that any **delays must be justified** and communicated to the State and recommended that the **President seek the SC's opinion under Article 143**, especially when constitutional issues arise, since Governors lack a mechanism to refer Bills for judicial review.
 - The Court referred to the ‘**In Re: The Special Courts Bill, 1978**’ case to reinforce the idea that: **Pre-enactment judicial review** can help **avoid legal challenges** later.
- **Principle Reinforced:** The judgment reaffirmed that **the Governor is a constitutional authority, not a political actor**, and must act in a manner that **respects representative democracy and federalism**.

In State of Punjab v. Principal Secretary to the Governor case, the Court addressed the Governor's refusal to assent to Bills. The Governor argued the Assembly sessions were illegal due to improper reconvening.

➤ The SC ruled in favor of the Punjab government, stating that while the Governor holds certain constitutional powers as an unelected Head of State, these powers cannot be used to disrupt the normal functioning of the state's legislative process.

➤ Specifically, the Court emphasized that if the Governor decides to withhold assent under Article 200, the Governor must follow the procedure outlined in Article 200 of remitting the Bill back to the state legislature for reconsideration.

Prior Precedents Set by SC in Cases Related to Governor's Powers

- **Shamsher Singh v. State of Punjab (1974):** The Court held that the **Governor is generally bound by the aid and advice** of the Council of Ministers. **Discretionary powers are the exception**, not the rule.
- **Rameshwar Prasad v. Union of India (2006):** The court held that **Governor's personal opinion cannot justify imposing President's Rule**. It reaffirmed that the Governor's decisions must be **constitutionally valid** and not politically motivated.
- **Nabam Rebia & Bamang Felix v. Deputy Speaker (2016):** The Court clarified that the **Governor cannot withhold assent indefinitely**. If withholding assent, the Governor **must return the Bill with a message**, possibly suggesting amendments.
 - The Court cited **Rules 102 and 103** of Assembly procedures, mandating the Speaker to read/ circulate the Governor's message when a Bill is returned.

What Happens now to Similar Cases by Other States?

The 2023 **State of Punjab** ruling, along with the current ruling, will likely influence how similar cases are decided in other states regarding the Governor withholding assent to Bills. In cases like **Kerala** and **Telangana**, where Bills have been pending with the Governor for extended periods, the rulings set a precedent for the judicial approach.

Reforms Suggested by Various Committees

- The **Sarkaria Commission (Report submitted-1988)** recommended the adoption of **definite timelines** for facilitating the **efficient disposal of references** under **Article 201** of the Constitution.
- The **Punchhi Commission (Report submitted- 2010)** also echoed this by suggesting that a timeline should be **read into Article 201**, ensuring that the Governor acts within a reasonable time frame and does not delay critical legislation indefinitely.
- Both the **Sarkaria** and **Punchhi Commissions** recommended that the **President seek the opinion of the SC** under **Article 143** when a Bill is apprehended to be **patently unconstitutional**. This reform aims to ensure that Bills that could undermine democratic principles are subjected to **judicial review**, preventing unconstitutional laws from being passed.
- The **National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRWC-2001)**, observed that because Governors are appointed by the **Union government**, there is an inherent risk of them acting as agents of the Centre and undermines their role as neutral heads of state in federal governance. This led to the suggestion for reforms to ensure that Governors remain neutral and do not become politically aligned with the Union government, especially in states where the opposition is in power.

In essence, this ruling enhances **legislative efficiency**, **reinforces the federal structure**, and ensures **accountability of the Governor**, setting a precedent for future cases involving delays in assent to state legislation.

Extra Mile: The Centre recently told the Supreme Court (SC) that the court's recent judgement on the role of TN governor does not **mechanically** apply to Kerala's case as the case involves distinct facts and should be heard separately. The SC agreed with the Centre's argument and scheduled the matter for hearing on **May 6, 2025**.

Significance of SC Ruling

- **Upholding Federalism and State Powers:** State governments, particularly those led by opposition parties, have a constitutional remedy against inordinate delays by Governors in granting assent to state Bills.
- **Clear Constitutional Remedy:** Introduces **clear timelines** for both the Governor and the President to act on Bills is crucial for preventing **indefinite stalling**.
- **Judicial Scrutiny and Accountability:** The ruling affirms that even when a Governor exercises discretion (e.g., withholding assent or reserving a Bill for Presidential consideration), such actions are **subject to judicial review**. The ruling dismisses the notion of an absolute veto/pocket veto by the Governor, emphasizing that the Governor must act on the advice of the **state's Council of Ministers** unless specific constitutional exceptions apply.
 - The removal of the phrase "in his discretion" in the Constituent Assembly debates was key in ensuring the Governor's actions are not independent of the elected state government.
- **Impact on Legislative Deadlock:** By creating **deemed assent** in cases of prolonged inaction.
 - The ruling also has wider implications for the **Union government's actions**, particularly in relation to judicial appointments, where delays by the executive could be challenged in a similar manner



Independent Survey to Assess MGNREGA

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Rural Development has recommended an independent survey to evaluate the **effectiveness** of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), and its shortcomings.

Key Recommendations by the Parliamentary Committee

- **Independent National Survey:** It recommended a comprehensive, independent, and transparent survey across the country focusing on- worker satisfaction; wage payment delays; participation trends; and financial irregularities to assess effectiveness, identify shortcomings, and inform policy reforms.

- **Addressing Inequities in Participation:** It observed inconsistent participation of SC/ST and women across districts and recommended a district-wise study to ensure equal opportunities for marginalized groups and fulfilment of the scheme's goal of social and economic inclusion.
- **Scheme Revamp and Modernization:** It called for a revamp of MGNREGA to reflect emerging challenges and changing socio-economic realities and urged the ministry to re-evaluate the structure and processes.
- **Increase in Guaranteed Workdays:** From 100 to 150 days for all eligible households. For Scheduled Tribes in forest areas and climate/disaster-affected regions, it suggested increasing the work limit to 200 days.
- **Wage Revision:** It highlighted that current wages are not aligned with inflation or cost of living and therefore suggested revising the base wage rate to at least ₹400 per day to ensure dignified earnings for rural workers.
 - ✓ The Ministry of Rural Development notified MGNREGA wage rates for FY 2025–26 ranging from ₹241 in Nagaland to ₹400 in Haryana, with a national average of ₹294. A 2019 expert panel led by Anoop Satpathy recommended a **National Floor Wage of ₹375/day** (based on July 2018 prices) for all sectors, including MGNREGA but the **recommendations were ignored**. In FY 25–26, only **Goa and Haryana** meet or exceed this level.
- **Timely Wage Payments and Compensation:** Expressing concern over chronic delays

What is MGNREGA?

The MGNREGA, enacted in **2005**, is a landmark social security scheme that guarantees the **right to work** by providing **at least 100 days of wage employment annually** to every rural household whose adult members are willing to do **unskilled manual work**.

Additional 50 days for Scheduled Tribe households in forest areas and to job card holders in such rural areas where drought or any natural calamity (as per Ministry of Home Affairs) has been notified.

- **Demand-Driven & Time-Bound:** The beneficiaries have the right to demand work, and the government is obligated to provide employment within 15 days of such a demand or the applicant is entitled to an **unemployment allowance**. This allowance is 1/4 of the minimum wage for the first 30 days and a half for the following period.
- **Proximity of Worksite:** Work should be within **5 km** of the applicant's residence. Beyond that, a **travel allowance** is provided.
- **Social Audit:** MGNREGA gives the Gram Sabha the right to Social Audit of all works and expenditures.
- **Wage Payments:** National Electronic Fund Management System (NeFMS) enables 100% of the **wage transfers** directly to workers' bank accounts, reducing leakages, delays, and corruption. Compensation is provided for wage delays beyond 15 days.
 - ✓ The adoption of NeFMS and Aadhaar Based Payment System (ABPS) in the current decade have made MGNREGA the biggest DBT Scheme in the country.
- **Inclusive Participation:** At least **one-third of beneficiaries are women**, their current participation has increased to **58.9%** in 2024–25. Focus is on **SC/ST households, women-headed families**, and other vulnerable groups.

Major Outcomes (2014–25)

- ▣ **Employment Generation:** **3029 crore person-days** generated- an **82% increase** compared to the previous decade (1660 crore person-days from 2006–14).
- ▣ **Asset Creation:** **8.07 crore rural assets created** during 2014–25, compared to **1.53 crore** in 2006–14. This marks a **526% increase in geotagged and quality-assured assets**. Emphasis on **individual assets** (e.g., wells, cattle sheds) rose from 17.6% in 2013–14 to **56.99% in 2024–25**.
- ▣ **Focus Areas:** Of the **266 permissible types of works**, major categories include **Agriculture and Allied; Natural Resource Management; and Rural Infrastructure**. These works directly contribute to **livelihood resilience, ecological sustainability, and community development**.

Recent Innovations & Focus Areas (2024–25)

- ▣ **Scheme Convergence:** Greater integration with Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana – Gramin (PMAY-G), National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM), Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP) and Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY) to enable multi-dimensional rural development and **efficient use of public funds**.
- ▣ **Flagship Initiatives:** include-
 - ➔ **Mission Amrit Sarovar:** Over **68,000 water bodies** created in Phase I; Phase II launched with a focus on **community-led water conservation**.
 - ➔ **Nutri Gardens:** Promoting food security and nutritional self-sufficiency at the household and community level.
 - ➔ **Moringa Plantations:** Enhancing **nutrition, income, and biodiversity** through convergence with NRLM.
- ▣ **Digital Tools for Transparency**
 - ➔ **NMMS (National Mobile Monitoring System):** Ensures real-time, geo-tagged attendance with photo verification, reducing fake entries.
 - ➔ **MIS Dashboards & NREGASoft:** Publicly accessible data on expenditures, person-days, and assets create. This along with JANMANREGA mobile app significantly increased citizen oversight of the program which was absent before 2014.
 - ➔ **GIS based planning, Geo-tagging of assets, SECURE** (Software for Estimate Calculation Using Rural Rates for Employment) etc. have made this Scheme one of the most transparently run schemes in the country.
 - ➔ **e-Muster Rolls:** Digitally recorded attendance to prevent ghost entries.

** Current Financial year's allocation of Rs 86,000 crore for this scheme is the highest ever budgetary allocation at the Budget Estimate stage.

in wage payments the committee recommended strengthening wage disbursement systems and increasing the compensation rate for delayed wages from the current 0.05% of unpaid wages per day.

- **Social Audits and Transparency:** It called for frequent social audits to improve accountability and recommended creation of a Social Audit Calendar by the Ministry of Rural Development.
- **Addressing Job Card Deletions:** It noted that over 5 million job cards (*issued by Gram Panchayats*) were deleted in 2021–22 due to minor errors (e.g., Aadhaar mismatch, spelling issues) affecting thousands of eligible workers. It thus recommended a system for manual verification and correction and ensuring genuine workers are not excluded from the scheme unjustly.
- **Addressing Regional Disparities:** It urged to implement the recommendations of Amarjeet Sinha Committee (2022–23) on inter-state variations which noted that expenditure under MGNREGA is lower in poorer states like Bihar than in better-off states like Tamil Nadu.

Significance and Challenges of MGNREGA

Aspect	Significance	Challenges
Livelihood Security	Provides legal right to work and wage employment to rural households, enhancing economic security .	Limited to 100 days/year , which is insufficient for year-round employment needs.
Infrastructure Development	Contributes to rural infrastructure like wells, roads, ponds, sanitation , improving access to basic services.	Quality of work is sometimes poor and not always aligned to local priorities .
Income Compensation	A study by Azim Premji University across four states (Bihar, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh) found that MGNREGA helped offset 20–80% of income losses suffered by rural households during the COVID-19 lockdown.	Wages are not inflation-indexed adequately ; real income value is decreasing. ✓ The Parliamentary Standing Committee has highlighted the increased cost of living and “abysmally low” wages as one of the reasons for worker drop-outs
Prevention of Migration	Utilizes rural labour locally, reducing distress migration to urban areas.	Delayed payments and irregular work availability can discourage participation.
Empowerment & Inclusion	Strengthens women’s participation , empowers marginalized communities through inclusive employment.	Participation of SC/ST and women is inconsistent across districts; access disparities remain.
Transparency & Accountability	Incorporates social audits , MIS systems, and public disclosure to enhance accountability.	Instances of corruption , such as manipulated records and embezzlement , persist in some areas.
Best Practices	Success stories like fish–vegetable polyculture (Jalpaiguri), poultry sheds (Paschim Bardhaman), and community bridges (South West Khasi Hills).	These examples are isolated and not widely scaled or replicated across states.
Wage Issues	Supports wage growth and rural wage stability; crucial during crisis (e.g., pandemic).	Wages remain below minimum wage in many states, violating Article 23 (forced labour) and Article 39(d) (equal pay for equal work for both men and women). In FY 25-26, wages in Haryana and Nagaland differ by as much as Rs 159.

Financial Inclusion	Promotes bank account access through DBT and ABPS.	Exclusion errors due to Aadhaar mismatches, especially in states like Bihar , lead to denial of benefits .
Policy Reform & Monitoring	Multiple expert committees (Jean Drèze, Anoop Satpathy, etc.) have given valuable wage reform suggestions.	Recommendations often ignored or not implemented . Use of outdated Consumer Price Index for Agricultural Labourers (CPI-AL) (base year 2009) for wage indexing continues.
Judicial Support	In <i>Sanjit Roy vs State of Rajasthan</i> (1983), the Supreme Court (SC) ruled that paying less than the minimum wage constitutes “forced labour” , violating Article 23 of the Constitution.	The MoRD continues to use 2009 as the base year for wage indexation, when NREGA wages were capped at ₹100. Despite acknowledging that current wages are not aligned with market rates , it has deliberately avoided revising the base year, resulting in long-term undervaluation of labour .

Extra Mile: MNREGA Wages and Related Committees

How are MGNREGA Wages Calculated?

Wage rates under the **MGNREGA** are governed by **Section 6** of the Act, which provides two mechanisms:

- **Section 6(1)**: Empowers the **Central Government** to notify wage rates for NREGA, overriding the Minimum Wages Act, 1948. The notified wage **cannot be lower than ₹60/day**.
- **Section 6(2)**: Until a central wage is notified, the wage rate under NREGA defaults to the **state’s minimum agricultural wage**.

Recommendations by Key Committees

1. **Jean Drèze Committee (2010)**: It recommended returning to Section 6(2), i.e., link wages to **state minimum wages and** using **CPI-AL (Consumer Price Index for Agricultural Labourers)** as an interim measure for indexation. Recommendations were **partially adopted**: CPI-AL adopted, but link to state minimum wages ignored.
2. **Mahendra Dev Committee (2014)**: It recommended setting NREGA wage **equal to state minimum wages and switching indexation** from CPI-AL to **CPI-Rural (CPI-R)** with updated **2014 base year**. Recommendations were **rejected** by Ministry of Finance due to fiscal concerns.
3. **Nagesh Singh Committee (2017)**: It recommended not to link wages to state minimum wages and shifting indexation from CPI-AL to **CPI-R**. **MoRD accepted the recommendations in 2019**, but in 2021 announced that it will continue with the CPI-AL.



T.N. Govt. Forms High Level Committee on State Autonomy

Tamil Nadu (TN) Chief Minister M.K. Stalin has constituted a High-Level Committee (HLC) headed by former Supreme Court (SC) Judge Justice Kurien Joseph to strengthen state autonomy, study Union–State relations, and retrieve powers that were moved from the State List to the Concurrent List over time.

About the HLC

It is a three-member committee consisting of Ashok Vardhan Shetty (Former IAS officer) and M. Naganathan (Economist and former Vice Chairman of Tamil Nadu State Planning Commission) apart from Justice Kurien Joseph. Its interim report is expected by January 2026 and final report by 2028. Its mandate includes to-

- Review the Constitutional provisions, laws, rules and policies with respect to Centre-State relations;
- Recommend ways to restore subjects moved from the State List to the Concurrent List;

- Propose measures for States to overcome administrative challenges;
- Suggest reforms to ensure maximum autonomy for States without compromising the unity and integrity of the nation; and
- Consider the recommendations of the Rajamannar Committee and subsequent commissions formed by the Union government on the Centre-State relations in light of current political, social, and economic developments.

Committees on Centre–State Relations

1. Rajamannar Committee (1969): Set up by TN under C.N. Annadurai to review Centre-State relations and safeguard state autonomy. Key Recommendations include:

- Abolishing the provision for President’s Rule (Article 356).
- Creating a permanent Inter-State Council.
- Transferring more powers and financial control to the States.
- Limiting the Centre's interference through agencies like the Planning Commission.

Relevance Today: Echoes in Tamil Nadu’s current demand for greater state rights and autonomy.

2. Sarkaria Commission (1983): Under the chairmanship of Justice R. S. Sarkaria with B. Sivaraman and Dr. S. R. Sen as its members, the commission examined the existing arrangements between the Union and the States. Set up by the Central Government to review Centre-State relations. Key recommendations included:

- Strengthening fiscal federalism by giving States more financial autonomy.
- Residuary powers of legislation related to taxation matters should remain exclusively with Parliament, while other residuary subjects, except taxation, should be placed in the Concurrent List.
- Establishing a permanent Inter-State Council (under Article 263) to promote dialogue between the Centre and the States, fostering greater cooperative federalism.
- Using President’s Rule (Article 356) sparingly and as a last resort.
- Conducting government work at both the Union and State levels in local language, especially when it affects local populations, to ensure better governance in a welfare State.

3. National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRWC) (2000): Headed by Justice M.N. Venkatachaliah. Key Recommendations include:

- Stronger fiscal federalism with more fund devolution.
- Setting up an Inter-State Trade Commission.
- Mandatory Centre-State consultations before passing laws affecting states.

4. Punchhi Commission (2007): Reviewed Centre-State relations, considering new challenges. Key Recommendations include-

- Restricting misuse of Article 356.
- Making the Governor’s role neutral and his removal transparent.
- Giving greater autonomy to States over Concurrent List subjects.
- Union should only address concurrent or overlapping subjects when absolutely necessary to maintain national policy uniformity.
- Regulating Union’s treaty-making power concerning matters in the State list to ensure greater state representation in treaties affecting their internal affairs.

5. NITI Aayog Reforms (Post-Planning Commission Era):

- Emphasized cooperative federalism.
- Encouraged regular Centre-State consultations.

- Promoted greater state role in economic planning and flexibility in centrally sponsored schemes.

Why was the Committee Setup?

It was setup because of several disputes between TN government and BJP-led Central Government. Key flashpoints include-

- **Education and the Demand to Shift It Back to State List:** Originally, **Education** was a **State List subject**. **42nd Constitutional Amendment (1976)** moved it to the **Concurrent List**. **TN** wants Education to be restored as a **state-only subject**. It views central exams like **NEET** as undermining state's rights to frame education policy suited to its needs.
 - **Latest Conflict:** The President **rejected TN's bill** seeking exemption from NEET, even though it was passed **twice** by the state Assembly.
- **Opposition to National Education Policy (NEP) and the "Hindi Imposition" Debate:** NEP proposes teaching **three languages:** mother tongue + English + one more language (mostly Hindi in practice). Whereas TN follows a **two-language formula:** Tamil + English. It sees **Hindi as an imposition** and an attempt at cultural dominance.
 - **Funding Controversy:** TN CM alleged that the Centre threatened to **withhold ₹2,152 crore education funds** under **Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan** if the state didn't adopt NEP policies. Although the central government denied the charges, saying **Hindi wasn't mandatory**.
- **Upcoming Delimitation Exercise (Post-2026) and Fear of Reduced Representation:** Seats in Parliament could be **reallocated based on population**. Due to **effective population control**, TN's **relative population share** is smaller. It fears **reduced number of Lok Sabha seats** compared to **northern states** where population growth has been higher and would **undermine Tamil Nadu's political voice** at the national level.
- **Tax Share Woes:** TN government highlighted that its share in tax devolution, based on Finance Commission recommendations, is disproportionately low. Despite objecting to the GST framework early on, the State's concerns were ignored.
- **Political Reasons:** It positions TN to **spearhead a broader federalist campaign** nationally, especially as southern states fear **reduced political and financial representation**.

Historical Legacy of State Autonomy in Tamil Nadu

- Tamil Nadu has historically led **federalism movements**.
- **C.N. Annadurai** and **M. Karunanidhi** (earlier DMK leaders) had formed the **Rajamannar Committee** in **1969** to study **Union-State relations**.
- The **Rajamannar Committee** was **decades ahead** of national efforts like the **Sarkaria** and **Punchhi Commissions**.

Extra Mile: Tamil Nadu Mandates Use of Tamil as Official Language Across Departments

The Tamil Nadu (TN) government has reiterated that **Tamil must be used** as the **official language** for all government communications, orders, and correspondence, in line with the Official Languages Act. Therefore, it issued an advisory recently directing senior officials and department heads to ensure:

- **Government orders and circulars** are issued only in Tamil.
- **All official letters and communications** must be in Tamil, with exemptions translated and reviewed by the Translation Division.
- **Replies to public letters in Tamil** must also be in Tamil.
- **Employees must sign correspondence** only in Tamil.

The move strengthens the state's commitment to **promoting Tamil** in administrative functions.



Telangana Becomes 1st State to Notify Sub-Categorization of SCs

Telangana has notified the **Telangana Scheduled Castes (Rationalization of Reservations) Act, 2025**, with effect from **April 14, 2025**, categorizing all 59 Scheduled Castes (SCs) into three groups based on their population and degree of social, economic and educational backwardness.

- ✓ Thus, becoming the **first state** to operationalize SC sub-classification (popularly called reservation within reservation) after the **Supreme Court's (SC) 2024 judgment (The State Of Punjab vs Davinder Singh)** which upheld the constitutionality of granting **separate quotas** for the most marginalized among SCs and STs.
- ✓ The **Andhra Pradesh** Cabinet also recently approved a draft ordinance proposal to implement sub-categorization among SCs in the state based on the recommendations of Rajeev Ranjan Mishra commission which recommended dividing the state SCs into 59 SC sub-groups classified into three different categories.
- ✓ In October 2024, Maharashtra government has appointed a committee (**chaired by Justice Anant Badar**) to examine the sub-classification of Scheduled Caste (SC) reservation. The move aims to address disparities within the SC community, where neo-Buddhists (formerly of the Mahar caste) are perceived as the primary beneficiaries of the current 13% SC reservation in Maharashtra.

The 2004 E.V. Chinnaiiah Case

- The 2004 E.V. Chinnaiiah case involved a challenge to a law in Andhra Pradesh that aimed to distribute reservation benefits among SCs more equitably, leading to a legal battle regarding the constitutionality of sub-classifying SCs within the reservation system.
- A **five-judge Constitution Bench** of the Supreme Court ruled that sub-classification within the SC category was not permissible, holding that SCs are a homogeneous group and cannot be further subdivided for reservation purposes.

This ruling was later **overturned (6:1 majority) by a subsequent seven-judge bench in 2024**, allowing for sub-classification of SCs and STs.

Objective of SC Sub-Categorization: To make reservation benefits more equitable as a single consolidated quota had allowed the numerically dominant castes to capture most opportunities.

Quota Distribution Among SC Groups: The two laws divide the SC quota as follows:

Telangana	Andhra Pradesh
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group I (15 most disadvantaged SC castes- 3.2% of SC population) – 1.0% reservation; • Group II (18 moderately advanced SC castes, mostly Madiga sub-castes; 62.74% of SC population) – 9.0% reservation; • Group III (26 better-off SC castes, mostly Mala sub-castes; 33.96% of SC population) – 5.0% reservation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group 1 ("Most Backward" Relli sub-group, 12 castes) – 1.0%; • Group 2 ("Backward" Madiga sub-group, 18 castes) – 6.5%; • Group 3 ("Relatively Less Backward" Mala sub-group, 29 castes) – 7.5%.

These allocations are all *within* the existing 15% SC reservation. Both governments have said the overall size of the SC quota may be reviewed once new population data are available.

Expected Benefits of Sub-Categorization

- **Inclusive and Balanced Development of SC Communities:** Sub-categorization tailors' reservation benefits according to the specific needs and backwardness of each SC sub-group. Instead of a few dominant castes monopolizing quotas, opportunities are spread across all sections ensuring **every sub-caste**, especially those historically marginalized, get fairer access to education, jobs, and other government schemes.

- ✓ Substantive Equality: Aligns with **Article 14 by addressing “graded inequalities”** within SCs, ensuring equitable access to reservations under **Articles 15(4) and 16(4)**.
- **Enhanced Access for Smaller and More Backward SC Groups:** Historically, larger SC groups like **Mala** (in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh) had disproportionate access to quotas, while smaller groups like **Madiga** and **Relli** were left behind. With sub-categorization, **more disadvantaged and numerically smaller groups** will now have **guaranteed shares** within the total SC quota.
- **Long-Term Socio-Economic Upliftment of Neglected Groups:** Over time, the policy is expected to deliver **fairer representation** in government jobs, education, political offices, and public life for the **most marginalized SC sub-groups**. Promote **structural social change**, enabling historically neglected communities to **move up the socio-economic ladder**. Eventually, this could lead to a **more cohesive and egalitarian society**.



Supreme Court Questions Unopposed Wins

The Supreme Court (SC) suggested that if only one candidate remains in an election, they should be declared elected only after securing a minimum vote share, instead of winning automatically without a poll.

Background

- **Petition:** Legal think tank **Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy** in **2024** filed a petition in the SC challenging the **constitutionality of Section 53(2)** of the *Representation of the People (RP) Act, 1951*, which allows a **single candidate to be declared elected unopposed** without holding an election.
- **Core Argument:** The petition argued that **not holding a vote** in such cases of unopposed candidates **denies voters their right to choose NOTA**, violating their **freedom of expression under Article 19(1)(a)**.
- **Key Precedent Cited:** SC's 2013 judgment in *People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) vs Union of India*, which held that **NOTA as a form of negative voting** was protected under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution.
- **Data Provided:** **26 Lok Sabha seats** have seen uncontested elections between 1951 and 2024. Uncontested elections are more common in state Assemblies, the petition says.
 - **More than 82 lakh voters** were denied their right to vote in these cases.
 - Example: In **2024**, BJP's Mukeshkumar Dalal was declared elected from **Surat** unopposed.
- **Hypothetical Concern Raised:** The petition highlights a scenario where **multiple candidates initially file nominations**, but **all except one withdraw** at the last moment. In such a case, even if **only 10,000 out of 1 lakh voters support the candidate**, and **25,000 prefer NOTA**, voters are **denied the chance to express dissent**.
 - Thus, it warns of a **potential misuse**, where a candidate could **influence others to withdraw**, effectively **winning without voter mandate**.

SC's Response to the Petition

- **Encouragement of Electoral Reform:** It welcomed the proposal terming it progressive. It suggested that even a sole candidate should be required to secure a **minimum vote share (e.g., 10–15%)** to be declared elected.
- **Democracy and Majority Principle:** It emphasized that democracy is founded on **majority support**, and thus, **even uncontested candidates should have demonstrable public backing**.
- **Acknowledgement of Voter Rights:** It noted that while **NOTA reflects voter dissent**, in uncontested elections, voters and the system are **left helpless** without the opportunity to express disapproval.
- **Caution Against Default Victories:** It questioned allowing a candidate to **enter Parliament "by default"** without securing even **5% of the vote**, calling for **future-proofing the law**.
- **Legislative Domain Recognized:** It clarified that instead of **striking down the law**, the court wants to **consider amending it through parliamentary deliberation**.

- **Follow-Up Action:** It has given Centre four weeks to respond, and the matter will be heard again in July 2025.

Arguments by the ECI and Centre

Election Commission's Stand	Centre's Position
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncontested elections are now rare (only one case since 1989). • NOTA was not meant to be a candidate, only a voter expression. • Implementing this reform would require legislative amendments to the RP Act and Election Rules. • Courts shouldn't impose reform for a rare scenario. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreed with the ECI stating desirability does not mean unconstitutionality. • A law can't be struck down merely because another version seems better. • Any addition to election law must follow Parliamentary deliberation.

Possible Implications of Introducing Minimum Vote Threshold for Unopposed Candidates

- **Strengthening Democratic Legitimacy:** Reinforcing the idea that representatives must earn their mandate and will prevent "default" victories.
- **Empowerment of Voter Choice:** It will uphold the **voter's right to express dissent** via NOTA, even in uncontested elections and encourage **greater voter participation** by giving meaning to their vote, even when only one candidate remains.
- **Deterrence Against Electoral Manipulation:** It will discourage backroom deals or coercion leading to **strategic withdrawals** of rival candidates and reduce the risk of **manufactured unopposed victories**.
- **Promotion of Competitive Politics:** It will push political parties to **field more candidates**, preventing monopolization of the contest and support **multi-party democracy**.
- **Need for Legal and Administrative Overhaul:** It will require **amendments** to the **RP Act, 1951**, and the **Conduct of Election Rules, 1961**.
- **Possibility of Re-Polling or Vacant Seats:** If the sole candidate fails to meet the minimum threshold, **re-elections may be necessary**, causing delays and additional costs leading to **temporary vacancy** of the seat, affecting representation.
- **Constitutional and Policy Debates:** It may trigger debate on whether **vote thresholds** are compatible with **universal adult franchise** and raise questions about **how NOTA votes are treated** in the broader electoral framework.



P.M. Mudra Yojana Completes 10 Years

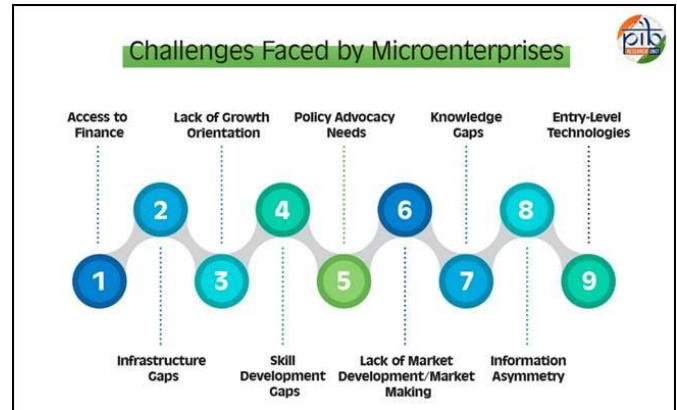
- Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY) the flagship programme for funding the unfunded micro enterprises and small businesses completed 10 years.
- PMMY was launched in 2015, for providing **collateral-free loans** to non-corporate, non-farm small and micro-entrepreneurs for income-generating activities.
- Loans are provided by member lending institutions, including banks, non-banking financial companies, microfinance institutions, and other financial intermediaries.
- Any individual, who is otherwise eligible to take a loan and has a business plan for small business enterprise can avail loan under the Scheme.
- Initially, loans were provided for income generating activities in the manufacturing, trading, services sector and also for activities allied to agriculture across three loan products, viz:

- **Shishu:** covering loans up to Rs 50,000.
- **Kishor:** covering loans above Rs 50,000 and up to Rs 5 lakh.
- **Tarun:** covering loans above Rs 5 lakh and up to Rs 10 lakh

- Later a new category of **Tarun Plus** was launched for **loans above Rs. 10 lakh and upto Rs. 20 lakh**. It would be available to the entrepreneurs who have availed and successfully repaid previous loans under the Tarun category.
- The guarantee coverage of PMMY loans upto Rs. 20 lakh is provided under the Credit Guarantee Fund for Micro Units (CGFMU).

Achievements under PMMY

- Since its launch PMMY has sanctioned over **52 crore loans worth Rs 32.61 lakh crore**, fuelling a nationwide entrepreneurial revolution.
- MSME lending surged from **Rs 8.51 lakh crore in FY14** to **Rs 27.25 lakh crore in FY24**, and is projected to **cross Rs 30 lakh crore in FY25**.
- The share of MSME credit in total bank credit increased from **15.8 percent in FY14** to **nearly 20 percent in FY24**, showcasing its growing role in the Indian economy
- Business growth is no longer confined to big cities—it is spreading to small towns and villages, strengthening India’s self-reliant economy and driving grassroots job creation.
- As of February 2025, since the launch of PMMY, Tamil Nadu has recorded the highest disbursement among states at Rs 3,23,647.76 crore, followed by Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka West Bengal and Bihar.
- Among Union Territories, Jammu and Kashmir leads with a total disbursement of Rs 45,815.92 crore.



Financial Inclusion of Women

- Women account for **68%** of all Mudra beneficiaries, highlighting the scheme’s pivotal role in advancing women-led enterprises across the country.
- Between **FY16 and FY25**, the per woman PMMY disbursement amount increased at a **CAGR of 13%** reaching **Rs 62,679**, while **per woman incremental deposits** grew at a **CAGR of 14%** to **Rs 95,269**.
- States with higher disbursement shares to women have recorded significantly higher employment generation through women-led MSMEs.

Financial Inclusion of Socially Marginalised Groups

- PMMY has made significant progress in breaking traditional credit barriers. **50% of Mudra accounts** are held by **SC, ST and OBC entrepreneurs**, ensuring wider access to formal finance.
- Furthermore, **11% of Mudra loan holders** belong to **minority communities**, demonstrating the scheme’s contribution to inclusive growth.

Progressive Lending

- The share of **Kishor loans** has grown from **5.9% in FY16** to **44.7% in FY25**, indicating a shift from micro to small enterprises.
- The **Tarun category** is also gaining momentum, proving that Mudra is not just about starting businesses but helping them scale.

- The **average ticket size of loans** has **nearly tripled**—rising from **Rs 38,000 in FY16** to **Rs 72,000 in FY23**, and further to **Rs 1.02 lakh in FY25**—reflecting **growing economies of scale** and a **deepening of both market depth and width**.



6th BIMSTEC Summit

- PM Modi attended the 6th Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) Summit in Bangkok.
- During the summit, PM Modi unveiled a **comprehensive 21-point action plan** aimed at revitalising BIMSTEC, positioning it as a key platform for regional connectivity, trade, and security—especially important given SAARC's current dormancy.

Key Highlights of the Speech Delivered by PM Modi

- **Appreciation of BIMSTEC Leadership and Vision**

- Commended **Thailand's** leadership over the past three years.
- Welcomed the enforcement of the BIMSTEC Charter.
 - ♣ The first charter of BIMSTEC came into force in May 2024. It was adopted during its 5th Summit in March 2022.
- Supported adoption of the Bangkok Vision 2030, highlighting its role in regional prosperity and inclusiveness.

- **Strengthening Institutional Mechanisms**

- Proposed expansion of BIMSTEC's institutional capacity.
- Welcomed the institutionalization of the Home Ministers' Mechanism and offered to host its first meeting in India.
- Stressed the role of this mechanism in combating cybercrime, terrorism, and human trafficking.

- **Enhancing Connectivity**

- Advocated for simultaneous growth of physical, digital, and energy connectivity.
- Noted the operationalization of the BIMSTEC Energy Centre in Bengaluru.
- Proposed acceleration of efforts for electric grid interconnection.

- **Promoting Digital Public Infrastructure**

- Offered to share India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) experience.

About Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)

- ⦿ It is an economic bloc that came into being in June 1997 through the **Bangkok Declaration**.
 - » BIMSTEC was initially formed with four member states- Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand on June 6, 1997.
 - » In Dec. 1997 Myanmar joined.
 - » Nepal became an observer state in 1998 and became full-time member of the bloc along with Bhutan in February 2004.
- ⦿ **Members** - Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Nepal and Bhutan.
- ⦿ **Permanent Secretariat** - Dhaka, Bangladesh
- ⦿ **Aim:** To counter the onslaught of globalisation by accelerating regional growth through mutual cooperation by utilising regional resources and geographical advantages.
- ⦿ The BIMSTEC region is home to over **1.8 billion people**, **~22% of the global population**. Their **combined external trade** in 2022 amounted to **USD 1.95 trillion** while their **combined GDP** was estimated at **USD 4.5 trillion**
- ⦿ **Areas of cooperation**
 - » It is sector-driven cooperative organisation in which, initially, 6 sectors had been included:
 - » Trade, Technology, Energy, Transport, Tourism and Fisheries
 - » As of now, BIMSTEC has 14 priority areas of cooperation.
 - » Climate change was added as the 14th priority area of cooperation in 2008.
 - » Among these priority areas, a member country chooses which of the 14 priority areas it is willing to take lead.
 - » **India is lead country in 4 areas:** Transport & Communication, Tourism, Environment & Disaster Management, Counter-Terrorism & Transnational Crime.

- Suggested a pilot study on DPI needs in BIMSTEC countries.
- Proposed integration of India's UPI with payment systems of BIMSTEC countries to boost trade and tourism.
- **Trade, Business, and Economic Integration**
 - Proposed a BIMSTEC Chamber of Commerce and an Annual Business Summit.
 - Suggested a feasibility study for trade in local currencies to strengthen economic collaboration.
- **Maritime Cooperation**
 - Welcomed the Maritime Transport Agreement for enhanced shipping & trade.
 - Proposed creation of a **Sustainable Maritime Transport Centre** in India to support policy coordination and maritime security.
- **Disaster Management Initiatives**
 - Recalled India's role as a first responder during disasters.
 - Proposed establishment of a BIMSTEC Centre of Excellence for Disaster Management in India.
 - Announced that the **4th Joint Disaster Management Exercise** will be held in India this year.
- **Health and Agriculture Cooperation**
 - Announced support for training in cancer care.
 - Proposed Centres of Excellence in:
 - ♣ Traditional medicine.
 - ♣ Agriculture (knowledge sharing, best practices, and capacity building).
- **Space Cooperation**
 - Offered Indian support in space technology for BIMSTEC countries.
 - He proposed:
 - ♣ A ground station for training.
 - ♣ Nano-satellite development and launches.
 - ♣ Use of remote sensing data for regional development.
- **Youth Development and Education**
 - Launched the **BODHI initiative** (BIMSTEC for Organized Development of Human Resource Infrastructure).
 - Announced:
 - ♣ Training of 300 youth annually in India.
 - ♣ Scholarships at the Forestry Research Institute and Nalanda University.
 - ♣ An annual training programme for young diplomats.
- **Cultural and People-to-People Exchanges**
 - Highlighted shared heritage through festivals like Odisha's Bali Jatra.
 - Announced:
 - ♣ The BIMSTEC Traditional Music Festival.
 - ♣ BIMSTEC Young Leaders' Summit.
 - ♣ Launch of a BIMSTEC Hackathon and Young Professional Visitors Programme.
 - ♣ BIMSTEC Athletics Meet in India in 2025.

- ♣ BIMSTEC Games in 2027 on the organization’s 30th anniversary.

- **Concluding Remarks**

- Reiterated BIMSTEC as a model for inclusive development and collective security.
- Quoted “Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Prayas” as the spirit guiding India’s commitment.
- Welcomed Bangladesh as the incoming Chair and wished success in its leadership.



New Global Pandemic Treaty

- WHO member states have agreed on a **draft** of a legally binding treaty aimed at improving global preparedness and response to future pandemics.
- This treaty, set to be ratified at the World Health Assembly in May, marks only the second legally binding accord in WHO’s history—the first being the 2003 tobacco control treaty.

Key Provisions of the Pandemic Treaty

- **Pathogen Access and Benefit Sharing**

- The treaty introduces a system where pharmaceutical companies gain access to scientific data—like ***pathogen samples and genomic sequences***—in exchange for a commitment to equitably share the resulting vaccines, drugs, and diagnostics during a pandemic.

- **Production Allocation to WHO**

- Manufacturers participating in the agreement must allocate:
 - ♣ 10% of their pandemic-related products (vaccines, therapeutics, diagnostics) to WHO free of charge, and
 - ♣ An additional 10% at affordable prices.

- **Technology and Knowledge Sharing**

- Member states are expected to encourage or incentivize the transfer of technology and know-how, enabling developing countries to manufacture their own medical tools during pandemics.

- **Conditions on Publicly Funded Research**

- Countries must create policies that require any publicly funded research—whether at universities or private companies—to ensure equitable and timely access to resulting treatments or diagnostics during health emergencies.

- **Government Intervention for Public Benefit**

- The treaty empowers governments to intervene when life-saving medicines, developed using public funds, are unaffordable or inaccessible, ensuring availability for citizens and vulnerable populations worldwide.

Criticism of the Global Pandemic Treaty

- ◇ **Limited Authority of the WHO**

- While the treaty is considered a major step forward, it does not grant the WHO any legal power over individual countries.
- Clause 24 explicitly states that the WHO cannot direct or change any national laws or policies.
 - It also cannot enforce travel bans, lockdowns, vaccine mandates, or any public health measures.

- ◇ **No Enforcement Mechanism**

- The WHO has no power to ensure compliance. In a future crisis, countries could again prioritize national interests—such as hoarding vaccines—with out facing consequences.
- This weakens the treaty’s enforceability.

- ◇ **Concerns from the Pharmaceutical Industry**

- Pharma leaders argue that unclear rules around intellectual property and benefit-sharing may discourage investment in high-risk pandemic research.
- They emphasized the need for legal certainty to maintain innovation and public-private partnerships in future health emergencies.

- ◇ **Lack of Clarity in Key Provisions**

- The “pathogen access and benefit sharing” system—central to the treaty—lacks detailed implementation guidelines, raising concerns about its practicality and effectiveness.

- ◇ **Absence of the United States**

- The U.S., a major player in vaccine and drug production, withdrew from WHO after Donald Trump’s return to power. Its absence significantly weakens the treaty’s impact.



Protocol for Defence Exports

- The Ministry of External Affairs dismissed a U.S. media report as "factually incorrect and misleading," which alleged that Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) supplied British-sourced items to Russia.
- The ministry emphasized that India's strong legal and regulatory framework on strategic trade governs its companies' overseas commercial activities.

Importance of Strategic Trade Controls

- Strategic trade controls are essential to prevent the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) and the unregulated transfer of conventional arms.
- According to the DGFT's *Handbook on India's Strategic Trade Control Systems*, India maintains a harmonised export control list for dual-use and military items—including software and technologies—with both civilian and military/WMD applications.
 - **Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT)** works under Ministry of Commerce & Industry.
- These items require export authorisation or licences, unless specifically exempted or prohibited.

Boosting Defence Exports

- As India targets ₹50,000 crore in defence exports by 2029, robust export controls are key to maintaining credibility and compliance with international norms.
- In FY 2024-25, defence exports reached a record ₹23,622 crore—a 12.04% increase over the previous year—demonstrating growing global demand.
- India exported a wide range of defence products — arms, ammunition, sub-systems, components. This reflects growing trust in Indian-made defence products.

Neutral Policy Stance

- India's strategic export decisions reflect its neutral stance in global conflicts.
- For instance, during the early stages of the Gaza conflict, India declined Israel's request for artillery shells.
- Similarly, it refrained from supplying "kinetic equipment" to either Russia or Ukraine, maintaining a balanced diplomatic position.

Steps Taken to Boost Defence Exports

Simplification of Licensing and Regulatory Framework

- The Defence Products List requiring industrial licences has been rationalised.
- Manufacturing of most parts/components no longer requires an industrial licence.
- Defence Production and Export Promotion Policy has been formulated to support industry growth.

India's Licensing System for Strategic Exports

- India's export control system aligns with its commitments under international disarmament and non-proliferation treaties such as the **Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC)** and **Biological Weapons Convention (BWC)**.
- It is also a member of key multilateral export control regimes, including:
 - **Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR)**
 - **Wassenaar Arrangement** (Conventional Arms and Dual-Use Goods & Technologies)
 - **Australia Group** (biological and chemical items)
- **SCOMET List and Export Authorisation**
 - Exports are regulated through the **Special Chemicals, Organisms, Materials, Equipment and Technologies (SCOMET)** list, which has eight categories.
 - Category 6, which includes Munitions List items, requires export authorisation issued by the Department of Defence Production (**DDP**).
- **Public and Private Sector Involvement**
 - As per a December 2024 report to a Parliamentary committee, the Defence Secretary stated that India is exporting to **over 100 countries**, primarily through Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs).
 - Key exported platforms include:
 - › Dornier 228 aircraft
 - › 155 mm advanced towed artillery gun
 - › BrahMos and Akash missiles
 - › Radar simulators and Pinaka rockets
 - However, the **private sector is also increasingly participating** in defence exports, signaling a broader base for India's export ecosystem.

- **Streamlining Export Procedures**
 - Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for exports have been streamlined.
 - An Export Promotion Cell has been set up within the Ministry.
 - DPSUs have been assigned specific geographical regions for targeted marketing of defence products.
- **Digital Transformation and Ease of Access**
 - An **end-to-end online portal** has been developed for submitting and processing export authorisation applications.
 - Applications and authorisations are **digitally signed**, enhancing speed and transparency.
 - Requirement of **government-signed End User Certification** has been removed for providing engineering services related to Munitions List items to **Wassenaar Arrangement countries**.
- **Institutional and Policy Support**
 - The **Defence Export Promotion Scheme (2018)** was launched to encourage exports of 'Make in India' products.
 - The **DDP** now acts as the **single point of contact** for issuing export licences for parts/components of small arms and ammunition, following delegation of powers from the Home Ministry (2018).
- **Introduction of Open General Export Licence (OGEL)**
 - The **OGEL** allows firms to export **specified defence items to designated countries** without needing case-by-case authorisation, significantly reducing delays and boosting export confidence.



Terror Attack on Tourists in Pahalgam

- Over two dozens tourists were killed in a terrorist attack in Baisaran Valley, a scenic spot in Pahalgam, Anantnag district of J&K.
- This is the deadliest since the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019. The remote, high-altitude area—accessible only by foot or horseback—posed challenges for rescue efforts.

Analysis

- It highlights a **major internal security challenge** with significant external implications for India.
- **Tourism as a Symbol of Normalcy Disrupted**
 - Since the abrogation of Article 370, a surge in tourism to Jammu & Kashmir was viewed as a sign of peace and prosperity.
 - The attack shatters this image and revives the Valley's painful memories of violence.
- **Terror Timing and Global Attention**
 - The attack occurred while US Vice-President JD Vance was visiting India and PM Modi was on a diplomatic trip to Saudi Arabia, a timing that echoes previous incidents aimed at international publicity.
 - ♣ **March 2000:** 36 Sikhs were massacred in Anantnag just before President Clinton's visit.

About Pahalgam

- » It is a popular hill station located in the Anantnag district in the southern part of the Kashmir Valley, Jammu and Kashmir.
- » It lies approximately 90 km from Srinagar International Airport.
- » **Tourist Attractions**
 - » Known as the 'Valley of Shepherds', Pahalgam offers lush mountain trails, dense forests, and the scenic Lidder River.
 - » Key attractions include:
 - > **Amarnath Cave Temple:** A revered Hindu shrine.
 - > **Aru Wildlife Sanctuary:** Home to species like brown bears and musk deer.
 - > **Betaab Valley:** Named after the Sunny Deol film Betaab.
 - > **Tulian Lake:** A serene alpine lake popular with trekkers.
 - > **Baisaran Valley:** A picturesque meadow drawing many tourists, often called "mini-Switzerland."

Baisaran: A Scenic Gem Near Pahalgam

- » Located just 5 km from Pahalgam, Baisaran is one of the region's most popular tourist and trekking destinations.
- » Accessible only by foot or ponies, the lack of motorable roads made rescue operations difficult during the recent terrorist attack.
- » **Often referred as Mini Switzerland of Kashmir**
 - » Due to its long, dark meadows and striking resemblance to European landscapes.

- ♣ **May 2002:** The Kaluchak attack coincided with US official Christina Rocca's visit, killing 23 people including women and children.

- **Kashmir and Pakistan's Provocative Rhetoric**

- The attack followed a provocative statement by Pakistan Army chief Gen. Asim Munir, who called Kashmir Pakistan's "jugular vein."

India's Response to the Pahalgam Terror Attack

- **Suspension of Indus Waters Treaty**

- India has suspended the **Indus Waters Treaty** with Pakistan, which governs river water sharing, until Pakistan stops supporting cross-border terrorism.
- This marks a major diplomatic shift since the treaty was signed in 1960.

- **Closure of Attari-Wagah Border Check Post**

- India has closed the **Attari Integrated Check Post**, halting all cross-border movement of people and goods.
- Those already in India with valid documents to return before **01 May 2025**.

- **Cancellation of SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme (SVES)**

- India has suspended the **SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme** for Pakistani nationals.
- All existing SVES visas are cancelled, and Pakistani nationals in India under the scheme must leave within **48 hours**.

- **Expulsion of Pakistani Military Advisors**

- India has **expelled all Pakistani military, naval, and air advisors** from the Pakistani High Commission in New Delhi, declaring them Persona Non Grata.
- Indian military advisors in Islamabad will also be withdrawn.

- **Reduction of Diplomatic Personnel**

- India will **reduce its diplomatic staff in Pakistan** from 55 to **30 by 01 May 2025**, significantly scaling down bilateral diplomatic engagement.

Pakistan Suspends 1972 Simla Agreement

- Pakistan has suspended the 1972 Simla Agreement as a reaction against stringent measures taken by India amid nationwide grief over the terrorist attack in Pahalgam.
- The Simla Agreement, long seen as the cornerstone of bilateral diplomacy between the two nations, was designed to ensure peaceful conflict resolution and maintain the status quo along the **Line of Control (LoC)**.
- Pakistan's unilateral withdrawal from the pact signals a departure from this framework and may reopen old hostilities.

Understanding the Simla Agreement

- Signed on July 2, 1972, by Indian Prime Minister **Indira Gandhi** and Pakistani President **Zulfikar Ali Bhutto**, the Simla Agreement was a diplomatic response to the 1971 Indo-Pak war, which **led to the creation of Bangladesh**.
- The treaty aimed to restore peace and normalise bilateral relations, establishing key principles for future engagement:
 - **Peaceful Coexistence:** Both nations committed to resolving conflicts bilaterally and refraining from third-party mediation.

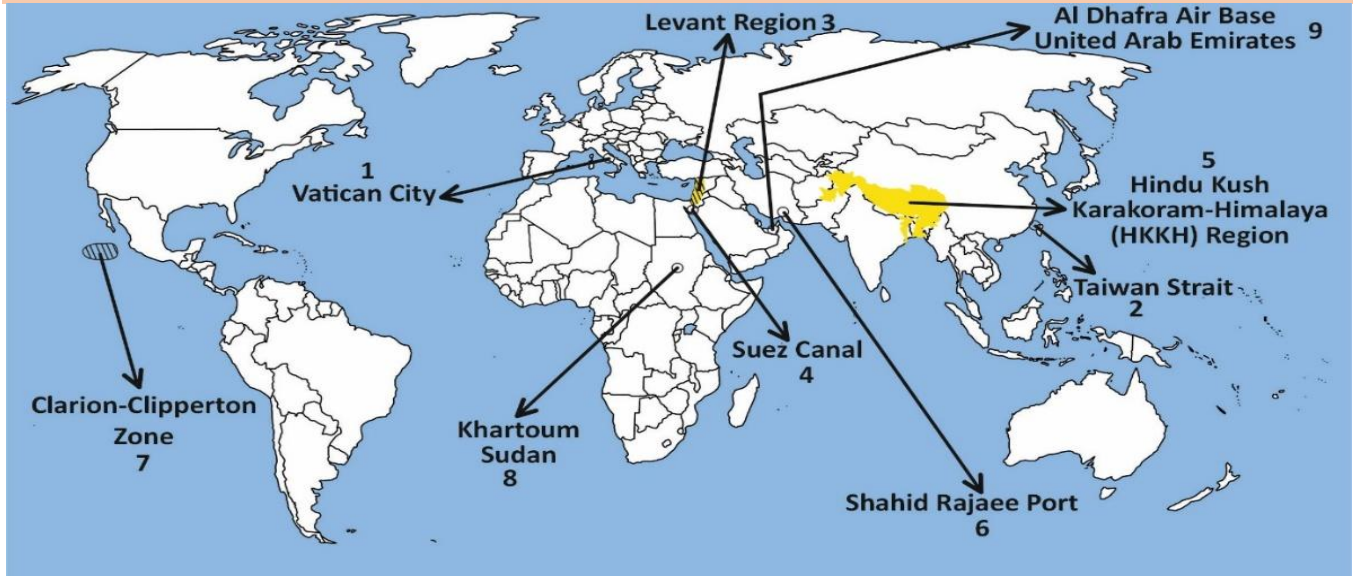
- **Respect for Sovereignty:** Each side was to respect the territorial integrity and political independence of the other.
- **Non-Interference:** The agreement explicitly prohibited any interference in each other's internal affairs.
- **Bilateral Negotiation Framework:** Issues such as Kashmir were to be resolved without international intervention.

- **Key Provisions and Outcomes**

- **Line of Control (LoC):** The ceasefire line from the 1971 war was converted into the LoC, a de facto boundary in Jammu and Kashmir.
 - § Both nations agreed not to alter this line unilaterally.
- **Return of Captured Territory:** India returned over 13,000 sq. km of Pakistani territory captured during the war, reinforcing its commitment to peace, though strategic areas like **Turtuk** and **Chalunka** were **retained**.
- **Recognition of Bangladesh:** While not part of the agreement directly, it paved the way for Pakistan's eventual diplomatic recognition of Bangladesh.
- **UN Charter Alignment:** The agreement reaffirmed both countries' adherence to the principles of the UN Charter, including peaceful coexistence and abstaining from use of force

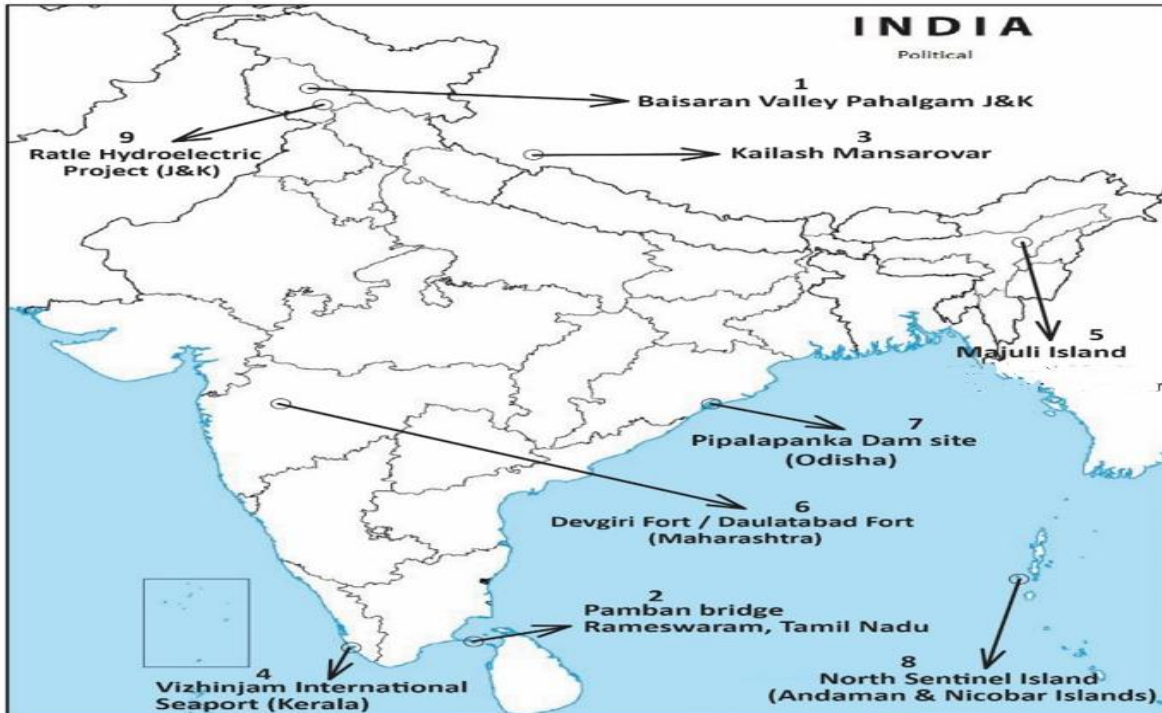
MAPS: PLACES IN NEWS


International Places in News



1	Vatican City	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is a Sovereign city-state within Rome (Italy), Southern Europe. It is an ecclesiastical state, the seat of the Roman Catholic Church, and situated on the west bank of the Tiber River. It's the only country to be inscribed as a World Heritage Site (since 1984) in its entirety.
2	Taiwan Strait	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> China launches aggressive military drills in Taiwan Strait. It separates mainland China from the island of Taiwan. It connects the South China Sea to the East China Sea. It is influenced by the Kuro-shio Current, which flows northward along the east coast of Taiwan. It is crucial for global shipping, and conflict in this area could severely impact international trade
3	Levant Region	<p>Region frequently cited for ongoing conflicts and terrorism threats (context of Hamas, ISIS)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Levant region generally includes the modern countries of Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. It's situated in the eastern Mediterranean, bounded by the Mediterranean Sea in the west, the Arabian Desert in the south, and Mesopotamia in the east and Taurus Mountains to the north.
4	Suez Canal	<p>Continued Houthi attacks originating from Yemen is impacting Suez traffic key waterway connecting Asia and Europe.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Suez Canal is situated in northeastern Egypt, spanning across the Isthmus of Suez. Suez Canal (Egypt) links Mediterranean and Red Sea.

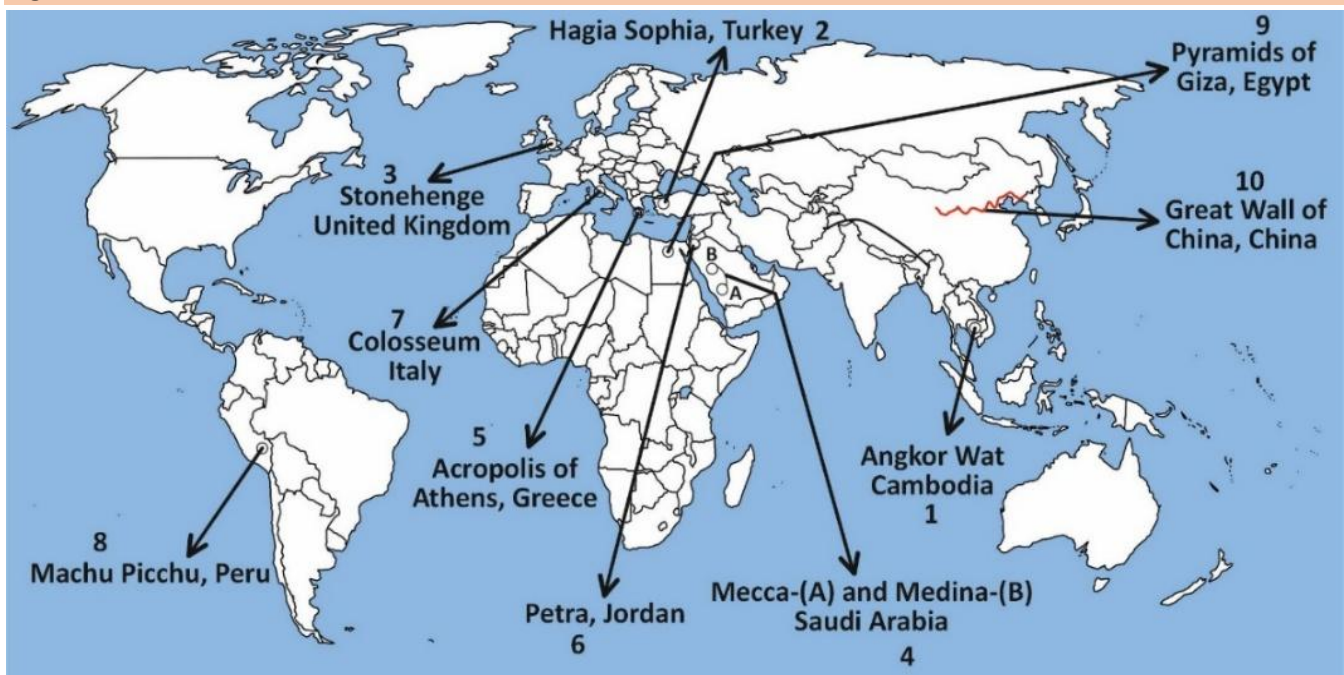
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Red Sea connects to Indian Ocean via Bab-el-Mandeb strait (near Yemen/Djibouti). ● The canal separates the African continent from the Sinai Peninsula. ● India relies on this route for trade, naval deployments for anti-piracy/security.
5	Hindu Kush Karakoram-Himalaya (HKKH) Region	<p>ICIMOD report (The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development) reveals record low snow persistence (3rd consecutive year).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It is a vast mountain system spanning across 8 countries including India, Pakistan, China, Nepal and Afghanistan. It is the source of 10 major Asian river systems the Amu Darya, Indus, Ganges, Brahmaputra (Yarlungtsanpo), Irrawaddy, Salween (Nu), Mekong (Lancang), Yangtse (Jinsha), Yellow River (Huanghe), and Tarim (Dayan). ● It is considered the Third Pole (after the North and South Poles), and has significant implications for climate. ● It contains vast cryospheric zones and is also the world's largest store of snow and ice outside the polar region.
6	Shahid Rajaei Port	<p>Significant explosion reported at the crucial Shahid Rajaei Port (Bandar Abbas) in Iran.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Shahid Rajaei Port is one of the two parts in the port of Bandar Abbas, southern Hormozgan province, Iran. ● It is located at the Strait of Hormuz. ● It is positioned on the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), which connects the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea, Russia, and Northern Europe.
7	Clarion-Clipperton Zone	<p>The U.S. has recently announced plans to support deep-sea mining in this area, raising concerns with the International Seabed Authority (ISA) over environmental and legal implications.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It is a vast area in the Pacific Ocean known for its high concentration of polymetallic nodules, which are rich in minerals like nickel, cobalt, copper, and manganese. ● It is located in Pacific ocean between Hawaii and Mexico.
8	Khartoum, Sudan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sudan's army has regained control of the capital city, Khartoum, nearly two years after it was taken by a paramilitary group (RSF). ● Khartoum is located at the confluence of the White Nile and Blue Nile in East Africa. ● Mass displacement and famine-like conditions in Khartoum underscore humanitarian challenges
9	Al Dhafra Air Base, United Arab Emirates	<p>In April 2025, the Indian Air Force (IAF) deployed MiG-29 and Jaguar fighter jets to participate in the 10th edition of Exercise Desert Flag-10, held at Al Dhafra Air Base in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Al Dhafra's location near the Persian Gulf makes it significant for maritime security












1	Baisaran Valley Pahalgam, J&K	Pahalgam (referred to as the " Valley of Shepherds ") is located in the Anantnag district in the southern part of the Kashmir Valley.
2	Pamban bridge, Rameswaram, Tamil Nadu	PM Modi inaugurated the Pamban Bridge in Rameswaram. The New Pamban Bridge is India's first vertical lift railway sea bridge & is 2.07-kilometre-long. Special polysiloxane coating protects it from corrosion.
3	Kailash Mansarovar	Kailash Mansarovar Yatra is set to resume in June 2025 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The pilgrimage, which is of religious significance to Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists, will be organized by Ministry of External Affairs This Yatra will travel through two routes: Lipulekh Pass in Uttarakhand and Nathu La Pass in Sikkim.
4	Vizhinjam International Seaport (Kerala)	This Seaport made news for docking the world's largest eco-friendly container ship, the MSC Türkiye. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This event highlights the port's ability to handle ultra-large container vessels (ULCVs) and its growing reputation as a major transshipment hub. It is India's first mega transshipment container terminal. Vizhinjam's strategic location, just 10 nautical miles from major international shipping routes, and its deep-water capacity (20 meters) make it ideal for handling large vessels and becoming a transshipment hub.
5	Majuli Island	Following Charaideo Maidams' UNESCO World Heritage status in 2024, Assam is now pushing for Majuli Island and Shiv sagar for UNESCO World Heritage Site status. <div style="text-align: right;">  </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Majuli, the largest river island (On Brahmaputra River) in the world. It is a unique blend of diverse tribal cultures and the vibrant traditions of Assamese Vaishnavite culture. Shiv sagar, known for its Ahom dynasty history, is home to numerous historical monuments and offers a glimpse into the region's past.

6	Devgiri Fort / Daulatabad Fort (Maharashtra)	<p>A major fire was reported at this historic 14th-century fort, which is a UNESCO-nominated heritage site.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Located in Aurangabad district the fort is symbol of Yadava dynasty • It briefly became capital of Tughlaq dynasty under reign of Muhammad bin Tughlaq. • The fort structure is a combination of Hindu, Islamic & Central Asian architectural elements reflecting cultural influences of period. • It is fortified in three layers Ambarkot, Mahakot, and Kalakot with moats, bastions, and iron-spiked gates. • The fort's location on the Deccan plateau made it a strategically important site for controlling trade routes and military operations in the region.
7	Pipalapanka Dam site / (Odisha)	<p>Protests by locals against the Odisha government's revived plan to build a dam at Pipalapanka on a tributary of the Rushikulya River (known for Olive Ridley turtle nesting).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Rushikulya River is a major river in Odisha, flowing primarily through the Kandhamal, Ganjam, and Boudh districts. • It does not form a delta at its mouth.
8	North Sentinel Island (Andaman & Nicobar Islands)	<p>A foreign national was detained for allegedly trespassing into the restricted tribal reserve, bringing focus back to the protection rules.</p> <p>The island is home to the Sentinelese, a tribe that has historically been isolated and hostile to outside contact.</p>
9	Ratle Hydroelectric Project (J&K)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Ratle project, on the Chenab River, is currently under construction. • The project has faced opposition from Pakistan, who claims they violate the Indus Water Treaty. • It includes a 133 m tall gravity dam and two power stations adjacent to one another. The installed capacity of both power stations will be 850 MW.

Significant Historical & Cultural Places around the World



1	<p>Angkor Wat, Cambodia</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Angkor Wat (A UNESCO site) is a vast temple complex in Cambodia, considered the largest religious monument in the world. • Originally built as a Hindu temple dedicated to Vishnu by King Suryavarman II in the 12th century, it later transitioned into a Buddhist temple. • Angkor Wat, has beaten Pompeii in Italy to become the eighth Wonder of the World.
2	<p>Hagia Sophia, Turkey</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was built in 537 CE originally as a cathedral under Byzantine Emperor Justinian I, which later was converted into a mosque (1453) and a museum (1935), then a mosque again (2020). • A UNESCO site, it represents the confluence of Christian and Islamic cultures, with iconic Byzantine architecture.
3	<p>Stonehenge, United Kingdom</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a prehistoric monument in Wiltshire, England. It is a remarkable feat of Neolithic engineering, constructed between 3000 and 2000 BCE. • It is a circular arrangement of large stones, possibly used for astronomical and ceremonial purposes, and is considered one of the world's most iconic ancient sites. • The megaliths (large stones) used to build the structure were arranged in a post and lintel configuration, where two vertical posts support a horizontal lintel stone.
4	<p>Mecca and Medina, Saudi Arabia</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These are the two holiest cities in Islam, located in the Hejaz region of Saudi Arabia. • Mecca, also known as Makkah, is revered as the birthplace of Prophet Muhammad • Medina is where Muhammad established the Muslim community and is the site of his tomb. • Both cities are major pilgrimage destinations for Muslims worldwide, particularly during the Hajj and Umrah.
5	<p>Acropolis of Athens, Greece</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is the most striking and complete ancient Greek monumental complex still existing in our times. • It is situated on a hill of average height (156m) that rises in the basin of Athens.
6	<p>Petra, Jordan</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is an ancient city in southern Jordan, (situated between the Red Sea and the Dead Sea) renowned for its rock-cut architecture and Nabataean heritage, which dates back to at least 7000 BC. • A UNESCO site, it showcases Nabataean art, architecture, and multicultural influences (Greek, Roman, Arabian). It symbolizes desert civilizations.
7	<p>Colosseum, Italy</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Also known as the Flavian Amphitheatre, it is a massive ancient Roman amphitheatre located in Rome, Italy. • It's the largest amphitheatre ever built, seating approximately 50,000 spectators, and is a prominent landmark and a major tourist attraction. • Construction began around 70-72 AD and was completed in 80 AD.

8	<p>Machu Picchu, Peru</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is an ancient Inca settlement located in the Andes Mountains of Peru. • The site was built in the 15th century and was also chosen as one of the New 7 Wonders of the World in 2007. • A UNESCO site, it represents pre-Columbian indigenous heritage and Incan cosmology. It's a global symbol of lost civilizations.
9	<p>Pyramids of Giza, Egypt</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Built around 2630 BCE during the Old Kingdom, these pyramids (including the Great Pyramid of Khufu) are among the last surviving Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. They reflect ancient Egyptian engineering and beliefs in the afterlife. • On the west bank of the Nile River, the Great Pyramid served as the tomb of the fourth-century pharaoh(king) Khufu (Cheops). It is the largest of the three Pyramids at Giza.
10	<p>Great Wall of China, China</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a historic defensive structure in China, built over centuries to protect against invaders. • It is a series of walls and fortifications, not a single continuous wall, and stretches for about 21,196 kilometers. • The most famous section is from the Ming dynasty, built during the 14th to 17th centuries. • The Great Wall begins in the east at Shanhaiguan in Hebei province and ends at Jiayuguan in Gansu province to the west.

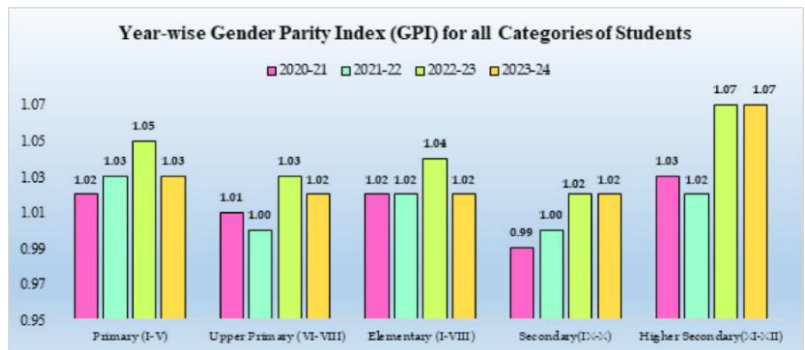
SOCIAL ISSUES

Women and Men in India 2024

- Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) has released the **26th edition** of its publication titled **Women and Men in India 2024: Selected Indicators and Data**.
- The publication offers a comprehensive overview of the gender landscape in India, presenting indicators and data across areas like population, education, health, economic participation, and decision-making.
- It presents gender-disaggregated data across urban-rural divides and geographic regions, facilitating an understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by women and men.
- It highlights both progress in gender equality and ongoing inequalities.
- By analyzing socio-economic indicators, it empowers policymakers, researchers, and other stakeholders to develop gender-sensitive policies facilitating sustainable and inclusive development.

Highlights

- **Education:** The primary and higher Secondary levels (students) have consistently high Gender Parity Index (GPI), indicating **strong female enrolment**. Upper primary and elementary levels saw fluctuations but remained close to parity.



- **Labour force:** The LFPR (Labor Force Participation Rate) in usual status for ages 15 years and above has improved from 49.8% (2017-18) to 60.1% (2023-24).
- **Financial Inclusion: Women own 39.2% of all bank accounts** and contribute to **39.7% of total deposits**. Their participation is highest in rural areas, where they make up 42.2% of account holders.
- There is rise in DEMAT account over the years, indicating growing participation in the stock market.
- From March 2021, to November 2024, the total number of **DEMAT accounts** increased from **33.26 million to 143.02 million**, marking more than a **fourfold rise**.
- Male account holders have consistently outnumbered female account holders, but female participation has also shown a growing trend.
 - The number of male accounts rose from 26.59 million in 2021 to 115.31 million in 2024, while female accounts increased from 6.67 million to 27.71 million during the same period.
- **Entrepreneurship:** Rising percentage of female-headed proprietary establishments across manufacturing, trade, and other services sectors has been observed from FY 2021 to FY 2024.
- Over the years, there has been an increase in the number of startups recognized by DPIIT with at least one-woman director, reflecting a positive trend in female entrepreneurship. The total number of such startups rose from 1,943 in 2017 to 17,405 in 2024.
- **Political participation:** The total number of electors increased from 173.2 million in 1952 to 978 million in 2024, with a notable rise in female voter registration.
 - Female voter turnout varied over the years, reaching 67.2% in 2019 but slightly declining to 65.8% in 2024. The gender gap in voting has narrowed, with female turnout surpassing male turnout in 2024.

Registrar General of India (RGI)

The Registrar General of India (RGI) recently warned hospitals to report all births and deaths within 21 days, citing widespread delays.

- ✓ The RBD Act, 1969 (amended in 2023) mandates the registration of all births and deaths digitally on the Centre's online portal Civil Registration System (CRS) from October 1, 2023.
- ✓ **SDG Target 16.9** aims to provide legal identity for all, including birth registration, by 2030.
- ✓ While 90% registration has been achieved, the goal of 100% universal registration remains unmet.
- ✓ **Progress Since 2011:** Registration level in 2011 was 82.4% for births and 66.4% for deaths, indicating significant progress over the years.

About the Registrar General of India (RGI)

The RGI is a statutory authority under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), established in 1949. The RGI also serves as the Census Commissioner of India and plays a key role in collecting and managing population data.

- ✓ According to Article 246 of the Indian Constitution, the census falls under the Union List (Entry 69 of Seventh Schedule).

Administrative Setup: The office is headed by a civil servant of Joint Secretary rank who functions as both Registrar General and Census Commissioner.

- ✓ The Office of RGI in India coordinates with state governments through Directorates of Census Operations (DCOs) in each state and union territory.

Key Responsibilities

- ⊙ **Census of India:** Conducting the decennial Census, the largest demographic survey in the world and collecting data on population size, socio-economic status, literacy, housing, etc.
 - ◆ Since the first census conducted in 1881, the Census has been conducted 15 times, with the most recent in 2011. Post-1949, it was conducted under the RGI and Census Commissioner.
 - ◆ The upcoming 2021 Census, delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ⊙ **Civil Registration System (CRS):** The Census Commissioner of India also serves as the Registrar General under the RBD Act, 1969, overseeing compulsory birth and death registration and coordinating the CRS across all States and UTs. The CRS was implemented to-
 - ◆ Create a **national-level database** managed by the RGI.
 - ◆ Ensure **unified digital birth certificates** as the **sole proof of date of birth** for services like education, jobs, and marriage registration.
 - ◆ Enable automatic updates to **National Population Register (NPR), ration cards, electoral rolls, and property records.**
 - ◆ Supports future implementation of the **National Register of Citizens (NRC)** under the **Citizenship Act, 1955.**
- ⊙ **Sample Registration System (SRS):** He conducts a nationwide survey semi-annually to estimate vital rates like birth rate, death rate, infant and maternal mortality rates (IMR & MMR).
- ⊙ **NPR:** As per the Citizenship Rules, 2003 under the Citizenship Act, 1955, the RGI compiles the NPR by collecting details of all usual residents living in India.
- ⊙ **Linguistic & Mother Tongue Surveys:** RGI conducts the Mother Tongue Survey which documents linguistic features of mother tongues consistently reported across two or more Census decades.
 - ◆ The first Linguistic Survey was completed by George Abraham Grierson in 1928.

Challenges Being Faced by RGI in Registering Births and Deaths

- **Role of State Authorities and Departments:** The RBD Act empowers the RGI to coordinate with Chief Registrars appointed by State governments.
 - Registration duties vary across States:
 - **Health Departments** manage registration in States/UTs like Assam, Chandigarh, Haryana, Lakshadweep, Meghalaya, Odisha, Punjab, Sikkim, and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands.
 - **Panchayat Departments** handle it in Kerala.
 - **Directorate of Economics and Statistics** manages it in Bihar.
- **Hospital Non-Compliance:** Many private and government hospitals delay reporting by waiting for relatives to approach them or by instructing relatives to file the registration themselves, rather than proactively reporting incidents within the mandated 21 days. This delay weakens **epidemiological tracking** and welfare scheme targeting.
 - ✓ Under the Civil Registration System (CRS), government hospitals have been entrusted with the responsibility of functioning as Registrars.
 - ✓ Private hospitals are required to report such events to the designated Registrar
- **Registrar Negligence:** Some local registrars fail to input reported events into the online portal promptly, resulting in delayed certificate issuance and a backlog of pending registrations, despite fines being in place for such negligence under Section 23(2) of the RBD Act.

- **Digital System Gaps:** The centralized online CRS faces operational challenges, including inconsistent data entry, delays in processing, and communication issues between hospitals and Registrars.
- **Incomplete Vital Statistics:** Vital statistics reports (key national-level data on infant mortality, stillbirths, and deaths) have not been released since 2020, hampering efforts to accurately track population changes and effectively plan public services. According to the 2020 Vital Statistics report-
 - **Registered births decreased by 2.4%**, from **2.48 crore in 2019 to 2.42 crore in 2020**, with most states showing a decline except Bihar, Haryana, MP, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Andaman & Nicobar, J&K, and Ladakh.
 - Meanwhile, **registered deaths rose from 76.4 lakh to 81.2 lakh** during the same period.
 - ✓ COVID-19 excess mortality estimates (particularly during the early stages of the pandemic) relied heavily on independent surveys like those conducted by The Lancet and the World Health Organization (WHO) due to limitations in the CRS.
- **Integration with Other Systems:** Since registration data is crucial for updating the NPR, ration cards, property registrations, and electoral rolls, lapses in timely reporting create wider administrative and social service challenges.
 - ✓ The Election Commission has repeatedly cited lack of timely death registration as a challenge in cleaning voter lists.
- **Bribery and Corrupt Practices:** Complaints have been received regarding bribes demanded by registration officials for issuing birth or death certificates. Such practices undermine public trust in the system.

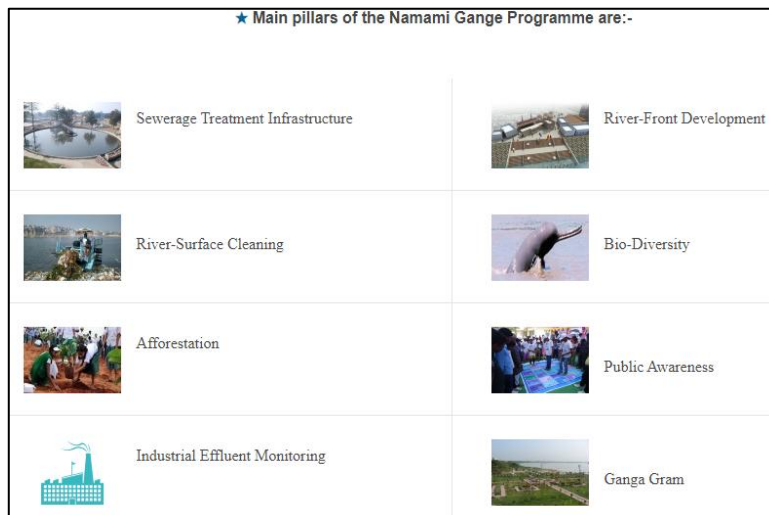
Tax Exemption for National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG)

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has notified the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) as an authority under the Income Tax (IT) Act, 1961.

This grants NMCG income tax exemptions, aiding its functioning under the Namami Gange Programme.

Namami Gange Programme

- It is an integrated conservation mission, approved as 'Flagship Programme' by the Union Government in 2014 with budget outlay of Rs.20,000 Crores.
- It is administered by the Ministry of Jal Shakti's Department of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, to accomplish the twin objectives of -
 - Effective abatement of pollution,
 - Conservation and rejuvenation of National River Ganga.



- The program would be implemented by the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), and its state counterpart organisations i.e., State Program Management Groups (SPMGs).
 - NMCG is the implementation wing of National Ganga Council (NGC), which replaced the National Ganga River Basin Authority.
 - NGC was created in 2016 under the River Ganga (Rejuvenation, Protection and Management) Authorities Order, 2016.
 - NGC oversees efforts to clean and rejuvenate the Ganga River, and is headed by the PM.
- In order to implement the programme, a three-tier mechanism for project monitoring comprising of:



A high-level task force chaired by **Cabinet Secretary** assisted by NMCG at the national level

State level committee chaired by **Chief Secretary** assisted by SPMG at the state level

District level committee chaired by the **District Magistrate**.

Recent Developments

- **Legal basis of the CBDT notification:**
 - **Clause 46A of Section 10, IT Act, 1961:** Exemption for income of bodies constituted under a Central/State Act for specified purposes. NMCG was constituted under the **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**.
- **Condition:** NMCG must continue as an authority under the Environment (Protection) Act with relevant purposes.

Background and Legal Transition of NMCG

- **Initial status:** Registered as a **society** (August, 2011) under the Societies Registration Act, 1860.
- **Upgradation:** Declared an '**authority**' (October, 2016) under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
- **Technical issue:** Despite this transition, PAN status continued as Association of Persons (AOP), attracting scrutiny and tax demands.

CSR Spending in India Sees 16% Growth in FY24

Funds **spent** by **listed** companies on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) rose by 16% to Rs 17,967 crore in 2023-24, in comparison to 2022-23.

- This significant rise mirrors the **18% increase in average three-year net profits**, which grew to ₹9.62 lakh crore from ₹8.14 lakh crore.
- As per the CSR mandate, companies were required to spend ₹18,309 crore.
- The slight shortfall between required and actual spending was due to **certain funds** being transferred to **Unspent CSR Accounts** for future utilization.
- This increase in spending came after three years of relatively flat growth, signalling a strong corporate commitment towards social welfare.

Trends in Compliance and Governance

- Corporate compliance with CSR norms continued to remain robust:
 - **98%** of the 1,394 eligible companies fulfilled their CSR obligations.
 - Around **49%** of the companies exceeded their mandated spending, reflecting a proactive approach.
 - Only **259 companies** fell short of the spending requirement, mainly due to multi-year project planning.
 - Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) also enhanced their contribution, with **66 PSUs** spending **₹3,717 crore**, marking a **19% increase** from the previous year.

About Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

- ◆ Enacted through the Companies Act, 2013 and enforced from April 2014, CSR mandates eligible companies to spend at least **2% of their average net profits** over the preceding three years on socially impactful initiatives.
- ◆ Companies with a **net worth of ₹500 crore or more, turnover of ₹1,000 crore or more, or net profit of ₹5 crore or more** in preceding financial year are obligated to undertake CSR activities.
- ◆ Over the years, CSR in India has expanded to include areas like education, healthcare, rural development, environmental sustainability, and cultural heritage.
- ◆ While compliance levels have consistently improved, recent trends suggest an evolving landscape where corporates are increasingly aligning their CSR strategies with sustainable development goals and national priorities.

Sectoral Allocation of CSR Funds

- ◆ CSR funds were predominantly directed towards key societal needs:
 - **Education** remained the top priority, attracting ₹1,104 crore.
 - **Healthcare** followed closely, receiving ₹720 crore.
- ◆ Notably, spending on **environmental sustainability** saw the steepest increase, with a **54% growth** compared to the previous year.
- ◆ Meanwhile, areas like **slum development** (-72%), **rural development** (-59%), and **armed forces veterans' welfare** (-52%) witnessed significant declines.

- Governance around CSR has also improved. Companies spending over ₹50 lakh must form a **CSR Committee** comprising at least three directors, including one independent director.
- Among the 1,028 companies mandated to set up committees, **990 had fully compliant structures**.

Call for Revising CSR Thresholds

- Given the significant rise in average corporate profits over the past decade, experts have called for a **revision of CSR eligibility thresholds**.
- The original thresholds were set when the average three-year net profit was ₹4.18 lakh crore; now it has more than doubled to ₹9.62 lakh crore.

Future Outlook

- As India's economy grows, CSR is expected to evolve from being a compliance obligation to a strategic pillar for brand building, social impact, and stakeholder trust.
- Emerging focus areas are likely to include:



India's Prison Crisis

The Tata Trusts published the **India Justice Report 2025** according to which Indian jails face extreme overcrowding and are battling multiple health challenges. Former Supreme Court **Justice Madan B. Lokur** warned that **extraditions** will be difficult until conditions are improved in Indian prisons.

Worsening Inmate Overcrowding

- The inmate population in India rose sharply from **3.8 lakh in 2012 to 5.7 lakh in 2022**, and is projected to reach **6.8 lakh by 2030**.
- However, the **available prison capacity stands at only 4.3 lakh**, with a forecast of just **5.15 lakh** by 2030, falling significantly short of demand.
- The **national occupancy rate** stands at **131%**, a substantial jump from **112%** in 2012.
- States like **Maharashtra** saw an occupancy spike from **99% to 161%** over a decade.
 - Uttar Pradesh houses the most overcrowded prisons.
 - Delhi's jails comprise 91% under-trials, highlighting delayed justice.
- The report identifies overcrowding as a key contributor to **communicable disease outbreaks**, deteriorating living conditions, and increased strain on administrative and health infrastructure.

Acute Shortage of Medical Professionals

- The report highlights a **43% vacancy rate among prison medical officers**, and the existing doctor-to-prisoner ratio stands at a staggering **1:775**, far worse than the **Model Prison Manual 2016 benchmark of 1:300**.
- This deficit in medical staff hinders not only day-to-day healthcare but also responses to outbreaks, injuries, chronic illness management, and even forensic documentation.

About the India Justice Report (IJR)



- It is a collaborative effort by several civil society organizations and policy think tanks.
- It is a data-driven assessment that evaluates the **justice delivery systems** across India's 36 States and UTs, covering five key sectors:

Police **Judiciary** **Prisons** **Legal Aid** **Human Rights Commissions**

- The report employs **quantitative indicators** to highlight both progress and persistent gaps in structural capabilities and public service delivery.

Police Force

- ✓ There is just one civil police officer for every 831 citizens.
- ✓ 17% of police stations lack CCTV surveillance.
- ✓ 30% of police stations do not have a women's help desk.
- ✓ Reserved quotas for women in police are unmet in all States/UTs.

Judiciary and Legal Aid

- ✓ Gujarat reported the highest vacancies in High Court judges and staff.
- ✓ Bihar's lower courts have 71% of cases pending for over three years.
- ✓ The per capita spending: ₹182 on judiciary, ₹57 on prisons, and a mere ₹6 on legal aid.
- ✓ No State in India allocates more than 1% of its total budget to the judiciary.

A Mental Health Emergency Behind Bars

- Perhaps the most serious revelation of the report is the near-collapse of India's prison mental healthcare system.
 - Only **25 psychologists** are available for the entire prison population, equating to **one psychologist for every 22,929 prisoners**.
 - In 2022, India had **69 sanctioned posts** for mental health professionals, but **less than half were filled**.
 - Not a single state or union territory meets the standard of **1 psychologist per 500 inmates**.
- Mental illness among prisoners doubled from **4,470 in 2012 to 9,084 in 2022**.
- Despite this surge, 25 States and Union Territories **make no provision** for a psychologist or psychiatrist within their correctional staff.
- This gap poses immense risks, including increased suicides, unchecked behavioural issues, and relapse among those with substance use disorders.

Invisibility of Disability in Prisons

- The report also notes the absence of national-level data regarding prisoners entering jails with a disability or those who **acquire disabilities during incarceration**.
- This undermines efforts to implement inclusive prison reforms or offer legal protection and special care to these vulnerable groups.

Recommendations and Way Forward

- The India Justice Report calls for:
 - Urgent recruitment of medical and mental health staff in jails.
 - Strategic investment in **prison infrastructure expansion**.
 - Regular publication of prison health and disability data.
 - Policy incentives for States to **decongest prisons**, especially through alternatives to incarceration like bail reforms and community sentencing.
- India's prison system stands at a crossroads. As the country advances technologically and economically, **its correctional system needs equal attention** to ensure dignity, health, and safety for all inmates, aligning with international human rights standards.

Senior Citizens' Right to Evict Relatives from Property

The Supreme Court (SC) dismissed a senior couple's plea to evict their son from their home under the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007.

About the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007

It is aimed at ensuring the welfare and maintenance of parents and senior citizens in India.

Objectives

- To provide a **legal framework** for children and relatives to maintain their elderly parents and ensure their **dignity and well-being**.
- To **protect senior citizens' rights** over their property and provide **institutional care** when needed.

How Did the SC Arrive at the Power to Evict?

- **S. Vanitha v. Deputy Commissioner, Bengaluru Urban District, 2020:** In this case, the SC examined whether a **Maintenance Tribunal** under the **Senior Citizens Act, 2007** could evict a Daughter-in-law (DIL) from her in-laws' home.
 - There were ongoing multiple parallel proceedings including a divorce case and a maintenance suit filed against the husband by the DIL.
 - The **Assistant Commissioner in 2015** had ruled in favor of the parents, stating the DIL had **no legal claim** over the house.
 - However, the DIL challenged this, citing her right to a **"shared household"** under the **Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005**.
- **SC Verdict:** The SC **acknowledged her protection under the Domestic Violence Act**, which allows residence in a *shared household*, even without ownership. However, the Court clarified that **Tribunals under the Senior Citizens Act can order eviction** under **Section 23(2)**, if it is:
 - **Necessary for the maintenance or protection** of the senior citizen.
 - In response to a **breach of obligation** by the child or relative to maintain the senior citizen.

Key Provisions

- **Right to Maintenance (Section 4):** To lead a normal, dignified life parents and senior citizens (aged 60+) can claim maintenance (provision for food, clothing, residence, medical attendance, etc.) if they are unable to support themselves from their children or relatives (legal heirs of a childless senior citizen).
 - **Application for Maintenance (Section 5):** Can be filed by the senior citizen/parent; an authorized person or voluntary organization; the Tribunal on its own (*suo motu*). Such applications must be resolved within 90 days, extendable by 30 more days if necessary. A tribunal has powers similar to a Judicial Magistrate (First Class) and it may refer cases to Conciliation Officers for amicable settlement before adjudication.
 - **Constitution of Maintenance Tribunal (Section 7):** Each state must set up one or more Maintenance Tribunals per subdivision presided over by an officer not below the rank of Sub-Divisional Officer.
 - **Order for Maintenance:** Tribunal may direct a child/relative to pay monthly maintenance of upto ₹10,000.
 - ▶ Maintenance orders can be revised due to misrepresentation, mistake, or changes in financial condition or based on a civil court decision.
 - ▶ The sum ordered must be deposited within 30 days of the Tribunal's order.
 - ▶ Tribunals can issue warrants, impose imprisonment for up to 1 month for non-payment and award interest on maintenance amounts at rates between 5% and 18%.
 - **Appeals (Sections 15–16):** Aggrieved parties can appeal tribunal orders within 60 days to Appellate Tribunal established by State government at district level which is presided over by District Magistrate.
 - **No Legal Representation (Section 17):** Legal practitioners are not allowed in Tribunal or Appellate Tribunal. Parties may be represented by a Maintenance Officer appointed by the State Government.
 - **Establishment of Old Age Homes (Section 19):** State are required to establish at least one old age home per district for indigent senior citizens with the capacity to accommodate at least 150 people providing services like medical care, recreation, and basic needs.
 - **Void Property Transfers (Section 23):** Transfer of property can be declared void in following circumstances:
 - ▶ **Conditional Transfers (Section 23(1)):** If a senior citizen gifts or transfers property on the condition that the transferee will provide basic care and amenities, and the transferee fails to do so:
 - ▶ **Maintenance from Transferred Estate (Section 23(2)):** If a senior citizen is entitled to maintenance from an estate and that estate (or part of it) is transferred. The maintenance right can be enforced against the transferee if:
 - The transferee (new owner) had notice of the rights' of senior citizen, or
 - The transfer was gratuitous (without payment).
- It cannot be enforced against a transferee who received the estate for consideration and without notice.
- **Abandonment (Section 24):** Abandoning a senior citizen is punishable with up to 3 months imprisonment, or ₹5,000 fine, or both.
 - **Cognizance and Summary Trial (Section 25):** All offences under this Act are cognizable and bailable; Tried summarily by a Magistrate.
 - **Civil Courts Barred (Section 27):** Civil courts have no jurisdiction in matters under this Act.

The SC ruled that **eviction power is implicit** in the Tribunal's authority and must be exercised after evaluating **all competing claims** in each case.

What is the Present Case?

The SC was hearing a case where parents sought to evict their son for alleged neglect and abuse. They were unsatisfied by the partial relief provided to them in **2019 by Maintenance Tribunal** under which:

- The son was barred from using any part of the house without permission.
- He was confined to his utensil shop and residential room with his family.
- The tribunal allowed for future eviction if he misbehaved again.

What did the SC Rule?

The Court denied eviction, noting no evidence of further misconduct by the son and clarified that eviction is not mandatory in every case.

Key Takeaway: Eviction under the Senior Citizens Act is discretionary, not mandatory- it depends on evidence of ongoing harm or necessity for the parents' protection.

Government Initiatives to Tackle Deepfakes

Recently, the Minister of State for Electronics & IT, in a written reply in Rajya Sabha, outlined the key regulatory steps taken by the Central Government to tackle misinformation and deepfakes.

Key Government Initiatives to Tackle Deepfakes

- **Legal Framework under the Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000:** The **IT Act, 2000** provides the foundational legal structure (Sections 66C, 66D, 67, etc.) to combat cybercrimes, including identity theft, impersonation, privacy violations, and transmission of obscene or explicit content. It applies to content generated using **AI tools or any other technology**, treating them under the relevant cyber offence provisions.
- **Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021:** These rules, notified under the IT Act, aim to address **emerging challenges in cyberspace**, including deepfakes and misinformation. Intermediaries (including social media platforms) are obligated to:
 - Not host or publish any unlawful content.
 - Act quickly to remove harmful or misleading information upon government notice or user grievances. (Intermediaries shall remove or disable access within 24 hours of receipt of complaints of contents that exposes the private areas of individuals)

Deepfakes are digitally altered videos, images, or audio recordings created using artificial intelligence (AI) technologies like Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs). These are often very realistic and can be used to spread false information, impersonate individuals, or mislead people.

Extra Mile: India's International Cooperation to Tackle Deepfakes

- ⊗ **OECD AI Principles (2019):** Promote use of AI that is innovative and trustworthy and that respects human rights and democratic values.
- ⊗ **GPAI (Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence):** Includes a Working Group on Responsible AI which is looking into synthetic media and misinformation, including deepfakes.
 - **GPAI** (Hosted by India in 2023) New Delhi Declaration brought together all major initiatives for AI – UN Advisory Group on AI, UK AI Safety Summit – at one event at GPAI New Delhi Summit.
 - AI Research Analytics and Knowledge Dissemination Platform (**AIRAWAT**) and National Program on Artificial Intelligence and its role in shaping AI ecosystem in India was prominently emphasized.
- ⊗ **Bletchley Park AI Safety Summit (UK, 2023):** First global summit on frontier AI risks, including misuse of generative AI like deepfakes.
 - India supported the UK's proposal for a Global AI Safety Institute to monitor AI misuse, including threats from deepfakes.
- ⊗ **UNESCO Guidelines on the Ethics of AI (2021):** Advocates "Right to Human Review" where people can challenge content generated by AI affecting them.

India-US Joint Statement on Emerging Technologies (2023 & 2024): Focuses on deepening cooperation in AI ethics and combating AI-driven disinformation.

- Prevent content that misleads users, incites violence, or threatens national security.

The **Grievance Appellate Committees** have been set up to hear appeals from users dissatisfied with intermediary responses. Appeals can be filed online via www.gac.gov.in.

- **Engagement with Industry and Advisory Mechanism:** The **Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY)** regularly engages with tech industry stakeholders to ensure ethical tech use.
 - **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023:** Although not deepfake-specific, it criminalizes acts like defamation, identity theft, and cyberstalking, which can cover deepfake usage.
 - **PIB Fact Check Unit:** Flags fake news and deepfakes involving government officials or programs.
- **Role of CERT-In (Indian Computer Emergency Response Team - established under IT Act, 2000):** CERT-In publishes alerts, advisories, and countermeasures on cyber threats, including those driven by AI. It released advisories in 2023 (AI threats) and 2024 (deepfakes) with safety measures for users. To promote safe digital practices, CERT-In:
 - Publishes guidance on threats like phishing, vishing, and malware.
 - Operates the **Cyber Swachhta Kendra** for malware detection and cleanup.
 - Leads the operations in Computer Security Incident Response Team-Finance Sector (CSIRT-Fin) to respond to and mitigate cybersecurity incidents in the financial sector.
 - Shares cybersecurity tips and best practices.
 - Conducts extensive public awareness campaigns such as Cyber Security Awareness Month (October of every year), Safer Internet Day (February's 1st Tuesday every year), Swachhta Pakhwada (1 to 15 February every year), and Cyber Jagrookta Diwas (1st Wednesday of every month).
- **Cybercrime Coordination by Ministry of Home Affairs:** The **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)** facilitates coordination among law enforcement agencies for cybercrime handling.
 - **National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal** (cybercrime.gov.in) allows public reporting of all types of cybercrimes, including deepfake-related offences.
 - A toll-free helpline **1930** is available for lodging complaints, especially for cyber financial frauds.

Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI)

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) launched the Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) to track Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) progress and empower over 2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats across India.

What is PAI? (The first-ever PAI Baseline Report for FY 2022–23)

- It is a composite, multi-domain, and multi-sectoral index designed to measure and assess the performance of Gram Panchayats (GPs).
- It incorporates 435 local indicators (331 mandatory + 104 optional), covering 566 data points across 9 themes of LSDGs (Localization of Sustainable Development Goals) aligned with National Indicator Framework (NIF) of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI).
 - ✓ The PAI is a progression of India's first sub-national measure of SDGs which was launched by NITI Aayog way back in 2018 (the SDG India Index).

Objectives of PAI

- **Measure Grassroots Progress:** by assessing the advancement of Panchayats toward achieving localized SDGs.
- **Identify Development Gaps:** by highlighting areas requiring focused developmental efforts.
- **Facilitate Evidence-Based Planning:** by enabling Panchayats to prepare actionable development plans based on validated data.

- **Promote Transparency and Competition:** by encouraging healthy competition among Panchayats while ensuring accountability and efficient governance.

Key Features

- **Nine LSDG Themes Assessed:** including-

<i>Poverty-Free and Enhanced Livelihoods</i>	<i>Healthy Panchayat</i>	<i>Child-Friendly Panchayat</i>	<i>Water-Sufficient Panchayat</i>	<i>Good Governance</i>
<i>Clean and Green Panchayat</i>	<i>Self-Sufficient Infrastructure</i>	<i>Socially Just and Socially Secured Panchayat</i>		<i>Women-Friendly Panchayat</i>

- **Performance Categories:** Based on the PAI scores & thematic Scores achieved by different GPs, they are grouped into one of the following performance categories-

<i>Achiever (Score 90+)</i>	<i>Front Runner (75 to <90)</i>	<i>Performer (60 to <75)</i>	<i>Aspirant (40 to <60)</i>	<i>Beginner (<40)</i>
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- **Data-Driven Tool:** It uses a **dedicated multilingual portal** (www.pai.gov.in) for data entry, tracking, and validation of Panchayat development metrics.
 - Over 2.16 lakh Gram Panchayats submitted validated data through the multilingual PAI portal, ensuring accuracy and reliability. Data from certain states/UTs is pending validation.
 - **Data Excluded (5 States/UTs):** Meghalaya, Nagaland, Goa, Puducherry, West Bengal
- **Tracking Progress Over Time:** by measuring incremental progress on LSDGs using scores of GP over years and grading GP's based on performance in achieving LSDGs.
- **Evidence Based Assessment and Planning** for prioritizing development. Kerala's Panchayats have pioneered child budgeting and gender budgeting, mapping closely to "Child-Friendly" and "Women-Friendly" Panchayats.
- **Institutional Convergence:** Integration of PAI metrics into Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GDPD) under the Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA) enables integrated planning.
- **Targeted Incentives:** Better method for incentivization on developmental progress-
 - PAI Data being used for incentivization by MoPR.
 - States can also adopt the same system for incentivization of Panchayats.
- **Intra-State Benchmarking:** No Inter-State comparison but State can compare GPs on LSDG thematic scores and composite PAI scores.

PAI 2022–23: Key Highlights

National Performance Overview	State-Wise Highlights
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total Panchayats Evaluated: 2,16,285 (out of 2,55,699). • Front Runners (Score 75–<90): 699 Panchayats (0.3%). • Performers (Score 60–<75): 77,298 Panchayats (35.8%). • Aspirants (Score 40–<60): 1,32,392 Panchayats (61.2%). • Beginners (Score <40): 5,896 Panchayats (2.7%). • Achievers (Score 90+): None. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gujarat and Telangana Lead as Front Runners • Other States with high Performer Counts included Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. • States with High Share of Aspirants included Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh indicating need for focused developmental support.

Noida Biryani Case

Recently, a Noida restaurant owner was arrested for allegedly delivering chicken biryani instead of vegetarian biryani.

- ✓ An FIR was filed under **Section 271 of the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita (BNS)** for a **negligent act likely to spread infection**.

Relevant Legal Provisions

- **Sections 271 and 272 of BNS** adapted from Sections 269 and 270 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1870 these sections aim to punish acts that are *likely to spread diseases dangerous to life*.

✓ Both are bailable offences.

Section	Provision	Nature	Punishment
271 BNS	Negligent act likely to spread infection	Negligent, not malicious	Up to 6 months
272 BNS	Malignant act likely to spread infection	With intent	Up to 6 months

- **Conditions for Applicability:** The act must be-
 - **Likely to spread a disease** considered *dangerous to life*, ruling out non-lethal infections
 - Performed by a person who *knew or had reason to believe* their actions (whether negligent or malignant) could spread such infection.
- **Applicability in the Noida Case:** The **link between the food mix-up** and the **spreading of deadly disease is unclear**. Chicken biryani delivery, though a mistake, raises doubts about the **validity of invoking Section 271** and may not meet the threshold of:
 - **Spreading infection**, and
 - Being a **life-threatening disease vector**.

Alternative Legal Avenues for this Case

- **Consumer Protection Act, 2019:** Addresses grievances related to service deficiencies.
- **Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006:** Governs food safety and labeling standards.

Constitutional and Human Rights Perspective

- **Article 21 – Right to Life and Personal Liberty (Due Process):** Arresting an individual without clear evidence of a crime infringes upon personal liberty.
 - ✓ **Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India (1978):** Established that any procedure depriving personal liberty must be just, fair, and reasonable.
- **Article 25 – Freedom of Religion: Respect for Religious Practices:** The incident underscores the need for service providers to be cognizant of religious sentiments.

Past Applications of Similar Provisions

- **During COVID-19 Pandemic:** Section 269/270 (IPC) were widely used to enforce lockdown and isolation rules. For example: Kanika Kapoor (Singer) in 2020 was booked under Section 269 in Uttar Pradesh for attending gatherings before testing positive.
- **Tuberculosis (2018):** Health Ministry declared that Clinical Establishments can be penalized under Sections 269/270 for failing to notify TB patients to public health authorities.

Judicial Interpretation

- Courts have **not laid down a uniform standard** for applying these sections. Instead, they evaluate each case on its **unique facts and circumstances**. For example-
 - **Mr 'X' v. Hospital 'Z' (2003):** The Supreme Court (SC) held that Section 269 cannot be invoked by one partner against another with AIDS if they “willingly” got married.
 - **Shiv Kumar v. State of Punjab (2008):** Madras High Court (HC) held that selling *adulterated paneer* falls under **Prevention of Food Adulteration Act 1954**, not criminal law under IPC thus, no criminal action can be taken against its sale as the case does not meet the prescribed standard.

Conclusion

With no proven intent or knowledge of risk by the restaurant, the **use of Section 271 in the Noida biryani case** appears **legally debatable** and highlights the **need for cautious and appropriate legal application**, especially with public health laws. This incident underscores the importance of proportionality in legal responses.

Waqf Act Challenged in Supreme Court

The Supreme Court (SC) has postponed its interim ruling on challenges to the **Waqf Act, 2025** until **May 5**, following the **Centre's request for time** to submit a formal response.

Background

- **The Challenge:** The **Waqf Act, 2025** is being challenged **on the basis that the act violates Article 26** of the Constitution, which protects the **right to manage religious affairs** and is subject to only three restrictions- public order, morality, and health.
- **Petitioners' View:** The Act interferes with the **essential and integral practices of the Muslim faith**, which Parliament is **not constitutionally allowed** to do.
- **Case Status:** The SC is currently examining whether the new law infringes upon these fundamental rights, though it acknowledged that the law may have *some positive aspects*.

Key Issues in the Challenge to the Waqf Act, 2025

- **Removal of "Waqf by Use" Concept:**
 - **Issue:** The Act abolishes future recognition of *Waqf-by-use* (lands long used for religious purposes but not formally registered).
 - **Concern:** Many historical Waqf properties (e.g., mosques, graveyards) may lose legal status.
 - **Petitioners' Argument:** Such lands are hard to register, and courts (including the 2019 *Ayodhya judgment*) have long recognized this concept.
- **District Collector's Powers Over Waqf Land:**
 - **Provision:** It allows the **district collector** to declare Waqf-used land as government land, suspending its Waqf status until courts decide.
 - **Concern:** It will alter Waqf status *before judicial determination*, risking misuse and arbitrary action.
- **Inclusion of Non-Muslims in Waqf Boards:**
 - **Provision:** It mandates at least two non-Muslim members in both the Central Waqf Council and State Waqf Boards.
 - **Challenge:** It is violative of Articles 26(b)- guarantees the community right to "manage its own affairs in matters of religion; 26(c)- right to own and acquire movable and immovable property; and 26(d)- right to administer such property in accordance with law.
 - **Petitioners' View:** Even one non-Muslim member compromises religious autonomy.
- **Applicability of the Limitation Act:**
 - **Change:** The 2025 law applies the **Limitation Act** to Waqf property disputes.
 - **Impact:** It bars Waqf authorities from reclaiming encroached land after a set period.
 - **Previous Position:** The 1995 Act had exempted Waqf properties from limitation rules.

The Centre assured the SC that it would neither make any appointments to Waqf Boards nor change the character of waqfs, including 'waqf-by-user' that are notified and registered as such until May 5.

{For more details on Waqf (Amendment) Act 2025, refer The Recitals-March 2025}

Corpus Delicti

A Raigad court in Maharashtra sentenced former police inspector Abhay Kurundkar to life imprisonment for the 2016 murder of assistant inspector Ashwini Bidre-Gore. Despite the absence of physical evidence, the court relied on circumstantial and technical evidence to establish that Bidre-Gore was killed at accused's residence.

Can Courts Convict a Person of the Murder even if the Body is not Found?

- Yes, courts *can* convict a person of murder even if the body is not found based on the legal principle of **corpus delicti**, (Latin term) which means "body of the crime"- not necessarily the physical body, but proof that a crime has occurred.

Core Elements of Corpus Delicti

1. Proof that a specific harm or loss occurred (e.g., death, loss of property).
2. Proof that the harm resulted from a criminal act, not from natural causes or accidents.

Relevance in Indian Legal System:

- While not explicitly used in Indian statutes, the principle is embedded in criminal jurisprudence — particularly in safeguarding against wrongful convictions.
 - Example: In murder trials, Indian courts often state: "Conviction cannot be solely based on confession unless the death (i.e., corpus delicti) is first established."
 - ✓ Without corpus delicti, people may be convicted for crimes that never happened.
- Courts, including the Supreme Court (SC), have held that recovery of a body is not essential if there is strong circumstantial or technical evidence showing the victim was murdered.
 - In *Rishi Pal vs State of Uttarakhand (2013)*, the SC ruled that in the absence of a body, "clinching evidence" must establish that the victim is dead, and the accused caused the death.
 - Historically, courts were cautious in such cases, fearing wrongful convictions, especially when the death penalty was involved. But modern rulings emphasize that if the prosecution can prove beyond doubt that the victim was killed, conviction is possible without recovering the body.
 - In the present case, though no body or DNA was found, the court ruled that such absence **does not automatically absolve the accused** and warned against setting a precedent that could aid future offenders.

Previous Precedents

- **Kirti Vyas (2018)**: Despite the body never being found, a Mumbai court in 2024 convicted two colleagues of murder relying on **CCTV footage, location data, bloodstain with DNA match, and accused's suspicious conduct**.
- **Sadiccha Sane (2021)**: In contrast, the Bombay High Court **granted bail** to the accused in the ongoing case, citing lack of a body or physical evidence. The court stated that such matters would be assessed during trial, which is yet to commence.

Comparative Jurisprudence

Country	Position on Corpus Delicti
USA	Mandatory to establish corpus delicti before conviction; especially important where confession is the only evidence.
UK	Emphasizes "actus reus" (physical component of a crime) must be proven objectively.
India	Not codified but followed as settled judicial principle.

Welfare and Support Schemes for Sportspersons in India

The Government is actively promoting sports through its various schemes and initiatives that identify grassroots talent, support athletes during and after their careers, and build a sustainable ecosystem for sporting excellence.

- ✓ The Government has significantly increased funding in sports, by allocating a **record ₹3,794 crore** for FY 2025–26 to support a wide range of **welfare and development schemes** designed to promote grassroots talent, assist elite athletes, and provide security post-retirement.

Key Schemes and Initiatives

- **Khelo India Programme:** A flagship initiative of the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports launched in 2016-17 to develop grassroots sports culture and create future champions through structured talent identification, training, and infrastructure support. The program is structured around 12 key verticals focusing on both mass participation and excellence. These verticals include play field development, infrastructure creation, state-level centers, annual competitions, talent identification, support for sports academies, promoting sports for women and individuals with disabilities, and more.
- **Retired Sportsperson Empowerment Training (RESET) Programme:** Launched in 2024, it empowers **retired athletes** through education, internships, and skill-building, helping them transition into roles like coaching and administration.
- **Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay National Welfare Fund for Sportsperson (PDUNWFS):** Offers **financial aid**, including ₹5 lakh ex-gratia; ₹10 lakh for medical treatment or sports injuries; ₹5,000 monthly pension for needy sportspersons; and support for families of deceased athletes and support staff.
- **Pension to Meritorious Sportspersons:** Lifetime pension ranging from ₹12,000 to ₹20,000/month for athletes winning medals in major international events like the Olympics, World Championships, and Asian Games.
- **Scheme of Human Resources Development in Sports (HRDS):** Focuses on **research, skill development, and knowledge sharing** in areas like sports science, coaching, and medicine.
- **Scheme for Sports & Games for the Disabled:** Promotes inclusive sports participation for persons with disabilities and supports para-athletes at grassroots and elite levels.
- **Panchayat Yuva Krida aur Khel Abhiyan (PYKKA):** Supports **rural sports infrastructure** and local-level competitions, encouraging participation at the village and block levels.
- **Assistance to National Sports Federations (ANSF):** Provides **comprehensive support** for athlete training, international exposure, foreign coaches, and organizing events.
- **National Sports Development Fund (NSDF):** Mobilizes government and private funds for **elite athlete training, infrastructure, and international competition access**.
- **National Sports Awards:** India's **highest sporting honors**, recognizing excellence and promoting a culture of sportsmanship and achievement. (Arjuna Award/Dronacharya Award/Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratan Award etc)



BharatNet

BharatNet is an ambitious flagship project of the Government to provide affordable and high-speed broadband connectivity to all Gram Panchayats (GPs) across the country. It is the world's largest rural broadband project, aimed at bridging the digital divide between urban and rural India.

Objectives of BharatNet (earlier called National Optical Fibre Network)

- Provide **non-discriminatory access** to broadband infrastructure to telecom operators, ISPs (Internet Service Providers), cable TV operators, and content providers.
- Enable delivery of essential services like **e-Governance; e-Health; e-Education; e-Banking; Telemedicine**.
- Promote **inclusive growth** and **digital empowerment** in rural and remote areas.

Project Scope

To connect approximately **2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats** (GPs) across India using technologies like **optical fibre (OF)**, **radio**, and **satellite** communications. Its **Phase III (Ongoing & Future-Oriented)** aims to integrate **5G readiness**; enhance **bandwidth**; strengthen **last-mile connectivity**. It also includes Amended BharatNet Program (ABP) 2023.

Key Features of ABP include

- Connecting **2.64 lakh GPs** using **ring topology** (a network design where connected devices form a circular data channel) and OF connectivity to the remaining non-GP villages on demand.
- Deployment of **Internet Protocol Multi-Protocol Label Switching (IP-MPLS) routers** at Block and GP levels.
- **10-year O&M (Operation & Maintenance)** responsibility built in.
- **Remote Fibre Monitoring System (RFMS)**
- **Power backup** at network points.

Executing Agencies: Bharat Broadband Network Limited (BBNL) – SPV set up in 2012 to execute the project. Under ABP, **BSNL** has been appointed as the **Project Management Agency (PMA)** for operation and maintenance.

Funding

It is done through **Digital Bharat Nidhi (DBN)**, it replaced the earlier **Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF)**.

Impact and Benefits

- **Digital Inclusion:** It provides Last Mile Connectivity (LMC) provided to schools, Primary Health Centres, Post offices enabling **online learning platforms** and **telemedicine** services. Rural areas are now connected to the digital ecosystem. Villagers access **e-services**, government schemes, and information online. It empowers Gram Panchayats to implement **e-governance** initiatives efficiently.
- **Economic Opportunities:** Digital commerce, banking, and **entrepreneurship** become accessible in rural regions.
- **Mobile Connectivity:** BharatNet complements the expansion of **4G mobile connectivity** in rural India. By Dec 2024, **6.18 lakh villages** had mobile coverage with 4G. BharatNet's broadband backbone enhances **mobile data speeds** and service quality.

Supporting and Complementary Initiatives

- **Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA):** Trained over **6.39 crore rural citizens** in digital literacy (as of March 2024).
- **National Broadband Mission (NBM 2.0):** Launched in January 2025 to accelerate broadband infrastructure rollout. It features **GatiShakti Sanchar Portal** for centralized Right of Way (RoW) clearances.
- **CSC e-Governance Services India Ltd:** Assigned to provide **last mile Wi-Fi and FTTH (Fibre-to-the-Home)** in GPs. Over **11.4 lakh FTTH** connections and **1.04 lakh Wi-Fi hotspots** installed (as of Sept 2024).

- **(Digital Bank Network) DBN-NABARD Collaboration:** Partnership to promote **digital services** in agriculture and rural development. Focus on **content sharing, ICT infrastructure, and digital economy awareness.**

Conclusion

By enabling broadband for all, BharatNet supports economic development, improves public service delivery, and fosters inclusive digital growth, placing India on track to become a truly connected and empowered digital nation.

Urdu is the Finest Specimen of Composite Cultural Ethos of India- Supreme Court

Upholding the use of Urdu on the signboard of a municipal council building in Maharashtra, the Supreme Court (SC) ruled that using Urdu on public signboards is constitutional and does not promote communalism.

- ✓ The judgment arose from an appeal challenging the use of **Urdu** alongside **Marathi** on the **Municipal Council, Patur** signboard in Maharashtra. The appellant, a former council member, argued that **Marathi being the state's official language**, using Urdu was improper.

About the SC Judgement- The court emphasized that:

- Urdu was not an alien language. It was born and nurtured in India and reached greater refinement and became a language of choice for poets in India.
- It belongs to a community, to a region, to people; and not to a religion.
- It is the finest specimen of *Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb*, or the *Hindustani tehzeeb*".
- Associating Hindi only with Hindus and Urdu only with Muslims is a "blow to national unity".
- Language is a medium for exchange of ideas that brings people holding diverse views and beliefs closer and it should not become a cause of their division.
- Urdu words have a heavy influence on Court parlance, both in criminal and civil law. From *adalat to halafnama to peshi, vakalatnama, dasti, etc* the influence of Urdu is writ large in the language of the Indian Courts.

Extra Mile: Facts about Urdu Language in India

- According to the **2011 Census**, Urdu was the **seventh most spoken** scheduled language (one of the 22 languages listed in the Eighth Schedule).
 - ✓ 2001 census listed Urdu at 6th position.
- Despite a **30 million increase** in the Muslim population between 2001 and 2011, the **number of native Urdu speakers declined.**
- Urdu is spoken, at least by a section of the population, in **almost all States and Union Territories**, except possibly in some **North-Eastern states.**
 - ✓ **The Progressive Writers' Movement (1936)** used Urdu to challenge feudalism, colonialism, and social injustice.
- Under **Article 345** of the Constitution, several states have adopted Urdu as a **second official language like** Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal and **Union Territories** of Delhi and Jammu & Kashmir.
 - ✓ **National Council for Promotion of Urdu Language (NCPUL)** under the Ministry of Education promotes Urdu through IT education, calligraphy, publication, and cultural activities.
 - ✓ While Urdu is not classified as a "classical language," efforts are being made to document its oral traditions and manuscripts.

Why are Civil Disputes Being Criminalized?

Recently, the Chief Justice of India (CJI) strongly criticized the Uttar Pradesh (UP) government for the rising trend of turning civil disputes into criminal cases, during a hearing on a cheque bounce case where the accused also faced criminal charges like breach of trust and conspiracy.

- ✓ There is a growing misuse of criminal law in **civil disputes** like money recovery, contracts, or property matters, where cases are wrongly given a **criminal colour** to pressure the opposing party.

How are the Civil Cases being Criminalized?

The common tactic involves falsely alleging that the other party had **dishonest intent from the start** of a civil agreement (like a loan or contract) to turn civil disputes into criminal cases. For example, in a simple loan case, if the borrower fails to repay the loan to the lender, the matter would traditionally fall under civil jurisdiction but the lender accuses the borrower of cheating (under Section 420 IPC / Section 318 Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)) to create pressure for recovery, thus turning the case into a criminal one.

Why is it happening?

Many view **civil litigation as slow and ineffective**, prompting misuse of **criminal law** to pressure opponents for quicker settlements. This is worsened by **influence over police** and a massive backlog. **As per the National Judicial Data Grid-**

- **Total civil cases pending in district courts: ~1.08 crore with 68% over one year old.**
- **Total pending cases in district courts: 4.52 crore, 76% (or 3.44 crore) of which are criminal cases.**

Related Judicial Precedents

- **G. Sagar Suri v. State of UP (2000):** Supreme Court (SC) cautioned against giving a **civil matter a criminal colour**, stating criminal law should not be used as a shortcut for civil remedies.
- **C. Subbiah @ Kadambur Jayaraj v. Superintendent of Police (2024):** A government teacher alleged fraud and intimidation in a real estate deal. SC held that a **purely civil land dispute** was wrongly turned into a **criminal case** involving fraud and breach of trust and there was **no evidence of criminal intent or intimidation**.
- **Indian Oil Corporation v. NEPC India Ltd. (2006):** SC held that **misusing criminal law for civil disputes** is unacceptable, and complainants doing so should be **held accountable**. It advised courts to use **Section 250 CrPC/Section 395 of the BNSS** (compensation for accusations made without reasonable cause) more often for **false or malicious accusations**.

Court's Observations on Civil vs Criminal Disputes

- **Civil disputes** (e.g., money recovery, contracts, inheritance) must **remain civil** unless there's **clear evidence of fraud, cheating, or dishonest inducement**.
- **Criminal law is not a shortcut** for civil remedies.
- Courts must **carefully examine allegations** before allowing criminal charges to proceed and should award **compensation for false or malicious accusations** to help deter unnecessary prosecutions and prevent harassment of innocent individuals.

Extra Mile: Civil Dispute vs Criminal Dispute – A Comprehensive Comparison		
Dimension	Civil Dispute	Criminal Dispute
Nature of Wrong	Violation of private rights between individuals or organizations	Violation of public rights or offences against society or the State.
Objective	To resolve disputes and provide compensation or specific relief.	To punish the offender and protect public order.
Burden of Proof	Balance of probabilities – Lesser standard of proof	Beyond reasonable doubt – High standard of proof due to serious consequences
Court Proceedings	Initiated by filing a civil suit in a civil court.	Initiated through FIR or complaint in a police station/magistrate
Abuse Trends	Increasing trend of criminalizing civil disputes to exert pressure – as seen in cheque bounce or loan default cases.	Genuine criminal cases sometimes falsely framed as civil (e.g., using forged documents in property deals)

Time Spent as Undertrial Cannot Be Deducted from Sentence- Kerala High Court

The Kerala High Court (HC) observed that a convict cannot claim remission of sentence for the period during which he/she remained an undertrial prisoner prior to conviction.

Case Background

- The case involves **Roopesh**, a Maoist activist convicted and sentenced by the **NIA Special Court** in April 2024. He had been in detention since July 9, 2015, and had spent over 8 years, 9 months as an undertrial.
- His wife requested the prison authorities to count his undertrial period remission under Section 72 of the Kerala Prisons and Correctional Services (Management) Act 2010 which outlines remission for good conduct and diligent work but applies only **after conviction**.
- The **trial court** allowed her plea, directing that the **set-off period** should be considered for remission. But the Prison Authorities denied remission for the undertrial period, citing legal provisions.

Kerala HC's Key Observations

- The court while referring to Rule 380 of the **Kerala Prisons Rules**, held that “**remission**” under Rule 376 shall be granted from the first day of the calendar month **following conviction** and pre-conviction detention cannot be counted for this purpose.
- It clarified that the “**set-off period**” under Section 428 CrPC (now Section 468 BNSS) allows reduction of sentence length but does not equate **undertrial detention** with **imprisonment on conviction**, and therefore, cannot be included in remission calculations.

Significance of the Ruling: It ensures uniform interpretation of **prison rules and sentencing provisions** across detention stages and clarifies the distinction between set-off and remission i.e.:

- Set off reduces the total sentence,
- Remission rewards good conduct after conviction.

Judicial Precedents

- **State of Kerala v. Raneef (2011):** The Supreme Court clarified that set-off under Section 428 CrPC applies to sentence reduction, not remission or parole eligibility.

Supreme Court Upholds Homebuyers' Right to Protest Peacefully Against Their Builders

The Supreme Court (SC) has upheld the right of homebuyers to peacefully protest against builders, saying portraying their right to free speech as a criminal offence is a clear abuse of the law.

Background-

- Unhappy with a builder's services, a group of homebuyers protested by erecting a public banner outlining their grievances. Reacting to which, the builder filed a defamation complaint under Section 500 read with Section 34 of IPC, alleging reputational harm.
- The Metropolitan Magistrate Court, Borivali, Mumbai, summoned the homebuyers, who appealed to the Bombay High Court (HC) to quash the builder's case. The HC, however, turned down the plea, compelling them to move the apex court.

Issue: Whether the complaint disclosed a valid case of criminal defamation against the homebuyers.

<u>SC's Ruling</u>	<u>Implications of the SC Ruling</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Peaceful protest is a right: of consumers protected under Articles 19(1)(a), (b), and (c) (freedom of speech, assembly, and association). This right is complementary to the seller's right to commercial speech. Legitimate protest, if done lawfully and respectfully, cannot be criminalized.• Ninth Exception to Section 499 IPC (Defamation) applies: The banner was found to be in good faith, without abusive language or malice. It was a genuine expression of grievance, not defamatory.• Reference to US Constitutional Protections: The Court cited First Amendment jurisprudence in the United States noting that peaceful pamphleteering and protest are recognized as legitimate forms of communication there.• Abuse of Legal Process: Criminalizing peaceful protests without satisfying legal requirements for defamation is an abuse of process. Courts must curb such misuse at the outset to prevent harassment and undue litigation.• Final Decision: It allowed the appeal, set aside the HC's decision and quashed the complaint & summons issued against the homebuyers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strengthening Consumer Rights: The ruling upholds the right of consumers to express grievances publicly in a peaceful manner and recognizes freedom of speech and peaceful assembly as vital in consumer-seller relationships.• Legal Safeguard Against Misuse of Defamation Law: It prevents developers/builders from misusing defamation laws to intimidate or silence consumers and encourages courts to scrutinize complaints at the initial stage and quash baseless proceedings.• Promotes Balance Between Commercial and Consumer Interests: It acknowledges that while sellers have a right to commercial speech, consumers have an equal right to protest and reinforces accountability of service providers by empowering aggrieved parties.<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016 (RERA): Mandates transparency and timely delivery, complementing the ruling.• Judicial Recognition of Peaceful Dissent: It sets a progressive precedent for peaceful protests in other sectors (e.g. banking, healthcare, telecom) and encourages non-violent modes of protest as legitimate tools of civic expression.• Prevents Legal Harassment: It protects individuals from lengthy criminal trials for actions that fall within legal and constitutional bounds and provides clarity on scope and limits of protest in light of defamation law.

Judicial Precedents regarding peaceful protest

- **Ramlila Maidan Incident v. Home Secretary (2012):** The SC upheld the right to peaceful protest as a democratic cornerstone, provided it adheres to reasonable restrictions.
- **Subramanian Swamy v. Union of India (2016):** The SC clarified that defamation laws must not be used to stifle legitimate criticism, emphasizing the need for a high threshold for criminal defamation.

- **Anita Thakur v. Government of J&K (2016):** The Court recognized protests as an extension of free speech, condemning excessive legal action against peaceful demonstrators.
- **Romila Thapar v. Union of India (2018)** – dissent is the safety valve of democracy
- **Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan v. Union of India (2018)** – peaceful protests cannot be pushed out of public spaces.

Karnataka Set to Be the First State to Finish Village-level Antiquities Survey

Karnataka has initiated a **first-of-its-kind village-level antiquities survey** across the state to document inscriptions, sculptures, monuments, and other heritage artifacts.

- ✓ The survey has been carried out in 119 taluks so far and the authorities hope to complete the survey in the remaining taluks by the end of the current financial year.

Objectives

- To create a **comprehensive inventory** of all antiquities across rural areas.
- To **safeguard archaeological heritage** through proper documentation and conservation.

Key Features

- **Geo-tagging of each antiquity** to build a digital and location-based archive.

Benefits

- **Strengthens the conservation framework** for over 25,000 estimated monuments in the state.
- **Helps in identifying new sites** for protection. There is **proposal** to protect 110 more monuments and steps are being taken to list another 1,000 monuments to be protected to ensure their conservation.
 - ✓ Karnataka is home to a rich cultural legacy spanning the Chalukya, Hoysala, Vijayanagara, and Rashtrakuta dynasties.
- **Encourages community participation** through existing PPP models like the Dharmasthala Trust collaboration.
 - ✓ Under a PPP model, the Dharmasthala Trust and the Department of Archaeology each contribute 40%, and the local community 20%, towards monument conservation. Over 200 monuments and temples have been restored through this initiative.
- **Enables CSR and public involvement** through initiatives like *Adopt a Monument*.
- **Supports better planning and management** to prevent heritage loss due to inter-departmental conflicts. For example, Mysuru's iconic structures such as the Lansdowne Building, Devaraja Market, and Maharani's College are examples of heritage loss caused by such disputes.

National Herald Case

A Delhi court refused to issue notice to Sonia and Rahul Gandhi in the National Herald case, directing the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to first address deficiencies in its chargesheet.

About National Herald

- **Founded:** in 1938 by Jawaharlal Nehru and other freedom fighters.
- **Purpose:** To voice liberal and nationalist views within the Congress.
- **Publisher:** Associated Journals Ltd (AJL), which also ran *Navjeevan* (Hindi) and *Qaumi Awaz* (Urdu).
 - ✓ AJL was a brainchild of Jawaharlal Nehru started in 1937 with 5,000 other freedom fighters as its shareholders. Its holdings were transferred to Young India Ltd. (YIL) in 2011.
 - ✓ YIL was set up in 2010, with Rahul Gandhi as its director. Sonia and Rahul Gandhi own 76% of shares.

- **Status:** Ceased operations in 2008 with debts of over ₹90 crore.

Allegations in the Case	Congress' Stand: It denies any wrongdoing, claims YIL was created for charitable purposes, and the asset transfer was lawful and dismisses allegations as “politically motivated.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By Subramanian Swamy (2012): He accused the Congress leaders of cheating and criminal breach of trust, claimed YIL “maliciously” took over AJL’s assets, worth over ₹2,000 crore, for ₹50 lakh; alleged AJL owed Congress ₹90.2 crore, and that the loan was illegally sourced from party funds. • ED Investigation (2014–present): Probing money laundering, irregular asset transfers, and potential misuse of political position, it attached AJL’s Panchkula plot worth over ₹60 crore in 2019 which was allotted to AJL in 1982 but was resumed in 1996 due to inactivity. It was re-allotted in 2005 by then CM Bhupinder Singh Hooda at original 1982 rates which the ED alleges that caused huge losses to the exchequer. 	<p>Legal Developments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2015–2016: Sonia and Rahul granted bail; SC allowed proceedings to continue. • 2018–2019: Government evicted AJL from Herald House; SC stayed eviction. • 2022–2024: Sonia and Rahul questioned by ED; chargesheet filed in April 2024. • 2025: Delhi court refused to issue notice pending rectification of chargesheet errors.

Rashtriya Karmayogi Jan Seva Programme

The Ministry of Ayush held a Rashtriya Karmayogi Jan Seva Programme (RKJSP) session at Ayush Bhawan to enhance the **service** orientation and skills of its **employee**, in collaboration with the Capacity Building Commission under Mission Karmayogi.

- ✓ **Mission Karmayogi:** Approved in September 2020, it is the National Programme for Civil Services Capacity Building (NPCSCB), aimed at creating a future-ready civil service rooted in Indian ethos and global best practices.

Objectives of RKJSP

- To build awareness of individual responsibilities and the broader impact of public service.
- To strengthen capacity and efficiency within its workforce.

Key Features of RKJSP

- **Interactive Methodology:** It moves away from traditional lectures to focus on structured discussions, teamwork, and problem-solving.
 - ✓ It supports Article 309, which governs civil service recruitment and training, by enhancing professional competencies.
- **Self-Reflection:** It encourages participants to understand their roles and purpose in public service.
- **Motivation & Inspiration:** It uses leadership stories and narratives to foster self-discovery and motivation.
- **Real-World Context & Case Studies Shared:** It incorporates insights from successful government campaigns (e.g., Ministry of Ayush initiatives) to connect learning with practice.
- **Session Structure:** It was delivered in four short sessions covering themes such as self-awareness, motivation, and leadership to promote active participation and continuous engagement.

Directive for the Efficient and Effective Management of Litigation

To reduce and regulate litigation involving the Union of India, the Department of Legal Affairs (Ministry of Law and Justice) has issued the “Directive for the Efficient and Effective Management of Litigation,” based on recommendations by the Committee of Secretaries chaired by the Cabinet Secretary.

- ✓ With the Central Government being a party in nearly 700,000 pending court cases (**finance ministry alone being of the litigants in nearly two lakh cases**), this directive seeks to streamline legal processes, minimize unnecessary litigation, and enhance governance efficiency.
- ✓ These directives will serve as a "**Standard Operating Procedure**" (SOP) for litigation management.
- ✓ **The 23rd Law Commission (2024–2027)** is examining judicial administration reforms, including case flow management, which synergizes with the directive's objectives.

Key Objectives

- To prevent unnecessary litigation and simplify legal procedures.
- To minimize unwarranted appeals and address inconsistencies in orders.
- To strengthen inter-departmental coordination in legal matters.
- To improve public accountability in arbitration cases.
- To establish a Knowledge Management System (KMS) to enhance legal efficiency.

Applicability

All Ministries and Departments of the **Central Government**, including their attached and subordinate offices, autonomous bodies, as well as Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) in matters pertaining to arbitration.

** State Governments may also consider adopting the Directive.

Implementing Authority: Committee of Secretaries, chaired by the Cabinet Secretariat.

Custodial Torture in India

The findings from a study on the 'Status of Policing in India Report' (SPIR) 2025 conducted by Lokniti-Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) in collaboration with '**Common Cause**' (a reputed NGO) based on responses from 8,276 police personnel across 17 states, reveals a troubling culture of abuse and acceptance of coercive practices within the police force.

The UN Convention (1984) defines torture as the intentional infliction of severe physical or mental pain by a public official for purposes like extracting information, punishment, or intimidation. India signed the Convention against Torture in 1997 but has not ratified it, so it is not legally binding in India.

Key Highlights from the Report

- **Normalization of Torture in Police Culture:** Many police personnel believe violence is a legitimate tool to extract information or deliver justice, especially in grave offences.
 - **Data:** 63% police agree violence is justified in serious offences (22% strongly agree). 42% support torture in terror cases, 34% in rape/murder cases, 28% for repeat offenders.
- **Regular Use of Forceful Tactics:** Despite being illegal, forceful methods are routinely used, especially in serious criminal investigations.
 - **Data:** 26% say suspects are often threatened. For serious crimes: 55% justify verbal threats, 50% slapping, 30% third-degree torture. Even in minor cases: 49% justify verbal threats, 32% slapping, 9% third-degree methods.
- **Inconsistent Reporting of Torture:** There is no uniform or mandatory reporting of torture incidents, which allows abuse to go unchecked.
 - **Data:** Only 39% say torture is *always* reported; 41% say *sometimes*; 9% say *never*.
- **Endorsement of Extra-Judicial Measures:** Some officers support illegal killings and mob justice, reflecting disregard for due process.
 - **Data:** 22% of police personnel believe dangerous criminals should be killed without trial.

- **Lack of Accountability in Custodial Deaths:** Despite multiple custodial deaths, convictions are nearly non-existent, showing systemic failure.
 - **Data: 2020 Custodial Deaths:** As reported by National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) – 76; National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) – 70; National Campaign Against Torture (NCAT) – 111. **Convictions (2018–22):** Zero.
- **Disproportionate Targeting of Marginalized Communities:** Custodial torture often impacts vulnerable groups the most, reflecting social bias and profiling. Victims largely include **Dalits, Adivasis, Muslims, slum dwellers, illiterate, and poor** individuals.
- **Weak Oversight by Judiciary and Medical Professionals:** Arrested persons rarely receive proper judicial or medical protection. Magistrates act as "silent spectators"; medical exams often done by non-forensic doctors (e.g., eye specialists or anesthesiologists).
- **Colonial-Era Policing Practices Continue:** The police system retains outdated, authoritarian structures due to lack of reform. As per the report such practices persist due to poor accountability, political pressure for results, inadequate training, and societal tolerance for quick fixes.
- **Encouraging Signs of Reform Support:** Despite problems, many police officers support modern, rights-based reforms.
 - **Data:** 79% support human rights training; 71% support torture prevention measures; 79% support scientific (non-coercive) interrogation.
- **Legal Framework Still Inadequate:** Confessions to police are inadmissible, but some official committees suggest partial admissibility- raising risks of legitimizing torture. **Malimath Committee** and **Law Commission (69th Report, 1977)** recommended allowing police confessions under safeguards.

Recommendations

- **Enacting a Law Against Torture** criminalizing it.
 - ✓ **Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India (1978), D.K. Basu v. State of West Bengal (1997)** laid down guidelines to **prevent custodial abuse**, including mandatory medical examinations and CCTV in police stations.
- **Ratifying the UN Convention Against Torture** to align with global human rights standards.
- **Insulating Police from External Pressures** to ensure police autonomy from political and bureaucratic interference.
- **Enhancing Police Accountability** and **protecting human rights**.

Doctrine of Prospective Overruling

The Supreme Court (SC) recently held that the Doctrine of Prospective Overruling should be applied cautiously and only when justified by the circumstances.

About the Doctrine of Prospective Overruling

- It is a principle that allows courts to **overturn an existing legal precedent** or **declare a law unconstitutional**, but apply this change **only to future cases**, leaving **past judgments and transactions unaffected**.
- The doctrine ensures that **new legal interpretations** or **judicial rulings** do **not apply retrospectively**. thus, saving past acts done in good faith based on the previous interpretation
 - ✓ Especially **helpful in constitutional and tax laws**, where retrospective invalidation can cause institutional breakdown.
 - ✓ This approach differs from the **classical Blackstonian doctrine** where courts were seen solely as interpreters of existing law, not creators of new legal principles.

Objective: To prevent injustice and maintain legal certainty when precedents are overruled or laws are changed.

Origin and Evolution: It was first recognized in the United States in *Great Northern Railway Co. v. Sunburst Oil & Refining Co. Case* (1932). English courts adopted it as an exception to the general principle that judicial decisions have both retrospective and prospective effects.

Adoption in India: It was first adopted by the SC in *I.C. Golaknath v. State of Punjab* (1967). Then Chief Justice K. Subba Rao emphasized that this doctrine allows courts to declare the law invalid without disrupting settled rights and past transactions. It was applied in several subsequent constitutional matters.

"The court must be forward-looking, yet backward-cautious." – Inspired by Justice Subba Rao (Golaknath)

Applicability: The doctrine is primarily applied in constitutional matters to prevent retrospective invalidation of laws.

Invocation: Often invoked to avoid the disruption caused by retrospective invalidation of laws or principles.

Authority: Only the SC has the authority to apply this doctrine to validate past decisions while applying new interpretations going forward. As SC has the **constitutional authority to declare law binding on** all courts in India (**Article 141 of the Indian Constitution**)

Advantages	Criticisms
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prevents injustice to parties who relied on the old law.• Encourages judicial innovation without disrupting settled law. Prospective overruling acts as a check on judicial overreach.• Ensures smooth legal transition and maintains public confidence.• Avoids confusion by not disturbing past decisions.• Provides administrative convenience in adapting to changes.• Gives time for affected entities to adapt to new legal norms.• Avoids reopening of past cases and unnecessary litigation.• It is a tool of judicial pragmatism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can lead to inequality- similar cases decided differently based on timing.• May create legal inconsistency and uncertainty in ongoing proceedings.• Opponents argue that if a law is unconstitutional, it should be void ab initio, not just going forward.• May delay the implementation of vital legal reforms.• It may deny justice to those who were wronged under the old law.• Doctrine lacks clear parameters; could lead to "selective application".

Complete Streets Initiative

Haryana Chief Minister inspected the state's first 'Complete Streets' initiative in Gurugram.

What is the Complete Street Initiative?

- It is a human-centric urban development approach that redesigns streets to ensure safe, inclusive, and accessible mobility for **all users**—pedestrians, cyclists, public transport users, and motorists—regardless of age, gender, or physical ability.
 - ✓ Complete Streets Initiative aligns with India's Smart Cities Mission, **AMRUT**, and **National Urban Transport Policy (NUTP)**.
- Reflecting **Haryana's commitment** to sustainable and inclusive urban development, this initiative is now being positioned as a **national model for people-friendly streets**.
- The initiative **emerged in the U.S. in 2003, coined by the National Complete Streets Coalition**, and was formalized through policies in over 1,600 U.S. municipalities by 2020.
 - ✓ It aligns with **global movements like Vision Zero (eliminating traffic fatalities)**

Objectives	Key Features
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote inclusive mobility: by ensuring children, women, the elderly, and persons with disabilities (Divyangjan) walk safely and with dignity. • Enhance public well-being: by shifting focus from just infrastructure to quality of life. • Encourage sustainable transport: by making walking, cycling, and public transit more attractive and safer. • Model collaborative governance: by showcasing successful cooperation between government, private sector, and civil society. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wide, shaded footpaths • Dedicated cycling tracks • Bioswales: Integrated systems for rainwater harvesting. • Tree preservation: Protection of mature trees to maintain greenery. • Floral landscaping: Plantation of over 20,000 flowering plants. • Street marshals: 24x7 deployment of trained personnel for safety and assistance.

RBI Proposes New Gold Loan Rules

RBI is introducing a framework for gold loans amid a sharp rise in gold loan outstanding and non-performing assets (NPAs).

The surge in gold prices has led to increased gold loan disbursements, with NPAs rising by 28.58% and loan outstanding by 27.26% over the past year.

Draft Guidelines Released in April 2025

- **Prohibited Collateral:** Lenders are barred from granting advances against:
 - Primary gold/silver
 - Financial assets backed by primary gold/silver (e.g., ETFs, mutual fund units)
- **Loan-to-Value (LTV) Cap**
 - For consumption gold loans, the LTV ratio must not exceed 75% of the gold's value.
- **Restrictions on Collateral Use**
 - Gold used as collateral for income-generating loans cannot be used *simultaneously* for consumption loans.
- **Ownership Verification**
 - Lenders must verify and maintain records of the ownership of gold collateral. Loans should not be extended where ownership is doubtful.
- **Tenor Cap for Bullet Repayment Loans**
 - Consumption loans requiring bullet repayment (principal and interest due at maturity) are to be limited to a maximum tenor of 12 months.
- **Operational Norms for Lenders:** Lenders must:
 - Integrate gold loan policies with credit and risk frameworks
 - Set borrower- and sector-specific exposure limits
 - Ensure loans are linked to repayment capacity via due diligence
 - Monitor end-use of funds and maintain detailed records

Attractiveness of Gold Loans

- **Ease and Accessibility:** Gold loans are attractive due to easy availability, minimal documentation, and quick processing.



Surge in Gold Loan NPAs



- Gold loan NPAs rose sharply by over ₹1,500 crore to ₹6,824 crore as of December 2024, compared to ₹5,307 crore a year earlier.
- **Break-up of NPAs**
 - Commercial banks reported gold loan NPAs of ₹2,040 crore, up from ₹1,404 crore in December 2023.
 - NBFCs reported NPAs of ₹4,784 crore, compared to ₹3,904 crore last year.
- **Gold Loan Outstanding Growth**
 - Total gold loan outstanding of banks and NBFCs stood at ₹11,11,398 crore in December 2024, rising from ₹8,73,701 crore a year ago.
- **Banks' Share**
 - Commercial banks held the majority share with ₹9,23,636 crore in gold loan outstanding.

RBI Flags Irregular Practices in Gold Loans

- A review by the RBI revealed several deficiencies in gold loan practices, including:
 - Use of third parties for sourcing and appraisal without proper oversight
 - Valuation of gold in the absence of the customer
 - Lack of transparency in gold auctions after defaults
 - Weak monitoring of Loan-to-Value (LTV) ratio
 - Incorrect application of risk weights
- **RBI Directives to Lenders**
 - The RBI instructed banks and NBFCs to review their gold loan policies and processes, identify gaps, and take corrective measures within a set timeframe.
 - It also emphasized strict monitoring of the gold loan portfolio and greater control over outsourced activities and third-party service providers.
- **Curbing Evergreening of Loans**
 - Previously, borrowers could repledge jewellery by just paying interest, enabling indefinite loan extensions.
 - Post RBI intervention in September 2023, repledging now requires full repayment of principal and interest, making the process costlier and limiting loan evergreening.

- **Higher Loan Value:** The sharp rise in gold prices has enabled borrowers to secure higher loan amounts against their gold holdings.
- **Digital Expansion:** The rise of digital platforms and fintech solutions has made gold loans more accessible, even in remote areas, boosting their popularity.

Surge In Gold Prices

- Gold prices recently crossed the Rs 1 lakh-level per 10 gm for the first time as the international prices surged.
- Gold prices in India generally follow international prices. Global gold prices continued to surge with rates crossing \$3,400 an ounce. **Gold has gained nearly 59% since March 2024.**

Indian Gold Market

- **India is the second largest gold market in the world after China.** Gold demand in the country in 2024 stood at **802.8 tonnes**. China's demand was 985 tonnes.
- The total gold demand value in India went up by 31% at **Rs 5.15 lakh crore in 2024**, compared to Rs 3.92 lakh crore in 2023.
- Gold holds a significant place in Indian culture, often being accumulated over generations. During times of financial need such as hospital expenses and college fees, individuals are more willing to pledge their gold holdings like jewellery to secure loans.
- During periods of economic uncertainty like trade wars or inflation, gold is perceived as a stable asset, prompting individuals to opt for gold loans to meet immediate financial needs.
- The growth of digital platforms, apps and fintech solutions has also made gold loans more accessible and attractive, even in remote areas, contributing to their rising popularity.

Reasons for the rise

- » The gold price rally is largely driven by renewed **uncertainty surrounding US monetary policy**, after the US President criticised the US Federal Reserve for not cutting interest rates and has shared plans to overhaul the Federal Reserve.
- » The criticism of the US Federal Reserve by the US President has shaken the investor confidence **pushing the US dollar sharply lower**, falling to its lowest level since 2022.
- » A **weaker dollar boosts demand for gold**, since it makes gold more affordable to investors holding foreign currencies.
- » Meanwhile, the US Fed issued a warning that tariffs could threaten its dual mandate of maintaining stable prices and full employment, which further strengthened gold's safe-haven appeal.
- » The rise in gold prices is also driven by **escalating geopolitical risks and persistent inflation concerns**.
- » It is also supported by **escalating tariff tensions, concerns over the US economic outlook and the looming US debt crisis**.
- » Further, continued buying from China, global central banks and institutional investors has added momentum to the bullish sentiment in gold.

GST E-Invoicing

The GST Council of India introduced e-invoicing (electronic invoicing) in a phased manner to standardize business-to-business (B2B) invoice reporting to the GST portal.

- There were no predefined formats. Hence, a uniform structure was developed in consultation with trade bodies and the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India.
- Over time, several modifications have been made to the e-invoicing regulations to enhance compliance and efficiency.

New GST E-Invoicing Rules from April 1, 2025

- **Mandatory 30-Day Deadline for E-Invoice Reporting**
 - Businesses with an Annual Aggregate Turnover (AATO) of **₹10 crore and above must report e-invoices to the Invoice Registration Portal (IRP) within 30 days of issuance.**
 - Earlier, this rule applied only to businesses with AATO above ₹100 crore.
 - With the lower turnover threshold, many more businesses must now comply with this rule.

- **Stricter Compliance & Penalties**
 - Currently, businesses delay invoice uploads, causing discrepancies in Input Tax Credit (ITC) claims.
 - From April 1, IRPs will block invoice uploads beyond 30 days, rejecting late submissions. Non-compliance may lead to penalties and financial consequences.
- **Compulsory Two-Factor Authentication (2FA)**
 - From April 1, all taxpayers, regardless of turnover, must use Two-Factor Authentication (2FA) for e-invoice and e-way bill generation.
- **Applicable to all types of Documents that need IRN Generation:** GST Invoices; Credit Notes; Debit Notes (for B2B supplies and exports)

GST E-Invoicing: Overview & Process

- GST e-invoicing is a system where B2B and export invoices are reported to the Union Government's e-invoice portal for validation.
- Each invoice receives a unique **Invoice Reference Number (IRN)**.
- However, invoices are not generated by the government but are created by taxpayers in their own systems and then reported.
- The system enables seamless electronic data exchange through API integration.
- **Approval & Rollout**
 - ✓ Approved in the **37th GST Council meeting** in **September, 2019**.
 - ✓ Rolled out in a **phased manner** starting **October 2020** for businesses with an Annual Aggregate Turnover (AATO) above ₹500 crore.
 - ✓ Extended in **January 2021** to businesses with **AATO between ₹100 crore and ₹500 crore**.
- **Exempted Businesses**
 - ✓ Special Economic Zone (SEZ) units
 - ✓ Insurance and banking sectors, including NBFCs
 - ✓ Multiplex cinema admissions
 - ✓ Goods transport agencies (road transport)
 - ✓ Passenger transport services
- **E-Invoicing Process**
 - ✓ Taxpayers generate invoices using their own accounting/billing system
 - ✓ The invoices are reported to the **Invoice Registration Portal (IRP)**.
 - ✓ The IRP validates the invoice and assigns a **Unique IRN** along with a **QR code**.
 - ✓ A GST invoice is legally valid only if it contains a valid IRN.

NITI NCAER States Economic Forum Portal

- NITI Aayog, in partnership with the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), has developed the **NITI NCAER States Economic Forum portal**.
- It is a comprehensive digital repository that **consolidates crucial data on social, economic, and fiscal parameters**, from **FY 1990-91 to FY 2022-23**.
- The portal also features research reports, analytical papers, and expert insights on state finances.
- It aims to enhance data accessibility and provide valuable insights into India's economic landscape at the state level.

Enhancing Data-driven Decision-making

- Designed as a **one-stop solution** for policymakers, researchers, and analysts, the portal enables a deeper understanding of macroeconomic, fiscal, demographic, and socio-economic trends.
- It will further help in benchmarking the data of each state against that of other States and the national figures. It will also provide a forum for informed debates and discussions.
- By serving as a comprehensive research hub, the portal empowers users to track historical trends, identify emerging economic patterns, and formulate evidence-based policies.

Key features: The portal is structured around **four core components**.

- **State reports:** These provide an overview of the macroeconomic and fiscal landscape across 28 Indian states, presenting key indicators on demographics, economic structure, socio-economic parameters, and fiscal performance.
- **Data repository:** A well-organised database offering direct access to extensive datasets across **five categories** - demography, economic structure, fiscal, health, and education.
- **State fiscal and economic dashboard:** A visual tool that presents graphical trends of key economic variables over time. It also provides quick access to raw data through summary tables and a data appendix.
- **Research and commentary:** This section draws from extensive studies on state finances, fiscal policy, and financial management at both state and national levels, offering expert analysis and policy perspectives.

Vibrant Villages Programme II

- The Union Cabinet has approved phase two of the Vibrant Villages Programme (VVP) for the comprehensive **development of strategic villages along international land borders (ILBs)**, with an outlay of **Rs 6,839 crore**.

- The scheme is part of the broader Viksit Bharat 2047 vision to secure India's land borders through sustainable and inclusive development.
- VVP-II is a **100% Central Sector Scheme** with full funding from the Union government and it will run till **FY 2028-29**.
- VVP-II is a continuation and expansion of the first phase (VVP-I), which was approved in February 2023 with focus on the northern borders.
- The new phase targets strategic villages along international land borders (ILBs) in **17 states and UTs**. These include:
 - **Northeast:** Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura.
 - **North and Northwest:** Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh.
 - **East:** Bihar, West Bengal.
 - **West:** Gujarat.

Key Objectives

- **National Security Through Integration:** It aims to integrate border populations as active participants in national security by making them "eyes and ears" of the border guarding forces.
- **Comprehensive Development:** Improve living conditions and create livelihood opportunities to reduce migration and facilitate sustainable development in sensitive border areas.
- **Crime Control:** Reduce cross-border crime through better community engagement and monitoring.

Activities covered

- The government plans to fund a wide range of projects at the village or cluster level.
- **Infrastructure:** Building critical infrastructure for connectivity, education (like SMART classrooms), and local amenities.
- **Livelihoods:** Support for value chains through cooperatives and self-help groups (SHGs), along with tourism circuit development.
- **Cultural Vibrancy:** Promotion of local culture via fairs, national day celebrations, ministerial visits, and community events.
- **Convergence of Schemes:** The programme seeks to saturate all border villages with services under existing welfare schemes through convergence in four thematic areas:
 - All-weather road connectivity
 - Telecom connectivity
 - Television access
 - Electrification

Implementation Model

- **Village Action Plans:** Tailored to the unique needs of each state, district, and village, these plans will be prepared in a collaborative approach.
- **PMGSY-IV Linkage:** Road connectivity will be taken up under the ongoing Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY-IV) programme under the Ministry of Rural Development.
- **Tech Enablement & information databases** Platforms like **PM Gati Shakti** will be used to monitor progress and resource planning

Rise in Volatility Index

- Volatility Index or India VIX - the market's fear gauge - recently jumped by 66% to 22.8, marking its **largest single-day jump in history**. The VIX is at the highest level in 10 months since the general elections in June 2024.
- The surge was driven by **growing US recession concerns** and their impact on corporate earnings and investment flows.



India VIX

- India VIX is a volatility index **computed by the National Stock Exchange** based on the order book of **NIFTY Options**.
- India VIX indicates the investor's perception of the **market's volatility in the near term** i.e. it depicts the expected market volatility **over the next 30 calendar days**.
- The higher the India VIX values, the higher the expected volatility and vice versa.

Volatility Index

- ❑ The Volatility Index or the Fear Index, is a measure of the market's expectation of volatility over the near term.
- ❑ Volatility is often described as the '**rate and magnitude of changes in prices**' and in finance often referred to as risk.
- ❑ Usually, during periods of market volatility, the market moves steeply up or down and the volatility index tends to rise. As volatility reduces, the Volatility Index declines.
- ❑ The Volatility Index is a measure of the amount by which an underlying index is expected to fluctuate in the near term, (calculated as annualised volatility, denoted in percentage) based on the order book of the underlying index options.
- ❑ The **Chicago Board of Options Exchange (CBOE)** was the first to introduce the volatility index for the US markets in 1993 based on S&P 100 Index option prices.
- ❑ In 2003, the methodology was revised, and the new volatility index was based on S&P 500 Index options.

- **'VIX' is a trademark of the CBOE**, and Standard & Poor's has granted a license to NSE, with permission from the CBOE, to use such a mark in the name of the India VIX

India Skills Accelerator

- In a significant move towards accelerating India's skilling goal, the **Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE)**, in collaboration with the **World Economic Forum (WEF)**, launched the India Skills Accelerator (ISA) initiative.
- ISA will function as a national **public-private collaboration platform** designed to enable **cross-sectoral efforts** in unlocking innovative ideas and driving systemic progress on complex challenges that demand a multi-stakeholder approach.
- At its core, ISA aims to accelerate **change across three critical levels**:
 - By improving awareness and shifting mindsets around future skills needs;
 - Increasing collaboration and knowledge sharing among stakeholders; and
 - Committing to upgrade institutional structures and policy frameworks to support a more adaptive and responsive skilling ecosystem.
- As India experiences rapid technological and economic change, **skill gaps** - cited by 65% of organisations as a major barrier - threaten to slow progress.
- The accelerator aims to **close these gaps** through **inclusive upskilling and reskilling, mobilizing investment** in lifelong learning, and facilitating government-industry collaboration.
- By enabling agile career transitions, promoting scalable training, and aligning education with industry need - especially in high-growth sectors like AI, robotics, and energy - the initiative will empower India's youth and drive future-ready workforce development.
- By strengthening alignment across the skills ecosystem, it will help close critical skills gaps, support the growth of India's digital and innovation-driven economy, and enable more people to thrive in a rapidly evolving world of work.

Niveshak Didi Phase 2

- The Investor Education and Protection Fund Authority (IEPFA) and India Post Payments Bank (IPPB) have signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) to jointly launch Phase 2 of the Niveshak Didi initiative.
- The collaboration aims to scale financial literacy among women in rural, semi-urban, and underserved areas through grassroots mobilization and community-driven education.
 - **Niveshak Didi** is a unique initiative that trains **women postal workers and community leaders** to act as financial educators within their local regions.
 - Women act as natural community influencers. When they are provided with the right knowledge and tools, they don't just manage their own finances better — they lead change in their communities.

Investor Education And Protection Fund Authority (IEPFA)

- **Launched in 2016**, IEPFA is a **statutory body** functioning under the **Ministry of Corporate Affairs**. Its objective is to ensure that investors across the country are both informed and protected.
- IEPFA plays a crucial role in promoting financial literacy, making it easier for individuals to understand the importance of managing personal finances.
- One of its primary missions is to **educate people** about their rights and responsibilities as investors.
- This becomes particularly important for individuals living in rural and underserved areas, who may have limited access to reliable financial education or resources.

India Post Payments Bank (IPPB)

- **Launched in 2018**, IPPB has been established under the **Department of Posts, Ministry of Communication** with 100% equity owned by the Union Government.
- The bank has been set up with the vision to build the most accessible, affordable and trusted bank for the common man in India.
- Its fundamental mandate is to remove barriers for the **unbanked & underbanked** and reach the last mile, by utilising the Postal network comprising ~1,65,000 Post Offices (~140,000 in rural areas) and ~3,00,000 postal employees.
- IPPB's reach and its operating model is built on the key pillars of India Stack - enabling **Paperless, Cashless and Presence-less banking** in a secure manner at the customers' doorstep, through a Core Banking Solution (CBS)-integrated smartphone and biometric device.
- IPPB delivers banking solutions through intuitive interfaces available in 13 languages to 11 crore customers across 5.57 lakh villages & towns in India.

- During **Phase 1**, more than 55,000 beneficiaries participated in IPPB Financial Literacy Camps across India, with approx. *60% female beneficiaries* mostly in the youth & economically active age group.
 - Every 2 out of 3 such beneficiaries belonged to deep rural locations ensuring maximum penetration at the grassroots levels.
- **Phase 2** will see the deployment of over **4,000 financial literacy camps** across India.
- These camps will be led by almost 40,000 women postal workers trained as Niveshak Didis, who will conduct sessions on responsible investing, fraud awareness, savings habits, and digital banking tools.

Remittance from Advanced Economies

- RBI's latest Remittance Survey shows a significant shift in India's remittance sources.
- The **Advanced Economies (AEs)** — particularly the United States, UK, Singapore, Canada, and Australia — together **accounted for more than half the total remittances in 2023-24**, overtaking the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

Remittance from Advanced Economies

- Remittances from the AEs have risen steadily in recent years.

	% of total remittances in 2023-24	% of total remittances in 2016-17
US (largest contributor)	27.7%	22.9%
UK	10.8%	3%
Canada	3.8%	3%
Singapore	6.6%	5.5%

- Although the number of Indian migrants in the US is smaller than in the GCC, they **send higher per capita remittances due to higher wages (including a higher minimum wage) and the greater purchasing power of the US dollar**.
- This pattern is also seen in other advanced economies such as Canada, the UK, Germany, and Australia, where Indian professionals earn significantly more than their counterparts in the Gulf.
- The increasing number of highly skilled Indian professionals in advanced economies, particularly in the STEM fields, finance, and healthcare, has also contributed to higher remittance inflows.

Decline in remittance from the Gulf

- ⊗ Historically, the six GCC nations — Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, and Kuwait — have been the biggest contributors of remittances to India because of the large numbers of Indian workers employed in those countries.
- ⊗ The share of the UAE in total remittances fell from 26.9% in 2016-17 to 19.2% in 2023-24, and that of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait fell from 11.6% to 6.7% and 6.5% to 3.9% respectively during the same period.
- ⊗ Multiple factors have led to a decline in remittances from the Gulf.
- ⊗ The economic downturn caused by the Covid - 19 pandemic resulted in widespread job losses and salary cuts, reducing the disposable income available for remittances.
- ⊗ Additionally, nationalisation policies — such as the Saudi Nationalisation Scheme or Nitaqat, also known as Saudisation — which prioritise local employment over foreign workers, have significantly decreased opportunities for Indian migrants.
- ⊗ The situation remains fluid, and a normalisation of economic affairs in the GCC countries could lead to an increase in remittance inflows from the region.

Trend going forward

- ⊗ Remittances from AEs, especially the US, given the policies of the current administration, could increase even further.
- ⊗ The harsh immigration policies of the US administration may make it harder to obtain green cards. These policies could force many to consider moving back to India.
- ⊗ In remittances terms, moving abroad involves draining resources from the source to the new host country. Returning to India would mean that considerable resources would come back to India in the form of remittances and other fixed assets.
- ⊗ Even if many Indian migrants do not actually return, they may choose to send higher remittances to India rather than investing in the US, due to an uncertain future in US.
- ⊗ This would reflect the behaviour of Indian workers in the Gulf, who have traditionally viewed themselves as temporary residents and prioritised sending money home over local investments.

Role of Indian Students

- A significant factor in the rise of remittances from the AEs is the increasing number of Indian students pursuing higher education abroad.
- While studying, they contribute to remittance inflows through **loan repayments**. After graduating and obtaining jobs, they might send remittances back home to their families.
- However, an increasing number of Indian students have been encountering **wilful deskilling**, in which highly educated graduates are **forced to accept low-skill jobs** in retail, delivery services, or hospitality to qualify for permanent residency.
- This situation reduces their long-term career prospects and restricts their capacity to send higher remittances.
- These students and young professionals are also especially vulnerable to abrupt changes in immigration policies, which could affect their earnings and remittance contributions further.

Way forward on Remittances

- To maximise remittance inflows and improve the welfare of migrant workers, India must focus on skill harmonisation at the sending-country level.
- Highly skilled workers must be supported for placement in roles that match their qualifications, while low-skilled workers should have access to appropriate opportunities without the risk of exploitation or forced deskilling.
- Bilateral and multilateral mobility agreements can play an important role in regulating migration and protecting workers from underemployment.

Global Trade and Outlook Statistics 2025

The World Trade Organization released the Global Trade and Outlook Statistics 2025.

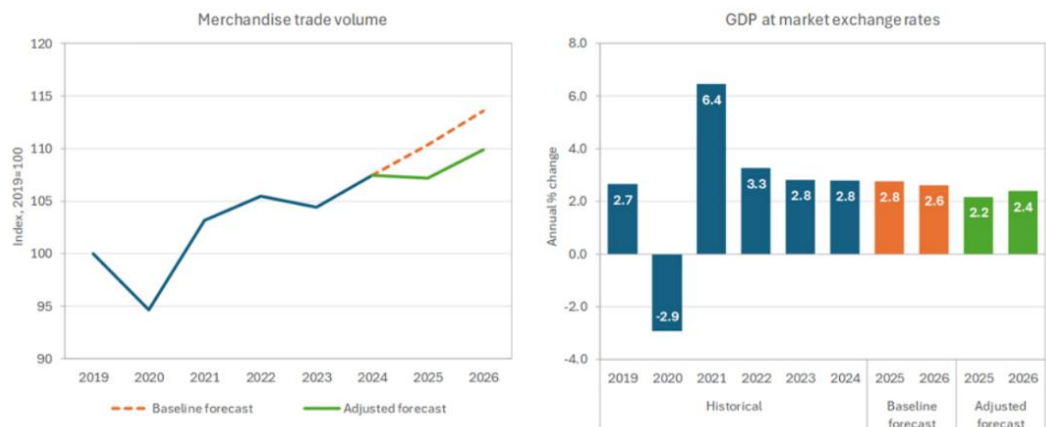
Highlights from the Report

- The **volume of world merchandise trade** is expected to **decline by 0.2%** in 2025 under current conditions, which would be nearly 3 percentage points lower than the previous forecast under a low tariff baseline scenario.
- However, severe downside risks exist, including the application of “reciprocal” tariffs and broader spillover of policy uncertainty, which could lead to an **even sharper decline of 1.5% in global goods trade**.
- This will be in sharp contrast to **2024** when the volume of **world merchandise trade grew by 2.9%** and **GDP expanded by 2.8%** making 2024 the first year since 2017 (excluding the rebound from COVID-19) where merchandise trade grew faster than output.

Commercial Services Trade

- Rising demand for services and

World merchandise trade volume and GDP growth, 2019-2026
Index, 2019=100 and annual % change



Note: Trade refers to average of exports and imports. Figures for 2025 and 2026 are projections.
Sources: WTO for historical trade statistics. WTO secretariat estimates for trade forecasts. Consensus estimates based on data from OECD, World Bank, IMF, UN, national statistics and WTO calculations for GDP.

advances in digitalization have helped expand the contribution of services to global trade.

- In 2024, **services accounted for 26.4% of global trade**, the highest share since 2005. Services trade totalled **\$8.69 trillion, increasing by 9% in 2024**. This is in sharp contrast to goods trade, which rose by only 2% in value terms in 2024.
- Although the high tariffs are limited to goods, their effects are expected to have an impact across the broader economy, including on services trade.
- The global volume of commercial **services trade is now forecast to grow by 4%**, slower than expected.
- International travel, particularly leisure travel, may be impacted by economic uncertainty, as discretionary spending on trips and accommodations can easily be reduced.
- Furthermore, various intermediate services supporting goods trade and other services such as professional, research and development, and information technology services, will likely face declining demand in the current economic climate.

Regional Impact

- North America is expected to see a 12.6% decline in exports and 9.6% drop in imports in 2025. The region's performance would subtract 1.7 percentage points from world merchandise trade growth in 2025, turning the overall figure negative.
- Asia is projected to post modest growth in both exports and imports this year (1.6% for both), along with Europe (1.0% export growth, 1.9% import growth).
- Both regions' contributions to world trade growth would remain positive under current policies, although smaller than in the baseline low tariff scenario.
- The collective contribution to world trade growth of other regions would also remain positive, partly due to their importance as producers of energy products, demand for which tends to be stable over the global business cycle.
- The disruption in US-China trade is expected to trigger significant trade diversion, raising concerns among third markets about increased competition from China.
- Chinese merchandise exports are projected to rise by 4% to 9% across all regions outside North America, as trade is redirected.
- Additionally, the restoration of US tariffs could have severe impacts for export-oriented least-developed countries (LDCs).
- This is because LDCs are particularly sensitive to external economic shocks due to their concentration of trade on a small number of products as well as their limited resources to deal with setbacks.
- Under the current situation with the pause on US' reciprocal tariffs, LDCs may benefit from trade diversion as their export structure is similar to China's, especially in textiles and electronics.

Silkyara Tunnel

- The excavation of the Silkyara tunnel in Uttarakhand has been completed and it would be **named after Baba Baukhnag, a local deity**. A portion of the tunnel had collapsed in 2023.
- The project is implemented by the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways (MoRTH), through National Highways & Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd. (NHIDCL).
 - NHIDCL is a wholly state-owned company, formed in 2014 for development of highways in states on the international borders.
- The construction of the tunnel, in the shape of a modified horseshoe, is estimated to be completed in 2026.

- The tunnel is being constructed at an estimated cost of around Rs 1,384 crore and is 4.531 kilometres long, with two lanes for bidirectional traffic.
- Falling along National Highway (NH) 134, it is built under **Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) mode**.
- It will reduce the travel distance from Dharasu to Yamunotri by about 20 km and travel time by about an hour.
- It will provide **all weather connectivity to Yamunotri**, one of the dhams on Chardham Yatra.

Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana

- The Ministry of Mines plans to set up a **Program Management Unit** for smooth implementation of Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana.
- PMKKKY was **launched in 2015**, aimed at the welfare of areas and people affected by mining-related operations, using the funds generated by District Mineral Foundations (**DMFs**) from the funds accruing to them in terms of the mining act.
- Mining companies are required to contribute **10%** and **30%** of the royalty (depending on the date of mining lease granted *after/ before* the 2015 Act) to DMFs, in addition to the royalty paid to state governments.

Objectives of PMKKKY

- > 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 socio-economics 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.
 - > 70% of the PMKKKY funds are to be utilised for high priority areas like drinking water supply, environment preservation, healthcare, education, welfare of women and children, skill development and sanitation.
 - > 30% of the PMKKKY funds are utilised for other priority areas like physical infrastructure, irrigation, energy and watershed development.
- District Mineral Foundations (DMF)**
- > 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 and the usage of the fund includes important and critical concerns.

Export Controls on Rare Earth Elements

Amid the ongoing U.S.–China trade war, Chinese authorities have imposed export controls on rare earth elements (REEs) and magnets that are needed in a range of manufacturing activities.

Rare Earth Elements

- REEs are a **series of seventeen substances** that are present in the earth's crust. Unlike its name, rare earths occur in plenty in nature, but the **rarity comes from the ability to isolate them chemically** and make them usable in industrial applications.
- Heavy and light rare earths occur naturally in several countries, such as **India, China, Myanmar, Japan, Australia and North Korea**.

China's Export Restrictions

- While rare earths are found in multiple countries, refining them, particularly heavy REEs has been an area dominated by China. Practically all heavy REEs used all over the world are refined in China.
- Therefore, Beijing has enormous control over the entire world for a range of supply chains for critical raw and intermediate materials.

- ⊙ Dysprosium's magnetic susceptibility makes it ideal for use in hard disks & car motors.
- ⊙ Gadolinium is used in nuclear reactors for shielding and in some medical equipment.
- ⊙ Lutetium is used in PET scanners and in petroleum refineries.
- ⊙ Samarium is used in powerful magnets in personal electronics.
- ⊙ Scandium–aluminium alloys are used in fighter aircraft.
- ⊙ Terbium is used in lighting for personal electronics; and
- ⊙ Yttrium is used in cancer treatments and superconductors.

- China's curbs target **dysprosium, gadolinium, lutetium, samarium, scandium, terbium, and yttrium**, seven of the seventeen elements classified as REEs.

Impact on India

- Indian supply chains may not be immediately impacted by China's export restrictions. While the government has taken steps to boost domestic production of semiconductors and defence equipment, the more advanced stages of manufacturing typically happen abroad in countries like China itself, and Japan.
- Japan has already taken steps to insulate itself from REE supply shocks, by building a months-long stockpile.
- Further, India imports a limited quantity of REEs, reflecting the state of the country's current position on global supply chains. **2,270 tonnes** of REEs were imported in 2023–24.
- India also has light REE extraction capabilities through the state-owned **Indian Rare Earths Ltd**, such as monazite extraction from beach sand in Kerala.

India's plan

- India has recognized the importance of REE production, as it is estimated to have 6% of their total deposits. It has launched the **National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM)**, which is India's strategic initiative to secure critical mineral supply chain by increasing domestic critical minerals production and foreign supply sources.
- Critical minerals are a larger umbrella under which REEs fall — in a 2022 list of 30 critical minerals notified by the Union government, all 17 REEs were one item.
- Under the NCMM, the government will facilitate or engage in 1,200 exploration projects, award exploratory licenses to incentivise private exploration, and auction more critical mineral blocks.
- The mission also aims to streamline regulatory approvals for critical mineral exploration and extraction.

Rural Growth under KVIC

- Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) has set a new record of production, sales and new employment generation in the financial year 2024-25. In the last 11 years, there has been an increase of:

447% in sales

347% in production

49.23% in employment generation

- The **production** of Khadi and Village Industry products was Rs. 26109 crore in the financial year 2013-14, it **increased nearly four times** to Rs. 116599.7 crore in FY 2024-25.
- The **sales** were Rs. 31154 crore in FY 2013-14 and it **increased nearly fivefold** to reach Rs. 170551.3 crore in FY 2024-25, which is the highest sale till date.
- While the cumulative **employment** was 1.30 crore in FY 2013-14, it rose to 1.94 crore in 2024-25
- Since the launch of the Pradhan Mantri Employment Generation Program (**PMEGP**) scheme, a total of 10 lakh units have been established.
- Implemented by KVIC, PMEGP is a major **credit-linked subsidy programme** aimed at generating self-employment opportunities through **establishment of micro-enterprises in the non-farm sector**.
- To provide employment to people in rural areas under the **Gramodyog Vikas Yojana (GVY)**, KVIC has more than doubled the budget from Rs 25.65 crore in the FY 2021-22 to Rs. 60 crore in FY 2025-26.
 - Implemented by the **Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME)**, GVY aims to create sustainable employment for rural unemployed youth to improve their skills and traditional entrepreneurship.
 - Under it, KVIC provides improved tools/ kits/machinery/ support & services and training to enhance income and production.
- In the last 10 years, 7,43,904 **trainees** have been trained through several departmental and non-departmental training centres of KVIC, out of which **57.45% are women**.

Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC)

- KVIC is a **statutory body** formed under the KVIC Act, 1956. It comes under the **Ministry of MSME**.
- It seeks to promote the development of khadi and village industries in rural areas in coordination with other agencies engaged in rural development.

Objectives

- Social objective of providing employment.
- Economic objective of producing saleable articles.
- The wider objective of creating self-reliance amongst the poor and building up of a strong rural community spirit.

- Apart from this, **80% of the 5 lakh khadi artisans are also women.**
 - In the last 11 years, the wages of Khadi artisans has been increased by 275% while in the last three years, it has been increased by 100%.

Safeguard Duty on Steel Imports

- India has imposed a **12% provisional safeguard duty for 200 days** on five steel product categories, to protect domestic players from surge in imports.
- The Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR) had found that there is a significant increase in the imports of these products into India, threatening to cause serious injury to the domestic industry/producers.
- Import of these products **increased from 2.29 million tonnes during 2021-22 to 6.61 million tonnes** during Oct. 2023- Sept. 2024. The imports have increased from **China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam.**
- The government has set the import prices between \$675 per tonne to \$964 per tonne for the five steel product categories. Any shipment imported below these import prices would attract the safeguard duty.

Safeguard duty

- **Safeguard duty** is a type of **temporary tariff** that a country imposes on **imported goods** to protect its domestic industry from sudden and unexpected rise in imports.
- It is imposed to **provide a level-playing field to domestic players.** This trade remedy is available to World Trade Organisation member-countries.
- These duties are **applicable against all the countries** with uniform rate of duty unlike the anti-dumping duties, which target specific countries.
- Unlike anti-dumping or countervailing duties, safeguard duties are usually **imposed for a limited period** and may be gradually reduced.

Impact

- As per the Indian Steel Association, the duty will protect Indian manufacturers from unfair imports and boost domestic production.
- However, MSME exporters from the engineering sector claim that any move to impose additional duties on steel imports would make domestic products uncompetitive and impact the country's outbound shipments from the sector.

Poverty and Equity Brief 2025

- The World Bank has released the Spring 2025 Poverty and Equity Brief (PEB) acknowledging India's fight against poverty.
- PEBs highlight trends in poverty, shared prosperity, and inequality for over 100 developing countries.
- It is **published twice a year** for the Spring and Annual Meetings of the World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund.
- Each PEB presents recent developments in poverty reduction, along with updated data on key development indicators.
- These indicators cover various aspects of poverty, including rates of poverty and the total number of poor, using both national poverty lines and international benchmarks (**\$2.15/day for extreme poverty, \$3.65/day for lower-middle-income, and \$6.85/day for upper-middle-income**).

Key Findings

Rural and Urban Poverty Reduction

- Extreme poverty (living on less than \$2.15 per day) fell from 16.2% in 2011-12 to **2.3%** in 2022-23, lifting 171 million people from extreme poverty.
- In rural areas, extreme poverty fell from 18.4% in 2011-12 to 2.8% in 2022-23.
- In urban centres, extreme poverty reduced from 10.7% to 1.1% over the same period.
- The gap between rural and urban poverty shrunk from 7.7 to 1.7 percentage points, with an annual decline rate of 16% between 2011-12 and 2022-23.

Strong Gains at Lower-Middle-Income Poverty Line

- India has made strong gains in reducing poverty at the lower-middle-income level, measured at \$3.65 per day.
- India's poverty rate at the lower-middle-income level, **fell from 61.8% in 2011-12 to 28.1% in 2022-23, lifting 378 million people** out of poverty.
- **Rural poverty declined from 69% to 32.5%**, while **urban poverty dropped from 43.5% to 17.2%**.
- The rural-urban poverty gap narrowed from 25 to 15 percentage points, with a 7% annual decline between 2011-12 and 2022-23.

Key States

- The five most populous states i.e. **Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar, West Bengal, and Madhya Pradesh**, represented 65% of India's extreme poor in 2011-12.
- By 2022-23, these states **contributed to two-thirds of the overall decline** in extreme poverty.

Decline in Multidimensional Poverty

- Non-monetary poverty, as measured by the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), which considers factors like **education, health, and living conditions**, declined from 53.8% in 2005-06 to 15.5% in 2022-23, reflecting on going improvements in living conditions.
- India's consumption-based Gini index improved from 28.8 in 2011-12 to 25.5 in 2022-23, indicating a reduction in income inequality.
 - The Gini index, also known as the Gini coefficient or Gini ratio, is a statistical measure that quantifies the extent of income inequality within a population.
 - It ranges from 0 to 1, with **0 representing perfect equality** (everyone has the same income) and **1 representing perfect inequality** (one person has all the income).

Employment Growth and Shifts in Workforce Trends

- Employment growth has outpaced the working-age population since 2021-22, with rising employment rates, especially among women.
- Urban unemployment fell to 6.6% in Q1 FY24/25, the lowest since 2017-18.
- Recent data indicates a shift of male workers from rural to urban areas for the first time since 2018-19, while rural female employment in agriculture has grown.
- Self-employment has risen, particularly among rural workers and women, contributing to economic participation.

Keonjhar Kalachampa

- A farmer from Odisha, whose indigenous paddy variety has gained widespread popularity in the State, has sought a share of profits from the seed's commercialisation.
- The move, if successful, would mark the first instance of a farmer in the State being compensated for conservation efforts under an initiative of the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Authority (PPV&FRA).
- Keonjhar Kalachampa is one of Odisha's 780 paddy varieties registered with the PPV&FRA.
 - The PPV&FRA was established to protect plant varieties, the rights of farmers and plant breeders, and to encourage the development of new varieties of plants through recognition and protection of the rights of the farmers, who have been conserving different plant varieties since a long time.
- Recognizing the importance of preserving traditional varieties like Kalachampa, Odisha has established a gene bank to store and conserve indigenous paddy seeds.

- This facility maintains seeds in a controlled environment, ensuring their preservation for up to 50 years.
- Keonjhar Kalachampa is known for its **high yield and tolerance to major diseases** and pests under field conditions in coastal Odisha.
- It is **non-lodging** (resistant to bending or falling over), responsive to fertilizers, suitable for both timely and late sowing, and was among the first traditional varieties of farmers in India to be integrated into the formal seed supply chain.
- Suitable for both rainfed and irrigated shallow lowlands, Kalachampa can be cultivated in both Kharif and Rabi seasons.

Nano Sulphur

- Scientists at The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) have developed nano sulphur that **increases yield of mustard by 30-40%** from 1,156 kg per acre to 1,559 kg per acre and increases oil content by 28-30%.
- DMH-11, the genetically-modified mustard, has shown per hectare yield increase by 10-40% in various multi-site trials conducted so far.
- Mustard was chosen to test the efficacy of nano sulphur because **sulphur in soil helps mustard get higher yield and higher oil content**. To improve oil content in mustard, a good amount of sulphur is needed.
- Further, use of nano sulphur on mustard crops leads to **increased plant height, branches, chlorophyll content, and biological yield**.
- It also **replaces up to 50% of traditional sulphur fertilisers** and can lead to an additional earning of up to Rs 12,000 per acre for farmers.
- **Nano sulphur is cost effective** as a 500 ml bottle of nano sulphur costs around Rs 450, while a bag of conventional sulphur in different grades varies from Rs 900-1,800.
- Nano sulphur also **solves the problem of leeching** that conventional sulphur has due to which it bypasses the roots and goes through the soft sandy soil.
 - Also, if the soil is compact, conventional sulphur gets trapped and does not reach the roots adequately. This does not happen with nano sulphur.
- In other words, if nano sulphur is applied through seed treatment, almost 90-100% is available for the plant, while in case of conventional sulphur just around 10-15% is available.
- Conventional sulphur is applied to the soil through various grades of fertilisers available in the market or individually.
- Nano sulphur could prove to be a boon for oilseed crops in India as **almost 41-45% of soils in India are deficient in sulphur**.
- Most of these soils are in **Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh**, all of which are major oilseed producers.
- Further, unlike nano urea and nano diammonium phosphate, **nano sulphur is a completely green product** that uses biological agents like plant promoting bacteria that secrete enzymes and metabolites.
- And, these enzymes and metabolites then help change the nature of the bulk material into nanoparticles.

Pipalapanka Dam

- The Odisha government's revived proposal to construct a dam at Pipalapanka in Ganjam district at the confluence of the **Rushikulya and Odangi rivers** has triggered fresh protests from environmentalists and local communities.

- While the government claims the project aims to provide irrigation to farmers, environmentalists allege that the dam is being built to supply water to industries.
- The Rushikulya river, which originates from the Rushimala hills in Kandhamal district, is considered the lifeline of Ganjam.
- Several of its **tributaries** — **Jarau, Badanadi, Baghua, Dhanei, and Ghodahada** — once ensured year-round flow but had been dammed, weakening the river from November to June.
- The Rushikulya beach is a major nesting site for **Olive Ridley sea turtles** too. The beach saw a record-breaking mass nesting event occurring in early 2025, drawing nearly 700,000 turtles.
- The Pipalapanka Dam was initially proposed in 1996, when Tata Steel planned a mega steel plant in the Chhatrapur area.
- However, widespread public protests led by environmentalists and political leaders forced Tata Steel to abandon the project. The dam proposal was also shelved.
- Pipalapanka is home to 2,000 hectares of lush forest, which sustains the livelihoods of tribal communities. All of this is at risk of submersion.
- As per environmentalists, the dam would obstruct the river's natural flow, drying up the Rushikulya from November to June
- This would collapse the river's ecosystem, disable lift irrigation systems and deplete groundwater levels — affecting tanks, wells and drinking water sources.

Kavach 5.0

- The Ministry of Railways has announced that Kavach 5.0 will be implemented to upgrade Mumbai's suburban railways, by increasing the number of trains by 30%.
- The plan is to reduce the gap of 180 seconds between two trains by 30%, which will lead to an improvement in the frequency of trains by 30%.
- Currently, Kavach 4.0 version is under implementation in the different parts of Indian Railways.

Kavach

- **Kavach** literally means **armour or shield** in Hindi. It is an indigenously developed **Automatic Train Protection (ATP) system** by Indian Railways designed to enhance safety and prevent train accidents due to human error.
- Simply put, it is a **set of electronic devices and Radio Frequency Identification devices** installed in locomotives, in the signalling system and the tracks, that coordinate with each other using ultra high radio frequencies to control the brakes of trains and also alert drivers.
- By continuously refreshing the movement information of a train, it is able to send out triggers when a loco pilot jumps signal, called Signal Passed at Danger (SPAD), a grave offence in railway operations wrt safety, and the key to accidents like collision.
- It maintains real-time location data of nearby trains to ensure safe separation. If a train ignores a red signal or exceeds speed limits, Kavach automatically applies the brakes.

New Pamban Bridge

- The Prime Minister recently inaugurated the New Pamban Bridge in Tamil Nadu.
- Rooted in history, the bridge dates back to **1914** when British engineers constructed the original Pamban Bridge, a cantilever structure **to connect Rameswaram Island with Mandapam on mainland India.**

- For over a century, it served as a critical lifeline for pilgrims, tourists, and trade but was no longer suitable for modern rail demands.
- Given the region's seismic activity, cyclones, marine corrosion and growing transportation demands a resilient, technologically advanced replacement was essential
- **Rail Vikas Nigam Limited (RVNL)**, a Navratna PSU under the Ministry of Railways, led the project, ensuring it met *higher speed, load, and maritime requirements*.
- It led to the construction of **India's first vertical lift railway sea bridge**, that is **2.07-kilometre-long** spanning the Palk Strait in Tamil Nadu.
- The 72.5-meter navigational span can be lifted **up to 17 meters**, allowing larger ships to pass underneath.
- The new bridge is 3 meters higher than the existing one, improving sea connectivity.
- The substructure is designed for two tracks, with the superstructure initially accommodating a single line.

RBI Eases Liquidity Coverage Ratio

RBI has relaxed the Liquidity Coverage Ratio (LCR) norms by introducing a new requirement: banks must now assign an additional 2.5% **run-off factor** to retail deposits accessible via internet and mobile banking (IMB) services. This is a reduction from the earlier proposed 5%.

- ✓ A **run-off factor** refers to the **percentage** of deposits that a bank expects to be withdrawn in a short-term period of stress.

Liquidity Coverage Ratio (LCR)

- The LCR is a regulatory standard designed to ensure that banks hold enough high-quality liquid assets (**HQLAs**) to cover their total net cash outflows over a 30-day stress period.
- It acts as a financial stress test to protect against short-term liquidity disruptions.
- **Origin and Implementation**
 - The LCR was developed by the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision (BCBS) following the global financial crisis.
 - Proposed in 2010 and finalized in 2014, the rule became fully applicable with a 100% minimum requirement in 2019.
- **LCR Formula**
 - $LCR = \text{High-Quality Liquid Assets (HQLA)} / \text{Total Net Cash Outflows (30 days)}$
 - The ratio reflects a bank's ability to survive a liquidity crunch for 30 days without external support.
- **Limitations of LCR (Reduced Lending Capacity):** Holding excess liquidity may limit banks' ability to offer loans.

RBI Releases Final LCR Norms

- **Digital Deposits and Run-off Factors**
 - IMB-enabled stable retail deposits will now attract a 7.5% run-off factor (up from 5%).
 - IMB-enabled less stable deposits will have a 12.5% run-off factor (up from 10%).
 - IMB includes services like internet banking, mobile banking, and UPI.
- **Implementation Timeline:** The revised norms will be effective from April 1, 2026 and apply to all commercial banks, excluding payments banks, regional rural banks, and local area banks.

Decline in Bond Yield

- Ahead of the RBI's monetary policy review and US' new tariff policy, India's benchmark 10-year bond yields fell sharply by nine basis points (bps) to 6.49% year-on-year.
- Closely following the trajectory of US bond yields, Indian bond yields have fallen 24 bps since March, after the RBI cut the repo rate by 25 bps in the February policy review.
- For FY 2024-25, the 10-year yield has plunged 62 bps so far, its biggest drop in five years.
- This decline is attributed to investors seeking safer assets ahead of US' anticipated tariff announcement.

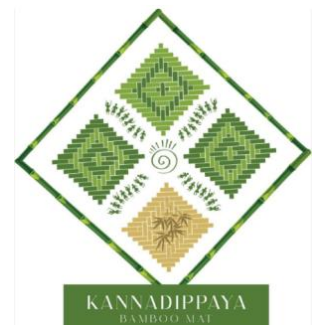
{For more details on bond yields refer The Recitals- December 2024}

Chapata Chilli Gets GI Tag

- The **Warangal Chapata Chilli** has become the 18th product from Telangana to get a geographical indication (GI) tag.
 - It is the third agricultural product from Telangana after **Banaganapalli mango** and **Tandur Reg Gram** to get GI-tagged.
- Also called **tomato chilli**, due to its bright red colour and round shape like a tomato.
- It is known for its **flaming red colour but low pungency** that puts its heat score at around 3,100-6,500 Scoville Heat Units (SHU). It is in demand due to its **natural colouring agent - paprika oleoresin**.
- It's unique characteristics can be attributed to the red and black soil of the region.
- There are three fruit types existing in the Warangal Chapata chilli, namely the single patti, double patti and odalu.

Kannadippaya Gets GI Tag

- Kannadippaya, a unique tribal handicraft from Kerala, has received the GI tag. It is the first **tribal** handicraft product from Kerala to receive the GI tag.
- It derives its name (literally meaning **mirror mat**) from its **unique reflective pattern**. The mat stands out for its unique properties — **providing warmth during winter and cooling effect in summer**.
- The craft is primarily preserved by the **Oorali, Mannan, Muthuva, Malayan, and Kadar tribal communities** and by the Ulladan, Malayarayan, and Hill Pulaya artisans in Idukki, Thrissur, Ernakulam, and Palakkad districts.
- The best quality kannadippaya is woven from **soft inner layers of reed bamboo** locally known as Njoonjileetta, Njoojoora, Ponnetta, Meieeta, and Neytheetta.
- Bamboo species such as Ochlandra sp. (called Kareetta, Pereetta, Velleeta, Chitoora, and Kanjoora) are also used.
- Historical records suggest that kannadippaya was once presented to kings by the tribal communities as a mark of honour.
- Since eco-friendly products are in demand globally, the tag will open international markets for kannadippaya.



India-Thailand Strategic Partnership

PM Modi paid a two-day visit to Thailand in order to attend the 6th BIMSTEC summit. During this visit, he held bilateral meeting with the PM of Thailand.

Key Highlights of the Visit

- **Relationship Upgraded to a Strategic Partnership**
 - PM Modi announced the elevation of bilateral ties to a "**Strategic Partnership**" following delegation-level talks with Thai PM **Paetongtarn Shinawatra**.
 - This development signifies a deepening of ties in security, trade, and regional cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.
 - The leaders agreed to establish a *Strategic Dialogue* between security agencies of both nations, signalling enhanced maritime and defence cooperation.
- **Indo-Pacific Vision and Regional Connectivity**
 - Reaffirming India's support for *ASEAN Centrality and Unity*, PM Modi underlined the shared vision of a free, open, inclusive, and rules-based Indo-Pacific.
 - He contrasted India's developmental approach (*vikaasvaad*) against expansionism (*vistaarvaad*), sending a clear message in line with India's evolving geopolitical stance in Asia.
 - A key agenda item included the signing of an Agreement on Maritime Cooperation, a strategic component given India's and Thailand's maritime interests.
- **Cultural Diplomacy and Symbolic Gestures**
 - In a powerful gesture of soft diplomacy, Thailand gifted PM Modi with the **World Tipitaka: Sajjhaya Phonetic Edition**, symbolizing shared Buddhist heritage.
 - This version was specially published in 2016 to commemorate the 70-year reign of Thai monarch King Bhumibol Adulyadej.

India – Thailand Bilateral Relation in Brief

Historical and Cultural Linkages with Thailand

- ◇ India and Thailand share civilizational ties rooted in history, culture, and religion.
- ◇ Buddhism, which originated in India, remains a key spiritual bond between the two countries.
- ◇ Ancient linkages through maritime trade routes and cultural exchanges, such as the adaptation of the Ramayana in Thai folklore as Ramakien, have ensured a long-standing mutual cultural appreciation.
- ◇ Indian influence is visible in Thai architecture, language (Sanskrit-Pali roots), traditional medicine, and performing arts.
- ◇ Thailand has historically acknowledged these ties, recently reaffirmed by the issuance of a commemorative postage stamp based on the Ramayana mural paintings during PM Modi's 2025 visit.

Political Relations between India and Thailand:

- ◇ The relationship gained momentum after India launched its '**Look East Policy**' in the early 1990s, which evolved into the '**Act East Policy**' under PM Modi.
- ◇ Thailand, in turn, has embraced its '**Act West Policy**', seeking deeper engagement with South Asia.

Economic and Commercial Relations:

- ◇ India and Thailand are important economic partners within Southeast Asia.
- ◇ During the period FY 2023-2024, Thailand was the **21st largest trading partner of India** with total bilateral trade of around USD 14.94 billion.
- ◇ Thailand is part of India's regional trade ambitions through ASEAN and BIMSTEC.
- ◇ There is a push to enhance mutual investments, MSME collaboration, and connectivity through initiatives such as the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway.

The Indian Diaspora in Thailand:

- ◇ The Indian community in Thailand, estimated at over **250,000**, includes both historical and recent migrants.
- ◇ They are primarily engaged in trade, jewellery business, hospitality, and various service sectors.

PM Modi's Visit to Saudi Arabia

- PM Modi paid a state visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This was PM Modi's third visit to Saudi Arabia.
- It followed Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's 2023 visit to India for the G20 Summit and the first meeting of the Strategic Partnership Council (SPC).

Key Highlights

- Strategic Partnership Council (SPC) Outcomes
 - **Leaders Second Meeting:** Co-chaired by PM Narendra Modi and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Jeddah.
 - **New Committees Introduced:**
 - ♣ **Defence Cooperation Committee** – to boost joint exercises, training, and defence industry collaboration.
 - ♣ **Tourism and Cultural Cooperation Committee** – to deepen cultural and people-to-people engagement.
- **High-Level Task Force on Investment (HLTF)**
 - **Saudi Investment Commitment:** Reaffirmed intent to invest **USD 100 billion** in India across diverse sectors.
 - **Key Developments:**
 - ♣ **Agreement on Two Refineries** to be set up in India.
 - ♣ **Breakthrough in Taxation Issues**, paving the way for smoother investment flow.
- **MoUs and Agreements**
 - **Space Cooperation:** MoU between Saudi Space Agency and India's Department of Space for peaceful space activities.
 - **Health Sector Collaboration:** MoU between health ministries of both nations.
 - **Anti-Doping Partnership:** MoU between Saudi Arabian Anti-Doping Committee (SAADC) and the National Anti-Doping Agency, India (NADA) for education and prevention.
 - **Postal Services Agreement:** Cooperation between Saudi Post and India Post on inward surface parcel services.

India - Saudi Arabia Bilateral Relation

- Bilateral diplomatic relations were **formally established in 1947**, and they have progressively deepened, particularly in the 21st century.
- The relationship was upgraded to a '**Strategic Partnership Council**' during PM Modi's visit in 2019, institutionalizing high-level dialogue.

Economic and Trade Relations

- India is the 2nd largest trade partner of Saudi Arabia whereas Saudi Arabia is the 5th largest trading partner of India.
- **In FY 2023-24, bilateral trade stood at USD 42.98 billion**, with Indian exports at USD 11.56 billion and imports at USD 31.42 billion.

Defence and Security Cooperation

- Defence ties have witnessed a boost through joint naval exercises (**Al-Mohed Al-Hindi**), counter-terrorism cooperation, and intelligence sharing.

Indian Diaspora in Saudi Arabia

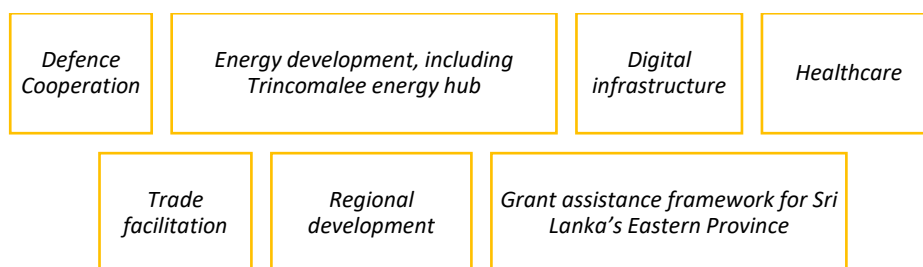
- **Over 2.4 million Indians reside in Saudi Arabia**, making them the largest expatriate group.
- The community is engaged in a range of professions and plays a crucial role in the Saudi economy.
- India is among the top beneficiaries of Hajj quotas, with **more than 1.75 lakh pilgrims participating annually**.

PM Modi's Landmark Visit to Sri Lanka

PM Narendra Modi was on a 3-day state visit to Sri Lanka. During this visit, he held high-level talks with President Anura Kumara Dissanayake and oversaw the signing of 7 MoUs across key sectors.

Key Outcomes

- **Strengthening Bilateral Ties with 7 MoUs Signed**



- **Landmark Defence Cooperation Pact**

- Sri Lanka reassured India that its territory will not be used to threaten India's security.
- Seen as a countermeasure to China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean region.

- **Focus on Clean Energy & Infrastructure**

- **Sampur solar power project** was virtually inaugurated by both leaders, supporting Sri Lanka's clean energy goals.
- Energy cooperation to develop **Trincomalee as a regional energy hub**.
- During this visit, two India-assisted railway projects were launched.
 - ♣ PM Modi inaugurated the 128 km Maho-Omanthai railway line refurbished with Indian assistance of \$91.27 million.
 - ♣ This was followed by the launch of the construction of an advanced signalling system from Maho to Anuradhapura, built with Indian grant assistance of \$14.89 million.

- **Prestigious Honour: 'Mithra Vibhushana' Medal for PM Modi**

- PM Modi became **the second foreign leader and the first Indian** to receive Sri Lanka's **highest honour**, the *Mithra Vibhushana*.
- Symbolizes recognition of Modi's role in **regional cooperation, cultural revival, and spiritual diplomacy**.

- **Historic Ceremonial Welcome at Independence Square**

- PM Modi was the **first foreign leader** to receive a **ceremonial welcome at Colombo's Independence Square**, reflecting the significance of the visit.

- **Economic Support and Future Cooperation**

- India's \$4.5 billion assistance during Sri Lanka's crisis was acknowledged as **"unprecedented."**
- Discussions included: Debt restructuring; Currency swap proposal to aid macroeconomic stability.

- **Tech support**

- India provided ₹300 crore grant to support Sri Lanka's Digital Identity Project.
- Focus on collaboration in digitalization across multiple domains including governance, services, and financial inclusion.

Student Visa Revocations in U.S.

The Trump administration has targeted visas of individuals suspected of participating in campus protests or even loosely associated with supporting human rights in Gaza.

U.S. Policy on Student Visas: Recent Changes and Crackdown

- **Student Visa Is a Privilege, Not a Right**

- Officials justified visa revocations by citing campus disruptions and claimed that student participation in such organised protest movements can warrant visa denial.

- **Legal Basis for Revocation**

- Under the **U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952**, the Secretary of State has the authority to revoke visas of foreign nationals deemed a threat to public order or national interests.

- **Scrutiny of New Visa Applicants**

- U.S. immigration officials have begun closely examining new F (academic), J (exchange), and M (vocational) visa applications.
- With this, it aims to refuse visas to individuals linked to protest movements, especially those seen as anti-Semitic.

- **'Catch and Revoke' Programme**

- Initiated under Trump's second term, this programme led to over 300 student visas being revoked by March 27.
- Indian students are reportedly among those affected.
- The programme is linked to an executive order signed in January to counter anti-Semitism on campuses.
- Visa revocations are partly based on AI-assisted reviews of students' social media activity.

- **Pressure on Universities**

- The Trump administration has also cut federal funding to prominent universities like Columbia, UPenn, and Johns Hopkins.
- This is part of its broader crackdown, signalling tough measures against institutions perceived to tolerate such movements.

Trump's Reciprocal Tariffs

- On April 2, US President Donald Trump marked "**Liberation Day**" by announcing reciprocal tariffs on major trading partners.
- Later, the **suspension of additional tariffs** on various countries, including India, **for 90 days** until July 9 this year was announced.
 - The countries included in the tariff pause will now face a reduced 10% tariff, as the U.S. plans individual negotiations with each nation.
- President Trump's tariffs mark a protectionist shift more intense than the 1930s Smoot-Hawley Act, which had worsened the Great Depression.

- The reciprocal tariff logic implies more hikes if other nations retaliate. Experts fear there is only two paths from here: either negotiation or escalation.

Announcement of Reciprocal Tariffs

- **Base Tariff**

- A **10% base tariff** will be imposed on all countries.
- This is a significant increase from the **pre-Trump tariff rate of 2.5%**.
- The base tariff will take effect from **April 5**.

- **Country-Specific Tariffs**

- **Additional tariffs** will be applied based on how much each country charges on US goods.
- These tariffs are set at “**half the rate**” of what the US estimates other countries impose.
- President Trump cited American “kindness” as the reason for this **discounted approach**.

Country	Trump estimates of tariffs on US goods	Trump's 'reciprocal' tariffs	US trade deficit in 2024 (with a minus sign) in \$ millions	US Trade Deficit as a percentage of the total US Trade deficit	Per capita income (US is at \$ 89,680)
Cambodia	97%	49%	-12,300	1.0	\$ 2,950
Vietnam	90%	46%	-1,22,071	10.1	\$ 4,990
Sri Lanka	88%	44%	NA	NA	NA
Bangladesh	74%	37%	-6,152	0.5	\$ 2,770
Thailand	72%	36%	-45,609	3.8	\$ 7,750
China	67%	34%	-2,95,402	24.6	\$ 13,870
Taiwan	64%	32%	-73,937	6.1	\$ 34,920
Indonesia	64%	32%	-17,883	1.5	\$ 5,250
Switzerland	61%	31%	-38,463	3.2	\$ 1,11,720
South Africa	60%	30%	-8,837	0.7	\$ 6,520
Pakistan	58%	29%	-2,989	0.2	NA
India	52%	26%	-45,664	3.8	\$ 2,940
South Korea	50%	25%	-66,007	5.5	\$ 37,670
Japan	46%	24%	-68,468	5.7	\$ 35,610
Malaysia	47%	24%	-24,830	2.1	\$ 14,420
EU	39%	20%	-2,31,769	19.3	\$ 45,240
Israel	33%	17%	-7,425	0.6	\$ 54,370
Philippines	34%	17%	-4,880	0.4	\$ 4,440
UK	10%	10%	11,857	-1.0	\$ 54,280
Brazil	10%	10%	7,351	-0.6	\$ 10,820
Singapore	10%	10%	2,829	-0.2	\$ 93,960
Chile	10%	10%	NA	NA	\$ 17,930
Australia	10%	10%	-73,927	6.1	\$ 67,980
Turkey	10%	10%	-1,453	0.1	\$ 16,880
Colombia	10%	10%	1,347	-0.1	\$ 7,900
World			-12,02,872		\$ 14,450

Analysis of the Tariffs: Kindness or Economic Strategy

- **Disproportionate Impact on Low-Income Countries**

- Cambodia, with a low per capita income of \$2,950 and contributing just 1% to the US trade deficit, faces the highest tariffs.
- Bangladesh, with an even lower per capita income and only 0.5% of the US trade deficit, faces a 37% tariff.

- **Lighter Tariffs on Major Deficit Contributors**

- China, which accounts for 25% of the US trade deficit, initially faced a 34% tariff.
- The EU, responsible for ~20% of the deficit, faces a 20% tariff.
- Only three regions (China, EU, and Vietnam) contribute double-digit shares to the US trade deficit.

- **Wealthier Nations Not Exempt**

- Countries **richer than the US per capita** (Switzerland and Singapore) also face tariffs.

- **Trade Surplus Countries Also Affected**

- Even countries where the US enjoys a trade surplus—like the UK, Brazil, Singapore, and Colombia—also face tariff increases.

[For detailed discussion on reciprocal tariff, refer *The Recitals – February 2025*]

US-Iran Nuclear Talks

- The unexpected talks between Iran and the US in Muscat (Oman) mark a significant shift, mainly driven by changes on the Iranian side.
- While both sides entered with deep disagreements—especially over whether the talks are "direct" or "indirect"—they still chose to negotiate.
- This was surprising given the hostile backdrop, including US military actions against Iran-backed Houthis.

Iran's Strategic Shift Amid Economic and Generational Pressures

- **Generational Shift in Iranian Society**
 - The average Iranian is 32 years old and has not experienced the defining events of older leaders — the 1979 revolution, the Iran-Iraq War, or the 1989 leadership succession.
 - Youth-led protests have been managed by the regime through a mix of coercion and limited reforms.
 - These newer generations are less ideologically bound and more focused on economic opportunity and social change.
- **Economic Pressures and Sanctions Fatigue**
 - Iran's "resistance economy" was built in response to Trump's "maximum pressure" policy since 2018.
 - With inflation and unemployment still high, Iran needs over \$100 billion in foreign investment to achieve meaningful growth.
 - President Masoud Pezeshkian and key figures like Abbas Araghchi support renewed economic engagement, including with US companies.
 - Even Supreme Leader Khamenei is reportedly not opposed to genuine American investment.
- **Internal Political Dynamics**
 - Reformists are using the country's economic vulnerability to advocate for a new nuclear deal.
 - Conservative hardliners, while cautious, are not obstructing the process—indicating a rare political alignment in favor of negotiations.
- **Changing Regional Environment**
 - Iran's regional network, the "Axis of Resistance," has been weakened.
 - Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia, which once opposed the 2015 nuclear deal, are now in favor of diplomatic resolution and regional economic integration.
- **International Influences**
 - Even allies like Russia, previously supportive of Iran's nuclear stance, are now encouraging a return to diplomacy—especially given Iran's support for Russia in Ukraine.
 - There is growing international consensus, even among Iran's traditional partners, that a negotiated nuclear deal is the preferred path forward.

[For discussion on 2015 Iran Nuclear Deal, refer The Recitals – March 2025]

Optional Practical Training Program in US

- A bill titled ***The Fairness for High-Skilled Americans Act of 2025*** was introduced recently in the US House of Representatives.
- The bill **proposes ending** the Optional Practical Training (OPT) program, which permits international students to work **temporarily** in the US **after completing their studies**.

- The move comes amid concerns that such programs, like the H-1B visa and OPT, reduce job opportunities for American workers.
 - Experts argue that the OPT program:
 - ♣ Undercuts American workers, especially recent graduates and high-skilled professionals.
 - ♣ Provides tax incentives to employers to hire cheaper foreign labor.
 - ♣ Circumvents H-1B visa caps, creating a loophole for businesses.
 - ♣ Allows employers to avoid payroll taxes like FICA (*Federal Insurance Contributions Act*) and Medicare.
- Critics, on the other hand, warn the move could harm US businesses dependent on skilled foreign talent.

Optional Practical Training (OPT) program

- ◊ It allows international students in the US on F-1 visas to work temporarily in a field related to their area of study.
 - The F-1 visa is a non-immigrant **student visa** that allows international students to enter the United States to pursue full-time academic studies.
- ◊ **Types of OPT**
 - **Pre-Completion OPT** - Students can work before completing their studies, provided they have completed at least one academic year of full-time study.
 - **Post-Completion OPT** - Allows students to work after graduation in their field of study for up to 12 months.
- ◊ **Extension for STEM Students**
 - Students pursuing degrees in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) can apply for a 24-month extension, enabling them to work in the US for up to three years after graduation.
- ◊ **Indian Students and OPT**
 - Among the 3.31 lakh Indian students in the US in 2023–24, around 29% (97,556 students) were on OPT.
 - Many Indian students opt for STEM OPT extensions as a way to earn, repay student loans, and potentially transition to an H-1B visa.

US Puts India on Watch List Over IP Rights Enforcement

- The U.S. once again placed India on its 'Priority Watch List' in the US Trade Representative's (USTR's) 2025 Special 301 report, citing India as one of the most challenging major economies for the protection and enforcement of intellectual property rights (IPRs).
- The report states that while India has made some efforts—like raising IP awareness and increased engagement with the U.S.—there has been limited progress on long-standing IP concerns.
- **Criticism of Patent Regime:** Key issues highlighted include:
 - Threat of Patent Revocations
 - Discretionary interpretation of patentability under the Indian Patents Act
 - Delays in patent grants and excessive reporting requirements
 - Lack of clarity in legal interpretations
- **India's Response: TRIPS-Compliant Regime**
 - India maintains that the U.S. report is a unilateral measure under the U.S. Trade Act, 1974 and asserts its IPR laws are fully compliant with the WTO's TRIPS agreement.
 - A trade expert reaffirmed India's comprehensive legal and institutional IPR framework.
- **Impact on India-U.S. Trade Relations**
 - The report comes amid negotiations for a bilateral trade agreement aiming to raise India-U.S. commerce to \$500 billion by 2030.
 - The U.S. is also aiming to reduce its \$41.18 billion trade deficit with India.

Russia's Strategic Interests in Crimea

- U.S. President Donald Trump, in an interview, stated that Crimea will stay with Russia and suggested that the region had effectively been handed to Putin during Obama's presidency.
- He reportedly urged Ukraine to accept a peace deal recognizing Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea.

- Experts caution that while tolerating a long-term occupation might be pragmatic, formally accepting a border change enforced by military force would mark a significant and troubling shift in U.S. foreign policy.



The Strategic Importance of Crimea

- **Geographic Significance**
 - Crimea holds immense strategic value due to its location, benefiting both from its own geography and that of Russia.
- **Russia’s Historical Quest for Warm Water Ports**
 - Most of Russia’s coastline lies in the Arctic region, making many ports unusable during winter.
 - Hence, gaining access to warm water ports has been a long-standing goal of Russian foreign policy.
- **Black Sea – Russia’s Gateway to the Mediterranean**
 - The Black Sea provides Russia with its warmest waters and the only direct maritime access to the Mediterranean via the Turkish-controlled Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits.
 - Control of these straits has historically been viewed as critical to Russia’s economic and military interests.
- **Sevastopol – The Naval Stronghold**
 - Unlike other shallow Black Sea ports, Sevastopol in Crimea is a deep-water port ideal for hosting the Black Sea Fleet.
 - It has been central to Russia’s maritime strategy since the 18th century and became a focal point in post-Soviet tensions with Ukraine.
- **Post-Soviet Disputes and Agreements**
 - After the Soviet Union's collapse, the 1997 Kharkiv Pact allowed Russia to retain its naval base in Sevastopol, even though Crimea was part of Ukraine.
 - This lease was extended until 2042, but Russia unilaterally ended the agreement during its 2014 annexation of Crimea.

India’s Exports to America, Imports from China Reach All-Time High in 2024-25

- In 2024–25, the **US remained India’s largest trading partner** for the fourth consecutive year, with bilateral trade reaching \$131.84 billion.
- China retained its position as the second-largest partner, with trade growing to \$127.7 billion.
- Historically, China was India’s top trading partner between **2013–14** and **2017–18**, and again in **2020–21**. The US has held the top spot since 2021–22.
 - Prior to China, the **UAE** held the top spot.

India–US Trade Registers Strong Growth in FY25

- India’s exports to the US rose by 11.6%, reaching **\$86.51 billion in 2024–25**
- Imports from the US increased by 7.44% to \$45.33 billion
- Resulting trade surplus for India stood at \$41.18 billion, an increase from \$35.32 billion in the previous year.
- **Future Outlook: Targeting \$500 Billion by 2030**
 - India and the US are **negotiating a trade agreement** aimed at boosting bilateral trade.
 - The shared goal: **increase total trade to \$500 billion by 2030.**

China Remains India's Second-Largest Trading Partner

- In 2024–25, India–China bilateral trade rose to \$127.7 billion, up from \$118.4 billion in 2023–24.
- **Trade Deficit with China Widens Sharply**
 - ◊ **India's exports to China** fell by **14.5%**, dropping to **\$14.25 billion**
 - ◊ **Imports from China** surged by **11.52%** to **\$113.45 billion**
 - ◊ This caused India's **trade deficit with China to widen by 17%**, reaching **\$99.2 billion**.
- **Analysis**
 - ◊ Experts noted that India's growing trade deficit with China reflects structural dependency, not just trade imbalance.
 - ◊ They termed it a "competitiveness crisis", as exports to China have fallen below FY14 levels despite a weaker rupee.

Mehul Choksi Arrested in Belgium

- Mehul Choksi, a key accused in the ₹13,500 crore Punjab National Bank fraud case, was arrested in Belgium.
- India has requested his extradition for trial. Choksi had moved to Belgium last year for cancer treatment after living in **Antigua** and **Barbuda** as a citizen since 2018.

Hurdles India May Face in Extraditing Mehul Choksi

- **2021 Dominica Kidnapping Allegation:** Choksi's lawyers are expected to highlight the controversial 2021 incident where he was allegedly abducted from **Antigua** and taken to **Dominica**.
 - ◊ Indian officials had arrived in Dominica to bring him back, but the attempt failed amid allegations of abduction and coercion.
- **Allegations of Forced Consent undermined his legal rights:** Choksi's legal team claims he was forced to sign a document consenting to return to India, which was meant to bypass legal protections he enjoyed as a citizen of Antigua.
- **Interpol Red Corner Notice Withdrawal:** In 2023, Interpol withdrew its Red Corner Notice against Choksi, citing concerns over the alleged abduction & risk of an unfair trial in India.
- **Human Rights and Health Concerns:** Choksi's defence is likely to argue that poor prison conditions in India, possible human rights violations, and his deteriorating health make extradition unsafe and unjust.
- **Complications Due to Antiguan Citizenship:** His lawyers may argue that Belgium must consider his citizenship status in Antigua before approving extradition to a third country.

Legalities Involved in Mehul Choksi's Case

◊ Extradition Treaty with Belgium

- India and Belgium have an extradition treaty dating back to 1901, which permits extradition based on dual criminality—the crime must be punishable in both countries.
- The treaty excludes extradition for political offences or if the accused claims political persecution.

◊ Legal Timeframe

- Belgium must receive evidence of Choksi's culpability from India within two months, or he will be released.

◊ Agencies Involved

- Choksi was arrested following requests by the CBI and ED. These agencies will now prepare a detailed legal case aligned with Belgian laws.

◊ Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (2020)

- India and Belgium signed this treaty to facilitate better cooperation in legal matters, including extraditions.

◊ Challenges Ahead

- Despite the arrest, Choksi's return to India may take a long time. European extradition processes are typically slow and complex.

◊ Past Precedents

- India's extradition efforts in Europe—like those involving Nirav Modi and Vijay Mallya in the UK—have faced prolonged delays, indicating that Choksi's extradition may also be drawn out.

India Expands its Extended Continental Shelf Claim in Arabian Sea

- India has expanded its Extended Continental Shelf (ECS) claim **by nearly 10,000 sq km** in the **Central Arabian Sea**.
- India has also **modified earlier claims** to avoid a long-standing maritime boundary dispute with Pakistan.
- Revised submissions were made in April 2025 to the **United Nations' Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS)**.

Background - Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and ECS

- **EEZ:** Coastal countries have exclusive rights to mining, fishing, and resources up to 200 nautical miles from their baselines.
- **ECS:** Countries can **claim additional seabed areas** if they can **scientifically prove it is a natural extension** of their landmass to the CLCS.
 - Rights include commercial mining of **polymetallic nodules**, oil reserves, and other valuable minerals.

India's Current Oceanic Claims

- **12 nautical miles:** Territorial Sea.
- **200 nautical miles:** EEZ.
- **New extension:** ~1.2 million sq km of ECS being added to ~2 million sq km EEZ.
- **Combined seabed and sub-seabed area:** It would become almost equal to India's land area of 3.274 million sq km.
- **India's first submission to the CLCS:** It was made in **2009** covering the Bay of Bengal, Indian Ocean, and Arabian Sea.

Dispute with Pakistan and Sir Creek Issue

- In **2021**, Pakistan objected to India's claims, citing an overlap of 100 nautical miles near the disputed Sir Creek region.
 - **Sir Creek** is a disputed tidal estuary between Rann of Kutch in Gujarat and Sindh province (Pakistan).
- As a result, CLCS rejected India's full claim in the Arabian Sea in March 2023.
- **April 2025:** India submitted two partial claims to safeguard uncontested regions.
 - This approach **avoids weakening India's position** in the valuable Central Arabian Sea region.

India's Closure of Transshipment Facility for Bangladesh

- India has withdrawn the transshipment facility for Bangladeshi exports to third countries via Indian ports and airports.
- **Official Reason:** Cited congestion at Indian ports and airports.
- **Immediate Impact:** Affects Bangladeshi apparel exports via air freighters, including for global brands like Zara.
- **Trigger: Bangladesh's Trade Restrictions on India**
 - **Yarn Import Ban:** In March, Bangladesh **suspended Indian yarn imports** through land ports.
 - **Port Closures:** The interim government **closed three land ports** (Chilahati, Daulatganj, Tegamukh) and **suspended operations at Balla port**, affecting bilateral trade flow.
- **Not Impacting Regional Transit:** The order will **not affect Dhaka's exports to Nepal and Bhutan** through Indian territory.
- **Background: Strained Bilateral Relations**

- **Political Tensions:** Relations worsened following **Sheikh Hasina's departure** amid mass protests in August last year.
- **Rise in Violence:** The interim government, led by **Muhammad Yunus**, failed to curb **attacks on minorities**, particularly Hindus.
- **Diplomatic Outreach:** PM Modi previously expressed India's desire for "**positive and constructive**" ties with Bangladesh at a BIMSTEC meeting in Thailand.

Dubai's Crown Prince Visit to India

The Crown Prince of Dubai, Sheikh Hamdan Bin Mohammed Al Maktoum, visited India to bolster trade and strategic relations between India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Key Outcomes

- The two sides decided six outcomes:
 - setting up of a campus of IIM, Ahmedabad in Dubai and commencement of first MBA programme in September 2025;
 - setting up of the first overseas campus of Indian Institute of Foreign Trade at the India Pavilion in Expo City Dubai;
 - starting construction work of **Bharat Mart** and the launch of a 3-D rendering of the Bharat Mart complex;
 - grant of land for UAE-India Friendship Hospital in Dubai;
 - development of ship-repair clusters at Kochi and Vadinar and opening of an India Office of Dubai Chamber of Commerce.
- **Economic and Trade Engagements**
 - **Bilateral Trade Growth:** Trade expected to **cross USD 97 billion**, targeting **USD 100 billion non-oil trade**.
 - **Virtual Trade Corridor (VTC):** Recognised as a **key component** of the IMEEC (India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor).
 - **MAITRI Interface:** Developed to support VTC operations and boost efficiency.
 - **India Office of Dubai Chamber of Commerce:** To deepen business ties; Indian companies dominate foreign investments in Dubai.
- **Healthcare Collaboration**
 - **India-UAE Friendship Hospital:** Dubai government allocated land for a **100-bed hospital**.
 - **Focus:** Affordable healthcare for **blue-collar Indian workers**.
- **Ship Repair Cluster MoU:**
 - Signed between **Cochin Shipyard Ltd** and **Drydocks World (DP World)**.
 - Locations: **Kochi (Kerala)** and **Vadinar (Gujarat)**.
 - Expected to introduce **global best practices** and expand offshore fabrication capabilities.

Extradition of Tahawwur Rana

- More than 16 years after the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks, **key conspirator Tahawwur Rana** has been **extradited from the United States to India**.
- His arrival represents a **significant milestone in India's counterterrorism efforts** and highlights the success of **ongoing diplomatic, legal, and intelligence collaboration** between India and the US.
- **India-US cooperation**

- **Extradition treaty basis:** India-US Extradition Treaty.
- **Key support:** US Department of Justice, Sky Marshal, and Indian intelligence.
- **Diplomatic coordination:** MEA, MHA, NIA, and Indian Embassy in the US.

Kailash Mansarovar Yatra to Resume After 5 Years

- India announced the resumption of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra from June to August 2025, after a five-year suspension.
- The yatra was halted in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the military standoff in eastern Ladakh.
- The Ministry of External Affairs will organize:
 - 5 batches (50 yatris each) via Lipulekh Pass (Uttarakhand).
 - 10 batches (50 yatris each) via Nathu La Pass (Sikkim).

Available Routes for the Yatra

Lipulekh Pass Route (Uttarakhand)	Nathu La Pass Route (Sikkim)
Most direct but physically demanding Involves around 200 km of trekking Lies near the trijunction of India, Nepal, and Tibet Operational since 1981 until halted in 2020	Fully motorable except for the 35–40 km circumambulation of Mount Kailash Longer (approx. 1,500 km), but easier for older or physically less active pilgrims Operational since 2015

Lapu-Lapu Day

- Recently, a tragic incident occurred in Vancouver, Canada, where a man drove a car into a crowd during Filipino community celebrations, killing nine people and injuring several others.
- The incident happened amid **Lapu-Lapu Day celebrations**, attended by thousands.
- Lapu-Lapu Day commemorates the **Battle of Mactan**, fought on April 27, 1521, where the Filipino chieftain Lapulapu defeated the Spanish forces led by Ferdinand Magellan.
- It is seen as a symbol of resistance against colonial rule.
 - British Columbia declared April 27 as Lapu-Lapu Day in 2023, recognizing the contributions and heritage of its large Filipino community.

UNESCO's Memory of the World Register

The manuscripts of the *Bhagavad Gita and Bharata's Natyashastra* have been added to UNESCO's Memory of the World Register among 74 new entries.

India's Contributions to UNESCO's Memory of the World Register

- India has made **13 submissions** to the Register, including two joint entries with other nations.
- **Range of Submissions**
 - India's entries span ancient scriptures, philosophical works, and modern political archives. E.g.
 - ♣ Archives of the Dutch East India Company (added in 2003)
 - ♣ Rig Veda (added in 2005)
 - ♣ Works of Shaivite philosopher Abhinavagupta (added in 2023)
 - ♣ Archives of the first Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit, Belgrade, 1961 (added in 2023)
- **Joint Submissions**
 - **NAM summit archives:** Jointly submitted with Algeria, Egypt, India, Indonesia, and Serbia
 - **Dutch East India Company archives:** Jointly submitted with Indonesia, Netherlands, South Africa, and Sri Lanka.

About UNESCO's Memory of the World Programme

☉ Launched in 1992, UNESCO's Memory of the World (MoW) Programme aims to protect valuable archive holdings and library collections worldwide.

☉ It seeks to prevent "collective amnesia" by ensuring the preservation and wide accessibility of the world's documentary heritage.

Objective and Vision

» The programme upholds that the world's documentary heritage belongs to all and must be preserved, protected, and made permanently accessible, respecting cultural contexts and practicalities.

☉ The MoW Register

» At the heart of the programme is the Memory of the World Register — a curated list of documents, manuscripts, oral traditions, audio-visual materials, and archival holdings of global significance and universal value.

☉ Updates and Submissions

» The Register has been updated biennially since 1997, with exceptions between 2017 and 2023.

» A maximum of two submissions per country are considered for inclusion in any given year.

» The number of new additions ranges from 9 (in 1999) to 78 (in 2017).

☉ Current Status and Notable Inclusions

» The Register now features 570 entries.

Natyashastra: A Pillar of Indian Performing Arts

- Traditionally attributed to **sage Bharata**, the Natyashastra is an ancient Sanskrit treatise on performing arts.
- It comprises around 36,000 verses detailing drama (natya), performance (abhinaya), music (sangita), emotions (bhava), and aesthetic experience (rasa).
- Scholars estimate its compilation between 500 BCE and 500 CE, with UNESCO citing around the 2nd century BCE as the most likely period.

Bhagavad Gita: A Timeless Spiritual Dialogue

- Traditionally ascribed to sage Vyasa, the Bhagavad Gita is a Sanskrit scripture consisting of 700 verses divided into 18 chapters.
- It is embedded within the sixth book (Bhishma Parva) of the epic Mahabharata.
- **Dating and Composition**
 - While the text is generally dated to the first or second century BCE, some scholars, like Winthrop Sargeant, suggest it was first written down in the second or third centuries CE after an earlier oral tradition.

India Supports 1st Global Carbon Tax to Decarbonise Shipping Sector

- **India + 62 other countries** voted in favour of the **world's first-ever global carbon tax** imposed on the shipping industry by the United Nations' shipping agency.
- The agreement was reached at the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) headquarters in London recently.
 - IMO is the United Nations specialized agency with responsibility for the safety and security of shipping and the prevention of marine and atmospheric pollution by ships.
 - IMO's work supports the UN SDGs.
- This marks a significant step in the global fight against climate change, especially in a sector previously untouched by the Paris Agreement.
- **MARPOL Integration:** The framework will be added as Chapter 5 to Annex VI (Prevention of air pollution from ships) of the **MARPOL Convention**

Background and Significance of the Global Tax

- ⊕ **Commercial shipping contributes about 3% of global greenhouse gas emissions.** Despite this, it had remained outside the scope of global climate pacts like the Paris Agreement.
- ⊕ The new decision by the IMO aims to plug that gap.
- ⊕ This carbon pricing system, which **will come into effect in 2028**, will require large vessels (above 5,000 gross tonnage) to either adopt cleaner fuel technologies or pay a penalty based on their emission intensity.
 - A carbon pricing system is a mechanism to address climate change by assigning a monetary cost to carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions, encouraging reductions in emissions and investment in cleaner technologies.
- ⊕ **According to the agreement:**
 - Ships will pay **\$100 to \$380 per tonne** of CO₂ emitted, depending on compliance thresholds.
 - The policy aims to generate up to **\$40 billion by 2030**, which will be reinvested to **decarbonise the maritime sector**.

Limitations

- It is projected to reduce shipping emissions by **only 10% by 2030**, whereas the IMO's own target is a **20-30% cut** by that year.
- Additionally, **revenues will be exclusively allocated to the maritime sector**, excluding broader climate adaptation or mitigation efforts, which has sparked criticism from vulnerable island nations.
- **Concerns from Developing Nations**
 - They advocated for a portion of the revenue to support **broader climate finance** needs.
 - Countries like **Tuvalu** and **Vanuatu** criticized the lack of transparency and the weakened ambition in the final design.
 - The policy's failure to support the **1.5°C temperature goal under the Paris Agreement** was seen as a missed opportunity.
- **Technical Details Pending**
 - Though the framework has been approved (to be formally adopted in October 2025), several operational aspects remain undecided.
 - Mechanisms for **revenue distribution, emissions verification, and compliance tracking** are still being negotiated.

150th Assembly of Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

- The 150th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) was held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. India was represented by the Lok Sabha Speaker Shri Om Birla.
- In his keynote address, Indian Lok Sabha Speaker emphasized the inclusive and welfarist character of the Indian Constitution.
- Shri Birla underlined those recent legislative efforts by the Indian Parliament, such as:
 - Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016; Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019; Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023; New Labour Code; etc.

- **About IPU**

- IPU is a global organization of national parliaments established in 1889 to promote democratic governance, peace, and cooperation between nations through parliamentary diplomacy.
- It acts as a platform for parliaments to discuss global issues, exchange best practices, and work together on shared challenges like sustainable development and human rights.

Landmine Ban Treaty

- Poland, Finland, and the three Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) have announced plans to withdraw from the **1997 Ottawa Convention banning anti-personnel landmines**, citing heightened security threats from Russia.
 - Norway is the only European nation bordering Russia that has not signaled withdrawal.
- Anti-personnel landmines continue to cause extensive civilian harm. According to the ICRC (*International Committee of the Red Cross*), over 80% of landmine victims are civilians.
- Despite the requirement under the Ottawa Convention to destroy landmine stockpiles within four years, not all countries have complied. Poland has now announced intentions to resume production.

India Working on Military Space Doctrine

- Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan announced that India is in the final stages of formulating a Military Space Doctrine, expected to be released within two to three months.
- This is an important step as the world is on the “cusp of an era” where space is becoming a key domain of warfare, necessitating preparedness through structured doctrines, research, and institutional frameworks.

India's Key Developments in Space Security

- **Adherence to Space Norms**
 - India adheres to major international space treaties including:
 - ♣ 1967 Outer Space Treaty (OST)
 - ♣ 1968 Rescue Agreement
 - ♣ 1972 Liability Convention
 - ♣ 1974 Registration Convention
 - ♣ 1979 Moon Agreement
 - India through ISRO is a member of the Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee (IADC) and follows the 2008 Debris Mitigation Guidelines.
- **India's Key Developments in Space Security**
 - **2010 – Integrated Space Cell:** Enhanced coordination between the Department of Space and Armed Forces.
 - **GSAT-9 (2017):** Used space diplomacy through the South Asia Satellite, strengthening regional influence (excluding Pakistan).
 - **2018 – Defence Space Agency (DSA):** Formed to address space-based military threats.
 - ♣ DSA is playing a central role in: Drafting the military space doctrine; Building an integrated satellite communication grid; Identifying and countering threats to national security from both state and non-state actors.
 - **2019 ASAT Test (Mission Shakti):** India demonstrated its counter-space capabilities, joining the US, Russia, and China.
 - **2023 – Indian Space Policy (ISP):** First formal space policy, although it lightly touches upon “national security”. It creates four distinct, but related entities, that will facilitate greater **private sector participation** in activities that have usually been the traditional domain of ISRO. These 4 entities are:



Need For a Space Security Doctrine

- ▶ **Rising Global Concerns Over Weaponisation of Outer Space**
 - ▶ In April 2024, Russia vetoed a UN Security Council resolution (drafted by the US and Japan) to prevent an arms race in outer space.
 - ▶ UN has called for a legally binding instrument to prevent arms race in outer space, but Russia and China rejected the 2024 draft resolution.
 - ▶ This follows fears of Russia developing nuclear anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons.
 - ▶ Military use of space has been ongoing since Sputnik (1957), with increasing threats of space warfare and space-based defence systems.
- ▶ **Militarization Trends: Space as the Fifth Operational Domain**
 - ▶ NATO declared space a fifth operational domain in 2019, reflecting its critical role in defence.
 - ▶ Countries like the US and Russia have created independent space forces and formulated doctrines to secure space dominance.
 - ▶ The failure of global consensus on responsible behaviours (e.g., the 2023 Working Group report) reflects growing mistrust among major powers.
- ▶ **Geopolitical and Astropolitical Tensions**
 - ▶ India faces growing geopolitical and astropolitical tensions, especially with China and Pakistan.
 - ▶ China's space advancements, including the **Space Silk Road** and PLA's restructured security forces (including Aerospace and Cyberspace), pose direct security challenges.
- ▶ **Other Factors**
 - ▶ Rising threats such as orbital, kinetic, electronic warfare, and cyber threats necessitate resilient space-based systems.
 - ▶ India's expanding space capabilities demand clear institutional frameworks to integrate civil, commercial, and military space activities.
 - ▶ Military space operations are critical for - Safeguarding national security; Addressing vulnerabilities of space-based systems; Tackling emerging space-based threats.

- **52-Satellite Constellation for Defence:** The government has approved the launch of a 52-satellite constellation for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR).
 - ♣ 31 satellites to be built by the private sector
 - ♣ Execution in partnership with ISRO and private players
 - ♣ Aimed at bridging operational gaps and preparing for future threats
- **International Partnerships:** India is strengthening space cooperation with QUAD, France, and others.

Conclusion: Towards a Space-Ready Military

- India's ongoing reforms in the space sector and the development of military space doctrines and policies reflect a **strategic shift** towards embracing **space as a crucial frontier for national security**.
- These initiatives aim to **build resilience, foster innovation, and integrate military, civil, and private capabilities** for a robust space defence architecture.

India's Rafale-M Deal with France

- India has signed a ₹63,000 crore agreement with France to procure 26 Rafale-Marine (Rafale-M) fighter jets for the Indian Navy.
- The order includes: 22 single-seater jets for carrier operations; 4 twin-seater trainer jets (non-carrier compatible).
- Deliveries will begin in 2028-29 & is expected to be completed by 2031-32
- **Rafale**
 - The Rafale, made by Dassault Aviation, is a twin-engine omnirole fighter aircraft known for its versatility and multi-mission capability, often likened to a Swiss Army Knife.
 - Though not a 5th-gen stealth aircraft, it has low radar visibility features, classifying it as a 4.5-generation fighter, offering high capability at lower cost than aircraft like F-35(5th Generation).

✓ How is the Rafale-M Different?

- The **Rafale-M** is tailored for **carrier-based operations**, sharing many features with IAF's Rafales but with key modifications:
 - **Takeoff Adaptations**
 - ✓ Indian carriers use **ski-jump ramps** for takeoff.
 - ✓ Rafale-M includes a **modified nose design** and **compact size** to optimize angle of attack and takeoff on short decks.
 - ✓ **Weight limitations** are necessary due to shorter takeoff runways.
 - **Landing Adaptations**
 - ✓ Uses **tailhooks** to catch arresting wires on the deck for immediate stops.
 - ✓ Features **reinforced airframe and undercarriage** to endure the stress of abrupt carrier landings.
 - **Marine-Specific Features**
 - ✓ Resistant to **corrosion** from sea air
 - ✓ Equipped with **special sensors and weapons** for anti-ship and anti-submarine missions
 - ✓ Operational on the **French aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle** since 2004

I4C Empowered Under Anti-Money Laundering Law

- The government has authorised the **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)** to share and receive information with the Enforcement Directorate (ED) under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).
 - The move was formalised via a Revenue Department notification.
- I4C is now included under Section 66 of the PMLA.
- **Aim: Combatting Cyber Frauds & Tracing Money Trails**
 - Enables better coordination between I4C, ED, and other law enforcement agencies.
 - Objective: Identify the masterminds behind transnational cyber frauds.
 - Strengthens efforts to trace illicit financial flows linked to cybercrime.
- **About I4C**
 - Established by: Ministry of Home Affairs

- o Approved: 2018 | Inaugurated: 2020
- o Headquarters: New Delhi
- o Purpose: Acts as a national-level coordination centre to combat cybercrimes.
- o Function: Provides a comprehensive and unified framework for law enforcement agencies (LEAs) to effectively tackle cybercrime across India.
- o I4C serves as the central point for addressing cybercrime issues in India.

DRDO Achieves Breakthrough in Hypersonic Weapon Technology

- DRDO successfully conducted ground testing of an Active Cooled Scramjet Subscale Combustor for over 1,000 seconds.
- **Developed By:** Defence Research & Development Laboratory (DRDL), Hyderabad – a DRDO lab.
- **Significance**
 - o Validates the design of a long-duration scramjet combustor.
 - o Paves the way for full-scale flight-worthy combustor testing.
- **About Hypersonic Cruise Missiles**
 - o Can travel at >5 times the speed of sound (>6100 km/h).
 - o Powered by air-breathing scramjet engines with supersonic combustion.
 - o Key for long-duration, high-speed cruise missions.

Global Military Spending in 2024

- According to the **Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)** report “*Trends in World Military Expenditure 2024*”, global military spending saw a sharp increase, driven largely by regional conflicts and strategic build-ups.
- **India vs PK Pakistan: Stark Contrast**
 - o **India’s military expenditure:** \$86.1 billion (↑ 1.6%) — 5th highest globally
 - o **Pakistan’s military expenditure:** \$10.2 billion
 - o India’s spending is **nearly nine times** that of Pakistan. This comes amid rising tensions following the **Pahalgam attack**.
- **Top 5 Global Military Spenders (60% of total):** Together, they spent **\$1,635 billion**.



Successful Trial of DRDO’s Mk-II(A) Laser-Directed Energy Weapon (DEW)

DRDO announced the successful trial of its indigenously developed **Mk-II(A) Laser-Directed Energy Weapon (DEW) system**, placing India among a select group of countries possessing high-power laser-DEW capability.

In nutshell: Laser-DEW System

- Directed Energy Weapons (DEW) use focused energy — such as lasers or microwaves — to disable, damage or destroy enemy assets without traditional projectiles.
- Unlike conventional weapons that rely on kinetic force (missiles, bullets), DEWs rely on **thermal or electromagnetic energy**.

- These systems can be mounted on vehicles, ships, or aircraft and are considered critical components of next-generation warfare.

Important Laser Weapon Systems of the World

- **USA's HELIOS** (High Energy Laser with Integrated Optical-dazzler and Surveillance) is deployed with the US Navy for drone and boat threats.
- **China's LW-30** is a vehicle-mounted laser defence system for drone interception.
- **Israel's Iron Beam** integrates lasers into its layered air defence against short-range missiles and drones.

• Capabilities Demonstrated by Mk-II(A) Laser- DEW

- Its speed, precision, and lethality made it a potent anti-drone solution.

• Cost-Effective Defence Solution

- Firing costs are equivalent to just a few litres of petrol, making it a low-cost alternative to traditional weapons for countering low-cost aerial threats like drones.

• Technological Functioning

- Using radar or Electro-Optic (EO) detection, the laser-DEW targets threats at the speed of light, cutting through structures or detonating warheads with intense precision—minimizing collateral damage.

Long-Range Glide Bomb 'Gaurav'

- The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) successfully conducted release trials of the indigenously developed Long-Range Glide Bomb (LRGB) 'Gaurav' using a Su-30 MKI aircraft.
- The 1,000 kg-class glide bomb, developed by Research Centre Imarat, Armament Research and Development Establishment, and Integrated Test Range, demonstrated a range of nearly 100 km with high precision.

IAF Aircraft Face GPS Spoofing During Relief Missions to Myanmar

- Indian Air Force (IAF) aircraft transporting relief materials to earthquake-hit Myanmar reportedly faced **GPS spoofing**—a cyberattack involving false GPS signals to mislead navigation.
 - The spoofing incidents triggered **serious security concerns**, highlighting the growing threat of **cyber interference in aviation**.
- The IAF confirmed awareness of degraded GPS conditions, which were pre-notified via a NOTAM (Notice To Airmen) issued by Mandalay International Airport.
- IAF stated that crews were well-prepared and equipped to manage such scenarios using backup navigation systems.
- India had launched 'Operation Brahma' to aid Myanmar following a major earthquake on March 28.

Operation Chakra V

- The CBI arrested four individuals (two from Mumbai, two from Moradabad) involved in a large-scale 'Digital Arrests' fraud, under **Operation Chakra V**.
- The scam involved impersonation of officials from agencies like the RBI and law enforcement, using fake uniforms, government-like backdrops, and legal jargon to instill fear in victims.
- Victims were falsely told they were "digitally arrested" and were extorted under pressure for their "release".

Exercises

AIKEYME Maritime Exercise	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The first edition of AIKEYME (Africa India Key Maritime Engagement) began on April 13, 2025, in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, aiming to enhance maritime cooperation between India and African nations.• The exercise aligns with PM Modi's vision of MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions).• Participating nations include India, Tanzania (co-hosts) and <u>Comoros, Djibouti, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, and South Africa.</u>
Tri-Service Exercise Tiger Triumph	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The fourth edition of the India-U.S. bilateral humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) amphibious exercise, Tiger Triumph 2025, was held at the Eastern Naval Command.• The exercise strengthens interoperability and all-domain operational readiness for large-scale disaster response.

Emissions Intensity Targets

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has released the **Draft Greenhouse Gases Emissions Intensity (GEI) Target Rules, 2025**.

These rules set emission reduction targets for "obligated entities" in energy-intensive sectors and establish a compliance mechanism under the **Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS), 2023**.

The CCTS aims to enable carbon credit trading to reduce emissions and support India's climate goals under the 2015 Paris Agreement.

Greenhouse Gases Emissions Intensity (GEI)

- GEI refers to the amount of GHGs emitted per unit of product output, such as emissions per tonne of cement, aluminium, or paper produced.
 - **GEI Definition:** The Draft GEI Target Rules, 2025, define GEI as "greenhouse gases emission intensity in tCO₂e/ equivalent output or product."
 - **tCO₂e Meaning:** tCO₂e (tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent) is the standard unit used to measure the warming impact of all GHGs.

Summary of Draft GEI Target Rules

- **Baseline Emissions & Reduction Targets**
 - Establishes 2023-24 as the baseline year for emissions.
 - Gradual **GHG reduction targets** set for 2025-26 and 2026-27.
 - Part of India's Carbon Credits Trading Scheme, 2023.
- **Industries & Entities Covered:** Total of 282 industrial units affected.
 - Applies to energy-intensive industries: Aluminium; Cement; Pulp & Paper; Chlor-Alkali
- **Compliance & Penalties:** Penalties prescribed for non-compliance with reduction targets.

How do these Draft Rules Tie into India's Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS)?

- **Framework of CCTS**
 - CCTS establishes a system for generating, trading, and utilizing carbon credit certificates.
 - Inspired by Article 17 of the Kyoto Protocol, which allowed trading of unused emission units **among countries**.
- **Role of GEI Targets in Carbon Credit Generation**
 - GHG Emission Intensity (GEI) targets clearly define goals for industries.
 - Industries must prepare action plans to achieve these targets.
 - Carbon credits are awarded to industries that reduce their emissions intensity.
- **Trading and Compliance Mechanism**
 - The trade mainly revolves around carbon dioxide, the principal GHG.

Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS) 2023 and Its Importance

- **Foundation: The PAT Scheme (Since 2012)**
 - › PAT (Perform, Achieve, Trade) was launched in 2012 to enhance **energy efficiency**.
 - › It set energy consumption reduction targets for selected energy-intensive industries.
 - › Companies achieving more than their targets earned **Energy Saving Certificates (ESCs)**, which could be traded with those who underperformed.
- **Evolution: Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS), 2023**
 - › CCTS builds upon the PAT scheme, expanding the focus from **energy efficiency** to greenhouse gas (**GHG**) **emissions reduction**.
 - › It introduces GHG emissions intensity (GEI) reduction targets specific to industries.
 - › Example: Cement plants can lower emissions by using biomass instead of coal or adopting energy-efficient kilns.
- **Alignment with International Commitments**
 - › Supports India's Paris Agreement pledge:
 - › Reduce emissions intensity of GDP by 45% by 2030 (compared to 2005 levels).
 - › Encourages the adoption of sustainable and advanced technologies in high-emission sectors.

- Carbon credits are traded on the Indian Carbon Market platform.
- Oversight by: Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE), Union Ministry of Power.
- Industries falling short must either:
 - Buy credits to cover the gap, or
 - Face penalties imposed by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).
- **Global Context**
 - Similar carbon credit markets have been operational: Europe since 2005; China since 2021.

Sagaing Fault

The recent Myanmar earthquake was caused along the Sagaing Fault.

Geological and Tectonic Significance of Sagaing Fault

Type	Right-lateral (dextral) strike-slip fault
Location	Fault line runs north-south from central Myanmar (Mandalay) to the Andaman Sea
Minor Plates involved	Boundary between the Burma Plate and the Sunda Plate
Major Tectonic Setting	Lies between Indo-Australian Plate and Eurasian Plate. It is one of the world's longest and most active strike-slip faults.

What is Strike Slip Fault

The horizontal movement of fault blocks occurs with minimal vertical displacement, typical of transform boundaries.

Implications for India

- **Geophysical Impact on Northeast India:** Seismic activity in the Sagaing Fault can trigger or influence seismic stress on nearby faults (e.g., Shillong Plateau).
- **Geostrategic Relevance:** The fault lies near India's Act East corridor – Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project. Earthquake risk could affect connectivity projects such as: Kalewa-Yagyi road section (Part of India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway)
- **Transnational Environmental Concerns:** Earthquake-induced landslides, river blockages (e.g., Chindwin-Irrawaddy system) may affect cross-border rivers and ecosystems.

Energy Statistics India 2025

The National Statistics Office (NSO) under Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) has released the annual publication “Energy Statistics India 2025”.

It contains key information about reserve, capacity, production, Consumption, and import/export of all the energy commodities (like Coal, Lignite, Petroleum, Natural Gas, Renewable Energy, etc.) of India.

Key Highlights of the Report

- The data shows India's strong energy recovery post-COVID and reflects efforts toward Viksit Bharat 2047 vision.
- More than half of the potential for generation of renewable energy has been concentrated within the four States of India viz. Rajasthan (20.3%), Maharashtra (11.8%), Gujarat (10.5%) and Karnataka (9.8%).
- Three states Odisha, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh account for approximately 70% of the total coal reserves in the country.

- Geographically, the maximum crude oil reserves in India are concentrated in the Western Offshore region, which accounts for 32% of the total crude oil reserves. This is followed by the Assam region, which holds 22% of the country's crude oil reserves.
- India has an immense **Renewable Energy *potential***, estimated at about 21 lakh MW, where wind power constitutes the largest share (55%), with substantial contributions also expected from solar (36%) and large hydropower (6%).
- **Dependency on Coal for Primary Energy Generation:** India continues to rely heavily on coal for energy generation.
- **Consumption of Electricity:** Industrial sector remains the largest consumer of electricity, accounting for 42% of the total consumption, followed by the domestic sector (24%), agriculture (17%), and commercial sectors (8%).
- **Percentage loss due to Transmission and Distribution** which was around 23% during FY 2014-15 has **gone down** to around 17% during FY 2023-24.

Hadean Protocrust

An international study by Macquarie University in Australia proposes that the **Hadean Proto crust** already contains the chemical fingerprints associated with plate tectonics.

- Chemical fingerprints, which are unique chemical compositions found in ancient rocks, provide clues about past plate tectonic processes.
- **What is the Hadean Protocrust:** It refers to the earliest known crust of the Earth, its outermost solid layer, that formed during the Hadean Aeon, the planet's first geologic era, which began around 4.6 billion years ago.
- **The Hadean Aeon** (about 4.6 to 4.0 billion years ago) The protocrust solidified from a magma ocean and eventually formed the first continents crust.
 - ✓ This period was characterized by intense heat, volcanic activity, and a partially molten surface. Hadean Aeon was followed by the Archean Eon
- **Archean Aeon (4 to 2.5 billion years ago)**, marked by the formation of **Earth's first stable crust**, the beginning of plate tectonics, and the emergence of life.
 - ✓ As the surface cooled, **thick crust formed the first continents** which moved over the semi-fluid asthenosphere beneath.
- **Importance in Geology:** It provides insights into early Earth formation, plate tectonics, and crust evolution.
- **Evidence of Hadean Protocrust:** Mainly in zircon crystals from the Jack Hills, Australia—some of the oldest known materials on Earth.

Reservoir Storage Monitoring System (RSMS) Portal

The Union Minister of Jal Shakti launched the Web-based Reservoir Storage Monitoring System (RSMS) Portal in New Delhi.

About RSMS Portal

- This Portal aims to significantly enhance **the monitoring of live storage** capacities across India's key reservoirs.
 - ✓ Live storage status of reservoirs is a very important input for the decision makers in order to priorities the requirements of water in terms of its domestic, agriculture, power, navigation and recreations uses. It indicates the level of water security in the country.

- The system, which tracks the live storage of 161 reservoirs managed by the Central Water Commission (totaling 182.375 BCM (Billion Cubic Metres), about **70.74% of India's developed storage**), automates the creation of reports and visual data.
- The RSMS Portal streamlines operations by allowing users to input data and **automatically generate graphs, charts, and tables** for weekly bulletins, thereby ensuring faster updates and better information sharing with relevant parties.
 - ✓ Previously, bulletin preparation involved manual compilation of graphs, charts, and tables.
- The web-portal has been developed using the **Digital brand Identity Manual (DBIM)** framework, making it one of the first government platforms to fully comply with the latest **Guidelines for Indian Government Websites (GIGW) 3.0**.

Mist Netting

Recent news highlights the significant threat posed by illegal mist netting to wild birds, particularly in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

What is Mist Netting?

- *Mist netting* is a scientific technique used for capturing birds and bats temporarily for research purposes such as tagging, measuring, or collecting biological data. It involves using fine, nearly invisible nylon nets suspended vertically between poles.
 - ✓ The name "mist" refers to how the net appears—fine like mist and almost invisible to flying animals.
 - ✓ Once captured, animals are gently removed, studied, and released unharmed.

Baku to Belem Roadmap

India at the 11th BRICS Environment Ministers' meeting at Brasilia (Brazil), proposed the “Baku to Belem Roadmap” to strengthen climate financing mechanisms.

More about 11th BRICS Environment Ministers' Meeting

- The Baku to Belem Roadmap is aimed at securing \$1.3 trillion in climate finance to support Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).
 - ✓ However, **COP29(Baku, Azerbaijan)** could commit to provide only \$300 billion by 2035 against the \$1.3 trillion demanded by developing nations.
- The 2025 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP30), to be hosted in Brazil, is critical for advancing global adaptation and resilience efforts.
 - ✓ COP30 (**Belém, Brazil**) will push for the Global Ethical Stocktake (GST) to limit the rise in global temperature to 1.5°C.
 - ✓ India and other developing nations aim to push for increased climate funding at COP-30 to bridge the financial gap left by COP-29 commitments.
- On energy security, India reiterated commitments made in the BRICS New Delhi Declaration (2021), which promotes a diversified energy mix, including fossil fuels, hydrogen, nuclear, and renewables.
- India highlighted the Green Grids Initiative – One Sun, One World, One Grid, launched under the International Solar Alliance, as a transformative project for global renewable energy integration.

Global Wind Report 2025

Global Wind Energy Council (GWEC) published The Global Wind Report 2025.

Key Findings of The Global Wind Report 2025

Released in London alongside the International Energy Agency's Summit on Energy Security, the Global Wind Report 2025 is GWEC's annual assessment of the wind energy sector.

- **Record Growth:** Global wind capacity reached 1,136 GW in 2024, with 117 GW of new installations, marginally higher than 116.6 GW in 2023.
- **Offshore Wind Surge:** A record 56.3 GW of offshore wind capacity was awarded globally, led by Europe (23.2 GW) and China (17.4 GW).
- **Shortfall Warning:** Current growth projections show the industry will deliver only 77 per cent of the installed capacity required by 2030 to maintain a viable pathway to net-zero emissions. This shortfall threatens international efforts to limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, as outlined in the Paris Agreement.
- India's **Kutch Wind Park in Gujarat, one of the world's largest**, generates 1.2 GW, cutting 2 million tonnes of CO2 annually.
 - ✓ As the fourth-largest wind market, India collaborates with International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) and Global Wind Energy Council to share best practices, strengthening its leadership in International Solar Alliance (ISA).

Wind Energy in India

- **Total Wind Power Capacity:** As of 31st March 2025, India has achieved a cumulative installed wind power capacity of 50.04 GW.
- In 2024–25, India added 4.15 GW of wind power capacity, up from 3.25 GW in 2023–24.
- India ranks 4th in terms of total installed wind power capacity, trailing only behind China, United States, and Germany.
- **State-wise Distribution:** Top wind energy-producing states in India are Gujarat, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu.

National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI)

Recently Supreme Court directed NEERI to assess the effects of local glass industries on Agra's Taj Mahal, part of the TTZ (Taj Trapezium Zone).

About National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI)

Historical Background and Evolution

- NEERI was originally established as the **Central Public Health Engineering Research Institute (CPHERI)** in 1958 to address post-independence challenges related to water supply, sewage disposal, communicable diseases, and industrial pollution.
- In 1974, it was renamed NEERI, aligning with global environmental awareness following the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm.

Organizational Structure and Mandate

- **NEERI** operates under the Ministry of Science and Technology as a constituent laboratory of CSIR (Council of Scientific and Industrial Research)
 - CSIR is India's largest publicly funded R&D organization, established in 1942.
- **Headquartered in Nagpur**, NEERI has five zonal laboratories in Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Mumbai, enabling region-specific environmental research and solutions.
 - NEERI is a partner in India's Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) National Implementation Plan (NIP), contributing to global commitments under the Stockholm Convention.

Key Contributions and Innovations of NEERI

- **Air Quality Monitoring Network:** NEERI developed receptor modeling techniques and air pollution control systems, such as green firecrackers under Supreme Court directives to improve Delhi’s air quality.
- **Grid-Based Mitigation Strategy:** In 2023, NEERI introduced the Local Area Management Plan (**LAMP**), a grid-based approach to combat air pollution in Delhi. *LAMP divides the NCR into smaller grids*
 - This strategy uses stationary and mobile sensors to monitor pollution hotspots and devise localized solutions, moving away from a “one-size-fits-all” approach.
- **NEERI ZAR** (Zero Discharge Toilet) developed for rural sanitation and remote areas (adopted by DRDO for army use in Siachen Glacier).
 - NEERI also developed **Phycoremediation technology** for cleaning polluted water bodies using algae.
- **Waste Management for Indian Railways:** At the RailIndia Expo 2025, NEERI proposed sustainable waste management strategies for Indian Railways, promoting a greener transport network.
- **Innovations in Health and Diagnostics:** During the COVID-19 pandemic, NEERI developed a cost-effective, patient-friendly Saline Gargle RT-PCR technique for testing.

AIM4NatuRe

On Earth Day (April 22), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations launched a significant new initiative, Accelerating Innovative Monitoring for Nature Restoration (AIM4NatuRe).

Details about AIM4NatuRe

- Building on the success of the AIM4Forests program, AIM4NatuRe aims to strengthen countries’ capacities to track and report restoration efforts across **diverse ecosystems**—forests, wetlands, grasslands, marine ecosystems.
- It is a US\$ 9 million programme funded by the United Kingdom and is set to run **from 2025 to 2028**.
- It aligns with global commitments like the **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework** (GBF), particularly Target 2 (restoring 30% of degraded ecosystems by 2030), and the **UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030)**.
- **Data-Driven Conservation:** Uses the Framework for Ecosystem Restoration Monitoring (FERM) to standardize data collection, enabling countries to track restoration outcomes effectively.
- **In India,** AIM4NatuRe’s approach could enhance monitoring of the Green India Mission, which aims to restore 26 million hectares of degraded land, using satellite data to track afforestation

Cloudburst

The occurrence of a cloudburst, subsequent flash floods, and landslides in Ramban, Jammu & Kashmir, inflicted casualties, caused structural damage.

About Cloudburst

- A cloudburst is an extreme weather event characterized by sudden, intense rainfall over a localized area within a short span, typically a few minutes to an hour.
- IMD defines cloudburst as rainfall of 100 mm or more in an hour over a roughly 10 km x 10 km area.
- It is a meteorological phenomenon caused by rapid condensation of moisture in cumulonimbus clouds.

Causes of Cloudbursts

Meteorological Factors	Geographical Factors
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orographic Lift: When moist air is forced upwards by mountainous terrain, it cools and condenses rapidly, forming dense cumulonimbus clouds. This is common in the Himalayas. • Convective Activity: Intense heating of the earth's surface during monsoons leads to strong convective currents, causing rapid cloud formation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topography: Hilly regions like the Western Ghats, Himalayas, and Northeast India are prone to cloudbursts due to orographic effects. • Localized Weather Systems: Microclimatic conditions in valleys or urban areas can exacerbate cloudburst occurrences.
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High-Altitude Climate Research Station

India's First-ever "Himalayan High Altitude Atmospheric and Climate Research Centre" was inaugurated in Jammu & Kashmir (Nathatop, Udhampur district).

- Coinciding with the inauguration, India also flagged off the Indo-Swiss Joint Research Project "**ICE-CRUNCH** (Ice nucleating particles and Cloud condensation nuclei properties in the North-Western Himalayas).

About this Research Centre

- The state-of-the-art facility, situated at one of the highest altitudes in the region, is expected to serve as a crucial gateway for cutting-edge climate research in the north-western Himalayas.
 - **The Chandra Telescope in Ladakh**, another high-altitude research facility, demonstrates India's expertise in leveraging Himalayan conditions for scientific advancements.
- **Himalayan Climate Influence:** The Himalayas act as a barrier to monsoon winds, causing heavy rainfall in northern India, and protect the subcontinent from cold Central Asian winds.
- The Centre, affiliated with the **World Meteorological Organization's** Global Atmospheric Watch (**GAW**) Programme, aims to conduct continuous atmospheric monitoring and eventually integrate data into global climate models.
- **Regional Implications:** Research from the Centre will help predict changes in river flows due to glacial melt, addressing water security and agricultural challenges.
 - The Himalayas are the source of major rivers like the Ganges, Indus, and Brahmaputra, which support over 800 million people.

Project "ICE-CRUNCH"

- **Project "ICE-CRUNCH"** is a collaborative study between Indian scientists from ETH Zürich, Switzerland, aimed at exploring the properties of ice nucleating particles (INPs) & cloud condensation nuclei (CCN) in the region.
- The Centre's research will support conservation efforts under India's **National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem (NMSHE)**.

Blue Category and Essential Environmental Services

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has recently introduced the Blue Category under the framework of Essential Environmental Services (EES).



Context of the Blue Category

- The **CPCB** introduced the Blue Category to promote **industries** that provide environmental benefits, such as waste management, renewable energy, and pollution control technologies.
- This move aligns with India's commitments under the Paris Agreement and SDGs.
- **Existing Framework:** The CPCB's earlier classification system included:
 - **Red Category:** Highly polluting industries (e.g., thermal power plants, cement).

- **Orange Category:** Moderately polluting (e.g., food processing, pharmaceuticals).
 - **Green Category:** Low pollution (e.g., solar panel assembly).
 - **White Category:** Non-polluting (e.g., IT services, introduced in 2016).
 - **The Blue Category** introduces a proactive approach, recognizing industries that mitigate environmental harm.
 - Thermax, an Indian company, has developed **Blue Category-compliant biomass boilers** that reduce emissions by 30% compared to coal-based systems, adopted in industries across Maharashtra.
 - **Scope of Blue Category:** Includes sectors like recycling units, waste-to-energy plants, green technology manufacturing (e.g., air purifiers, water treatment systems), and carbon capture and storage (CCS) facilities. These industries are deemed essential for environmental sustainability.
 - e-waste recycling units under this category reduce hazardous waste in landfills, aligning with **SDG 12** (Responsible Consumption and Production).
 - **Note: Blue Category is different from Blue Washing**
- 'Blue Washing'** refers to the practice of portraying polluting industries as environmentally friendly by categorising them under less polluting or cleaner industry labels.

Species in News

<p>Long-snouted vine snake</p> 	<p>A rare long-snouted vine snake has been rediscovered in the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve in Lakhimpur Kheri, Uttar Pradesh, marking its first documented sighting in the state and only the second recorded instance in India.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Characterized by an elongated pointed snout and slender green body, which helps in excellent camouflage among foliage. • Known for its binocular vision—a rare trait among snakes, allowing it to accurately judge distances while hunting. • It is arboreal, diurnal, ovoviviparous (hatches eggs within body)
<p>Yak</p> 	<p>Nepal became the first yak range country in the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) to observe first-ever a 'National Yak Day' (on April 20, 2025).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecological and Environmental Significance: Yaks are uniquely adapted to cold, arid, high-altitude ecosystems (above 3,000 m). • Their grazing supports alpine meadow regeneration. • Habitat: The Yak is a long-haired bovid found throughout the Himalayan region of South Asia, the Tibetan Plateau, and as far north as Mongolia and Russia. In India, it is primarily found in Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand.
<p>Labeo Uru and Labeo Chekida</p>  <p>ICAR-NBFGR Discovers Two New Fish Species from the Western Ghats!</p> <p>Labeo chekida, locally known as "kaka chekida", is a small, dark-bodied fish found in the Chalakudy river.</p> <p>Labeo uru, named for its unique sail-like dorsal fin, was discovered in the Chandragiri River.</p>	<p>Two new freshwater fish species, Labeo uru and Labeo chekida discovered in the Western Ghats.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labeo uru and Labeo chekida are endemic to the Chandragiri and Chalakudy rivers, respectively, in the Western Ghats, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. • Labeo uru: Characterized by elongated, sail-like fins, which enhance maneuverability in fast-flowing waters. • Labeo chekida: Known as "kaka chekida" (crow-like) due to its small, dark-bodied appearance. Compact, dark body suited to its riverine habitat, with distinct scale patterns.

<p>Theobaldius` konkanensis</p> 	<p>A new land snail species, <i>Theobaldius konkanensis</i>, was recently discovered in the Konkan region of Maharashtra.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habitat: Found in leaf litter and on damp, decaying branches in tropical evergreen and semi-evergreen forests at altitudes of 80–240 meters above sea level. Active from June to September (monsoon season) • Behavior: Diurnal and nocturnal, easily found in shaded forest canopies during the afternoon.
<p>Woolly Flying Squirrel</p> 	<p>Himachal Pradesh Forest Department (HPFD) has found the first-ever photographic evidence of Woolly Flying Squirrel in the remote Miyar Valley in Lahaul and Spiti district.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is one of the world’s largest and rarest flying squirrels, known for its woolly fur and elusive nature. • The squirrel is notable for being the longest and heaviest gliding mammal • Appearance: Dense, straight, silky fur, blue gray on the back, lighter gray on the underside. • Diet: Herbivorous, feeding on mosses, lichens, buds, and cones • Habitat: High-altitude coniferous forests (2,400 – 3,600 m), cliffs and gorges. Endemic to North-Western Himalayas: Pakistan, India (J&K, Ladakh) • IUCN Red List conservation status: Endangered

Crispr in Cancer Diagnostics

Scientists at Tata Memorial Hospital have developed an innovative genetic testing tool called **RAPID-CRISPR** for a rare blood cancer called **Acute Promyelocytic Leukemia (APL)** using the Crispr gene-editing system.

RAPID Crispr Diagnostic System

- RAPID stands for Redefined APL IDentification.
- It is CRISPR-based detection system that scans a blood sample for the presence of the PML-RARA fusion gene.
- Once it detects the mutation, it uses a special “scissor” enzyme to cut it. These cutting triggers a signal that appears on a simple strip—similar to a home pregnancy test.

Significance of RAPID: Early detection, Low-cost, non-invasive, and portable diagnostic tool for cancer.

What is APL?

- It is a special kind of blood cancer caused by a unique genetic mutation involving two genes: PML (on chromosome 15) and RARA (on chromosome 17).
- In APL, a portion of these two genes swap places and mistakenly fuse together, forming a faulty gene.
- This defective gene hampers the production of healthy white blood cells and platelets, resulting in weakened immune system and uncontrolled bleeding.
- As a result of this genetic mutation the white blood cells remain immature, do not become functional cells and pile up as useless WBCs resulting in their blockade
- ▶ **Revolutionary treatment:** This blockade is treated by the revolutionary All-trans Retinoic Acid (ATRA) + Arsenic Trioxide (ATO)
- ▶ Both ATRA and ATO are included in the WHO Model List of Essential Medicines (EML), and they are now available as generic versions.

Extra Mile: What is CRISPR?

- CRISPR is a modern gene-editing tool that allows scientists to precisely modify genetic material.
- Think of Crispr editing system as a torchlight and a scissor. At its core, CRISPR systems have two main components:
 1. Molecular Scissors – enzymes like Cas9 or Cas13 that can cut DNA or RNA.
 2. Torchlight (Guide RNA) – a specially designed RNA sequence that leads the scissor to the exact spot in the genome where editing is needed.

Why CRISPR Is Revolutionary?

- Recombinant DNA technology, our earlier tool for gene modification, worked more randomly—it was like shooting in the dark.
- CRISPR changed the game by allowing us to read the genome, identify specific parts, and make precise edits.
- **Application:** Crispr systems are used in a) gene therapy to delete an undesired section of the gene, augment a gene b) molecular diagnostic as in case of RAPID. Additionally, Crispr based system is used to detect presence of zika and dengue virus in a sample.

Genome India Project: Preliminary Findings

Result of whole genome sequences of nearly 10000 Indians from different ethnicities has revealed about 180 million different variety of genes.

- 20,000 individuals’ **blood samples** and **phenotype data** (e.g., weight, height, hip & waist circumference, blood pressure) collected, establishing a **bio bank**.
- Participants represented 83 population groups: 30 tribal; 53 non-tribal.
- ~10,000 genomes sequenced in first phase, creating a reference genome for India.

Genome India Project (by Department of Biotechnology (DBT))

- It is a flagship bioinformatics project that aims build a reference genome of Indians.
- This will help us understand
 - a) our susceptibility to a disease
 - b) our ability to respond to a drug/therapeutic; adapt to a certain environment, diet etc
 - c) genetic variation among different ethnic population and
 - d) tracing our ancestry
- Launched in 2020, whole-genome-sequencing of Indians was necessitated due to the limitation of Human Genome Project 2001 which sequenced only white population groups.

Genomics: A New Lens to Understand Life at the Molecular Level

- Our traditional understanding of living organisms has largely been at the level of organs or organ systems.
- With molecular biology this approach has moved towards understanding life at a deeper level — the molecular level — where genes and their expression patterns shape not just individual traits but also response to the environment.

What is Genomics?

- It is the science of mapping the complete set of genes (called the genome) of a living organism — and understanding how this genetic information translates into visible traits (phenotype).
- Genomics is only a part of much larger emerging field called Omics — which includes related areas like proteomics (study of proteins), metabolomics (study of metabolic products), and transcriptomics (study of gene expression).

Why is Genomics important? The shift to molecular-level understanding allows us to design precise, targeted, and safer solutions in a range of fields — particularly in:

Health & Medicine

Agriculture

Environment & Sustainability

India's Major Genomics Initiatives

- Genome India Project — Mapping *genetic variations* in the Indian population

- INDIGEN — Database of Indian Genome Variations. It is a precursor to the broader Genome India Project (GIP). It focused on sequencing the genomes of 1,008 individuals from various ethnic groups

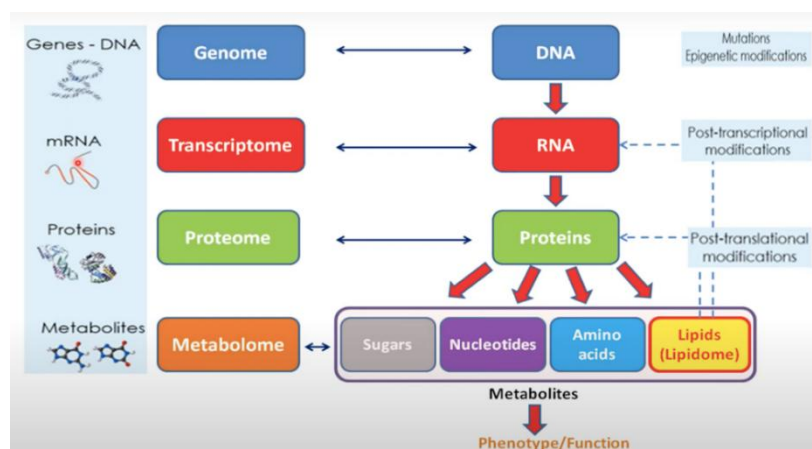
- Human Microbiome Project — Microbial communities (e.g. gut microbes) inhabiting the human body and their health links

- Human Atlas Project — Mapping human cells, tissues, and functions

- IndiGAU — Genome mapping of indigenous cattle breeds

- Rice Genome Chips — Using genomics to improve rice varieties for Indian conditions.

One Health Approach: Omics (encompassing fields like genomics, proteomics, and metabolomics)



Applications of Genomics in Health and Agriculture

➤ In Health & Medicine

- Enables precision and personalised healthcare (right drug, right dose, right patient)
- Helps in diagnostics — identifying disease-causing mutations
- Supports drug discovery based on gene targets
- Builds reference genomes specific to the Indian population for better research & treatment outcomes

➤ In Agriculture

- Accelerates plant breeding through Marker-Assisted Selection (MAS)
- Development of crops that are:
 - ✓ Nutrition-rich; Disease and pest resistant; High-yielding and climate-resilient
- Genome mapping of microbes used in sustainable agriculture (like nitrogen-fixing bacteria)

Variations in genome: the key in biotechnology

- About 99.9% of the genome of individuals within a species is identical. But given the size of the genome like for humans (3 billion base pairs or letters), even 0.1% variation comes out to be about 3 million. Further the variations can be either:
 - in the base pair (letter in our analogy) Eg: say A instead of T: this is fancily called **single nucleotide polymorphism (SNP)**. This is important in tracing **ancestry and population genetics**. Eg: DNA analysis of Rakhigarhi project to debunk Aryan invasion theory.
 - number of times the arrangement of letters appears. This is like saying the no of times a word or many words appear(s) is different in different individuals. This is what they see in **DNA fingerprinting**. The no of times the pattern appears is called **VNTRs**. (variable number of tandem repeats)
- Difference in the entire genome set to understand various organisms present in a sample as is done in the field of **metagenomics (environmental DNA** in deep sea, difficult areas, aerial samples, wildlife monitoring etc)

Fram2 Mission

Fram 2, the 1st ever human space flight to polar orbit, was launched by SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket.

- ✓ The mission lasted approximately 3.5 days

About Fram2 Mission

- It took 4 astronauts to a 90⁰ circular orbit (enabling it to fly over both the North and South Poles) along the poles on board Dragon spacecraft of SpaceX.
- It is intended to
 - a) Study an unusual light emissions resembling auroras above the polar regions at an altitude of 400-500 km.(auroras are normally found in lower altitudes 100-300Km)
 - b) Conduct experiments concerning human health in microgravity conditions particularly the behaviour of human body in spaceflights by capturing the **first-ever X-ray image** of a human in space.

Extra Mile: Important Human Spaceflights of Space X

- Inspiration 4: 1st all civilian human space flight
- Axiom 1, 2, 3 and 4: Axiom 4 carried an Indian Airforce astronaut. (Refer to July 2024 Recitals for details).
- Polaris Dawn: 1st in the Polaris series of manned missions planned:
 - ✓ Relevance of Polaris (1st commercial spacewalk): aims for highest earth orbit for a crewed mission. (1400 km)

CROP: Realtime Crop Monitoring System

The ISRO, utilizing advanced satellite remote sensing via its **CROP system**, has estimated that India's wheat production across eight key states reached 122.724 million tonnes by March 31, 2025.

- ✓ ISRO and National Remote Sensing Centre have jointly developed **CROP (Comprehensive Remote Sensing Observation on Crop Progress)** that helps in real-time monitoring of agricultural crops in India.

CROP Framework in Nutshell

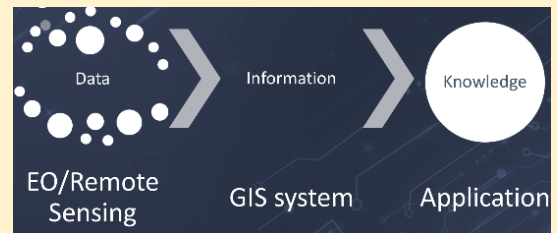
- It is a **geospatial technology product** built on remote sensing data for decision support system in agriculture.
- Using **multispectral data from optical and radar based remote sensing satellites** the CROP framework helps in assessing various biotic (pests, diseases) and abiotic (drought, heat) conditions of a crop helping in development of a **vegetation health index**.
- Different earth observation satellites that have contributed data for the development of Vegetation Health Index include **EOS-04 (RISAT-1A), EOS-06 (Oceansat-3), and Resourcesat-2A**.

About Vegetation Health Index (VHI)

- The VHI is a remote sensing-based composite index that acts as the foundation for various geospatial technology-based decision support system in agriculture.
- It combines two satellite-derived indices:
 - **Vegetation Condition Index (VCI)**: indicates vegetation greenness (thus moisture conditions)
 - **Temperature Condition Index (TCI)**: indicates thermal stress on vegetation
- This helps in better planning, forecasting and monitoring of various agricultural production activities including crop estimation, crop failures, crop insurance and agri marketing activities.
 - ✓ IMD's Drought Early Warning System (DEWS) includes VHI in its indicators.
 - ✓ Currently used for wheat monitoring in Rabi season across 8 states; scalable to other crops.
 - ✓ The Mahalanobis National Crop Forecast Centre (MNCFC) uses VHI in FASAL (Forecasting Agricultural Output using Space, Agro-meteorology, and Land-based observations).

Extra Mile: Geospatial technology

- To understand how CROP fits into India's agri-tech landscape, we need to grasp what geospatial technology means.
- Geo spatial technology product is a location-intelligent decision support system that is built on a suite of technologies including remote sensing, navigation, communication, GIS systems, AI etc.



Few examples of geospatial technology in agriculture & Allied Industries

- ↪ **Sagarmitra**: a geospatial app that sends live-messages in mother tongue to the fisherfolks about potential fishing zones, rough weather and alerts upon approaching international boundaries.
- ↪ **CHAMAN**: Coordinated Programme on Horticulture Assessment and Management using Geoinformatics uses remote sensing data to monitor fallow lands in the post-kharif season to intensify horticulture production in rabi season.
- ↪ **GEO FARMS**: a private sector led geo-spatial product in supply chain management of perishable agri-products.

- In nutshell it is simply a basket of technologies that take raw data from EOS satellites turn it into meaningful information using GIS systems and make useful decision support system like an app, an AI model etc that executes useful tasks.

Semaglutide: Wonder Drug For Obesity & Diabetes

- Semaglutides is a class of drugs that mimic a naturally occurring hormone in human body (in the gut) called **GLP-1 (Glucagon like peptide)**
 - ✓ GLP-1 is a hormone involved in multiple activities in the body from management of blood sugar levels to breaking of food to feeling of satiety in the stomach and managing hunger pangs.
 - ✓ **Mechanism Highlights of GLP-1:**

- Increases insulin secretion in response to glucose.
- Slows gastric emptying, reducing appetite.
- Acts on the hypothalamus, increasing satiety and reducing hunger.
- Decreases glucagon release, lowering blood sugar.
- By mimicking a hormone in the body these wonder drugs are known to have beneficial effects in many obesity-associated lifestyle disorders including type-2 diabetes (HbA1c reduction), kidney functions, dementia, cardiovascular diseases etc.
 - ✓ SDG 3.4 aims to reduce premature mortality from non-communicable diseases (NCDs) by one-third through prevention and treatment, and promote mental health and well-being by 2030.

Vehicle-to-Grid (V2G) Technology

The Kerala State Electricity Board in partnership with IIT Bombay is exploring the implementation of **Vehicle-to-Grid (V2G) technology** across the State to enable reverse charging of grid from electric vehicles (EVs).

Vehicle-to-Grid (V-2-G) in nutshell

- V-2-G technology relies on the principle of **bi-directional** energy transfer between EVs and grid.
 - ✓ EVs can charge from the grid (grid-to-vehicle, G2V) and discharge electricity back to the grid (vehicle-to-grid, V2G) or to homes (vehicle-to-home, V2H) during peak demand or power outages.
- It is primarily to improve energy efficiency of grids in the renewable energy dominated world.
- V-2-G represents a shift in thinking about EVs from being an energy consuming to energy storage devices as the EV penetration increases.

Relevance of V-2-G

V-2-G technology at best is relevant for auxiliary services like frequency regulation, grid balancing and peak shaving. It is not an ideal solution for large scale energy storage.

1. Grid Balancing Applications

Need for Grid Balancing

- Grid is an infrastructure used to transmit electrical energy and not store it.
- Thus, at every moment electricity generation should be equal to electricity consumption.
- A mismatch leads to grid going off balance leading to damages to electric appliances, blackouts etc.
 - **Case 1:** supply > demand → voltage spikes (overvoltage) → equipment damage, blackouts.
 - **Case 2:** supply < demand → frequency drops → blackouts, brownouts.

2. Renewable Energy Integration

- Two characteristic features of renewable energy are variability and intermittency.
- Accordingly, the success of a renewable energy shift depends on a good energy storage infrastructure which has 2 **components**.
 - A) Large scale energy storage which requires **grid scale batteries** to store excess energy produced during the day in case of say solar. (V-2-G is not suitable for this)
 - B) In addition, there is also a need for **small scale energy storage** relevant for efficient functioning of grid due to sudden mismatch in the supply and demand albeit small. This is where V-2-G comes into picture.

****Important: V-2-G is not suitable for large scale energy storage applications which require a centralised energy storage unit like a grid scale battery, pumped-hydro storage etc.**

3. Peak shaving at micro-grid level

- In conditions where there is high penetration of EVs particularly in metro and mega cities, their integration to the grid can efficiently balance the peak demands quickly. This is called **peak shaving**.

Challenges for V-2-G Integration

- It is not suitable in cities with **low penetration** of electric vehicles and charging infrastructure.
- The life of the battery is related to the number of **charging-discharging cycles**. Typically the Li-ion batteries used in cars withstand about 7000-10000 cycles today. If the EV batteries are discharged to power the grid this reduces the effective charging-discharging cycle of battery use in EVs.

Current status of V-2-G

- Countries including Denmark, Spain, California in USA and UK have implemented V-2-G for auxiliary services.

Biomass Satellite Mission

European Space Agency (ESA) launched the '**Biomass**' forest-monitoring satellite aboard Vega-C rocket.

- ✓ Biomass is a part of the '**Earth Explorers**' series of climate satellites of ESA (under its Living Planet Programme) which aims to study the changes in diverse ecosystems and their impact on and from climate change.

Biomass Satellite Mission in nutshell

- The mission provides global maps of forest biomass & height at **200 m resolution** and detects forest disturbances (e.g., clear-cutting) at **50 m resolution** every six months over its 5.5-year lifespan.
 - ✓ Forests, often called "Earth's green lungs," absorb approximately 7.6–8 billion tonnes of CO₂ annually, acting as the second-largest carbon sink after oceans.
- It operates in two phases: an 18-month tomographic phase for 3D forest mapping and a subsequent 3.5-year interferometric phase to track changes.
- Its data supports climate action under frameworks like the UN's REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 13 and 15).

About the Biomass Satellite

- 1st ever satellite to use a P-Band (435 MHz) Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR).
 - ✓ The P-Band frequency of radio waves is suitable to sense 'bulk material' and penetrate forest canopy. Thus, it aids in active remote sensing of forest biomass including the forest canopy, size of tree trunks till the roots of the trees.
- The satellite will be launched in a sun-synchronous orbit at 666 Km above the surface of the earth.
 - ✓ **Note:** Sun synchronous orbit is chosen for the satellites to return to the same position periodically (say 10AM everyday) thus ensuring constant lighting conditions for comparative measurements over time.

Extra Mile: Earth Explorer Satellite Series

- A series of earth observation satellites to study the dynamic and interactive nature of earth system including its interior, cryosphere, hydrosphere, atmosphere, ionosphere and different ecosystems of its land surface.
- Other **Earth Explorer missions** that have been launched or are in development, including
 - ✓ **GOCE** (Gravity Field and Steady-State Ocean Circulation Explorer),
 - ✓ **SMOS** (Soil Moisture and Ocean Salinity),
 - ✓ **CryoSat** (cryosphere monitoring), **Swarm** (geomagnetic field), **Aeolus** (atmospheric winds),

- ✓ **EarthCARE** (Earth Cloud Aerosol and Radiation Explorer), **Biomass** (forest carbon),
- ✓ **To be launched: FLEX** (photosynthesis & functioning of vegetation), and **Harmony** (Earth system interactions)
- In India, data from SMOS has been used to monitor soil moisture in drought-prone regions like Marathwada (Maharashtra), aiding in agricultural planning and water resource management.

RT-LAMP: TB Diagnostic Tool

Researchers in India have developed and tested a faster, cheaper, more reliable, and sharper molecular diagnostic tool RT-LAMP for the early detection of Tuberculosis.

RT-LAMP (Real-Time Loop-Mediated Amplification)

- RT-LAMP is a molecular diagnostic technique that amplifies nucleic acids (DNA or RNA) at a constant temperature (typically 60–65°C), eliminating the need for sophisticated thermal cyclers required in traditional Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) tests.
- A molecular diagnostic test relies on detecting the genotype (genome) of the bacterial pathogen as against the sputum smear test which detects the mere presence or absence of the pathogen.
 - ✓ This sputum smear test is less sensitive as it cannot detect drug-resistant pathogen. (50% as against 89% of genotype-based tests)
- Genexpert and Truenat are presently the commonly used molecular diagnostic test.
- RT-LAMP once approved can replace Genexpert & Truenat due to advantages like Higher sensitivity; Cheaper; Faster
 - ✓ **Non-Invasive Potential:** RT-LAMP can be adapted for non-sputum samples (e.g., oral swabs, urine), improving diagnosis in children and HIV-positive patients who might struggle to produce sputum.
- RT-LAMP has received approval from the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO).

Extra Mile: Molecular Diagnostic Test in TB

- **Early diagnosis** is the 1st among the 4 pillars of **National Strategic Plan for TB Elimination (NTEP) 2017-2025**. (4 pillars include **Detect – Treat – Prevent – Build**)
- **Importance of Early Detection:** Early TB detection is critical to interrupt transmission, reduce mortality, and prevent the emergence of multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB).

Universal Acceptance (UA): A movement for Multilingual Internet

In a push for digital inclusion, **Government of India is taking steps** to make all official websites Universal Acceptance (UA) compliant.

- It means all government portals, website URL, email addresses will now have domain name mirrors in 22 scheduled Indian languages like सरकार. भारत(hindi) etc. for gov.in etc.
- The aim is to make digital services accessible to citizens in their own scripts, across the entire governance ecosystem.
 - ✓ **Note:** March 28 was recognised as Universal Acceptance Day by The National Internet Exchange of India (NIXI), under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).

Universal Acceptance (UA)

- Universal Acceptance is a worldwide movement for making the internet multi-lingual in nature by developing internationalised domain names (IDNs) and the associated email addresses.

- ✓ The primary purpose of **Internationalised Domain Names (IDNs)** is to expand the domain names, regardless of language, script, or length.
- ✓ Ensure compatibility with Email Address Internationalization (EAI) standards. Example: A user with an email address in Devanagari (e.g., नाम@डोमेन.भारत) should be able to use it on global platforms like Gmail or e-commerce websites without errors.
- ✓ UA aligns with **SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities)** by ensuring equitable access to digital resources.
- **Universal Acceptance** is driven by the **Universal Acceptance Steering Group (UASG)**, supported by the **Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN)**.
- This makes the internet truly inclusive as it ensures local languages are equally recognized and processed by all internet-enabled systems like webpages, apps, softwares, AI models etc.
- ✓ To put simply, your browser, app, login forms, AI models etc should accept user@सरकार.भारत as easily as user@gov.in.

Understanding the Web Architecture

- Every time you try to access a webpage, a function in an app or even an AI model you are essentially connecting to a file, a software or database in a computer somewhere (server).
- To make these connections easier we use the domain name system (DNS) that maps the IP address of every computer to a human-readable addresses. Eg: www.vajiramandravi.com, www.upsc.gov.in etc.
- In simple words DNS is akin to a phone book for web addresses.

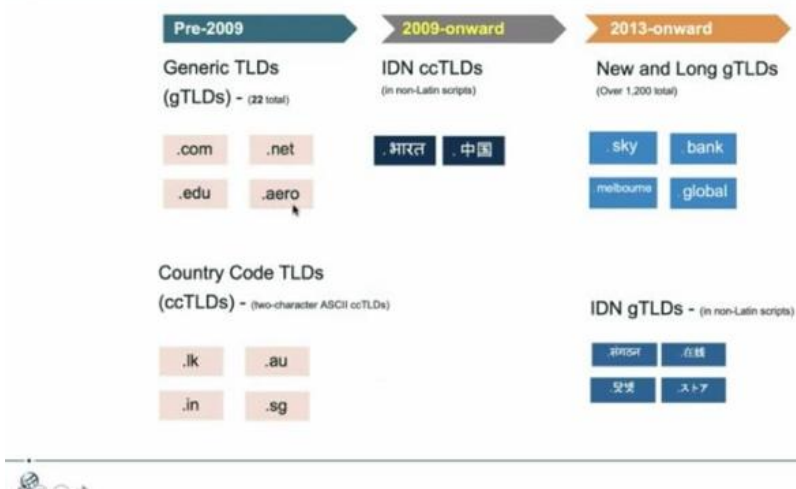
Extra Mile: From Top Level Domain (TLD) Names to Internationalised Domain Names: An Evolution

- To make the retrieval easier, the DNS are arranged in the databases in a particular fashion say by category, country etc. (.in for India, .us for USA etc)
- As more and more devices were connected to the internet the DNS systems had to evolve.

Technological Evolution: From ASCII to Unicode

- **ASCII Limitation:** Initially, DNS was built on ASCII (*American Standard Code for Information Interchange*), limiting web addresses to English characters. This excluded non-English scripts.
- **Unicode Revolution:** Later, Unicode enabled support for scripts like Hindi or Tamil, giving rise to Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs). Enabled representation of characters from Indic scripts (Devanagari, Tamil), East Asian scripts (Chinese, Japanese), Arabic, etc.

Expansion of the DNS



- ✓ While Unicode enabled a coding system of many languages beyond English these codes/languages are not recognised by internet-enabled systems like web URL, email systems, AI models etc.

- ✓ **Punycode:** IDNs are encoded in Punycode (a way to represent Unicode with ASCII). Example: xn--h2brj9c is Punycode for सरकार.भारत

Evolution of Domain Types: Hierarchy and Diversity

Domain Type	Example	Purpose
Generic TLD (gTLD)	.com, .org, .net	Commercial, Organizations, Networks
Country-code TLD (ccTLD)	.in (India), .us (USA)	Geographic identity
New gTLDs	.education, .tech	Specific categories and professions
IDNs	सरकार.भारत	Linguistic inclusion

Vellore Declaration: Type 5 Diabetes Officially Recognised

The international diabetes foundation (IDF) has, for the first time, formally recognised malnutrition-linked diabetes as a distinct form of disease now called Type 5 diabetes.

- ✓ While the recognition came at the 75th World Diabetes Congress in Bangkok, the decision was taken in a forum in Vellore, Tamil Nadu and thus called Vellore Declaration.
- ✓ Type 5 diabetes, previously termed J-type diabetes in Jamaica (1955), was first observed in undernourished populations.
- ✓ In 1985, WHO classified it as malnutrition-related diabetes mellitus, but this category was discontinued in 1999 due to insufficient evidence linking malnutrition directly to diabetes.

Background: Diabetes and Insulin Dysfunction

- Diabetes mellitus is a condition that is caused due to reduction in the quantity of effective insulin in the body.
- Insulin is an important hormone that plays an important metabolic role (helps in cellular respiration) of maintaining optimum glucose levels in the blood and the body.
- Pancreas among other things play the function of producing 2 very important hormones
 1. Insulin produced by B-cells (also called beta cells)
 2. Glucagon produced by A-cells.
- If the glucose levels utilised in the blood is compromised the energy level decreases due to insufficient cellular respiration.

Type 5 Diabetes in Nutshell

Cause	Unlike Type 1 (autoimmune) and Type 2 (insulin resistance), Type 5 diabetes results due to high levels of insulin deficiency primarily due to chronic undernutrition, especially during childhood (1st 1000 days of life from womb to 2 years of age) or adolescence.
Demographics	Affects lean individuals with significantly lower body-mass index (BMI < 18.5 kg/m ²) in LMICs (Low Middle-Income Countries), particularly in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. It has no autoimmune or genetic basis.
Symptoms	Severely reduced insulin secretion, low body fat percentage; Stunted growth; and poor wound healing among children, and poor metabolic control, dark skin patches around neck; Poor concentration, memory, and school performance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Distinguishing it from other diabetes types (Constant fatigue; Weight loss and failure to gain weight, Excessive thirst, increased urination, Lack of appetite).
Treatment	A high protein diet is important. Depending on the person's low BMI & physical activity levels, an adequate amount of carbs & fats is needed to ensure weight gain.

Policy and Governance Challenges

Integration with Existing Frameworks: India's *National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases, and Stroke (NPCDCS)* must be updated to include Type 5 diabetes, ensuring screening and management at primary healthcare levels.

Extra Mile: Diabetes Types and Need for Classification

- Diabetes is classified into different types depending on what causes insulin dysfunction.
- Dysfunction in insulin could result from either
 1. **Insulin deficiency:** Inability of the body to produce enough insulin
 2. **Insulin resistance:** Inability of the body to use insulin.
- Further deficient production of insulin can be due to insufficient B cells in pancreas or defective pancreas or lack of signal to pancreas to produce insulin (autoimmune response).

Type 1 diabetes	Type 2 diabetes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It is typically associated with inability of the body to produce insulin due to autoimmune response.• In this case the immune destroys insulin-producing B cells	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This is associated with insulin resistance: inability of body to utilise insulin. Instead, it builds up in body eventually returning into fat leading to obesity.• In turn obesity leads to inefficient functioning of insulin setting up a vicious cycle. This is called insulin resistance.

- **Type 5 diabetes** is due to impaired development of pancreas due to malnutrition in early years. Thus, it is also called severe-insulin deficient diabetes. (SIDD)
 - ✓ Insulin secretion is severely reduced — much lower than typical Type 2 Diabetes and just above levels seen in Type 1 Diabetes.
- Given the different causes of insulin dysfunction their treatment requires different approaches and hence different classification.
 - ✓ So far malnutrition related diabetes was classified under Type 2 diabetes leading to misdiagnosis and defective treatment.

Sarhul Festival

- The festival of Sarhul was recently celebrated by the tribals in Jharkhand and Chhotanagpur region to welcome the new year and the spring season.
- It is celebrated by tribes such as the **Oraon, Munda, Santal, Khadia, and Ho**, with unique names for the festival and particular ways of celebrations. It is celebrated every year on the **third day of the Chaitra month** of the Hindu calendar.
- Sarhul, literally means “**worship of the Sal tree**” and the festival is **rooted in nature worship**.
- Sal tree (*Shorea robusta*) is worshipped in the tribal tradition, as it is considered sacred and symbolizes life and fertility.
- The Sal tree is considered the **home of Sarna Maa**, the deity protecting the village from unpleasant natural forces.
- The festival celebrates the **symbolic union of the Sun and the Earth**, as this union is key to all life on Earth. Sarhul can thus be seen as a celebration of the cycle of life itself.
- Sarhul has evolved from being a hunting-centred tradition to one that revolves around agricultural processes. This reflects the evolving lifestyle of tribals in Chhotanagpur.
- A **male priest (pahan)** from the village plays the role of the Sun, while his **wife (pahen)** becomes the Earth.
- Tribals begin ploughing their fields, sowing their crop, or entering the forest to gather produce, only after the rituals are completed.

Guru Tegh Bahadur

- The Parkash Purab (birth anniversary) of Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur, the **ninth guru** of the Sikhs, was recently celebrated.
- The Guru was born in Amritsar in 1621 to Mata Nanki and Guru Hargobind, the sixth Sikh guru, who raised an army against the Mughals and introduced the concept of warrior saints.
- As a boy, Tegh Bahadur was called **Tyag Mal** because of his ascetic nature. He spent his early childhood in Amritsar under the tutelage of **Bhai Gurdas**, who taught him Gurmukhi, Hindi, Sanskrit, and Indian religious philosophy, while **Baba Budha** trained him in swordsmanship, archery, and horse-riding.
- At the age of 13, Tegh Bahadur distinguished himself in a battle against a Mughal chieftain. His bravery and heroic swordsmanship in the battle earned him the name of Tegh Bahadur. (“Tegh” is ‘sword’ in Punjabi.)
- He was **married to Mata Gujri at Kartarpur** in 1632, and he subsequently left for Bakala near Amritsar.
- He traveled extensively to preach the teachings of Nanak and contributed many hymns to the Guru Granth Sahib including the Saloks, or couplets.
- He is regarded as the **saviour guru**, as during the reign of the Mughals, there were oppressions in which people were forced to convert to Islam under the Mughal ruler Aurangzeb.
- And in that period of time, he resisted the forced conversions of non-Muslims to Islam.
- Later, Guru Tegh Bahadur was executed on the orders of Aurangzeb in Delhi in 1675. His martyrdom is remembered as the **Shaheedi Divas** every year on November 24.

Golconda Blue Diamond

- A rare 23.24-carat blue diamond, known as The Golconda Blue is set to be auctioned in Geneva, Switzerland.

- With its royal heritage, extraordinary colour, and exceptional size, the diamond is one of the rarest blue diamonds in the world.
- For India, it holds deep historical significance due to its origins in the famed **Golconda mines of present-day Telangana**, where the **Koh-i-Noor, Hope Diamond, and Darya-i-Noor** among other world-famous diamonds have been found.
- It was once owned by **Maharaja Yeshwant Rao Holkar II of Indore** during 1920s and 1930s.
- After independence in 1947, the diamond was acquired by renowned New York jeweler **Harry Winston**. The piece later made its way to the **Maharaja of Baroda** before entering private ownership.

Pandit Chatur Lal

- The Department of Posts will release a commemorative stamp to honour tabla exponent Pandit Chatur Lal, during the ongoing centenary celebrations to celebrate his work.
- He was the first Indian percussionist to introduce tabla to the West in the 1950s. He played a role in the first-ever Long Playing of Indian classical music recorded for Western audiences — a 1955 album featuring Ali Akbar Khan, produced with the help of Yehudi Menuhin.
- Born in Udaipur, Chatur Lal came from a family of court musicians and learned tabla under of Ustad Abdul Hafiz Ahmed Khan. He joined Delhi's All India Radio (AIR) as a staff artiste in 1947.
- Chatur Lal was also the **first Indian percussionist to be nominated at the Oscars in 1957**, along with Pandit Ravi Shankar for **A Chairy Tale**, a Canadian short film. In 1962, he performed for Queen Elizabeth at the Rashtrapati Bhawan.
- He passed away at the age of 40 in 1965.

Pope Francis

- Pope Francis recently passed away after battling a lengthy illness. Since 1415, all Popes except one have died in office. **Benedict XVI**, Francis's predecessor who assumed the papacy in 2005, retired in 2013, citing a lack of strength of mind and body.
- Pope Francis was the **266th Pope**, in a **lineage dating back to Saint Peter in 30 CE**. He assumed the papacy in 2013.
- He stepped into office as the Church faced the **Vatileaks scandal**, the leak of confidential documents exposing corruption in the Vatican.
- He was the **first South American Pope** and the **first from the Jesuit order**. He was born **Jorge Mario Bergoglio** in 1936 in Buenos Aires, and was ordained as a Jesuit priest in 1969. He became a bishop in 1992 and the **Archbishop of Buenos Aires** in 1998.
- Pope Francis was viewed as a moderate. In the past, he said the Church should apologise to gay people and opposed trickle-down free-market economic policies.

Transfer of Power



- Detailed laws and rituals, some dating back to the Middle Ages, govern the transfer of power from one pope to the next.
- Traditionally, the Pope's death is **verified by the camerlengo**, the cardinal who serves as the **Church's treasurer**.
- The **Ring of the Fisherman**, the Pope's ring bearing the seal of his papacy, is broken off to symbolise the end of his rule.
- The cardinals, who are isolated in the **Sistine Chapel in the Vatican**, vote in several rounds until a single candidate enjoys a **two-thirds majority**.
- For each round of voting that does not lead to an election of a Pope, black smoke is released from the chapel; **white smoke signals the election of a new Pope**.
- A representative from the College of Cardinals stands in the main balcony of St Peter's Basilica and announces. "**Habemus papam (We have a Pope)**".
- The new Pope, who chooses a name that usually honours a saint or a predecessor, then delivers his first address to the public from the balcony.

- He emphasized on a “Church of the poor for the poor”, and spoke against economic inequality and advocated for a more just global economy.
- He took steps to address and prevent child sexual abuse, including the establishment of new accountability mechanisms.
- He authored the 2015 encyclical (Papal letter) *Laudato Si*, a groundbreaking document calling for global action on climate change.

Office of the Pope

- **The Pope is the Bishop of Rome and the visible head of the Catholic Church, which regards Jesus Christ as its invisible head.**
- He is also known as the supreme pontiff, and **his office is called the Papacy.**
- The papacy oversees the Holy See, the central governing body of the Church and Vatican City, which enjoys formal diplomatic relations with other nations.

AWARDS/ PERSONALITIES IN NEWS

Dr. K. Kasturirangan

- Renowned space scientist Dr K. Kasturirangan recently passed away in Bengaluru. He is known for his significant contributions in space science, education, and policy planning.
- Kasturirangan was **ISRO Chairman and Secretary of the Department of Space from 1994 to 2003**, and this era witnessed significant progress and several major missions.
- He was the Project Director for India's first two experimental earth observation satellites, **BHASKARA-I & II**.
- One of his landmark contributions was the expansion of India's remote sensing **Indian Remote Sensing (IRS) programme**.
- Satellites like **IRS-1C and IRS-1D** launched during his tenure, provided high-resolution data for use in agriculture, forestry, water resources, and urban planning.
- He led the successful development and launch of vital satellite series like **Indian National Satellite (INSAT)** for communication and meteorology, and IRS for Earth observation.
- The space programme witnessed a successful operationalisation of **Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV)** and flight testing of **Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV)** during his leadership.
- Notably, India's first lunar mission, **Chandrayaan-1**, was conceived during his leadership.
- Kasturirangan also chaired the committee responsible for drafting the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**.
- He also made a significant contribution to environmental conservation through his role as the **Chairman of the high level working group on Western ghats**, popularly known as Kasturirangan committee.
- He held significant positions such as Member of the Planning Commission, Member of the Rajya Sabha from 2003-2009 and Chairman of the Karnataka Knowledge Commission.
- His accomplishments earned him numerous prestigious awards, including the Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan, and Padma Vibhushan.

International Telecommunication Union

- India has nominated **M. Revathi**, joint wireless advisor, Department of Telecommunications (DoT), as its candidate for director of the Radiocommunication Bureau, International Telecommunication Union (ITU).
- The ITU is the **United Nations specialised agency for information and communication technologies**, which ensures that the world's communication systems work safely, securely, and fairly together.
- **Established in 1865** as the **International Telegraph Union**, it is the **oldest UN agency** and is the first formal and permanent international organization.
- Based in **Geneva, Switzerland**, the ITU's global membership includes 194 countries and around 900 companies, universities and international and regional organizations.
- The Radiocommunication Bureau of the ITU regulates the global radio frequencies and satellite orbits—crucial for 5G, 6G, space broadband and disaster response.

Khelo India Youth Games 2025

- Bihar will host the seventh edition of Khelo India Youth Games 2025 in the month of May.

- The **mascot** of the 2025 Games will be **Gajsimha** which symbolizes the **power of elephant and heart of lion**. The mascot has been derived from the archival heritage of **Pala dynasty** from Nalanda and Bodhgaya engraved on temples and their pillars.
- The **theme** of this year's games is "**Khel Ke Rang! Bihar Ke Sang!**"
- The **official logo** for the 2025 Games integrates key icons of Bihar's heritage:
 - The **Mahabodhi Temple** signifying spiritual and historical depth;
 - The **Peepal tree** symbolizing growth and prosperity;
 - The **Madhubani art** reflecting cultural richness; and
 - The **Valmiki Tiger Reserve and Gangetic Dolphin Sanctuary** underscoring ecological diversity.
 - Cultural pride shines through **Chhath Puja's sun worship traditions**, while the **Ashoka Chakra** connects Bihar's legacy to India's national identity.
 - The world-renowned **Nalanda University** represents Bihar's contributions to global education, complemented by the **House Sparrow—its state bird**—highlighting conservation efforts.
 - The **Lion Capital**, a national emblem rooted in Bihar's Mauryan past, reflects strength and justice.



Khelo India

- **Launched in 2017**, Khelo India is a flagship event of the **Ministry of Youth Affairs** to revitalise sports at the grassroots level.
- There are **four key events** under the Khelo India movement:
 - Khelo India Youth Games (KIYG) – for school and junior athletes
 - Khelo India University Games (KIUG) – for university-level athletes
 - Khelo India Para Games (KIPG) – for para-athletes
 - Khelo India Winter Games (KIWG) – for winter sports enthusiasts

Breakthrough Prize 2025

- The 2025 Breakthrough Prize worth \$3 million each have been announced in Life Sciences, Mathematics and Fundamental Physics.
- Also known as the **Oscars of Science**, the awards were **established in 2013** by Mark Zuckerberg and his wife Priscilla Chan, former Google chief Sergey Brin, Anne Wojcicki, and tech investors Yuri and Julia Milner.

Breakthrough Prize in Life Sciences

- **Weight-loss drugs:** Five scientists who contributed to the development of the weight loss drugs, **Ozempic and Wegovy**, were awarded the prize in Life Sciences.
- They were awarded the Prize for **discovering and characterising the GLP-1 hormone**, which aided the creation of drugs treating diabetes and obesity.
- **Multiple Sclerosis treatment:** Multiple Sclerosis (MS) is an unpredictable chronic disease caused by the immune system attacking the protective layer that covers nerve fibres of the central nervous system. Alberto Ascherio and Stephen L. Hauser were awarded the Prize for identifying the role of the B-cells of the immune system in MS and devising treatments targeted at the same.
- **Gene-editing technologies:** David R Liu was awarded the Prize for **developing the base editing and prime editing technologies** widely used to edit the DNA of living organisms. These are significant as they can edit the DNA without cutting its double helix, and rewrite entire stretches of defective DNA with a corrected version.

Breakthrough Prize in Fundamental Physics

- The \$3 million prize in Fundamental Physics is awarded to thousands of researchers from more than 70 countries representing four experimental collaborations at CERN's Large Hadron Collider (LHC) – **ATLAS, CMS, ALICE and LHCb**.
- The ATLAS and CMS collaborations will receive \$1 million each, while ALICE and LHCb will receive \$500,000 each.
- CERN is the **European particle physics laboratory near Geneva, Switzerland**. The **LHC at CERN is the world's largest and most powerful particle accelerator**, causing protons to accelerate and collide, thus helping scientists study the properties of matter.
- The Experimental **High Energy Physics (HEP) group of Bose Institute (BI)** has also been awarded the prize in Fundamental Physics as a part of ALICE at CERN.
 - Bose Institute, Kolkata is the only **Autonomous Institute under Department of Science and Technology**, working in A Large Ion Collider Experiment (ALICE) at CERN.
 - ALICE studies the Quark-Gluon Plasma (QGP), a state of extremely hot and dense matter that existed in the first microseconds after the Big Bang.

Breakthrough Prize in Mathematics

The Mathematics Breakthrough Prize was awarded to Dennis Gaitsgory for his central role in the **proof of the geometric Langlands conjecture**.

MacGregor Memorial Medal

- Five military personnel have been conferred the MacGregor Memorial Medal by Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan for outstanding contributions in military reconnaissance, exploration and adventure for the years 2023 and 2024.
- The medals were presented at a ceremony held at the **United Service Institution of India (USI)**.
- **Instituted in 1888**, the medal commemorates **Major General Sir Charles Metcalfe MacGregor, founder of USI** (established in 1870).
- Originally intended to recognise the acts of military reconnaissance and exploratory journeys, the medal's scope was expanded in 1986, post-Independence, to include military expeditions and adventure activities.
- The medal is **open to all ranks (serving and retired)** of the Armed Forces, Territorial Army, Reserve Forces, Rashtriya Rifles and Assam Rifles.