



**VAJIRAM & RAVI**  
Institute for IAS Examination

# the recitals

**G7 Summit 2025**

**PM Modi's Visit to Republic of Cyprus**

**Air India Crash**

**NAVYA**  
(Nurturing Aspirations through Vocational Training for Young Adolescent Girls)

**UN's Development Conference in Seville**

**Israel Iran War**

**Chenab Bridge**

**ULLAS**  
Uttam ULLAS - Uda Bharat Shiksha Kosh

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**JUNE  
2025**

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- Jan Suraksha Schemes
- Kerala Seeks to Amend Wildlife Act
- New Quota Policy for Ladakh
- 'Support to Poor Prisoners' Scheme
- The Registration Bill 2025
- DHRUVA
- Are the States Being Squeezed Out of Funds by the Centre?
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# Unmasking Poverty In India

In April 2025, the government cited a World Bank report claiming 171 million people were lifted out of extreme poverty in a decade. Later, the World Bank updated its poverty estimates, stating that only 5.75% of Indians now live in **abject** poverty, down from 27% in 2011–12.

## Key Takeaways from World Bank Data on Poverty in India

- **Revised Historical Poverty Estimates**
  - The World Bank's latest data shows India's past poverty levels were overestimated. For example, 1977-78 poverty was 47%, not 64%.
- **New Poverty Line: \$3 Per Day (PPP)**
  - Using this, India's extreme poor declined from about 34.4 crore (27%) in 2011–12 to 7.5 crore (under 6%) in 2022–23 — a significant improvement.
- **Misconceptions About the Poverty Line**
  - A common mistake is converting \$3 using the market rate (₹85/USD).
  - Instead, PPP conversion applies — approximately ₹20.6 per dollar — reflecting actual purchasing power.
    - The \$3/day poverty line is not a direct cash figure but reflects what \$3 can buy in India, adjusted for local costs.

## India's Own Domestic Poverty Lines

- **Pre-Tendulkar (2009):** ₹17/day (urban), ₹12/day (rural)
- **Tendulkar Committee (2009):** Raised to ₹29/day (urban), ₹22/day (rural)
- **Updated for 2011–12:** ₹36/day (urban), ₹30/day (rural)
- **Rangarajan Committee (2014):** Recommended ₹47/day (urban), ₹32/day (rural)

## Perspective Of Poverty in India

Despite India's history of poverty research, defining who is poor varies widely. Estimates range from 5.75% to 66%, depending on the benchmark used.

### Multidimensional Poverty Indicators

- Apart from income-based poverty, India has also seen improvement in **non-monetary dimensions** of deprivation:
- **World Bank's MPI:** India's non-monetary poverty fell from **53.8% in 2005-06 to 15.5% in 2022-23**.
- **NITI Aayog Estimates:** Show a reduction in multidimensional poverty from **29.17% in 2013-14 to 11.28% in 2022-23**.

## Reasons Behind India Using the World Bank's Poverty Line to Estimate Poverty

- ⊕ India's last recognised poverty line was in **2011–12** based on the **2009 Tendulkar Committee**.
- ⊕ In 2014, the Rangarajan Committee proposed a new method, but it was never formally adopted.
- ⊕ Due to data gaps and outdated methods, India now relies on NITI Aayog's Multidimensional Poverty Index or the World Bank's poverty line.
- ⊕ In the absence of updated national metrics, the World Bank's poverty line is increasingly used to estimate poverty trends in India.

## About World Bank's Poverty Line

- ⊕ The World Bank's poverty line reflects the cost of basic living, adjusted to each country's PPP (Purchasing Power Parity), to allow fair comparisons.
- ⊕ **Origins of the \$1-a-Day Benchmark**
  - In 1990, researchers used PPP exchange rates to compare national poverty lines of the poorest countries, establishing the first global standard: \$1/day (1985 prices).
- ⊕ **Adjustment for Inflation and Global Context**
  - As global prices rose, the World Bank updated its poverty line—in June 2025 raising it to **\$3/day for extreme poverty**.
  - At the 2025 PPP rate (₹20.6/USD), India's extreme poverty line equals ₹62/day. For comparison, the PPP rate is 0.67 for the UK and 3.45 for China.

- **Multiple Measures, Conflicting Realities**
  - 5.75% Indians live below World Bank’s \$3/day (₹62) poverty line for abject poverty in India.
  - 24% Indians live below the World Bank’s poverty benchmark for *lower middle-income countries* including India (₹87).
  - 82.7% Indians live below the World Bank’s poverty line for upper middle countries (₹171)
  - 20% Indians voluntarily offer labour for minimal wages.
  - **66%** Indians receive free food under government schemes.
  - These diverse indicators present a conflicting picture of poverty.
- **Policy vs Reality: Income Tax Benchmark**
  - The 2024 Union Budget waived tax for those earning up to ₹12 lakh/year (₹3,288/day), contrasting sharply with the ₹62/day poverty line — highlighting the vast income spectrum.
- **Two Ways to Interpret WB Data**
  - First, celebrate the reduction in extreme poverty.
  - Second, reflect on broader economic hardship, as 83% of Indians live on just ₹171/day — a figure that includes total income or expenditure.
- **The Bigger Question: What Truly Defines Poverty?**
  - The variation in definitions and data prompts a deeper inquiry into India’s actual economic well-being and whether poverty is being accurately understood or just statistically managed.



## Jan Suraksha Schemes

Three Jan Suraksha Schemes namely- Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (**PMJJBY**), Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (**PMSBY**) and Atal Pension Yojana (**APY**) completed 10 years since their launch in May 2015. Aimed at affordable social security for the underserved, these schemes provide life and accident insurance and pension benefits, promoting financial protection and resilience for vulnerable citizens.

### About the Schemes

Feature	PMJJBY	PMSBY	APY
<b>Objective</b>	To provide life insurance cover at an affordable premium	To offer accident insurance cover for death/disability.	To provide guaranteed pension to workers in the unorganized sector.
<b>Type of Cover</b>	For death due to any reason	Accidental death and disability insurance	Monthly pension after age 60
<b>Administering Body</b>	LIC and other life insurers with tie-up through Banks/Post Offices	Public/Private general insurers via banks/post offices	Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA).
<b>Eligibility Criteria</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age: 18–50 years at entry</li> <li>• Must have savings account</li> <li>• Consent for auto-debit</li> <li>• Coverage till age 55</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age: 18–70 years</li> <li>• Must have savings account</li> <li>• Consent for auto-debit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age: 18–40 years</li> <li>• <b>Must not be an income tax payer (after 1 Oct 2022)</b></li> <li>• Must have a bank account</li> </ul>
<b>Premium Amount</b>	₹436 per annum per member	₹20 per annum per member	Monthly/quarterly/half-yearly (Based on age and desired pension): ₹42–₹210/month (if

			joining at 18); ₹291– ₹1,454/month (if joining at 40)
<b>Benefits Offered</b>	₹2 lakh on death due to any cause (natural or accidental)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ₹2 lakh on accidental death or total disability</li> <li>• ₹1 lakh on partial disability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly pension of ₹1,000, ₹2,000, ₹3,000, ₹4,000 or ₹5,000 (based on contribution and scheme joining age)</li> <li>• Spouse continues to get same pension after subscriber's death</li> </ul>
<b>Coverage Period</b>	1 year (1st June to 31st May), renewable annually	1 year (1st June to 31st May), renewable annually	Lifetime pension from age 60 onwards, lifelong cover with minimum 20 years contribution
<b>Enrollment Process</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At Bank/Post Office</li> <li>• Online via Net Banking</li> <li>• No medical examination required</li> <li>• Aadhaar-based KYC needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At Bank/Post Office</li> <li>• Online via Net Banking</li> <li>• Aadhaar-based KYC</li> </ul>	Bank branch or digital portals (e-APY, net banking, mobile apps)
<b>Exclusions</b>	Lien period of 30 days from enrolment date (only for new entrants)	Claim rejected if death/disability not due to accident	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Premature exit allowed only in cases of terminal illness/death</li> <li>• Voluntary exit allowed with some deductions</li> </ul>
<b>Government Contribution</b>	Not applicable	Not applicable	Yes (for early joiners in 2015–16): 50% of contribution or ₹1,000/year whichever was lower for 5 years
<b>Tax Benefits</b>	Not specified	Not specified	Under Section 80CCD of Income Tax Act (if eligible)
<b>Impact as of 2025</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 23.36 crore enrolled</li> <li>• 9.05 lakh claims disbursed</li> <li>• ₹18,102.78 crore claim payout</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 51.06 crore enrolled</li> <li>• 1.57 lakh claims disbursed</li> <li>• ₹3,121.02 crore payout</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7.66 crore subscribers</li> <li>• ₹45,974.67 crore pension corpus</li> </ul>
<b>Other Highlights</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Covers all deaths (natural, accidental, pandemic-related)</li> <li>• Pro-rata premium available for late entry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One of the lowest-cost accident insurance schemes globally</li> <li>• Covers major and minor disability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotes retirement savings culture</li> <li>• Focused outreach by PFRDA through state/district campaigns, media, QR tools, chatbot</li> </ul>



## Kerala Seeks to Amend Wildlife Act

Kerala urged the Centre to amend the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 to permit the killing of wild animals that pose threats to human life and property by entering human habitats.

## What Does the Wildlife (Protection) Act (WP Act), 1972 Currently Allow?

The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 is a key legislation aimed at the conservation and protection of wildlife and their habitats, ensuring ecological and environmental security across India.

### Key Provisions of the Act Relevant to Human-Wildlife Conflict

- **Prohibition on Hunting (Section 9):** Hunting of any wild animal listed under **Schedules I to IV** is **prohibited**, except under **Section 11 of the act (Exceptions to Hunting)** which permits only the **Chief Wildlife Warden (CWLW)** to allow killing or capture of wild animals if:
  - The animal has **become dangerous to human life or property**, or
  - It is **disabled or diseased** beyond recovery.
- **Vermin Declaration (Section 62):** The Centre can declare certain animals as **vermin**, allowing their killing without legal consequences for a specified time and region. This provision is rarely used and requires **central government approval**, limiting states' ability to act independently.
  - ✓ Vermins are usually considered problem or nuisance animals that attack humans, crops, livestock or property. They are placed under **Schedule V** of the Wildlife Protection Act, of 1972.
- **Non-Lethal Measures are Prioritized:** Before lethal methods are considered, the Act mandates **capturing, tranquilizing, or relocating** the animal. These are often **logistically unfeasible**, particularly in remote or densely populated areas. **Relocation sites** are often inadequate or unavailable, leading to further complications.

### Concerns Raised over the Proposed Amendments

#### • Species endangerment:

Several targeted animals (e.g. tigers, leopards, elephants) are globally **endangered or vulnerable**. Culling them, even in pockets, risks shrinking their populations further. Critics warn this could have *"cascading effects on the ecosystem"*, upsetting predator-prey balance.

• **Setting precedent:** Allowing one state to relax the WP Act may open the door for others. India's commitment to conservation (under the Constitution, National Wildlife Action Plans, *Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)*/*Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)* treaties, etc. could be eroded if exceptions become routine.

• **Right to life vs. protection of nature:** The conflict also


### Kerala's Rationale and Proposals for Amending the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972



Reason	Explanation	Corresponding Proposed Amendment
1. Escalating Human-Wildlife Conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• From 2016–2025, <b>919 people have died</b> and nearly <b>9,000 have been injured</b> in wildlife attacks in Kerala.</li> <li>• <b>273 village panchayats</b> have been designated as conflict hotspots.</li> </ul>	<b>Region-specific and seasonal culling permissions</b> for targeted culling of dangerous animals like <b>man-eating tigers or crop-raiding elephants</b> , with <b>strict monitoring</b> to prevent abuse.
2. Inadequacy of Legal Provisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Act restricts decision-making to the <b>CWLW</b>, causing delays in emergency response.</li> </ul>	<b>Decentralizing "kill permit" authority</b> by transferring the power to issue "kill permits" to <b>regional Chief Conservators of Forests (CCFs)</b> for <b>faster, localized decisions</b>
3. Procedural Rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rules, such as verifying if a wild boar is pregnant before culling, are <b>impractical on the ground</b>.</li> <li>• Failure of non-lethal approaches like <b>tranquilisation, fencing, or relocation</b> due to logistical constraints and lack of suitable sites for relocation.</li> </ul>	<b>Revising existing rules to eliminate impractical conditions</b> , ensuring <b>realistic and prompt action</b> in life-threatening situations.
4. Limited Local Empowerment	Local authorities and forest field staff in <b>remote or tribal areas</b> lack powers	<b>Immunity from legal action for farmers and frontline officials</b> who take <b>good faith action</b> against aggressive or destructive wildlife.
5. Overpopulation of Certain Species resulting in Crops & Livelihood Loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Wild boars and bonnet macaques</b> are breeding prolifically, making <b>frequent incursions into human settlements</b></li> <li>• The inclusion of bonnet macaques in <b>Schedule I (2022)</b> has severely limited control measures.</li> <li>• Wild boars, elephants, macaques, and peafowl cause massive crop damage (up to 60% in Wayanad by wild boars).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Permission to declare wild boars as vermin</b> under Section 62 for <b>specific regions and timeframes</b>, enabling <b>controlled population management</b></li> <li>• <b>Downgrading bonnet macaques to a lower schedule</b> to facilitate their <b>capture &amp; relocation</b> without waiting for CWLW approval.</li> </ul>
6. Judicial and Conservation Constraints	Court rulings and conservation advisories restrict proactive responses by the state.	<b>Legal clarity and framework</b> to allow seasonal/controlled culling with safeguards.

raises constitutional balancing acts. Article 21 (Right to Life) protects citizens from threats to life and livelihood. At the same time, Directive Principles (Art. 48A) and Fundamental Duty (Art. 51A(g)) commit the state and citizens to preserve the environment and wildlife.

- **Animal welfare:** Planned killing raises ethical issues. Methods like traps or shooting can cause suffering. The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act embody India's ethos of compassion. Many argue that lethal control should remain a last resort.
- **Habitat loss:** Experts emphasize that the root of conflict is habitat loss and human encroachment. Culling is seen by some as treating symptoms rather than causes. Ecologists suggest stronger emphasis on corridor protection, alternative livelihoods, fertility control (e.g. animal contraceptives) and community coexistence plans.



## Way Forward

- **Negotiated Amendment:** The Centre and Kerala should engage in a detailed consultative process. If the WP Act is amended, it should be **highly targeted**. For example, time-bound provisions for specific species or regions, with mandatory scientific clearance, could limit misuse. National bodies (NTCA, NBWL) might set criteria for granting any culling permission.
- **Strengthening Non-Lethal Measures:** Kerala should redouble non-lethal efforts including better physical barriers (electric fences, trenches, solar grid fences), crop insurance for farmers, community awareness programs, and rapid response teams to scare animals back. Successful models like solar-powered fences for elephants, synthetic chili-based deterrents can be expanded. Authorities can also deploy state-of-the-art monitoring (drones, GPS-collars) to track problem herds.
- **Habitat Management:** Protecting wildlife corridors and preventing further fragmentation will keep animals in natural areas. Kerala could revise land-use plans to discourage encroachment near reserves. Restoring degraded forest patches and creating alternative grazing zones.
- **Community Involvement:** Involving panchayats in decision-making (as Kerala is proposing) is sensible. Local vigilance committees, livelihood support (e.g. promoting wildlife-friendly tourism), and transparent & timely compensation schemes for losses will build public trust.
- **Scientific Population Control:** For boars and monkeys, Kerala could explore humane population control (contraceptive baiting is under research for pigs and primates).
- **Legal safeguards:** E.g. killings only of identified problem animals, strict reporting requirements, periodic reviews by wildlife experts, and sunset clauses. This ensures the measure remains exceptional, not routine.
- **Monitoring and review:** Kerala and the Centre should set up an independent panel (ecologists, forest experts, jurists) to monitor the impact of any culling policy. If ecological indicators worsen (e.g. a drop in predator populations or unexpected crop losses), the policy must be reexamined.



## New Quota Policy for Ladakh

The President notified new regulations defining new policies on reservation, languages, domiciles, and composition of hill councils for Ladakh.

- ✓ After the special status of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) under Article 370 of the Constitution was read down on 5<sup>th</sup> August 2019, the former State of J&K was split into two UTs- J&K and Ladakh.

### Ladakh's Demographic Context

- Population (2011 Census): **2,74,289 with nearly 80%** belonging to **Scheduled Tribes (ST)**.
- **Leh** is predominantly **Buddhist**.
- **Kargil** has a sizeable **Muslim population**.

### What are the New Regulations?

1. **Ladakh Civil Services Decentralization and Recruitment (Amendment) Regulation, 2025:** Introduces a **domicile requirement** for the first time for recruitment to government posts in Ladakh. A person is considered a domicile of Ladakh if they meet **any one** of the following-
  - **Non-Ladakhis must stay for 15 years of continuous residence** in Ladakh (counted from October 31, 2019).
  - **7 years of schooling** in Ladakh and appearance in **Class 10 or 12** exam in the UT.
  - **Children of central government employees** who have worked in Ladakh for **at least 10 years**.
  - **Spouses or children** of a person who is a recognized domicile.

**Significance:** It gives legal shape to the demand that **jobs in Ladakh should go to locals** and responds to concerns about **unemployment** and **outsiders competing for local posts**.

**Prior Status:** No separate domicile definition for Ladakh & no exclusive reservation for Ladakhi residents in local jobs.

2. **Ladakh Civil Services Domicile Certificate Rules, 2025:** Establishes the **procedure and authority** for issuing domicile certificates including-

- **Issuing authority:** Tehsildar of the concerned area.
- **Appellate authority:** Deputy Commissioner (DC).
- **Application mode:** Can be submitted **physically or online**.
- **Requires submission of proof:** such as **residency documents, education certificates, employment records of parents**, etc.

3. **Union Territory of Ladakh Reservation (Amendment) Regulation, 2025:** Updates and expands the **reservation structure** for Ladakh such as-

- **85% reservation** for **Scheduled Castes (SC)/Scheduled Tribes (ST)/Other Backward Classes (OBC) and Other socially and educationally backward groups**.
- Additional **10% reservation** for **Economically Weaker Sections (EWS)** (as per central norms).
- Total reservation in Ladakh government jobs and **professional colleges** (medical, engineering) = **95% (highest in India)**.
- Non-local residents require a continuous 15-year stay in Ladakh from October 31, 2019, to qualify for a 5% job quota.

**Significance:** One of the **highest reservation levels** in India ensuring that the **tribal and backward communities**, which make up a **majority of Ladakh's population**, get equitable access to jobs and education and continuity in opportunity from school to career.

**Prior Status:** Limited to 50% for SC/ST/OBC in professional institutions and no specific provisions for EWS.

4. **Ladakh Official Languages Regulation, 2025:** Recognizes Ladakh's **multilingual identity** and grants **official status** to certain languages like **English, Hindi, Urdu, Bhoti**, and **Purgi**. Support will be provided for **Shina, Brokskat, Balti**, and **Ladakhi** through institutional promotion (e.g., education, cultural bodies, media).

**Significance:** First formal recognition of local tribal and cultural languages strengthens **cultural identity and heritage** preservation and promotes **inclusivity and regional pride** by acknowledging Ladakh's linguistic diversity.

**Prior Status:** No official recognition of local languages

5. **Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils (LAHDCs) (Amendment) Regulation, 2025:** Promotes **gender inclusion** in the governance of *Leh and Kargil* districts by reserving **One-third (1/3rd) of the seats** in both the **Leh and Kargil LAHDCs for women**. This reservation will be **rotated across different constituencies** in each election cycle.

**Significance:** It will empower women in **local self-governance**, bring Ladakh in line with **national efforts**.

**Prior Status:** No mandatory representation of women in LAHDCs.

### Concerns Raised Regarding the New Regulations

- **Lack of Constitutional Protection:** The new regulations have been framed under **Article 240** of the Constitution, which empowers the President to make laws for UTs without legislatures. However, these are **executive orders**, not part of the Constitution, meaning they can be **modified or revoked at any time** by the central government. This makes them far less secure than inclusion under the **Sixth Schedule**, which offers **guaranteed constitutional protections** to tribal regions.
- **No Safeguards for Land Ownership: Absence of any legal restriction** on the purchase of land by non-domiciles or outsiders is a **major concern** in Ladakh, especially given its **fragile environment**, increasing tourism, and large infrastructure projects. Without land protection laws, there's a growing fear that **outsiders may exploit Ladakh's limited resources**, impacting both its ecology and the rights of its indigenous communities.

- **No Legislative Body or Law-Making Power:** Despite being a UT since 2019, Ladakh still **lacks a legislative assembly** or any local law-making authority. Although, the **LAHDCs** remain **administrative in nature**, they do not possess the kind of powers granted to **Autonomous District Councils** under the Sixth Schedule, which includes authority over land, forests, education, and local customs.
- **Symbolic Cultural Recognition Only:** While the 2025 regulations **recognize languages** like Bhoti and Purgi as official, this move is largely **symbolic**. There is **no concrete plan** for integrating these languages into **education, governance, or the judicial system**. Without institutional support such as curriculum development, teacher training, or administrative use, these languages risk remaining **culturally relevant but politically marginalized**.
- **Inadequate Domicile Criteria:** The current rule defines a **15-year residence** in Ladakh as sufficient to qualify for domicile status. However, **local leaders and activists**, including those from the **KDA**, have demanded a **30-year requirement** to prevent short-term settlers from claiming local privileges. They argue that the shorter period could **dilute the employment benefits** meant for the genuine local population.

## Why were these Regulations Introduced?

- **First Region-Specific Legal Framework:** These regulations mark the **first comprehensive legal shift** toward creating governance structures **tailored to Ladakh**, distinct from the ones inherited from Jammu & Kashmir.
- **Alternative to Sixth Schedule:** Instead of amending the Constitution to include Ladakh under the **Sixth Schedule** (which gives constitutional autonomy to tribal areas), the Centre has opted for **executive regulations** under **Article 240**. While these address key concerns, they lack **constitutional permanence**.
- **Addresses Core Protest Demands (Partially):** like **jobs for locals** (with a domicile requirement and high reservation), **recognition of local languages** and identity and **Women's representation** in governance but **no land protection** or **legislative Assembly** has been provided yet.
- **Balance Between Governance and Cultural Identity:** **Bhoti, Purgi, etc.** now have a place in the **official narrative** which will help **bridge trust** between Ladakhi communities and the Centre.

Core Demands of Ladakh	Objective
Inclusion under the 6 <sup>th</sup> Schedule	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For constitutional protection for tribal areas</li> <li>• To empower autonomous district councils</li> <li>• For control over land, forests, customs, and local laws</li> </ul>
Statehood / Legislative Assembly for Ladakh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For political representation and law-making powers</li> <li>• To end exclusive central control</li> <li>• To restore democratic governance</li> </ul>
Land & Job Safeguards for Locals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To prevent land and job access by outsiders</li> <li>• To preserve Ladakh's fragile ecology and tribal identity</li> <li>• Similar to pre-Article 370 protections under Article 35A</li> </ul>
Separate Lok Sabha Seats for Leh and Kargil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To ensure both Leh (Buddhist-majority) and Kargil (Muslim-majority) have voice in Parliament</li> <li>• To acknowledge geographic and demographic differences</li> </ul>
Filling of Government Vacancies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To reduce unemployment</li> <li>• To ensure locals get benefits of new reservation policy (95%)</li> <li>• To strengthen administrative capacity</li> </ul>

\*\* These demands were led by Leh Apex Body (LAB), Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) and Sonam Wangchuk (environmentalist).

## Why did the demands emerge?

- **Loss of Legal Safeguards:** With the removal of Article 35A & Article 370 in 2019, locals feared outsiders could buy land, settle, and take government jobs.
  - ✓ Article 35A allowed the J&K legislature to decide the "permanent residents" in the former State, prohibits a non-J&K resident from buying property, and ensures job reservation for its residents.
- **Lack of Local Voice in Governance:** Ladakh had no legislature — decisions affecting the region were made entirely by the central government.
- **Environmental & Cultural Threats:** Ladakh's fragile ecology and tribal identity were seen to be at risk due to unregulated development.
- **Unfulfilled Promises:** Initial excitement over UT status faded as no new protections or development mechanisms emerged.



## 'Support to Poor Prisoners' Scheme

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has raised concerns over States and UTs **not utilizing** funds under the 'Support to Poor Prisoners' scheme.

## About the Support to Poor Prisoners' Scheme

The **Support to Poor Prisoners Scheme**, launched by the MHA in **May 2023**, is a significant Central Government initiative aimed at addressing the plight of economically disadvantaged prisoners who remain incarcerated due to their inability to:

- **Secure bail** because they cannot furnish surety or bail bonds.
- **Pay fines** imposed upon them after conviction.

**Objective:** To enable the release of poor prisoners by:

- Paying their **bail amount** (for undertrials) up to ₹40,000.
- Paying their **fine amount** (for convicts) up to ₹25,000.
- Facilitating access to legal aid and reducing prison overcrowding.

### Key Features

- **100% Centrally Funded:** The Central Government had made a provision for Rs 20 crores each for the Financial Years 2023-24, 2024-25 and 2025-26.
- **Implementing Agency:** *National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)* as the **Central Nodal Agency (CNA)**.
- **Eligibility:** Undertrial or convicted prisoners who are **financially incapable** of paying bail/fine but it **excludes** those booked under Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA), Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and any other specified stringent law.
- **Institutional Structure:** It consists of an-

Empowered Committee (EC) (at District-level)	Oversight Committee (OC) (at State-level)
<p>Constituted for assessing individual cases, approving financial support and monitoring implementation. It includes-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ District Magistrate/Collector</li> <li>○ Secretary, District Legal Services Authority (DLSA)</li> <li>○ Superintendent of Police (SP) of the district</li> <li>○ Jail Superintendent</li> <li>○ Judge in-charge of the prison</li> </ul>	<p>Constituted at state level for approving large payments beyond standard limits and reviewing implementation and fund flow. It includes-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Principal Secretary (Home/Jail)</li> <li>● Secretary (Law Dept.)</li> <li>● DG/IG Prisons</li> <li>● Secretary, State Legal Services Authority</li> <li>● Registrar General of the High Court</li> </ul>

- **Operational Procedure:**

For Undertrial Prisoners	For Convicted Prisoners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Notification by Jail Authorities:</b> Jail authorities notify DLSA if a prisoner isn't released within 7 days of bail.</li> <li>• <b>Inquiry into Financial Condition:</b> DLSA investigates financial condition (within 10 days) with help of NGOs, social workers, etc.</li> <li>• <b>Review by EC:</b> The DLSA places all such identified cases before the District EC, which is required to meet every 2–3 weeks to examine and process them.</li> <li>• <b>Sanctioning of Financial Assistance:</b> The EC can recommend financial assistance up to ₹40,000 per case for one prisoner. The sanctioned amount can be drawn and provided to the court either as a Fixed Deposit or any other acceptable method.</li> <li>• <b>Recovery of Bail Amount After Trial:</b> If the prisoner is acquitted or convicted, the trial court may order the return of the bail amount to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Notification by Jail Superintendent:</b> If a convict can't be released due to non-payment of fine, the Jail Superintendent must inform the Secretary, DLSA within 7 days.</li> <li>• <b>Investigation by DLSA:</b> The DLSA must investigate the financial condition of the prisoner within 7 days, with the assistance of social workers, NGOs, or other relevant bodies.</li> <li>• <b>Financial Aid Sanction by EC:</b> If satisfied with the investigation of the DLSA, the EC may release up to</li> </ul>

<p>the government unless the bail continues or is granted by the appellate court.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Cases Involving Bail Over ₹40,000:</b> For bail amounts exceeding ₹40,000, the Secretary, DLSA can recommend payment to the EC and may also request the court to reduce the surety. Amounts above ₹40,000 need approval from the State OC.</li> </ul>	<p>₹25,000 to the Court for the prisoner's release.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Approval for Higher Amounts:</b> For any amount over and above Rs. 25,000/-, the proposal may be approved by the State level OC.</li> </ul>
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- **Fund Flow Mechanism:** CNA maintains a **central account** in Canara Bank. States/UTs must designate a Sub Agency (SA) at the State level which must open a zero-balance subsidiary account with Canara Bank. SA to map the account on **Public Financial Management System (PFMS)** for seamless flow of funds from the Central Government's CNA account to State/UT Headquarter level subsidiary account on a **case-by-case** basis.
- ✓ **PFMS** is a web-based system designed, developed, owned and implemented by the Controller General of Accounts (Ministry of Finance) that enables **real-time digital payments, DBT, fund tracking, accounting, and fiscal reporting.** It ensures efficient cash management through "just-in-time" fund transfers and integration with banks and state financial systems.

Significance of the Scheme	Challenges Faced by the Scheme
<p><b>Access to Justice for the Marginalized:</b> The scheme ensures that financial status does not become a barrier to liberty, thereby promoting Equality Before Law (Article 14) and Right to Life and Personal Liberty (Article 21) under the Constitution.</p> <p><b>Reduces Overcrowding in Prisons:</b> According to the India Justice Report 2025, jails in India are overcrowded with an average occupancy rate of over 131%, and undertrials make up 76% of the prison population. By 2030, the prison population is projected to reach 6.8 lakh, while capacity will only rise to 5.15 lakh.</p> <p><b>Promotes Rehabilitation and Reintegration:</b> By facilitating early release, the scheme allows poor prisoners to rejoin society, seek employment, rebuild their lives and prevent long-term socio-economic damage caused by prolonged incarceration for minor or bailable offences.</p> <p><b>Supports Legal and Prison Reforms:</b> The scheme works in tandem with efforts like the <b>Model Prisons Act, 2023</b>, and digital tools like <b>e-Prisons</b> to modernize the justice system.</p> <p><b>Ensures Effective Use of Central Funds:</b> The scheme is fully centrally funded, ensuring that no financial burden falls on States/UTs and promotes cooperative federalism, as implementation is done at the State level with Central oversight via the NCRB.</p> <p><b>Humanitarian Governance:</b> Aligned with the government's commitment to "reaching the last mile", the scheme is a clear step towards inclusive governance, especially for the most disadvantaged citizens</p>	<p><b>Underutilization of Funds:</b> Despite funds being made available through the <b>CNA</b> most <b>States/UTs have not drawn funds.</b> Only <b>₹22.84 lakh</b> has been utilized by just <b>12 States</b> till March 2025, out of the ₹20 crore allocated for 2023–24.</p> <p><b>Failure to Identify Eligible Prisoners:</b> by States/UTs under the scheme results in no aid being extended to those in need.</p> <p><b>Non-constitution or Inactivity of Committees:</b> States/UTs were directed to form ECs and OCs which are either not constituted or are not functioning regularly</p> <p><b>Lack of Regular Review Mechanism:</b> ECs are supposed to meet every 2–3 weeks to consider cases, but such meetings are not being held consistently.</p> <p><b>Ignoring MHA Advisories and Follow-ups:</b> The MHA has conducted several video conferences, issued guidelines and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), and sent reminders—yet States/UTs have shown poor responsiveness.</p> <p><b>No Efforts to Reduce Prison Overcrowding:</b> The scheme is also meant to decongest jails by enabling release of poor undertrials. The lack of implementation defeats this purpose</p>



**Way Forward**

- **Immediate identification** of eligible prisoners in each district.
- **Constitution and activation** of ECs and OCs.
- **Training and awareness** for jail officials and DLSA staff on the SOPs.
- **Regular monitoring** by the MHA and **publishing periodic progress reports.**
- **Simplifying fund access procedures** and **incentivizing States** for proactive implementation.



# The Registration Bill 2025

The Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) has invited feedback on the draft Registration Bill, 2025.

## What is the Registration Bill, 2025?

It is a draft legislation proposed by the MoRD which seeks to replace the over-a-century-old **Registration Act, 1908** and create a **modern, digital, paperless and citizen-centric legal framework** for the registration of documents, especially those concerning **immovable property**.

### Objectives of the Bill

- To **digitize** and **streamline** the document registration process.
- To **enhance legal reliability** of registered documents.
- To **reduce fraudulent transactions** and **procedural bottlenecks**.
- To create a **uniform and efficient registration system** across India that is in sync with socio-economic and technological changes.

### Registration Bill, 2025 vs. Registration Act, 1908

Provisions	Registration Act, 1908	Registration Bill, 2025
<b>Mode of Registration</b>	Primarily physical and paper-based; digital storage added via Sec 16A (2001 amendment).	Provides for electronic presentation, signing, identity verification, and issuance of digital registration certificates. (Sections 1, 29, 52)
<b>Definitions and Terminology</b>	Basic definitions (Sec 2) like “addition”, “immovable property”, “lease”.	Expanded to include “Inspector General of Registration (IGR)”, “mental incapacity” etc. (Section 2)
<b>Compulsory Registration</b>	Sec 17 lists certain documents like gift deeds, leases >1 year, etc.	Expanded compulsory documents: agreements to sell, powers of attorney, court orders, equitable mortgages, sale certificate, company merger and demerger. (Section 12)
<b>Optional Registration</b>	Allowed under Sec 18 for lower-value or informal documents.	Documents not required to be compulsorily registered under Section 12 can still be voluntarily registered. (Section 13)
<b>Registration Officers &amp; Hierarchy</b>	Limited to Registrars, Sub-Registrars and Inspectors of Registration offices. (Sec 3–7)	Modernizes the organizational structure of the registration establishment by creating a more agile and responsive hierarchy, including the introduction of Additional and Assistant IGR. (Sections 4, 5)
<b>Appointment Process for Registrars</b>	In case of a vacancy, the Inspector-General can appoint someone to act as Registrar. If not, the local District Court Judge can appoint a temporary Registrar until the State Government fills the post.	Vests rule-making authority with the appropriate government to ensure alignment with local governance structures.
<b>Jurisdiction and Office</b>	Documents must be presented in office where property is located. (Sec 28, 29)	Allows in-person or electronic submission at relevant office. (Sections 24, 25, 28)
<b>Identity Verification</b>	Compulsory affixing of Photo and fingerprints at registration office (Sec 32A added in 2001).	Aadhaar-based or other consented digital verification accepted. Manual & biometric options provided. (Section 29)
<b>Effect of Registration</b>	A registered document becomes legally effective from the date it was signed (executed), not from the date it was registered (Sec 47); overrides oral agreements (Sec 48).	Same principles, with additional clarity for mortgages, sale agreements, etc. (Sections 16–19)

<b>Refusal of Registration</b>	Allowed on procedural grounds; appeals can be made against the order within thirty days of refusal in a Civil Court under whose jurisdiction the registration office is situated (Sec 72–77).	Provides clear grounds for refusal and rules for cancellation. Appeals can be filed within 30 days— first to the Registrar, then to a court if needed (Sections 58–64, Chapter XIII).
<b>Time Limits for Presentation</b>	Must present within 4 months from the date of execution (Sec 23–26).	Same time frame; if delayed due to unavoidable circumstances then allows presentations with reasons and fine. (Sections 20–23)
<b>Inter-agency Coordination</b>	No clear provision.	Enables electronic integration with other record-keeping systems to enhance the efficiency and integrity of information flows.
<b>Penalty</b>	Imprisonment of up to 7 years in jail, a fine, or both.	Provides for an imprisonment of up to 3 years in jail, a fine, or both.

<b>Benefits of the Proposed Bill</b>	<b>Concerns Raised Regarding the Bill</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Digital Convenience:</b> It enables online submission, verification, and certification of documents</li> <li>• <b>Faster and Transparent Process:</b> It streamlines registration, cuts delays, and enhances transparency through digital records.</li> <li>• <b>Reduced Fraud and Disputes:</b> Biometric/e-signature verification and mandatory registration of more documents curb fraud.</li> <li>• <b>Legal Certainty:</b> Clearly defined refusal/cancellation grounds increase trust in registered documents.</li> <li>• <b>Inclusivity:</b> Offers alternatives to Aadhaar; no one is denied registration for not having Aadhaar.</li> <li>• <b>Improved Governance:</b> Adds new administrative posts and clearer hierarchy for efficient functioning of registration offices.</li> <li>• <b>Business &amp; Citizen Friendly:</b> Simplifies language and procedures, making it easier for small businesses and individuals.</li> <li>• <b>National Uniformity:</b> Creates a standard framework across states.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Cybersecurity Risks</b> to Storing sensitive data like e-signatures and property records digitally.</li> <li>• <b>Digital Exclusion:</b> Citizens without internet access or digital literacy, especially in rural areas, may face difficulties.</li> <li>• <b>Delegation to CSCs (Common Service Centres):</b> Delegating complex legal functions (e.g. stamp duty calculation, title verification) to CSCs may lead to procedural errors or misuse.</li> <li>• <b>Ambiguity in Optional Registration:</b> Section 13 allows optional registration but does not specify which documents it covers, creating scope for confusion or misuse.</li> <li>• <b>Discretionary Powers for Cancellation:</b> The Inspector General has wide powers to cancel registration, which may be misused if not properly checked.</li> <li>• <b>Implementation Challenges:</b> Uniform and effective implementation across states and UTs may be difficult due to varied administrative capacities.</li> <li>• <b>Short Appeal Timeline:</b> A 30-day limit to appeal against refusal or cancellation may not be adequate for all citizens, especially those in remote areas.</li> <li>• <b>Need for Stronger Safeguards:</b> Though natural justice is mentioned, detailed guidelines for safeguards during registration cancellation are not fully laid out.</li> </ul>

### Way Forward

- **Strengthen cybersecurity** to protect digital records.
- **Ensure digital inclusion** through support for rural and digitally illiterate users.
- **Clarify ambiguous provisions**, especially around optional registration.
- **Establish safeguards** to prevent misuse of cancellation powers.
- **Train officials and upgrade infrastructure** for smooth nationwide implementation.
- **Promote public awareness** to ensure informed participation.

The Department of Posts (under the Ministry of Communications) has launched **DHRUVA (Digital Hub for Reference and Unique Virtual Address)**- a transformative digital policy aimed at making address data a core part of **India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)**.

### What is DHRUVA?

**DHRUVA** is a DPI that lets users easily create, share, and manage their address information in a secure and accurate way by using **geo-coding** to replace old, confusing address systems with a simple digital method.

- ✓ Like barcodes for products, **DHRUVA** standardizes addresses to improve service delivery, save time, and protect user privacy across sectors.

### Evolution of Indian Postal Service



**Colonial Transformation:** The British East India Company expanded and formalized postal services:

- In 1766, Lord Clive established a regular postal system in Bengal.
- Post Offices opened in Calcutta (1774), Madras and Bombay (1786).
- 1837: The Company secured a monopoly over postal services.
- 1854: Dalhousie's Post Office Act introduced fixed postage, stamps, and a unified system, greatly expanding postal reach.

**Present Status:** India Post operates over 160,000 post offices- 130,000 in rural areas and employs around 600,000 people, making it India's third-largest workforce after defence and railways.

### Challenges in the Modern Era:

- (1) Privatization and competition from courier giants like FedEx and DHL reduced India Post's market share.
- (2) Digital communication led to the decline of letter-writing and services like Book Post, which was officially discontinued in 2023.
- (3) Infrastructure gaps and delays weakened India Post's position in the express and parcel market.

**Recent Reforms and Future Outlook:** In 2023, the Post Office Bill (Promotes digitization and e-commerce partnerships) replaced the colonial 1898 Act, aiming to modernize services and integrate banking. It plays a vital role in ensuring last-mile connectivity and delivering essential services, especially in remote regions.

**Key Layers of DHRUVA:** DHRUVA works through two main layers:

DIGIPIN Layer	Digital Address Layer
<p><b>What is it?</b> DIGIPIN (Digital Postal Index Number) is a 10-character alphanumeric code that identifies a very specific location like a house or shop on a <b>4x4 metre square grid</b> across India. DIGIPIN will not replace the traditional six-digit PIN system. Instead, it is intended to act as an extra layer of precision built on top of existing postal addresses.</p> <p><b>Developed By-</b> The Department of Posts, IIT Hyderabad, and ISRO's National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC).</p> <p><b>How is it made?</b> It's created using satellite data (geo-coordinates like latitude and longitude) encoded into a 10-character alphanumeric format using predefined symbols. The DIGIPIN can be accessed at <a href="https://dac.indiapost.gov.in/mydigipin/home">https://dac.indiapost.gov.in/mydigipin/home</a>.</p>	<p><b>What is it?</b> This layer allows users to generate unique and customized labels (such as username@domain) to represent their DIGIPIN and descriptive addresses and manage this information.</p> <p><b>Why is it useful?</b> Instead of writing your full address every time, one can just share your Digital Address. It's like a UPI ID for addresses.</p>
<p><b>Key Takeaways</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>DIGIPIN</b> = The exact digital location of your home or place (like GPS coordinates).</li> <li>● <b>Digital Address</b> = A simple name you create to use and share that location easily (like an email ID for your address). For example, <i>rahul@Dhruva</i>.</li> </ul>	

### Key Features of DHRUVA

- **Privacy-Centric and User-Controlled:** It collects only essential data, ensures all address sharing is based on **explicit user consent**, and allows users to **update, share, or revoke** their address information at any time. Built on a federated model, it avoids central data storage, protecting user autonomy.
- **Efficient Service Delivery and Governance:** By enabling accurate digital addresses, DHRUVA improves public and private services such as **last-mile deliveries, Know Your Customer (KYC), emergency response (medical supplies)**, and welfare distribution. It supports better governance through **address intelligence** for planning and resource allocation, especially in rural or hard-to-reach areas.

✓ **DHRUVA's** precise addressing can reduce *return-to-origin (RTO) losses*, as seen in pilot integrations with logistics firms.

- **Interoperability, Innovation, and Open Integration:** DHRUVA is built on **open APIs and protocols**, enabling easy integration with both government and private platforms. Its Address-as-a-Service (AaaS) model fosters innovation and reduces the technical barriers for startups and businesses to offer new location-based services.
- **Inclusive and Accessible:** Designed with a **mobile-first, multilingual interface**, DHRUVA ensures addressability in **rural and underserved areas**. It removes the need for users to rely on traditional address knowledge or literacy, promoting **digital inclusion**.
- **Reliable, Verifiable, and Trusted Ecosystem:** The platform includes **address verification tools**, such as Standardized formats, confidence scores and validation by authorized entities.

## Extra Mile: what3words

**Concept:** what3words is a UK-based global addressing system that divides the entire surface of the Earth into a grid of 3m x 3m squares—covering every part of the globe, including oceans and unmarked rural areas.

**Unique Address:** Each square is assigned a unique three-word combination (e.g., `///index.home.raft`).

**Precise Navigation:** Helps in pinpointing exact locations where traditional addresses fail (e.g., entrances of large buildings, remote disaster zones).

✓ **Example:** The address for the entrance of India Post's headquarters in Delhi is `///importing.mailings.openly`.

**Wide Adoption:** It's integrated into various platforms, including navigation apps, logistics software, and emergency response systems.

**Smart Mobility:** Integrated with car navigation systems (e.g., Mercedes-Benz, Ford).

**Proprietary System:** what3words is not open-source—some critics argue that essential infrastructure like addressing should be public.

### History of PIN Code

The Postal Index Number (PIN) was introduced in **1972**, by **Shriram Bhikaji Velankar**, a senior member of the Posts and Telegraphs Board.

- The PIN Code was meant to ease the process of mail sorting and delivery in a country where different places, often, have the same or similar names, and letters are written in a wide variety of languages.
- The PIN is made up of six digits. The **first number indicates the postal region** — Northern, Eastern, Western, Southern; and number 9, which signifies the Army Postal Service.
- The second number denotes a sub-region, and the third represents the sorting district. The remaining numbers narrow the geography further to the specific post office making the delivery.
- DoP undertook a national **geofencing exercise** across all postal jurisdictions to georeference all the pin code boundaries of the country.
- Know Your PIN Code web application uses Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) location features to allow users to identify the correct PIN Code based on the location and submit feedback to improve PIN code accuracy.

- **Legacy Address Modernization:** DHRUVA supports **onboarding of old, unstructured addresses** by converting them into structured, geo-coded digital formats.
- **Service Discovery and Civic Planning:** Through spatial data mapping, DHRUVA helps users and platforms discover nearby services (e.g., health centers, delivery hubs), improving civic planning and operational efficiency.
- **Robust Grievance Redressal:** The system includes **multi-channel support** (apps, email, call centers) for addressing user complaints.
- **Security, Accountability, and Transparency:** With regular audits, oversight mechanisms, and clearly defined roles.
- **Scalable and Future-Ready Design:** DHRUVA's **modular, flexible architecture** supports wide-scale adoption and adapts to new technologies, policy changes, and evolving user needs—ensuring long-term sustainability.

### Significance

For Citizens	For Government	For Private Sector	For National Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empowers users with ownership of their address data.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enables targeted delivery of schemes and benefits.</li> <li>• Improves emergency response and welfare audits.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhances last-mile delivery accuracy.</li> <li>• Reduces cost and effort in address verification and KYC.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Part of India's journey towards becoming a Viksit Bharat (developed nation).</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensures easy access to services regardless of location.</li> <li>• Reduces dependence on paper documents or manual address entry.</li> <li>• Protects privacy through consent-based sharing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supports urban and rural planning with accurate spatial data.</li> <li>• Aligns with SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supports market analytics, customer segmentation, and logistics optimization.</li> <li>• Opens new opportunities for startups and tech innovators.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complements India's success with Aadhaar, UPI, DigiLocker, and ONDC.</li> <li>• Positions India as a global leader in DPI-led digital transformation.</li> <li>• <b>Geospatial Governance:</b> By integrating with the <b>National Geospatial Policy 2022</b>, DHRUVA supports data-driven urban planning.</li> </ul>
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## Are the States Being Squeezed Out of Funds by the Centre?

The question arises as the Union government has been progressively reducing revenue transfers to the States, even as States face declining revenue-generating capacity and tighter restrictions on borrowing.

**Background:** The current debate over fiscal federalism has **deep historical roots**, dating back to the early decades of India's independence-

• **Federal Financial Strain (1962):** During the proceedings of the **Third Finance Commission (FCIII)** in 1962, **multiple States expressed concerns about the Centre encroaching on State autonomy**, particularly through- Unilateral financial decisions and Central directives on matters constitutionally assigned to States. The FCIII noted a **“disturbing” trend** where States were becoming **excessively dependent on Central financial assistance**.

### Vertical Devolution (Centre to All States)

VS

### Horizontal Devolution (Division among States)

- ⊕ **Current Formula:** 41% of the divisible pool of central taxes is shared with States (15th FC recommendation).
  - 1% reduction from the 14FC recommendation was allocated to the newly formed UTs of J&K, and Ladakh.
  - The divisible pool includes tax revenues collected by the Centre, after deducting Cesses, Surcharges and Cost of tax collection.
  - If the Centre collects ₹100: ₹12 from cesses, ₹8 from surcharges, ₹80 is normal tax revenue; ₹2 tax collection cost then only ₹78 becomes the divisible pool.
  - 41% of ₹78 = ₹32 is given to States; remaining ₹46 + ₹20 goes to Centre.
- ⊕ **Problem:** Post-14th FC (which increased devolution from 34% to 42%), Centre started increasing **cess and surcharge collections**.
  - From 2021–22, for every ₹100 tax collected, **₹13.5 came from cesses/surcharges**- highest in over a decade.
  - Even though 41% share remains **unchanged on paper**, the **actual amount** States receive has **declined**.
- ⊕ **States' Demand:** Increase vertical devolution from 41% to 50% and include cesses/surcharges in divisible pool via constitutional amendment.

Article 271 empowers the Union government to levy cesses and surcharges.

- ⊕ **Current Formula:** The 15th FC distributed the tax among states based on-
  - **Income Distance (45%):** Poorer States with lower per capita income receive a higher share.
  - **Population (2011 Census) (15%):** States with larger populations get more funds.
  - **Geographical Area (15%):** States with larger land area are allocated more funds.
  - **Forest and Ecology (10%):** States with greater forest cover are rewarded.
  - **Demographic Performance (12.5%):** States that have controlled population growth receive more.
  - **Tax Effort (2.5%):** States that collect taxes more efficiently are rewarded.
- ⊕ **Problem:** The **top 3 criteria (income distance, population, area)** make up **75%** of the weight. States like **Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana** that have controlled population, developed their economy, and improved tax collection- **receive less money** due to the **low weightage** of these good-performance indicators (only 15%).
  - For instance, **Kerala's share** in the divisible pool dropped from **3.08% (FY02)** to **1.9% (FY26 estimate)** whereas **UP** with larger population and higher income gap is expected to get **17.9%** in FY26.
- ⊕ **State's Demand:**
  - **Telangana:** Give **50% weightage to GSDP** (economic output).
  - **Tamil Nadu:** Add **15% weightage** for a State's **contribution to national GDP**.
  - **Gujarat:** Increase weightage for **overall performance**.
  - **Goa:** Introduce **12.5% weightage** for **SDGs**.
  - **Kerala & Goa:** Reduce income distance weightage from **45% to 30%**.

- **Divergence among States (Post-Liberalization Scenario-1991):** Southern and Western States saw economic growth, while eastern, central, and northern regions lagged, leading to stark disparities in development and social indicators.
- **Resurgence of Fiscal Federalism Tensions:** Persistent inter-state inequalities have intensified decades old concerns over financial centralization with states increasingly vocal against the dilution of their financial rights.

### What is the Current Issue for fiscal tensions among Centre and States?

The latest fight is unfolding across three different layers-

#### Centre-to-State Transfers

Disputes over the extent (vertical devolution of taxes), distribution (horizontal devolution of taxes) and composition of funds shared by the Centre (divisible pool of taxes). {Refer figure}

#### State's Own Revenue

For more than a decade, **States' own tax revenue (SOTR)** has fallen below 50% of their total revenue. Earlier (2000s and early 2010s), it was often **above or close to 50%**.

**Sources of SOTR-** Stamp duty, registration fees, Motor vehicle tax, State GST (SGST) and other local taxes.

- ✓ In FY18, SGST contributed 15% of States' total revenue. Now, SGST contributes around 22%. But excluding SGST, own tax share fell from 34% to 28%, showing weakening local revenue streams.
- ✓ SGST rates are decided by the GST Council, not the individual States. Many States (e.g., Tamil Nadu, Kerala, West Bengal) oppose some Council decisions, feeling loss of fiscal autonomy.

### Key Issues Regarding Declining SOTR

- **Decline in SOTR relative to GSDP (Gross State Domestic Product)** in several advanced States is a key concern. For instance, in Tamil Nadu, SOTR to GSDP ratio has gradually declined from 7.72% in FY13-15 to 6.17% in FY 22-24.
  - This has been the case in Karnataka, Kerala, Bihar, Delhi, and Madhya Pradesh, too. While the ratio has risen in Maharashtra, Manipur, Meghalaya, Odisha, and Uttarakhand, it has remained stagnant in other States.
  - **Reason:** Before GST, **Sales Tax was a major source** of buoyant revenue (around 60%). GST is **destination-based**, so producing States (like Karnataka) **lose tax advantage**. Tax on **services** is zero-rated if exported-hurting service-rich States.
- **Declining Non-tax Revenue:** Non-tax revenue of States includes grants from the Centre, earnings from social, fiscal, economic, and general services rendered by the States, interest receipts, and dividends/profits from State public sector enterprises. Trends show:
  - The share of non-tax revenue in state's total revenue is expected to drop **below 24%** in FY25- lowest in 25 years.
  - **Interest receipts:** have stayed below 5% of States' non-tax revenue over the past decade, down from 5-9% in the 2000s and early 2010s.
  - **Dividends from PSUs:** have remained consistently below 1%.
  - **Service earnings:** such as public health (social service) and power (economic service) rarely exceeded 30% in the last decade.

**Result of falling SOTR (Rising Dependence on Central Transfers)-** Between FY16 and FY25, States received as transfers/ grants from the Centre:

- **23-30% of their total revenue and 65-70% of non-tax revenue.**

#### Limits on Borrowing

Under **Article 293**, the Centre can set a **Net Borrowing Ceiling (NBC)** for States- a limit on how much they can borrow. This is usually **3% of the State's GSDP**, based on Finance Commission advice and the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act.

**Concerns Raised Regarding NBC:**

- **Restricted Financial Autonomy:** Though States pass their own FRBM laws, they must still get Centre's approval to borrow if they owe the Centre money- giving the Centre real control.
- **Off-Budget Borrowings:** Earlier, States could borrow indirectly through PSUs or special purpose vehicles, without showing it in the Budget- this was called off-budget borrowing. Now, the Centre counts these too within the 3% borrowing cap, tightening the leash further.
  - ✓ In 2023, Kerala challenged this borrowing limit in the Supreme Court, calling it a "financial embargo". The Court, however, refused to intervene, upholding the Centre's power.

**Way Forward**

For the Finance Commission	For the Centre	For States
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider raising vertical devolution.</li> <li>• Revise horizontal devolution criteria to reward performance and contribution.</li> <li>• Recommend a constitutional cap on cesses and surcharges.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid excessive centralization of resources</li> <li>• Respect fiscal federalism in spirit, not just form</li> <li>• Empower States through predictable, rule-based transfers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen own revenue mechanisms.</li> <li>• Improve tax compliance and efficiency.</li> <li>• Strategize non-tax revenue generation from public utilities and PSUs.</li> </ul>



## Actor Booked Under SC/ST Act

Telugu actor **Vijay Deverakonda** has been booked under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act (SC/ST Act), 1989 for allegedly making derogatory remarks about tribal communities at a recent film event.

**About SC/ST Act, 1989**

This special law aims to prevent crimes and discrimination specifically targeted at **Scheduled Castes (SCs)** and **Scheduled Tribes (STs)**, protect their dignity, and ensure they get fair justice.

- ✓ **2015 Amendment:** Strengthened provisions for victim relief, time-bound investigations, and expanded definitions of atrocities.
- ✓ **2025 Focus:** The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has emphasized increasing special courts and training police to enhance implementation.

**Objectives of the Act:**

- **Prevent Atrocities:** Stop crimes and humiliating acts committed by non-SC/ST persons against SCs and STs. (This Act does not apply to crimes committed between SCs and STs.)
- **Establish Special Courts:** Ensure quick investigation and speedy trial through **Special Courts and Exclusive Special Courts**.
- **Relief and Rehabilitation:** Provide **immediate relief**, legal aid, compensation, and social/economic rehabilitation for victims.
- **Protect Victims and Witnesses:** Ensure that victims, their families, and witnesses are protected from threats, intimidation, or violence during investigation and trial.
- **Empower State Machinery:** Strengthen district and police administration to identify atrocity-prone areas, take preventive action, and monitor implementation.

## Key Provisions

- ⊙ **Definition of Atrocities & Punishments for offences (Section 3):** Lists specific atrocities by non-SC/ST persons, such as:
  - Forcing SC/STs to eat filthy substances, dump waste near homes, public insults.
  - Grabbing their land, forcing bonded labour/manual scavenging.
  - Denying access to public places or rights.
  - Obstructing voting, politics, or religious/social practices.
  - Sexual offences against SC/ST women.
  - Destroying sacred objects.
  - Social/economic boycott, witchcraft allegations, false cases to harass.
- ⊙ **Punishment:** 6 months to life imprisonment + fine; **death penalty** if false evidence causes wrongful execution.
- ⊙ **Investigation:** All offences listed in the Act are cognizable. An investigation of offence committed under the Act cannot be investigated by an officer not below the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP).
- ⊙ **Neglect of Duty by Public Servants (Section 4):** Public servants (who are not SC/ST) can be punished with **6 months to 1 year imprisonment** if they fail to register FIR, record statements properly, investigate and file charge sheets within 60 days and perform duties under this Act.
- ⊙ **Special and Exclusive Special Courts (Section 14):** For the purpose of providing for a speedy trial, the State Government shall, with the concurrence of the Chief Justice of the High Court, establish in each district a Court of Session to be a Special Court exclusively to try the offences. Trials must proceed **day-to-day** and be completed as far as possible within **2 months**. Appeals against orders/bail go directly to High Courts.
- ⊙ **Rights of Victims and Witnesses (Section 15A):** includes-
  - **Protection from threats/intimidation.**
  - Right to be heard at bail/parole hearings.
  - Free copies of FIRs and charge sheets.
  - Travelling, maintenance, and rehabilitation expenses.
  - Relocation, if needed.
  - Trial proceedings must be **video recorded**.
  - NGOs can help victims and families.
  - Special Courts can keep names/addresses confidential for safety.
- ⊙ **No Anticipatory Bail (Section 18 & 18A):** With 2018 Amendment, **no preliminary enquiry** is needed before registering an FIR; no prior approval needed for arrest.
- ⊙ **Preventive and Remedial Measures (Sections 16, 17, 21):** District Magistrates can **declare atrocity-prone areas** and take preventive action. **Collective fines** can be imposed on communities encouraging atrocities. States must run surveys, frame schemes for relief/rehabilitation, and report to Parliament annually.
- ⊙ **Other Features:** include-
  - **Exterment:** Likely troublemakers can be **removed** from an area for up to **3 years**.
  - **Forfeiture:** Property used for committing an atrocity can be seized.
  - **Presumption of Guilt:** If an offence happens linked to an SC/ST dispute, courts **presume knowledge of the victim's caste**.
  - **Override Clause:** Act overrides any conflicting law or custom.

### Significance of the Act

- **Protects Marginalized Communities:** Provides **legal protection** to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes against **caste-based violence, discrimination, and humiliation**. Recognises specific offences that target **social dignity**, land rights, political participation, etc.
- **Deterrent Effect:** Harsh punishments (up to life imprisonment or death in extreme cases) act as a **deterrent** for caste-based atrocities. **No anticipatory bail** and strict bail conditions strengthen victim protection.
- **Social Justice Tool:** Upholds **constitutional values** of equality, non-discrimination, and human dignity (Article 17- abolition of untouchability). Empowers oppressed communities to **assert their rights**.
- **Global Commitments:** Contributes to **SDG 10** (Reduced Inequalities) and

### Criticism/ Challenges of the Act

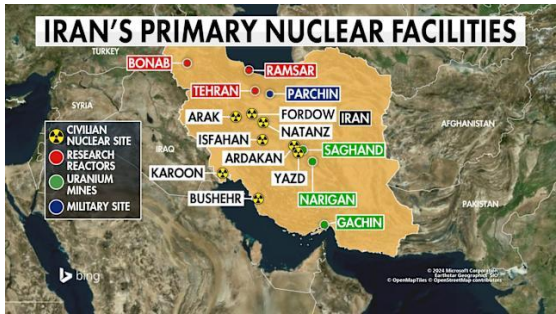
- **Misuse Allegations:** Critics argue that **false cases** are sometimes filed to settle personal disputes, land/property disputes, or political rivalries. The Supreme Court (in *Subhash Kashinath Mahajan, 2018*) noted misuse concerns (SC ruled misuse was harming “innocent citizens,” and imposed safeguards like preliminary inquiry and prior approval for arrests.), though Parliament reversed this dilution later.
- **Low Conviction Rates:** According to a report published under the SC/ST Act, the decline in conviction rates under the act fell to 32.4% in 2022 from 39.2% in 2020 raising serious concerns about the effectiveness of legal protections for marginalized communities.
  - **Reasons:** Poor investigation, hostile witnesses, social pressure, or compromise.
  - In many states like Uttar Pradesh, charge-sheeting delays and weak prosecution led to acquittals in serious atrocity cases like **Hathras (2020)**.
- **Implementation Gaps:** Inadequate funds, Delays in investigation and trial despite strict timelines. Victims often lack awareness of rights, face threats, or withdraw complaints. Relief and compensation don't always reach victims quickly.
- **Institutional & Administrative Burden:** Requires dedicated courts, trained prosecutors, and protection measures- many states lack sufficient infrastructure.

<p><b>SDG 16</b> (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) by addressing discrimination and ensuring access to justice.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Social Backlash:</b> Sometimes leads to <b>social tension</b> in mixed communities, with allegations that the law is unfairly harsh on the accused without prior inquiry. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Perception of the law being “too strict” or “anti-upper caste” creates social resistance.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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# Israel Strikes Iran's Nuclear Sites

- Israel launched a major strike on Iran, targeting nuclear and military sites in Tehran, killing Iran's Revolutionary Guard chief and two top nuclear scientists.
- The attack marks a dramatic escalation in the Israel-Iran shadow war, raising fears of a broader regional conflict amid growing tensions over Iran's advancing nuclear programme.
- Later, the United States entered the Israel-Iran conflict by bombing three Iranian nuclear facilities using advanced B-2 stealth bombers and bunker-busting bombs.
  - The United States Air Force and Navy attacked three Iranian nuclear facilities: **Fordow, Natanz, and Isfahan**, in an operation called "**Midnight Hammer**".
- Finally, US President Donald Trump announced a ceasefire between Israel and Iran, shortly after Iran launched a missile attack on the **Al Udeid airbase in Qatar**, the largest US military base in the Middle East.



### US has Bombed Nuclear Sites in Iran



- ★ Fordow: Underground uranium enrichment facility. Iran's most heavily fortified site, buried under a mountain near Qom
- ★ Natanz: Main uranium enrichment facility. Large underground complex housing advanced centrifuges
- ★ Isfahan: Uranium conversion facility. Processes yellowcake into uranium hexafluoride (UF6) gas for enrichment at other sites.

### Iran's Nuclear Programme

- Iran claims its nuclear programme is dedicated solely to **civilian and peaceful purposes**, such as energy production and medical research.
- Despite Iran's assertions, many countries and the IAEA remain unconvinced, suspecting military dimensions to the programme.
- For the first time in two decades, the IAEA Board of Governors formally declared Iran in breach of its nuclear non-proliferation obligations.
- Earlier IAEA reports revealed that Iran has enriched uranium up to 60% purity, dangerously close to the 90% threshold needed for weapons.

### Bunker-Buster MOP and B-2 Spirit Stealth Bomber

- US used the GBU-57 Massive Ordnance Penetrator (MOP) to target Iran's deeply buried Fordow nuclear facility.
- The bomb, deployable only by the B-2 Spirit stealth bomber, was used for the first time.
- **Bunker-Buster MOP**
  - The **GBU-57 MOP** is the US Air Force's most powerful non-nuclear bomb, capable of penetrating 60 meters of earth.
  - It measures about 20.5 feet in length and 31.5 inches in diameter and weighs about 13,000 kgs
- **B-2 Spirit Stealth Bomber**
  - The B-2 Spirit is a long-range, stealth strategic bomber designed to evade advanced air defenses and deliver heavy payloads, including the GBU-57 MOP.

- o Operated by the US Air Force, it combines cutting-edge stealth technology with global strike capability, making it a key asset in high-value, deep-penetration missions.

### Global US Military Footprint

- According to a July 2024 Congressional Research Service report, the US operates at least 128 overseas military bases across 51 countries.
- In the Middle East, under CENTCOM (*U.S. Central Command*), the US maintains key bases in **Qatar (Al Udeid)**, Bahrain, Kuwait, UAE, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia, with additional deployments in Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Yemen.
- These bases support surveillance, combat, airlift, missile defence, and counterterrorism operations, with major installations like Al Udeid and Bahrain's Fifth Fleet (navy) serving as strategic regional hubs.



## PM Modi's Visit to Republic of Cyprus

- PM Modi paid a state visit to Cyprus. During this visit, he held talks with President Nikos Christodoulides.
- This was the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister to Cyprus in over two decades. It underscores the strategic depth and enduring friendship between the two democracies.

### Key Highlights of the Visit

- **PM Modi Conferred Cyprus's Highest Honour**
  - o Cyprus President awarded PM Modi the "**Grand Cross of the Order of Makarios III**", the country's highest civilian honour.
- **Focus on implementing the 2024 Apia Commonwealth Ocean Declaration**
  - o The leaders committed to enhancing coordination within international bodies like the UN and the Commonwealth, with a focus on implementing the **2024 Apia Commonwealth Ocean Declaration**. (*Apia is the capital and largest city of Samoa*)
    - ✓ This Declaration emphasizes sustainable ocean governance, climate resilience, marine biodiversity protection, and capacity-building among member states
    - ✓ The inaugural Commonwealth Ocean Ministers Meeting was held in Cyprus in April 2024.
    - ✓ This led to the creation of the **Blue Charter Centre of Excellence** to promote sustainable ocean practices and build capacity among Commonwealth nations.
- **Strengthening Political Dialogue**
  - o The two countries agreed to hold regular high-level political dialogue and activate institutional mechanisms through their foreign ministries to monitor and implement an upcoming bilateral Action Plan.
- **Support for Cyprus Sovereignty and UN-Led Peace**
  - o India reiterated support for Cyprus' sovereignty and UN-backed efforts for a bizonal, bicommunal federation.
    - ✓ **Bizonal**: The territory is divided into two zones, reflecting the geographical separation of the two communities.
    - ✓ **Bicommunal**: The federation is structured to accommodate and represent the interests of both **Greek** Cypriot and **Turkish** Cypriot communities.
  - o Both opposed unilateral actions that hinder negotiations.
- **Enhanced Defence and Security Cooperation**
  - o Cyprus and India condemned terrorism, including recent attacks in Kashmir.
  - o They pledged joint action on counter-terrorism, cyber security, defence production, maritime security, and crisis response coordination.

- **Connectivity and Regional Integration**
  - Both sides endorsed the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) as a game-changer for connectivity.
  - Cyprus offered to serve as a logistics hub and gateway for Indian trade into Europe.
- **EU–India Strategic Engagement**
  - Cyprus pledged to support India-EU ties during its **2026 EU Council Presidency**.
    - ✓ Cyprus will assume Presidency of the Council of the European Union in early 2026.
  - Both nations welcomed progress in key areas like trade, defence, energy, and space, and committed to concluding the **EU–India Free Trade Agreement** by year-end.
  - Both sides also supported continued collaboration through the **EU–India Trade and Technology Council** and extending the 2025 Strategic Roadmap.
- **Trade, Innovation, and Economic Partnerships**
  - India and Cyprus agreed to expand trade and investment.
  - A Cyprus–India Business Forum and potential MoU on innovation and technology (AI, digital infrastructure, research) are planned.
- **Mobility, Tourism, and Cultural Ties**
  - A Mobility Pilot Program will be finalized by end-2025.
  - Both leaders called for boosting tourism, cultural ties, and exploring direct air connectivity between the two nations.
- **Action Plan 2025–2029**
  - A detailed five-year Action Plan will guide bilateral cooperation, monitored jointly by the respective foreign ministries, to ensure sustained progress in strategic areas.

#### Analysis: A Strong Message to Turkey

- During this visit, India reiterated its support for the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and unity of the Republic of Cyprus.
- This strong diplomatic message comes at a time when India–Turkey relations are tense, particularly due to Turkey’s vocal criticism of India on Kashmir and its support for Pakistan following the Pahalgam attack and Operation Sindoor.
- PM Modi’s symbolic visit to the **Historic Centre of Nicosia**, overlooking Turkish-controlled Northern Cyprus, further highlighted India’s solidarity with Cyprus.

#### Turkey–Cyprus conflict



- The Turkey–Cyprus conflict stems from the island’s division between Greek and Turkish Cypriots.
- After gaining independence from Britain in 1960, tensions rose due to Greek Cypriot demands for union with Greece and Turkish Cypriot fears.
- A 1974 Greek-backed coup **triggered** a Turkish invasion, resulting in the north being administered by Turkish Cypriots since 1974 which proclaimed itself the “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” in 1983.
- The island remains divided, with the UN maintaining a buffer zone.
- Repeated UN-led negotiations have failed to resolve issues like territorial return and political equality.
- Recent disputes over natural gas exploration have further deepened tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean.



## PM Modi's Visit to Croatia

PM Modi paid an official visit to Croatia. This was the first-ever visit of an Indian PM to Croatia to strengthen the growing momentum of high-level exchanges between the two nations.

#### Key Outcomes

- **Key Agreements Signed**
  - MoU on Agricultural Cooperation
  - Programme of Cooperation in Science and Technology
  - Cultural Exchange Programme (2026–2030)
  - MoU for Hindi Chair at the University of Zagreb

- **Long-Term Defence Cooperation**
  - Leaders of both the nations agreed to formulate a long-term defence plan.
  - **Focus areas:** Defence production, military training, and exchange programs.
- **Coastal Infrastructure and Shipbuilding**
  - Croatian firms are invited to participate in India's Sagarmala project for port modernization, coastal development, and multimodal connectivity.
  - India also seeks Croatian involvement in shipbuilding and maritime infrastructure.
- **Connectivity & Maritime Cooperation**
  - Emphasis on improving connectivity through the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)
  - Cooperation in ports and shipping, with Croatia potentially serving as a Mediterranean gateway to Central Europe
- **Space, Technology & Research Collaboration**
  - India will share its space expertise with Croatia.
  - Academic institutions from both nations will undertake joint research projects.
  - A five-year cultural exchange programme was finalized.
  - Croatia's Zagreb University Indology department was praised for promoting Indian studies.
- **Mobility Agreement in the Works**
  - India and Croatia to soon sign a mobility agreement to facilitate movement of people between the two countries.
- **Investment & Economic Cooperation**
  - India aims to increase investments in Croatia's pharma, agriculture, IT, clean tech, digital tech, and semiconductor industries.

## Croatia: A Strategic Pillar in India's European Engagement

⊕ PM Modi's historic visit to Croatia, part of a larger diplomatic tour including Cyprus and Canada, underscores Croatia's growing strategic importance in India's evolving engagement with Europe.

⊕ **Strategic Maritime Gateway to Europe**

→ Croatia's Adriatic Sea coastline makes it a key maritime access point to Central and Eastern Europe.

→ Ports like Rijeka, Split, and Ploče are part of the EU's TEN-T network (**trans-European transport network**).

→ For India, these ports serve as alternative entry routes into Europe, especially amidst global supply chain disruptions and under the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) initiative.

⊕ **Political Leverage via EU and NATO**

→ As a member of both the EU and NATO, Croatia offers India indirect access to influential Western institutions.

→ This is particularly valuable for India's EU Free Trade Agreement negotiations, offering regulatory insight and diplomatic backing.

⊕ **Economic Gateway with Expanding Trade Potential**

→ Bilateral trade stood at USD 337.68 million in 2023, with potential for rapid growth.

→ India views Croatia as a launchpad for EU market access, especially in: Pharmaceuticals; Information technology; Engineering.

⊕ **Institutional and Entrepreneurial Cooperation**

→ Key agreements include:

- India–Croatia Agreement on Economic Cooperation (2017)

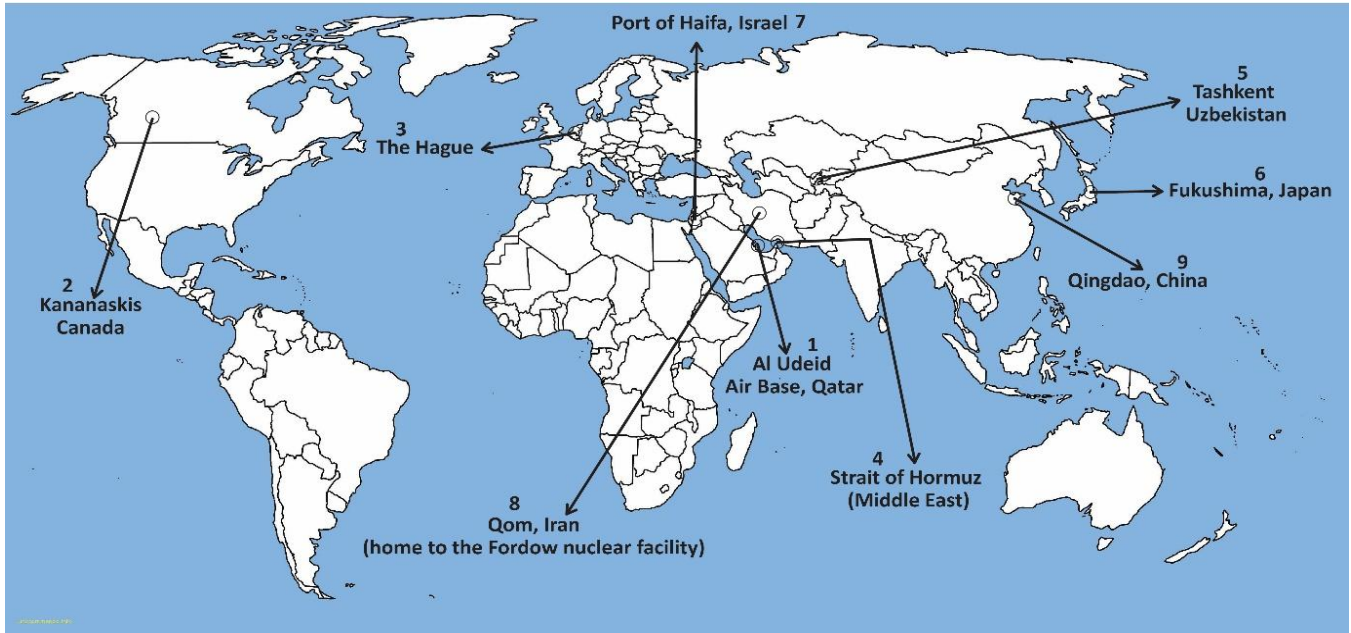
- Bilateral Investment Protection Agreement (2001)

→ The India–Croatia Startup Bridge (2021) fosters collaboration in AI, green tech, and robotics, reflecting mutual interest in next-gen innovation.



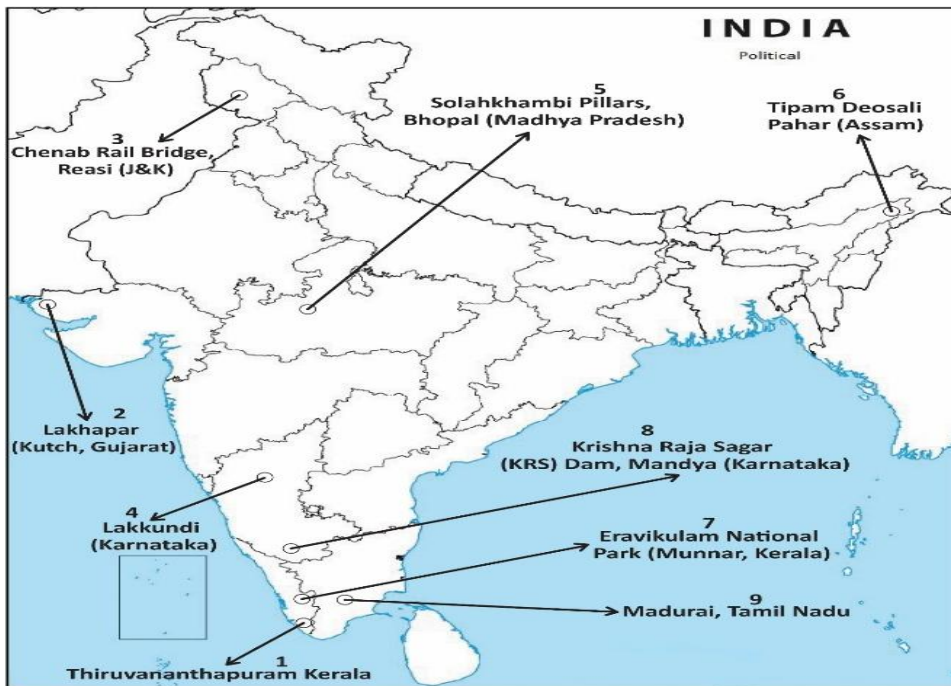
# MAPS: PLACES IN NEWS

## International Places in News



<b>1</b>	<b>Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar</b>	<p>Iran has responded to the United States' direct involvement in the Iran-Israel conflict by targeting its military assets at Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar in the Middle East.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Al Udeid is the largest U.S. military base in the region, located in gas-rich Qatar, which lies 190 km (120 miles) south of Iran across the Gulf.</li> <li>The 24-hectare (60-acre) base, in the desert outside the capital Doha, was set up in 1996 and is the forward headquarters for US Central Command.</li> <li>It houses the <i>Qatar Emiri Air Force</i>, the <i>US Air Force</i>, the <i>United Kingdom's Royal Air Force</i>, and other foreign forces.</li> </ul>
<b>2</b>	<b>Kananaskis, Canada</b>	<p>The 51st G7 summit was held in Kananaskis, Alberta, Canada. This was the 2nd G7 summit to be held in Kananaskis since the 28th G8 summit in 2002 and the seventh summit held in Canada.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kananaskis spans around 4,000 km<sup>2</sup> along the eastern <b>slopes of the Canadian Rockies</b>; adjacent to Banff National Park.</li> <li>Formed from <b>uplifted limestone glacial landscapes</b>, its peaks were sculpted during the last ice age (~12,000 years ago)</li> </ul>
<b>3</b>	<b>The Hague</b>	<p>Netherlands was hosting the NATO Summit 2025 at the <b>World Forum in The Hague</b>. This was the first time since NATO's founding in 1949 that the Netherlands is hosting a NATO summit.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Location:</b> Located in the western part of the Netherlands, in the province of South Holland, on the North Sea coast.</li> <li><b>Status:</b> Though Amsterdam is the capital, The Hague is the administrative and <b>royal capital of the Netherlands</b>. (Known for its mix of Gothic, Baroque, and modern architecture.)</li> <li>Often referred to as the <b>"International City of Peace and Justice"</b>, The Hague hosts: <i>International Court of Justice (ICJ)</i>; <i>International Criminal Court (ICC)</i>; <i>Permanent</i></li> </ul>

		<i>Court of Arbitration (PCA); Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)</i>
4	<b>Strait of Hormuz (Middle East)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> Connects the <i>Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea</i>. <b>North:</b> Iran (including Qeshm and Hormuz Islands) &amp; <b>South:</b> Oman (Musandam Peninsula exclave) and United Arab Emirates (UAE)</li> <li>• <b>Major Ports Nearby:</b> <i>Fujairah (UAE); Basra (Iraq), Bandar Abbas (Iran)</i></li> <li>• <b>U.S. Naval Presence:</b> The U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet, based in Bahrain, patrols the strait to ensure freedom of navigation.</li> </ul>
5	<b>Tashkent, Uzbekistan</b>	<p>Tashkent was highlighted for hosting the <b><i>UzChess Cup Masters 2025</i></b>, where Indian Grandmaster R. Praggnanandhaa won.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> Northeastern Uzbekistan, near the border with Kazakhstan</li> <li>• <b>Geography:</b> Lies on <b><i>the Chirchik River</i></b>, west of the Tian Shan Mountains</li> <li>• Tashkent was site of the <b><i>Tashkent Agreement</i></b> (1966) between India and Pakistan (post-1965 war)</li> </ul>
6	<b>Fukushima, Japan</b>	<p>China to resume some Japanese seafood imports after Fukushima ban.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> Northeastern Japan, in the Tohoku region, on the island of Honshu.</li> <li>• Famous for <b><i>samurai culture, onsens (hot springs)</i></b>, and seasonal festivals.</li> <li>• 2011 nuclear accident at Fukushima is one of the only two nuclear accidents rated Level 7 (major accident) on the <b><i>INES scale (the other: Chernobyl)</i></b>.</li> </ul>
7	<b>Port of Haifa, Israel</b>	<p>Haifa Port, controlled by Adani Ports (holds a 70% stake), remains operational after an Iranian missile strike.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> On the Mediterranean coast, in <b><i>Haifa Bay, northern Israel</i></b></li> <li>• It has a natural deep-water harbour, which operates all year long, and serves both passenger and merchant ships.</li> <li>• <b><i>Gateway to the Mediterranean:</i></b> Serves as Israel's key link to Europe, North America, and Asia via the Suez Canal.</li> <li>• <b>India-Israel Cooperation:</b> Adani's entry is part of India's broader push for <b><i>IMEC (India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor)</i></b>.</li> </ul>
8	<b>Qom, Iran (home to Fordow nuclear facility)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> Situated ~140 km south of Tehran, along the Qom River, on the edge of Iran's central desert (<b><i>Dasht-e Kavir</i></b>).</li> <li>• <b>Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant (FFEP):</b> ~30 km south of Qom, built into a mountain near the village of Fordow for protection against airstrikes.</li> </ul>
9	<b>Qingdao, China</b>	<p>Qingdao Hosted the 22<sup>nd</sup> SCO Defence Ministers' Meeting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> Situated on the Yellow Sea, Qingdao lies on the Shandong Peninsula, facing South Korea and Japan across the sea.</li> <li>• One of <b>China's major seaport cities</b>; key for maritime trade and naval logistics.</li> <li>• Nickname: <b><i>"Oriental Switzerland"</i></b> – for its European architecture and seaside charm</li> <li>• <b>May Fourth Movement (1919):</b> China's protest movement started over Qingdao's transfer to Japan in the Treaty of Versailles.</li> <li>• It was returned to Chinese control in 1922 following diplomatic pressure and negotiations. However, Japan re-occupied Qingdao during World War II, along with other parts of eastern China, before it was ultimately restored to China after Japan's defeat in 1945.</li> </ul>

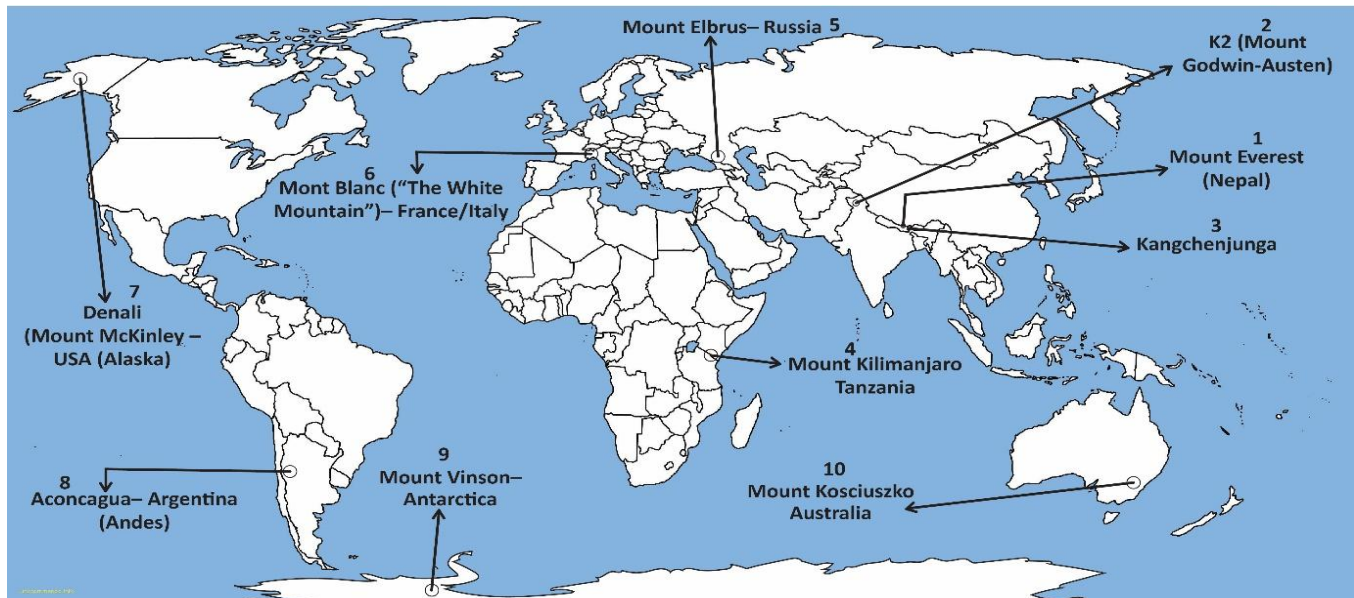


1	<p><b>Thiruvananthapuram Kerala</b></p>	<p>Four-day '<b><i>Bhoomi</i></b>' conclave on digital land survey held in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> Southernmost district of Kerala.</li> <li>• <b>Space &amp; Technology Hub:</b> Indian Institute of Space Science and Technology (IIST); Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre – VSSC</li> <li>• <b>Tourist Attractions:</b> <i>Napier Museum; Kovalam and Shankumugham beaches; Kuthiramalika Palace; Neyyar Dam &amp; Wildlife Sanctuary; Ponmudi Hills</i></li> <li>• <b>Upcoming Vizhinjam Port:</b> Strategically located trans-shipment terminal, expected to rival Colombo and Singapore ports</li> </ul>
2	<p><b>Lakhapar (Kutch, Gujarat)</b></p>	<p>A team of researchers has unearthed a 5,300-year-old settlement at Lakhapar village near Lakhpat in Kutch district dating back to the Early Harappan period. (pre-dating Dholavira's prime).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The site offers critical insights into <b><i>pre-urban Harappan socio-cultural evolution</i></b>, regional interaction networks between Sindh and Chalcolithic Gujarat</li> <li>• A single <b><i>in-situ burial</i></b> within the habitation area marks the first pre-Prabhas pottery burial within a Habitation site in Gujarat</li> <li>• The <b><i>Narayan Sarovar Sanctuary</i></b> (in Lakhpat Taluka) with chinkara and desert scrub forest lies nearby (~within Lakhpat region)</li> </ul>
3	<p><b>Chenab Rail Bridge, Reasi (J&amp;K)</b></p>	<p>Prime Minister Modi inaugurated the world's highest railway bridge, constructed over the Chenab River in Jammu and Kashmir.</p>
4	<p><b>Lakkundi (Karnataka)</b></p>	<p>Karnataka Chief Minister initiated excavation on the premises of the historical <b><i>Kote Veerabhadreshwara temple (Chalukya-era)</i></b> in Lakkundi of Gadag district</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lakkundi became one of the capitals of the Hoysala Empire and was a <b><i>thriving agrahara</i></b> (centred on learning and scholarly pursuits), supported by numerous temples and stepwells.</li> <li>• Home to over 50 temple ruins, including both Hindu and Jain sites, with many restored by the ASI.</li> </ul>

5	<b>Solahkhambi Pillars, Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh)</b>	<p>These pillars dismantled for conservation—sparking debate over best practices.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Solahkhambi structure is located in Bihar Kotra village, about 3 km from <b>Chidikoh Bird Sanctuary</b> in Rajgarh district.</li> <li>• It dates from the 10th to 11th century CE, from the <b>Paramara dynasty</b>, and resembles classical Greek architecture like the Acropolis</li> <li>• Originally composed of 14 pillars arranged in two rows of seven—despite the name implying sixteen pillars (“<b>Solahkhambi</b>”)</li> </ul>
6	<b>Tipam Deosali Pahar (Assam)</b>	<p>A heritage tourism project is underway at Tipam Deosali Pahar in Assam to honor <b>Chaolung Sukapha</b>, the founder of the Ahom kingdom.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tipam Deosali Pahar (also known as Tipam Hills) served as the first temporary capital of the <b>Ahom dynasty</b>, established by Chaolung Sukapha in 1228 AD, shortly after crossing the Patkai Hills.</li> <li>• Nestled among tea gardens with panoramic views over the <b>Burhi Dihing River, Dihing-Patkai rainforest, and the Patkai Hills</b> toward Arunachal Pradesh</li> </ul>
7	<b>Eravikulam National Park (Munnar, Kerala)</b>	<p>Eravikulam National Park has been recognized as the best national park in India based on the <b>Management Effectiveness Evaluation (MEE)</b>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Altitude:</b> Grassland plateaus from ~2,000 m, rising to 2,695 m at Anamudi—South India’s highest peak.</li> <li>• <b>Flagship species:</b> Home to India’s largest population of the endangered <b>Nilgiri Tahr</b></li> <li>• <b>Amphibians:</b> The critically endangered <b>Raorchestes resplendens</b> was discovered on Anamudi within the park</li> <li>• Every 12 years, the hills light up with <b>purple Neelakurinji</b> blooms—the next bloom is expected around 2030</li> </ul>
8	<b>Krishna Raja Sagar (KRS) Dam, Mandya (Karnataka)</b>	<p>For <i>the first time in 85 years</i>, the Krishna Raja Sagar (KRS) reservoir reached <b>its full capacity of 124.8 ft in June</b>, marking a rare early peak and setting the stage for Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to become the first ever CM to offer the traditional Bagina at KRS in June.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> Constructed across the <b>Kaveri River</b> at the confluence of its tributaries—Hemavathi and Lakshmana Thirtha</li> <li>• <b>Type:</b> <b>Gravity dam</b> built using stone masonry and surki (lime + brick powder), designed by Sir M. Visvesvaraya and commissioned between 1911–1931 during the reign of Krishnaraja Wadiyar IV</li> <li>• <b>Role:</b> Supplies irrigation water to Mandya and Mysuru districts; drinking water to <b>Mysuru and Bengaluru</b>; supports hydro-electric generation at Shivanasamudra; contributes to downstream Tamil Nadu via releases to <b>Mettur Dam</b></li> </ul>
9	<b>Madurai, Tamil Nadu</b>	<p>A large-scale gathering titled <b>Murugan Devotees Conference</b> was organised at Madurai.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Madurai City</b> (Located on the banks of <b>the Vaigai River</b>): One of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world, with references dating back over 2,500 years.</li> <li>• <b>Sangam Era:</b> Madurai was the seat of the <b>Tamil Sangams</b> (assemblies of poets and scholars). The First <b>Sangam</b> is believed to be held here.</li> </ul>

- **Pandya Capital:** Capital of the Pandya dynasty, which ruled intermittently from the 4th century BCE to 16th century CE.

## Major Mountains/Peaks Around The World



1	<b>Mount Everest (Nepal)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> Mahalangur Himal, Nepal-China border (8,848.86 m, highest peak in the world).</li> <li>• <b>Highest point on Earth</b>, part of the Himalayan range formed by <i>Indo-Australian and Eurasian plate collision</i>. ✓ First confirmed ascent by <b>Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay (1953)</b></li> <li>• Sacred to local Sherpa and Tibetan communities as "<b>Chomolungma</b>" (Mother Goddess of the World).</li> </ul>
2	<b>K2 (Mount Godwin-Austen)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> Karakoram Range, Located in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), (8,611 m, second-highest peak).</li> <li>• Known as "<b>Savage Mountain</b>" due to high fatality rates among climbers.</li> <li>• <b>Agricultural Significance:</b> Glacial melt affects Indus River, critical for India-Pakistan water security.</li> </ul>
3	<b>Kangchenjunga</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> India-Nepal border, (Sikkim Himalayas).</li> <li>• <b>Third-highest peak</b>, part of the Himalayan range. Named "<b>Five Treasures of Snow</b>" for its five peaks. ✓ Part of Kangchenjunga Biosphere Reserve (UNESCO)</li> <li>• Its summit lies at a section of the Himalayas, the Kangchenjunga Himal, which is bounded in the west by the <i>Tamur River</i>, in the north by the <i>Lhonak River</i> and Jongsang La, and in the east by the <i>Teesta River</i>.</li> </ul>
4	<b>Mount Kilimanjaro Tanzania</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Geographical Significance:</b> <b>Highest peak in Africa</b>, a dormant volcano with three cones (Kibo, Mawenzi, Shira).</li> <li>• Unique equatorial glacier, rapidly melting due to global warming.</li> <li>• UNESCO World Heritage Site (Kilimanjaro National Park)</li> <li>• Regarded as <b>one of the Seven Summits</b> (the highest peak on each continent), making it globally important for mountaineers.</li> </ul>
5	<b>Mount Elbrus– Russia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> <b>Caucasus Mountains</b>, in Southern Russia, near the border with Georgia.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Geographical Significance:</b> Highest peak in Europe and Russia</li> <li>• <b>Harsh alpine climate:</b> Snow-covered year-round with sub-zero temperatures. (<i>Part of the Seven Summits</i>)</li> </ul>
6	Mont Blanc (“The White Mountain”)– France/Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> Lies on the France–Italy border, between the regions of Haute-Savoie (France) and Aosta Valley (Italy).</li> <li>• <b>Geographical Significance:</b> Highest peak in the Alps (Birthplace of modern mountaineering)</li> <li>• A glaciated mountain massif, composed <i>mainly of granite and gneiss</i></li> <li>• <b>Mont Blanc Tunnel (Engineering Marvel):</b> Length: 11.6 km road tunnel under the mountain. Connects Chamonix (France) to Courmayeur (Italy).</li> </ul>
7	Denali (Mount McKinley – USA (Alaska))	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Geographical Significance:</b> <b>Highest peak in North America.</b> Named "Denali" (Great One) by indigenous Koyukon people; formerly Mount McKinley. (<i>Part of the Seven Summits</i>)</li> <li>• The name Mount McKinley was used from the late 19th century until it was officially changed back to Denali in 2015.</li> <li>• <b>Rock Composition:</b> Primarily <b>granite (quartz monzonite)</b>, the mountain is a pluton uplifted by the subduction of the Pacific Plate beneath the North American Plate.</li> </ul>
8	Aconcagua– Argentina (Andes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Geographic Status:</b> <i>Highest peak in the Western &amp; Southern Hemispheres and outside Asia</i>; part of the Principal Cordillera in the Andes.</li> <li>• <b>Altitude Effects:</b> Atmospheric pressure at summit ~40% of sea level; altitude sickness (AMS, HAPE, HACE) is a major risk.</li> </ul>
9	Mount Vinson– Antarctica	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> <b>Highest peak in Antarctica</b>; Part of the Vinson Massif in the northern Sentinel Range of the <i>Ellsworth Mountains</i>.</li> <li>• <b>Significance:</b> Part of Seven Summits challenge; Remotest peak. (Completing Vinson is a critical goal for Seven Summits aspirants—the only Antarctic climb in the list)</li> <li>• <b>Polar Conditions:</b> <i>Dominated by a high-pressure polar ice cap.</i> Winter temperatures descend to –60 °C; summer (Nov–Jan) averages around –30 °C, with 24 hr daylight</li> </ul>
10	Mount Kosciuszko– Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> Snowy Mountains, New South Wales, in Kosciuszko National Park, Australia.</li> <li>• <b>Range:</b> Main Range, part of the Great Dividing Range</li> <li>• <b>Topography:</b> Rounded, gently sloping summit. No glaciers today, but evidence of past glaciation exists in the <i>form of cirques and moraines</i>.</li> <li>• Mount Kosciuszko is not a tall mountain (2,228 m) by global standards, but it is Australia’s highest mainland peak and a key part of the Seven Summits</li> <li>• <b>Indigenous Significance:</b> The mountain is sacred to the Aboriginal <b>Ngarigo people</b>.</li> </ul>

## India's Gaps in Gender Equality Metrics

India has slipped to the **131<sup>st</sup> position out of 148 countries** in the **World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index 2025**, a fall of two places compared to its 129<sup>th</sup> rank in 2024. While gaps in economic participation, education, and health have improved or remained stable, political empowerment has worsened. Despite more women voting, their representation in top political positions remains low.

## Regional Comparison and Global Leaders

- India's position stands out starkly in the South Asian context. Bangladesh made remarkable gains, rising 75 positions to reach 24th globally.
- Nepal (125), Bhutan (119), and Sri Lanka (130) also ranked above India. Only Maldives (138) and Pakistan (148) scored lower.
- Globally, Iceland retained its top position for the 16th consecutive year, followed by Finland, Norway, UK, and New Zealand.

## Impact of Women's Reservation on Political Representation

- The 33% reservation for women in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, passed in 2023, will be implemented only after the next Census and delimitation, making 2029 the earliest possible rollout.

### Current Representation Levels Remain Low

- The 18th Lok Sabha have 74 (13.6%) women Members of Parliament (MP), marking a slight dip from 2019 when 78 women MPs were elected.
- Additionally, the share of women in ministerial roles declined from 6.45% to 5.56%.
- In 2023, women made up only 9% of MLAs across States.
- Chhattisgarh had the highest share (18%), while Himachal Pradesh had just one woman MLA and Mizoram had none.
- **Limited Timeframe, Uncertain Long-Term Gains**
  - The reservation law is valid for only 15 years, meaning it will likely apply to just two general elections (2029 and 2034).
- **Gaps in Leadership Pipelines**
  - Despite decades of 33–50% reservation at local levels, there's no structured pathway to elevate women from panchayats to higher politics.

## Shift From Exclusion to Participation

### Gender Gap in Voting Narrows

- ▶ The voter gender gap has shrunk from 17 percentage points in 1962 to less than 2 points in 2014.
- ▶ In the last two general elections, women voters outnumbered men, partly due to male migration for work.

### Women as a Key Vote Bank

- ▶ With growing turnout, political parties now actively court women voters, launching targeted welfare schemes like free bicycles for girls and monthly cash allowances for poor women.
- ▶ The rise in women voters is reshaping electoral strategies and policy priorities.

## Rising Voters, Stagnant Representation

- Despite the **surge in women voters**, this has **not led to a rise in women candidates** fielded by political parties.

### Parties Avoid Giving Women Winnable Seats

- ▶ Parties often cite "lack of winnability" to deny women tickets in stronghold constituencies.
- ▶ Instead, they field women in reserved SC/ST seats to meet multiple quotas.
- ▶ Experts note that women voters don't vote solely for women. **Unlike** caste-based voting, women prefer performance and policies over identity.

### The Need for Systemic Change

- ▶ Since 1952, women candidates have had a higher average winning percentage than men.
- ▶ The issue lies in low nomination rates, with women making up only 8–9% of candidates from major parties.
- ▶ Structural barriers, internal party dynamics, and outdated assumptions continue to block capable women from entering the political arena in larger numbers.

## India Breaks into Top 100 in Global SDG Index for the 1<sup>st</sup> Time

India has, for the first time, secured a position among the top 100 countries in the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Index**, ranking 99<sup>th</sup> out of 167 nations in the 2025 edition of the Sustainable Development Report.

### India's Rise in the Global SDG Rankings

- This leap forward underscores India's growing focus on sustainable development and its ongoing efforts to improve across the 17 SDGs adopted by United Nations member states in 2015.
- The SDG Index is part of the annual **Sustainable Development Report (SDR)** released by the **UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network**.
- It evaluates countries on a scale of 0 to 100, where 100 represents complete achievement.
- **India scored 67**, a significant improvement from its **109<sup>th</sup> position in 2024**.

### Comparative Regional Rankings and Progress

- Bhutan secured 74<sup>th</sup> place (70.5), Nepal 85<sup>th</sup> (68.6), Bangladesh 114<sup>th</sup> (63.9), and Pakistan 140<sup>th</sup> (57).
- Meanwhile, India's maritime neighbours Maldives and Sri Lanka, ranked 53<sup>rd</sup> and 93<sup>rd</sup>, respectively.
- Since 2015, India has steadily improved its position in the index, from 116<sup>th</sup> in 2017 to 109<sup>th</sup> in 2024.

### Global Trends and Regional Bright Spots

- Despite India's positive momentum, the 2025 SDR warns that global SDG progress is stagnating.
- Only 17% of the **169 targets across 17 goals** are on track for achievement by 2030. The report attributes the slowdown to conflicts, structural vulnerabilities, and fiscal limitations, particularly in low-income and fragile states.
- European countries dominate the upper echelons of the index, with Finland, Sweden, and Denmark occupying the top three ranks. Of the top 20 countries, 19 are in Europe.
  - However, even these countries face challenges in achieving climate and biodiversity-related goals due to unsustainable consumption patterns.
- East and South Asia emerged as the regions with the fastest SDG progress since 2015, driven by socioeconomic development. Notable improvers include:
  - Nepal (+11.1), Cambodia (+10), The Philippines (+8.6), Bangladesh (+8.3), Mongolia (+7.7)
- Other standout performers globally include Benin (+14.5), Uzbekistan (+12.1), UAE (+9.9), Saudi Arabia (+8.1), and Peru (+8.7).

## India's Crackdown on Child Labour

Telangana, Bihar and Rajasthan have emerged as the top three states in India for **child labour rescues** as well as for the number of arrests in child labour-related cases in 2024-25.

## Areas of Advancement and Reversal

- While India and many developing countries show progress on critical development indicators, global performance presents a mixed picture.
- Areas of notable advancement include:
  - Access to electricity (SDG 7)
  - Internet and mobile broadband use (SDG 9)
  - Reduction in under-five and neonatal mortality (SDG 3)
- Conversely, the report highlights significant setbacks in:
  - Obesity (SDG 2)
  - Press freedom (SDG 16)
  - Sustainable nitrogen management (SDG 2)
  - Biodiversity loss (measured via the Red List Index - SDG 15)
  - Corruption perceptions (SDG 16)
- These reversals underscore the complex and sometimes contradictory nature of development, where progress in one area may coincide with backsliding in another.

## Multilateralism and Financial Reform in Focus

- A unique aspect of the report is its assessment of countries' commitment to multilateralism. Barbados, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago top the list of most committed countries.
- Among G20 nations, Brazil ranks highest at 25<sup>th</sup>, and Chile leads the OECD countries at 7<sup>th</sup>.
- In stark contrast, the United States ranks last for the second consecutive year, reflecting its policy stance against the SDGs and its withdrawal from key international frameworks such as the Paris Agreement and the WHO.
- The SDR also lays emphasis on the need to reform the global financial architecture.
- Ahead of the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FFD4) in Seville, the report criticises the current system for:
  - facilitating capital flows toward rich nations while
  - underfunding emerging and developing economies (EMDEs).

## Alarming Trends in Exploitation

- The report reveals that nearly **90% of rescued children** were employed in sectors categorised under the “**worst forms of child labour**” as per ILO Convention **182**, ratified by India. These included:
  - Spas and massage parlours
  - Orchestra
  - Domestic labour
  - Informal entertainment services
- In many instances, children were subjected to **sexual exploitation, pornography, and prostitution**, underscoring the urgency for focused legal intervention.

## Recommendations from the Report

- **Launch of a National Mission to End Child Labour**, with dedicated financial & human resources.
- Creation of **district-level Child Labour Task Forces**.
- Establishment of a **Child Labour Rehabilitation Fund**.
- Formulation of a **comprehensive national rehabilitation policy**.
- **Compulsory education till 18 years**, extending beyond the current RTE mandate (up to 14 years).
- **State-specific policies** aligned with local socio-economic challenges.
- **Zero-tolerance policy** on child labour in **government procurement**.
- Expansion of the list of **hazardous occupations and processes** under the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act.
- Extension of the **SDG 8.7 deadline to 2030** to realistically target the eradication of all forms of child labour.

## India's New National Policy for Senior Citizens

A new national policy on senior citizens is in the draft stages with the Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

- As per government estimates, the proportion of senior citizens in India is expected to grow significantly from **8.23% in 2011 to 12.16% in 2026**, and further to **20% by 2047**.
- The policy aims to reflect these demographic realities and ensure adequate provisions for a growing elderly population.

## Introduction

- India witnessed a major surge in efforts to curb child labour in 2024-25, with **over 53,000 children rescued across the country**.
- A recent report from the child rights network **Just Rights for Children (JRC)** in collaboration with the **Centre for Legal Action and Behaviour Change (C-LAB)** sheds light on the scale of exploitation and the systemic challenges in eliminating child labour.
- Report title: "Building the Case for Zero: How Prosecution Acts as a Tipping Point to End Child Labour"
- It offers a comprehensive roadmap for effective legal, educational, and rehabilitative interventions to break the cycle of exploitation.

## Scale of the Rescue Operations

- Between April 1, 2024, and March 31, 2025, JRC, through its network of over 250 NGOs, coordinated **38,889 rescue operations** across **24 States & UT** in partnership with law enforcement agencies. This led to the rescue of **53,651 children**.
- The top five states by number of rescues were:
  - ➔ **Telangana**: 11,063 children
  - ➔ **Bihar**: 3,974 children
  - ➔ **Rajasthan**: 3,847 children
  - ➔ **Uttar Pradesh**: 3,804 children
  - ➔ **Delhi**: 2,588 children
- These states also accounted for the highest number of arrests in child labour-related offences.



## Constitutional and Legal Framework for the Elderly

- **Article 41** of the Indian Constitution directs the state to make effective provisions for securing the right to public assistance in cases of old age.
- Further, under the **Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007**, children and legal heirs are obligated to care for their elderly parents, including financial and physical support.
  - ➔ The Act provides **mechanisms for senior citizens to claim maintenance through tribunals**, and mandates state governments to **establish old age homes**.
- Provisions have also been made in personal laws, income tax rebates, and transport benefits to ease the lives of older citizens.
- **National Policy on Older Persons (NPOP) 1999**, and its revised draft in 2011, laid the groundwork for inclusive elder care policies.

## Challenges Faced by the Elderly in India

- Despite supportive legal provisions, senior citizens in India continue to face numerous challenges:
  - ➔ **Healthcare Accessibility**: Limited geriatric care facilities, lack of regular health check-ups, and high out-of-pocket expenditures remain persistent concerns.
  - ➔ **Economic Insecurity**: Many older individuals are without formal pension systems and rely on informal family support, which is eroding due to migration and urbanization.
  - ➔ **Social Isolation and Abuse**: Changing family structures, reduced intergenerational interactions, and neglect have contributed to emotional and sometimes physical abuse of the elderly.
  - ➔ **Digital Exclusion**: With increasing digitization of services, elderly citizens are often unable to access essential facilities such as banking, healthcare, pension disbursement, grievance redressal and government benefits.
  - ➔ **Inadequate Infrastructure**: Old age homes and care centres are unevenly distributed and often fail to meet quality standards.

## Key Areas of Focus

- The Council meeting included deliberations on several critical areas:
  - **Digital Inclusion**
  - **Grievance Redressal and Elder Abuse**
  - **Role of NGOs and Associations:** Efforts are being made to institutionalise senior citizen groups and NGOs into policymaking, implementation, and feedback systems.
  - **Minimum Standards for old age homes & senior care institutions** to ensure better quality of life.
  - **Community Engagement and Intergenerational Bonding**
- **Review of Ongoing Schemes**
  - The government also reviewed progress under key schemes such as the **Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana (RVY)** and the **Integrated Programme for Senior Citizens (IPSrC)**:
    - Over **5 lakh senior citizens** have received free assisted-living devices under RVY.
    - The IPSrC supports **708 NGOs** running old age homes, physiotherapy centres, and mobile medicare units.
  - These schemes fall under the broader **National Action Plan for Welfare of Senior Citizens (2020)**, which replaced the earlier 2011 policy.

## District De-Addiction Centers

As part of the **National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (NAPDDR)**, the **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment** has invited proposals to set up **District De-Addiction Centres (DDACs)** in **291 “gap” districts** across **30 States/UTs**.

## What Are “Gap” Districts?

These are districts **with no existing Central government-supported de-addiction infrastructure**, such as **IRCA**s (Integrated Rehabilitation Centres for Addicts); **ODIC**s (Outreach and Drop-in Centres) and **CPLI**s (Community-based Peer Led Initiatives)

- ✓ Highest number of “gap” districts have been identified in Chhattisgarh, where 31 of the State’s 33 districts have figured in this list.
- ✓ Each DDAC will combine the functions of **IRCA**s, **CPLI**s, and **ODIC**s to serve as **multi-purpose facilities**.
- ✓ DDACs align with **NAPDDR** and the **National Health Policy 2017**, emphasizing preventive healthcare and mental health support.

**Who Can Apply?** Eligible NGOs and start-ups with at least 2 years of experience in de-addiction work.

## Need for the Initiative:

- According to the **2017–18 National Survey** around **1.18 crore children/adolescents** and **7 crore**

## National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (NAPDDR)



NAPDDR is a **central scheme (FY 2021-22 to FY 2025-26)** under the **Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment (MoSJE)** to **reduce drug demand through prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and awareness**. Under the scheme-

- **States/UTs** get funds for **awareness, prevention, and capacity building**.
- **NGOs/Voluntary Organizations (VOs)** get support to run **IRCA**s, **CPLI**, **ODIC**, and **DDAC**s.
- **Government hospitals** get funds for **Addiction Treatment Facilities (ATFs)**.

**Objective:** To build a **drug-free society** through **community involvement, education, treatment, and rehabilitation**, reducing harm to individuals, families, and society.

## Key Activities

- Provides services through initiatives like **Nasha Mukht Bharat Abhiyaan (NMBA- launched in 2020)**, which now covers **all districts**.
- Operates a **National Toll-free Helpline (14446)** for counselling and referrals.
- Integrated with **Tele MANAS** for free 24/7 tele-mental health support.

## Impact & Reach

- Beneficiaries increased from **3.39 lakh (2022–23)** to **6.47 lakh** already served in **2024–25** (till March 2025).
- NMBA has reached **15+ crore people**, including **youth and women**, with participation from **4+ lakh educational institutions**.
- Each year on 26th June- observed as the '**International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking**'.
- A **National Online Pledge** to be Drug Free had **1.67+ Crore students** from **99,595 educational institutions** pledging to be drug free.
- **Events** like 'Nashe se Azaadi- A National Youth and Students Interaction Programme', 'Naya Bharat, Nasha Mukht Bharat', 'NMBA Interaction with NCC' are regularly organized to engage and connect with youth and other stakeholders.
- **MoUs** have been signed with Spiritual/Social Service organizations like The Art of Living, Brahma Kumaris, ISKCON etc. to support to NMBA and conduct mass awareness activities.
- All the **de-addiction facilities** have been geo-tagged for ease of access by the public.

adults were estimated to be using psychoactive substances like **alcohol, cannabis, opioids, sedatives, inhalants, cocaine**, etc.

- This initiative is a significant step to **fill critical gaps** in India’s de-addiction infrastructure, especially in underserved districts.

Objective of DDACs	Activities under DDACs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Treatment and rehabilitation</b> of people suffering from substance use.</li> <li>• <b>Awareness generation</b> in vulnerable communities.</li> <li>• <b>Early identification and intervention</b> (especially among youth and children).</li> <li>• <b>Prevention and risk mitigation</b> activities.</li> <li>• <b>Harm Reduction Strategies:</b> Includes Opioid Substitution Therapy (OST) and Needle-Syringe Exchange Programs (NSEP) for high-risk groups.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Multi-Service Framework:</b> Offering detoxification, counseling, therapy, and aftercare services under one roof.</li> <li>• Identify and train peer educators</li> <li>• Implement early intervention education</li> <li>• Refer children/youth using substances to treatment</li> <li>• <b>Community-Based Approach:</b> Engaging local communities, NGOs, and SHGs to foster awareness and reduce stigma around addiction.</li> </ul>

**Extra Mile: Best Case Studies; Practices across India for De-addiction**

- **Manipur’s ‘War on Drugs’** campaign is a comprehensive initiative aimed at eradicating illegal poppy cultivation, disrupting drug trade networks.
- **Mission SPANDAN:** The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) signed a landmark MoU with five prominent spiritual organizations to combat drug abuse through spirituality and awareness.
- **Kerala’s Vimukthi Mission:** Vimukthi is an anti-narcotics campaign to eliminate drug abuse in Kerala Society.
- **Punjab’s Outpatient Opioid Assisted Treatment (OOAT) centers,** supported by NAPDDR, have reduced opioid dependency through localized treatment.

**India to Integrate Rare Blood Donor Registry with e-Rakt Kosh**

Central Health Ministry is looking at integrating the **Rare Donor Registry of India (RDRI)** with the national online platform for blood bank management & blood availability information called **e-Rakt Kosh**.

- This move aims to significantly improve access to rare blood types for patients across the country, reduce transfusion-related complications, and enhance blood bank coordination.
- The integration will provide a single-window digital interface under the **National Health Mission (NHM)**, connecting rare blood group donors with hospitals and blood banks.
- This effort is especially vital for patients suffering from complex conditions such as thalassemia, sickle cell anemia, or requiring rare blood types like Bombay blood group, Rh-null, and P-Null.

**Rare Donor Registry of India (RDRI)**

- It was developed by the Indian Council of Medical Research, National Institute of Immunohaematology (ICMR-NIIH) in collaboration with four partner institutes.
- It currently maintains a carefully screened database of around 4,000 donors, tested for over 300 rare blood markers.
- Particularly for individuals who are alloimmunised (i.e., their bodies reject common blood antigens), the registry provides access to highly specific donor matches.
- A key technological advancement in this initiative is a DNA-based multiplex PCR test developed to rapidly identify rare blood types, especially tailored to Indian patients.

**E-Rakt Kosh: A Unified Platform for Blood Management**

- e-Rakt Kosh is a digital blood bank management system developed by the **Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (CDAC)** and operated under NHM.
- It provides real-time information about blood stock availability, blood donation camps, and donor tracking across the country.



## ULLAS - Nav Bharat Saaksharta Karyakram

Goa recently became the 2<sup>nd</sup> state after Mizoram to be officially declared fully literate under the ULLAS (Understanding Lifelong Learning for All in Society) initiative. Tripura becomes 3<sup>rd</sup> state to achieve Full Functional Literacy

### Salient Features of the ULLAS

- **Implementation Structure:** Schools will serve as the **unit of implementation** and will be used for **surveying beneficiaries and identifying volunteers**. **Flexibility** will be provided to **States/UTs** to carry out **innovative activities** as per local needs.
- **Mode: Hybrid** (both in online and offline)
- **Use of Technology & Digital Platforms:** Adult education is imparted using **Online Teaching, Learning and Assessment System (OTLAS)**- a digital application integrated into the **ULLAS Web Portal and Mobile App** (content in 22 languages) developed by the **National Informatics Centre (NIC)**.
- **ICT support:** may be provided through **CSR and philanthropic contributions**, including setting up **facilitation centers**, providing **cell phones or IT access** for economically weaker learners and volunteer **support**.
- **Priority Beneficiaries:**

Social Categories	Geographical Areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Girls and women</li> <li>• SC/ST/OBC/Minorities</li> <li>• Persons with Special Needs (Divyangjans)</li> <li>• Marginalized groups including nomadic tribes, construction workers, and labourers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Aspirational districts</b> (as per NITI Aayog)</li> <li>• Districts with <b>low literacy</b> (below national/state average)</li> <li>• Districts with <b>female literacy below 60%</b></li> <li>• Areas with <b>high SC/ST/Minority population</b></li> <li>• <b>Educationally backward blocks</b></li> <li>• <b>Left Wing Extremism-affected districts</b></li> </ul>

- **Convergence and Partnerships:** Convergence with relevant ministries and departments to enhance coordination and engagement of community-level functionaries like **PRIs (Panchayati Raj Institutions), Anganwadi and ASHA workers, Volunteers from Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYSK), National Service Scheme (NSS), and National Cadet Corps (NCC)** (approx. 50 lakh) and **20 lakh students** from Teacher Education and Higher Education Institutions.
- **Jan Andolan (People's Movement): Literacy Week (1st–8th September 2023)** witnessed participation from **around 3 crore stakeholders**. States/UTs encouraged to **highlight local success stories** (individual, family, village, district) through **electronic media, print and folk media, interpersonal and social media platforms**.
- **Assessment and Certification:** **FLNAT** (Functional Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Test) will be conducted **twice a year**. **Assessment centers** will be local schools. **Certificates of literacy** will be jointly issued by **NIOS (National Institute of Open Schooling)** and **DSEL (Department of School Education & Literacy)**.

**Financial Outlay:** Total ₹1037.90 crore- Centre: ₹700 crore; States: ₹337.90 crores

## What is ULLAS?



- ULLAS also known as the **New India Literacy Programme (NILP)** is a five-year (**2022-27**) centrally sponsored scheme launched in 2022 by the Department of School Education and Literacy (Ministry of Education) in line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020
- It aims to provide basic education & functional literacy (reading, writing, numeracy) to **adults aged 15 years and above** who missed formal schooling.

**Vision-** To make 'Bharat - Jan Jan Saakshar'- Literate India through **volunteerism (Kartavyabodh)**.

## Objective of ULLAS:

- To cover **non-literates aged 15 years and above** across **all States and UTs**.
- To impart **Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN)** to a total of **5 crore learners** with a target of **1 crore learners per year**.

## Five Core Components of ULLAS:

1. **Foundational Literacy & Numeracy**
2. **Critical Life Skills** – financial literacy, digital literacy, legal literacy, healthcare and awareness, childcare and education, family welfare, etc.
3. **Basic Education** – for providing appropriate equivalence.
4. **Vocational Skills** – employment-linked skill development.
5. **Continuing Education** – holistic adult education (across arts, science, sports, etc.).

## Significance of ULLAS Scheme

- **Wide Reach and Participation:** 2.43 crore learners have registered on the ULLAS platform. 1.77 crore individuals have taken the **Functional Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Test (FLNAT)** since **March 2023**, spanning **33 states/UTs**. This reflects substantial mobilization and community outreach.
- **Certification Progress:** 1.03 crore learners have successfully passed FLNAT and received certification from NIOS).
- **High National Average Pass Rate:** 90% of test-takers across India pass FLNAT, indicating effective teaching and learner engagement. Some states like **Tamil Nadu** and **Goa** achieved **100% pass rates in 2024 tests**.
- **Inter-State Performance Variability:** While most states showed high performance, a few had below-average pass rates like **Tripura: 75.97%; Gujarat: 87.07%; Uttarakhand & Jharkhand:** Just above 85%. States like **Delhi, Rajasthan, Punjab, UP, and Assam** reported above 95% pass rates.
- **Strong Female Participation:** Over **65% women participants** in **Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Mizoram, Odisha, UP, Assam, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Delhi** indicates positive strides toward gender equity in education.
- **Contextualization and Language Inclusion:** The test is designed centrally but translated and contextualized by states into local languages, ensuring **inclusivity and accessibility**.

### How is "Full Literacy" Defined under ULLAS?



- **Definition of Literacy:** As per the Ministry of Education's communication to states in August 2023, literacy is defined as- "The ability to read, write, and compute with comprehension – i.e., to identify, understand, interpret, and create- along with critical life skills such as digital literacy, financial literacy, etc." This reflects a comprehensive and functional approach to literacy beyond just basic reading and writing.
- **Full Literacy:** 100% literacy under ULLAS doesn't require literally every individual to be literate. A state/ UT achieving 95% literacy is considered to have reached "full literacy". This benchmark takes into account practical challenges like age, health, or willingness of certain individuals, particularly the elderly, to participate. For example: **Goa reached 99.72% literacy** after identifying and educating non-literate persons through ULLAS; over **80 panchayats were declared 100% literacy**.
- The definition draws from **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** (emphasizes adult education and foundational literacy) and **UN SDG 4.6**, aiming for a "substantial proportion of adults" to achieve literacy and numeracy by 2030.

## International Air Transport Association

The Prime Minister addressed the *International Air Transport Association's (IATA)* 81st Annual General Meeting (AGM) and plenary session of *World Air Transport Summit (WATS)* in New Delhi. This marked the first time India hosted the AGM in 42 years, since 1983.

- ✓ WATS addressed crucial industry issues including economics, air connectivity, energy security, sustainable aviation fuel production, decarbonization financing, and innovations.

### Origin and History of IATA

- Founded in 1945, in Havana, Cuba, by 57 airlines from 31 nations, the IATA is a successor to the International Air Traffic Association established in 1919 in The Hague.
- It is headquartered in Montreal, Canada, with offices worldwide.

### Objectives of IATA

- To promote the growth and development of international air transportation.
- To foster cooperation among international airlines.

## India's Vision for Global Connectivity



- **Policy Support:** Reforms like the new Aircraft Act granting legal authority to the **Cape Town Convention (2001)** in India, incentives for aircraft leasing, 100% FDI under the automatic route, GST reduction, and tax rationalization measures create a business-friendly environment.
- **Open Skies:** Strong support for global connectivity and open skies, aligned with **Chicago Convention (1944)**.
- **Safety & Standards:** Alignment with International Civil Aviation Organization's (ICAO) global safety standards and recognition for aviation security improvements.

**Note:** Members of IATA are airlines, while the members of ICAO are sovereign states. ICAO, is a specialized organization that is part of UN with 193 members, with its headquarters in Montreal, Canada.

- To enhance safety across all areas of air transportation.
- To establish international air traffic rules and regulations.

### Functions of IATA

- **Industry Standards & Regulations:** It develops global standards for ticketing, cargo handling, and operations.
- **Advocacy:** It represents airline interests in policy discussions with governments and international bodies.
- **Financial Systems:** It manages global payment systems like BSP (*Billing and Settlement Plan*) and CASS (*Cargo Account Settlement Systems*) to streamline financial settlements.
- **Training & Certification:** It offers training and certification to improve safety and operational efficiency.
- **Sustainability:** It supports decarbonization efforts and promotes Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAF).
- **Data & Research:** It provides industry data, forecasts, and safety performance reports.

**Membership:** It has about 350 member airlines from 126 countries, representing over 80% of global scheduled air traffic. The members handle 3.3 billion passengers and 59 million Tonnes of cargo annually (2024 data).

## Key Milestones in India's Aviation Sector

- ✦ **Dramatic Growth:** India is now the world's third-largest domestic aviation market, after China and US.
- ✦ **Airport Expansion:** Operational airports have increased from 74 in 2014 to 162 in 2025.
- ✦ **Passenger Growth:** Annual air passengers have reached 240 million and are projected to hit 500 million by 2030.
- ✦ **Cargo Handling:** Air cargo has grown to 3.5 million metric tons annually, with a target of 10 million metric tons by 2030.
- ✦ **UDAN Scheme:** Over 15 million people have benefitted from affordable air travel.
- ✦ **Aircraft Orders:** Indian carriers have placed orders for over 2,000 new aircraft, reflecting rapid fleet expansion.
- ✦ **World-Class Infrastructure:** Airport handling capacity now stands at 500 million passengers per year.
- ✦ **Digital Innovation:** The Digi Yatra app enables seamless, paperless travel using facial recognition technology.
- ✦ **MRO Growth:** Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) facilities have increased from 96 to 154 since 2014, with a \$4 billion MRO hub targeted by 2030.
- ✦ **Women's Participation:** India leads globally with over 15% women pilots and 86% women in cabin crew. Women engineers in India's MRO sector exceed global averages, demonstrating growing female participation in the industry.



### Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB)

The Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) has initiated a formal investigation into the Air India plane crash in Ahmedabad.

#### What is AAIB?

Established in 2012, the AAIB is an **attached office under the Ministry of Civil Aviation** and is **responsible for investigating aircraft accidents and incidents** in Indian airspace or involving Indian-registered aircraft, in compliance with **Annex 13 of the Chicago Convention (1944)**- the international framework for aircraft accident investigation under International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

✓ Previously, the **Air Safety Directorate of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA)** was responsible for investigating aircraft accidents and incidents, operating under the provisions of the **Aircraft Rules, 1937**.

**Legal Basis:** Section 7 of the Aircraft Act, 1934 and the **Aircraft (Investigation of Accidents and Incidents) Rules, 2012** (amended in 2017 & 2021).

**Objective:** To ensure **independence of investigation** from the regulatory body, DGCA.

#### Functions of AAIB

- **Classification of Safety Occurrences:** Categorizes events into **Accidents, Serious Incidents, and Incidents**.
  - ✓ **Accidents:** Events causing fatal/serious injuries, significant aircraft damage, or loss of the aircraft.
  - ✓ **Serious Incidents:** Near-accidents with high probability of becoming accidents (e.g., airprox incidents, aborted takeoffs on taxiways).
  - ✓ **Incidents:** Minor events affecting safety but not leading to accidents.

- **Scope of Investigation:** All accidents and serious incidents involving aircraft with **All-Up Weight (AUW) > 2250 kg** or **turbojet aircraft**. Other incidents can also be investigated at AAIB's discretion if deemed necessary.
- **Prevention-focused:** As per Rule 3 of the 2017 Rules, AAIB investigations aim solely at preventing accidents and incidents, not assigning blame or liability (To Determine cause & contributing factors).
- **Immediate Access:** AAIB has authority for **unrestricted access to evidence** without needing court or government approvals.
- **Additional Responsibilities:** Conducts **safety studies**, supports **Court or Assessor-led investigations** under Rule 12 of the 2017 Rules and works to strengthen India's **State Safety Programme (SSP)**.

### Significance

- **Enhances aviation safety** by providing **transparent, independent, and accountable investigations**.
- Aligns India's practices with **global civil aviation standards**, ensuring **international credibility** in air accident investigations.
- **Separation of Regulatory and Investigative Roles:** Earlier, DGCA performed both regulation and investigation—conflict of interest. Now, AAIB ensures independent analysis.

### Comparative Perspective

Country	Investigation Body	Key Feature
USA	NTSB (National Transportation Safety Board)	Independent federal agency with own labs.
UK	AAIB (Air Accidents Investigation Branch)	Oldest aviation investigation body



## Stages Of an Air Crash Probe

- **Notification & Initial Response:** The accident is promptly reported to authorities like DGCA.
- **Assessment:** Based on severity, AAIB decides the level of investigation (field investigation, limited scope, or full formal investigation) and dispatches investigators to the site.
- **On-Site Investigation:** Investigators secure the crash site, document evidence, and recover the flight data recorder (FDR- "Black Boxes") and cockpit voice recorder (CVR)-Crucial for understanding the aircraft's final moments.
- **Evidence Collection:** It consists of Multidimensional Evidence-Gathering-
  - **Aircraft & Engine Exam:** Wreckage and debris are inspected for mechanical failures.
  - **Interviews:** Survivors and maintenance personnel are questioned.
  - **Maintenance Logs:** Airworthiness records, past discrepancies, AD (Airworthiness Directives) compliance.
  - **Records Review:** Logs, load sheets, and weather data are analyzed.
  - **Meteorological Data:** Weather reports, radar maps at time of crash.
  - **Technical Data:** CVR/FDR data and communication logs are examined.
- **Detailed Analysis:** includes-
  - **Operational:** Evaluates pilot response, CRM (crew resource management), checklist adherence, emergency protocols. For example, did crew declare a MAYDAY call at the right time? Did they follow checklist protocols?
  - **Engineering:** Examining failed parts, often tested by Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM). Metallurgical assessments or borescope inspections can reveal if a blade broke due to fatigue, improper installation, or foreign object damage.
  - **Human Factors & Organizational Review:** Evaluating pilot health, fatigue, and airline practices.
- **Root Cause Determination:** All findings are correlated to identify the chain of events leading to the crash, often involving a mix of technical and human factors.
  - Uses 'Swiss Cheese Model': Systemic failure is often due to multiple layers of defense breaking down.
- **Final Report Compilation:** A comprehensive report is prepared including:
  - **Factual Info:** Flight details, weather, personnel.
  - **Findings:** Evidence-based conclusions and probable causes.
  - **Safety Recommendations:** Issued to prevent recurrence.
- **Publication & Follow-up:** The report is published and shared with stakeholders (airlines, OEMs, regulators), possibly leading to design or training changes.

### Zudpi' Scrub Lands

After decades of litigation over 86,000 hectares of Zudpi jungle lands in **eastern Vidarbha**, the Supreme Court (SC) ruled that these lands are to be treated as "**forest**" under the **Forest (Conservation) Act** and cannot be diverted for non-forest use without prior central approval and strict compliance with court-laid conditions.

## What are Zudpi Lands and Why Were They in Limbo?

- **Meaning: Zudpi** (a Marathi term meaning "bushy" or "shrubby") **lands** are bushy, scrubby wastelands with sparse vegetation found mainly in six districts of eastern Vidarbha- Nagpur, Chandrapur, Gadchiroli, Bhandara, Wardha, and Gondia.
- **Historical Usage and Classification:** Under the Maharashtra Land Revenue Code, 1966, these lands were classified as *Gairan* (grazing lands) and were widely used for **public purposes**: schools, health centers, burial grounds, water supply, even for **land allotments to the poor**, and **large-scale infrastructure** (e.g., railways, irrigation, defense). After the 1960 state reorganization, similar lands in Maharashtra were reclassified as *Gairan* or *Gurcharan*, but in Vidarbha, they remained labeled as 'Zudpi Jungle' due to bureaucratic inaction.
- **Legal Confusion Over Forest Status:** In **1987**, Maharashtra issued an order declaring **Zudpi lands as "scrub forests"** not governed by the **Forest (Conservation) Act (FCA), 1980** and handed them to the Revenue Department for **grazing and afforestation**. This **order was legally challenged** by the **Bombay Environmental Action Group (BEAG)** in the Bombay High Court (HC).
  - ✓ Under the FCA, no forest land can be used for non-forest purposes without prior approval from the **Central Government**.
- **Centre's 1992 Clarification:** The Centre clarified that **Zudpi lands** were to be treated as **forest lands** under the FCA but if **already diverted** to non-forest use, state could seek **post-facto regularization** via a proposal to the Centre. Thus, the state government **withdrew** its 1987 order.
- **Godavarman Judgment (1996):** In the landmark **T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad case**, the **SC held that Zudpi jungles** were to be treated as "forest land" under FCA.
- **Attempts to Resolve the Issue:** A **High-Powered Committee** appointed by the state recommended **92,115 hectares** to be declared as **Protected Forests** and **6,409 hectares**, unfit for forest use, to be **de-notified**.
- **Renewed Push for De-Notification:** In **2019**, Maharashtra government approached the SC seeking permission to exclude the 86,409 hectares from the FCA's purview. The SC formed a **Central Empowered Committee (CEC)** to examine the issue. The **CEC conducted field visits** and filed its report. In **2024**, due to unresolved questions, the SC asked the CEC to submit a **second report**, which became the basis of the final decision.

## Key Arguments in the Case

Party	Argument	Concern/Justification
Maharashtra Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Zudpi lands were <b>never intended as forest lands</b>; continued classification was due to <b>administrative inaction</b> post-1960 reorganization.</li> <li>• Denying de-notification would cause <b>grave and irreparable damage</b> to development and welfare.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Correcting records is essential to prevent <b>harm to lakhs of citizens</b> and to allow critical <b>public projects</b>.</li> <li>• Would <b>stall infrastructure</b>, housing, and public utility projects.</li> </ul>
Prasad Khale (Intervener)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opposed de-notification; argued it would <b>degrade forests</b> and <b>disrupt wildlife corridors</b>.</li> <li>• Criticized the <b>2025 CEC report</b> for <b>ignoring ecological concerns</b> like biodiversity and habitat continuity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Scrub forests and Zudpi lands</b> play a crucial ecological role and should not be diverted for non-forest use.</li> <li>• Urged the Court to consider the long-term <b>environmental impact</b> over short-term development gains.</li> </ul>

## Significance of the SC Judgement

- **Legal Clarity on Zudpi Jungle Lands:** It ends decades of ambiguity over the legal status of Zudpi lands, especially in Vidarbha.
- **Balance Between Development and Environment:** The judgment strikes a middle ground: it protects forest ecosystems while also allowing limited, regulated development on *pre-1996 land allotments*; Recognizes livelihood and housing rights of citizens and public infrastructure already developed on such lands; and prevents arbitrary diversion of forest land and enforces accountability for post-1996 violations.

- **Promotes Accountability and Monitoring:** by mandating action against officials who violated forest laws, setting up Special Task Forces and a monitoring role for the CEC to ensure compliance, curb encroachments, and oversee land transfers.
- **Boost to Planned Infrastructure in Vidarbha:** It clears the way for stalled infrastructure projects in eastern Maharashtra, especially in cities like Nagpur, without compromising forest protection.

### Gyan Post

The Department of Posts (DoP- under the Ministry of Communications) introduced 'Gyan Post', a dedicated postal service for affordable delivery of educational, cultural, social and religious books to promote access to educational and cultural materials across India.

- ✓ Gyan Post aligns with the vision of '**Har Ghar Gyan, Har Sapne Ko Udaan**' (Knowledge for Every Home, Wings for Every Dream)

### Key Features

- **Marking Requirement:** The outer packet must be clearly marked with the words "Gyan Post".
- **Tracking Facility:** Real-time Tracking is available through the standard India Post tracking systems.
- **Proof of Posting & Delivery:** A standard receipt is provided at the time of posting. An optional proof of delivery can also be availed.
- **Withdrawal/Recall Option:** The sender has the option to recall the item or change the delivery address, provided the item has not been invoiced for delivery.
- **Inspection Rights:** Postal staff have the authority to inspect packets. Any violations of conditions may result in penalties.
- **Delivery Method:** Items are delivered as parcel post through surface (land) transport to keep costs low.
- **Public-Private Synergy:** The initiative's planned linkage with the **Open Network for Digital Commerce** (ONDC) indicates potential for integrating digital platforms to enhance reach and efficiency.
- **Cost:** The cost ranges between 20 rupees (for sending packets up to 300 gms) to 100 rupees (for packets up to 5 kilograms)-excluding applicable taxes.

- ✓ 'Gyan Post' offers up to 70% lower rates compared to standard book post for heavier parcels.

## SC Verdict in the Case

Issue	SC Ruling
<b>Present Status</b>	Zudpi jungle lands are to be treated as "forest lands" under the FCA, 1980.
<b>Exception</b>	Lands allotted for <b>non-forest purposes before Dec 12, 1996</b> (date of Godavarman judgment) may be <b>exempt</b> , subject to Centre's approval under Section 2 of FCA according to which <b>without prior approval of the Central Government</b> , no State Government or authority can <b>de-reserve forest land; divert forest land, assign forest land</b> to any private person, authority, or agency and <b>clear natural trees</b> .
<b>Post-1996 Allotments</b>	Any diversion after Dec 12, 1996, needs <b>strict scrutiny</b> by the Centre. Punitive action must be taken against officials who violated SC directions.
<b>Proposal Format</b>	The <b>Centre, state, and CEC</b> must jointly devise a <b>uniform proposal format</b> within <b>3 months</b> for diversion of land.
<b>Public Utility Consideration</b>	Recognized that many Zudpi lands host vital public facilities (e.g., HC building, secretariat, schools), and <b>residents/farmers cannot be displaced</b> arbitrarily.
<b>Compensatory Conditions</b>	The Centre must <b>not impose compensatory afforestation</b> or <b>Net Present Value (NPV)</b> payments on pre-1996 cases.
<b>Encroachment</b>	Special Task Forces to <b>remove encroachments post-October 25, 1980</b> within <b>2 years</b> . All <b>commercial allotments post-1989</b> to be treated as encroachments.
<b>Transfer of Lands</b>	Remaining Zudpi lands to be handed over to the <b>Forest Department</b> within <b>1 year</b> for afforestation.
<b>Use by Non-Government Entities</b>	Diversion for <b>non-governmental entities is prohibited</b> .
<b>Protection of Fragmented Lands</b>	All <b>unallotted fragmented Zudpi parcels (&lt;3 hectares, not near forests)</b> to be declared <b>protected forests</b> .
<b>Monitoring</b>	The <b>CEC</b> will monitor the <b>implementation</b> , and the <b>Chief Secretary's certification</b> is needed to use Zudpi lands for compensatory afforestation where non-forest land is unavailable.

### Objectives

- **Educational Access:** Enable affordable delivery of printed learning resources for students and aspirants.
- **Inclusivity:** Reach underprivileged and rural populations.
- **NEP Alignment:** Fulfill New Education Policy's (NEP) goal of equitable educational material access.
- **Support Self-Learning:** Help competitive exam aspirants and remote learners access books easily.

### Eligibility Criteria

<b>Type of Books Allowed</b>	Textbooks, guides, cultural/social/religious literature recognized by law
<b>Recognized Bodies</b>	Materials from Govt. boards, universities, autonomous/statutory institutions
<b>Commercial Publications</b>	Not allowed (no business books, advertisements, or price lists)
<b>Printer/Publisher Info</b>	Must be printed on each book
<b>Nature of Content</b>	Only printed matter; no hand-written or personal communication

## Centre Caps MGNREGS Spends

For the first time, the Government has imposed a spending cap on the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). Only 60% of the annual allocation (Rs 86,000 crore) can be spent in the first half (April–September) of FY 2025–26 i.e. Rs 51,600 crore.

- ✓ Previously, MGNREGS operated as a **demand-driven** scheme, i.e., spending was based on actual demand for work from rural households- with **no upper cap**.

## Reason for Capping MGNREGS Spends



**Chronic Overspending:** Every year, around **70% of the MGNREGS budget gets used up by September** (first half of the financial year). This leaves **very little money for the remaining six months**, making it hard to meet work demands later in the year.

**Large Pending Dues:** Pending payments for wages and materials often pile up to **₹15,000-₹25,000 crore** annually resulting in workers facing **delays in wages**, and states struggling to manage the scheme smoothly.

**Budget Rollover:** On average, about **20% of the following year's MGNREGS budget** is used just to **clear previous year's dues**. This delays the start of new works and strains the **next year's finances**.

**Avoiding Borrowings:** Government aims to reduce dependency on supplementary allocations and bring the MGNREGS under the Monthly/Quarterly Expenditure Plan (MEP/QEP).

- ✓ MEP/QEP is a financial tool used by government departments to manage spending, forecast cash flow, and ensure expenditure aligns with budgetary limits.

### Concerns Raised

- **Existing Liabilities:** FY 2024-25 ended with ₹21,000 crore in unpaid dues (wages and material costs). With only 60% (₹51,600 crore out of ₹86,000 crore) allowed in the first half, nearly half the cap could go just to clear old dues.
  - Result- very little is left for fresh employment, defeating the scheme's core purpose.
- **Mismatch with Work Demand Cycles:** Work demand peaks April–June and again post-monsoon (September). Weather variability (like droughts) can spike demand mid-year. For example, 2023 drought in Karnataka caused a 20% surge in demand in July–August.
  - A fixed 60% cap ignores such demand spikes, meaning states may not be able to respond to real-time rural distress.
- **Labour Budget Goals at Risk:** The labour budget for FY 2025–26 is set at 198.86 crore person-days of which 133.45 crore (67.11%) are expected to be generated in the first half alone. But with capped funds and carryover dues, the Rural Development Ministry may fall short of creating these many jobs defeating the scheme's purpose.
- **Legal Concerns (Violation of Statutory Rights):** MGNREGS is a legal entitlement guaranteed under the MGNREGA Act, 2005, it transformed employment from a negative right under Article 21 (which mandated that the state must not interfere with your livelihood unreasonably) to a positive statutory obligation, legally requiring the government to provide work on demand. Capping expenditure may force states to deny work once the cap is hit-effectively violating the law.
  - Constitutional courts have held that financial inability cannot be a reason to disregard statutory or constitutional duties, including in *Swaraj Abhiyan v Union of India* (2016), *Municipal Council, Ratlam vs Shri Vardhichand* (1980), and *Paschim Banga Khet Mazdoor Samity v State of W.B.* (1996).
- **Uncertainty in Implementation:** If 60% cap is reached by August or September, states may deny job applications, violating

### Way Forward

- **Introduce Flexibility Within MEP/QEP Framework:** Allow contingency-based spending relaxations for MGNREGS during periods of high rural distress (e.g. drought, floods, job losses). Create provision-linked flexibility rather than a rigid percentage cap.
- **Clear Pending Liabilities Promptly:** Also ensure strict enforcement of the 15-day wage payment rule under MGNREGA.
- **Ring-Fence Funds for Employment Generation:** Allocate a dedicated portion of the budget solely for *fresh employment* generation to prevent diversion toward past dues.
- **Strengthen Monitoring and Demand Forecasting:** Use real-time data and local conditions (weather, crop cycles) to predict and respond to demand spikes. Empower local bodies to flag early indicators of distress.
- **Ensure Legal Compliance and Accountability:** Respect the statutory nature of MGNREGS; financial planning should not override workers' legal entitlements. Periodic judicial or independent audits should be done to ensure compliance with the Act.

Section 3 of the Act, which guarantees work within 15 days of demand or they may allow work but delay wage payments, breaching Para 29 of Schedule II (Payment of Wages Act, 1936), which mandates wages be paid within 15 days of completion.

➤ This opens the door to statutory violations and potential litigation, while also eroding public trust in the scheme.

- **Undermines the Original Spirit of the Act:** MGNREGS was designed as a rights-based welfare programme, ensuring guaranteed employment to rural households. The cap restricts this guarantee.
- **Fiscal Discipline Over Livelihood Rights:** The decision reflects a prioritization of financial control over social welfare. Critics argue that budget targets are being put ahead of the basic right to livelihood.

- **Increase Budgetary Allocation if Needed:** If rural distress persists or demand grows, mid-year allocations through supplementary budgets should be considered.

- **Dialogue with Stakeholders:** Involve civil society, states, and worker unions in policy reviews to ensure that reforms address ground realities and preserve the scheme's core objectives.

{For more about MGNREGS, please refer to The Recitals- April 2025 edition}

### Election Commission Upgrades VTR Sharing Process

The Election Commission of India (ECI) successfully implemented the upgraded Voter Turnout Reporting (VTR) process during the recently held bye-elections in five Assembly Constituencies (ACs) where the Presiding Officer of each polling station was able to directly enter voter turnout data into the new ECINET App.


✓ ECINET is a major digital initiative by ECI aimed at creating a user-friendly, unified digital platform for all stakeholders in the electoral process- including electors, election officials, political parties, and civil society organizations.

#### Why was the Upgraded VTR Introduced?

- To **eliminate delays** and improve public trust in turnout data.
- To **address concerns** about discrepancies and lack of real-time updates during past elections.
  - ✓ The ECI faced criticism during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections for delays (up to 11 days) in publishing final voter turnout figures and for discrepancies between initial and final turnout percentages. Opposition parties raised concerns about transparency and potential data manipulation.
  - ✓ Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), a non-governmental organization, had also approached the Supreme Court (SC) on the issue.
- To **modernize** the reporting mechanism as part of a larger digital initiative under the **ECINET platform**.
- To **increase Transparency** as VTR will be accessible to the public and media much earlier.

#### Key Features of the New Process:

- **Direct Entry by Presiding Officers (PROs):** Every PRO at each polling station can now enter **voter turnout data directly into the ECINET App** every two hours.
- **Real-Time Aggregation:** Data is **automatically aggregated at the constituency level** and made publicly available on the **VTR App** every two hours.



## Index Cards

ECI has made the **Index Card system** more **technology-driven**.

#### What is an Index Card?

It is a **non-statutory, post-election statistical format** used by the ECI to provide **constituency-level election data** for researchers, academia, and policymakers.

#### What Data Does It Cover?

- Information on **candidates, electors, votes polled, votes counted**.
- **Party-wise & candidate-wise vote share**.
- **Gender-based voting patterns**, regional trends, and party performance.
  - ✓ The index card forms the foundation for generating about 35 statistical reports for Lok Sabha elections, and 14 statistical reports for state assembly elections covering details like voter turnout, polling stations, women's participation, party performance, winning candidates, and constituency-wise results.
  - ✓ The Statistical Reports are based on **secondary data** from Index Cards; the **primary final data** stays in statutory forms with the **Returning Officers**.

Old System	VS	New System
<b>Earlier:</b> Data was manually filled on physical Index Cards → then manually entered into an online system → caused delays.		<b>Now:</b> Fully <b>technology-driven</b> , uses <b>automation and data integration</b> → faster and more efficient reporting.

- **Final Data Entry at Poll Close:** After the close of poll, **before leaving the station**, the PRO updates the final voter turnout on the VTR app, ensuring **minimal delay**.
  - **Offline Functionality:** In **low or no-network areas**, data can be entered **offline** and will sync automatically when connectivity is restored.
- \*\* The statutory procedure of issuing **Form 17C** to polling agents under **Rule 49S** of the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961, remains unchanged.

### How is it Different from the Previous (Existing) Process?

Aspect	Previous Process	Upgraded Process
<b>Data Entry</b>	PROs shared data with <b>Sector Officers</b> , who relayed it to Returning Officers (ROs) via <b>calls/SMS/messaging apps</b> .	PROs <b>directly enter</b> turnout data into the <b>ECINET App</b> .
<b>Frequency of Updates</b>	Data was <b>manually collected</b> and was aggregated every two hours and uploaded to the Voter Turnout (VTR) App.	PROs enter data <b>every 2 hours</b> , and it is <b>auto aggregated</b> .
<b>Final Turnout Entry</b>	Done <b>after all other duties</b> , often late at night or next day.	Entered into ECINET <b>before leaving the polling station</b> .

### ANI Vs YouTube Content Creator Case

The ANI accused YouTuber Mohak Mangal of using its exclusive content in at least 10 videos, citing copyright and trademark infringement. The Delhi trial court and High Court (HC) are hearing related cases, which may clarify legal grey areas around content use by digital creators.

#### Background

ANI filed multiple copyright takedown notices with YouTube, alleging Mohak Mangal used its protected content without permission. YouTube issued strikes and removed the videos. In response, Mangal appealed via counter notifications, arguing his use fell under "fair dealing" for reporting, criticism, and review, as allowed under Indian copyright law.

#### Arguments and Delhi HC Ruling

**ANI's Allegations:** ANI alleged not only **copyright and trademark infringement** but also that Mangal made **disparaging remarks** against the agency

#### Mohak Mangal's Defence:

Mangal had argued that his use

### What is 'fair dealing' under the copyright law?

- Fair dealing is a statutory exception under Section 52 of the Indian Copyright Act, 1957, allows limited use of copyrighted material without permission if used for private use, including research, criticism or review, or for reporting of current affairs and events.
- **2012 Amendments:** Expanded the scope of fair dealing to include educational use, digital formats, and incidental storage, aligning with technological advancements.
- Although there is no fixed definition of fair dealing, Courts interpret it on a case-by-case basis by considering-
  - ➔ Purpose of use (e.g., public interest, criticism)
  - ➔ Extent and nature of the copying (short extracts vs. wholesale reproduction)
  - ➔ Financial impact on the original creator
  - ➔ Whether there's creative input or just copying
  - ➔ Transformative Value: Adds new meaning, commentary, or understanding
- For example, in *TV Today vs. New Laundry*, the Delhi HC refused to block News Laundry's use of TV Today's content, accepting the possibility of fair dealing. The court noted that the content was used for criticism and review and there was no irreparable harm to TV Today.
- **Civic Chandran v. Ammini Amma (1996, Kerala HC):** Use of portions of a play in another literary work for social critique was held to be fair dealing.
- **The Chancellor, Masters & Scholars of the University of Oxford vs. Rameshwari Photocopy Services (DU Photocopy Case, 2016):** Delhi HC ruled in favor of students and a photocopy shop that created course packs using excerpts from textbooks. Upheld educational use under fair dealing.
- In the present case, Mangal claims his use of ANI clips was for reporting and critique, fitting under fair dealing. However, since YouTube removed his videos under California's Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) and not Indian law, the Indian courts will now decide whether his use qualifies as fair dealing.

### Challenges and Criticisms

- **Lack of clear definition:** Ambiguity leads to legal uncertainty and over-cautious takedowns
- **Digital domain confusion:** Not clear how fair dealing applies to YouTube, memes, podcasts
- **Chilling effect:** Fear of litigation discourages valid fair uses
- **Cross-border conflicts:** US-based platforms (like YouTube) follow DMCA, not Indian fair dealing laws

### Reforms

- Codify detailed digital fair dealing provisions to address modern content use.
- Issue guidelines for educators, journalists, and creators on ethical use.
- Train judiciary and IPR registrars to uniformly interpret fair dealing.
- Align Indian law with global best practices while retaining public interest focus.

Fair dealing under Indian copyright law acts as a crucial check on the monopoly of content owners while promoting freedom of thought, access to knowledge, and responsible critique

of ANI's content should not be seen as infringement because of the 'de minimis' principle.

### Delhi HC's Ruling on Trademark Disparagement and the 'De Minimis' Principle-

- The court **did not rule on the copyright or trademark infringement issues** and focused only on "disparagement", directing Mangal to **remove the offensive remarks** from his video.
  - ✓ **Surgical Editing Directive:** The court ordered Mangal to remove only the disparaging portions, allowing the video to remain online after edits, preserving freedom of expression.
  - ✓ **No Injunction on Entire Video:** Unlike ANI's request for a complete takedown, the court adopted a balanced approach, avoiding blanket restrictions.
- The 'de minimis' principle is a legal concept that exempts minor or trivial matters from legal scrutiny. It is **simpler and faster** to apply than the more complex **fair dealing** defence. Indian courts use **five key factors** to assess if a use qualifies as *de minimis*:

<b>Size and type of harm</b>	<b>Cost of adjudication</b>	<b>Purpose of the violated obligation</b>
<b>Impact on third-party rights (like viewers)</b>		<b>Intent of the alleged violator</b>

### Why Investigators Cannot Summon Lawyers?

The Supreme Court (SC) recently held that summoning lawyers for advising clients violates their rights and undermines legal autonomy. The ruling came in a hearing involving a Gujarat-based lawyer, who was summoned by police for securing bail for his client in a loan dispute case.

- ✓ This follows the SC Bar Association's condemnation of ED (Directorate of Enforcement- under Department of Revenue) summons to two senior advocates over their legal advice in a case.

**Core Legal Issue Involved: Whether a lawyer can be summoned by an investigative agency merely for rendering legal advice, in the absence of any allegation of fraud, conspiracy, or unlawful intent?** This issue raises deep constitutional, statutory, and ethical questions about the **independence of the legal profession** and the **sanctity of attorney-client privilege**.

- **Right to Counsel and Rule of Law:** If a lawyer can be summoned **merely for offering advice**, it undermines the **right to legal representation**, a basic element of natural justice. Even **incorrect legal advice** does not constitute wrongdoing unless tied to an unlawful intent. This could result in Lawyers hesitating to give honest legal opinions, especially in sensitive cases, out of fear of being investigated.

### Related Judicial Precedents

Indian courts have consistently upheld that lawyers cannot be summoned merely for advising clients in cases like:

- **A.V. Pavithran v. CBI (2024, Bombay HC):** The court quashed CBI summons to an advocate holding that legal advice is protected under attorney-client privilege (Section 126 of the Indian Evidence Act, now Section 132 of BSA, 2023). It reaffirmed the principle: *"Once privileged, always privileged."*
- **Praram Infra v. State of M.P. (2025, MP HC):** The court quashed summons to an advocate, stating that a lawyer cannot be called for questioning if they are neither an accused nor a witness. It reiterated that professional communications are privileged and protected from disclosure.

### Privileges Available to Attorney-client Communication under Indian Law

**Section 132, Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA), 2023**

It provides that any **oral, written, or electronic communication** between an advocate and client is protected. This includes advice, documents, and discussions related to the case or legal representation.

- ✓ The privilege **continues even after the professional relationship ends.**
- ✓ **Exceptions to the Privilege:** An advocate can disclose client communication **only in the following three situations:**
  - 1. Client's Consent:** The client explicitly allows disclosure.
  - 2. Illegal Purpose:** The communication was made to further an illegal act.
  - 3. Observation of Crime:** If the lawyer witnesses a crime during their employment.

**\*\*Unlike advocates, chartered accountants, company secretaries, and cost accountants do not enjoy this legal privilege under the BSA. This makes the legal profession uniquely protected in terms of confidentiality.**

**ATTORNEY  
CLIENT  
PRIVILEGE**

**Bar Council of India Rules (Advocates Act, 1961)**

- Advocates must offer advice **"without fear or favour"** and in accordance with the law.
- The privilege is **not a personal right or shield**; it is a **public duty**, aimed at ensuring the **free and fair administration of justice.**

**SC's Ruling in the Present Case:** The Court observed that summoning a lawyer solely for providing legal advice raises serious concerns about the **independence of the legal profession** and the **administration of justice**. It held that lawyers enjoy constitutional protection under **Article 19(1)(g)**- *freedom to practice any profession* and statutory privilege under **Section 132 of the BSA, 2023**. The Court also:

- **Framed key legal questions** on whether lawyers can be summoned merely for advice, and if judicial oversight is needed when their role is disputed.
- **Issued notice** to the Attorney General, Solicitor General, Bar Council of India, and others to assist in resolving the matter.
- **Stayed the summons** against the petitioner until further orders.
- **Referred the case to the Chief Justice of India** for appropriate action, given the significance of the issues involved.

### Central Schemes Must Pass 'Effectiveness' Test to Continue

As per a recent Finance Ministry circular, to enhance *fiscal prudence* and *governance efficiency*, all centrally funded schemes (whether fully or partially funded) will only continue beyond the current financial year if two conditions are met:

- **Evaluation reports** show the scheme is effective in meeting its goals.
- There is a **justified need** to continue or expand the scheme.

**Sunset Clause for Schemes: Every scheme must now have a fixed end date (sunset date).** The aim is to **improve the quality of government spending** by preventing schemes from running indefinitely without review.

- ✓ The government is currently in the process of conducting a third-party evaluation of all fully funded Central Schemes, while NITI Aayog is appraising the Centrally Sponsored Schemes.
- ✓ **54 Central and 260 Centrally Sponsored schemes** across sectors like education, health, tribal welfare, infrastructure, etc. will end on March 31, 2026 unless re-approved.

### Funding Limitations

- **Total outlay** for a scheme over the next Finance Commission (FC) cycle (2026–2031) should not exceed **5.5 times the average annual expenditure** made during 2021–22 to 2024–25.
- Ministries can **propose cheaper schemes** or adjust funding across schemes- increase in one must be balanced by a cut in another.
- **All schemes will be "fund-limited"**: Spending must stay within the approved outlay.

**Impact on Demand-Based Schemes like MGNREGA:** Even **flexible, demand-driven programs like MGNREGA** must follow the new rule:

- Spending will be **based on estimated beneficiaries** during the FC cycle.
- **Sanctions (approvals)** must stay within the total approved budget.
- If more people need to be covered, **extra approval is needed** from the Department of Expenditure.

**Possible Implications of the Effectiveness Test for Schemes:** The government is **enforcing outcome-based, time-bound, and budget-limited** governance of welfare schemes. This could lead to:

- **Better accountability and efficiency.**

### Multidimensional Analysis of the 'Effectiveness Test' Policy

<b>Third-Party Audits</b>	Independent bodies like NITI Aayog or CAG to assess performance (similar to OECD's performance budgeting).
<b>Weeding Out Redundancy</b>	Ineffective schemes (e.g., Stand-Up India's low disbursement rates) may be discontinued. Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) succeeded due to Aadhaar-linked verification
<b>Performance-Linked Funding</b>	Aligns with FRBM Act's fiscal discipline goals.
<b>Focus on High-Impact Schemes</b>	Resources redirected to Ayushman Bharat, PM Awas Yojana (proven success).
<b>Data-Driven Targeting</b>	SECC 2011 data used to validate PM Ujjwala Yojana's LPG penetration
<b>Avoiding Exclusion Errors</b>	NFSA's(National Food Security Act), digitized ration lists reduced leakage.
<b>Cooperative Federalism</b>	States can propose customized variants (like Odisha's Kalia Scheme vs. PM-KISAN).

- **Reduction or closure of underperforming or outdated schemes.**
- Tighter fiscal control- especially as India moves toward **fiscal consolidation.**

### Lilavati Hospital vs HDFC Bank Case

The Lilavati Hospital Trust has accused HDFC Bank’s chief (Sashidhar Jagdishan) of taking a Rs 2 crore bribe to help some individuals illegally control the Trust. FIRs and court cases are ongoing.

#### Significance of the Case

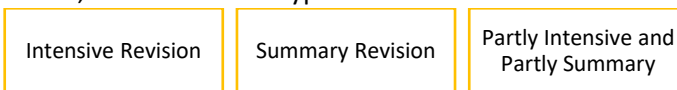
- **Corporate Governance:** The allegations against Jagdishan raise questions about ethical leadership in India’s banking sector, a key pillar of economic stability.
- **Charitable Trust Governance:** The internal feud within the LKMM (Lilavati Kirtilal Mehta Medical) Trust reflects broader challenges in managing charitable organizations, often marred by family disputes. Also shows how trusts can invoke the law to protect themselves from alleged corporate overreach.
- **Trust in Financial Institutions:** The dispute erodes public trust in banks, especially if allegations of bribery and favoritism are substantiated.
- **Questions Credibility of Evidence:** The case depends on a handwritten diary, highlighting issues around the admissibility and reliability of informal evidence in criminal cases.
- **Highlights Corporate–Trust Disputes:** It shows how internal trust disputes can escalate into allegations of bribery, harassment, and misuse of position involving big corporate leaders. It raises questions about the influence of banks over charitable or public trusts through loan recovery and financial leverage.
- **Broader Impact:** May set a precedent for how courts handle bribery and breach of trust charges involving big corporate names. May affect public perception of corporate governance, accountability, and the limits of corporate power in civil society.

### Fresh Voter Rolls in Bihar

The Election Commission has launched a **special intensive revision** of the electoral roll in **poll-bound Bihar**, requiring all voters **not listed in the 2003 rolls** to **submit fresh documents** proving their eligibility—marking the beginning of a likely **nationwide exercise.**

#### Electoral Roll (ER): A Constitutional Responsibility of the ECI

- The Election Commission of India (ECI) regards the creation, maintenance, and purification of the Electoral Roll (ER) as a core constitutional duty.
- This duty is rooted in **Article 324, the Representation of the People Act, 1950**, and the **Registration of Electors Rules, 1960 (RER).**
- **Types of Revision**
  - As per Rule 25(1) of RER 1960, there are three types of revisions:



#### EC Begins Special Intensive Revision of Electoral Rolls in Bihar

- Voters not listed in the 2003 rolls must now submit fresh proof of eligibility.
  - The last intensive revision in Bihar was in 2003, with the qualifying date of January 1, 2003.
- **Proof of Birth and Parental Origin Now Mandatory**
  - **Born Before July 1, 1987:** Must provide proof of their own date and/or place of birth.
  - **Born Between July 1, 1987 – December 2, 2004:** Must furnish proof of date/place of birth of either parent.
  - **Born After December 2, 2004:** Must provide date/place of birth proof of both parents. These categories align with the **Citizenship Act, 1955**, according to EC sources.

- **Legal Basis and Historical Context**

- This revision is being conducted under powers granted by the RPA Act 1950 (Section 21), which allows the EC to prepare electoral rolls afresh.

- **Process**

- **Booth Level Officers (BLOs)** will conduct **house-to-house surveys**, distribute pre-filled enumeration forms, and collect them with supporting documents.
- Forms can also be submitted via the **ECINET app or ECI website**.
- Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) verify voter eligibility under **Section 23 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950**.
- Under **Section 24**, appeals against ERO decisions can be made to the District Magistrate or Chief Electoral Officer.
  - If any claims or objections arise, the AERO will investigate before final approval.

- **Need for intensive revision**

- The last intensive revision in Bihar was done in 2003.
- Due to rapid urbanisation, migration, new eligible voters, unreported deaths, and inclusion of foreign illegal immigrants, the EC has now ordered a fresh revision to ensure accurate and error-free electoral rolls.

### EC Revises Protocol for Handling EVMs and VVPATs with Mock Poll Data



- Earlier, EVMs and VVPATs where mock poll data wasn't deleted/slips weren't removed were **set aside and not counted** if the margin of victory exceeded the number of such votes.
- This led to discrepancies between total votes polled and counted.
- **New Instructions: Count All Machines Separately**
  - The Election Commission has now directed that such machines (where votes cast during the pre-polling mock poll is somehow not deleted or the slips not removed) must be **counted on a separate table**, not discarded.
    - ▶ **Mock poll votes** will be **subtracted** using the mock poll certificate.
    - ▶ This ensures a **more accurate final count** and **greater transparency**.
- **Accountability Measures for Poll Officials of such polling stations**
  - Strict action will be taken against the Presiding Officer and Polling Officer of **such polling stations**
  - These officials will face disciplinary action, reinforcing the need for compliance and care during polling procedures.

### Lokpal of India Adopts a New Motto

The Full Bench of Lokpal of India has adopted a new Motto- “Empower Citizens, Expose Corruption” replacing the old one- *Ma Gridhah Kasyavid Dhanam* (Do not be greedy for anyone’s wealth).



## RBI's Financial Conditions Index (FCI)

In a bid to enhance real-time monitoring of the country's financial health, a recent study by the RBI has proposed the construction of a Financial Conditions Index (FCI) for India with a **daily frequency**.

### Introduction

- The FCI is a **composite indicator** that aggregates data across major financial segments to evaluate how tight or relaxed financial conditions are, relative to their **historical average since 2012**.
- This move aligns with global central banking practices, where FCIs help gauge monetary transmission, inform policy decisions, and signal systemic stress.

### Purpose and Structure of the Financial Conditions Index

- The proposed FCI aims to serve as a dynamic and high-frequency barometer of India's financial stability by integrating data from:



- The FCI is built using **20 market-based indicators**, and values are standardised to reflect changes in financial tightness or looseness in standard deviation units. A positive value indicates tighter conditions, while a negative value suggests easier financial conditions.

As India's financial architecture becomes increasingly complex, the RBI's daily FCI will play a pivotal role in ensuring financial stability. Continued refinement of the index, such as inclusion of newer market indicators, algorithmic adjustments, and integration with other macroeconomic dashboards, can further enhance its utility.

## Evolution of Financial Conditions in Recent Years

### Post-Pandemic Recovery and Easy Financial Conditions

- The COVID-19 pandemic led to a dramatic tightening of financial conditions due to a sharp sell-off in equity and corporate bond markets.
- However, this was followed by an exceptionally loose financial environment in 2021-2022, driven by the RBI's proactive interventions, including:
  - Large-scale liquidity infusion
  - Policy rate cuts
  - Regulatory forbearance measures
- During this period, the FCI reached a low of **-2.197** in mid-June 2021, indicating extremely easy financial conditions.

### Periods of Tightening

- Significant peaks in the FCI were observed during historical stress episodes, such as:
  - **July 2013 Taper Tantrum:** A peak of **+2.826**, primarily driven by tightening in bond and forex markets due to fears of US Federal Reserve tapering.
  - **September 2018 IL&FS Crisis:** Equity and bond markets contributed to financial tightening, reflecting stress in the NBFC sector.
  - **Early 2020 COVID-19 Onset**

## UN's Development Conference in Seville

Global leaders began the once-in-a-decade **Financing for Development (FFD4)** Conference in **Seville, Spain**, aiming to reform global aid, tax systems, and climate finance structures. This Conference is crucial for mobilizing the necessary resources and fostering international cooperation to achieve the SDGs.

### Seville FFD4 Conference to Set Ambitious Global Development Agenda

- The 4<sup>th</sup> Financing for Development (FFD4) conference, brings together political, financial, and trade leaders to address key development challenges including aid, trade, and debt.
- **The 'Seville Commitment' Blueprint**
  - Leaders expected to adopt a 38-page political document, the "Seville Commitment," outlining a non-binding roadmap for *global development financing* over the next decade.
- **Building on Past Milestones**
  - **Monterrey Consensus (2002):** Set ODA (Official development assistance) targets and backed the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative.
  - **Addis Ababa Action Agenda (2015):** Introduced the 17 SDGs and focused on tax reform and tackling illicit financial flows.

- **A Challenging Global Backdrop**

- FFD4 convenes amid major aid cuts in wealthy nations and climate change scepticism from influential leaders.

### Key Objectives of the Seville Commitment

- The 2024 Seville Commitment aims to **support poorer nations** in facing climate crises through:
  - **Debt reforms:** Including debt-for-climate swaps and disaster-linked debt pause clauses.
    - Debt-for-climate swaps: Cancelling or refinancing a portion of a country's debt in exchange for commitments to invest in climate-related projects.
    - Disaster-linked debt pause clauses, also known as Climate-Resilient Debt Clauses (CRDCs), allow for a temporary suspension of debt payments in the event of a climate-related disaster
  - **Global solidarity levies:** Proposals to tax polluters or the ultra-rich to fund sustainable development.
  - **Debt restructuring frameworks:** Streamlining global debt solutions.
  - **Innovative financing:** Leveraging special drawing rights via multilateral development banks.
  - **Seville Platform for Action:** A new coalition-building mechanism to fast-track implementation of key goals.
- **High-Profile Attendance, U.S. Missing**
  - Over 70 heads of state and key global leaders including India attended.
  - The United States, exited negotiations after failing to remove language on climate, sustainability, and gender equality.

### U.S. Absence a Double-Edged Sword

- While the U.S. withdrawal weakens global consensus, some believe progress may be easier without its attempts to dilute climate and equity goals.
- **Barriers to "Debt Reform" Progress**
  - Tensions persist over global debt frameworks, particularly between African nations and key lenders like China, hampering unified action on a debt convention.
- **Challenges to Global Tax Reform**
  - Opposition from Trump and others makes it harder to achieve global tax rule changes, a core agenda item.
- **Strong Global Consensus on Climate Action**
  - Despite disagreements, there is broad international agreement on the urgent need to scale up climate adaptation financing for vulnerable countries.

### Financial Backdrop to FFD4 in Seville


- The UN estimates a **\$4 trillion shortfall in financing** for sustainable development worldwide, highlighting the urgent need for large-scale financial reform.
- Multilateral development banks have mobilised only a few hundred billion dollars
- Since 2014, the average **interest costs** for developing countries as a share of their tax revenues have nearly doubled, straining public finances.
- China's loans to Africa have become net negative, with repayments exceeding new disbursements, reducing available financial support on the continent.
- Roughly 3.3 billion people—over half of Africa's population—live in countries where debt servicing costs exceed public health expenditures.

### MoU on Organic Farming

- Indian Overseas Bank (IOB) has entered into a tripartite MoU with AMUL (India's largest dairy cooperative) and Richplus (AMUL's organic farming partner) to promote organic farming.
- As part of this MoU, IOB is targeting to **onboard 1 lakh organic farmers** in Tamil Nadu, where organic farming is already gaining ground, and then scale it nationally.
- A key feature of the initiative is the launch of a **co-branded Organic Farming Card** for IOB account holders. The card offers farmers **access to discounted organic inputs** through Amul's certified outlets and other support.
  - Other benefits include free agronomist support, training opportunities, high-quality seeds, certification, and market access, creating a comprehensive ecosystem for sustainable growth.
  - IOB will also introduce a **dedicated credit scheme Harit Kranti**, tailored to the needs of organic farmers
- The MoU also facilitates National Programme for Organic Production (**NPOP**) **certification** for farmers and **guarantees buy-back arrangements** to ensure fair pricing and market stability.

## Index of Industrial Production Drops

- **Growth** in industrial activity in the country slowed to an *eight-month low* of **2.7%** in April 2025. In April 2024, the IIP had grown by 5.2%
- The Index of Industrial Production (IIP) has been dragged down by lower activity in several sectors, including mining and quarrying, electricity, primary goods, infrastructure and construction, and consumer non-durables.
- According to the IIP for April 2025, growth in industrial activity was last slower in August 2024, when it had contracted 0.1%.
- The output of the mining sector (-0.2%) contracted during April for the first time in eight months.
- Meanwhile, output in the electricity sector (1.1%) decelerated in April to a seven-month low. Output in the manufacturing sector (3.4%) slightly decelerated during the month.
- Notably, the **capital goods** sector saw very strong growth of 20.3% in April 2025, due to a low base of 2.81% in April last year.



## Index of Industrial Production (IIP)

- ✓ IIP is a composite indicator that measures changes in the volume of production of a basket of industrial products over a period of time.
- ✓ It measures the growth rate of industry groups classified under:
  - ✓ **Broad sectors:**
    - ➔ Mining 14.37% (29 items)
    - ➔ Manufacturing 77.63% (809 items)
    - ➔ Electricity 7.99% (1 item)
  - ✓ **Use-based sectors:** Basic Goods, Capital Goods and Intermediate Goods.
- ✓ It is computed and published by the **Central Statistical Organisation (CSO), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation**, with a time lag of six weeks from the reference month.
- ✓ The **base year** for the calculation is **2011-12**. The index value is compared to the value it had in the same month last year to figure out the economy's industrial health.

### Significance of IIP

- ✓ It provides a single representative figure to measure the general level of industrial activity in the economy on a monthly basis.
- ✓ It is used by government agencies including the Ministry of Finance, RBI etc, for **policy purposes**.
- ✓ It is used for the compilation of **Gross Value Added (GVA)** of the manufacturing sector in the **Gross Domestic Product (GDP)** on a quarterly basis.

### Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)

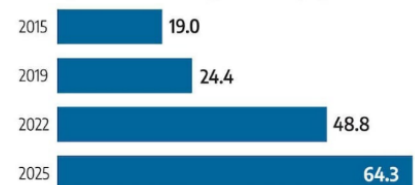
- ✓ DPIIT is a department under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- ✓ Individual administrative ministries look after the production, distribution, development and planning aspects of specific industries allocated to them. However, **DPIIT is responsible for the overall industrial policy**.
- ✓ It is also responsible for facilitating and increasing the **FDI** flows to the country.

## Rise in Social Protection Coverage in India

- **India now ranks second in the world in social security coverage**, providing social protection to **more than 94 crore** of its citizens, as per the International Labour Organization's (ILO) ILOSTAT database.
- **India's social security coverage** in 2025 stood at **64.3%**, up from **19% in 2015**.
- In its assessment, ILO included data from 32 central & state schemes. These include schemes like Atal Pension Yojana, Kisan Samman Nidhi, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Janani Suraksha Yojana and PM POSHAN, among others.
- **ILO's criteria** to consider a scheme as part of the social security net include that it should be **legislatively backed, in cash and be active** along with the availability of **verified data of the last three years**.
- The present figure reflects only Phase I of the data pooling exercise. This phase focused on beneficiary data of Central sector schemes and women-centric schemes in selected 8 States.
- With Phase II, it is expected that India's total social protection coverage will soon surpass the 100-crore mark upon verification of additional schemes by the ILO.

### Expanding cover

Social protection coverage in India (%)



Source: ILOSTAT

### Significance

- Moreover, the increase in social protection coverage will further **strengthen India's global engagements**, particularly in finalising Social Security Agreements (SSAs) with developed nations.

- These agreements will ensure the **portability of social protection benefits for Indian professionals working overseas**, while offering partner countries the transparency required for mutual recognition frameworks.
- This will further **strengthen India's position in trade and labour mobility negotiations** by showcasing a credible and robust social protection regime.

### Modified Interest Subvention Scheme Extended

The Union Cabinet has approved the continuation of the Interest Subvention (IS) component under the Modified Interest Subvention Scheme (MISS) for the financial year 2025-26.

- The continuation of the scheme will cost the exchequer **Rs 15,640 crore**. No changes have been proposed in the structure or other components of the scheme.

#### Agri Credit Highlights

- **Institutional credit disbursement** through KCC increased from **Rs 4.26 lakh crore in 2014 to Rs 10.05 lakh crore by December 2024**.
- **Overall agricultural credit flow** also rose from **Rs 7.3 lakh crore in 2013-14 to Rs 25.49 lakh crore in 2023-24**.
- Digital reforms such as the launch of the **Kisan Rin Portal (KRP)** in 2023 have enhanced transparency and efficiency in claim processing.

### Modified Interest Subvention Scheme (MISS)



- MISS is a **Central Sector Scheme** aimed at ensuring the availability of short-term credit to farmers at an affordable interest rate through **Kisan Credit Card (KCC)**.
- Under MISS, farmers get **short-term loans of up to Rs 3 lakh** through KCC at a **subsidised interest rate of 7%**, with 1.5% interest subvention provided to eligible lending institutions.
- Additionally, farmers repaying loans promptly are eligible for an **incentive of up to 3% as a Prompt Repayment Incentive (PRI)**, effectively reducing their interest rate on KCC loans to 4%.
- For loans taken exclusively for animal husbandry or fisheries, the interest benefit is applicable up to Rs 2 lakh.
- There are more than **7.75 crore of KCC accounts** in the country. The continuation of the support is critical to sustaining the flow of institutional credit to agriculture, which is vital for enhancing productivity and ensuring financial inclusion for small and marginal farmers.

### Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products

The Union Government has announced the **restoration of benefits** under the Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP) scheme for exports made by *Advance Authorization (AA) holders, Export-Oriented Units (EOUs), and units operating in Special Economic Zones (SEZs)*.

- The benefits will be applicable for all eligible exports made from 1st June 2025 onwards.
- The decision has been taken to **boost India's export competitiveness** in global markets. The benefits under RoDTEP for these categories were previously available until the beginning of February 2025, and their restoration is expected to **provide a**

### Background of RoDTEP scheme

- The US had earlier challenged India's key export subsidy schemes in the World Trade Organization (WTO).
- A dispute panel in the WTO ruled against India, stating that India's export subsidy programmes violated WTO norms.
- The panel further recommended India to withdraw such export subsidy programmes. This led to the development of the RoDTEP Scheme, in order to ensure that India stays WTO-compliant.

### Features of RoDTEP

- Operational since **January 2021**, RoDTEP was formed to replace the Merchandise Exports from India (MEIS) Scheme.
- RoDTEP is based on the globally accepted principle that taxes and duties should not be exported, and taxes and levies borne on the exported products should be either exempted or remitted to exporters
- Before the introduction of RoDTEP, GST taxes and import/customs duties for inputs required to manufacture exported products were either exempted or refunded.
- However, certain taxes/duties/levies are outside GST, and were not refunded for exports, such as, VAT on fuel used in transportation, Mandi tax, Duty on electricity used during manufacturing etc.
- The RoDTEP scheme now covers these taxes/duties/levies which are refunded for exported products.
- The rebate is issued as a transferable electronic scrip by the Central Board of Indirect Taxes & Customs in an end- to-end IT environment.
- Moreover, a monitoring and audit mechanism, with an Information Technology based **Risk Management System (RMS)**, is used to physically verify the records of exporters.

### Benefits of RoDTEP

- The scheme helps the country to **comply with WTO norms**, while providing benefits to exporters.
- By covering previously uncovered taxes/duties the **scheme leads to cost competitiveness of exported products** in international markets.
- It also creates **better employment opportunities** in export-oriented manufacturing industries.
- The introduction of the digital platform, helps clearance at a much faster rate and also increases the accuracy of transaction processing.
- As of March 2025, total disbursements under the RoDTEP scheme have crossed Rs. 57,976 crores, underscoring its significant role in supporting India's merchandise exports.

level playing field for exporters across sectors.

### Miniratna Status

- The Ministry of Defence has approved the **Miniratna status Category-I** for **Munitions India Limited (MIL), Armoured Vehicles Nigam Limited (AVNL) & India Optel Limited (IOL)**.
- Major products of MIL include small, medium and high calibre ammunition, mortars, rockets, hand grenades etc. with in-house manufacturing of initiatory compositions, propellants and high explosives.
- Major products of AVNL include Armoured/ Combat Vehicles (T-90, MBT Arjun, Infantry Combat Vehicles 'BMP-II Sarath' etc.), support vehicles and defence mobility solutions (Stallion etc.)
- Main products of IOL include Opto-Electronic systems and vision equipment which are used in land system platforms & weapons like battle tanks T-90, T-72, Infantry Combat Vehicle BMP-II, Artillery Guns, Naval Guns etc.

### Criteria for grant of Miniratna status to CPSEs

- **Miniratna Category-I status:** - The Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) which have made profit in the **last three years** continuously.
  - Their pre-tax profit should have been **Rs.30 crores or more** in at least one of the three years and they should have a positive net worth to be eligible to be considered for grant of Miniratna-I status.
- **Miniratna Category-II status:** - The CPSEs which have made profit for the last three years continuously and have a positive net worth are eligible to be considered for grant of Miniratna-II status.
  - Miniratna CPSEs should have not defaulted in the repayment of loans/interest payment on any loans due to the Government.
  - Miniratna CPSEs shall not depend upon budgetary support or Government guarantees.

### ICRISAT Centre of Excellence for South-South Cooperation in Agriculture

- The *International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT)*, in **collaboration with** the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), **launched** the ICRISAT Centre of Excellence for South-South Cooperation in Agriculture (ISSCA).
- The initiative aims to **accelerate agricultural innovation and collaboration across the Global South**.
- The launch also featured the signing of a strategic MoU between ICRISAT and DAKSHIN (Development and Knowledge Sharing Initiative).
- The Global South possesses a rich foundation of innovation, local expertise, and proven solutions, but more coordinated action, investment, and partnership are needed to unlock their full potential at scale.
- The establishment of ISSCA provides a dedicated platform to exchange knowledge, scale innovations, and form partnerships among countries facing similar agricultural, climatic, and socio-economic challenges.
- ISSCA will serve as a catalyst for translating proven agricultural solutions into scalable impact.
- It features a digital portal that functions as a storehouse of validated innovations, enabling peer-to-peer learning, partnership brokering, and the deployment of low-cost, high-impact technologies and policy models tailored to dry-land and developing regions.

### ICRISAT

- ➔ **Headquartered in Hyderabad**, ICRISAT is an international organisation which conducts **agricultural research for rural development**.
- ➔ It is a non-profit organization that works to improve livelihoods in dryland regions of Asia and sub-Saharan Africa
- ➔ It was **established in 1972**, by a consortium of organisations convened by the Ford and the Rockefeller foundations.
- ➔ Since its inception, India has granted a special status to ICRISAT as a United Nations organization operating in the Indian territory making it eligible for special immunities and tax privileges.

### Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS)

- ➔ RIS is a **New Delhi-based** autonomous policy research institute that specializes in international economic affairs and development cooperation.
- ➔ **Established in 1983**, as a registered society, it **operates under the Ministry of External Affairs**.
- ➔ Its mandate is to promote **South-South Cooperation** and assist developing countries in shaping equitable global economic policies.

### Development and Knowledge Sharing Initiative (DAKSHIN)

- ➔ Launched during the 1st Voice of Global South Summit in 2023, DAKSHIN is an initiative of Govt. of India to mobilise the Global South towards human-centric development.
- ➔ It assists stakeholders and partners in the identification and implementation of scalable and sustainable solutions that can transform the economies and societies of countries of Global South.
- ➔ It acts as an accelerator for the Global South towards the realisation of Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals.

## FASTag Based Annual Pass

- The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has announced a FASTag-based **annual pass** priced at **Rs 3,000** for hassle-free-highway travel.
- The annual pass will become available for purchase from 15 August this year, through the **Rajmarg Yatra mobile app** and on the official websites of the NHA as well as the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH).
- It is **only valid for non-commercial private vehicles** such as cars, jeeps, and vans.
- It will allow commuters to **travel toll-free for 200 trips or one year** from the date on which the pass is activated, whichever comes first.
- The pass will only work at toll plazas that are operated by the National Highways Authority of India (NHA).
- Thus, holders of the annual pass will still need to pay toll on state highways, private-run toll roads, and state-run expressways.
- It is part of the government's broader efforts to modernise road infrastructure in the country while enhancing user convenience on the national highway grid.
- It will reduce wait times, ease congestion, and minimize disputes at toll plazas.

## FASTag

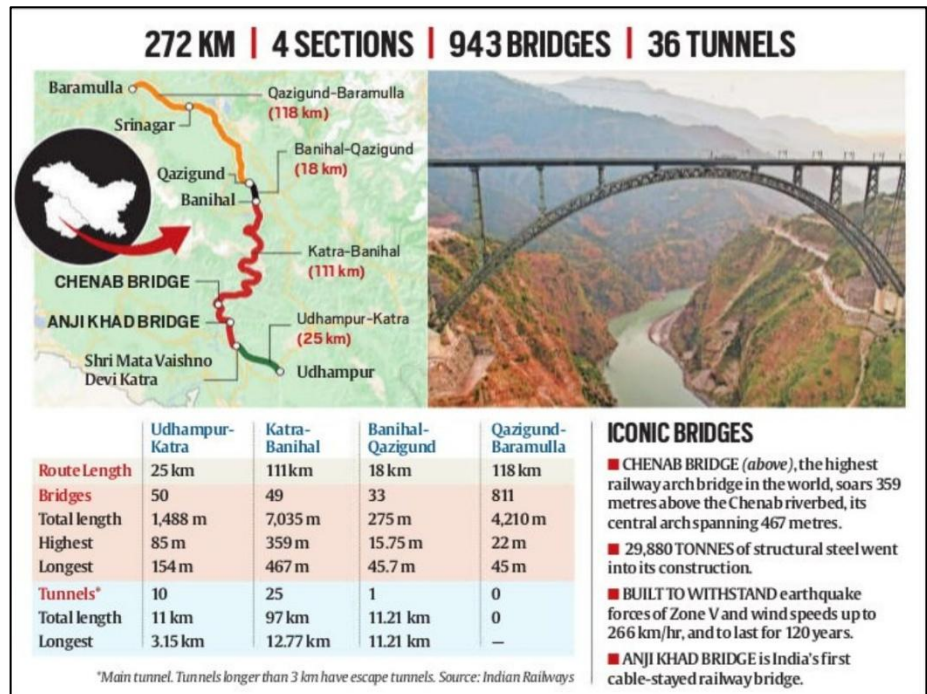
- FASTag is an electronic toll collection system managed by the **National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) and the National Highways Authority of India (NHA)**.
- It uses **Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology** to communicate with scanners installed at toll plazas.
- Once the car crosses a toll plaza, the requisite toll amount is automatically deducted from a bank account or a prepaid wallet linked to the FASTag.

## Chenab and Anji Bridges Inaugurated

The Prime Minister recently inaugurated the Chenab Bridge and Anji Bridge in Jammu & Kashmir. These initiatives focus on improving accessibility, promoting tourism, and generating employment.

## Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL) Project

- In 1994, the project was extended from Udhampur to Srinagar and Baramulla.
  - The USBRL Project was officially approved in March 1995 at an estimated cost of ₹2,500 crore and declared a national project in 2002.
  - Over the years, sections of the line became operational.
- **Completion of USBRL: A Landmark Achievement**
  - USBRL is now fully completed
    - Total cost: ₹43,780 crore
  - It now connects Katra (Reasi district J&K) and Srinagar with a travel time of just 3 hours, marking a transformative milestone in connectivity for the region.



## Chenab Bridge

- It is the **world's highest railway arch bridge**, situated at a height of **359 metres above the Chenab river**. It is a 1,315-metre-long steel arch bridge
- It also ensures **year-round connectivity to Kashmir**, even when roads are blocked by snow.

## Anji Khad Bridge

- Anji bridge is **India's first cable-stayed railway bridge**, constructed over the Anji River, a tributary of the Chenab River.
- It is also a critical component of the **USBRL project** and facilitates all weather **connectivity between Katra and Reasi**.

## Financial Stability and Development Council

- The Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs chaired the 29th meeting of the Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC), in Mumbai.
- The FSDC meeting underlined the government's commitment to maintaining a robust and resilient financial system that not only facilitates economic growth but also safeguards the interests of all stakeholders.

## FSDC

- FSDC is a **non-statutory apex-level body** constituted by the government in 2010.
- The council is **headed by the finance minister** and has the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) governor and chairpersons of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) and Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) as other members.

## Functions

- It aims to strengthen and institutionalise the mechanism of maintaining financial stability.
- It monitors **macro-prudential** supervision of the economy, including functioning of large financial conglomerates, and addresses inter-regulatory coordination and financial sector development issues.
- It helps to coordinate India's international interface with financial sector bodies like the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and Financial Stability Board (FSB).
- It also focuses on financial literacy and financial inclusion.

## Etalin Hydropower Project

- The Environment Ministry's Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) has granted in-principle forest clearance to the **3,097-MW Etalin hydropower project**.
- The Etalin project is among the largest proposed hydropower projects in India in terms of generation capacity.
- It is being executed through a joint venture between **Jindal Power Ltd.** and the **Hydro Power Development Corporation of Arunachal Pradesh Ltd.**
- The project will be a **run-of-the-river** one, which **does not involve storage**, and is proposed to be constructed on **Dri river and Talo river**, the **local name for Dibang**, in the state's biodiverse Dibang valley.
- **Run-of-the-river systems** are hydroelectric systems that harvest the energy from flowing water to generate electricity in the absence of a large dam and reservoir—which is how they differ from conventional hydroelectric facilities.

## Concerns

- The approval comes despite the same FAC raising biodiversity and wildlife concerns in 2022, when it had rejected the proposal.
- The project involves **diversion of 1,175 hectares of forest land** and **felling of around 2.78 lakh trees** in Dibang Valley.
- The forest area required for the project is mostly community forest, and it has faced continued resistance from the **Idu Mishmi community**.
  - ▶ The Idu Mishmi community is known for their deep spiritual and cultural ties with the forest and rivers. They have voiced concerns over displacement, loss of livelihood, and cultural erosion.
- The area is home to tigers, leopards, snow leopards, black bears, alpine musk deer, Mishmi takin, and about 680 bird species.
- Further, Arunachal Pradesh falls in **Seismic Zone V** (most active), raising safety concerns.

## National Investment and Infrastructure Fund

- The Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs chaired the 6th meeting of the Governing Council (GC) of the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund Limited (NIIF) in New Delhi.
- Recognising NIIF's growing role in mobilising capital into infrastructure and other key sectors of the Indian economy, the GC appreciated NIIF's performance and took note of the expansion in its Assets Under Management which has increased to more than Rs 30,000 crore.


**Category I AIFs:** Generally, invest in start-ups/early-stage ventures which the government or regulators consider as socially or economically desirable. e.g. venture capital funds, infrastructure funds.

**Category II AIFs:** AIFs which do not fall in Category I and III and which do not undertake leverage/borrowing other than to meet day-to-day operational requirements and as permitted in the SEBI (AIFs) Regulations, 2012. E.g. real estate funds, private equity funds.

**Categories III AIFs:** AIFs which employ diverse or complex trading strategies and may employ leverage including through investment in listed/ unlisted derivatives. e.g. hedge funds, private investment in Public Equity Funds.

## NIIF

- NIIF is an **Indian government backed entity** established to **provide long-term capital** to the country's infrastructure sector. It was founded as a category II **Alternative investment fund (AIF) in 2015**.
- The objective behind creating this fund was to maximize economic impact mainly through infrastructure investment in commercially viable projects, **both greenfield and brownfield**.
  - A **greenfield** project refers to a completely new project and **brownfield** projects are pre-existing projects that are modified or upgraded.
- The **Indian government has 49% stake** in NIIF with the rest held by foreign and domestic investors such as Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, Temasek and HDFC Group.
  - NIIF is considered India's **quasi sovereign wealth fund**. A sovereign wealth fund is a **state-owned fund**.
- Its portfolio now includes investments in ports and logistics, real estate and renewables.



### Funds under NIIF

<b>Master Fund</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>It is an <b>infrastructure fund</b> with the objective of primarily investing in operating assets in the core infrastructure sectors such as roads, ports, airports, power etc.</li></ul>
<b>Fund of Funds (FoF) - Private Markets Fund</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>FoF invests in funds managed by fund managers who have good track records in infrastructure and associated sectors in India.</li><li>Some of the sectors of focus include green infrastructure, mid-income &amp; affordable housing, infrastructure services and allied sectors.</li></ul>
<b>Strategic Opportunities Fund (SoF)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Its objective is to invest largely in equity and equity-linked instruments and is one of the largest India-focused growth equity fund.</li><li>It has been established to provide long-term capital to high-growth future-ready businesses in India.</li><li>The fund's strategy is to build a portfolio of large entrepreneur-led or professionally managed domestic champions and unicorns.</li></ul>
<b>India Japan Fund (IJF)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>IJF aims to invest in sectors that focus on <b>environmental preservation</b>. This includes investing in green sectors and traditionally high GHG emitting sectors which are proactively focusing on a low carbon emission strategy.</li></ul>

## Heat Tolerant Pigeon Pea

- The International Crops Research Institute for Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) has developed a **pigeon pea (tur dal) variety ICPV 25444**, that can withstand extremely high temperatures (up to 45° C).
- Scientists deployed a technique called **speed breeding** to cut short the breeding time significantly.
- The protocol helped researchers grow up to four generations a year, reducing the time required to develop a new variety from 15 years to just five.
- ICPV 25444 *reduces the barrier* for pigeon-pea from being grown in the summer season across several parts of the country, *allowing farmers to grow it during hotter months*.
- **India currently produces 3.5 million tonnes** of pigeon-pea annually, falling short of the 1.5 million tonnes needed to meet domestic demand. This results in **\$800 million worth of imports** every year.
- This trait could turn about 12 million hectares of rice fallows, which grow paddy in kharif but largely left idle in rabi due to high temperatures and nonavailability of enough water to grow a crop.

- The innovation would also help farmers in Africa and other parts of the world where pigeon-pea is in short supply.
- Besides withstanding high temperatures through the 40 days of the flowering stage, the new variety will help farmers **double the output to 2 tonnes a hectare**.
- Moreover, it would **require very little water** and it **reduces the time-to-harvest period to 4 months** from the present period of 6-7 months.
- Besides, the **crop is grown at a uniform height**, unlike the traditional varieties, which lead to plants of different heights, making it difficult for machine harvesting.
- By transforming pigeon-pea into an all-season crop, ICRISAAT has come up with a solution that has the potential to address pulse shortages and climate challenges faced by farmers across India.

## SEZ Reforms

- The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has notified several modifications to the **Special Economic Zones (SEZ) Rules, 2006**, to address the specialized needs of semiconductor and electronics component manufacturing sectors.
- Manufacturing in these sectors is highly capital intensive, import dependent and involve longer gestation periods before turning profitable.
- Thus, rule amendments have been carried out to promote investments and boost manufacturing in these high technology sectors.

### Impact

- The amendments will boost high-tech manufacturing in the country, boost growth of semiconductor manufacturing ecosystem and create high skilled jobs in the country.
- Following the amendments, two new SEZs have already been approved with a total investment of Rs 13,100 crore.
- Micron Semiconductor Technology India will establish an SEZ facility in Sanand, Gujarat for the manufacture of semiconductors with an estimated investment of Rs 13,000 crore. Hubballi Durable Goods Cluster will establish an SEZ facility for the manufacture of electronic components in Dharwad, Karnataka, at a cost of Rs 100 crore.

### Amendments to SEZ Rules, 2006

- One of the changes was to **Rule 5**, which dealt with the size of the SEZ. Earlier, an SEZ set up exclusively for the manufacture of semiconductors or electronic components needed a minimum contiguous land area of 50 hectares.
- This has now been significantly **reduced to 10 hectares**. This reduced size will allow companies to make smaller investments but still avail of SEZ benefits such as tax exemptions, duty-free imports, and infrastructure support.
- Amendment to **Rule 7** now allows the Board of Approval for SEZs to relax the condition that had **required SEZ land** to be "encumbrance-free", in cases where it is mortgaged or leased to the Central or State Government or their authorized agencies.
  - Land is considered to be encumbrance-free if it does not have any legal claims, liens, or charges against it, and when clear title of ownership and transfer can be established.
- With India's complicated land record mechanisms, and lengthy legal processes, such a requirement would have limited the growth of SEZs. Relaxing this rule will allow SEZs to come up faster.
- **Rule 18** was amended to allow SEZ units in semiconductor and electronics component manufacturing to supply domestically also, after paying the applicable duties.
  - Conventionally, SEZs are exclusively export oriented. Allowing domestic sales not only protects the SEZs from the ongoing global trade uncertainty but also ensures a steady supply to the domestic market itself.
- The amended **Rule 53** will allow the value of goods received and supplied on a free-of-cost basis to be included in **Net Foreign Exchange (NFE)** calculations and assessed using applicable customs valuation rules.

## NAVYA

- An initiative for skilling of adolescent girls **NAVYA – Nurturing Aspirations through Vocational Training for Young Adolescent Girls** was launched.
- It is a joint initiative of **Ministry of Women and Child Development and Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship**.
- It is a **pilot initiative** aimed at equipping **adolescent girls aged 16–18 years** with a minimum qualification of Class 10, with vocational training mainly in non-traditional job roles (*such as Graphic Designer, Smartphone Technician, Drone Assembly Expert, CCTV Installation Technician, and Professional Makeup Artist*).
- It will be **implemented in 27 districts** across **19 States** which include aspirational districts and districts of North Eastern region.

- The programme will utilise the strengths of Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) and PM Vishwakarma Yojana.
- **Supplementary Training Module (of 7 Hours):** will also be provided under Navya, focusing on 4 key areas:
  - **Interpersonal Skills:** Hygiene, self-presentation, conflict management
  - **Communication Skills:** Active listening, effective communication
  - **Workplace Safety:** POSH & POCSO law awareness
  - **Financial Literacy:** Budgeting, savings, and financial concepts
- **Empowering Implementation via District Skill Committees:** To connect girls with local skill development schemes, job fairs, and entrepreneurship opportunities.
- NAVYA aims to empower girls with skills, confidence, and opportunities—ensuring that every young woman becomes a catalyst in India’s journey towards a developed, self-reliant, and inclusive future.

## QR Codes For Roads under PMGSY

The Union Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) has asked states to attach QR codes on all maintenance information display boards for roads built under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY).

### Functioning of the New System

- The aim of the new system is to get **public feedback** about the quality and maintenance of roads.
- To enable easy sharing of feedback, a utility has been created in eMARG. A QR code can be generated for each road, to be displayed on the maintenance information display board on the road.
- The board can contain instructions for registering feedback in English and the local language.
- Any road user/public can scan the QR code using a mobile phone and will get all details of the road. Users can click photographs on the road and can highlight any maintenance related issue in the feedback window.
- The citizens’ feedback photos will be integrated with the relevant Routine Inspection. Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning will be employed to analyse these photographs to advise on **Performance Evaluation** marks.

## Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY)



- PMGSY was launched in 2000, under the Ministry of Rural Development to provide all weather roads in rural habitations.
- Starting as a totally Centrally Sponsored Scheme, the funding pattern was modified from 2015-16 to 60:40 between the Centre and states (except for northeastern and Himalayan states - 90:10).
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of PMGSY was launched in 2013. Another component, called the **Road Connectivity Project for Left Wing Extremism Affected Areas (RCPLWEA)**, was launched in 2016 for the construction of rural roads in LWE-affected areas.
- The 3<sup>rd</sup> phase was launched in 2019 and in 2024, **phase 4<sup>th</sup>** was approved to provide all-weather road connectivity to **25,000 unconnected habitations** with the following population size (as per Census 2011):
  - ✓ 500+ in plains;
  - ✓ 250+ in North East & Hill States/UTs, special category areas (Tribal Schedule V, Aspirational Districts/Blocks, Desert areas); and
  - ✓ 100+ in Left Wing Extremism (LWE) affected districts.
- ✓ A total of 62,500 km of road length is proposed to be constructed for Rs 70,125 crore from 2024-25 to 2028-29.
- Since the scheme was launched, a total road length of **8,36,850 km has been sanctioned**, of which **7,81,209 km has been completed**.

### Existing mechanism

- The **National Rural Infrastructure Development Agency (NRIDA)** under the MoRD, provides technical support for implementing the PMGSY.
- Under PMGSY, all roads after the completion of construction are maintained by the contractor for five years.
- This is done using a **mobile-cum-web-based e-MARG (electronic Maintenance of Rural Roads under PMGSY) system**. It is an e-governance solution for managing and monitoring rural road maintenance.
- The contractor carries out the routine maintenance and submits bills on eMARG.
- The field engineering staff carry out Routine Inspection (RI) to verify the maintenance by the contractor, and based on geo-tagged photographs captured during RI, the Performance Evaluation (PE) is done based on 12 parameters of routine maintenance.
- As a whole, maintenance comes under the ambit of state governments, with rural roads being a state subject.
- The NRIDA also deploys its National Level Monitors (NLMs) to check the construction quality of roads.
- The NLMs reports have highlighted substandard works under the PMGSY in the past.
- However, there was no existing mechanism to capture people’s feedback about the quality of maintenance.

## Scheme to Promote Manufacturing of Electric Passenger Cars in India

- The Ministry of Heavy Industries (MHI) has notified guidelines for the **Scheme to Promote Manufacturing of Electric Passenger Cars in India (SPMEPCI)**.
- The scheme is intended to **attract global investments in India's electric vehicle (EV) sector** while strengthening the country's position as a global automotive manufacturing hub.
- It is designed not only to **bring cutting-edge EV technologies** into the Indian market but also to **build indigenous manufacturing capabilities** through a clear framework of **domestic value addition (DVA) targets**.

### Benefits

- The scheme would fast track the development of a competitive and self-reliant EV manufacturing ecosystem in India, contributing to the larger goals of the Make in India and Aatmanirbhar Bharat initiatives.
- The effort is also expected to generate high-quality employment, accelerate the adoption of clean energy technologies, and position India as a preferred destination for global automotive innovation.
- It also aligns with India's climate goals, including its commitment to achieve net-zero emissions by 2070.

## Scheme Details

- Approved companies will be allowed to **import a limited number of completely built electric four-wheelers (e-4W)** at a **reduced customs duty rate of 15%** for a period of five years.
- These imports must meet a **minimum cost, insurance and freight (CIF) value of \$35,000 per unit**. The concession is **capped at 8,000 units per year**, with the flexibility to carry forward unused quotas.
- However, the total duty foregone will be limited to either Rs 6,484 crore or the actual investment made by the applicant, whichever is lower.
- To qualify for these benefits, **applicants must commit to a minimum investment of Rs 4,150 crore within three years** of receiving approval. They must also establish manufacturing facilities and commence production within this period.
- A **minimum of 25% DVA should be achieved within three years, rising to 50% within five years**. The DVA assessment will follow the existing Standard Operating Procedure of the PLI Scheme for Automobile and Auto Components.
- While there is no cap on maximum investment, only **specific categories of expenditure**—such as new plant and machinery, engineering research and development, and essential buildings—will be **counted towards the investment threshold**.
- Notably, **expenditure on land is excluded**, while **spending on charging infrastructure** will be considered **up to a limit of 5% of the total committed investment**.
- **Eligibility** is restricted to companies or global groups with an **automotive manufacturing revenue of at least Rs 10,000 crore** and **fixed asset investments of not less than Rs 3,000 crore**.

## Nano Fertilizer Plant in Brazil

- IFFCO (Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative) will be setting up its **first overseas** nano fertiliser in Brazil.
- The plant will be set up under a 70:30 joint venture between IFFCO subsidiary IFFCO Nanoventions, and Brazilian company NANOFERT.
- The facility will produce 4.5 million litres annually, boosting global reach and reducing costs.
- In 2021, IFFCO had launched nano urea in liquid form as an alternative to conventional urea in India. Later, in 2023, IFFCO had launched nano-DAP (di-ammonium phosphate), which aimed at decreasing the country's import dependence.

### Nano Fertilizers

- Nano fertilizers are nutrients that are **coated with nanomaterial** in order to enable controlled release and slow diffusion into the soil. These particles typically range from **1 to 100 nanometers** in size.
- Nano fertilizers are considered a key part of **precision agriculture** and **sustainable farming** strategies globally.
- Due to their small size and high surface area, nano fertilizers can improve nutrient uptake by plants, reduce losses due to leaching, evaporation and runoff. It also leads to lower input costs and reduced environmental impact.

## Moody's Downgrades US Credit Ratings

- Moody's Ratings has downgraded the United States government's credit rating from the perfect AAA status to AA1.

- Though Moody's cut the rating, it assigned a "stable" outlook for now, citing the US Federal Reserve's historically strong and independent monetary policy.
  - Moody's is considered one of the Big Three credit-rating agencies, which also include S&P and Fitch Ratings.
  - As a credit rating agency (CRA), the company issues credit ratings for the debt of public and private companies, and other public borrowers such as governments and governmental entities.
- In Moody's ratings system, securities are assigned a rating from AAA to C, with AAA being the highest quality and C the lowest quality. To each of these ratings Moody's adds numerical modifiers 1, 2 and 3, with a lower number signifying a better rating.

## Sovereign Credit Rating



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

## Ratings Methodology

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

## Significance of the ratings

- ❑ From a company's or a government's perspective, a better rating helps raise funds at a cheaper rate.
- ❑ It has an impact on companies planning to borrow overseas through bonds or foreign loans, as investors or banks abroad may well seek higher interest rates because of weak prospects.
- ❑ Hence, firms and many governments that borrow from the international markets are mindful of rating downgrades.

### Reasons for US' Rating Cut

- Over more than a decade, US federal debt has risen sharply due to continuous fiscal deficits. During that time, **federal spending** has increased while **tax cuts** have reduced government revenues.
- As deficits and debt have grown, and interest rates have risen, interest payments on government debt have increased significantly.
- Without adjustments to taxation and spending, the budget flexibility is limited.
- Mandatory spending, including interest expense, is projected to rise to around 78% of total spending by 2035 from about 73% in 2024.
- As a result, it is expected that federal deficits will reach nearly 9% of GDP by 2035, up from 6.4% in 2024.
- The federal debt burden will rise to about 134% of GDP by 2035, compared to 98% in 2024. Federal interest payments are likely to absorb around 30% of revenue by 2035, up from about 18% in 2024 and 9% in 2021.

### Impact of the Downgrade

- The downgrade could have wide ranging impact. US Treasury yields, the foundation for everything from mortgage rates to student loans, may rise if investors see lending to the US government as riskier.
- This means higher costs across the board for borrowing, including homes, cars, and credit cards.

### South Asia unit of International Potato Centre

- The Union government has cleared a proposal to set up the **South Asia regional centre of the Peru-based International Potato Center (CIP)** in India.

- **Headquartered at Lima in Peru**, the CIP was **founded in 1971** as a research-for-development organisation with a focus on potato, sweet potato and Andean roots and tubers.
- The CIP-South Asia Regional Centre (CSARC) will come up at **Singna in Agra (UP)**. The entire project will cost Rs 171 crore, of which India will contribute Rs 111 crore, while the remaining will be funded by the CIP.
- Its major **objective** is to increase food and nutrition security, farmers income, and job creation *by improving potato and sweet potato productivity*, post-harvest management and value-addition.
- CSARC will be the second major international agricultural research institution to set its operations. In 2017, a regional centre of the Philippines-based International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) was established in Varanasi.

### Potato Production

- **India is the world's second largest producer and consumer** of potato; in 2020, it saw a production of 51.30 million tonnes.
- At the top is China, with its potato output in 2020 at 78.24 million tonnes. Together, the two countries account for over one-third of the global potato production (359.07 MT).
- **Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal lead the production** at 15 MT (million tonnes) each in 2020-21, followed by Bihar (9 MT). Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Punjab are the other significant potato producers.

### Digital Payment Intelligence Platform

The Reserve Bank of India has roped in **major public and private banks to develop the Digital Payment Intelligence Platform (DPIP)** as a Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI).

#### Rise in Frauds

- According to the latest report of RBI, there has been a significant rise in bank frauds, with the amount involved rising nearly three times to Rs 35,014 crore in FY25, compared to FY24. Of this, Rs 25,667 crore worth of fraud was reported by public sector banks.
- Frauds occurred predominantly in the category of digital payments (card/internet) in terms of the number and primarily in the loan portfolio (advances) in terms of value.

#### Details of DPIP

- The proposed platform seeks to strengthen fraud risk management by facilitating **real-time** intelligence gathering and sharing.
- Last year in June, the RBI had formed a **committee chaired by A. P. Hota**, to examine various aspects of establishing this DPI.
- **Reserve Bank Innovation Hub (RBIH)** has been assigned to build a prototype of DPIP in consultation with banks.
- Once operational, DPIP will collect and analyse data from various sources to identify potential threats and prevent fraudulent activities.

### Household Income Survey

- The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) will conduct the first-ever Household Income Survey in 2026.
  - MoSPI, over the last couple of years, has conducted a variety of surveys on different parts of the Indian economy in addition to the regular ones that compile GDP, Consumer Price Index, and Index of Industrial Production.
  - These include annual surveys on unincorporated enterprises, the service sector, a forward-looking survey on private sector capital expenditure, and domestic travel and tourism, among others.
  - Last month, MoSPI released its *maiden **monthly** Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)*, which had so far been conducted only on a *quarterly basis for urban areas and annually for rural areas*.

- The revamped monthly PLFS also seeks details about households' usual monthly income from rent, pension, interest, and remittances.
- The household survey will be MoSPI's latest attempt to measure household income in India, with pilots conducted in the past not resulting in a nationwide survey due to difficulties in collecting reliable income data.
- These past attempts date back to the 1950s, when it tried to collect information on income as part of its consumer expenditure surveys on an experimental basis. Further attempts were made in the 1960s as part of the Integrated Household Survey.
- However, these efforts were not continued as it was found that the estimates of income were lower than the estimates of consumption and savings put together.
- In addition to measuring household income, the proposed survey will also try to assess the impact of adoption of technology on wages.

### Technical Expert Group

- A **Technical Expert Group (TEG) chaired by economist Surjit Bhalla**, formerly India's executive director at the IMF is being set up to guide the ministry on the method of estimation and other aspects of the survey.
- The TEG will provide guidance with regard to finalisation of concepts and definitions, preparation of the survey method and instruments, sampling design and method of estimation.
- It will also incorporate best practices from survey conducted by countries like Australia, USA, Canada and South Africa.

### GDP Base Year Change

- MoSPI, recently stated that it is in the process of revising the base year for the calculation of Gross Domestic Product (**GDP**), Index of Industrial Production (**IIP**) and Consumer Price Index (**CPI**).
- GDP is the central metric to assess the annual economic growth or the overall size of an economy.
- It measures the current market value of all final goods and services produced within a country in a given period of time (say a quarter or a year).
- Notably, GDP maps the "final" goods and services, not the intermediate ones.
- The "base year" refers to the year that works as a **benchmark for calculations**.
- At present, the base year is 2011-12. In other words, the GDP in 2011-12 is used as a "base" over which the GDP growth of any following year is calculated.
- The new base year for **GDP calculations** will be **2022-23** and the revised series of data will be released on February 27, 2026.
- The base year for Index of Industrial Production (**IIP**) will also be revised to **2022-23** while the base year for Consumer Price Index (**CPI**), which is used to assess the rate of inflation faced by consumers, will be revised to **2023-24**.

### Background

- The first set of estimates of national income (GDP) for India was compiled by the National Income Committee, under the **chairmanship of PC Mahalanobis in 1949**.
- The base year revision for calculating the GDP has been revised on seven different occasions till now.

### Rationale Behind Base Year Revision

- India started off as a predominantly agrarian economy. With each passing decade, India's economic structure has changed. Today, most of the GDP (around 55%) comes from the services sector while agriculture contribute less than 20%.
- However, the number of people involved in agriculture has not fallen in a similar manner. Estimating GDP from the farm and estimating from the services sector requires different data sets and different methodologies.
- Further, these methodologies also change with the improvements in data as well as understanding of the linkages in the economy.

- Thus, regular revisions capture the changes in the way India’s economy functions — new industries can be included and outdated ones removed from the calculations.
- Further, they provide a more accurate picture of the “real” economic growth, which is the economic growth after removing the effect of inflation.
- For example, an economy’s GDP could double in a year in **two** very contrasting ways: the total output remains the same but the prices double or the prices remain the same and the “real” output (say cars manufactured inside the country) doubles.
- The reality lies somewhere in the middle and revising the base year provides a more accurate understanding of how the real economy is growing.

### Importance of the Current Revision For India’s Global Standing

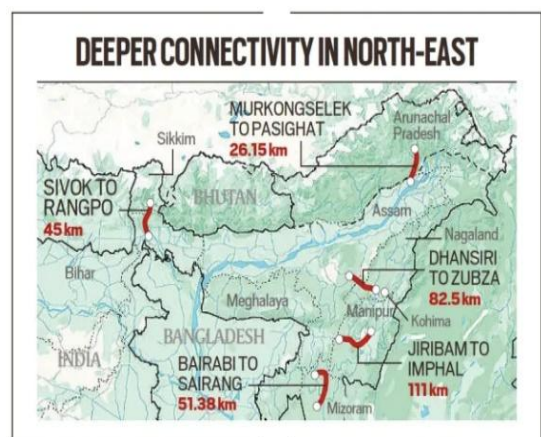
- Although it is true that each revision improved the estimation of India’s GDP, yet the **last revision in 2015** created a lot of controversy that dented India’s global standing.
- In particular, many experts claimed that the methodological changes incorporated in 2015 meant that India was overestimating (i.e. overstating) its GDP. Even the government’s own Chief Economic Advisor Arvind Subramanian, questioned the credibility of India’s GDP.
- The new series will come at a time when India will be on the verge of becoming the third-largest economy after the US and China (in nominal GDP terms). That, in turn, means global investors and analysts are likely to examine the results very carefully.
- Thus, accuracy of the new series will be central not just for the billions of dollars of investor money but also for the credibility of India’s data and its usefulness for domestic policymaking.

### Aizawl Joins Rail Network

- Mizoram’s capital Aizawl has now been linked to the national railway network via the **Bairabi–Sairang line** in the state.
- This makes Aizawl the **fourth North-East state capital** to have rail connectivity after **Guwahati (Assam), Agartala (Tripura) and Itanagar (Arunachal Pradesh)**.
- The Bairabi–Sairang line is a 51.38-km railway project with a sanctioned cost of Rs 5,021.45 crore.
- The project is divided into **four sections** with the Bairabi–Hortoki section already commissioned in July 2024. The remaining sections — Hortoki–Kawnpui, Kawnpui–Mualkhang, and Mualkhang–Sairang — are slated for operations by June.
- The Bairabi-Sairang project is part of a broader, accelerated push by the Ministry of Railways to connect all N-E state capitals by rail.

### Other Key New Line Projects Underway

- **Dimapur–Kohima New Line (Dhansiri–Zubza):** Aimed at connecting Nagaland’s capital, Kohima, this 82.5-km line extends from Dhansiri station in Assam, to Zubza (15 km from Kohima).
  - Its targeted date of completion (TDC) is set for December 2029.
- **Murkongselek–Pasighat New Line:** This 26.15-km broad gauge project under Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) will enhance connectivity between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The line extends from Murkongselek in Assam to Pasighat in Arunachal Pradesh.
  - With a cost of Rs. 414.84 crore, the line is scheduled to be completed by February 2026.
- **Sivok–Rangpo New Line:** This 45-km line aims to connect Sikkim to the national network for the first time.



- The line traverses from Sivok (West Bengal) to Rangpo (Sikkim). With a project cost of Rs. 7,876.92 crore its TDC is December 2027. Currently, Sikkim has no railway connectivity.
- **Jiribam–Imphal New Line:** Spanning approximately 111 km, the project aims to integrate Manipur’s capital Imphal.
- In addition to new lines, railway infrastructure is being upgraded with doubling projects like the **Agthori–Kamakhya line in Assam** with a new rail-cum-road bridge at Saraighat.
- The two other major line doubling projects in Assam are **New Bongaigaon-Agthori via Rangiya** (142.97 km), which was commissioned in October 2024, and **New Bongaigaon-Goalpara-Kamakhya** doubling project, which is likely to be commissioned in March 2027.

## Updates in Monetary Policy

- RBI’s Monetary Policy Committee has reduced the **policy repo rate by 50 basis points to 5.5%**. One basis point is equal to 0.01%.
- With this decision RBI hopes to fulfil the objective of achieving the medium-term target for consumer price index (CPI) inflation of 4% within a band of +/- 2%, while supporting growth.
- There will be consequent adjustment of the Standing Deposit Facility (SDF) rate under the Liquidity Adjustment Facility (LAF) to 5.25% and of the Marginal Standing Facility (MSF) rate and the Bank Rate to 5.75%.

### Repo Rate

- Repo rate, short form for **Repurchase Agreement**, refers to the rate at which commercial banks borrow money from the central bank of a country in case of shortage of funds.
- It is the rate at which the RBI provides liquidity under the LAF to all LAF participants against the collateral of government and other approved securities.

### Impact of the Repo Rate Cut

- It is expected that all external benchmark lending rates (EBLR) — lending rates set by the banks based on external benchmarks such as the repo rate — will decline by a similar margin.
- Lenders may also reduce interest rates on loans that are linked to the **marginal cost of fund-based lending rate (MCLR)** - the minimum lending rate below which a bank is not allowed to lend.
- A lower repo rate makes borrowing cheaper for individuals and businesses, which can **lead to increased spending and investment, thereby boosting economic growth**.
- EMIs on home and vehicle loans will come down, making it easier for individuals to repay their debts.
- With lower interest rates, banks are more likely to lend, making credit more accessible to consumers and businesses.
- However, a lower repo rate **can lead to higher inflation**, as increased money supply and lower interest rates can drive up prices.
- It can reduce the interest earned on savings, making it less attractive for individuals to save.

### Staggered CRR Cut

- Separately, the RBI also decided to reduce the cash reserve ratio (CRR) by 100 basis points (bps) over the course of this year, to provide sufficient liquidity to the banking system.
- CRR is the average daily balance that a bank is required to maintain with the RBI as a percent of its net demand and time liabilities (NDTL).
- CRR will be reduced to 3% of NDTL in a staggered manner, with four cuts of 25 bps each.
- The cut in CRR would **release primary liquidity of about Rs 2.5 lakh crore** to the banking system by December 2025.
- Besides providing liquidity, it will reduce the cost of funding of the banks, thereby helping in monetary policy transmission to the credit market.

## Sagarmala Finance Corporation Limited

- The **Union Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways (MoPSW)**, inaugurated Sagarmala Finance Corporation Limited (SMFCL), India's first Non-Banking Financial Company (NBFC) in the maritime sector.
- Formerly known as Sagarmala Development Company Limited, SMFCL will bridge crucial financing gaps in the maritime sector and catalyse economic growth.
- It will offer tailored financial products—including short, medium, and long-term funding—to a diverse range of stakeholders such as port authorities, shipping companies, MSMEs, startups, and maritime educational institutions.
- SMFCL will also support strategic sectors like shipbuilding, renewable energy, cruise tourism, and maritime education, further reinforcing India's vision to emerge as a global maritime leader.
- With this milestone, SMFCL is well positioned to play a transformative role in India's maritime infrastructure development, enabling projects that contribute to sustainable development, innovation, and national logistics efficiency.

## Amrit Bharat Station Scheme

- The Prime Minister inaugurated 103 redeveloped railway stations, spread across 18 states and Union Territories, under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme (ABSS).
- **Launched in 2022**, ABSS is a long-term plan to improve over 1,300 railway stations and develop them as city centres.
- It represents a significant step towards modernizing India's railway infrastructure, aiming to provide passengers with world-class amenities while preserving the rich cultural heritage of each region.

## Operation Deep Manifest

- The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) has launched an operation codenamed Operation Deep Manifest, targeting the **illegal import of Pakistani-origin goods routed through third countries**, primarily via Dubai, UAE.
- Following the Pahalgam terror attacks, the Government had imposed a comprehensive ban, effective May 2025, on the direct or indirect import or transit of goods originating in or exported from Pakistan. Previously, such goods were subject to 200% customs duty.
- The operation has thus far led to the seizure of 1,115 metric tonne of goods valued at approximately Rs 9 crore, which were in violation of import policy conditions and prohibitions.

## Digital Payments Award

- India Post Payments Bank (IPPB) has won the Union Finance Ministry's **Digital Payments Award 2024-25** in recognition of its outstanding contribution to expanding digital payments and financial inclusion across the country.
- The recognition comes after IPPB achieved the 1st position among all payments banks on the **Department of Financial Services (DFS)** performance index for FY 24-25, after receiving a "Special Mention" award last year.

### India Post Payments Bank



- ▶ 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 and under-banked and reach the last mile by utilising a network comprising 165,000 post offices (~140,000 in rural areas) and ~300,000 postal employees.
- ▶ IPPB's operating model is built on the key pillars of **India Stack** - Enabling paperless, cashless and presence-less banking in a simple and secure manner at the customers' doorstep, through a **Core Banking Solution (CBS)** -integrated smartphone and biometric device.
- ▶ IPPB delivers banking solutions through interfaces available in 13 languages to 11 crore customers across 5.57 lakh villages & towns in India.

# INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

## Trump's New Travel Ban on 12 Countries

- President Donald Trump signed a new travel ban restricting entry from 12 countries and limiting visas for seven others.
- Aimed at reviving his earlier immigration agenda, the ban is intended to curb a possible surge in immigration.
- A travel ban is a U.S. federal policy that restricts or prohibits nationals from specific countries from entering the country. It may involve full entry bans or limitations on certain visa categories.

## New Travel Ban Under Trump

- The travel ban fully restricts entry for citizens from 12 countries. Partial restrictions apply to travellers from 7 Countries.
- **Purpose of the Ban**
  - The ban aims to encourage cooperation with each listed country, considering their “unique circumstances.”
  - Countries may negotiate with the U.S. to ease restrictions, following a process similar to Trump’s trade negotiations.

- **Criteria for Inclusion**

- Countries were included based on:
  - ✓ Inadequate screening and vetting procedures
  - ✓ High visa overstay rates
  - ✓ Presence of terrorist actors or support for terrorism
  - ✓ Refusal to accept deported nationals

- **Specific Allegations**

- **Iran and Cuba:** Labeled state sponsors of terrorism
- **Somalia:** Called a terrorist safe haven
- **Afghanistan:** Identified as being controlled by the Taliban, a designated global terrorist group
- **Haiti:** Accused of sending “hundreds of thousands” of illegal migrants.

- **Exemptions**

- The ban does not apply to: Current visa holders; U.S. permanent residents; Dual nationals of banned countries traveling on a non-restricted passport.

Countries Identified	Travel Ban	Travel Restrictions
		Cuba
State-sponsored terrorism, or a safe haven for terrorists	Iran, Somalia, Libya, and Afghanistan	
Lack of a competent or cooperative central authority for issuing passports or civil documents	Afghanistan, Eritrea, Haiti, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Yemen	Venezuela
High visa overstay rate	Afghanistan, Burma (Myanmar), Chad, Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Haiti, Sudan	Burundi, Cuba, Laos, Sierra Leone, Togo, Turkmenistan, Venezuela
Not accepting their removable nationals	Burma (Myanmar), Eritrea, Iran, Somalia	Cuba, Laos, Sierra Leone, Venezuela

## French Nuclear Umbrella For Europe

- French President Macron expressed openness to stationing French nuclear weapons in other European countries, marking a significant shift in France’s traditionally independent nuclear policy.
- This move reflects evolving security dynamics in Europe amid the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war.
- **Strategic Rationale: Towards European Strategic Autonomy**
  - The proposal aligns with France’s long-standing vision of **European strategic autonomy**—enhancing the EU’s capability to defend itself independently of outside powers.
  - This sentiment is also shaped by uncertainty over U.S. security guarantees, especially following Trump’s *conditional stance on NATO commitments*.
- **Nuclear Sharing Model**
  - Nuclear sharing refers to a nuclear-armed state placing weapons in allied non-nuclear states under strict controls.

- In NATO, the U.S. stations B61 tactical nuclear bombs in Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Turkiye.
  - ✓ The U.S. retains ownership and decision-making authority, ensuring legal compliance under current interpretations of the NPT.
- **International Law: Legal but Contested**
  - Under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), nuclear states cannot transfer weapons or control to non-nuclear states.
  - NATO's sharing model *skirts this issue* by retaining U.S. ownership and control during peacetime.
  - While participants claim NPT compliance, many non-proliferation advocates dispute this interpretation, and France's proposed model may face similar legal scrutiny.

### Bulgaria Cleared to Adopt the Euro in 2026

- The European Commission has approved Bulgaria's readiness to join the **Eurozone**, setting **January 1, 2026**, as the official adoption date. Bulgaria is set to become the 21st Eurozone member.
  - EU member states and the European Parliament are yet to ratify the decision, though approval is expected.
- This follows a decline in inflation and steady economic alignment with EU requirements.
- Current currency of Bulgaria: The Bulgarian Lev.

#### About Euro

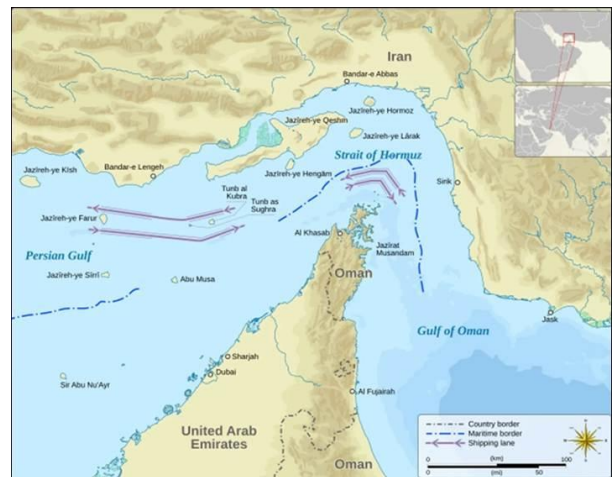
- The **Euro (€)** is the **official currency** of the **eurozone**, used by **20 of the 27** European Union (EU) member countries.
- Introduced in **1999** (non-cash form) and **2002** (notes and coins), it is managed by the **European Central Bank (ECB)**.
- **Conditions to Adopt the Euro (Convergence Criteria or Maastricht Criteria):**
  - An EU country must meet the following criteria before adopting the euro:
    - ✓ **Price Stability:** Inflation must be no more than 1.5 percentage points above the average of the three best-performing EU countries.
    - ✓ **Sound Public Finances:** Fiscal deficit  $\leq 3\%$  of GDP; Government debt  $\leq 60\%$  of GDP.
    - ✓ **Exchange Rate Stability:** The national currency must remain stable within the **Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM II)** for **at least two years**.
    - ✓ **Long-term Interest Rates:** Must be no more than 2 percentage points above the average of the three best-performing EU countries in terms of inflation.

### Iran Moves to Block Strait of Hormuz

Iran's Parliament approved a proposal to close the Strait of Hormuz, pending a final decision by the Supreme National Security Council, following US strikes on Iranian military sites.

#### Strait of Hormuz

- It is a narrow waterway that connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman, eventually leading to the Arabian Sea.
- It serves as a crucial maritime passage for oil-exporting countries like Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. It handles a significant portion of the world's oil trade.
- Its location in the territorial waters of Iran and Oman adds to its geopolitical sensitivity.
- **Geographic Vulnerability**



- At its narrowest, the strait is just 33 km wide, with a 3 km wide shipping lane in each direction.
- This limited space makes it highly vulnerable to blockades or attacks on passing vessels.

### Significance of the Strait of Hormuz

- It is the world's most important oil and LNG transit route.
- In 2024–25, over 25% of global seaborne oil trade and 20% of global oil and petroleum consumption products passed through it.
- Additionally, 20% of global LNG trade, mainly from Qatar, also transited the strait.
- Geographically, there is no direct sea route alternative to bypass the Strait.
  - Any disruption would severely affect global oil and gas flows, causing sharp price hikes and broader inflationary impacts.

### 2025 NATO Summit

- 2025 NATO summit was held in The Hague, the Netherlands.
- During the summit, the NATO Allies agreed to a new defence spending benchmark of 5% of GDP, a major increase from the earlier 2%.
  - 3.5% for core defence needs (equipment, personnel, operations).
  - 1.5% for defence-related infrastructure and industry.
- This is part of the Hague Defence Investment Plan, aimed at strengthening NATO's deterrence and readiness.
- The 2026 NATO Summit will be held in Türkiye.

### NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization.)

- It is a military and political alliance established in 1949 through the North Atlantic Treaty (also called the Washington Treaty).
- **Members** –32 members
- NATO's primary purpose is to guarantee the freedom and security of its members through collective defence.
  - An attack against one member is considered an attack against all (Article 5 of the treaty).

### Protests in Los Angeles Trigger Federal Military Response

- Widespread protests erupted in Los Angeles following U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids and arrests.
- In response, **President Trump deployed 4,000 National Guard troops and 700 Marines**, sparking legal and constitutional debate.
  - **The National Guard** is unique: it can be deployed by both the States and the federal government.
  - In normal situations, it reports to State Governors and is exempt from the Posse Comitatus Act (*restricts the use of U.S. military in domestic law enforcement*)

### Can the U.S. President Deploy the Military Domestically?

- Under the Posse Comitatus Act (1878), active-duty military is prohibited from engaging in civilian law enforcement unless authorised by:
  - The U.S. Constitution
  - An Act of Congress, like the Insurrection Act
- The Insurrection Act allows the President to use military force:
  - At the request of a State, or
  - Unilaterally, to enforce federal law, suppress rebellion, or protect civil rights if a State is unwilling or unable to act.

### Indian Context: Military Deployment in States

- **Article 355** obligates the Union to protect States from internal disturbances.

- While ‘public order’ is a State subject, the Union can deploy armed forces to aid ‘civil power’ under Entry 2A of List I.
- The Supreme Court (*Extra-Judicial Execution Victim Families Assn. vs Union of India*; 2016) ruled such deployment must be **temporary** and cannot replace civil authority.
- **Once Normalcy is restored**, military must be **withdrawn**.

### Operation Sindhu to Evacuate Indian Nationals from Iran

- In response to the escalating Iran-Israel conflict, the Government of India launched Operation Sindhu to ensure the safety of Indian nationals in Iran.
- In the first phase, 110 Indian students were evacuated from northern Iran. The students crossed into Armenia via land with help from the Indian Embassy in Tehran.
  - During the hostilities between Iran and Israel, Armenia became the key evacuation route for Indians from Iran.
- Later, Operation Sindhu was expanded to evacuate neighbouring nationals by evacuating stranded **Nepali and Sri Lankan nationals** from Iran, alongside Indians.
- India maintains critical ties with both Iran (Chabahar port, regional security) and Israel (defence partnership).
- Delhi has been careful with its public stance, walking a tightrope in this sensitive geopolitical context.

### India-Armenia Strategic Ties

- **Defence Cooperation**
  - India has emerged as Armenia’s leading arms supplier, surpassing Russia.
  - Notable deal: \$250 million arms package (2022) including PINAKA rocket launchers and Akash-1S air defence systems.
- **Political Alignment**
  - Armenia supports India’s Kashmir stance and UNSC permanent seat aspiration.
  - Strong alignment in multilateral forums.
- **Geostrategic Importance**
  - Armenia is central to the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), linking India to Europe via Iran and Armenia.

### The Issues Around Deportation

At least seven residents of West Bengal, mistakenly **pushed into Bangladesh** by the Border Security Force (BSF) on suspicion of being illegal immigrants, have been brought back to India after the intervention of the West Bengal government.

#### Pushback Policy in Action

- Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma announced a shift to pushbacks to bypass lengthy legal processes.
- Over 2,500 suspected Bangladeshis have been pushed back so far.
- **Centre Delegates Deportation Powers to States**
  - Since citizenship and foreigners are Union List subjects, the Ministry of Home Affairs delegates *Deportation powers* to state governments.
  - In a 2024 affidavit to Jharkhand High Court, the Centre clarified that no federal police force exists solely for this task, and state police are responsible for action on illegal migrants.
- **Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950**
  - Enacted amid communal violence post-Partition (1947), especially concerning migrants from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh).

Deportation	Pushback
Legal process through courts	Unofficial, no formal legal procedures
Involves arrest, trial, and confirmation	Immediate removal across border
Deportation after identity is verified	Based on BSF discretion at international border
Needs cooperation from foreign country	No formal communication with the foreign state

- Though it extends to all of India, it has special provisions for Assam.
- Section 2 empowers the Union Government to expel individuals or groups from India or Assam if they are deemed detrimental to public or tribal interests.
- Orders can direct such persons to leave within a specified time and route, with further directions as necessary.

### India Imposes Curbs on Jute Imports from Bangladesh

- India has imposed import restrictions on jute products from Bangladesh, banning entry through all land routes and permitting only via Nhava Sheva port in Maharashtra.
- Transit goods to Nepal and Bhutan are exempted.
- **Triggered by:**
  - Strategic concerns over Bangladesh's growing proximity to China.
  - Trade malpractices including evasion of anti-dumping duties (ADD).
  - Adverse impact on India's jute sector, especially in West Bengal and Bihar.
- **Impact of Subsidised Imports**
  - Bangladeshi jute enjoys direct government subsidies. Indian anti-dumping duties have been circumvented by:
    - ✓ Exploiting exemptions
    - ✓ Mis-declaration and under-invoicing
    - ✓ Exporting beyond capacity
  - Despite ADD, imports rose from \$117M (FY22) to \$144M (FY24).
- **Fallout for Indian Jute Sector**
  - FY 2024–25: Jute prices fell below MSP (₹5,000 vs MSP of ₹5,335).
  - Resulted in mill closures and liquidity crunch: 6 mills shut; ₹1,400 crore unpaid dues; Over 4 lakh workers affected.
  - Mills are underutilised, affecting rural livelihoods in West Bengal, Bihar, Assam, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Tripura and Meghalaya

### Existing Legal Framework for Foreigners (Till 2025)

- Prior to 2025, India relied on colonial-era laws for managing foreigners:
  - ▶ Foreigners Act, 1946
  - ▶ Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920
  - ▶ Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939
  - ▶ Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act, 2000

### Immigration and Foreigners Act, 2025

- In **April 2025**, Parliament passed this new law to **modernize immigration governance**, repealing older laws.
- Establishes a **consolidated legal regime** for both immigration and foreigner management.

### Special Border Movement Rules

- **Nepal:** Open border agreement with India — no visa/passport needed.
- **Myanmar:** Free Movement Regime (FMR) permits people living within **10 km of the border** to cross freely.
  - ▶ Following the 2021 military coup in Myanmar, over 40,000 refugees, mainly Chin ethnic group, entered Mizoram.
  - ▶ MHA in March 2021 directed northeastern states to identify and deport refugees.
  - ▶ Stressed that state governments cannot grant refugee status as India is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol.

### Visit of President of Paraguay to India

Paraguayan President Santiago Peña Palacios visited India, marking his first official trip to the country. The visit aimed to enhance bilateral ties and explore strategic cooperation, especially in the context of expanding regional commerce in Latin America through the MERCOSUR trade bloc.

#### Key Highlights of the Visit

- **Historical Ties:** India-Paraguay diplomatic relations were established in **1961**, with India's embassy in **Asuncion** opening in **August 2022**.
  - This visit marked **64 years of India-Paraguay diplomatic ties**.
- **Diplomatic Context:** The visit comes amid global trade realignments and a growing India-Latin America engagement. Paraguay, known for its **balanced foreign policy**, is seen as a reliable regional ally for India.
- **MERCOSUR Collaboration:** PM Modi highlighted the potential to expand the **India-MERCOSUR Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA)** signed in 2004 and urged joint efforts to boost trade through this Latin American bloc.

- **Natural Resources Focus:** Indian interest in **Paraguay's mineral and natural resources** was noted as a key driver of future cooperation.
- **Traditional Medicine and Healthcare:** India invited Paraguay to cooperate on evidence-based traditional medicine and its wider application.
- **Clean Energy and Green Technology:** Paraguay was welcomed as a founding member of the Global Biofuels Alliance (GBA) and 100th member of the International Solar Alliance (ISA).

#### 4th India-Central Asia Dialogue

India hosted the **India-Central Asia Business Council**, followed by the **4th India-Central Asia Dialogue**.

##### Key Highlights

- **Connectivity Focus**
  - EAM S. Jaishankar called for enhanced use of Chabahar Port and the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) to improve India's trade with Central Asia.
- **Trade and Currency Cooperation**
  - Pitched for trade settlements in local currencies, backing initiatives like Special Rupee Vostro Accounts and UPI integration.
- **Trade Potential & Sectoral Opportunities**
  - Bilateral trade between India and Central Asia reached \$2 billion, though EAM said this "does not reflect full potential".
- **Identified sectors for collaboration**
  - Pharmaceuticals (Central Asia is a key market for Indian pharma)
  - Energy and Resources: uranium, crude oil, gas, coal, fertilizers, and mining
  - Digital platforms: Aadhaar, DigiLocker for student/tourist facilitation

#### Revised Procedure for Biometric Collection of Illegal Migrants in India

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has **revised** the procedure for collecting and uploading biometric data of illegal migrants due to technical issues with the **Foreigners Identification Portal (FIP)** under **NAFIS (National Automated Fingerprint Identification System)**.

- **Revised Mechanism**
  - NAFIS infrastructure will no longer be used for FIP-related biometric data of illegal migrants.
  - Instead, fingerprint scanners available under the **District Police Module (DPM)** of the Immigration Visa Foreigner Registration Tracking system (**IVFRT**) will be used.
  - Computers, webcams, and scanners will be provided at:
    - ✓ Police stations in hotspot areas
    - ✓ Holding (detention) centres
    - ✓ Border Outposts (BOPs) manned by border forces
  - **Bureau of Immigration (BoI)** through **FRROs (Foreigners Regional Registration Office)** is the **nodal authority** for:
    - ✓ Managing FIP
    - ✓ Ensuring **data integration from FIP to IVFRT**
    - ✓ Ensuring **FIP data not migrated to NAFIS** any longer
  - **Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)** will handle **nationality verification** of migrants as referred on the FIP.

##### Evolution of the Biometric Tracking System

- 2018: Portal launched to collect data on Rohingya migrants.
- 2023: DPM rolled out to identify overstaying foreigners; later evolved into FIP to cover illegal migrants from all countries.

- Earlier plan: Use NAFIS equipment (from NCRB- *National Crime Records Bureau*) for standardized, interoperable biometric capture.
- Now revised due to digitization hurdles and inter-agency coordination issues.

### India–South Africa Strengthen Defence Ties through Submarine Cooperation

- India and South Africa held their 9th Joint Defence Committee (JDC) meeting on defence cooperation in **Johannesburg**.
- Two **bilateral agreements** were signed focusing on **submarine cooperation**, marking a significant development in naval collaboration.
- The two sub-committees on - Defence Policy and Military Cooperation; and Defence Acquisition, Production, R&D - shared their progress and roadmap during the JDC.

### New Golden Trump Card

- The Trump Card is a new U.S. visa scheme offering permanent residency and work rights for a \$5 million investment.
- It also provides a path to citizenship. It was announced by President Donald Trump in February 2025.
- Sample gold-colored card bearing Trump’s image was unveiled in April.
- The Trump Card is expected to replace the EB-5 immigrant investor program, which:
  - Required a \$1 million investment in businesses creating U.S. jobs (or \$800,000 in rural/depressed areas).
  - Issued 14,000 visas last year.
- **Purpose:** Aimed at addressing the \$36.2 trillion national debt.
  - Trump projected the sale of **1 million cards**, potentially generating **\$5 trillion**.

### U.S. Dilutes Remittance Tax in Latest Bill

- In the updated version of the ‘One Big Beautiful Bill Act’, the U.S. Senate draft has:
  - Reduced the remittance tax to 1% from the originally proposed 3.5%.
  - Narrowed the scope of the tax, applying it **only to cash-based transfers**.
- The tax will not apply to remittances made through: U.S.-based bank accounts or financial institutions; Debit or credit cards issued in the U.S.
- Tax will only apply to: Cash; Money orders; Cashier’s checks; Other similar physical instruments.
- **Major Relief for the Indian Community**
  - Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) in the U.S. often send large sums to family in India.
  - Exempting digital and institutional transactions reduces potential financial burden.
  - Experts say this change will prevent a drop in remittance volumes to India, a key source of foreign exchange.

# SUMMITS AND ORGANISATIONS

## G7 Summit 2025

- The 2025 G7 Leaders' Summit was held in Kananaskis, Alberta (Canada). This year (2025) marked the 50th anniversary of the first G7 Summit.
- PM Modi participated in the G7 Outreach Session, addressing the theme “Energy Security: diversification, technology and infrastructure”.

### Key Outcomes

- **Ukraine:** Canada pledged CA\$4.3 billion for Ukraine and announced new Russia sanctions.
- **Joint Statements Issued On:**
  - **Critical minerals**
    - ✓ It emphasized diversifying critical mineral production, increasing investment and local value addition, and promoting innovation, building on the 2023 Five-Point Plan for Critical Minerals Security.
    - ✓ It was also backed by India.
  - Artificial Intelligence and Quantum innovation
  - Foreign interference and transnational crime
  - Wildfire response
    - ✓ It pledged to tackle wildfires using science-based, local, and nature-based solutions, supporting to reverse deforestation and land restoration goals by 2030 of the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration.
  - Israel-Iran tensions (Iran labeled a regional destabilizer)

### Key Highlights of the Summit



- ➔ Canada, under Prime Minister Mark Carney, led the summit with three key priorities:
  - ➔ **Protecting Communities & the World** – Focused on peace, security, foreign interference, and wildfires.
  - ➔ **Building Energy Security & Digital Transition** – Highlighted AI, quantum tech, and critical mineral supply chains.
  - ➔ **Securing Future Partnerships** – Aimed at private investment, infrastructure, & market expansion.
- ➔ **No Final Communiqué** - Unlike past years, no joint leaders' declaration was released. Absence of a final communiqué and trade tensions signaled cracks within the G7.
- ➔ **Overshadowed by multiple global crises**
  - ➔ The 51st G7 Summit was overshadowed by multiple global crises, including the escalating Israel–Iran conflict (which led to President Trump's early departure), US–G7 trade tensions, Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine, and the Israel–Hamas war in Gaza.
- ➔ Trump suggested Russia's expulsion in 2014 was a mistake, hinting at a possible Putin invitation in 2027 (US G7 Presidency).
- ➔ **Next Summit:** Announced by Macron to be held in Évian, France, from 14–16 June 2026.

## G7

- The G7 includes Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK, the US, and the EU.
- It is an informal forum for discussing economic governance, international security, and emerging technologies.
- In 2025, the G7 accounted for ~29% of global GDP.
- Russia remains excluded from the group due to the 2014 annexation of Crimea.

## 3<sup>rd</sup> UN Ocean Conference (UNOC3)

- Co-hosted by **France and Costa Rica**, the UNOC3 was held in Nice (France) to discuss ocean protection and conservation.
  - The U.S. sent only observers, signaling its broader withdrawal from climate multilateralism under the Trump administration.
- **Theme** - “Accelerating action and mobilizing all actors to conserve and sustainably use the ocean”.
- The Conference sought to support the implementation of SDG14 (Life Below Water), with three main priorities:
  - **Priority 1:** Working towards completion of multilateral processes linked to the ocean

- **Priority 2:** Mobilizing finance resources for the SDG14 and supporting the development of a sustainable blue economy
- **Priority 3:** Strengthen and better disseminate knowledge linked to marine sciences to enhance policy-making

### Key Outcomes

- **Global Consensus Reached in Nice**
  - Countries adopted a sweeping political declaration titled "***Our Ocean, Our Future: United for Urgent Action***" at the close of UNOC3.
- **Nice Ocean Action Plan:** The conference produced the Nice Ocean Action Plan, featuring:
  - A Political **Declaration**
  - Pledges included youth advocacy, marine literacy, treaty ratifications, and innovative financing.
- **Major National and Regional Announcements**
  - **EU:** €1 billion for ocean science and conservation
  - **Germany:** €100 million to remove underwater munitions
  - **New Zealand:** \$52 million for Pacific ocean governance
  - **Indonesia & World Bank:** Launched a 'Coral Bond'
  - 37-country coalition: **Formed the High Ambition Coalition for a Quiet Ocean**
    - ✓ This coalition aims to combat ocean noise pollution.
- **Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) See Expansion**
  - Only 8% of oceans are designated as MPAs, with just 2.8% effectively protected.
  - French Polynesia announced the world's largest MPA (5 million sq. km).
  - Chile, Colombia, and Tanzania also pledged new MPAs.
- **Momentum for the High Seas Treaty (BBNJ- Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction)**
  - 19 new ratifications, taking the total to 50 out of required 60.
  - Treaty will come into effect 120 days after reaching 60 ratifications.
  - It aims to protect marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdictions.
- **New Commitments for Coral Reef Protection**
  - 11 nations pledged to protect climate-resilient coral reefs via national strategies.
  - Over \$25 million pledged by donors to the **Global Fund for Coral Reefs (GFCR)**.
    - ✓ Bleaching event currently affecting 83.7% of coral reef area, the largest on record.
    - ✓ Coral reefs support 25% of marine life and provide services worth up to \$9.9 trillion/year.
- **Deep-Sea Mining Dispute**
  - **Call for global moratorium** on deep-sea mining received strong support but wasn't included in the final declaration.
- **Tensions Over Loss and Damage, and SIDS Voices**
  - Small Island Developing States (SIDS) demanded stronger language on loss and damage from climate impacts.
  - Emphasis placed on ensuring SIDS inclusion in all ocean-related declarations.
- **Looking Ahead: UNOC4 in 2028**
  - The next UN Ocean Conference will be **co-hosted** by Chile and South Korea in 2028. It will serve as a critical checkpoint for SDG14 and global ocean protection commitments.
    - ✓ SDG14 aims to protect 30% of the ocean by 2030.

### Liability and Accountability in Ship Sinking Incidents

- Two recent maritime incidents off Kerala's coast have raised environmental and safety concerns:
  - MV Wan Hai 503, a Singapore-flagged vessel carrying over 2,000 tonnes of fuel and hundreds of containers, caught fire 88 nautical miles off Beypore.

- o Earlier, in May 2025, the Liberian container ship MSC ELSA 3 sank off the Kochi coast.
- Both incidents highlight growing risks to marine ecology and coastal safety.

## Regulating Framework for Global Shipping and Liability

- **Global Oversight by the IMO**
  - o The **International Maritime Organization (IMO)**, a UN agency, regulates global merchant shipping.
  - o It sets norms for **pollution control, safety, and liability**.
  - o Member countries, including India, must pass **domestic laws** to implement IMO conventions.
- **India's Maritime Regulatory Framework**
  - o The **Directorate General (DG) of Shipping** enforces IMO conventions in India.
  - o India has **not yet ratified** key treaties like:
    - ✓ **2004 Ballast Water Convention**
    - ✗ **2010 Hazardous & Noxious Substances (HNS) Convention**
      - **MSC ELSA 3**, which sank off Kochi carrying calcium carbide, revealed India's vulnerability.
    - ✓ Since India hasn't ratified the **HNS Convention**, it must rely on **domestic maritime laws**.
- **Flags of Convenience: A Loophole**
  - o Many ships register in **Flags of Convenience (FOC)** nations (e.g., Liberia, Marshall Islands) with **minimal oversight**.
  - o Enables owners in developed countries to **cut costs** and **bypass stricter laws**, despite IMO membership.
- **Cargo Liability and Contracts**
  - o **Ship owners are liable** for cargo loss/damage under the **bill of lading**, a legal contract between exporter and carrier.
  - o The bill is transferred to the importer via **letters of credit** through banks.
- **P&I Clubs: Insurance for Liabilities**
  - o **Protection & Indemnity (P&I) Clubs** insure ship owners against: Cargo loss; Environmental damage; Loss of life; Legal claims.
- **Environmental Damage and Unlimited Liability**
  - o Cargo loss liability is capped, but environmental damage liability is not.
  - o Covers:
    - ✓ **Oil spills**, chemical leaks
    - ✓ **Fishery and tourism losses**
    - ✓ **Disruption to coastal businesses**
    - ✓ Governed by the **International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships** (Polluter Pays Principle).
  - o Some **national laws cap liabilities** to protect ship owners from open-ended claims.
- **Salvage Responsibility and Legal Framework**
  - o **Ship owners are responsible** for wreck removal.
  - o If salvage is not possible, they remain liable for **resulting damage**.
  - o Governed by the **Nairobi Convention (2007)**, applicable up to **200 nautical miles** off India's coast.

## India Wins Presidency of IIAS

India has won the Presidency of the **International Institute of Administrative Sciences (IIAS)** for the 2025–2028 term.

- India is set to host the 2025 IIAS' Annual Conference in Kochi, Kerala.
- India has been a member since 1998 (represented by DARPG- Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances).
- IIAS publishes journals like: **International Review of Administrative Sciences (IRAS)** – peer-reviewed research.

## Significance of India's Victory

- This was the first-ever election by ballot in the 100-year history of the IIAS.
- It also marks India's first time securing the Presidency of IIAS.

## India's Vision for IIAS Presidency

- The Indian Presidency will reflect the governance model of "Maximum Governance – Minimum Government." Key focus areas:
  - Next-Generation Administrative Reforms
  - Digital empowerment of citizens
  - Digital transformation of institutions
  - Bridging the North–South divide with inclusivity and unity

## About IIAS

- Founded in Madrid in 1930, the IIAS is a global federation comprising 31 Member Countries, 20 National Sections, and 15 Academic Research Centres.
- HQ: Brussels, Belgium.
- It promotes scientific research in public administration and collaborates closely with the United Nations.
  - It should be noted that the IIAS is not a formally affiliated body of the United Nations.
- Key member countries include **India**, Japan, China, Germany, Italy, Korea, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Switzerland, Mexico, Spain, Qatar, Morocco, and Indonesia, among others.

## 5 Countries Elected To Serve On UN Security Council

- Bahrain, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Latvia, and Liberia have been elected as non-permanent members of the UNSC for a two-year term starting January 2026.
  - Latvia will take a seat on the Council for the first time in its history.
- They will replace Algeria, Guyana, South Korea, Sierra Leone, and Slovenia.
- These new members will join Denmark, Greece, Pakistan, Panama, and Somalia, who were elected last year and will serve through 2026.
- The UN Security Council consists of 15 members — 5 permanent (China, France, Russia, UK, and US) with veto power, and 10 non-permanent members elected for staggered two-year terms.
- Elections are held annually by secret ballot, with regional seat allocation, requiring a two-thirds majority in the General Assembly.

## Stockholm International Conference on Electoral Integrity

- Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Shri Gyanesh Kumar attended the International IDEA (*Institute for Democracy & Electoral Assistance*) Stockholm Conference on **Electoral Integrity** in Sweden.
- The Conference brings together heads of EMBs (*Election Management Body*), policymakers, and institutional leaders to deliberate on contemporary challenges to electoral integrity.
- Key focus areas include disinformation, digital disruption, electoral security, climate-related risks, and the role of Artificial Intelligence in elections.
- He delivered the inaugural keynote address, highlighting India's globally recognized election management practices.
- During his address, the CEC emphasized the unparalleled scale of Indian elections:
  - 979 million electors in 2024
  - 6.2 million Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs)
  - 20 million personnel involved, including police, polling staff, observers, and party agents
  - 743 political parties, 20,271 candidates in 2024 General Elections
- He noted that elections in India are held under the scrutiny of political parties, media, and observers, ensuring transparency akin to real-time audit.
- Tracing the journey from **173 million voters in 1951–52** to **979 million in 2024**, CEC highlighted India's ability to **adapt to complexity** while upholding **constitutional values**.
- India's elections ensure participation of:
  - First-time voters
  - Senior citizens (85+)

- Persons with disabilities
- Third-gender electors
- Voters in remote and high-altitude areas, including Tashigang, the world's highest polling station

### IAEA Declares Iran Non-Compliant

- The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Board of Governors passed a resolution declaring Iran in breach of its 1974 Safeguards Agreement, citing concerns over unexplained uranium traces at multiple sites.
  - The vote saw opposition from China, Russia, and Burkina Faso, with 11 abstentions.
- **Rare Invocation of Article XII.C Powers**
  - The Board invoked Article XII.C of the IAEA's 1957 Statute, a rarely used provision, to declare Iran as non-compliant.
  - It has only been invoked **six times before**: against Iraq (1991), Romania (1992), North Korea (1993), Libya (2004), Iran (2006), and Syria (2011).



- ◆ **About:** IAEA is an autonomous international organization under the United Nations system.
  - ▶ It was established in 1957
- ◆ **Headquarters:** Vienna, Austria
- ◆ **Members** - It has 180 member states (India is one of the founding members).

#### Key Roles and Functions:

- ▶ **Promote Peaceful Use of Nuclear Energy** - Support nuclear applications in medicine, agriculture, industry, and energy production.
- ▶ **Implement Safeguards and Non-Proliferation Measures** - Verify that nuclear material is not diverted for weapons purposes (especially under the NPT).
- ▶ **Ensure Nuclear Safety and Security** - Set safety standards and respond to nuclear emergencies.
- ▶ **Technical Cooperation and Capacity Building** - Provide training & Assist member states in using nuclear technology for development goals.

**Scientific Research and Development** - Conduct and support research in nuclear sciences through coordination and data sharing.

### IAEA Safeguards agreements

- IAEA safeguards are legally binding agreements established under the IAEA Statute to ensure the peaceful use of nuclear material.
- As of May 2023, **182 countries**, mainly **non-nuclear-weapon states under the NPT**, have signed **comprehensive safeguards agreements**, the most common type of safeguard arrangement.
- **1974 Safeguards Agreement**
  - The 1974 Safeguards Agreement refers to a legally binding accord between Iran and the IAEA, concluded under the framework of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

### Foreign Investigators Probe Air India Crash on Indian Soil

When **Air India Flight 171** crashed in Ahmedabad, killing all 241 onboard, **US (NTSB, FAA)** and **UK (CAA)** agencies joined the probe. Their involvement is due to **international aviation norms**.

#### Why Foreign Agencies Investigate Air Crashes on Indian Soil?

- **Chicago Convention: Global Aviation Framework**
  - The **Convention on International Civil Aviation (1944)**, or **Chicago Convention**, provides the legal basis for international cooperation in aviation safety.
  - It has **193 member countries**, including **India, the US, and the UK**, and is overseen by the **International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO)**.
- **Annex 13: Global Protocol for Crash Investigation**
  - **Annex 13** of the Convention sets rules for investigating aircraft accidents.
  - It emphasizes **root cause analysis** over assigning blame, aiming to improve **future aviation safety**.
- **Shared International Responsibility**
  - Under **Chapter 5 of Annex 13**, countries involved in the aircraft's **design or manufacture** (like the US for Boeing and GE) are entitled to participate in investigations, regardless of crash location.

- **Who Leads and Who Participates?**
  - **State of Occurrence:** Leads the investigation
  - In AI 171's case, **India**, through its **Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB)**, is the lead agency.
  - **Other Entitled States:**
    - ✓ **State of Registry:** India
    - ✓ **State of Operator:** India (Air India)
    - ✓ **State of Design:** United States (Boeing)
    - ✓ **State of Manufacture:** United States (Boeing and GE)
  - Hence, **NTSB and FAA** have a formal right to participate. **Boeing and GE** may send technical experts.
- **UK's Involvement**
  - Though not automatically entitled, **UK is involved** as **53 British nationals** were among the deceased.
  - ICAO permits participation from states with a **substantial interest**, such as loss of nationals.

### SCO Defence Ministers' Meeting

- At the 2025 SCO Defence Ministers' meeting, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh refused to sign the joint statement.
- This was after the joint statement excluded any mention of the April 22 Pahalgam terror attack but included a reference to the Jaffar Express hijacking in Balochistan.
- As the current SCO chair, Beijing hosted the 2025 defence ministers' meeting in Qingdao.

### Shangri-La Dialogue 2025

- Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan visited Singapore to attend the **22nd Shangri-La Dialogue**, Asia's premier defence and security summit.
- Organised by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), the Shangri-La Dialogue hosts defence ministers, military chiefs, and strategic experts from around 40 nations to deliberate on Indo-Pacific security challenges.
- It is held annually in Singapore. It provides a platform for decision-makers from Asia-Pacific, North America, Europe, and the Middle East to discuss key regional security issues and share policy responses.
- General Chauhan's presence at the Shangri-La Dialogue reaffirms India's commitment to regional security and positions it as a proactive stakeholder in shaping the Indo-Pacific's strategic future.

### Tech Surveillance in Sundarbans

- Amid rising concerns over illegal immigration and terror infiltration, the Border Security Force (BSF) has reached out to the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
- It has sought help in deploying advanced surveillance systems. These include drones, radars, satellite imagery, and CCTVs.
- The focus is a 113-km stretch of the India-Bangladesh border in the Sundarbans.
- **Challenging Terrain, Limited Patrolling**
  - The BSF currently monitors 123 km of the Sundarbans region — a difficult area filled with tidal creeks, mangroves, and remote islands.
  - Surveillance is conducted using 8 floating Border Outposts (BOPs) and 96 patrol vessels, which are insufficient given the terrain's complexity and growing security risks.
- **Tech-Based Vigilance Strategy**
  - BSF has proposed to bring 113 km of the Sundarbans under full technological surveillance.
  - A feasibility study has been completed with inputs from ISRO and DRDO.
  - Field visits by DRDO are expected after it finishes its current work in Gujarat's creek areas.
- **Focus on Counter-Terror and Illegal Crossings**
  - Intelligence inputs suggest terror outfits are actively exploring riverine and maritime routes — especially through the Sundarbans — for infiltration.
- **Push for Observation Towers and Co-Located Posts**
  - The BSF has requested land from the West Bengal government to build 7 observation towers and expand co-located forest posts, where BSF personnel share existing infrastructure with forest officials.
  - Despite repeated surveys, lack of participation from the Forest and Revenue Departments has delayed land allocation.
  - West Bengal authorities have agreed to provide land at 2 sites but progress on others remains stalled.
- **Wider Strategy to Secure Eastern Frontier**
  - This initiative is part of the Centre's broader border management strategy, which includes:
    - ✓ Deployment of additional forces
    - ✓ Accelerated deportation of illegal immigrants
    - ✓ Enhanced inter-agency intelligence coordination

### Intensifying Anti-Naxal Drive

- The government has intensified efforts to eliminate Left-Wing Extremism (LWE), aiming to end the decades-long Naxal insurgency by March 31, 2026, as declared by Union Home Minister.
- **Major Gains in Maoist Strongholds**
  - Security forces have made significant advances in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Odisha, particularly in the Bijapur-Sukma-Dantewada tri-junction.
  - The use of forward operating bases, enhanced road connectivity, and targeted operations have been central to the strategy.
- **Surge in Maoist Casualties**
  - In Chhattisgarh alone, 209 Maoists were killed in the first five months of 2025—nearly matching the 219 killed in all of 2024.
  - The most notable success was the killing of CPI Maoist general secretary Basavaraju in May 2025.
    - ✓ Union Home Minister Amit Shah termed this the first time in 30 years that a leader of such high rank has been eliminated in India's fight against Naxalism.

- **Operation Black Forest: Massive Success**
  - Operation Black Forest was launched on April 21. It was a bold and carefully planned three-week joint campaign by the CRPF and Chhattisgarh Police.
  - It successfully dismantled the Maoists' strongest fortress in the Kurragutta hills on the Chhattisgarh-Telangana border.
- **Key Factors Behind the Success**
  - Strong political will
  - Intelligence-led operations
  - Enhanced state-centre coordination
  - Active participation of local units like Chhattisgarh's District Reserve Guards
- **Setbacks and Challenges Remain**
  - Despite gains, ambushes by Maoists in areas like Kolhan (Jharkhand) and Abujmad (Chhattisgarh) have resulted in casualties among security forces, showing the rebels still retain strike capabilities.
- **The Road Ahead: Security and Development**
  - To fully neutralize LWE, the government must sustain military pressure while also ensuring governance, infrastructure, and welfare outreach in the affected regions.

### Indian Navy to Commission INS Tamal

- INS Tamal, a stealth multi-role frigate, was commissioned at Yantar Shipyard, Kaliningrad, Russia.
- It is the eighth and final Krivak-class frigate sourced from Russia.
  - It is also the second vessel of the Tushil-class, an upgraded version of the Talwar and Teg classes, each with three ships.
- It marks the last foreign-built warship for the Indian Navy, aligning with the 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' and 'Make in India' initiatives.
- Upon commissioning, **INS Tamal** will be assigned to the **Western Fleet** under the **Western Naval Command**, known as the '**Sword Arm**' of the Indian Navy.
- **Technological Features**
  - 26% indigenous components, including the BrahMos long-range cruise missile.
  - Enhanced stealth and stability in a 125-meter, 3,900-ton warship.
- **Domestic Production: Tripud Class**
  - Under the Tushil-class contract, India is building two similar frigates—**Tripud class**—at **Goa Shipyard Limited** with Russian technology and design support.
  - Once completed, the Indian Navy will operate **10 frigates** with similar capabilities and standardized equipment, weapons, and sensors across **four different classes**.

### SIPRI 2025 Report: Global Nuclear Modernisation Intensifies

- According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) 2025 report, nearly all nine nuclear-armed countries, including India and Pakistan, continued aggressive nuclear weapons modernisation in 2024.
- This includes: Upgrading existing systems; Adding new delivery technologies; Expanding fissile material stockpiles.
- **India's Expanding Arsenal**
  - India's nuclear warhead count increased from **172 (2024)** to **180 (2025)**.
  - Continued development of **canisterised missiles** capable of carrying **multiple warheads** during peacetime.
  - Ongoing focus on enhancing delivery systems, strategic deterrence, and operational readiness.
- **Russia and U.S. Still Hold 90% of Global Arsenal**
  - **U.S.:** 5,177 warheads (1,770 deployed)

- **Russia:** 5,459 warheads (1,718 deployed)
- Both are undergoing **extensive modernisation**, with concerns that **New START Treaty** expiry in **2026** may trigger further stockpile increases.
- **Arms Control Weakening**
  - Past reductions in nuclear stockpiles (post-Cold War) are reversing.
  - Fewer dismantlements, faster deployments, and deteriorating arms control regimes have increased risk of a new nuclear arms race.
- **Geopolitical Implications**
  - Growing strategic competition and national debates in East Asia, Europe, and the Middle East suggest more nations may consider developing nuclear weapons.
  - Experts warn of an increasing reliance on nuclear deterrence in an era of weakened global governance.

### India Fast-Tracks Defence Procurement Reforms

- The Ministry of Defence (MoD) is implementing a new strategy to compress procurement timelines, accelerate contract awards, and ensure faster payments—especially to private vendors. This follows lessons learned from Operation Sindoor.
- **Digitisation Over Field Trials**
  - Traditional field evaluation trials that took years are being replaced with simulation and digitised testing.
  - This aims to eliminate delays and fast-track acquisitions of critical defence systems.
- **Focus on Domestic Industry & Interoperability**
  - Special emphasis on promoting private sector participation, especially in:
    - ✓ Anti-drone and smart ammunition
    - ✓ Armored vehicles
    - ✓ Loitering munitions and guided missile integration
- **Defence Expenditure as Share of GDP**
  - India's defence budget has **remained below 2.5% of GDP** over the past five years.
  - For FY 2024–25 and FY 2025–26, it is **1.98% and 1.91%** of GDP respectively.
  - Experts recommend **at least 2% of GDP** for credible deterrence, especially amid regional threats.

### Indian Navy to Induct Warships

- The Indian Navy is set to **induct 9 to 10 warships** between **June and December 2025**, marking a significant expansion in its operational strength.
- Most of these vessels are **indigenously built**, reflecting growing self-reliance in warship manufacturing.
- **First ASW-SWC Vessel: INS Arnala**
  - INS Arnala, the **first** Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow Water Craft (ASW-SWC), was commissioned in Visakhapatnam.
  - First of 16 ASW-SWC ships, designed by GRSE and built in collaboration with L&T Shipbuilders.
  - Equipped for anti-submarine warfare, search-and-rescue, and low-intensity maritime ops.
  - Notable as the largest Indian warship powered by a diesel-engine–waterjet combo.
  - Named after Arnala Fort in Vasai, Maharashtra.
- **Push for Indigenous Warship Building**
  - Navy targets a 175-ship fleet by 2035.
  - Officials highlight quicker commissioning timelines due to:
    - Tech upgrades
    - Strong indigenisation drive
    - Navy's role in IDDM (Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured) process

## Ukraine's Operation Spider's Web

- Recently, Ukraine launched a drone attack deep inside Russian territory, destroying over 40 planes. This marked the deepest incursion since the war began in 2022. This operation was titled as **Operation Spider's Web**.
- The attack used **First-Person View (FPV) drones**, reportedly smuggled into Russia and concealed in "mobile wooden houses."



## About FPV Drones

- FPV drones are remotely operated via live video feed, giving pilots a real-time view from the drone's perspective through goggles or screens.
- While commonly used for filming, they are increasingly applied in warfare. Due to limited range and operator visibility, they are often preceded by reconnaissance drones for target identification.

### Effectiveness of FPV Drones

- Cost-Effective:** Each FPV drone with explosives can cost as little as \$500.
- Precision Strikes:** Despite being small, they can target with high accuracy.
- Stealthy and Agile:** Their size and maneuverability allow deep strikes while evading radar.
- Reduced Risk:** They limit the need for direct human engagement in hostile zones.

## Parag Jain Appointed as New Chief of R&AW

- Parag Jain, a 1989-batch IPS officer from the Punjab cadre, has been appointed as the new Chief of the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW). He succeeded Ravi Sinha.
- R&AW is India's external intelligence agency, responsible for gathering foreign intelligence, counter-terrorism, and strategic analysis.
- R&AW is administratively part of the Cabinet Secretariat, but is directly under the Prime Minister's Office.
- The head of R&AW is designated as the Secretary (Research) in the Cabinet Secretariat and reports to the Prime Minister.

## Exercises

<b>India-France Joint Military Exercise Shakti</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Indian Army contingent participated in 8th edition of the biennial <b>India-French Joint Military Exercise SHAKTI</b>.</li> <li>The exercise was conducted at Camp Larzac, La Cavalerie, France.</li> <li>The 2025 edition focuses on joint sub-conventional operations under UN Charter Chapter VII in semi-urban terrain.</li> </ul>
<b>India-UK Naval Exercise</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Indian Navy conducted a Passage Exercise (PASSEX) with the UK Carrier Strike Group in the North Arabian Sea.</li> <li>In January 2024, Rajnath Singh became the first Indian Defence Minister in 22 years to visit the UK. The visit focused on defence, security, and industrial cooperation.</li> <li>India and UK upgraded ties to a <b>Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in May 2021</b>.</li> </ul>
<b>Exercise Khaan Quest</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Indian Army contingent participated in the 22nd edition of Exercise Khaan Quest, held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.</li> <li>The multinational military exercise focused on peacekeeping operations and enhancing interoperability under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.</li> <li>Initiated in 2003 as a <u>U.S.-Mongolia bilateral exercise</u>, Khaan Quest became a multinational event in 2006, promoting global peacekeeping readiness.</li> </ul>
<b>17th Edition of Joint Military Exercise 'Nomadic Elephant'</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The 17th edition of the bilateral military exercise 'Nomadic Elephant' between India and Mongolia was held at the Special Forces Training Centre in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.</li> <li>Focused on the conduct of non-conventional operations in semi-urban and mountainous terrain under a United Nations mandate, the exercise aims to enhance the operational capabilities of both the forces.</li> <li>Its last edition was conducted at Umroi, Meghalaya, in July 2024 (1<sup>st</sup> edition was held in 2004 in Mangolia). The exercise reflects the growing defence cooperation between the two countries.</li> </ul>

# ENVIRONMENT AND GEOGRAPHY

## India Expands Coastline by 3,500 km

India's coastline has increased by nearly 50%, not due to territorial expansion but because of **more accurate recent measurements**. While these changes hold administrative and strategic significance, they do not reflect any actual change on the ground.

### India's Coastline Now Measures 11,098 km

- India's coastline has increased from 7,516 km to 11,098 km, a rise of 3,582 km (nearly 48%).
- **From Low to High-Resolution Mapping**
  - The previous measurement used low-resolution data (scale 1:4,500,000), which missed fine land features.
  - The new measurement used high-resolution data (scale 1:250,000), capturing more bends, curves, and irregularities, thereby increasing the measured length.
- **Inclusion of Offshore Islands**
  - Another contributor to the increase is the inclusion of many previously uncounted offshore islands (submerged at high tide), which were either invisible in older data or missed due to manual limitations.

LENGTH OF INDIA'S COASTLINE ALONG STATES	
State/UT	Coastline length (in km)
Gujarat	2340.62
Maharashtra	877.00
Karnataka	343.30
Kerala	600.15
Tamil Nadu	1068.69
Andhra Pradesh	1053.07
Odisha	574.71
West Bengal	721.02
Daman and Diu	54.38
Pondicherry	42.65
Lakshadweep	144.80
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	3083.50

Source: Ministry of Ports, Shipping

### Island Counting: A Different Challenge

- **Previous Discrepancies in Island Numbers**
  - In 2016, the Surveyor General of India listed 1,382 offshore islands, while state agencies, Coast Guard, and Navy reported a lower count of 1,334.
  - The difference arose due to varying definitions and criteria.
- **Data reconciliation & Standardisation Updated the Island Count**

1,298 offshore islands

91 inshore islands

Total: 1,389 islands

- This count excludes river islands like those in Assam and West Bengal.


## Pilot Scheme to Tackle Human-Tiger Conflict Outside Reserves

The Union Environment Ministry has given approval for funding for the **'tigers outside of tiger reserve' pilot scheme** to manage human-tiger conflicts better through enhanced monitoring and protection.

- *Between 2020-2024, 382 people were killed in tiger-related incidents, with 111 deaths recorded in 2022 alone.*

### Addressing the Challenge of Tigers Beyond Protected Areas

- This scheme, with **an outlay of Rs. 88 crore until 2026-27**, aims to enhance the protection, monitoring, and conflict management capabilities in regions where tigers roam outside officially designated tiger reserves.



**Coastline Paradox**

- ➡ India's new coastline measurement is more accurate but still not definitive.
- ➡ **Precision Changes Everything**
  - ➔ Advancements in mapping technologies, such as GIS, lead to greater precision and thus a longer calculated length.
- ➡ **The Paradox Beyond Coastlines**
  - ➔ The coastline paradox applies to other natural features too, like river networks and mountain ranges.
  - ➔ For instance, river banks are irregular, but river lengths are typically calculated along the main stream, avoiding the same variability.
- ➡ **Periodic Reassessment Now a Norm**
  - ➔ Due to evolving technology & natural processes (like erosion & land reclamation), India has decided to recalculate its coastline every 10 years aligning with other countries

## Scope and Implementation of the Pilot Scheme

- Initially, **80 forest divisions across 10 states** have been shortlisted for funding.
- These divisions were identified based on the frequency & severity of human-tiger conflicts.

### Key objectives of the pilot scheme include:

- Strengthening monitoring systems through technology.
- Capacity building of forest staff to manage conflict.
- Partnering with civil society organisations and expert veterinarians.
- Supporting prey base augmentation to reduce livestock predation.
- The scheme will be implemented at the ground level by the Chief Wildlife Wardens of state forest departments in collaboration with National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).
- The NTCA is currently finalising the list of eligible divisions and has been asked to submit revised, year-wise financial estimates before final approval by the CAMPA governing body.

- The pilot scheme is financially backed by the National CAMPA. The executive committee of the **National Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA)** has given in-principle approval for a year of pilot implementation.

### The Blue NDC Challenge

On the first day of the third UN Ocean Conference (UNOC3), Brazil and France had launched Blue NDC (Nationally Determined Contributions) Challenge initiative to scale up ocean-focused climate action.

#### Background and Context

- The Blue NDC Challenge is a *global call to action* urging countries to embed ocean-based solutions in their NDCs, which are national climate plans under the Paris Agreement (adopted in 2015) aimed at limiting global temperature rise to well below 2°C, ideally 1.5°C, above pre-industrial levels.
- The initiative aligns with the 10th anniversary of the Paris Agreement and builds momentum for COP30, hosted by Brazil in Belém in November 2025.
- **Inaugural Participants:** Alongside Brazil and France, six other countries—Australia, Fiji, Kenya, Mexico, Palau, and the Republic of Seychelles— have committed to including ocean-focused actions in their updated NDCs.
- **Support Mechanisms:** The initiative is backed by organizations like the World Resources Institute (WRI), Ocean Conservancy, Ocean & Climate Platform, and WWF-Brazil, with support from UN High-Level Climate Champions

#### The UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030):

- Also known as the **Ocean Decade**, is a global initiative led by UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC).
- It aims to reverse the decline in the health of the ocean and catalyze new solutions for sustainable development.
  - ✓ **The "30 by 30" initiative** aims to protect 30% of the Earth's land and oceans by 2030.

About Khichan Wetland (Phalodi, Jodhpur District)	Menar Wetland Complex (Udaipur District)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location and Composition:</b> Situated in the northern Thar Desert, Khichan Wetland comprises two water bodies, Ratri Nadi (river) and Vijaysagar Talab (pond)</li> <li>• <b>Biodiversity:</b> The wetland supports over 150 bird species, including large wintering flocks of over 22,000 migratory demoiselle cranes, making it a critical stop along the Central Asian Flyway (CAF).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location and Composition:</b> Menar Wetland (“Bird Village”) is a freshwater monsoon wetland formed by three ponds—Brahma Talab, Dhand Talab, &amp; Kheroda Talab—covering 463.4 hectares.</li> <li>• <b>Biodiversity:</b> The wetland hosts 110 waterbird species, of which 67 are migratory, including critically endangered <b>white-rumped vultures</b> and <b>long-billed vultures</b>. (In 2016, it was declared an Important Bird Area (IBA).)</li> <li>• Over 70 plant species are found, including mango trees around Braham talab that host a large <b>colony of Indian flying foxes</b>.</li> </ul>

### Two New Ramsar Sites

Two new wetlands — Khichan in Phalodi and Menar in Udaipur — from Rajasthan have been designated as Ramsar sites, taking up the list of such wetlands in India to **91**, the highest in Asia.

- ✓ Rajasthan now hosts **four Ramsar Sites**, including **Sambhar Lake** (spanning Nagaur and Jaipur districts) and **Keoladeo Ghana National Park** in Bharatpur.
- ✓ Both Khichan and Menar meet the standards due to their **rich avian biodiversity**.
- ✓ Both wetlands exemplify unique wetland types—**Khichan as a desert wetland** and **Menar as a freshwater monsoon wetland**.

## Extra Mile: Ramsar Convention and India's Role

- The Ramsar Convention (1971, Ramsar, Iran) is an intergovernmental treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands.
  - ✓ According to the Convention, wetlands are defined as *“areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres”*.
- India (a signatory since 1982) has 91 Ramsar sites, the highest in Asia and third globally after the UK (176) and Mexico (144).

## "EnviStats India 2025"

The Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (MoSPI) released the 8th issue of the publication titled "EnviStats India 2025: Environment Statistics".

### Important Highlights of the publication "EnviStats India 2025"

- The annual mean temperature increased from 25.05°C in 2001 to 25.74°C in 2024. Similarly, the annual minimum and maximum temperature rose from 19.32°C to 20.24°C and 30.78°C to 31.25°C respectively, during the same period.
- Inland fish production has increased from 61.36 lakh tonnes in 2013-14 to 139.07 lakh tonnes in 2023-24, possibly indicating inland aquaculture and freshwater fisheries.
- Thermal power generation has increased from 7,92,053 GWh to 13,26,549 GWh & Electricity generation from renewable energy sources has increased from 65520 GWh to 2,25,835 GWh during 2013-14 to 2023-24.

## One of the nine criteria must be fulfilled to be the Ramsar Site.

- Criterion 1:** If it contains a representative, rare, or unique example of a natural /near-natural wetland type found within the appropriate biogeographic region.
- Criterion 2:** If it supports vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered species or threatened ecological communities.
- Criterion 3:** If it supports populations of plant and/or animal species important for maintaining the biological diversity of a particular biogeographic region.
- Criterion 4:** If it supports plant and/or animal species at a critical stage in their life cycles, or provides refuge during adverse conditions.
- Criterion 5:** If it regularly supports 20,000 or more waterbirds.
- Criterion 6:** If it regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species/ subspecies of waterbird.
- Criterion 7:** If it supports a significant proportion of indigenous fish subspecies, species or families, life-history stages, species interactions and/or populations that are representative of wetland benefits and/or values and thereby contributes to global biological diversity.
- Criterion 8:** If it is an important source of food for fishes, spawning ground, nursery and/or migration path on which fish stocks, either within the wetland or elsewhere, depend.
- Criterion 9:** If it regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species/ subspecies of wetland-dependent non avian animal species.

## Flue Gas Desulphurisation (FGD)

A high-level expert committee, headed by Principal Scientific Adviser Ajay Sood, has proposed **scrapping** India's decade-old policy that requires all coal-based thermal power plants (TPPs) to install Flue Gas Desulphurisation (FGD) units.

- Instead, the installation should be limited to plants using **imported coal** or **coal with high sulphur content (>0.5%)**, ensuring a more cost-effective and targeted approach to reducing sulphur dioxide emissions. 92% of Indian coal has low sulphur content (0.3%–0.5%).
- The report warns that widespread FGD installation could backfire environmentally. It would raise

### What is Flue Gas?

Flue gas is the mixture of gaseous emissions released through the flue or chimney of fossil fuel-burning facilities, especially thermal power plants (TPPs), industrial furnaces, and boilers. It is the by-product of combustion processes involving coal, oil, natural gas, biomass, etc.

### Composition of Flue Gas

It varies depending on the fuel type, combustion process, and technology used. The primary components include Carbon Dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>); Sulfur Dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>); Nitrogen Oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>); Particulate Matter (PM); Unburnt Hydrocarbons; Heavy Metals (Hg, Pb) etc.

It often contains pollutants that must be removed before being released into the atmosphere.

### Flue Gas Desulphurisation (FGD)

FGD refers to a set of technologies used to remove **sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>)** from the exhaust flue gases of fossil fuel-based thermal power plants and industrial units.

Environmental Benefits: Reduces Acid Rain; Improves Air Quality

### Types of FGD Systems

Type	Description
Wet FGD	Uses lime/limestone slurry to absorb SO <sub>2</sub> (Removes 90-98% of SO <sub>2</sub> .)
Dry FGD	Uses dry sorbents (lime or sodium-based) (50-90% SO <sub>2</sub> removal, less efficient than wet FGD)
Semi-dry FGD	Uses atomized water and absorbent.

\*\*Dry and semi-dry systems are less efficient but more cost-effective for older units

### Key Technologies to Reduce Flue Gas Emissions

Technology	Function
Flue Gas Desulphurization (FGD)	Removes SO <sub>2</sub>
Electrostatic Precipitators (ESPs)	Remove PM
Selective Catalytic Reduction (SCR)	Reduces NO <sub>x</sub> emissions
Carbon Capture & Storage (CCS)	Captures CO <sub>2</sub> from flue gas
Low NO <sub>x</sub> burners	Optimizes combustion

power consumption in plants and add 69 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> between 2025- 2030, while only reducing SO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 17 million tonnes.

- **High Costs Make FGD Economically Unviable:** FGD installation costs ₹1.2 crore per MW. With coal capacity expected to reach 283,000 MW by 2032, the financial burden is massive.

### Working of FGD

- **Absorption:** An absorbent like lime, limestone, or ammonia reacts with SO<sub>2</sub>.
- **Scrubbing:** The absorbent, often in slurry form, is sprayed into a scrubber tower to contact flue gases.
- **Chemical Reaction:** SO<sub>2</sub> reacts with the absorbent to form compounds like calcium sulphite or calcium sulphate.
- **Byproducts:** Some systems (Wet FGD) produce useful byproducts like gypsum, which is used in construction.

### Restricting AC Temperature

The Union Ministry of Power proposed standardizing the operational temperature range of new air conditioners to 20°C–28°C across residential, commercial, and vehicular sectors.

### Rationale Behind the Proposal

The proposal is driven by the twin objectives of 1) Energy conservation & 2) safeguarding public health

Energy Conservation	Public Health Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Rising Energy Demand:</b> India’s peak electricity demand reached 241 GW in June 2025, with air conditioners contributing ~50 GW (20% of the total load).</li> <li>• <b>Energy Savings Potential:</b> According to the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE), increasing the AC temperature by 1°C can save approximately 6% of electricity consumption. Setting a default temperature of 24°C could save up to 20 billion units of electricity annually, reducing the need for new power plants and grid upgrades, which could cost ₹7.5 trillion by 2035.</li> <li>• <b>Grid Stability:</b> Lowering AC temperatures to 16°C–18°C strains the power grid, increasing the risk of blackouts. Standardizing the temperature range to 20°C–28°C flattens peak demand curves, ensuring stable power supply for essential services.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Health Risks of Extreme Cooling:</b> Prolonged exposure to temperatures below 18°C can lead to health issues such as respiratory infections, asthma, hypertension, and mental health challenges, particularly among vulnerable groups like the elderly and children. The proposed range of 20°C–28°C aligns with WHO guidelines, which recommend 22°C–26°C.</li> <li>• <b>Thermal Shock Prevention:</b> Extreme temperature differences between indoor and outdoor environments can cause fatigue, sinus issues, and respiratory stress. A moderate temperature range reduces these risks, enhancing public well-being.</li> <li>• <b>Alignment with Global Trends:</b> Japan (Cool Biz campaign, recommending 28°C) and Spain (27°C minimum for public spaces).</li> </ul>

### Revised Green India Mission (GIM)

The Centre released a revised roadmap for the Green India Mission (GIM).

New Changes under Green India Mission (GIM)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A central focus of the revised mission plan will be on the <b>restoration</b> and <b>saturation</b> of vulnerable landscapes through regionally conducive best practices.</li> <li>• This will see <i>area and landscape-specific restoration activities</i> in three important mountain ranges – <b>Aravallis, Western Ghats, and Indian Himalayas</b>, along with the <b>mangrove ecosystems</b>. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ GIM interventions will be synced with the Centre’s recently launched <b>Aravalli Green Wall project</b>, aimed at combating the degradation and desertification in one of the world’s oldest mountain ranges, which acts as a natural barrier against the Thar desert.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

- ✓ **Aravalli Green Wall project** aims to initially restore 8 lakh hectares across 29 districts and 4 states. It uses native plant species, restore grasslands, forests, and water systems

- The revised GIM roadmap prioritizes the restoration of **impaired open forests** to effectively restore large areas of forests and degraded lands, as well as for carbon sequestration, based on estimates from the Forest Survey of India (FSI).

- ✓ According to the FSI, this approach alone has the potential to sequester 1.89 billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> over 15 million hectares.



- Launched in 2014 under the NAPCC (National Action Plan on Climate Change), it is a strategic initiative to combat climate change by increasing forest and tree cover, enhancing biodiversity, and supporting livelihoods dependent on forests.
- It aligns with India's commitments under the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 15 (Life on Land).
- The mission targets increasing forest cover on **5 million hectares** and improving the quality of forest cover on another **5 million hectares**.

#### Key Strategies under GIM

The GIM employs a participatory and decentralized approach:

- **Afforestation and Reforestation:** Planting trees on degraded lands, community lands, and urban areas.
  - ✓ For example, the mission promotes agroforestry and farm forestry to integrate trees into agricultural landscapes, as seen in states like Andhra Pradesh, where farmers integrate eucalyptus and teak plantations.
  - ✓ **Afforestation Progress:** From 2015-16 to 2020-21, the mission supported tree plantation and afforestation across 11.22 million hectares through various central and state schemes.
- **Ecosystem Restoration:** Restoring degraded ecosystems, such as wetlands and grasslands, to enhance biodiversity.
  - ✓ The restoration of the Chilika Lake ecosystem in Odisha is a notable example, where community involvement improved biodiversity and fisheries.
- **Community Participation:** Engaging local communities through Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs) and Van Panchayats.
  - ✓ In Himachal Pradesh, JFMCs have successfully managed community forests, ensuring sustainable resource use.
- **Urban Forestry:** Promoting green cover in urban areas to combat pollution and heat islands. Delhi's Green Action Plan under GIM includes tree plantations along roads and in parks.
- **Climate Adaptation:** Strengthening resilience through watershed management and soil conservation, as seen in the Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP) in Rajasthan.

#### How will the Revised GIM Combat Land Degradation and Desertification?

- According to the ISRO's Desertification & Land Degradation Atlas, around a third of India's geographical area – 97.85 million hectares – underwent land degradation during 2018-19.
- **India's national commitment:**
  - ✓ To tackle climate change submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), India aims to create an additional carbon sink of 2.5 -3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide through additional forest and tree cover by 2030.
    - During the 2005-2021 period, an additional carbon sink of 2.29 billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent has been created.
  - ✓ India has also made an ambitious commitment to restore 26 million hectares of degraded land by 2030. The GIM and allied interventions, such as the Green Wall project, are all designed to help meet these goals.
- **Projections:** It also estimates that by aligning ongoing schemes and intensifying afforestation efforts, GIM can help India expand its forest and tree cover up to 24.7 million hectares. This would be enough to achieve a carbon sink of 3.39 billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent by 2030, as per the FSI's projections.

#### Kulsi River & River Dolphins

Ignoring warnings by environmentalists, the Assam & Meghalaya governments have decided to jointly set up a 55MW hydro power project on the Kulsi river, known as a nesting ground for the endangered Ganges river dolphins.

#### About Kulsi River (Tributary of the Brahmaputra River)

Origin & River Course: **Meghalaya's West Khasi Hills** to Kamrup district of Assam. It flows in Assam before it meets the Brahmaputra.

### Kulsi River & River Dolphins: Symbiotic Relationship

- Its depth ( $\geq 2$  meters) supports aquatic biodiversity, particularly the Ganges River Dolphin. The river's turbulent waters and confluences are ideal for dolphins, which rely on echolocation due to their blindness.
  - ✓ The Kulsi River was identified by WWF-India as one of nine optimal habitats for Ganges River Dolphin conservation due to its deep waters and confluence with the Brahmaputra.
- The first-ever nationwide census of river dolphins carried out by the Dehradun-based Wildlife Institute of India (WII) counted at least 17 river dolphins in the 60kms stretch of the Kulsu.
  - ✓ The Ganges River Dolphin was designated India's National Aquatic Animal in 2009 and Assam's State Aquatic Animal.

#### Threats to Dolphins in Kulsi River:


- **Habitat Degradation:** Unregulated mechanized sand mining has reduced water levels by 70% in some areas, disrupting dolphin habitats.
- **Pollution:** Industrial effluents and agricultural runoff (e.g., organo-phosphate pesticides) contaminate the river, leading to dolphin mortalities.
- **Infrastructure Development:** The proposed 55 MW hydroelectric project on the Kulsi River threatens dolphin nesting sites and could fragment habitats.


The Mising community's folklore reveres the Kulsi River and its dolphins, fostering cultural support for conservation.

### Extra Mile: Policy and Conservation Initiatives for River Dolphins

At India Level	At International Level
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Project Dolphin (2021):</b> Launched by the Ministry of Environment, Forest &amp; Climate Change (MoEFCC).</li> <li>• <b>National Dolphin Research Centre (NDRC, 2024):</b> Inaugurated in Patna, Bihar, the NDRC is India's first dedicated facility for dolphin research.</li> <li>• <b>First Dolphin Tagging (2024):</b> The WII (Wildlife Institute of India), Assam Forest Department, and Aaranyak tagged a Ganges River Dolphin in Assam's Brahmaputra system to study its movement and habitat preferences.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The "Bogotá Declaration":</b> 11 Asian and South American countries, including India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Cambodia, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela, signed the declaration.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The declaration focuses on the <b>six surviving river dolphin species:</b> <i>Amazon, Ganges, Indus, Irrawaddy, Tucuxi, and Yangtze finless porpoise.</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>• River dolphins are listed under <b>CMS Appendix I</b> and promoting international cooperation for migratory species.</li> <li>• All river dolphin species are listed under <b>CITES Appendix I &amp; II</b>, regulating international trade to prevent poaching</li> <li>• Aligns with <b>SDG 14 (Life Below Water)</b></li> </ul>

### Species in News

<p><b>Fishing Cat</b></p> 	<p>Wildlife Institute of India (WII- Dehradun) has collared three endangered fishing cats for the first time in India to study behaviour patterns of the species, in the Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary (CWS) in the Godavari estuary.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Size and Appearance:</b> About twice the size of a domestic cat, with a muscular build and stocky legs.</li> <li>• <b>Habitat:</b> Wetlands, including mangrove forests, river valleys, and cultivated grasslands near water bodies.</li> <li>• <b>Habitat Loss:</b> Wetlands, the primary habitat of Fishing Cats, are under threat from agricultural expansion, aquaculture (e.g., shrimp farming in <b>Andhra Pradesh</b>)</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ For example, mangrove degradation in the Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary (CWS) threatens its population.</li> <li>• <b>Conservation Status:</b> Vulnerable (IUCN Red List); CITES Appendix II and Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, offering legal protection against hunting.</li> <li>✓ In Chilika Lake, the designation of Fishing Cat as “Ambassador” by Chilika Authority (CA) has fostered community pride.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Bonnet Macaques</b></p> 	<p>Kerala to seek Centre’s nod for bonnet macaque birth control programme.</p> <p>The Bonnet Macaque is endemic to southern India. Recognizable by the tuft of hair on its head (resembling a bonnet)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Distribution:</b> Peninsular India – Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Maharashtra <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Absent in forested Western Ghats core; prefers urban and semi-urban areas, temple towns, and agricultural fringes.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Religious Ties:</b> Often protected due to association with Hanuman in Hinduism.</li> <li>• <b>Omnivorous:</b> Feeds on fruits, seeds, insects, human leftovers.</li> <li>• <b>Conservation Status:</b> The Bonnet Macaque is listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List (since 2020, upgraded from Least Concern due to population declines) and is protected under Schedule II of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. It is also listed in CITES Appendix II, regulating international trade.</li> </ul>

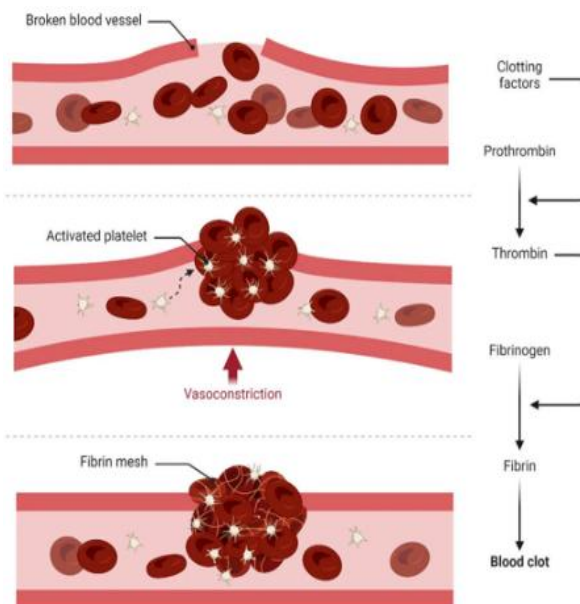
## Nanozymes To Treat Excessive Blood Clotting

Researchers at IISc- Bengaluru have developed a **novel artificial enzyme, or nanozyme**, made of vanadium pentoxide ( $V_2O_5$ ) nanoparticles to combat excessive blood clotting, a condition known as thrombosis.

- ✓ This condition, associated with disorders like pulmonary thromboembolism (**PTE**), ischemic stroke, and complications from diseases like COVID-19, can lead to life-threatening events such as heart attacks and strokes.

### Nanozymes

- These are synthetic nanoparticle enzymes designed to mimic natural enzymes in the human body to trigger or regulate biological reactions.
- The nanozyme, developed by IISC scientists, mimics **glutathione peroxidase**, a natural enzyme that reduces oxidative stress — a key trigger for abnormal blood clotting at the blood vessels.
  - ✓ **Note:** Glutathione peroxidase is an enzyme that neutralizes harmful reactive oxygen species (ROS) like peroxides in the body by converting it into harmless water molecules through redox reactions. (Reduction-oxidation)



**Blood Clotting Mechanism (*haemostasis*):** Under normal conditions, the blood clotting cascade involves platelets aggregating at injury sites, triggered by agonists like collagen and thrombin.

- ✓ However, in conditions like PTE or COVID-19, increased oxidative stress and elevated reactive oxygen species (ROS) **over-activate** platelets, leading to harmful clot formation.

Nano-materials in healthcare		
Nanoparticle type	Function/Mechanism	Application
<b>Liposomes</b>	Drug delivery: Nanoparticles that are fat-like molecules to carry and release drugs at target site	Used in cancer therapy and mRNA vaccines for targeted drug delivery
<b>Dendrimers</b>	Tree-like, branched synthetic molecules that can attach to drugs or genes	Used in gene therapy, drug delivery, and antimicrobial applications.
<b>Nanomicelles</b>	Tiny carriers formed by soap-like molecules (surfactants); help dissolve oily drugs	Improve absorption of fat-soluble drugs like cancer medicines or vitamins
<b>Carbon Nanotubes (CNTs)</b>	Hollow tubes made of rolled-up sheets of carbon atoms (graphene)	Used for drug delivery, tissue scaffolds, and biosensors.
<b>Quantum Dots</b>	Tiny crystals (trapped electrons) made of semiconductors like cadmium selenide	Used for cancer imaging and cell-level diagnostics due to their glowing property.

<b>Nanozymes</b>	Artificial enzymes made from materials like metal oxides (e.g., vanadium pentoxide)	Help neutralize harmful <u>reactive oxygen species</u> in the body and prevent clotting disorders
<b>Gold Nanoparticles</b>	Made of pure gold at nanoscale; bind to cells or molecules and absorb light	Used in diagnostics, targeted cancer therapy, and photo-thermal treatments
<b>Silver Nanoparticles</b>	Release silver ions that kill bacteria and fungi	Used in antimicrobial coatings, wound care, and infection-resistant fabrics
<b>Nanowires</b>	Wire-like structures made from metals or semiconductors like silicon or zinc oxide	Used in biosensors for glucose, gases, and temperature detection
<b>Diamondoids</b>	Cage-like carbon molecules with diamond-like structure, derived from petroleum gases	Being studied for drug delivery
<b>Graphene, Nanosheets</b>	Very thin carbon layers, one atom thick, with strong conductivity	Used in flexible devices, bio-sensing, and tissue engineering platforms

### Semaglutide Patent Infringement Case

The Delhi High Court has allowed domestic pharma company Dr. Reddy Lab to manufacture and export but not sell patented drug Semaglutide in India. **(Novo Nordisk and DRL case)**.

#### Semaglutide: Patent Timeline in India

##### Post-1990s: Epidemiological shift to life-style disorders

- Given the epidemiological shift from infectious diseases to non-communicable diseases, there is growing interest in development of new class of drugs to treat lifestyle disorders, especially anti-diabetic and anti-obesity drugs.

##### Early 2000s: Growing interest in anti-diabetic drug research

- Accordingly, **Novo Nordisk**, a danish pharma company, developed a synthetic lab-made peptide molecule called semaglutide as anti-diabetic and anti-obesity drug.
- Semaglutide belongs to a class of drugs that mimics a natural hormone GLP-1 agonists in the body which controls sugar levels, manages hunger pangs thereby acting as anti-diabetic and anti-obesity drug.

**\*\* (For more details on Semaglutide; please refer Recitals April 2025)**

##### 2004 onwards: Patent phase: Patent filing for Semaglutide

- Novo Nordisk files patent on Semaglutide in various countries including India. This provided exclusive rights of manufacture, use and sale of these drugs for 20 years. Nobody can make generic(copy-cat) versions.
- Novo Nordisk has filed 3 patents in India
  - In 2004 which expired in 2024
  - In 2006 which is about to expire in 2026
  - In 2020 which was not granted patent (due to evergreening concerns)

##### Post-2020s: Generics phase

- As the demand for anti-diabetic and anti-obesity drugs is exploding pharma majors are
  - Looking for alternatives and
  - Developing the generic version so that they will be ready to position themselves in the market upon expiry of patent.

- Accordingly, Indian Pharma majors like Dr. Reddy's laboratory (DRL), Sun pharma, Biocon etc began developing their own versions of GLP-1 drugs, including Semaglutide, to be market-ready by 2026 when the patent is set to expire.

**Today: Tussle-phase: Novo Nordisk v/s DRL case**

- Novo Nordisk files a suit seeking refrain on manufacture, use, sale and export of semaglutide.
- DRL has opposed this refrain and declared in undertaking that it is only manufacturing and not selling the drug in India.
- Besides it is exporting to countries where there is no patent on semaglutide.
- Delhi HC has
  1. Categorically disallowed sale of semaglutide in India
  2. Allowed for manufacture and export only for regulatory purposes and not for commercialisation even in those countries where there is no patent right on the drug.

**Extra-mile: Drug Patenting in India**

<b>What and Why?</b>	<p><b>What?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Patents are intellectual property rights (IPRs) that give inventors exclusive control over their inventions.</li> <li>• In case of drugs, a patent grants exclusive rights (monopoly) over manufacture, use, sell, and export the drug for a specific period.</li> </ul> <p><b>Why?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Patent rights are granted to encourage innovation, but only for a limited period to prevent anti-competitive practices and ensure larger welfare.</li> </ul>
<b>Patents in India</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intellectual property rights are protected under the Indian Patents Act, 1970.</li> <li>• Until 2005, India allowed only process patenting (protecting the method of making a drug).</li> <li>• After aligning with WTO's TRIPS agreement in 2005, India adopted product patenting — granting exclusive rights to make, use and sell the active pharmaceutical ingredient of the drug (molecule responsible for therapeutic effect) for 20 years. (Section 48).</li> <li>• During this period, the drug is often expensive to help companies recover research costs.</li> </ul>
<b>Exceptions to patent monopoly</b>	<p><b>1. Compulsory licensing for public interest</b></p> <p>If a patented drug is not made available at affordable prices, the government may allow other companies to manufacture generic versions of it without the patent holder's permission. This is called compulsory licensing and is issued by the Controller of Patents in public interest.</p> <p><b>2. Regulatory purposes</b></p> <p>Exception can also be granted to companies to manufacture the patented drugs for regulatory purposes.</p>
<b>Ever-greening</b>	<p>Companies try to extend their monopoly beyond 20 years by patenting minor changes to the original drug (e.g., new form, dosage, or method), it is called evergreening.</p> <p><b>**Section 3(d)</b> blocks such misuse and extend patent only if the change shows significant improvement in therapeutic efficacy.</p>

**Spot-scanning Proton Arc Therapy (SpArc)**

A new radiation technique developed in the US has improved precision in treating cancers.

## SPArc (Spot scanning Proton Arc Therapy): A new precision tool

### What is SPArc?

- SPArc is an advanced form of proton therapy that targets tumours with **higher precision**, particularly in anatomically complex regions around skull, brainstem, spinal cord etc.
  - ✓ SPArc improves upon traditional **Intensity Modulated Proton Therapy (IMPT)** by enhancing dose conformity, plan robustness, and delivery efficiency.

### Working

- It works by delivering proton beams spot-by-spot around the tumour, dynamically adjusting both the intensity and angle of proton beam. Hence the name spot-scanning proton arc therapy, or SPArc.

Conventional Proton therapy: SFO-IMPT	SPArc: Enhanced precision
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SFO-IMPT ((Single Field Optimised – Intensity Modulated Proton Therapy) is the current standard of proton radiation therapy for cancer care.</li> <li>• It involves fixed proton beams to kill cancer cells. It is fixed in terms of the energy level of the proton beam and the angle with which the beam is delivered to the body.</li> <li>• Thus, the radiation level cannot be controlled mid-treatment and may spill over into nearby healthy tissues especially in crowded anatomical regions like head and neck.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In contrast, SPArc allows dynamic control of both intensity of radiation and its delivery angle during treatment, reducing exposure to nearby healthy tissues.</li> <li>• SPArc is further classified into two types depending on how beam angle and intensity are controlled:                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Step-and-shoot SPArc:</b> The beam angles and energy levels are pre-programmed before treatment. Radiation is delivered one step at a time, then the machine moves to the next angle.</li> <li>2. <b>Dynamic SPArc:</b> The beam-angle and energy levels are calculated realtime as the the radiation is delivered offering highest precision.</li> </ol> </li> </ul>

## DNA Fingerprinting for Victim-identification In Air India Crash Case

DNA profiling was conducted to identify the victims of the unfortunate Air India crash using the DNA fingerprinting technique.

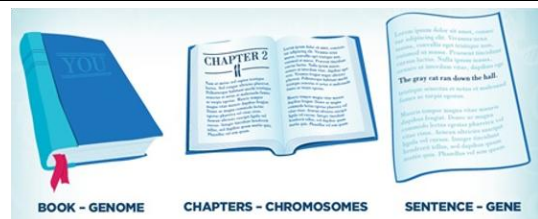
### DNA Fingerprinting

- It is a technique used to establish the unique identity of an individual at the genetic level.
- It relies on a particular type of variation present in the DNA of all individuals within a species
- The variation studied in DNA fingerprinting is called VNTR (**Variable Number of Tandem Repeats**) within the DNA of an individual.
- **Application:** Forensics; Establishing parentage and Victim identification in disasters

### Extra-mile: VNTRs and DNA Fingerprinting

#### Variations in DNA

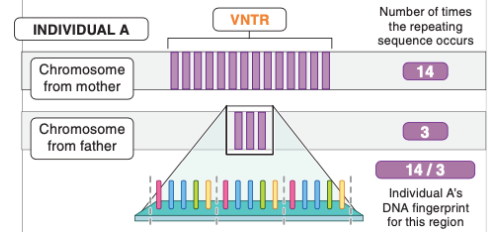
- The entire set of DNA in an organism is called the **genome**.
- DNA, the code of life, is essentially made of 4 types of **nucleotide molecules (bases)** called Adenosine, Guanine, Cytosine and Thiamine (A,G,C,T), arranged in a particular sequence like letters in a book. The size of human genome is 3-billion nucleotide sequence long.
- Individuals in humans have 99.9% identical genome to one another. Thus, even a small (0.1%) proportion of variation is huge. These variations decide the uniqueness of an individual.



- Further variations can be
  - ✓ in a single nucleotide base (Single Nucleotide Polymorphism)
  - ✓ In a sequence of bases
  - ✓ In the way nucleotide sequences are structured. (VNTRs)

**VNTRs**

- Some sequences in our genome (with about 100 bases) keep repeating again and again, like say a word 'mango' keeps on repeating in a book.
- The number of times this repetitive sequence occurs on a genome differs in unrelated individuals. These are called VNTR (variable number of tandem repeats)
- In related individuals the number of times these sequences repeat is same.
- By counting, the number of times, the repetitive sequence occurs in a chromosome (both mother's and father's versions), we can establish the identity of an individual. This is the DNA fingerprint of that individual.



**Axiom 4: India's Leap to ISS**

India made history with the Axiom-4 mission as Shubhanshu Shukla became the first Indian astronaut to reach the International Space Station (ISS) — and only the second Indian to travel to space after Rakesh Sharma in 1984.

- ✓ An Indian Airforce Captain, he will also pilot the Gaganyaan Human Spaceflight mission of India in 2027 along with another astronaut Prashant Nair, a backup crew in Axiom-4.

**Axiom 4**

- It is the 4th private spaceflight astronaut mission, of Axiom Space, launched aboard the SpaceX's Dragon crew vehicle called 'Grace' and Falcon 9 rocket.
- Axiom Space is US-based private space company building the world's 1<sup>st</sup> private space station as a successor to ISS which is set to retire by 2030.
- **International Collaboration:** The mission strengthens India-U.S. space cooperation, formalized through a Space Flight Agreement (SFA) between ISRO and Axiom Space, and aligns with the **Artemis Accords**, which India joined in 2023.
- **Significance for India:** It is a precursor to India's human space flight program, Gaganyaan, planned for 2027 launch and ambitious plan to send astronauts to moon by 2040 & its long-term goal of establishing the **Bharatiya Antariksh Station (BAS) by 2035**.
  - ✓ With the global space market projected to double by 2030, India aims to increase its share from **2% to 10%**, and missions like Ax-4 contribute to this goal by fostering private-sector innovation.

Axiom 4: Important science experiments and impact	
Area of study	Objective and Impact
Study of microorganisms & small organisms	<p><b>Cyanobacteria</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A photosynthetic bacteria will be studied for their potential to support life in space including as a source of oxygen and food.</li> <li>• To study their growth, cellular activity, and biochemical responses to microgravity.</li> </ul> <p><b>Voyager Tardigrades Experiment</b></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are small organisms known to survive in extreme conditions. Study of these organisms in microgravity conditions could offer clues to molecular mechanisms that help adapt to extreme conditions.</li> </ul>
<b>Agriculture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study of 6 crops to identify space-hardy varieties — key for long-duration human spaceflight missions like Gaganyaan, Moon, or Mars.</li> </ul>
<b>Health</b>	<p><b>Cerebral Hemodynamic Study</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To study how blood circulates in the brain under microgravity conditions.</li> <li>• This could improve our understanding of cardiovascular adaptation in space and inform medical diagnostics and treatments for conditions like stroke and hypertension on Earth.</li> </ul> <p><b>Myogenesis experiment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To study the biological pathways of muscular degeneration in space.</li> <li>• This understanding is expected to help treat people with muscle-degenerative disorder on earth.</li> </ul> <p><b>Diabetes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Currently people with insulin-dependent diabetes are not selected to be astronauts.</li> <li>• The experiment will study variations in blood-sugar levels in microgravity conditions.</li> </ul> <p><b>Miscellaneous</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In addition, experiments also relate to behaviour of cancer in low-Earth orbit, DNA repair, 3-D printed polymers etc.</li> </ul>
<b>Preparedness for future space travels</b>	Physical and cognitive impact of using computer screens in microgravity, particularly how pointing tasks, gaze fixation and rapid eye movements are affected in space.

### Voyager Tardigrades Experiment

Astronauts of Axiom-4 (Ax-4) will conduct the ‘Voyager Tardigrades experiment’ to study one of nature’s most indestructible lifeforms — tardigrades — in the harsh environment of space.

#### What are Tardigrades? (water bears or moss piglets)

- They are micro aquatic organisms, about 0.5 mm long.
- They are known for their resilience to extreme habitats from mountain tops to deep sea.
- Commonly found on thin film of water on mosses and lichens.
- They have survived for 600 million years and have outlived all five major extinction events.

#### Important characteristics

- 8 legs with claws; Specialised mouth to extract nutrients from small organisms like algae & plant cells.
- Survive extreme temperature ranges from  $-272^{\circ}\text{C}$  to  $150^{\circ}\text{C}$ .
- Endure UV radiation, space vacuum, and deep-sea pressure (up to 40,000 kilopascals)

#### Reasons for resilience

- Upon encountering harsh conditions, they slow down their metabolism ( $<0.01\%$ ) and lose their body water ( $>95\%$ ) — entering a “tun state” that protects them. They are carried by Axiom-4 astronauts in this state.

- They produce unique proteins which form gel-like structures that protect cells from damage under stress.

### Relevance

- **Biotechnology:** Insights from their proteins and genes can help build better protective biomaterials, vaccines, and advanced sunscreens.
  - ✓ The primary goal is to identify genes and molecular mechanisms responsible for tardigrades' DNA repair and resilience, such as the *TRID1 protein* and Cytoplasmic-Abundant Heat-Soluble (*CAHS proteins*), which form a gel-like matrix to protect cellular components.
- **Medical preservation:** Their ability to survive desiccation can aid in developing techniques for long-term preservation of human tissues and organs.
- **Astrobiology:** The study contributes to understanding how life might survive in extraterrestrial environments, supporting theories of panspermia (life transfer via meteorites etc).
  - ✓ The 2019 *Beresheet probe crash*, where tardigrades likely survived on the Moon, underscores their potential to persist beyond Earth.
- **Space missions:** They offer models for developing astronaut protection strategies against radiation and muscle loss in long-duration missions.
  - ✓ Tardigrades first travelled to space in 2007 aboard the European Space Agency's Foton-M3 mission.

## Natural Hydrogen: White Hydrogen

Researchers in many parts of the world are probing the feasibility of exploring natural hydrogen sources in the subsurface of earth's crust.

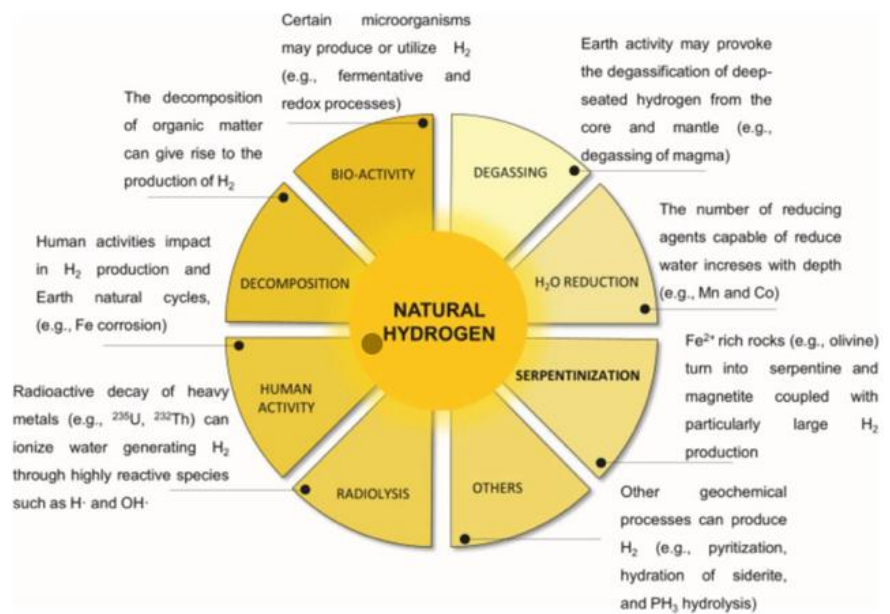
### Natural Hydrogen (Molecular Hydrogen (H<sub>2</sub>))

- It is known to be formed in certain geochemical processes that occur in the subsurface of the earth 's crust including serpentinization (breakdown of certain types of igneous rocks), radiolysis of water and fermentation.
- Unlike green hydrogen (produced via electrolysis using renewable energy) or grey/blue hydrogen (derived from fossil fuels), White Hydrogen is extracted directly from underground reservoirs, emitting no CO<sub>2</sub> during use.
  - ✓ Unlike industrially produced hydrogen (e.g., green, grey, or blue hydrogen), White Hydrogen is generated through geological processes and *requires minimal processing*, making it a game-changer in the global shift toward sustainable energy.
- **Global Discoveries:** Significant deposits have been identified in France (Lorraine basin), Mali, Australia, the United States, Russia, and Colombia, with estimates suggesting tens of billions of tons globally.
  - ✓ 2023 discovery in *France's Lorraine basin* revealed one of the largest known reservoirs, potentially worth \$92 billion.
- **India's Energy Context:** India, aiming for net-zero emissions by 2070, has prioritized clean energy through the *National Green Hydrogen Mission* (launched January 2023).
  - ✓ While the mission focuses on green hydrogen, White Hydrogen's low cost (around \$1/kg compared to \$3.5–5.5/kg for green hydrogen) and natural abundance make it a compelling alternative.

### What is Natural Hydrogen/White Hydrogen?

- It as a byproduct of certain biotic and abiotic processes in the subsurface of the earth's crust.
- The processes include
  - **Serpentinization:** Chemical change of certain low-silicate iron rock formations releasing hydrogen: A reaction between water and iron-rich **ultramafic rocks** (e.g., olivine) in the Earth's crust, producing hydrogen and magnetite. Common in tectonically active regions like mid-ocean ridges.

- **Radiolysis of water:** splitting of sub surface water molecules when subject to radioactivity underground
- **Fermentation:** Anaerobic breakdown of organic matter by certain microorganisms
- **Mantle Degassing:** Hydrogen escapes from the Earth's mantle in tectonically active zones, contributing to surface-level deposits.



- This subsurface hydrogen, if trapped before it is released to the atmosphere, is called white hydrogen.

### Kerala's Rapid Diagnostic Test for Brain-Eating Amoeba

The Kerala State Public Health Lab has developed its own molecular diagnostic test for detecting different varieties of the deadly brain-eating amoeba— a breakthrough that could reduce mortality in Meningoencephalitis cases in the state.

#### Significance of the Rapid Diagnostic Test

- So far Kerala was dependent on a facility at PGI, Chandigarh for diagnosis.
- With the development of molecular test, diagnosis can be expedited helping further reduce mortality from the deadly brain fever.
- **Early Detection and Reduced Mortality:** The test allows rapid identification of FLA (free-living amoebae) in cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) samples, enabling timely administration of drug cocktails (amphotericin B, azithromycin, miltefosine, rifampicin, and fluconazole).
- **Methodology:** The PCR-based test **amplifies DNA** from FLA in CSF samples, identifying specific genetic markers for each amoeba species.
  - ✓ Unlike traditional CSF wet mount microscopy, which offers only presumptive diagnosis, PCR provides confirmatory results within hours.

<b>Amoebic Meningoencephalitis (Amoebic brain fever)</b>
<p><b>What?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amoebic brain fever is a part of spectrum of brain diseases called Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES). (Brain tissue inflammation)</li> <li>• Meningoencephalitis is a rare but fatal condition which is characterised by inflammation of the brain, particularly the protective membranes (meninges) surrounding the brain and spinal cord.</li> </ul> <p><b>Causes &amp; Transmission</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amoebic brain fever is caused by free-living amoeba (FLA) commonly found in warm freshwater bodies like lakes, ponds and rivers, and occasionally in poorly maintained swimming pools.           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The amoeba in these water bodies enters the body through the nose, leading to brain tissue destruction. Human-to-human transmission is not known to occur.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

- The deadly FLA varieties include: *Naegleria fowleri* (most common and most fatal), *Acanthamoeba* spp., *Vermamoeba vermiformis*, *Balamuthia mandrillaris*.

#### Disease Fatality

- Globally it is known to have very high mortality rates of 97%.
- Kerala, with its early treatment protocol and **One Health** approach, has reduced the mortality rate to less than 25%.

**Note:** “**One Health**” is an integrated approach that coordinates human, animal, and environmental health responses.

### DRUM Web App

In line with the current boom in location intelligence and geospatial technology, researchers from IIT Kharagpur have developed an App for a **greener urban mobility solution**.

- ✓ DRUM app is similar to google maps but with additional features that shows the least polluted and most energy efficient routes in realtime, contributing to **SDG 11** (Sustainable Cities and Communities).

#### DRUM App (*Dynamic Route planning for Urban green Mobility*)

- It is a location intelligence system that provides users five route options: shortest, fastest, least exposure to air pollution (LEAP), least energy consumption route (LECR), and a combination of all four factors called the suggested route.
- **Technical Architecture:** The app uses GraphHopper, a Java-based routing library, for generating multiple route options, and Mapbox for real-time traffic updates.
- Pollution data is sourced from the **Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and the World Air Quality Index (AQI)**.
- **Future Developments:** DRUM 2.0 is under development, incorporating machine learning models like Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) and Prophet models to predict air quality, traffic, and energy use, enabling smarter route and departure time suggestions.

### SAHAV Digital Ocean Data Portal

On the sidelines of the Third UN Ocean Conference (UNOC3- held in Nice, France), India launched the SAHAV Digital Ocean Data Portal — a key geospatial tool to support **Marine Spatial Planning**.

- ✓ Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) is a public process that analyzes and allocates the **spatial and temporal** distribution of human activities in marine areas.

#### SAHAV

- SAHAV is a web-based, open-source (As a Digital Public Good), GIS-based decision support system jointly developed by India and Norway.
  - ✓ It is named after Sagar-Hav, meaning Ocean in Hindi and Norwegian.
- It is designed for science-based ocean management by providing real-time data on physical, chemical, biological, and geological parameters of the ocean and coastal areas.
- It integrates geospatial data from land, sea, ecology, and human activities into a single digital platform.

Location intelligence of SAHAV	
Domain	Location intelligence data
Land use	District/village boundaries, coastal infrastructure, & urban development footprints
Water Resources	Distribution of tanks, canals, and surface water bodies affecting coastal dynamics

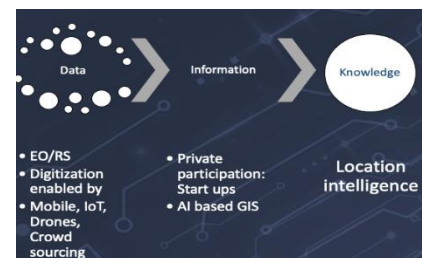
<b>Environment</b>	Water quality, marine pollution, precipitation, humidity, and ocean floor features (geomorphology)
<b>Ecology</b>	Datasets on mangroves, coral reefs, biodiversity hotspots, sandy areas, and potential fishing zones
<b>Oceanography</b>	EEZ boundary, 12/24 nautical miles, and bathymetry (sea floor depth/topography)
<b>Human activities</b>	Maritime infrastructure: ports, coastal protection structures, ocean instruments, navigation routes

### Extra-mile: Geospatial Technology and Location Intelligence

Geospatial technology product is a location intelligent decision support system that uses data from suite of technologies including remote sensing, navigation, LiDAR, communication systems to build useful GIS systems for various socio-economic solutions like urban planning, disaster response, smart agriculture, and health resource mapping etc.

#### Reason for the Recent Rise In Geospatial Technology

- The rise of mobile technology, machine-to-machine communication, IoT and faster data transmissions etc has led to massive increase in crowdsourcing of input data leading to novel location intelligence solutions.
- In addition, AI has added to building novel information systems given access to massive data due to crowdsourcing.
  - ✓ For example, DRUM App uses data from **local sensors**, air quality monitoring stations set up under National Air Quality Mission, vehicles, etc.
- Other important efforts towards democratisation of geospatial technology by India include SVAMITVA (land rights), Bhu-naksha, Geo-MGNREGA (asset tracking). Bhuvan portal, Sagarmitra (potential fishing, zones) etc.



### Advanced Liquid Cooling Systems For Data Centres

Multiple studies have highlighted the growing role of advanced liquid cooling technologies in helping the ICT industry meet its climate change goals.

- ✓ **Immersion cooling** and **direct-to-chip cooling** are emerging as critical solutions for data centres.

#### Need for Advanced Cooling Solutions for Data Centres

- **Climate target for ICT:** According to International Energy Agency (IEA) and UN digital sustainability report on AI, the ICT industry needs to cut its emission by 42% by 2030 relative to 2015 levels.
- **Emission intensity:** Cooling systems in data centres consume nearly 30–45% of total energy— as much as the computing (processors) itself, and thus a major source of emissions.
- **Data-centred living:** The rise of data-centric living — driven by AI, 5G, cloud computing, and compute-heavy GPU infrastructure — demands cleaner, more efficient cooling solutions.
- **Limitation of traditional systems:** Traditional solutions based on air-cooling systems have reached the threshold and not capable of handling high-density GPU servers and Generative AI workloads generating more heat per unit area.

#### Environmental Impact of Liquid Cooling Technologies

- Reduce Greenhouse gas emissions by over 15% & Energy use by over 15%
- Reduce Water consumption by 31-50%, which is critical given growing global water stress

Advanced Liquid Cooling Technologies		
Cooling technology	Principle/Mechanism	Advantage/Disadvantage
<b>Traditional air-cooled system</b>	Uses fans to move air across processors and components to remove heat.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cheaper but energy-intensive</li> <li>• Less efficient at high computing loads</li> <li>• Fans take up space putting a limit as the number of transistors grow.</li> </ul>
<b>Direct-to-Chip cooling system</b>	<p>Also called cold-plate system.</p> <p>Uses a cold plate as the base on which the chips are seated. The cold plates are embedded within them micro-pipes carrying coolant which carries heat to-and-fro and dumps it in a heat sink outside the chip board.</p> <p>The coolant used is <b>25% polyethylene glycol + 75% water</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transfers heat 2–5 times more efficiently than air cooling</li> <li>• Targets heat at source</li> <li>• Reduces power use.</li> <li>• Expensive</li> </ul>
<b>Immersion Cooling</b>	<p>Entire server components immersed in a <b>dielectric liquid</b> which act as coolant.</p> <p><b>Note:</b> Dielectric liquid is one that <b>does not</b> conduct electricity (<i>until a certain voltage</i>) but conducts heat.</p> <p>Thus, it can come in contact with live electronic parts without causing a <b>short circuit</b> and at the same time absorb heat from server components and circulate it out.</p> <p>Typically engineered oils or fluorocarbon-based fluids are used.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides uniform cooling</li> <li>• Lower risk of overheating</li> <li>• Silent and reliable compared to fans.</li> </ul>

### HAL To Manufacture SSLVs Independently Soon

HAL (Hindustan Aeronautics Limited) will now be manufacturing SSLV (Small Satellite Launch Vehicle), first under the guidance of ISRO, independently after two years.

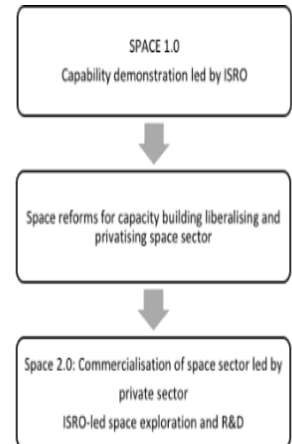
✓ Rocket technology has been transferred to HAL in line with the space sector reforms initiated in 2020.

### HAL's Dual Role and Transition to Independent Manufacturing

Technology Transfer	Manufacturing Capabilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ISRO (through <b>IN-SPACE</b>: Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre) will provide HAL with complete technical know-how, including design, production, and testing protocols. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ This builds on HAL's existing expertise in aerospace manufacturing, as seen in its production of aircraft like the <b>Tejas LCA and ALH Dhruv</b>.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HAL's infrastructure, such as its Aerospace Division in Bengaluru, is well-equipped to handle complex aerospace projects. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Its experience in <b>delivering PSLV rockets with Larsen &amp; Toubro (L&amp;T)</b> under a 2022 contract demonstrates its readiness for SSLV production</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## Commercialisation of Space Sector: Space 2.0

- Space 2.0 represents a series of steps to liberalise space sector and to throw open space sector activities including satellite manufacturing, launch capability, launch vehicle manufacturing, building spaceports etc to private sector.
- Various steps taken under space sector reforms can be classified into 4 areas
  - Liberalization of data:** Data acquired using satellites were restricted to government use. Given the rise in geospatial technology products, data is being liberalized and made freely available to private companies.
  - Liberalizing space activities:** Opening up all space activities to private sector. The technology transfer to HAL falls within this step.
  - Institutional reforms:** For provide handholding support to private sector:
    - INSpace is responsible for technology transfer and related policy framework
    - NSIL (*New Space India Limited*) is responsible for marketing of their products.
  - Space education:**
    - ✓ Programs like UNNATI are aimed at training professionals in satellite building and assembly.
    - ✓ ISRO conducts a training program on space science to school children under the banner YUVIKA



## Candida Tropicalis

Researchers have found the mechanism through which 'Candida Tropicalis' (a fungus) develops **resistance to anti-fungal drugs** such as fluconazole and voriconazole.

### Candida Tropicalis

- It is a fungal pathogen (a yeast species in the Saccharomycetales order) that causes bloodstream infections, especially in tropical and subtropical regions.
  - ✓ **Zoonotic Potential:** It causes infections in animals, such as fungal mastitis in dairy cows.
- Although not recognised as global health threat like 'Candida Auris' (a bigger concern), it is an emerging concern in healthcare setting particularly in India, China and Thailand.
- Candida tropicalis has developed *drug resistance to anti-fungal drugs* called **azoles**, due to widespread use of a class of fungicides in agriculture particularly in India.
- These pathogens alter the number of chromosomes sets which gives it an extra gene that is responsible for developing multi-drug resistance. This is called **ploidy plasticity** (chromosome plasticity)
  - ✓ **WHO's 2022 Fungal Priority Pathogens List** highlights C. tropicalis as a high-priority pathogen, urging global action to develop new antifungals and diagnostics.

## Kheer Bhawani Mela

- Kashmiri Pandits celebrated Zyestha Ashtami at the Kheer Bhawani temple at Tulmulla village in **Central Kashmir's Ganderbal district**.
- The festival, known as Kheer bhawani Mela, held every year, is the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest gathering of Hindus in Kashmir after the annual Amarnath Yatra.
- The temple constructed above a sacred spring, which is said to change its colours.
- **Goddess Ragnya Devi – an incarnation of Goddess Durga** – is the presiding deity of this temple.
- The temple gets its name from kheer, or milk and rice pudding, that pilgrims pour into the spring inside the temple complex as an offering to the goddess.
- **Maharaja Pratap Singh** built this temple in 1912, which was later renovated by Maharaja Hari Singh.
- According to mythology, **Lord Rama** worshipped the goddess during his exile.

## Bonalu Festival

- Bonalu, a traditional Hindu festival centred on the **Goddess Mahakali**, was celebrated.
- The festival is celebrated annually in the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad, and parts of Telangana.
- It is celebrated in the Hindu calendar month of **Ashada**, that falls in June/July.
- Devotess offer **Bonam** (contraction of Bhojanam, which means a meal), containing cooked rice, jaggery, curd and neem leaves to the Goddess.
- During the festival, people also hold '**rangam**' or forecasting the future.
- The **Telangana** government accorded the status of **state festival** to Bonalu after the formation of the new state in 2014.

## Buddhu Nonia

The government paid tributes to freedom fighter **Buddhu Nonia** during the **centenary celebrations** of his martyrdom and acknowledged the Nonia community's contribution to Nonia Rebellion.

### Nonia Rebellion

- The Nonia Rebellion was a series of uprisings by the **Nonia community in Bihar**, primarily between **1778 and 1800**, against the exploitative practices of the East India Company (EIC).
- The Nonia community was traditionally involved in the **production of saltpetre, a crucial ingredient in gunpowder**, which was highly valued by the EIC. The EIC, through its control of saltpetre trade, exploited the Nonias, leading to resentment and hardship among the community. Facing economic hardship and injustice, Nonias organized themselves into a rebellion, fighting against the British. The revolt primarily took place in the districts of Saran, Vaishali and Purnia, where saltpetre production was concentrated.

### Buddhu Nonia

- He was born in Begusarai, Bihar in the Nonia community.
- During the **Salt Satyagraha in 1930 started by Gandhi**, he took part in making and distributing salt, directly defying the British imposed salt tax.
- For this, he was arrested by the British and thrown into a boiling salt cauldron.

## Poson Poya

- Sri Lanka celebrated the sacred Poson Poya festival marking the **historic arrival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka**, over 2,000 years ago, in the 3rd century BC.
- Observed on the **June full moon**, the festival commemorates the **first sermon preached by Arahata Mahinda, son of Emperor Ashoka, to King Devanampiyatissa at Mihintale**, marking the arrival of Buddhism to Sri Lanka.
- The focal point of the religious festival is the Buddhist monastic complex on the **mountain of Mihintale** and around Buddhist sites in **Anuradhapura**, which was one of the first cities in Sri Lanka to convert to Buddhism.

## Centenary of a Historic Conversation

- The Prime Minister recently inaugurated the **centenary celebrations** of the historic conversation between two of India's greatest spiritual and moral leaders **Sree Narayana Guru and Mahatma Gandhi**.
- The historic conversation took place at **Sivagiri Mutt in Kerala** on **March 12, 1925**, during Gandhi's visit.
- The conversation is remembered for its deep engagement with key issues of the time-Vaikom Satyagraha, the question of religious conversions, the principle of non-violence, the abolition of untouchability, and the upliftment of marginalised communities.
- Described as a moment of moral and philosophical convergence, the 1925 meeting has since been regarded as a milestone in India's social reform movement.

## Sree Narayana Guru

- Sree Narayana Guru (1856–1928) was an Indian **social reformer, philosopher, spiritual leader and poet** from Kerala.
- He played a pivotal role in transforming Kerala's rigid caste-based society by leading a reform movement against its injustices to promote spiritual enlightenment and social equality.
- His quote "**one caste, one religion, one god for man**" defined his reform movement. He promoted education as a tool for empowerment especially the marginalized.
- In **1888**, he **consecrated a Shiva temple at Aruvippuram**, breaking traditional Brahmanical rules and asserting that spiritual liberation is not the monopoly of the upper castes.
- **Padmanabhan Palpu** founded the **Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam** in 1903, with the guidance of **Narayan Guru**. SNDP aimed to uplift the **Ezhava community** through education, economic development, and social unity.
- In 1905, Guru organised **India's first All India Industrial and Agricultural Exhibition** at Kollam.
- In 1922, under Guru's guidance the **Travancore Labour Association**, which is the first organised labour union in Kerala, was established.
- He composed **45 works in Malayalam, Sanskrit and Tamil**, which included **Atmopadesa Satakam**, a hundred-verse spiritual poem and **Daiva Dasakam**, a universal prayer in ten verses.
- He also translated three major texts, **Thirukural of Valluvar, Ishavasya Upanishad and Ozhivil Odukkam of Kannudaiya Vallalaar**.

## Vaikom Satyagraha

- The Vaikom Satyagraha was a **non-violent movement** for access to the prohibited public surroundings of the **Vaikom Temple in the Kingdom of Travancore**, that **began in 1924** and lasted for over a year.
- Most of the great temples in the princely state of Travancore had for years forbidden lower castes not just from entering, but also from walking on the surrounding roads.
- The movement demanded the right to public access to the roads around the Vaikom temple, regardless of the castes.
- The campaign was conducted and led by leaders like **T. K. Madhavan, K. Kelappan, and K. P. Kesava Menon**.
- **Mahatma Gandhi** visited Vaikom in 1925 to support the movement and played a mediating role.

- After prolonged agitation three out of the four roads around the Vaikom temple were opened to all castes in 1925.
- However, access to the fourth road and entry into the temple was allowed to people from all castes, only in 1936, after the **Temple Entry Proclamation** by the Travancore king.

### Kolhapuri Chappals

Italian luxury fashion brand Prada listed a pair of flat leather sandals for about one lakh rupees on their website. These sandals have a strong resemblance to India's age-old iconic Kolhapuri chappals.

### Kolhapuri Chappals

- These are **handcrafted unisex leather sandals** traditionally made by artisans in Maharashtra's Kolhapur.
- Believed to have originated centuries ago, these sandals are best known for their distinctive braided leather straps, intricate cutwork and craftsmanship.
- These sandals are a marker of regional identity and craftsmanship involving a **manufacturing process that is entirely manual**, involving **vegetable-tanned leather** and indigenous techniques passed down from generation to generation. In 2019, Kolhapur chappals were granted the GI tag.
- However, Kolhapuri artisans have continued to struggle with shrinking markets and competition from factory-made imitations.

### Cultural Appropriation

- Typically cultural appropriation refers to when elements of culture, particularly those of historically oppressed or colonised societies, are adopted by dominant groups without consent, credit, or compensation.
- In the world of fashion, this often translates to luxury brands borrowing indigenous motifs, crafts, and garments for profit. In this case, Prada did not mention India, Kolhapur, or the craft's artisan legacy.
- Brands like Louis Vuitton have previously featured Banarasi motifs and Indian embroidery styles in collections without direct collaboration with artisan communities.
- These controversies raise questions about cultural equity, economic justice, and who profits from indigenous heritage in the global luxury market.

### Limits of Global IP Protections

- India's Geographical Indications Act (1999) protects products like Kolhapuris within Indian territory, preventing commercial use of the term "Kolhapuri Chappal" by unauthorised producers. However, **this protection fails to extend beyond India's borders.**
- Internationally, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) is currently having discussions about protecting traditional cultural expressions and geographical indications.
- However, as of now, **there is no binding international framework that prevents the imitation of indigenous designs unless it involves trademark, copyright, or patent violation.**
- This legal grey zone allows luxury brands to replicate indigenous designs, till they avoid using protected names or misleading branding.

### Significance

- There is a growing global conversation about decolonising fashion, ethical consumption, and the rights of indigenous artisans.
- As the world increasingly values sustainable, handmade, and heritage products, ensuring that the benefits of such trends reach their original creators is **no longer just a cultural concern, but a matter of economic justice.**
- The current controversy highlights the ongoing **power imbalances in the global fashion industry** and is a reminder of how cultural heritage, when separated from its communities, becomes another commodity for profit.

- For India, it signals the continuing need to safeguard not just the products of its artisan economy, but the dignity and livelihoods of those who create them.

### Ambubachi Mela

- The Ambubachi Mela was held at the Kamakhya temple in Guwahati, Assam.
- It is an annual mela (gathering) during the **Hindu month of Ashadha**, around the middle of June. It is widely described as the **Mahakumbh of the East**.
- This mela is also known as **Ameti** or **Tantric fertility festival** since it is closely associated with Tantric Shakti cult prevalent in eastern parts of India.
- The festival celebrates the **annual menstruation of Goddess Kamakhya**, symbolizing fertility, regeneration, and the creative power of the Divine Mother.
- It is believed that during monsoon rain the creative and nurturing power of the ‘menses’ of mother Earth becomes accessible to devotees at this site during Ambubachi. The name ‘Ambubachi’ itself **translates to water flowing**.
- For three days the temple remains closed, indicating a period of rest for Mother Goddess. Moreover, there is no ploughing, sowing and other agricultural activities.
- Fragments of cloth stained with the blood-mark of the Goddess are distributed to the devotees and pilgrims preserve these in their houses as protective amulets.

### Birsa Munda

- The Prime Minister paid tributes to legendary tribal leader Birsa Munda on his 125th death anniversary, also known as **Balidan Diwas (Marty’s Day) on 9th June**.
- Birsa Munda was born into the **Munda tribe on November 15, 1875, in Ulihatu village of Bengal Presidency** now in Jharkhand.
- Known as ‘**Dharti Aaba**’ or ‘**Father of the Earth**,’ his birth anniversary is celebrated across India as **Janjatiya Gaurav Diwas**.
- Revered today as Bhagwan (Lord) Birsa Munda, he was an exceptional leader who recognised the impact of British rule on tribal traditions.
- He realised the erosion of tribal rights as a school student. His activism led to his expulsion from school in 1890.
- He led a **socio religious tribal movement** known as **Ulgulan (The Great Rebellion) in 1899** asserting tribal identity and rights over water, forests and land.
- During this uprising his followers proclaimed in their native language: “**Diku Raj Tuntu Jana – Abua Raj Ete Jana**”, meaning “**The rule of outsiders is over, our own rule has begun.**”
- He was eventually captured by the British and passed away at the young age of 25 in British custody but left behind a legacy of resistance that continues to inspire tribal and non-tribal Indians alike.
- The Ranchi jail where Birsa Munda died has since been converted into the **Birsa Munda Smriti Sangrahalaya (Memorial Museum)**.

## AWARDS/PERSONALITIES IN NEWS

### National Florence Nightingale Award 2025

- The President of India presented the National Florence Nightingale Awards for the year 2025 to 15 nursing professionals.
- The award was **instituted by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in 1973** as a mark of recognition for the meritorious services of nursing professionals to society.
- The award is given to outstanding nursing personnel employed in Central, State/UTs and Voluntary Organizations. Each award consists of a certificate of merit, cash award of Rs.1,00,000 and a medal.

### Prime Ministers Museum and Library Society

- The Prime Minister recently chaired the 47<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting of the Prime Ministers Museum and Library (PMML) Society in the **Teen Murti House** campus.
- **Teen Murti House** was the official residence of the Commander-in-Chief in India. It was designed by **Robert Tor Russel and built in 1929-30** as part of Edwin Lutyens' imperial capital.
- Post independence, it became the official residence of independent India's first PM Jawaharlal Nehru.
- After his death in 1964, the government decided to dedicate it to Nehru and converted it into a museum and a library. Formerly known as the Nehru Museum and Library Society, it is an autonomous institution under the **Ministry of Culture**.
- It is dedicated to the objective of promoting advanced research on modern and contemporary India.

### Padma Awards

- The President of India conferred Padma Awards to 69 eminent personalities for the year 2025 at Rashtrapati Bhavan.
- Of them, 3 were conferred with Padma Vibhushan, 9 with Padma Bhushan and 57 with Padma Shri.
- Instituted in **1954**, the Padma Awards are one of the highest civilian honours of India announced annually on the eve of Republic Day and are conferred by the President later.
- The Awards are given in **three categories: Padma Vibhushan** (for exceptional and distinguished service), **Padma Bhushan** (distinguished service of higher order) and **Padma Shri** (distinguished service).
- The Padma Vibhushan is the second-highest civilian award of the Republic of India, second only to the Bharat Ratna.
- The Padma award seeks to recognize achievements in all fields of activities or disciplines where an element of public service is involved viz. literature and education, arts, science and engineering, trade and industry, civil services, public affairs, sports, medicine etc.
- The awards are given on the recommendations made by the **Padma Awards Committee**, which is constituted by the Prime Minister every year. The nomination process is open to the public. Even self-nomination can be made.
- All persons without distinction of race, occupation, position or sex are eligible for these awards. However, government servants including those working with PSUs, except doctors and scientists, are not eligible for these Awards.
- The awards can also be conferred on foreigners/ NRIs/ Overseas Citizen of India (OCI).
- The award does not amount to a title and cannot be used as a suffix or prefix to the awardees' name.