



the recitals

CURRENT AFFAIRS - MARCH 2025



PM Modi Meets PM of New Zealand



Waqf Bill passed in Parliament
What happens next?



पंचायतों में महिला नेतृत्व को नई दिशा
सशक्त पंचायत-नेत्री अभियान
का शुभारंभ



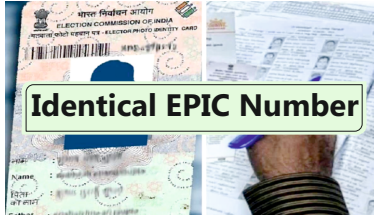
D-VOTER



Tahawwur Hussain Rana
Extradition Case



PM Modi Visit Mauritius



Identical EPIC Number



INFOSYS COUNTERSUES
COGNIZANT



**National eVidhan
Application**
Digital Legislatures
One Nation
One Application



UPI
Payments

BHIM 3.0 LAUNCHED INDIA

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- Preparation' for Rape Differs from 'Attempt' to Rape
- Advocate's (Amendment) Bill 2025
- Elected Women Representatives in Panchayats
- SC Limits Power of Arrest Under CGST, Customs Acts
- GROK AI Controversy
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Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his recent *Mann Ki Baat* address, highlighted the rising obesity crisis in India, particularly among children, noting that one in eight Indians is affected.

- He urged people to cut oil consumption by 10% each month. Following up on social media, he nominated prominent personalities to raise awareness and strengthen the fight against obesity.
- **2025 Economic Survey** recommends imposing a 'health tax' on ultra-processed foods (**UPFs**) to reduce consumption.

Defining Obesity

- Obesity is commonly measured using Body Mass Index (BMI), which is the ratio of a person's weight to their height squared.

BMI > 30 → Obese

BMI 25-30 → Overweight

- For children and adolescents (ages **5-17**), the International Obesity Task Force's weight-for-age and gender criteria are used.

Scale of Obesity in India

- The percentage of overweight/obese women rose from 20.6% (NFHS-4, 2015-16) to 24% (NFHS-5, 2019-21), while for men, it increased from 18.9% to 22.9%.
- Urban areas recorded significantly higher obesity rates than rural regions.
- **Abdominal Obesity Concerns in India**
 - A 2023 study in The Lancet Regional Health Southeast Asia found that abdominal obesity, measured by waist circumference, affected 40% of women and 12% of men.
- **Childhood Obesity on the Rise**
 - NFHS data shows that the percentage of overweight children under 5 years increased from 2.1% (2015-16) to 3.4% (2019-21).
 - Projections from the World Obesity Atlas 2022 estimate that by 2030, obesity prevalence will reach 10.8% among children aged 5-9 years and 6.23% among those aged 10-19 years.

Health Risks Associated with Obesity ("mother of all diseases")

- According to the WHO, obesity significantly increases the risk of:

Cardiovascular diseases

Diabetes

Cancer

Osteoarthritis

Impact of Childhood & adolescence Obesity

- Increased likelihood of developing **non-communicable diseases (NCDs)** earlier in life.
 - ✓ (NCDs) now account for about **60% of all deaths in India.**
- Adverse **psychosocial effects**, such as stigma, discrimination, bullying, and lower academic performance.
- Higher chances of **obesity persisting into adulthood**, leading to further health complications.

Reasons for Rising Obesity in India

- **Unhealthy Diets and Ultra-Processed Food:** These foods contribute to **visceral fat accumulation** and increase the risk of cardio-metabolic diseases.
- **Nutritional Deficiencies and Economic Barriers**

- Low-income households, especially those relying on the **public distribution system**, consume more carbohydrates (rice and wheat) due to affordability issues.
- Nutrient-rich foods like **fruits, vegetables, pulses, dairy, and animal-based foods** are expensive, making healthy eating inaccessible to many.
- While obesity is currently more prevalent among urban middle-class populations, it is rising among the **rural poor** as well.
- **Lack of Physical Activity**
 - A study in *The Lancet Global Health* found that **nearly half of all Indians** do not get sufficient physical activity.
 - Indoor sedentariness due to desk jobs and digital devices, combined with unsafe and uninviting outdoor environments, limits exercise.
 - Factors discouraging physical activity such as:
 - Lack of cycling lanes and pedestrian pathways
 - Poorly lit streets and rising crime rates
- **Environmental Factors:** Air pollution contributes to inflammation and metabolic disorders, further increasing obesity risk.
 - Without clean, green, and safe urban environments, physical activity remains difficult.

Issues in Food Labelling and Advertising

○ Regulatory challenges:

- Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has failed to implement strong food labelling and advertising regulations since 2017.
- Current regulations are **ambiguous, subjective, and industry-friendly**. No front-of-pack warning labels exist despite growing health risks.

○ The flawed Indian Nutrition Rating (INR) system:

- Proposed in September 2022 by FSSAI, **modelled after Australia's failed 'health star' system**, it assigns 1 to 5 stars to packaged foods based on nutritional content.

● Criticism:

- **Misleading consumers** by creating a false 'health halo' around unhealthy foods.
- To support the rating system, the FSSAI cited **a study from IIM Ahmedabad**, which it **never critically examined**.
- **Food industry representatives dominated** key stakeholder meetings and members of the scientific panel were sidelined.
- **FSSAI ignored its own 2021 draft regulations** indicating 'traffic light' colour-coded and mandatory warning labels and instead bowed down to industry lobbying.

■ Example of misclassification:

- **Soft drinks** with high sugar content may get 2 stars instead of a warning label.
- **Cornflakes** (high in sugar and sodium) get 3 stars, misleading consumers.

○ Ineffective advertising regulations:

- India has **laws regulating advertising of HFSS** (High Fat, Salt, Sugar) foods, but none are effective.
- **Consumer Protection Act, 2019:** Defines misleading advertisements but does not mandate nutritional disclosure.
- **National Multisectoral Action Plan (2017):** Recommended stricter HFSS advertising rules, but no action was taken.
- **Loophole:** Advertisements do not disclose sugar/salt/fat content, allowing brands to target children.

Way Forward

- **Implement clear front-of-pack warning labels:** Scrap the INR system and replace it with mandatory '**High in Sugar/Salt/Fat**' warnings as done by **Chile**
- **Define and regulate UPFs and HFSS foods:** Establish clear sugar/salt/fat limits based on WHO and Indian Council of Medical Research-National Institute of Nutrition (**ICMR-NIN**) guidelines.
- **Strengthen advertising regulations:** Amend existing laws or introduce a comprehensive advertising ban on HFSS/UPFs. Harmonize regulations across multiple laws for consistency.
- **Public awareness campaigns:** Launch a national campaign in multiple languages to educate people on the health risks of UPFs.

Obesity in India is a **policy failure**, not a public failure. **Weak and subjective labelling and advertising laws** have let junk food giants enjoy the freedom to make profits at the expense of public health.

'Preparation' for Rape Differs from 'Attempt' to Rape

A recent Supreme Court (SC) ruling has highlighted a critical legal debate regarding the distinction between "preparation" and "attempt" in cases of sexual offenses, particularly under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

Background

- The case stems from a controversial Allahabad High Court (HC) judgment that downgraded charges of attempted rape against three accused individuals, stating that their actions only constituted "preparation" and not an "attempt" to commit rape.
- The SC taking Suo motu cognizance of the case stayed the HC's decision and emphasized the need for sensitivity in handling such cases.

Preparation vs Attempt

Aspect	Preparation	Attempt
Definition	Initial stage where a person plans or arranges for committing an offence.	A stage where a person takes active steps towards committing the offence.
Legal Status	Generally, not punishable in most cases.	Punishable under law.
Key Requirement	Only planning and arranging resources without any direct action.	The accused must take an action that goes beyond preparation towards committing the offence.
Court Rulings	In <i>State of Maharashtra v. Mohd. Yakub</i> (1980), the SC held that "attempt begins where preparation ends."	In <i>Abhayanand Mishra v. State of Bihar</i> (1961), the SC ruled that an attempt requires intention, preparation, and an act in furtherance of committing the crime.

Standard Applied by the Allahabad HC

- **Reliance on English Case Law:** It referred to *Rex v. James Lloyd (1836)*, where the court held that:
 - For an assault to be classified as an attempt to rape, the accused must have **intended to gratify his passion despite resistance from the victim.**
 - **Resistance by the victim is a key factor** in determining an attempt to rape.
- **Lack of Penetration as a Factor:** Since penetration is a key element for proving rape under the IPC, the absence of such an attempt influenced the court's ruling.
- **Reduced Charges and Punishment:** The HC ruled that the accused should be tried under **Section 354B IPC (assault or use of criminal force with intent to disrobe a woman)**. The punishment for this offence ranges from **1 to 5 years of imprisonment.**

Previous Precedents

- **Rajasthan HC Ruling (May 2024):** The court applied the Lloyd test and altered an attempted rape conviction by ruling that the act did not cross the threshold of attempt. Instead, the accused was convicted under Section 354 IPC.
- **Aman Kumar & Anr v. State of Haryana (2004):** The SC adopted a similar approach, reducing an attempted rape conviction by concluding that the act did not qualify as an attempt.

Implications of the Allahabad HC Ruling

- **Lowering the Legal Threshold for Attempted Rape:** The HC has set a **restrictive precedent** on what qualifies as an attempt to rape could make it harder to convict offenders under **attempted rape provisions** in future cases.

- **Reliance on Outdated Legal Principles:** Application of the **1836 Lloyd ruling**, an **outdated standard** does not align with modern interpretations of **sexual offenses**, especially under **child protection laws** like POCSO.
- **Reduced Punishment for Sexual Offenses:** By **downgrading the charges to Section 354B IPC instead of facing up to 7 years or life imprisonment**, the accused would only face **1 to 5 years**, potentially **weakening deterrence**.
- **Potential for Misuse in Future Cases:** The ruling could be cited as a **defense strategy** in future cases.
- **Calls for a More Progressive Legal Approach:** Modern jurisprudence focuses on **the intent and substantial steps taken** toward committing a crime rather than requiring near-complete execution. A **victim-centered approach**, particularly in **child sexual abuse cases**, may lead to stricter interpretations of what constitutes an **"attempt."**

Extra Mile: Government Initiatives Undertaken for Child Safety

- 1. Legal Framework (POCSO Act, 2012):** It defines a child as anyone under 18 years. It was amended in 2019 for stricter punishment, including the death penalty. It also provides for the establishment of special courts for speedy trials. Punishments Under POCSO include-
 - ✓ **Penetrative Sexual Assault (Sec 4):** 20 years to life imprisonment.
 - ✓ **Aggravated Sexual Assault (Sec 10):** Minimum 5 years imprisonment.
 - ✓ **Child Pornography (Sec 14):** Up to 7 years imprisonment.
 ** POCSO e-Box, an online complaint box launched for children to file complaints of sexual abuse.
- 2. POCSO Rules, 2020:** provide-
 - ✓ Mandatory police verification & training for staff in child-related institutions (Rule 3).
 - ✓ Special Courts can grant interim compensation for child rehabilitation (Rule 9).
 - ✓ Immediate financial relief for basic needs via Child Welfare Committees.
- 3. Fast-Track Special Courts (FTSCs) by Department of Justice:** 754 FTSCs, including 404 exclusive POCSO Courts, are operational in 30 States/UTs. Over 3,06,000 cases disposed of by Jan 2025.
- 4. Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015** – Provides protection, rehabilitation, and reintegration for children in conflict with the law or in need of care and protection.
- 5. National Child Labour Project (NCLP)** – by the Ministry of Labour and Employment aims to rehabilitate child laborers and provide them with education and vocational training.
- 6. Awareness Campaigns:** Films, posters, and video clips are being disseminated through media. NCERT includes Childline 1098 & POCSO E-box info in schoolbooks.
- 7. e-Raksha Portal** – A Ministry of Education initiative for digital safety and cyber awareness among children.
 - ✓ **KIRAN Mental Health Helpline** – A psychological support helpline for children facing emotional distress.
- 8. Mission Vatsalya Initiatives (formerly Integrated Child Protection Scheme - ICPS):** by Ministry of Women and Child Development has organized-
 - ✓ Zonal conferences & workshops for state officials, police, and child protection bodies.
 - ✓ Sensitization programs for local governance bodies and law enforcement.
 - ✓ Regional symposiums (Vatsal Bharat) on child safety in key cities.
 - ✓ Virtual technical training Session on the Modules of Institutional and Non- Institutional Care in the Mission Vatsalya Portal for Northeastern States.
- 9. National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) Initiatives:**
 - ✓ **Digital Portals:** Baal Swaraj-POCSO tracking portal for real-time monitoring of child abuse cases.
 - ✓ **Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM):** Engaging social media platforms for blocking harmful content.
 - ✓ **Regional Meetings:** Addressing challenges in POCSO implementation and victim assistance.

10. Other Various Initiatives:

- ✓ "Operation Muskaan," also known as "Operation Smile," is a Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) initiative to locate and rehabilitate missing children.
- ✓ **PENCIL Portal** (Child Labour Tracking): Real-time reporting & tracking of child labor violations.

11. State-Level Initiatives for Child Safety:

- ✓ **Assam: Sishu Suraksha App** – Mobile app for reporting child rights violations.
- ✓ **Rajasthan & Jharkhand: Surakshit Bal Mitra Gram** – Focuses on child labor prevention.
- ✓ **Karnataka's Good Touch, Bad Touch Initiative:** Integrated into school curriculums across the state.



Advocate's (Amendment) Bill 2025

The Centre has withdrawn the Advocates (Amendment) Bill, 2025, due to strong opposition from lawyers and the Bar Council of India (BCI). A revised version will be introduced after incorporating public feedback.

Key Provisions of the Advocates (Amendment) Bill, 2025

- **Expansion of Definitions and Regulatory Reforms:**
 - **Advisory Board**, a new body was to be setup under the **Bar Council of India (BCI)** to oversee legal education, research, and professional development.
 - **Legal Practitioner** included **law graduates** engaged in legal work within **corporate entities, law firms, or public organizations**, beyond traditional courtroom roles.
 - **Misconduct** was defined as any breach of **professional conduct standards set by BCI**, enabling stricter disciplinary oversight.
 - **All-India Bar Examination (AIBE)** or other tests were made mandatory for both **enrollment and continuation in practice**.
 - **Verification Certificate by State Bar Councils (SBCs)** were to be issued to conduct **five-yearly verification** of advocates' credentials, place of practice, and qualifications.
- **Structural Changes in Bar Councils:**
 - **It proposed expansion of SBCs** to include more states and **new election regulations** to enhance transparency.
 - **Disqualification for Elections:** It banned advocates with **criminal convictions (minimum three-year sentence)** or pending **misconduct cases** from contesting elections. However, BCI may allow candidates if falsely implicated.
 - **Gender Inclusion & Government Representation:** It proposed-
 - At least **two eminent women advocates** to be co-opted in **BCI**.
 - Up to **three members nominated by the Central Government** in **BCI**
- Section 49B, granting Centre the power to issue binding directions, set eligibility criteria, and regulate BCI's oversight of State bar councils.

About the Advocates (Amendment) Bill, 2025

- ◉ It was a proposed set of changes to the original Advocates Act of 1961
 - » The Advocates Act, 1961 regulates legal practice and the conduct of advocates in India. It also established the All-India Bar and State Bar Councils.

Objectives of the Bill

- ◉ **Modernizing Legal Profession:** to align with current needs and global best practices.
- ◉ **Improving Legal Education:** to enhance the quality of legal education and training.
- ◉ **Raising Professional Standards:** to ensure lawyers are well-equipped for a rapidly changing world.
- ◉ **Fairness and Accessibility:** to make the legal profession fair, transparent, and accessible to all.

- **Strengthening Legal Education and Standards:** It proposed centers of **Legal Education to be BCI-approved** and undergo **periodic inspections**.
 - Allowed recognition of foreign **law degrees** subject to **reciprocal agreements and compliance** with Indian standards.
 - Mandated newly enrolled advocates to complete **up to one year** of post-enrollment apprenticeship.
- **Mandatory Registration with Bar Associations:** was proposed for advocates where they practice and update their registration upon changing location or practice area.
- **Disciplinary Reforms & Ethical Regulations:** It proposed **BCI and SBCs to act on misconduct cases within one month and resolve the cases within two years**. Failure at the end of SBCs would have led to the transfer of such cases to **BCI**.
 - **Frivolous complaints** attracted **up to ₹50,000 in penalties**.
 - Advocates found guilty of **misconduct** were proposed to be **fined up to ₹3 lakh**.
 - A new **independent body to investigate corruption** allegations against BCI members was to be setup.
- **Restrictions on Lawyers' Right to Protest:** A contentious provision in the draft bill sought to prohibit lawyers from calling for boycotts or abstaining from court work terming it as deemed misconduct. However, **symbolic one-day protests for professional grievances were allowed**.
- **Regulation of Law Firms & Non-Practicing Advocates:** **BCI will regulate law firms**, including those **operating across multiple states**. **Non-practicing advocates may lose voting rights** in Bar Council elections.
 - **Practicing law without proper enrollment** will attract a **penalty of up to one year in prison and/or a fine of ₹2 lakh**.
- **Digitalization & Financial Assistance:** **SBCs must maintain digital records** of all advocates for easy verification. BCI and State Bar Councils can **receive funding from government and non-government sources** to support advocate welfare schemes and legal aid programs.

Concerns Raised Regarding the Bill

- **Threat to Autonomy of the BCI:** by allowing the central government to nominate up to three members to BCI.
- **Restrictions on Lawyers' Right to Protest:** Restricting strikes & protests violated fundamental rights under Article 19 of the Constitution (freedom of speech & expression).
- **Expanded Definition of 'Legal Practitioner':** included individuals working with *foreign law firms and corporate entities*. Questions were raised about whether this would grant in-house counsel the right of the audience before courts and tribunals and whether legal privilege would extend to their advice.
 - ✓ While some welcomed the potential for foreign investment and expertise, BCI and others expressed concerns about the impact on domestic lawyers and the need to protect their interests.
 - ✓ **BCI v. A.K. Balaji (2018) case:** SC upheld the restriction on foreign law firms and lawyers practicing in Indian courts, whether for litigation or non-litigation purposes, unless they comply with the Advocates Act, 1961, and the BCI rules.
- **Lack of Adequate Consultation:** The legal fraternity expressed concerns over the perceived haste in introducing the bill without thorough consultation. The opposition party criticized the bill as "poorly drafted" and emphasized the need for proper forums to address lawyers' grievances.
- **Redundancy of State Bar Councils:** Expansion of the BCI's authority, including the power to hear misconduct complaints nationwide and dissolve SBCs deemed ineffective. This was seen as making SBCs redundant and undermining the federal structure of the Advocates Act. SBCs feared that their autonomy and authority would be diminished, reducing them to mere administrative bodies.
- **Definition of "Misconduct":** The broad and vague definitions of "misconduct," raised concerns about potential misuse and arbitrary application.

- **Liability for Loss:** Making advocates liable for "loss" suffered by clients, potentially leading to misconduct complaints if a client lost a case. This provision was criticized for potentially holding lawyers responsible for outcomes beyond their control and opening the door to frivolous complaints.

Way Forward

- **Inclusive Consultation:** Government should engage with Bar Councils, legal experts, and advocates to incorporate their concerns.
 - ✓ Conduct public discussions and parliamentary scrutiny before reintroducing the bill.
- **Preserving BCI Autonomy:** Ensuring no undue government interference in the BCI's functioning. Strengthening internal governance within BCI to ensure ethical and professional standards.
- **Balancing Regulation & Rights:** by addressing misconduct issues without restricting lawyers' right to protest. Lawyers should have the right to express dissent, but excessive disruptions in court proceedings should be addressed through ethical guidelines, not prohibitive laws.
- **Protecting Domestic Practitioners:** by clearly defining "legal practitioners" to safeguard Indian lawyers' interests. Domestic lawyers should be given opportunities to upgrade their skills through exposure to international legal standards.
- **Focus on Judicial Reforms:** by aligning amendments with broader legal sector improvements, including legal education and access to justice.



Elected Women Representatives in Panchayats

A Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) committee submitted its report on "Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) in Panchayats."

- ✓ The committee set up in 2023 following a 2023 Supreme Court (SC) order, conducted regional workshops with participants from 14 states.

Key Findings of the Report

- This report identified that despite constitutional mandates for women's political participation, EWRs in panchayats often face systemic barriers such as official bias, patriarchal norms, and weak deterrent laws that allow male relatives to act as proxies.
- Based on these findings, the ministry plans to introduce policy interventions, structural reforms, and exemplary penalties to stop practices like 'Pradhan Pati', 'Sarpanch Pati', and 'Mukhiya Pati'.

About Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) in Panchayats

- The 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendment Acts, enacted during P V Narasimha Rao's government, mandated the reservation of one-third of seats for women in PRIs and offices of the chairperson at all levels of Panchayati Raj institutions (Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti, and Zila Parishad) and in urban local bodies respectively.
 - Article 243D and Article 243T ensure women's participation in rural and urban governance.
 - 21 states and 2 UTs increased the reservation from 33% to 50%.
 - Nari Shakti Vandan Adhinyam mandates 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, further strengthening gender-inclusive governance.
 - The reservation has significantly influenced **local governance, gender equality, and grassroots democracy**
- 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts** established local self-governance in **rural and urban India**, respectively, by adding **Part IX (Panchayats)** and **Part IXA (Municipalities)** to the Constitution.

Advantages of Reservation	Challenges Faced by EWRs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced Representation & Gender Equality: With over 1.45 million women holding 46.6% of local governance seats, India ranks high in women's participation in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of Political Experience and Training: Many new EWRs enter their roles with little exposure or practical knowledge of governance. This leads to ill-equipped decision-making processes. • Dependence on Male Guidance (Pradhan Pati Syndrome)

<p>local governance. This led to increased interventions in domestic violence and child marriage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved Local Governance & Policy Outcomes: Women-led panchayats drive more inclusive decision-making and efficient resource use. A 2010 study across 11 states found that villages with women leaders experienced lower corruption and made better investments in key services such as water, sanitation, education, and roads, leading to more gender-sensitive policies. • Strengthened Citizen Participation: Women leaders foster effective crisis management during COVID-19 through migrant tracking, arranging medical support, and more demonstrates their agile and responsive governance. • Leadership Opportunities & Role Models: Successful leaders like Chavvi Rajawat, India's first MBA Sarpanch from Soda Village (Tonk District) in Rajasthan, serve as powerful role models. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A 2008 survey of three villages in Punjab found that 75% of elected female representatives in village panchayats are run by proxy participants or their husbands. • Gender-Based Discrimination: Women often face exclusion during official and informal meetings. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A report from Kerala found that despite constituting 54% of the total number of elected members in local governance, women did not seem to be part of the decision-making process. • Entrenched Patriarchal Norms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ In 2022, reports of husbands/ male family members taking oath instead of the elected women representatives came out from Madhya Pradesh. • Political Pressure and Coercion: Women representatives may face overt or covert threats, coercion, and even violence from political opponents or dominant local groups. Tactics such as using “No Confidence Motions” to remove them further exacerbate their vulnerability. • Socio-Economic Disadvantages: Many women in local governance, often from marginalized groups (Scheduled Caste (SC)/Scheduled Tribe (ST), minority, or disability categories), face additional socio-economic and cultural challenges. Heavy <i>domestic and caregiving responsibilities</i> further limit their opportunities for full political engagement. • Structural Issues: Digital literacy in India is highly gendered, influenced by caste and class dynamics. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Women are 7% less likely to own a mobile phone and 26% less likely to use mobile internet, limiting their digital empowerment.
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Structural Reforms Needed Beyond Symbolic Measures

- **Training and Mentorship:** To equip women with the skills required for effective governance. Setting up local centres that offer ongoing training, legal advice, and technical support.
- **Legal and Policy Frameworks:** Clear, exemplary penalties would help ensure that male relatives do not usurp the roles meant for women. Extending the duration of reserved seats to allow women sufficient time to learn, grow, and establish themselves as independent decision-makers.
- **Digital Empowerment:** Promoting use of AI and digital platforms to provide real-time governance and legal support.
 - ✓ Digital Sakhi Initiative (Maharashtra) trained women to use banking and governance apps, enabling their financial independence.
- **Institutional Support Structures:** Establishing federations of women panchayat leaders would facilitate peer learning and enhance collective bargaining power in local governance.
 - All-women panchayats (e.g., Manje Raj Panchayat in Maharashtra and Kultikri Gram Panchayat in West Bengal) demonstrate that structural reforms can lead to enhanced participation and improved socio-economic outcomes.
- **Dedicated Oversight Bodies:** like an independent task force or monitoring committee can be formed including representatives from civil society, women leaders, and local governance experts for tracking the progress of the MoPR recommendations.

- **Transparency:** Regular progress reports, Periodic Audits and Field Visits and public disclosures can help ensure transparency and accountability. Digital platforms and AI-based monitoring tools can be developed to track real-time progress, document cases of proxy leadership, and gather feedback from women representatives.

- ✓ Platforms like Meghalaya’s e-Governance initiatives, such as the e-District project and MeghAbility which demonstrate the use of technology to streamline operations and improve *accessibility for diverse groups*, including marginalized communities, can be adapted for women-led panchayats.
- ✓ Odisha’s Gender-Responsive Budgeting Initiative tracks fund utilization under women-led governance.

Extra Mile: Sashakt Panchayat-Netri Abhiyan

The **Ministry of Panchayati Raj** recently launched the “**Sashakt Panchayat-Netri Abhiyan**” at a National Workshop of Women Elected Representatives in New Delhi, attended by over **1,200 women Panchayat leaders**.

About Sashakt Panchayat-Netri Abhiyan

It is a **capacity-building initiative** aimed at empowering **Women Elected Representatives (WERs)** of **Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)**

Objectives & Purpose

- ① Strengthens women leaders' roles in **grassroots governance**.
- ② Focuses on building leadership skills and boosting **confidence** in WERs.
- ③ Encourages women to exercise **independent authority** and minimize male interference in decision-making.

Key Features

- ① **Specialized training modules** for WERs in Panchayati Raj Institutions.
- ② The **Primer for Panchayat Representatives on “Laws Addressing Gender-Based Violence and Harmful Practices”**(2025) was launched by United Nations Population Fund (**UNFPA**) and **Ministry of Panchayati Raj**.
 - › It aims to educate locally elected representatives and the public about key laws addressing **Domestic violence; Dowry; Workplace sexual harassment; Child sexual abuse; Child marriage; Gender-biased sex selection; Human trafficking; Technology-facilitated gender-based violence**.
 - › It equips Panchayat leaders to challenge social norms that perpetuate gender inequality and violence, promoting proactive intervention at the grassroots level.
- ③ **Outstanding women leaders were felicitated** for their contributions to rural governance.
- ③ **Two panel discussions** included:
 - › **Women’s Participation and Leadership in PRIs** – Exploring how female representation is reshaping rural governance.
 - › **Women-Led Local Governance** – Highlighting sectoral interventions in **health, education, safety, economic opportunities, and digital transformation**.

Significance

- ① Promotes inclusive development through women-led governance.
- ② Empowers women to actively implement schemes like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Ujjwala, and PM Awas Yojana.

Challenges Addressed

- ① Tackles the “Mukhiya Pati” and proxy leadership culture to ensure real empowerment of elected women leaders.
- ② Encourages WERs to focus on financial independence and decision-making.

- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Channels could be created for continuous feedback from elected women representatives, local communities, and civil society organizations. This could include annual surveys, public consultations, and the proposed annual award for Anti-Pradhan Pati champions as an incentive for best practices.

MoPR Efforts to Strengthen EWRs in PRIs

- **Capacity Building & Leadership Development:** by conducting workshops, conferences, and expert group discussions on women empowerment and leadership. It is also issuing advisories to states based on best practices and recommendations.
- **Enhancing Participation in Governance:** by advising states to hold separate Ward Sabha and Mahila Sabha meetings before Gram Sabha sessions and encouraging greater participation of women in Gram Sabha meetings and Panchayat decision-making.
- **Digital Empowerment through e-Governance:** by implementing **Mission Mode Project on e-Panchayat (MMP-ePanchayat)** under Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyaan (RGSA) for digitalizing Panchayats. It has launched

eGramSwaraj (<https://egramswaraj.gov.in>) for transparent planning, progress tracking, financial management, and asset details.

- **Financial Reforms & Transparency:** It has rolled out **AuditOnline** (<https://auditonline.gov.in>) for real-time auditing of Panchayat accounts, ensuring transparency and accountability. It has also integrated **eGramSwaraj** with **Public Financial Management System (PFMS)** for real-time vendor payments (₹1.74 lakh crore transacted).



SC Limits Power of Arrest Under CGST, Customs Acts

In a landmark judgment, the Supreme Court (SC) in *Radhika Agarwal v. Union of India* curtailed the arbitrary arrest powers of tax officers under the Central Goods and Services Tax (CGST) Act, 2017, and the Customs Act, 1962.

- ✓ The ruling mandates stricter safeguards to prevent misuse of arrest provisions, ensuring alignment with constitutional rights (Article 21/22) and procedural fairness.
- ✓ This move curbs misuse of arrest provisions and aligns with the SC's broader efforts to limit prosecuting agencies' powers, as seen in *Arvind Kejriwal v. Directorate of Enforcement (2025)*, where similar restrictions were imposed on the ED under the PMLA.

Background

- The case originated from a series of petitions challenging the constitutional validity of certain provisions in the CGST and Customs Acts, particularly Sections 69 and 70 of the CGST Act.
- Petitioners argued that these sections granted tax authorities unchecked powers to arrest individuals without adequate safeguards, potentially infringing upon fundamental rights guaranteed under Articles 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty) and Article 22 (Protection from Arbitrary Arrest) of the Constitution.


Key Limitations Imposed by the SC

- **Procedural Parity with Criminal Law:** Officers must adhere to CrPC safeguards, including:
 - Producing the arrestee before a magistrate within 24 hours of arrest to prevent prolonged detention without judicial scrutiny.
 - Informing family/friends of the arrest and allowing legal counsel during interrogation.
 - Providing written grounds for arrest to the accused to ensure transparency.
 - ✓ This transparency is critical for the arrestee to challenge the arrest or seek bail, reinforcing the protection of personal liberty.
- The ruling aligns with India's **Taxpayer's Charter (2020)**, which emphasizes fairness and transparency.
- **Evidence Threshold:** Arrests require material evidence demonstrating guilt, not mere suspicion. Officers must document all evidence, including exculpatory material, and record "reasons to believe" in writing before arrest.
- **Classification of Offenses:**
 - **Cognizable Offenses** (e.g., smuggling, duty evasion over ₹50 lakh under Customs Act) permit warrantless arrests.
 - **Non-cognizable Offenses** (minor violations) require a magistrate's warrant, aligning with *Om Prakash v. Union of India (2011)*.
- **Ban on Coercive Tactics:** Tax authorities cannot use arrest threats to compel tax payments without adjudication. Affected taxpayers may seek refunds, and errant officers face disciplinary action.
- **Judicial Oversight:** Courts can scrutinize arrest reasons for arbitrariness, ensuring compliance with constitutional rights under Articles 21 and 22.


Implications of the Ruling

- **Strengthened Individual Rights:** By safeguarding individuals against arbitrary detention.
 - ✓ Prevents overreach by tax officers, similar to *Journalist Vinod Dua v. Union of India (2021)*, where SC emphasized protection from misuse of legal provisions.
- **Enhanced Accountability and Transparency:** Detailed documentation and the requirement to record “reasons to believe” compel tax authorities to justify each arrest, thereby reducing the risk of coercive or unjust practices.
- **Business Confidence:** Taxpayers gain clarity: arrests are reserved for willful evasion (e.g., fake invoices, smuggling) rather than procedural lapses.
 - ✓ India’s reforms bring its taxation framework closer to OECD guidelines on fair tax enforcement.
 - ✓ Encourages decriminalization of minor tax offenses, a key recommendation by NITI Aayog and the Finance Ministry.

Thus, the SC’s decision reinforces that while tax officials retain the power to arrest under the Customs and GST Acts, such power is now tightly bound by constitutional safeguards and procedural norms, ensuring that enforcement does not trample individual rights.



Analysis of Judgement



- **Balancing Enforcement and Rights:** While the judgment upholds the legitimate power to arrest for serious tax offences, it stresses that such power must be exercised with due process, mirroring earlier rulings (e.g., *Om Prakash and Arvind Kejriwal v. Directorate of Enforcement*) to prevent abuse.
- **Shift in Legal Framework:** The judgment effectively modifies the earlier interpretation that allowed arrests without a warrant for certain offences, by emphasizing that only those offences explicitly reclassified as cognizable and non-bailable under recent amendments justify warrantless arrests.
- **Limited Judicial Review:** Courts will now focus on statutory compliance rather than reassessing the sufficiency of the officer's evidence, ensuring that the decision to arrest is reviewed only when there is manifest arbitrariness or mala fide intent.
 - This prevents judicial overreach into executive functions but also limits relief avenues for accused individuals, especially in complex tax cases where interpretations of evidence vary.
- **Implementation:** Tax departments may struggle with evidence-gathering protocols, potentially delaying high-stakes fraud investigations.
- **Judicial Burden:** Courts may face increased bail petitions and challenges to arrest validity.



GROK AI Controversy

Grok 3, an AI chatbot has ignited discussions about artificial intelligence (AI), free speech, and accountability in India due to its **unfiltered responses**, including the use of Hindi slang and politically sensitive remarks.

What is Grok 3?

- Developed by xAI, a company founded by Elon Musk, Grok 3 is a generative AI chatbot launched in February 2025 as the most advanced AI model designed to provide helpful and truthful answers while focusing on reasoning, problem-solving, and understanding complex topics.
- A major upgrade from Grok 2, with significant improvements in performance, it has been described as “an order of magnitude more capable” than its predecessor with enhanced computational power (which houses approximately 200K GPUs) and improved training methods for better responses.

What Distinguishes Grok from Other AI Chatbots?

- **Truth-Seeking Focus:** Grok is built with an explicit goal of pursuing “maximally helpful and truthful” answers, often avoiding overly cautious responses common in other models.
 - ✓ **Potential Issue:** This approach raises concerns about ethical AI governance.
- **Advanced Reasoning Abilities:** Unlike many chatbots that rely heavily on pattern-matching, Grok 3 emphasizes step-by-step reasoning. It can break down complex questions, explore multiple solution paths, and self-correct errors, making it particularly strong in math, science, and logic-based tasks.

- **Massive Computational Backbone:** Trained on xAI's Colossus supercomputer with over 100,000 Nvidia GPUs, Grok 3 leverages a scale of computing power that outstrips many competitors.
 - ✓ This raises concerns about the monopoly of AI computing power, as only a few tech giants (xAI, OpenAI, Google, Microsoft) have access to such resources.
- **DeepSearch Integration:** Unlike other chatbots that rely on pre-trained data, Grok can dynamically fetch and analyze real-time information from **X (Twitter)**, giving it a unique edge in news, stock markets, and social discourse analysis.
- **Unfiltered Perspective:** While other AIs like ChatGPT might lean toward neutrality or heavy moderation, Grok's unfiltered tone is witty, irreverent, and less constrained by corporate guardrails.
- **Iterative Improvement:** While competitors like OpenAI or Google iterate more gradually, Grok's upgrades (e.g., a tenfold capability jump from Grok 2 to 3) reflect an aggressive pursuit of AI supremacy.
- **Subscription-Based Access & Monetization Strategy:** Unlike OpenAI's ChatGPT Plus (\$20/month) or Google's Gemini Advanced, Grok is currently free for X Premium+ subscribers and has a SuperGrok paid tier for advanced features.

What is the Legal Context of AI-Generated Responses and Free Speech?

- **No Inherent Free Speech Rights:** AI chatbots, as non-human entities, are not granted **free speech rights** like individuals.
- **Application of Legal Frameworks:** AI outputs are evaluated under existing legal restrictions on speech. If the content crosses constitutional limits or other legal boundaries, it may be subject to regulation or penalties.
- **Accountability of Deployers:** If an AI system, like Grok, produces abusive or unlawful content due to negligent moderation, its deployers can be held liable.
- **Balancing Innovation and Regulation:** The debate centers on ensuring that while AI-generated speech remains innovative, it must not breach the permissible restrictions defined by law.

Are there any Legal Precedents regarding the Liability for AI-Generated Speech?

Yes, in a landmark ruling in 2024, a civil court ordered Air Canada to honor a false refund policy generated by its AI chatbot. The court held Air Canada responsible, treating the AI chatbot as a publisher.

Best Possible Ways to put a check on AI Chatbots

- **Understanding the Vulnerabilities & Risk Mitigation:** Chatbots are susceptible to "jailbreaks," where users exploit weaknesses to bypass safeguards, leading to rule-breaking outputs. Developers must conduct thorough risk assessments to identify and address potential vulnerabilities.
- **Transparency:** By disclosing details about training datasets and ensuring their diversity, developers can mitigate inherent biases and reduce the risk of problematic outputs.
- **Regular Red-Teaming** exercises, where internal or external experts deliberately try to provoke the AI into breaking its rules, can uncover weaknesses before they are exploited in the wild.
- **Stress Testing:** It should be an ongoing process, ensuring that the chatbot remains robust against new forms of prompt engineering and exploitation tactics.
- **Feedback Loops:** Creating mechanisms for users and moderators to report problematic responses.
- **Clear Guidelines** that define permissible outputs and the legal boundaries of AI-generated content
- **Safe Harbour Provisions** can be explored similar to those for online platforms, to provide a framework where compliance with due diligence protocols can offer legal protection.



Uttarakhand (U.P. Zamindari Abolition & Land Reforms Act, 1950) Amendment Bill, 2025

The Uttarakhand Legislative Assembly passed the Uttarakhand (Uttar Pradesh Zamindari Abolition and Land Reforms Act, 1950) Amendment Bill, 2025, which will ban non-residents from buying agricultural and horticultural land in 11 of the state's 13 districts.

- ✓ In 2003, then Uttarakhand Chief Minister N D Tiwari introduced the first-ever limit on non-residents purchasing land in the state's hilly areas under the Congress government.

About Uttarakhand (U.P. Zamindari Abolition and Land Reforms Act, 1950) Amendment Bill, 2025

The new amendment bill introduces **sweeping changes** to regulate land ownership by non-residents and industrial entities in order to protect local interests while balancing economic growth.

Objectives

- **Preserve Local Interests:** by protecting agricultural and horticultural land from being acquired by non-residents/outside, preserving the rights of local residents and safeguarding Uttarakhand's cultural identity.
- **Curb Land Mafias:** by addressing rampant exploitation of land laws by non-residents and preventing speculative buying by land mafias.
- **Promote Sustainable Development:** by balancing environmental preservation with economic growth and regulating industrial and commercial land use.
- **Strengthen Land Management:** by ensuring proper utilization of land through stricter oversight and prevent misuse of purchased land.

Key Features

- **Ban on Non-Resident Agricultural Purchases:** Non-residents cannot buy agricultural/horticultural land in 11 districts (excludes Haridwar and Udham Singh Nagar). In exempted districts, state government approval is required for such purchases. These two districts remain open for such transactions due to their industrial importance. The restriction aims to prevent exploitation of fertile lands in the hill districts.
- **Reinstatement of Ceiling on Industrial/Tourism Land:** Maximum 12.5 acres allowed for industries, tourism, etc., in 11 districts. Additional land can only be acquired with state government approval.
- **Land Limits:** Non-residents can buy up to 250 square meters (sqm) for residential use (only once per family) with an affidavit confirming no prior purchase beyond this limit in Uttarakhand. Land bought for commercial purposes must be used within 3 years; else, ownership reverts to the state.
- **Mandatory Digital Records:** A dedicated portal will record all land transactions involving outsiders, ensuring transparency and preventing unauthorized sales
- **Leasing Provisions:** It allows leasing of land for 30 years for agriculture, horticulture, alternate energy sources etc.
- **Strict Regulatory Framework:** Detailed documentation and compliance measures, to ensure transparency and accountability. It replaces district magistrate approvals with state government sanctions for land transfers beyond limits.
- **Clear Eligibility Criteria:** It sets out definitions and eligibility criteria to determine who qualifies as a local resident.
- **Land Use Restrictions in Municipal Areas:** Can only be used as per designated purposes; violations will result in forfeiture to the government.

Implications

<u>Positive Implications</u>	<u>Negative Implications</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Restricted Land Sales to Outsiders: protects local farmers' access to land.• Centralized Oversight and Transparency: Mandatory affidavits for buyers outside municipal areas seek to prevent fraudulent purchases.• Repeal of Controversial 2017 Amendments that allowed unlimited land acquisitions for industrial projects, reinstating a 12.5-acre ceiling for such projects in most districts.• Price Stabilization: Restricting outsider purchases could slow land price inflation, making property more affordable for locals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Loopholes in Exempted Districts: Haridwar and Udham Singh Nagar—home to fertile agricultural land risk exploitation of prime resources.• Leasing Loopholes: 30-year leases for agricultural, horticultural, and renewable energy projects could enable de facto control by outsiders despite ownership restrictions.• Economic Growth Concerns: Centralizing approval authority may deter investors due to bureaucratic delays and politicized decision-making. Sectors like tourism and renewable energy could face hurdles in acquiring land.• Incomplete Land Reforms: The Bill lacks measures to resolve systemic issues like outdated land records and disputes over 88,141 hectares of unproductive land. Opposition leaders demand comprehensive reforms, including updated "chakbandi" (land consolidation).• Political Distrust: The rushed passage without committee scrutiny and exemptions for BJP strongholds (e.g., Haridwar) have fueled allegations of favoritism toward industrial lobbies.



Can Lokpal Probe Complaints Against HC Judges?

A Special Bench of the Supreme Court (SC) appointed an amicus to assist in a case questioning whether the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013, extends the anti-corruption ombudsman's jurisdiction to probe allegations against sitting High Court (HC) judges.

Case Background

- The issue came to the forefront when the Lokpal led by former SC judge A.M. Khanwilkar, issued an order in January 2025 stating that judges of HCs established by Acts of Parliament fell within the ambit of Section 14 of the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act.
 - The order was issued when two complaints were filed against a HC judge, alleging he influenced cases involving a company that was his client when he was an advocate. The order only addressed the question of its jurisdiction over HC judges and the merits of the complaint.
- This move was seen as an expansion of the Lokpal's mandate, potentially intruding into areas traditionally governed by judicial accountability mechanisms.
 - Article 50 mandates separation of the judiciary from the executive, reinforcing why judges are held accountable through judicial mechanisms like impeachment (Article 124(4)) and the in-house procedure set by the Supreme Court.
- In response, the Supreme Court took up the matter *Suo moto* and later stayed the Lokpal's order, pending further review.
 - ✓ **Suo moto jurisdiction, a facet of Article 32** allows the SC to take up cases **on its own**, without a formal petition, in matters of **public interest, fundamental rights violations, or urgent judicial intervention**.

- ✓ **The Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968** governs complaints against SC and HC judges, indicating a separate legal framework for judicial accountability.
- ✓ **The Second Judges Case (1993)** emphasized judicial independence, making the appointment and oversight of judges the judiciary's domain, not the executive's.
- Various stakeholders, including legal experts and judiciary members, expressed concern that allowing an external body to investigate sitting judges could upset the balance between accountability and judicial independence.

About the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013

It was enacted to establish an independent anti-corruption authority, **Lokpal**, at the national level and **Lokayuktas** in the states to investigate allegations of corruption against public officials.

- ✓ This act was a direct outcome of civil society movements, notably the Anna Hazare-led **anti-corruption movement (2011)**, which demanded a strong institutional framework to tackle corruption.

Key Provisions of the Act

- **Establishment of Lokpal and Lokayuktas.**
- **Structure of the Lokpal:** The Lokpal consists of a **Chairperson and up to 8 members** (50% must be judicial members, and 50% must be from SC/ST/OBC, minorities, or women categories).
 - ✓ The Chairperson is a **former Chief Justice of India, Supreme Court judge, or an eminent person** with expertise in anti-corruption, law, or public administration- appointed on the recommendation of a selection committee comprising of - **the Prime Minister (PM), Speaker of Lok Sabha, Leader of Opposition (LoP), Chief Justice of India (CJI) (or nominee), and an eminent jurist.**
- **Jurisdiction and Scope (Section 14):** It covers **PM, Ministers, Members of Parliament, public servants, and officers from Group A, B, C, and D** of the Central Government.
 - **Exception:** The Prime Minister is covered except in cases related to national security, foreign policy, atomic energy etc.
 - The Lokpal can also probe chairpersons and officers of **government-financed bodies and NGOs receiving significant foreign donations.**
- **Inquiry and Investigation Powers:** Lokpal has an **Inquiry Wing** to conduct **preliminary inquiries** and a **Prosecution Wing** for legal proceedings.
 - It has the **power to approve prosecution, conduct search and seizure, provisionally attach assets,** and confiscate properties acquired through corruption.
- **Special Courts:** The Act mandates the creation of **Special Courts** to ensure swift trials for corruption cases.
- **Protection of Whistleblowers (under the Whistleblower Protection Act, 2014):** It provides safeguards to whistleblowers who report corruption.
- **Complaint Mechanism:** Citizens can file complaints against corrupt officials.
 - The Act penalizes **false complaints** with imprisonment and fines.
- **Independence and Financial Autonomy:** Lokpal's budget is charged to the **Consolidated Fund of India** to ensure financial independence.
- **Accountability and Reports:** Lokpal must **submit annual reports** to the President, which are tabled in Parliament.

What was the Rationale of Lokpal Behind Issuing the Order?

- **Legal Interpretation:** The Lokpal was of the opinion that while **Section 14** of the Act defines "public servant," it does not explicitly include judges. However, **Section 14 (f)** covers officials of **autonomous bodies established by an Act of Parliament.**

- **SC Exclusion:** In January 2025, Lokpal has dismissed a complaint against former CJI D.Y. Chandrachud. on the basis that it cannot investigate SC judges since the SC was established under Article 124 of the Constitution, not an Act of Parliament.
- **HC Inclusion:** The Lokpal distinguished HC judges, noting that several HCs were established and restructured under Acts predating the Constitution (e.g., High Courts Act, 1861, and Government of India Act, 1935). Since the General Clauses Act, 1897 considers pre-Constitution laws as Acts of Parliament, the Lokpal argued that HC judges fall within its ambit.
- **Cautious Approach:** The Lokpal asserted that HC judges fall under the term "any person" but acknowledged that investigating them would require probing judicial conduct. Citing the K. Veeraswami ruling, it cautiously deferred the matter to the CJI for guidance before proceeding.

In *K. Veeraswami v. Union of India (1991)*, the SC held that while judges are "public servants" under the Prevention of Corruption Act, criminal proceedings against them require prior sanction from the President after consultation with the Chief Justice of India (CJI). This ensures protection against frivolous accusations.

Can Complaints Be Filed Against Judges?

Yes, complaints can be filed against judges, but there are legal safeguards to prevent frivolous prosecutions which include:

- **Judicial Immunity: Section 77 of IPC (1860) / Section 15 of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)** provide that Judges **cannot be prosecuted** for actions taken in their **official capacity**.
- **K. Veeraswami Case (1991): mandates prior sanction from the President.** The **CJI's advice is binding** on the President.
- **Distinction from Impeachment: Filing a criminal case** requires **CJI's consultation** and **Presidential approval** while **impeachment** of a judge follows a **Parliamentary approval process**.

SC's View

- **Overreach of Powers:** The SC has expressed reservations over the Lokpal's unilateral decision to extend its jurisdiction to High Court judges. The Court is wary that such an extension could infringe on the independence of the judiciary. The SC is of view that Judges are already subject to an '**internal accountability system**' under the judiciary.
- **Procedure and Precedents:** The Court questioned whether the procedure followed in issuing the Lokpal's order was appropriate, given that complaints against sitting judges traditionally follow a separate route that respects the internal accountability of the judiciary i.e. through internal procedures and mechanisms like the collegium system or specific disciplinary bodies.
 - Example: In 2019, Justice Narayan Shukla (Allahabad HC) was found guilty of misconduct by an in-house inquiry panel.
- **Legislative vs. Judicial Processes:** Allowing the Lokpal to probe against sitting judges would effectively bypass these established judicial accountability mechanisms and it may violate the doctrine of separation of powers (SOP) principle.
 - Critics argue that this not only disrupts the balance of power but could also be used as a tool for political or extrajudicial pressures.



Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2025

Parliament recently passed the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2025 which was re-introduced as UMEED (Unified Waqf Management, Empowerment, Efficiency, and Development) Act.

Background

- The Waqf (Amendment) Bill 2025 was originally introduced in August 2023. It seeks to amend the Waqf Act, 1995 with the aim to enhance **Waqf property management** by improving transparency, governance, and coordination with local authorities.
- Following Opposition criticism, it was referred to the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC), which cleared 14 amendments (proposed by the ruling party) and rejected 44 Opposition amendments. The committee submitted its report in February 2025 which was soon approved by the Union Cabinet.
- The bill was reintroduced in the houses as UMEED Act and after a heated debate in both the houses of the parliament, it was finally passed.

Key Changes Proposed in the Revised Bill

Changes	2024 Version of the Bill	Revised Bill (2025)
'Waqf by User' Doctrine	Abolished the principle recognizing properties as waqf based on long-term religious or charitable use.	Retains 'waqf by user' for properties registered before enactment of Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025 <u>unless disputed or classified as government property.</u>
Collector's Role in Surveys	Allowed the District Collector to conduct surveys of waqf properties.	Mandates that a senior officer <u>above the rank of Collector</u> will conduct inquiries into government properties claimed as waqf. ✓ Until a final decision is made, such disputed properties will be treated as government land.
Practicing Islam Requirement for Donors	Only a person practicing Islam for at least five years could create waqf.	Requires donors to 'show or demonstrate' Islamic practice for five years and prove no contrivance in property dedication.
Legal Proceedings & Six-Month Limitation	No legal proceedings for waqf rights allowed beyond six months after enactment of Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025.	Courts can hear cases beyond six months if applicants show valid reasons for the delay in filing the application.
Waqf-alal-Aulad	Stated that creating waqf-alal-aulad shall not result in <i>denial of inheritance</i> rights of heirs, including women, of the waqif. ✓ Waqf-alal-aulad is a specific form of Islamic endowment where the revenue generated from a property is aimed at supporting the descendants of the donors. 'Waqif' is a person who creates a Waqf for the beneficiary.	Creation of a waqf-alal-aulad shall not result in denial of inheritance rights of heirs, including women heirs, of the waqif or any other rights of persons with lawful claims.
Inclusion of Non-Muslims in Waqf Institutions	Allowed non-Muslims in key waqf institutions, such as the <u>Central Waqf Council, State Waqf Boards and Waqf Tribunals.</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandates at least two non-Muslim members in both the Central Waqf Council and State Waqf Boards. • Removes the requirement for a waqf board's CEO to be Muslim.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires a Joint Secretary-level officer handling waqf matters to be on the Waqf Board.
Composition of Waqf Tribunals	The composition was changed from a three-member body to a two-member body consisting of a district judge and an officer of joint secretary rank to the State government.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expanded to a three-member body comprising a district judge, a joint secretary-level officer from the State government, and an expert in Muslim law and jurisprudence. Existing tribunals can continue functioning until current members' tenure expires.
Mandatory Registration Portal	Required all waqf properties to be registered on a central portal within six months of the law's commencement.	Allows tribunals to extend the six-month registration deadline if a valid reason is provided by the muttawali (custodian).

Benefits of Proposed Amendments	Concerns Raised
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased Transparency & Accountability: Stricter regulations for Waqf property management reduces the chances of mismanagement and encroachments. Mandating senior government officers to oversee Waqf property surveys also enhances credibility and prevents arbitrary claims. Judicial Oversight & Legal Clarity: The bill ensures that legal proceedings related to Waqf properties follow a prescribed time limit, preventing indefinite disputes. <u>Allowing <i>appeals to HCs against tribunal decisions provides an additional layer of judicial review.</i></u> Inclusivity in Waqf Governance: Mandating women representation in Waqf Boards, promotes gender inclusivity in decision-making and the inclusion of non-Muslim members will help bring diverse expertise and ensure transparency in financial management. Protection of Government-Owned Land: Investigation of properties claimed as Waqf by senior government officers, will help reduce potential wrongful claims over public land. Flexibility in Compliance: by allowing waqf tribunals to extend deadlines for property registration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over Government Control: Critics argue that giving the government more authority over Waqf properties weakens the autonomy of the Muslim community in managing its religious endowments and may lead to politically motivated decisions. Uncertainty Over Historical Waqf Properties: The Bill restricts the 'waqf by user' doctrine to only pre-registered properties, leaving ambiguity over historical properties used for religious purposes but not formally registered. Representation Issues: The provision allowing non-Muslim members and a non-Muslim CEO in Waqf Boards is seen by critics as interference in community affairs, potentially undermining the management by Muslims. Stricter Donor Eligibility: The requirement that a donor must be a practicing Muslim raises concerns over religious scrutiny and subjectivity in defining who qualifies as a practicing Muslim. Political and Social Backlash: The Bill has been widely criticized by opposition parties and Muslim organizations, with allegations that it aims to weaken Waqf governance and diminish minority rights. Critics argue that it sets a precedent for state intervention in religious endowments, which could extend to other communities in the future.

{For more information on Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024, please refer to The Recitals- August 2024}

Extra Mile: Mussalman Wakf (Repeal) Bill, 2024

Parliament also gave its approval to the Mussalman Wakf (Repeal) Bill, 2025 which seeks to repeal the Mussalman Wakf Act, 1923 with the aim to eliminate redundancy and streamline wakf administration under a unified legal framework.

- The 1923 Act governed the management, accounting, and publication of wakf properties dedicated by Muslims for religious, pious, or charitable purposes under Muslim law. However, it did not apply to wakfs covered under the Waqf Act, 1995.



In-House Enquiry against HC Judge

The Chief Justice India (CJI) has formed an in-house committee to investigate misconduct allegations against Delhi High Court (HC) judge Justice Yashwant Varma following the discovery of large sums of cash at his residence during a fire-control operation.

Case Background

- **Fire Incident & Discovery of Cash:** A fire broke out at Justice Yashwant Varma's residence where the fire-control personnel discovered large amounts of burnt cash in the storeroom.
- **Preliminary Inquiry:** The Chief Justice of the Delhi HC conducted an initial inquiry and reported to the CJI that a deeper investigation was necessary after seeking Justice Varma's response who denied any knowledge of the cash, stating neither he nor his family placed it there. He also claimed they were not shown the burnt sacks of money during the fire-control operation.
- **Further Actions Taken:** Justice Varma's judicial work has been withdrawn, he has been transferred to his parent Allahabad High Court by the collegium and a three-member committee has been constituted by the Supreme Court (SC) for an in-depth investigation including-
 - The Chief Justice of Punjab & Haryana HC.
 - The Chief Justice of Himachal Pradesh HC.
 - A Judge of the Karnataka HC.

What is an In-house Procedure?

- The in-house procedure is a non-statutory, confidential mechanism developed by the SC to deal with complaints against sitting judges of the SC and HCs without resorting to impeachment under Articles 124(4) and 217(1)(b) of the Constitution.
- The SC developed an in-house procedure in 1999 to investigate complaints of alleged misconduct against judges of higher judiciary. It was made public in 2014.

Evolution of the In-House Procedure

- **Initial Need for an Internal Mechanism (1995):** was sparked by allegations of financial impropriety against Bombay HC Chief Justice A.M. Bhattacharjee. In *C. Ravichandran Iyer v. Justice A.M. Bhattacharjee*, the SC observed a yawning gap between proved misbehaviour and bad conduct inconsistent with the high office.
- **Formation of the In-House Procedure (1997-1999):** A five-member committee comprising of senior most HC chief justices was constituted by the SC to create a procedure for addressing judicial misconduct. The report was submitted in 1997 and adopted with amendments in 1999.
 - ✓ This procedure provided a structured approach for handling complaints against judges internally.
- **Revision After Sexual Harassment Case (2014):** A complaint of sexual harassment by a Madhya Pradesh Additional District Judge led to a review of the process and the following process evolved-

- **Receipt of Complaint:** A complaint against a judge can be received by Chief Justice (CJ) of a HC, CJI or President of India. If received by the CJ of HC or the President, it is forwarded to the CJI for further examination.
- **Preliminary Assessment by the CJI:** The CJI can dismiss the complaint at any stage if it is deemed frivolous or lacks merit. If the complaint appears serious, the CJI may seek a preliminary report from the CJ of the concerned HC to verify its credibility.
- **Formation of Inquiry Committee:** If the preliminary report suggests a deeper probe, the CJI examines the report and the judge's response. The CJI then forms a three-member inquiry committee:
 - **For HC Judges:** comprising of **two Chief Justices from other HC and one HC Judge.**
 - **For HC Chief Justices:** comprising of **one SC Judge and two Chief Justices of other HCs.**
 - **For SC Judges:** comprising of **three SC Judges.**
- **Inquiry and Investigation:** The committee determines its own procedure following the principles of natural justice (ensuring the accused judge has a chance to respond). After the inquiry, the committee submits a detailed report to the CJI.
- **Possible Outcomes:** If misconduct is not serious, the judge is informed accordingly otherwise the judge is asked to resign or retire voluntarily.
 - If the judge refuses to resign, the President and Prime Minister are informed for Parliament to initiate removal under constitutional provisions.
 - **Justice Soumitra Sen Case (2011):** The in-house committee (constituted under the Judges Inquiry Act 1968) found him guilty of financial misconduct, which led to impeachment proceedings in Parliament.

Strengths and Challenges of the In-House Procedure

Strengths	Challenges & Criticism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Maintains Judicial Independence: Prevents political and executive interference in judicial matters. ● Ensures Confidentiality: Protects the reputation of judges in case of baseless allegations. ● Faster than Impeachment: Offers a quicker mechanism to deal with misconduct before it escalates. ● Institutional Integrity: Reinforces the credibility of the judiciary by allowing self-regulation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lack of Transparency: Since the findings are not made public, it raises concerns about opaque decision-making. ● No Direct Punitive Power: The procedure cannot remove a judge; it can only recommend resignation or refer the case for impeachment. ● Judges Investigating Judges: Critics argue this leads to soft inquiries, and there is no external oversight. ● Limited Public Trust

Removal of a Judge Under the Indian Constitution

- **Constitutional Basis:** **Article 124(4)** (for SC judges) and **Article 218** (for HC judges) provide for the procedure to be followed for the removal of judges from office through parliamentary proceedings.
- **Grounds for Removal:** A judge can be removed only for **“proved misbehaviour”** or **“incapacity”**.
- **Role of the President:** The **President can remove a judge** only after **receiving an address from both Houses of Parliament**.
- **Parliamentary Approval:** The removal motion must be:
 - **Supported by a majority** of the **total membership** of each House.
 - **Approved by at least two-thirds** of the members **present and voting** in each House.
- **Same Session Requirement:** The motion must be passed in **both Houses during the same parliamentary session** before being sent to the **President for final approval**.

Suggested Reforms for Judicial Accountability

- **Transparency in In-House Inquiries:** Currently, in-house inquiry details are confidential. Key findings should be disclosed to enhance public trust and transparency.
- **Criminal Accountability for Judges:** No judge has faced criminal punishment even after being found guilty of misconduct. Legal provisions must be introduced to hold guilty judges criminally accountable.
- **Establishment of an Independent Judicial Oversight Body:** The UK has the 'Judicial Conduct Investigations Office', an autonomous body for judicial misconduct investigations. India should create a similar independent body under the CJI's supervision for continuous oversight and inquiry into judicial misconduct.
- **Reforming the Collegium System for Judicial Appointments:** A broad-based National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) can be reintroduced headed by the CJI and including representatives from legislature, lawyer associations, and academia. To maintain judicial independence, CJI and senior judges can also be given veto power.



Quality of Public Expenditure Index

The RBI has developed a **Quality of Public Expenditure (QPE) index** to assess how efficiently the Centre and State government are spending public funds.

Quality of Public Expenditure (QPE) Index

Any one variable — say, fiscal deficit or capital expenditure — will never be able to capture the full story about the QPE. Thus, the RBI has **used the data since 1991 to create the QPE index** for both the Centre and states. The index is based on **five variables**:

- **Capital outlay to GDP ratio:** The money set aside by governments towards building physical infrastructure, expressed as a percentage of GDP. The higher the ratio the better the QPE.
- **Revenue expenditure to capital outlay ratio:** This captures the relative weight of the two kinds of expenditures; the lower the value of this ratio the better the QPE.
- **Development expenditure to GDP ratio:** Development expenditure is a broad term that refers to all public expenditure that is intended to stimulate *economic growth* by enhancing the economy's stock of **production factors** (land, labour, capital and entrepreneurship)
 - The most frequently cited categories include education and training, public infrastructure investments, R&D (which drives technological advancement and innovation), and healthcare (which boosts both the size and productivity of the labour force by extending the span of healthy life).

Background: Over the past two decades, there have been two standout trends.

Push for fiscal discipline	Push for higher capital expenditure (Capex)
<p>To limit the tendency in government to overspend — financed by over borrowings — India instituted prudential norms in 2003 often called the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM Act), which stated two things:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▣ The fiscal deficit should ideally not exceed 3% of GDP. ▣ The revenue deficit should be zero. <p>The idea behind these two requirements was that the government should only borrow for capital expenditure (and not for paying higher salaries and other everyday spending).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▣ It is also important to note that India has now shifted to targeting overall debt (add up all the past deficits) as a percentage of GDP — instead of an individual year's fiscal deficit — as a way to maintain fiscal discipline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▣ Capex is the kind of expenditure that boosts productive capacity of the economy. For example, paying salaries is "revenue" or "current" expenditure while building a road is capital expenditure. ▣ There has been a growing realisation that India needs to boost its physical infrastructure in order to be able to grow fast. ▣ The whole point behind these two shifts is to improve the QPE, as that results in better outcomes of citizens both in terms of economic growth as well as social metrics such as health and education. ▣ However, in the same period India has also faced several crises such as the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 and the technical recession during the Covid-induced lockdowns of 2020. ▣ Moreover, there has been an increasing tendency to either waive loans or provide more handouts in the form of direct cash transfers and other "freebies" such as free electricity. All of these, in turn, hurt QPE

- In some cases, even subsidies — particularly those aimed at improving nutrition, such as food subsidies — are also considered part of development expenditure as they bring long-term welfare gains. A higher ratio indicates improved economic productivity.
- **Development expenditure to government's total expenditure Ratio:** The higher the value of this ratio the better is QPE.
- **Interest payments to total government expenditure ratio:** Interest payments increase if governments have high deficits in the preceding years. A lower value of this ratio shows better QPE.

India's Performance

- In Charts 1 and 2, the RBI captures the net effect of all these factors on the quality of public spending since economic reforms (1991) in India.
- The RBI has broken the whole period — 1991 to now — in six phases illustrating how structural forces have shaped the QPE at both levels of government.

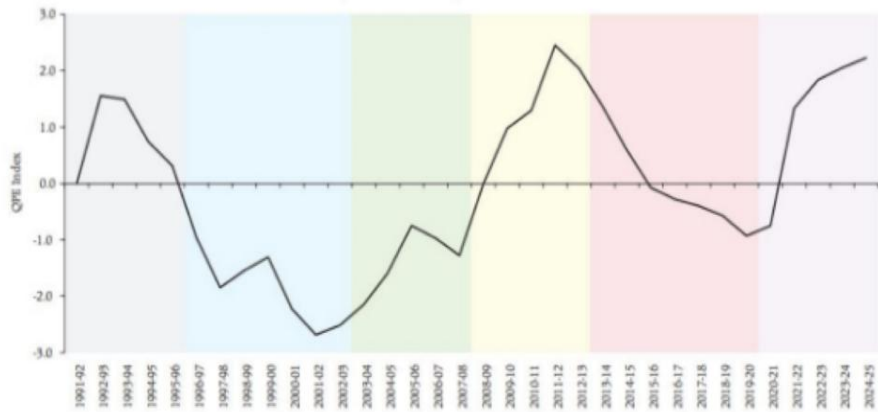


Chart 1: Quality of Public Expenditure index for the Centre. The six colour bands denote the six phases. Source: RBI estimates

- **First Phase (1991–1997):** The Centre's index (Chart 1) showed a slight improvement, while the States' index (Chart 2) declined modestly.
 - These movements were driven by the fiscal pressures faced by both levels of government. Public investment fell as fiscal consolidation took priority.

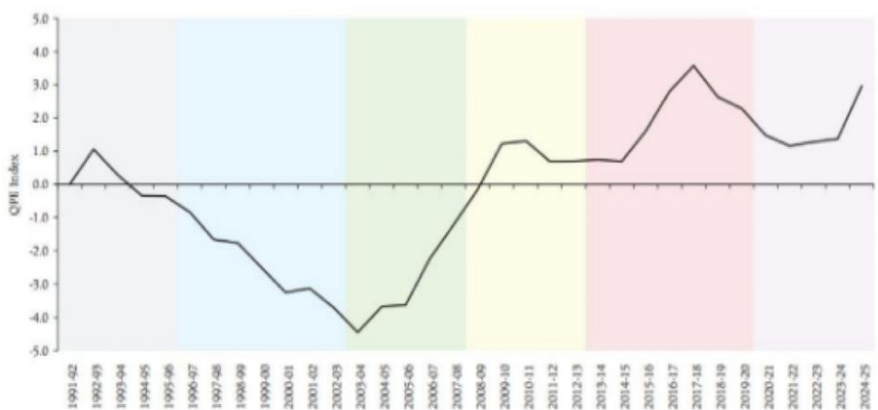


Chart 2: Quality of Public Expenditure index for the States. The six colour bands denote the six phases. Source: RBI estimates

- **Second Phase (1997–2003):** Both indices experienced a sharp decline, reflecting the combined impact of the Fifth Pay Commission implementation, rising interest payments, and the continued dominance of revenue expenditure over capital outlay.
- **Third Phase (2003–2008):** This phase shows the positive effects of both fiscal discipline (as FRBM Act (2003) started guiding government borrowing) and fast economic growth making more money available for spending.
 - States also benefited from higher fiscal devolution (higher share in taxes).
 - The index rebounds sharply until the world is hit by Global Financial Crisis (GFC) of 2008.
- **Fourth Phase (2008–2013):** GFC pushed the Centre to adopt countercyclical fiscal measures, including stimulus packages.
 - Governments, especially the Centre had to spend more in order to counter the slowdown and hurt caused by the GFC.

- While this continued to push up the index during this phase, higher spending levels resulted in higher deficits, and it eventually started eroding the QPE.
- **Fifth Phase (2013–2019):** The trajectory of the index went in opposite directions for the Centre and the states.
 - The QPE saw an improvement in states with improvements in development spending as well as more money being available to them due to the recommendations of the 14th Finance Commission.
 - The Centre further faced challenges with GST revenue sharing initially favouring the states.
- **Sixth Phase (2019–2025):** It is marked by another crisis (Covid pandemic) and another bump of fiscal stimulus. However economic recovery especially driven by the increased focus on capital expenditure helped to push up the QPE.
 - At the moment, the QPE in India (both at Centre and state levels) is close to the highest point they have ever been since the start of economic liberalisation in 1991.

Recent QPE Trends

According to Economic Survey 2024-25, government Capex increased 8.2% YoY (Year-over-year). Union Budget 2025-26 has allocated Rs 11.21 lakh crore for capital expenditure (3.1% of GDP) in FY 2025-26.

Future Outlook

- **Sustaining Capex Growth** in infrastructure, renewable energy, and digital transformation.
- **Balancing Welfare & Development Spending** ensuring social schemes do not outweigh productive investments.
- **Enhancing Fiscal Federalism** – Strengthening Centre-state financial coordination.
- **Maintaining Fiscal Discipline** – Keeping borrowing under control while ensuring growth
- **Strengthening Transparency and Monitoring** – Using data-driven governance models.



PM Modi's Visit to Mauritius

PM Modi visited Mauritius. He was the Chief Guest at Mauritius' National Day celebrations on March 12. This was his second visit since 2015.

Key Outcomes of PM Modi's Visit to Mauritius

- **Elevation of Bilateral Ties** - India and Mauritius elevated their relationship to an 'Enhanced Strategic Partnership'.
- **Strengthening Economic & Trade Cooperation**
 - Agreements signed to promote the use of national currencies for cross-border trade.
 - Expansion of cooperation in MSME sector.
 - *Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA):* India's first trade agreement with an African country to be fully leveraged for expanding bilateral trade.
 - Local currency settlement mechanism (INR & Mauritian Rupee) to facilitate bilateral trade and reduce dependency on USD.
 - Mauritius positioned as a gateway for Indian businesses to Africa.

Why Mauritius is Significant for India?

1. Strategic Location in the Indian Ocean

- Mauritius is a key maritime partner for India in the western Indian Ocean.
- The country plays a vital role in India's **Vision SAGAR**
- India's presence in **Agaléga island** enhances regional security and maritime surveillance.

2. Diplomatic and Political Engagement

- India established **diplomatic relations with Mauritius in 1948**, one of the first few post-independence engagements.

3. Countering China's Influence

- In February 2024, India and Mauritius inaugurated the **Agaléga airstrip and jetty projects**, boosting connectivity.
- India's presence in **Agaléga** helps counter China's growing influence in the **Indian Ocean Region**.
- Facilities in Agaléga aid **Mauritian maritime security**, preventing piracy, drug trafficking, and illegal fishing.

- **Maritime Security & Defence Collaboration**
 - India reaffirmed commitment to securing Mauritius' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).
 - Assistance in Coast Guard modernization, a police academy, and a National Maritime Information Sharing Centre.
 - Cooperation on white shipping, blue economy, and hydrography.
- **Launch of MAHASAGAR Vision**
 - PM Modi unveiled MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions).
 - It builds upon India's **SAGAR** (*Security and Growth for All in the Region*) policy for the Indian Ocean.
 - It focuses on trade, sustainable development, security, technology sharing, and concessional financing.
- **India's Development Assistance to Mauritius**
 - India to help construct a new Parliament building in Mauritius as a gift from the 'Mother of Democracy'.
 - Mauritius received support in education, healthcare, space, and financial sectors.
 - New commitments:
 - ✓ 100 electric buses with charging infrastructure.
 - ✓ 100 km water pipeline replacement under India's first INR-denominated Line of Credit.
 - ✓ Redevelopment of Ganga Talao Spiritual Sanctuary with Indian grant assistance.
 - UPI and Rupay Card introduced to promote business and tourism.
- **Space & Climate Change Cooperation**
 - Development and launch of India-Mauritius Satellite with training for Mauritian scientists.
 - Disaster preparedness & weather forecasting systems supported by ISRO and Ministry of Earth Sciences.
- **Health & Education**
 - Expansion of Jan Aushadhi Kendras (first overseas Indian generic medicine outlets) across Mauritius.
 - Sharing expertise on drug de-addiction and rehabilitation
 - Appreciation for the setting-up of an Ayush Centre of Excellence in Mauritius.
- **Chagos Islands & Diplomatic Support**
 - India reaffirmed respect for Mauritius' sovereignty over Chagos Islands.
 - Support for a mutually beneficial agreement between Mauritius and the UK on the Chagos Islands.

India-Mauritius Bilateral Ties

- **Indian Development Projects**
 - ▶ India has provided nearly \$1.1 billion in development assistance to Mauritius over the last decade, including \$729 million in lines of credit and \$427 million in grants.
 - ▶ India has funded major projects like **Metro Express, Supreme Court, ENT Hospital, and Social Housing Units.**
- **India as a First Responder**
 - ▶ India has consistently supported Mauritius during crises, including the Covid-19 pandemic, **the Wakashio oil spill in 2020**, reinforcing its role as a reliable partner.
 - ▶ India was the **1st responder** during **Cyclone Chido** in 2024, using Agaléga's facilities
- **Trade and Investment**
 - ▶ India is amongst the largest trading partners of Mauritius. Mauritius is the second largest source of FDI into India for FY 2023-24, after Singapore.
 - ▶ The two countries signed the **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement in 2021**, India's first trade deal with an African nation.
 - ▶ Several Indian PSUs, including Bank of Baroda, LIC, and NBCC, operate in Mauritius.
- **Capacity Building and Education**
 - ▶ Mauritius is a significant beneficiary of India's ITEC programme, with around 4,940 Mauritians trained since 2002-03.
 - ▶ Additionally, 2,300 Indian students are pursuing higher education in Mauritius in fields such as medicine, hotel management, and business studies.
- **Cultural and Historical Connections**
 - ▶ **70% of Mauritius' population** is of Indian origin, tracing back to indentured laborers under British rule.
 - ▶ Mahatma Gandhi's visit in 1901 influenced Mauritius' freedom movement and its **National Day (March 12)** marks his **Dandi March anniversary.**
 - ▶ The recent visit will highlight the legacy of Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, whose ancestors were from Bihar, and celebrate shared cultural traditions, including Maha Shivratri and the Ganga Talao pilgrimage site.

- **Cultural & People-to-People Ties**

- Announcement of facilities for Char Dham Yatra and Ramayana trail for Mauritius citizens.
- Collaboration on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) for human development.
- Jointly inaugurated the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Institute of Public Service and Innovation in Mauritius.



India-Russia Arctic Conference

- Speaking at an India-Russia Arctic conference, Russian Ambassador to India emphasized India's growing role in the Arctic as a **stabilizing force** amid rising militarization by NATO countries.
- The conference was organized by Vivekananda International Foundation and The Northern Forum of Russia.

Key Highlights

- **India-Russia Scientific Collaboration in the Arctic**

- Russian Ambassador highlighted areas of bilateral research cooperation, including climate change, atmospheric studies, geosciences, glaciology, and polar biology.
- Indian scientists are also studying the Arctic's influence on South Asian monsoons.
- Institutions like the Arctic and Antarctic Research Institute (Russia) and the Indian National Centre for Polar and Oceanic Research (NCPOR) are actively collaborating, supported by a 2024 memorandum on Arctic research.

- **Energy and Mineral Resource Cooperation**

- Both countries are exploring joint ventures in Arctic energy and mineral resource extraction.

- **Utilisation of the Northern Sea Route (NSR)**

India's Strategic and Economic Interests in the Arctic

- India's 2022 Arctic Policy takes a whole-of-government approach, focusing on climate, economy, and governance.
 - However, it overlooks rising militarization and great power rivalries.
- **Economic Opportunities in the Arctic**
 - The melting Arctic ice is reshaping global shipping routes.
 - While the NSR offers limited advantages for India, linking the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) with Russia's Unified Deep-Water System (UDWS) could reduce costs and stimulate hinterland development.
 - Additionally, the Chennai-Vladivostok Eastern Maritime Corridor aims to integrate with the NSR, potentially cutting travel time to Europe by two weeks.
- **Countering China's Expanding Presence**
 - China is aggressively investing in the Russian Arctic, particularly in energy and infrastructure, under its Polar Silk Road initiative.
 - With a US\$10 billion investment, China's growing presence threatens India's strategic and economic interests.
- **Navigating Geopolitical Dynamics**
 - The Arctic is becoming a strategic battleground, with China asserting itself as a "near-Arctic state."
 - While India's policy emphasizes sustainability, it must also strengthen strategic autonomy through diversified partnerships.
 - By engaging in Arctic affairs, India can protect its energy security and assert influence in a multipolar world order.

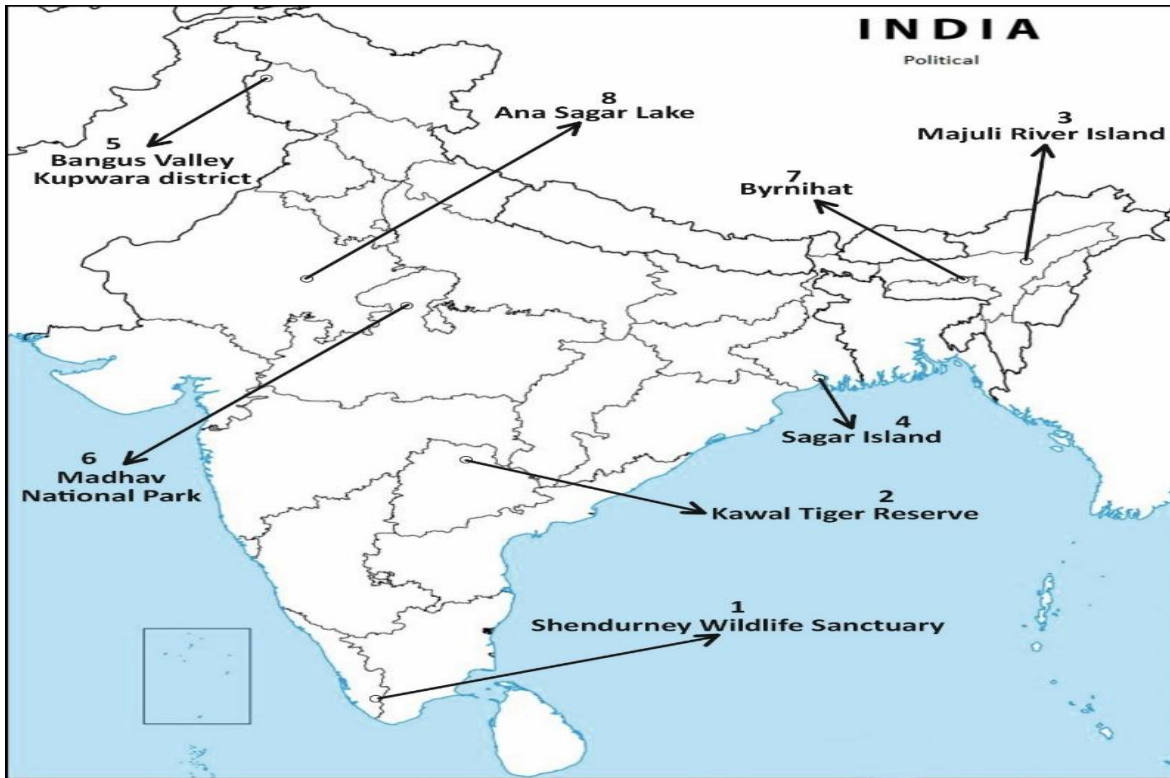
India-Russia Relations in the Arctic

- With 50-55% of the Arctic's coastline under Russian jurisdiction, India has invested \$15 billion in Russian oil and gas projects, securing its economic and strategic foothold in the region.
- **Strengthening Bilateral Trade and Arctic Cooperation**
 - At the 22nd Indo-Russia Summit, both nations committed to intensifying trade and investment, especially in the Russian Far East and Arctic zones.
 - A joint working body within IRIGC-TEC (India-Russia Intergovernmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technological, and Cultural Cooperation) has been established to enhance collaboration on the Northern Sea Route (NSR).
 - They also set a goal to increase bilateral trade to \$100 billion by 2030.
- **Geopolitical and Energy Security Implications**
 - As global power shifts towards Asia, India-Russia cooperation in the Arctic is becoming increasingly vital.
 - Russia controls ~80% of Arctic gas and ~20% of its oil reserves, while India seeks reliable energy sources for its growing economy.

- India and Russia are strengthening maritime cooperation through the NSR.
 - ♣ NSR provides a shorter trade corridor between Eurasia and the Asia-Pacific.
- The India-Russia working group on NSR met in October to discuss cargo transit, polar navigation training for Indian sailors, and Arctic shipbuilding projects.
 - ♣ An MoU on NSR cooperation is under negotiation.
- **Expanding India's Arctic Research Infrastructure**
 - Russia has offered vacant research stations in the Arctic for India's use.
- **India's Strategic Investment in Russia's Far East**
 - As India expands its investments in Russia's Far East, cooperation on the NSR was highlighted in Prime Minister Modi's visit to Moscow.
 - Both nations aim to establish a stable and efficient transport corridor to strengthen their economic and geopolitical ties in the Greater Eurasian region.

MAPS: PLACES IN NEWS

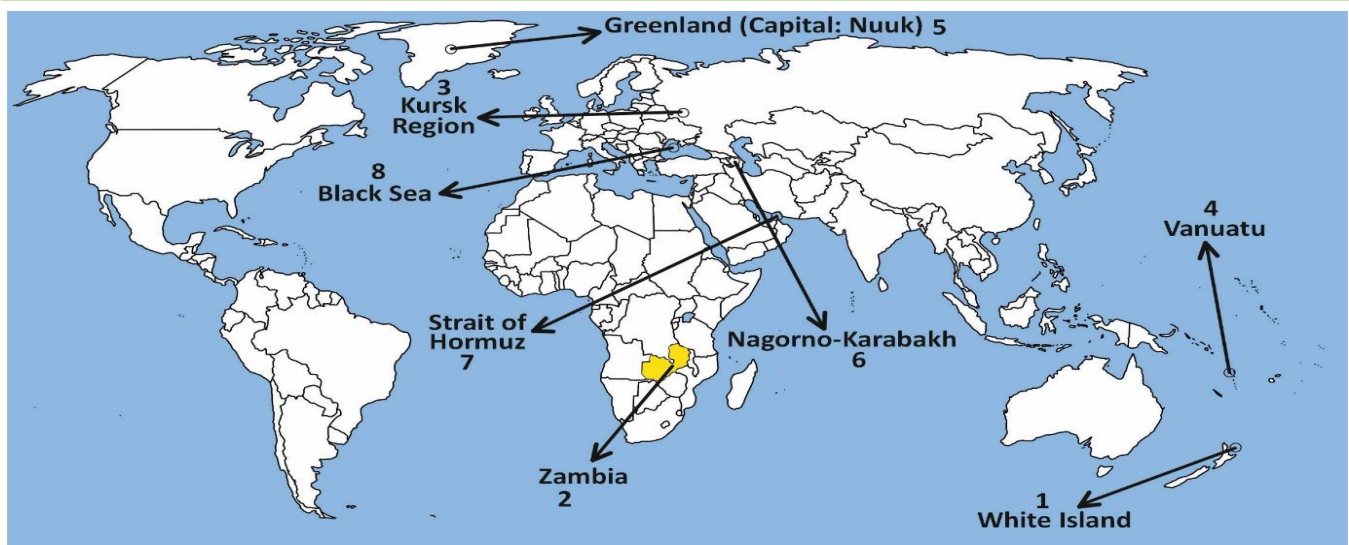
NATIONAL PLACES IN NEWS



1	Shendurney Wildlife Sanctuary	Researchers have discovered two new species of jumping spiders from Shendurney Wildlife Sanctuary, Kerala. It's situated in the Kollam district of Kerala. It falls under the jurisdiction of the Agasthyamalai Biosphere Reserve. It's known for its rich biodiversity, featuring tropical evergreen and semi-evergreen forests. A variety of animal species, including endangered ones like the lion-tailed macaque are prominent in the Sanctuary. The sanctuary is associated with the Thenmala Eco-tourism Project (India's first planned eco-tourism destination).
2	Kawal Tiger Reserve	It's situated in the Telangana. Here technology like solar pumps has been installed near borewells in reserve to facilitate easy water supply to tanks, pits and other natural reservoirs. It's located along the Godavari River. The vegetation is primarily Southern Tropical Dry Deciduous Forests, with teak and bamboo being dominant.
3	Majuli River Island	Recent study has shed light on the escalating human-wildlife conflict (HWC) in the Majuli River Island district of Assam. It's recognized as one of the world's largest river islands formed by the Brahmaputra River and its anabranches. However, it is constantly being eroded by the Brahmaputra river. It is a significant center of Assamese neo-Vaishnavite culture. It's home to numerous "Satras" (monasteries), which are hubs of traditional art, dance, and music. In 2016 it became the first island to be made a district in India.
4	Sagar Island	National Green Tribunal has issued directives to restore Sagar island. It is located in the Bay of Bengal at the confluence of the Hooghly River and the Ganges Delta . It is the largest island in the Sundarbans region and falls under South 24 Parganas district, West Bengal. It also hosts Gangasagar Mela , one of India's largest religious pilgrimages. Recently it is highly vulnerable to climate change, facing severe coastal erosion, salinity intrusion, and extreme weather events.

5	Bangus Valley, Kupwara district	The Jammu and Kashmir government announced the Bangus Valley, located near LoC as ecotourism destination . The name “Bangus” is originated from the Sanskrit words “Van” (forest) and “Gus” (grass), reflecting the valley’s lush grassy landscapes. It is located approximately 100 kilometers northwest of Srinagar. The valley rests at an elevation of about 10,000 feet above sea level within the Pir Panjal mountain range. The valley is surrounded by the Rajwar and Mawar regions to the east, the Shamasbury and Dajlungun Mountains to the west, and the Chowkibal and Karnah Guli areas to the north.
6	Madhav National Park (MP)	It is declared as 58 th Tiger reserve in India. It is a protected area located in the Shivpuri district. It lies on the northern fringe of the Central Highlands of India, forming part of the Upper Vindhyan Hills intermixed with plateaus and valley sections. Sakhya Sagar and Madhav Sagar, both created by damming the Manihar River are important Lakes in the Park.
7	Byrnihat (Meghalaya)	Recently World Air Quality Report for 2024 has termed Byrnihat as the “most polluted city in the world”. It is located around 20 km from Guwahati and 65 km from Shillong. It has presence of industries like coke production, cement manufacturing, ferroalloys, steel production, distilleries, and brick kilns etc. The “bowl-like” topography of the region, with surrounding hills, inhibits the dispersion of air pollutants, exacerbating pollution levels.
8	Ana Sagar Lake	The Supreme Court has directed the Rajasthan government to demolish the illegal amusement Park near Anasagar Lake, based on the grounds of environmental concerns and violations of wetland laws. It is artificial lake located in Ajmer . It was constructed between 1135 and 1150 AD by Arnoraja (also known as Ana), the grandfather of Prithviraj Chauhan. It is not yet designated as a Ramsar site.

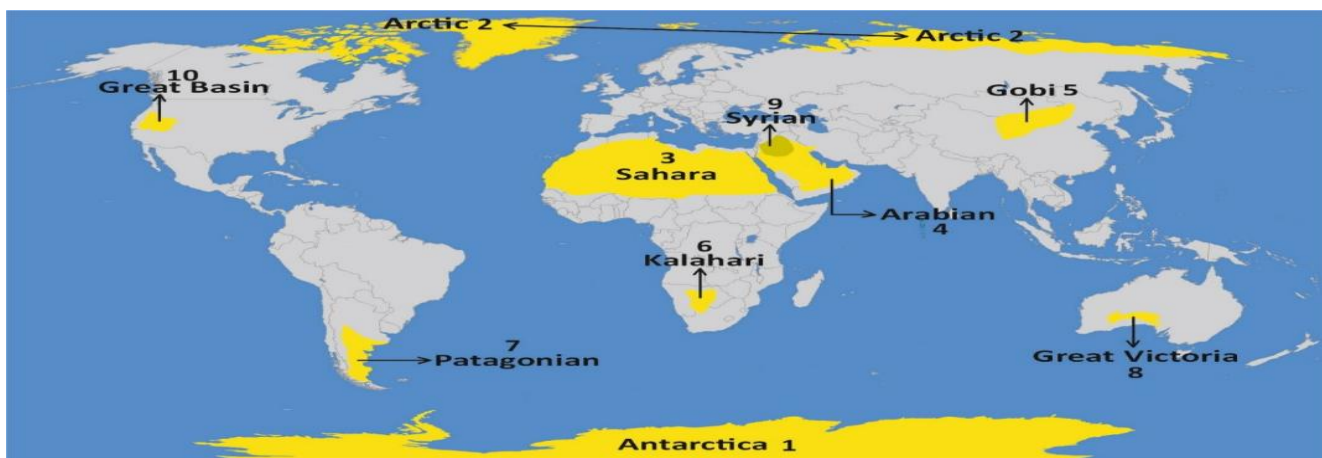
INTERNATIONAL PLACES IN NEWS



1	White Island	New Zealand High Court judge overturned the criminal conviction of the owners of Whakaari (White Island), for failing to ensure visitor safety following 2019 eruption. It’s one of New Zealand’s most active cone volcanoes. The island holds cultural significance for the Māori people, who refer to it as “Whakaari,” meaning “dramatic volcano.”
2	Zambia	Indian government has secured 9,000-sq-km block to explore copper and cobalt in a region in Zambia known for high-grade deposits. Zambia is a landlocked country in

		Southern Africa. It borders countries namely Angola, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Tanzania, Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Botswana, and Namibia. Zambezi River, Kafue River, Luangwa River are the major rivers in country. Zambia is the 7 th largest copper producer globally.
3	Kursk Region	Russian troops have launched a large-scale attacks to retake parts of the western Kursk region from Ukrainian forces. It's located in the western part of Russia, near the border with Ukraine. It's famously known for the Battle of Kursk during World War II, one of the largest tank battles in history. The region is part of the Central Black Earth Region, known for its fertile soil.
4	Vanuatu	It is an island nation in the South Pacific Ocean , located approximately 1,750 km east of northern Australia. It is situated southeast of the Solomon Islands, northeast of New Caledonia, and west of Fiji. The archipelago consists of 83 islands arranged in a Y-shaped configuration stretching over 650 km . The capital and largest city, Port Vila , is located on Efate Island . Island is home to several active volcanoes, including Mount Yasur, which is one of the world's most accessible active volcanoes.
5	Greenland (Capital: Nuuk)	Recently parliamentary elections held in Greenland (an autonomous territory under Denmark). It is world's largest island, situated between the Arctic and Atlantic Oceans. Ice Sheet covers around 80% of Greenland. Major mountains include Watkins Range, including Gunnbjorn Fjeld (tallest mountain in the Arctic). It is abundant with rare earth minerals, uranium, and other strategic metals.
6	Nagorno-Karabakh	Armenia and Azerbaijan have agreed to a peace agreement set to end the conflict between over disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region. Also known as Artsakh by Armenians, it is a landlocked, mountainous region in the South Caucasus
7	Strait of Hormuz	Iran have installed its missile systems on the three disputed islands (Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb, and Abu Musa) near the Strait of Hormuz. It is a narrow waterway between Iran and the Arabian Peninsula, specifically the United Arab Emirates, and Musandam (Oman). It connects the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman. Persian Gulf is on the west while Gulf of Oman is on the Strait's east.
8	Black Sea	USA and Russia are engaged in diplomatic talks to advance a broader ceasefire in Ukraine and negotiate a Black Sea maritime ceasefire. It is one of the marginal seas of the Atlantic Ocean. It has bordering countries namely Russia and Ukraine (North), Turkey (South), Bulgaria (West), Georgia (East) and Romania.

IMPORTANT DESERTS IN WORLD



1	Antarctic Polar Desert	It's the coldest , driest, and windiest continent on Earth. Most of the continent is covered by a massive ice sheet. Precipitation is very low, especially in the interior. The McMurdo Dry Valleys are a notable area within Antarctica that is exceptionally dry. It holds a vast amount of the world's freshwater, frozen in its ice sheets.
2	Arctic Polar Desert	It encompasses the northernmost regions of the world, including parts of <u>Canada, Russia, Greenland, and other Arctic islands</u> . It has extremely cold temperatures prevail throughout the year with Very low precipitation. Vegetation is sparse, consisting mainly of low-growing plants like mosses, lichens, and some hardy grasses. Wildlife includes Arctic foxes, Polar bears, Reindeer (caribou), Musk oxen, Seals and walruses (in coastal areas).
3	Sahara	It's the largest hot desert in the world, located in North Africa. It spans across 11 countries: Algeria, Chad, Egypt, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Sudan, Tunisia, and Western Sahara
4	Arabian	It covers most of the Arabian Peninsula, & is characterized by extremely hot and arid conditions . It extends into parts of <u>Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Yemen</u> . The landscape varies, including sand dunes, rocky plateaus, gravel plains, and wadis (dry riverbeds). It features some of the world's largest continuous sand deserts, like the Rub' al Khali (Empty Quarter). It is rich in oil and natural gas reserves.
5	Gobi	It stretches across parts of northern and north-western China and southern Mongolia. It's a cold desert , with extreme temperature variations. Winters are very cold, and summers can be hot. It's known for its strong winds. It is not just sand; it includes vast stretches of rocky terrain, gravel plains, and sparse vegetation.
6	Kalahari	It covers parts of Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa . It's a semi-arid sandy savanna, not a true desert in the strictest sense, as it receives more rainfall than a typical desert. It experiences hot summers and relatively cold winters. Rainfall is variable and unpredictable. The Kalahari is characterized by vast stretches of reddish sand, interspersed with grasslands, acacia woodlands, and salt pans.
7	Patagonian	It's situated primarily in <u>Argentina and extends into parts of Chile</u> , in the southern part of South America. It's a cold desert, influenced by the rain shadow effect of the Andes Mountains. It experiences strong westerly winds. The landscape consists of steppes, plateaus, and canyons.
8	Great Victoria	It stretches across parts of Western Australia and South Australia. It's Australia's largest desert. The landscape features sand dunes, grassland plains, areas of desert pavement (gibber plains), and salt lakes. It has a very arid climate with low and irregular rainfall.
9	Syrian	It covers parts of <u>Syria, Jordan, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia</u> . It has a hot and arid climate, with very low rainfall.
10	Great Basin	It's a cold desert & is the largest area of contiguous endorheic (allows no outflow to other external bodies) watersheds in North America , meaning that all precipitation within the basin evaporates, sinks underground, or flows into lakes that have no outlet to the ocean. It spans across much of Nevada, Utah, and portions of California, Oregon, Idaho, and Wyoming.

Shifts in India's Migration Landscape 5 Years After Covid-19

Five years after Covid-19, migration patterns have largely **reverted to pre-pandemic trends**, but **new challenges** and emerging factors such as **climate change and economic transformations** continue to shape migration in India.

Reverse Migration During Covid-19

- The pandemic triggered an unprecedented **urban-to-rural** reverse migration.
- Government estimates suggest a net reverse migration of **44.13 million** during the first lockdown and **26.3 million** during the second.
- **Migrants faced** wage theft, food insecurity, lack of healthcare and education, discrimination, and brutality. Many families dependent on **remittances** suffered severe economic strain.

Return to Urban Migration and Rural Economic Challenges:

- The rural economy was **unable to absorb** the returning workforce.
- **MGNREGA provided limited** relief but could not sustain long-term employment.
- Factors driving **return migration to urban areas**:
 - Rural distress and low wages
 - Urban aspirations and economic opportunities
 - **Climate change** significantly **impacts agriculture** and allied activities, contributing to distress and out-migration.

Urban Migration Trends and Government Initiatives:

- Urbanization is projected to continue, with **40%** of India's population expected to live in cities by **2026**.
- Government initiatives like **Smart Cities Mission** encourage migration for economic growth.

Challenges in Migration Governance and Policy Interventions

- **Data gaps and the need for improved migration governance**:
 - **2021 Census delay** has hindered accurate assessment of post-pandemic migration trends.
 - **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020-21** recorded a 28.9% migration rate, a marginal increase from 28.5% in NSS 64th Round (2007-08), but does not reflect long-term trends.
 - **Lack of a comprehensive Indian emigrant database** limits policy effectiveness.
- **Social security and welfare initiatives**:
 - **e-Shram portal** (2021) aims to create a National Database of Unorganised Workers (**NDUW**) and provide social security benefits, including insurance and access to subsidised food grains.
 - However, it faces **issues** due to lack of awareness and digital access.
 - **One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC)** scheme (2018) helps migrants access PDS benefits, but many still remain excluded.

Impact on International Migration

- **Indian emigrants faced job losses**, wage cuts, poor living conditions, and health risks.
- Despite hardships, **remittances remained resilient**, sustaining many Indian households.
- **Migration trends post-pandemic**:
 - ➔ Gulf Cooperation Council (**GCC**) countries remain key destinations.
 - ➔ **Europe** is attracting more skilled migrants, with Indians being top recipients of the EU Blue Card in 2023.
 - ➔ **African nations** are emerging as migration hubs for employment in IT, manufacturing, and healthcare, though challenges persist.
 - ➔ **Healthcare workers** from India continue to be in high demand globally.
 - ➔ **Student migration surged post-pandemic**:
 - The Kerala Migration Survey 2023 indicates that the number of student emigrants from Kerala nearly **doubled** from 1.29 lakh in 2018 to 2.5 lakh in 2023.
 - The RBI data shows that **outward remittances for studies** abroad (peaking at \$3,171 million in 2021) **reflected a sharp increase in spending on international education**.
 - We have also witnessed the student crisis during the **Russia-Ukraine war**.

Expanding Kerala Model and Future Policy Directions:

- **Kerala Migration Surveys** (every five years since 1998) have significantly improved **migration policy formulation**.
- **States** like Odisha, Goa, Punjab, Gujarat, Jharkhand, and Tamil Nadu have **replicated** this model.

Conclusion:

- Five years after the Covid-19 crisis, India's migration landscape is **evolving**.
- While urban migration is **resuming** and international emigration **diversifying**, **new factors** like climate change, global economic shifts, and policy interventions are influencing movement patterns.
- **Strengthening migration governance** through data-driven policy reforms and improved social security mechanisms is crucial for ensuring migrant welfare and economic stability.

World Happiness Report 2025

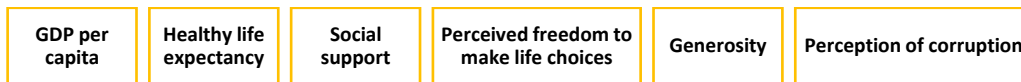
The World Happiness Report 2025, published by the Wellbeing Research Centre at the **University of Oxford**, ranks **Finland** as the happiest country for the **eighth consecutive year**.

It highlights **an improvement in India's happiness score and ranking** over the past three years.

The rankings are based on Gallup surveys and the **UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network**.

Methodology of the World Happiness Report:

- **Life evaluations:** Based on responses from the Gallup World Poll, where people rate their life on a 0-10 scale using the Cantril Ladder method (*worst towards best*)
- **Three-year average:** The 2025 rankings are based on data collected from 2022 to 2024.
- **Key indicators considered:** While the rankings are not based on an index, **six primary factors** influence happiness scores:



Key Highlights of the World Happiness Report 2025

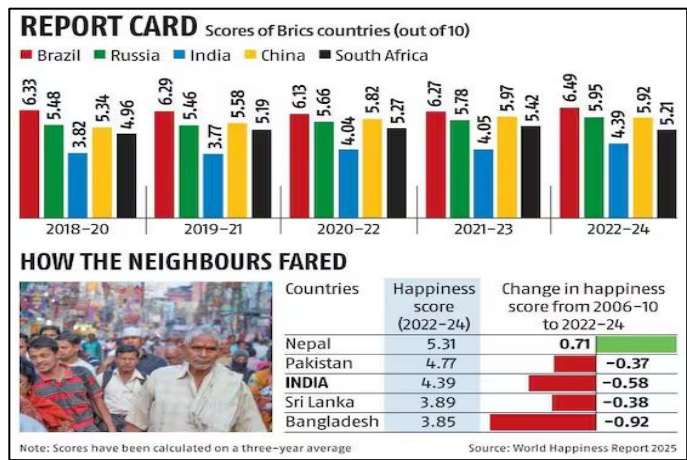
- **Top-ranked countries:**
 - **Nordic dominance:** Finland, Denmark, Iceland, and Sweden.
 - **New entrants in top 10:** Costa Rica (6th) and Mexico (10th).
- **Determinants of happiness:**
 - Beyond **economic growth, trust, social connections, and support networks** play a crucial role in happiness.
 - **Household size:** In Mexico and Europe, families with four to five members report the highest happiness levels.
 - **Belief in kindness:** Trust in strangers returning a lost wallet strongly correlates with national happiness.
- **Declining happiness in the west:**
 - **United States (24th):** Dropped from 11th (2012) due to increased **isolation**, with a 53% rise in people dining alone over two decades.
 - **United Kingdom (23rd):** Lowest happiness level since 2017.
- **Least happy countries:**
 - **Afghanistan:** Continues to be the unhappiest, with Afghan women facing extreme hardship.

- **Sierra Leone and Lebanon** ranked second and third lowest.

- **Global social support decline:** 19% of young adults reported having no one to rely on.

India's Ranking and Performance:

- **Improved ranking:** India moved up from 126th (out of 143 countries last year) to **118th** (out of 147 countries).
- **Score increase:** India's happiness score rose from 4.054 to 4.389 (on a scale of 10).



Cancer Centre at District Hospitals

The Union Health Ministry plans to set up cancer daycare centres in all district hospitals. Each centre will offer chemotherapy, counseling services, and medicines, with four to six beds. Every facility will have an oncologist or trained medical officer, two nurses, a pharmacist, a counsellor, and a multi-purpose worker.

Objective and Implementation

- To ensure continuity of cancer treatment, especially in the 764 district hospitals that currently lack such facilities.
- Patients will receive initial treatment plans at tertiary care centres and continue treatment at these daycare centres.
- As per the Union Budget announcement, 200 centres are planned for the current financial year, with the full rollout expected over three years.

- **Concerns Over Staffing:** While the Government suggested using existing district hospital staff, the Parliamentary panel recommended separate recruitment.

- **Expert Recommendations:** Experts support the initiative but stress the need for additional services:

- **Pain Management:** Many cancer patients require pain relief, which can be provided at a low cost.
- **Training for Medical Staff:** Since not all district hospitals

Key Government Initiatives for Cancer Control

- ⊙ **National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke (NPCDCS)**
- ⊙ **Strengthening of Tertiary Care for Cancer Scheme**
 - Aims to decentralize cancer treatment and expand access to specialized care.
 - **Key Infrastructure Developments:** 19 State Cancer Institutes (SCIs); 20 Tertiary Care Cancer Centres (TCCCs); National Cancer Institute (NCI), Jhajjar, Haryana; Chittaranjan National Cancer Institute (CNCI) – Second Campus in Kolkata.
- ⊙ **Ayushman Bharat Yojana (PMJAY)**
 - Launched in 2018 to provide universal health coverage.
 - Covers chemotherapy, radiotherapy, and surgical oncology for economically vulnerable families.
- ⊙ **Health Minister's Cancer Patient Fund (HMCPF)**
 - **HMCPF** under Rashtriya Arogya Nidhi (RAN) provides financial aid up to ₹5 lakh for cancer treatment to patients below the poverty line. The maximum financial assistance admissible under the Scheme will be ₹15 Lakh.
- ⊙ **National Cancer Grid (NCG)**
 - Established in 2012 to standardize and improve cancer care across India.
 - Comprises 287 member institutions, including cancer centres, research institutes, and advocacy groups.
 - Treats over 750,000 new cancer patients annually, covering 60% of India's cancer burden.

Advancing Cancer Research and Treatment

- ⊙ **India's First Indigenous CAR-T Cell Therapy – NexCAR19**
 - Developed in April 2024 by IIT Bombay, Tata Memorial Centre, and ImmunoACT.
 - A breakthrough treatment for blood cancers, reducing dependency on expensive imported therapies.
- ⊙ **Quad Cancer Moonshot Initiative**
 - Launched in September 2024 in partnership with the US, Australia, and Japan.
 - Focuses on eliminating cervical cancer in the Indo-Pacific region through screening, vaccination, and advanced research.
- ⊙ **Expansion of ACTREC (Advanced Centre for Treatment, Research, and Education in Cancer)**
 - Began expansion in January 2025 to enhance cancer research, treatment, and patient care.

have oncologists, doctors and staff must be trained in managing chemotherapy side effects and complications.

- **Regional Feasibility:** States like those in the Northeast and Kerala, where district hospitals already offer cancer care, may find it easier to implement the initiative.

Cancer Burden in India

- In India, cancer cases are projected to rise significantly, with over 14 lakh new cases recorded in 2023.
- Approximately 100 out of every 1 lakh people in India are diagnosed with cancer annually.
- The National Cancer Registry Programme (NCRP) under ICMR has been tracking cancer trends since 1982 to enable evidence-based policymaking.
- **Union Budget 2025-26: Strengthening Cancer Care**
 - The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has been allocated Rs. 99,858.5 crore, with Rs. 95,957.8 crore for the Department of Health & Family Welfare and Rs. 3,900.6 crore for Health Research.
 - **Customs Duty Exemptions:** 36 life-saving drugs, including those for cancer, are fully exempted from Basic Customs Duty (BCD); Six additional medicines to attract a concessional 5% duty.
 - Drugs under Patient Assistance Programmes are also fully exempted.

Designate Cancer as a Notifiable Disease in India

Union government has resisted the move, saying the practice is to notify only infectious diseases and that cancer is non-communicable and not infectious.

Notification of infectious diseases is a legal mandate and compels physicians to report designated diseases to public health authorities, failing which they could face legal consequences

- Unlike infectious diseases, cancer does not pose an immediate threat to public health through direct transmission and sudden deaths.
- Proponents argue that mandatory reporting could enhance early detection. However, there are fundamental issues with this approach.
 - ✓ First, cancer is not a single-point diagnosis. Cancers as a disease are more diverse ranging from benign to malignant. Notifiability triggers rapid containment measures, whereas cancer requires long-term management rather than emergency interventions.
 - ✓ Second, making it a notifiable disease also raises privacy concerns. There is still stigma attached to cancer

Rather than legally mandating notification, strengthening existing cancer registries is a more thorough and effective alternative.

India's Habitual Offender Laws

Government has revealed in Parliament that laws which declare a section of criminals as "habitual offenders" **continue to operate** in as many as **14 States and UTs**, despite the **Supreme Court's recent observations** questioning their constitutional validity and discriminatory application.

Habitual Offender Laws

- Habitual offender laws in India allow state authorities to identify and monitor individuals convicted of certain crimes repeatedly.
- These laws were intended to control repeat offenders, but have come under heavy criticism for **institutionalising discrimination**, especially against **denotified, nomadic, and semi-nomadic tribes (DNT, NT, SNT)**.

- These communities have historically been labelled as "criminal tribes" during British rule.

Historical Roots: From Criminal Tribes to Habitual Offenders

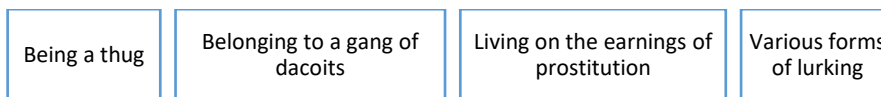
- The origins of these laws date back to **colonial legislation**:
 - **Regulation XXII (1793)** granted magistrates power to imprison or force labour on certain communities based merely on suspicion.
 - This evolved into the **Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) of 1871**, which allowed the British to declare **entire communities as "criminal by birth"**.
 - The CTA was extended in 1924 to cover all of colonial India.
- Post-independence, following the **Criminal Tribes Enquiry Committee Report (1949-50)**, the CTA was repealed in **1952**, and communities previously criminalised were officially **denotified**.
- However, states soon introduced **Habitual Offender Acts**, which, while framed around individual behaviour, continued to disproportionately target DNTs.

Supreme Court's Intervention and Recent Developments

- In **October 2024**, the Supreme Court expressed concern over the habitual offender classification while addressing caste-based discrimination in jails.
- The bench, led by then-Chief Justice **D.Y. Chandrachud**, highlighted that:
 - *"A whole community ought not to have either been declared a criminal tribe in the past or a habitual offender in the present."*
 - The court "urged" states to review the relevance and application of these laws, especially when they appear to be **tools for profiling entire communities**.

Crimes Under the Habitual Offender Tag

- State laws define habitual offenders based on prior **convictions for specific offences**, including:



- These laws typically involve maintaining **registers of such offenders**, which continue to echo the registration practices under the CTA.
- In states like Rajasthan, prison manuals even **explicitly link habitual offender status to denotified communities**.

Impact on Denotified and Nomadic Tribes

- Despite formal denotification, DNTs remain vulnerable to police surveillance, social ostracization, and **systematic exclusion**.
- Several activists worked to document the injustice, prompting action from the **NHRC**, and later, the **United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination**, which called for repeal of these laws in **2007**.
- Several reports, including the **B.S. Renke Commission (2008)** and the **Xaxa Committee (2014)**, have emphasized how the **stigma of criminality persists**, further marginalising DNTs from education, employment, and social integration.

Current Status Across States

- Reactions from states to the Supreme Court's observation have been mixed:
 - **Punjab** and **Odisha** report no active use of the law in recent years.
 - **Andhra Pradesh** has no inmates under the law currently.
 - **Gujarat** and **Goa** support retaining the law, claiming it is not used to target DNTs.

- **Uttar Pradesh** subsumed these provisions under its **Goondas Act**.
- **Delhi** leads in application: as per **NCRB 2022**, **21.5%** of its convicts were classified as habitual offenders, **the highest in the country**.

Importance of Repeal

- Critics argue that the habitual offender laws:
 - **Perpetuate colonial-era stigma** and discrimination.
 - Enable **targeted policing** of marginalised communities.
 - Violate **fundamental rights**, including equality (Article 14) and freedom of movement (Article 19).
 - Contradict India's commitments to **racial and caste-based non-discrimination** under international human rights law.

India's **habitual offender laws** may appear neutral on paper, but their **colonial legacy and discriminatory enforcement** have made them tools of oppression against vulnerable communities. A **uniform repeal** across all states would be a **long-overdue step** toward justice and inclusion for DNT, NT, and SNT communities.

Behind ASHA Protests in Kerala - Demand for Hike in Honorariums

Opposition MPs from Kerala protested in Parliament, demanding higher honorariums and retirement benefits for ASHA workers. The leaders highlighted that ASHAs earn only ₹233 per day, often irregularly.

In response, Health Minister J P Nadda stated that the NHM Steering Group had approved increased incentives, which would be implemented soon.

Role of ASHAs in Rural Healthcare

- ASHA stands for Accredited Social Health Activist. They are the part of India's National Rural Health Mission (NRHM).
- The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) employs them.
- **Launch of ASHAs**
 - NRHM launched ASHAs in 2005 as community health functionaries working alongside **Anganwadi workers** under the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS).
 - In 2013, NRHM and the National Urban Health Mission were merged into **National Health Mission**
- **Responsibilities of ASHAs**
 - Serve as the first point of contact for marginalized communities, particularly women and children, for healthcare needs.
 - Promote awareness of good health practices and assist in accessing public health services.
 - Support maternal and childcare, immunization drives, family planning, and disease prevention programs.
 - Conduct periodic home visits and maintain health records.
- **Selection Criteria**
 - Women aged 25-45, preferably married, widowed, or divorced.
 - Minimum education qualification of Class 10.
 - Selection involves gram panchayats, Anganwadi institutions, community groups, and self-help groups.
- **Coverage and Workforce**
 - One ASHA is assigned per 1,000 people.
 - As of 2022-23, India had 9.2 lakh **rural ASHAs** and approximately 79,900 **urban ASHAs**.
 - The highest number of ASHAs are in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, and Madhya Pradesh.

Earnings of ASHAs

- **Volunteer Status and Payment Structure**

- Initially, ASHAs were considered honorary volunteers whose work was designed not to interfere with their livelihood.
- However, many now work full-time as they serve as the first point of contact for marginalized households.
- Despite this, the NHM still classifies them as volunteers, making them ineligible for fixed salaries beyond task-based incentives.

- **Monthly Incentives and Honorarium**

- ASHAs receive a **monthly incentive of ₹3,000**, shared between the Centre and the state.
- Payment is tied to completing specific tasks and is often not fully disbursed.
- Kerala ASHAs get **₹500 for the Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram** (early childcare scheme), but its applicability is limited in areas with low childbirth rates.

- **State-Specific Honorarium and Task-Based Earnings**

- In Kerala, ASHAs receive a **monthly honorarium of ₹7,000**, funded by the state.
- Payment depends on completing **10 tasks**, such as running clinics and maintaining ward reports, each valued at ₹700.
- Additional **task-based incentives vary** depending on different national health schemes and their applicability in specific areas.

ASHA Honorariums: Kerala vs Other States

- Kerala Health Minister stated that the state offers the highest honorarium to ASHAs.
- However, some states provide higher payments and additional benefits.
- **Sikkim:** Paying **₹10,000** per month since October 2022.
- **Andhra Pradesh:** Increased honorarium to **₹10,000** and introduced **₹15 lakh gratuity** for ASHAs completing **30 years of service**.
- **Karnataka:** Raised honorarium from **₹5,000 to ₹10,000** (effective April) following an ASHA workers' strike demanding **₹15,000** as a fixed monthly honorarium.

Rising Consumer Credit in India

RBI's Financial Stability Report (FSR) 2024 has highlighted an alarming rise in household debt, which has increased from **36.6% of GDP in June 2021 to 42.9% in June 2024**.

Increasing Household Debt: A Cause for Concern	Shift in Borrowing Trends
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While India's household debt remains lower than most emerging economies, the rising debt-to-GDP ratio signals potential macroeconomic weaknesses. • Debt is typically taken to acquire assets such as homes and vehicles. However, recent data indicates that Indian households are borrowing <i>more for</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The RBI report presents a mixed picture regarding consumer credit. • A significant proportion of new loans is being taken by healthy, prime borrowers, <u>reducing the share of sub-prime borrowing.</u> • Rising per capita debt is mainly observed among super-prime borrowers, who are using loans for asset creation rather than discretionary spending. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Super-prime borrowers, who exhibit the best creditworthiness, are followed by prime borrowers who, while still considered good credit risks, are one step below the top tier.

<p><i>consumption</i> rather than for asset creation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This shift raises concerns about the financial health of lower-income groups and the long-term impact on economic stability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Borrowing for consumption purposes, however, has increased, <u>particularly among lower-income groups.</u> • While these trends indicate a maturing credit market, the growing reliance on loans for consumption raises concerns about the sustainability of household finances.
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Consumption Loans: A Red Flag for Financial Stability

- A worrying trend in the report is the increasing share of loans taken for consumption rather than investment in assets like housing or education. The data reveals that:
 - **64% of loans taken by super-prime borrowers** are directed towards asset creation.
 - **Nearly half of the loans taken by sub-prime borrowers** are being used for consumption.
 - Lower-income households (earning below ₹5 lakh annually) rely heavily on unsecured credit such as **credit card debt and personal loans** for daily expenses.
- This trend suggests that many households may be borrowing to meet essential expenses rather than for wealth accumulation.
- In addition, rising delinquency rates in **personal loans and credit card debt** indicate increasing financial stress among lower-income groups.

Multiplier Effect of Rising Debt

- Households with lower incomes generally have a higher **income multiplier**, meaning they spend a larger portion of their income on goods and services.
- However, if they are burdened with debt repayments, their disposable income shrinks, reducing overall consumption and slowing down economic growth.
- Several key issues arise:
 - Households borrowing more due to **income insecurity** post-pandemic
 - **BNPL (Buy Now, Pay Later) schemes**, encouraging excessive borrowing

RBI's Response: Curbing Unchecked Credit Growth

- In response to the rise in unsecured loans, the RBI has introduced measures to **slow down consumer credit growth** since September 2023. These steps include:
 - **Tighter lending norms** for personal loans and credit card borrowing.
 - **Encouraging banks to focus on prime borrowers**, reducing the risk of default.
 - **Monitoring financial institutions** to prevent reckless lending practices.
- While these measures have led to a slowdown in credit growth, the structural risks associated with rising consumption debt still remain.

Policymakers must carefully balance credit growth with financial prudence to ensure that India's expanding consumer credit market remains sustainable.

Dramatic Performances Act, 1876

Recently, the Prime Minister (PM) Modi referred to the **Dramatic Performances Act (DPA), 1876**, which allowed the British government to prohibit public performances deemed scandalous, defamatory, seditious, or obscene.

Key Provisions

- **Prohibition Powers:** The government could prohibit performances deemed offensive, with orders served to performers, venue owners, or notified publicly.
- **Government Discretion:** The Act allowed the government to impose bans based on subjective opinions.
- **Penalties:** Disobedience could result in **three months' imprisonment, fine, or both.**
- **Police Authority:** Magistrates could authorize police to enter venues, arrest participants, and seize props or costumes linked to prohibited performances.
- **Licensing Requirement:** In designated areas, performances required a **government license**, and scripts had to be submitted in advance.
- **Exemptions:** Religious festival performances like **jatras** were excluded.
 - ✓ **Jatra** is a traditional folk theatre in **Bengal, Odisha**, and parts of **Bangladesh**, known for **open-air staging, musical accompaniment, and stylized acting**, often depicting **Hindu mythology, folk legends, or current events.**

Current Status of DPA

- The DPA was formally **repealed in 2018** through the **Repealing and Amending (Second) Act, 2017** as part of the Modi government's initiative to remove **obsolete laws** and improve the **ease of doing business**. However, it had ceased to be a **valid law since 1956** when the **Allahabad High Court (HC) in State vs. Baboo Lal and Ors (1956)** ruled it unconstitutional.
 - ✓ Since 2014, over **2,000 obsolete laws** have been repealed under this exercise.
- While DPA was repealed, film censorship & artistic restrictions continue today under:
 - ✓ Cinematograph Act, 1952: Governs film certification in India.
 - ✓ IT Rules, 2021: Regulates digital content & OTT platforms.
- Similar state-level versions existed in regions like **Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Delhi**, and **Tamil Nadu**, but were later repealed. The **Madras HC** struck down the **Tamil Nadu Dramatic Performances Act, 1954**, in **2013**, reinforcing the need to eliminate such colonial-era legislations.

Historical Background

This Act was Enacted to suppress nationalist sentiments after the Prince of Wales' visit (1875-76). The DPA was part of colonial laws alongside the **Vernacular Press Act, 1878**, and the **Sedition Law of 1870**.

- **Trigger Event:** The Act was enacted in response to the nationalist play Nil Darpan (The Indigo Mirror) by Dinabandhu Mitra (1860). This play exposed the oppression of indigo planters by British landlords.
- **The Vernacular Press Act of 1878**, enacted under **Viceroy Lord Lytton**, aimed to control regional language publications. It required publishers to obtain licenses and deposit funds, enabling authorities to seize seditious presses, materials, and publications critical of British rule.
- **The Sedition Law of 1870** (Section 124A IPC), penalized attempts to incite hatred, contempt, or disaffection toward the government.

About Dramatic Performances Act (DPA), 1876

It was enacted to control public performances that were **scandalous, defamatory, seditious, or obscene**.

Objective: To curb nationalist sentiment and maintain colonial control.

About State vs. Baboo Lal and Ors (1956)

- In **June 1953**, the **Lucknow branch of Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA)** planned to stage a play based on **Munshi Prem Chand's 'Idgah'**.
- Although initially granted permission, the magistrate later revoked it without clear reasons and prohibited the play mid-performance.
- The **Allahabad HC** examined the constitutionality of the DPA rather than the specific incident. Citing previous rulings on colonial laws conflicting with constitutional rights, the court declared that the Act is an ultra vires of the Constitution as it imposed **unconstitutional restrictions on freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(2)**.
- The court also acknowledged concerns of **political victimization** raised by the petitioner.
- The Allahabad HC ruling in State vs. Baboo Lal (1956) set a foundation for future free speech cases.
 - **Romesh Thapar vs. State of Madras (1950):** Struck down pre-censorship on publications.
 - **K.A. Abbas vs. Union of India (1971):** Upheld film censorship but required reasonable justification.
 - **S. Rangarajan vs. P. Jagjivan Ram (1989):** Ruled that censorship must be proportional to actual harm.

Why are Colonial-era Laws Still in Force in India?

- **Constitutional Provision: Article 372** allows colonial-era laws to remain in force post-independence unless repealed or amended.
- **No Presumption of Constitutionality:** Colonial laws must be defended by the government if challenged in court.
 - ✓ **Post-Independence Laws** are presumed constitutional unless proven otherwise by the petitioner.
- **Government Stance:** Successive governments have defended several colonial laws, including:
 - **Preventive detention** and **unlawful association** laws .
 - **Sedition law** (retained in the **Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)**).
 - **Marital rape exception**, which is currently under Supreme Court (SC) review.

Model Women-Friendly Gram Panchayats Initiative (MWFGP)

The National Convention on Model Women-Friendly Gram Panchayats (MWFGP) was recently organized by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj.

More About MWFGP

MWFGP aims to establish at least one Model Gram Panchayat in each District in the country that is both **women and girl friendly**. The **National Convention** introduced two key initiatives to promote gender-sensitive governance:

1. **Virtual Training Programs:** Designed for elected representatives and officials of MWFGP, these programs aim to develop leadership skills, enhance awareness, and ensure effective implementation of women-centric initiatives at the grassroots level.
2. **Real-Time Monitoring Dashboard:** This **digital platform** tracks the progress of MWFGPs by collecting and analyzing **real time** data on women's participation and welfare.

Significance of the MWFGP Initiative

- **Enhanced Access to Healthcare:** The presence of **Village Health, Sanitation, and Nutrition Committees** in every Gram Panchayat creates a strong framework for community health management. Women leaders will be encouraged to promote government health schemes such as:
 - **Ayushman Arogya Mandir** offering 12 types of medical services.
 - **Janani Suraksha Yojana** and **Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram** to ensure safe motherhood and institutional deliveries.
- **Women's Leadership and Empowerment: Specialized training** will help build leadership skills among **women pradhans**. They will be able to actively implement key schemes like:
 - **Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana**
 - **Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana**
 - **Ayushman Bharat** and **pension schemes** for widows and divyanjan.
- **Social and Community Development:** will be achieved drawing from successful regional models like:
 - **Kerala's Jagratha Samithi** for safeguarding women and children.
 - **Odisha's initiatives** against social evils like child marriage.
 - **Rajasthan's UNFPA collaboration** for developing women- and child-friendly Gram Panchayats.
- **Promoting Women's Participation in Governance:** The initiative emphasizes moving from **women-centric** to **women-led** development, ensuring women play active roles in decision-making. The enactment of the **Women's Reservation Bill (Nari Shakti Vandan Adhinyam)** reinforces this effort.

- **Digital and Data-Driven Interventions:** The launch of a **Real-Time Monitoring Dashboard** will enable tracking of women's participation and welfare programs, ensuring measurable progress.

The MWFGP initiative is a transformative step towards creating safer, inclusive, and progressive rural communities, aligning with country's vision of "**Sashakt Mahila, Sashakt Panchayat, Sashakt Bharat**".

ITEC Executive Capacity Building Programme on Human Rights

The National Human Rights Commission (**NHRC**) in partnership with the Ministry of External Affairs (**MEA**), successfully concluded its Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Executive (**ITEC**) Executive Capacity Building Programme on Human Rights for senior functionaries of the National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) of Global South.

- The participants got exposure to various aspects of civic and political rights as well as socio-economic and cultural rights enjoyed by the people of India.

About ITEC

The **ITEC Programme**, established in 1964 is the **flagship capacity-building initiative** of the **MEA, India**.

Administered by: Development Partnership Administration-II (DPA-II), MEA

Key Highlights

- **Annual Training Opportunities:** Offers **10,000+ fully funded** in-person training slots through **400 courses** at **100+ institutes** in India.
 - ✓ **Example:** Training on Election Commission of India's (ECI) model of free and fair elections.
- **Global Reach:** Since **2014**, nearly **100,000 professionals** have benefited from these world-class training programs.
 - ✓ India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) can be a model for data privacy & governance in developing countries.
- **Adaptability:** Continued even during COVID-19, providing **10,000 online trainings** in healthcare and governance.
- **Customized Training:** ITEC also provides **customized training** based on country-specific needs and employs diverse modalities, including:
 - **eITEC** – Online training via digital platforms.
 - **ITEC-Executive** – Short-term, policy-focused, in-person training for senior government executives.
 - **ITEC-Onsite & ITEC-Expert** – Onsite capacity-building assignments by Indian experts.

Significance of the Programme

- **Strengthening Global South Cooperation:** Representatives from Africa, Latin America, and Asia-Pacific participated in this initiative to learn from India's experiences.
- **Promotion of India's Soft Power:** India has historically promoted democracy and human rights in forums like UNHRC and NAM. Aligns with India's Neighborhood First and Act East Policies.
- **Strengthening Institutional Capacities:** Participants gain insights into best practices in civil liberties, socio-economic rights, and cultural freedoms.
 - Learning from India's experience with Right to Information (RTI), affirmative action policies (reservation system), and social welfare schemes (like MGNREGA & PDS).
- **Diplomatic and Economic Advantages:** African nations benefiting from ITEC training often engage in bilateral trade and development projects with India.

New Aadhaar Governance Portal Launched

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) launched the **Aadhaar Good Governance Portal** to streamline Aadhaar authentication approvals.

- ✓ This initiative aligns with India's commitment to **ease of living, digital governance, and citizen-centric service delivery**.

Aadhaar is a 12-digit unique ID issued by Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) to every Indian resident, linking their biometric and demographic data. Launched in 2009, it serves as verifiable proof of identity, required for many government services and increasingly used by private companies.

Objective: To simplify and accelerate Aadhaar authentication approvals for various entities, both government and private, that provide public interest services.

Regulatory Framework: This initiative is backed by the Aadhaar Authentication for Good Governance (Social Welfare, Innovation, Knowledge (SWIK)) Amendment Rules, 2025, notified under the Aadhaar Act, 2016.

Key Features of the Aadhaar Good Governance Portal & Amendment Rules 2025

- **Enhanced Ease of Living and Service Accessibility:** The portal ensures **efficient and transparent** authentication processes. It helps citizens access **seamless digital services** with greater ease. Aadhaar authentication, already trusted by over a billion Indians, will now facilitate hassle-free access to newer services.
 - ✓ **JAM Trinity (Jan Dhan - Aadhaar - Mobile):** Aadhaar-linked DBT (Direct Benefit Transfer) has minimized leakages in welfare schemes like PM-KISAN & LPG subsidy.
- **Seamless Authentication for Public Interest Services:** It enables Aadhaar holders to avail themselves of services in **hospitality, healthcare, education, e-commerce, and credit rating sectors**. Service providers can use Aadhaar authentication for **staff attendance, e-KYC verification, customer onboarding, and exam registrations**.
 - ✓ **e-KYC in Banking:** Aadhaar-based e-KYC has cut down verification time from days to minutes for financial services.
- **Step-by-Step Guide for Authentication Requests:** The portal provides a **comprehensive guide** for entities applying for Aadhaar authentication. It includes detailed **Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)** for onboarding entities. The platform supports **face authentication integration** into customer-facing apps, enabling **anytime, anywhere** verification.
 - ✓ **Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM):** Aadhaar-linked Health IDs enable paperless medical records.

Impact on Digital Governance

- **Improved Transparency & Inclusivity:** With **better decision-making processes** for authentication approvals.
 - **FASTag & Aadhaar Linkage:** Ensures transparent toll payments and prevents fraud.
- **Boost to Digital Economy:** Aadhaar authentication supports **secure and trusted transactions**, strengthening **India's digital ecosystem**.
 - **Face Authentication Integration (2024):** UIDAI's new facial recognition system aims to reduce authentication failures.
 - **ONDC (Open Network for Digital Commerce):** Aadhaar authentication ensures trust & security in digital trade.
- **Better Public-Private Collaboration:** The expansion of authentication services to **private entities** fosters greater cooperation in delivering efficient services to citizens.

Identical EPIC Numbers

West Bengal Chief Minister (CM) Mamata Banerjee accused the Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP), with Election Commission's (EC) backing, of adding out-of-state voters to West Bengal's electoral roll, citing **duplicate** Electors Photo Identity Card (EPIC) numbers. This issue, involving identical EPICs across states, has sparked concerns over electoral fraud and political controversy.

How Did the Duplication Occur?

- **Legacy Decentralized Process:** Prior to ERONET, states and UTs used a manual, decentralized system for allotting EPIC numbers. This process allowed different state election offices to issue voter IDs using similar alphanumeric series.
- **Resulting Overlap:** Due to this decentralized approach, two or more voters in different states or constituencies were assigned the same EPIC number. Although the number itself was duplicated, each voter's record still contained distinct demographic details, constituency information, and polling booth data.
- **Difficulty Tracking Similar EPICs:** The legacy method did not have a centralized database to track previously issued numbers across all regions. As a result, identical EPIC series were used

What is an EPIC Number?

An EPIC number is a unique 10-digit alphanumeric code assigned to each registered voter in India which carries personal details such as the voter's name, age, address, photograph, and other relevant information. It was introduced in 1993 to enhance electoral transparency and prevent impersonation.

How is it issued?

Initially, EPIC numbers were issued manually, but since 2017, they are being generated through the ERONET digital platform.

- ERONET, a web-based platform for election officials, assigns EPIC numbers during voter registration and links them to state and constituency data to ensure uniqueness. It automates electoral roll management, including registration, migration, and deletions.

inadvertently by different State/UT Chief Electoral Offices, leading to the possibility of identical numbers appearing on voter ID cards in various parts of the country.

Why It's a Concern?	What was EC's Response?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The core of the worry lies in the perception that a duplicate EPIC number could lead to voter impersonation or manipulation. Critics argue that if a voter in one state has an EPIC number identical to someone in another state, there might be complications during photo verification at polling stations. This, they fear, could lead to legitimate voters being turned away- a scenario that they believe could be exploited for political gain. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It has clarified that despite some EPIC numbers being identical, each voter's card includes additional details like their assembly constituency and designated polling station. Therefore, a person can vote only in the polling station associated with their enrollment—even if their EPIC number matches someone else's in a different state. The EC has indicated that any case of duplicate EPIC numbers will be resolved within a three-month period, ensuring that future electoral roll updates will not face the same issue.

Are There any Safeguards Available?

- Built-in Safeguards:** Despite the duplication, the system is designed so that a voter can cast their vote only at their designated polling station in the constituency where they are registered. The additional details on the EPIC card (such as the voter's photograph, demographic information, and polling station) serve as checkpoints.
- Verification Process:** Poll officials cross-check the EPIC number with the voter's other details. This multi-layer verification process minimizes the risk that a duplicate number could be exploited for fraudulent voting.

Proposed Solutions: To address the anomaly, the EC announced plans to-

- Aadhaar-Voter ID Linking:** This initiative aims to identify and remove duplicate voter registrations, enhancing the accuracy of electoral rolls.
- ERONET 2.0 Updates:** ERONET platform will be updated to ensure that all future EPIC numbers are unique and to rectify existing duplications.

Cognizant And Infosys File Lawsuits Against Each Other

Tech giants Cognizant and Infosys have filed lawsuits against each other. The tussle centers on serious allegations of trade secret misappropriation and anti-competitive practices, intertwined with controversies over high-profile executive transitions.

Background

Initiation of the Dispute: In August 2024, Cognizant's subsidiary **TriZetto**- a healthcare solutions provider filed a lawsuit in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Dallas, alleging that Infosys had stolen data from its proprietary software applications, specifically Facets and QNXT (these platforms help automate tasks such as claims processing and billing for health insurers).

Cognizant's Allegations Against Infosys	Infosys Allegations Against Cognizant
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Breach of NDAs: Cognizant's complaint asserts that Infosys violated multiple Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs) by accessing and misusing confidential data from TriZetto's software. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A similar case involved Waymo v. Uber (2017-18), Google's self-driving unit, Waymo, accused Uber of stealing trade secrets, leading to a settlement where Uber agreed to pay Waymo \$245 million (0.34% of Uber's equity) and not use Waymo's technology. Misappropriation of Data: The allegation claims that Infosys repackaged the stolen data to build "Test Cases for Facets" and develop competing products, notably Infosys Helix. Refusal to Audit: When TriZetto requested an audit to verify Infosys' claims of non-misuse (as permitted under their NDAs), Infosys allegedly refused to cooperate, which Cognizant argues is indicative of deliberate obfuscation. Market Impact: Cognizant contends that this misappropriation not only undermines fair competition but also raises entry barriers in the U.S. healthcare sector, potentially leading to higher costs and premiums for consumers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delayed Product Launch: Infosys alleges that Ravi Kumar (joins Cognizant in January 2023), deliberately delayed the development of the Helix platform. This delay reportedly extended the project's timeline by 18 months. Anticompetitive Practices: Infosys claims that Cognizant engaged in practices such as poaching key executives and imposing restrictive contractual clauses that hindered Infosys from accessing necessary resources. Economic Damages: As a result of these actions, Infosys is seeking triple the damages it incurred, along with legal costs, arguing that Cognizant's actions stifled competition and harmed its business prospects.

- **Emergence of Countersuits:** By January 2025, Infosys retaliated by filing a countersuit against Cognizant's CEO, Ravi Kumar S, a former Infosys executive accusing him of deliberately delaying the launch of its healthcare platform, **Helix**, through actions that allegedly included withholding critical engineering support and engaging in anticompetitive practices.

Reasons for the Dispute

- **Competition in Healthcare Software:** Both Infosys and Cognizant offer similar healthcare solutions, which automate administrative tasks for health insurance companies. The dispute highlights the intense competition in this niche market, where proprietary software is crucial for competitive advantage.
- **Executive Transitions and Confidentiality:** The case also underscores the challenges of executive transitions between major IT firms. Confidentiality agreements and NDAs are critical in preventing the misuse of proprietary information when executives switch companies.

History of Anti-Compete Litigation in the Indian IT Sector

- **Precedents and Trends:** Non-compete litigation has been on the rise, with similar disputes occurring in recent years:
 - In 2023, Wipro sued its former CFO, Jatin Dalal, who joined Cognizant after resigning from Wipro. The case was settled with Cognizant paying \$505,087 (~₹4 crore).
 - Another lawsuit involved Wipro's former SVP, Mohammad Haque, who also transitioned to Cognizant, leading to a financial settlement.
- **Regulatory Framework:** India's legal framework, including the Competition Act of 2002, provides mechanisms to address anticompetitive practices. However, the application of these laws in the IT sector is evolving, with a focus on protecting intellectual property and preventing unfair competition.
 - ✓ The Competition Commission of India (CCI) has started scrutinizing big IT firms for restrictive employment clauses.

Future Implications on the Tech Industry

- **Stricter NDAs & Non-Compete Clauses:** Companies may enforce stronger NDAs, longer cooling-off periods and tighter confidentiality agreements for executives moving to competitors to protect proprietary information.
 - ✓ In the 2010s, Infosys implemented **non-compete clauses** in its employment contracts, preventing former employees from working on the same client projects with rival firms like TCS, Accenture, IBM, Wipro, and Cognizant for six months after leaving.
- **Regulatory Changes:** The case could drive regulatory bodies to refine laws on anticompetitive practices and intellectual property protection.
 - ✓ **CCI's Probe into Google (2022):** CCI fined Google for abusing its dominant position in Android OS—similar scrutiny may apply to IT hiring practices.
- **Impact on Talent Mobility:** Firms may become more cautious about hiring executives from rivals, affecting talent movement within the IT sector.
 - ✓ In the 2000s, major Silicon Valley tech companies like Google, Apple, Intel, and Adobe, along with others, engaged in "no-poach" agreements to prevent each other from hiring each other's employees
- **Enhanced Trade Secret Protections:** Organizations will likely adopt stricter auditing and internal controls to prevent data theft.
 - ✓ **Infosys' Internal Security Policies:** Infosys already uses advanced digital forensics to track potential IP breaches.
- **Rise in Litigation:** As competition intensifies, similar lawsuits may become more common, prompting regulatory interventions.

- **Need for Clear Transition Rules:** A formal framework for executive transitions could help prevent disputes and ensure ethical hiring practices.
 - ✓ **Japan's "Lifetime Employment" Model:** In Japan, job mobility is low, reducing corporate lawsuits—but this also limits innovation.

Laws Governing Import of Gold in India

A Bengaluru Special Court rejected Kannada actor Ranya Rao's bail plea after her arrest for smuggling over 14 kg of gold from Dubai. The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), calling it a major seizure, is probing whether it was an isolated case or part of a larger operation. Authorities are also investigating possible police involvement, as local officers allegedly escorted Rao home after her Dubai trips.

- ✓ The DRI working under the Central Board of Indirect Taxes & Customs (CBIC), Ministry of Finance is India's top anti-smuggling agency, combating contraband smuggling, drug trafficking, wildlife trade, and Customs fraud.

About the Laws Governing Gold Import into India

- **Historical Context:** Until 1990, the **Gold (Control) Act, 1968** strictly regulated gold possession and imports. It was **repealed** as part of economic liberalization, leading to a shift in regulation through **customs duties** instead of outright restrictions.
- **Current Gold Import Laws:** Today, gold imports are primarily governed by the:
 - **Customs Act, 1962:** This act governs the import-export process, including the classification, valuation, and imposition of duties on gold. It mandates that all gold imports be declared at the time of entry, and appropriate customs duty must be paid. It includes-
 - **Section 11:** Empowers the government to prohibit or restrict imports and exports of goods for specific purposes, such as maintaining the security of India, preventing smuggling, and conserving foreign exchange.
 - **Section 111** under which smuggled gold is a **prohibited good** and can be **confiscated**.
 - ✓ In 2003, the Supreme Court ruled that any imported article not meeting the applicable conditions or restrictions must be classified as a "prohibited good".
 - **Section 112** under which Offenders face a **fine equal to the value of the smuggled gold**.
 - **Section 135** under which if the smuggled gold's market value **exceeds ₹1 lakh**, the offender can face **up to 7 years of imprisonment**.
 - **Baggage Rules, 2016:** It provides **Duty-Free Allowances** for following rules for an individual *residing outside of the country for more than a year*:
 - **Men:** Can bring up to **20 grams** (worth **₹50,000 duty-free**)
 - **Women:** Can bring up to **40 grams** (worth **₹1,00,000 duty-free**)
 - For Indian residents (irrespective of gender), the limit is 10 grams without any customs duty.
 - **CBIC Guidelines:** Indian passengers returning from Dubai after **6+ months stay** can bring **up to 1 kg** of gold by paying customs duty. The applicable **Customs Duty Rates** are:
 - **3%** → Men: **20-50g**, Women: **40-100g**
 - **6%** → Men: **50-100g**, Women: **100-200g**
 - **10%** → Men: **100g+**, Women: **200g+**
 - **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023:** Section 111 (organized crime) penalizes "trafficking in illicit goods" with a minimum of five years imprisonment, extendable to life imprisonment.
 - **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), 1967:** If smuggling **damages India's monetary stability**, it can be considered a **terrorist act** under **Section 15**, leading to severe penalties, including **life imprisonment**.

Why Gold Smuggling Happens?

- **High Import Duties & Taxes:** India imposes **import duties (up to 15%) and 3% GST** on gold, making legal imports expensive. Smugglers avoid these taxes, selling gold **cheaper** in the black market.
 - ✓ **Example:** The July 2024 duty reduction from 15% to 6% led to an immediate surge in legal gold imports, highlighting how tax policy impacts gold flows.
- **Weak Indian Rupee & Forex Constraints:** Rupee depreciation increases the cost of imported gold, making smuggling a cheaper alternative.
- **Strong Domestic Demand:** Gold is deeply valued in Indian **weddings, festivals, and as an investment**. Legal imports may not meet demand, encouraging illegal channels.
- **Black Money & Money Laundering:** Smuggled gold is used to **hide unaccounted money**, bypass financial scrutiny and is often used for **illegal fund transfers** and criminal financing.
 - ✓ The Bilateral Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) create loopholes, where gold imported duty-free in one country is rerouted to India illegally.
- **Profitability & Organized Crime:** The price difference between legal and smuggled gold makes it **highly lucrative**. Well-established syndicates use **air routes, sea routes, and hidden compartments** to evade customs.
- **Strict Banking Regulations:** Government policies discourage large cash dealings, pushing **businesses and individuals toward smuggled gold** for off-record transactions.

Implications of Gold Smuggling in India

Economic Impact	Security and Legal Concerns
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Loss of Government Revenue: Smuggling leads to tax evasion, depriving the government of customs duties and GST revenue.<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ According to World Gold Council (WGC), India's illegal gold imports surged to ~156 metric tons, valued at around \$9 billion, in the last year, a significant increase from 100 tons in 2022• Disrupts Market Prices: Unaccounted gold affects official trade and price stability, leading to market distortions.• Impacts Foreign Exchange Reserves: Illegal imports, affects India's forex reserves and trade balance.• Encourages Black Money and Hawala Transactions• Weakens Banking System: Illegal gold trade reduces reliance on official financial channels, impacting credit flow	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Law Enforcement Burden: Smuggling cases strain customs, DRI, and law enforcement agencies, increasing the need for surveillance and border control.• Severe Legal Consequences: Offenders face heavy fines, confiscation of gold, and up to life imprisonment under the Customs Act, BNS, and UAPA.• National Security Risks through Funding of Criminal Activities: Proceeds from smuggling may be used to fund organized crime, terror financing, and illicit trade.

D-Voter

Assam's opposition voiced concerns about the condition of 'D' (Doubtful) voters in the state, calling for the closure of its sole detention centre, now referred to as a transit camp, and urging the presentation of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) report in the Assembly.

Who are D-Voters?

- D-Voters (Doubtful Voters) are individuals in Assam unable to prove their Indian nationality whose citizenship status is under scrutiny, leading to their temporary disenfranchisement until their nationality is verified.
- Their cases are either pending with the Foreigners Tribunals or they have been declared foreigners.

- ✓ Assam has witnessed large-scale migration, especially from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), leading to concerns over demographic changes and identity politics.
- This category was introduced by the Election Commission of India (ECI) in 1997.

Restrictions on D-Voters: They cannot vote or contest in elections; can't hold government jobs

Legal Ambiguity: The term 'D-Voter' is not defined in the **Citizenship Act, 1955**, or the **Citizenship Rules, 2003**.

- ✓ The **Citizenship Rules, 2003**, framed under the **Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2003**, outline the process for maintaining the National Population Register (NPR) and NRC.
- ✓ The National Register of Citizens (NRC) was updated in 2019 to distinguish Indian citizens from foreigners.
- ✓ The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, provides citizenship to non-Muslim migrants from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.
- ✓ **The Assam Accord (1985)** set March 24, 1971, as the cutoff date for detecting and deporting foreigners. It further specifies that all persons who came to Assam after 1st January 1966 (inclusive) and up to 24th March 1971 (midnight) shall be detected in accordance with the provisions of the Foreigners Act, 1946 and the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1939.

Can a "D" voter apply for NRC Inclusion?

Yes, "D" voters can apply for NRC inclusion, but their names will be added only after clearance from the Foreigners Tribunal (quasi-judicial bodies established under the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964) and removal from the Electoral Roll as D-voters.

Citizenship Verification Process

Section 4 (Preparation of the NRC) of the Citizenship Rules 2003 provides for the citizenship verification process. It includes:

- **Initial Verification:** The Local Registrar marks individuals with doubtful citizenship in the NPR for further inquiry. The concerned individual or family is notified after verification.
 - ✓ NPR is a database of all usual residents of India. NPR is the basis for NRC and helps identify doubtful citizens.
- **Opportunity for Hearing:** They can present their case before the **Sub-district or Taluk Registrar of Citizenship** before a final decision. The Registrar must conclude findings within **90 days**, with possible extensions if justified in writing.
- **Publication & Objections:** A **draft Local Register of Indian Citizens** is published for corrections, objections, or inclusion requests. Objections must be filed within **30 days** of publication.
 - The Registrar reviews and disposes of objections within **90 days**, then submits the final list to the **District Registrar** for inclusion in the **NRC**.
- **Appeal Process:** Aggrieved individuals can appeal to the **District Registrar** within **30 days** of the decision. The appeal is reviewed within **90 days**, and if successful, the individual's name is added to the **NRC**.

Pratibimb Module

Recently the Lok Sabha was informed that the 'Pratibimb' module has led to 6,046 arrests, 17,185 linkages, and 36,296 cyber investigation requests.

About the Pratibimb Module

- The 'Pratibimb' module is a Geographic Information System (GIS)-based software launched by the **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)** under the Union Home Ministry.
- It is a **cybercrime tracking system** designed to assist law enforcement agencies (LEAs).

- ✓ The **I4C**, established by the Ministry of Home Affairs, plays a crucial role in coordinating cybercrime investigations and strengthening India's cyber defense mechanisms.
- ✓ **National Cybercrime Threat Analytics Unit (NCTAU)** – Analyzes emerging threats.
- ✓ **National Cybercrime Reporting Portal (NCRP)** – Allows citizens to report cyber frauds.

Key Functions

- **Criminal Location Mapping:** It tracks criminals and crime infrastructure, providing jurisdictional visibility.
- **Cybercrime Investigation Assistance:** It facilitates the seeking and receiving of techno-legal assistance from **I4C** and Subject Matter Experts (SMEs).
- **Data Analysis:** It identifies interstate linkages of crimes and criminals involved in cybercrime cases across different States/UTs.

Similar Initiatives:

- **'Samanvaya' Platform:** A coordination system for cybercrime data sharing and analytics among LEAs.
- **National Cyber Forensic Laboratory (Investigation), New Delhi:** It has been established to provide early-stage forensic assistance to State/UT Police, supporting over 11,835 cybercrime cases.

International Comparisons

- **USA:** FBI's Cyber Division (AI-based crime prediction).
- **UK:** National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) (Real-time cyber intelligence sharing)

Extra Mile: Recent Cybercrime Trends in India (FY 2024)

- According to Finance Ministry data, **High-value cyber fraud cases** surged more than **4 times in FY 2024** causing losses of **₹177 crore** more than double the previous year.
- Cases involving amounts over **₹1 lakh** rose from **6,699 (FY 2023) to 29,082 (FY 2024)**.
- Scammers are exploiting low cyber literacy using **AI, impersonation, and digital fraud (Digital Arrests)** via calls, texts, and online platforms.
 - ✓ **Example:** The "Loan App Scam"—fraudsters offered instant loans, then harassed victims with AI-generated deepfake videos.
- **Authorities' Response:**
 - Telecom regulator has blacklisted spam callers.
 - RBI has proposed freezing suspected fraudulent accounts.
 - The government has launched awareness campaigns, handbooks, and media outreach.
 - Banks have enlisted Bollywood stars for cyber awareness, while a fact-checking group partnered with TV anchors to educate vulnerable seniors.
 - The Prime Minister in his *Mann ki Baat* program has also urged citizens to strengthen online security.

Sansad Bhashini

In a major step towards modernizing parliamentary processes, the Lok Sabha Secretariat and the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) signed an MoU to develop the Sansad Bhashini initiative recently.

About Sansad Bhashini Initiative

It leverages **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** and **Natural Language Processing (NLP)** to enhance multilingual support, streamline parliamentary operations, and improve access to parliamentary records.

Key Features

- **Multilingual Translation:** It will provide AI-driven seamless translation of debate documents, agenda files, and committee meetings into regional languages and will help promote linguistic diversity and accessibility for all citizens.
- **Real-Time Speech Conversion & Transcription:** It will provide instant speech-to-speech conversion with real-time transcription
- **AI-Powered Interactive Chatbot:** It will assist officials and members in retrieving procedural rules and documents by providing instant, accurate responses, improving efficiency.
 - ✓ AI-powered chatbots used in the EU and Canada's Parliament have improved legislative efficiency.
- **Speech-to-Text & Live Interpretation:** It will help convert verbal debates into text with real-time transcription and will also include noise reduction, customizable vocabulary, and documentation tools for accuracy.
 - ✓ **NeVA** (National e-Vidhan Application) can integrate Sansad Bhashini to make legislative processes paperless and more efficient.
- **Improves Public Accessibility:** Citizens can read/listen to parliamentary debates in their preferred language, promoting transparency and engagement.

If successful, **Sansad Bhashini** could accelerate **AI adoption in India**, making parliamentary proceedings more inclusive and efficient.

National e-Vidhan Application (NeVA)

Delhi recently became the 28th legislature to join the National e-Vidhan Application (NeVA) platform.

What is NeVA?

- It is an online platform developed under the guidance of the **Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs (MoPA)**. It is **device-neutral** and **member-centric**, providing legislators with smart access to **House business**, including **member details, rules, business lists, notices, bills, questions, reports, and committee documents**.
- This digital platform is based on the principle of '**One Nation-One Application**'. Its core aim is for end-to-end digitalisation of all the functions of State Legislatures by transforming them into "**Digital Houses**".
 - ✓ **Nagaland** created history by becoming the **first State Assembly** in the entire country to implement the NeVA programme to become completely paperless.

Objective: To digitize legislative procedures, making them more efficient, accessible, and sustainable across states and UT assemblies.

Key Features

- **Access to Legislative Information:** Members can view all House business details on their phones and tablets. Ministers can manage parliamentary work, including replies to questions and access to proceedings.
- **Support for Government Departments:** It enables departments to operate digitally, ensuring seamless coordination. Thus, expanding the adoption of tech-driven legislative governance across India.
- **Facilitates House Proceedings:** It assists the Chair in conducting sessions efficiently, enhances legislators' ability to fulfill their responsibilities and streamlines legislative processes thus reducing delays and improving governance.
 - ✓ E.g. Uttar Pradesh Assembly shifted to a fully digital format for question submissions and discussions.
- **Secure & Reliable Platform:** It is hosted on Meghraj 2.0, India's cloud infrastructure for security, disaster recovery, and uninterrupted functioning.
- **Multi-Stakeholder Access:** It is usable by members, ministers, assembly staff, government departments, media, and citizens for different purposes. Thus, enabling smooth communication between legislators and secretariat staff.

- **Paperless Operations:** It provides **real-time access** to **agendas, bills, and reports etc.**, reduces paper usage and promotes a **greener governance model**.
- **Multilingual Support:** It caters to **diverse linguistic needs** across states and regions.
- **Integration with Other E-Governance Initiatives:** Linking NeVA with DigiLocker (for safe storage of legislative documents); National Judicial Data Grid (for legal reference) and MyGov Portal (for public feedback on bills)

Best Practices & Global Examples

- **Estonia:** Fully digital e-Parliament system with AI-driven bill drafting.
- **UK:** Hansard digital records for real-time public access to debates.
- **South Korea:** AI-based legislative monitoring system for real-time public interaction.

Assistance to State & UTs for Modernization of Police (ASUMP)

The *Assistance to State & UTs for Modernization of Police (ASUMP)*, (erstwhile *Modernization of State Police Forces (MPF)* scheme) is implemented by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).

✓ 'Police' and 'Public Order' are State subject as per the 7th Schedule of the Constitution of India.

Objective: To ensure that police forces in States and UTs are well-equipped to handle modern security challenges through:

- Development of police infrastructure, including modern police stations.
- Equipping police personnel with the latest technology, weapons, and communication systems.
- Strengthening law enforcement capabilities at the ground level.
- Promoting thematic modernization by allowing States/UTs to focus on specific modernization components each year, such as cyber policing, communication upgrades, or advanced weaponry.

Funding Pattern (Centre: State)

For Himalayan States (Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh) & 8 North Eastern States (Category A)	90:10
Remaining States (Category B)	60:40
UTs (Category C)	100% Central Funding

Key Guidelines

- **Items/Activities Covered:** Expenditure is permissible for weapons, forensic equipment, IT systems, communication tools, training aids, cyber forensics equipment, surveillance tools, traffic control devices, and SMART policing-related items.
 - Construction of police housing is restricted to specific areas (Jammu & Kashmir, Northeastern states, LWE districts). Mobility funds can only be used for field-level police offices.
- **Capacity Building:** At least 10% of the action plan must focus on capacity building for police personnel and improving police-public interaction. This includes training in stress management, community service initiatives, and grievance handling improvements.
- **Project Management Consultancy (PMC):** States/UTs may hire PMCs for technical advice on IT projects. PMC costs are capped at 3% of each project's budget.
- **Contingency Reserve:** A reserve fund constituting 5% of the annual allocation is set aside for emergent needs without requiring prior liquidation of unspent balances from previous years.
- **Incentives for Police Reforms:** States/UTs demonstrating exemplary implementation of police reforms may receive up to 20% additional funding under the scheme.

- **Approval Mechanism:** State/UT Action Plans must be approved by a State/UT Level Empowered Committee (SLEC/UTLEC) before submission to MHA for final approval by its High-Powered Committee (HPC).

Extra Mile: Smart Policing Initiatives

- **CyTrain Portal by Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) Platform:** It offers **online training** for police and judicial officers in cybercrime investigation, forensics, and prosecution. Over **1,02,321 officers registered**, and **79,909 certificates have been issued** so far.
- **Cyber Crime Prevention Against Women and Children (CCPWC) Scheme:** Financial aid has been provided to states/UTs for **cyber forensic labs, hiring cyber experts, and training personnel**. **33 States/UTs have forensic labs**, and **24,600 officials are trained** in cybercrime awareness and investigation.
- **iRAD (Integrated Road Accident Database):** Developed by MoRTH & IIT Madras to reduce road accidents through data-driven policing.
- **Weekly Peer-Learning Sessions:** are conducted **every Friday** for police and Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) to discuss **cybercrime trends, investigation methods, and countermeasures**. **98 sessions** held so far.
- **The National Automated Fingerprint Identification System (NAFIS):** launched in 2022, is a centralized, nationwide database of fingerprints managed by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)
- **National Cybercrime Reporting Portal (NCRP):** It was launched in **2019** for the **public to file complaints** regarding cybercrime including cybercrimes against women and children. Complaints which are then converted into **FIRs**, and subsequent action is taken by **State Governments**. State Governments have received financial aid to strengthen **1930 helpline for call centers** for assisting citizens with online cyber complaints.
- **Inter-Operable Criminal Justice System (ICJS):** Integrated database for courts, police, jails, and forensic labs.
- **Joint Cybercrime Coordination Teams (JCCTs):** **7 JCCTs** have been set up in cybercrime hotspots for better coordination.
- **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C):** Launched in 2020 for national cybercrime prevention and investigation.
- **Samanvaya Portal:** It is a joint Cybercrime Investigation Facilitation Platform to facilitate cybercrime data sharing and map criminals and crime infrastructure for jurisdictional visibility.
- **CCTNS (Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems):** Launched in 2009, connects 15,000+ police stations across India.
- **National Cyber Forensic Laboratory & Cyber Commando Wing:** Delhi-based **Forensic Lab** provides cybercrime investigation support. **Cyber Commando Wing** was established to recruit specialized personnel. **3,785 personnel trained** in cyber forensics, prosecution, and judiciary.
- **SMART Policing Concept:** Introduced in **2014**, it emphasizes **modernization, cybercrime prevention, drug de-addiction, and protection of vulnerable groups**. ((S – Strict & Sensitive; M – Modern & Mobile; A – Alert & Accountable; R – Reliable & Responsive; T – Tech-savvy & Trained))
- **Citizen-Centric Mobile Apps:**
 - ✓ **HIMMAT App (Delhi Police)** – Safety app for women.
 - ✓ **Suraksha App (Karnataka)** – Panic button for distress calls.
 - ✓ **M-POLICE App (Madhya Pradesh)** – Enables FIR filing and police complaints.
 - ✓ **e-Beat Book & Digital FIRs:** Chandigarh police launched e-Beat books for digital monitoring of crime-prone areas.
- **Bureau of Police Research & Development (BPR&D) Training Initiatives:** **323 workshops/webinars** conducted on **cybercrime, cryptocurrency, mobile forensics, and fintech frauds**. **26,591 officers trained** in advanced policing techniques.

- **G20 Cybersecurity Conference (2023):** Hosted by MHA in Gurugram, it focused on Non-fungible tokens (NFTs), AI, and Metaverse-related crime.
 - **Joint seminar on cryptocurrency investigations** held with **France in Dec 2024.**

Section 44(3) of Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023

Opposition has urged the government to repeal Section 44(3) of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 (DPDP), calling it a threat to the Right to Information (RTI) Act. Prominent RTI activists also voiced opposition.

✓ The DPDP Act aims to balance individuals' data privacy rights with lawful data processing needs.

What is Section 44(3) of DPDP Act 2023?

Section 44(3) amends Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act, 2005, allowing authorities to deny access to information related to personal data **without considering** whether its disclosure serves a larger public interest. This contrasts with the previous requirement, which mandated a public interest assessment before denying such information.

Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act originally states that government officials are not required to share personal information about an individual if it is unrelated to public activity or interest. Additionally, if revealing the information would invade someone's privacy, it cannot be disclosed- unless the concerned officer believes that making the information public serves a *greater public interest*.

Concerns Raised Regarding Potential Implications of Section 44(3) on RTI Requests

- **Denial of Public's Right to Know & Accountability:** Exempting all personal information may block access to crucial details about public servants, such as asset declarations, weakening accountability mechanisms established under the RTI Act.
- **Right to Information vs Right to Privacy:** The Supreme Court in Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) v. Union of India (2017) recognized privacy as a fundamental right under Article 21. However, RTI is also a right under Article 19(1)(a) (Freedom of Speech and Expression).
 - ✓ **Section 44(3) favors privacy** over transparency, potentially weakening Article 19(1)(a) by limiting access to public information.
- **Removal of Public Interest Test:** Authorities no longer need to justify denials based on public interest, making it easier to withhold essential information.
- **Increased Denials & Erosion of Public Trust:** Government agencies may reject more RTI requests without demonstrating a legitimate privacy concern, reducing transparency and diminishing public trust in governance.
- **Legal Challenges & Processing Delays:** With more RTI rejections, citizens may appeal to courts, increasing judicial backlog. **Central Information Commission (CIC)** might see a rise in appeals and complaints

Global Comparisons and Best Practices

- **United Kingdom:** The UK's Freedom of Information Act protects public interest disclosures, even when they involve personal data.
- **United States:** Under FOIA (The Freedom of Information Act), the Privacy Exemption (Exemption 6) is not absolute—it must be weighed against public interest.

Way Forward: Establishing objective criteria for determining what constitutes personal information vs public interest disclosures along with Empowering CIC to review RTI denials under Section 44(3).

Punjab Tops in Agriculture Infrastructure Fund

- Punjab has utilised 100% of the Rs 4,713 crore allocated to it by the Centre under the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF) scheme.
- As of February 2025, with 21,740 projects, **Punjab ranks at number 1** in the country in implementing this scheme, with the highest number of sanctioned projects and has been given an additional Rs 2,337 crore allocation.
- Notably, nine out of the top 10 districts in the country AIF are from Punjab.
- Punjab is followed by Madhya Pradesh (12,487 projects), Maharashtra (10,407) & Uttar Pradesh (8,539)

Agriculture Infra Fund

- It is **pan India Central Sector Scheme** launched in **2020**.
- It provides a **medium - long term debt financing facility** for creation of post-harvest management infrastructure and community farming assets through **interest subvention and financial support**.
- When the scheme was started, it was meant for post-harvest management and processing at the primary level, but now, **integrated processing at the secondary level has also been included**.
 - For example, a kinnow farmer could earlier get funds for grading, waxing, and packaging of the crop (primary post-harvest processes), but since August 2024, they can avail funds to make and sell juices, jams, etc. out of the kinnow produce (secondary level).
- However, the secondary level funds are available only to those involved in the primary processing too.
- The government has also allowed **convergence between Component-A of the PM-KUSUM scheme and AIF**. The aim is to **promote sustainable clean energy solutions** alongside agricultural infrastructure development.

Benefits

Farmers	Government	Agri-entrepreneurs and startups
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Improved marketing infrastructure to allow farmers to sell directly to a larger base of consumers ○ With investments in logistics infrastructure, farmers will be able to sell in the market with reduced post-harvest losses and a smaller number of intermediaries. This will further make farmers independent ○ With modern packaging and cold storage system access, farmers will be able to further decide when to sell in the market ○ Community farming assets for improved productivity and optimization of inputs will result in substantial savings to farmers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Government will be able to direct priority sector lending in the currently unviable projects by supporting interest subvention, incentive through convergence and credit guarantee. ○ Government will further be able to reduce national food wastage percentage thereby enable agriculture sector to become competitive with current global levels. ○ Central/State Government Agencies or local bodies will be able to structure viable projects on their own or through PPP projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ With a dedicated source of funding, entrepreneurs will push for innovation in agriculture sector by leveraging technologies like IoT, AI, etc. ○ It will also connect the players in ecosystem and hence improve avenues for collaboration between entrepreneurs and farmers

Financing

- Under the scheme, **Rs 1 lakh crore is to be disbursed by financial year 2025-26** and the interest subvention and credit guarantee assistance will be given till the year 2032-33.
- Funds will be provided by banks and financial institutions as loans to Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS), Marketing Cooperative Societies, Farmer Producers Organizations (FPOs), SHGs and **farmers**.
- Loans can also be given to the Joint Liability Groups (JLG), Multipurpose Cooperative Societies, agri-entrepreneurs, startups, Aggregation Infrastructure Providers and PPP projects sponsored by the government agency or local body.
- Loans under the scheme will have **interest subvention of 3% per annum** up to a limit of Rs. 2 crore. This subvention will be available for a maximum period of seven years.
- Credit guarantee support is through the Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE) and National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABSanrakshan Trustee Company Pvt. Ltd.).

- Under AIF, benefits of other state and central subsidies can also be taken.

Impact

- As of August 2024, **Rs. 47,575 crore has been sanctioned for 74,508 projects** under AIF. These sanctioned projects have mobilized an investment of Rs 78,596 crore in agriculture sector.
- The projects sanctioned have helped in generating more than **8.19 lakh rural employment** opportunities
- The storage infrastructure created has added nearly **550 Lakh Metric Tonnes (LMT) of storage capacity** which includes 510 LMT of dry storage and ~40 LMT of cold storage.
- This additional storage capacity can save up to 20.4 LMT of food grains and 3.9 LMT of horticulture produce annually.

Livestock Health & Disease Control Programme

- The Union Cabinet approved the revision of the Livestock Health and Disease Control Programme (LHDCP), with an outlay of Rs 3,880 crore for two years.
- The scheme aims to improve the animal health sector by implementing prophylactic vaccination programmes against various diseases of livestock and poultry, capacity building, disease surveillance, and strengthening the veterinary infrastructure.
- LHDCP has now **three components**:

National Animal Disease Control Programme (NADCP)

Livestock Health & Disease Control (LH&DC)

Pashu Aushadhi **(newly added)**

- NADCP: A flagship scheme launched in 2019 for control of Foot & Mouth Disease (FMD) and Brucellosis by vaccinating 100% cattle, buffalo, sheep, goat and pig population for FMD and 100% bovine female calves of 4-8 months of age for brucellosis.
 - ✓ FMD can reduce milk yield by 50%
 - ✓ Brucellosis leads to abortions in cattle, lowering reproduction rates
- LH&DC has **three sub-components**:
 - Critical Animal Disease Control Programme (CADCP);
 - Establishment and Strengthening of Existing Veterinary Hospitals and Dispensaries - Mobile Veterinary Unit (ESVHD-MVU); and
 - Assistance to States for Control of Animal Diseases (ASCAD).

Pashu Aushadhi

- Pashu Aushadhi is a **new component added** under the LHDCP. The government will open Pashu Aushadhi stores across the country to provide **affordable generic veterinary medicines** to people engaged in animal husbandry and dairying.
- From Rs 3,880 crore for LHDCP, Rs 75 crore has been provided for the Pashu Aushadhi component.
- It has been conceptualised on the lines of the existing Pradhan Mantri Bharatiya Janaushadhi Kendras (**PMBJK**), which provide quality generic medicines at affordable prices to people

Significance of LHDCP

- ✦ As per the 20th Livestock Census, India's Livestock population stood at 535.78 million in 2019. This included a total bovine population (including cattle, buffalo, mithun and yak) of 302.79 million.
- ✦ The productivity of livestock is impacted adversely due to diseases like Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD), Brucellosis, Peste des Petits Ruminants (PPR), Cerebrospinal Fluid (CSF), Lumpy Skin Disease.
- ✦ A significant portion of the out-of-pocket expenditure of farmers goes into buying medicines to treat their cattle and other animals for illnesses.
- ✦ Implementation of LHDCP facilitates reduction in these losses by preventing diseases through immunization, surveillance and upgradation of healthcare facilities.
- ✦ Also, the scheme helps to improve productivity, generate employment, encourage entrepreneurship in the rural area

- More than 10,300 PMBJKs are currently functional across the country.
- “Generic medicines” are basically non-branded drugs, which are marketed under a non-proprietary/ approved name rather than a proprietary/brand name.
- **Ethnoveterinary Medicines:** The Pashu Aushadhi Kendras will also sell ethnoveterinary medicines, based on traditional beliefs and indigenous knowledge and practices, to treat animal diseases.
- **Administration:** The stores will be run by *Cooperative Societies* and *Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samridhhi Kendras (PMKSK)*.
- **Traditional Formulations:** The National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) has compiled a list of traditional formulations targeting bovine ailments such as: Mastitis; FMD-related lesions (mouth and foot); Fever, diarrhoea, bloating, indigestion; Worm infestations.

Vizhinjam Port

- Vizhinjam International Seaport Project (VISP) has received the environmental clearance for the development of phase II and phase III.
- Located near Thiruvananthapuram, Vizhinjam would be India’s **first international deepwater transshipment port** with a natural depth of more than 18 meters, scalable up to 20 meters, which is crucial to get large vessels and mother ships.
- The Rs 7,600 crore multipurpose seaport project is being built by Adani Ports and SEZ Private Limited on a **design, build, finance, operate and transfer (DBFOT) model**.
- The DBFOT deal is for 40 years, with provisions extending for 20 years.

Significance

- India has 13 major ports. However, the country lacks a landside mega-port and terminal infrastructure to deal with ultra-large container ships.
- Hence, nearly 75% of India's transshipment cargo is handled at ports outside India, mainly Colombo, Singapore, and Klang.
- VISP is designed to cater to container transshipment, multi-purpose, and break-bulk cargo. Also, the port is located 10 nautical miles from the international shipping route.
- Thus, the cost of movement of containers to and from foreign destinations is likely to come down.
- Moreover, it offers large-scale automation for **quick turnaround** of vessels with state-of-the-art infrastructure to handle Megamax container ships.
- Developing a port into a Transshipment Hub will lead to forex savings, FDI, increased economic activity at other Indian Ports, development of related logistics infrastructure, improved operation efficiencies and increase in revenue share.
- Several other allied businesses viz. ship chandlery, ship repair, crew change facility, logistics value-added services, warehousing and bunkering also come up at the transshipment port.
- The project is expected to generate 5,000 direct job opportunities, apart from giving a boost to an industrial corridor and cruise tourism.

Formation & Promotion of 10,000 FPOs

- The target of forming 10,000 Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) was achieved under the **Central Sector Scheme - Formation and Promotion of 10,000 FPOs**.
 - 10,000th FPO has been registered in Khagaria district (Bihar) and focuses on maize, banana, and paddy.
- The scheme was **launched in 2020** with an outlay of Rs **6,865 crore till 2027-28**.

Services Undertaken by FPOs

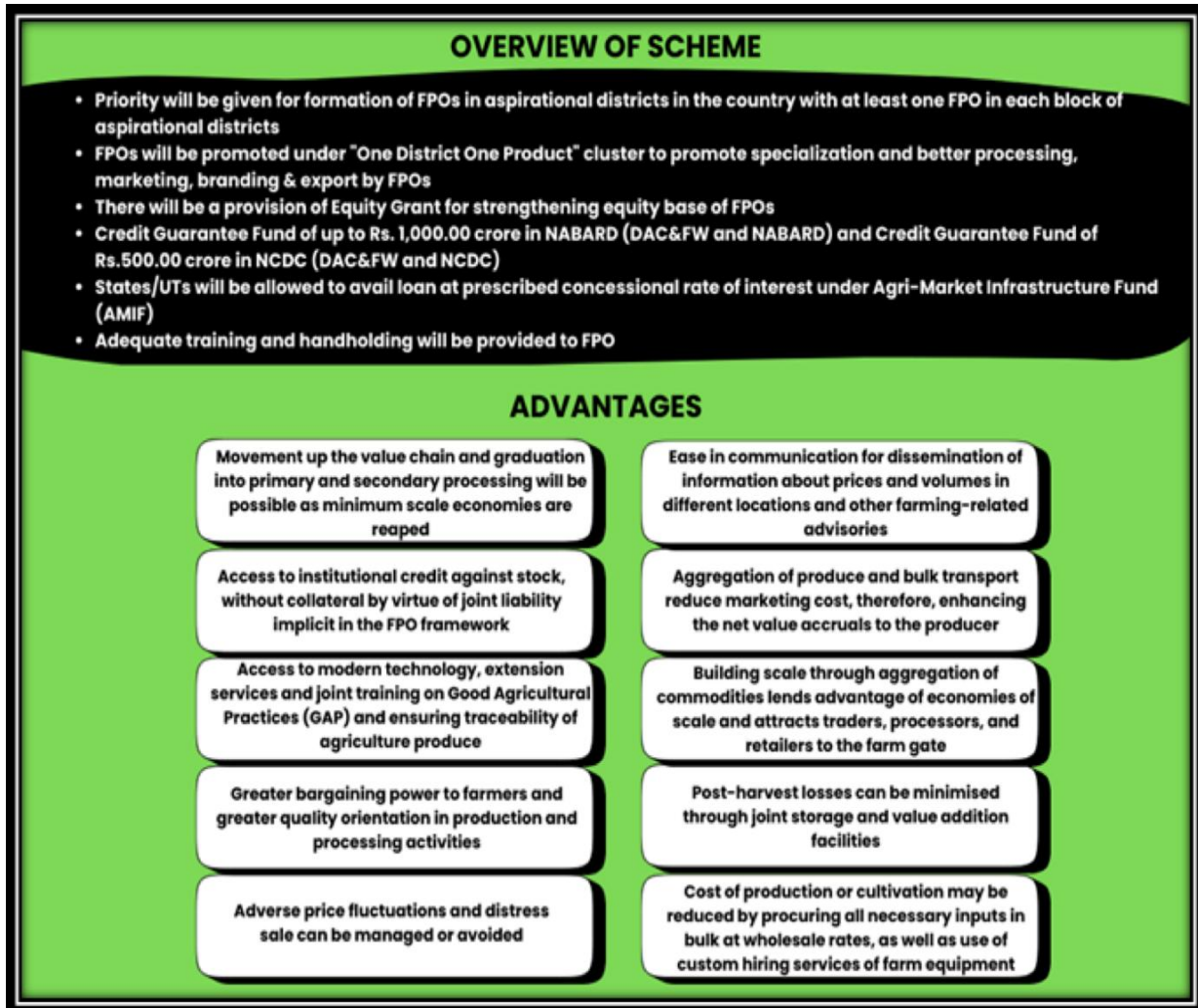
- Supply quality production inputs like seed, fertilizer, pesticides and other such inputs at

FPOs

- FPOs are entities incorporated/ registered either under Part IXA of Companies Act or under Co-operative Societies Act of the concerned states.
- FPOs are groups formed by farmers for the purpose of utilising collectives through economies of scale in production and marketing of agricultural and allied sector.
- It intends to enhance productivity through efficient, cost effective and sustainable resource use for ensuring sustainable income-oriented farming, thus helping in reduction of cost of farm production and increase in farmers' income.
- To facilitate this process, the Small Farmers' Agribusiness Consortium (**SFAC**) was mandated by Department of Agriculture and Cooperation, Ministry of Agriculture, to support the state governments in the formation of FPOs.
- Approximately **30 lakh farmers** in the country are connected to FPOs, with around **40% of them being women**. These FPOs are now conducting business worth thousands of crores in the agricultural sector.
- FPOs help in collectivization of such small, marginal and landless farmers in order to give them the collective strength to deal with various issues.

reasonably lower wholesale rates. Access to technology & finances.

- Make available need-based production and post-production *machinery and equipment* like cultivator, tiller, sprinkler set, combine harvester on custom hiring basis for members to reduce the per unit production cost.
- Make available **value addition** like cleaning, assaying, sorting, grading, packing and farm level processing facilities on reasonably cheaper rates.
- Undertake higher income generating activities like seed production, bee keeping, mushroom cultivation etc.
- Facilitate **logistics services** such as storage, transportation, loading/un-loading etc. on shared cost basis.



Scheme Details

- Under the scheme, there is a provision for handholding support for a period of five years to each new FPO formed, and financial assistance up to **Rs 18 lakhs to each FPO** towards management cost for 3 years.
- Additionally, matching equity grant up to Rs 2,000 per farmer member of FPO with a limit of Rs 15 lakh per FPO and a credit guarantee facility up to Rs 2 crore of project loan per FPO from eligible lending institutions to ensure institutional credit accessibility to FPOs.

Challenges Faced by FPOs

- Inadequate Professional Management and lack of technical skills and awareness.
- Weak financials and inadequate access to credit.
- Lack of risk mitigation mechanism.

- Inadequate access to infrastructure and the market.

IRCTC & IRFC get Navratna Status

- The Centre has approved the upgradation of Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) and Indian Railway Finance Corporation (IRFC) as the country's 25th and 26th Navratna companies respectively.
- IRCTC is an extended arm of the Indian Railways, and the only entity selling train tickets online. The Ministry of Railways holds a 62.40% share in IRCTC.
- IRFC's main function is to secure the Indian Railways' extra budgetary resources (EBR) requirements through market borrowings at the most competitive rates and terms. The Ministry of Railways holds 86.36% share in IRFC.
- **All seven listed Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs)** of the Indian Railways now have Navratna status. The Indian Railways have a total 12 CPSEs.
- The five Indian Railways companies with Navratna status before IRCTC and IRFC are Container Corporation of India (CONCOR), Rail Vikas Nigam Ltd (RVNL), RITES Ltd, IRCON International Ltd, and RailTel Corporation of India Ltd.
- CONCOR is a multimodal logistics company for freight transport, and RailTel provides connectivity services such as IP-based video surveillance systems at stations and NIC e-Office services.
- IRCON specialises in building railways and highways projects in India and abroad.
- RITES is a multidisciplinary transport infrastructure consultancy organisation and RVNL implements projects relating to creation and augmentation of capacities of rail infrastructure on a fast-track basis.

Eligibility criteria for Navratna status

- CPSE which are Miniratna I, Schedule 'A' and have obtained excellent or very good MOU ratings in three of the last five years and have composite scores of 60 (out of a maximum score of 100) or above in the following six selected performance indicators:
 - Ratio of Net profit to Net Worth;
 - Ratio of Manpower cost to Total cost of production or cost of services;
 - Ratio of Profit Before Depreciation Interest and Tax (PBDIT) to Capital employed or Return on Capital Employed;
 - Ratio of Profit Before Interest and Tax (PBIT) to Turnover;
 - Earnings Per Share (EPS); and
 - Inter sectoral performance of the company.

Benefits of Navratna status

- Navratna companies are allowed to invest up to 15% of their net worth on a single project, or 30% of their net worth in all the projects in a given year, subject to a cap of Rs 1,000 crore without seeking approval from the central government.

Bills of Lading Bill, 2024

- In an effort to support the country's growing shipping sector, the Lok Sabha has passed the Bills of Lading Bill, 2024, which aims to update and simplify the legal framework for shipping documents.
- A **bill of lading** refers to a document issued by a freight carrier to a shipper. It contains details such as the type, quantity, condition, and destination of goods being carried.
- With the shipping industry evolving and the global trade landscape changing, there is a need for India to adopt a more comprehensive and understandable law that aligns with international standards.
- The proposed legislation will replace the colonial-era Indian **Bills of Lading Act, 1856**, providing a more modern and user-friendly approach to maritime shipping. It will rename the existing law to the Bills of Lading Act, 2025 and include several key reforms.
- The new legislation aims to simplify the language and reorganize provisions without altering their underlying substance.

- It also empowers the Central Government to issue directions to facilitate the law's implementation along with an inclusion of a standard repeal and saving clause, while eliminating the colonial legacy of the 1856 Act.
- These changes will bring numerous benefits, including streamlined business processes, reduced litigation risks, and improved clarity for carriers, shippers, and lawful holders of goods.
- The updates are expected to facilitate a more efficient and reliable shipping environment.

Farmers' Share in Agri Produce

- RBI conducted a pan-India survey to find the share of consumer prices received by farmers for major rabi crops.
- The survey conducted in May-July 2024, covered mandis/villages in 86 centres across 18 states for 12 rabi crops using three separate questionnaires for farmers, traders and retailers.
- As per the survey, farmers received a share ranging from **40-67% of consumer prices for major rabi crops**.
- Farmers' share is higher for non-perishable crops and lower for perishable products (fruits and vegetables).

Other Findings

- While cash transactions dominate the payments in the agriculture supply chain, electronic payments registered a significant increase in 2024 survey over the previous surveys of 2018 and 2022.
- The weather forecast and irrigation availability appear to be the most critical factors in the farmers' decision function regarding rabi sowing.
- An analysis of mark-ups indicates that higher transaction costs (transportation, labour, rent) reduce the retailers' markups, while higher post-harvest losses in perishables seems to permit the retailers to pass losses onto the consumers.

Non-Perishable Products

- **Wheat** farmers emerged as the biggest beneficiaries, with a **67% share of consumer prices**.
- This is because wheat is a notified commodity, with a significant portion of produce sold through the public procurement system. Public Procurement at minimum support price gives farmers an assured market option.
- **Rice** farmers received an estimated **52% share of retail prices**. This figure is consistent with previous surveys.
- Within pulses, **lentil** producers receive around **66%** and **gram (chana)** around **60%**.
- A higher share of farmers is desirable for lentils to incentivise production, since it is mainly grown by small-holder farmers and there is significant import dependency.
- Within oilseeds, farmers' share for **rapeseed and mustard (R&M)** stood at **52%**.

Perishable products

- Perishable crops have lower farmers' share and higher trader/retailer markups than the non-perishables.
- The combined share of traders and retailers in consumer prices is more than half in perishables (except for tomatoes).
- The **farmers' share** in the prices of perishable commodities (fruits and vegetables) is **estimated around 40-63%**.
- In India, the fruit and vegetable supply chain comprise many unorganised intermediaries, which creates difficulties in identifying the flow of products, funds and information across the supply chain, and can compress farmers' share in consumer prices.
- Perishable products are characterised by short shelf-life cycles, seasonal production, diverse quality and quantity, special logistical requirements, quality standards, demand and cost uncertainties.
- They are also dependent on climatic conditions and supply chain lead time that create more uncertainties about their timely and sufficient availability in the markets.

Reinsurance

- The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) has given **Valueattics Reinsurance** the license to commence reinsurance business in India.
- This is the **first private reinsurer in India** to be granted a reinsurance license. Currently, public sector General Insurance Corporation (GIC Re) is the only reinsurance company operating in India.
- Reinsurance companies play a crucial role in the insurance industry by providing insurance to other insurance companies, acting as a second level of insurance or insurers' insurer to manage and transfer risk, particularly large or catastrophic losses.

- Companies that seek reinsurance are called **ceding companies**.
- Reinsurance seeks to assure solvency, proper market conduct, fair contract conditions, reasonable pricing, and suitable consumer protections.

Benefits of Reinsurance

- Reinsurance is critical to the financial stability and operational effectiveness of insurance businesses.
- It helps to **transfer risk** to another company to reduce the likelihood of large payouts for a claim. It helps insurers to **remain solvent** by recovering all or part of a payout.
- By transferring considerable sections of risk to reinsurers, insurers not only protect themselves from large-scale losses but also **free up critical money**.
- This strategic adjustment increases their ability to fund additional insurance and pursue new market opportunities.
- Since, insurance firms become the customer of the reinsurer, the reinsurance companies provide important expertise and enhanced risk management capabilities, which helps the insurance companies in their business.

Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI): It is an autonomous, statutory body set up under the IRDA Act, 1999.

Functions of IRDAI

- Registering and regulating insurance & reinsurance companies
- Protecting policyholders' interests
- Licensing and establishing norms for insurance intermediaries
- Promoting professional organisations in insurance
- Regulating premium rates and terms of non-life insurance covers
- Ensuring insurance coverage in rural areas and of vulnerable sections of society

Digital Transformation Award

- RBI has been selected for the **Digital Transformation Award 2025** by Central Banking at London (UK) for its digital initiatives named **Pravaah and Sarthi**.
- These digital initiatives have reduced the use of paper-based submissions, thus transforming RBI's internal and external processes.

Sarthi

- Launched in 2023, Sarthi digitised RBI's **internal workflows**, enabling its employees to store and share documents securely, improving record management, and increasing the options for data analysis through reports and dashboards.
- It helps RBI to boost operational efficiency by automating processes. It allows task and performance tracking, improved collaboration, and integration with other RBI systems.
- Where previously RBI's many departments relied on a fragmented mix of manual and digital processes, Sarthi creates a unified global repository for the central bank's information.

Pravaah (*meaning smooth flow*)

- Launched in 2024, Pravaah, creates a digital channel for external users to submit regulatory applications to the RBI.
- Documents submitted and processed through the portal are plugged into the Sarthi database, where they can be handled digitally across RBI offices, with centralised cybersecurity systems and digital tracking.
- Pravaah has so far allowed more than 70 different regulatory applications to be digitised, supporting the work of nine RBI departments.
- By the end of 2024, it has marked an 80% increase in monthly applications, partly due to the increased ease of use provided by the portal.

Parvatmala Pariyojana

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), chaired by PM Narendra Modi, has approved two major ropeway projects in Uttarakhand under the **National Ropeways Development Programme – Parvatmala Pariyojana**.
- Both projects will be executed under the Design, Build, Finance, Operate, and Transfer (DBFOT) model in a **Public-Private Partnership (PPP)** framework.
- The projects will be based on the **monocable detachable gondola (MDG)** and **tricable detachable gondola (3S)** technology.
- Both the projects will boost tourism, create jobs, and support local industries like hospitality and travel.
- They will provide safe, eco-friendly, and all-weather connectivity for the pilgrims and will enhance accessibility to the respective shrines.

Kedarnath Ropeway Project

- Kedarnath, one of the 12 **Jyotirlingas**, is situated at an elevation of nearly 12,000 feet in Rudraprayag district.
- The **12.9 km Sonprayag to Kedarnath** ropeway is sanctioned at Rs 4,081 crore.
- It will have a capacity of 1,800 passengers per hour per direction and will reduce travel time from 8-9 hours to just 36 minutes.

Hemkund Sahib Ropeway Project

- Hemkund Sahib is a Sikh shrine, where the **10th Sikh Guru - Guru Gobind Singh is believed to have meditated**. It is at an elevation of 15,000 feet in Chamoli district.
- The **12.4 km Govindghat to Hemkund Sahib** ropeway will be developed at a cost of **Rs 2,730 crore**.
- It will be developed with a capacity of 1,100 passengers per hour per direction replacing the challenging 21-km trek with a modern transport system
- This ropeway will have a Govindghat to Ghangaria section, which serves as a gateway to the **Valley of Flowers National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site**, and Ghangaria to Hemkund Sahib section.

National Ropeways Development Programme – Parvatmala Pariyojana (NRDP - PP)

- To enhance **last-mile connectivity** in remote and hilly regions, NRDP-PP was announced in the 2022 Budget under **PPP mode**.
- Implemented by the **National Highway Logistics Management Limited (NHLML)**, the initiative aims to develop over 250 ropeway projects covering 1,200 km within five years.
- Aligned with the **Make in India** initiative, the programme mandates at least **50% indigenous components** in ropeway construction.

Major Factors Driving Ropeway Infrastructure

- **Economical** – Ropeways require minimal ground construction, reducing land acquisition costs. Despite higher per km construction costs than roads, they can be more economical overall due to lower maintenance costs.
- **Faster** – Ropeways provide a direct aerial route, making them faster by bypassing hilly and challenging terrains.
- **Environmentally Friendly** – Ropeways have low dust emissions, and material containers can be designed to prevent environmental pollution.

Unified Logistics Interface Platform

- The Unified Logistics Interface Platform (ULIP) recorded over 100 crore Application Programming Interface (API) transactions, marking a significant step towards building a tech-driven logistics ecosystem in India.
- Launched under the National Logistics Policy (NLP) in 2022, ULIP integrates 43 systems from 11 ministries through 129 APIs, covering over 1,800 data fields to enhance data accessibility and operational efficiency.
- With 1,300 plus registered companies and 350 plus agreements signed, ULIP is driving automation, real-time cargo tracking, and regulatory compliance.
- The platform processes an average of one crore API transactions per week, benefiting businesses of all sizes and democratising access to logistics data.
- ULIP's multi-modal API ecosystem facilitates real-time tracking across road, rail, ocean, and air, ensuring just-in-time inventory management and cost savings. Several companies use ULIP for transporter verification

and supply chain optimisation, to adopt greener transport alternatives, cut emissions, and align with India's carbon reduction goals.

- Additionally, logistics service providers are streamlining freight movement and digital documentation, reducing congestion at logistics hubs.
- At the same time, state and central government departments are leveraging it for data-driven decision-making.
- ULIP aligns with India's vision of becoming a global trade and manufacturing powerhouse, modernising logistics infrastructure, and enhancing competitiveness in the Make in India initiative.

Gum Arabic

- Gum Arabic is increasingly being trafficked from rebel-held areas of war-torn Sudan, complicating efforts to insulate supply chains from conflict.
- Gum arabic (gum acacia, gum sudani) is a natural gum originally consisting of the hardened sap of two species of the Acacia tree.
- However, the term gum arabic does not actually indicate a particular botanical source.
- The gum is harvested commercially from wild trees, **mostly in Sudan (80%)** and throughout the Sahel, from Senegal to Somalia.

Applications

- Gum arabic's mixture of polysaccharides and glycoproteins gives it the properties of a glue and binder that is edible for humans.
- It is used in the food industry as a stabiliser, emulsifying agent, and thickening agent in icing, fillings, soft candy, chewing gum, confectionery, and to bind the sweeteners & flavourings in soft drinks.
- Therefore, companies like Pepsi and Coke, can't exist without having gum arabic in their formulations. Wine makers use it as a wine fining agent.
- For artists, it is the traditional binder in watercolour paint and in photography for gum printing.
- Lithographic printers employ it to keep the non-image areas of the plate receptive to water.
 - This treatment helps to stop oxidation of aluminium plates in the interval between processing & printing.
- Pharmaceutical drugs and cosmetics also use the gum as a binder, emulsifier, and suspending agent or viscosity-increasing agent.
- It is an important ingredient in shoe polish and can be used in making homemade incense cones. It is also used as a lickable adhesive, for example on postage stamps, envelopes, and cigarette papers.

Gold Monetisation Scheme Discontinued

The government has discontinued the Gold Monetisation Scheme's medium- and long-term deposits due to prevailing market conditions amid rising gold prices. However, short-term deposits will continue at the discretion of banks based on commercial viability.

Gold Monetisation Scheme

- GMS was a revamped version of an older Gold Deposit Scheme. GMS was **launched in 2015** to reduce country's reliance on the import of gold in the long run and mobilise the idle lying gold for productive purposes.
- It allows consumers to either **sell** their gold or **store** it with banks, so it could merge into the formal economy and reduce the country's gold imports and thus, reduce the current account deficit.

- Idle gold held by **households, trusts and various institutions** in India was deposited under this scheme.
- GMS consisted of **three components**:
 - Short-term bank deposit (1-3 years)- decided by banks on the basis of prevailing international lease rates, other costs, market conditions, etc. and is borne by banks
 - Medium-term government deposit (5-7 years)- decided by government, in consultation with RBI and borne by the central government.
 - Long-term government deposit (12-15 years)- decided by government, in consultation with RBI and borne by the central government
- GMS interest rate was fixed at 2.25% for medium-term bonds and at 2.5% for long-term bonds.

Status of other gold schemes

- ⊗ GMS is the second gold scheme to face closure by the government in recent months amid a sharp rise in gold prices. Gold prices have risen sharply by 41.5% to Rs 90,450 per 10 gm (as of March 25, 2025) from Rs 63,920 per 10 gm on January 1, 2024.
- ⊗ Centre recently **discontinued fresh issuance of sovereign gold bonds (SGBs)**.
 - SGBs were issued with the objective to boost investment in gold, but the announcement to cut the import duty on gold in Budget 2024-25 was already in line with that objective and helped raise demand for gold.

Moreover, as per the government, gold bonds had been a "fairly high-cost borrowing" for the government and, hence, no fresh issuances are being made

- The medium- and long-term deposits under the GMS have been discontinued. The existing medium- and long-term government deposits are not impacted, and these deposits will run till maturity.
- The **minimum deposit allowed was 10 gm** of raw gold (bars, coins, jewellery excluding stones and other metals). There was **no maximum limit** for deposit under the scheme.
- Till November 2024, approximately **31,164 kg of gold had been mobilised** under GMS. Out of this, short-term gold deposits accounted for 7,509 kg gold, medium-term gold deposits stood at 9,728 kg, and 13,926 kg was mobilised for long-term gold deposits.
- **Gold Collection from Different Sources**
 - From individuals/HUFs (FY 2016-17 & 2017-18): 1,134 kg
 - From temples, trusts, mutual funds, gold ETFs, and firms: 10,872 kg

BHIM 3.0

- NPCI BHIM Services Limited (NBSL) recently launched Bharat Interface for Money (BHIM) 3.0.
 - **Launched in 2016**, BHIM has been instrumental in facilitating digital payments across India.
- BHIM 3.0 aims to provide a more seamless and user-friendly experience with improved accessibility, financial management tools, and exclusive offerings for businesses.

Key Features for Users

- **Expanded language support**: It will now be available in 15+ Indian languages to cater to a wider audience.
- **Optimised for low internet areas**: Ensures uninterrupted transactions even in regions with weak or unstable network connectivity.
- **Advanced money management**: New tools allow users to efficiently track, manage, and *split expenses*.
- **Family mode**: Allows users to onboard family members, monitor shared expenses, and assign payments for better financial planning.
- **Spends analytics**: Provides a categorised breakdown of monthly expenses through an intuitive dashboard.

NPCI BHIM Services Limited (NBSL)

- ⊗ NBSL was incorporated in 2024, as a **wholly owned subsidiary of the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)**.
- ⊗ NBSL aims to enhance the adoption of digital payments through the BHIM platform and is committed to providing a seamless, secure, and user-friendly payment experience to individuals and businesses across India.

National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)

- ⊗ **Set up in 2008**, NPCI is an umbrella organisation for operating retail payments and settlement systems in India.
- ⊗ It is an **initiative of RBI and Indian Banks' Association (IBA)** under the provisions of the **Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007**.
- It has been incorporated as a **Not for Profit Company** to
- ⊗ provide infrastructure to the entire banking system in India for physical as well as electronic payment and settlement systems.

- **Action needed:** A built-in task assistant that reminds users of pending bills, UPI Lite activation, and low balance alerts.

Special Feature for Business And Shopkeepers – BHIM Vega

In-app payments: Now shopkeepers and merchants can accept payments directly in the app through BHIM 3.0. This will not require the customer to switch to third-party apps, making the payment process easier.

Dalle Chilly

- The Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) has successfully exported the first consignment of GI-Tagged Dalle Chilly from Sikkim to the Solomon Islands.
- This significant achievement underscores India's growing prominence in the global organic agricultural market and highlights the increasing international demand for premium products from the North-Eastern region.
- Dalle Chilly, also known as **Fire Ball Chilly or Dalle Khursani**, is renowned for its intense pungency, bright red colour, and high nutritional value.
- Rich in vitamins A, C, and E, along with potassium, its **Scoville Heat Units (SHU) range from 100,000 to 350,000**, making it a sought-after spice for both culinary and medicinal applications.
- Dalle Chilly has received the Geographical Indication (GI) tag in 2020.
- This consignment ensured farmers received a premium price of Rs 250-300 per kg, compared to the usual Rs 180-200 per kg, reaffirming the economic benefits of GI tagging and international trade.
- Dalle Chilly's export to the Solomon Islands is expected to enhance Sikkim's prominence on the global spice map, opening new avenues for international trade.

APEDA

APEDA was established under the **Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority Act** passed by the Parliament in **1985**.

Headquartered in New Delhi, it functions under **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**.

Functions

- Promotion of export-oriented production and development of the scheduled products;
- Registration of persons as exporters of the scheduled products;
- Fixing of standards and specifications for scheduled products for the purpose of exports;
- Improving of packaging of the scheduled products;
- Improving of marketing of the scheduled products outside India;
- Training in various aspects of the industries connected with the scheduled products;
- It also functions as the Secretariat to the **National Accreditation Board (NAB)** for the implementation of accreditation of the Certification Bodies under National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP) for Organic exports.

Equalisation Levy Abolished

The Central government has proposed to **abolish the equalisation levy on online advertisements**, as a part of amendments to the Finance Bill, 2025.

- The proposal is aimed at showing an **accommodative stance to the United States**, which has threatened to introduce reciprocal tariffs.
- The development also comes at a time when India and the US are engaged in **broader trade negotiations** that have been ongoing for a while.

Impact

- The levy had increased advertising costs for businesses relying on global platforms such as Google and Meta.

Background

- An equalisation levy is a **levy to equalise the tax component** of a resident e-commerce company as well as a non-resident e-commerce company.
- India introduced the equalisation levy, also referred to as **Google Tax, in 2016** to tax profits generated by non-resident digital companies providing services to Indian firms.
- It was designed to ensure a level playing field for local digital businesses, which were subject to income tax.
- Google and Meta dominate India's digital advertising market. They together accounted for around 65% of the Rs 50,000-crore market in 2024. The industry is expected to grow to nearly Rs 70,000 crore by the end of 2026.
- The government initially charged a 6% levy on digital services such as online advertising on payment exceeding Rs 1 lakh a year to a non-resident service provider.
- In 2020, India expanded its scope to include a 2% equalisation levy on e-commerce sites offering digital services in India.
- In 2021, India, the United States, and fellow members of the OECD/G20 Inclusive Framework agreed to tackle the tax complexities posed by the digital economy's rapid growth, to create a fair and cohesive global framework.
- India had removed the 2 percent levy on e-commerce operators in the July 2024 Budget. With this latest announcement, the entire equalisation levy structure will cease to exist from **Fy26**.

- The removal of levy will make online advertising more affordable, accessible and cost-effective for businesses of all sizes, particularly benefiting startups and small enterprises.
- Businesses will also have more flexibility to allocate budgets across domestic and international platforms. It could lead to a rise in ad spending and further boost the country's rapidly growing digital ecosystem.
- It will simplify taxation and align India more closely with the OECD's global tax framework.

Revised Rashtriya Gokul Mission

The Union Cabinet has approved the **Revised Rashtriya Gokul Mission (RGM)** to boost the livestock sector, with an additional outlay of **Rs 1,000 crore**, bringing the total budget to **Rs 3,400 crore** for the **15th Finance Commission period (2021-22 to 2025-26)**.

Rashtriya Gokul Mission (RGM)

- **Launched in 2014**, RGM is a focussed project under **National Programme for Bovine Breeding and Dairy Development**.
- It aims to **conserve and develop indigenous breeds** in a focused and scientific manner and enhance milk production and productivity.
- **Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying & Fisheries, Ministry of Agriculture** has been implementing the Mission through the State Implementing Agencies (SIA viz Livestock Development Boards).

New Additions to Revised RGM

- **Heifer Rearing Centres:** One-time assistance of **35% of capital cost** for setting up **30 housing facilities** for **15,000 heifers**.
- **Support for High Genetic Merit (HGM) Heifers:** **3% interest subvention** on loans taken by farmers to purchase HGM In vitro fertilization (IVF) heifers from milk unions/financial institutions.

Ongoing Activities under RGM

- Strengthening of semen stations and Artificial Insemination (AI) network.
- Bull production and breed improvement using sex-sorted semen.
- Skill development and farmer awareness programs.
- Establishment of Centres of Excellence and strengthening of Central Cattle Breeding Farms.

Impact of RGM

- With the implementation of RGM and other efforts of the Government, **milk production has increased by 63.55%** in the last ten years.
- Along with this the **availability of milk per person**, which was 307 grams per day in 2013-14, has **increased to 471 grams per day** in 2023-24. **Livestock productivity** has also **improved by 26.34%** in the same period.
- Till date, over 8.39 crores animals have been covered and 5.21crores farmers have been benefitted under the Nationwide Artificial Insemination Programme (NAIP) under the RGM.
- A total of 22 IVF labs have been set up across the country under the State Livestock Boards (SLBs) or in Universities and over 2541 HGM calves have been born.

Kosi Mechi Intra-State Link Project

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved the inclusion of Kosi Mechi Intra-State Link Project of Bihar under Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana -Accelerated Irrigation Benefits Programme (PMKSY-AIBP) of Ministry of Jal Shakti.
- CCEA has also approved central support of Rs 3,652.56 crore to Bihar for completion of the project by March, 2029 with an total **estimated cost of Rs 6,282.32 crore**.
- The Kosi Mechi Project will divert part of surplus water of Kosi river for extending irrigation to Mahananda basin lying in Bihar.
- This will be done by extending the existing **Eastern Kosi Main Canal (EKMC)** beyond its tail end up to river Mechi so that rivers Kosi and Mechi which flow through Bihar could be linked together within Bihar.

Benefits

- The project has a potential to **divert/utilize about 2,050 million cubic meter of surplus Kosi water** through the proposed link canal.

- It will provide **2,10,516 hectares additional annual irrigation** in Kharif season in Araria, Purnea, Kishanganj and Katihar districts of Bihar.
- Further, after remodelling of existing EKMC, shortfall **supply to 1.57 lakh hectare shall be restored.**

PMKSY

- Launched in 2015, PMKSY is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme**, providing central grants to state governments to improve farm productivity and to ensure better utilization of water resources in the country.
- It has been approved for the **period of 2021-26** with an overall outlay of **Rs 93,068.56 crore** (central assistance of Rs 37,454 crore).
- It was launched by subsuming ongoing schemes like:

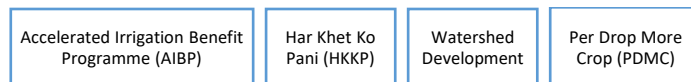


- It is implemented in an area development approach, adopting decentralized state level planning and allowing the states to develop their irrigation development plans based on district/blocks plans.

Objectives of PMKSY

- Achieve convergence of investments in irrigation at the field level.
- Integration of water source, distribution and its efficient use.
- Improve on - farm water use efficiency to reduce wastage and increase availability both in duration and extent.
- Enhance the adoption of precision - irrigation and other water saving technologies.
- Ensure the integrated development of rain fed areas.

PMKSY Components



Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme (AIBP)-Ministry of Jal Shakti

- Implemented by **Department of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation**, the AIBP component is for creation of irrigation potential through major and medium irrigation projects.
- Under it, central assistance is provided to State Governments to complete ongoing irrigation projects.
- Total additional irrigation potential creation targeted during 2021-26 under AIBP is 13.88 lakh hectare.
- So far 63 projects have been completed under PMKSY-AIBP and additional irrigation potential of 26.11 lakh hectare has been created since April 2016.

Incentive Scheme for BHIM-UPI

The Union Cabinet has approved the '**Incentive Scheme for Promotion of Low-Value BHIM-UPI Transactions (Person to Merchant - P2M)**' for the financial year 2024-25, with an estimated outlay of Rs 1,500 crore.

Objectives of the Scheme

- Encourage small merchants to adopt UPI by eliminating additional transaction costs.
- Enhance financial inclusion by increasing UPI adoption, particularly in Tier-3 to Tier-6 cities and rural areas.
- Improve digital infrastructure by ensuring higher system uptime and efficiency.
- Support the government's vision of a less-cash economy, fostering transparency and financial accountability.

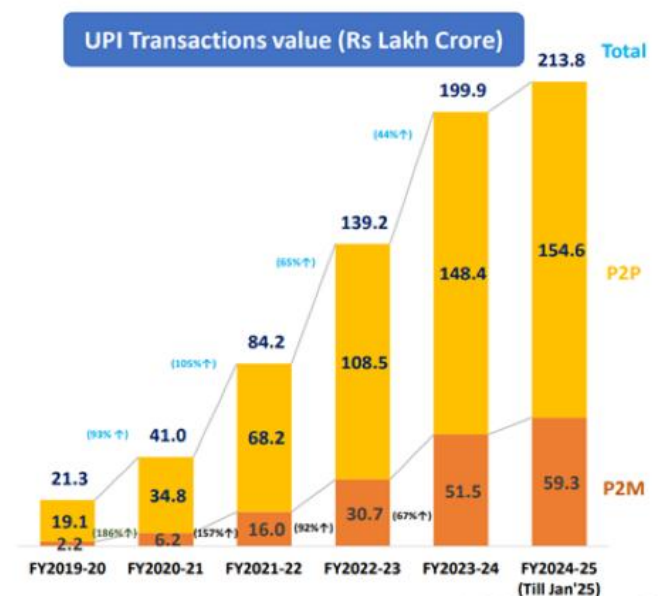
Need for the Scheme

- The expenditure incurred by the digital payment industry for providing services to customers/merchants is recovered through the **Merchant Discount Rate (MDR)**.
- The MDR is a fee that merchants and other businesses must pay to a payment processing company on debit or credit card transactions.
- MDR of up to **0.90% of the transaction value** is applicable across all card networks for **debit cards**.
- **MDR of up to 0.30%** is applicable for **UPI P2M (Person to Merchant)** transactions.
- To support payment ecosystem participants in effective service delivery, the government has been implementing the Incentive Scheme.
- **Since 2020**, MDR has been made zero for RuPay Debit Card and BHIM-UPI transactions through amendments in the **Payments and Settlement Systems Act, 2007** and the **Income-tax Act, 1961**.
- The incentive is paid by the government to the **Acquiring Bank** (merchant's bank) and is then shared among other stakeholders: **Issuer Bank** (customer's bank), **Payment Service Provider Bank** (facilitates UPI onboarding/API integration), and **App Providers**.
- Over the last three financial years, the government has significantly increased payouts for digital transaction incentives:
 - FY 2021-22: Rs 1,389 crore;
 - FY 2022-23: Rs 2,210 crore;
 - FY 2023-24: Rs 3,631 crore.



Key Features of the Scheme

- **Incentive of 0.15% per transaction value** for **UPI (P2M)** transactions up to Rs 2,000 for small merchants.
- **Zero MDR** for transactions across all categories, ensuring cost-free digital transactions.
- 80% of the admitted claim amount by acquiring banks will be disbursed without conditions each quarter.
- **10% of the admitted claim** will be paid **only if** the acquiring bank's **technical decline rate** (failed transactions due to technical issues on their side) is **less than 0.75%**.
- The remaining **10% of the claim** will be paid **only if** the acquiring bank's **system uptime** (availability of their systems) is **more than 99.5%**.



Project Farm Vibes

An ambitious experiment called Project Farm Vibes (PFV) is being conducted in the Pune district, since 2023. It is a revolutionary set of **farm-focused technologies** developed by **Microsoft Research**.

Technologies Used

- PFV utilizes solutions like Azure Data Manager for Agriculture (ADMA), which gathers data from satellites, weather providers, and on-ground sensors, creating a comprehensive view of field conditions.

- **Farmvibes.AI** uses artificial intelligence to monitor vital parameters—soil moisture, temperature, humidity and pH,
- **Agripilot.ai** taps into Azure Maps and Azure OpenAI to offer farmers actionable insights for sustainable food production.

Impact

- Farmers have reported a rise in crop production by over 40%, along with a significant 25% reduction in fertiliser costs due to spot fertilisation techniques.
- Moreover, water consumption has dropped by more than 50%, and post-harvest wastage has seen a decline of over 12%.
- These innovations not only lead to greater productivity and profitability for small landowners but also contributes to environmental benefits by curbing water wastage, soil erosion, deforestation, chemical runoff, and greenhouse gas emissions.

Rise in KCC Bad Loans

- In a sign of stress in the agriculture sector, scheduled commercial banks, excluding regional rural banks (RRBs), have seen a **sharp increase of 42% in bad loans in Kisan Credit Card (KCC) accounts**.
- The outstanding NPA amount in the segment rose to **Rs 97,543 crore by end of December 2024**, compared to Rs 68,547 crore at end of March 2021
- Among all other agriculture loans offered by banks, such as tractor or food and agri-processing loans, the highest amount of defaults are seen in the KCC segment.
- In 2024, **Uttar Pradesh had the maximum outstanding amount** under the KCC scheme across all banks (SCBs, cooperative banks and regional rural banks). It was followed by Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Karnataka.

Kisan Credit Card

- Introduced in **1998**, the KCC scheme provides adequate and timely access to credit to farmers for agricultural and other allied activities.
- KCC offers a **revolving cash credit facility** to farmers, without any restrictions on the number of debit or credits within their sanctioned limit.
- KCC loans are part of the overall agriculture loan book of banks, which comes under the **priority sector lending (PSL)**.
- The farmers **eligible** under the KCC scheme include small farmers, marginal farmers, share croppers, oral lessee and tenant farmers. Self Help Groups (SHGs) or Joint Liability Groups (JLGs) are also eligible for availing benefits.
- The Centre, under Modified Interest Subvention Scheme (MISS), provides interest subvention of 1.5% to banks for providing short-term agriculture loans through KCC up to Rs 3 lakh at a concessional interest rate of 7%.
- An additional prompt repayment incentive of 3% is provided to farmers on timely repayment of loans, which effectively reduces the rate of interest to 4%.

Year	Number of operative accounts (crore)	Amount outstanding in operative accounts (₹ crore)	Amount outstanding in NPA accounts (₹ crore)
FY2021	3.07	4,56,736	68,547
FY2022	2.69	4,76,271	84,637
FY2023	2.83	5,18,485	90,832
FY2024	2.98	5,74,974	93,370
Q1 FY2025*	2.96	5,70,982	95,616
Q2 FY2025*	2.95	5,86,833	96,918
Q3 FY2025*	2.94	5,91,533	97,543

KCC data of Scheduled Commercial Banks (excluding Regional Rural Banks); *Data are provisional
Source: RBI

- The Budget 2025-26 has announced to increase the loan limit under the MISS from Rs 3 lakh to Rs 5 lakh.
- Loans up to Rs 2 lakh are extended on a collateral-free basis, ensuring hassle-free access to credit for small and marginal farmers.

NPA Classification

- The NPA classification in the KCC segment is different from other retail loans, where an account becomes an NPA if interest and instalment of principal remain overdue for more than 90 days.
- The repayment period for KCC loans is as per the crop season (short or long) and marketing period for the crop. The crop season for states is decided by the respective State Level Bankers Committee (SLBC).
- For short duration crops, the crop season is 12 months and for long duration crops it is 18 months in most states.
 - A loan granted for short duration crops is treated as NPA, if the installment of principal or interest remains overdue for **two crop seasons**.
 - A loan granted for long duration crops is treated as NPA, if the installment of principal or interest remains overdue for **one crop season**.

Factors for the Rise in Defaults

- Inability of farmers to repay loans due to weather-related damages to crops. In such cases, inadequate crop insurance or no crop insurance, owing to higher premium, also impacts farmers' loan repayment capabilities.
- Lack of awareness among farmers about repayment timelines;
- Delay in payments due to needs related to personal household requirement;
- Weak loan recovery mechanism for banks.
 - In case of a housing or an SME loan, once a loan becomes an NPA, banks can sell the property taken as collateral. This kind of mechanism is not possible in an agricultural loan.
- Defaults are higher in the KCC segment where the amount borrowed is much lower compared to other agricultural loans, and so, repayment becomes the last priority for a farmer.
- Farmers' suicides further prevent lenders from taking aggressive recovery steps
- Besides, expectations of farm loan waiver ahead of any state election often distorts the repayment behaviour of farmers.
 - As per a 2019 RBI report to 'Review Agriculture Credit', loan waivers do impact the credit flow to agriculture due to moral hazard among both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of the bailout.
- This impact could be both in loan performance, as borrowers choose to default strategically in anticipation of future bailouts, and in credit allocation, as banks reallocate lending to lower risk borrower segments.

Revised National Programme for Dairy Development

- The Union Cabinet has approved the Revised National Programme for Dairy Development (NPDD), aimed at **modernizing** India's dairy sector and ensuring its long-term growth.
- Classified as a Central Sector initiative, the scheme has been **allocated an additional Rs 1,000 crore**, taking the total budget outlay to Rs 2,790 crore for the duration of the 15th Finance Commission period from **2021-22 to 2025-26**.
- The revised programme is focused on strengthening the dairy infrastructure across the country. It seeks to boost milk procurement, processing capacity and ensure better quality control systems.

Components of NPDD

Component A	Component B
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It is dedicated to improving essential dairy infrastructure, such as milk chilling plants, advanced milk testing laboratories, and certification systems.• It also prioritizes the formation of new village-level dairy cooperative societies and aims to strengthen milk procurement and processing capacities, particularly in the North Eastern Region, hilly areas, Union Territories, and other remote and backward regions.• It also includes financial support for the formation of two new Milk Producer Companies (MPCs).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It is known as "Dairying through Cooperatives (DTC)" continues efforts to sustainably develop dairy cooperatives.• It is being implemented in partnership with the Government of Japan and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) under existing agreements.• It targets improving dairy production, processing, and marketing infrastructure in nine states: Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Telangana, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

Impact of NPDD

- It has benefited over 18.74 lakh farmers and generated more than 30,000 direct and indirect employment opportunities.
- It has increased milk procurement capacity by an additional 100.95 lakh litres per day.
- Over 51,777 village-level milk testing laboratories have been strengthened, while 5,123 bulk milk coolers with a combined capacity of 123.33 lakh liters have been installed.
- In addition, 169 labs have been upgraded with Fourier Transform Infrared (FTIR) milk analysers, and 232 dairy plants now have advanced systems for detecting adulteration.

Revised NPDD

- The Revised NPDD aims to establish 10,000 new Dairy Cooperative Societies, processing in the NER and form 2 Milk Producer Companies (MPCs) in addition to the ongoing projects of NPDD.
- It will transform India's modern infrastructure, in sync with White Revolution 2.0 and will further support the newly formed cooperatives by providing new technology, and quality testing labs.
- It is projected to generate 3.2 lakh direct and indirect employment opportunities.
- It is intended to help farmers gain better access to markets, ensure better pricing through value addition, and improve the efficiency of the supply chain, leading to higher incomes, particularly benefiting women, who represent 70% of India's dairy workforce.

Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme

- The Union cabinet has approved an Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme for a **period of six years** with one year of gestation period.
- It is the next step in the government's electronics manufacturing efforts, which have so far focused on setting up *semiconductor fabrication units and IT hardware*, along with finished goods like mobile phones.
- The scheme will promote domestic manufacturing of electronics components, display and camera modules, non-surface mount devices, multi-layer printed circuit boards, lithium-ion cells for digital applications, among others.
- It will also provide incentives for the domestic manufacturing of other **bare components**, such as resistors, capacitors, inductors, transformers, fuses, resistor networks, thermistors, and potentiometers, used in the production of battery packs, mobile phones, laptops, tablets, and other handheld devices.
- It also focuses on **capital goods**, mainly large machinery that is used to manufacture other components.
- The initiative is expected to **attract Rs 59,350 crore** in investments, **generate Rs 4,56,500 crore in production**, and create **91,600 direct jobs**, along with numerous indirect employment opportunities.

- The scheme aims to strengthen domestic manufacturing, strengthen India's electronics supply chain, and reduce dependence on imports.
- Instead of offering incentives to companies based just on incremental production, the government will take a **three-pronged approach** to disburse incentives under the new scheme.
- Applicants under the scheme will be given incentives based on the **number of direct jobs created**, in addition to **support for capital expenditure done** by the companies. A third approach will involve incentives based on the **turnover of the companies**.

India's Electronics Ecosystem

- Electronics is one of the highest-traded and fastest-growing industries globally.
- The domestic production of electronic goods increased to Rs 9.52 lakh crore in 2023-24 from Rs 1.90 lakh crore in 2014-15, at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of over 17%.
- The exports of electronic goods have also increased from Rs 0.38 lakh crore in FY 2014-15 to Rs 2.41 lakh crore in FY 2023-24 at a CAGR of more than 20%.

PM Modi Meets PM of New Zealand

India signed a defence cooperation pact with New Zealand and agreed to step up dialogue to enhance maritime safety. This comes after PM Modi met the visiting PM of New Zealand, Christopher Luxon.

Key Highlights

• Defence and Security Cooperation

- India and New Zealand signed an **MoU for Defence Cooperation** to strengthen bilateral defence ties. A roadmap will be prepared for cooperation in the **defence industry sector**.
- Both nations agreed to **regularize defence engagements**, including military exercises, port calls, and exchange of high-level delegations.
- New Zealand welcomed **India's membership in the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF)** and acknowledged India's role during New Zealand's command of **Command Task Force 150**.
- **Maritime safety and security** were emphasized, with both countries committing to regular dialogue on the issue.

• Indo-Pacific Strategy and Regional Stability

- Both nations reaffirmed their commitment to a **free, open, and secure Indo-Pacific**, emphasizing **rules-based international order**.
- PM Modi's statement—"We believe in development, not expansionism"—was seen as a reference to China's aggressive behavior in the region.

• Counterterrorism and Security Concerns

- Both sides condemned terrorism in all forms and called for **concrete action against UN-proscribed terrorist organizations**.
- Modi raised concerns about **anti-India activities by illegal elements in New Zealand**, urging cooperation against such groups.

• Free-Trade Agreement (FTA) Negotiations

- India and New Zealand **agreed to launch negotiations for a FTA** to enhance economic integration.
- The agreement aims to **boost trade and investment** in key sectors like **dairy, food processing, and pharmaceuticals**.

• Migration and Skilled Worker Mobility

- Agreement to **formulate a framework for addressing illegal migration** and improving mobility for skilled workers.
- PM Modi acknowledged the Indian diaspora's contributions to New Zealand's economy.

India-New Zealand Relations

• Historical ties

- They share a longstanding and growing friendship dating back to the 1800s.
- For example, early Indian settlers in Christchurch (1850s) and larger immigration waves from Punjab and Gujarat (1890s).
- Indian troops fought alongside ANZACs in Gallipoli (1915) during World War I.

• Political ties

- Diplomatic ties established in 1950 with the opening of a Trade Commission, later upgraded to a High Commission (1952).

• Trade and economic ties

- New Zealand is India's **11th largest two-way trading partner**.
 - India-New Zealand total trade in **2023-24 was valued at US\$ 1.75 billion**.
- **Key trade sectors**: Education, tourism, dairy, food processing, pharmaceuticals, renewable energy, and critical minerals.
- **Indian exports to NZ**: Pharmaceuticals, precious metals & gems, textiles, motor vehicles, and non-knitted apparel.
- **Indian imports from NZ**: Logs, forestry products, wool, edible fruit & nuts.

• Cultural and people-to-people relations

- Approximately 250,000 persons of Indian origin & NRIs contribute significantly to New Zealand's society.
- New Zealand Post issued Diwali stamps (2021), recognizing the cultural significance of the Indian diaspora.

- o Luxon highlighted that Indian-Kiwis are the third-largest ethnic group in New Zealand, making significant contributions to the workforce and education sector.

Trump Establishes US Bitcoin Reserve

- Former U.S. President Donald Trump signed an executive order establishing a **Strategic Bitcoin Reserve** and a **US Digital Asset Stockpile**.
- The Bitcoin reserve will be funded with BTC forfeited in criminal or civil asset seizures, providing the U.S. with a strategic advantage. Similarly, the **Digital Asset Stockpile** will include other forfeited digital assets.

Working of Bitcoin Reserve

- The White House fact sheet highlights that no clear policy exists for managing seized digital assets, leading to accountability issues and missed opportunities for centralization and security.
- **Government Bitcoin Holdings & Audit**
 - o It is estimated that the U.S. government owns around 200,000 BTC, but a full audit has never been conducted.
 - o The executive order mandates a complete accounting of federal digital asset holdings.
- **Bitcoin as a Reserve Asset**
 - o The U.S. will not sell Bitcoin deposited into the Strategic Bitcoin Reserve but will hold it as a store of value.
 - o The Secretaries of Treasury and Commerce are tasked with developing budget-neutral strategies to acquire more Bitcoin without imposing costs on taxpayers.
- **Strategic Advantage & Missed Opportunities**
 - o With Bitcoin's fixed supply of 21 million coins, the fact sheet underscores the importance of early adoption for strategic positioning in the global financial system.
 - o Past premature sales of Bitcoin have cost U.S. taxpayers over \$17 billion.

Other Digital Assets in the Stockpile

▣ Apart from Bitcoin, the **US Digital Asset Stockpile** will include **Ethereum, XRP, Solana, and Cardano**, as mentioned by President Trump earlier.

▣ Acquisition Policy

- ▣ U.S. government will not actively acquire additional digital assets for the stockpile.
- ▣ Instead, it will consist only of assets obtained through forfeiture proceedings, similar to the Bitcoin reserve.

Management & Potential Sales

- ▣ The Secretary of the Treasury is authorized to develop strategies for responsible stewardship, which may include selling assets from the stockpile.

Trump Announced Reciprocal Tariffs from April 2

US President Donald Trump announced the implementation of reciprocal tariffs on trade partners starting April 2, regardless of their economic status.

Uncertainty for India Amid US Tariff Plans

- US President Donald Trump reiterated his criticism of India's high tariffs, particularly in the auto sector, where duties exceed 100%.
- **Bilateral Trade Agreement at Risk**
 - o India and the US are working on a bilateral trade agreement (BTA), with Indian officials seeking relief from tariffs, including the 25% duty on steel and aluminum.
- **Concerns Over US Commitment to Trade Deals**
 - o Trade experts warn that Trump's tariff decisions, such as the 25% duties on Canada and Mexico, indicate a disregard for WTO norms and existing trade agreements.

- The imposition of these tariffs raises doubts about America’s adherence to future trade deals, including one with India.
 - ♣ The **North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)**, the trade deal between the US, Canada, and Mexico, had been in place since January 1994.
 - ♣ However, Trump was dissatisfied with its terms and, during his first term, replaced it with the **United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA)** in 2018-19.
 - ♣ Trump’s tariffs on Canada and Mexico violate USMCA and highlight his disregard for negotiated trade agreements.
- **Farm Sector Vulnerability Amid US Tariff Plans**
 - India's agricultural sector is highly vulnerable to US reciprocal tariffs due to significant differences in tariff rates between the two countries.
 - Farmers’ unions continue to push for a legally guaranteed Minimum Support Price (MSP), adding to the sector’s sensitivity.
- **High Tariff Disparity Between India and the US**
 - According to an ICRIER (*Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations*) report, India imposes an average tariff of 17% compared to 3.3% by the US.
 - The gap is even wider in agriculture, where India’s simple average tariff is 39% and the trade-weighted rate is 65%, while the US maintains much lower rates of 5% and 4%, respectively.
- **Auto and Pharma Sectors Face Tariff Risks**
 - With countries demanding greater access to India’s protected markets, these industries may see higher costs and reduced competitiveness in the US.
- **Strategies for Indian Industries**
 - A GTRI report suggests that Indian firms should explore alternative export markets such as Europe, Southeast Asia, and Africa, where tariff barriers are lower.
 - Additionally, forming joint ventures with American firms or setting up assembly units in the US could help mitigate the impact of tariffs.

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

Nepal’s Growing Political Turmoil: Monarchist Revival and Public Anger

- Nineteen years after losing his throne, **Gyanendra Shah** has become a symbol of public frustration with Nepal’s democratic system and leadership.
- Recently, thousands gathered in Kathmandu, demanding the **restoration of the monarchy**, leading to violent clashes with the police.
- The ruling coalition's **MPs demanded Shah’s arrest** in Parliament, while the pro-monarchy Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) challenged the government to act.
- **Former King Shah**, while not openly asking for his return, has issued statements highlighting Nepal’s economic decline and youth migration.
- **Public Outrage Over Corruption**
 - Protests reflect mounting anger over corruption scandals, where many senior leaders and former Prime Ministers are implicated.
 - Nepal’s political immunity system has allowed leaders to evade legal action, worsening public distrust.

- **Future Implications: Conflict or Dialogue?**

- The demand for a **monarchy revival** threatens Nepal's **republican structure**.
- Fear of investigations and legal actions could push corrupt politicians to **resist monarchy's return**.
- The **pro-republic forces may need to negotiate** with the royalist movement to prevent prolonged instability and deeper social unrest.

Bangladesh Strengthens Ties with China During Yunus' Visit

- Recently, Chief Adviser of Bangladesh, Muhammad Yunus, visited China. During the visit nine agreements were signed, expanding economic and technical cooperation.
- Bangladesh welcomed China's involvement in major projects, including:
 - Teesta River Comprehensive Management and Restoration Project (TRCMRP)
 - ♣ The \$1 billion project aims to build a reservoir, deepen the riverbed, and develop embankment roads.
 - ♣ Bangladesh had sought a \$725 million loan from China, but Beijing was initially hesitant.
 - Special Economic Zone in Chattogram
 - Defence cooperation, including acquiring fighter jets
- **Infrastructure and Economic Agreements**
 - Bangladesh secured \$2.1 billion in Chinese investments, loans, and grants, including:
 - ♣ \$400 million for Mongla Port modernization.
 - ♣ \$350 million for the Chinese Economic and Industrial Zone (CEIZ) in Chattogram.
 - ♣ 30 Chinese companies committed \$1 billion in CEIZ investments.
 - ♣ \$150 million in technical assistance.
- **Expanding People-to-People Ties** - 2025 declared as the "Year of China-Bangladesh People-to-People Exchanges."
- Bangladesh's growing alignment with China marks a **significant geopolitical shift**, especially amid strained ties with India. However, whether the interim government can implement these projects remains uncertain.

Vanuatu's Golden Passport Scheme

- The Vanuatu government has revoked the passport of Lalit Modi, the founder of the Indian Premier League (IPL), after "recent revelations in international media".
- Modi, wanted in India for alleged financial irregularities, had previously applied to surrender his Indian passport at the Indian High Commission in London.
- **Independence:** Vanuatu gained independence in **1980** after being jointly administered by **Britain and France**.
- **Economy:** The country's economy is reliant on **tourism, agriculture** (notably copra, beef, kava, and cocoa), and **offshore financial services**.
- **Vanuatu's Golden Passport Program**
 - Vanuatu offers a Citizenship by Investment (CBI) program, allowing wealthy individuals to buy citizenship.
 - Cost: **\$135,500 to \$155,500 (₹1.18 - ₹1.35 crore)**
 - No residency requirement; all documents can be submitted digitally
 - A Vanuatu passport allows visa-free entry to 113 countries (Ranked 51st globally).

Pakistani Baloch Separatist Militants Behind Train Hijacking

- Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) insurgents attacked and hijacked the Jaffar Express traveling from Quetta to Peshawar in Balochistan's Bolan district.
- This marks one of the largest recent attacks by Baloch insurgents amid ongoing unrest in the region.

Background of the Baloch Insurgency

- Balochistan is Pakistan's largest but least populated province, rich in natural resources but economically underdeveloped.
 - Pakistan has four provinces – Balochistan, Sindh, Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
- Ethnic Baloch communities have long accused the central government of economic neglect and Punjab's dominance over resources, military, and bureaucracy.
- **Historical Context**
 - After independence, Balochistan remained independent under a treaty with Pakistan until March 1948.
 - The **Khan of Kalat**, initially sought independence but later signed the instrument of accession under political pressure.
 - British concerns over Russian influence and internal demands from other Baloch regions contributed to its integration into Pakistan.
- **Continued Unrest and Foreign Involvement**
 - Pakistan has accused India of supporting Baloch insurgent groups, an allegation India denies.
 - China's **China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)** has become a target of Baloch militants, who see it as exploitative and lacking local benefits.
- **Strategic and Economic Importance of Balochistan**
 - **Key to China's CPEC:** Balochistan is crucial to China's \$65 billion CPEC under Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative.
 - **Rich in Resources:** It hosts major mining projects, including **Reko Diq**, one of the world's largest **gold and copper mines**, operated by Barrick Gold.
 - **Security Concerns:** The long-running Baloch insurgency has destabilized the province, threatening Pakistan's plans to tap into its vast resources.
 - **Geopolitical Significance:** Balochistan has a long Arabian Sea coastline near the Strait of Hormuz, a vital oil shipping route.

Race To Secure Copper Supplies

- Recently, India secured a 9,000-sq-km block in Zambia to explore **copper and cobalt**, crucial for overseas mining as domestic production declines.
- Earlier, US had warned that overreliance on foreign copper threatens national security, defense, infrastructure, and technology.
- At the same time, facing tight **copper ore** supply, China is restricting smelting overcapacity—companies looking to build new smelters must secure long-term mining contracts, mainly in DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo), Chile, and Peru.
 - China controls 50% of global smelting and refining capacity.

Africa's Growing Role in Critical Minerals

- Africa's share in copper, lithium, and natural graphite production is increasing.
- Africa produces 70% of global cobalt and 16% of global copper.

- The DRC is projected to become the world's second-largest copper supplier by 2030 (IEA report).

- **India's Copper Exploration in Zambia**

- India secured a 9,000-sq-km block in Zambia's Northwestern province through a government-to-government deal.
- Geological Survey of India (GSI) will explore the site, which is six times the size of Delhi.
- In Copperbelt province, Vedanta Group already owns a large copper mine.
- Zambia ranks 7th globally in copper production (Chile, Peru, an DRC are top three).

- **Global Competition for Mineral Assets**

- Major copper producers in Zambia: First Quantum Minerals (Canada); Nonferrous Metal Mining (China, state-owned).
- India's Ministry of Mines is working through nodal officers in the DRC, Tanzania, Mozambique, and Rwanda to secure more mineral assets.
- Competition for critical minerals remains intense as other countries also seek to expand their supply chains.

Rising Demand for Copper

- Driven by EV batteries and clean energy technologies, copper demand is projected to outstrip supply by 2035.
- Countries like India, China, and the U.S. are racing to secure supply chains and boost domestic capabilities.

- **Copper Value Chain**

- Copper ore undergoes multiple processing stages: Concentrate production; Smelting into anode; Refining into cathode (used for industrial inputs like rods, sheets, and wires).

- **Mining Remains Essential**

- **Recycling and alternative battery chemistries** could help, but **primary mining** is still crucial to meet global demand.

India's overseas focus for copper

- **India's Declining Domestic Copper Production**

- Domestic ore production (2023-24): 3.78 million tonnes, 8% lower than in 2018-19.

- Hindustan Copper Ltd (HCL) saw a 6% year-on-year decline in production (April-January 2023-24).

- **Rising Dependence on Imports**

- Copper concentrate imports doubled in value to ₹26,000 crore (2023-24) from 2018-19.

- India has large copper deposits, but extensive exploration is needed before mining.

- **Overseas Expansion Strategy**

- India is securing greenfield and brownfield copper assets in Zambia, Chile, and the DRC to meet short-term demand.

- These high-grade deposits and mining-friendly environments allow faster project development. However, geopolitical risks pose challenges to overseas investments.

Tahawwur Hussain Rana Extradition Case

- The United States Supreme Court has **rejected** the plea of Tahawwur Hussain Rana, **an accused in the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks**, against his extradition to India.
- Rana had filed an "**Emergency Application for Stay**" following President Donald Trump's approval of his extradition.
- India requested Rana's extradition in December 2019 under the **India-US Extradition Treaty (1997)**.
 - Rana opposed extradition, citing "**double jeopardy**," claiming he was already acquitted of charges related to India.

US Position on Indian Extradition Requests

- **Only two alleged terrorists** have been extradited from the US to India:
 - Charanjeet Singh Cheema (2005)
 - Kulbeer Singh Kulbeera (2006)
- The treaty facilitated **11 extraditions** between 2002-2018, **mostly for financial fraud**. 65 Indian extradition requests remain pending with the US.
- The US refused to extradite **David Headley** due to his plea bargain and **Warren Anderson** (Union Carbide CEO) due to "insufficient evidence."

India-US Extradition Treaty (1997)

- It facilitates extradition for offences punishable by more than one year of imprisonment in both countries.
- Acts such as **terrorism, hijacking, and crimes against protected persons** are extraditable.
- **Political offences are non-extraditable.**
 - ◆ However, certain actions are not construed as political offences under the treaty. These are:
 - The murder or other willful crime against a Head of State/ Government or a member of their family,
 - Aircraft hijacking and aviation sabotage,
 - Crimes against internationally protected persons including diplomats, and
 - Hostage-taking, etc.,
- The US government found "**probable cause**" to believe that Rana committed extraditable offences under the **treaty's dual-criminality clause**.

US Clears Firm to Build and Design N-Reactors in India

- The India-US civil nuclear deal, signed two decades ago, has taken a significant step forward with regulatory approval from the US Department of Energy (DoE).
- The approval allows US-based Holtec International to transfer Small Modular Reactor (SMR - a capacity of 30MWe to 300 MWe per unit) technology to Indian private firms.
 - Holtec International will now be able to transfer SMR technology to three Indian private firms: Holtec Asia, Tata Consulting Engineers (TCE), and Larsen & Toubro (L&T).
 - The authorisation is valid for 10 years, subject to periodic reviews.
- The deal, however, excludes Indian state-owned entities like Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL), NTPC Ltd., and the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) due to India's reluctance to provide non-proliferation assurances.
- **Significance**
 - The development marks a diplomatic success for India.
 - It allows India to scale up its nuclear sector and move towards globally dominant Pressurised Water Reactor (PWR) technology, moving beyond its current Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs).
 - The deal also positions India and the US to compete with China, which is aggressively advancing in the SMR sector.
- **Challenges Ahead**
 - Legal barriers remain, particularly India's **Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010**, which holds suppliers liable for accidents, discouraging foreign investments.
 - Additionally, amendments to the **Atomic Energy Act, 1962**, are needed to allow private players into nuclear power generation, currently restricted to state-owned companies.

India Terms US Religious Freedom Report Biased

- India has sharply rejected the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) 2025 Annual Report, labeling it as "biased and politically motivated."
- The 2025 report accuses India of attacks and discrimination against religious minorities.
- The report recommends that **India be designated a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC)** and calls for sanctions against Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) and an individual linked to Pannun assassination plot.
 - Despite USCIRF's repeated recommendations since 2020, the U.S. State Department has not designated India as a CPC.
 - The Indian government has largely barred USCIRF members from visiting India, except in 2016.
- It also suggests reviewing the sale of MQ-9B drones to India.
- MEA criticized USCIRF for issuing reports that misrepresent isolated incidents and undermine India's multicultural society, reflecting a "deliberate agenda" rather than genuine concern for religious freedom.
- The USCIRF's methodology has been criticized for relying on unreliable sources and ignoring India's constitutional protections for religious freedom.

Dubai Retains Top Spot as Global FDI Destination

- Dubai has maintained its position as the world's top destination for **Greenfield Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)** for the fourth consecutive year, attracting a record AED 52.3 billion (\$14.24 billion) in estimated FDI, marking a 33.2% increase from 2023.

- India surpassed the USA, France, and the UK to become the **leading source of FDI into Dubai** in 2024, contributing 21.5% to the total FDI inflow.
 - Other major contributors include the USA (13.7%), France (11%), and the UK (10%).

Princess Astrid of Belgium Leads Economic Mission to India

- Princess Astrid of Belgium led an Economic Mission to India, marking her second such visit.
- The delegation visited the Agristo-Masa potato processing plant in Bijnor, Uttar Pradesh, where Agristo announced an additional INR 750 crore investment to expand its operations.
- During this visit, 35 business and academic collaboration agreements were signed in areas like green technology, healthcare, food processing, ports, and education.
- India and Belgium share strong trade relations, with bilateral trade exceeding USD 15 billion in 2023-24. Belgium is India's 5th largest trading partner in the EU, with over 175 Belgian companies operating in India and cumulative investments totaling USD 4 billion.

Namibia's First Female President

Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah has been sworn in as **Namibia's first woman president**, extending the governing party's **35-year rule**. Outgoing President **Nangolo Mbumba**, officially handed over power during the **country's 35th independence anniversary**.

Trump Imposes 25% Tariffs on Buyers of Venezuelan Oil

- US President Donald Trump announced a 25% tariff on imports from countries buying oil and gas from Venezuela, set to take effect on April 2.
- This move could impact major buyers like China and India, increasing global trade tensions.
- Venezuela had previously redirected its oil exports to nations like China, India, and Spain, despite past US sanctions.
- In 2023, Venezuela exported 660,000 barrels per day, with China and **India** among top buyers.
 - Reliance Industries had also secured US approval to import Venezuelan crude.
- Trump accused Venezuela of sending criminals to the US and labeled its government hostile.

India's 'Operation Brahma'

- In response to the March 28 earthquake in Myanmar, India launched '**Operation Brahma**', swiftly delivering **relief supplies, medical aid, rescue teams, and a field hospital**.
- India emerged as a first responder, reinforcing its regional leadership.
- **India's Strategic Edge:**
 - **Proximity Advantage:** Quick logistical response due to geographical closeness.
 - **Strong Bilateral Ties:** Pre-existing relations facilitated effective disaster coordination.
- **US Absence – A Strategic Vacuum?**
 - The **US response remained limited**, offering only \$2 million in aid.
 - Budget cuts and agency restructuring weakened its disaster response capacity, allowing India to **step into the leadership vacuum**.
 - This **enhances India's soft power** and reinforces its role as a **reliable regional partner**.

SUMMITS AND ORGANISATIONS

India's Push for Global Ban on Sikhs for Justice (SFJ)

- Amid discussions at the **Raisina Dialogue**, the Indian government reiterated its demand for a ban on the separatist Khalistani group Sikhs for Justice (SFJ) in the U.S. and New Zealand.
 - It should be noted that, recently, SFJ held a "referendum" in Los Angeles, seeking support from the Sikh diaspora for its secessionist agenda.
- If any country from the **"Five Eyes" intelligence network** (U.S., U.K., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) bans SFJ, others are likely to follow due to their shared intelligence framework.
 - A successful ban in any of these countries could pave the way for SFJ's designation under **UN Security Council Resolution 1373**.
 - This would further compel member states to take legal action against the group in accordance with Financial Action Task Force (FATF) regulations.
- India believes that banning SFJ would not only curb its influence but also strengthen its position in ongoing diplomatic disputes related to alleged assassination plots.
- The government continues to push for international action to counter the group's separatist agenda.

Reasons Behind Non-Compliance by Other Countries

- **SFJ's Activities: Incendiary but Not Illegal**
 - Despite India's concerns, many Western countries consider SFJ's actions provocative but within legal bounds.
 - Strategic partners like the U.S., U.K., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand allow the group to operate freely, frustrating India.
- **Perception of G.S. Pannun**
 - Foreign governments often view SFJ founder G.S. Pannun as a non-serious figure, despite his incendiary speeches, threats against Indian institutions, and allegations of human rights violations against India.
- **India's Legal Actions Against SFJ**
 - Since 2018, India's National Investigation Agency (NIA) and state police have registered 122 cases against SFJ, leading to 105 arrests.
 - The government renewed SFJ's ban under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), citing links to violence, sabotage, and alleged ties with Pakistan's ISI to incite Indian Army soldiers.

About Raisina Dialogue

- Launched in **2016** by India's **Ministry of External Affairs**, it is India's premier international conference on geopolitics and security.
- It aims to be a counterpart to the **Munich Security Conference** and **Shangri-La Dialogue**, fostering discussions on global challenges.
- Named after **Raisina Hill**, home to India's key government institutions, the event brings together world leaders, policymakers, and strategists.

Raisina Dialogue 2025:

- The **10th edition** was held in **March 2025**, in **New Delhi**, inaugurated by **Prime Minister Narendra Modi**.
- New Zealand PM Christopher Luxon was the chief guest, delivering the keynote address under the theme **"Kalachakra" (Wheel of Time)**.

- Foreign Ministers from Bhutan, Nepal, Maldives, and Mauritius attended, while Bangladesh was notably absent.

India Launches Cities Coalition for Circularity (C-3)

- India launched **the Cities Coalition for Circularity (C-3)**, a multi-nation alliance aimed at city-to-city collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and private sector partnerships to **enhance sustainable urban development**.
 - A circular economy keeps materials and products in circulation for as long as possible.
 - It involves sharing, leasing, reusing, repairing, refurbishing and recycling existing materials and products as long as possible.
- The initiative focuses on waste management and resource efficiency, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region.
- The C-3 coalition marks a major step in India's commitment to sustainable urban development and global collaboration in circular economy practices.
- **India's Vision for Circular Economy**
 - India emphasized the **Pro-Planet People (P3) approach** and the importance of **3R principles—Reduce, Reuse, Recycle**—to drive resource efficiency.
 - It proposed forming a working group to finalize the coalition's structure and operational framework.
 - India is advancing circular economy principles through various initiatives:
 - ♣ **Swachh Bharat Mission** – Promotes waste segregation and recycling.
 - ♣ **Smart Cities Mission** – Focuses on sustainable urban development.
 - ♣ **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)** – Holds companies accountable for product lifecycles.
 - ♣ **GOBAR-Dhan Scheme** – Currently implemented in 67.8% of districts, supporting waste-to-energy conversion.
- **Background: The Regional 3R and Circular Economy Forum**
 - Launched in 2009, the forum promotes sustainable waste management, resource efficiency, and circular economy principles in the Asia-Pacific.
 - Recognizing challenges like rapid economic growth, resource depletion, and rising waste generation, it has played a key role in policy dialogue and capacity building.
 - The **Hanoi 3R Declaration (2013-2023)** set 33 voluntary goals for transitioning to a circular economy.

Trump's Shift on Iran Nuclear Deal

US President Donald Trump said that he has written to Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei about renegotiating a nuclear deal.

- **Status of the Deal**
 - Efforts to revive JCPOA under Biden failed. Iran increased uranium enrichment and supported Russia, further straining negotiations.
 - By 2024, economic struggles pushed Iran towards diplomatic engagement.
- **Trump's Motives and Challenges**

About Iran Nuclear Deal

- ✦ The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), signed in 2015 by the five permanent UN Security Council members, Germany, the EU, and Iran, aimed to limit Iran's nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief.
- ✦ Under the deal, Iran agreed to cap uranium enrichment at 3.67%, a level suitable for civilian energy use but not weapons production.
- ✦ Additionally, Iran committed to enhanced monitoring by the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) through a roadmap agreement.
- **Trump's 2018 Withdrawal from JCPOA**
- ✦ Trump withdrew from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, calling it "one-sided" and citing Iran's missile program and regional activities. Despite international backlash, U.S. sanctions crippled Iran's economy, leading Iran to roll back its commitments.

- o Seeking a policy win, Trump has signaled openness to negotiations, possibly cushioning U.S.-Israel relations amid the ongoing Palestine conflict.
- o However, Iran deeply distrusts him for upending the 2015 JCPOA.
- o A new deal with harsher terms or indefinite nuclear restrictions may be difficult to achieve, given Iran's strategic leverage and past grievances.

International Criminal Court and Its Reach

- Former Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte was flown to the **Netherlands** to face charges of crimes against humanity before the International Criminal Court (ICC).
- His indictment marks a significant moment for the ICC, which has often struggled to enforce its warrants.
- The court accuses Duterte of being individually responsible for mass killings carried out during his aggressive war on drugs between 2011 and 2019, a campaign that led to the deaths of approximately 30,000 people.
- The case is particularly notable because Duterte withdrew the Philippines from the ICC's jurisdiction in 2019.
- However, ICC prosecutors argue that crimes committed before the withdrawal still fall under the court's authority.
- This move has sparked debates on the ICC's power and reach in prosecuting global leaders.
- **Significance**
 - o Duterte's arrest is a rare success for the ICC but highlights its reliance on national governments and political influences.
 - o The court faces criticism for alleged Western bias, as many cases target leaders from developing nations.
 - o Its actions often intersect with global geopolitics, leading to accusations of political misuse, as seen in China's opposition to the Duterte case.

Understanding the ICC's Jurisdiction & Challenges in Enforcing ICC Warrants

- The ICC, established in 2002 under the 1998 Rome Statute, prosecutes individuals for genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.
- With 125 member states, it relies on national governments and Interpol for enforcement, but compliance is inconsistent, as seen in cases like Vladimir Putin and Benjamin Netanyahu.
 - The ICC can refer non-compliance to the UNSC for further action.
- Key challenges include its lack of enforcement power, political resistance, and geopolitical interference from major powers.
- Additionally, under the complementarity principle, the ICC intervenes only when national courts fail to prosecute, as seen in the Philippines case.

Indian Digital Economy Ranked 28th on User Spending

- As per the report by the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER)'s Prosus Centre for Internet and Digital Economy (CIDE), India's user economy ranks 28th in the world.
- This means while India as a country has achieved high level digitalisation at the aggregate level, the level of digitalisation for the average Indian remains fairly modest.

Key Highlights

- **India's Digitalisation Paradox**
 - o India is the 3rd largest economy globally but ranks 28th in digital user economy.
- **Internet Connectivity vs. Digital Economy Spending**
 - o India's internet density is comparable to global standards.
 - o However, user spending on digital services does not match the relative size of the economy.
 - o Greater investments are needed to enhance digital penetration and accessibility.

- **Growth Potential of the Digital Economy**
 - India's digital economy is growing at twice the rate of the overall economy.
 - By 2029, the digital sector is expected to constitute one-fifth of India's GDP.
- **CHIPS Framework Analysis**
 - India ranks 8th in an overall combination of economy size and digital user economy.
 - The CHIPS framework evaluates digitalisation based on:
 - ♣ Access quality; Affordability; Data intensity; Fintech industry strength; AI readiness; Green energy investments.
- **Digital Harnessing & Regional Disparities**
 - Strong ICT services exports and high IT sector market capitalisation boost India's ranking.
 - Southern and Western states are more advanced in digitalisation compared to Eastern and Northern states.
- **Challenges & Areas for Improvement**
 - India excels in decentralised finance, strong startups culture, and unicorn high valuations.
 - Lags behind in:
 - ♣ Consumer IoT and metaverse adoption (below G32 median).
 - ♣ AI infrastructure and research.
 - ♣ Significant scope for improving digital adoption and innovation.

India and Malaysia Co-Chair 14th ADMM-Plus Counter-Terrorism Meeting

- The 14th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) Experts Working Group on Counter-Terrorism (EWG on CT) was held in New Delhi, with participation from ASEAN nations, ADMM-Plus member states, and the ASEAN Secretariat.
 - The ADMM-Plus is a platform for ASEAN and its eight Dialogue Partners Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Russia and the United States (collectively referred to as the Plus Countries).
 - The aim of this platform is to strengthen security and defence cooperation for peace, stability, and development in the region.
- India and Malaysia, the new co-chairs for 2024-2027, outlined a work plan, including a Table-Top Exercise in Malaysia (2026) and a Field Training Exercise in India (2027).
- The discussions focused on developing a robust counter-terrorism strategy, sharing on-ground experiences, and laying the groundwork for future activities.

DEFENSE AND SECURITY

Entire Border with Myanmar to be Fenced In 10 Years

- The 1,643-km-long India-Myanmar border will be fully fenced with an anti-cut, anti-climb barrier within the next ten years.
- The project was announced by Union Home Minister in February 2024, and work has accelerated in recent months.
- Until last year, only 10 km of the border near Moreh (Manipur) had been fenced.
- **Security and Surveillance Measures**
 - Surveillance cameras will be installed along the fence to monitor movement.
 - The new infrastructure aims to curb illegal infiltration and enhance border security.
 - The model may also be used along the Pakistan and Bangladesh borders.
- **Challenges and Opposition**
 - Naga and Kuki-Zo bodies oppose the fencing, citing disruptions to ethnic and familial ties.
 - India and Myanmar have historically followed the Free Movement Regime (FMR), allowing border communities to move freely within 10 km without visas.
- **Changes to the Free Movement Regime (FMR)**
 - Initially introduced in 1968 with a 40-km movement limit, it was reduced to 16 km in 2004 and further regulated in 2016.
 - The FMR was suspended in February 2024, and a new protocol was introduced in December 2024.
 - Individuals entering India from Myanmar must now register at border gates, provide biometrics, and obtain a seven-day border pass.
- **Geopolitical and Security Concerns**
 - Former Manipur CM N. Biren Singh linked ethnic violence in the region to unregulated cross-border movement.
 - So far, around 9,000 people have used the border gates under the new system, with minimal cases of overstaying.
- **Border Length by State** - Arunachal Pradesh (520 km); Nagaland (215 km); Manipur (398 km); Mizoram (510 km)

AFSPA Extended in Manipur, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh

- **AFSPA Extension in Manipur**
 - The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) extended the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) in Manipur for another six months, effective from April 1, 2025.
 - The entire state is declared a 'disturbed area' except for **13 police stations in five valley districts** (Imphal, Lamphel, City police station, Singjamei, Patsoi, Wangoi, Porompat, Heingang, Irilbung, Thoubal, Bishnupur, Nambol, and Kakching).
 - AFSPA was reimposed in six police station limits in five districts on November 14, 2024, after ethnic violence erupted on **May 3, 2023**.
 - ♣ President's Rule was imposed in the state on **February 13, 2025**.

- AFSPA was withdrawn from all valley police stations from **April 1, 2022, to April 1, 2023**, due to an improved security situation.
- **AFSPA Extension in Nagaland**
 - The Act has been extended in **eight districts** and **21 police stations** in five other districts.
- **AFSPA Extension in Arunachal Pradesh**
 - AFSPA will continue in **Tirap, Changlang, and Longding districts**.
 - Areas under **Namsai, Mahadevpur, and Chowkham police stations** in **Namsai district** (bordering Assam) have also been declared as 'disturbed areas'.
- **Powers Under AFSPA**
 - The 1958 Act empowers the Indian Army and Central Armed Police Forces to:
 - ♣ Use lethal force against individuals violating the law.
 - ♣ Conduct arrests and searches without warrants.
 - ♣ Receive immunity from legal proceedings without the Central government's approval.

Govt. Report to Delhi HC Emphasizes Content Disclosure and Labelling for Deepfakes

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) submitted a status report to the Delhi High Court highlighting key concerns about deepfakes.

Key Highlights of the Government Report on Deepfakes

- **Lack of a uniform definition for "deepfake."**
- **Call for AI Content Regulation**
 - Stakeholders emphasized mandatory AI content disclosure, labeling standards, and grievance redressal mechanisms, **focusing on malicious actors** rather than creative uses of deepfake technology.
- **Debate on Intermediary Liability**
 - MeitY's panel proposed mandatory compliance for intermediaries regarding deepfake content.
 - Stakeholders' cautioned against over-reliance on intermediary liability frameworks, advocating better investigative and enforcement mechanisms instead of new regulations.
 - ♣ Intermediary liability frameworks determine the extent to which intermediaries can be held liable for content on their platforms.
- **Challenges in Deepfake Detection**
 - The Data Analysis Unit (DAU), part of the Meta-supported Misinformation Combat Alliance, highlighted:
 - ♣ Deepfakes targeting women during elections.
 - ♣ A post-election spike in AI-driven scam content.
 - ♣ Audio-based deepfakes are harder to detect.
- **Law Enforcement and Regulatory Actions**
 - The Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) has been tasked with gathering data on deepfake-related cases from law enforcement agencies.
 - Proposed solutions include awareness campaigns via platforms like YouTube.

Regulation of Deepfakes in India

- In India, while there's no specific law directly addressing deepfakes.

- **Existing Legal Framework:**
 - **Information Technology Act, 2000:**
 - ♣ **Section 66D:** Penalizes cheating by impersonation using a computer resource, which could apply to deepfakes used for fraudulent impersonation.
 - ♣ **Section 66E:** Addresses violation of privacy, which could be relevant if deepfakes are used to share private content.
 - ♣ **Sections 67, 67A, and 67B:** Prohibit and punish the publication or transmission of obscene or sexually explicit material.
 - **Defamation Laws:** Deepfakes used to spread misinformation or damage someone's reputation can be challenged under defamation laws.
 - **Copyright Act, 1957:** Copyright holders can initiate legal proceedings against individuals who use copyrighted material without permission to create deepfakes.

India Strengthens Maritime Ties with African Nations through IOS Sagar and AIKEYME

- The Indian Navy's **Indian Ocean Ship (IOS) Sagar mission** is providing advanced training to 44 personnel from nine friendly foreign countries (FFCs), reinforcing maritime cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- Participants from Comoros, Kenya, Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, and Tanzania are undergoing training at naval schools in Kochi and onboard the **INS Sunayna**, renamed IOS Sagar for the mission.
- This initiative aligns with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's **MAHASAGAR (Mutual And Holistic Advancement for Security & Growth Across the Region)** vision, emphasizing regional security collaboration.
- It is expected to deepen India's naval engagement with African nations, complemented by the upcoming **Africa India Key Maritime Engagement (AIKEYME)** exercise in mid-April.
 - The event, co-hosted by India and Tanzania, will feature a six-day multilateral exercise involving ten African nations.

India Launches 'Tavasya,' Final Krivak-Class Stealth Frigate

- India launched '**Tavasya**', the last of four Krivak-class stealth frigates, at Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL).
- Under the 2016 India-Russia agreement, two frigates were imported from Russia, while two were built at GSL under technology transfer agreement.
 - The first Indian-made frigate, **Tripud**, was launched in July 2024 and is set for delivery in 2026.
 - The first Russian-built frigate, **Tushil**, was commissioned in December 2024, while the second, **Tamal**, is undergoing trials and will be commissioned in June 2025.
- Tavasya is expected to be India's last foreign-licensed warship, as the country transitions to indigenous warship construction.

Global Intelligence Chiefs' Conference 2025

- The fourth Global Intelligence and Security Chiefs' Conference was hosted by India's National Security Advisor Ajit Doval.
- The conference, **organized by R&AW and the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS)**, continues to position India as a key player in global security cooperation.
 - It is modelled on the Munich Security Conference and Shangri-La Dialogue.

- It brought together 28 participants from around 20 countries, including the U.S., Canada, Australia, and Russia.
 - Chiefs from the Five Eyes alliance (U.S., U.K., Canada, Australia, New Zealand) participated.
 - The visit of Canadian intelligence chief signals potential thawing of India-Canada ties, which had been strained over the Hardeep Singh Nijjar case.
- The meeting, traditionally held a day before the Raisina Dialogue, focused on pressing global security concerns.
- **Key Issues Discussed**
 - **Counterterrorism and Transnational Crimes** – Strengthening international cooperation to combat terrorism, organized crime, and narcotics.
 - **Indo-Pacific Security and Intelligence Sharing** – Enhancing coordination amid evolving geopolitical tensions.
 - **Immigration and Extradition** – Addressing cross-border legal and security challenges.
 - **Terror Financing and Cybersecurity** – Tackling illicit financial networks and cyber threats.

Vertical Launch Short Range SAM for Navy Test Fired

- India successfully flight tested the vertically launched short range surface to air missile (VL-SRSAM) from a defence test facility off the Odisha coast.
- **About VL-SRSAM**
 - Indigenously developed Short-Range Surface-to-Air Missile (SRSAM) by DRDO.
 - Designed for quick reaction and capable of neutralizing aerial threats, including sea-skimming targets.
 - Initially developed for the Indian Navy with a 40 km strike range, now extended to 80 km.
 - Currently being adapted for the Indian Air Force to protect air bases.
- **Key Features**
 - **Propulsion:** Solid propellant for high-speed maneuverability.
 - **Speed & Altitude:** Can reach Mach 4.5 with a maximum altitude of 16 km.

Exercises

Varuna 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercise Varuna 2025, the 23rd edition of the India-France bilateral naval exercise, took place in the Arabian Sea. • Bilateral Naval Exercise between India and France, first initiated in 1993. • Officially named 'Varuna' in 2001, it has become a key pillar of Indo-French strategic cooperation. • Other India-France Military Exercises <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ FRINJEX: Army Joint Exercise. ◦ GARUDA: Air Force Exercise.
Prachand Prahaar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indian Army conducted a <i>Tri-Service integrated multi-domain</i> warfare exercise, 'Prachand Prahaar', in the high-altitude terrain of Arunachal Pradesh under Eastern Command. • The exercise aimed to validate an integrated approach to surveillance, command and control, and precision firepower across the Army, Navy, and Air Force.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Prachand Prahaar’ builds on Exercise Poorvi Prahar (November 2024), which focused on aviation asset integration.
Marine Security Belt 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iran, Russia, and China have launched their fifth annual joint naval drills, <i>Marine Security Belt 2025</i>, in the Gulf of Oman near Iran’s Chabahar port. • The exercises focus on maritime target strikes, damage control, and search-and-rescue operations. • Russia reported that crews practiced firing at simulated unmanned boats and aerial targets. • The drills take place amid tensions in the Red Sea, where Yemen’s Houthis have attacked Israel-linked ships, pausing after a Hamas-Israel ceasefire in January but threatening to resume if Israel continues its blockade of Gaza. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ U.S. and Western allies have increased their naval presence, forming a 10-nation force in December 2023 to counter Houthi attacks. ○ The U.S. Navy also has a fleet based in Bahrain.

ENVIRONMENT AND GEOGRAPHY

World Air Quality Report 2024

The World Air Quality Report 2024 by IQAir highlights severe pollution in India, with 13 of the world's 20 most polluted cities located in the country.

- **Byrnihat** (Assam) is the most polluted city globally, while Delhi remains the most polluted capital. India ranked **fifth** in air pollution in 2024, improving from third place in 2023.
- Oceania is the world's cleanest region, with 57% of regional cities meeting the WHO PM2.5 annual guideline value of 5 µg/m³.



Key Highlights of the World Air Quality Report 2024

• Pollution in India: Key Highlights

○ Decline in Average PM2.5 Levels

- India's average PM2.5 concentration in 2024 was **50.6 µg/m³**, reflecting a **7% decrease** from 2023 (54.4 µg/m³).

○ Most Polluted Cities

- **Byrnihat** recorded an **annual PM2.5 concentration of 128.2 µg/m³**.

○ Major Pollution Sources

- Crop stubble burning accounted for 60% of PM2.5 pollution during peak periods.
- Vehicular emissions, industrial discharges, and construction dust were other significant contributors.

• Air Pollution: A Global Crisis

○ Widespread Exposure to Dirty Air

- Only **12 countries, regions, and territories** met the WHO's recommended PM2.5 limit of **5 µg/m³**.
- These regions were primarily in **Latin America, the Caribbean, and Oceania**.

○ Most Polluted Countries

- The five most polluted countries, based on **annual average PM2.5 concentrations**, were:

Chad – 91.8 µg/m ³	Bangladesh – 78 µg/m ³	Pakistan – 73.7 µg/m ³	Congo – 58.2 µg/m ³	India – 50.6 µg/m ³
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National Wildlife Health Policy

Five years after the Covid-19 pandemic, the Centre is reviewing a draft National Wildlife Health Policy (NWHP) to strengthen wildlife disease surveillance and research.

National Wildlife Health Policy (NWHP) Under Review

- The policy proposes integrated surveillance systems, new diagnostic labs, and cross-sectoral collaborations to address zoonotic disease risks.
- It aims to mitigate risks of wildlife-origin pathogens, like SARS-CoV-2, by improving early detection and response mechanisms.

- **Alignment with One Health Approach**
 - NWHP aligns with the National One Health Mission, which integrates efforts across human, animal, and environmental health sectors.
 - Monitoring wildlife, both in the wild and in captivity, has become crucial for pandemic preparedness.
- **Key Stakeholders and Policy Formulation**
 - CZA is leading the policy drafting, with consultations driven by the Principal Scientific Adviser's office and support from IIT Bombay.
- **National Referral Centre for Wildlife (NRC-W) as a Key Hub**
 - NRC-W, inaugurated by PM Modi in Junagadh, Gujarat, will be a central authority for investigating wildlife mortalities, disease outbreaks, diagnostics, and treatments.
- **Bridging Information Gaps and Cross-Sectoral Coordination**
 - Currently, wildlife disease surveillance is fragmented across different ministries and independent research efforts.
 - The policy aims to integrate data from the Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Agriculture, and Department of Animal Husbandry to ensure better coordination.
- **Establishment of Wildlife Health Databases**
 - The policy proposes a National Wildlife Health Database and a Wildlife Health Information System to centralize real-time and historical data.
 - These will complement existing systems like the National Animal Disease Referral Expert System to predict and prevent outbreaks.
- **Satellite Diagnostic Labs and Community Engagement**
 - The policy recommends setting up satellite diagnostic labs near key forest habitats to improve wildlife disease detection and response.
 - It also emphasizes community engagement, such as vaccination programs for cattle near national parks, to prevent disease spillover from domestic to wild animals.

National Referral Centre for Wildlife (NRC-W)

- ⊗ Zoonotic diseases account for 60% of emerging infectious diseases worldwide, with 72% originating from wildlife.
- ⊗ India has experienced several localized but severe outbreaks, such as Kyasanur Forest Disease and Nipah virus. Against this backdrop, Centre has established **NRC-W in Junagadh, Gujarat**.
 - » Out of 1,407 human pathogens, 816 are zoonotic, posing a significant health risk.
- ⊗ **NRC-W** will focus on emerging infectious diseases, wildlife disease surveillance, and outbreak management.
- ⊗ **Advanced Research and Surveillance Facilities**
 - » NRC-W will be equipped with state-of-the-art investigation and surveillance technology to detect diseases in both animals and humans.
 - » It will also support skill-based training, data analytics, and policy development to enhance wildlife health management.
 - » NRC-W will bridge the gap between wildlife health, human health, and livestock programs, ensuring a holistic approach to One Health.
- ⊗ **Collaborative Approach for Wildlife Health**
 - » NRC-W will function in collaboration with national and international institutes.
 - » The Central Zoo Authority (CZA) will act as the nodal agency, ensuring coordination between zoos and wildlife health programs across India.

Biodiversity Leak

Science journal has highlighted that local restoration of agricultural landscapes to meet biodiversity targets can cause 'net harm' due to biodiversity leak.

Biodiversity Leak

- It's the *displacement of nature-damaging human activities*. When one area is protected or restored, activities like deforestation, agriculture, or industrial operations may simply shift to other, often more vulnerable, regions.
- This can result in a net loss of biodiversity globally, even if local biodiversity improves.

Key Factors

- Shift in agricultural and forestry production: When restrictions are placed on these activities in one area, the demand for goods like food and timber often leads to increased production elsewhere.
- Global Trade: When wealthy nations increase conservation at home, they can increase import of goods that are produced in other nations that have high biodiversity.

Way ahead

- Stronger Environmental Laws, Monitoring and Impact Assessment
- Promoting practices like agroforestry & responsible agriculture.
- International cooperation: The **European Union's Biodiversity Strategy for 2030** (under the European Green Deal) seeks to reverse ecosystem degradation and safeguard at least 30% of land and marine ecosystems by the decade's end, **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework** aims to protect 30% of land and sea areas by 2030 to counter biodiversity loss.

Avalanche

An avalanche struck a Border Roads Organisation (BRO) project at Mana in Uttarakhand's Chamoli.

About Avalanche

- It's a gravity-driven phenomenon where a mass of snow, often mixed with ice, air, and debris, accelerates downhill.
- Types: Can be classified based on their snow type and size.

A. Sluffs: Small, less dangerous avalanches of dry, powdery snow.

B. Slabs: More dangerous, large snow masses where the weak layer is buried deeper.

Types of Avalanches in Disaster Response:

- ✓ Dry Snow Avalanches: Fast-moving, can reach speeds of 300 km/h.
- ✓ Wet Snow Avalanches: Slower but more destructive due to the density of wet snow.
- ✓ Glacial Avalanches: Triggered by icefall from glaciers (e.g., Nanda Devi Glacier collapse, 2021).

Factors Responsible for Avalanche

- Slope: Typically occur on slopes between 25 and 60 degrees, with the highest risk around 30-45 degrees.
- Stability of Snowpack: Weak layers within the snowpack, such as newly fallen snow, buried surface hoar, or depth hoar, can create a sliding surface.
- Trigger: Natural events like heavy snowfall, wind loading, or temperature changes, or by human activities like skiing, snowboarding, or snowmobiling.
- Terrain: The shape and features of the terrain, such as gullies, bowls, and convex slopes, can influence avalanche formation and path.

Difference Between Avalanche and Landslide		
	Avalanche	Landslide
Composition	Primarily involves the rapid flow of snow and ice. May also include debris mixed with snow	Involves the movement of rock, soil, earth, and debris down a slope
Location	Occurs predominantly in mountainous regions with significant snow accumulation	Can occur in various terrains, including mountain hills, and even gentle slopes.
Triggering Factors	Heavy snowfall, rapid temperature changes, wind, unstable snowpack conditions, and human activities (e.g., skiing).	Heavy rainfall, earthquakes, volcanic activity, erosion, deforestation, and human activities (e.g., construction).
Speed	Characterized by rapid, high-velocity movement.	Range from slow, gradual movement to rapid sudden flows

Cali Fund

The 'Cali Fund' was launched to protect the biodiversity at the resumed 16th Conference of Parties (COP16) to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UN-CBD) in Rome.

About Cali Fund (Managed by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) & United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP))

Purpose

- Aims to ensure fair and equitable benefit-sharing from the use of **Digital sequence information (DSI)** on genetic resources.
 - ✓ DSI, encompassing genetic data from plants, animals, and microorganisms, is essential for product development in industries like pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, agriculture, and biotechnology.
- It seeks to have industries (private companies) that profit from using genetic data contribute financially to conservation efforts.
- To provide compensation and support to Indigenous communities and developing nations that play a vital role in preserving biodiversity.

Key features

- A significant portion (50%) of the fund's resources is earmarked for Indigenous peoples and local communities
- It is being implemented by the UN-CBD in collaboration with the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and other international stakeholders
- The fund supports the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF)
 - It aims to create a "nature-positive" world by 2030.
 - Was adopted at the 15th Conference of the Parties (COP15) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in December 2022 in Montreal, Canada.
 - A prominent target is the "30x30" goal, which aims to conserve and manage at least 30% of the world's terrestrial, inland water, and coastal and marine areas by 2030.
 - Other targets address issues like: Reducing threats to biodiversity, Sustainable use and benefit-sharing, Tools and solutions for implementation.

MISHTI Scheme

Gujarat has emerged as the national leader in mangrove afforestation, covering 19,020 hectares in just two years under the Centre's 'MISHTI' scheme.

- ✓ Gujarat has India's longest coastline (~1,600 km), making it highly vulnerable to coastal erosion, cyclones, and sea-level rise.

About MISHTI Scheme (Mangrove Initiative for Shoreline Habitats & Tangible Incomes)

- Launched on world environment day 2023 under Union Budget 2023-24, with implementation from 2023 to 2028. It involves collaboration with state governments, local communities, and other stakeholders.
 - ✓ Gujarat Ecological Education & Research (GEER) Foundation is spearheading community-driven mangrove conservation.
- **Implementation:** By the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- **Goals:** To increase and restore mangrove cover along India's coastlines and on salt pan lands.
 - ✓ Mangroves sequester up to 4 times more carbon than tropical rainforests.
 - ✓ Mangroves serve as breeding grounds for various marine species, bolstering fish populations and supporting fisheries.
 - ✓ Mangroves act as bio-shields against cyclones, storm surges, and tidal waves.
- **Funding:** Utilizes funds from various sources, including the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) and the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) Fund.
- **Geographical scope:** It covers Mangrove areas across 9 states and 3 union territories of India. It places special focus on areas like the Sundarbans delta in West Bengal and the Hooghly Estuary.
- It aligns with India's commitment to the **Mangrove Alliance for Climate (MAC)**.
 - launched at COP27, spearheaded by the UAE in partnership with Indonesia, will promote mangroves as a nature-based solution to climate change.
 - Vietnam's Mangrove Reforestation Model (funded by UNDP) reduced disaster losses—India can learn from its payment-for-ecosystem-services approach.

7th National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) Meeting

Prime Minister chaired the 7th National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) meeting at Gir National Park.

Key Announcements During the 7th meeting of NBWL

- **Riverine Dolphin Estimation:** Prime Minister released the report of the first-ever riverine dolphin estimation conducted in the country, which estimated a total of 6,327 dolphins.
 - ✓ Uttar Pradesh recorded the highest numbers, followed by Bihar, West Bengal, and Assam.
- Laid the foundation stone of the **National Referral Centre for Wildlife at Junagadh**, which will function as the hub for coordination and governance of various aspects related to wildlife health and disease management.
- **Asiatic lion Census:** Announcement of the initiation of the 16th cycle of Asiatic lions estimation to be conducted in 2025.
 - ✓ Population estimation of Asiatic Lions is carried out once every five years. The last such exercise was carried out in 2020.
 - ✓ Lion conservation in **Barda (Gujarat)** will be supported through prey augmentation and other habitat improvement efforts.

- An announcement for establishing a **Centre of excellence at Wildlife Institute of India- Campus** in SACON (Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History), Coimbatore.
 - ✓ The centre will also support the states and UTs in equipping Rapid Response Teams with advanced technology, gadgets for tracking, forewarning; prescribe surveillance and Intrusion Detection Systems in human-wildlife conflict hotspots
 - ✓ Engagement of the Wildlife Institute of India with the **Bhaskaracharya National Institute for Space Applications and Geo-informatics (BISAG-N)** to address the challenge of human-wildlife conflict.
- **The Cheetah introduction** will be expanded to other areas including the Gandhisagar Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh and Banni Grasslands in Gujarat.
- Considering the need to upscale the conservation efforts, he announced a **National Great Indian Bustard Conservation Action Plan (IUCN status: Critically Endangered)**.
- Initiation of a new Project on Gharials for their conservation.
 - ✓ Constitution of various task forces to work on Indian Sloth Bear, Ghariyaal and Great Indian Bustard conservation and development.
- Cooperation in Co-ordination unit under the United Nations Convention on the **Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)**.
- PM asks the Wildlife Board and Environment Ministry to gather the **traditional knowledge and manuscripts** of various regions of India with respect to conservation and management of forests and wildlife

Extra Mile: About National Board for Wildlife (NBWL)

- NBWL is established in 2003 under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972
 - ✓ As per the Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act, 2002, a provision was incorporated for the constitution of NBWL replacing the Indian Board for Wildlife (1952).
- It is the apex body on wildlife conservation and development. It primarily acts as an advisory body to the Central Government on matters related to wildlife conservation.
- Functions: To grant approval for projects located within or near national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. This includes infrastructure projects, mining, and other development activities. The NBWL assesses the potential impact of such projects on wildlife and their habitats.
 - ✓ Etalin Hydropower Project (Arunachal Pradesh), where NBWL played a role in assessing biodiversity loss risks.
 - ✓ Recovery programs for species like the Great Indian Bustard, Hangul (Kashmir Deer), and Vultures.
 - ✓ Ken-Betwa River Linking Project, affecting Panna Tiger Reserve, led to mitigation measures like compensatory afforestation.
- Composition: It is chaired (ex-officio Chairperson) by the Prime Minister of India.
 - ✓ Vice-Chairperson: Minister of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (MoEFCC).
- It includes representatives from various government departments, wildlife experts, and NGOs. Includes defence and expenditure secretaries, army chief, and other high-ranking officials.
- Standing Committee: which is empowered to approve projects.
- No changes to Protected areas boundaries allowed without NBWL recommendation.

Wallace Line

Researchers have called for the boundary line (Wallace Line) to be redrawn

Wallace Line

- It is an imaginary biogeographical boundary that separates the ecozones of Asia and Wallacea (a transitional zone between Asia and Australia).
- It was first proposed by the British naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace in the 19th century.
- It marks a sharp division in the distribution of animal species. To the west of the line, it finds species related to those in Asia. To the east, it finds a mix of Asian and Australian species, with a strong presence of Australian-related fauna (like marsupials).
- The line runs through the Malay Archipelago, notably: Between the islands of Bali and Lombok and Between Borneo and Sulawesi.
 - ✓ Even though these islands are geographically close (~35 km apart), their fauna is strikingly different.
- The differences in species distribution are largely attributed to: Historical geological events, particularly plate tectonics and changes in sea levels. These events created deep-water barriers that prevented the movement of many land animals.
 - ✓ Tectonic movements of the Sunda Shelf (Asian plate) and Sahul Shelf (Australian plate).
- It helps us understand: Evolutionary biology, Species migration, impact of geological history on biodiversity



Wallace Line & Future Research

- Redrawing the Wallace Line could better explain species migration patterns.
- NASA's Landsat satellite program is tracking Wallacean habitat shifts due to climate change & deforestation.

Indian Context

Lessons for Indian Biogeography	Influence on Indian Conservation Efforts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sundarbans Delta shows similar species separation due to water barriers (e.g., Bengal Tiger vs. Saltwater Crocodile). • Western Ghats & Himalayas act as natural barriers influencing species distribution. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India's National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) includes Wallacean-type conservation principles (e.g., isolation of species). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Example: Great Nicobar Biosphere Reserve protects endemic species influenced by Wallacean biodiversity.

Antarctic Circumpolar Current (ACC)

The research by the University of Melbourne predicts that the Antarctic Circumpolar Current will be 20% slower by 2050 as the world warms, with far-reaching consequences for life on Earth.

- ✓ The slowing ACC could contribute to Antarctic ice shelf disintegration, leading to higher sea levels.

Antarctic Circumpolar Current (ACC)

- **Circulation:** It's the only ocean current that completely encircles the globe, flowing eastward around Antarctica. It's driven primarily by **strong** westerly winds (the "Roaring Forties" and "Furious Fifties.")
- It's the largest ocean current in terms of volume transport, moving a massive amount of water.
- ACC transports carbon dioxide (CO₂) into deep waters, playing a major role in carbon sequestration.
- It acts as a barrier, isolating the waters around Antarctica and contributing to the region's unique climate.
- India operates **Bharati & Maitri** research stations in Antarctica to study ACC dynamics. National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR), Goa leads India's ACC studies.

Reasons for ACC Slowdown

- Antarctic ice melt: Freshwater inflow lowers salinity, reducing water density & sinking.
 - ✓ Global warming around Antarctica has resulted in weakening of Antarctic Bottom Water (**AABW**).
 - ✓ AABW is a sinking process and a critical component of global ocean circulation tied to circulation of ACC.
- Weaker westerly winds (shifting south due to global warming) reduce ACC intensity.
- Ocean stratification prevents deeper mixing, trapping heat & accelerating warming.

Global Thermohaline Circulation ("Global Conveyor Belt")

- The ACC connects the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans, facilitating the exchange of heat, nutrients, and gases.
- It helps to regulate global temperatures by transporting heat away from the tropics and towards the polar regions. It influences the distribution of sea ice and the formation of Antarctic Bottom Water.
 - ✓ Influences monsoon patterns in South Asia by regulating Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) and El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO).
 - ✓ **Example:** Weakened ACC could cause warming in Indian Ocean, intensifying droughts in Africa and stronger monsoons in India.
- It is defined by a series of fronts, or areas of rapid change in water properties, including the Subantarctic Front, the Polar Front, and the Southern ACC Front.

World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS)

Union Minister for Environment, Forest, and Climate Change, inaugurated the World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS) 2025 in New Delhi.

About WSDS (event organized by The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI))

- Started in 2001 as the Delhi Sustainable Development Summit (DSDS), it was rebranded to WSDS to reflect its broader international scope.
- 2025 Theme: 'Partnerships for Accelerating Sustainable Development and Climate Solutions'
 - 24th WSDS focused the critical role of collaborations among governments, businesses, civil society, and other stakeholders in driving meaningful progress toward sustainability goals.
- Key components: Sustainable Development Leadership Award (SDLA), Ministerial and High-Level Sessions, Thematic Tracks, CEO Forum, Youth Connect

Mycelium Bricks

Mycelium bricks are emerging as a viable and sustainable alternative to conventional clay bricks.

About Mycelium Bricks (Roha Biotech (IIT Madras Incubated))

- Composition: Consist of mycelium grown on a substrate of agricultural byproducts, such as sawdust, straw, or corn stalks.
 - ✓ Mycelium acts as a natural biopolymer, similar to synthetic resins used in traditional bricks but completely organic.
- Production Process: The mycelium is allowed to grow and bind the agricultural waste together, forming a solid matrix. The resulting material is then dried to stop the growth of the mycelium, creating a solid brick-like structure.

- Benefits: Biodegradable and compostable, lower carbon footprint compared to conventional building materials.
 - ✓ **MycoHAB Project (2023, UK):** The world's first structural mycelium building.
- Properties: Thermal and acoustic insulation, Moldability, relatively lightweight
 - ✓ NASA is exploring Mycelium bricks (Myco-architecture project) for building extraterrestrial habitats on the Moon and Mars due to their lightweight and insulating properties.
- Applications: Building walls, insulation, and packaging,
 - ✓ Waste-to-Wealth Mission (NITI Aayog): Mycelium bricks align with agro-waste upcycling objectives.
- Challenges: Durability and moisture resistance, scaling up production to meet widespread demand. Mycelium bricks have a lower compressive strength than traditional bricks, limiting load-bearing applications.
- The Energy Conservation Building Code (ECBC) promotes sustainable construction materials, but mycelium bricks need explicit policy backing.

UN Water Development Report 2025

The UN World Water Development Report 2025 (Launched on World Water Day (March 22)) focuses on the critical role of mountain waters, including glaciers, in global water resources.

Key Insights from UN Water Development Report 2025 (Published by UNESCO on behalf of UN-Water, annually)

- Theme: "Mountains and glaciers – Water towers". Mountain glaciers act as natural water towers, storing vast amounts of freshwater.
- It addresses the impact of rapidly changing mountain cryosphere (the Earth's surface covered by snow and ice) on downstream societies.
- Climate change is accelerating glacier melt, decreasing snow cover, and increasing the risk of extreme weather events. This intensifies risks such as floods, droughts, landslides, and sea-level rise, with devastating consequences for both people and ecosystems.
 - ✓ The report states that there is compelling evidence indicating that the "peak water" threshold has already been surpassed in glacial-fed rivers across the tropical Andes, western Canada, and the Swiss Alps.
- This poses a threat to the water and food supply of billions of people who rely on mountain water sources. Retreating glaciers threaten the food and water supply of 2 billion people around the world.
- It highlights the urgent need for improved mountain water governance and sustainable management practices.

Implications for India

- **Impact on River Systems:** Indus, Ganges, and Brahmaputra rivers originate from Himalayan glaciers. Increased glacial melt initially raises river flows, heightening flood risks.
- **Agricultural Vulnerability:** Changes in melt patterns can disrupt planting and harvesting cycles, threatening food security for a substantial portion of India's population.
- **Hydropower Challenges:** India's hydropower projects, many situated in the Himalayan region, rely on steady glacial meltwater. Variability in water flow can affect electricity generation.

Bedmap3

The latest version and findings of Bedmap3 were published.

About Bedmap3 (collaborative community project, led by the British Antarctic Survey (BAS))

- Bedmap3 integrates over six decades of data to provide an unprecedented view of the Antarctic's subglacial landscape. It incorporates data from various sources, including ice-thickness measurements from radar surveys, bathymetry, surface altitude data from satellites, and grounding lines.
 - ✓ Bathymetry is the study of the "beds" or "floors" of water bodies, including the ocean, rivers, streams, and lakes.
- It has compiled over 82 million data points, significantly more than its predecessor- Bedmap2, providing a much higher resolution (500 m grid spacing) view of the landscape beneath the Antarctic ice sheet.
- The project has uncovered hidden mountains, deep valleys, and intricate geological formations beneath the ice. Notably, it identified the thickest ice in an unnamed canyon in Wilkes Land, measuring approximately 4,757 meters.
- It indicates that Antarctica has more ice grounded below sea level than previously estimated, making it potentially more vulnerable to melting due to warming ocean waters.
- **Antarctica:** Earth's fifth largest almost completely ice-covered continent. It is the coldest continent on earth. It covers Earth's South Pole with no trees or bushes. The only plants that can survive the extreme cold are lichens (Algae + Fungi), mosses and algae.

Green Grabbing

The Asian Development Bank (ADB)-funded Assam Solar Park has sparked protests from local communities against green grabbing.

About Green Grabbing

- It is a specific type of land grabbing where land and resources are appropriated for environmental purposes, often under the guise of conservation, biodiversity protection, climate change mitigation, or promoting ecosystem services.
 - ✓ **Dongria Kondh Tribes in Odisha:** The Vedanta mining project was halted due to protests by tribal communities, but similar land acquisitions under environmental initiatives continue.
- Often leads to the displacement or marginalization of local communities who depend on these resources for their livelihoods.
 - ✓ **Example:** Maasai people in Tanzania's Ngorongoro Conservation Area have been evicted to make way for wildlife tourism.
- Can be driven by various actors, including governments, international environmental organizations, multinational corporations, NGOs, and even wealthy individuals.
 - ✓ **Forest Rights Act, 2006:** Provides land rights to forest dwellers but is often overlooked in green projects.





Kasampatty Sacred Grove

Kasampatty Sacred Grove in Dindigul district has been officially notified as Tamil Nadu's second Biodiversity Heritage Site (BHS) under the Biological Diversity Act, 2002 after the **Arittapatti village in Madurai district** as the first declared in 2022.

- Also known as **Veera Kovil Sacred Grove**, it Spans 4.97 hectares near the **Alagarmalai Reserve Forest**. This grove is enveloped by lush mango plantations, enhancing its natural beauty and fertility.

{For more about BHS Refer The Recitals-Feb 2025}

Species In News

<p>Gharials</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Madhya Pradesh government released 10 gharials into the Chambal-river at the National Chambal Gharial Sanctuary in Morena. • Gharials are endemic (native to Indian subcontinent) long-snouted crocodiles. • Habitat: Chambal River, Girwa River, Ken River, Yamuna River, Brahmaputra River, Ghaghara River, Bhagirathi-Hoogly River. • Unlike crocodiles, gharials feed exclusively on warm-blooded species and are not man-eaters. Its jaws make it physically incapable of devouring any large mammal. • They exhibits Sexual Dimorphism means males and females differ significantly in size and appearance. • IUCN Status: Critically Endangered
<p>Ruellia Elegans</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Also known as Brazilian petunia, Christmas pride • Ruellia Elegans, the flowering plant native to wet tropical biomes is posing the threat to the native biodiversity of Assam. It has bright red trumpet shaped flowers. • India has six native species of Ruellia • It was introduced in the Andaman Islands, apart from Jamaica and Puerto Rico.
<p>IGUANAS</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iguanas have been found in Fiji and Tonga which are conventionally native to Americas. • Iguanas are large lizards that are primarily herbivorous. • Distinctive features: a row of spines along their back and a dewlap (a flap of skin under their throat), long tails that they use for balance and defence. • Habitat: Native to tropical areas of Mexico, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean • IUCN Red List: Not Threatened; CITES Listing: Appendix II
<p>Caracal</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First photographic record of a caracal has been taken in Mukundra Hills Tiger Reserve (Rajasthan) • It is a primarily nocturnal cat species known for its distinct and pointy ears, which give the animal its name. • Distribution: Africa, Middle East, Central Asia and South Asia. • In India it is only found in parts of Rajasthan and Gujarat. • IUCN Status: Least Concern (LC); The Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972: Schedule I

ISRO Successfully Undocks SpaDeX Satellites

ISRO successfully undocked the **SpaDeX (Space Docking Experiment)** satellites SDX01 (Chaser) and SDX02 (Target) after nearly two months of testing their docking capabilities.

- This accomplishment positions India as the fourth country after the United States, Russia, and China to develop this advanced space docking capability.
- The achievement is critical for future ISRO missions, including human spaceflight, lunar exploration, and the construction of India's planned space station.

About SpaDeX Mission

- SpaDeX is an ambitious ISRO mission designed to test India's ability to autonomously dock and undock satellites in orbit. The experiment involved:
 - **Docking:** Two 220-kg satellites, SDX01 and SDX02, were maneuvered into the same orbit and progressively brought closer until they were joined in January, 2025.
 - **Power Sharing** capabilities, where both satellites operated as a single composite unit.
 - **Undocking:** The satellites were commanded to separate, successfully completing the undocking operation.

Indian Firms Racing To Build Local AI Solutions

Recently, the **IndiaAI Mission** launched **AI Kosha**, a national dataset platform for collecting non-personal data to develop AI models. It also introduced the **Common Compute portal**, providing startups and academia access to shared GPUs (*Graphics Processing Units*) for AI development.

- **Currently 14,000 GPUs commissioned** for shared access, up from **10,000 announced earlier** in 2024.
- GPUs supplied by **10 selected companies**, ensuring a **robust and diversified AI compute ecosystem**.
- **Plans to develop indigenous GPUs within 3-5 years**, reducing dependency on imports and strengthening India's self-reliance in AI technology.

AI Kosha: India's National AI Dataset Platform

- AI Kosha is part of the **IndiaAI Datasets Platform**, aimed at addressing a key challenge in AI development—**the dominance of Western-trained models**.
- Many AI models rely heavily on English-language data, making them less effective for India's diverse linguistic and cultural landscape.
- Data sourced from **government initiatives**, including **Telangana's open data platform, health records, 2011 Census data, satellite imagery, and pollution data**.
- **Building India-Specific AI Models**
 - AI Kosha seeks to make **India-centric data** more accessible for researchers and AI developers.
 - It includes datasets such as **translation models for Indian languages**, helping reduce bias in AI training.
- **Impact on AI Development:** Open-source AI models provide a foundation, but **local datasets are essential** to ensure AI tools are relevant and effective for Indian users.

{For more about IndiaAI Mission, refer The Recitals (March24)}

Solar Flares and Aditya L1 mission

The Solar Ultraviolet Imaging Telescope (SUIT) onboard Aditya-L1 recorded the first-ever image of a solar flare 'kernel'. SUIT one of the seven scientific payloads on the Aditya-L1 spacecraft, developed by the Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA), Pune

Significance of Discovery

- Supports long-standing theories about solar energy transfer.
- Advancing the prediction of solar storms and space weather to protect satellites and power grids.
- Advances global solar physics research, enhancing our understanding of the Sun's impact on Earth's climate.

About Solar Flares

- These are sudden, intense bursts of energy (magnetic fields) released from the Sun's surface.
- This energy takes the form of electromagnetic radiation, spanning the entire electromagnetic spectrum, from radio waves to gamma rays.
- They originate in active regions of the Sun, which are areas with strong and complex magnetic fields, often associated with sunspots.
- **Classification:** Based on their X-ray intensity, using a letter system: A, B, C, M, and X, with X-class flares being the most powerful. Each letter class is 10 times more powerful than the previous one.

About Aditya L1 mission (Launched in 2023 aboard PSLV C-57 rocket)

- India's first dedicated space-based observatory for studying the Sun.
- Primary goal is to investigate the solar atmosphere, solar magnetic storms, and their impact on the environment around Earth.
- The spacecraft is positioned in a halo orbit around the Lagrange point 1 (L1) of the Sun-Earth system, approximately 1.5 million kilometers from Earth. This location provides a continuous, unobstructed view of the Sun.
- It was successfully placed in its halo orbit around L1 in January 2024.

Ocelot Chip

Amazon unveils first quantum chip 'Ocelot' days after Microsoft's Majorana 1 and Google's 'Willow' chips.

Key Features and Significance

- Ocelot is a nine-qubit silicon microchip that has been internally fabricated by Amazon.
 - ✓ Qubits are the building blocks of quantum computers. While classical computers process text and images in binary code comprising bits, quantum computers run on qubits based on the principles of quantum mechanics.
- It aims to pave the way for building larger and more reliable quantum computers.
- A major challenge in quantum computing is the high error rate of qubits (quantum bits). The Ocelot chip is designed with a focus on mitigating these errors.
 - ✓ Error generation is a major challenge when it comes to scaling qubits, which are known to collapse into normal behaviour due to the slightest external disturbances in temperature or pressure. Hence, maintaining the stability of qubits is a critical issue.
- It utilizes "cat qubits," which inherently suppress certain types of errors, reducing the resources needed for error correction. These qubits, inspired by Schrödinger's cat thought experiment, are designed to be more stable and resistant to certain errors.

- It can reduce the costs of implementing quantum error correction by up to 90% compared to current approaches.

Blue Ghost Mission

Firefly Aerospace's Blue Ghost lunar lander has successfully landed at the Moon's Mare Crisium region, a volcanic formation on the Moon's northeastern near side.

About Blue Ghost Mission

- It's part of NASA's Commercial Lunar Payload Services (CLPS) initiative, which aims to utilize commercial companies to transport scientific instruments and technology demonstrations to the Moon.
- The lander is equipped with ten high-tech instruments like lunar soil analyser, radiation-tolerant computer, drill & vacuum system etc designed for scientific and technological research.
 - ✓ **Lunar Environment Heliospheric X-ray Imager (LEXI-Instrument):** Captures images of Earth's magnetosphere interacting with solar wind, contributing to space weather studies.
 - ✓ **Lunar Instrumentation for Subsurface Thermal Exploration with Rapidity (LISTER):** Measures heat flow from the lunar interior by drilling into the regolith.
- Duration: Expected to operate for a full lunar day (14 Earth days).

Purpose

- To support **NASA's Artemis program** and broader lunar exploration goals, that aims to establish a *long-term human presence on the Moon*.

Bose Metal

Scientists from Japan and China has found that niobium diselenide (NbSe_2) exhibits properties of a Bose metal, a long-theorized but unproven quantum state.

About Bose Metal

A Bose metal is a **quantum state** of matter where **Cooper pairs** (electron pairs in superconductors) do not fully condense into a superconducting phase, leading to anomalous conductivity even at extremely low temperatures.

- A Quantum State: It's not a traditional metal in the sense of iron or copper. Rather, it's a unique state that can occur in certain materials under specific, often extreme, conditions, like very low temperatures and strong magnetic fields.
- The Bose name comes from Satyendra Nath Bose, whose work with Albert Einstein led to Bose-Einstein statistics. This is because the Cooper pairs, as they act as a pair, behave like bosons
- Cooper Pairs: These are pairs of electrons that form in superconductors. In a Bose metal, these Cooper pairs exist, but they don't fully condense into a superconducting state.
- Anomalous Conductivity: This results in a situation where the material exhibits some level of electrical resistance, even at very low temperatures. This is unusual because conventional physics predicts that at such temperatures, a material should either become a perfect conductor (superconductor) or an insulator.
- There's potential for applications in quantum computing and advanced electronics, as this state exhibits unique quantum properties.
 - ✗ **Quantum Computing:** Can help develop more stable qubits, reducing quantum decoherence
 - ✓ **Energy Transmission:** Future power grids may integrate materials based on Bose metals to enhance energy efficiency.

PUNCH Mission-Solar Maximum

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) is set to launch its solar mission, **Polarimeter to Unify the Corona and Heliosphere (PUNCH)** during the solar maximum phase of the Sun's cycle.

About PUNCH Mission

- Objective: To study how the Sun's corona transitions into the solar wind, the constant stream of charged particles that flows throughout the solar system. It aims to provide a comprehensive, 3D view of this region, which is crucial for understanding space weather.
 - ✓ Polarimetry for enhanced observation: Unlike previous missions (e.g., SOHO, Parker Solar Probe), PUNCH will provide a real-time dynamic view of solar wind behavior.
 - ✓ Parker Solar Probe (launched in 2018) studies the Sun's corona at close range, while PUNCH will complement it by providing large-scale imaging of solar wind.
- It consists of a constellation of four small satellites that will work together to create continuous, wide-field images of the Sun's outer atmosphere and the inner heliosphere.
- It will utilize **polarimetry**, a technique that measures the polarization of light, to create 3D maps of the solar wind. It will take continuous imaging of the Sun's corona and solar wind.
 - ✓ NASA's Artemis program aims to establish a lunar base by the 2030s. PUNCH's data will be vital for radiation protection strategies.
 - ✓ Data from PUNCH can complement ISRO's Aditya-L1 Mission, which studies the solar corona.

Therapeutic Proteins

Therapeutic proteins are increasingly becoming an indispensable part of healthcare, with their applications found in treating both infectious diseases, and non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and cancer.

About Therapeutic Proteins

- These proteins are aimed at preventing, treating, or diagnosing diseases.
- They are used to replace deficient or malfunctioning proteins in the body.
- They can augment existing biological pathways or introduce new therapeutic functions. They can target specific molecules involved in disease processes
- **Types:** Common examples include monoclonal antibodies, hormones (like insulin), enzymes, growth factors, and cytokines

Role in Personalized & Precision Medicine

- mRNA technology + Therapeutic proteins are creating customized treatments.
- Gene editing tools (CRISPR, TALENs) enhance protein-based drug production.
- Gene therapy + Proteins can provide potential cures for genetic disorders.
 - ✓ **Example:** CAR-T cell therapy (combining proteins & immune cells) for leukemia treatment.
- **Production:** Produced using biotechnology, particularly recombinant DNA technology, where genes encoding the desired protein are inserted into host cells (like bacteria or mammalian cells) that then produce the protein.
- Global therapeutic protein market is projected to exceed \$500 billion by 2030. India ranks among the top global producers of biosimilars & biologics.
 - ✓ GAVI, COVAX, CEPI fund protein-based vaccines for developing countries.
 - ✓ DeepMind's AlphaFold (AI model for protein folding) is revolutionizing drug discovery.

Extra Mile: Types of Therapeutic Proteins & Examples

Type	Function	Examples
Hormones	Replace deficient hormones	Insulin (Diabetes), Growth hormone (Dwarfism)
Monoclonal Antibodies (mAbs)	Target specific antigens in diseases like cancer & autoimmune disorders	Trastuzumab (Breast Cancer), Rituximab (Lymphoma)
Enzymes	Replace or supplement defective enzymes	Factor VIII (Hemophilia), Dornase alfa (Cystic Fibrosis)
Cytokines	Modulate immune response	Interferons (Hepatitis, MS), Interleukins (Cancer therapy)
Fusion Proteins	Combine different proteins for enhanced action	Etanercept (Autoimmune diseases)
Protein-based Vaccines	Provide immunity against diseases	Novavax (COVID-19), HPV vaccine

Plastic Ice (The Fourth Form of Water)

Scientists have confirmed the existence of a fourth form of water, Plastic Ice VII, phase of ice that forms under extreme pressure conditions.

About Plastic Ice VII: (Exists at deep planetary interiors and high-pressure lab setups.)

- It is formed under extremely high pressures, specifically above 3 gigapascals (GPa) (~30,000 times Earth's atmospheric pressure). This intense pressure causes the water molecules to arrange themselves in a distinct crystalline structure.
 - ✓ This property could explain why some ice sheets in Antarctica and Greenland exhibit plasticity rather than brittle fracture.
 - ✓ Europa (moon of Jupiter) and Enceladus (moon of Saturn) might contain Plastic Ice in their deep ice crusts, influencing the possibility of subsurface life.
- **Plastic" Behavior:** It refers to its unusual mechanical property: it can deform significantly without fracturing. This is because the water molecules, while arranged in a crystal lattice, can still rotate relatively freely, allowing the ice to flow and change shape under stress.
- Structure: Ice VII has a body-centered cubic (bcc) crystal structure.
- Its discovery has implications for understanding the behavior of water under extreme conditions, such as those found in the interiors of planets and moons.
 - ✓ Water-rich planets and moons experience high pressures in their cores, where Plastic Ice VII might exist. Helps explain internal heat flow, magnetic field generation, and possible water reservoirs on **exoplanets**.
- **Biomedical & Pharmaceutical Applications:** Could be used in cryopreservation for storing organs, stem cells, and vaccines.

Northeast Centre for Technology Application & Reach (NECTAR)

Central government has decided to establish NECTAR's permanent campus in Shillong.

About NECTAR (Autonomous Society-under the Department of Science & Technology)

- In 2012, NECTAR was created through the merger of the National Mission for Bamboo Application (NMBA) and the Mission for Geospatial Applications (MGA)."

- It focuses on utilizing modern technologies, particularly remote sensing, GIS (Geographic Information System), and other geospatial tools (Information and Communication Technology (ICT)), to address the unique challenges of the North Eastern Region.
 - ✓ NECTAR's involvement in promoting Agri-Tech and Bamboo Industry has gained momentum, aligning with India's Atmanirbhar Bharat and Vocal for Local initiatives.
 - ✓ NECTAR's assistance in promoting Eri and Muga silk industries in Assam and Meghalaya.
- Areas of interventions: Biodiversity Conservation, Infrastructure Development, Disaster Management, Agriculture and Horticulture, Water Resources Management, Healthcare, Skill development
 - ✓ The Northeast is a seismically active region (Zone V). NECTAR is helping develop earthquake-resistant housing models.
 - ✓ NECTAR has approved a project of developing a floating shelter for animals to save them during floods using bamboo composite application in Kaziranga National Park.

Birefringence

Recent research reveals that there is growing use of Birefringent materials in LCD screens, medical microscopes, optical switches, waveplates, frequency converters, and high-power lasers.

About Birefringence ("double refraction")

- Birefringence is **an optical phenomenon** where a single light wave entering an anisotropic material split into two rays, each traveling at different speeds and refracted at distinct angles.
- **Common examples of birefringent materials include:**
 - ✓ **Natural Crystals:** calcite, quartz, mica.
 - ✓ **Biological Structures:** Collagen fibers, muscle tissues
 - ✓ **Engineered Materials:** Liquid crystals in LCD screens, certain plastics

Fundamental Principles:

- Anisotropy means that the material's properties, in this case, its refractive index, are not uniform in all directions. This non-uniformity is often due to the material's crystal structure or the alignment of its molecules.
- In birefringent materials, refractive index varies with the polarization of light and its direction of travel.
- Birefringent materials split unpolarized light into two polarized components. When light enters a birefringent material, it splits into two rays:
 1. The ordinary ray (o-ray) obeys Snell's law of refraction.
 2. The extraordinary ray (e-ray) does not necessarily obey Snell's law and travels at a different speed.

Observable Effects:

- **Double Vision:** When viewing an object through a birefringent crystal, such as calcite, the object appears doubled.
- **Interference Patterns:** When polarized light passes through a birefringent material and then through another polarizer, interference patterns can be observed.
- **Color Effects:** If the birefringence is wavelength-dependent, colored fringes can be observed.

Applications of Birefringent Technology

- **Next-Gen Display Technologies:** Apple and Samsung's OLED advancements use birefringence to enhance screen clarity and efficiency.

✓ Quantum Dot Displays (QLEDs) utilize birefringence to improve color accuracy.

- **Optical Communication (Fiber Optics):** Polarization-maintaining fiber optics rely on birefringence to reduce signal distortion, vital for 5G networks and satellite-based internet (e.g., Starlink, OneWeb).
- **Polarization Cameras & Military Applications**
- **Alzheimer's & Neurodegenerative Research:** Birefringence is being used to study protein misfolding in Alzheimer's disease
- **Himalayan seismic research** uses birefringence-based wave analysis to study stress accumulation along tectonic plates, improving earthquake preparedness in India.
- **Bullet Train (Mumbai-Ahmedabad)** project incorporates birefringence-based stress analysis to ensure material resilience.

Chandrayaan-5

ISRO Chairperson announced the Centre's approval for the Chandrayaan-5 mission along with India's second spaceport at Kulasekarapattinam, Tamil Nadu.

About Chandrayaan5 (Joint mission between ISRO and JAXA)

- It aims to explore the Moon's south pole, with a focus on conducting detailed studies of the lunar surface, its composition, and potential water resources. It also contributes to India's long-term goal of achieving a human landing on the Moon by 2040.
- It will involve on-site sampling and analysis of lunar material. It will demonstrate lunar night survival technologies.
- The mission will deploy a significantly larger and more advanced rover (250 kg) compared to previous Chandrayaan missions designed to explore shadowed regions of the lunar surface, particularly near the south pole, where water ice is suspected to exist.

About India's Second Spaceport (Location: Kulasekarapattinam, Thoothukudi district of Tamil Nadu)

- It is primarily designed to facilitate launches of the Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV).
- It offers strategic advantages, particularly for polar orbit launches, by enabling direct southward trajectories over the Indian Ocean.
- Launching from Kulasekarapattinam avoids the need for fuel-consuming maneuvers around Sri Lanka, which are required when launching from Sriharikota.

White Hydrogen

France has discovered 46-million-ton white hydrogen reserve in the Moselle region, valued at \$92 trillion.

About White Hydrogen

- Unlike "green" or "blue" hydrogen, which require production processes, white hydrogen is found naturally within the Earth.
- It's formed through geological processes, such as reactions between water and certain minerals
- It's considered a potentially clean energy source, as its extraction could have a lower carbon footprint compared to traditional hydrogen production.
- Production costs around \$1 per kilogram, making it highly affordable.

{For more about different types of Hydrogen refer The Recitals April 2024}

India Bio-Economy Report 2024

The Department of Biotechnology has released the India BioEconomy Report 2024 highlighting that India's bioeconomy crossed \$165 billion, contributing 4.2% of GDP.

Key Findings of Bio-Economy Report

- The value has nearly doubled from around \$86 billion in 2020 to \$165 billion in 2024.
- The number of companies in the bioeconomy sector increased by approximately 90% in the last three years, from 5,365 in 2021 to 10,075 in 2024.
- The sector is projected to reach about \$300 billion by 2030 and \$1 trillion by 2047.
- Industrial Sector is the largest contributor with approximately \$78 billion, driven by biofuels and bioplastics. **Example:** The Ethanol Blending Program (EBP) has boosted biofuel production, reducing import dependence on crude oil.
- Pharmaceutical Sector is accounted for 35% of the total value, with vaccines being major contributors.
- Research & IT is the fastest-growing segment, including biotech software development, clinical trials, and bioinformatics. **Example:** India's Genome Sequencing Program and AI-based drug discovery startups like Strand Life Sciences.
- Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana, Gujarat, and Andhra Pradesh collectively generated over two-thirds of the bioeconomy value.
 - ✓ Eastern & Northeastern Regions: Contributed less than 6% of the total value.
- **Policy initiative:** BioE3 Policy (2024): Launched by the government with the objective of "Biotechnology for Economy, Environment, and Employment." Aims to establish India as a global hub for bio-manufacturing and R&D in biotechnology.

GAIA Mission

The European Space Agency (ESA) shut down space observatory mission, Gaia (Global Astrometric Interferometer for Astrophysics).

About GAIA Mission (Launched in 2013 to create the most precise 3D map of the Milky Way galaxy)

- It was located at Lagrange Point 2 (L2), about 1.5 million km from Earth.
- It primarily focused on measuring the positions, distances, and motions of over a billion stars.
 - ✓ The mission is crucial for understanding exoplanets, stellar physics, dark matter distribution, and even fundamental physics like **General Relativity**.
- It's findings allowed scientists to recreate not just a 3-D map of the galaxy, but also how it will change over time.
- It has detected over 1,50,000 asteroids and projected their orbits, including those that may pose a threat to the Earth in the future.
- It has uncovered a new kind of black hole – including one close to the Earth. Generally black holes were previously discovered by light emitted by materials falling in, those discovered by Gaia are "truly black and can only be detected by their gravitational effects.
- The shape of milky way galaxy revealed which has a central bar and spiral arms. Viewed from its edge, the galaxy is seen as a disc with a bulge at the centre.
- However, Gaia shows that this disc is warped and wobbles – that is, it rocks left to right (very, very slowly). This is likely caused by collisions with a smaller satellite galaxy.

Amir Khusrau

PM Modi, at the 25th *Jahan-e-Khusrau* festival, described this festival as carrying the “fragrance of the soil of Hindustan.” **Amir Khusrau**, known as *Tuti-yi-Hind* (Parrot of India), is regarded as a key figure in North India’s **Ganga-Jamuni culture**. He made significant contributions to **Indian classical music**, **qawwali**, and developed **Hindavi**, a precursor to **modern Hindi and Urdu**.

The ‘Indian Turk’

• Cultural Synthesis in His Identity

- Khusrau embraced both his Turkic and Indian heritage, a theme reflected in his writings.
- Various scholars described him as a symbol of cultural fusion, and he often referred to himself as an “Indian Turk.”

- **Birthplace:** Though *Patiyali (Etah, Uttar Pradesh)* is widely believed to be his birthplace, Khusrau himself never mentioned it in his writings.

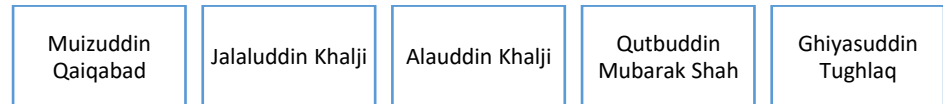
Poet of the Sultans

- He initially served princes and nobles before securing a permanent place in the Delhi Sultanate’s court.

• Role of Praise Poetry

- In medieval Islamic culture, praise poetry was a key tool for rulers to establish their cultural and political legitimacy. Court poets relied on royal patronage and faced fierce competition.

- **Khusrau also served at least five Delhi Sultans:**



- He also had many influential patrons over five decades, showcasing the exceptional quality of his poetry. He wrote in Persian, the court language, as well as **Hindavi**.

• Honors and Recognition

- Sultan Jalaluddin Khalji conferred on him the title of ‘Amir’.
- Historian Ziauddin Barani recorded in *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi* that Jalaluddin held Khusrau in great esteem, and that Khusrau served as keeper of the Qur’an in his court.

The Devoted Disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya

- Amir Khusrau was the most beloved disciple of the Chishti saint Nizamuddin Auliya. The saint held him in high regard, once declaring:

- “*He (Khusrau) is the keeper of my secrets, and I shall not set foot in Paradise without him.*”

• Balancing the Court and the Khanqah

- Khusrau was respected both in the royal court and in the Sufi khanqah. Despite navigating two different worlds, his loyalty was never questioned.

- **A Shared Fate in 1325:** Master and disciple passed away within months of each other in 1325.

Khusrau’s Enduring Legacy

• Musical Contributions

- Khusrau’s ghazals and qawwalis remain popular, performed in Sufi dargahs and Bollywood. His famous compositions include:

- He is also credited with **shaping Indian classical music**, including:
 - Crafting dozens of ragas
 - **Developing ornate khayal music**
 - Inventing the sitar and tabla (though evidence remains limited)

Herath

- The festival of Mahashivratri was recently celebrated across the country. However, the festival takes a distinct identity known as ‘Herath’, celebrated among the **Kashmiri Pandit community**.
- The name of this three-week-long festival (Herath) is derived from the Sanskrit words **Hara (another name for Lord Shiva)** and **Ratri (night)**.
- The celebration begins a day before Shivratri. Beginning from the **13th night of Phalgun** month (February-March) until the new moon, it marks the unity of divinity, consciousness, and feminine energy that leads to creation.
- It also **celebrates the sacred union of Goddess Parvati and Lord Shiva**, similar to MahaShivratri.
- The main worship, known as **Vatuk Pooja**, is conducted using a steel vessel (Kalash) filled with water and **walnuts, symbolising the four Vedas**.
- The day following Shiva Chaturdashi is known as **Salam**, a unique tradition reflecting the historical unity of Pandits and Muslims in the Kashmir Valley.
- On the fifteenth day, called **Dooni-Mavas**, walnuts are distributed among family members as a sacred offering.
- Kashmiri Pandits greet one another with the phrase **Herath Poshte**, extending warm wishes for the occasion.
- The largest gathering takes place at the **Shankaracharya Temple overlooking Dal Lake** in Srinagar.

Menhir

- The Mudumal megalithic menhirs in Telangana’s Narayanpet district will soon be the 2nd UNESCO World Heritage Site in the state, after being added to the tentative list by the World Heritage Centre in 2025.
 - Telangana has only one Unesco World Heritage Site at Ramappa temple, inscribed in 2021
- A menhir is a **standing or an upright stone**, which is **usually tapered at the top**. It is man-made, in that it is sculpted and placed by humans, and usually quite large.
- The largest surviving menhir, the **Grand Menhir Brisé or the Great Broken Menhir** in **Brittany, France**, once stood at 20.6 m tall.
- The term ‘menhir’ is derived from the Brittonic **“maen” meaning “stone”, and “hîr” meaning “long”**.
- It was first used by French military officer and Celticist antiquarian **Théophile Corret de la Tour d’Auvergne**.
- The menhirs in Europe were originally associated with the **Beaker culture** who lived during the **late Neolithic and early Bronze Age** — roughly 4,800 to 3,800 years before present (BP).
- But the oldest European menhirs are today dated to as early as 7,000 BP.
- The **menhirs in Mudumal**, dated to roughly 3,500 to 4,000 BP, are the **oldest known menhirs in India**.



Purpose

- Menhirs can either be found alone, or as a part of a larger complex of prehistoric megaliths, simply, large stone structures.
- While the exact purpose of many megalithic sites is debated, they likely served **ceremonial functions**. Some were markers of graves, while others might have served some astronomical purposes.
- The Mudumal site has been described as a “**megalithic astronomical observatory**” by the UNESCO dossier.
- Today, the Mudumal menhirs are closely associated with local legend, with one particular menhir being **worshipped as Goddess Yellamma**.

Swadesh Darshan Scheme

- The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has criticised the implementation of the Swadesh Darshan scheme after reviewing a report of the Comptroller and Auditor General on the performance of the scheme.
- **Launched in 2014**, it is a scheme of **Ministry of Tourism (MoT)** that aims to promote and develop the potential of tourism in India through theme-based tourism circuit.
- The scheme is a **central sector scheme**, i.e. - 100% funded by Union Government. The funding available for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives of Central Public Sector Undertakings and Corporate Sector is also used in this scheme.

Issues Raised by the PAC

- During the period of 2014-15 to 2018-19, a total of 76 projects were sanctioned under identified thematic circuits in 31 States/Union Territories for Rs 5,292.57 crore, with the aim of developing theme-based tourist routes.
- The audit report had highlighted serious lapses in the formulation and execution of the scheme.
 - The government has not carried out feasibility studies before launching the scheme and has exceeded the sanctioned amount due to poor planning.
 - Approvals were given without Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) and there had been no formal mechanism for evaluation and approval.
 - The government has been criticised for its failure to complete projects within the stipulated timeframe and many projects remained incomplete or were non-functional.

Way Ahead

- The committee has directed the MoT to conduct a physical field inspection of all projects, and submit a comprehensive reply, with actual status of projects, current maintenance and operational status, and status of coordination and implementation.
- MoT has also been asked to provide details on employment generation impact of the scheme and the tourist footfall.

Vikramshila University

- A decade after Nalanda University came up in the foothills of Rajgir, work is on to revive another ancient centre of learning Vikramshila University, in Bhagalpur Bihar.
- Vikramshila Mahavir was **founded by King Dharmapala** of the Pala dynasty in the **late 8th to early 9th century AD**.
- Although the Centre had approved the project in 2015 and sanctioned Rs 500 crore, the state government had been unable to identify a suitable land for the project.

- While **Nalanda university** flourished from the **Gupta Period (320-550 AD) to the 12th century**, **Vikramshila** thrived during the Pala Period (**8th to 12th century**).
- Subjects such as theology, philosophy, grammar, metaphysics and logic were taught at Vikramshila.
- But the **most important branch of learning were the tantras** because Vikramshila flourished in the days of tantricism, when occult sciences and magic were subjects of study both in Buddhism as well as Hinduism.
- The university produced several eminent scholars, among them, **Atisa Dipankara**, who played a key role in the establishment of Buddhism in Tibet.
- The institution prospered for about four centuries before fading out along with Nalanda around the 13th century due to rise of Hinduism and the decline of Buddhism along with the invasion of Bakhtiyar Khalji.

AWARDS/ PERSONALITIES IN NEWS

Jnanpith Award

- Famous Hindi poet and writer from Chhattisgarh, **Vinod Kumar Shukla**, will be awarded the 59th Jnanpith Award for 2024 for his contributions to Hindi Literature. He is the **first person from Chhattisgarh state** to be awarded this honour.
- His first booklet of poetry 'Lagbhag Jai Hind' was published in 1971. His major novels include 'Naukar Ki Kameez'. 'Deewar Mein Ek KhidkiRahtiThi' and 'KhilegaToDekhenge'.
- He was also awarded with Sahitya Akademi Award.

Jnanpith Award

- Instituted in 1961, the Jnanpith Award is the highest literary award in India presented annually by the **Bharatiya Jnanpith**. It is conferred to an author for their outstanding contribution towards literature since 1965.
- It can only be conferred upon an Indian citizen and is given only to writers writing in Indian languages included in the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution and English, with **no posthumous conferral**.
- The award carries a cash component of Rs 11 lakh, a **statue of Vagdevi** and a citation.
- The first recipient of the award was the Malayalam writer G. Sankara Kurup who received the award in 1965 for his collection of poems, Odakkuzhal (The Bamboo Flute).

Abel Prize

- Japanese mathematician **Masaki Kashiwara** has been awarded this year's Abel Prize.
- Kashiwara was awarded "for his fundamental contributions to algebraic analysis and representation theory, in particular the development of the theory of D-modules and the discovery of crystal bases."
- **First awarded in 2003**, the Abel prize recognises pioneering **scientific achievements in mathematics**.
- It is often considered to be an **equivalent of the Nobel Prize**, which does not have a category for mathematics.
- It is named after **Norwegian mathematician Niels Henrik Abel** (1802-29).
- The prize was **established by the Norwegian Parliament** in 2002, on Abel's 200th anniversary.
- It is awarded by the **Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters** on behalf of the Norwegian government.
- The recipients are chosen by an expert committee appointed by the Academy under the advice of the International Mathematical Union (IMU) and the European Mathematical Society (EMS).
- The prize includes a monetary award of **7.5 million kroner** (roughly \$720,000) and a glass plaque designed by Norwegian artist Henrik Haugan.

IOC President

Zimbabwe's Kirsty Coventry has been elected as first woman President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) succeeding **Thomas Bach**.

IOC

- The IOC is the international, non-governmental, sports governing body of the modern Olympic Games.
- **Founded in 1894 by Pierre de Coubertin and Demetrios Vikelas**, it is **based in Lausanne, Switzerland**.
- It is the authority responsible for organizing the Summer, Winter, and Youth Olympics.

- It is also the governing body of the National Olympic Committees (NOCs) and the worldwide Olympic Movement, which includes all entities and individuals involved in the Olympic Games.

Prani Mitra and Jeev Daya Award

- The Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) conducted the **Prani Mitra and Jeev Daya Award Ceremony**.
- This initiative aims to recognize **outstanding individuals and organizations** for their **remarkable contributions to animal welfare and protection**.
- The awards were presented under two major categories: **Prani Mitra Award** and **Jeev Daya Award**.
- The **Prani Mitra Award** is conferred under **five sub-categories**:
 - Advocacy (Individual),
 - Innovative Idea (Individual),
 - Lifetime Animal Service (Individual), along with two awards each for
 - Animal Welfare Organizations and
 - Corporate, PSUs, Government Bodies, or Co-operatives.
- The **Jeev Daya Award** is presented in **three sub-categories**:
 - Individual,
 - Animal Welfare Organization, and
 - Schools, Institutions, Teachers, or Children

Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI)

- Headquartered in Ballabgarh, Haryana, it is a **statutory body** established under the **Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960**.
- It was Founded by Rukmini Devi Arundale, a notable animal rights activist.
- The Board oversees Animal Welfare Organisations (AWOs) by granting recognition to them if they meet its guidelines.
- It provides financial assistance to recognised AWOs