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Institute for IAS Examination

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**CURRENT
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- SC Scraps Point-based System for Senior Advocates Designation
- Courts Have 'Limited Power' To Modify Arbitral Awards
- e-Zero FIR Initiative
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Right To Charge a Service Fee

The Delhi High Court (HC- in its ruling authored by Justice Prathiba M. Singh) has upheld the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA)'s 2022 guidelines, ruling that mandatory service charges in restaurants are illegal and constitute an unfair trade practice under the Consumer Protection Act (CPA), 2019.

The **CPA, 2019** came into effect in **2020**, replacing the 1986 Act to provide **faster and more effective consumer grievance redressal**. It provided for the establishment of the **Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA)** to **protect consumer rights** and act against **unfair trade practices (UTP)**. **CCPA powers include:**

- ✓ Investigating consumer rights violations.
- ✓ Recalling unsafe goods/services.
- ✓ Stopping unfair trade practices and misleading ads.
- ✓ Penalizing misleading manufacturers, endorsers, and publishers.

Background

- **Core Legal Issue:** The core issue in the case was whether restaurants can levy a mandatory service charge (typically 5%–20% of the bill) as part of their pricing model, or whether doing so constitutes an unfair trade practice under the CPA, 2019.

- **Consumer Grievance:** Consumers have complained that they are being compelled to pay this charge, which is often added to bills without their knowledge or consent and is sometimes misrepresented as a government levy. This raises concerns about *price transparency, consumer autonomy, and the right to fair treatment.*

- **Regulatory Action by CCPA:** In response to widespread complaints, the CCPA issued guidelines in 2022 prohibiting restaurants from automatically adding service charges to bills.

- **Industry Challenge:** The National Restaurants Association of India (NRAI) and the Federation of Hotels and Restaurants Association of India (FHRAI) legally challenged the guidelines, defending service charges as a legitimate business practice.

Final Verdict by Delhi HC

- **Section 2(46) – Unfair Contract (Mandatory Service Charge is Unfair Trade Practice):** Automatically levying a **service charge** on restaurant bills without customer consent constitutes an **unfair trade practice** under the **CPA, 2019**.

- **Service Charge Must Be Voluntary:** A **tip or service charge must be voluntary**, based on the **consumer's discretion and satisfaction** with service- not a compulsory condition.

- **Upheld the CCPA Guidelines:** **2022 CCPA guidelines** as a **valid exercise of statutory power**, affirming they have the **force of law** and are not merely advisory.

How is a service charge different from a tip?

A tip is **voluntary** and given after the meal based on service quality, while a service charge is **pre-fixed** and added automatically, regardless of the customer's experience.

Arguments from Both Sides

CCPA/Government

- Service charges, when added automatically, **deprive consumers of informed choice**.
- They are **deceptive**, as the advertised price does not reflect the final price.
- They **fall under Section 2(47) of CPA, 2019**, which defines unfair trade practice.
 - **Section 18 – Powers of the CCPA:** The CCPA is empowered under Section 18(2)(l) to issue guidelines to prevent unfair trade practices and protect consumer interests.
- Restaurants are **free to include service costs in food prices**, but not to spring add-on charges.

Restaurant Industry (NRAI and FHRAI)

- **Service charges are a long-standing norm**, used for **staff welfare** and equitable distribution of tips.
- Customers are **free to dine elsewhere** if they disagree with the charge.
- The Guidelines **interfere with their right to trade and set prices**, protected under **Article 19(1)(g)** of the Constitution.
- **Transparency via menus or signage** should suffice for informed consent.
- The ban would **harm employees**, as service charge funds are pooled and distributed as part of wages.

- ✓ The ruling validates the CCPA's role as a proactive consumer watchdog, capable of issuing enforceable guidelines.
- **No Violation of Business Rights: Business freedom is not absolute;** reasonable restrictions are allowed in **public interest** (Article 19(6)). Restaurants remain free to set prices but **cannot mislead consumers** by adding undisclosed charges post-facto.
- **No Legal Basis for Mandatory Charge for Staff Welfare:** There is **no statutory or contractual obligation** requiring restaurants to collect service charges for employee welfare. Staff compensation can be managed through **menu pricing**, not mandatory add-on fees.
- **Final Conclusion: Consumer rights and transparency** outweigh business inconvenience, and **mandatory service charges cannot be imposed**. Consumers must always retain the **choice** to pay or not.
 - ✓ **Judicial Precedent:** The decision aligns with prior rulings, such as *Indian Medical Association v. VP Shantha (1995)*, where the Supreme Court held that essential services must comply with Consumer Protection Act (1986).

Global Practices: Tipping vs. Service Charges

- **United Kingdom:** Under the *Employment (Allocation of Tips) Act, 2023*, 100% of tips and service charges must go to staff. Service charges are **voluntary**, and diners can request removal if dissatisfied.
- **United States: Tipping is voluntary** and culturally expected (15–20%), with no federal mandate. **Mandatory service charges**, if applied, are treated as business revenue and may be taxed.
- **France & Switzerland: Service is included** in menu prices (*service compris*). There's **no separate service charge**, and tipping is purely optional.



SC Scraps Point-based System for Senior Advocates Designation

The Supreme Court (SC) recently abolished the existing points-based assessment system for designating Senior Advocates in the SC and High Courts (HCs).

- ✓ The case stemmed from a Senior Advocate (SA) allegedly misrepresenting facts. Rather than initiating disciplinary action, the SC chose to discard the mechanisms for evaluating candidates for senior designation.

Background

- **Legal Basis for Senior Advocate Designation:** Section 16 of the Advocates Act, 1961 provides the legal foundation for designating an advocate as a "Senior Advocate".
 - The designation was based on the court's opinion of an advocate's ability, standing at the Bar, or special knowledge or experience in law and required the advocate's consent for such designation.
- **Indira Jaising-I (2017) Guidelines:** In this case, Jaising had opposed the secret ballot system and batted in favour of a Permanent Committee (PC) to **assess** the candidates. The Court accepted her view and introduced a structured, points-based system for designating SAs to bring transparency and objectivity. Thus,

5-member Permanent Committee (PC) was formed comprising:

- Chief Justice (of SC or HC),
- Two senior-most judges,
- Attorney General or Advocate General,

Scoring included:

- For 10–20 years of practice (10 points) and for practice beyond 20 years (20 points);
- Judgments, domain expertise, pro bono work (40 points),
- Publications (15 points);

○ One member from the Bar nominated by the above.	○ Interview (25 points).
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- **Indira Jaising-II (2023) Refinements:** The Court held that secret ballot voting by the Full Court was an exception, allowed only with recorded reasons. It could be used only in rare instances. It reduced publication points from 15 to 5 and increased the weightage for legal work to 50. Minimum age for designation was set at 45 years.

Implications of the Judgement

- **End of the Structured Evaluation System & Return to Judicial Discretion:** The scrapping of the point-based, merit-oriented system means there's no longer a transparent, standardized method to assess candidates.
 - ✓ This may reduce objectivity and increase arbitrariness or favoritism, reliance on personal perceptions and internal court dynamics.

✓ What Remains?	✗ What Goes?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Permanent Secretariat set up under the 2017 guidelines will continue. • A minimum of 10 years of practice remains a requirement. • Advocates may still apply for designation, which serves as consent. The Full Court may confer designation even without an application. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The points-based evaluation system (publications, judgments, interviews, years of practice). • The interview component is now eliminated. • The PC's decisive role is diluted; it becomes more of a screening body.

- **Dilution of the Permanent Committee's Role:** Making PC more administrative than evaluative will weaken the institutional checks and balances meant to ensure fairness in designations.
- **Years of Practice No Longer a Key Metric:** This will help prevent mediocrity from being rewarded but may disadvantage consistent long-term contributors without flashy portfolios.
- **Lack of Accountability and Transparency:** The use of secret voting is no longer restricted, and no reasons need be recorded unless courts decide otherwise. This could lead to lack of accountability and transparency in the designation process.

Reversals and Changes in the 2025 Verdict

The 2025 verdict in Jitender @ Kalla significantly overhauls the process for designating SAs, effectively dismantling reforms introduced in the Indira Jaising cases. The verdict provided for:

Aspect	Old Method (Indira Jaising Judgments, 2017 & 2023)	New Method (2025 Jitender @ Kalla Verdict)
Evaluation Framework	Structured point-based system (up to 100 points).	Abolished as "unworkable" and "subjective".
PC	Central role in evaluation and recommendation.	Its decisive role is diluted making it more of a screening body.
Interviews	25 points allocated for interview; assessed articulation and presence.	Interviews were criticized as inadequate and undignified for senior lawyers, risking bias in favour of articulate but less deserving candidates. Thus, eliminated.
Years of Practice	Carried weight (10–20 years = 10 pts, >20 years = 20 pts).	No longer a formal criterion; seen as potentially rewarding mediocrity.
Publications	5–15 points allotted.	Removed; viewed as impractical and irrelevant.
Judgments & Legal Work	Assessed with high weight (up to 50 points).	No quantified assessment.
Decision-Making Body (Appointments)	By Full Court, based on PC recommendation and point totals.	Eligible candidates' applications and documents will be placed before the Full Court , which will aim for consensus; if that fails, a majority vote will decide.
Voting Process	Secret ballot allowed but only in rare cases, with reasons recorded.	Majority voting allowed; secret ballot optional and unrestricted.
Transparency Measures	Candidates' marks and integrity declarations could be published.	No prohibition on canvassing, no publication of marks or declarations on integrity.
External Scrutiny	Proposals for evaluation by external bodies (e.g., research centres).	No outsourcing of assessment to neutral research institutions like registrars or SC's Centre for Research and Planning.
Eligibility Without Application	Designation typically initiated by candidate application.	Full Court can designate even without an application.
Diversity Encouragement	Not specifically emphasized.	HCs directed to include lawyers from Trial/District Courts & Tribunals.
Status of Designation Process	Appointments were made under structured rules.	Frozen until new rules are framed by SC and HCs.
Accepted Suggestions	1) Individual judges could in writing recommend candidates for designation of SA. 2) Designated SAs wear a gown with a "flap" at the back.	1) Individual judges can't recommend candidates. 2) HCs may do away with distinct gowns for Senior Advocates.

- **Stalling of New Designations:** No new designations will be made until new guidelines are framed by SC and HCs. This may delay deserving advocates from being recognized, affecting career growth.
- **Small Step Toward Diversity:** HCs are encouraged to include advocates from Trial and District Courts and Tribunals in the designation process. If implemented, this could broaden the pool and democratize access to senior designation.

While the judgement restores some dignity and flexibility, it raises serious questions about transparency, fairness, and accountability in recognizing legal excellence.



Courts Have 'Limited Power' To Modify Arbitral Awards

In a 4:1 verdict, the Supreme Court (SC) ruled that appellate courts can modify arbitral awards of the *Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996*, (based on the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) Model Law) but only in limited circumstances.

- **Conflicting Judicial Views:** In earlier cases like *McDermott International (2006)* and *Project Director, NHA v. M. Hakeem (2021)*, the Court held that modification was not allowed under Sections 34 and 37. (The ruling aligns with India's commitment to becoming an arbitration hub, as excessive judicial intervention could deter foreign investors.)
 - In contrast, rulings like *Vedanta Ltd. v. Shenzden (2018)* and *Tata Hydroelectric (2003)* allowed limited judicial modification.
- **Need for Larger Bench Clarification:** Due to inconsistent precedents, the Bench referred the issue to a five-judge Constitution Bench to settle the legal position on whether Indian courts can modify arbitral awards which led to the present ruling.
 - *Delhi Airport Metro Express vs. DMRC (2021) case*, where the SC set

Case Background:

- **Gayatri Balasamy v. ISG Novasoft Technologies Ltd.:** Gayatri Balasamy was appointed Vice President (M&A Integration Strategy) at ISG Novasoft Technologies on 27 April 2006. On 24 July 2006, she tendered her resignation, citing sexual harassment by company CEO. The resignation was not accepted, and over the following year, she received three termination letters.
- **Legal Disputes and Criminal Complaints:** Balasamy filed criminal complaints under the IPC and Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Harassment of Women Act, 1998 against senior ISG officials. ISG retaliated with defamation and extortion cases against her. Eventually, both parties reached the SC.
- **Arbitration and Award:** The SC referred the dispute to arbitration. The arbitral tribunal awarded ₹2 crore in compensation to Balasamy.
- **Madras High Court (HC) Proceedings:** Balasamy approached the Madras HC to **set aside** the award, claiming the tribunal ignored key issues. In 2014, a single-judge bench **modified** the award, granting her an additional ₹1.6 crore. In 2019, a Division Bench revised this further, calling the additional compensation "excessive" and reduced it to ₹50,000.
- **Special Leave Petition (SLP) in SC:** Balasamy challenged the Madras HC's order through a SLP in the SC and the case was heard before multiple benches. In February 2024, the Division Bench recognized a critical legal issue- Can a court modify an arbitral award under Sections 34 and 37 of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996?
 - ✓ **Section 34** of the Arbitration Act allows a party to **apply to set aside** an arbitral award on specific grounds such as procedural irregularities, bias, incapacity, invalid arbitration agreement, or lack of proper notice of the arbitrator's appointment.
 - The *ONGC vs. Saw Pipes (2003)* case expanded the scope of "public policy" under Section 34, allowing courts to set aside awards that violate fundamental principles of Indian law
 - ✓ **Section 37** of the Act allows courts to hear appeals against orders related to arbitration.
 - ✓ **Section 37(1)(c)** permits appeals against decisions to **set aside or uphold** an arbitral award under Section 34."
 - ✓ The Supreme Court's 4:1 ruling emphasizes that modification is permissible only in "limited circumstances,

A **Special Leave Petition (SLP)** is a constitutional right under Article 136 that allows an individual to **appeal to the SC** even when there is **no automatic right of appeal**. Key features include:

- It is filed against any court or tribunal decision (except military tribunals).
- It is used when there is **no direct route of appeal** available.
- SC has **full discretion** to accept or reject the petition.
- It can be filed in **civil or criminal cases**.
- If the Court **grants leave**, the SLP becomes a **regular appeal**.
- It is often used as a **last resort** after all other legal remedies are exhausted.
- The objective is to **prevent injustice** or address a **substantial legal issue**.

aside an arbitral award for patent illegality sparked discussions about judicial intervention in arbitration. The recent ruling addressed these concerns by clarifying the boundaries of such intervention.

Arguments by Union Government and Petitioners

Union Government	Petitioners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Courts have no power to modify arbitration awards under the 1996 Act, <i>they can only set aside awards</i>. Only Parliament can authorize modification of awards through amendment; courts lack this power. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognizing the power of modification would expedite arbitration and reduce litigation. Since setting aside is a broader power, modification should be inherently included within it.

Final Verdict in the Case

The SC, in a 4:1 majority, ruled that courts can **modify** arbitral awards under the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996, but only in limited scenarios, including:

- **Severable Awards:** Courts may **separate** invalid portions from valid parts and retain the enforceable portion.
- **Apparent Errors:** Courts can correct clerical, computational, or typographical errors on the face of the record.
- **Post-Award Interest:** Courts may modify interest awarded post-arbitration under certain conditions.
- **Article 142:** The SC can modify awards under Article 142 of the Constitution to secure “complete justice,” but this power must be used with great caution.

Dissenting Opinion (Justice K.V. Viswanathan): He held that Section 34 only allows setting aside an award, not modifying it. He argued that modification and severance are distinct, and the former cannot be read into the Act. He disagreed with using Article 142 for modifying awards, stating it would create legal uncertainty and also held that post-award interest cannot be modified under Section 34.

- ✓ This might draw from *Ssangyong Engineering vs. NHA (2019)*, where the Supreme Court held that courts **cannot** interfere with the arbitrator’s findings unless they shock the conscience of the court.



e-Zero FIR Initiative

Ministry of Home Affairs's (MHA) Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C) introduced the new **e-Zero FIR** (electronic Zero First Information Report) as a pilot project in Delhi, the initiative is expected to be extended across India soon.

What is e-Zero FIR Initiative?

It is a new digital system launched which will automatically convert complaints of cyber financial crimes involving Rs 10 lakh or more into FIRs, filed either on the National Cybercrime Reporting Portal (NCRP) or through the cybercrime helpline 1930, into Zero FIRs.

- ✓ Zero FIR was introduced after the recommendation of the **Justice Verma Committee**, which was set up after the 2012 Nirbhaya gangrape case.

Objective: To eliminate early delays in the “**golden hour**” (when recovering stolen funds is most feasible) and fast-tracking police crackdown in high-value cyber financial frauds.

How the e-Zero FIR System Works?

The e-Zero FIR process streamlines complaint registration into a few automated steps:

Step	Description
Victim files a complaint	of a cyber fraud (typically a financial scam) via the NCRP or by calling the 1930 helpline.

Automated threshold check	The system flags cases where the reported loss exceeds ₹10 lakh (the current threshold) and are eligible for e-FIR conversion
Electronic FIR registration	Eligible complaints are instantly registered as a Zero FIR at the Delhi e-Crime Police Station through the integrated I4C portal and Delhi Police e-FIR platform
Forwarding to local police	The e-Crime Station then automatically routes the case to the appropriate territorial cybercrime unit based on the victim's location. Jurisdictional issues are bypassed by this centralized filing
Victim confirmation	The complainant is required to visit the designated cybercrime police station within three days to confirm and convert the Zero FIR into a regular FIR for investigation

Key Benefits of e-Zero FIR

- **Improved coordination and recovery:** Faster FIR registration triggers earlier coordination with banks and telecom companies for immediate action and to prevent fund transfers. As banks and law enforcement can act immediately (e.g. freezing accounts or tracing transactions or blocking SIM cards) while evidence is fresh.
- **Alignment with Digital Governance and Cybersecurity Goals & infrastructure:** The project is explicitly tied to Prime Minister's goal of a "Cyber Secure Bharat". By making online transactions safer (through deterrence and recovery), the system underpins trust in the digital economy.
- **Data-driven oversight:** Because all e-FIRs flow into NCRB's CCTNS system, the government can monitor trends in cyber fraud in real time. This data helps shape future policies and technology deployments under India's cybersecurity strategy.

Legal and Technical Infrastructure:

New legal framework (BNSS):

The project was enabled by the recently enacted **Bhartiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS)**, which modernized India's criminal law. Sections 173(1) and 173(1)(ii) of BNSS explicitly allow FIRs to be registered electronically at any police station and transferred across jurisdictions. In practice, this means the Delhi e-Crime Station is authorized to issue an FIR on behalf of the entire country ("irrespective of territorial jurisdiction").

Integrated digital platforms:

The initiative integrates **I4C NCRP portal** (for complaint intake), **Delhi Police's e-FIR platform**, and the NCRB's **Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS)** database. So, when a qualifying complaint arrives on NCRP/1930, the software triggers a registration on the e-FIR platform and updates CCTNS automatically.

✓ According to the MHA, the **I4C's Citizen Financial Cyber Fraud Reporting and Management System** has received over 13.4 lakh complaints since 2021, involving frauds worth approximately ₹36,450 crore, with ₹4,386 crore saved due to timely interventions.

Centralized cybercrime unit:

Delhi's designated **e-Crime Police Station** has been notified as the central node for e-FIRs

Data security and tracking:

All e-FIRs are logged in the national crime database (CCTNS), ensuring digital audit trails. This supports coordinated investigation across states and provides statistics for policymaking.

Aspect	Traditional FIR	e-Zero FIR
Filing Time	Hours to days	Instant (automated)
Jurisdiction	Police Station (PS) Bound	National (Pan-India)
Medium	Manual/Paper	Online/Digital
Follow-Up	Victim must visit PS	Online + physical confirmation
Coordination	Fragmented	Integrated (I4C + NCRP + CCTNS)

Challenges and Way Forward

Challenge	Way Forward
Digital Divide	Conduct awareness campaigns in regional languages, expand rural digital police kiosks.
Data Privacy Risks	Implement strict encryption, data minimization, and periodic audits.
Fraud Threshold Bias (₹10 lakh)	Consider tiered e-Zero FIR models for smaller cyber frauds (₹1–10 lakh).

The e-Zero FIR initiative represents a paradigm shift in India's law enforcement and cybercrime response, combining legal reform, digital innovation, and **victim-centric service delivery**.



Digital Access Part of Fundamental Right to Life & Liberty

The Supreme Court (SC- *In Pragya Prasun v. Union of India*) while hearing pleas to make Know-Your-Customer (KYC) inclusive for the visually impaired and acid attack survivors, emphasized “right to digital access” is “an instinctive component” of the right to life and liberty (Article 21) and directed revisions to digital KYC norms to ensure accessibility for ‘persons with disabilities’ (PwDs).

- ✓ The ruling empowers the **2.68 crore PwDs in India (as per the 2011 Census)** by ensuring their inclusion in the digital ecosystem.

KYC Framework and Its Challenges

The KYC process is mandated under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002 to verify the identity of a customer for opening bank accounts, accessing welfare schemes, SIM cards, and financial services.

- RBI prescribe a Customer Due Diligence (CDD) framework and, via Clause 18, introduces Video-based Customer Identification Process (V-CIP), enabling remote customer verification through secure, real-time video interaction.

Challenges for PwDs

- **Inaccessible Verification Methods: Acid attack survivors and visually impaired individuals face systemic exclusion in digital KYC, e-KYC, and video-KYC due to reliance on facial recognition, blinking,**

Legal Framework Supporting Digital Rights

Constitutional Provisions:

- **Article 14 (Equality Before Law) & Article 15 (Non-discrimination):** Digital exclusion of PwDs violates these articles by denying them equal access to services.
 - ✓ For instance, visually impaired individuals unable to complete digital KYC are excluded from financial inclusion programs like the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY).
- **Article 21 (Right to Life and Dignity):** Recognizes a life with dignity, now interpreted to include meaningful access to digital platforms necessary for welfare, **finance**, health, and education.
 - ✓ For example, **inaccessible e-learning** platforms hinder PwDs' access to education under schemes like Samagra Shiksha
- **Article 38 (Directive Principles):** Mandates the state to minimize inequalities—digital access is essential to social and economic justice.
 - ✓ In the digital age, access to online platforms is essential for availing government services (e.g., Ayushman Bharat), education (e.g., **SWAYAM**), and financial inclusion (e.g., **UPI-based transactions**).

Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016: Adopts a **social-barrier model** that defines disability as resulting from impairments combined with societal and environmental obstacles that hinder full participation in society.

- **Section 13(1) of the RPwD** mandates the appropriate Government to ensure that the persons with disabilities have rights, equally with others, to own or inherit property, movable or immovable, control their financial affairs and have access to bank loans, mortgages & other forms of financial credit.
- **Section 42 of RPwD:** Mandates the government to ensure all media and electronic content are accessible, including features like audio descriptions, sign language, captions, and universal design in devices.
- **Section 46 of RPwD:** Mandates accessibility in all services and infrastructure, including digital financial services.

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD): to which India is a signatory, emphasizes equal access to information and communication technologies (ICTs). The RPwD Act and the accompanying Rules, 2017 is aligned with UNCPRD's Article 9 (Accessibility), reinforcing India's obligations to ensure digital accessibility.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) emphasize inclusive access to technology and justice, reinforcing India's commitment to digital inclusion.

Judicial Precedent: In *Rajive Raturi v. Union of India* (2024), the SC recognized inaccessibility as a constitutional violation and ruled that inaccessible digital platforms violate Article 21, affirming accessibility as a constitutional mandate. The SC ruled that existing RPwD Rules lack mandatory standards and are ultra vires the RPwD Act. It directed the Centre to frame binding accessibility rules within three months, in consultation with stakeholders and National Academy of Legal Studies and Research (NALSAR) and ensure enforcement through penalties for non-compliance.

- ✓ In *Distribution of Essential Supplies and Services During Pandemic*, the Court recognised the importance of digital accessibility for PwD. The Court emphasised that digital platforms related to vaccination and other essential services must be accessible to all ensuring that no individual is excluded due to disability
- ✓ *Jeeja Ghosh v. Union of India* (2016): The court recognized the rights of PwDs to dignity and non-discrimination, setting a precedent for inclusive policies in public services, including digital platforms.
- ✓ The Court also analyzed the framework of National Policy on Universal Electronic Accessibility, 2013, Guidelines for Indian Government Websites which lay down the reference points and standards for access to electronic and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) products.

and visual tasks like reading flashing codes.

- **Violations of ICT Accessibility Standards:** Most KYC platforms **ignore the 2021 & 2022 ICT Accessibility Standards**, lacking screen-reader guidance, audio prompts and differentiation cues for document uploads.
 - ✓ The absence of audio prompts in Aadhaar-based KYC scanners excludes visually impaired users from biometric verification.
- **Rejection of Alternative Authentication: Thumb impressions**, a vital method for blind users, are **not accepted as valid signatures or for PAN authentication**. Aadhaar-based systems often **fail due to inaccessible scanners and absence of text-to-speech/self-verification features**.
- **Inflexible RBI Master Directions:** RBI rules **forbid any “prompting” during video KYC**, preventing assistants from helping PwDs navigate the process, thus **denying reasonable accommodation**.
- **Forced Physical Appearance & Rejections:** Due to these barriers, many PwDs are either **asked to appear in person**, defeating the purpose of digital services or are **rejected arbitrarily**, with vague or technical justifications.

What the Data Says?

Barrier Break-National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP) Accessibility Survey (2024) highlights critical gaps in the digital accessibility of financial platforms (like banking, insurance, and investments) in India. It shows-

- ◆ **High Error Rate in Digital Interfaces:** On average, **91.55 accessibility errors** were found per homepage across top 100 financial companies. The **Insurance sector** was the worst performer with **120.73 errors**, while **international banks** had the lowest at **33.4**.
- ◆ **Predominance of Basic Accessibility Failures:** **71.23%** of errors violated Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) **2.2 Level A** (basic accessibility standards).
 - ✓ **28.77%** fell under **WCAG Level AA** (intermediate level accessibility).
- ◆ **Lack of Accessibility Integration in Product Lifecycle:** Accessibility is often an afterthought, not integrated into the design and development stages of digital financial products.
- ◆ **Sector-Wide Gaps in Compliance:** Despite the RPwD Act, WCAG guidelines, and IS 17802 standards, most organizations lack structured **digital accessibility programs** or regular audits.
 - ✓ **Information Technology Act, 2000:** Supports secure digital transactions but lacks specific accessibility mandates.

SC's Verdict

- **Constitutional Reinterpretation of Article 21:** The Court **reinterpreted the “right to life” under Article 21** to include **meaningful digital access (as a Constitutional Mandate)** as essential for accessing education, health, governance, and economic opportunities in the digital age.
- **Recognition of the Digital Divide:** It acknowledged that **PwDs, rural residents, elderly, poor, and linguistic minorities** face **systemic digital exclusion**, violating the promise of equality and dignity.
- **Emphasis on Substantive Equality:** It held that the **State’s responsibility under Articles 21, 14, 15, and Directive Principle under Article 38** includes ensuring **inclusive and accessible digital infrastructure**, portals, and fintech services.
- **Directives Issued:** by the Court included-
 - **Mandatory accessibility standards** for all digital platforms regulated by RBI, SEBI, Department of Telecommunication (DoT), etc.
 - **Appointment of nodal officers** in every department for digital accessibility and all their websites/apps should have **periodic audits** by certified professionals, with PwDs involved in user-testing.
 - **Modification of eKYC norms:** like providing alternatives to live selfies or blinking (e.g., thumb impression, Aadhaar + OTP), screen-reader compatibility, audio cues, and flexible verification formats.

Broader Impact and Future Implications of SC Verdict

- **Policy Reforms:** RBI, SEBI, UIDAI, etc., will have to update guidelines to mandate accessibility-by-design. Fintech and banks must adapt to avoid non-compliance.
 - ✓ The RBI guidelines on accessible ATMs (2016) mandated features like tactile keypads and voice guidance, but compliance remains uneven.
- **Innovation and Inclusive Design:** There will be increased demand for WCAG 2.2 and BIS accessibility compliance.

- ✓ Accessible India Campaign (**Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan**), launched in 2015, aims to make public infrastructure accessible. The SC's ruling extends this vision to the digital realm, ensuring that platforms like **DigiLocker** and **UMANG** are accessible to PwDs.



Challenges Faced by Civil Services

On Civil Services Day (April 21), Cabinet Secretary T. V. Somanathan emphasized the vital role of civil services in upholding democracy, highlighted the need for lateral entry to bring in specialized expertise, and called for greater transparency in governance.

Evolution of Civil Services in India	Role of Civil Services in India across Multiple Dimensions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • British Era (1858 onwards): The Indian Civil Service (ICS) was established by the British to administer colonial India. Recruitment was merit-based (By Macaulay Report (1854)), via rigorous exams conducted in London (Limited Indian representation; exams held in English and at a distant location). Officers were tasked with revenue collection, law and order, and implementing British policies. • Post-Independence (1947 onwards-Shift from “Rule by law” to “Rule of law”): UPSC replaced the colonial recruitment system and became the apex body for impartial and merit-based recruitment of civil servants. The ICS evolved into the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and other All India Services (under Articles 312-315). <p>Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel: “The civil services are the steel frame of India.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democratic Processes: Conducting free and fair elections under the Election Commission’s supervision, and maintaining administrative continuity during periods like President’s Rule. • Policy and Governance: Acting as policy advisors, drafters, coordinators to ministers, helping design evidence-based solutions (Objectivity & Rationality) and ensuring implementation of government schemes and laws effectively. • Public Administration (Law and Order Maintenance): Overseeing public service delivery in health, education, sanitation, etc. and enforcing regulatory laws related to industries, environment, safety, etc. • Crisis Management and Welfare Functions for Inclusive Development: Leading disaster relief and rehabilitation operations, monitoring and executing welfare schemes (e.g., MGNREGA, food security, pensions). • Institutional Stability and Continuity: Serving as the institutional memory of the government and providing continuity & stability, irrespective of changes in political leadership and also providing non-partisan, professional, and long-term perspective. • Diplomatic and International Roles: The Indian Foreign Service (IFS) represents India on global platforms, negotiating treaties and fostering international cooperation, as seen in India’s leadership in forums like G20 and BRICS.

Major Issues Faced by Civil Services in India

- **Politicization and Erosion of Neutrality:** Increasing **political interference** affects the independence of civil servants and undermines objectivity and impartiality. Transfers, postings, and promotions are often influenced by **political considerations** rather than merit.
 - ✓ In the 2010 DARPG survey, 78% of respondents believed that some or most officers used influence to gain sought-after positions. Only 24% believed that these postings were merit-based.
- **Generalist vs. Specialist Gap:** Most civil servants are **generalists** lacking **domain expertise**, which hampers effective policy formulation and implementation, especially in technical areas like health, environment, or digital governance (Resentment among specialized services for lack of promotion parity and central roles.)
 - ✓ The **COVID-19 pandemic** exposed the lack of domain experts in public health administration at key decision-making levels.

- **Lack of Accountability:** Performance evaluation systems are weak. **Poor performers** are rarely penalized, while **efficient officers** receive little recognition or reward. Promotion and evaluation systems are seniority-based, not performance-based. No structured KPI (Key Performance Indicator) system to assess impact.

- **Corruption and Ethical Decline:** Misuse of discretionary powers, nexus with contractors, and bureaucratic rent-seeking. Corruption persists at **multiple levels**, particularly in service delivery and regulatory functions. **Transparency and vigilance mechanisms** are often bypassed or weakened.

- ✓ India ranked 96 out of 180 countries in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) by Transparency International for 2024.

- **Procedural Delays and Red Tapism:** Bureaucracy is often **slow and process-driven**, with a focus on compliance rather than outcomes. This leads to inefficiency and **delays in decision-making**.

- ✓ For example, infrastructure projects often face delays due to slow clearances from multiple bureaucratic levels.

- ✓ **Fragmented Coordination and Silos:** Ministries and departments operate in silos, leading to duplication and poor inter-agency coordination.

- **Resistance to Reform:** There is an institutional **resistance to change** and innovation. Technology adoption and administrative modernization are slow.

- ✓ Many civil servants are slow in adopting data-driven governance, AI, or e-governance tools.

- ✓ Digitization of records, blockchain in governance, or GIS-based planning still remains limited to pilot projects.

- **Outdated Recruitment, Inadequate Training and Capacity Building:** Current system focuses on rote-based knowledge, not practical skills or domain expertise. Training is often **generic and outdated**. Lack of continuous learning and exposure to **global best practices** affects adaptability.

- ✓ For instance, civil servants working in digital governance projects often lack training in

Aspect	Merit System	Spoils System
Basis of Selection	Appointments to government posts are made based on qualifications and performance in competitive exams, usually conducted by an independent authority like UPSC in India.	Government posts are awarded as political rewards to supporters of the ruling party or leader by the ruling political executive.
Origin	UK/India (1858), institutionalized in UPSC.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USA based on the idea: "To the victor belong the spoils." • Common until the Pendleton Act of 1883, which began replacing it with a merit-based system.
Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To promote fairness, efficiency, and professionalism. • To build career bureaucrats who are politically neutral. 	To reward political allies
Effect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes efficiency and good governance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May lead to corruption, inefficiency and politicization of administration.

Suggested Reforms

Ensure Bureaucratic Autonomy: by enforcing fixed tenures for key positions (as recommended by the Supreme Court (SC) in the T.S.R. Subramanian case, 2013) and strengthening Civil Services Boards (CSBs) to regulate transfers transparently.

- ✓ In the 2013 T.S.R. Subramanian case, the SC directed the Centre and States to ensure **minimum fixed tenures** for civil servants within three months, to promote administrative stability and reduce political interference.

Introduce Lateral Entry at Higher Levels: Appoint professionals from outside the bureaucracy (academia, private sector, etc.) into mid- and senior-level positions for ensuring transparent selection and performance-linked contracts.

Shift Focus from Process to Outcomes: Introducing Outcome Budgeting in all ministries and linking officer evaluations to measurable performance indicators, not just seniority.

Modernize Training and Capacity Building: Expanding and institutionalizing Mission Karmayogi with a Digital Learning Platform (iGOT) for lifelong learning and including modules on technology, ethics, leadership, and policy evaluation. Promote process reengineering and time-bound approvals (as in Ease of Doing Business reforms).

Strengthen Accountability Mechanisms: by revamping Annual Confidential Reports (ACRs) with 360° feedback (tracking feedback from subordinates, peers, and public), setting up independent ethics bodies within civil services and enforcing stricter anti-corruption laws and disciplinary actions. Strengthening institutions like Lokpal, CVC, and CBI with independence and digital audit tools.

Rationalize Cadre and Reduce Vacancies: by optimizing cadre allocation based on workload and regional needs.

Promote Use of Technology in Governance: Adopting e-office systems, data-driven dashboards, and AI-enabled governance tools and improving digital literacy among officers.

Encouraging Innovation and Reform Mindset: Encourage District Good Governance Index to reward innovation at local levels; Create "Innovation and Reform Cells" at ministry/district levels and promote inter-service competitions to highlight replicable governance models.

Encourage Specialization and Career Tracks: by introducing domain-specific career tracks (e.g., health, finance, infrastructure) and allowing mid-career specialization through sponsored degrees or training.

cybersecurity, data privacy, or e-governance tools.

- **Over-centralization and Workload Imbalance:** India has one of the lowest bureaucrat-to-citizen ratios globally. Civil servants, especially at senior levels, are often **overburdened**, managing multiple departments. **Delegation of authority** to lower levels is insufficient.
 - ✓ As of January 2024, there is a shortage of IAS and IPS officers, with 1,316 and 586 vacant posts respectively straining India's governance.
- **Public Trust Deficit:** Perception of inefficiency and corruption has eroded **citizen confidence** in bureaucracy.
 - ✓ Bureaucracy often fails in last-mile delivery due to poor monitoring, leakage, and lack of empathy.
- **Frequent Transfers:** Short tenures hinder **policy continuity** and demotivate officers. Frequent reshuffling affects long-term planning and local accountability.
 - ✓ Senior IAS Officer **Ashok Khemka** was transferred over **57 times** in his career due to his anti-corruption stance.



Mob Lynching

Recently, three policemen were suspended in Karnataka for allegedly failing to promptly report a mob lynching incident in Mangaluru.

- ✓ Mob lynching refers to the extrajudicial killing or assault of an individual or group by a mob, often driven by rumors, misinformation, or deep-seated prejudices.

Legal Provisions Related to Mob Lynching

The BNS, 2023 introduced a new category of culpable homicide to address mob lynching, focusing on justice, deterrence, and victim protection under following sections:

- **Section 103(2):** If five or more persons commit murder based on discriminatory grounds (like race, caste, religion, etc.), each member is punishable with death or life imprisonment, plus fine.
- **Section 117(4):** Penalizes **mob-inflicted serious injuries** on similar grounds with strict punishment.

Constitutional Perspectives: Section 103(2) of the BNS aligns with key constitutional rights:

- **Article 14:** Upholds **equality**, protecting against discrimination.
- **Article 21:** Reinforces the **right to life**, threatened by mob lynching.
- **Article 19(1)(a):** Balances **free speech** with preventing **hate speech** that incites violence.

Causes for Mob Lynching in India

- ⊕ **Communal and Identity-Based Prejudice:** Mob lynchings are often triggered by religious, caste, or ethnic hatred, particularly against Muslims, Dalits, or migrants.
- ⊕ **Misinformation and Social Media Rumors:** False information spread through WhatsApp and other social media has fueled many lynchings, especially related to child kidnapping or organ trafficking. For example, in 2018, five men were lynched in Maharashtra allegedly over rumours of child abduction spreading over WhatsApp.
- ⊕ **Cow Vigilantism and Cultural Policing:** Mob violence has been legitimized in some areas under the guise of "protecting cows"- often targeting minorities without evidence. For example, in 2024, Sabir Malik, a Bengali migrant worker, was lynched in Haryana over a false claim of beef possession. Lab tests found no beef.
 - ➔ Human Rights Watch in 2019 reported that 44 people were killed in cow-related violence between 2015 and 2018, with 36 victims being Muslim.
- ⊕ **Failure of Law Enforcement and Legal Loopholes:** Police often fail to prevent mob violence or do not pursue cases effectively, resulting in low conviction rates. Before the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023, cases were handled under general Indian Penal Code (IPC) provisions (murder, rioting, etc.), which failed to address group accountability or bias-motivated violence effectively.
 - ➔ In 2017, the NCRB collected data on mob lynching and hate crimes but found it unreliable due to the lack of legal definitions. As a result, data collection on these crimes was discontinued.
- ⊕ **Economic Causes:** Economic inequality exacerbates social tensions, as disadvantaged groups are seen as threats to scarce resources. The intersection of economic deprivation and social prejudice often manifests in violent outbursts.
- ⊕ **Political and Societal Encouragement:** Certain political rhetoric has normalized vigilantism, creating an atmosphere where mobs feel empowered and immune from punishment. While states like **Manipur, Rajasthan, West Bengal, and Jharkhand** have passed anti-lynching laws, most lack effective enforcement.

Global Comparison

- **USA:** Hate crimes attract **enhanced penalties** under federal/state laws (e.g., *Matthew Shepard Act, 2009*).
- **South Africa:** Strict laws against **group-based violence**, especially from racial tensions and historical injustices, ensuring severe penalties.

Judicial Precedent (Tehseen S. Poonawalla case (2018))

The Supreme Court (SC) condemned mob lynching and cow vigilantism, calling them illegal, inhuman, and a threat to the rule of law and India's unity. The Court framed guidelines as **preventive, remedial, and punitive** measures:

Preventive Measures	Remedial Measure	Punitive Measures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nodal Officer: Appoint in every district (SP rank or above) to monitor and prevent lynchings. • Identify Affected Areas: States must list districts prone to such incidents within 3 weeks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FIR Registration: Automatic FIR under Section 153A IPC for spreading hate or fake news on social media. • Compensation Scheme: States must formulate a victim compensation scheme under Section 357A CrPC within 1 month. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fast-Track Courts: Set up in each district to try lynching cases; trial to be completed within 6 months. • Legislative Recommendation: Parliament should create a separate law specifically criminalizing lynching.

Challenges Faced in Addressing Mob Lynching Cases	Way Forward
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty in Identifying Accused: Large crowds and masked individuals make it hard to pinpoint specific offenders. Mobs often disperse quickly, and eyewitnesses hesitate to identify perpetrators due to fear. • Weak Investigation and Evidence Collection: Police often arrive late, fail to secure the crime scene & to collect adequate forensic evidence. Crucial video or digital evidence is often destroyed or deleted by the perpetrators. • Political and Social Interference: Some attackers enjoy political backing or local support, which obstructs arrests and prosecution. Victims and their families may face threats, harassment, social boycott or pressure to settle or withdraw cases. • Delayed Justice: Prosecutions often drag on for years with repeated adjournments. Lack of fast-track courts and dedicated judicial mechanisms undermines deterrence. • Spread of Misinformation: Rumours on social media, especially WhatsApp, often trigger lynchings based on fake news (e.g., child kidnapping, cow slaughter). Authorities are slow to counter or regulate such content in real-time. • Bias in Law Enforcement: In some cases, police are accused of partiality, targeting victims instead of aggressors, especially in communal contexts. FIRs may be diluted, or wrong sections applied, weakening the case. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective Implementation of BNS Provisions: Strictly enforce Section 103(2) and related sections of BNS and ensure uniform application across states with special training for police and prosecutors. • Establish Fast-Track Courts: Set up dedicated fast-track courts for lynching cases to ensure swift trials and deterrent punishment. • Strengthen Police Accountability and Training: Appoint nodal officers in every district (as per 2018 SC guidelines) to monitor and act against mob violence. Train law enforcement in crowd control, digital evidence handling, and bias-free investigation. • Robust Witness Protection: Implement a strong witness protection program to encourage testimony without fear or retaliation. Offer relocation, anonymity, and legal support where needed. • Curb Misinformation and Hate Speech: Monitor and take down rumour-based content on social media in real time. Penalize those who spread hate speech or incite violence, especially on public platforms. • Public Awareness and Community Engagement: Launch campaigns to educate

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of Public Awareness: Many citizens are unaware that lynching is illegal and punishable. There's a lack of community engagement or education against vigilantism. • Compliance Issues: In a plea by National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW), SC found widespread non-compliance with its 2018 anti-lynching directions as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Most states failed to file action taken report except Madhya Pradesh and Haryana. ○ FIRs were filed against victims (e.g., for cow slaughter) rather than lynchers. ○ There were cases of misuse of FIRs, lack of proper investigation, and non-registration of mob lynching cases. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • citizens on the illegality and consequences of mob violence. Involve civil society, religious leaders, and community influencers to promote tolerance and lawful conduct. • Political and Administrative Neutrality: Ensure zero political interference in police investigations. Hold public officials accountable if they justify or ignore acts of vigilantism. • Central Database and Monitoring: Maintain a national registry of mob lynching incidents and court outcomes to track trends and assess policy impact. Empower bodies like the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to conduct regular audits and issue advisories.
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The Veeraswamy Case

The Vice President sought an FIR against Delhi High Court (HC) Judge Yashwant Varma and urged a review of the Supreme Court's (SC) K Veeraswami judgment, claiming it has created a "scaffolding of impunity" around the judiciary.

Background of K. Veeraswami Case

- **About Justice K. Veeraswami:** He served as the **Chief Justice of the Madras HC** from May 1969 to April 1976. Known as a **highly competent judge**, he declined an elevation to the SC. But his tenure ended under a cloud, as corruption allegations emerged shortly before his retirement.
- **Allegations and FIR:** The **CBI registered an FIR** against Justice Veeraswami, alleging he possessed **assets worth**, disproportionate to his known sources of income. The FIR raised a constitutional question: **Can a sitting High Court judge be investigated or prosecuted?** Justice Veeraswami **challenged the FIR** in the Madras HC.
- **Madras HC Ruling (1979):** A **full bench of the Madras HC** delivered a **2-1 verdict**, refusing to quash the FIR. The ruling maintained that **investigation could proceed**, despite the judge's status. Justice Veeraswami then appealed to the SC.

Key Legal Questions Before the SC

- **Are Judges "public servants"** under Section 2 of the Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA), 1947?
 - **Can Judges be prosecuted** for criminal misconduct under Section 5(1)(e) of the PCA?
 - **Who is the competent authority** to sanction such prosecution under Section 6 of the PCA?
- **Section 2 of PCA (Definition of Public Servant):** A "public servant" under this Act is as defined in Section 21 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).
 - **Section 5(1)(e) of PCA (Criminal Misconduct):** A public servant is guilty if they, or someone on their behalf, possess assets during their office tenure that are disproportionate to their known income and cannot be satisfactorily explained.
 - **Section 6 of PCA (Requirement of Prior Sanction):**

- **Section 6(1):** No court can take up a corruption case against a public servant **without prior sanction** from the authority **empowered to remove them** from office:
 - **Central/State Government**, if the person serves the Union or State and cannot be removed without its approval.
 - For others, the authority who has the **power to remove** them.
- **Section 6(2):** If there's **confusion** about who should give the sanction, it must come from the **authority competent to remove** the person at the time the offence allegedly occurred.

SC Verdict (1991) It delivered by a **5-judge Constitution Bench** in a **3-2 majority** by ruling:

- **Judges as Public Servants:** Judges fall within the definition of “public servants” as per Section 2 of PCA and Section 21 of IPC.
- **Prosecution and Judicial Immunity:** Immunity under Section 77 of the IPC protects judges only for acts done in judicial capacity. Criminal misconduct (e.g., corruption) is not protected under this section.
- **Requirement of Sanction under Section 6:** For HC/SC Judges, the President is the removal authority, but President acts only upon a parliamentary address under Articles 124 and 217. Hence, practically and constitutionally, only the Chief Justice of India (CJI) can sanction prosecution.
- **Preserving Judicial Independence:** Court emphasized that executive control over judges would compromise independence. Therefore, sanctioning power must reside with the judiciary to avoid political misuse.
- **Procedural Constraints:** It held that involving the President and Parliament for each case is impractical. Thus, the requirement of the CJI’s approval acts as a safeguard from executive overreach.

Precedents Cited

- **Union of India v. S.H. Sheth (1977)** – Affirmed judicial independence from executive influence.
- **S.P. Gupta v. Union of India (1981)** – Defined the constitutional foundation of judicial independence.
- **R.S. Nayak v. A.R. Antulay (1984)** – Clarified sanctioning under Section 6 of the Act.

Interpretation Techniques Used

- **Ejusdem Generis:** The Court rejected the argument that this principle limits the Act's application only to executive public servants, affirming that judges are included.

Implications of the Verdict

- **Strengthening Judicial Independence:** The judgment **safeguards the judiciary** from political or executive interference.
- **Limitation of Accountability:** By requiring CJI approval, the **prosecution of judges became rare**, raising concerns of **limited transparency**.
- **Need for Reform:** Judgment revealed a **legislative gap**. The court implicitly urged **Parliament to create a structured, independent mechanism** to address judicial misconduct.

Practical Application

- **Justice Veeraswami had retired** by the time of the ruling, so he was not directly affected.
- The **first practical application** of this precedent came in **2019**, when:
 - Then CJI **Ranjan Gogoi allowed the CBI to file an FIR against Justice S N Shukla** (Allahabad HC) for favoring a private medical college.
 - An earlier attempt to impeach Justice Shukla by **CJI Dipak Misra** had failed due to inaction by the government.

Conclusion

The **Veeraswami judgment balanced accountability with judicial autonomy**. It remains a **cornerstone for judicial conduct jurisprudence** but also serves as a reminder that **mechanisms for holding judges accountable** remain

underdeveloped. A **constitutional amendment or specific statute** is needed to ensure both **integrity and independence** of the judiciary.



SC Bars Fresh Law Graduates from Judicial Exams

The Supreme Court (SC) restored the condition requiring candidates applying for civil judge recruitment to have a minimum of **three years of law practice**.

Background	Key Highlights from the Latest SC Verdict
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Origin of the Case: The matter arose in the case All India Judges' Association vs Union of India (2025) prompted by petitions from judicial aspirants and associations seeking clarity and reform on eligibility norms for the Civil Judge (Junior Division) exam. • Concerns from the Judiciary: Several High Courts (HCs) raised concerns about the lack of courtroom exposure among fresh law graduates entering the judicial service. Complaints included poor practical understanding, immature court conduct, and ineffective case handling by inexperienced judges. • Core Legal Question: The central issue before the Court was- "Should fresh law graduates be allowed to appear for judicial service exams immediately, or must they first have at least three years of legal practice?" • SC Bench: The case was heard by a three-judge Bench comprising of Chief Justice of India (CJI) B.R. Gavai and two other SC judges which reinstated the mandatory 3-year legal practice requirement for entry-level judicial posts (Civil Judge/Junior Division). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 Years Law Practice Mandatory: for Civil Judge (Junior Division) exam candidates as legal work experience equips aspirants to handle life-liberty issues and court procedures, which cannot be learned from textbooks alone. • Directions to States: The Court directed all States and High Courts to amend their service rules so that henceforth only advocates with at least three years of practice (from provisional enrolment date) may appear for the civil judge exam. • Experience Certificate: The required experience must be certified by either: (a) the Principal Judicial Officer of the relevant court, or (b) an advocate with at least 10 years' standing (with such certificate endorsed by the Principal Judicial Officer). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For candidates practicing at the HC or SC level, an advocate's certificate is also needed. ○ The Court also ruled that service as a judge's law clerk counts toward the three-year requirement. • Mandatory Training: In addition to practice years, the judgment mandates a one-year training period for all newly appointed Civil Judges before they begin court work. • Prospective Effect: Importantly, the Court made the rule prospective. It will apply only to future recruitment cycles (those notified on or after 20 May 2025). Any examinations already underway when the verdict was delivered remain unaffected. • Implementation Timeline: All High Courts and States must amend their rules promptly. The Court gave no long stay; the three-year rule takes effect from the <i>next</i> entry-level judicial exam. In practice, this means candidates now in law school or recent graduates must plan to practice for three years before they become eligible.

Historical Evolution of the Three-Year Practice Rule

- **Initial Recommendation by the Law Commission (1958):** The **14th Law Commission Report (1958-chaired by M.C. Setalvad)** recommended that candidates for the lower judiciary should have **3–5 years of practice at the Bar**.
- **SC Endorsement (1993):** In **All India Judges' Association v. Union of India (1993)**, the **SC upheld the three-year practice rule** reaffirming the belief that judicial officers should have **prior litigation experience** before joining the bench.

- **Concerns About Talent Attraction (Late 1990s):** The **Shetty Commission** reviewed conditions of the subordinate judiciary and found that the rule **discouraged bright law graduates**, and many top students **opted out of judicial services** due to the delay and lack of incentives in early litigation practice.
 - ✓ The Shetty Commission, also known as the First National Judicial Pay Commission, was established in 1996 under the Chairmanship of Justice K. J. Shetty to examine the service conditions and salary structure of judicial officers in India.
- **Abolition of the Rule (2002):** Based on the Shetty Commission's findings, the **SC removed the three-year practice requirement in 2002 stating that mandatory legal practice** was deterring good candidates and affecting recruitment quality.
- **Widespread Relaxation (Post-2002):** After the 2002 judgment, most States allowed fresh graduates to appear for magistrate/judicial service exams without any litigation experience.
- **Reinstatement of the Rule (2025):** The SC reinstated the three-year practice requirement for Civil Judge (Junior Division) posts marking a policy reversal.

Implications for Judicial Aspirants	Criticism of the Verdict
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher Threshold for Entry: Pushing the average age of new judges into their late 20s or 30s, especially due to irregular exam schedules and added training requirements- effectively delaying judicial careers. • Socio-economic Barriers: The ruling places a financial burden on aspirants from modest or rural backgrounds, who often struggle to afford unpaid or low-paid litigation work. Poor implementation of minimum stipend guidelines by Bar Council of India (around ₹20,000 in cities, ₹15,000 in rural areas) further worsens the situation, potentially excluding grassroots voices from the Bench. • Gender and Diversity: The rule may worsen gender and diversity gaps, as women (only 15.31% of practicing lawyers (2023 data by Law Ministry), 38.3% of district judges, 14% of HC judges, and 6% of SC justices as per India Justice Report 2025) face added hurdles like family duties and limited mentorship. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ In over 75 years of independence, no woman has ever been appointed CJJ. • Vacancies and Pendency: The eligibility restriction may shrink the applicant pool, slowing recruitment when courts already face 30% HC vacancies, 5,133 lower court vacancies, and over 5 crore pending cases- risking further delays in justice delivery. • Exclusion of Non-Litigating Candidates: The new rule excludes non-litigating lawyers like those in firms, NGOs, or academia- by requiring three years of courtroom practice. • Verification of Actual Practice: Candidates may secure provisional registration but not practice in reality as 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of Empirical Evidence: SC did not present any data to prove that fresh graduates performed poorly. No analysis of actual complaints, efficiency, or quality of judgments delivered by younger judges. • Disregard of Training Infrastructure: Judicial academies already train new recruits for 12 months in law, procedure, and court conduct. Other government services (IAS, IPS, IRS) do not require prior experience training is considered sufficient. • Excessive Qualification Timeline: 5-year BA LLB + 3-year practice + 1-2 years recruitment delay = 9-10 years before entry-level appointment. This is longer than what is required for Group A services like IAS. • Elitism and Inequity: The rule is seen as favoring the privileged, as only those with financial support or connections can afford low-paid litigation work. Critics argue that judicial competence stems from aptitude, not court exposure, citing examples of successful judges who entered directly after graduation. • Overlooking Legal Education Advances: Modern legal education already includes practical training through internships, moot courts, and clinics. The real issue may lie in mentorship and institutional support, not lack of court experience. • Unstructured Early Practice: Many young lawyers spend years doing clerical or menial

verification mechanisms are open to **abuse and false certification**.

tasks under seniors. There is no guarantee that 3 years will result in meaningful experience.

Way Forward

- **Structured Training Programs:** Replace mandatory practice with formal judicial training combining classroom and courtroom exposure.
- **Recognize Diverse Experience:** Count internships, clerkships, and legal aid work as valid experience toward eligibility.
- **Financial Support for Juniors:** Ensure stipends or fellowships for young advocates to make early litigation work financially viable.
- **Mentorship and Inclusion Initiatives:** Launch targeted mentorship and preparatory programs for women, rural, and underrepresented aspirants.
- **Reform Judicial Exams:** Redesign exams to test practical legal skills like judgment writing and case analysis rather than just theoretical knowledge.
- **Improve Recruitment Processes:** Conduct exams more regularly and streamline promotions to address vacancies and reduce backlog.



President Seeks SC Opinion on Bill Assent Deadlines

The President invoked the Supreme Court's (SC's) advisory jurisdiction under Article 143(1) to seek its opinion on whether timelines can be set for the President and Governors to act on Bills passed by state Assemblies.

- ✓ The reference follows SC's ruling that set a three-month deadline for presidential assent on Bills, overturning Tamil Nadu (TN) Governor R N Ravi's withholding of assent to 10 Bills.

About SC's Advisory Jurisdiction (Article 143)

Types of Questions Referred:

- **Article 143 (1):** The President may refer any question of law or fact of public importance which has arisen or which is likely to arise. Here, the SC **may tender or may refuse** to tender its opinion to the President.
- **Article 143(2):** It allows the President to refer disputes arising from out of any pre-constitution treaty, agreement, covenant, sanad or other similar instruments. The SC **must tender** its opinion to the President.

Nature of the Advice: In both the cases, the opinion expressed by the SC is only advisory and not a judicial pronouncement.

Bench Requirement: As per Article 145(3), any reference under Article 143 must be heard by a minimum five-judge Bench. The SC then sends its majority opinion back to the President.

- ✓ If a smaller bench, during an appeal (under Article 132- Appellate jurisdiction of SC in appeals from High Courts (HCs) in certain cases), identifies such a question as essential, it must refer the matter to a five-judge bench and decide the appeal based on that opinion.

Presidential Role and Cabinet Aid: While the President generally acts on the aid and advice of the Cabinet, Article 143 provides a way to seek independent constitutional guidance directly from the judiciary.

Historical Use: Since 1950, the advisory jurisdiction has been invoked at least 15 times by various Presidents to clarify important constitutional questions.

Presidential Reference: The reference explains Articles 200 and 201 don't set timelines for the Governor or President to act, though the Tamil Nadu ruling imposed deadlines. It highlights that their discretion involves complex factors like federalism and separation of powers.

- The President raises concerns over conflicting SC rulings on the justiciability of her assent, states using Article 32 instead of Article 131 for federal issues, unclear scope of Article 142, and that deeming assent of a President or Governor on a bill is alien to the constitutional scheme.
 - ✓ TN, Kerala, Telangana and Punjab had approached SC against their Governors under Article 32.
- It held that while the Court's advisory opinion under **Article 143** isn't binding, it carries persuasive value and should generally be accepted by legislatures and executives.

Questions referred By President To SC	Prima Facie Assumptions (Based on TN Governor's Judgement)
1. <i>What are the constitutional options before a Governor when a Bill is presented under Article 200?</i>	Grant assent, withhold assent, or reserve for the President. Once reconsidered and passed again, the Governor must assent.
2. <i>Is the Governor bound by the Council of Ministers' (COM's) advice under Article 200?</i>	Yes, except in three cases: derogation of HC powers, bills needing President's assent for immunity, or bills threatening the Constitution's democratic principles.
3. <i>Is the Governor's discretion under Article 200 justiciable?</i>	Yes, withholding or reserving a bill is subject to judicial review based on constitutional standards.
4. <i>Is Article 361 an absolute bar to judicial review of Governor's actions under Article 200?</i>	No. Courts can review the Governor's actions under Article 200 despite Article 361.
5. <i>Can Courts impose a timeline on a Governor under Article 200?</i>	Yes. Courts can prescribe reasonable time limits where delay defeats the constitutional purpose.
6. <i>Is the President's discretion under Article 201 justiciable?</i>	Yes, but only to examine if the decision was arbitrary or malafide.
7. <i>Can Courts prescribe timelines for the President under Article 201?</i>	Yes. Absence of a prescribed timeline doesn't justify inaction. Reasonable timelines ensure constitutional efficiency.
8. <i>Must the President seek Supreme Court opinion under Article 143 on reserved bills?</i>	Not mandatory, but advisable- especially when bills are reserved for constitutional concerns.
9. <i>Can Courts adjudicate on a bill's contents before it becomes law?</i>	Yes. Courts can review potential unconstitutionality before enactment to prevent invalid laws.
10. <i>Can Article 142 substitute decisions of the Governor/President?</i>	Yes, but only in rare, exceptional cases of constitutional violation-like TN case.
11. <i>Is a bill law without Governor's assent under Article 200?</i>	Normally no, but in TN's case, the Court deemed assent under Article 142 due to Governor's unjustified inaction.
12. <i>Is a 5-judge bench mandatory under Article 145(3) to decide constitutional interpretation?</i>	Not addressed directly in the TN governor judgement, but precedent suggests not always required.
13. <i>Can Article 142 override substantive constitutional provisions?</i>	Not always. Article 142 can't automatically deem assent; courts may review inaction and direct resolution.
14. <i>Is Article 131 the only remedy for Union-State disputes?</i>	No. Article 32 can be used for writs like mandamus against Governor's inaction, as seen in TN case.

Relevant Constitutional Provisions

- **Article 131 (Original Jurisdiction of the SC):** It grants the SC exclusive authority to hear disputes between 1) Centre and one or more States; 2) Centre and some States vs. other States; 3) Two or more States. It applies only to disputes involving legal rights and excludes disputes arising from pre-Constitution treaties.
- **Article 142 (Enforcement of decrees and orders of SC):** It empowers the SC to pass any order necessary to do complete justice in any pending matter and secure attendance, document production, and punish contempt.
- **Article 200 (Governor's Assent to State Bills):** After a Bill is passed by a State Legislature, the Governor can give assent/ withhold assent or reserve it for the President/ return the bill if not a money bill for reconsideration with suggested changes. If the legislature passes it again, with or without changes, the Governor must give assent.
- **Article 201 (Bills Reserved for Consideration):** When a Governor reserves a Bill, the President may assent or withhold assent. For non-Money Bills, the President may return it for reconsideration, and if re-passed within six months, it shall be presented again to the President for his consideration
- **Article 361 (Immunity for President and Governors):** The President or Governor shall not be answerable to any court for exercising powers and duties of their office.

Can the SC Decline to Answer a Presidential Reference?

Yes, the SC **can decline** to answer a presidential reference under **Article 143(1)** of the Constitution as the provision states- the court "may, after such hearing as it thinks fit, report to the President its opinion thereon" - the use of "may" means it is **not mandatory**. The SC has **discretion** to decide whether or not to answer.

Why Can the SC Decline?

- It is a **Discretionary power** under Article 143(1) and cannot be used to **intervene in pending cases**.
- Court avoids giving opinions that may be used **for political purposes**.
- Also, advisory opinion is **not binding**, so it might be **futile** if the issue moves into regular litigation.

Can the SC overturn its April 8 decision through the Presidential reference?

No, SC cannot overturn its April 8 decision through a presidential reference as in its 1991 opinion on the Cauvery Water Dispute, the SC clarified that Article 143 is not meant to review, or reverse settled judicial decisions. It also held that-

- **Settled Questions of Law Not Open for Advisory Opinion:** Once the SC has ruled on a legal issue, it is **no longer a matter of legal uncertainty (res integra)**.
- **No Appellate Jurisdiction via Article 143:** SC cannot act as an appellate court over its own decisions via a Presidential reference. The President also cannot confer appellate powers on the Court through Article 143. However, the government can still file a review petition or a curative petition.

** In the present case, since the judgment was delivered by a two-judge Bench and similar matters (Kerala and Punjab) are pending, a larger Constitution Bench might take it up in the future.

Is the Presidential Reference Only About the April 8 Ruling?

No, the Presidential reference is **not limited** to the April 8 ruling. It contains **14 legal questions**, many stemming from the April 8 judgment, but also addresses **broader constitutional issues like-**

- **Question 12** asks whether only a **larger Bench** can hear cases involving **substantial constitutional questions**.
- **Question 13** seeks clarity on the **SC's use of Article 142**, its power to "do complete justice".
- **Question 14** asks the SC whether disputes between the Union and State Governments can only be resolved through a suit under Article 131, or if the SC can use other jurisdictions (like writs under Article 32) to decide such matters.

Broader Context Behind the Presidential Reference

- **Centre vs. Opposition-ruled States:** The case arises from tensions between the Centre and Opposition-ruled states as the Governors, appointed by the Centre, are accused of blocking state governments by withholding assent to Bills.
- **SC's April 8 Judgment:** As the SC scrutinized both Governors' and the President's powers, set a 3-month deadline for the President to clear Bills reserved by Governors and allowed states to file writs of mandamus against the President to force decision within the time limit.
- **Government and Political Response:** The government claimed the ruling undermines Parliament and the people's mandate.

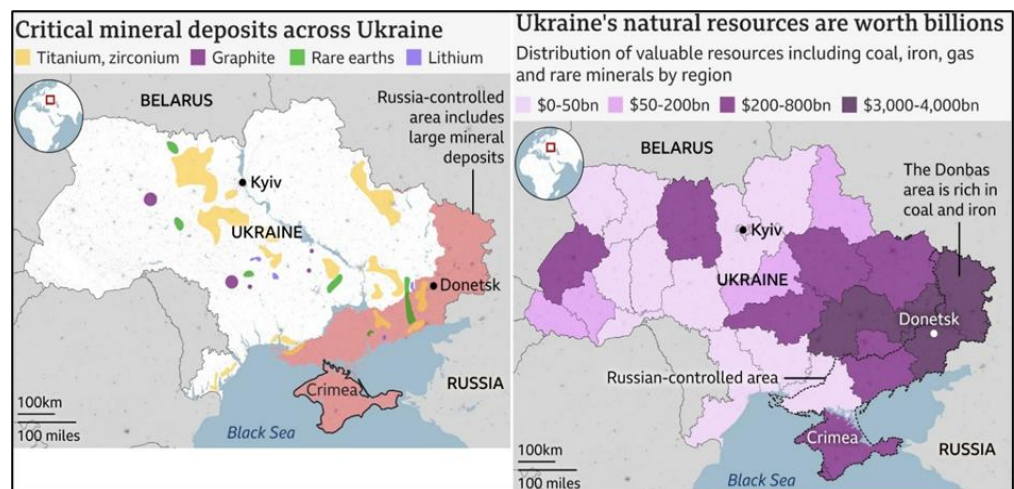


US-Ukraine Minerals Deal

- The US and Ukraine have finalized a major Minerals deal after months of tense negotiations.
- Under the agreement, the US gains preferential access to Ukrainian mineral and resource licenses, while Ukraine receives financial and military aid for post-war reconstruction.
- Trump called the deal "payback" for the \$350 billion he claims the US has spent supporting Ukraine, though official figures show \$182.8 billion.

Key Highlights of US-Ukraine Minerals Deal

- **Oil and gas included alongside minerals**
 - While the deal focuses on Ukraine's mineral wealth, it also covers oil, natural gas, and other hydrocarbons.
 - In all cases, Ukraine retains full ownership of the resources, though the US will have joint access.
- **United States-Ukraine Reinvestment Fund**
 - A new fund will be created and jointly managed by both countries on an equal partnership basis.
 - For the first ten years, all profits and revenues from the fund are expected to be reinvested into Ukraine's development.
- **Resource Ownership and Control**
 - Ukraine will retain full ownership and control over its natural resources, with the right to decide where and what to extract.
- **Contributions to the Fund**
 - The US will contribute via direct funding or new military assistance.
 - Ukraine will contribute 50% of revenues from new licenses for critical materials, oil, and gas extraction.



- **Use of Military Assistance**
 - The agreement emphasizes future military support—potentially including air defence systems—and confirms Ukraine will not owe any debt to the US for past aid.
- **US Troop Involvement Ruled Out**
 - Trump has **not committed** to sending US troops or backing European military involvement in Ukraine.
 - The deal is **economic and strategic**, not a defense pact.
- **Limitations**
 - The minerals deal **does not contain explicit security guarantees** for Ukraine.
 - No specific commitments regarding the amount of U.S. investment.
 - No detailed roadmap for developing specific mineral deposits.
 - No explicit mention of technology transfer for mineral processing.

Ukraine's Strategic Mineral Wealth

- Ukraine holds approximately 5% of the world's critical raw materials, giving it a strategic edge in the global supply of essential minerals.
- Ukraine has deposits of 22 out of the 34 minerals identified as critical by the European Union.
- These include: Industrial and construction materials; Ferro alloys and non-ferrous metals; Precious metals and rare earth elements.

Key Mineral Reserves

- **Graphite:** 19 million tonnes of proven reserves; among the top five global suppliers. Crucial for EV batteries.
- **Titanium:** Holds 7% of Europe's supply; used in aerospace and infrastructure.
- **Lithium:** Contains one-third of Europe's deposits; essential for modern batteries.
- **Other Crucial Elements:** Includes beryllium and uranium, important for nuclear technology.
- **Additional Metals:** Ukraine has significant reserves of copper, lead, zinc, silver, nickel, cobalt, and manganese.
- **Rare Earth Elements:** Hosts deposits of all 17 rare earths used in electronics, defense, and green energy.

Geographic Distribution of Major Resources

- **Titanium:** Found mostly in northwestern and central Ukraine
- **Lithium:** Located in central, eastern, and southeastern regions
- **Graphite:** Found in central and western Ukraine; represents 20% of global reserves
- **Coal:** Reserves remain significant, though most are now in Russian-occupied territory

Russian Occupation and Economic Loss

- An estimated \$350 billion worth of mineral resources lie in territories occupied by Russia.
- As of 2022, Russia controls:
 - ➔ 63% of Ukrainian coal mines
 - ➔ 50% of manganese, caesium, tantalum, and rare earth deposits.
- Russia has seized at least two lithium sites:
 - ➔ One in Donetsk
 - ➔ One in Zaporizhzhia
- Ukraine still retains control of lithium reserves in the central Kyrovohrad region.



Pakistan-Turkey Nexus

- India thwarted a large-scale drone attack by Pakistan, targeting 36 sites along the western border. Over 300 drones, likely **Turkish-made Asisguard Songar models**, were used.
- The attack raises concerns about Turkey's growing military support for Pakistan, evidenced by recent Turkish military activity in Karachi.
- While Turkey denies sending arms, it remains Pakistan's staunchest ally in West Asia and the only country to condemn India's Operation Sindoor.

Growing Convergence Between Turkey & Pakistan

- **Historical and Ideological Bond**
 - Shared Islamic identity has historically underpinned the Turkey–Pakistan relationship.
 - During the **Cold War**, both were part of Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) and the Regional Cooperation Development (RCD).

- Pakistan supported Turkey in the Cyprus conflicts (1964, 1971) and pledged early recognition of Turkish Cyprus in 1983.
- The rise of **Recep Tayyip Erdoğan** and his **political Islamism** deepened the ideological alignment with Pakistan post-2000.
- **High-Level Political Engagement**
 - Erdoğan has visited Pakistan at least **10 times** since 2003.
 - He co-chaired the **7th Pakistan-Türkiye High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council** in February 2025, reflecting close bilateral ties.
- **Strategic Balancing Against Gulf Powers**
 - *Turkey, alongside Qatar, competes with Saudi Arabia and UAE* for influence in the Muslim world.
 - It seeks alternative alliances with non-Gulf states like Pakistan and Malaysia.
 - The 2019 Kuala Lumpur Summit, supported by Pakistan and Turkey, was viewed as an attempt to challenge Saudi leadership.
- **Indian Ocean Region (IOR) Engagement**
 - Turkey is expanding its presence in the IOR:
 - ♣ Established its largest overseas military base in Somalia (2017).
 - ♣ Sold Baykar TB2 drones to Maldives (2024).
 - Turkey has held numerous naval exercises with Pakistan's Navy, the second-largest in the IOR, while avoiding similar engagement with India.
- **Diplomatic Support on Kashmir**
 - Turkey has consistently supported Pakistan's stance on Kashmir.
 - In February 2025, President Erdoğan reiterated solidarity with "Kashmiri brothers," prompting a diplomatic protest from India.
 - ♣ Turkey's pro-Pakistan stance continues despite India's gestures, such as humanitarian aid after the 2023 earthquake.
 - Pakistan acknowledges Turkey, along with China and Azerbaijan, as its key international supporters during crises.
- **Deepening Defence Cooperation**
 - Turkey has become Pakistan's second-largest arms supplier (after China) as of 2020.
 - Defence ties trace back to 1988 via the Military Consultative Group framework.
 - Recent acquisitions from Turkey include: Bayraktar drones; Kemankes cruise missiles; Asisguard Songar drones.
- **Naval Modernisation and Strategic Collaboration**
 - Turkey plays a critical role in modernizing Pakistan's naval capabilities, in line with Ankara's Indian Ocean strategy.

India's Strategic Counters to the Turkey-Pakistan Nexus

- **Eastern Europe: Support to Cyprus and Greece**
 - ✓ India backs the Greece-supported Republic of Cyprus, in opposition to Turkey and Pakistan's support for the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.
 - ✓ Greece reciprocates by supporting India's stance on Kashmir.
- **South Caucasus: Military Alliance with Armenia**
 - ✓ India has become Armenia's top arms supplier, surpassing even Russia by 2024.
 - ✓ This aligns India against Azerbaijan, which is militarily backed by Turkey and Pakistan.
 - ✓ In 2024, Pakistan signed a \$1.6 billion arms deal with Azerbaijan, and held a trilateral summit with Turkey and Azerbaijan.
- **Competing Infrastructure Visions**
 - ✓ India's IMEC (India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor) bypasses Turkey, weakening Ankara's historical role as a bridge between Asia and Europe.
 - ✓ Turkey has criticized IMEC and is now pushing its own "Iraq Development Road" project as a rival.

- ♣ \$1 billion deal in 2018 for four advanced corvettes by STM Defence Technologies for Pakistan Navy.
- ♣ Mid-life upgrades of Agosta 90B submarines by Turkey's STM — replacing French firm DCNS.



UK-India FTA Signed

- India and the UK signed a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) after nearly three years of negotiations. The agreement reduces tariffs on **90% of goods**.
- The deal aims to boost trade, investment, job creation, and innovation.

Background: From "Diwali Deadline" to Final Agreement

- The FTA was first targeted for completion by Diwali 2022 during British PM Boris Johnson's India visit, where he called Modi his "khaas dost."
- Despite missing the initial deadline, the agreement was finally achieved in 2025, marking a major milestone.
- **UK First Among Western Trade Partners**
 - The UK beat the US and EU in sealing an FTA with India — a strategic win for both nations.
 - This puts India in a stronger position for ongoing trade talks with Washington and Brussels, as the UK deal becomes a benchmark for future agreements.

Key Highlights of the UK-India Trade Deal

Trade Expansion

- The deal is projected to increase annual bilateral trade by £25.5 billion from 2040 onward.
- In 2024, UK-India trade stood at £42.6 billion, with UK exports at £17.1 billion and imports from India at £25.5 billion.
- India ranked as the UK's 11th-largest trading partner in 2024.

Tariff Reductions and Market Access

India's Gains:

- ♣ 99% of Indian exports to the UK will enjoy zero-duty access.
- ♣ **Boost for labour-intensive sectors:** textiles, marine products, leather, footwear, sports goods, toys, gems & jewellery, engineering goods, auto parts, and organic chemicals.

UK's Gains:

- ♣ India to slash duties on 90% of tariff lines, with 85% becoming fully tariff-free within 10 years.

Major Sectors Benefitting:

- **Alcohol:** Tariffs on whisky and gin will drop from 150% to 75% initially, reaching 40% by the tenth year—boosting the **UK's Scotch whisky exports**.
- **Automobiles:** India will cut auto import tariffs to 10% under a quota system (down from over 100%).

PRODUCTS ON WHICH DUTY WILL BECOME ZERO

AGRI AND PROCESSED FOODS

SECTOR	DUTY RANGE	UNDER FTA
Animal products	Upto 20%	99.3% *
Vegetable/Oil products	Upto 20%	99.8% *
Processed food	Upto 70%	99.7% *

*Tariff Lines at Zero duty

INDUSTRIAL GOODS

SECTOR	DUTY RANGE	UNDER FTA
Minerals	Upto 8%	Zero Duty
Chemicals	Upto 8%	Zero Duty
Plastic/Rubber	Upto 6%	Zero Duty
Leather/Footwear	Upto 16%	Zero Duty
Wood/Paper	Upto 10%	Zero Duty
Textile/Clothing	Upto 12%	Zero Duty
Headgear/Glass/Ceramic	Upto 12%	Zero Duty
Gems & Jewellery	Upto 4%	Zero Duty
Base Metals	Upto 10%	Zero Duty
Mechanical Machinery	Upto 8%	Zero Duty
Electrical Machinery	Upto 14%	Zero Duty
Transport/Auto	Upto 18%	Zero Duty
Instruments/Clocks	Upto 6%	Zero Duty
Arms/Ammunition	Upto 2%	Zero Duty
Furniture/Sports goods	Upto 4%	Zero Duty
Works of art	0%	Zero Duty

- **Other Goods:** Reduced tariffs for British exports such as cosmetics, aerospace components, lamb, medical devices, advanced machinery, salmon, electrical machinery, soft drinks, chocolate, and biscuits making UK exports more competitive.
- **Services and Workforce Mobility:**
 - The deal includes increased quotas for Indian workers to take up employment in specific sectors in the UK, enhancing labour mobility and service trade cooperation.
 - Indian workers in the UK will receive a three-year exemption from social security payments, reducing financial burden and improving mobility opportunities.

Reasons Behind the Push for the Deal

- **Supply Chain Disruptions & China Diversification:**
 - The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerabilities of global supply chains overly reliant on China.
 - Western countries, including the UK, sought to implement a 'China-plus one' strategy—diversifying supply chains by partnering with countries like India.
- **Post-Brexit Market Realignment**
 - After Brexit, the UK lost access to the EU's Single Market.
 - India, with its large and growing consumer base, emerged as a critical alternative to offset this economic gap.
- **Economic Pressures in the UK**
 - The UK has been grappling with a cost-of-living crisis.
 - The FTA is viewed as a timely economic boost and a political win for PM Keir Starmer, who assumed office in July 2024.
- **India's Shift from RCEP**
 - In 2019, India opted out of the China-led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), increasing the urgency to find alternative trade alliances like the UK.

Key Issues During Negotiations

- **Limited Trade Gains for India**
 - According to the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), many Indian exports already benefit from low or zero tariffs in the UK, so the FTA's impact on trade volume may be limited.
- **Services and Work Visas**
 - India prioritized better access for its service professionals, particularly in IT and healthcare.
 - However, immigration remains a sensitive issue for the UK post-Brexit.
 - Eventually, only about 100 new work visas per year for Indian professionals were agreed upon.
- **Carbon Tax Dispute**
 - The UK's proposal to impose a carbon tax on metal imports (based on emissions) raised concerns for Indian exporters, particularly in steel and aluminum.
 - Negotiations were needed to address the potential impact on India's competitiveness.



WHA Historic Pandemic Agreement

- Member States of the World Health Organization (WHO) have unanimously adopted the world's first Pandemic Agreement at the **78th World Health Assembly (WHA)**.

- This historic decision follows over 3 years of negotiations initiated in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The agreement is **legally binding**

Key Highlights of WHO Pandemic Agreement

- Full implementation awaits the finalization of key mechanisms by May 2026, followed by ratification by at least 60 countries for it to enter into force.
- **Legal Framework and Historical Significance**
 - This is only the second international **legal** agreement under Article 19 of the WHO Constitution.
 - ♣ The first was the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (2003).
- **Objective**
 - The agreement aims to strengthen global pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response, guided by equity, solidarity, transparency, and scientific evidence.
 - It also respects the sovereign rights of states.
- **Prevention and Surveillance**
 - Countries are encouraged to:
 - ♣ Develop and implement national pandemic prevention plans.
 - ♣ Improve early detection and control of infectious diseases.
 - ♣ Focus on areas like routine immunisation, lab safety, antimicrobial resistance, and zoonotic disease prevention.
- **Sustainable Local Production**
 - Nations should:
 - ♣ Ensure equitable distribution and rapid scale-up of pandemic-related health products (e.g., vaccines).
 - ♣ Aim for sustainable, timely, and fair access to these products during pandemics.
- **Technology Transfer**
 - Technology and knowledge transfer, particularly to developing countries, should be encouraged on **mutually agreed terms**.
 - Use of licensing, financing, and regulatory incentives to facilitate transfer.
 - Promote regional/global tech hubs coordinated by WHO.
- **Pathogen Access and Benefit Sharing (PABS)**
 - A new system (PABS) will enable rapid sharing of pathogen data with manufacturers.
 - In return, manufacturers must provide **20% of real-time production** to WHO (10% as donations, rest at affordable prices).
 - Participation is open to all companies, regardless of location.
 - ♣ Detailed mechanism to be negotiated and finalized by **May 2026**.
- **Supply Chain and Logistics**
 - A Global Supply Chain and Logistics Network will be established for equitable and timely access to health products.
 - Countries should use the network during emergencies to ensure need-based, fair distribution.
 - WHO will coordinate its structure and operations.

- **Respect for National Sovereignty**
 - The agreement does not grant WHO authority to impose or mandate national laws or pandemic response actions (e.g., lockdowns, vaccine mandates, travel bans).
 - It ensures state sovereignty is preserved in all aspects of implementation.
- **Absence of USA from the Pact**
 - The US' absence from the agreement casts a long shadow over its effectiveness.
 - U.S. negotiators left discussions about the accord after President Donald Trump began a 12-month process of withdrawing the U.S. from the agency when he took office in January.

World Health Assembly (WHA)

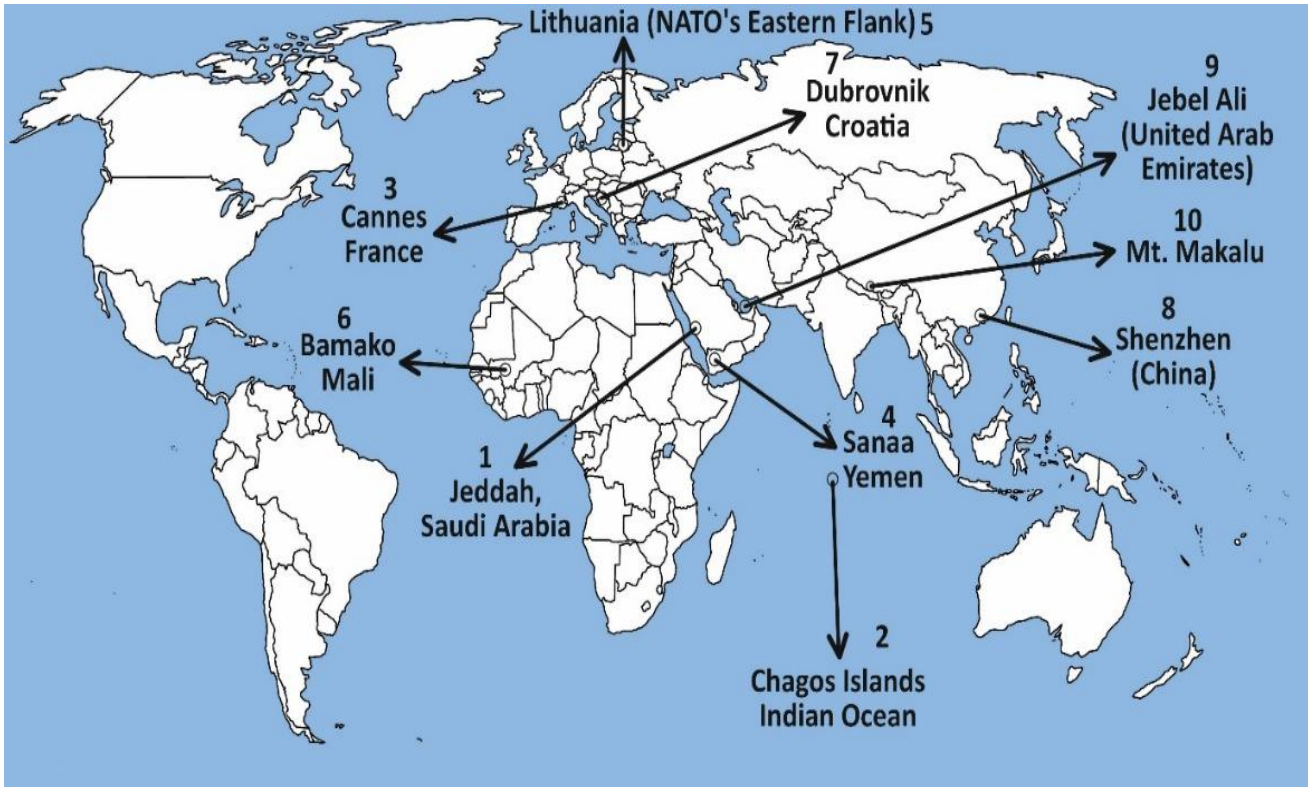
- ⊕ WHA is the decision-making body of the WHO. It is composed of delegates from all WHO Member States.
- ⊕ The Assembly meets annually to determine policies, approve budgets, and review work programs.
- ⊕ The assembly is held at **Geneva, Switzerland**.

⊕ Functions

- Sets WHO's policies and priorities.
- Appoints the Director-General of WHO.
- Approves WHO's budget and work programs.
- Adopts international treaties and agreements under Article 19 of the WHO Constitution.
- Monitors global health trends and coordinates international responses.

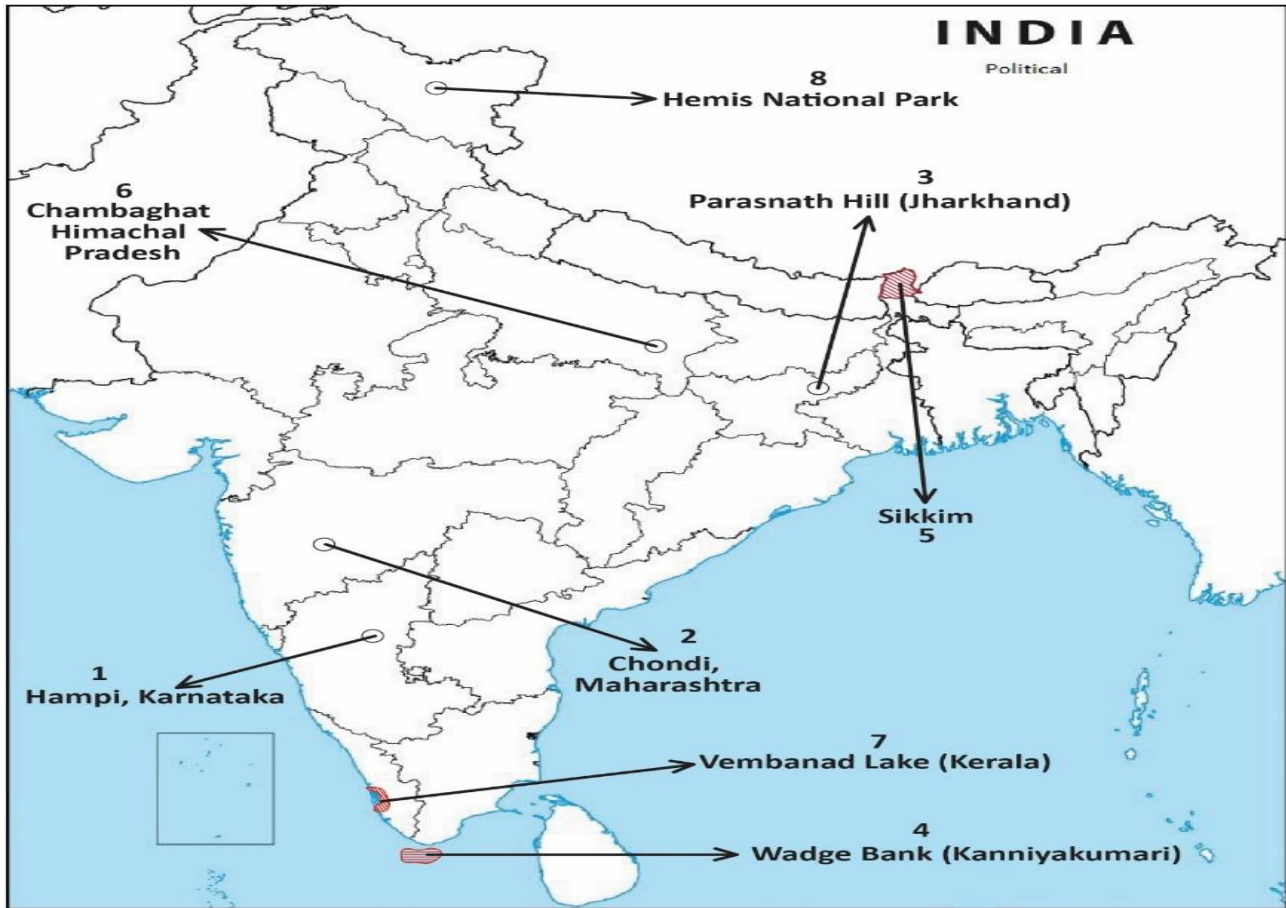
MAPS: PLACES IN NEWS

International Places in News



1	Jeddah, Saudi Arabia	<p>The Islamic Arts Biennale 2025 was hosted in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The event, titled "And All That Is In Between," showcased a blend of historical and contemporary Islamic art.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is located on the western coast of Saudi Arabia, along the Red Sea, Second-largest city in Saudi Arabia (after Riyadh). Gateway for Hajj: It serves as the entry point for millions of Muslims traveling for Hajj and Umrah to Makkah.
2	Chagos Islands, Indian Ocean	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is situated in the central Indian Ocean, approximately 1,600 km south of India and 500 km south of the Maldives. It consists of over 60 islands, with Diego Garcia being the largest and most strategically significant.
3	Cannes, France	<p>78th Cannes Film Festival 2025 (One of the most prestigious film festivals in the world) was held in May.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Location: It is situated on the French Riviera, specifically on the Mediterranean coast in southeastern France. India frequently showcases films at Cannes and has been chosen as a "Country of Honour" (notably in 2022 at the Cannes Film Market).
4	Sanaa, Yemen	<p>Israeli airstrikes targeted Sanaa International Airport after Houthi Attacks, damaging a Yemenia Airways plane</p>

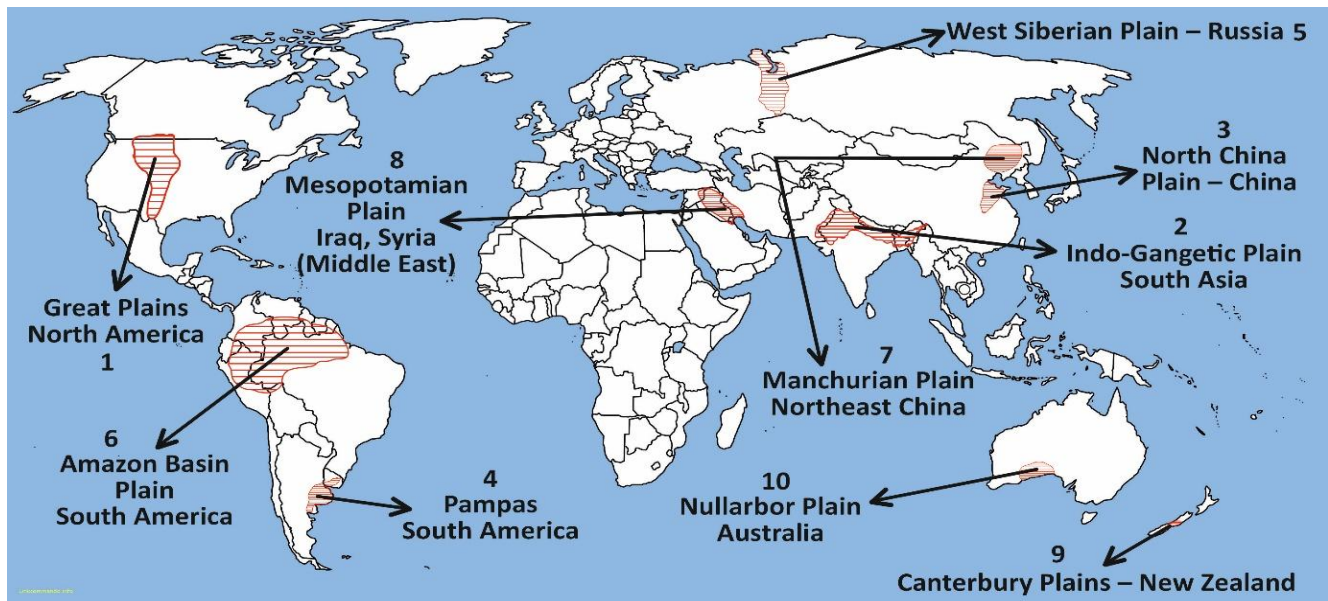
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sana'a, the capital of Yemen, is the largest city and a cultural and political center. The city's Old City is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, known for its distinctive architecture. • It has been a site of conflict and destruction, particularly in the early 2000s, with the Houthi movement's insurgency against the Yemeni government.
5	Lithuania (NATO's Eastern Flank)	Germany has started establishing its 45th Tank Brigade in Lithuania , marking its first permanent foreign deployment since WWII, to bolster NATO's eastern defenses amid Russian threats. The unit is expected to be fully operational by 2027.
6	Bamako, Mali	Massive pro-democracy protests erupted against President Assimi Goïta's military regime, following the dissolution of political parties. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Situated in southwestern Mali (West Africa) on the banks of the Niger River, Bamako is encircled by the Manding Mountains, including peaks like Koulouba and Point G.
7	Dubrovnik, Croatia	It has been recognized as a top travel destination for 2025 by Wanderlust Magazine, specifically on their " Travel Green List ". <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geographical Importance: Located near the borders with Bosnia & Herzegovina and Montenegro, along the Adriatic Sea (Known as the "Pearl of the Adriatic") • The Old City of Dubrovnik is a UNESCO World Heritage Site Since 1979 • Featured prominently as "King's Landing" in <i>Game of Thrones</i>, boosting soft power and film tourism
8	Shenzhen (China)	The U.S. restrictions on semiconductor software exports to China, announced in May 2025, will affect Shenzhen's tech hub status. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Located on the east bank of Pearl River Delta, close to the South China Sea • Known as "China's Silicon Valley" and serves as a gateway between mainland China and global markets via Hong Kong
9	Jebel Ali (United Arab Emirates)	Jebel Ali Port benefits from \$200 billion U.S.-UAE deals, including AI cooperation, announced during Trump's visit in May 2025. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategically positioned at the crossroads of Asia, Africa, and Europe • Close to the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial chokepoint for global oil trade • Jebel Ali Port: Largest port in the Middle East and 9th busiest port in the world (by cargo volume)
10	Mt. Makalu	Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) successfully scaled Mt. Makalu, the 5 th highest peak in world. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Lies in the Mahalangur Himalayas (a subrange of the Himalayas); On the border between Nepal and Tibet (China) • The region is inhabited by Sherpas, Rai, and Tamang communities. • The ITBP has now successfully climbed 6 of the world's 14 eight-thousanders (14 highest mountains on Earth) and a total of 229 peaks, including Mount Everest, Mount Kanchenjunga, Mount Dhaulagiri, Mount Lhotse, and Mount Manaslu.



1	Hampi, Karnataka	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hampi (Lies on the banks of the Tungabhadra River) was Capital of the Vijayanagara Empire and stand's today as evidence of what is known as the <i>last 'great Hindu empire'</i> of South India. UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHS): Designated in 1986 as the "Group of Monuments at Hampi".
2	Chondi, Maharashtra	Chondi is also being recognized as Ahilyabai Holkar's birthplace. Year 2025 marks her 300th anniversary (born on May 31, 1725).
3	Parasnath Hill (Jharkhand)	<p>The Jharkhand High Court directed the state government to enforce a pre-existing ban on the consumption and sale of meat, alcohol & other intoxicants on a Parasnath Hill.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A hill considered to be sacred by both the Santal Adivasi and Jain communities. (Hill is referred to as Marang Buru by Santals and Parasnath by Jains) Marang Buru (literally "the Great Mountain") is the supreme animist deity in the Santal tradition. The Jug Jaher Than (sacred grove) on the hill is the most sacred dhorom garh (religious site) of the Santals. Jains believe that 20 of the 24 Jain tirthankaras (divine teachers) attained nirvana (liberation) on Parasnath Hill. The name "Parasnath" is derived from Parshvanatha, the 23rd tirthankara. Today, there are more than 40 Jain temples and dhams on the hill.

4	Wadge Bank (Kanniyakumari)	<p>Kanniyakumari fishers oppose hydrocarbon project at Wadge Bank under Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wadge Bank is a significant submarine plateau located in the Indian Ocean, approximately 80 kilometers south of Kanyakumari (Cape Comorin), Tamil Nadu • 1976 India-Sri Lanka Maritime Boundary Agreement: This agreement recognized Wadge Bank as part of India's EEZ, granting India sovereign rights over its resources. Sri Lankan fishing vessels were prohibited from operating in the area.
5	Sikkim	<p>50th Anniversary of Sikkim: Sikkim became a state on May 26, 1975.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monarchy: Sikkim was a kingdom ruled by the Chogyal dynasty until 1975 • Integration with India: Became the 22nd state of India in 1975 after a referendum • Climate: Varies from subtropical in the south to alpine in the north
6	Chambaghat, Himachal Pradesh	<p>A 600-million-year-old stromatolite fossil, a "living stone memoir" created by cyanobacteria, was found near Chambaghat, offering insights into early Earth's biology and atmosphere.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Chambaghat is nestled at an elevation of around 1,500 meters above sea level, offering a temperate climate conducive to agriculture and habitation. • Mushroom Research: Chambaghat houses the Directorate of Mushroom Research, contributing to Solan's reputation as the "Mushroom City of India."
7	Vembanad Lake (Kerala)	<p>Vembanad, the longest lake in India and the largest in Kerala, is gasping for breath.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Spans across Kerala (Alappuzha, Kottayam, Ernakulam, and parts of Kochi). • Type: Brackish lagoon and longest lake in India (approximately 96.5 km in length). • Recognized under the Ramsar Convention (2002) as a wetland of international importance. • It is fed by six major rivers, notably the Meenachil, Achankovil, Pamba, and Manimala, and has an outlet into the Arabian Sea on the western side. • Cultural Link: Setting for Kerala boat races (Nehru Trophy Boat Race) on Punnamada Lake (a part of Vembanad).
8	Hemis National Park	<p>Hemis National Park reported the highest recorded number of snow leopards in the world, with about 2.07 animals per 100 square kilometers (km²).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a wildlife park located in Ladakh. This is the only park in the country, which is located in the northern region of Himalayas and it is the largest national park in the country. • Altitude Range: 3,000 to 6,000 meters above sea level • Biogeographic Zone: Trans-Himalayan (Zone 1A, Cold Desert) • Forms part of the Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Program (GSLEP)

Major Plains Around the World



1	Great Plains – North America	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Extends from Canada to Texas, between Rocky Mountains and Mississippi River. • Geographical Type: These are flat land covered in prairie, steppe and grassland ecosystems • Agricultural Importance: Called the “Breadbasket of the World” (wheat, maize, barley).
2	Indo-Gangetic Plain – South Asia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Along the Indus and Ganga River systems. • Geographical Type: Alluvial plain, formed by river deposition. • Agricultural Significance: One of the most fertile plains in the world; dense irrigation network. • Demographic Relevance: Highly populated; major cities like Delhi, Lahore, Dhaka.
3	North China Plain – China	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: The plain is bordered to the north by the Yanshan Mountains, to the west by the Taihang Mountains, to the south by the Dabie Mountains, and to the east by the Yellow Sea and Bohai Sea. • Geological Feature: Formed by Yellow River loess deposition. • Agriculture: Rich in wheat, maize, sorghum, millet, peanuts, sesame seed, cotton, and various vegetables. • Urbanization: Hosts Beijing and Tianjin, industrial and political hubs.
4	Pampas – South America	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Central Argentina stretching to Uruguay (from the Atlantic Ocean westward toward the Andes Mountains.) • Geographical Type: Temperate grassland plain. • Economic Role: Cattle ranching and wheat farming; hub of Argentina’s agro-economy. • Cultural Note: Home to Gaucho culture (cowboys).

5	West Siberian Plain – Russia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Between Ural Mountains and Yenisei River. • Geographical Feature: Largest continuous flatland in the world. • Economic Significance: Rich in natural gas, oil, and minerals. • Climate: Harsh continental; poor agricultural potential due to permafrost and marshes.
6	Amazon Basin Plain – South America	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Surrounds the Amazon River across Brazil, Peru, and Colombia. • Geographical Nature: Low-lying alluvial plain. • Ecological Role: Houses the Amazon Rainforest (largest tropical rainforest), key for global carbon sink and biodiversity. • Strategic: Rich in resources (timber, minerals), but faces threats from deforestation and illegal mining.
7	Manchurian Plain – Northeast China	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Lies in northeast China, primarily in Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning provinces. • Geography: Parts of the region, have volcanic features, but the plain itself is mainly alluvial. • Economic Importance: Rich in soybeans, maize, and coal. • Geo-political Relevance: Shares border with Russia and North Korea; military sensitivity.
8	Mesopotamian Plain – Iraq, Syria (Middle East)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Between Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. • Historical Value: Cradle of Mesopotamian Civilization (Sumerians, Babylonians). • Geography: Alluvial plain, prone to flooding. • Modern Use: Agriculture-based (wheat, barley); oil-rich regions (southern Iraq). • Strategic Relevance: Geopolitical tensions, water disputes.
9	Canterbury Plains – New Zealand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Eastern South Island, stretching from the Southern Alps to the Pacific Ocean. • Geological Nature: Formed by glacial and alluvial deposits. • Agricultural Output: Key region for dairy, sheep farming, and wine production. • Tourism: Scenic plain near Southern Alps; adventure tourism hub.
10	Nullarbor Plain – Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Southern Australia, between South and Western Australia. It lies along the Great Australian Bight and is traversed by the Eyre Highway. • Nature: Karst limestone plateau, one of the driest places. • Human Use: Sparse population; highway transport corridor. • Environmental Note: Unique subterranean cave systems many with underground lakes and fossils. Despite the harsh environment, it supports unique flora and fauna, including species adapted to extreme aridity.

SOCIAL ISSUES

Insights from NSO Household Surveys (2011–2024)

The Household Consumption Expenditure Surveys (HCES) for 2022–23 and 2023–24 by the National Statistical Office (NSO) provide updated insights into **poverty and inequality trends in India**. This helps to **explore trends** in head count ratio, the depth of poverty and trends in inequality **from 2011-12 to 2023-24**.

Defining Poverty - Based on the Rangarajan Committee Methodology

- **Rural poverty lines (monthly per capita consumption expenditure - MPCE):**

2011–12: ₹972	2022–23: ₹1,837	2023–24: ₹1,940
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- **Urban poverty lines (MPCE):**

2011–12: ₹1,407	2022–23: ₹2,603	2023–24: ₹2,736 (For a family of five: ₹13,680).
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Poverty Reduction Trends

- **Declining Poverty Ratios:**

- Total poverty ratio (rural + urban) -

2011–12: 29.5%	2022–23: 9.5%	2023–24: 4.9%
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- Poverty declined significantly between 2011-12 and 2023-24 (**2.05 percentage points per annum**), though the rate of decline was **slightly less** compared to the period 2004-05 to 2011-12 (2.2 percentage points per annum).

- **Global Comparison – World Bank Insights**

- In India, **extreme poverty** (living on less than \$2.15 per day in purchasing power parity terms) -

- 2011–12: 16.2%
- 2022–23: 2.3% - more than **170 million were lifted** above conditions of extreme poverty in this period.

- Number of people below the **poverty line criteria** for lower-middle-income countries — \$3.65 per day — fell from 61.8% to 28.1%.

Possible Drivers of 2023–24 Poverty Reduction:

- **Key macroeconomic factors:**

- **GDP growth:** GDP growth increased from 7.6% in 2022-23 to 9.2% in 2023-24 — **an increase of 1.6 percentage points in one year**.
- **CPI inflation:** The consumer price index (CPI) declined from 6.7% in 2022-23 to 5.4% in 2023-24 — a decline of 1.3 percentage points.
- **Food Inflation:** However, food inflation **increased** from 6.6% to 7.5% during the same period.

POVERTY RATIOS USING DIFFERENT CUT-OFFS: ALL INDIA									
Poverty Line (PL) Cut-offs	Rural			Urban			Rural+urban		
	2011-12	2022-23	2023-24	2011-12	2022-23	2023-24	2011-12	2022-23	2023-24
150	66.6	34.8	27.8	52.8	27.8	21.7	62.6	32.8	26
125	51.3	20.8	14.8	40.1	16.9	11.9	48.1	19.7	13.9
115	43.5	15.8	9.9	34.7	12.9	8.8	41	15	9.6
100	30.9	9.6	4.9	26.8	9.3	4.8	29.5	9.5	4.9
85	18.3	4.8	4.2	18.1	4.6	4.1	18.3	4.7	4.2
75	11.1	4.2	3.7	12.4	4.1	3.6	11.5	4.2	3.7
50	3.9	2.8	2.5	4.3	2.7	2.4	4	2.8	2.4

Note: 1. 100 per cent PL refers to Rangarajan Committee's Poverty Line, adjusted for CPI-based inflation.
 2. Rural + Urban data are the weighted average; weights being their respective shares in the estimated persons. Source: Estimates using Household Consumer Expenditure Surveys of NSSO

- **Observation:**
 - As there are no major changes in welfare schemes, **GDP growth appears as the most plausible reason** for poverty reduction in 2023–24.

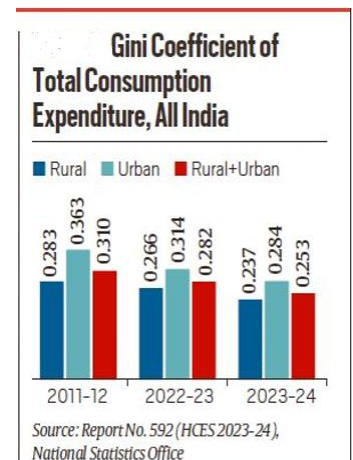
STATE	ENROLMENT		DROP
	2023-24	2024-25	
UP	1.74 crore	1.52 crore	21.83 lakh
Bihar	1.79 crore	1.73 crore	6.14 lakh
Rajasthan	62.65 lakh	57.02 lakh	5.63 lakh
West Bengal	1.17 crore	1.13 crore	4.01 lakh
Karnataka	43.49 lakh	41.33 lakh	2.15 lakh

Depth of Poverty - Beyond the Headcount Ratio

- **Headcount ratio vs poverty depth:** The headcount ratio measures the **percentage** of the population living below the poverty line, while poverty depth (also known as the poverty gap) measures the average **distance** between the poor and the poverty line.
- **Observation:** It can be concluded that many non-poor lie just above the poverty line (115–125% of PL). This means that most people are **clustered around the poverty threshold**.

Inequality Trends - Consumption Expenditure:

- **Gini coefficient:**
 - The Gini coefficient is a statistical measure designed to **quantify the level of income inequality** within a population.
 - It is a numerical value between **0 and 1**, where 0 represents perfect equality (everyone has the same income) and 1 represents perfect inequality (one person has all the income).
- **Observation:**
 - The decline in inequality was **higher for urban areas**.
 - The inequality in consumption (Rural + Urban) **declined significantly in one year** — the Gini coefficient fell from 0.282 in 2022-23 to 0.253 points — a decline of 0.029 points.
 - On the other hand, the decline during the 11-year period 2011-12 to 2022-23 is almost similar.



Conclusion

- **Poverty in India is now in single digits**, and inequality has declined moderately.
- The significant one-year drop in poverty (2022–23 to 2023–24) **may be driven by GDP growth** but requires more data to confirm if it's a lasting trend.
- The **concentration** of the poor near the poverty line indicates better prospects for **targeted policy interventions**.

Sharp Decline in Govt. School Enrolment & PM-POSHAN Coverage

The Ministry of Education (MoE) has flagged a **steep decline in enrolment** in **government and government-aided schools** at the **primary and upper-primary levels** across 23 States and UTs in 2024–25. This has prompted the MoE to seek investigation and remedial action from the affected States.

PM-POSHAN Scheme Overview

- **PM-POSHAN (Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman):** Formerly known as the **Midday Meal Scheme**.
- **Target group:** Children from **pre-primary to Class 8** in government and government-aided schools.
- **Objective:** Address child nutrition, enhance school attendance, improve learning outcomes.
- **Funding pattern:** Centre and States share cost in 60:40 ratio; Centre provides foodgrains.

Major Findings from the PM-POSHAN Review Meetings

Reasons Behind the Decline:

- **Data Cleansing and Methodological Changes:**
 - Shift from aggregate school-wise data to **student-wise reporting** (includes name, address, Aadhaar details) led to the **removal of “ghost” entries**, revealing more accurate figures.
- **Shift to private schools:** Post-COVID **reversal of enrollment trends** - students shifting from government to private schools, possibly due to **parental preferences**. Many families, even from low-income groups, believe private schools offer better English instruction, discipline, and exam preparedness.

Declining Coverage Under PM-POSHAN

- **States with Major Drops in Meal Coverage**

UP: Dropped by 5.41 lakh

Rajasthan: 3.27 lakh

West Bengal: 8.04 lakh

Delhi: 97,000

- **Delhi’s Underperformance:**

- Midday meal coverage in 2024–25 -

Balvatika (pre-primary):
60%

Primary: 69%

Upper primary:
62%

- All below the national average.

- **Concerns raised:**

- In some States, students bring their **own tiffins**.
- MoE has instructed States to ensure **meal quality and universal coverage**.

Other Reports Showing Similar Trends:

- **The UDISE+ report** (2023-24) revealed an **overall drop of 1.5 crore** in school enrolment (both government and private) compared to 2018–19 to 2021–22 averages.
- The PM-POSHAN review meetings show that **the downward trend continues** into 2024–25.

Way Ahead:

- **Robust digital infrastructure** for real-time monitoring of school data, ensuring transparency and elimination of ghost beneficiaries.
- **Integration of PM-POSHAN** with broader health and education initiatives, such as POSHAN Abhiyaan and **Samagra Shiksha**, to create holistic child development ecosystems.
- **Community-driven models** involving local panchayats, SHGs, and school management committees to build trust in public education.
- **Public-private partnerships (PPPs)** to enhance infrastructure, nutritional standards, and pedagogical quality in government schools.
- **Incentivising enrolment and retention**, especially in socio-economically vulnerable areas, through targeted scholarships, nutritional add-ons, and quality education interventions.

SECC 2011 & India's Caste Census Landscape

The Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs has approved the inclusion of caste data in the upcoming population census. India has not published disaggregated caste data since the 1931 Census, creating a **significant gap in understanding caste-based demographics**. The Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011 attempted to bridge this gap but it did not make certain caste-wise population data public.

Background and Historical Context

- **The most recent publicly available data** on caste populations at the national level are from the **1931 Census**.
 - It will serve as the **baseline for the caste data** that the government has now decided to collect as part of the upcoming, pandemic-delayed **Census 2021**.
- **The 1941 Census** collected caste data but it was not released due to World War II.
- **Post-independence Censuses** have not included disaggregated caste data, except for broad SC/ST figures.
- Though census is a central subject, the Collection of Statistics Act, 2008 enables states and local bodies to collect data — as done by Karnataka (2015) and Bihar (2023).

Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC), 2011

- **Overview**
 - **Beginning:** The Union Ministry of Rural Development began the SECC in June, 2011 through a nationwide door-to-door enumeration exercise.
 - **Purpose:**
 - **Assess socio-economic status** of rural and urban households, and allow the ranking of households based on predefined parameters.
 - The data to be used for **policy, research, and the implementation** of various development programs.
 - **Coverage:** Conducted in 24 lakh enumeration blocks, each with ~125 households.
 - Only the socio-economic data was published in 2016; the caste data was withheld.
- **Key features:**
 - **Joint exercise** with Census 2011, **but administratively distinct**.
 - The caste census was under the **administrative control** of the Ministry of Home Affairs, through the Registrar General of India (RGI) and Census Commissioner of India.
 - **Census in Rural Area by** - the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD)
 - **Census in Urban areas by** - the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation (MoHUPA); and
 - **Caste Census by** - Ministry of Home Affairs, Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India.
 - **Overall administration** - The Ministry of Rural Development

Differences Between SECC 2011 and Census 2011

- **Confidentiality and accessibility:**
 - **Census 2011 data:** Confidential and used for statistical purposes.
 - **SECC 2011 data:** Open for government use in identifying beneficiaries for schemes.
- **Common parameters:**
 - **Demographic and economic data:** Gender, age, marital status, religion, literacy, etc.
- **Additional parameters in SECC:**
 - **Caste data**
 - **Health:** Nature of disability (sight, speech, mental illness, etc.) and diseases (cancer, TB, leprosy).
 - **Economic status:** Asset ownership (mobile, AC, fridge), housing condition, source of lighting, latrines, and kitchens.
 - **Employment and income (Urban-specific):** Source of income (begging, vending, pension, rent).
 - **Rural-specific:** Landholding, mechanised equipment, tribal group membership, bonded labour, manual scavenging.

Caste and Tribe Specific Data - SECC vs Census 2011 on Caste

- **Census 2011:** Only asked about SC/ST status, not specific caste names or OBC/general category.
- **SECC 2011:**
 - Collected disaggregated caste data.
 - **Categories:** SC (Code 1), ST (Code 2), Other (Code 3), No Caste/Tribe (Code 4).
 - Captured name of caste/tribe if applicable.
- **Government order on SC classification:**
 - As per 1990 order, Scheduled Castes must be Hindu, Sikh, or Buddhist.
 - Scheduled Tribes can be from any religion.

Population Census-2027

India will conduct its next population census by March 1, 2027, after a historic 16-year gap, as announced by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs. This will be India's **first digital census** and the first post-Independence census to include **caste enumeration**.

India's Next Census Scheduled for 2027

- The government has announced that the next nationwide population census will begin on April 1, 2026.
- **Key Features of the 2027 Census**

First fully Digital Census

Caste Enumeration

- **Timeline and Phases**
 - The census will be held in **two phases**:
 - House Listing and Housing Schedule
 - Population Enumeration (includes caste data)
 - Both phases will span April 1, 2026 to February 28, 2027.
- **Legal and Procedural Aspects**
 - The census will be conducted under the Census Act, 1948 and the Census Rules, 1990.
 - A gazette notification under Section 3 of the Census Act is expected soon, which will formally announce the schedule.
- **Political Implications**
 - As per the constitutional mandate, the first census after 2026 can be used for the delimitation of Lok Sabha constituencies.
 - This data could form the basis for electoral constituency restructuring before the 2029 General Elections.
- **Impact on Women's Reservation**
 - The 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, as mandated by the recently passed Women's Reservation Act, will also come into force only after a new delimitation exercise is conducted based on post-2026 census data.
- **No Update on NPR**
 - There was no mention of updating the **National Population Register (NPR)** during the announcement.
 - As per Citizenship Rules, 2003, NPR is the first step toward compiling a National Register of Indian Citizens (NRIC/NRC).

Delimitation to Begin After Release of Census 2027 Data

- Once the final census data is released in late 2027, the process of delimitation will begin.
- The Parliament must first pass a new Delimitation Act to legally empower the formation of a Delimitation Commission.
- **Legal Provision and mandate**
 - The process is mandated under **Articles 81 and 82 of the Constitution**, which require delimitation after every **Census**.
 - Once formed, the Commission will consult **state governments and stakeholders** to devise a formula based on **population per constituency**.
- **Formation and Composition of the Delimitation Commission**
 - The Delimitation Commission will be:
 - Headed by a retired Supreme Court judge
 - Include the Chief Election Commissioner and State Election Commissioners
 - Assisted by MPs and MLAs from states as associate members (*without voting rights*)
- **Historical Background**
 - Delimitation was done after the **1951, 1961, and 1971 censuses**.
 - Delimitation Commissions have been constituted **4 times** – in 1952 under the Delimitation Commission Act, 1952, in 1963 under Delimitation Commission Act, 1962, in 1973 under Delimitation Act, 1972 and in 2002 under Delimitation Act, 2002.
 - Delimitation Act of 2002 allowed only boundary redrawing, not an increase in seat numbers.
 - 42nd Constitutional Amendment (1976) froze the number of seats until after the 2001 Census.
 - 84th Constitutional Amendment (2002) extended this freeze until the first census after 2026.
- **Current Scenario**
 - The current 543 Lok Sabha seats are based on the 1971 Census.
 - To increase seats, a Constitutional Amendment is required, needing a two-thirds majority in Parliament.
- **Political and Regional Challenges**
 - Southern states may lose out in a population-based seat redistribution, as they have successfully controlled population growth.
 - Maintaining the current cap of 550 seats (Article 81) without increasing total seats could disadvantage them further.

Human Development Index (HDI)

India has climbed four positions to rank 130 out of 193 countries in the **2023 HDI**, according to the **2025 Human Development Report** by the United Nations Development Programme (**UNDP**).

Title: *A matter of choice: People and possibilities in the age of Artificial Intelligence*

India-Specific Findings

	2023	2022
HDI Rank	130 out of 193	134
HDI Value	0.685	0.644

Life Expectancy	72 years	67.7 years
Expected Years of Schooling	13 years	12.6 years
Mean Years of Schooling	6.9 years	6.57 years
GNI per capita	\$9,047 w.r.t. PPP (2021)	\$6,951
Category	Still under Medium Human Development nearing the High Development threshold (0.700)	
Multidimensional Poverty	135 million Indians exited poverty between 2015-16 and 2019-21	
Neighborhood Comparison	Same HDI value as Bangladesh, but with differing indicators; India ahead of Pakistan (168th, 0.544) and Nepal (145th, 0.622). Sri Lanka holds the 89th position at 0.776.	
BRICS Comparison	Brazil (89), Russia (59), China (75), South Africa (110) all ahead of India.	
Inequality-adjusted HDI(IHDI)	0.475 as India faces a 30.66% loss due to inequality	
Gender Inequality Index (GII)	Ranks 102nd with a score of 0.403 as Female labour force participation and political representation remain low	
Top performer	Iceland (0.972), Norway, Switzerland	
Bottom	South Sudan, Somalia, Central African Republic.	

The pace of HDI growth globally is the slowest since 1990. Inequality between low and very high HDI countries has worsened for the fourth consecutive year.

Unified Data Hub (UDH)

The **Delhi** government is planning to set up a Unified Data Hub (UDH) to centralize departmental data and ensure welfare schemes benefit only eligible residents.

What is the Unified Data Hub (UDH)

It is a **centralized** digital platform developed with the aim to integrate and unify citizen data from various government departments to create verified, de-duplicated, and accurate records for beneficiaries of welfare schemes (such as subsidies, pensions, and financial assistance etc.)

Objectives of UDH

- **Create “Golden Records”**: Single, verified citizen profiles by resolving data duplication and inconsistencies across departmental databases.
- **Targeted Welfare Delivery**: to ensure that only eligible and genuine residents receive welfare benefits to enable evidence-based governance using reliable data.
- **Prevent Leakages**: to eliminate fraud, duplication, and leakage.

How UDH Works?

- **Data Integration**: It will aggregate citizen data from multiple departments into one centralized repository.
- **Smart Matching Algorithms**: It will use algorithms to identify and eliminate duplicates, ensuring data accuracy.
- **Real-Time Updates** by authorized entities.
- **Unique Identification**: Every citizen will be assigned a unique ID and households will receive a unique family ID.
 - › If Aadhaar is linked to a ration card, the ration card number becomes the family ID.
 - › If not, a new family ID can be created using Aadhaar manually.
- **Eligibility Tracking**: The “golden record” will track services availed and professional status to determine eligibility for schemes.
- **Social Registry Support**: It will aid in outreach, registration, and eligibility decisions for welfare programmes.

Key Features

- **Centralized Data Repository**: All departmental data stored and accessed from a single platform.
 - ✓ UDH ensures “minimum government, maximum governance”
- **Dashboard and Reporting**: Provides real-time dashboards and analytical reports for policy formulation.
- **Data Security and Privacy**: Ensures compliance with data protection laws and high standards of confidentiality.
 - ✓ The initiative also demonstrates the potential of **big data** in governance.
- **Inter-Departmental Access**: Departmental databases will have access to unified and verified citizen records.

- **Build Integrated Infrastructure:** to develop a unified digital platform for citizen-centric governance.

Comparative Analysis with Other States

- **Andhra Pradesh's Real-Time Governance System (RTGS):** Integrates data from multiple departments to monitor welfare schemes and disaster management, improving response times and transparency.
- **Kerala's K-SMART Platform:** A digital governance platform that centralizes citizen data for service delivery, reducing bureaucratic delays.
- Puducherry Government has implemented a Unified Data Hub (UDH) to validate and eliminate duplicate beneficiaries. It currently covers residents and their enrolled schemes across 24 departments and 150 central and state welfare programmes.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

Private Member's Bill

Private Member's Bills (PMBs), once a vital parliamentary tool, have eroded due to frequent disruptions, adjournments, and prioritization of government business, reducing them to symbolic gestures and reflecting a democratic decline.

What is PMBs

- A PMB is a legislative proposal introduced by a **Member of Parliament (MP)** (*whether elected or nominated*) **who is not a Minister**. It allows individual MPs- whether from the ruling party or the Opposition to propose laws **independently of the government**.
- Rule 65 (Lok Sabha) outlines the process for introducing PMB's.

Key Features of PMB	Significance
<p>Purpose: Enables MPs to raise issues, suggest reforms, and propose new laws.</p> <p>Schedule: In the Lok Sabha (LS), the last two-and-a-half hours of business on every Friday are earmarked for the introduction and discussion of PMBs (Rule 26). In the Rajya Sabha (RS), PMBs are taken up every alternate Friday for two-and-a-half hours.</p> <p>Difference with Government Bills: Government Bills are drafted by ministries and introduced by Ministers. PMBs reflect the views and priorities of individual Mps, not necessarily the official policy of the government.</p>	<p>PMBs enable MPs to propose laws based on personal convictions, constituency needs, or social issues, serving as a rare avenue for independent legislative initiative beyond party lines like-</p> <p>Progressive Ideas: Supriya Sule's 2019 'Right to Disconnect' Bill, though not passed, sparked national debate on work-life balance and mental health.</p> <p>Legislative Influence: In 2015, Tiruchi Siva's 'Rights of Transgender Persons' Bill became the first Private Member's Bill in over 40 years to be passed by the Rajya Sabha. Though it didn't pass in the LS, it paved the way for the government's Transgender Persons Act, 2019.</p> <p>Express Independent Thought: BJP MP Gopal Shetty's Bill seeking free healthcare for senior citizens.</p>

Trends in PMBs- 17th & 18th Lok Sabha

- **Declining Impact and Discussion:** Since independence only 14 PMBs have been passed and received presidential assent and since 1970 none have been passed by both Houses.
- The first PMB was the *Muslim Wakf Bill of 1952* by Syed Kazmi of the Congress. This bill was intended to enhance the management and oversight of Wakf (charitable endowment) properties.
 - ✓ Subsequently, this bill resulted in the passage of the Waqf Act in 1954. This Act was later updated and is now known as **the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025**.
 - The Supreme Court (Enlargement of Criminal Appellate Jurisdiction) Bill, 1968, holds the distinction of being the last PMB to be passed by both Houses, which happened in 1970.
- **17th Lok Sabha (2019–2024):** 729 PMBs were introduced in the LS and 705 in the RS. However, only two in the LS and 14 in the RS were ever discussed.
 - **18th Lok Sabha (So far in 2024):** 64 PMBs were introduced in the LS but none was discussed
 - In RS, out of 82 PMBs listed, only 49 were introduced and discussion began on just one

Reasons for Shrinking Space for Independent Legislative Action	Reforms to Strengthen the PMB Process in India
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-Defection Law (52nd Constitutional Amendment): Introduced to curb political instability, the law penalizes MPs who deviate from the party line. As a result, it discourages MPs, especially from the ruling party, from expressing independent views or challenging their party's legislative stance. • Party-Centric Parliamentary Culture: Whip systems and internal discipline mean MPs often vote as directed, leaving little room for personal legislative initiative. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safeguard Time for PMBs: Parliamentary rules should be amended to <i>protect Friday time slots</i> for PMBs, allowing deviations only in cases of national emergency. • Establish a PMB Review Committee: A dedicated committee to <i>screen PMBs</i> for quality, public importance, and constitutionality which can recommend a

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced Legislative Time: Fridays, reserved for PMBs, are frequently disrupted or allocated to government business. • Marginalization of Individual MPs: As the executive dominates the legislative process, individual MPs- especially backbenchers have less influence on policymaking, with most bills coming from the government. • Inadequate Institutional Support: MPs often lack research assistance or staff support to draft complex legislation. • Public Perception vs Party Control: Although voters often elect MPs based on individual merit and constituency work, these MPs are constrained within a system that prioritizes party loyalty over personal judgment. 	<p><i>priority list</i> for discussion, enabling structured and merit-based deliberation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce a time-bound Fast-Track Mechanism for high-impact PMBs with wide cross-party support, ensuring they reach the floor more efficiently. • Adopt the UK’s Ten-Minute Rule: Allow MPs to make a 10-minute speech supporting a PMB, followed by a brief rebuttal. This enables <i>more MPs to present ideas</i> and helps maintain brevity and order. • Recognize PMBs as Democratic Instruments: Embrace PMBs as a <i>vital channel for grassroots and non-partisan legislative ideas</i>, as highlighted by the Vice President, fostering innovation and inclusivity in law-making.
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Water Sharing Dispute Between Punjab & Haryana

Amid its ongoing face-off over sharing water with Haryana, the Punjab Assembly while rejecting the Bhakra Beas Management Boards’s (BBMB’s) decision to release an extra 4,500 cusecs of water to Haryana, passed a resolution stating that it would not spare “even a single drop of water” from its share to Haryana.

Haryana’s Water Demand

- It has requested a release of **8,500 cusecs of water** for the period **May 21 to May 31, 2025**.
- This demand may **further increase in June**, as **temperatures rise** and **crop irrigation needs peak**.
- Haryana's rationale is based on the **urgent need for drinking water** especially in the water-starved districts of Hisar, Sirsa, and Fatehabad.
- **Haryana’s kharif sowing** (cotton and paddy) is threatened due to dry canals especially after temporary outages in its canal systems (e.g. Western Yamuna Canal repairs).
- Dry canals have impacted wetlands, wildlife, and livestock. Haryana warns that if water is not drawn before monsoon, **overflow into Pakistan** may occur through the Harike barrage.

Background and Historical Context

Bhakra Nangal Dam and Canal System: The Bhakra Nangal Dam, completed in 1963 on the Sutlej River in Himachal Pradesh (HP), is a critical infrastructure project designed for irrigation and hydropower. It supplies water to Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan through an extensive canal system.

BBMB: After Haryana was carved out of Punjab in 1966, the BBMB was established under the Punjab Reorganization Act, 1966, to oversee water sharing and dam operations among Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan. The BBMB decides the annual quota of water supply to Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan for a yearly cycle from May 21 to May 20 each year.

♦ This board was renamed BBMP in 1976 and given the additional task of managing projects on the River Beas, namely the Beas-Satluj Link Project (Pandoh dam), and Pong dam, both in Himachal.

Disputed Interpretations of Water Ownership: Punjab asserts that Sutlej-Beas waters rightfully belong to it and that other states access them only through BBMB-sanctioned arrangements. Conversely, Haryana maintains that it is legally entitled to a fixed share under existing BBMB allocations and prior agreements like the 1976 accord which allocated the waters of the Ravi and Beas rivers among Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan.

BBMB’s April 2025 Water Order: On April 23, 2025, BBMB’s technical committee recommended releasing **4,500 cusecs of extra water to Haryana**. Punjab strongly opposed the decision, citing procedural lapses such as failure to provide the required seven-day notice for BBMB meetings.

Punjab’s Boycott and Legislative Action: Punjab government boycotted BBMB meetings (April 28–30), calling them unconstitutional and unanimously passed a resolution rejecting BBMB’s April recommendations and declared it would **not release even a single drop of water** beyond its share.

Legal Petitions in Courts: A petition was filed in the Punjab & Haryana High Court seeking immediate release of **8,500 cusecs** and removal of Punjab Police from Bhakra headworks. BBMB also approached the High Court alleging Punjab’s deployment of state police at the dam was illegal.

Punjab's Water Demand

- It has demanded **8,000 cusecs** during the same period (late May), similarly citing Kharif agricultural needs.
- The state estimates that total **demand may rise to around 23,000 cusecs** across all recipient states and territories **by June**, especially as pre-monsoon heat intensifies.
- Punjab claims this is essential to protect its **expanded canal network**, which now serves **over 60% of its farmland** and reduced releases will increase groundwater dependence, which is already critically low in the state.

Why Has Punjab Capped Haryana's Water?

- **Overuse of Allocated Share:** According to **Punjab's irrigation officials**, **Haryana has already used 104%** of its allocated share for the **current water year**. This means Haryana has already consumed more than its agreed quota, based on historical BBMB allocations and the 1976 framework.
- **Risk to Punjab's Water Security:** Releasing additional water to Haryana would **directly impact Punjab's own irrigation capacity**, especially for its Kharif crops. It could also **lower the reservoir levels at Bhakra Dam**, which Punjab relies on heavily due to **groundwater depletion** (over 80% of its area is in the 'dark zone'). With **Beas and Ravi reservoir levels already reported to be "lower than usual"**, Punjab contends that further diversions could jeopardize both **agriculture and drinking water supplies** within the state.
- **Humanitarian Water Already Supplied:** Punjab maintains it has already acted on **humanitarian grounds** by releasing **4,000 cusecs daily** to Haryana- **more than double** what Haryana needs for **basic drinking water (estimated at 1,700 cusecs)**. From Punjab's perspective, Haryana's additional request is primarily for **irrigation**, not emergency relief.

Way Forward

- **Revisiting and Updating Water-Sharing Agreements:** The current distribution is based on **historical arrangements like the 1976 executive order**, which **no longer reflect present-day demographics, land use, or water stress**. A **neutral expert committee** (e.g. under the Ministry of Jal Shakti or Supreme Court monitoring) could be constituted to reassess **scientific, equitable allocation** including parameters like **groundwater stress, cropping patterns, climate impact, and population growth**.
- **Infrastructure and Technological Modernization:** **Water losses due to leakage, outdated canal systems, and unscientific irrigation** are rampant in both states. Steps could be taken like upgrading canal lining, using **real-time telemetry systems** to monitor flow and consumption, investing in **micro-irrigation (drip/sprinklers)** especially in Haryana's command areas and renovating storage and distribution mechanisms at the **Bhakra and Nangal dam networks**.
- **Creating a Joint Punjab-Haryana Water Management Board:** BBMB is a central body. Setting up a **bipartisan board** of technical experts and senior officers to manage allocations **transparently with weekly data sharing could be helpful**, including **independent hydrologists and environmental economists** to balance political demands with resource sustainability.
- **Shifting to Sustainable Cropping and Demand Management:** Punjab's paddy, and Haryana's sugarcane and rice cultivation, **consume 80–90% of water**- unsustainable in arid zones. Promoting crop diversification to **millets, pulses, oilseeds, and other less water-intensive crops and using incentive-based schemes** (like MSP for alternative crops) and **awareness drives** for farmers can be useful.
- **Climate-Responsive Water Policy:** Both Punjab and Haryana are vulnerable to **monsoon variability**, leading to irregular **reservoir inflows** and **seasonal stress**. Integration of **climate forecasts** and **hydro-meteorological modelling** into seasonal planning could be done along with developing **early warning systems** for drought and canal failures.

ECINET

The Election Commission of India (ECI) will soon be launching a new user-friendly single-point digital interface "ECINET".

What is ECINET?

It is a major digital initiative by ECI aimed at creating a user-friendly, unified digital platform for all stakeholders in the electoral process- including electors, election officials, political parties, and civil society organizations. Currently, it is in an advanced stage of development, undergoing rigorous trials to ensure smooth functionality, ease of use and strong cybersecurity protections.

Key Features of ECINET

- **One-Stop Platform:** ECINET will integrate over 40 existing ECI mobile and web applications like Voter Helpline App, Voter Turnout App, cVIGIL (for reporting Model Code of Conduct violations), Suvidha 2.0 (for candidate nominations), ESMS, Saksham, ENCORE, ERONET App and KYC App into a single interface. These apps together have recorded over 5.5 crore downloads.
- **Enhanced User Experience:** The platform is being designed with a modern UI (User Interface) and simplified UX (User Experience). It eliminates the need for multiple downloads or remembering various logins, thus reducing user fatigue.
- **Accurate and Official Data:** Only authorized ECI officials will enter data on ECINET, ensuring accuracy and credibility. In case of any discrepancies, the primary data as duly filled in statutory forms will prevail.
- **Wide Accessibility:** Users will be able to access ECINET through smartphones or desktops, making it inclusive and convenient for all.

Target Beneficiaries

- Nearly 100 crore electors
- 10.5 lakh Booth Level Officers (BLOs)
- 15 lakh Booth Level Agents (BLAs)
- 45 lakh Polling Officials
- 15,597 Assistant Electoral Registration Officers (AEROs)
- 4,123 Electoral Registration Officers (EROs)
- 767 District Election Officers (DEOs)



Legal Framework

All data and operations on ECINET will adhere to:

- Representation of the People Act, 1950 & 1951
- Registration of Electors Rules, 1960
- Conduct of Election Rules, 1961
- And other guidelines issued by the ECI from time to time



India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM)

Mr. Rakesh Verma, a 1993 batch IAS officer recently assumed the charge as Director General, India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM).

What is IIIDEM?

It is the **training and capacity-building arm (an autonomous institution) of the Election Commission of India (ECI)** established in 2011 to professionalize and strengthen election management, not only within India but globally. It is located in New Delhi.

Objective: (“Democracy Dialogues” through IIIDEM = soft power tool)

- To fulfill the vision of India's constitutional architects, who emphasized **free, fair, and credible elections** as the foundation of democracy and ensure compliance with the Model Code of Conduct (MCC).
- To serve as a platform for **training, research, and knowledge-sharing** in the field of electoral management and technological interventions like Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs).
- **Addressing emerging challenges** through knowledge, skill, and ethical orientation.

Functions of IIIDEM

- **Training & Capacity Building:** of Indian election officials (from grassroots booth-level officers (BLOs) to senior levels) to conduct elections efficiently and transparently. It has conducted 122 international training programs for participants from 117 countries, building a global electoral community.
 - ✓ In March 2025, EC commenced first ever training of over 1 lakh BLOs at IIIDEM in batches from Bihar, West Bengal & Assam.
- **International Outreach:** It conducts global programs under India's leadership of the Cohort on Election Integrity, in collaboration with the ITEC Division of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and shares India's experience and best practices in election management with Election Management Bodies (EMBs) worldwide.
- **Academic Collaboration:** It partnered with Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) to offer a two-year master's Program in International Electoral Management and Practices (MIEMP) in a blended format: Online learning + Field-based practical training.
 - ✓ Through its association with ECI's SVEEP program, IIIDEM promotes voter awareness and participation.

'Campus Calling' Initiative

Recently, the National Commission for Women (NCW) launched the 'Campus Calling' initiative.

What is the "Campus Calling" Initiative?

Launched in collaboration with 'Yuvamanthan', a youth development platform, the campus calling initiative is a major youth-focused initiative aimed at fostering **gender-sensitive and cyber-safe educational environments** among college students across India.

- ✓ The initiative aligns with SDG 5 (Gender Equality). It also aligns with the National Cybersecurity Strategy 2020-25 and complements the Cybercrime Prevention against Women and Children (CCPWC) scheme
- ✓ The initiative educates students about the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 (**POSH Act**), emphasizing safe campus environments.
- ✓ **#MeToo movement** in India highlighted the prevalence of sexual harassment in educational institutions.

What is the "Triple Test" for OBC Reservation in Local Bodies?

It is a three-step guideline laid down by the SC in the case of *Vikas Kishanrao Gawali vs State of Maharashtra, 2021* (building on earlier rulings such as *Indra Sawhney vs. Union of India (1992)* and *K. Krishna Murthy vs. Union of India (2010)*) to ensure that reservations for OBCs in local body elections are fair, evidence-based, and constitutionally valid. It includes:

1. Set up a dedicated commission and Empirical Inquiry by a Commission:

A dedicated commission must be established to conduct a rigorous empirical investigation into the nature and extent of backwardness of OBCs in local governance.

2. Specify the Quota Recommendation Based on Data: Based on the commission's findings, the exact proportion of reservation needed should be determined avoiding arbitrary or excessive quotas.

3. Ensure that the aggregate reservation (for SCs, STs, and OBCs) and Capping Total Reservation at 50%: The total reservation for SCs, STs, and OBCs combined in local bodies must not exceed 50% of the total seats, as per the general constitutional limit set in earlier judgments like *Indra Sawhney*.

✓ **Articles 243D and 243T:** These mandate reservations for SCs, STs, and OBCs in Panchayats and Municipalities, respectively.

✓ While SC/ST reservations are proportionate to their population, OBC reservations require **empirical justification** due to the heterogeneity of backward classes.

Key Features	Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campus Ambassadors: Each participating institution will appoint two male and two female campus ambassadors to lead gender sensitization efforts. • Scope and Reach: It targets over 1,000 universities and colleges across India and is one of the largest student outreach efforts by the NCW. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved Cyber Safety: It equips youth with knowledge to tackle cybercrimes and online harassment and promotes responsible digital behaviour and online security. • Institutional Reforms and Creation of Safer Campuses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs) mandated under the POSH Act in colleges are strengthened by 'Campus Calling'. • Nationwide Impact: By targeting over 1,000 institutions, it is one of the largest student engagement programmes which can contribute to long-term societal transformation through grassroots youth involvement. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The UN Women's HeForShe campaign, which engages men in gender equality, provides a global model for 'Campus Calling'.

Triple-Test for OBCs

Jharkhand has completed Other Backward Class (OBC) population data collection across all districts as the **first step** of the Supreme Court (SC) mandated "**triple test**" to determine fair and constitutional OBC quotas in urban local bodies.

- ✓ Tamil Nadu, which has a long history of OBC reservations, conducted a similar exercise through the Justice Thanikachalam Commission to assess OBC backwardness in local bodies.

How are OBCs Classified in Jharkhand?

In **Jharkhand**, the **OBCs** are divided into two sub-categories based on the level of social and educational backwardness:

BC-I (Backward Class I)

OBCs as a whole constitute nearly **50% of Jharkhand's population**. Among them, the **Kudmi community** (a subgroup of the Mahato/Mahto caste) is the **largest**, forming about **15% of the electorate**. This decentralized approach recognizes the diversity of backwardness across states and avoids a one-size-fits-all policy.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More backward 127 castes among OBCs, they receive a larger share of reservation. • Prioritized to ensure equitable representation.
BC-II (Backward Class II)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatively better-off socially and educationally • Includes about 45 castes.

e-Passport

The Indian government recently launched the ePassport- electronic or a biometric chip-enabled travel document, aligning with over 120 countries like the US, Canada, France, Australia and Japan to enhance digital travel and border security.

What is an ePassport?

- An ePassport is a modern, secure version of the traditional passport that combines a physical booklet with an embedded Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) Chip and an antenna.
 - ✓ The e-Passport initiative is **part of the Passport Seva Programme (PSP) Version 2.0**, a collaboration between the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) & Tata Consultancy Services (TCS).
- This RFID chip and its antenna are built into the back cover and store the passport holder's personal details (Name, date of birth, passport number, and other demographic details) and biometric data such as facial features or fingerprints digitally.
- It looks similar to a regular passport but can be identified by a small gold symbol on the front cover, indicating the presence of the electronic chip.
 - ✓ The e-Passport software, developed by IIT Kanpur and the **National Informatics Centre (NIC)**, reflects India's technological self-reliance, aligning with Atmanirbhar Bharat.

Key Features and Benefits of ePassport

- ❑ **Enhanced Data Security:** The ePassport stores data both in printed form and in a **digitally signed RFID chip**. This chip is protected by **Public Key Infrastructure (PKI)**, making the data tamper-proof and ensuring it can only be read by authorized systems.
- ❑ **Faster Immigration and Contactless Travel:** Biometric e-gates at many international airports can read the ePassport chip automatically, allowing **contactless identity verification**.
- ❑ **Forgery and Identity Theft Prevention:** **PKI and digital signatures**, make duplication or alteration extremely difficult. Unlike paper-only passports, which can be manipulated or forged, ePassports are nearly impossible to replicate without triggering security alerts during border control.
- ❑ **Compliance with International Standards:** The Indian ePassport complies with **International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Document 9303** and includes security layers like:
 - ➔ **Basic Access Control (BAC):** Prevents unauthorized reading.
 - ➔ **Passive Authentication (PA):** Verifies the authenticity of stored data.
 - ➔ **Extended Access Control (EAC):** Protects sensitive data like fingerprints or iris scan.
- ❑ **Streamlined Passport Updates and Renewals:** Future updates like address changes or renewals can be done more efficiently due to digital data storage. If a passport holder changes their residential address, updating it digitally through passport services may be quicker and more reliable than reissuing a new document entirely.
- ❑ **Supports India's Digital Transformation:** ePassports promote paperless travel and integrate with **digital identity systems** like DigiLocker or Aadhaar-based services. Travelers may, in the future, link their ePassport with other digital documents to enable a **fully paperless airport journey**, from check-in to boarding.
- ❑ **Improved National and Border Security:** By syncing passport data with real-time watch-lists, including biometric data helps authorities better **track cross-border movement** and detect suspicious identities.
 - ➔ **Example:** If a lost or stolen passport is reported, the digital record can be invalidated instantly in international systems, preventing its misuse. Interpol's I-Checkit system can integrate ePassports to verify identities instantly at global checkpoints.
 - ✓ I-Checkit is a screening solution that enables private sector partners to submit customer or crew identity document information to INTERPOL via an encrypted Virtual Private Network (VPN) for screening against INTERPOL's database and travel and identity documents associated with INTERPOL Notices (Red Notices only).

Is Replacement Mandatory?

No, existing passports remain valid until expiry. ePassports will be issued **gradually** based on the technical readiness of passport offices.

Multi Agency Centre

Union Home Minister inaugurated the revamped Multi Agency Centre (MAC).

What is MAC?

- The MAC under the Intelligence Bureau (IB-within the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)), is a national intelligence-sharing hub (India's foremost intelligence fusion center) where central and state agencies

collaborate daily to analyze terrorism-related inputs under four categories: Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), Northeast, Left Wing Extremist (LWE) states, and Rest of India.

- It was established in 2001 post-Kargil and reinforced after the 2008 Mumbai attacks.

Objective: To enable real-time intelligence sharing among various security agencies to combat terrorism (zero-tolerance policy on terrorism) and related threats.

Key Features of the Revamped MAC

- **Nationwide Connectivity:** Developed at a cost of ₹500 crore, it now connects **all police districts** across the country through a **secure digital network**.
 - ✓ In the state capitals, the network links the **Subsidiary MAC (SMAC)** at state-level housed in the Subsidiary Intelligence Bureau (SIB), state police Special Branch and other offices of all counter-terror agencies.
- **Multi-Agency Collaboration:** It involves **28 organizations**, including **RAW, armed forces, State police**, and other intelligence/security bodies for facilitating **real-time sharing of intelligence inputs**.
- **Advanced Technology Integration:** It is equipped with **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** and **Machine Learning (ML)** tools, it uses **Geographic Information Systems (GIS)** for spatial intelligence mapping and supports **predictive analytics, hotspot mapping, and timeline analysis**.
- **Seamless & Integrated Platform:** It unifies efforts of all participating agencies to tackle **terrorism, extremism, organized crime, and cyber threats**.
 - ✓ The MAC aligns with global frameworks like the **UN Security Council Resolution 1373 (2001)**, which emphasizes international cooperation against terrorism.

Strategic Importance

Enhanced National Security:

It strengthens coordination for operations like anti-Naxal actions and counterterrorism strikes (e.g., Operation Sindoor).

✓ **The Operation Kagar (2025)-Synergy in Operations:** The Home Minister highlighted the MAC's role in coordinating anti-Naxal operations in Karreguttalu Hills (Chhattisgarh-Telangana border), demonstrating excellent inter-agency coordination between Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) and state police.

Efficient Intelligence Use:

It converts vast data into actionable insights through advanced analytics.

✓ The MAC enhances India's soft power and strengthens its role in global forums like the G20 and Financial Action Task Force (FATF), particularly in combating terror financing.

Future Expansion:

It plans to integrate databases from other central agencies for a more **holistic security ecosystem**.

✓ **Breaking the "Silo Culture":** Facilitates **horizontal integration** across ministries and **vertical integration** from local to national agencies.

Should NOTA Be Included in All Elections Compulsorily?

Recently, the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy (independent think-tank for legal research) filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) seeking to make the NOTA (None of the Above) option mandatory in all elections, including those with only a single candidate.

Nota and Its Significance

NOTA as an option was introduced in 2013, following a PIL by the People's Union for Civil Liberties. It allows voters to reject all candidates on the ballot while still maintaining their right to vote.

Significance of NOTA

- > **Numerical Perspective:** In the three Lok Sabha (LS) elections since NOTA's introduction (2014, 2019, 2024), **just over 1%** of voters chose NOTA. In state assembly elections, the percentage has mostly hovered slightly above 1% with-
 - **Bihar (2015):** Highest at **2.48%**.
 - **Gujarat (2017):** Around **1.8%**.
- > **Contextual Significance:** Even **1% of votes** in a LS constituency (with an average of 25 lakh voters) can amount to **25,000+ people**- a substantial number when viewed in absolute terms. In some constituencies, the number of NOTA votes has **exceeded the victory margin** between top candidates, indicating its **potential impact**.
- > **Trend Over Time:** NOTA participation tends to be **higher in the first election** after its introduction in a state. Subsequent elections show a **decline or fluctuation**, though the trend is **not strictly linear**. This suggests that while initial enthusiasm may wane, NOTA continues to reflect **underlying dissatisfaction** with candidates.
- > **Impact:** Though the Election Commission (EC) argues that NOTA hasn't achieved significant impact, it remains a vital tool for making the electoral process more accountable and responsive to public sentiment.

Can NOTA Be Made Compulsory in All Elections?

Supporting Arguments	Opposing Arguments
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Democratic Value of NOTA: NOTA gives voters a way to express dissent, especially when there is only one candidate and upholds the principle that voters should always have a choice, reinforcing democratic accountability.• Administrative Feasibility: Uncontested elections are rare, so implementing NOTA in these few cases would not place a significant burden on the EC.• Symbolic and Ethical Importance: It signals the system's responsiveness to public sentiment and strengthens voter empowerment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Statistical Rarity of Uncontested Elections: There have been only 9 uncontested elections since 1952 and 6 since 1971 in Lok Sabha elections. The EC argues that such rare instances do not warrant changes to existing laws or procedures.• EC's Position: It is firmly against mandating NOTA in every election, especially in uncontested ones. It believes the Supreme Court should not entertain the PIL given the negligible number of cases. <p>Legal and Legislative Constraints: Current laws do not recognize NOTA as a contesting candidate. Making NOTA mandatory would require amending the Representation of the People Act, 1951 and Conduct of Election Rules, 1961. Such changes must be made through Parliament, not by judicial order.</p>

Way Forward

- **Minimum Vote Threshold for Candidates** should be set for a candidate to be declared elected. This prevents candidates from winning elections solely due to low voter turnout or a fragmented opposition.
- **Granting Legitimacy to NOTA:** Recognize NOTA as more than a symbolic option by introducing a rule for **re-election** if NOTA receives a certain percentage of votes.
- **Enhancing Voter Awareness** through voter education campaigns to **inform citizens about the role and implications of NOTA**.

Doctrine of Presumption of Constitutionality

Petitioners called the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025 a “creeping acquisition” of Muslim waqf properties, countering the Supreme Court's (SC's) view that such laws enjoy a presumption of constitutionality.

What is Doctrine of Presumption of Constitutionality?

- It is a fundamental principle in constitutional law that assumes **laws enacted by a competent legislature are constitutionally valid** unless proven otherwise.
- This doctrine reflects the judiciary's respect for the legislative process and the democratic mandate. It places the burden of proof on the person challenging the validity of the statute to demonstrate that it violates the Constitution.
- It is not a rule of evidence but a rule of judicial **interpretation and deference**.
- The presumption remains in force until it is rebutted by clear and convincing arguments showing a law's **unconstitutionality beyond a reasonable doubt**.

Objectives of the Doctrine:

- **Respect for Separation of Powers:** by ensuring judiciary respects the role and authority of the legislature,
- **Democratic Deference:** by recognizing that elected lawmakers, being accountable to the public, are presumed to legislate within constitutional bounds.
- **Judicial Restraint:** By preventing courts from striking down laws, especially in politically sensitive or policy-heavy domains.
- **Discouraging Frivolous Litigation:** By requiring a **high threshold of proof** to challenge legislative enactments.

- **Legal Stability and Predictability**

Legal Basis

- In *ML Kamra v. New India Assurance (1992)*, the SC emphasized that courts must presume laws to be constitutional unless they clearly violate constitutional provisions.
- In *K Anjaiah v. K Chandraiah (1998)*, the Supreme Court held that laws are presumed constitutional unless proven to violate the Constitution, and courts must try to interpret and uphold them rather than strike them down.
- In *Githa Hariharan v. RBI (1999)*, the Court reiterated that the validity of legislation should be presumed and invalidated only upon clear constitutional violations.

Scope of the Doctrine: The doctrine applies to-

- **All laws enacted by Parliament or State Legislatures.**
- **Both plenary and delegated legislation.**
- **All categories of legislation**, particularly economic and social legislation, where courts show greater deference (*respect*) to legislative wisdom.

However, the intensity of judicial scrutiny may vary depending on whether the law affects **fundamental rights** or targets **suspect classifications**.

Significance of the Doctrine	Limitations of the Doctrine
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preserves Constitutional Balance: Reinforces the checks and balances between the legislature and the judiciary. • Guides Statutory Interpretation: Encourages courts to interpret laws in a manner that preserves their validity (“reading down”). ✓ Courts use the <i>reading down</i> technique to interpret statutes in a way that upholds their constitutionality. However, this is only applicable when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The law is ambiguous. ○ There is a plausible(<i>reasonable</i>) constitutional interpretation available. ○ The law does not violate constitutional principles. • Strengthens Legislative Authority: Prevents judicial activism from undermining the legislative function. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rebuttable Nature: It can be overturned when a law is shown to violate fundamental rights or constitutional provisions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In <i>Githa Hariharan v. RBI (1999)</i>, it was stated that the presumption could be overridden in cases of clear constitutional violations. ○ In <i>Minerva Mills v. Union of India (1980)</i>, the court held that if the intent of the statute is clearly unconstitutional, “reading down” cannot save it. • No Presumption for Unconstitutional Objectives: If the law’s object or effect is unconstitutional, the presumption does not apply. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Doctrine of Colourable Legislation becomes relevant here— i.e., legislature cannot do indirectly what it cannot do directly.</i> • Cannot Be Used to Save Arbitrary Laws: Laws granting unbridled or arbitrary powers without adequate safeguards are more likely to be struck down. • Applicability to Pre-Constitutional and Colonial Laws: Many colonial-era laws, though enacted by “competent legislatures,” have been held to be inconsistent with modern constitutional values.

Shift in Free Speech Jurisprudence

The Supreme Court (SC) granted interim bail to Professor Ali Khan Mahmudabad of Ashoka University, Haryana. He had been arrested after two First Information Reports (FIRs) were registered against him for social media posts related to Operation Sindoor. While the court allowed him temporary release, it refused to halt the ongoing investigation into the case.

Content of the Social Media Posts

- **Facebook Post on May 8:** Mahmudabad criticized the actions of Pakistan military, commended India's armed forces for not escalating the situation and called for de-escalation emphasizing that civilian deaths on both sides were tragic. He also applauded India's inclusion of **women officers** in press briefings as a reflection of pluralism but warned that such symbolism would amount to "hypocrisy" if not accompanied by real change, citing issues like **bulldozing of homes** and **mob lynchings**.
- **Facebook Post on May 11:** He defended Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri from online abuse after announcing a ceasefire and criticized warmongering netizens who displayed a "blind bloodlust for war".

Charges Filed Against the Professor: FIRs have invoked several sections of the **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023**, including:

- **Section 152:** For "acts endangering sovereignty, unity and integrity of India" - similar to the old sedition law.
- **Section 196(1)(b):** For actions disturbing **communal harmony**.
- **Section 197(1)(c):** For **imputations prejudicial to national integration**.
- **Section 299:** For **outraging religious feelings**.
- **Section 79:** For **insulting the modesty of a woman**.
- **Section 353:** For **statements causing public mischief**.

SC's Response: While granting an interim bail (temporary release), it directed the Haryana Police to form a Special Investigation Team (SIT) with senior IPS officers from outside Haryana and Delhi to assess the "true meaning" of the posts as the court noted that some of Mahmudabad's words could be seen as having a "**dual meaning**."

✓ The Defense argued that the professor had no criminal intent and claimed that the posts were an expression of patriotism.

Legal Context: Is 'Unpatriotic' Speech Punishable?

The Indian Constitution protects freedom of speech under Article 19(1)(a), with specific restrictions listed under Article 19(2) (e.g., incitement to offence and public disorder, defamation, etc.). Relevant judgments on the matter include:

- **Shreya Singhal v. Union of India (2015):** SC struck down Section 66A of the IT Act for criminalizing vague terms like "offensive" or "insulting" speech and affirmed that even disturbing or unpopular views are constitutionally protected under Article 19(1)(a), and any restriction must meet the test of reasonableness under Article 19(2).
- **Kaushal Kishor v. State of UP (2023):** A Constitution Bench reaffirmed that the grounds under Article 19(2) are exhaustive. No additional restrictions, however well-intentioned, can be introduced. It emphasized that people cannot be penalized merely for holding non-conforming opinions.

Previous Judicial Precedents:

- **Imran Pratapgadhi vs State of Gujarat (2025):** SC ruled that FIRs under BNS Sections 196, 197(1), and 299 must be assessed from the viewpoint of reasonable, strong-minded individuals- not those threatened by criticism and reaffirmed the judiciary's duty to protect free speech under Article 19(1)(a), even if it causes discomfort.

Conclusion

The case underscores the clash between free speech and state power. Though Mahmudabad's posts were critical, legal precedents affirm that discomfiting speech isn't criminal. The SC's response will test India's adherence to constitutional freedoms.

RBI's Surplus

The RBI's Central Board announced a record surplus transfer of ₹2.69 lakh crore to the Central government for 2024-25, marking a 27% increase over the previous year's ₹2.11 lakh crore.

Higher-than-Expected RBI Transfer

- The ₹2.69 lakh crore surplus transferred by the RBI exceeds the government's budgeted estimate of ₹2.56 lakh crore from the RBI, public sector banks, and insurance firms combined.
- This implies that actual collections from this category will significantly surpass expectations.
- **Unusually High Transfers in 2024–25**
 - The record surplus transfer was driven by increased foreign exchange sales, higher earnings from forex assets, and gains from liquidity management operations.
- **Room for Flexibility in Future Transfers**
 - With the RBI widening the **Contingent Risk Buffer (CRB)** range to 4.5–7.5%, it has greater flexibility.
 - If it opts for a lower buffer (e.g., 4.5%) next year, it could still transfer a substantial surplus to the government—even if revenues decline.

Understanding the Nature of RBI's Surplus

- RBI is not a company and has no shareholders, so it doesn't pay dividends.
- Instead, it transfers surplus earnings to the Central government as mandated by the RBI Act, 1934.
 - As per the RBI Act, once expenses and required provisions for contingencies are met, the remaining profit is transferred to the Central government.
- **Sources of RBI's Revenue**
 - **Seigniorage:** The RBI earns seigniorage — the difference between the face value of currency and its production cost — when commercial banks purchase currency notes at face value.
 - **Lending Operations:** The RBI lends to the Central and State governments, as well as commercial banks, and earns interest on these loans.
 - **Foreign Investments:** The RBI invests in foreign bonds, earning interest and sometimes gaining from currency exchange rate fluctuations.

RBI's Safety Net: Contingent Risk Buffer (CRB)

- The RBI maintains a CRB as a safeguard against potential financial stability crises.
- This buffer is part of the broader Economic Capital Framework (ECF).
- **Jalan Committee Recommendations**
 - In 2018, the Bimal Jalan committee recommended that the CRB should be maintained within a range of 5.5–6.5% of the RBI's balance sheet.
 - Adopted in 2019, along with a recommendation to review the ECF every five years.
- **Recent Changes to the CRB Range**
 - Following the latest review in 2024-25, the RBI's Central Board widened the CRB range to 4.5–7.5%.
 - The buffer was gradually increased from 5.5% (2018–22) to 6% (2022–23), then 6.5% (2023–24), and now stands at 7.5%, the new upper limit.
- **Record Surplus Despite Higher Buffer**

- Even after allocating a record-high 7.5% of its balance sheet to the CRB, the RBI still managed to transfer a record ₹2.69 lakh crore surplus to the Central government for 2024–25, reflecting robust profitability.

Decline in Net FDI

- As per the RBI, the **net foreign direct investment (FDI) declined by 96.5%** to \$353 million in FY 2024-25, compared to the previous fiscal. Net FDI in 2023-24 was \$10.1 billion.
- **Net FDI = Gross FDI, which is the total money coming in – (The money being repatriated (sent back) out by foreign companies doing business in India + Outward FDI (OFDI) by Indian companies)**
- While net FDI dropped, gross investment, has remained strong, rising to **\$81 billion** in 2024-25 from \$71.3 billion the previous year, and \$71.4 billion in 2022-23.
- Gross FDI inflows remain concentrated in manufacturing, financial services, electricity and other energy, and communication services sectors, with a share of more than 60%.
 - Singapore, Mauritius, the UAE, Netherlands, and U.S. accounted for more than 75% of the flows during this period.

Factors behind the net decline

- **Repatriation and disinvestment** by foreign companies doing business in India grew to \$51.5 billion in 2024-25, the highest in at least a decade, up from \$44.5 billion in the previous year.
- **OFDI**: Indian companies significantly increased their investments abroad, contributing to the reduction in net FDI inflows. In 2024-25, Indian companies invested a total of \$29.2 billion in other countries, up by 75% from \$17 billion in FY 24.
- This reflects a growing interest among Indian businesses to tap into global supply chains and international opportunities.
 - Singapore, the U.S., UAE, Mauritius and the Netherlands together accounted for more than half of the rise in OFDI.

DII's surpass FPIs

- In a significant shift, domestic institutional investors (DIIs), have surpassed foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) as dominant shareholders in India's equity market.
- DIIs in India are institutions based within the country that invest in the financial markets, primarily in **equities, bonds, and other financial assets**. They pool money from individuals or entities and invest it on their behalf.
- **Major types of DIIs in India are Mutual Funds, Pension Funds, Insurance companies and banking and financial institutions.**
- FPIs are **non-resident investors** (institutions or individuals) who invest in a country's **financial markets**, but **do not take direct ownership or control** of companies unlike FDI.
 - ▶ FPIs include global hedge funds, sovereign wealth funds, foreign asset management firms, foreign pension funds etc.

Growth of DIIs

- DIIs held a 17.62% stake in companies listed on the National Stock Exchange (NSE), overtaking FPIs at 17.22%, as of March 2025.
- This is the first time DIIs have overtaken FPIs since tracking began in 2009, with the value of DII holdings reaching Rs 71.76 trillion.
- A decade ago, FPIs dominated with lead of over 10 percentage points. DII holdings were worth half of FPIs' at that point.
- This transformation signals a structural change in India's capital markets, driven by a rise in domestic retail participation — both via direct equity investing and through the mutual fund systematic investment plan (SIP) route.
- The growing influence of DIIs has reduced the market's dependence on foreign capital and has made domestic money a stabilising force.
- This stability was evident in recent months. In October 2024, DIIs absorbed over Rs 1 trillion in FPI selling, preventing a market crash.
- This is in contrast with past crises, like the 2008 Lehmann Brothers collapse when FPI selling triggered a sharp Sensex decline.

Global context

- Globally, markets like the US or Japan also benefit from strong domestic participation. However, India's shift toward domestic investor dominance sets it apart from many emerging markets, where FPIs still control the markets.
- In contrast, India's DII-led market is increasingly insulated from global shocks. With India's economy projected to grow at 5-6% annually, rising incomes and financial literacy are driving more savings into equities.
- This makes India's markets safer as they are backed by SIP flows, which are continuous and long-term in nature, unlike the volatile FPIs.

Significance of FPIs

- Despite the growth of DIIs, FPIs are still important because they hold a significant percentage of the market.
- FPIs also bring liquidity, global expertise, and signals of confidence to international investors. If foreign investors were to buy significantly, that could be a catalyst for markets as it would have two strong buyers.

- Sector-wise analysis reveals that financial banking and insurance services, followed by manufacturing; and wholesale, retail trade, restaurants and hotels accounted for more than 90% of the rise of OFDI.
- Further, a rise in high profile Initial Public Offerings (IPO) provided **exit opportunities** for long-term foreign investors, leading to substantial capital repatriation.

Investment Climate and Outlook

- India's global FDI share fell from 6.5% in 2020 to **2.1% in 2023**
- India slipped to 16th position globally in 2023 (from 8th in 2022), per UNCTAD's World Investment Report 2024
- **Challenges**
 - Geopolitical uncertainty, including U.S. trade policies
 - Limited FDI liberalization scope
 - Need for regulatory, taxation, and judicial reforms
- **Optimistic Outlook**
 - India remains the fastest-growing major economy
 - Large market size seen as an attraction
 - Infrastructure push post-FY22 expected to boost medium-term FDI

Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project

- The National Dam Safety Authority (NDSA), India's national safety regulator for large dams has found irreparable damage in the structure of three barrages that are part of the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project (KLIP)
- KLIP is a multi-purpose irrigation project on the **Godavari river** in Kaleshwaram, Telangana.
- The project begins at the **confluence of the Pranhita and Godavari rivers**. It will be the **world's largest multi-stage lift irrigation project**.

Significance of KLIP

- The project spreads over approximately 500 km in 13 districts, with a canal network of 1,800 km. It covers several rainfall deficit districts-
- Thus, KLIP will give a significant boost to agriculture in Telangana, by enabling farmers to grow multiple crops with a year-round supply of water.
- Moreover, there is a growing fresh water fishing industry in the state as the numerous water bodies created under the project are also being used to grow fish



Lift Irrigation

- In lift irrigation projects, water is **not** transported by natural flow and it does not rely on gravity to flow in canals from higher ground to lower;
- Instead, water is **lifted** with the help of external energy (fuel based or electric power using pumps or other mechanical means), to a main delivery chamber at the highest point in the project, from where it is distributed to beneficiary fields.
- The source is mainly groundwater, river streams, ponds and lakes.

UP 'AGREES' & 'AI Pragya' Initiatives

The Uttar Pradesh government and the World Bank has launched two programmes — **UP AGREES** (Uttar Pradesh Agriculture Growth and Rural Enterprise Ecosystem Strengthening) and **AI Pragya**.

GAME and NITI Alliance For Entrepreneurship

- *Global Alliance for Mass Entrepreneurship (GAME)* and NITI Aayog have announced a strategic partnership aimed at facilitating vibrant entrepreneurship ecosystems across multiple states in India.
- The collaboration will focus on advancing **place-based interventions**, starting with pilot sites in Nagpur, Visakhapatnam and Uttar Pradesh.
- It seeks to empower **local entrepreneurs** bringing together relevant local stakeholders in that particular region's entrepreneurship ecosystem, including government, corporates, educational institutes, financial institutes and community organisations.
- The pilot sites will implement *GAME's proven methodologies* that focus on enabling entrepreneurs to start and scale businesses.
- These interventions include access to finance, markets, mentors, peer networks, capacity-building programs, policy advocacy and community-driven initiatives.
- The collaboration is expected to facilitate innovative solutions that address systemic barriers to entrepreneurship. The goal is to create self-sustaining ecosystems that can generate widespread employment opportunities.
- By focusing on local contexts and creating localised solutions tailored to the unique challenges of each region, it will nurture a culture of entrepreneurship with local ownership and drive economic growth.

UP AGREES	AI Pragya
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Under the UP AGREES project, the state government will get Rs 2,737 crore loan from the World Bank for a period of six years,■ It will directly benefit farmers, farmer organisations, fishers, and agriculture-based MSMEs.■ The state government will contribute Rs 1,166 crore to the project, while the loan amount will have to be repaid over 35 years with an interest rate of just 1.23%.■ It aims to revolutionise agriculture in 28 districts of Purvanchal and Bundelkhand and benefit nearly 10 lakh farmers with 30% participation from women.■ 10,000 women producer groups will be linked to the project which also includes sending 500 farmers abroad for exposure to best farming technologies to help strengthen small farmers and reduce regional disparities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Under it the state government aims to train 10 lakh youth in artificial intelligence (AI) and other emerging digital technologies.■ It will provide certification in key domains like AI, machine learning, data analytics, and cybersecurity — leading to more employment opportunities and a thriving start up ecosystem in the state.■ It will also enhance technological efficiency in core sectors such as government services, farming, education and healthcare.■ It will be implemented with the support of various state departments, including Education, Health, Agriculture, Rural Development, Revenue, and Secretariat Administration.■ Global technology giants like Microsoft, Intel, HCL, Amazon and Google will collaborate with the state government to launch upskilling initiatives across the state.

GAME

- GAME was **launched in 2018** as a catalyst for a nationwide movement of mass entrepreneurship. Its aim is to create 50 million new jobs by 2030, where women own 25% of the businesses.
- It brings together a cross-section of alliances, partners, funders, and other players in the ecosystem to inspire an entrepreneurial movement across the country.

Expansion of Credit Guarantee Scheme for Startups

- The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) has notified the expansion of the Credit Guarantee Scheme for Startups (CGSS).
- Credit guarantee programmes are **designed to share the lending risk of the lenders** and in turn, facilitate access to finance for the prospective borrowers.
- The **ceiling on guarantee cover per borrower** under the CGSS has been **raised from Rs 10 crore to Rs 20 crore.**
- Simultaneously, the **extent of guarantee coverage has been revised to 85% of the amount** in default for loan amounts **up to Rs 10 crore** and **75% for amounts exceeding that limit.**

- The scheme also offers a **reduced Annual Guarantee Fee (AGF) for startups** operating within **27 identified Champion Sectors**.
 - The AGF for these sectors has been **halved from 2% per annum to 1%**, to encourage innovation in areas critical to India's manufacturing and services ambitions under the Make in India initiative.
 - These Champion Sectors were earlier recognised by the government to help accelerate industrial self-reliance and technological advancement.

Credit Guarantee Scheme for Startups

- **Launched in 2022**, the scheme provides guarantee coverage against credit instruments offered to eligible startups by Scheduled Commercial Banks, All India Financial Institutions (AIFIs), Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs), and SEBI-registered Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs).
- **Operated by the National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company Limited (NCGTC)**, its primary aim is to make collateral-free debt funding more accessible through instruments such as working capital, term loans, and venture debt.

Significance

- The expansion will further reduce the perceived risks associated with lending to startups in established financial institutions, enabling greater financial flow.
- This will help startups to undertake research and development, experimentation, and create cutting-edge innovation and technologies.

FRP and MSP Increased

- Amid a drop in sugar production during the current season (October 2024 to September 2025), the Centre has increased the fair and remunerative price (FRP) of sugarcane by Rs 15 (4.41%) to **Rs 355 per quintal** for the sugar season 2025-26.
- The FRP hike will encourage sugarcane farmers to plant more when sugar production is seeing a dip. The new FRP will come into effect October 1, 2025.
- Along with this, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved the increase in the Minimum Support Prices (MSP) for fourteen Kharif crops for Marketing Season 2025-26.

Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP)

- FRP is the minimum price mandated by the government that sugar mills have to pay farmers for their produce.
- The FRP for sugarcane is decided every year by the Centre's **CCEA headed by the Prime Minister**.
- FRP is based on the **recommendation of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP)**, a body under the **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare**.

Minimum Support Price (MSP)

- ⊗ MSP is the price at which the government is supposed to procure/buy a particular crop from farmers if the market price falls below it.
- ⊗ **MSPs provide a floor for market prices** and ensure that farmers receive a certain minimum remuneration so that their costs of cultivation (and some profit) can be recovered.
- ⊗ MSP was introduced in the 1966-67 to boost domestic production when India was in food deficit to incentivise farmers to plant input-intensive high yielding wheat or paddy varieties.
- ⊗ **CACP recommends MSPs for 22 mandated crops and FRP for sugarcane.** The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) takes a final decision on the level of MSPs.
- ⊗ While recommending MSPs, the CACP looks at the following factors:
 - Demand and supply of a commodity;
 - Cost of production;
 - Market price trends (both domestic and international);
 - Inter-crop price parity;
 - The terms of trade between agriculture and non-agriculture (that is, the ratio of prices of farm commodities to that of non-farm goods and services);
 - A minimum of 50% as the margin over the cost of production; and
 - The likely implications of an MSP on consumers of that product.

22 Crops covered under MSP

- ⊗ 7 types of **cereals** (paddy, wheat, maize, bajra, jowar, ragi and barley);
- ⊗ 5 types of **pulses** (chana, arhar/tur, urad, moong and masur);
- ⊗ 7 **oilseeds** (rapeseed-mustard, groundnut, soyabean, sunflower, sesamum, safflower, nigerseed);
- ⊗ 3 **commercial crops** (cotton, copra, raw jute).

- The FRP for sugarcane is decided using the same mechanism as the one that is used to calculate the MSP of 22 other crops.
- However, while the **MSP is not legally guaranteed, sugar mills are legally obligated to pay the FRP.**
- The payment of FRP across the country is governed by **The Sugarcane Control order, 1966** which mandates **payment within 14 days** of the date of delivery of the cane, failing which the cane commissioner may act against the miller.
- Failure to clear farmers' due can even lead to the attachment of mill properties.
- The FRP is based on the recovery of sugar from the cane. **Sugar recovery** is the ratio between sugar produced versus cane crushed, expressed as a percentage. The higher the recovery, the higher is the FRP, and higher is the sugar produced.

Most Favoured Nation Status

- The United States President has signed an executive order to lower the prices of prescription drugs by a range of 59% to 90%, by describing the moves as the most favoured nation's (MFN) policy.
- The US currently pays about three times more for the same drugs compared to other high-income nations. Hence, the move is referred to as equalising drugs prices worldwide.

Most Favoured Nation

- **MFN** is a status or level of treatment given by one country to another country in international trade agreements.
- Countries following the MFN status **cannot discriminate among their trading partners or grant one country a special favour** (like low tariffs or fewer import restrictions) without extending the same to other WTO members.
- Under Article 1 of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), 1994, every member country of the WTO must give MFN status to all other member countries.
- Between 1996 and 2019, India accorded the MFN status to Pakistan. This was revoked in February 2019 following Pakistan's terror attack on Pulwama in Jammu & Kashmir.

Impact of the US move

- Pharmaceutical companies have opposed this move and are lobbying for safeguards. They have expressed fear that the proposed price cuts would reduce their profits, which in turn would reduce funds for research on new medicines.
- The US accounts for nearly a third of India's pharma exports, which rose 16% to about \$9 billion last fiscal. Thus, the impact on India would be significant.

India 4th Largest Economy

- The NITI Aayog CEO recently said that India has become the fourth largest economy in the world.
- This was based on the recent World Economic Outlook report of International Monetary Fund (IMF), according to which, India is set to become the fourth largest economy in 2025. Only the United States, China, and Germany are currently ahead of India.

Benefits of MFN

- > It **promotes non-discrimination**, as all trading partners get equal treatment.
- > It **encourages trade liberalization** by leading to reduced tariffs which increases market access globally.
- > It **simplifies trade relations** as uniform rules **reduce complexity and legal disputes**.
- > It **enhances predictability and stability** which encourages long term investments.
- > It **reduces the risk of trade wars** and the chances of retaliatory trade measures.

Exceptions

- > **Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs):** Countries in a free trade agreement (**EU, NAFTA, ASEAN**) can give each other better terms without extending them to all MFN partners.
- > **Generalized System of Preferences (GSP):** Developed countries can offer lower tariffs to developing nations to support their growth, without offering the same to all.
- > **National Security Exceptions:** Trade restrictions are allowed for reasons of national security, even if they violate MFN.

- India's nominal GDP is projected to rise to \$4,187.017 billion, surpassing Japan's estimated \$4,186.431 billion.
- India continues to be the world's fastest-growing major economy and is the only country expected to record over 6% growth over the next two years.
- This rapid growth is expected to push India's GDP to \$5,584.476 billion by 2028, enabling it to overtake Germany and become the third-largest economy.
- Germany, meanwhile, is projected to see no GDP growth in 2025, followed by a modest 0.9% in 2026. The country is anticipated to be among the hardest hit in Europe due to the ongoing global trade war. Its GDP is forecast to reach \$5,251.928 billion by 2028.
- Japan is also expected to suffer due to the trade war, with its economic growth stagnating at 0.6% in both 2025 and 2026.
- The United States, which remains the world's largest economy, is projected to have a GDP of \$30,507.217 billion in 2025, followed by China at \$19,231.705 billion.

Way Forward

- For India to truly emerge as an economic superpower, growth must be broad-based—reaching beyond metros, beyond the formal sector, and beyond the top percentile of income earners.
- Measures like skill development, employment generation, financial inclusion, technological advancement, among others need to be worked upon.
- Strengthening the MSME sector, creating an enabling ecosystem for inclusive development, and utilising the role of banks and financial institutions as catalysts for transformation are essential.

Factors aiding growth in India

- ✦ A combination of structural forms, strategic investments and favourable global dynamics has worked for India.
- ✦ Moreover, prudent fiscal and monetary policies have provided the foundation for a stable GDP growth.
- ✦ India's expanding service sector, tech industry, and domestic demand are also major drivers of the economy.
- ✦ The boom in manufacturing and construction sectors have been significant contributors to recent GDP growth.
- ✦ Substantial public capital expenditure has led to industrial growth and infrastructure development, enhancing economic resilience.
- ✦ Geopolitical shifts, including global supply-chain realignments due to the US-China trade tensions, have positioned India as an attractive destination for investment and manufacturing.

Challenges

- ✦ **Low per capita GDP:** Although India has reached the fourth position in terms of GDP, it lags significantly when it comes to GDP per capita. For example, Japan's GDP per capita is \$33,900 compared to India's \$2,800.
- ✦ **Income Disparities:** While the economy grows, income inequality persists, with many citizens not experiencing proportional improvements in living standards.
- ✦ **Private Investment:** Sustaining growth requires increased private sector investment, which has been uneven despite healthy corporate balance sheets.
- ✦ **Global Economic Uncertainties:** External factors, such as geopolitical tensions and trade policies of major economies, could impact India's export-driven sectors.

Bank.in Domain For Banks

RBI has decided to operationalise the '**bank.in**' domain for banks. It asked banks to start the migration of their existing domains to the 'bank.in' domain and complete the process before October 31, 2025.

bank.in domain

- A **domain name is used to find websites**. It is a **unique and easy-to-remember address to access websites** on the internet.
- The operationalisation of the bank.in domain name is through the **Institute for Development and Research in Banking Technology (IDRBT)**.
 - IDRBT has been authorised by the **National Internet Exchange of India (NIXI)**, under the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)**, to serve as the exclusive registrar for this domain.
 - **NIXI is a not for profit organisation set up for Internet Service Providers (ISPs)** for routing the domestic traffic within the country, instead of taking it all the way to US/abroad.

- This results in better quality of service and reduced bandwidth charges for ISPs by saving on international bandwidth.
- The '.in' domain is India's own **Country Code Top Level domain (ccTLD)**, which is a two-letter string added at the end of a domain name.
 - A ccTLD functions as more than just a string in a web address. It is **considered a symbol of national identity** on the global internet.

Pilot Study on Annual Survey of Services Sector Enterprises

- The Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (MoSPI) has released findings of a pilot study on **Annual Survey of Services Sector Enterprises (ASSSE)** to capture insights into the Incorporated Service Sector.
- The study covered service sector enterprises from the Goods and Services Tax Network (**GSTN**) database which are registered under Companies Act, 1956 or, Companies Act, 2013 or Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) Act, 2008.
- **Phase I** of the pilot was conducted during May 2024– August 2024 covering 10,005 enterprises.
- **Phase-II** (Nov. 2024 to Jan. 2025) of the pilot was conducted on 5020 enterprises selected from the list of eligible enterprises of Phase-I
- The pilot provides valuable operational insights and a foundation for launching a full-scale annual survey of incorporated service sector enterprises from January 2026.

National Scheme for Industrial Training Institute

The Union Cabinet has approved the National Scheme for Industrial Training Institute (ITI) Upgradation.

Background

- ITIs have been the backbone of vocational education and training in India since the 1950s, operating under state governments.
- While ITI network has expanded by nearly 47% since 2014, reaching 14,615 across with 14.40 lakh enrolment, vocational training via ITIs remains less aspirational and have also suffered from lack of systemic interventions to improve their infrastructure, and appeal.

Scheme Details

- The **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** will focus on **upgradation of 1,000 government ITIs** in hub and spoke arrangement with industry aligned revamped trades (courses).
- It also involves capacity augmentation of five National Skill Training Institutes (NSTIs), including setting up of five National Centres of Excellence for Skilling in these institutes.

Rationale behind the domain change

- Rapid digitalisation has increased **exposure to cyber threats and digital risks**, which are getting sophisticated with time.
- Frauds present multiple challenges for the financial system in the form of **reputational risk, operational risk, business risk and erosion of customer confidence** with financial stability implications.
- Currently, banks are either using '.com' or '.co.in' as their domain name, which is more generic.
- Anybody can approach an internet domain registering authority and register a domain name. For example, one can register as Xbank Of India.co.in. Here zero (0) is used instead of an alphabet 'O' in word 'OF' is used while registering the domain.
- The changes are so minute that not everyone can differentiate a real web site from a fake one. Fraudsters are using such fake websites for phishing attacks and other kinds of digital frauds.
- To deal with such issues, RBI has introduced this **exclusive internet domain (bank.in)** for Indian banks.
- After the migration, while visiting a bank website, customers should ensure that the domain should be 'bank.in'. And, in case they receive a mail from their bank with a domain ending in 'bank.in', it can be considered genuine.
- With the new domain name, it would be difficult for any entity, except **RBI regulated banks, to register with 'bank.in'**.

Objective of the pilot

- ❑ The service sector is a key driver of India's economy, contributing to about **55% of Gross Value Added (GVA) in FY25**. It also provides **employment to ~30%** of the workforce.
- ❑ While the unincorporated part of the service sector is covered in **Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE)** conducted by **National Statistics Office**, there is a lack of data on the economic, employment, and other related aspects of the incorporated service sector.
- ❑ The main objective was to test operational processes - enterprise response, clarity of survey instructions, efficacy of the questionnaire and the availability of key data from official records such as books of accounts, profit and loss statements etc.

Key findings

- ❑ Majority of the corporate entities in the pilot are Private Limited Companies (82.4%) during FY 2022-23 followed by Public Limited Company and Limited Liability Partnership (each having nearly 8% share).
- ❑ The same trend is noticeable for all the Broad Activity Categories (BAC) i.e., Construction, Trade and Other Services.
- ❑ Larger enterprises with output of Rs 500 crores and above dominate in terms of asset ownership (62.77%), net fixed capital formation (62.73%), gross value added (69.47%) and total compensation (63.17%).
- ❑ Further, enterprises having output below Rupees 500 crores, account for 63.03% of total employment and 36.84% of total compensation.
- ❑ Overall, 28.5% of enterprises reported having additional places of business within the state.

- The outlay of the scheme is **Rs.60,000 crore** (Central Share: Rs.30,000 crore, State Share: Rs.20,000 crore and Industry Share: Rs.10,000 crore).
- It will be co-financed to the extent of 50% of **central share** by the **Asian Development Bank** and the **World Bank**, equally.
- The financial assistance provided under various schemes in the past was inadequate to meet the full upgradation needs of ITIs.
- This included addressing growing investment requirements for infrastructure upkeep, capacity expansion, and the introduction of capital-intensive, new-age trades.
- To overcome this, a **need-based investment provision** is included under the scheme, allowing flexibility in fund allocation based on the specific infrastructure, capacity, and trade-related requirements of each institution.
- For the first time, the scheme seeks to establish deep industry connect in planning and management of ITI upgradation on a sustained basis.
- It will adopt an **industry-led Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) model for an outcome-driven implementation strategy**, making it distinct from previous efforts to improve the ITI ecosystem.

Significance

- It will address the long-standing challenges in infrastructure, course relevance, employability, and the perception of vocational training.
- In doing so, it will create a pipeline of skilled workers aligned with industry demand, thereby addressing skill shortages in high-growth sectors and facilitating industries, including MSMEs, in accessing employment-ready workers.

National Bank for Financing Infrastructure & Development

- The National Bank for Financing Infrastructure & Development (NaBFID), is planning to enter the **overseas** credit market for the first time, and aims to raise \$2 billion through loans and bonds this financial year.
- This will help to deepen India's market for offshore debt, which is relatively small compared to Asian peers like South Korea.
- NaBFID was **set up in 2021**, as India's **5th All India Financial Institution (AIFI)** under **The National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development Act, 2021**.
- It is a specialized **Development Finance Institution (DFI)** aimed at supporting the country's **infrastructure** sector.

AIFIs are specialized financial institutions in India regulated by RBI. They provide sector-specific long-term financing and investment. **5 AIFIs** in the country are:

- Export - Import Bank of India (Exim Bank)
- National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD)
- Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI)
- National Housing Bank (NHB)
- NaBFID

Development Finance Institution (DFI)

- ❑ DFIs are organisations usually owned by the government or public institutions to provide funds for **infrastructure** and large scale projects, where it often becomes unviable for large banks to lend.
- ❑ They provide two types of funds- Medium (1-5 years) and Large (< 5 years).
- ❑ DFIs do not accept deposits from people but they raise funds by borrowing from governments, insurance companies, pension funds and sovereign funds.
- ❑ It also provides a guarantee to banks on behalf of companies and subscriptions to shares, debentures etc.
- ❑ DFIs in India:
 - > 1st DFI in India was the Industrial Financial Corporation of India (IFC) that was launched in 1948. IDBI, UTI, NABARD, EXIM Bank, SIDBI, NHB, IIFCL are the other major DFIs.
 - > Later, several of them were converted into banks like ICICI Bank, IDBI Bank etc.
- ❑ DFIs in India are classified as per their functions:
 - > National Development Banks e.g IDBI, SIDBI, ICICI, IDFC
 - > Sector specific **AIFIs** e.g. NaBFID, EXIM Bank, NABARD, NHB
 - > Investment institutions e.g LIC, GIC, UTI
 - > State level institutions e.g. state Finance corporations.

- Its **objectives** are addressing the gaps in **long-term finance** for **infrastructure** development, strengthening the development of bonds and derivatives markets in India, and sustainably boosting the country's economy.
- It aims to enable credit flow through innovative instruments such as longer tenor loans, blended finance, partial credit enhancement, takeout financing, and facilitate crowding-in of infrastructure finance.

Bond Forwards

- The new RBI norms have authorised the use of bond forwards in government securities.
- A bond forward is a **financial contract** between two parties to **buy or sell a bond at a future date** for a **pre-agreed price**.
- It is a type of **forward contract**, specifically applied to **fixed-income securities** like government or corporate bonds.
- The pre-agreed price is called the forward price and the contract value is realised at maturity.
- Scheduled commercial banks, standalone primary dealers and institutional investors like insurance companies would act as market makers for bond forwards.
 - However, small finance banks, payment banks, local area banks, and regional rural banks are **excluded** from engaging in market-making.

Market maker

- A **market maker** is a financial firm or an individual that **actively quotes both buy and sell prices** (called bid and ask) in a given financial instrument — such as stocks, bonds, or currencies — with the goal of **providing liquidity and facilitating trading**.
- Market makers **provide the market with liquidity** and ensure its ongoing functionality.
- Brokerage houses are the most common types of market makers, providing purchase and sale solutions for investors.
- Market makers quote a bid price (the highest price they're willing to pay to buy) and an ask price (the lowest price they're willing to sell). They earn by buying at the bid price and selling at the ask price. They make a profit by earning this difference called the **bid-ask spread**.
- They help to **reduce the volatility** by absorbing temporary imbalances and by narrowing the spread.

Benefits

- The move is aimed at enabling market participants, especially long-term investors, such as insurance funds, to manage their cash flows and interest rate risk across different cycles.
- It will also help in efficient pricing of derivatives linked to government securities and expand market participation.

Futures & Options

Several financial experts including the Finance Minister and Chief Economic Advisor have highlighted the risk of growing interest in Futures and Options (F&O) and have cautioned against trading in derivatives.

Issues with Derivatives

- Derivatives are a helpful tool for those informed traders who use them as a **hedging strategy (to mitigate losses)**.

Derivative

- **Derivatives** in terms of financial markets refers to **financial contracts between two or more parties and derive their value from an underlying asset or benchmark**.
- The underlying assets can be stocks, stock indices or commodities such as crude oil, natural gas, gold, silver, copper etc.
- For example, if the rate of gold increases, then the rate of a gold futures contract in the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX) will also increase. Here, gold is the underlying asset for the gold futures contract.
- Likewise, the Nifty 50 is the underlying asset for the Nifty futures contract. In India, the two popular forms of derivatives are futures and options (F&Os).

Futures

- Futures are derivative contracts in which **both the buyers and the sellers have an obligation to buy or sell an underlying asset at a predetermined price on a future date**.
- If a trader thinks the price of natural gas will increase in the next three months, he/she can buy a natural gas futures contract. If the prediction is right, they can gain considerable profit. But if the prediction fails, it would incur significant loss.

****Note:** A futures contract is similar to a Forwards contract. However, there are also important difference. While a futures contract is a standardized agreement that can be traded on an exchange, a forward contract is simply a private agreement between a buyer and a seller.

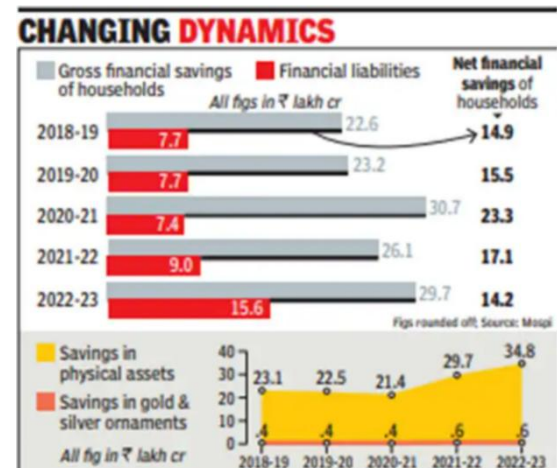
Options

- In an options contract, **buyers have the right, but not an obligation, to buy an underlying asset** via the **call option**, or have the right to **sell** an underlying asset via the **put option** at a specified price before a certain date.
- It's because of this flexibility, investors think options are safer. Though options provide more options than futures (by removing the obligation to buy/sell), they are highly risky, to the extent that it can wipe off the entire capital employed in the derivative contract.

Are they assets?

- **F&Os are not long-term assets**; after the expiry of the contract, one cannot enjoy the possession of the underlying asset.
- Therefore, unlike equities, there is no possibility of growth in the value of the derivative assets in the long run.

- However, most retail investors enter the derivatives market without proper skill and knowledge and end up **speculating** in the market and face severe losses.
- One of the main risks of derivatives is the **leverage facility**, which allows traders to take larger positions with a relatively small capital, unlike in spot markets.
- Traders are attracted by the fact that leverage can magnify profits, but they are not aware that leverage can also magnify losses. Even a small negative movement in the price of the underlying asset can cause huge, irrecoverable losses.
- A study by SEBI showed that **~93% of the individual traders** — 9 out of 10 individual traders — in the equity F&O segment **incurred losses** with an **average loss of Rs ~2 lakh** during FY22.
- Any unchecked rise in retail trading of F&O can create future challenges, not just for the markets, but for the investor sentiments and also for household finances.
- There has been a **decline in net financial household savings to a five-year low** in FY23, a decline of Rs 9 lakh crore in three years (*high of ₹23.3 lakh crore in 2020-21*) to **Rs 14.16 lakh crore** at the end of FY23.
- Household investment in shares and debentures almost doubled to Rs 2.06 lakh crore in 2022-23 from Rs 1.07 lakh crore in three years from 2020-21.
- Investment in mutual funds almost trebled to Rs 1.79 lakh crore in 2022-23 in three years from Rs 64,084 crore in 2020-21.
- **Financial liabilities** at Rs 15.6 lakh crore were at their highest level in 2022-23 since 2011-12 when it was at Rs 2.9 lakh crore.
- The financial sector has a responsibility to ensure that capital market grows in those areas where Indian household savings can be utilised for productive purposes.
- Hence, it would be advisable for them to go for long-term investment for wealth creation and to get a real rate of returns



Hourglass Model

- Artificial Intelligence (AI) has outgrown its role as a mere task automator — it's now reshaping how Indian companies are built and run as a core business transformer.
- The **old pyramid model**, with its top tier of bosses, a thick layer of middle managers, and broad base of workers, is being replaced by something new — an hourglass model.
- In the hourglass model, AI shrinks the middle by taking over coordination and decision-making, reducing the need for human oversight.
- This allows leaders at the top focus on strategy. At the base, frontline workers, specialists, and AI tools team up using real-time insights to get the job done more efficiently.
- It's a sleeker and quicker way to work, and is powered by AI's ability to sync operations, adapt in a dynamic environment, and pair human creativity with machine precision.
- McKinsey estimates that AI could push trillions into the global economy, with firms seeing productivity rise by up to 25% after adopting AI. This will lead to significant improvements in efficiency and flexibility.
- Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), India's economic spine, will also gain in a big way from this productivity lift.

- In European countries as well as the U.S., the hourglass model is gaining momentum quickly. A Gartner report forecasts that by 2026, one in five companies will use AI to reduce half their middle managers, saving costs while boosting output.
- According to the International Labour Organization, high wages — around \$35 an hour in the U.S. versus \$1-\$2 in India, make automation a smart choice.

Indian Scenario	Challenges in India
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India has its own path. Cities like Bengaluru and Hyderabad are leading in AI innovation, yet India ranks 72nd on the International Monetary Fund’s AI Preparedness Index with a score of 0.49, far behind the U.S. (0.77) or Singapore (0.80). • Indian firms aren’t adopting the hourglass model completely; they’re testing it with a hybrid arrangement. • E-commerce leaders like Flipkart and Reliance Jio use AI to predict buying trends or address issues in delivery, but they keep layers of managers to tackle India’s diverse, multilingual markets. • Lower labour costs ease the pressure to cut middle roles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jobs are at risk especially for middle managers and the less skilled. Globally, up to 800 million jobs could be affected by 2030. In India, this could widen gaps — non-graduates and older workers would suffer the most. • There are ethical issues with AI. AI can make unfair decisions if data is bad. • Further, transparency is a challenge, as Indians dislike their data being sold off and misused. • Lack of infrastructure is another roadblock. With 65% of Indians in rural areas and many offline, AI’s reach is limited. Moreover, bringing in AI infrastructure isn’t cheap, and not every firm will be able to afford it. • It’s not just technology — it’s people as well. Flattening organisations risks pushback from workers and bosses, that resist change and prefer traditional ways.

Way Ahead

- Workers need to be **re-skilled** by training the staff in AI basics, data skills, and problem-solving; Skill India’s digital courses can act as a launchpad.
- Adoption of a hybrid model by using AI for analytics or customer chats and keeping humans for the big decisions.
- Develop ethical guidelines to set rules for fair, open AI, with checks to avoid bias and build trust.
- Team up with Western firms for know-how, tailoring it to India’s needs, like affordable tech for SMEs. India’s hourglass won’t just be a copy of the West — it’ll be its own model, fusing AI’s power with the country’s economic and cultural roots.

Sagar Mein Samman

- The Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways unveiled ‘Sagar Mein Samman’ (SMS), a policy initiative to create a future ready gender equitable maritime workforce.
- It was launched at the inaugural **International Day for Women in Maritime** in Mumbai, to increase women’s participation in all maritime operations - from the docks to decision making boards.
- Held under the theme "**Women in Maritime: Leading Transformation and Sustainability**," the event was organized by **Directorate General of Shipping**.
- Major scope of the SMS policy is planning & strategy, training & development, research & development, governance & compliance, communications, and community outreach.

- India's maritime sector has witnessed a **rise in women seafarers from 341 in 2014 to 2557 in 2024**, recording a significant **growth of 649%**.
- Further, the number of **registered women seafarers rose by 739% from 1,699 in 2015 to 14,255 in 2024**.
- Since 2014, about 2,989 women seafarers have received financial assistance.
- Govt. aims for **12% female representation** in technical maritime roles by 2030.
- Empowering women in maritime is not just about equity—it's a strategic necessity. Their leadership brings innovation, strength, and a more sustainable future for the sector.

Digital Initiatives to Reform PDS

- The Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution has launched three major digital initiatives — the **Depot Darpan Portal**, and digital platforms **Anna Mitra**, and **Anna Sahayata**— aimed at transforming India's Public Distribution System (PDS).
- It is a significant step towards enhancing transparency, improving infrastructure, and empowering both beneficiaries and frontline workers involved in the delivery of subsidised food grains

Significance

- Both Anna Mitra and Anna Sahayata are aligned with the vision of Digital India, driving transparency, speed, and efficiency in welfare delivery.
- The initiatives will help to harness technology for good governance – making the process of grievance redressal and basic operations more accessible, citizen-friendly and effective.

Depot Darpan

- Depot Darpan is a **digital self-assessment and monitoring portal** aimed at empowering depot officials to systematically evaluate and enhance their operations.
- It is designed to help food grain depots achieve the highest standards of warehousing excellence.
- A grading framework has been introduced that assesses depots on a **60:40 ratio of operational performance and infrastructure standards**.
- The platform assigns a **Composite Rating** based on
 - **infrastructural parameters**—such as safety standards, environmental sustainability, and statutory compliance
 - **operational parameters** like occupancy levels, profitability, and storage efficiency.
- Utilising advanced technologies, it integrates IoT sensors for real-time monitoring of environmental and inventory conditions, CCTV surveillance for improved security, and live video feeds with analytics to support informed, data-driven decision-making.
- It has the potential of saving approximately Rs 275 crore in Food Corporation of India (FCI)-owned depots through process efficiencies.
- It will also lead to increase in income of around Rs 140 crore in Central Warehousing Corporation (CWC)-operated foodgrain warehouses through optimized space utilization.

Anna Mitra

- The Anna Mitra mobile app will empower key field-level stakeholders of the PDS with **secure, real-time access to essential operational data** aiming at enhancing accessibility, responsiveness, and transparency.
- Fair Price Shop (FPS) dealers will be able to view stock receipts, access monthly sales reports, and receive timely alerts from authorities.
- Food supply officers will be able to monitor FPS performance, track and manage grievances, and access detailed beneficiary data.
- Food Inspectors can conduct geo-tagged inspections, verify the accuracy of stock distribution, and review FPS ratings, ensuring greater accountability and transparency across the supply chain.
- In the pilot phase, Anna Mitra covers four states—Assam, Uttarakhand, Tripura, and Punjab—and is available in two languages, Hindi and English

Anna Sahayata

- Anna Sahayata is a citizen-first advanced **grievance redressal platform** designed to serve over 81 crore beneficiaries of the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY).
- It is built on the pillars of accessibility, accountability, and efficiency which utilises modern tools like WhatsApp, IVRS, and Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) to make grievance lodging as easier.
- It covers five states in pilot phase—Gujarat, Jharkhand, Telangana, Tripura, and Uttar Pradesh—and is available in five languages, Hindi, Gujarati, Telugu, Bangla and English.

Konkan Railway Merges with Indian Railways

- The Maharashtra government has agreed to merge the Konkan Railway Corporation Limited (KRCL) with Indian Railways.
- With **Goa, Karnataka and Kerala** having already approved the merger, Maharashtra's decision clears the way for the complete integration.
- Maharashtra had delayed its approval due to the significant investment it had made in the establishment of the KRCL in 1990.
- It was also concerned about the Konkan route losing its importance if KRCL were to be merged with the Indian Railways.



- The Konkan Railway (KR) was **established in 1990 as a special purpose vehicle** in the Ministry of Railways to carry out the difficult task of constructing railway lines through the rocky Western Ghats.
- The project, which officially began operations in 1998, sought to connect Roha in Maharashtra, Goa, Mangaluru in Karnataka and coastal Kerala. It provided both goods and passenger movement across the Konkan coast.
- With a length of 741 km, the rail route substantially reduced travel time, and connected distant areas to the major towns and cities of the shareholder states.
- The **KRCL was formed as a joint venture** in which the Union Government held a 51% stake, Maharashtra 22%, Karnataka 15%, and Goa and Kerala 6% each. Moreover, KRCL always existed as a distinct entity from the Indian Railways.

Need for the merger

- While being operationally successful, KRCL has been suffering with financial issues for years.
- With lesser revenues and increasing infrastructure demands, the company found it difficult to finance expansion or afford major upgrades.
- The merger can also be a precursor to new projects along the route, improving connectivity, the frequency and quality of services, and ultimately benefiting local economies, tourism and employment in Maharashtra and beyond.

- Maharashtra has agreed to the merger based on two conditions:
- The name “Konkan Railway” will be used even after the merger; and
- Indian Railways will reimburse Maharashtra with a sum of more than Rs 394 crore for the state’s initial investment.
- The Centre has agreed to meet both these conditions. The merger process will involve reworking employee hierarchies, operational areas and service contracts.

Significance

- After the merger, the passengers are likely to benefit from upgraded infrastructure, improved frequency and quality of trains, better security measures, and increased connectivity with other routes of Indian Railways.
- It could also lead to more competitive fares, seamless booking on Indian Railways channels, and standardised customer grievance redressal mechanisms.

Pumped Storage Hydropower System

- According to new data from the Central Electricity Authority (CEA), three players—Greenko, Adani Green, and JSW Energy—are set to develop nearly two-thirds of India’s planned 51 gigawatt (GW) **pumped storage hydropower (PSH)** capacity by **2032**.
- India has pumped storage **potential of 176 GW**, with around 40% (70 GW) in Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh alone. At present, India has less than 5 GW of installed pumped storage capacity.
- Together with battery energy storage systems (BESS), pumped storage will play a key role in balancing India’s **power grid** amid increasing integration of variable renewable capacities like solar and wind.

Pumped storage hydropower



- **PSH systems** are a type of **hydroelectric energy storage** used to balance electricity supply and demand.
- They act like giant batteries, storing energy in the form of water at height and releasing it to generate electricity when needed.
- **Two Reservoirs:** There are two water reservoirs at different elevations — an upper and a lower one.
- **Pumping Mode (Energy Storage):** When electricity demand is low (usually during off-peak hours), excess energy from the grid is used to pump water from the lower to the upper reservoir.
- **Generating Mode (Energy Release):** During high electricity demand, water is released from the upper reservoir back to the lower one, passing through turbines to generate electricity.

PSH vs BESS



- Pumped storage projects typically have longer gestation periods—around five years—due to the need for environmental clearances and more complex civil works.
- However, unlike BESS, **pumped storage** remains the **dominant** form of energy storage globally, accounting for **over 90% of installed capacity**.
- **PSH** is better for **long-duration, grid-scale storage** but needs specific geographical conditions like **large land and water reservoirs**, which limits its scalability potential.
- **BESS** is ideal for **quick response and decentralized applications**, especially where land and water are limited. Due to this it **can be scaled easily** at different locations.
- While BESS offers faster and more flexible deployment, it faces supply-side risks, with much of the global battery manufacturing concentrated in China.
- Recognising the trade-offs and the need for energy storage in the larger context, Indian policymakers are pursuing a balanced strategy that supports both technologies.

SPICED Scheme

- The **Spices Board** has announced the launch of the “**Sustainability in Spice Sector through Progressive, Innovative and Collaborative Interventions for Export Development (SPICED)**” scheme for the financial year **2025–26**.
- The scheme is aimed at significantly enhancing the export of spices and value added spice products as well as improving the productivity of **cardamoms** and upgrading the post-harvest quality of spices across India for export.
- It is also focused on enabling compliance with global food safety and phytosanitary standards and boosting the capacity of stakeholders across the value chain.
- It will focus on farmers' groups, FPOs (Farmer Producer Organizations), farmer clusters identified under ODOP (One District One Product) and DEH (District Export Hub), as well as SC/ST communities, exporters from the NE region, and SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises).

- It will **offer financial assistance** across various components, aiming to enhance sustainability, facilitate innovation, & promote export development in Indian spices sector.
- It offers support for activities such as replanting and rejuvenation of cardamom plantations, development of water resources, micro-irrigation, promotion of organic farming, expansion of good agricultural practices (GAP) and installation of improved post-harvest infrastructure
- In export development and promotion, the scheme assists in participating in international trade fairs, buyer-seller meets, and other market linkage programs.
- Special emphasis is given to supporting first-time exporters and small businesses.

Spices Board India

- Spices Board under the **Ministry of Commerce** is a **statutory body** constituted in 1987 under the **Spice Board Act, 1986**.
- **Headquartered in Kochi, Kerala**, it is responsible for the overall development of cardamom industry and export promotion of 52 spices.

Remittance Tax in US

- The United States (US) administration has proposed a **3.5%** excise tax on remittance transfers from the US. The tax will also be applicable on green card holders and people with H1B visas and only US citizens and nationals are exempt.
- **Remittance** refers to money that is transferred, typically by a **foreign worker to someone in their home country**.
- The provision requires that the tax be collected by remittance-transfer providers at the point of transfer, who are responsible for depositing it every quarter with the treasury secretary.
- Notably, **no minimum limit has been set** in the proposed bill. Thus, even small transactions will be taxed unless the sender is a US citizen or national.



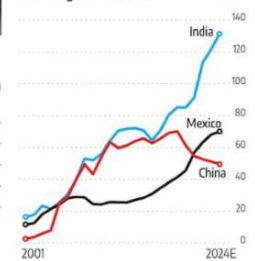
Share in India's inward remittances (in %)

Country	2016-17	2020-21	2023-24
US	22.9	23.4	27.7
UAE	26.9	18	19.2
UK	3	6.8	10.8
Saudi Arabia	11.6	5.1	6.7
Singapore	5.5	2.4	6.6

Source: Data for 2016-17 and 2020-21 are sourced from the RBI's remittance surveys — RBI (2018) and RBI (2022a), respectively

Changing dynamics

Top three countries receiving remittances



E: Estimate Source: RBI, World Bank

Impact on Indians

- Remittances have long been a critical source of income for low- and middle-income countries and have continued to exceed foreign direct investment (FDI) flows and ODA (*Official Development Assistance*) combined.
- As per the World Bank, **India has been the top recipient of remittances since 2008**, with its share in world remittances rising from around 11% in 2001 to about **14% in 2024**.
- The **top five recipient countries** for remittances in 2024 were **India (\$129 billion)**, followed by **Mexico (\$68 billion)**, **China (\$48 billion)**, the **Philippines (\$40 billion)**, and **Pakistan (\$33 billion)**.
- There are nearly 54 lakh overseas Indians in the US, including about 33 lakh Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs). Most of these individuals are in the US on temporary work visas like H-1B and L-1 or are green card holders who have not yet acquired citizenship.
- As per an RBI bulletin, the **share of the US in India's total remittances is the largest**, rising to 27.7% in 2023-24.
- If the proposal gets approved, the cost for Indians (and people of other nationalities) in the US sending money back home will rise.

Decline in Outward Remittance Under LRS

- India's outward remittances under the Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS) moderated by 6.85% year-on-year (YoY) to \$29.56 billion in FY25, after reaching an all-time high of \$31.73 billion in FY24.
- Outward remittance** refers to the transfer of money in foreign currency from a resident in India to a beneficiary located outside the country.
- Introduced in 2004**, under LRS, **resident individuals, including minors**, can freely **remit (send) up to \$2,50,000** per financial year for permissible **current or capital account transactions**.
- These transactions include **education, medical treatment abroad, purchase of property, and investments in foreign stocks**.

Outflow from India

Overall remittance (in \$ bn)

FY20	18.76	
FY21	12.68	
FY22	19.61	
FY23	27.14	
FY24	31.73	
FY25	29.56	

Source: RBI

Key Points

- While most major components of LRS posted growth, **remittances for studies abroad and medical treatment declined** by 18.77% and 56.30% YoY, respectively.
- For the first time in four years, the number of Indian students heading to foreign universities has simultaneously declined across the top three destination countries — Canada, the United States and the UK.
- There is a sharp decline of at least 25% in Indian students receiving study permits across these key destinations in 2024.
- In FY25, **international travel** — the largest LRS segment, **accounting for nearly 60%** — dipped marginally by 0.25% YoY to \$16.96 billion.
- Funds transferred for maintenance of close relatives declined by 19.28% to \$3.72 billion. Remittances under the gift component fell by 17.9% YoY to \$2.9 billion.
- However, LRS remittances in equity and debt investments rose 12.45% YoY to \$1.69 billion, while the purchase of immovable property abroad increased by 33.11% YoY to \$0.32 billion.

Factors for the Decline

- Last year, **global economic uncertainty** and a **weak income growth and domestic consumption** led to the decline in foreign remittances. Furthermore, a **high base effect** has also been attributed as a reason for the decline.
- Additionally, the Indian rupee depreciated by 2.4% in FY25, which impacted the funds sent for maintenance of close relatives.

Orange Economy

- At the inauguration of the **World Audio Visual and Entertainment Summit (WAVES)** in Mumbai, the Prime Minister appealed to global companies to create content in India and highlighted the significance of Orange Economy for the country.
- Referencing the country's rich artistic history, he recalled that two thousand years ago, **Bharata Muni's Natya Shastra** had emphasised the power of art in shaping emotions and human experiences.
- The **orange economy**, also known as the **creative economy**, refers to economic activities that utilise creativity, culture, and intellectual property to generate wealth and jobs.
- It includes sectors like **music, film, design, fashion, publishing, arts, and software development**.
- United Nations declared 2021 the International Year of Creative Economy for Sustainable Development.

WAVES

- WAVES is a global event organized for promoting discussions, collaboration, and innovation in the Media & Entertainment (M&E) industry {Advertising and Marketing, Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming, Comics, and Extended Reality (AVGC-XR), etc.}

Objectives

- **Position India as a global creative hub** by establishing India as a leading destination for M&E innovation, content creation, and intellectual property development
- **Develop India's M&E infrastructure** and build capacity of the industry to ensure skilled workforce for global needs.
- Provide a platform for international stakeholders to engage in discussions, partnerships, and investments in the M&E sector.
- Encourage the **adoption of cutting-edge technologies** such as Artificial Intelligence, Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR), and Extended Reality (XR) in the entertainment industry.

World Bee Day

- The Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) celebrated **World Bee Day 2025** on **20th May**, under the banner 'Sweet Revolution Utsav'. It is celebrated on the birthday of **Anton Janša**, a pioneer of modern apiculture.
- This year's theme, "**Bee inspired by nature to nourish us all**", highlights the critical roles bees and other pollinators play in agrifood systems and the health of the planet's ecosystems.
- Pollination is essential for agrifood systems, supporting the production of more than 75% of the world's crops, including fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds. In addition to increasing crop yields, pollinators improve food quality and diversity.
- Without bees, nearly 30% of food crops and 90% of wild plant species would face serious threats.
- Pollinators are increasingly threatened by habitat loss, unsustainable agricultural practices, climate change and pollution.
- Bees and other pollinators serve as indicators of environmental health. Protecting pollinators enhances biodiversity and critical ecosystem services, such as soil fertility, pest control, and air and water regulation.
- Nature-friendly agricultural practices like agroecology, intercropping, agroforestry, and integrated pest management help sustain pollinators.

Honey Mission



- Launched in 2017, the **Honey Mission** is a flagship initiative of **KVIC**, under the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME).
- Till date, KVIC has distributed over 2,29,409 bee boxes and bee colonies across the country, resulting in the production of approximately 20,000 metric tonnes of honey, generating an income of Rs. 325 crore for beekeepers.
- In FY 2024-25, beekeepers associated with KVIC exported honey worth Rs. 25 crore.
- It aims to promote **beekeeping** as a source of livelihood and as a catalyst for increasing rural income, improving crop productivity through pollination, and supporting ecological balance.

Central Bee Research & Training Institute

- The programme also highlighted the historic contribution of the Central Bee Research & Training Institute (CBRTI), Pune, established in 1962.
- The institute has trained over 50,000 beekeepers in modern apiculture techniques. CBRTI's role extends beyond honey production to enhancing agricultural and horticultural productivity through pollination, fostering bee-related research, and nurturing rural entrepreneurship.

Shillong Silchar Highway

- The Union Cabinet has approved the construction of a 166.8-km-long, 4-lane, highway from **Mawlyngkhung near Shillong in Meghalaya to Panchgram near Silchar in Assam**.
- The project has been approved at a cost of Rs 22,864 crore and is the **first high-speed corridor project in the North-East**.



- Of the total length of the project, 144.8 km lies in Meghalaya and 22 km in Assam.
- It is being implemented by **National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL)** for the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH), and is expected to be completed by 2030.
- The proposed highway will become an extension of a key multi-modal transport project in Myanmar, leading to an alternative link via sea between the North-East states and Kolkata.
- The new highway from Shillong to Silchar will reduce dependency on the Siliguri Corridor.

Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project (KMTPP)

- KMTPP is a strategic infrastructure initiative jointly undertaken by India and Myanmar.
- Its primary objective is to provide an alternative route to connect India's northeastern states with the Bay of Bengal, thereby reducing dependence on the narrow Siliguri Corridor and enhancing regional connectivity.
- As the term multi-modal suggests, the project combines several modes of transport.
- **Kolkata to Sittwe:** This 539 km stretch between the two seaports will be covered by ship via the Bay of Bengal. India has invested significant resources to upgrade the Sittwe port to increase its capacity. This part of the project has been completed.
- **Sittwe to Paletwa:** This 158 km stretch on the **Kaladan river** in Myanmar will be covered by boat. The river is navigable and all work has been completed on this part of the project.
- **Paletwa to Zorinpui:** This 108 km four-lane road will be the last leg of the corridor in Myanmar. The last 50 km of this highway (from Paletwa, Myanmar to Zorinpui) is yet to be completed.
- **Zorinpui to Aizwal & beyond:** While Zorinpui is connected to Aizwal and the rest of the Northeast by road, the NHIDCL plans to eventually extend the high-speed corridor from Shillong all the way to the border town.

Implementation model

- The project will be implemented in Public - Private Partnership (PPP) mode under the **Hybrid Annuity Model (HAM)**.
- The Hybrid Annuity Model is a **mix of Engineering, Procurement, and Construction (EPC) and the Build, Operate, and Transfer (BOT)- Annuity models**.
- The government contributes 40% of the project cost in the first five years through annual payments (annuity). The remaining payment is made on the basis of the assets created and the performance of the developer.
- As the government pays only 40%, during the construction stage, the developer has to find money for the remaining amount in the form of equity or loans.
- There is no toll right for the developer. Under HAM, revenue collection is the responsibility of the NHAI.
- As per the government's policy HAM is used in stalled projects where other models are not applicable.

Significance of Shillong Silchar highway

- Once operational, the new alignment will reduce journey time from 8.5 hours to just 5 hours.
- Shillong-Silchar connectivity is significant, as Silchar is the entry point for connecting Mizoram, Tripura and Manipur as well as the Barak Valley region of Assam.
- Thus, it will become a major connectivity link for the entire North-East and an important milestone for developing the region as a gateway for India's Act East Policy.
- With the help of the Kaladan project, cargo will reach from Vizag and Kolkata to the North-East, without being dependent on Bangladesh.
- It will **boost tourism** by providing quicker access to locations like **Cherrapunji, Dawki, Jowai, and the Barak Valley**—making the Northeast more accessible for both domestic and international tourists.

India Places Curbs on Bangladesh Exports to North-East and Abroad

- India has imposed restrictions on Bangladeshi exports to North-East India and overseas.
 - Earlier in April 2025, India ended a five-year-old transshipment facility that allowed Bangladesh to export goods to Western markets via *Indian land routes and airports*
- This move appears to be a response to Bangladesh's continued use of *non-tariff* barriers that hinder Indian exports to Bangladesh.
 - The decision follows remarks by Bangladesh's interim government head Muhammad Yunus in Beijing, where he described North-East India as "landlocked" and Bangladesh as its "only guardian to the ocean."
 - India interpreted this, along with persistent trade restrictions, as a disregard for mutual trade balance.

Key Highlights

- **Scope of the Restrictions**
 - The Directorate General of Foreign Trade issued a notification specifying:
 - ♣ Restrictions apply across all Land Customs Stations (LCSs) and Integrated Check Posts (ICPs) in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram.
 - ♣ LCS Changrabandha and Fulbari in North Bengal are also included to prevent re-routing of goods through the Siliguri Corridor.
- **Products affected include:**
 - Readymade garments; Wooden furniture; Plastic and PVC goods; Fruit-flavoured and carbonated drinks; Baked goods, snacks & confectionery, Cotton yarn, among others.
- **Exempted Items and Routes**
 - Certain categories are exempted from restrictions: Fish, LPG, edible oil, and crushed stone; Exports to Nepal/Bhutan transiting through India; Readymade garments can still be imported via **Kolkata & Nhava Sheva seaports.**

Existing Transit Framework and Disparities

- There are 11 land transit points in the Northeast for trade with Bangladesh: 3 in Assam; 2 in Meghalaya; 6 in Tripura.
- India had allowed Bangladeshi goods to transit through all land ports and seaports without restrictions.
- Bangladesh, however, continued to restrict Indian exports through LCSs and ICPs bordering the region.
 - Yarn exports from India via land ports were stopped from April 2025.
 - Indian rice exports have been banned through Hili and Benapole (west Bengal) ICPs since April 2025.
 - Indian exports face rigorous inspections upon entry into Bangladesh.
 - Bangladesh's policies have restricted Northeast India's market access, limiting it to primary agricultural goods.

India's Rationale and Concerns

- According to Indian officials, Bangladesh continues to restrict Indian exports via land ports, especially those bordering the North-East, despite earlier bilateral agreements.
- North-East India's industrial growth suffers due to:
 - High transit charges by Bangladesh
 - Lack of reciprocal access to Bangladeshi markets

- Over-dependence on Bangladeshi imports
- Port restrictions are meant to support local manufacturing and ensure a level playing field for Indian industries.
- **India's Position**
 - India asserts that Bangladesh cannot cherry-pick trade benefits and must engage in fair, reciprocal trade practices.
 - While open to dialogue, Delhi insists that Dhaka must create a constructive atmosphere for engagement.

Bangladesh – India Trade Dynamics

- Trade Volume (2023–24): ~\$14 billion.
- India's Exports to Bangladesh: ~\$11–11.3 billion.
- India's Imports from Bangladesh: ~\$1.8–1.9 billion.
- Trade Surplus in India's Favor: ~\$9–10 billion.
- India is Bangladesh's 2nd largest trading partner in Asia. Bangladesh is India's largest trade partner in South Asia.

Revamped OCI Portal Launched

- Union Home Minister Amit Shah launched a **redesigned** Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) portal to simplify the registration process for overseas Indians.
 - The previous portal, developed in 2013, operated in over 180 Indian missions abroad and 12 FRROs (*Foreigners Regional Registration Offices*). It processed around 2,000 applications daily.
- Revamp was prompted by technological advancements and feedback from users.
- **Objective and Benefits**
 - The revamped portal aims to:
 - ♣ Simplify the registration and application process for OCI cardholders.
 - ♣ Provide enhanced functionality, advanced security, and a user-friendly experience.
 - ♣ Benefit over 5 million existing OCI cardholders and new applicants.
 - ♣ Ensure that Indian-origin citizens face no inconvenience when visiting or staying in India.

Overseas Citizen of India (OCI)- Essentially a foreign passport holder

- **OCI scheme**, introduced in August **2005**, allows Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) who were - *Citizens of India on or after January 26, 1950, or Eligible to become citizens on that date* - to register for an **OCI card**.
- Spouse of foreign origin of a citizen of India or spouse of foreign origin of an OCI Cardholder and whose marriage has been registered and subsisted for a continuous period of not less than two years immediately preceding the presentation of the application is also eligible for registration as OCI cardholder.
- Benefits of an OCI Card:
 - Multiple-entry, multi-purpose, life-long visa for visiting India.
 - Exempt from police registration for any length of stay in India.
- A series of new restrictions were introduced, including a requirement for OCIs to secure a special permit to undertake “any research”, to undertake any “missionary” or “Tablighi” or “journalistic activities”, or to visit any area in India notified as “protected”/ “restricted”/ “prohibited”.

- OCIs are considered at par with “foreign nationals” in respect of “all other economic, financial and educational fields” for the purposes of the Foreign Exchange Management Act, 2003
- An OCI card holder is **not entitled** to vote; to be a member of a Legislative Assembly or of a Legislative Council or of Parliament; to hold Indian constitutional posts.
- Foreign military personnel either in service or retired are also **not** entitled for grant of OCI.
- PIO’s and OCI cardholders have been merged under one category OCI in 2015.
- Global OCI Card Holders (as of 2023)
 - o There are over 45 lakh registered OCI card holders across 129 countries:

United States – 16.8 lakh	United Kingdom – 9.34 lakh	Australia – 4.94 lakh	Canada – 4.18 lakh
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Election of Pope Leo XIV

- Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost has been elected the 267th pope of the Roman Catholic Church after two days of deliberation by the College of Cardinals.
 - o The election followed the recent death of Pope Francis, the first Latin American pope, known for his progressive reforms over a 12-year papacy.
- He became the first American to be elected pope and had chosen the name Pope Leo XIV.
- Born in Chicago, Pope Leo XIV was made a cardinal by Pope Francis in 2023.
- He previously led the Augustinian order, worked as Bishop of Chiclayo in Peru, and most recently served in the influential Vatican office, the Dicastery for Bishops.
- Pope Leo XIV’s election marks a significant moment for the Church, overcoming long-standing Vatican hesitation about choosing an American due to the U.S.’s global influence and secular culture.

US, China Agree to 90-Day Tariff Truce

- The United States and China have agreed to a 90-day pause in their trade war following two days of high-level talks in Geneva.
- Both countries will suspend the high tariffs and non-tariff barriers imposed since April 2. In a joint statement, they expressed commitment to resolving their trade disputes.
- Following the truce, both countries have reduced their base tariff rates to 10% on each other’s imports.
- After the truce:
 - o Effective US tariff on Chinese imports: 30%
 - o Effective Chinese tariff on US imports: 10%

THE TRADE WAR BETWEEN US & CHINA

<p>FEB 1: Trump imposes 10% tariffs on China, 25% on Mexico and Canada, citing fentanyl crisis</p> <p>FEB 4: As tariffs on China take effect, Beijing puts 15% tariffs on US coal, LNG; 10% on crude</p> <p>MAR 4: Another 10% US tariffs; total now 20%. China responds with up to 15% on key US farm products</p> <p>APR 2: On “Liberation Day” Trump announces 34% on all Chinese goods from April 9</p> <p>APR 4: China announces its own 34% effective April 10, as well as controls on rare earths exports</p>	<p>APR 7: Trump threatens additional 50% tariffs if China doesn’t back down</p> <p>APR 9–10: The US levies 84% additional tariffs, bringing the total to 104%. China retaliates with 84% tariffs, effective April 10. Trump then raises it to 125%, totalling 145%.</p> <p>APR 11: China raises tariffs to 125%, effective Apr 12, and declares no further hikes</p> <p>APR 13: Trump exempts smartphones, computers and other electronics, subjecting them only to a 20% tariff</p> <p>MAY 6: Talks in Geneva announced</p>
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Colombia Joins China’s BRI

- Colombia formally joined **China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**, marking a significant shift in its foreign policy. The agreement was signed during a regional summit in Beijing.

- China has become the largest trading partner for several Latin American nations including Brazil, Chile, and Peru.
- With Colombia’s inclusion, nearly two-thirds of the region is now part of the BRI.
 - One major BRI project is the Beijing-funded port in Chancay, Peru — Latin America’s first. It symbolizes China’s growing footprint on the continent.
- **China-CELAC Forum: A Push for Multilateralism**
 - At the China-CELAC Forum, Xi pledged \$9.2 billion in credit for development in the Global South, focusing on infrastructure, clean energy, counterterrorism, and education.
 - ♣ **CELAC** is the acronym for the **Community of Latin American and Caribbean States**, a regional bloc of 33 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.
 - ♣ It aims to promote integration, cooperation, and a stronger regional voice in international forums.
 - China positioned itself as a defender of multilateralism and free trade.
- **US-China Rivalry in Latin America Intensifies**
 - The US has expressed concern over China’s increasing presence in Latin America, particularly over strategic assets like the Panama Canal.
 - As a vital route for 5% of global shipping, the Panama Canal remains a strategic asset.
 - A US-led consortium is now looking to acquire Chinese-controlled ports in the region as tensions between the two superpowers escalate.

Political Crisis in New Caledonia

- A French-brokered political deal for New Caledonia collapsed in May 2025, deepening uncertainty over its future.
- Despite three referendums rejecting independence, Kanak-led pro-independence groups remain dissatisfied.
- Talks failed over disputes about voter rights and a proposed “sovereignty in partnership” model, which loyalists rejected.
- **Current status**
 - New Caledonia is a French Pacific territory with around 2,71,400 people, located in the southwest Pacific Ocean.
 - It has a unique semi-autonomous status under the **1998 Nouméa Accord**, with its own Congress and restricted local citizenship.
 - The Kanak people, New Caledonia’s indigenous population, have long sought independence due to colonial trauma and historical injustices.
 - The 1984–88 conflict and subsequent accords granted limited autonomy but not full sovereignty.

U.K.–E.U. Formal Summit Marks New Era of Cooperation

- The **first formal U.K.–E.U. summit** since Brexit signaled a reset in ties, with leaders from both sides declaring a "new chapter" in their relationship. U.K.
- **Key Trade and Market Access Agreements**
 - The E.U. gains 12-year access to U.K. fishing waters, replacing annual negotiations.
 - In return, the U.K. gains broader access to EU plant and animal markets, but must align with future E.U. sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) rules.

- Carbon markets between the U.K. and E.U. will be linked to avoid tariffs in heavy industries like steel and cement.
- **Broader Foreign and Security Cooperation**
 - Regular foreign and security dialogues every six months agreed.
 - Initial steps for U.K. involvement in the EU's €150 billion defence loan facility.
 - Collaboration planned on sanctions, space policy, and tackling trans-national crimes, including people-smuggling and irregular migration.
- **Mobility and Youth Programs**
 - Both parties agreed to further talks on reintroducing a student exchange program and establishing a time-bound, capped *youth mobility scheme*.

Trump Blocks Harvard from Enrolling International Students

- A U.S. judge **temporarily blocked** the Trump administration's move to revoke Harvard's ability to enrol international students, following Harvard's refusal to alter its policies.
- The move stemmed from Trump's March 2025 executive order on campus free speech, triggered by protests over Israel's war in Gaza.
- The administration cited harassment of Jewish students and long-standing conservative grievances about liberal bias, and "wokeness" in elite universities, with institutions like Columbia and Cornell also under scrutiny.

Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP)

- SEVP certification, issued by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), allows educational institutions to enrol international students holding F-1, M-1, or J-1 visas.
 - F-1 visa is for students attending accredited U.S. colleges or universities, or studying English at an accredited institute.
 - M-1 visa is for students enrolled in non-academic or vocational programs.
 - J-1 visa is for exchange visitors participating in educational and cultural exchange programs.
- Without SEVP certification, institutions cannot issue **Form I-20** — a crucial document required for international students to obtain and maintain legal student status in the U.S.

One Big Beautiful Bill

The U.S. House of Representatives passed the One Big Beautiful Bill, a sweeping 1,000+ page legislation encapsulating President Trump's second-term policy promises.

- It now awaits Senate approval before becoming law.

Key Highlights

- **Permanent Tax Cuts:** Extends income and estate tax cuts from 2017.
- **New Tax Breaks:** Reduces taxes on overtime, tips, and social security income, targeting middle-income Americans.
- **Increased Spending:** Boosts funds for border security and military upgrades.
- **Government Efficiency:** Aims to cut "waste, fraud, and abuse" in public spending.
- **Raising the Debt Ceiling:** Authorizes more government borrowing to pay existing obligations.

GENIUS Act

- Bitcoin has surged past the \$110,000 mark for the first time, driven by renewed investor optimism following the progress of a major crypto bill in the U.S. Senate — **the GENIUS Act (*Guiding and Establishing National Innovation for US Stablecoins*)**.
- **Key Provisions of the Bill**
 - **Mandatory Compliance:** Issuers must adhere to anti-money laundering (AML) and anti-terrorism laws, along with privacy regulations under existing banking norms.
 - **Full Reserve Requirement:** Stablecoins must be backed 1:1 by fiat currency or high-quality liquid assets.
 - **Separation of Funds:** Issuers must keep reserves separate from operational funds.
 - **Transparency & Audits:** Regular third-party audits and public disclosures of reserves are mandatory.
- **Political & Ethical Concerns**
 - Some lawmakers have raised concerns about the Trump family's involvement in crypto for personal gain and lack of oversight.

UK Transfers Chagos Islands Sovereignty to Mauritius

- UK PM **Keir Starmer** signed a landmark deal transferring sovereignty of the **Chagos Islands**, including **Diego Garcia**, to **Mauritius**.
- The UK will now **lease Diego Garcia** from Mauritius for **99 years**. Mauritius will receive **£3.4 billion (\$4.35 billion)** over the lease period (average **£101 million/year**).
 - Diego Garcia is a key joint **US-UK military base** critical for Indian Ocean operations, including regional security and rapid military response.
 - This base was Used in:
 - ♣ 2024–25 strikes on Houthi targets in Yemen
 - ♣ Humanitarian missions to Gaza
 - ♣ 2001 bombing campaigns in Afghanistan

Chagos Archipelago: Geographical and Historical Overview

- The Chagos archipelago has 60+ low-lying islands, 1,600 km northeast of Mauritius.
- **Land Area:** ~56.1 sq km; Diego Garcia alone: ~32.5 sq km (comparable to Lakshadweep).
- **Total Area (including lagoons):** ~15,000 sq km; the Great Chagos Bank is the world's largest atoll (12,642 sq km).
- **Colonial Legacy**
 - Uninhabited until late 1700s; the French brought enslaved laborers from Africa and India.
 - Under the 1814 Treaty of Paris, France ceded Mauritius (including Chagos) to Britain.
 - In 1965, the UK created the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) to serve Cold War strategic needs.
 - Chagos was detached from Mauritius before its 1968 independence. In return, Mauritius received £3 million.

Visit of President of Angola to India

- The President of Angola Joao Manuel Goncalves Lourenco paid a State Visit to India.
 - A visit of the President of Angola to India is taking place after 38 years.

- This was President Lourenco’s first ever bilateral State Visit to India. The visit comes at a time when India and Angola are celebrating the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations this year.

Key Outcomes

- **\$200 Million Defence Credit Line Announced**
 - PM Modi announced a \$200 million defence credit line to Angola for modernising its defence forces.
 - Discussions also covered repair, overhaul, and supply of defence platforms.
- **Expansion into Strategic Sectors**
 - Agreements and cooperation were discussed in:



- **Emphasis on Global South Solidarity**
 - PM Modi emphasized the India-African Union relationship, describing both as “partners in progress” and “pillars of the Global South.”

India-Angola Bilateral Relations

- India and Angola share warm and friendly ties, anchored by a strong energy partnership.
- Bilateral trade reached \$4.19 billion in 2023–24, reflecting steady growth.
- Cooperation is expanding in areas like development partnership, capacity building, and defence.

India Rejects China’s Renaming of Arunachal Pradesh Locations

- India strongly rejected China’s latest move to rename 27 locations in Arunachal Pradesh, calling the action “**vain and preposterous**” and affirming that the state “**was, is, and will always remain an integral part of India.**”
- **China's New List of Renamed Locations**
 - China’s Civil Affairs Ministry announced Chinese names for 27 places in Arunachal Pradesh, which include: 15 mountains; 4 passes; 2 rivers; 1 lake; 5 inhabited areas.
 - This is China’s fifth such attempt, previously naming: 6 places in 2017; 15 places in 2021; 11 places in 2023; 30 places in April 2024.
- China claims nearly **90,000 sq km** of Arunachal Pradesh as part of “**Southern Tibet.**”

Golden Dome, Futuristic US Missile Defence

- **Golden Dome** is a proposed U.S. missile defense shield announced by Donald Trump, inspired by Israel’s Iron Dome but far more ambitious.
- It aims to use thousands of space-based satellites and interceptors to detect and destroy missiles, including ICBMs, shortly after launch.
- The \$175 billion project, led by the U.S. Space Force, is untested and faces skepticism over its feasibility, timeline (by 2029), and funding in Congress.

SUMMITS AND ORGANISATIONS

India Abstains from IMF Vote to Give More Funds to Pakistan

- India abstained from voting on the IMF's decision to disburse \$1 billion under a \$7 billion **Extended Fund (EFF) Facility** and an additional \$1.3 billion under the **Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF)**, emphasizing that the IMF must adhere to procedural and technical norms.
- The abstention was not due to lack of opposition but because the IMF does not allow formal "no" votes—only "yes" or abstention are permitted.

India's Key Objections to IMF Assistance for Pakistan

- **Prolonged Dependency and Poor Track Record**
 - Pakistan has been a frequent IMF borrower, with assistance provided in 28 of the past 35 years, including four programs in the last five years.
 - India noted Pakistan's poor implementation of IMF conditions and lack of lasting reform.
- **Debt Sustainability Concerns**
 - Continued bailouts have led to unsustainable debt, making Pakistan a "too big to fail" debtor and creating long-term risks for the IMF.
- **Military Dominance and Economic Mismanagement**
 - India criticized the Pakistani military's role in economic affairs, citing lack of transparency and accountability that undermines reforms.
- **Use of Funds and Terrorism**
 - India strongly objected to funding a country that sponsors cross-border terrorism, warning it poses reputational risks to global institutions and violates international norms.

Extended Fund Facility (EFF)



- EFF provides financial assistance to countries facing serious medium-term **balance of payments** problems because of structural impediments or slow growth.
- It helps countries implement medium-term **structural reforms**
- **Type:** Repayable loan, not a grant or financial aid.
- **Tenure:** Extended period (3+ years), with longer repayment timelines than standard IMF loans.
- **Disbursement:** Tranches released based on **periodic reviews**
- **Eligibility**
 - Available to all IMF member countries facing actual/potential external financing needs.
 - Typically used by advanced and emerging economies; low-income countries may use EFF alongside the Extended Credit Facility (ECF).
 - ECF is a loan program offered by the IMF to **low-income countries** facing persistent balance of payments difficulties.

Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF)



- RSF provides affordable, longer-term financing to low-income and vulnerable middle-income countries.
- It aims to strengthen macroeconomic resilience and sustainability by:
 - Supporting reforms related to **climate change and pandemic preparedness** that threaten their balance of payments stability.
 - RSF provides affordable, longer-term financing with a 20-year maturity and a 10½-year grace period.
 - Enhancing policy space and building financial buffers against long-term structural challenges.
- **Eligible countries include:** PRGT-eligible low-income countries (LICs) [those that qualify for concessional financing from IMF's Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust (PRGT)].

IMF Voting System Explained

- The IMF Executive Board has 25 directors, representing countries or groups of countries.
- Voting power is based on **economic size**, not one country—one vote as in the UN.
- The IMF typically makes decisions by consensus.
- In rare formal votes, members can only vote in favor or abstain— 'vote against' is not allowed.

India–Pakistan Ceasefire Agreement

India and Pakistan agreed to halt all firing and military action after heightened tensions due to Indian precision strikes on terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan and PoK.

India's Legal Justification for Strikes

- India described the strikes as “**measured and non-escalatory.**”
- While it did not explicitly invoke **Article 51 of the UN Charter**, which permits self-defence after an armed attack, India's response implies reliance on this principle.
 - India briefed 13 of 15 UNSC members, fulfilling its procedural obligation.
 - Pakistan and Sierra Leone were not represented at the briefing.

Right of Self-Defence Under International Law

- **Article 51** allows force only after an **armed attack** and requires **immediate reporting** to the **UN Security Council**.
 - ICJ jurisprudence (e.g., *Nicaragua v. United States*) sets a **high threshold** for what qualifies as an “armed attack.”
- India's attribution of the Pahalgam attack to “**Pakistan-trained terrorists**” suggests it is invoking this right based on state involvement.

Can Self-Defence Be Invoked Against Non-State Actors?

- The UN Charter primarily governs **state conduct**, making it harder to apply against **non-state actors**.
- ICJ requires a **link to the host state** for self-defence to apply.
- India directly attributes the attack to **Pakistan**, supporting its legal position.
- **The ‘Unable or Unwilling’ Doctrine**
 - This controversial and evolving doctrine allows force against non-state actors in another country if that country is unwilling or unable to stop them.
 - Used by the US (e.g., bin Laden raid, strikes in Syria), but criticized by countries like China and Russia.
 - India has previously supported the doctrine in principle, outlining three cumulative conditions for its application:
 - ♣ Repeated attacks by non-state actor
 - ♣ Host state unwilling to neutralize threat
 - ♣ Host state actively supporting terrorists
 - India's remarks on Pakistan's inaction and support for terrorism suggest implicit use of this doctrine.

Necessity and Proportionality in Military Response

- Any military action under self-defence must meet the tests of necessity and proportionality.
- **Necessity:** Met if the host state cannot/will not neutralize threats.
- **Proportionality:**
 - *Narrow view:* Only to halt current attack
 - *Broader view:* Includes future threat prevention
- Since India targeted **only terrorist infrastructure**, its actions are considered **proportionate and necessary** under international law.

UN Peacekeeping Ministerial in Berlin

- The United Nations Peacekeeping Ministerial 2025 concluded in **Berlin (Germany)**.

- o The Berlin Ministerial follows earlier summits in: Accra (2023); Seoul (2021); New York (2019); Vancouver (2017); London (2016).
- o The 2025 meeting marks the **80th anniversary of the UN** and the **10th anniversary of the Leaders' Summit on Peacekeeping**.
- The event focused on strengthening UN peacekeeping through innovative and adaptive approaches.
- Key themes included addressing complex conflicts, leveraging new technologies, and combating mis- and disinformation.

Key Outcomes

- ▣ **Global Participation and Pledges**
 - 74 member states made pledges at the Ministerial.
 - 53 member states pledged uniformed capabilities, including:
 - ▶ 88 military and police units
 - ▶ Airlift, individual experts, staff officers, and police officers.
- ▣ **Focus on Training and Capacity Building**
 - 59 member states pledged specialized **training** on critical peacekeeping aspects such as:
 - ▶ Peacekeeping intelligence
 - ▶ Protection of civilians
 - ▶ Gender sensitivity
 - ▶ Prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse
- ▣ **Advancement Through Technology**
 - 18 member states made pledges for technological innovation and data-driven approaches to enhance mission efficiency and effectiveness.
- ▣ **Support for Women, Peace and Security Agenda**
 - 38 member states pledged actions to promote:
 - ▶ Gender-responsive peacekeeping
 - ▶ Increased participation of women in peacekeeping roles

India's Pledges at the UN Peacekeeping Ministerial 2025 (Berlin)

- India, one of the largest troop contributors to UN Peacekeeping (UNPK), reaffirmed its strong support by making significant pledges at the Berlin Summit.

Uniformed Capabilities Pledged	Training and Capacity Building Initiatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India has committed to deploying the following specialized units: • One Quick Reaction Force (QRF) Company • One male armed police unit (CRPF or mixed CRPF unit) • One women-led Police Unit • One Counter-Explosive Ordnance Disposal (IED/EOD) Unit • One K9 Unit • One SWAT Police Unit 	<p>In addition to deploying personnel, India pledged robust support for peacekeeping <u>training and capacity building</u> through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UN Pre-deployment Training of Trainers Course • UN Military Observers Course • UN Contingent Commanders Course • UN Female Military Officers Course • International training courses by the UNCIVPOL (UN Civilian Police Component) Centre

- **India-U.S. Collaboration**
 - o India has a longstanding tradition of offering peacekeeping training and has expanded its cooperation by partnering with the **United States** to conduct peacekeeping training programs for **African nations**.

Current Peacekeeping Force

- Over **61,000 military and police peacekeepers** from **119 countries**
- More than **7,000 civilian personnel** across **11 UN Peacekeeping Missions**

India's Current Contribution

- India ranks as the 4th largest troop-contributing country with **5,375 personnel**, following: Nepal (5,951); Rwanda (5,897); Bangladesh (5,677).

National Security Advisory Board Revamped

- The Union government has restructured the National Security Advisory Board (NSAB), appointing former **RAW chief Alok Joshi as its new chairman**, along with six other members.
- The seven-member board includes:
 - **Military Veterans:** Air Marshal P.M. Sinha (Former Western Air Commander); Lt Gen A.K. Singh (Former Southern Army Commander); Rear Admiral Monty Khanna.
 - **Police Officers:** Rajiv Ranjan Verma (Retired IPS); Manmohan Singh (Retired IPS)
 - **Diplomat:** B. Venkatesh Varma (Retired IFS)

National Security Advisory Board (NSAB)

- **NSAB** is a key body under India's three-tier national security structure.
 - National Security Council (NSC) – Apex body headed by the Prime Minister.
 - Strategic Policy Group (SPG) – Chaired by the National Security Advisor (NSA).
 - National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) – Advisory body providing long-term analysis.
- It provides inputs on strategic and security-related matters and plays a crucial role in shaping India's national security policies by bringing together domain experts from various fields.
- **Legal Mandate**
 - The NSAB has no statutory or constitutional status.
 - It operates under the framework of the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS).
 - It is an **advisory and non-binding body** — its recommendations are not enforceable but carry weight.
- **Composition**
 - Headed by a Chairperson (usually a former senior official or expert).
 - Includes 7 members from diverse fields such as diplomacy, military, academia, economics, science & tech.
 - Members are appointed by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) or on NSA's recommendation.
 - It is non-permanent, and its composition may change based on government needs.
- **Functions and Responsibilities**
 - Provides policy perspectives and recommendations to the National Security Council (NSC).
 - Offers strategic guidance on evolving threats and national interests.
 - Focuses on research, foresight, and independent analysis to support government decision-making.
- **Current Agenda of NSAB**
 - Neighbourhood strategy and Western neighbourhood
 - Border management
 - Maritime security
 - Internal security
 - Strategic industries and technology
 - Strategic communications

Cyber-Bullying and The Legal Gaps in India

- In the wake of the Pahalgam terror attack, Himanshi Narwal, widow of Navy Lieutenant Vinay Narwal, faced severe online abuse after appealing for peace and rejecting anti-Muslim sentiment.
- Similarly, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri was trolled for announcing a ceasefire understanding with Pakistan, leading him to lock his X (formerly Twitter) account.
- These incidents highlight how anonymous online trolls often target individuals who challenge dominant narratives.
- To address this growing menace, regulatory reforms are needed to ensure accountability and curb impunity in digital spaces.

Gaps in India's Legal Framework

- India lacks a specific law to address online hate speech and trolling.
- Instead, it relies on general provisions under the **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023**, and the **Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000**.
- Key relevant sections include:
 - **BNS:** Section 74 (outraging modesty), 75 (sexual harassment), 351 (criminal intimidation), 356 (defamation), and 196 (promoting enmity).
 - **IT Act:** Section 66C (identity theft), 66D (impersonation), and 67 (obscene content).
- **Other Legal Tools**
 - In India, Section 69A of the IT Act allows the government to block online content in the interest of public order, national security, or foreign relations.
 - Non-compliant platforms risk losing safe harbour protection under Section 79, which otherwise shields them from liability for user content.
- **Government Initiative**
 - **Cyber Crime Prevention Against Women and Children (CCPWC):** Launched by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to ensure a safe online environment, especially for children and women. It includes a helpline (1930) and portal for anonymous reporting of cyberbullying
- **Structural Limitations and Need for Reform**
 - Legal experts argue that while the framework is partially functional, it fails to address collective online harassment or sustained abuse that isn't clearly obscene or threatening.
 - Laws like stalking under BNS are *gender-specific* and don't account for mob-led digital abuse.
 - Provisions like defamation or intimidation require proof of threat or reputational damage, which are often inadequate in the fast-paced, anonymous world of online trolling.

Rise of New-Age Cybercrimes

- Modern cybercrimes such as cyberbullying, stalking, hate speech, and doxxing have become rampant.
- **Doxxing**—publicly revealing private information like addresses or phone numbers—often leads to real-world harassment and threats.

Doxxing and Associated Challenges

- Eg. Delhi High Court ordered X (formerly Twitter) to remove tweets that exposed the personal and professional information of a woman who had criticized Uttar Pradesh CM.
- Despite acknowledging privacy violations, the court ruled that the act did not amount to doxxing, as the information was already publicly available.
- **Doxxing Not a Statutory Offence—Yet a Privacy Threat**
 - Experts highlight that doxxing poses a serious threat and violates the right to privacy.
 - Although it is not a statutory crime in India, civil remedies under tort law may still be pursued.
- **Legal Ambiguity Over 'Publicly Available' Data**
 - The Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023 excludes personal data from its protection if the data is "publicly available."
 - However, this term remains undefined, leaving room for misinterpretation and potential misuse.
- **Risk of Cybercrimes Due to Legal Loopholes**
 - The vague definition of "publicly available data" in the DPDP Act can enable cybercrimes like doxxing.
 - In the digital age, even fragmented pieces of data across platforms can be easily aggregated to target individuals, raising serious privacy and safety concerns.

- **Other Challenges**

- **Enforcement Remains the Weakest Link** - Experts agree that poor enforcement, not the absence of laws, often prevents victims from receiving justice.
- **Institutional Apathy**-With minimal institutional support and public awareness, legal options become a last resort, leading to psychological and legal trauma.
- **Legal and Structural Barriers to Justice** - Analysts highlighted critical challenges like anonymity of offenders, jurisdictional complexity, and inadequate cybercrime training.

Operation Sindoor

- India successfully conducted Operation Sindoor, a joint military operation involving the Army, Navy, and Air Force, targeting terrorist camps at nine locations in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).
- The strikes were a response to the April 22 terrorist attack in Pahalgam, attributed to ISI-backed militant groups.
 - Precision munitions were used to hit four targets in Pakistan (Bahawalpur, Muridke, Sialkot, Sarjal) and five in PoK
 - The targets were chosen to **dismantle anti-India terrorist infrastructure** linked to groups actively engaged in cross-border terrorism.



- These groups operate from training camps (Markaz) and launch pads, often concealed within government-run buildings.

Key Signals from Operation Sindoor

↻ Redefining the Causal Link Between Pakistan and Terrorism

- India framed Operation Sindoor as a response not just to the recent Pahalgam attack, but to a two-decade-long pattern of Pakistan-sponsored terrorism since the 2001 Parliament attack.
- It highlighted the role of groups like Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), both UN-designated terrorist groups.
- Cited examples like Sajid Mir and the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF's) role in forcing Pakistan to take symbolic actions without dismantling terror networks. Sentencing Sajid Mir has largely been seen as a move by Pakistan to get itself off the FATF grey list
- Targeting key sites like Markaz Subhan Allah (Bahawalpur), Markaz Taiba (Muridke), and Mehmooona Joya (Sialkot) undermines Pakistan's narrative that newer proxy groups (like TRF) are disconnected from Islamabad.

↻ Targeting Terror, Not the Pakistani Military

- India continues its doctrine of hitting terrorist infrastructure without targeting Pakistan's conventional military.
- The strikes were labeled as "non-military" and "preemptive", similar to the approach in the 2016 surgical strikes and 2019 Balakot airstrike.
- However, Sindoor marks an escalation in depth and scale, striking targets deep within Pakistan, not just in PoK.

↻ Calibrated Action with Strategic Restraint

- India emphasized Sindoor was "focused, measured, and non-escalatory", showing it does not seek full-scale war.
- However, it sent a clear message that Pakistan's nuclear deterrence posture no longer shields its terror infrastructure.
- Future escalations by Pakistan could trigger Indian retaliation on military assets, pushing the threshold higher.

Precision Guided Long Range Weapons in Indian Military's Arsenal

- India carried out Operation Sindoor, targeting 21 terror camps across nine locations in Pakistan and PoK.
- The Indian Armed Forces used precision strikes with niche-technology weapons and carefully chosen warheads to minimize collateral damage.

Cutting-Edge Precision Weapons in India's Military Arsenal

• HAMMER

- The **HAMMER (Highly Agile and Manoeuvrable Munition Extended Range)** is an air-to-ground precision-guided weapon system developed by Safran, a French aerospace and defence company.
- It has a range of up to 70 km and can be mounted on Rafale jets, as well as fitted to bombs and other guided systems, making it highly versatile for medium-range tactical operations.
- The system is autonomous, resistant to jamming, and capable of being launched from low altitudes over rough terrain, allowing precision strikes against a wide range of targets.

• SCALP

- SCALP-EG (Système de Croisière Autonome à Longue Portée — Emploi Général), also known as Storm Shadow in the UK, is an air-launched cruise missile designed for long-range deep strike missions with stealth features.
- Developed by MBDA, a European multinational defence company, SCALP has a range of around 450 km and is capable of low-altitude flight, making it hard to detect.
- It can be deployed at night and in all weather conditions, providing the Indian Air Force with high operational flexibility.
- SCALP uses a combination of INS, GPS, and terrain referencing for navigation, allowing it to penetrate heavily fortified targets like bunkers and ammunition depots with high precision.

• METEOR: Next-Gen Air-to-Air Superiority

- The Meteor is a Beyond Visual Range **Air-to-Air** Missile (BVRAAM) developed by MBDA, effective even in dense electronic warfare environments.
- It uses a solid-fuel 'ramjet' motor, providing continuous thrust and enabling the largest 'No Escape Zone' among air-to-air missile systems.

• BRAHMOS: India's Supersonic Cruise Power

- It is jointly developed by India's DRDO and Russia's NPO Mashinostroyeniya, and is operational in all three Indian defence services.
- It operates at speeds close to Mach 3, ensuring faster target engagement, low dispersion, and minimal interception risk.
- The missile follows a 'Fire and Forget' mode, with a cruising altitude of up to 15 km and terminal altitude as low as 10 metres, carrying a 200–300 kg conventional warhead.

• Loitering Munitions

- Loitering munitions are aerial weapons that combine surveillance and strike capabilities, allowing them to identify and engage targets with precision.

Key Features of Precision-guided munitions:



- **Advanced Guidance Systems:** GPS, laser, radar, or infrared tracking for precision targeting.
- **In-Flight Correction:** Adjust course mid-air for optimal accuracy.
- **Reduced Collateral Damage:** Targets are hit with minimal impact on surrounding areas.
- **Deployment Flexibility:** Can be launched from air, sea, land, or drones.
- **Enhanced Accuracy:** Drastic improvement over traditional unguided munitions.

- These systems can be operated autonomously or manually, offering real-time intelligence and the ability to strike at the right moment.

India's Air Defence Response to Pakistani Attacks

- On May 8, Pakistan launched a coordinated attack with drones and missiles targeting Indian military bases and cities.
- The Indian Air Force (IAF) swiftly activated its Integrated Counter-UAS (*Unmanned Aerial Systems*) Grid and air defence systems, successfully intercepting and neutralizing the threats.
- **Key Air Defence Systems Deployed**
 - **S-400 Triumph:** Deployed on the northern border; three squadrons received from Russia.
 - **Barak 8 MRSAM:** Medium-range Surface-to-Air Missile developed jointly with Israel.
 - **Akash:** Indigenous Indian missile system.
 - **S-125 Pechora:** Legacy Russian system still in active use.
 - **Guns, Radars, and Electronic Warfare Systems:** Used to track and destroy UAVs and enemy drones.
- **Integrated Counter-UAS Grid in Action**
 - The IAF used jamming and spoofing techniques to mislead and neutralize UAVs.
 - The counter-UAS system forms a key part of India's layered air defence strategy.
 - Debris from intercepted drones and missiles is currently being collected.

Use of HAROP Loitering Munition in Operation Sindoor



- On May 8, India thwarted Pakistani retaliation and simultaneously targeted multiple Pakistani air defence systems, including one in Lahore.
- HAROP loitering munitions, made by Israel, were reportedly used in the operation.
- **HAROP: A Modern Loitering Munition**
 - ▶ **Definition:** Loiters near the target area before crashing into it with an explosive payload.
 - ▶ **Nickname:** Known as "suicide drones" or "kamikaze drones."
- **Israeli Origin and Battlefield Capabilities**
 - ▶ **Developer:** Israeli Aerospace Industries (IAI).
 - ▶ **Features:**
 - Combines features of UAV and missile.
 - Effective against high-value targets like tanks, command posts, and air defence systems.
 - Endurance of up to 9 hours with 360° attack capability.
 - Immune to GNSS jamming, enhancing operability in hostile environments.
 - Launched from land or naval platforms, suitable for diverse terrains.

PM Announces Strategic Doctrine

In his address to the nation for the first time after Operation Sindoor, PM Modi outlined a new anti-terror doctrine.

India's Anti-Terror Doctrine: As Outlined by PM Modi

- **Three Core Principles of the India's New Doctrine**
 - **Response on India's Terms:** India will choose the timing, nature, and scale of its response to terror attacks.
 - **No Tolerance for "Nuclear Blackmail":** India will not be deterred by Pakistan's nuclear posturing.
 - ⊕ **No Distinction Between Terrorists, their masterminds and State Sponsors**
- **New Normal in India's Response to Terror**
 - Operation Sindoor is positioned as a benchmark and a new standard in India's fight against terrorism. This lowers the threshold for future Indian military responses and projects a higher degree of offensive readiness.
- **Framing India's Fight in the Global War on Terror**
 - PM Modi linked India's actions to the global anti-terror campaign, comparing the strikes against Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba to global responses to terror after 9/11.
 - This positions India as a global stakeholder in counter-terrorism.

- **International Messaging: “This is Not the Era of Terrorism”**
 - To counter accusations of war-mongering, Modi invoked his now-famous phrase, “This is not the era of war,” and adapted it: “This is also not the era of terrorism.”
 - He called for global unity and zero tolerance against terrorism for a safer world.
- **Firm Red Lines on Talks with Pakistan**
 - India reaffirmed its long-standing position:
 - ♣ No talks with Pakistan unless they are about terrorism and PoK.
 - ♣ Terror and talks, trade, or even water cannot go together.

IOS Sagar Arrives in Port Louis

- INS Sunayna, renamed as **Indian Ocean Ship (IOS) SAGAR**, was flagged off by Defence Minister in April 2025 from **Karwar Naval Base**.
- It is deployed in the **South Western Indian Ocean** to strengthen **regional maritime security** and foster **international cooperation**.
- The vessel is carrying 44 naval personnel from nine friendly countries including: Madagascar; Maldives; Comoros; Kenya; Mauritius; Mozambique; Seychelles; Sri Lanka; Tanzania.
- **Phase-I Completed with Mauritius**
 - IOS SAGAR arrived at Port Louis Harbour, Mauritius, after completing the first phase of joint Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) surveillance with the Mauritius National Coast Guard.
 - The visit marks a major step in India’s maritime cooperation and capacity-building efforts with Indian Ocean Region (IOR) nations.
- **Capabilities of INS Sunayna**
 - Specializes in anti-piracy, maritime surveillance, and humanitarian aid
 - Equipped with medium and close-range gunnery weapons
 - Features modern electronic warfare and missile defence systems
 - Has helicopter-carrying capability, enhancing surveillance range

Civil Defence Drills

- A nationwide civil defence mock drill was conducted across various districts of India.
- These drills, part of "Operation Shield," focused on regions near the border and potentially vulnerable to cross-border threats.
- The drills simulated incidents to evaluate emergency response mechanisms, with scenes of simulated injuries, firefighters extinguishing flames, and blackouts.

About Civil Defence

- Civil Defence measures are designed to address emergency situations, protect the public, and help restore critical services and infrastructure damaged by disasters or hostile attacks.
- **Historical Background**
 - Initially, Civil Defence in India focused on awareness and planning under the **Emergency Relief Organization (ERO)**.
 - The 1962 China War and 1965 Indo-Pak conflict prompted a policy shift.

- This led to the enactment of the **Civil Defence Act, 1968**, enabling protective measures across India during hostile attacks.
- **Civil Defence Act, 1968 and Amendments**
 - The Civil Defence Act, 1968 authorizes non-combat measures to protect people and property from hostile attacks via air, land, or sea.
 - It also enables the formation of the Civil Defence Corps and the creation of rules and regulations.
 - The 2009 Amendment expanded its scope to include disaster management as an additional function of Civil Defence, covering both natural and man-made disasters.
- **Organizational Structure**
 - Civil Defence is primarily volunteer-based, supported by a small number of paid staff during peacetime and expanded during crises.
 - The current volunteer target is 14.11 lakh, of which 5.38 lakh have already been raised.
 - The organisation is managed and trained by Deputy Controllers, Medical Officers, and Civil Defence Instructors.
 - Duty and training allowances are provided to volunteers.
 - The long-term goal is to have 1 crore Civil Defence volunteers across India within 7 years.

BrahMos-NG and Air-Launched BrahMos Developments

- The **BrahMos-NG (Next Generation)**, a **compact** air-launched version of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile, is in the advanced stages of development and expected to be flight-tested within a year.
- Production and induction are likely within 1–2 years after testing.
- **Key Highlights**
 - **Extended Range**
 - ♣ Originally capped at 290 km due to the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), BrahMos' range increased to 450 km after India joined MTCR in 2016.
 - ♣ Work is ongoing to extend the range to 800 km; a maiden trial has already been conducted.
 - **BrahMos-NG Specifications**
 - ♣ **Weight:** 1.33 tonnes (half the current air-launched version's 2.65 tonnes)
 - ♣ **Speed:** Up to Mach 2.8
 - ♣ **Capacity:** Su-30MKI: Can carry up to 4 BrahMos-NG missiles; LCA Tejas: Can carry 2 BrahMos-NG missiles
 - **Deployment**
 - ♣ The air-launched BrahMos is currently deployed on Sukhoi Su-30MKI aircraft.
 - ♣ In January 2020, IAF inducted the 222 'Tiger Sharks' Squadron in Thanjavur, armed with BrahMos.
 - ♣ So far, 40 of 272 Su-30MKIs have been modified for BrahMos integration.
 - **BrahMos Overview (supersonic cruise missile)**
 - ♣ Joint venture between India and Russia, named after Brahmaputra and Moskva rivers.
 - ♣ Inducted in 2005 in anti-ship role; can be launched from land, sea, sub-sea, and air.

INSV Kaundinya – A Tribute to Ancient Indian Maritime Heritage

- The Indian Navy officially inducted INSV Kaundinya, a stitched sail ship modeled on a 5th-century CE vessel depicted in Ajanta Caves, at a ceremonial event held at Karwar Naval Base.
- The event was presided over by Union Culture Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat.
- **Project Genesis** - Initiated in July 2023 through a tripartite agreement between the Ministry of Culture, Indian Navy, and Hodi Innovations, with funding from the Culture Ministry.
- **Construction** - Constructed using **traditional stitched shipbuilding** by artisans from Kerala, led by **master shipwright Babu Sankaran**.
- **Materials** - Wooden planks, coir rope, coconut fibre, and natural resin.
- **Indian Navy's Role**
 - Oversaw design, technical validation, and construction.
 - With no blueprints available, design was reconstructed from Ajanta iconography.
 - Hull and rigging validated via hydrodynamic testing at IIT Madras.
- **Cultural Features**
 - Sails: Motifs of Gandabherunda and Sun
 - Bow: Sculpted Simha Yali
 - Deck: Harappan-style stone anchor
- **Symbolic Significance**: Named after Kaundinya, the legendary Indian mariner who journeyed to Southeast Asia, the ship highlights India's rich maritime heritage, ancient trade networks, and cultural exchange.
- **Future Voyage**: INSV Kaundinya, now based at Karwar, will undertake a transoceanic voyage along the ancient trade route from Gujarat to Oman later this year.

SC Recognizes CAPF as Organised Services

The Supreme Court (SC) ruled that Group A officers of the Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) from batches dating back to 1986 are to be recognised as “Organised Services” for “all purposes”.

Key Highlights

- **Background**
 - CAPF officers have sought **Organised Group A Services (OGAS)** status for over a decade.
 - In 2015 and 2019, Delhi High Court and Supreme Court upheld their eligibility.
 - In 2021, they again moved the Supreme Court citing career stagnation.
 - Main demands: cadre restructuring, Non-Functional Financial Upgradation (NFFU) implementation, and end to IPS lateral entry.
 - They argued the current system hampers dignity, career growth, and causes demoralisation.
- **Supreme Court's Ruling**
 - A two-judge bench of the Supreme Court delivered a landmark verdict in favour of CAPF officers.
 - The ruling mandated that Group A officers of CAPFs from batches as early as 1986 must be treated as part of Organised Group A Services for all service-related matters.
 - **Key Directions of the Court:**
 - ♣ IPS deputation in CAPFs, particularly at the Senior Administrative Grade (SAG) and IG levels, must be progressively reduced within two years.

- ♣ Cadre review and restructuring is to be completed within six months to facilitate timely promotions.
- ♣ Recruitment rules must be amended to align with the new framework and mitigate promotion stagnation.
- **Implications for CAPF Officers**
 - The judgment is expected to benefit nearly 13,000 Group A CAPF officers.
 - Officers will now be eligible for promotions and financial upgrades, including Non-Functional Financial Upgradation (NFFU).
 - ♣ Introduced in 2006 through the Sixth Pay Commission, NFFU allows officers to receive financial benefits even if they are not promoted, as long as a batchmate is promoted in another organization.

Understanding the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs)



- CAPFs play a pivotal role in safeguarding India's internal security and borders.
- Comprising 7 key forces, Border Security Force (BSF), Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB), National Security Guard (NSG) & Assam Rifles (AR), CAPFs are under the administrative control of the **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)**.
- CAPFs are India's frontline paramilitary forces responsible for diverse internal security tasks, from counter-insurgency to border protection and guarding critical infrastructure.

Challenges in Career Progression

- Promotion avenues for CAPF officers were historically limited by recruitment rules that favoured IPS officers for senior posts through lateral entry.
- This arrangement led to frustration and delayed promotions, affecting morale and motivation within the force.
- Officers often had to serve **25-30 years** before being promoted to key ranks like **Commandant or DIG**, significantly exceeding standard timelines.

Historic Double-Handed Circumnavigation by INSV Tarini

- Two Indian Navy officers, Lt Cdr Roopa A and Lt Cdr Dilna K became the first Indian double-handed circumnavigators when their journey concluded at Mormugao Port, Goa.
- They sailed over 25,400 nautical miles in eight months aboard INSV Tarini.
- It marked the successful completion of **Navika Sagar Parikrama II**, flagged off on **2 Oct 2024** from **Naval Ocean Sailing Node, Goa**.
- **Record-Breaking Circumnavigation**
 - First Indian double-handed (two-member crew) circumnavigation of the globe.
 - Covered 25,400 nautical miles (~50,000 km), across 4 continents, 3 oceans, and 3 Great Capes.
 - Accomplished using wind and sail power only, with no external assistance.
- Expedition reflects India's maritime ambition, innovation, and commitment to women-led initiatives.
- Symbolizes the Indian Navy's motto: "Courageous Hearts, Boundless Seas."

India's First Interpol Silver Notices in Visa Fraud and Crypto Scam Cases

- The CBI has secured Interpol Silver Notices against two individuals — one for visa fraud and another for running an unauthorised cryptocurrency scheme involving ₹113.10 crore — to trace and recover their criminal assets globally.
- **INTERPOL Silver Notice**
 - **Launch**
 - ♣ Interpol launched Silver Notice in January 2025 as a pilot programme involving 51 countries.
 - ♣ It allows sharing alerts and requests for identifying and tracking assets of criminals worldwide.
 - ♣ Each country can request up to nine Silver Notices during the pilot phase (till November 2025).
 - ♣ It enables the **sharing of information on illicit assets** related to crimes like **fraud, corruption, and drug trafficking**, thereby enhancing **international cooperation**.

o Key Objectives:

- ♣ **Tracking Illicit Assets:** Identifies and monitors properties, vehicles, bank accounts, and businesses acquired through illegal means.
- ♣ **Facilitating Global Cooperation:** Strengthens collaboration between nations in tackling transnational organized crime.
- ♣ **Enabling Asset Recovery:** Supports the location and eventual seizure or return of laundered assets across jurisdictions.

1st batch of 17 Women Cadets Graduate from NDA

Seventeen women cadets graduated in the 148th NDA batch, marking a historic moment that paves the way for women to potentially reach top leadership positions in the Indian armed forces in the future.

Long Journey to NDA: A Milestone in Women's Military Inclusion

- Women's entry into the Indian military began with the British-era Military Nursing Service in 1888.
- In 1958, the Indian Army Medical Corps started granting regular commissions to women doctors.
- **Opening Non-Medical Roles (1992–2008):**
 - o The Women Special Entry Scheme (WSES) was introduced in 1992, allowing women to join select non-combat branches as Short Service Commission (SSC) officers.
 - o In 2008, women SSC officers in the Judge Advocate General department and Army Education Corps (AEC) became eligible for Permanent Commission (PC).
- **Expanding Opportunities (2019–2020)**
 - o In 2019, women were allowed PC in eight additional non-combat streams, though command roles were still denied.
 - o Legal challenges culminated in a landmark 2020 Supreme Court verdict affirming women's right to PC and command roles in ten streams, rejecting gender-based discrimination.
- **Breaking Barriers (2021–2024):**
 - o Following a Supreme Court directive in 2021, the NDA opened its doors to women.
 - o The 17 women cadets who graduated in 2024 were the first batch admitted after this historic ruling, symbolizing a transformative shift in India's military landscape.

India's AMCA Stealth Jet Project Approved

- In a strategic boost to India's self-reliant defence vision, the Ministry of Defence has approved the execution model for the **Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA)** programme.
- The Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA), in collaboration with private industry partners, will spearhead the development of AMCA, a stealth-heavy, multi-role aircraft.
- The plan is to produce **five prototypes** under a budget exceeding **Rs. 15,000 crore.**

Features and Capabilities of AMCA

- The AMCA is envisioned as a **twin-engine, 25-tonne aircraft** equipped with **advanced stealth characteristics**, including **internal weapons bays, sensor fusion, and super cruise capability.**
- These features are designed to significantly reduce radar visibility, allowing the aircraft to engage in **deep-penetration missions** and precision strikes with minimal detection.
- Key technological highlights of the AMCA include:

- **Internal Fuel Capacity:** 6.5 tonnes
- **Electronic Pilot:** AI-assisted decision-making system
- **Integrated Vehicle Health Management:** Predictive maintenance for reduced downtime
- **Net-centric Warfare Suite:** Real-time combat coordination, including seamless integration with **Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs)**
- **Weapon Load:** Internal bay capable of carrying 1,500 kg, including **four long-range air-to-air missiles** and **precision-guided munitions**
- The AMCA's features put it in the same league as advanced fifth-generation fighters like the **F-35 Lightning II** (USA), **Sukhoi Su-57** (Russia), and **Chengdu J-20** (China).
- These aircraft emphasize stealth, multi-role capabilities, and network-enabled warfare.

Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief of SW Air Command

- Air Marshal **Nagesh Kapoor** assumed charge as the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief (AOC-in-C) of the South Western Air Command (SWAC), headquartered in Gandhinagar, Gujarat.
- He succeeds Air Marshal Narmadeshwar Tiwari, who will take over as Vice Chief of the Air Staff.
- SWAC is responsible for controlling air operations in the southwestern region of India, including most of Rajasthan, parts of Gujarat, and areas from Kutch to Pune.

SC Quashes Centre's Move on Retrospective Green Clearances

Supreme Court (SC) declared as illegal the Ministry of Environment's 2017 notification that allowed ex-post facto environmental clearances — i.e., permissions granted after a project had already started. The court also struck down a 2021 office memorandum that laid out a procedure for granting such post-facto clearances.

It further barred the Centre from issuing similar notifications or orders that violate the **Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification of 2006**, reinforcing the principle that environmental approvals must be obtained before project execution.

- EIA Notification, 2006 mandates prior environmental clearance for projects likely to impact the environment, human health, and social infrastructure.
- The process includes multiple stages: project screening, environmental impact study, public hearing, and expert committee review.

2017 Notification and Post-Facto Clearances

- In March 2017, the Ministry of Environment issued a notification offering a one-time, six-month window for industries to seek clearance after starting operations or making changes without approval.
- This applied to projects that had begun without prior clearance, expanded beyond approved capacity, or altered their product mix.
- **Centre's Justification for Post-Facto Clearances**
 - The Centre argued it was better to **regulate violations** rather than leave them unchecked.
 - Violators would be made to **pay for remediation and pollution**.
 - Simultaneously, state authorities and pollution control boards were expected to take action under the **Environment Protection Act, 1986**.
- **Centralised Appraisal and Expert Oversight**
 - All post-facto clearance cases, regardless of project size or category, were to be appraised (evaluated) **centrally**.
 - Appraisal proceeded only if the project was permissible at its site; otherwise, closure was recommended.
 - A committee headed by **S R Wate** (ex-NEERI Director) appraised violation cases, meeting **47 times** between 2017 and 2021.
- **SOP Introduced in 2021**
 - A Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) was issued in July 2021 to standardise the handling of violation cases, following a National Green Tribunal directive.

SC Criticises Centre for Protecting Environmental Violators

- The Court questioned whether development should come at the cost of environmental degradation.
- **Violation of Fundamental Rights**
 - The Court held that the 2017 Notification and 2021 Office Memorandum (OM) violated:
 - **Article 21** – Right to life, which includes the right to a **healthy, pollution-free environment**.
 - **Article 14** – Right to equality before law, as the OM extended protection to violators **fully aware** of the legal consequences.
- **SC Rejects Centre's One-Time Justification**
 - The Supreme Court reminded the Centre of its earlier undertaking before the Madras High Court, where it claimed the 2017 notification was a **one-time exception**.

- The SC ruled that even a one-time exemption was unconstitutional, as it undermines the public's **right to a clean environment**.

Illegality of Post-Facto Clearances

- The Court cited **Common Cause v. Union of India (2017)** and **Alembic Pharmaceuticals v. Rohit Prajapati (2020)** to reaffirm that ex-post facto clearances are alien to environmental law.
- Such clearances violate the foundational principles of the EIA notification.

Previous judgements: The Supreme Court affirmed that it is the duty of constitutional courts **to protect the environmental rights of citizens**. This was also reiterated by the court in -

- **M.C. Mehta** case 1986 (lays down the concept of ‘absolute liability’),
- **Godavarman Thirumulpad** case 1995 (redefined the concept of ‘forests’). This description ‘forest’ covers all statutorily recognised forests, whether designated as reserved, protected or otherwise. It also offered additional instructions on managing forest areas, including transferring forest land for non-forest purposes, as per the Forest Conservation Act, 1980.
- The recent (2024) case where SC ruled that citizens have a **“right against the adverse effects of climate change”**.

- **2021 Office Memorandum Violated Judicial Orders**

- The bench criticised the Centre for issuing the 2021 Office Memorandum, which allowed retrospective clearances, despite earlier Supreme Court rulings against it.
- It held that this **regularised** illegal actions of starting projects without prior environmental clearance.
- The Court observed that the Centre intentionally avoided using the term "ex-post facto" in the SOP, but the substance and effect remained the same.
- It labelled the move as “clever drafting” to circumvent previous judicial restrictions.

- **Reaffirmation of Environmental Jurisprudence**

- In the **Alembic Pharmaceuticals case**, the SC had clearly ruled that post-facto approvals were against environmental principles and should not be permitted.
- The current bench reiterated that such actions are a direct affront to the rule of law and ordered the Centre not to reintroduce such mechanisms in any form.

- **Existing clearances not affected:** Environmental clearances already granted under the now-invalidated instruments will remain valid.

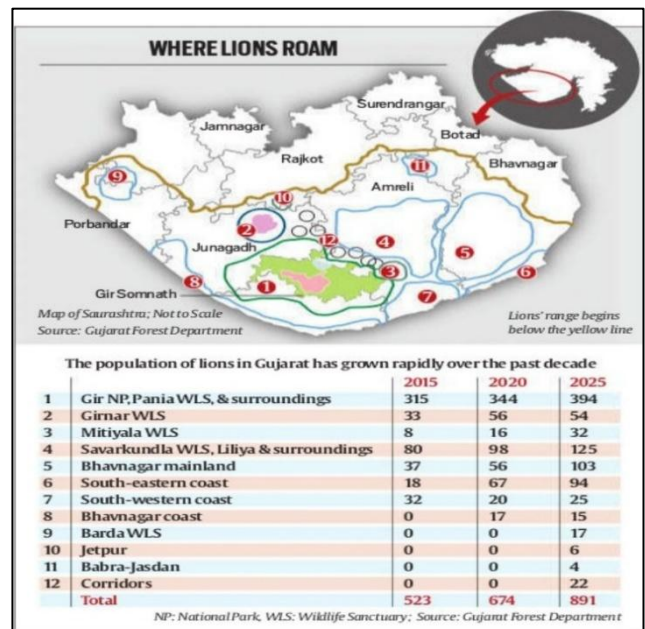
Asiatic Lions

The latest lion population estimate in Gujarat shows **891 Asiatic lions**, marking a 32% increase since 2020. Their geographical range has expanded by 17%, now covering 35,000 sq km across 58 talukas in 11 districts.

Asiatic Lions: Expanding Territory, Limited Habitat

- **New Territories, Same Challenges**

- In the past five years, Asiatic lions have moved into three new regions — Barda Wildlife Sanctuary, Jetpur, and Babra-Jasdan.
- Their spread trend across locations and the rise to nearly 900 individuals led to the IUCN upgrading their status from “critically endangered” to “endangered” in 2008.



- **Disproportionate Growth vs. Range Expansion**
 - While the lion's range expanded by 430% since 1990, their population rose by only 214%.
 - This disparity reveals that area expansion hasn't translated proportionally into population growth.
- **Shortage of Protected Wilderness**
 - The Saurashtra peninsula lacks sufficient protected areas beyond Gir National Park and a few small sanctuaries like Pania, Girnar, Mitiyala, and Berda.
 - As this reach carrying capacity, lions increasingly wander into wastelands, farmlands, and plantations, relying on fragmented patches of natural vegetation.
- **Lions Outside Forests**
 - Only 56% of Gujarat's lions were found in forested zones.
 - In 2020, data showed a stark contrast in population density — 15.2 per 100 sq km in forests vs. 1.65 in non-forested areas — highlighting the unsuitability of much of the expanded range for sustainable habitation.

Future of the Pride: Relocation and Habitat Challenges for Asiatic Lions

- **Delay in Supreme Court-Directed Relocation:** Despite a 2013 SC order mandating the relocation of Asiatic lions from Gujarat to Madhya Pradesh within six months, the move has been delayed for over 12 years.
 - Gujarat had assured compliance seven years ago, but the transfer remains unfulfilled.
- **Project Lion and New Site Identification:** Launched in August 2020, Project Lion initially proposed seven sites across Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan for lion relocation.
 - However, by July 2022, government restricted assessments to sites within Gujarat only.

Green Hydrogen Certification Scheme of India (GHCI)

Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) launched a **Green Hydrogen Certification Scheme** under the **National Green Hydrogen Mission** and notified rules for claiming emission offsets under the Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS).

- ✓ The National Green Hydrogen Mission aims to produce *at least 5 million metric tons (MMT) of green hydrogen per year by 2030.*

About Green Hydrogen Certification Scheme of India (GHCI)

- The GHCI scheme, based on the standard, applies only to green hydrogen production from electrolysis or conversion of biomass.
- **Nodal Agencies:** Producers must appoint **Accredited Carbon Verification (ACV)** agencies, recognized by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency, for independent verification.
- The GHCI promotes the use of solar, wind, and other renewables for hydrogen production, supporting India's target of 500 GW renewable energy capacity by 2030.
 - ✓ This scheme aligns with achieving net-zero emissions by 2070 (India's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement) and reducing dependence on fossil fuels.

Objectives of the Green Hydrogen Certification Scheme

- **Certify Green Hydrogen Production:** Verify that hydrogen is produced using renewable energy sources through electrolysis or biomass conversion, with emissions *not exceeding 2 kg CO2 equivalent per kg of hydrogen* (well-to-gate emissions) averaged over 12 months.
- **Support Global Trade:** Position India as a credible exporter of green hydrogen by aligning with international standards, facilitating trade with countries like the EU and Japan.

- ✓ India has signed an agreement with Japan & Singapore to supply 4.12 lakh tonnes of green hydrogen derivatives like green ammonia.
- **Promote Decarbonization:** Enable industries such as steel, fertilizers, and transportation to transition to green hydrogen, reducing carbon emissions.
 - ✓ The certification also enables producers to access carbon credits under the **CCTS**, subject to additional compliance requirements.
 - ✓ Certificates are issued in multiples of 100 kg of hydrogen

The GHCI utilizes a **four-tiered certification system**. This system includes:

1. **Concept Certificate:** This certificate centers on the initial design and planning stages of a green hydrogen project by verifying Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) framework
2. **Facility-Level Certificate:** This certificate assesses operational preparedness of the facility.
3. **Provisional Certificate:** This certification provides an initial evaluation of actual emissions by analyzing production data.
4. **Final Certificate:** This is a comprehensive certification that definitively evaluates the facility's emissions based on its production data. Final Certificate is a requirement for any facility that either receives government incentives or plans to sell hydrogen within the domestic market.
 - A nominal fee is applicable only for the final certificate.

Global Action on Chemicals and Waste at BRS COPs 2025

An Inter-Ministerial delegation from India, led by the Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change had participated in the Conference of the Parties (COPs) to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm (BRS) Conventions at Geneva.

- ✓ The theme of this year's high-level segment is *"Make visible the invisible: Sound management of chemicals and wastes."*

The BRS Conventions

The Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions are global treaties aimed at regulating hazardous chemicals and waste to protect human health and the environment:

Basel Convention (1989)	Rotterdam Convention (1998)	Stockholm Convention (2001)
Controls transboundary movements of hazardous wastes and their disposal . It entered into force in 1992 and addresses the problem of "toxic trade" by requiring prior informed consent (PIC) for hazardous waste exports.	Entered into force in 2004, it Promotes shared responsibility and cooperative efforts in the international trade of certain hazardous chemicals & pesticides through Prior Informed Consent (PIC)	Targets the elimination or restriction of Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) - e.g. "dirty dozen", that persist in the environment.

India's Role and Contributions at BRS COPs 2025

- India called for *predictable international financing mechanisms and the mobilization of domestic resources* through tools like progressive taxation, carbon levies, and Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) to tackle chemicals and waste better for human health and the environment.
- **New POPs:** Pushed for the inclusion of additional chemicals, such as PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances), in the Stockholm Convention's POPs list

- India highlighted the **role of CSIR-NEERI's** side event at **BRS COPs 2025**, which showcased its **National Implementation Plan (NIP)** update for POPs management, waste rules, and efforts to curb dioxins, involving inputs from UNEP and CPCB.

“Means of Implementation” at BRS COP

India underscored the importance of predictable and sustainable international financing to support the implementation of BRS conventions in developing countries. Key points raised included:

- **Polluter Pays Principle:** Advocated for contributions from developed nations, historically responsible for chemical pollution, to fund implementation efforts in the Global South.
 - ✓ India reiterated the **principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR)**, arguing that developed nations should bear a greater responsibility for providing resources due to their historical contributions to chemical pollution.
- **National Implementation Plans (NIPs):** Highlighted India's updated NIP under the Stockholm Convention, which outlines strategies to phase out POPs like DDT and PCBs (*polychlorinated biphenyls*).

Extra Mile: BRS COPs & it's Past

- The BRS COPs occur every **two years** and aim to advance global action on hazardous chemicals and waste management. These joint meetings, often referred to as a **“triple COP”**.
- The 2023 BRS COPs resulted in several key outcomes for the management of hazardous chemicals and waste.
- These included the listing of three new chemicals under the Stockholm Convention, the addition of a pesticide to the Prior Informed Consent (PIC) procedure under the Rotterdam Convention, and the adoption of technical guidelines for managing plastic waste and electronic waste (e-waste) under the Basel Convention.

Tsarap Chu Conservation Reserve

The Himachal Pradesh notified the Tsarap Chu Conservation Reserve by issuing a notification under Section 36A (1) of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

About Tsarap Chu Conservation Reserve

- Tsarap Chu, **India's largest conservation reserve** spread over 1,585 square kilometres, is Himachal Pradesh's (HP) **fifth conservation reserve located in Spiti Valley**; it is also prime snow leopard habitat ('ghost of the mountains').
 - ✓ Tsarap Chu joins *Darlaghat, Naina Devi, Potter Hill, and Shilli* as HP's fifth conservation reserve.
 - ✓ Conservation Reserve Management Committee involving local stakeholders, ensures participatory management, aligning with the Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act of 2003.
- It is bounded by the Union Territory of Ladakh to the north, the Kibber Wildlife Sanctuary extending up to Malang Nala and Lungar Lungpa to the east, Kabjima Nala to the south and Chandratal Wildlife Sanctuary to the west.
 - ✓ It is also the location for the **confluence of the Unam River and Charap Nala**.
- *Tibetan wolf, bharal (blue sheep), Himalayan ibex, kiang (wild ass), and the Tibetan argali* are also found in the region.
- **Rare bird species** such as *Rose Finch, Tibetan Raven, and Yellow-billed Chough* enrich the region.

Tissue-cultured Teak

Tissue-cultured teak has potential to boost India's timber cultivation and trade but requires identifying best farm practices.

What is the Concept of Tissue culture for Teak?

- Tissue culture is a modern biotechnological tool that revolutionizes plant propagation.
- For teak, it involves **culturing** meristematic tissues or nodal segments in a nutrient-rich medium under controlled conditions to produce genetically identical plantlets (clones).
 - ✓ This method addresses several limitations of traditional propagation.
- The Forest Research Institute (FRI) in Dehradun and the Institute of Forest Genetics and Tree Breeding (IFGTB) in Coimbatore have successfully developed tissue culture protocols for teak.
 - ✓ **National Agroforestry Policy (2014):** Encourages tree plantations on farmlands, with tissue-cultured teak as a viable option.

Tissue Culture Research of Teak in India

- ❖ In India, tissue culture research in teak was *pioneered in the 1970s*, followed by extensive efforts by the **National Chemical Laboratory (NCL), Pune**, in the 1980s-90s.
- ❖ There are several protocols in place; for instance, in 2005, the *Indian Council of Agricultural Research-Central Research Institute for Dryland Agriculture, Hyderabad*, established a method to culture nodal explants (tissues) from juvenile shoots of mature trees.
- ❖ The protocol **has four stages**: 1) establishment of primary explants, 2) in vitro multiplication, 3) rooting and 4) hardening (acclimatization).

Dimensions of Tissue-Cultured Teak

Agricultural and Biotechnological Dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniformity and Quality: Tissue-cultured teak plants are clones, ensuring uniformity in growth, wood quality, and resistance to pests and diseases. • Rapid Multiplication: Unlike seed-based propagation, which is slow & inconsistent, it allows mass production of plantlets in a short time.
Economic Dimension	Higher Returns for Farmers: Tissue-cultured teak plants mature faster (15-20 years compared to 25-30 years for seed-grown teak), enabling farmers to realize profits sooner.
Environmental Dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carbon Sequestration: Teak plantations act as carbon sinks, absorbing CO₂. Tissue-cultured teak enhances carbon sequestration efficiency. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The Green India Mission under the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) can promote tissue-cultured teak plantations to restore degraded forest lands. ✓ Bonn Challenge: India's commitment to restore 26 million hectares of degraded land by 2030 can accommodate tissue-cultured teak plantations
Social Dimension	The Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED) has promoted tissue-cultured teak plantations among tribal communities in Chhattisgarh, integrating them with livelihood programs like Van Dhan Yojana.

Extra Mile: All About Teak Wood ("king" of timbers)

- **Teak** is one of the world's most valuable tropical hardwoods, with applications ranging from shipbuilding to construction to high-end furniture.

- Asia holds over 95 per cent of the world's teak resources, with **India alone managing 35 per cent** of planted teak forests.
- As per the *"Global Teak Resources and Market Assessment 2022"*, published by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra have the largest area of natural native teak forests.
- Green felling of timber from government-owned forests is prohibited under the Forest Conservation Act, 1980, and National Forest Policy, 1988. Private plantations are relied upon to meet the growing domestic and international demand for this prized timber.

Global Methane Tracker 2025

Recently, The International Energy Agency (IEA) released Global Methane Tracker 2025 report.

Key Findings from Global Methane Tracker 2025

- **Methane's Potency:** Methane is responsible for around 30% of the rise in global temperatures since the Industrial Revolution.
 - ✓ **Abandoned wells and mines** – included in this year's Global Methane Tracker *for the first time* – contributed around 8 Mt to these emissions in 2024.
 - ✓ In April 2025, *the IEA and the government of the U.K.* convened an international Summit on the Future of Energy Security to review the trends shaping global energy security.
- **Energy Sector Emissions:** The energy sector (oil, gas, coal, and bioenergy) contributes over 35% of anthropogenic methane emissions, with 120 million tonnes (Mt) from fossil fuels and 20 Mt from bioenergy in 2024.
 - ✓ In 2024 some oil and gas companies met the **highest level of reporting (known as "Gold Standard")** set by the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) Oil and Gas Methane Partnership 2.0 (OGMP 2.0).
 - ✓ **Global Methane Pledge (GMP):** Launched at COP26 (2021), the GMP aims to reduce methane emissions by 30% from 2020 levels by 2030.
- Large methane leaks detected by satellites reached a record high in 2024, with significant events like **a well blowout in Kazakhstan (2023-lasting over 200 days)** & others contributing over 5 Mt.
 - ✓ New methane-focused satellites became operational in 2024, including **MethaneSAT and Tanager-1**, which have sensitive detection thresholds and provide high resolution data.
- **Investment Needs:** Achieving a *75% reduction in methane emissions by 2030 requires* USD 170 billion.

20th Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF-20)

India participated in the 20th session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF-20), held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

India's Participation at UNFF-20: Key Highlights

- India highlighted its commitment to achieving the **Voluntary National Contributions (VNCs)** under the *United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests 2017–2030*.
 - ✓ India highlighted a **25.17% forest and tree cover** (as per India State of Forest Report 2023), with a *consistent increase* over the past 15 years.
- A key moment of India's participation was the *invitation to all UN Member States* to join the International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA-For conservation of the seven big cat species).

- The Indian delegation called for global action on the outcomes of **the Country-Led Initiative (CLI)** hosted by India in Dehradun in October 2023, which focused on forest fire management and forest certification.
 - ✓ India reiterated its proposal for a **Global Fire Management Hub** under UNEP and FAO to share knowledge on forest fire mitigation
 - ✓ Mass Plantation Campaigns: The Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam campaign resulted in planting 1.4 billion seedlings
- India joined a high-level panel on “**Valuing Forest Ecosystems in National Policy and Strategy,**” where the delegation shared findings from pilot studies in Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, and tiger reserves.
 - ✓ These studies quantified ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration, water provisioning, and biodiversity conservation using frameworks such as the *System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA)* & *Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA)*.

Geotubing Technology

A study conducted by scientists from the *National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT)* using geotube technology has found that they yielded remarkable transformations in the coastal landscape behind the offshore breakwater stretch.

About Geotube Technology: Transforming Coastal Landscapes for Sustainable Development

What is Geotube Technology?

- Geotube technology involves the use of large, **permeable geotextile tubes** filled with dredged or locally sourced sediment, typically sand, to create structures such as offshore breakwaters, groynes, or shoreline protection barriers.
 - ✓ **Odisha and Tamil Nadu Coastlines:** Geotubing Technology used for coastal erosion control after the impact of cyclones like Phailin and Gaja.
- These tubes are made of **high-strength, permeable geotextile fabric** that allows water to pass through while retaining the solid material inside.
- Once filled and sealed, geotubes act as flexible, durable barriers that **absorb and dissipate wave** energy, reduce coastal erosion, and promote sediment deposition to form stable beaches.

Advantages of Geotube Technology

- **Cost-Effective:** Significantly cheaper than traditional methods, with lower maintenance costs.
- **Adaptability:** Suitable for diverse coastal environments, from high-energy wave zones to flood-prone areas.
- **Rapid Implementation:** Can be deployed quickly in emergency situations, such as flood control.

Case Study: Poonthura Geotube Offshore Breakwater Project

- The Poonthura project, implemented by the Kerala State Coastal Area Development Corporation (KSCADC) with technical support from NIOT, serves as a landmark example of geotube technology’s transformative potential.
- **Background:** Poonthura, a coastal village in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, faced severe erosion, with conventional seawalls failing to prevent landward retreat. NIOT proposed geotubes as an alternative after a successful pilot in Chennai.
- **Implementation:** The project involved installing five 100-meter-long geotube breakwater units at a depth of 6–7 meters, 80–120 meters offshore.

Bow Echoes

The intense storm that hit Delhi appeared in an unusual shape (a crescent or an archer’s bow) in the India Meteorological Department’s (IMD’s) weather radar imagery.

What is a 'bow echo'?

- Bow Echoes are a meteorological phenomenon where a line of thunderstorms takes on a bow-shaped appearance on weather radar. They are often associated with severe weather events like straight-line winds, heavy rainfall, hail, and occasional tornadoes.
 - ✓ The term "bow" refers to the curved radar signature, resembling an archer's bow, formed due to strong winds pushing the center of the storm line forward.
 - ✓ When rain-cooled air comes down to the ground, it spreads out horizontally. As this happens, a boundary called the **gust front** is created between the rain-cooled air and warm-moist air on the surface. This **front pushes up** the warm-moist air into the atmosphere, which forms new thunderstorms. These new thunderstorms produce more rain, thereby creating more rain-cooled air, which helps the gust front to maintain its strength. As this process keeps repeating itself, there comes a point when there is an inflow of air on the trailing side of the line of storms and bends it like an archer's bow.

Formation Mechanism

Process	Explanation
Cold downdraft	The storm's downdraft spreads out upon hitting the ground.
Enhanced central push	Strong winds at mid-levels push the central part of the line forward.
Bow shape emerges	Flanking cells lag behind, while the center surges ahead → bow shape appears.
Rear-inflow jet	Jet of fast-moving air reinforces the storm's central region.

Monitoring & Forecasting

- **Doppler Weather Radar:** Detects shape, velocity, and intensity of storm systems.
- **Satellite Imagery:** Helps track storm development over large spatial areas.
- **Numerical Weather Models:** Predict convective initiation and evolution of mesoscale systems.

Geographical Occurrence

- **Midwestern USA:** Most frequent region; part of "Tornado Alley" (Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska etc.)
- **India (Rare, but possible):** Could form during intense pre-monsoon or post-monsoon thunderstorms in NE states.
- **Europe (Occasional):** Recorded during intense convective events, especially in summer months.

Germanium

India engaged with China on germanium (a critical mineral for Semiconductors) export restrictions.

About Germanium

- Germanium is not found in its pure form but as a byproduct of zinc and copper mining or from coal fly ash.
 - ✓ India's **Ministry of Mines** has identified germanium as a critical mineral due to its importance in both defense applications and renewable energy technologies.
- **National Critical Minerals Mission (NCMM)** lists germanium among 30 critical minerals, with ₹5,600 crore for exploration related to these critical minerals.
 - ✓ **China's Dominance:** Controls more than half of global germanium production, raising supply chain risks.
 - ✓ India *lacks significant germanium deposits* and relies on imports, primarily from China. The *Geological Survey of India (GSI)* has not identified viable germanium reserves.
- **Germanium** is technically a metalloid in Group 14 of the periodic table, distinct from the 17 rare earth elements (REEs), which include the **15 lanthanides, scandium, and yttrium**.

- ✓ However, its inclusion in discussions of critical minerals, alongside REEs, stems from its scarcity, high-tech applications, and geopolitical significance.
- **Semiconductor Nature:** Germanium's ability to conduct electricity under specific conditions makes it vital for electronics. It was used in early transistors before silicon became dominant.
- **Infrared Optics:** Used in night-vision goggles, thermal imaging cameras, and missile guidance systems. Example: Military-grade infrared lenses in defense systems rely on germanium.

Moringa

PKM1, a variety of *Moringa oleifera*, has created a global impact, especially in countries such as Senegal, Rwanda and Madagascar in the African continent.

About Moringa ("miracle tree")

- Moringa (*Moringa oleifera*), also known as the drumstick tree, is a fast-growing, **drought-resistant tree** native to the Indian subcontinent.
- Its leaves, pods, seeds, and roots are rich in vitamins (vitamins A, C, and E), minerals (calcium, iron), and antioxidants, making it a superfood with potential to address malnutrition
- WHO & UNICEF have recommended moringa in malnutrition and anemia control programs, especially in Africa and South Asia.
 - ✓ In Tamil Nadu's Dindigul and Theni districts, FPOs (Farmer Producer Organisations) export organic moringa powder to Japan and Germany.

Botanical and Agro-Climatic Profile:

- **Native to:** India (Western Ghats, Himalayas); now grown in Africa, Southeast Asia
- **Climate Suitability:** Grows in arid and semi-arid tropical climates
- **Soil Preference:** Tolerates poor, alkaline, and even sandy soils
- **Intercropping use:** It is often intercropped with crops like maize or millets, enhancing farm resilience.
- **Lifespan:** Perennial; flowers and fruits multiple times a year

Tapti Basin Mega Recharge Project

Chief Ministers of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra signed an MoU to implement the Tapti Basin Mega Recharge Project, touted as the world's largest groundwater recharge scheme.

About Tapti Basin Mega Recharge Project

- This project aims to harness the waters of the Tapti River to address drinking water needs in northeastern Maharashtra (e.g., Nagpur) and provide irrigation support to southern Madhya Pradesh (e.g., Burhanpur and Khandwa).
 - ✓ **Total Water Usage:** 31.13 TMC (Thousand Million Cubic feet), with 11.76 TMC allocated to Madhya Pradesh and 19.36 TMC to Maharashtra.
- It is the third major inter-state river project involving Madhya Pradesh, following the **Ken-Betwa Link Project** (with Uttar Pradesh) and the **Parbati-Kalisindh-Chambal Link Project** (with Rajasthan).
- **Key Objectives of this Project**


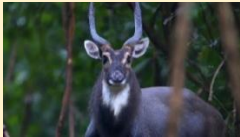

Groundwater Recharge: The project uses a network of canals and weirs to recharge groundwater in the Tapti Valley's bajada zone (a gently sloped depositional plane), addressing saline groundwater issues in Maharashtra's Vidarbha region

Irrigation Expansion: It will provide permanent irrigation to 1,23,082 hectares in Madhya Pradesh and 2,34,706 hectares in Maharashtra, boosting agricultural productivity.

Tapti River and Its Basin

- **Origin and Flow:** The Tapti River (called Tapi in Maharashtra) originates in Multai, Betul district, Madhya Pradesh, and flows westward for approximately 724 km through Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Gujarat before draining into the Arabian Sea at the Gulf of Khambhat.
 - ✓ It is India's second-longest west-flowing river after the Narmada, alongside the Mahi.
 - ✓ Purna River is the main left-bank tributary, providing perennial flow.
- **Basin Characteristics:** The Tapti basin covers a diverse terrain bounded by the Satpura Range (north), Mahadeo Hills (east), Ajanta and Satmala Hills (south), and the Arabian Sea (west).
 - ✓ The basin is characterized by groundwater stress and erratic rainfall.

Species in News

<p>Red-Crowned Roofed Turtle</p> 	<p>After 30 years, 20 critically endangered, red-crowned roofed turtles (biological name <i>Batagur kachuga</i>) were reintroduced to the Ganga, marking a significant conservation effort in India.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is one of the 50 species in the list of Asia's most-endangered tortoises and freshwater turtles. • The shells of these freshwater turtles can be as long as 56 cm and can weigh up to 25 kg. In comparison to the females, the males are shorter and reach only half the length • In India, red-crowned roofed turtles survive only in the Chambal River (less than 300), with no evidence of their presence elsewhere in the world for the past 30 years.
<p>Saola</p> 	<p>An international team of scientists has mapped the genome of the Saola, the rarest large land mammal in the world.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The saola ("Asian unicorn") is categorised as 'Critically Endangered' on the population size assessed in 2015 to be 50-300 individuals. • Found in the misty highland forests of the Annamite Mountain range along the border between Vietnam and Laos, the saola has yet to be observed alive by scientists in its natural habitat. • limited knowledge about this elusive animal is largely drawn from physical remains (primarily skulls and a few skins)
<p>Mosura Fentoni</p> 	<p>Scientists identified a new extinct species, Mosura fentoni, an early marine predator from around 506 million years ago during the Cambrian period.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This small (1.5-6 cm) extinct species, a member of the Radiodonta group and a distant relative of modern arthropods like insects and spiders, possessed highly specialized features. • Its remarkably elongated body was divided into three distinct sections: a short neck, a mid-section (mesotrunk) with six paddle-like flaps for swimming, and a long rear section (posterotrunk) with up to 16 segments featuring rows of fine gills.

1st ever Gene Edited (GE) Rice varieties

ICAR has developed climate-smart world's first genome edited (GE) rice varieties using CRISPR-Cas9-based gene editing techniques (specifically SDN1 and SDN2).

- These are India's first-ever gene-edited **food crop varieties** cleared for cultivation.
- ✓ In March 2022 India relaxed the regulatory control of certain gene editing techniques (**SDN1** (*Site-Directed Nuclease*) and **SDN 2**) that did not involve insertion/augmentation of a foreign gene.

In Nutshell: Gene Edited Rice

- India's first genome-edited rice varieties include **DRR Dhan/Rice 100 (Kamla) & Pusa DST Rice 1**.
 - ✓ These are improved versions of 2 traditional varieties – Samba Mahsuri and MTU 1010 – using the CRISPR Cas 9 based *SDN 1 and SDN 2 techniques*
 - ✓ These techniques not involve introduction of foreign gene (exogenous DNA). Thus, the resultant crop is a **non-transgenic** variety.
 - ✓ ****Note SDN-3 (and beyond):** Introduce an entire foreign gene — functionally equivalent to GM, hence transgenic.

Properties

- **DRR Rice 100**
 - ✓ High yield: A 19% increase in yield as it led to more grains per plant
 - ✓ Environmental benefits including lower methane emissions and reduced water requirement. This is because the crop matured 20 days earlier.
- **Pusa DST (Drought and Salt Tolerance) Rice 1**
 - ✓ Improved tolerance to drought, salinity, and climate stresses.

Genetically Modified (GM) crops and Gene Edited (GE) crops: A Scientific and Regulatory classification

The distinction between genetic modification and gene editing is scientifically unsound as both involve alteration of genome. However, for the purpose of regulation, genetically engineered crops are classified into transgenic and non-transgenic crops.

	GM crops	Gene Edited crops
Technique	Modification of genome using R-DNA technique and thus not precise	Genome editing using CRISPR system and thus more precise
Nature	Involves introduction of genes from unrelated species into host plants. Essentially transgenic in nature as it involves insertion of a foreign gene.	May or may not be transgenic.
Regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strictly regulated under biosafety regulations under Environment Protection Act 1986. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulatory discrimination • Regulation of <i>gene edited crops without the introduction of foreign gene is relaxed</i> under bio

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ These rules applied broadly to all genetic engineering techniques, including recombinant DNA, gene editing, and gene drives — without distinction • Requires the approval of GEAC (Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee), the highest authority for GM crops in India 	<i>safety regulations of Environment Protection Act in India.</i>
Status in India	BT Cotton is the only GM crop allowed for commercial cultivation in India	The new rice varieties are the 1st gene edited crops to be allowed for cultivation.

Extra Mile: Evolution From R-DNA (Recombinant DNA) to Gene Editing

Aspect	r-DNA Technology	Gene Editing
Inception	1970s (Herbert Boyer and Stanley Cohen)	2012 (Jennifer Doudna and Emmanuelle Charpentier)
Method	Inserting a foreign DNA fragment into a host genome e.g., inserting Vitamin A genes from daffodil into rice (Golden Rice)	Editing endogenous DNA sequences (cut, insert, delete)
Precision	Random integration this process of cutting and pasting lacks precision as the enzyme used for cutting the DNA is non-specific (does not involve reading of the genome)	Targeted and site-specific the enzymes used to cut the DNA can be programmed to edit a specific part of the genome. Thus, these techniques are broadly known as Site-directed Nuclease (SDN) technique.
Tools	Restriction enzymes, ligases	CRISPR-Cas9, TALENs, ZFNs (Zinc Finger Nuclease)
Applications	Production of insulin, growth hormones	Treating genetic disorders, precision agriculture

India's 1st Gene-edited Sheep

- In a related news India reached yet another historic milestone in the area of livestock genetics when researchers from Kashmir produced India's 1st gene edited sheep.
- The achievement belongs to Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Science & Technology (SKUAST) of Srinagar who incidentally also produced the **1st clone** of pashmina goat in India called Noori in 2012.

In nutshell: 1st gene edited sheep

- The gene editing led to increase in muscle mass of the animal by 30%.
- This was done by disrupting the myostatin gene that regulates muscle growth.
- This mutation is naturally observed in European breeds like the Texel but not present in Indian sheep.
- Since the *gene editing involved no foreign gene*, the resultant breed is non-transgenic in nature.

Drone-based Quantum Key Distribution System

- India is advancing its quantum communication network by developing a drone-based quantum key distribution system.
- In a strategic public-private partnership, C-DOT and Synergy Quantum India Pvt Ltd signed an MoU for the purpose.

Quantum Key Distribution

- Quantum Key Distribution (QKD) is a cutting-edge technology that leverages the principles of quantum mechanics to enable ultra-secure communication.
- QKD is based on the sharing of **encryption keys** between two parties, where the keys cannot be intercepted or replicated, owing to the quantum properties of particles like photons.
- **Drone-based Quantum Key Distribution** is primarily aimed at providing **on-demand deployment of secure communication infrastructure** during emergencies, disasters, battlefield operations, or mobile command centers.

Encryption in QKD vs Conventional Encryption

Feature	Classical Encryption	QKD Encryption
Fundamental Basis	Based on mathematical algorithms	Based on quantum mechanics principles (e.g., superposition, entanglement)
Vulnerability	To quantum computing	Immune to quantum attacks
Key Generation	Random key generation by software or hardware	Key derived from quantum properties of photons
Key Transfer	Transmitted (can be intercepted)	Shared via quantum states (cannot be intercepted)
Eavesdropping Detection	No	Yes (in-built via disturbance of states)
Cost and Infrastructure	Cheaper, widely deployed	Expensive, requires quantum channels, photon detectors, repeaters
Practical Limitations	Computational power may overcome it in future	Distance limitations (optical fiber ~100-200 km)
Example (India)	Common use in digital services (e.g., Aadhaar, UPI)	Drone-based QKD for defense use

Quantum Mechanical Principles behind QKD

- **Heisenberg's uncertainty principle** – any attempt to measure a quantum system alters it. Observation disturbs the quantum state, ensuring eavesdropping detection.
- **Quantum superposition** – particles exist in multiple possible states until measured (making keys probabilistically secure)
- **Decoherence** – interaction with the environment disturbs quantum states, revealing tampering
- **The No-Cloning theorem** – quantum states cannot be copied without prior knowledge of their configuration. Prevents duplication of quantum information.

Together, these principles ensure that any attempt to intercept or replicate the key is detected automatically.

Key Achievements in QKD

1st QKD by India	ISRO demonstrated QKD in 2021 for the 1st time between a 300-meter communication link.
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QKD over 100 km	IIT Delhi and DRDO demonstrated QKD between Prayagraj and Vindhyachal.
Drone-based QKD	Public-private partnership to establish communication link between drones /drone-to-ground station.
Space-based quantum communication	ISRO plans to build satellite-based communication link using QKD for long ranges

Potential Use Cases of QKD

- While still at an early stage of adoption the following high-value sectors can be have potential uses of QKD deployment

Government and Defense Communication

- It is the most secure channel for point-to-point communication for national security, border control, and high-level military communications.

Banking and Financial Networks

- Banks and stock exchanges require secure, low-latency encryption — particularly for real-time high-value transactions and clearing operations.
- By integrating QKD into core banking and SWIFT-like systems, institutions can future-proof themselves.

Critical Infrastructure – Power and Smart Grids

- QKD can secure smart grids which require realtime low latency authentication

Health and Medical Data Networks

- In sectors like health, patient records and diagnostic data are becoming increasingly digitized and networked.

Satellite-Based Communication and National Backbone Networks

- With increasing reliance on SATCOM for governance, disaster response, and diplomacy, QKD-enabled satellite links are emerging as a sovereign asset.

EOS 09 Satellite

ISRO attempted to launch dual-use earth observation satellite EOS-09. However, PSLV C-61 failed to place it into its intended sun-synchronous polar orbit (SSPO) due to a glitch in 3rd stage of the rocket.

- ✓ This marks the third PSLV failure since its debut in 1997, following setbacks in 1993 (PSLV-D1) and 2017 (PSLV-C39).

EOS-09 Satellite (RISAT-1B: Being a Part of RISAT Series)

- EOS-09 was part of India’s plan to augment its 52-satellite surveillance and remote sensing constellation.
- It is a “dual use” a reconnaissance satellite to be used mainly in military but also for civilian operations.
 - ✓ **Military applications:** Identify unauthorised border activities, track infiltration routes, detect hidden structures like tunnels and bunkers
 - ✓ **Civilian applications:** Flood mapping, cyclone monitoring, soil moisture analysis, and crop health assessment—critical for disaster response and agricultural planning

Features

Feature	Capability
Sensor: C-Band Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR)	capable of imaging ✓ during day and night and

	✓ under cloudy, rainy, foggy conditions
Resolution: Five imaging resolutions up to 1 m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Thus can “zoom-out and zoom-in” for broad imagery as well as smaller objects. ✓ Can detect minor changes such as fresh soil disturbances, new encampments and vehicular movements providing actionable intelligence
Hybrid polarimetry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ enables sending and receiving radio waves at multiple orientations (polarised): <p>Primarily used to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Detect targets under foliage such as bunkers and hidden tunnels ✓ Map different terrain types as different terrains scatter light differently ✓ Differentiate between natural and artificial objects, helping to identify camouflaged military assets

Extra Mile: RISAT series

RISAT series are dual-use satellites launched in the aftermath of the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks for border surveillance and to check infiltration.

Characteristics

- Active remote sensing satellites using SAR: beaming a radio signal on the earth’s surface and ‘senses’ the radio signal reflected back giving them all-weather and day-and-night observing capability.
- Classified into two types depending on the sensors used
 1. **RISAT 1 series:** Uses **C-Band** Synthetic Aperture Radar: Used along with Cartosat-2 in planning of the 2016 surgical strike in the aftermath of Uri terror attack
 2. **RISAT 2 series:** Uses **X-band** Synthetic Aperture Radar: Launched after the 2008 Mumbai terror attack

Gene Therapy For Haemophilia

India has successfully conducted its first human trial of gene therapy for haemophilia.

- ✓ Researchers from Christian Medical College (CMC) Vellore and inSTEM (Bengaluru), an autonomous institute under the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), developed the world’s first lentivirus-based gene therapy for haemophilia.

About Haemophilia

- Haemophilia is a rare genetic bleeding disorder (mainly Factor VIII (Haemophilia A) or Factor IX (Haemophilia B)) in which the blood clotting ability of the individual is compromised. (X-linked genetic disorder and thus commonly affects males)
- This leads to spontaneous bleeding in joints, soft tissues and muscles. It becomes particularly dangerous when internal bleeding occurs, such as in the case of a brain hemorrhage.
- **Treatment:** Intravenous infusion of clotting factors; recombinant therapy; gene therapy in advanced nations
- **Emerging Innovations:** CRISPR-based gene editing, long-acting clotting factors, subcutaneous treatment options

Gene Therapy for Haemophilia

- The blood clotting factors are **proteins** normally produced in the liver of a healthy individual.
- To treat haemophilia the person’s blood-related stem cells (hematopoietic stem cells) are genetically engineered to produce WBCs that are capable of producing the proteins responsible for clotting.
- The genes responsible for clotting factor protein are introduced via a viral vector called lentivirus. Thus, it is called lentivirus-based gene therapy.

World's 1st Gene-Editing Therapy to Cure CPS1 Deficiency

Researchers have successfully conducted a World's 1st gene -editing therapy using CRISPR system to save a baby with rare metabolic genetic disorder, CPS-1 deficiency.

Significance

- It is the first time CRISPR system is used to edit a defective gene in gene therapy. So far CRISPR system was used to augment a gene in gene therapy like CAR-T-cell therapy in case of immunodeficient disorders or cancer.

CPS-1 Deficiency

- Carbamoyl Phosphate Synthetase I (CPS-1) deficiency is a rare, autosomal recessive inherited metabolic disorder of the urea cycle, which leads to hyperammonemia.
 - ✓ Thus, its deficiency or absence causes ammonia to build up to toxic levels in the body. High levels of ammonia can cause coma, brain swelling, and permanent brain damage
- **Diagnosis:** Plasma ammonia test, genetic testing, liver biopsy, enzyme assay
- **Treatment:** Protein-restricted diet, nitrogen-scavenging drugs (sodium benzoate, sodium phenylbutyrate), in severe cases liver transplantation
 - ✓ Traditionally its cure requires liver transplant.

China's Tianwen-2 Mission

China has successfully launched a spacecraft Tianwen 2 to near-earth asteroid.

Tianwen 2 (Launch Vehicle: Long March 3B rocket)			
Mission objective	It is a dual-purpose mission <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To collect and return samples from the near-Earth asteroid 469219 Kamo'oalewa (a space rock-believed to be a fragment of moon) by 2027. 2. To later orbit and study Comet 311P, located in the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter, by 2035. 		
About Kamo'oalewa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discovered in 2016 by the Pan-STARRS 1 asteroid survey telescope in Hawaii. It is a small asteroid that is around 15 million km from earth and thus called near-earth object. • It is classified as a quasi-satellite of earth. A quasi-satellite is an object that orbits the Sun but stays close to a planet due to gravitational resonance. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ It is orbiting the sun for more than 100 years. 		
Significance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the study of samples confirms its origin from moon it is as good as a living fossil of our moon. • Most space rocks similar in size and closer to earth are short-lived (few months to a year or two) making this object unusual. • Studying its structure and behavior can aid in planetary defense strategies against future asteroid threats. 		
Other important Asteroid missions	Mission	Space agency	Significance

Hyabusa 1	JAXA (Japan)	Returned samples (very minimal) from asteroid Itokawa in 2010
Hyabusa 2	JAXA	Returned samples from asteroid Ryugu in 2020
Osiris Rex	NASA (USA)	Returned rocks and dust samples from asteroid Bennu in 2023

** Tianwen-3, expected by 2028, aims to retrieve samples from Mars, placing China among the few nations planning interplanetary sample return missions.

Repairability Index for Smartphones, Tablets

- The Department of Consumer Affairs has developed a Repairability Index (RI) framework specifically for smartphones and tablets.
- Once implemented, the framework will require manufacturers to declare a repairability score indicating the ease of repair of their devices.

What is it?

- The Repairability Index (RI) is a rating system that assesses how easily a smartphone or tablet can be repaired — either by consumers themselves or by third-party repair shops.
- Such indexing or rating will aid consumers in making an informed choice while buying these products.

Parameters for RI

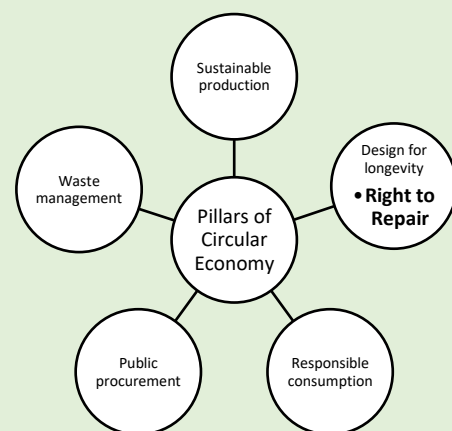
1. Repair information: Easy access to repair manuals/ Do It Yourself (DIY), diagnostic information.
2. Spare parts: Easy access to original spare parts
3. Affordable tools: Easy access to safe tools including softwares
4. Modular design: so that one part is repaired without damaging the other.
5. Economic feasibility: making the cost of repair parts and labor affordable.

Right to Repair in India

Right to repair is one of the pillars of **circular economy** and aligns with **SDG 12** (Responsible consumption and production) AND **LiFE movement** (Lifestyle for the Environment).

Accordingly, India is taking the following steps to promote Right to Repair in India

- In 2022, the government launched the **Right to Repair Portal**, enabling companies to share repair-related information across four sectors: automobiles, mobiles & electronics, consumer durables, and farming equipment.
- Dept of Consumer Affairs has developed the **RI framework**
- An overarching **Right to Repair legislation** is on the anvil, with the aim of enhancing consumer rights around access to repair.



Sodium Ion Batteries

Researchers in India are making progress in developing sodium-ion batteries.

- ✓ Most recently, a team of scientists engineered a sodium-ion battery that is both **fast-charging** and **long-lasting**. This could make sodium-ion batteries
 - a. a cheaper & long-storage alternative to Li-ion batteries in electric vehicles
 - b. a good candidate for grid-scale batteries

Relevance of batteries as energy storage device

Batteries are the dominant energy storage pathway that is particularly relevant as India steps up efforts towards

1. Grid-level storage: for a renewable energy-dominated energy basket due to its intermittent and variable nature.
2. Electrification of transportation: to address 3-fold challenge of
 - a. high import dependence of crude oil
 - b. rising ambient air pollution
 - c. Carbon emissions and associated climate change

Working principle of a battery

- **Rechargeable batteries** primarily make use of the **reversible chemical reactions** that involves splitting of **electron and ions** and their recombination at the electrodes.
- The two and fro movement of electrons and ions between the electrodes is what happens while charging and discharging a battery.
 - ✓ **Discharge cycle:** electrons move from anode to cathode through a wire powering a device
 - ✓ **Charge cycle:** electrons are pushed to move from cathode to anode by applying external energy.

To enable seamless two-and-fro movement of electrons and ions we use

1. Charge carrier and anode: A charge carrier that readily loses electrons leading to splitting of ions and electrons at the anode. (High electrochemical potential). Eg: Alkali metals like Lithium, Sodium etc.
2. Electrolyte: A medium that allows ions to move between electrodes, but not electrons — ensuring that electrons take the external circuit and power the device.
3. Cathode: A material that becomes stable upon gaining electrons and thus acts as place for recombination of electrons and ions from anode. Eg: metal oxides of Iron, Manganese, Cobalt, Nickel etc. The number of times the process of splitting and recombination can occur depends on the stability of the cathode material.

Parameters

In nutshell the parameters that determine the construction of a good battery

- A cheaper reliable source of charge carriers like Lithium, Sodium etc.
- A stable anode to collect these charge carriers like graphite, hard-carbon, graphene etc
- A suitable cathode that can remains stable with every recombination deciding the number of charge-discharge cycles and thus the life of the battery.
- Electrolyte that can effectively handle the two-and-fro movement of ions between the electrodes.

Thus, the above materials decide the size, life, cost and energy-output of a battery.

Sodium-ion and Lithium-ion batteries: a comparison

Parameter	Lithium-ion batteries (LiB)	Sodium-ion batteries (NiB)	Significance
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Charge-carriers	Lithium (Li ⁺)-smaller, lighter	Sodium (Na ⁺)- larger and heavier	Impacts the choice of electrodes particularly anode.
Anode	Graphite-stable and compatible with Li Graphite simply provides a physical structure to accommodate free lithium atoms to reside. (Not involved in chemical reaction)	Graphite not suitable given the larger size. Use of hard carbon as a structure to accommodate Na ⁺ ions.	Determines size and cost.
Cathode	Lithium metal oxides (e.g., LiCoO ₂ , NMC (Lithium Nickel Manganese Cobalt Oxide) — high-performing but uses cobalt and nickel	Multiple alternatives like Sodium-Manganese metal oxides. Free from cobalt, nickel	Li-ion batteries have high import dependence for cobalt and nickel which are geopolitically sensitive.
Electrolyte	Liquid electrolytes with lithium salts at manageable temperature	liquid electrolytes with sodium salts but high operating temperature limiting its application. (As sodium is liquid at high temperatures ~ 350 degree Celsius)	High operating temperature of liquid electrolytes limits the application in portable devices like phones and laptops. Solid state batteries with solid electrolytes are the future. (In research)
Energy-density	High (~150–250 Wh/kg) - compact, suitable for electronics and EVs	Lower (~100–160 Wh/kg) - bulkier for same capacity	Na-ion less suited than Li-ion for smartphones, but viable for large storage like grid batteries
Cost	High - driven by cost of lithium, cobalt, and refining processes	Lower - sodium is abundant in carbonates, sulphates, phosphate and chloride; cathode doesn't use Co/Ni	
Longevity (no of charge-discharge cycle)	Varies (up to 2000-3000 cycles in advanced EV cells)	Recent designs show over 3000 cycles	
Charge-discharge time	Faster charge and discharge time.	Recent design has achieved fast charging 80% in 6 minutes. Discharge is slower than LiB making it suitable for long-duration storage	Faster discharge time make LiB unsuitable for grid storage and thus the interest in NiB.
Raw materials	Lithium, cobalt, nickel, graphite — mostly imported	Sodium, iron, manganese, hard carbon — domestically available	
Critical mineral dependence	High	Low	Helps in achieving strategic tech independence

India's 1st Quantum Technology Park in Amravati

In a boost to the National Quantum Mission, Andhra Pradesh (AP) is setting up India's 1st Quantum Technology Valley Park in Amravati in partnership with IT giants including IBM, TCS and L&T.

Quantum Technology Valley Park

- It will be built on the foundation of the largest quantum computer in India, a 156-qubit Heron quantum processor of IBM Quantum System-2.
- TCS along with IBM will work on creating quantum algorithms to solve problems particularly in the fields of life science, energy economization, materials science, environmentally friendly manufacturing, cryptology and supply chain.
- In addition, the project aims to support quantum-enabled public services such as GST optimization, real-time census modelling, and the development of India's first quantum governance framework.

Bharat Forecasting System

India recently launched the Bharat Forecasting System, the world's highest resolution weather forecasting model.

- ✓ The Bharat Forecasting System is **powered** by the **high-performance computing (HPC) facility** Arka established in Indian Institute of Tropical Metrology (IITM), Pune.

Bharat Forecasting System (BFS)

- The BFS is India's first **indigenously** developed high-resolution weather prediction model launched by the Ministry of Earth Sciences & developed by IITM, Pune.
- The important properties of BFS include:
 - ✓ Give weather forecasts at the block-level for the next two hours (called nowcast-forecasts of present weather conditions immediately)
 - ✓ **World's highest resolution:** it predicts weather for a 6*6 km grid from the current 12*12 km. (reducing the forecast area from 144 sq km to 36 sq km for more localized predictions)
 - ✓ Enhanced forecasting of extreme weather events such as heat and cold waves, cyclones, heavy rainfall, floods, thunderstorms, lightening, etc. across the country.
- The BFS impact extends far beyond India's boundaries. The system provides high-resolution forecasts for the entire tropical belt from 30° South to 30° North,
 - ✓ covering vast swathes of Africa, Southeast Asia, and South Asia – regions where accurate weather prediction can prevent humanitarian disasters.

Supercomputer Arka

- Arka and Arunika are the two HPC systems (under the Ministry of Earth Sciences) launched in September 2024. These supercomputers are dedicated to work in weather forecasting.
- It aims to achieve its vision of moving towards a weather-aware society and improve earth-ocean sciences to optimise fisheries, maintain marine biodiversity, and also in deep-sea exploration.
- Arka supercomputer will power the high-resolution numerical weather prediction (NWP) models which along with the network of 39-odd Doppler weather radars installed in the country act as the backbone of Bharat Forecasting System.

Comparative Analysis between Arka and Arunika

Characteristic	Arka	Arunika
Processing speed	11.77 petaflops	8.24 petaflops

Storage capacity	33 petabytes (10 ¹⁵)	24 petabytes
Location	IITM, Pune	National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting, Noida
Application	Powers Bharat Forecasting System; high-resolution weather modelling; block-level nowcast	Medium-range forecasting, oceanic research, atmospheric modelling

Muziris Heritage Project

- The Leader of Opposition in the Kerala legislature recently appreciated historian M.G.S. Narayanan for his role in shaping the **Muziris Heritage Project (MHP)**.
- MHP covers the restoration and preservation of numerous historical sites, including forts, palaces, synagogues, churches, mosques, and traditional markets spread across the Ernakulam and Thrissur districts.
- **Launched in 2009**, MHP is one of the biggest conservation projects in India, where the state and the central governments have come together, with **support from the UNESCO**, to conserve a rich culture that is 3000 years old or more.
- Muziris was an active port on the west coast of southern India in the 1st century BCE.
- Although, archaeologists have still not discovered when the city port was actually established, but it is clear that Muziris was the **headquarters of the early Chera dynasty**.

Saraswati Pushkaralu

- The 12 day Saraswati Pushkaralu festival was held at Triveni Sangamam at Kaleshwaram in Telangana.
- Saraswati Pushkaralu is celebrated once every 12 years, when Jupiter (Brihaspati) enters the zodiac sign Gemini (Mithuna).
- It is held to honour the sacred River Saraswati, respected as the goddess of knowledge and wisdom.
- It is believed that Saraswati flows unseen, beneath the surface known as **Antarvahini, or subterranean stream**.
- Kaleshwaram is the only place in South India where three rivers converge, and thus, three Pushkaralu (river festival) — **Godavari, Pranahita and Saraswati** — are observed here in their respective cycles.
- The last Godavari Pushkaralu took place in 2015 and the Pranahita Pushkaralu in 2022.

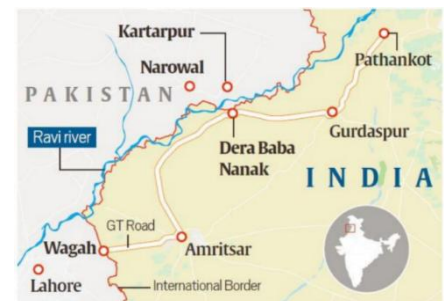
Kaleshwaram

- The Kaleshwaram temple complex, is known for **Sri Kaleshwara Mukteshwara Swamy shrine**.
- The temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva and is unique for housing two Shiva Lingas — Lord Kaleshwara (Yama) and Lord Mukteshwara (Shiva) — on a single pedestal.
- Another significant aspect of the temple is a hole in the Mukteshwara Linga that cannot be filled with water.
- It is believed that there may be an underground passage leading to the Godavari River. Additionally, it is believed that the passage is also called the **Saraswati River**.
- The temple is one of the three sacred Shiva temples in the region known as **Trilinga Desham**, which translates to "Land of Three Lingas," alongside the other two located at **Draksharamam and Srisailam**.

Kartarpur Corridor Closed

The Kartarpur corridor at Dera Baba Nanak in Punjab's Gurdaspur district was recently shut after the Operation Sindoor.

- The Kartarpur corridor links Gurdwara Darbar Sahib (final resting place of Guru Nanak) in Pakistan, to Dera Baba Nanak shrine in Punjab's Gurdaspur district (India).
- The first guru of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, founded Kartarpur on the right bank of the **Ravi River** and established the first Sikh commune there.



- The Gurdwara was established by Guru Nanak in 1522. He lived there for 18 years until he breathed his last.
- During the partition, the region was divided between India and Pakistan. The Radcliffe Line awarded the right bank of the Ravi River, including Kartarpur, to Pakistan, and the Gurdaspur tehsil on the left bank of Ravi to India.
- However, pilgrims from India had to take a bus to Lahore to get to Kartarpur, which is a 125 km journey.
- To address this, India signed the Kartarpur corridor agreement with Pakistan in 2019. Under the pact, Indian pilgrims of all faiths are allowed to undertake round the year visa-free travel through the 4.5-km-long passage.

Raghuji Bhosale I's Sword Reclaimed

- Maharashtra government has reclaimed the iconic sword of legendary Maratha warrior Raghuji Bhosale I, at an auction held by Sotheby's in London. The artefact was secured for £38,100 (around Rs 43.49 lakh).
- The sword auctioned in London is a typical example of the '**firangi**' style of **Maratha weaponry** — characterised by a straight, single-edged European blade paired with a locally crafted Mulheri hilt (handle).
- The blade has the European manufacturer's mark and is inscribed with a gold-inlaid Devanagari script, reading '**Shrimant Raghoji Bhosale Senasaheb Subha Firang**'.
- The sword holds immense historical significance for several reasons. Most medieval Indian weapons either lacked decorative detailing or did not bear the maker's or owner's name, making this sword a rare and remarkable exception.

Raghuji Bhosale I

- Raghuji Bhosale I (1695–February 14, 1755) was the **founder of the Nagpur-based Bhosale dynasty** and a prominent Maratha general during the reign of **Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj**.
- Due to his bravery and military acumen, he was honoured with the title '**Senasaheb Subha**' by Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj.
- Raghuji led pivotal military campaigns in Bengal in 1745 and 1755, significantly expanding the Maratha Empire's territory into Bengal and Odisha. His influence also extended to regions such as Chanda, Chhattisgarh and Sambalpur.
- Raghuji's successful campaigns in South India, which resulted in the defeat of the Nawabs of Kurnool and Cuddapah, further solidified Maratha dominance in the region.

Shirui Lily Festival

- The Shirui Lily festival returns to **Manipur** after a two-year pause because of the long-drawn conflict in the state.
- The festival is organised by the Manipur government's **Department of Tourism**. **First held in 2017**. It is named after the **Shirui Lily**, recognised as the **state flower of Manipur**.
- The festival coincides with the blooming season of this rare flower.
- Held in **Manipur's Ukhul district**, which is home to the **Tangkhum Naga community**, the event is designed as an **eco-tourism festival** to raise awareness about the Shirui Lily and to promote tourism to the hills of Ukhul.

Shirui Lily

- It is a pinkish-white flower, endemic to the upper reaches of the Shirui Hill range in Ukhul district.
- The locals call it the '**Kashong Timrawon**' after **Timrawon, the daughter of mythical goddess Philava** who resides and protects the hills of Shirui.

- Over the years, this already **endangered species** has faced further threats to its habitat.
- Its habitat has been invaded by the dense root system of a wild dwarf bamboo species.

Ahilyabai Holkar

- The Ministry of Culture in collaboration with the Government of Madhya Pradesh recently commemorated the 300th birth anniversary of Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar.
- Born on 31st May 1725, in the **village of Chondi in Ahmednagar** (Maharashtra).
- She came from a humble background. After being impressed with young Ahilya, **Malhar Rao Holkar**, the **Lord of the Malwa territory**, got her married to his son **Khanderao Holkar**, in 1733.
- Her husband Khanderao died during the **siege of the Kumher Fort**.
- After the death of her father-in-law and her son Male Rao, she took over the reign of Malwa in 1767 and became the ruler of Indore.
- The **Philosopher Queen** as she is famously known, passed away on **August 13, 1795**

Ahilyabai's Contributions

- She established a **textile industry in Maheshwar**, which today is very famous for its **Maheshwari sarees**.
- She engaged in several **philanthropic activities** like construction of temples, pilgrimage centres, ghats, wells, tanks etc.
- Her most notable contribution was the renovation and repair of the **famous Kashi Vishwanath Temple in 1780**. Recognizing her contribution, a statue of Devi Ahilyabai Holkar has been installed in Kashi Vishwanath temple.
- Ahilyabai initiated the **construction of roads and rest houses** across India and **restored temples** at pilgrimage sites like **Haridwar, Kashi, Somnath, and Rameshwaram**.
- She is also credited for the construction of **Old Somnath temple** in Gujarat. Interestingly, this temple is popularly known as the **Ahilyabai temple**.
- Her vision, however, extended beyond religion — **she supported farmers and expanded trade**. Understanding the importance of education, she **established many gurukuls and schools**.
- In a revolutionary move for her time, **she formed a women's army** and trained them in warfare, self-defense, and administrative security.

Buddha Purnima

- Buddha Purnima or Vesak was celebrated on 12th May. It commemorates the **birth, enlightenment and death of Gautama Buddha**. It is observed on the **full moon day of the month Vaisakh**.
- The United Nations declared Vesak as an *International Day of Observance* in 1999, recognizing its global cultural and spiritual significance.

Gautama Buddha

- Gautama Buddha was born as **Siddhartha Gautama in Lumbini**, in present-day Nepal, to **King Suddhodana** and **Queen Maya Devi**, rulers of the **Shakya clan**.
- Siddhartha was raised in great luxury in the palace of **Kapilavastu**. His father ensured he was shielded from all forms of suffering or worldly troubles. He married **Princess Yashodhara** at the age of 16 and had a son named **Rahul**.
- Moved by the desire to understand the cause of suffering, he renounced his princely life, and became a wandering ascetic in search of truth.

- Realizing that neither luxury nor extreme self-denial led to true wisdom, he adopted the “**Middle Path**” — a balanced approach to spiritual practice
- At the age of 35, while meditating under the **Bodhi tree in Bodh Gaya**, he **attained enlightenment (bodhi)** and became the **Buddha, or "the Awakened One."**
- He gave his first sermon at **Sarnath** - the **Dharma Chakra Pravartana Sutra**). This Sutra is also known as the **First Turning of Wheels of Dharma** and comprised of the Four Noble Truths and Noble Eightfold Path.
- The method for attaining the end of suffering, is known as the **Noble Eightfold Path**.
- He established the **Sangha**, a community of monks to spread his teachings.
- At the age of 80, Buddha passed away in **Kushinagar**. This event is known as **Mahaparinirvana**—the final passing beyond the cycle of birth and rebirth.
- Buddhism evolved into a variety of traditions and practices, represented by **Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana**.

International Booker Prize 2025

- In a landmark moment for Indian literature, **Banu Mushtaq's short story collection Heart Lamp** won the International Booker Prize 2025.
- The stories in Heart Lamp reflect her background as a journalist and advocate, with a sharp focus on women's rights and resistance to caste and religious injustice.
- Her win comes just a few years after another Indian writer, **Geetanjali Shree**, won the 2022 International Booker for **Tomb of Sand**.
- Mushtaq is the second Kannada writer in recent times to be recognised by the Booker Prize, the last being **UR Ananthamurthy in 2013**. In 2013, UR Ananthamurthy became the first Kannada writer ever shortlisted for the Man Booker International Prize.
- Heart Lamp was **originally published in Kannada** and previously translated into Urdu, Hindi, Tamil, and Malayalam.
- She has been a part of several social movements from the 70s to the 90s like the **Dalit and Kisan Movements** and the **Bandaya Sahitya Sangatane**.
- She is the recipient of several major literary honours, including the **Karnataka Sahitya Academy Award** and the **Daana Chintamani Attimabbe Award**.
- Heart Lamp has been **translated into English by Deepa Bhashti**. With this, Bhashti, has become the **first Indian translator to win the prize**. She won the **English PEN's 'PEN Translates' award** for the same work in 2024.

International Booker Prize

- The International Booker Prize (formerly known as the Man Booker International Prize) is an international literary award hosted in the United Kingdom.
- From 2005 until 2015 the award was given every two years to a living author of any nationality for a body of work published in English or generally available in English translation.
- Since 2016, the award has been given annually to a single work of fiction or collection of short stories, translated into English and published in the United Kingdom or Ireland, with a £50,000 prize for the winning title, shared equally between author and translator.

World Food Prize 2025

- **Brazilian scientist Mariangela Hungria** has won the 2025 World Food Prize for her pioneering work in reducing the use of chemical fertilisers and developing biological seed and soil treatments to boost crop yields and nutrition.
- She has developed dozens of biological treatments that enabled crops to absorb nutrients from soil bacteria—enhancing the productivity of wheat, maize, rice, beans and especially soybeans, now Brazil's top agricultural export.
- Over her 40-year career Brazil's soybean production increased from 15 million tonnes in 1979 to 173 million tonnes in the current harvest.
- Brazilian farmers were estimated to have saved up to \$40 billion annually in input costs due to the technologies developed by Hungria.

- Her work focused on **biological nitrogen fixation (BNF)**, a natural process in which naturally occurring microorganisms convert atmospheric nitrogen into forms plant roots can absorb from soil, reducing the need for synthetic fertilisers.
- Through BNF crops form a mutually beneficial relationship with soil bacteria that provide them with nitrogen.

World Food Prize

- The World Food Prize is an international award **established in 1986 by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Dr. Norman E. Borlaug (father of the Green Revolution)**.
- Often referred to as the Nobel Prize for Food and Agriculture, it honours individuals who have made significant contributions to improving the quality, quantity, or availability of food worldwide.
- Administered by World Food Prize Foundation, the award includes a \$500,000 monetary prize & is presented annually in Des Moines, Iowa, during the Borlaug Dialogue, a global symposium on food security.
- **1st recipient** of the award was **Dr. M.S. Swaminathan (in 1987)**, the **father of green revolution in India**.

Executive Director of IMF

- **Parameswaran Iyer**, executive director at the World Bank, has been temporarily entrusted with the responsibility of being India's nominee director on the executive board of IMF.
- He fills a vacancy created with the termination of services of K.V. Subramanian as the executive director at the IMF, six months ahead of his three-year tenure.
- The executive board of the IMF conducts the day-to-day business of the IMF. It discusses all aspects of the Fund's work, from the staff's annual reviews of member countries' economies to policy issues relevant to the global economy,
- It is composed of 25 executive directors elected by the member countries or groups of countries.
- Countries with large economies have their own executive director, but most countries are grouped in constituencies representing four or more countries
- India is in a four-country constituency, along with Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Bhutan as members.

Saroj Ghose

- Saroj Ghose, the **father of India's science museum movement**, passed away recently.
- Dr. Ghose was the **founding Director General of National Council of Science Museums** from 1979-1997.
- **Headquartered at Kolkata**, the NCSM was **formed in 1978** as an **autonomous society** under the **Union Ministry of Culture**.
- He is remembered as the architect of India's extensive network of science centres and museums. His efforts earned him the title of **Bhishma Pitamah of Indian Science Museums**.
- He envisioned and executed the development of a **decentralised model of science museums across India**, making science accessible, interactive, and inspiring to millions.
- His distinguished career included receiving the **Padma Bhushan in 2007 and Padma Shri in 1989**. He also led the **International Council of Museums in Paris as president**.
- He played a crucial role in designing landmark institutions such as the **Science City in Kolkata**, the **National Science Centre in New Delhi**, and the **Nehru Science Centre in Mumbai**.
- He also contributed to projects like Kolkata's Town Hall Museum, New Delhi's Parliament Museum, Rashtrapati Bhawan Museum, and Gujarat Science City in Ahmedabad.

UPSC Chairman

- Former defence secretary **Dr. Ajay Kumar** is the newly appointed chairman of the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC). He will succeed **Preeti Sudan** whose tenure completed recently.
- Dr. Kumar is a retired IAS officer from the 1985 batch of the Kerala cadre.
- He is credited with the creation of the Chief of Defence Staff, AtmaNirbhar Bharat initiatives, the Agniveer scheme, and corporatisation of Ordnance Factories.
- He has also played a significant role in several Digital India projects like UPI, Aadhaar, myGov, and Government e-Marketplace.
- The term of his appointment will be regulated in accordance with the provisions of **Article 316(2)** of the Constitution of India, and the conditions of service will be governed by **UPSC (Members) Regulations, 1969**, as amended from time to time.
- Members of the commission have a **term of six years or till they attain the age of 65 years**.