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Somnath Swabhiman Parv

Supreme Court On Acid Attack Survivors

Russia China ties

Cyprus President visit

Credibility of NTA

BRICS Foreign Ministers' Meeting 2026

NEET UG MAY 2026 CANCELLED

Green Card Rule

5 nation Visit of Indian PM.

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CURRENT AFFAIRS



2026 MAY

— Editor's Cut —

- NFHS-6
- Governor's Role In Government Formation
- Supreme Court On SIR
- 16th FC Report (2026–31)
- NCRB 2024 Report
- Trump–Xi Summit 2026
- India-Vietnam Relations
- Visit of Indian PM to Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, and Italy
- Quad: 11th Foreign Ministers' Meeting
- 1 year of Operation Sindoor
- HLC on Demographic Changes

INDEX

EDITOR'S CUT _____ 4 - 26

- NFHS-6
- Governor's Role In Government Formation
- Supreme Court On SIR
- 16th FC Report (2026-31)
- NCRB 2024 Report
- Trump-Xi Summit 2026
- India-Vietnam Relations
- Visit of Indian PM to Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, and Italy
- Quad: 11th Foreign Ministers' Meeting
- 1 year of Operation Sindoor
- HLC on Demographic Changes

MAPS: PLACES IN NEWS _____ 27 - 32

SOCIAL ISSUES _____ 33 - 38

- NSO Health Survey
- Guidelines on Diabetes Mellitus in Children
- JANANI
- NITI Aayog Report on 'School Education System in India'
- Launch of JEEVAN App and SHATAYU Geriatric Caregiver Dashboard
- Stagnant Old age Pension
- Kerala has Announced a New Department for Welfare of Senior Citizens
- Residential Segregation

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE _____ 39 - 59

- Proposal To Increase Strength Of Supreme Court Judges
- School Management Committee Guidelines 2026
- Appointment Of CBI Director
- UAPA & BAIL: Reaffirming Liberty In Anti-Terror Cases
- Credibility Of National Testing Agency
- Atmanirbhar Panchayat Programme
- Karnataka's Digital Grievance Redressal System For Gig Workers
- Certification Of Brain Death

- Journey Of EVMs Between Polling And Counting
- First Paperless State Judiciary
- AI Push To Solve Crimes
- Language Policing And Its Implications
- Central Prabhari Officer Portal
- National Panchayat Award
- Grievance Redressal Assessment And Index (GRAI) Rankings
- Jharkhand Treasury Scam
- Prison Statistics India (PSI) 2024
- Joint Consultative Machinery
- Supreme Court On Acid Attack Survivors
- Plea Bargaining
- BCCI & RTI
- JPC On One Nation One Election
- National Sports Governance Board And Tribunal Rules, 2026
- Sedition
- National Council For Public Works (NCPW)
- Women Representation In IAS Reaches Record 41%
- Right To Trauma Care Part Of Article 21
- Samadhan Didi
- Safe Travel on National Highways A Fundamental Right

ECONOMY _____ 60 - 77

- Fugitive Economic Offenders
- Gold Repatriation by RBI
- Fair and Remunerative Price of Sugarcane Announced
- Ban on Sugar Exports
- Vadinar Ship Repair Facility
- Mission for Cotton Productivity
- UDGAM Portal
- I4C - RBIH MoU on Mule Accounts
- Women and Men in India 2025
- Mission SEHAT
- Jute Crop Information System
- South Coast Railway Zone

INDEX

- Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme 5.0
- Withholding Tax to be Reduced
- Mission Arunachal Kiwi
- Q-SAFE Committee
- MoU between AYUSHEXCIL and Spices Board
- Past Risk and Return Verification Agency
- India's First Mega Greenfield Shipyard
- Achievements of PMFME Scheme
- Reforms Introduced under PM-WANI
- Country Strategic Opportunities Programme with IFAD
- Scheme to Boost Coal Gasification
- Capital Adequacy Norms Revised
- SARTHAK PDS
- SHE-MART
- ILO Complaint By Tea Workers

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS _____ 78 - 87

- Deepening Russia-China Ties and the Challenge for India
- PM Modi's Visit to UAE
- India-Cyprus Relations: Elevated to Strategic Partnership
- Pakistan Inducts First Hangor-Class Submarine
- Project Freedom & the Strait of Hormuz Crisis
- India Retained in EU Draft List for Continued Seafood Exports
- Green Card Rule — New India-US Friction Point
- China's Hainan Free Trade Port
- Lipulekh Pass & Kailash Mansarovar Yatra Dispute
- India-US Critical Minerals Framework
- India Rejects Arbitration Award on IWT
- EAM's Visit to CARICOM
- MEA Launches Drive to Register Indian Students Abroad
- India Formalises Sports Policy on Pakistan

- German-Netherlands Corps to Command Baltic Defence
- France Repeals Code Noir

SUMMITS AND ORGANISATIONS _____ 88 - 93

- UN Secretary-General Election — 2026
- World Health Assembly Recognises Stroke as a Public Health Priority
- UN Report on Sexual Violence in Conflict Zones
- India-Africa Forum Summit Postponed
- The Indian Ocean Dialogue
- BRICS Foreign Ministers' Meeting 2026

DEFENSE AND SECURITY _____ 94 - 100

- SC's Landmark Framework Against Human Trafficking in India
- TARA Weapon System
- India's Chopper-Launched Naval Missile Salvo Test
- Operation RAGEPILL
- CBI Launches AI Helpbot 'Abhay'
- India, Algeria Hold First Joint Defence Commission Meet
- DRDO's New Drone-Launched Precision Guided Missile
- 1,200 Fishing Harbours to Come Under Unified Security Framework
- India's Third Recipient of UN Military Gender Advocate Award
- Indian War Memorial Inaugurated in Seoul
- Exercises
- New CDS and Naval Chief Named
- INS Mahendragiri Delivered

ENVIRONMENT AND GEOGRAPHY ___ 101 - 107

- India's First Green Methanol Plant
- Coastal Atmospheric Research Testbed (C-ART)
- Ecocide and Environment Destruction
- SkyCast
- Rising Night-Time Temperatures in India

INDEX

- Block Level Monsoon Forecasting System unveiled by IMD
- India's Evolving Legal Metrology Ecosystem
- Sperm Whale Clicks
- IITM Pune's WISE-2026 and Incubation Centre for Climate Startups
- Outer Core- Changes Observed in the Direction of the Flow
- Controlled Earthquakes
- Species in News

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY _____ 108 - 116

- Hantavirus
- Manus AI
- Canine Distemper Virus
- GalaxEye's Drishti Satellite
- Psyche Spacecraft
- Fibre-Optic Drones
- Germanium-Free Drone Imaging Tech
- Centre of Excellence for Space Technology
- ISO International Subcommittee Meetings on 'Space Systems and Operations'
- MoU to Accelerate Responsible AI Adoption in Healthcare
- Model Collapse
- UMMID Programme
- SMILE Mission
- Information Agents
- Ebola
- Ferrocene Puzzle Solved
- Ayush Anudan Portal
- Blue Straggler Star
- Chandrayaan-3 Hop Experiment
- Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission
- Project Garud
- PCOS Is Now Polyendocrine Metabolic Ovarian Syndrome (PMOS)
- Spinal Muscular Atrophy
- Babesia

CULTURE _____ 117 - 118

- Ru-Soam bridges
- Algoza
- Somnath Swabhimani Parv
- Gift Diplomacy

AWARDS/ PERSONALITIES IN NEWS __119-120

- Pulitzer Prize 2026
- National Florence Nightingale Awards 2026
- International Booker Prize 2026
- Agricola Medal
- Padma Awards 2026
- Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science

Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) recently released the National Family Health Survey-6 (NFHS-6).

NFHS-6 (2023-24) was conducted by MoHFW with the **International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS), Mumbai as the nodal agency-** covering **6.79 lakh households across 715 districts**. It is the **first NFHS after the COVID-19 pandemic** and serves as a key evidence base for policymaking, evaluating flagship welfare schemes, tracking progress towards national and global development goals and for measuring **SDG 3 (Good Health)** and **SDG 5 (Gender Equality)** targets.

Key Findings of NFHS-6

• Demographic & Population Trends:

- **Total Fertility Rate (TFR):** Remained steady at **2.0**, successfully stabilizing below the replacement threshold level of 2.1 signifying structural **demographic stabilization**.
- **Age Transition:** The population under 15 years declined from 26.5% to 25.5%, while the elderly cohort (60+years) expanded from 11.8% to **12.9%**, indicating rapid **population ageing**.

• Maternal Healthcare & Nutrition (A Stride Towards Universal Access):

- **Institutional Deliveries:** Climbed to **90.6%** (up from 88.6%), moving India closer toward universal institutional coverage.
- **Antenatal Care (ANC) Continuity:** First-trimester ante-natal health care (ANC) registration improved to 76.2% (from 70.0%), and pregnant women completing at least 4 ANC visits increased from 58.5% to **65.2%**.
- **Maternal Supplementation:** Mothers consuming Iron-Folic Acid (IFA) supplements for ≥180 days rose sharply from 26.0% to **37.8%**.
- **Drivers:** Sustained intervention via Janani Suraksha Yojana (**JSY**), Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (**PMMVY**) and **SUMAN** (Surakshit Matritva Aashwasan).

- **JSY**, launched in **2005** promotes **institutional deliveries among poor pregnant women** through cash assistance and ASHA support, with special focus on low-performing states.
- **PMMVY**, launched in **2017**, provides **cash assistance to pregnant and lactating women** to support maternal nutrition, compensate wage loss, and promote institutional healthcare and the girl child.
- **SUMAN** launched in 2019, aims to eliminate preventable maternal and newborn deaths by ensuring assured, respectful and quality maternal and newborn healthcare services during pregnancy, childbirth and the postpartum period.

• Child Health, Immunization & Nutritional:

- **Malnutrition Declines:** Stunting (low height-for-age) fell from 35.5% to **29.3%**; severe wasting dropped from 7.7% to **5.2%**; underweight dipped marginally to 31.8%.
- **Universal Immunization Coverage:** Full vaccination among infants (12-23 months) rose to **87.1%** (from 83.8%), supported by *Mission Indradhanush* and the *U-WIN* platform. Trust in the public healthcare system remains immense, with **95.6%** of vaccinations delivered via public facilities.
- **The Dietary & Feeding Regressive Trends:** While **early breastfeeding improved** (within one hour of birth: **41.8% → 50.1%**), **exclusive breastfeeding for infants under six months declined** (**63.7% → 55.8%**), indicating premature weaning. Additionally, only **15.3% of children aged 6-23 months receive an adequate and diverse diet**, highlighting persistent "**hidden hunger**".

• Socio-Economic Development & Financial Protection:

- **Digital & Financial Inclusion:** Women using the internet nearly doubled to **64.3%** (from 33.3%). Women operating their own bank accounts rose to **89.0%** (*PM Jan Dhan Yojana* effect).
- **Financial Risk Protection:** Household health insurance coverage expanded from 41.0% to **60.2%**, illustrating the footprint of *Ayushman Bharat-PMJAY*.

Way Forward: To safeguard its demographic dividend, India's health policy architecture must pivot from an exclusively calorie-centric, curative model to a **preventive, nutrition-sensitive, and lifestyle-oriented ecosystem**.

Critical Public Health Vulnerabilities:



- **The Adult Obesity & Metabolic Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) Epidemic:** India is witnessing a sharp rise in **obesity and metabolic NCDs**, with overweight/obesity increasing to **30.7% among women** and **27.3% among men** (15-49 years), particularly in urban areas (**42.8% women; 36.3% men**). Simultaneously, elevated blood sugar levels have risen to **20.9% among men** and **17.8% among women**, signalling a growing burden of diabetes and cardiovascular diseases.
- **Rising Caesarean Deliveries:** India's **C-section rate increased to 27.2%**, well above the WHO-recommended **10-15%**, with an exceptionally high prevalence in **private hospitals (54.1%)** compared to **public facilities (16.9%)**, raising concerns about over-medicalization and commercialization of maternal healthcare.
- **State-wise Variations:** NFHS-6 reveals significant interstate disparities. Private-facility C-section rates range from **81.4% in Assam to 49.3% in Bihar**, while Kerala's narrow public-private gap (**39% vs 42.5%**) reflects stronger public health infrastructure. Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Odisha continue to face challenges relating to nutrition, menstrual hygiene, education and lifestyle diseases, highlighting the need for targeted state-specific interventions.

Critical Policy Implications & Challenges:

- **The Paradox of Epidemiological Polarization:** India is dealing with **triple Burden of Malnutrition**- coexistence of undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and rising obesity. While the primary structural agenda of addressing undernutrition (stunting and wasting) remains unfinished, it is now matched by a rapid expansion of lifestyle-driven overnutrition (obesity and diabetes).
- **Intergenerational Nutrition Challenge:** Poor maternal nutrition can adversely affect fetal development, increasing the risk of obesity, diabetes and other metabolic disorders in later life, highlighting the importance of maternal healthcare and nutrition.
- **The Governance Challenge of "Missing Indicators":** Factsheets for NFHS-6 omitted parameters for **anaemia prevalence, access to clean cooking fuel (PM Ujjwala tracking), and sex ratio at birth**. This omission limits independent civil society assessment of key central welfare interventions.
- **Regional Disparities:** Marked interstate and urban-rural variations persist, complicating uniform national health targets and requiring hyper-localized policy solutions.



Governor's Role In Government Formation

The **2026 Tamil Nadu Assembly election** produced a fractured verdict in which the incumbent DMK lost power (winning 59 seats) and TVK emerged as the single largest party (with 108 seats). The total strength of the assembly was 234 and the margin required for winning was 118. This led to the Governor's delay in inviting TVK leader Vijay to form the government triggering a debate regarding constitutional morality, gubernatorial discretion, and the primacy of the people's mandate in a parliamentary democracy.

The issue also highlights the **constitutional principles governing appointment of the Chief Minister** in situations where no party secures an outright majority.

Constitutional Position of the Governor:

- **Article 164(1):** The Chief Minister (CM) of a State shall be appointed by Governor, while other ministers shall be appointed by Governor on the advice of the CM.
 - The Constitution does not prescribe any criteria for selecting CM during **hung assembly**.
- **Discretionary power (Article 163):** The Governor functions in accordance with the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers with the CM, except certain functions where discretion is exercised.
- In case of no party having a clear majority, the Governor exercises situational discretion.
- But this power is **not absolute**, and the Governor must operate within constitutional limitations.

- To put it otherwise, in a parliamentary democracy, a government’s legitimacy depends on majority support in the Legislative Assembly, and the exercise of discretion by the Governor must remain consistent with democratic norms.

Parliamentary Convention in Government Formation:

- In the absence of a clear majority, constitutional conventions guide the Governor’s actions in appointing the Council of Ministers. Based on recommendations of the **Sarkaria (1983) and Punchhi (2007) Commissions**, the order of preference in inviting parties to form government generally includes:
 - A **pre-poll alliance or party** commanding a clear majority.
 - The **single largest party** with support from others to secure majority.
 - A **post-poll coalition** in which partners formally join the government.
 - A **post-electoral alliance** providing outside support: Some parties join the government and others (including independents) agree to provide support from the outside.

- The Governor’s responsibility is to identify the leader most likely to command legislative confidence and ask them to prove majority through a **floor test** within a reasonable period.
- Constitutional convention **discourages subjective political assessment or delay that could influence political realignments.**

The Case of Tamil Nadu

- **TVK** emerged as the single largest party with **108 seats**, while no pre-poll alliance securing majority support. Support reportedly extended by **Left parties, Congress and VCK** enabled TVK to stake claim to government formation.

- However, initially, there was a wait for the oath-taking ceremony as the Governor asked for 118 signatures before inviting TVK leader to form a government, which legal observers noted as unusual.
- Questions relating to majority support are constitutionally expected to be resolved through a **floor test in the Assembly**. The Governor is generally expected to avoid determining majority through **private assessments** or requiring proof beyond constitutional convention.

Judicial Precedents and Constitutional Principles:

- ◆ Judicial precedents such as **S.R. Bommai (1994)** and **Rameshwar Prasad (2006)** emphasise legislative majority primarily determined by its majority on the floor of the House as the basis of government legitimacy.
- ◆ In the **Karnataka case (2018)**, the Supreme Court advanced the floor test to be held within 24 hours to prove majority
- ◆ Similar principles were applied in **Goa (2017), Uttarakhand (2016) and Maharashtra (2019)**, where majority was tested on the Assembly floor.
- ◆ In **Nabam Rebia case (2016)**, the Supreme Court emphasised that Governors must act within constitutional boundaries and avoid arbitrariness.
- ◆ The **Punchhi and Sarkaria Commissions** recommended limiting gubernatorial discretion and relying on established conventions.

Concerns Regarding the Governor’s Conduct:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delay in inviting the single largest party despite visible support raised concerns regarding impartiality and constitutional propriety. • Speculation about alternative post-poll combinations was viewed as potentially undermining the electoral mandate. • A Governor should not determine the majority based on subjective assessment or public claims. Instead, the ultimate test is a vote in the legislative assembly.

Way forward
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislative confidence, not gubernatorial discretion, determines the legitimacy of a government. • Floor tests remain the accepted constitutional mechanism for resolving uncertainty regarding majority support. • Governors are expected to remain politically neutral and uphold constitutional morality. • Respect for the electoral mandate and parliamentary conventions is central to federal democracy in India.

Extra Mile: WHEN DOES CM CEASE TO HOLD OFFICE?

The continuation of Mamata Banerjee as Chief Minister despite the Trinamool Congress losing the West Bengal Assembly elections renewed debate on when a Chief Minister ceases to hold office, the Governor’s powers and the role of legislative majority in parliamentary democracy. Questions have emerged regarding whether a Governor can remove a Chief Minister, the meaning of “pleasure of the Governor” under Article 164, and the constitutional process after defeat in elections or expiry of the Assembly.

Analysis of Current Situation

- Since the incumbent government lost the Assembly election, resignation by the Chief Minister would ordinarily follow as a matter of **parliamentary convention**.

- However, refusal to resign immediately **may not have major constitutional consequences** if the Assembly's tenure is ending and a new government is in the process of formation.
- The Governor cannot remove the Chief Minister solely on grounds of **electoral defeat** before formal constitutional processes unfold.
- Any challenge to election results may be pursued through an **election petition** under the Representation of the People Act, 1951 or constitutional remedies where electoral integrity is questioned.
- The episode underscores an **important constitutional principle**: democratic legitimacy ultimately flows from legislative confidence and the people's mandate, not gubernatorial discretion.

Can Election Results Be Challenged?

- Election outcomes may be challenged through an **election petition** under the Representation of the People Act, 1951.
- **Section 100** permits challenge on grounds such as:
 - Corrupt electoral practices
 - Improper conduct by election officials
 - Non-compliance with statutory provisions
- **Writ petitions** may also be filed where broader constitutional concerns affecting electoral integrity are raised.

Parliamentary Convention

- In a parliamentary democracy, the executive derives legitimacy from majority support in the elected House.
- A Chief Minister is expected to resign after losing majority support or after a clear electoral defeat.
- The Governor's role is limited to facilitating formation of a government capable of commanding Assembly confidence. The floor test remains the accepted constitutional mechanism to resolve disputes regarding majority.

Removal of a Chief Minister:

A Chief Minister ceases to hold office under the following circumstances:

- **Loss of Majority in the Legislative Assembly:** A Chief Minister must resign if they fail to prove majority support in a floor test.
 - ▶ Majority support is determined on the floor of the House and not through subjective political assessment.
- **Defeat in Assembly Elections:** By parliamentary convention, a CM usually resigns after electoral defeat. However, until a new Assembly is constituted and an alternative government takes office, the outgoing CM may continue in a caretaker capacity.
- **Expiry or Dissolution of the Assembly:** Under Article 172, a State Legislative Assembly ordinarily has a five-year tenure unless dissolved earlier. Once the Assembly's term ends, the Council of Ministers effectively ceases to hold office, although a caretaker arrangement may continue temporarily.
- **Resignation or Death:** A Chief Minister may voluntarily resign or cease to hold office upon death.

Role of Governor in Removal:

- Under **Article 164(1)**, the Council of Ministers holds office "during the pleasure of the Governor", but this power is not absolute.
 - ▶ The Governor cannot arbitrarily dismiss a Chief Minister who enjoys majority support in the Assembly.
- Dr. B.R. Ambedkar clarified in the Constituent Assembly that ministers remain in office only as long as they enjoy **legislative confidence**.
- The Supreme Court has repeatedly held that the Governor ordinarily acts on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers. In *A.G. Perarivalan v. State Through Superintendent of Police* (2022), the Court observed that the Governor is not an independent executive authority.
- The Governor's role is primarily to:
 - ▶ Facilitate formation of a government capable of commanding majority support.
 - ▶ Order a floor test where majority is in doubt.
 - ▶ Invite another claimant if the incumbent loses confidence and resigns.



Supreme Court On SIR

The Supreme Court upheld the Election Commission of India's (ECI) **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** of electoral rolls in Bihar, affirming the Commission's constitutional responsibility to maintain accurate electoral rolls and ensure free and fair elections. The Court rejected challenges alleging that the exercise was unconstitutional, arbitrary and beyond ECI's powers.

Four Key Legal Questions Before the Supreme Court

1. Did the ECI Have the Power to Conduct SIR?

<p>Petitioners' Arguments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1950 already provides for electoral roll revisions and ECI cannot create a new procedure outside the statute. The Bihar exercise was far more extensive than routine revisions and therefore exceeded ECI's powers. 	<p>ECI's Arguments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ECI relied on Article 324 of the Constitution and Sections 21(2) and 21(3) of the RPA, 1950. Section 21(2) permits intensive revision of electoral rolls, while Section 21(3) empowers ECI to order a special revision at any time if circumstances warrant. It argued that concerns relating to duplicate, deceased, shifted and ineligible voters justified the exercise. 	<p>Supreme Court's Ruling:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Court held that Section 21(3), read with Article 324, provides sufficient authority to undertake such an exercise. Purification of electoral rolls is directly linked to the conduct of free and fair elections.
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2. Whether the Exercise Pursued a Legitimate Constitutional Purpose and Satisfied the Test of Proportionality?

<p>Petitioners' Arguments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The exercise imposed excessive burdens on voters and risked disenfranchising genuine electors. Large-scale documentation requirements were disproportionate to the objective sought to be achieved. 	<p>ECI's Arguments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The objective was to ensure that only eligible citizens remain on electoral rolls. Free and fair elections require accurate voter lists and removal of duplicate or ineligible entries. 	<p>Supreme Court's Ruling:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Court held that maintaining the purity of electoral rolls is a legitimate constitutional objective linked to free and fair elections. The exercise served an important public purpose and was not arbitrary merely because it involved extensive verification. The Court observed that democracy requires participation by eligible voters, and electoral integrity is as important as electoral inclusion. Consequently, the SIR satisfied the proportionality requirement.
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3. Whether the Procedure Adopted Violated the RPA and the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960?

<p>Petitioners' Arguments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The procedure adopted by ECI allegedly departed from the framework prescribed under the RPA and the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960. It was argued that ECI imposed documentary requirements not contemplated under existing law. The exercise allegedly shifted the burden of proving eligibility onto voters. 	<p>ECI's Arguments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Commission maintained that the process was conducted within the framework of the RPA and the 1960 Rules. Adequate opportunities were provided for submission of documents, corrections, objections and appeals. 	<p>Supreme Court's Findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Court found no fundamental inconsistency between the SIR process and the statutory framework. It held that ECI enjoys procedural flexibility while carrying out revision exercises, provided statutory safeguards are observed. The existence of <i>mechanisms for objections, corrections and appeals ensured procedural fairness</i>. Therefore, the procedure did not violate the RPA or the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960.
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4. Can ECI Examine Questions Related to Citizenship?

Petitioners' Arguments:	ECI's Arguments:	Supreme Court's Ruling:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Citizenship determination is the domain of the Ministry of Home Affairs and competent authorities under citizenship laws. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is not determining citizenship in a final legal sense. It is only verifying whether a person satisfies the eligibility conditions to remain on electoral rolls. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Court held that ECI's scrutiny is limited to voter eligibility and does not amount to a final determination of citizenship. Such scrutiny falls within its electoral responsibilities.

Significance of the Verdict	Concerns Raised
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reaffirms ECI's powers under Article 324 and Sections 21(2) and 21(3) of the RPA, 1950. Strengthens the principle that free and fair elections require accurate electoral rolls. Clarifies the distinction between electoral eligibility verification and citizenship determination. Provides legal backing for future SIR exercises across the country. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possibility of exclusion of vulnerable groups due to documentation gaps. Burden of proving eligibility may disproportionately affect migrants and poor voters. Questions remain regarding procedural safeguards and accessibility of the revision process.

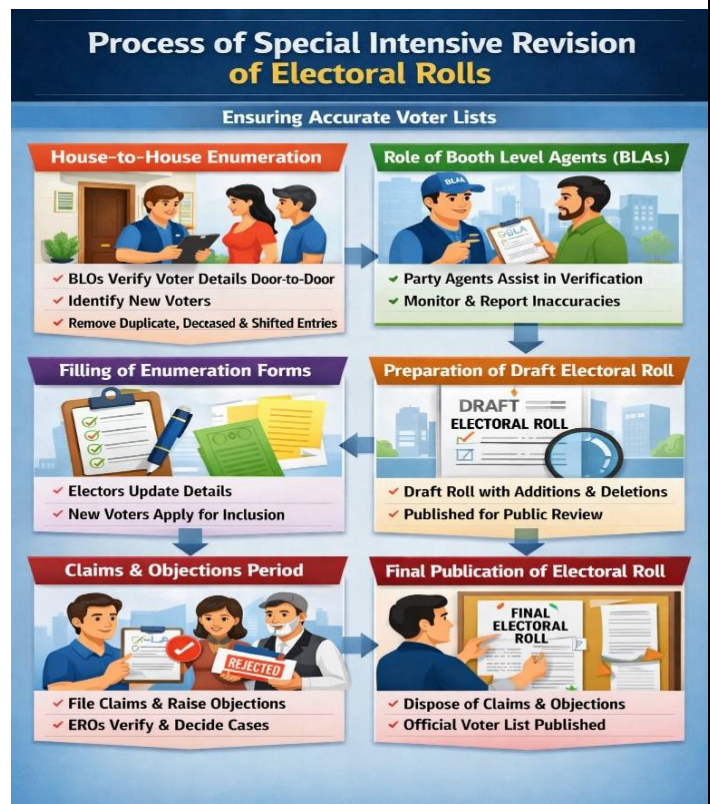
Extra Mile: PHASE III OF SIR OF ELECTORAL ROLLS

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has announced **Phase III of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** of electoral rolls, beginning May 30, 2026, across **16 States and 3 UTs**. The exercise aims to ensure that only eligible voters are included in electoral rolls, while removing **duplicate, shifted or ineligible entries**. With this phase, SIR will cover almost the entire country, except **Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh**, where the schedule will be announced later.

About Special Intensive Revision (SIR): It is a comprehensive revision of electoral rolls undertaken by the ECI under powers derived from Article 324 of the Constitution and the Representation of the People Act, 1950.

Key Highlights of Phase III:

- SIR-III will cover around **36.73 crore electors** in a phased manner.
- More than **3.94 lakh Booth Level Officers (BLOs)** will conduct door-to-door verification, supported by around **3.42 lakh Booth Level Agents (BLAs)** nominated by political parties.
- The exercise will be aligned with the ongoing Census house-listing process to optimise administrative resources.
- States and UTs included are: Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Haryana, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Odisha, Punjab, Telangana, Uttarakhand, Manipur, Mizoram, Sikkim, Tripura, Jharkhand, Nagaland, Delhi, Chandigarh, Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu (DNH & DD).



Key Concerns Regarding Phase II of SIR:

- Phase II reportedly resulted in a **10.2% reduction in electoral rolls (9 states & 3 UTs)**, raising concerns over possible disenfranchisement.
- Allegations were raised that **marginalised and minority communities** were disproportionately affected in some States, particularly **West Bengal**.
- Errors in software and methodology reportedly led to deletion of entire sets of names (families/ groups) rather than only individual duplicate entries.
- Booth rationalisation conducted simultaneously with enumeration allegedly made it harder for electors to verify their inclusion.

Changes Introduced Since Earlier Phases

- Following lessons from **Bihar** and earlier phases, documents will not be collected during the enumeration stage.
- **Aadhaar** has been included as an acceptable supporting document for identity verification, in line with Supreme Court directions, though it will serve only as proof of identity and not citizenship.



16th FC Report (2026–31)

The **16th Finance Commission (Chairman: Dr. Arvind Panagariya)** submitted its report for the award period **2026–27 to 2030–31**, laying out recommendations on fiscal devolution between the Centre and States under **Article 280** of the Constitution. The Commission sought to **balance equity (support to poorer states), efficiency (rewarding economic contribution), and fiscal discipline**, while strengthening local governance and improving fiscal sustainability.

Constitutional Mandate of Finance Commission:

- Constituted every five years under **Article 280**.
- Recommends:
 - Vertical devolution – distribution of taxes between Centre and States.
 - Horizontal devolution – distribution among States.
 - Grants-in-aid to states under Article 275.
 - Measures to strengthen State finances and local bodies.

Key Recommendations of the 16th Finance Commission:

- **Vertical Tax Devolution Retained at 41%:**
 - The Commission retained the States' share in the divisible pool at 41%, continuing the arrangement of the 15th Finance Commission.
 - States had sought an increase to 50% (from 41%), citing rising welfare obligations, GST-related fiscal constraints and growing expenditure responsibilities.
- **New Formula for Horizontal Devolution:** The Commission revised the criteria for sharing resources among States:
 - Income distance remains the dominant criterion to support poorer states and reduce regional disparities.
 - A new criterion, **Contribution to GDP (10%)**, replaced *tax and fiscal effort*, aiming to reward economically stronger states.
 - Demographic Performance criteria is now based on population growth from 1971–2011, replacing the 15th FC's change in Total Fertility Rate (TFR) metric.

Criteria	Weight
Income Distance	42.5%
Population (2011)	17.5%
Area	10%
Forest & Ecology	10%
Demographic Performance	10%
Contribution to GDP	10%

- Forest criteria now weighs both the share of a state in the overall forest area, and its share in the increase in overall forest area between 2015 and 2023. It also now includes open forests, unlike the 15th FC which only counted dense/moderate forests.

- **Grants-in-Aid:**

- The Commission recommended **₹9.47 lakh crore** in grants-in-aid during 2026–31:

- **Local governments (7,91 lakh crore):** Rs ~4.35 lakh crore and Rs ~3.56 lakh crore for rural and urban local bodies, respectively. These grants are divided into basic (80%) and performance-based (20%) components.

- **Special Infrastructure Grants and Urbanisation Premium Grants** have also been recommended for urban local bodies.
- **Disaster management corpus** for states ~ ₹2.04 lakh crore.

- The cost-sharing pattern between the centre and states is recommended to be: (i) 90:10 for north-eastern and Himalayan states, and (ii) 75:25 for all other states. Centre's share in total will be ~Rs 1.55 lakh crore.
 - However, unlike earlier Finance Commissions, it discontinued revenue deficit grants, sector-specific grants and **state-specific grants**, signalling a shift toward greater fiscal self-reliance.

■ **Major Fiscal Reforms Recommended:** The Commission emphasised fiscal prudence and responsible borrowing, recommending:

- **Fiscal deficit target:**
 - ➔ Centre: 3.5% of GDP by 2030–31
 - ➔ States: 3% of GSDP
- It also recommended strictly discontinuing the practice of off-budget borrowings for states and bringing all such borrowings onto their budgets. The definition of fiscal deficit and debt should be expanded to uniformly include all offbudget borrowings.

■ **Rationalisation of Subsidies:**

- States were advised to review untargeted subsidies and unconditional cash transfers.
- The Commission recommended a uniform disclosure framework for subsidy accounting to improve transparency and fiscal sustainability.

■ **Power Sector Reforms:**

- Recommended DISCOM reforms and privatisation where feasible.
- Proposed a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) model to absorb inherited debt during restructuring of power utilities.

■ **Reform of State Public Sector Enterprises (SPSEs):**

- The Commission recommended a review and closure of 308 inactive State Public Sector Enterprises (SPSEs).
- It recommended formulation of a state-level PSEs disinvestment policy to target inactive and underperforming SPSEs.

■ **Strengthening Local Governments:**

- The Commission significantly increased support to Panchayats and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs). Grants were linked to reforms such as:
 - ➔ Timely constitution of State Finance Commissions (SFCs)
 - ➔ Audited accounts and transparency
 - ➔ Improved urban governance and service delivery.


Key Concerns:	Significance of the Report:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Devolution: Retention of 41% devolution disappointed several states seeking greater fiscal autonomy. ● Cesses and Surcharges Issue: States argue that although the devolution share is 41%, it applies only to the divisible pool, excluding cesses and surcharges, which have increased significantly. This effectively reduces the share available to states. ● Equity vs Efficiency Debate: Better-performing states, especially in southern and western India, argue they are penalised for economic success, fiscal discipline and population control. Poorer states defend redistributive transfers as essential for balanced regional development. ● Reduced Fiscal Flexibility: Tighter borrowing norms and removal of grants may constrain states' ability to undertake welfare spending and infrastructure investments. ● Weaker states' concerns: Withdrawal of revenue deficit grants may disproportionately affect fiscally weaker states. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Marks a transition from "entitlement-based transfers" to "performance and compliance-driven fiscal federalism." ● Attempts to balance equity with incentives for growth and fiscal discipline. ● Promotes fiscal responsibility, transparency and structural reforms in states. ● Strengthens local governments, recognising them as crucial for service delivery and urbanisation.

- **Southern States' Concerns:** Despite introduction of GDP contribution criterion, many southern states believe income distance continues to disproportionately favour poorer states.




NCRB 2024 Report


The latest **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) Crime in India 2024 report** shows that while the overall crime rate in India declined by about 6% in 2024, cybercrime cases witnessed a sharp rise of 17.9%. The report also highlights growing concerns regarding cyber fraud, missing children, juvenile crimes, prison overcrowding, suicides and drug overdose deaths.




National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)




NCRB is a premier agency under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) responsible for collecting, analysing and disseminating crime and criminal data across India. It acts as the central repository of crime statistics and supports evidence-based policing and criminal justice administration.



Establishment and Background:




- **Established:** 1986; Headquarters: New Delhi
- Established based on recommendations of the National Police Commission (1977–81) and the MHA Task Force (1985) to modernise crime record management.




Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)

Major Functions of NCRB:


- 

1. Crime Data Collection and Analysis:

 - Compiles and analyses crime data reported by States/UTs under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita offences; Special and Local Laws (SLL)





Publishes annual reports such as:

 - Crime in India
 - Prison Statistics India (PSI)
 - Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India (ADSI).
- 



2. Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS):

 - NCRB monitors and implements CCTNS, a nationwide digital policing platform connecting police stations for real-time crime and criminal tracking.


- 



3. National Automated Fingerprint Identification System (NAFIS):

 - NCRB manages NAFIS, a national searchable fingerprint database to aid criminal identification and investigation.


- 



4. National Database of Sexual Offenders (NDSO):

 - Maintains a database of convicted sexual offenders and shares information with States/UTs for law enforcement purposes.


- 


5. Digital Police and Citizen Services:

 - Supports the Digital Police Portal, enabling services like online complaint filing and verifications services.


- 

6. Training and Capacity Building:

 - Provides training and technical support to police organisations in use of IT-enabled policing systems.



Overall Crime Trends in India:

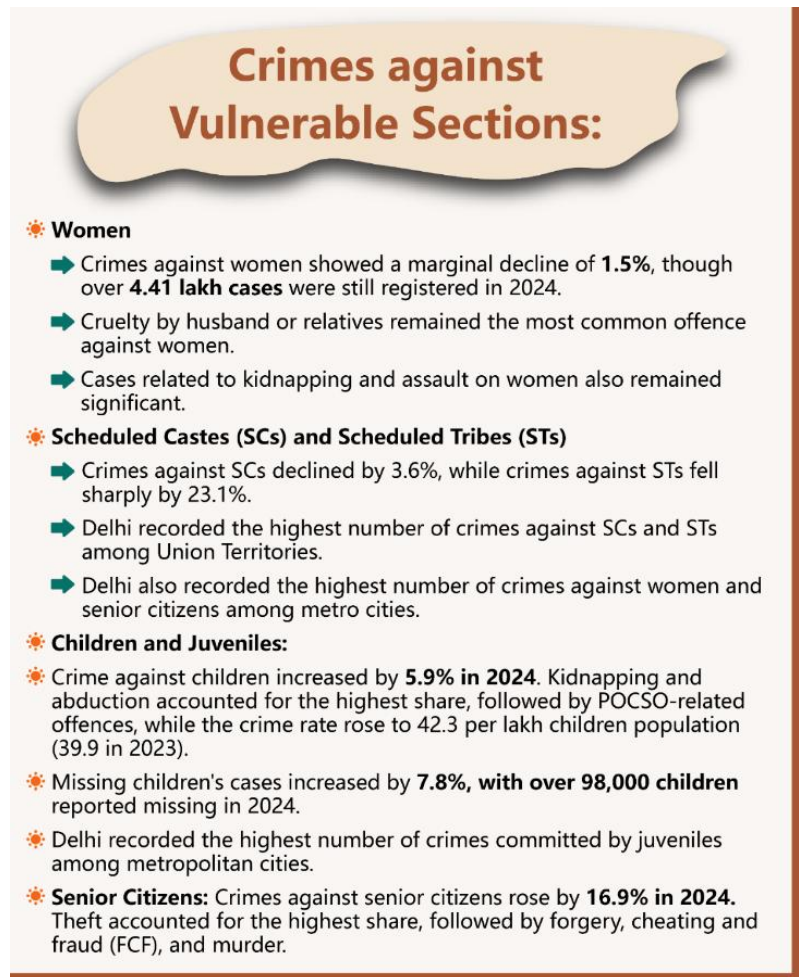
- Total cognisable crimes declined from **62.41 lakh cases** in 2023 to about **58.86 lakh cases** in 2024.
 - The reported 6% dip is largely attributed to the implementation of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023.
 - Under the BNS, simple 'Hurt' was made a non-cognisable offence. Consequently, cases registered under the 'Hurt' category saw a massive 30.58% decline (dropping from 6.36 lakh to 4.41 lakh cases), which artificially deflated the overall national crime numbers.
- Crime rate per lakh population fell from **448.3 in 2023 to 418.9 in 2024**.
- **Economic offences** increased by 4.6%, rising from **~2.05 lakh cases** in 2023 to **~2.14 lakh cases** in 2024.
 - **Forgery, cheating, and fraud** accounted for nearly 90% of all economic offences.
- **Murder cases** declined marginally by 2.4% in 2024.

Rise in Cybercrime

- Cybercrime cases increased by 17.9%, rising from **86,420 cases in 2023 to 1,01,928 cases in 2024**.
- Cybercrime rate increased from **6.2 to 7.3 per lakh population**.
- About **72.6% of cybercrime cases** were related to online fraud.
- Other major cyber offences included:
 - Sexual exploitation;
 - Extortion
- The data reflects **increasing digitalisation and rising vulnerability** to online financial frauds.

Other Key Findings:

- **State-Wise Variations: Telangana** recorded a sharp rise in total cognisable crimes in 2024 and emerged among States with the highest crime rates (cases per lakh population) in the country.
 - **Uttar Pradesh** recorded the highest per capita crime rate (7.4), followed by **Arunachal Pradesh and Jharkhand**.
 - **Nagaland** continued to record the lowest crime rate in the country.
 - The State/UT reporting highest charge-sheeting rate under IPC and BNS Crimes are **Kerala (94.5%), Puducherry (91.0%) and West Bengal (90.6%)**.
 - Among metropolitan cities, **Delhi** ranked worst in violent crimes (murders, kidnappings) and fourth worst in economic offences. **Bengaluru** has recorded the country's highest suicide rate (20 per lakh population) among major metros.
- **Crimes against foreigners** increased by around 8%.
- **Cases involving foreigners** committing offences also increased.
- **Prison overcrowding and rising cyber fraud** emerged as major governance and law-and-order concerns.



Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India (ADSI) 2024 report

The **ADSI 2024 report**, published by the **NCRB**, recorded 1,70,746 suicides and ~1.75 million accidental fatalities nationwide. The overall suicide rate dropped marginally to 12.2 per lakh population, but concerning spikes emerged in specific categories.

Road Accidents in India: Key Findings

- India recorded nearly **1.99 lakh deaths** due to traffic accidents in 2024, averaging around 546 deaths per day.
- Road accident deaths **increased marginally by 0.79%** compared to 2023.
- **Speeding** remained the biggest cause of fatalities, accounting for the majority of road accident deaths.
- National highways, despite constituting a small share of total roads, accounted for a disproportionately high number of fatalities.
- **States recording the highest fatalities were:**
 - Uttar Pradesh
 - Tamil Nadu
 - Maharashtra
- **Drug Overdoses:** Fatalities linked to drug overdoses jumped sharply by 50% year-over-year to 978 in 2024. Tamil Nadu and Punjab reported the highest figures.
- **Concerns in Road Safety:**
 - Weak enforcement of traffic regulations, especially over-speeding norms.
 - Poor road engineering and unsafe highway infrastructure.
 - Limited adherence to helmet and seat-belt norms.
 - Delays in trauma care and emergency medical response.

Suicide Trends in India

- India's suicide rate declined marginally to **12.2 per lakh population in 2024**, indicating a slight improvement compared to previous years.
- NCRB recorded around **1.71 lakh suicides in 2024**.
- **Vulnerable Gender:** Nearly **7 out of 10** suicide victims were men.
- **Age & Causes:** The 18–30 age bracket saw the highest vulnerability, with "family problems" cited as the leading cause of suicide.
- **Leading Occupations:** Daily wage earners remained the highest affected group, accounting for around 31% (52,910) of total suicides.
- Suicides among **farmers and agricultural labourers** continued to remain significant.
- **Major causes of suicides included:**
 - Family problems
 - Illness
 - Drug abuse and addiction
 - Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu recorded among the highest number of suicide cases.
- **Dowry Violence:** Dowry-related suicides saw a 6.7% increase, rising to 1,693 in 2024.

Significance of the NCRB Data:

- Highlights the **changing nature of crime in India**, especially the rapid rise of cyber-enabled offences.
- **Reflects the need for stronger cyber policing**, digital awareness and financial fraud prevention mechanisms.
- **Draws attention to persistent social concerns** such as crimes against women, juvenile delinquency and mental health-related suicides.
- Emphasises the need for **prison reforms, better urban policing & stronger protection for vulnerable groups**.



Trump–Xi Summit 2026

- U.S. President Donald Trump visited China to meet the Chinese President Xi Jinping. This was Trump's first visit to China during his 2nd term and the first visit by a sitting American President to China since 2017.
- It was also the seventh in-person meeting between President Trump and President Xi Jinping.

- Originally expected to focus on trade tensions and Taiwan, the summit is taking place amid the ongoing Iran crisis, which has added a major geopolitical dimension to the discussions.
- Trump arrived with a large business delegation of over a dozen American CEOs. The composition of the delegation — businessmen rather than China hawks — was widely read as signalling Trump's preference for economic engagement over confrontation.

Four Issues on the Table

- **Iran War — The Dominant Crisis**
 - The **West Asia war** — with an uneasy ceasefire holding — dominated the summit beyond its original agenda.
 - China, alongside Pakistan, is positioning itself as a key mediator in the Iran conflict.
 - **Key outcome:**
 - ♣ Both sides agreed on the need to keep the Strait of Hormuz open and to support the free flow of energy.
 - ✓ China imported over 1 million barrels per day from Iran — accounting for over 85% of Iran's oil exports before the war.
 - ✓ ~60% of oil headed for China flows through the Strait of Hormuz — making the blockade directly damaging to Beijing.
 - ♣ Xi made clear **China's opposition to the militarisation of the Strait.**
 - ♣ However, there was **no broader agreement** on addressing the Iran crisis itself
- **Trade — Competing Interests, Tentative Steps**
 - The US-China tariff war — the original driver of the summit — saw some tentative movement:
 - ♣ Setting up a **Board of Trade** for trade issues.
 - ♣ A **Board of Investment** to allow Chinese investment in **non-sensitive sectors.**
 - ♣ China's possible willingness to buy **Boeing aircraft** and **American soybeans.**
 - ♣ The US cleared 10 Chinese firms to purchase Nvidia's advanced H200 chips — a significant concession given that these chips had not previously been sold to China.
 - **Outstanding tensions**
 - ♣ US concerns: China's **restrictions on rare earths** for commercial use.
 - ♣ China's concerns: American **export controls**, particularly on **semiconductors.**
 - **India angle:** Any concessional tariff deal between US and China could set the baseline for the ongoing US-India trade deal negotiations in New Delhi.
- **Taiwan — The Most Dangerous Flashpoint**
 - Taiwan emerged as the sharpest point of contention, with both sides underlining their positions without resolution.
 - The \$11 billion arms deal with Taiwan announced in **December 2025** continues to be a sore point for Beijing.
- **AI and Technology — New Dialogue, Old Rivalry**
 - Both sides discussed establishing an **AI Safety Dialogue** — a potential new channel of communication.
 - Competition in advanced technologies — semiconductors, AI, critical minerals — remains a structural long-term rivalry.

China's Strategic Confidence

- China feels confident to stand up to Trump on sanctions, technology controls, critical minerals, and Iran. Yet Beijing's eagerness to hold the summit signals it is less confident than it appears - — but it is strategically using the moment.
- Beijing is using the summit to manage the US — inducing Trump to delay competitive steps in exchange for bilateral stability — a détente on terms favourable to Beijing.

Conclusion

- The Beijing summit produced an uneasy truce rather than a genuine breakthrough.
- With ceremony dominating substance, both sides managed to avoid escalation while leaving all fundamental tensions — Taiwan, trade, technology, Iran — unresolved.
- As the power dynamic continues to shift in China's favour, the real question is whether the US-China relationship is being genuinely stabilised or merely managed by Beijing to buy time in a deepening strategic rivalry.



India-Vietnam Relations

- During Vietnamese President To Lam's recent visit to New Delhi, India and Vietnam elevated bilateral ties to an "**Enhanced Comprehensive Strategic Partnership**" — India's highest level of diplomatic engagement.
- A new bilateral trade target of \$25 billion by 2030 was set (up from current \$16.4 billion).

Key Outcomes

• Diplomatic Significance

- To Lam is also **General Secretary** of the Communist Party of Vietnam — his visit within a month of assuming presidency signals high priority given to India.

• Enhanced Comprehensive Strategic Partnership

- ⊖ The most significant outcome was the decision to elevate ties to an "Enhanced Comprehensive Strategic Partnership".
- PM Modi cited cooperation across — culture, connectivity, capacity-building, security, sustainability, and supply chain resilience.

India-Vietnam Relations in Brief

■ Historical Evolution (given in table)

■ Bilateral Trade & Economic Cooperation

✓ Current Trade (2025–26)

- ➔ Total trade: ~**USD 16 billion** (10%+ YoY growth)
- ➔ India's exports to Vietnam: ~USD 6.11 billion
- ➔ Vietnam's exports to India: ~USD 10.35 billion

✓ Key Sectors of Engagement

- ➔ **Pharmaceuticals** — Indian generic medicines have a growing market in Vietnam
- ➔ **Agriculture & Fisheries** — Indian grapes, pomegranates ↔ Vietnamese durians, pomelos
- ➔ **Manufacturing & Electronics** — Vietnam emerging as high-tech hub; Indian investment opportunities
- ➔ **Renewable Energy & EVs** — Clean energy transition cooperation
- ➔ **Digital Economy** — E-commerce, digital payments, MSMEs in global value chains

✓ Strategic Economic Context

- ➔ Vietnam is a member of **ASEAN** and party to **RCEP** — serves as a gateway for Indian businesses into Southeast Asian markets.

■ Defence & Security Ties

✓ Key Pillars

- ➔ **Defence Lines of Credit (LoC)** — Supply of defence equipment and patrol vessels to Vietnam
- ➔ **Joint Exercises & Training** — Military exchanges, staff talks, interoperability building
- ➔ **Maritime Security** — India offered to host a Vietnamese liaison officer at **IFC-IOR** (Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region), Gurugram
- ➔ **Defence Industrial Collaboration** — Joint R&D, co-production of defence technologies, participation in defence exhibitions
- ➔ **Coast Guard Cooperation** — Maritime safety and search-and-rescue operations

✓ Indo-Pacific Alignment

- ➔ Both nations share concerns over freedom of navigation in the South China Sea
- ➔ Vietnam joined the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) during the visit

■ Cultural & People-to-People Ties

- ✓ Indian diaspora in Vietnam: ~**8,000 people** (business, IT, professional services)
- ✓ Shared civilisational links through **Buddhism** and the ancient **Cham civilisation** (Hindu influences)
- ✓ **My Son Sanctuary** — UNESCO World Heritage Site in Vietnam reflecting shared heritage
- ✓ India's development assistance: **66 Quick Impact Projects** across Vietnamese provinces (education, healthcare, community infrastructure)

Year	Milestone
1954	PM Nehru — first foreign leader to visit Vietnam, just a week after liberation of Hanoi
1972	Formal diplomatic relations established
1975	India among first to recognise unified Vietnam post-reunification
2007	Elevated to Strategic Partnership — India's first such partnership in ASEAN
2016	Further elevated to Comprehensive Strategic Partnership
2026	Now elevated to Enhanced Comprehensive Strategic Partnership

- **13 Agreements Signed — Key Ones**
 - **RBI ↔ State Bank of Vietnam** — MoU on digital payments and QR-based cross-border transactions
 - MoU on **radioactive and rare earth minerals**
 - Cooperation in **digital public infrastructure, AI, 6G, space, and critical minerals**
 - Agreements on urban management, culture, and manuscripts
- **Trade Target: \$25 Billion by 2030**
 - Key enablers: smoother export of Indian pharma, agri, fisheries & animal products; market access for Indian grapes & pomegranates ↔ Vietnamese durians & pomelos; supply chain resilience & diversification.

Strategic Significance for India

- **Act East Policy & Vision MAHASAGAR**
 - PM Modi described Vietnam as a "**major pillar of India's Act East Policy and Vision MAHASAGAR**"
 - Vietnam serves as India's key link to ASEAN engagement and Indo-Pacific strategy
- **Counter-China Dimension**
 - Both nations share concerns over South China Sea; UNCLOS-based order emphasized
 - Defence cooperation, Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) membership, and maritime coordination all carry strategic weight vis-à-vis China



Visit of Indian PM to Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, and Italy

- PM Modi paid a state visit to four European nations, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway and Italy.
- India-EU Context
 - Visit took place against the backdrop of major India-EU milestones:
 - ♣ Conclusion of the India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA)
 - ♣ New India-EU Security and Defence Partnership
 - ♣ India-EU Mobility Agreement
 - ♣ Ongoing India-EU Trade and Technology Council

1. Visit to Netherlands

- PM Modi visited the Netherlands (May 16–17, 2026); held talks with Dutch PM **Rob Jetten** at The Hague.
 - This was his second visit to the Netherlands (first one was in 2017).
- During the visit, Netherlands returned **11th-century Chola-era copper plates** — a significant cultural repatriation after a 14-year diplomatic effort.

Key Outcomes of PM Modi's Visit

- **Elevation to Strategic Partnership**
 - Bilateral ties formally upgraded to a **Strategic Partnership** — India's latest such elevation in Europe.
 - Cooperation now spans water, semiconductors, innovation, defence, sustainability, and mobility.
- **17 MoUs Signed — Key Areas**
 - "**WAH**" Framework (**Water, Agriculture, Health**) - Dutch expertise in flood control and water management to support India's river rejuvenation and climate resilience efforts.
 - **Semiconductors — The Headline Agreement:** TATA Electronics ↔ ASML (Dutch company): Semiconductor fabrication project — strategically significant given ASML's near-monopoly on **EUV lithography machines**, critical for chip manufacturing.
 - ♣ Reflects India's ambition to build a domestic **semiconductor ecosystem**.

- **Renewable Energy & Critical Minerals** - Cooperation on **green hydrogen, renewable energy**, and critical minerals supply chains.
 - ♣ Netherlands joined the Global Biofuel Alliance.
 - ♣ Joint Working Group on Renewable Energy established.
 - ♣ India–Netherlands Green Hydrogen Roadmap launched.
- **Other Areas** - Defence, mobility, innovation, and sustainability.
- **Cultural Repatriation — Chola Copper Plates (Anaimangalam Copper Plates or the Leiden Plates)**
 - Netherlands returned **11th-century copper plates** from the reign of **Rajaraja Chola I (985–1014 AD)**.
 - Comprises **21 large copper plates and 3 small plates (~30 kg)** with texts in Sanskrit and Tamil — contain details on land grants, governance, taxation, and socio-economic conditions of Chola era.
 - Originally brought to the Netherlands in **1712** by Florentius Camper when Nagapattinam was under Dutch control.
 - It reflects India's growing **antiquity repatriation diplomacy** (US, Australia, and several European nations have also returned artefacts in recent years).

Conclusion

- PM Modi's Netherlands visit marks a substantive upgrade in bilateral ties — from a primarily trade-driven relationship to a **multidimensional strategic partnership** spanning semiconductors, clean energy, water management, and defence.
- The Chola copper plate repatriation adds a civilisational dimension to modern diplomacy.
- The friction over human rights concerns, however, underscores the challenge India faces in managing **values-based diplomacy** with European partners even as economic and strategic convergences deepen.

India-Netherlands Bilateral Relations



Historical Background of India-Netherlands Relations

- ▷ Ties date to the 17th century — Dutch East India Company established early trading links with India.
- ▷ Formal diplomatic relations established post-Independence in 1947.
- ▷ Evolved from trade to broader cooperation in agriculture, science, technology, water management, and climate action.

Trade & Economic Ties

- ▷ Bilateral trade: USD ~27 billion (2023–24); India exported USD 22.37 billion — accounting for 5.12% of **India's total merchandise exports**.
- ▷ The Netherlands is India's **11th-largest trading partner** globally, **third-largest export destination (after USA and UAE)**, and **largest in Europe**.
- ▷ India's major exports: petroleum products, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, machinery, textiles.
- ▷ Netherlands' major exports to India: machinery, chemicals, medical equipment, technology.
- ▷ Netherlands is India's **fourth-largest investor** with cumulative FDI of USD 55.6 billion, and Indian Overseas Direct Investment to the Netherlands stands at USD 28 billion, with over 300 companies present in India and the Netherlands.

Indian Diaspora & People-to-People Ties

- ▷ Netherlands hosts the **2nd largest Indian diaspora in Europe** (~2,60,000) — including 60,000 Indians and 2,00,000 Surinamese-Hindustani people of Indian origin.
- ▷ Over 3,500 Indian students currently studying in the Netherlands.

Multilateral Cooperation

- ▷ Joint engagement on **climate change, maritime security, international trade routes**, and rules-based international order.
- ▷ Netherlands supports stronger **India-EU engagement** in trade and technology.

Diplomatic Friction Points

- **Press Freedom & Minority Rights** – Dutch PM has raised concerns over press freedom and minority rights (including Muslim community) in India.
- **Insiya Child Abduction Case** - PM Jetten raised the case of Insiya — a Dutch-born child allegedly abducted to India by her Indian father in 2016 when she was two years old; father convicted in the Netherlands.
 - ▷ MEA response: "Case is sub judice; we would not comment at this stage."

2. Sweden

- PM Modi visited Sweden (May 17–18, 2026) — his first visit in **eight years** (last visit: April 2018 for the first India-Nordic Summit).
- Bilateral ties elevated to a **Strategic Partnership**; upgraded **Joint Action Plan (2026–2030)** endorsed.

Key Outcomes of the Visit

■ Strategic Partnership & Joint Action Plan (2026–2030)

- Ties formally elevated to a Strategic Partnership — covering green transition, emerging technology, trade, security & defence, climate action, and economic frameworks.
- Upgraded **Joint Action Plan** to guide cooperation through 2026–2030.
- Joint ambition to double bilateral trade and investment within five years.

■ Technology & AI Corridor — SITAC

- Statement of Intent signed for the Sweden-India Technology and AI Corridor (SITAC).
- Covers: 6G, AI, quantum computing, life sciences, and Digital India priorities.

■ Defence — Beyond Buyer-Seller

- PM Modi - "We are moving beyond a mere buyer-seller relationship towards a long-term industrial partnership."
- Saab (a premier Swedish aerospace and defence company) is building its first Carl-Gustaf manufacturing plant outside Sweden at Jhajjar, Haryana — India's first 100% FDI-driven defence manufacturing project.
- Discussions covered supply chains, defence electronics, and strategic industrial co-production.

■ Innovation & SME Partnership

- Launch of a Joint Innovation Partnership 2.0 which includes a new virtual India-Sweden Joint Science and Technology Centre (ISJSTC).
- Development of an India-Sweden SME and Start-up Platform.
- Sweden invests over **3% of GDP in R&D** — consistently among Europe's top performers on the European Innovation Scoreboard.

■ Green Transition & Sustainable Mobility

- **LeadIT 3.0** (Leadership Group for Industry Transition) — co-launched by India and Sweden — now has **50 members across 18 countries**.
- **Maharashtra–Candela MoU** (March 2025): **Rs. 1,990 crore** Swedish electric-boat investment.
- Cooperation on sustainable mobility, green hydrogen, and climate action deepened.

■ Critical Minerals — Supply Chain Sovereignty

- Sweden hosts **one of Europe's largest Rare Earth metals**— creating a natural **India-Sweden axis** on supply chain sovereignty for **EVs, semiconductors, and defence electronics**.

■ Sweden's highest honour to PM Modi

- PM Modi was conferred the '**Royal Order of the Polar Star, Degree Commander Grand Cross**' — Sweden's **highest honour** for foreign heads of government, instituted in the 18th century; recognises exceptional contribution to Sweden relations.

India-Sweden Bilateral Relations

● Trade & Economic Ties

- ✓ Bilateral trade in goods and services: **USD 7.75 billion (2025)**.
- ✓ Over **280 Swedish companies** operating in India.
- ✓ Sweden is a major FDI source in India — logistics, technology, manufacturing, and renewable energy.

● Strategic Alignment

- ✓ Sweden has taken one of **Europe's firmest positions on de-risking from China** — removing Chinese vendors from telecom networks, tightening research-security norms.
- ✓ This makes India one of Sweden's most consequential strategic diversification partners in Asia.
- ✓ Both nations share values of **democracy, transparency, innovation, and sustainability** — the stated foundation of bilateral ties.

Conclusion

- The India-Sweden Strategic Partnership reflects a matured bilateral relationship — moving from trade and technology cooperation to a **comprehensive strategic alignment** rooted in shared democratic values and converging geopolitical interests.
- Anchored by SITAC, the defence industrial partnership, and critical minerals cooperation, the visit has laid an ambitious roadmap that positions Sweden as one of India's most consequential European partners in the decade ahead.

3. Norway

- PM Modi visited Oslo (May 18-19, 2026) — first standalone bilateral visit by an Indian PM to Norway in 43 years (last visit: PM Indira Gandhi, 1983).
- Bilateral ties elevated to a "**Green Strategic Partnership**".
- PM Modi also attended the **Third India-Nordic Summit in Oslo** — a similar level platform India shares only with the United States.

Key Outcomes

● Elevation to Green Strategic Partnership

- Ties upgraded during delegation-level talks with Norwegian PM Jonas Gahr Støre.
- **Four pillars of the new partnership**: Clean Energy; Climate Resilience; Blue Economy; Green Shipping.
- Norwegian PM: The partnership provides "the foundation to work on knowledge, resources, and ambitions for the green transition."

- **Key MoUs Signed**
 - ISRO ↔ Norwegian Space Agency — deepening space cooperation (ISRO antennas at Svalbard already operational from 2026)
 - ♣ Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) cooperation
 - ♣ High-tech Health Solutions and digital health
 - ♣ Artificial Intelligence and Research
- **Triangular Cooperation Agreement — Global South Dimension**
 - India and Norway to jointly provide human development solutions to Global South countries using India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI).
 - Positions India as a global digital development partner — significant for India's South-South cooperation agenda.
- **Norway Joins Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)**
 - Norway announced its decision to join IPOI — India's maritime framework for the Indo-Pacific.
 - Reflects growing strategic convergence between the two nations in the Indo-Pacific region.
- **Arctic & Polar Cooperation**
 - PM Modi acknowledged Norway's role as a key Arctic nation.
 - Cooperation areas: climate change research, protection of fragile ecosystems, and joint polar research.
 - India's Arctic research station "Himadri" has hosted over 400 scientists since 2008.
 - GRSE–Kongsberg Maritime MoU (June 2025): Will deliver India's first indigenous Polar Research Vessel.
- **Honour for PM Modi**
 - Awarded the *Grand Cross of the Royal Norwegian Order of Merit* by King Harald V — Norway's recognition of Modi's contribution to bilateral ties.
- **Third India-Nordic Summit**
 - Attended by leaders of all five Nordic nations — Norway, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, and Sweden.
 - Only India and the United States engage the Nordic bloc at this summit level.

India-Norway Bilateral Relations

- **Historical Background**
 - ✓ Diplomatic relations established in 1947 — Norway among the first nations to recognise India's sovereignty.
 - ✓ Relationship evolved from development cooperation to a comprehensive partnership in trade, technology, and strategic affairs.
 - ✓ Norway has consistently supported India's bid for permanent membership in a reformed UN Security Council.
- **Trade & Economic Ties**
 - ✓ **Bilateral trade:** USD 1.05 billion (2024–25) — India exported USD 630 million; imported USD 420 million.
 - ✓ Major Norwegian firms in India: Telenor, Equinor, Yara, DNV, Jotun.
 - ✓ **India-EFTA TEPA** (Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement) (in force from October 1, 2025) — India's first FTA with developed European nations; commits USD 100 billion in investment and 1 million direct jobs over 15 years. Norway is an EFTA member.
- **Sovereign Wealth Fund**
 - ✓ Norway's Government Pension Fund Global (GPF) — world's largest sovereign wealth fund with corpus of ~USD 2 trillion — has invested ~USD 30 billion in Indian capital markets.
 - ✓ Norfund (Norway's development finance institution) remains active in Indian renewables.
- **Maritime Cooperation**
 - ✓ Indian shipyards hold 11% of the Norwegian Shipowners' Association order book.
 - ✓ Cochin Shipyard building eco-friendly vessels for Norway.
 - ✓ Inaugural India-Norway Maritime Security Dialogue held in September 2025.
- **Space Cooperation**
 - ✓ ISRO antennas at Svalbard (Norway's Arctic Archipelago) strategically important for India's satellite tracking and polar orbit missions.
- **Infrastructure & Technology**
 - ✓ Norwegian tunnelling technology has powered the Char Dham railway project in India.
 - ✓ Clean energy cooperation supporting diversification of India's energy basket.
- **Demographic Opportunity**
 - ✓ Over 45% of Norway's population is above 45 — creates a structural demand for Indian skilled talent in healthcare, technology, and services.
- **People-to-People Ties**
 - ✓ Indian diaspora in Norway: ~30,000.
 - ✓ Over 40 Indian associations in Norway.
 - ✓ Popular events: Turbandagen (Turban Day) since 2010; Oslo Colour Festival since 2022.

- Builds on Stockholm 2018 (first India-Nordic summit) and Copenhagen 2022.

Conclusion

- PM Modi's Norway visit marks a transformative moment in India-Nordic engagement — elevating a historically modest bilateral relationship into a **strategically anchored Green Partnership**.
- The combination of Norway's sovereign wealth, maritime expertise, clean energy leadership, and Arctic access with India's scale, digital infrastructure, and growing strategic ambition creates a partnership that is as forward-looking.
- Norway joining IPOI and the Triangular DPI cooperation agreement reflect a shared vision extending well beyond bilateral interests into **global governance and the Indo-Pacific order**.

4. Italy

- During the last leg of the visit, PM Modi visited Italy.
- Bilateral ties elevated to a "**Special Strategic Partnership**" during talks with Italian PM **Giorgia Meloni**. Partnership anchored by the **Joint Strategic Plan of Action 2025–29**.

Key Outcomes

- **Elevation to Special Strategic Partnership**
 - Marks a **qualitative transformation** — Italy now views India as a major geopolitical and economic power, not merely a large market.
 - Reflects convergence on: global governance, economic resilience, strategic autonomy, rule-based international order, and Indo-Pacific stability.
 - PM Modi's framing: "**Design and Develop in India and Italy, Deliver for the World.**"
- **Trade & Economic Partnership**
 - Bilateral trade target: **€14.25 billion → €20 billion by 2029**.
 - Tata Motors' €3.8 billion acquisition of Iveco Group — largest-ever Indian investment in Italy.
 - Italy opened a **SIMEST office in Delhi** with a €500 million funding line; SACE added €200 million for SMEs.
- **Defence — Industrial Roadmap**
 - Major outcome: **Defence Industrial Roadmap** — covering co-development, co-production, technology transfer, and industrial partnerships.
 - **Priority sectors:**
 - ♣ **Helicopters** — renewed cooperation between **Adani Defence** and **Leonardo S.p.A** (Italy)
 - ♣ Naval platforms and marine armaments
 - ♣ Electronic warfare systems
 - ♣ **MRO** (Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul) facilities
 - Significance: Defence ties had stalled after the **AgustaWestland corruption controversy** — this roadmap marks a decisive reset.
- **IMEEC — Italy as Western Anchor**
 - Italy reiterated strong support for the **India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC)** — positions itself as **Europe's western anchor**.
 - First **IMEEC Ministerial Meeting** agreed to be held in **2026**.
 - IMEEC significance: trade connectivity, supply chain resilience, energy security, and maritime integration.
 - **Sparkle-Airtel Blue-Raman submarine cable** connecting to **Genoa** now activated — strengthens digital and energy connectivity.
 - ♣ **Structure: Blue cable** (Italy-Greece-Israel) and **Raman cable** (Israel-Jordan-Saudi Arabia-Oman-India)
- **Technology & Innovation**
 - Proposed **India-Italy Innovation Centre** — to connect industries, research institutions, and start-ups.
 - Cooperation in: AI, quantum computing, space, civil nuclear energy, critical minerals, supercomputing.
 - Shared vision on **ethical AI governance**:

- ♣ India's **MANAV** (technology centred on human welfare) +
- ♣ Italy's "**algor-ethics**" (European humanist tradition)
- Goal: AI that promotes social empowerment, protects human dignity, avoids manipulation, and bridges digital divides — especially relevant for the **Global South**.
- **Energy & Green Partnership**
 - Collaboration in: renewable energy, green hydrogen, smart grids, sustainable infrastructure.
 - India's green hydrogen ambitions align with Italy's renewable tech expertise and Europe's energy needs.
 - Cooperation under India-led global initiatives: International Solar Alliance, CDRI, Global Biofuels Alliance.
- **Maritime & Connectivity**
 - Both nations — major maritime powers in the Mediterranean and Indo-Pacific — agreed to strengthen:
 - ♣ Maritime transport and port modernisation
 - ♣ Logistics and blue economy cooperation
 - ♣ Inter-regional connectivity across the "**Indo-Mediterranean**" geopolitical space
- **People-to-People & Social Cooperation**
 - Mobility of **Indian nurses** to Italy.
 - Roadmap on higher education and research cooperation.
 - Cooperation in agriculture and Indian seafood exports.
 - Discussions on a future Social Security Agreement for Indian professionals in Italy.

Conclusion

- The elevation of India-Italy ties to a Special Strategic Partnership marks a significant broadening of India's European engagement — moving decisively beyond the traditional France-Germany axis.
- Anchored by the Defence Industrial Roadmap, the IMEEC corridor, shared AI ethics, and deep economic complementarities, the partnership reflects India's emergence as an indispensable partner for Europe in navigating a multipolar world.
- At its best, this is not just a bilateral relationship — it is a model of values-led, innovation-driven, and strategically anchored cooperation between the Indo-Pacific and Europe.



Quad: 11th Foreign Ministers' Meeting

- The **11th** Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting (FMM) was held in New Delhi— attended by EAM S. Jaishankar (India), Secretary of State Marco Rubio (US), FM Toshimitsu Motegi (Japan), and FM Penny Wong (Australia).
- Meeting produced significant outcomes on energy security, critical minerals, and maritime cooperation.
- However, it ended without clarity on the next Quad Leaders' Summit — sparking questions about the grouping's future trajectory.
 - Previous Quad joint statements always identified the next host country for the Leaders' Summit. The May 26 statement only referred to "looking forward to the next Summit" — no host, no date.
 - The Summit was originally due in India — first delayed from 2024 due to a requested swap with the U.S. (Wilmington Summit), then 2025, now 2026 with no confirmed date.
 - 6th Quad Leaders' Summit held in Wilmington, Delaware (USA) in September 2024

Key Outcomes of the 11th Quad FMM

- **Indo-Pacific Energy Security Framework**
 - Launched amid concerns that **Strait of Hormuz tensions** could disrupt global energy supplies.
 - Quad emphasised "**uninterrupted flow of global commerce**" and resilient energy transportation.
 - Framework objectives:
 - ♣ Enhance **energy supply diversification**

- ♣ Improve resilience against geopolitical disruptions
- ♣ Promote **cleaner and secure energy systems** across the Indo-Pacific
- Significant for India — which imports a large share of its crude oil requirements.
- **Critical Minerals & Rare Earth Cooperation**
 - New measures to reduce dependence on **China-dominated** critical mineral supply chains.
 - Focus on: **lithium, cobalt, nickel, rare earth elements** — essential for EVs, renewables, semiconductors, and defence.
 - Quad countries to strengthen cooperation in **mining, processing, and technology development**.
 - Complemented by a separate **India-US Strategic Critical Minerals Cooperation Framework** signed on the sidelines.
- **Maritime Security & Domain Awareness**
 - Steps to improve maritime domain awareness, joint sea patrol coordination, and monitoring of illegal fishing and coercive maritime activities.
 - Reaffirmed support for freedom of navigation and UNCLOS-based international law.
 - Significant given growing tensions in the South China Sea and wider Indo-Pacific.
- **Pacific Islands & Regional Connectivity**
 - Expanded engagement with Pacific Island nations — including Fiji's port infrastructure and logistics cooperation.
 - Aims: improve connectivity, strengthen humanitarian response, deepen strategic partnerships across the Pacific.

Conclusion

- The 11th Quad FMM delivered substantive outcomes — energy security, critical minerals, and maritime cooperation frameworks that directly serve India's strategic interests. Yet the unresolved question of the Leaders' Summit casts a shadow.
- The Quad's real test lies not in ministerial communiqués but in whether its four leaders can demonstrate the political will to meet at the highest level — and send an unambiguous signal of solidarity in an increasingly contested Indo-Pacific.
- Until that happens, the question of whether the Quad is an alliance in ascent or a grouping losing momentum will remain unanswered.



1 year of Operation Sindoor

On May 7, 2025, under Operation Sindoor, India launched precision strikes on terror targets in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and Pakistan.

About the Quad — Background

❖ Origins & Evolution

- **2004** - Cooperation among four nations during **Indian Ocean tsunami relief** — seed of the idea
- **2007** - Quad formally proposed
- **2017** - **Revived** under Trump's first term amid rising China concerns
- **2021** - Upgraded to Leaders' Summit level — first in-person Summit held
- **2026** - 11th FMM held; Leaders' Summit still unscheduled

❖ Structure & Objectives

- Full name: Quadrilateral Security Dialogue — India, USA, Japan, Australia.
- Officially: a platform for practical cooperation, not a military alliance.
- Core goal: free, open, inclusive, and rules-based Indo-Pacific.
- Key areas: maritime security, critical minerals, clean energy, supply chain resilience, cybersecurity, emerging technologies, disaster response.

❖ India's Strategic Interest in the Quad

- Secures sea lanes of communication in the Indian Ocean.
- Complements India's Act East Policy.
- Reduces dependence on concentrated supply chains for critical minerals and semiconductors.
- India maintains Quad is not directed against any country — consistent with its multi-aligned foreign policy.

Is the Quad Being Downgraded?

❖ The absence of a Leaders' Summit raises genuine questions:

- The Quad's **institutional credibility** rests on Leaders'-level political commitment — FM meetings (while productive), cannot substitute for summit-level strategic signalling.
- Trump's **transactional approach** to foreign policy and closer Xi engagement creates structural uncertainty about US priorities in the Indo-Pacific.
- Despite substantive FM-level outcomes, the **optics of a perpetually postponed summit** create significant risks signaling that Quad cohesion is weakening.
- For India, the Quad remains valuable, but over-reliance on it as the primary Indo-Pacific framework carries risk if US commitment wavers.

It was followed by four days of hostilities between India and Pakistan. This operation is widely described as a military success and technological breakthrough.

Key Military Lessons & Post-Sindoor Priorities

- India's armed forces identified **overarching** post-conflict priorities:
 - Large-scale construction of underground infrastructure
 - Establishment of a comprehensive **Air defence shield**
- Additionally: new troop deployment doctrines, technology acquisition (drones, counter-drones), and updated warfighting concepts.

Priority 1 — Underground Infrastructure

- **Command & Control Centres**
 - Construction of underground centres starting with Army's Command and Corps HQ level, cascading down to divisional and lower levels.
 - To be equipped with **C4I2SR** — Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Information, Surveillance & Reconnaissance — shared across all services on a secure network.
 - Enables commanders to lead operations securely during active conflict.
- **Other Underground Facilities**
 - Medical facilities
 - Living bunkers for long-term habitation during wars/disasters
 - Ammunition and FOL (Fuel, Oil, Lubricants) storage at forward border locations
 - Rations storage in both forward and depth areas
 - 3D-printed bunkers — quick to construct & resilient
- **Western Border Focus**
 - Special emphasis on underground infrastructure along the **western borders** to make daily routine operations resilient to wars or disasters.

Priority 2 — Air Defence Modernisation

- **Trigger**
 - During Operation Sindoor, Pakistan sent **swarms of low-cost drones** into Indian territory, camouflaging armed and surveillance drones among them.
 - Global lessons also drawn from the Israel-Iran war — drone/missile swarm tactics.
- **Sudarshan Chakra Mission**
 - Ambitious plan to establish a comprehensive national air defence shield.
 - DRDO recently submitted a pre-feasibility report on the project.
- **Akashteer System (Army)**
 - Indigenous, **automated Air Defence (AD) Control and Reporting System**.
 - Vehicle-mounted, highly mobile — ideal for active war zones.
 - Integrates with **IACCS** (IAF) and **TRIGUN** (Navy) for a unified real-time battlefield picture.
 - ♣ IACCS (IAF) - Integrated Air Command and Control System — integrates all air defence assets to detect, identify, intercept, and destroy hostile intruders.
- **Counter-UAS (Unmanned Aircraft Systems) Procurement**
 - Large-scale procurement of **counter-drone (counter-UAS) systems**.
 - Many to be integrated with **legacy weapons** (e.g., L/70 guns used during Sindoor to shoot down drones) — cost-effective and ammunition-efficient.
- **Advanced Sensors & Radars**
 - Focus on sensors covering threats from **ballistic missiles to small drones**.
 - Key principle: **detection speed** is the foundation of effective air defence.
- **Offensive Air Defence Concept**
 - Goal is to **deny the enemy use of its own airspace** for launching attacks.

- S-400, Kusha, and MRSAMs can all serve offensive roles depending on deployment.
- **Notable Disclosure — 300 km Kill:** On May 7, India destroyed a large Pakistani airborne platform — likely an ELINT (Electronic Intelligence) or AEW&C (Airborne Early Warning and Control) aircraft — at a distance of ~300 km

System	Type	Significance
S-400	Russian long-range	Used to destroy Pakistani ELINT/AEW&C aircraft at ~300 km
Triumf	SAM	— "largest-ever recorded surface-to-air kill"
Project Kusha	Indigenous DRDO long-range SAM	Protects strategic military & civilian assets from aerial threats
MRSAM	Medium-range SAM	Can act as offensive air defence based on deployment
Akashsteer	Indigenous Army AD system	Mobile, integrates with all three services

Priority 3 — Dual-Use of Border Infrastructure

- Airfields, highways, and roads connecting strategic areas near borders identified as key dual-use assets.
- IAF conducted an Emergency Landing Field (ELF) activation drill on Purvanchal Expressway, Sultanpur (UP) — aircraft used: Su-30MKI, Jaguar, Mirage 2000, C-295.
- Several airfields near borders opened for civil use — dual-use strategy.

Conclusion

- A year after Operation Sindoor, India's military modernisation has moved with unusual urgency — shaped by lived battlefield experience rather than theoretical planning.
- As global conflicts continue to reshape the character of warfare, India's post-Sindoor transformation positions it to fight the wars of tomorrow, not just those of yesterday.

Analysis: What Changed?

- Operation Sindoor was not merely a military episode — it was a doctrinal inflection point.
- **From Reactive to Proactive Defence:** The emphasis on offensive air defence marks a significant doctrinal evolution. India is no longer content with absorbing first strikes; its air defence architecture is being designed to project deterrence outward.
- **Drone Threat as the New Normal:** Pakistan's use of low-cost drone swarms during Sindoor mirrors global trends seen in Ukraine and the Middle East. India's accelerated counter-UAS procurement and integration with legacy systems signals recognition that asymmetric aerial warfare is now a permanent feature of modern conflict, not an aberration.
- **Hardening of War Infrastructure:** The large-scale underground infrastructure push reflects a shift toward resilient warfighting, where India prepares not just to strike but to sustain operations under attack. This is a lesson drawn equally from Sindoor and from observing how Ukraine's dispersed and hardened infrastructure helped it survive Russian strikes.
- **Indigenisation Under Pressure:** The development of Project Kusha, the expansion of Akashsteer, and the integration of counter-UAS systems with existing platforms all reflect India's push toward atmanirbharta in defence.



HLC on Demographic Changes

- The Union Government has constituted a **High-Level Committee on Demographic Changes (HLCDC)** under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to examine "unnatural demographic changes" allegedly arising from illegal immigration and other abnormal factors.
- The committee has been formed under the chairmanship of Justice Prakash Prabhakar Naolekar (Retd. SC Judge).
- The move follows: PM Modi's announcement of a "Demographic Mission" during his Independence Day speech on August 15, 2025.

Why the Committee was Formed?

- The Union Home Minister argued that demographic changes caused by illegal infiltration and other abnormal reasons pose challenges to:
 - National sovereignty
 - Internal security and law & order
 - Social cohesion

- Tribal identity and protection
- Resource distribution and governance
- The government contends that certain demographic shifts in border and sensitive regions cannot be explained solely through normal fertility and mortality trends.

Key Mandates of the Committee

- **Scientific Study of Demographic Changes**
 - Examine demographic shifts across regions and communities
 - Analyse causes including:
 - ♣ Illegal immigration and cross-border movement
 - ♣ Fertility variations
 - ♣ Economic migration
 - ♣ Socio-environmental factors
 - ♣ Administrative failures
- **Identification of "Abnormal" Population Trends**
 - Study abnormal settlement patterns
 - Examine orchestrated or planned migration
 - Analyse structural changes in religious and social demographics
 - Identify population changes diverging from national trends
 - Special focus areas: Border districts, tribal regions, urban centres, and industrial corridors
- **Illegal Immigration and Deportation Framework**
 - A major responsibility of the committee is to recommend a permanent and streamlined mechanism for identification, detention, and deportation of illegal immigrants.
 - The process is expected to be legal, fair, and time-bound. The committee will also propose measures to strengthen:

Border management	Identification systems	Monitoring mechanisms	Centre-State coordination
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- **Population Stabilisation and Census Concerns**
 - The committee has been additionally tasked with recommending an institutional framework for population stabilisation.

Key Issues and Concerns

- **National Security Dimension**
 - Government links demographic imbalance to: Border security threats; Illegal cross-border networks; Pressure on public resources; Governance challenges.
- **Constitutional and Human Rights Questions**
 - The proposed framework may raise debates concerning:
 - ♣ Citizenship rights and due process
 - ♣ Fairness in detention and deportation
 - ♣ Minority rights protections
 - ♣ Federal relations between Centre and States
- **Data and Evidence Challenges**
 - Experts may question:
 - ♣ The definition of "abnormal demographic change"
 - ♣ Reliability of demographic attribution methods

Conclusion

- While the government views HLCDC as essential for protecting sovereignty and social stability, the exercise is likely to generate wider constitutional, political, and socio-economic debates.
- The committee's recommendations could fundamentally shape India's future immigration and population policies in the years ahead.

MAPS: PLACES IN NEWS

International Places in News



1	Staten Island	<p>~36 people have been injured following a fire and 2 powerful explosions at a shipyard on Staten Island.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Island borough of New York City in New York Harbor. • Connectivity: Connected by Staten Island Ferry and Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge. • Features: Known as the “Borough of Parks” due to extensive parks and forests. • Historical Importance: Originally inhabited by the Lenape Native Americans. Historic Richmond Town preserves 17th-century buildings.
2	Galapagos Archipelago	<p>A newly installed monitoring system called smart island monitoring model promises to scale ecosystem conservation in Galapagos archipelago.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Pacific Ocean archipelago, ~600 miles west of Ecuador. Lies across the Equator. • Features: 19 volcanic islands with rugged terrain. Highest point- Mount Azul. • UNESCO Status: UNESCO World Heritage Site (1978). • Biodiversity: Home to Galápagos tortoise, marine iguana, flightless cormorant, and Galápagos penguin. Galápagos penguin is the only penguin found in the Northern Hemisphere.
3	Uturuncu volcano	<p>Recently, it was revealed that the eruption of Mount Uturuncu volcano could become imminent, since new batches of hot magma were making their way up from the depths.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Dormant stratovolcano in southwestern Bolivia, in the Andes.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Features: Known as a “zombie volcano” due to ongoing seismic activity, tallest mountain in southern Bolivia. Last erupted ~250,000 years ago. • Geological Significance: Located above the massive Altiplano-Puna magma reservoir. Shows “sombbrero” uplift pattern and frequent minor earthquakes.
4	Tristan da Cunha	<p>British military medics recently conducted a rare parachute mission to the remote Tristan da Cunha island to assist a UK national suspected of hantavirus infection from the cruise ship <i>MV Hondius</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Volcanic archipelago in the South Atlantic Ocean, midway between Africa and South America. Known as the world’s most remote inhabited island group. • Features: Part of the British Overseas Territory of Saint Helena. Main settlement-Edinburgh of the Seven Seas; No airport; accessible only by boat or helicopter. • Importance: 2 of its islands- Gough Island and Inaccessible Island are UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Economy based on farming and fishing.
5	Qom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Capital of Qom Province in north-central Iran. • Religious Importance: Major centre of Shia Islamic scholarship and pilgrimage. Home to the Shrine of Fatima Masumeh and Iran’s largest theological college. • Historical Importance: Key centre during the 1979 Islamic Revolution; Ayatollah Khomeini ruled from here. • Indian Community: Hosts a large Indian community, mainly students and researchers.
6	Lake Kariba	<p>After a decade of erratic rains and heatwaves that devastated Lake Kariba’s levels, new inflows from the upper Zambezi are lifting the reservoir.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Artificial lake on the Zambezi River along the border of Zambia and Zimbabwe. • Features: World’s largest artificial lake by volume formed after construction of the Kariba Dam • Importance: Provides hydropower to Zambia and Zimbabwe. Supports commercial fishing and biodiversity. Includes Chete Island, known for wetlands and large African elephant population.
7	Pashupatinath Temple	<p>India recently gifted a special type of sandalwood to the Nepal government to be used at the Pashupatinath temple.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Hindu temple on the banks of the Bagmati River near Kathmandu. • Religious Importance: Dedicated to Lord Shiva as Pashupati (“Protector of Animals”). One of the holiest Shiva temples in Nepal. • History: Religious site since at least the 5th century BCE; present structure rebuilt in the 15th century. Declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979. • Features: Built in Nepalese pagoda style with gold-covered roof and silver-plated doors. Famous for the golden statue of Nandi, Shiva’s bull.
8	Daishoin Temple	<p>A fire destroyed part of the Daishoin Buddhist temple complex, the Reikado Hall, which housed Japan’s ‘eternal flame’ for 1,200 years.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Buddhist temple on Miyajima Island in the Chugoku region of Japan. Located at the base of Mount Misen. • Features: Known for its large temple complex with multiple halls, statues, and structures.

9	Bismarck Sea	<p>A submarine volcanic eruption in the Bismarck Sea, north of Papua New Guinea has drawn attention to the poor mapping of the deep ocean floor on Earth.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Part of the southwestern Pacific Ocean near Papua New Guinea. Surrounded by the Bismarck Archipelago (New Britain, New Ireland, Admiralty Islands). • Features: Opens to the Pacific (north) and to the Solomon Sea (southeast) through the Vitiaz and Dampier straits and St. George's Channel.
10	Rottneest Island	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Island in the Indian Ocean off the coast of Western Australia, near Perth and Fremantle. • Features: Limestone island with sand dunes and salt lakes. Famous for quokkas, protected marsupials found on the island. • Present Status: Popular tourist resort and wildlife sanctuary.

National Places in News

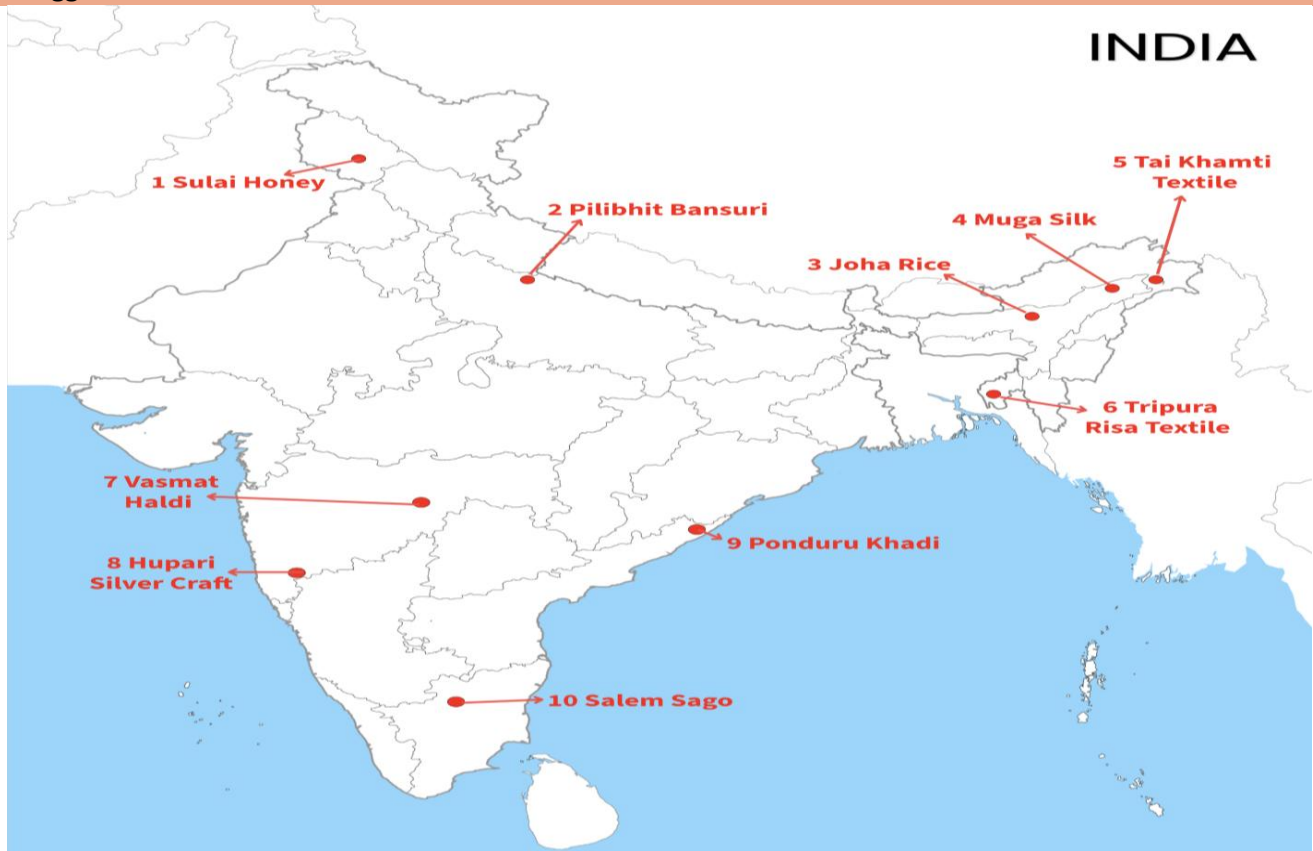


1	Rakchham Chitkul Wildlife Sanctuary	<p>Himalayan brown bear sightings in Rakchham-Chitkul Wildlife Sanctuary have revived conservation interest after a female bear and her cubs were photographed recently.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh. Also known as Sangla Wildlife Sanctuary. • Features: Part of the Western Himalayas; Dry-zone sanctuary with no monsoon rainfall. • Vegetation: Dry temperate forests, alpine scrubs, coniferous forests, and pastures.
2	Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary	<p>The forest department has begun preparations for a scientific wildlife census in Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary to assess the population and movement of key species, including tigers, leopards, bears, deer, and foxes.</p> <p>About Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Almora district, Uttarakhand, in the Kumaon Himalayas. • Features: Highest point: Zero Point (Jhandi Dhaar). Famous for Himalayan views including Nanda Devi and Kedarnath. • Apart from wildlife, it was Established to conserve broadleaf oak forests. • History: Former summer capital of the Chand Dynasty; named after Bineshwar Mahadev Temple.
3	Sambhar Lake	<p>Environmentalists have criticised the proposed 100 MW solar power project near Sambhar Lake, warning that even a relatively small installation could disturb the fragile wetland ecosystem.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Saline lake- 80 km southwest of Jaipur (Rajasthan). Largest inland saltwater lake in India. • Features: Surrounded by the Aravalli Hills; fed by five main streams. Ramsar Site since 1990. Major salt-producing region, contributing ~9% of India’s salt production. • Ecology: Famous for colourful saline waters due to algae and bacteria. Important wintering site for flamingoes and migratory birds.
4	Tipeshwar Wildlife Sanctuary	<p>The Nagpur Bench of the Bombay High Court sought responses over alleged resort construction and commercial activities in the eco-sensitive zone around Tipeshwar Wildlife Sanctuary.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Yavatmal district, Maharashtra. Spread over 148.63 sq km in the Patanbori and Parwa ranges. • Features: Known as the “Green Oasis of Eastern Maharashtra.” Basaltic soil formed from ancient volcanic activity. Rivers: Purna, Krishna, Bhima, and Tapti flow through the sanctuary.
5	Ambazari Lake	<p>Deployment of high-capacity harvester machines at Ambazari Lake has finally given a major push to the long-pending battle against the massive spread of water hyacinth.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Oldest and largest lake of Nagpur, near the city’s southwest border. • Features: Built in 1870 during Bhonsle rule as a water reservoir for Nagpur. Source of the Nag River. Named after surrounding mango trees (“Amba” = mango).
6	Chaprala Wildlife Sanctuary	<p>Telangana irrigation engineers said the proposed Pranahita-Chevella barrage on the Pranahita River would not submerge Chaprala Wildlife Sanctuary near the project site.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Gadchiroli district, Maharashtra. Located near the confluence of the Wardha and Wainganga rivers; Pranhita River forms its western boundary. • Features: Monsoon flooding and several tanks support rich biodiversity. Home to the indigenous Gond tribal community.
7	Tungabhadra Dam	<p>Nearly two years after Gate No. 19 was washed away, the historic Tungabhadra Dam near Hosapete stands renewed with all 33 crest gates replaced.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Multipurpose dam across the Tungabhadra River in Vijayanagara district, Karnataka. Tungabhadra is a tributary of the Krishna River. Also called Pampa Sagar. • History: Joint project of the erstwhile Hyderabad State and Madras Presidency; completed in 1953 by Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. • Importance: Provides irrigation, hydropower, and flood control. Built using a unique mud-and-limestone combination technique (surkhi mortar).

8	Ulsoor Lake	<p>As Ulsoor Lake has been drained for desilting after over three decades, lake conservation activists have objected to desilting only 0.6 m of the lakebed, calling it inadequate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Man-made lake in Bengaluru, also called Halasuru Lake. • Features: Oldest and largest lake in Bengaluru built by Kempe Gowda II in 1648; renovated in 1862 by Sir Lewin Bowring. Covers ~123.6 acres with seven interconnected islands. Known for its India-map-like shape
9	Tholpetty Wildlife Sanctuary	<p>A wild gaur that entered populated areas of Kannur district, Kerala, was captured by Forest Department officials and released into Tholpetty Wildlife Sanctuary.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Wayanad district, Kerala. • Features: Part of the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary and Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve. One of the two sections of Wayanad Sanctuary; the other is Muthanga. Forests include tropical moist deciduous and semi-evergreen types.
10	Vembanad Lake	<p>Recent Kerala government action on houseboats, following a High Court order on pollution, has renewed concerns over rising pollution levels in the Vembanad Lake ecosystem.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Largest lake in Kerala and longest lake in India. Major backwater system separated from the Arabian Sea by a barrier island. • Features: Largest tropical wetland ecosystem on India's southwest coast. Fed by Meenachil, Achankovil, Pampa, and Manimala rivers. Hosts the Nehru Trophy Boat Race (Vallam Kali). • Conservation: Ramsar Site since 2002; protected under the National Wetlands Conservation Programme. Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary lies on its eastern coast.

GI-Tagged Products



S.No.	GI-Tagged Products	Description
1	Sulai Honey (GI Tag-2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State: Jammu & Kashmir (Ramban District). • Key Features: Wild Himalayan honey; crystal-clear (white to amber); high medicinal/antioxidant properties; derived from the <i>Sulai</i> plant; high yield due to superior bee strains.
2	Pilibhit Bansuri (GI Tag-2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State: Uttar Pradesh (Pilibhit District). • Key Features: Handcrafted bamboo flutes; renowned for professional-grade acoustic quality and smooth tone; a major traditional craft hub for Indian classical music.
3	Joha Rice (GI Tag-2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State: Assam (Major Centres- Nagaon, Baksa, Goalpara, Sivasagar etc). • Key Features: Aromatic winter paddy; rich in Omega-3/6, antioxidants; scientifically validated as anti-diabetic and cardio-protective.
4	Muga Silk (GI tag-2007)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State: Assam (Major Centres- Jorhat, Kamrup, Goalpara, Udalguri etc.) • Key Features: "Golden Silk"; natural yellowish-golden luster; extreme durability; produced from Assam silkmoth or Muga silkworm which fed on Som/Soalu); Used for sarees, mekhalas and chaddars.
5	Tai Khamti Textile (GI Tag-2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State: Arunachal Pradesh (Major Centres- Namsai and Changlang). • Key Features: Traditional handloom of the Tai Khamti tribe; features intricate embroidery, local fibers, and natural dyes. Traditional attire includes <i>Chyn</i> (jacket), <i>Phanoi</i> (sarong), <i>Scin</i> (skirt), and <i>Khenyao</i> (jacket).
6	Tripura Risa Textile (GI Tag-2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State: Tripura (Main centres: Belonia, Kailasahar, Sadar & Khowai). • Key Features: Embroidered stole/upper garment; made on loin looms; motifs are tribe-specific (Chakma, Kuki, Reang); symbol of Borok cultural identity.
7	Vasmat Haldi (GI Tag-2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State: Maharashtra (Major Centres- Hingoli, Parbhani, Nanded). • Key Features: High curcumin content (3-8%); vibrant golden-yellow color and strong aroma; recognized for medicinal/pharmaceutical value.
8	Hupari Silver Craft (GI Tag- 2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State: Maharashtra (Major Centre- Kolhapur: Hupari town). • Key Features: Intricate handmade silver jewelry; famous for <i>ghungroos</i> (seamless silver balls) and anklets; industry supported by 25,000+ artisans.
9	Ponduru Khadi (GI Tag-2025)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State: Andhra Pradesh (Major Centre- Srikakulam). • Key Features: Fine hand-spun/woven cotton (100-120 count); uses unique cleaning technique with Valuga fish jawbone; uses "Gandhi Charkha" (single-spindle with 24 spokes).
10	Salem Sago (GI Tag-2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State: Tamil Nadu (Major Centres- Salem, Erode). • Key Features: Tapioca-derived starch pearls (<i>javvarisi</i>); used for food/pharma/textile applications; produced via wet starch processing.

Note: As of early 2026, India has over 650 registered Geographical Indication (GI) tags with Tamil Nadu leading with 56 GI tags.

SOCIAL ISSUES

NSO Health Survey

The National Statistical Office(NSO) 80th Round *Household Consumption: Health Survey*, covers 1.39 lakh households (both rural and urban) across India to assess healthcare access, affordability, and utilization patterns.

Key Highlights from the Survey

- **Improved Health-Seeking Behaviour:** The Proportion of Population Reported Ailing (**PPRA**) nearly doubled between 2017-18 and 2025 (Rural: **6.8%→12.2%**; Urban: **9.1%→14.9%**), indicating increased awareness and proactive health-seeking behaviour.
- **Expansion of Health Insurance Coverage:** Coverage under government-financed health insurance schemes (like Ayushman Bharat- Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY)) expanded more than threefold (Rural: **12.9%→45.5%**; Urban: **8.9%→31.8%**)
- **Out-of-Pocket Expenditure (OOPE) Trends:**
 - **Overall Hospitalization:** The median OOPE per hospitalization case was recorded at ₹11,285, indicating that more than half of hospitalization cases incurred relatively low expenses. High costs are limited to cases requiring specialized care.
 - **Public Facilities (Hospitalization):** For over half the cases in public health facilities, the OOPE was only ₹1,100.
 - **Public Facilities (Outpatient):** The median OOPE for non-hospitalization (outpatient) care in public facilities is zero.
 - **Equity:** Granular data shows a declining trajectory of OOPE among the bottom two consumption quintiles.
- **Increased Utilization of Public Facilities:** Rural outpatient care utilization at public facilities rose from **28% (2014) to 35% (2025)** as a result of free drugs, diagnostics, and expanded primary healthcare services.
- **Maternal Health & Institutional Deliveries:** Institutional deliveries increased significantly between 2017-18 and 2025 (Rural: **95.6%**; Urban: **97.8%**) reflecting improved maternal healthcare services.
- **Epidemiological Transition:** The survey noted a decline in infectious diseases across the country. Conversely, there is a rising prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes and cardiovascular diseases (CVDs).

Key Government Interventions Credited for Progress

- **Primary Care:** Over 1.84 lakh Ayushman Arogya Mandirs (AAMs) expanding preventive and promotive care.

- **Affordability:** Free Drugs Service Initiative (FDSI), Free Diagnostics Initiative (FDI), and the AMRIT pharmacy network.

- **Financial Protection:** Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY).

- **Maternal Health:** Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY), Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakaram (JSSK), and Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA).

Indicators	NSO 75th Round (2017-18)	NSO80th Round (2025)
PPRA (Rural)	6.8%	12.2%
PPRA (Urban)	9.1%	14.9%
Govt. Insurance (Rural)	12.9%	45.5%
Govt. Insurance (Urban)	8.9%	31.8%
Inst. Delivery (Rural)	90.5%	95.6%
Inst. Delivery (Urban)	96.1%	97.8%
Public Facility Use (Rural)	28% (2014)	35%

Way Forward

- **Strengthening Preventive Healthcare:** Focus on pollution control, nutrition, fitness, and lifestyle awareness to address the rising burden of NCDs.
- **Expanding Public Health Infrastructure:** Improve healthcare infrastructure in rural and Tier-II/Tier-III regions through better doctor-patient ratios, diagnostics, and emergency care facilities.

- **Enhancing Protection:** Deepen coverage under Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY by expanding specialized treatment coverage and increasing private hospital participation.
- **Ensuring Continuity of NCD Care:** Strengthen long-term management through uninterrupted medicine supply, digital monitoring, and community-based follow-up via Ayushman Arogya Mandir centers.
- **Reducing Hidden Healthcare Costs:** By decentralizing healthcare delivery and improving patient transport support systems.

Significance of the Health Survey

- **Validation of Public Policy:** Provides empirical proof of the success of the **Assurance Model** (PM-JAY) and **Infrastructure Model** (Ayushman Arogya Mandirs), evidenced by a 3x rise in insurance coverage.
- **Socio-Economic Buffer:** Decline in OOPE for the bottom two quintiles demonstrates that healthcare is acting as a **poverty-reduction tool** by preventing "medical-debt traps."
- **Governance Shift:** The rise in PPRA signals a transition from **Passive to Proactive health-seeking behavior**, increasing citizen-led accountability in public health delivery.
- **Promoting Equity:** Narrowing rural-urban gaps in institutional deliveries (95.6% vs 97.8%) reflects a successful push toward **Inclusive Growth** and the realization of **Article 47** (Duty of the State to improve public health).
- **Global Leadership:** Positions India as a pioneer in the **Global South** for achieving large-scale Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and meeting **SDG 3** (Good Health and Well-being) targets.

Challenges Involved in India's Healthcare System

- **The "Ailing" Paradox:** Higher PPRA may reflect an actual increase in **morbidity** due to environmental degradation and sedentary lifestyles, rather than just "awareness."
- **Median vs. Catastrophic Expenditure:** While the median OOPE is low, it masks **Catastrophic Health Expenditure (CHE)** in specialized cases (e.g., cancer, cardiac care), which still forces households into financial distress.
- **The NCD Transition:** The shift toward chronic NCDs (Diabetes, CVDs) requires **long-term care continuity**- a challenge for a public system traditionally designed for acute/infectious disease management.
- **Quality-Quantity Trade-off:** Increased utilization of public facilities (35% in rural areas) is creating **infrastructure fatigue**, leading to longer wait times and a diluted doctor-patient ratio.
- **Indirect Economic Costs:** "Zero-cost" outpatient care does not account for **hidden costs** like transportation, loss of daily wages, and caregiver opportunity costs, which remain barriers for the poorest sections.

Guidelines on Diabetes Mellitus in Children

The Union Health Ministry recently introduced the national framework for screening, diagnosis, treatment, and long-term management of diabetes in children.

What are these Guidelines About?

The **Guidance Document on Diabetes Mellitus in Children** establishes India's first **structured and standardized national framework** for screening, diagnosis, treatment and long-term management of childhood diabetes. The guidelines integrate childhood diabetes care into the **public health system** ensuring universal diabetes screening for children from **birth to 18 years**.

Need for the Guidelines

- **Rising Burden of Childhood Diabetes-** Increasing cases of **Type 1 Diabetes** and other forms of diabetes among children. Delayed diagnosis often leads to severe complications and deaths.
- **Lack of Uniform National Framework-** No standardized national protocol exists, treatment access varies across regions. Families face high costs for insulin and monitoring.
- **Need for Early Detection-** Early diagnosis is essential to prevent complications, reduce mortality and improve quality of life.

Key Highlights and Objectives of the Guidelines:

- ✓ **Universal Screening:** Implementation of screening via schools, community platforms, and Primary Health Centres (PHCs).
- ✓ **Free Comprehensive Care:** Provision of free diagnostic services, lifelong insulin therapy, and monitoring supplies (glucometers/strips) through public facilities.
- ✓ **The "4Ts" Awareness Campaign:** A simplified diagnostic tool to help caregivers identify early symptoms:
 - ✓ **Toilet:** Frequent urination.
 - ✓ **Thirsty:** Excessive thirst.
 - ✓ **Tired:** Extreme fatigue.
 - ✓ **Thinner:** Unexplained weight loss.
- ✓ **Continuum of Care:** A referral "hub-and-spoke" model linking community screening to District Hospitals and specialized Medical Colleges.
- ✓ **Empowerment:** Training for families on insulin administration and emergency response (hypoglycemia management).

- **Financial Burden on Families-** Diabetes requires lifelong treatment, including insulin, glucose monitoring and regular follow-up care.

Significance	Implementation Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieving SDGs: Supports SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being). Helps reduce NCD-related mortality and advances Universal Health Coverage (UHC) through free diagnosis and treatment. • Strengthening Article 21: Protects children’s Right to Life by enabling early detection and preventing avoidable deaths from diabetic complications. • Financial & Social Benefits: Reduces medical expenses for families through free insulin and monitoring support. Improves children’s health, education, and long-term productivity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource Gaps: Shortage of pediatric endocrinologists and diagnostic infrastructure in rural areas. • Supply Chain: Ensuring an uninterrupted, cold-chain-secured supply of insulin to remote locations. • Adherence: Supporting families through the psychological and logistical challenges of lifelong disease management. • Data Integration: The need for a digital registry to track patient outcomes and follow-up adherence nationwide.

JANANI

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare recently launched JANANI (Journey of Antenatal, Natal and Neonatal Integrated Care) for strengthening maternal and child healthcare services in the country.

What is JANANI?

It is a **digital maternal and child healthcare platform** developed as an upgraded version of the **Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) portal**. It creates **longitudinal digital health records** for women and children across the entire continuum of care.

Objectives

- To ensure **continuous monitoring** of maternal and child healthcare services.
- To provide **portable and accessible digital health records** (*Ayushman Bharat Health Account (ABHA)*)
- To strengthen **service delivery, accountability, and coordination** among health programmes.
- To ensure **continuity of care** (*Antenatal care (ANC), Natal care and Neonatal care*) for migratory populations and reduce duplicate records.
- To reduce maternal and infant mortality, Universal Health Coverage (UHC).

Key Features of JANANI:

- **Digital Health Records:** Maintains records from antenatal care, delivery preparedness and delivery, postnatal care, newborn and young childcare, family planning.
- **QR-enabled MCH Cards:** QR-based **Mother and Child Health (MCH) cards** for easy portability and access.
- **Risk Monitoring:** Provides automated alerts for high-risk pregnancies, due-list generation and missed health milestones.
- **Integration with National Platforms:** Linked with U-WIN and POSHAN Abhiyaan for seamless exchange of maternal, immunization, nutrition, and child health data.
- **Beneficiary Registration:** Registration through ABHA, Aadhaar (OTP/biometric) and mobile number. Supports pan-India search to avoid duplication.
- **Citizen-centric Services:** Self-registration through web/mobile. Alerts and reminders for ANC visits and immunization. Information on nearby health facilities and expected place of delivery. Health and nutrition guidance.

NITI Aayog Report on ‘School Education System in India’

According to NITI Aayog’s recent report “*School Education System in India- Temporal Analysis and Policy Roadmap for Quality Enhancement*”, India has achieved near-universal primary school access, but secondary-level retention and learning outcomes remain major concerns.

Key Highlights from the Report:

- **Current Status & Structural Bottlenecks:**
 - **The ‘Pyramid’ Problem:** India’s school ecosystem has **14.71 lakh schools** and **24.69 crore students** but suffers from a **sharp pyramidal structure**: 7.3 lakh primary schools and only 1.64 lakh higher secondary schools.

- **Leaky Pipeline:** Nearly **4 in 10 students** drop out before higher secondary education.
- **Institutional Fragmentation:** Only **5.4% schools** provide continuous **Grade 1-12 schooling**, forcing repeated school transitions and worsening attrition.
- **Ghost Schools & Governance Gaps:** Around **7,993 schools** have zero enrolment yet continue receiving resources due to outdated records (highest in West Bengal & Telangana).
- **Learning Crisis & Technology Challenges:**
 - **Declining Learning Outcomes:** Grade 8 reading proficiency fell from **74.7% (2014)** to **71.1% (2024)**. Only **45.8% Grade 8 students** can solve basic division.
 - **Rote vs Applied Learning:** PARAKH 2024 shows poor conceptual understanding; less than **30% Grade 6 students** are competent in fractions.
 - ✓ **PARAKH** (Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development) is India's national assessment regulator under NCERT, set up under National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 to standardize student assessments and monitor learning outcomes across school boards.
 - **AI in Education:** AI & Computational Thinking introduced from Grade 3, but the report warns against over-reliance on AI, weak ethical safeguards and inadequate teacher preparedness.
- **Infrastructure Deficits (Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) 2024-25):**
 - **Basic Infrastructure Gaps:** 1.19 lakh schools lack electricity, 14,505 schools lack drinking water, and 59,829 schools lack hand-washing facilities.
 - **Digital Divide:** One-third of schools lack internet connectivity. 50% government secondary schools lack science labs.

Policy Roadmap & Recommendations:

- ▶ **'Cylindrical Schooling' Model:** Promote composite **Grade 1-12 schools** to reduce transition-related dropouts and bridge the post-Right to Education (RTE) financial gap.
- ▶ **School Complexes (NEP 2020):** Cluster secondary schools with nearby schools/Anganwadis within a 5-10 km radius. Enable shared teachers, ICT labs, sports and vocational infrastructure.
- ▶ **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI):** Integrate PM e-Vidya (unifies all-digital, online, and on-air education efforts to provide multi-mode access to learning), BharatNet (India's flagship rural broadband project to connect all Gram Panchayats through optical fibre for digital, e-health, e-education, and e-governance services) and Gati Shakti (National Master Plan for Multi-modal Connectivity used here to **accelerate digital/physical infrastructure rollout** in remote schools) for equitable digital access.
- ▶ **Administrative Reforms:** Fill block/district-level vacancies through time-bound recruitment and vacancy mapping.
- ▶ **Financing Reform:** Raise public expenditure on education from **4.6% of GDP** toward the long-pending **6% target**.

Launch of JEEVAN App and SHATAYU Geriatric Caregiver Dashboard

Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment recently launched "JEEVAN" (Joint Elderly Empowerment & Virtual Assistance Network) Mobile Application for Senior Citizens and "SHATAYU" (Senior Holistic Care Assistance and Training for Your Utility) Geriatric Caregiver Dashboard.

About JEEVAN Mobile Application	About SHATAYU Geriatric Caregiver Dashboard
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Objective: To improve the safety, welfare, healthcare access, and social inclusion of senior citizens through a digital platform. ● Key Features: Provides- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Information on government schemes & welfare programmes. ○ Emergency assistance and support services ○ Details of old-age/senior citizen homes ○ Simple, elderly-friendly interface with accessibility features. ● Significance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Promotes dignity, safety and empowerment of elderly persons. ○ Strengthens the elder-care ecosystem using technology. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Objective: To support and strengthen geriatric caregiving services across India. ● Key Features: Provides- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Information on availability of trained geriatric caregivers. ○ District- and state-level caregiver database. ○ User-friendly and simplified dashboard. ● Significance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Helps build a well-functioning care economy. ○ Improves access to professional elderly care services.

Stagnant Old age Pension

A recent study- "Impact Assessment and Evaluation of the National Social Assistance Program (NSAP)" by the Academy of Management Studies (AMS) for the Union Ministry of Rural Development reports that the Centre's contribution to monthly pensions has remained stagnant since **2012**.

The Core Problem

Fixed cash transfers (ranging from ₹200 to ₹500) have lost approximately **45% of their real purchasing power** due to sustained inflation.

The Math

With the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rising from 100 in 2012 to 191 in 2024, the study argues that the ₹200 pension should ideally be ₹353-₹382 today to maintain the same standard of living.

Recommendations for Policy Reform The report offers a roadmap for structural reform, which is significant from a governance and social justice perspective:

- **National Floor Pension (NFP):** Implement a uniform "floor" for pension amounts across all states, similar to the National Floor Level Minimum Wage.
- **Inflation Indexing:** Dynamically link pension amounts to the **Consumer Price Index (CPI)** to allow for automatic annual adjustments, protecting beneficiaries from cost-of-living increases.
- **State-Level Harmonization:** Encourage states to provide "top-ups" to the central share in a transparent manner to reduce regional disparities (e.g., noting that states like Telangana and Haryana perform better due to higher state-funded top-ups).
- **One-time Relief Revision:** Update the NFBS assistance from ₹20,000 to approximately ₹40,000 to reflect current economic realities.

About NSAP: Launched in 1995, the NSAP provides a social safety net to vulnerable groups through five core schemes:

Scheme	Target Group	Monthly Benefit (Central Share)
Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS)	Elderly (60-79 / 80+)	₹200 / ₹500
Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme (IGNWPS)	Widows (40-79 / 80+)	₹300 / ₹500
Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS)	Disabled (18-79 / 80+)	₹300 / ₹500
National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS)	Families (Loss of breadwinner)	₹20,000 (One-time)
Annapurna Scheme	Eligible non-pensioners	10 kg of food grains per month free of cost

Kerala has Announced a New Department for Welfare of Senior Citizens

Kerala has announced India's first dedicated department for elderly welfare. Earlier, issues related to senior citizens were handled by the state Social Welfare Department.

- ✓ This initiative aligns with Article 41 of the Constitution (**Directive Principles of State Policy**), which directs the State to provide public assistance in cases of old age.

Need for New Department: Kerala is currently experiencing a "greying" of its population, characterized by metrics that mirror developed European nations rather than the rest of India like-

- **Shrinking Working-Age Population:** A Total Fertility Rate (TFR) of **1.35** (well below the replacement level of 2.1) suggests a shrinking future workforce.
- **Rapid Aging:** The population over 60 is expected to reach **20.9% by 2031**, significantly higher than the projected national average of 13.1%.
- **The Dependency Burden:** The old-age dependency ratio is projected to climb to **34.3% by 2031**, placing immense fiscal pressure on the state for pension and healthcare support.

What are the Drivers of the "Grey" Shift?

- **Migration Patterns:** Large-scale outmigration of the youth (to the West/West Asia) has created a "care vacuum," leaving behind elderly parents without primary familial support.
- **Healthcare Success:** High life expectancy (78.4 years for women, 71.9 for men) is a testament to Kerala's robust public health system but simultaneously increases the duration for which elderly care is required.

- **Gender Disparity:** A skewed sex ratio among the 80+ population (1651 women per 1000 men) highlights the "feminization of aging," where elderly women often face increased vulnerability, widowhood, and financial dependence.

The Policy Response- Towards a "Care Economy": Kerala is pioneering a shift toward a **Care Economy**- a model that treats caregiving as a formal economic sector rather than an informal family burden- through:

- **Institutional Innovation:**
 - Department for the Elderly-** providing a dedicated administrative apparatus for policy implementation and **State Elderly Commission-** a quasi-judicial body to protect rights and address grievances.
- **Community-Based Models:**
 - Vayomithram-** Mobile medical care for the elderly and **Palliative Care Grid-** a massive collaborative effort involving 1,300+ government institutions and 1,200+ NGOs to support bedridden and ailing citizens.

Critical Challenges:	Way Forward
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Skill Gap: There is a severe shortage of specialized personnel. To meet the WHO-recommended multidisciplinary model by 2030, the state must triple its geriatricians and significantly increase the pool of trained nurses and therapists. • Public Health Focus: Over 70% of the elderly suffer from chronic conditions (hypertension, diabetes), and nearly 1 in 4 face psychological distress. This necessitates a shift in the primary healthcare focus from communicable disease control to long-term geriatric and mental health management. • Financial Security: While 75% are covered by welfare pensions, the reliance of the elderly on manual labour (e.g., MGNREGS participation) underscores a lingering gap in financial security for the aging population. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formalization of the Care Economy: Moving beyond palliative care to create a structured industry for geriatric services like government-certified training programs to upskill caregivers, turning caregiving into a respectable, economically viable profession. • Infrastructure Integration: Developing "Age-Friendly" urban and rural planning, focusing on accessible public transport, barrier-free housing, and specialized geriatric wards in all Primary Health Centres (PHCs). • Financial Security: Scaling pension schemes while encouraging the private sector and insurance providers to develop affordable, long-term care insurance products specifically designed for the elderly. • Leveraging Technology (Age-Tech): Scaling digital health platforms for telemedicine and remote monitoring, particularly for elderly residents living alone due to family migration. • Psychosocial Support Networks: Strengthening community-based day-care centers (like Sayamprabha Homes) to combat social isolation and mental health issues, reducing the burden on institutionalized care.

Residential Segregation

A working paper, 'Residential Segregation and Unequal Access to Local Public Services in India', found high levels of segregation among Muslims and Scheduled Castes- closely tied to unequal access to basic services.

What is Residential Segregation?

Residential segregation refers to the spatial separation of communities based on caste, religion, or class, resulting in clustered settlements such as Dalit hamlets or Muslim-majority localities. It creates unequal access to schools, healthcare, sanitation, piped water, and other public services, despite constitutional guarantees of equality.

Impact of Residential Segregation:	Steps to Address Residential Segregation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unequal Access (The "Spatial Tax"): Physical segregation leads to infrastructure shunting, where essential services like piped water and sewage often stop at the boundaries of marginalized settlements, creating "service deserts." • Poor Healthcare & Social Barriers: Facilities are concentrated in dominant-caste hubs. Access is hindered not just by distance, but by social distance- fear of discrimination and humiliation leading to delayed care and higher health risks. • Erosion of Social Capital: Spatial isolation prevents "bridging" connections, creating information asymmetry. Marginalized youth are cut off from informal job and welfare networks, while physical distance reinforces social prejudices. • Educational Disadvantages: Children face a restricted "aspiration horizon." Poor local infrastructure and the social friction of traveling to "hostile" areas for better schooling lead to higher dropout rates and stalled mobility. • Economic "Ghettoization": Chronic under-investment forces residents to pay a "Ghetto Tax," spending more on expensive private alternatives (like water tankers) because the public grid fails to reach their neighborhoods. • Institutional Bias & Political Dilution: Physical isolation allows for administrative neglect. Budgetary priorities are often diverted toward affluent areas with more lobbying power, leaving segregated clusters politically underrepresented. • Constitutional Erosion: Segregation undermines Articles 14 (Equality before law), 15 (Prohibition of Discrimination), 17 (Abolition of Untouchability), and 21 (Protection of life and personal liberty), effectively institutionalizing modern forms of exclusion and preventing the equitable distribution of national growth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive Planning: Use GIS mapping to identify "service deserts" and mandate Inclusionary Zoning to ensure mixed-income and diverse housing in all new developments. • Anti-Discrimination Laws: Enact strict legislation to prevent housing discrimination in the private rental market based on caste, religion, or identity. • Shared Public Commons: Design parks and community centers at the junctions of different neighborhoods to encourage social interaction and break down stereotypes. • Hyper-Local Accountability: Shift from district-level data to neighborhood-level social audits, ensuring infrastructure penetrates the "last mile" of every settlement. • Political Empowerment: Strengthen the voice of marginalized groups in local urban bodies to ensure equitable budget allocation and dignity-based governance.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

Proposal To Increase Strength Of Supreme Court Judges

In May 2026, President Droupadi Murmu promulgated an **Ordinance** that increased the sanctioned strength of the Supreme Court of India from 34 to **38 judges** (including the Chief Justice of India), reflecting ongoing efforts to strengthen judicial capacity and address rising case pendency in the country.

Key Highlights

- **Increase in judge strength:** The sanctioned strength of the Supreme Court will be increased by four judges, taking the total (excluding the Chief Justice of India) from 33 to 37 judges.
- **Legislative route:** The increase will be carried out through an amendment to the **Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Act**, which governs the strength of judges under Article 124 of the Constitution.
- Timeline of Supreme Court Judge Strength Expansion (Including CJI):

1950: 8 Judges (Initial strength).	1956: 11 Judges.	1960: 14 Judges	1978: 18 Judges	1986: 26 Judges	2009: 31 Judges	2019: 34 Judges	2026: 38 Judges (via ordinance)
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<p>Need for Increasing Supreme Court Strength:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immense Case Backlog: As of 2026, the Supreme Court faces a heavy workload with over 93000 pending cases. • Reduced Pendency & Faster Justice: Reducing the burden on existing judges, and providing quicker justice to litigants. • Capacity to Constitute More Benches: A higher number of judges allows the court to operate with more benches simultaneously, facilitating the speedy disposal of matters. • Post-Pandemic Digital Surge: The increase in digital e-filings, especially post-pandemic, has necessitated enhanced judicial resources. • Handling Complex Legal Issues: With more judges, the Supreme Court can better handle Constitution Benches, which decide important legal questions, without pausing regular hearings. 	<p>Limitations of the Measure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pendency in the Supreme Court constitutes only a small fraction of total pending cases across Indian courts. • Most judicial backlog lies in district and subordinate courts, followed by High Courts. • Merely increasing the number of Supreme Court judges may not address structural causes such as rising litigation, inadequate judicial infrastructure and shortage of judges at lower levels. • Expansion of the Supreme Court’s jurisdiction continue to add pressure on the system.
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Structural Challenges in the Judiciary

- **Escalating Case Backlog:** Total pending litigation has reached over 55.8 million cases (*March 2026*) across all tiers.
 - The National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG) reports ~ 49.14 million cases clogged in district courts, ~6.42 million in High Courts, and a historic high of around 93,000 cases in the Supreme Court.
- **Stagnant Judge-to-Population Ratio:** Depending on the metric, the ratio stands at an inadequate 15 judges per million people based on actual working strength data from the India Justice Report, or up to 22 per million under broader parliamentary estimates. This remains far below the Law Commission’s recommended benchmark of 50 per million.
- **Pervasive Post Vacancies:** High Court vacancies remain critical with roughly 350+ judicial seats unfilled out of a 1,114 sanctioned strength. In the lower courts, there is an estimated deficit of over 4,800 judges (Dec 2025).

- **Severe Infrastructure & Budgetary Gaps:** India spends less than 0.09% of its GDP on maintaining judicial infrastructure. The lower courts continue to face an acute lack of separate functional courtrooms, digital connectivity in rural outposts, and fundamental basic amenities.
- **Massive Under-trial Strain:** Jails remain heavily overburdened, with ~75% of all inmates classified as under-trials who are awaiting formal judgment.
- **Prolonged Litigation Lifespans:** Extreme delays persist across the board, with over 180,000 cases lingering unresolved for more than 30 years.

Suggested Reforms

- Increase judicial strength across district courts and High Courts, not just the Supreme Court.
- Establish an **All India Judicial Service (Article 312)** to improve recruitment quality and uniformity in lower judiciary.
- Improve court infrastructure, **digitalisation and case management systems**.
- Promote judicial discipline and efficient calendar management to expedite case disposal.
- Encourage responsible litigation, especially by governments, which are among the largest litigants.
- Strengthen Alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanisms and legal reforms to reduce unnecessary litigation.

School Management Committee Guidelines 2026

The **Ministry of Education** launched the **School Management Committee (SMC) Guidelines, 2026** to strengthen **community participation, decentralised governance and accountability** in school education. The guidelines aim to improve school functioning by making parents, teachers and local communities **active stakeholders** in school management and learning outcomes.

What are School Management Committees (SMCs)?

- SMCs are statutory bodies under **Section 21 of the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009**.
- They promote community participation in school governance, especially in government and aided schools.
- SMCs function as a bridge between schools, parents and local communities.

Clarification on Applicability (2026)

The Ministry clarified that private unaided schools (**Section 2(n)(iv) of RTE Act**) **not receiving government aid or grants** are not mandatorily bound by the guidelines.

Key Features of SMC Guidelines, 2026:

- ⦿ **Unified Governance Structure:** A single SMC will oversee education from Balvatika (pre-primary) to Class XII, replacing the earlier separate systems of SMCs (primary level) and School Management Development Committees (secondary level).
- ⦿ **Composition of SMCs:**
 - ✓ 75% members to be parents/guardians of enrolled students.
 - ✓ At least 50% representation for women.
 - ✓ Representation for Parents/guardians of socio-economically disadvantaged groups and of children with special needs (CWSN) mandated.
 - ✓ Inclusion of teachers, school heads and **local representatives**.
- ⦿ **Leadership Structure:** The chairperson and vice-chairperson are elected from the parent members. The school principal or head teacher acts as the member-secretary.
- ⦿ **School Development Planning:** SMCs will prepare a three-year **School Development Plan (SDP)** with annual sub-plans.
 - ✓ Focus on infrastructure, enrolment, teacher availability, learning outcomes and student welfare.
- ⦿ **Academic and Infrastructure Monitoring:** Creation of Academic Committees to monitor:
 - ✓ Learning outcomes
 - ✓ Teacher attendance
 - ✓ Foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN)
 - ✓ School Building Committees to supervise infrastructure and safety compliance.
- ⦿ **Financial and Administrative Powers:**
 - ✓ SMCs empowered to directly execute civil works up to ₹30 lakh.
 - ✓ Larger projects to follow public tendering procedures with SMC participation.
- ⦿ **Child Safety and Inclusion Measures:**
 - ✓ Mandatory display of POCSO-related information and Internal Complaints Committee details.
 - ✓ Conduct of biannual safety and evacuation drills.
 - ✓ Use of PRASHAST (Pre-Assessment Holistic Screening Tool) app for identification and inclusion of children with special needs.
- ⦿ **Transparency and Accountability:**
 - ✓ Mandatory monthly meetings and periodic social audits.
 - ✓ SMCs to be constituted within one month of the academic session, with first meeting within a week.
 - ✓ Member tenure fixed at two years, capped at two consecutive terms.

Such schools are, however, encouraged to voluntarily adopt SMCs to improve participatory governance and accountability.

Significance

- Promotes decentralised and participatory school governance aligned with the vision of NEP 2020.
- Strengthens parental involvement, accountability and transparency in school administration.
- Helps improve learning outcomes, infrastructure and inclusion through local oversight.
- Encourages a child-centric and community-owned education ecosystem.

Challenges:

- Capacity constraints and limited awareness among parents may affect effective functioning.
- Risk of politicisation or elite capture in committee functioning.
- Uneven implementation across States due to administrative differences.
- Questions raised regarding applicability to autonomous/private institutions.

Appointment Of CBI Director

The debate over the **Chief Justice of India's (CJI) role in appointing the CBI Director** resurfaced amid the ongoing process of selecting a successor to **CBI Director Praveen Sood (now term extended)**, whose tenure is nearing completion. Recent disagreements within the selection committee, including dissent by the **Leader of Opposition**, revived concerns over transparency, executive dominance and institutional independence in the appointment process.

Related Judgements and Acts

1. Vineet Narain v. Union of India (1997):

- The Supreme Court stressed the need for **functional autonomy of the CBI** and recommended safeguards to insulate it from political interference.
- This judgment laid the foundation for later reforms in appointment procedures.

2. Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013:

- Though legislative rather than judicial, the Act institutionalised the **three-member appointment committee including the CJI**.

3. Common Cause v. Union of India (2021):

- The Court emphasised that fixed tenure and transparent appointments are crucial for preserving institutional independence of investigative agencies.

Significance of the Debate

- Raises larger questions about **institutional independence, accountability and constitutional checks and balances**.
- Since the CBI investigates corruption involving senior public officials and politically sensitive matters, the credibility of its leadership is critical for **public trust**.

Procedure of Appointment of CBI Director

- The appointment of the CBI Director is governed by the **Delhi Special Police Establishment (DSPE) Act, 1946**, as amended by the **Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013**.
- The **Central Government appoints the CBI Director** based on recommendations of a **high-powered selection committee** comprising:
 - **Prime Minister** – Chairperson
 - **Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha** (or leader of the single largest opposition party)
 - **Chief Justice of India (CJI)** or a Supreme Court judge nominated by the CJI.
- A panel of senior IPS officers is shortlisted on the basis of **seniority, integrity and experience in anti-corruption investigations**.
- The Director enjoys a **minimum fixed tenure of two years**, extendable up to one year at a time, up to a total maximum of five years (initial two years + three one-year extensions)



Why Was the CJI Included in the Selection Committee?

- The CJI's inclusion emerged from concerns over **political misuse and executive control of the CBI**, often criticised as a "caged parrot".
- Judicial participation was intended to act as a **neutral institutional safeguard** ensuring credibility

Concerns Raised in the Current Debate

- Critics argue that involving the CJI in executive appointments may **blur the doctrine of separation of powers and checks & balances**, since judges become participants in administrative decisions.
- Concerns also arise regarding **conflict of interest**, as courts may later adjudicate disputes involving the same appointment process.
- Others argue that removing the CJI could weaken institutional checks and make the process vulnerable to **executive dominance**, particularly given the politically sensitive nature of CBI investigations.

- The controversy reflects the continuing challenge of balancing **executive efficiency with institutional neutrality** in key appointments.

UAPA & BAIL: Reaffirming Liberty In Anti-Terror Cases

The debate around bail under the **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)** resurfaced after the Supreme Court recently expressed reservations over an earlier ruling denying bail to **Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam** in the **Delhi riots conspiracy case**. The Court reiterated that **“bail is the rule and jail is the exception”** even in UAPA cases, especially where prolonged incarceration and delayed trials threaten the constitutional right to liberty under **Article 21**.

Primary Issue

The issue concerns the interpretation of **Section 43D(5) of UAPA**, which places stringent conditions on grant of bail if a prima facie case exists. Recent judicial observations indicate that **constitutional protections** may override statutory restrictions in cases of excessive delay.

Related Judgements

- **NIA v. Zahoor Ahmad Shah Watali (2019)**: The Supreme Court adopted a stricter approach to UAPA bail. Courts were directed not to examine evidence in detail at the bail stage and only determine whether accusations appear prima facie true, making bail difficult. The judgment significantly strengthened prosecutorial discretion in UAPA cases.
- **Union of India v. K.A. Najeeb (2021)**: A three-judge Bench held that constitutional courts can grant bail despite stringent restrictions under Section 43D(5) of UAPA if:
 - Trial is unlikely to conclude within a reasonable time.
 - The accused has suffered prolonged incarceration.
 - The Court gave primacy to the right to speedy trial under Article 21 over statutory limitations on bail.
- **Umar Khalid / Sharjeel Imam Bail Case (2026)**: A Supreme Court Bench questioned whether an earlier denial of bail ignored the binding precedent in K.A. Najeeb. The Court observed that smaller benches cannot dilute principles laid down by larger benches and reaffirmed that prolonged incarceration cannot continue indefinitely merely because UAPA is invoked.

Significance of the Ruling

- Reinforces the constitutional principle that personal liberty under **Article 21** cannot be indefinitely suspended due to delayed trials.
- **Reasserts judicial discipline**, emphasising that smaller benches must follow larger bench precedents such as K.A. Najeeb.
- **Balances national security concerns with civil liberties**, ensuring anti-terror laws do not become instruments of prolonged punishment without conviction.
- Strengthens the doctrine that pre-trial detention should not become **punitive in nature**.

Issues in UAPA Bail Jurisprudence:	Way Forward:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stringent Bail Conditions: Section 43D(5) makes bail extremely difficult once a prima facie case is established. • Prolonged Incarceration: Trials in UAPA cases often take years, leading to lengthy imprisonment without conviction. • Inconsistency in Judicial Approach: Divergent interpretations between Watali and K.A. Najeeb have created uncertainty. • Low Conviction Rates and Delayed Trials: Extended pre-trial detention often effectively becomes punishment. • Risk of Misuse: Critics argue UAPA may sometimes be used broadly against activists, journalists or dissenters, raising civil liberty concerns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strict adherence to K.A. Najeeb principle in cases involving prolonged detention and delayed trials. • Time-bound trials in UAPA cases through dedicated special courts and better judicial capacity. • Clearer judicial guidelines harmonising Watali and Najeeb to reduce inconsistency. • Periodic judicial review of detention to prevent indefinite incarceration. • Ensure national security laws operate within constitutional safeguards, preserving both security and fundamental rights.

Credibility Of National Testing Agency

Repeated controversies surrounding the **National Testing Agency (NTA)**, particularly the cancellation of **NEET-UG 2026**, have renewed concerns regarding the agency’s operational capacity, transparency, and crisis management abilities.

About NTA:

- **Established:** 2017 (began functioning in 2018) ; **Parent Ministry:** Ministry of Education (earlier MHRD)
- Nature: Autonomous & self-sustained testing organisation registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860.
- **Major Examinations Conducted by NTA:**
 - NEET-UG: Admission to undergraduate medical and dental courses.
 - JEE Main: Engineering admissions and gateway for JEE Advanced.
 - CUET: Common University Entrance Test for Central Universities.
 - UGC-NET: Eligibility for Assistant Professorship and Junior Research Fellowship.
 - CMAT, GPAT, AISSEE and other national-level examinations.
- **Mandate and Functions of NTA:**
 - Conduct standardized, transparent, and fair entrance examinations.
 - Develop a scientifically designed testing system using modern technology.
 - Ensure merit-based admissions while reducing multiplicity of entrance exams.
 - Improve accessibility through wider network of centres and multilingual testing.
 - Develop expertise in test administration, psychometrics and assessment frameworks.

What Further Needs to be Done- Radhakrishnan Committee (2024)

- **Move Towards Computer-Based Testing (CBT):**
 - Government and expert panels have advocated gradual transition to computer-based examinations, especially for high-stakes tests like NEET.
 - Expansion of CBT infrastructure through increased testing centres and digital capacity building.
- **Computer-Assisted PPT (Pen-and-Paper Test):**
 - There is a proposal for encrypted digital transmission of question papers to centres shortly before examinations, followed by local printing to reduce leak points.
- **Multi-stage or hybrid examination** formats combining digital and written testing.

Recurring Issues and Controversies in NTA Examinations:

- **Repeated Paper Leak Allegations:**
 - ✓ NEET has faced allegations of leaks in **2024 and 2026**, affecting credibility.
 - ✓ Dependence on physical transportation and storage of question papers creates vulnerabilities.
- **Weak Operational Capacity:**
 - ✓ Conducting exams for over **20 lakh candidates** across thousands of centres creates enormous logistical challenges.
 - ✓ Inadequate staffing and over-centralisation strain efficiency.
- **Cybersecurity and Data Concerns:**
 - ✓ Risks of hacking, leakage of confidential data and digital malpractice persist.
 - ✓ This is primarily because weak cyber architecture affects trust in digital systems.
- **Crisis Communication Failures:**
 - ✓ Delayed or inconsistent public communication during controversies also undermines confidence in the institution.
 - ✓ There is a lack of transparent grievance redressal mechanisms in the organisation.
- **Leadership and Institutional Accountability Issues:**
 - ✓ Administrative instability and delays in reform implementation weaken institutional credibility.
 - ✓ Limited independent oversight over examination management.
- **NEET specific issues:** The exam has repeatedly faced allegations related to:
 - ✓ Question paper leaks and circulation of "guess papers"
 - **2024 NEET paper leak** and grace marks controversy
 - ✓ Organised cheating networks and impersonation
 - **2019 Tamil Nadu** impersonation scam involving proxy candidates
 - ✓ Rank inflation and irregular scoring patterns
 - ✓ Other controversies related to conduct of examination
 - **2022 Kerala** frisking controversy affecting girl students



Measures Taken by Government to Address Issues in NTA:

- **Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024:**
 - ✓ Enacted to curb paper leaks, cheating syndicates, impersonation and organised exam fraud.
 - ✓ Provides for strict penalties, including imprisonment and fines for individuals or institutions involved in malpractice.
- **Constitution of the Radhakrishnan Committee (2024):**
 - ✓ A high-level committee headed by former ISRO Chairman K. Radhakrishnan was set up after the NEET-UG 2024 controversy.
 - ✓ Mandated to review NTA functioning and recommend structural, technological and governance reforms.
- **NTA's 'Zero Error, Zero Tolerance' Policy:**
 - ✓ Following the **NEET-UG 2024 controversy**, the NTA introduced a "**Zero Error, Zero Tolerance**" policy to ensure secure, transparent and malpractice-free examinations.
 - ✓ Measures included **enhanced frisking, biometric verification, CCTV surveillance, GPS-enabled transport of question papers, centralised monitoring and stricter anti-cheating mechanisms.**
- **CBI and Enforcement Action in Malpractice Cases:**
 - ✓ Central agencies such as the CBI have been involved in investigation of major paper leak allegations.
 - ✓ Arrests and action against cheating syndicates, coaching centres and intermediaries involved in examination fraud.
- **Capacity Expansion for Digital Exams:**
 - ✓ Increase in computer-based test centres used for exams like JEE and CUET to gradually prepare infrastructure for larger examinations such as NEET.

- **Institutional and Administrative Reforms:**
 - Review of NTA's governance structure and operational systems.
 - Strengthening coordination with State governments, district administrations and law enforcement agencies.
 - Enhanced oversight of examination logistics and centre management.
 - **Enhanced mechanisms** to prevent malpractice, impersonation and paper leaks.
- **Enhanced Grievance Redressal and Transparency:**
 - Introduction of answer key challenges, objection windows and greater transparency in score normalisation and evaluation processes.
 - Calls for stronger crisis communication mechanisms and quicker response to controversies.

Concerns Regarding Complete Shift to CBT

- Limited computer infrastructure and unequal digital access may affect fairness for rural and disadvantaged candidates.
- NTA currently lacks sufficient CBT infrastructure to conduct NEET for over 22 lakh candidates simultaneously.
- A gradual or hybrid transition may therefore be more practical.

Atmanirbhar Panchayat Programme

The **Ministry of Panchayati Raj** organised an outreach workshop at the **National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRD&PR), Hyderabad**, to operationalise and disseminate the **Atmanirbhar Panchayat Programme (APP)**. The initiative aims to strengthen grassroots governance by promoting financially self-reliant Panchayats through innovative project development and enhanced own revenue generation.

What is APP?

The programme is being implemented under the **Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA)** to enhance local governance capacity.

Atmanirbhar Panchayat Programme Features:

- **Focus on Own Source Revenue (OSR):** The programme aims to strengthen Panchayats' ability to generate their own revenue rather than depend solely on grants.
- **Bankable project development:** Supports Gram and Block Panchayats in creating financially viable, revenue-generating projects.
- **National challenge mechanism:** Panchayat proposals are selected through a transparent competitive process.
- **Technical assistance:** Provides end-to-end support from project conceptualisation to financial closure.
- **Multiple financing avenues:** Encourages funding through PPP models, CSR contributions, bank loans, and convergence with government schemes.
- **Community participation:** Ensures mandatory Gram Sabha consent, with ideas originating from local bodies.
- **Digital platform support:** Uses the Atmanirbhar Panchayat Portal for application, monitoring, and transparency.
- **Time-bound implementation:** Envisioned as a four-year programme to build financially strong Panchayats.

Atmanirbhar Panchayat Programme Significance:

- **Strengthens fiscal autonomy:** Reduces dependence on grants by enhancing local revenue generation capacity. It also facilitates access to diverse funding sources, enabling execution of development projects.
- **Promotes grassroots economic development:** Encourages localised, need-based projects that boost rural economies.
- **Improves governance quality:** Financial independence leads to better accountability, planning, and service delivery.
- **Encourages innovation:** Motivates Panchayats to adopt innovative and sustainable development models.
- **Enhances participatory democracy:** Ensures community involvement through Gram Sabhas, strengthening local ownership.
- **Supports Atmanirbhar Bharat vision:** Builds self-reliant rural institutions, which are foundational to national development.

Karnataka's Digital Grievance Redressal System For Gig Workers

The **Government of Karnataka** has launched India's first state-level **digital grievance redressal** system for gig workers, operationalising provisions under the **Karnataka Platform-Based Gig Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Act, 2025**. The initiative aims to address complaints related to wages, working conditions, and platform practices through a transparent and time-bound mechanism.

Key Features of the Act

- **Legal recognition of gig workers:** Defines gig and platform workers and brings them under a formal regulatory framework.
- **Welfare Board establishment:** A state-level board under the Act oversees registration, welfare schemes, and implementation.

- **Gig Workers Welfare Fund:** It is created through contributions from aggregators (1–5% of payouts), government, and workers.
- **Registration and unique ID:** Workers are registered and provided a unique identification number to access benefits.
- **Social security benefits:** Includes provisions for insurance, healthcare, and financial protection.
- **Transparency norms:** Platforms must disclose payments, deductions, and algorithmic decisions affecting workers.
- **Two-tier grievance mechanism:**

Core functionality:

- **Centralised digital portal:** Workers can file complaints through the IPGRS (Integrated Public Grievance Redressal System) platform.
- **Wide coverage of issues:** Complaints related to wages, working conditions, and platform disputes can be registered.
- **Transparency and accountability:** Digital tracking ensures time-bound resolution and monitoring.
- **Accessible interface:** Provides an easy and standardised mechanism for gig workers, many of whom lack formal grievance channels.

Significance:

- **Strengthens labour rights:** Provides gig workers with a formal & enforceable grievance redressal mechanism.
- **Improves working conditions:** Addresses issues of wage disputes, arbitrary actions, and lack of support.
- **Enhances accountability of platforms:** Aggregators are made responsible for fair practices and compliance.
- **Promotes social security:** Complements welfare provisions by ensuring effective implementation and access.
- **Model for other states:** Sets a precedent for regulating gig economy in India, where workforce is rapidly expanding.
- **Supports inclusive growth:** Integrates gig workers into the broader labour welfare framework, reducing informality.

Internal Dispute Resolution Committee (IDRC) at platform

Welfare Board

- **Compliance and penalties:** Aggregators must follow reporting norms, with penalties for violations.

Certification Of Brain Death

The Supreme Court of India has directed the **All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS, Delhi)** to constitute an expert panel to review and suggest improved protocols for declaring brain death, following concerns over the reliability and transparency of current procedures.

Background and Context

- The case originated from a petition by Kerala-based doctor and activist **S. Ganapathy**, who raised concerns about malpractices in brain death certification linked to **organ transplantation**.
- He alleged that patients may be declared brain dead without adequate testing, potentially to facilitate organ donation.
- Expert opinion is sought from AIIMS doctors on whether additional tests such as EEG and angiogram are required before declaring brain death.

Why Do We Need to Declare People Brain Dead?

- **Essential for organ donation:** Organs such as heart, liver, kidneys, and eyes can be donated only after brain death is declared.
- **Legal recognition of death:** Under Indian law, brain death is considered equivalent to death, even if the heart is still beating with support.
- **Medical decision-making:** Helps doctors decide on withdrawal of life support and further treatment.

What is brain death?

- Brain death is the **irreversible cessation** of all brain functions, including the brain stem, which controls breathing and vital reflexes.
- The person may **appear alive** because the **heart continues to beat** with ventilator support, but there is no possibility of recovery.
- It is distinct from **coma or vegetative state**, where some brain activity may still exist.

What is EEG and Angiogram?

- **Electroencephalogram (EEG):** A test that records electrical activity in the brain using electrodes placed on the scalp; absence of activity may indicate brain death.
- **Angiogram:** An imaging test that uses contrast dye and X-rays to check blood flow in brain vessels; absence of blood flow supports diagnosis of brain death.
- These are considered **ancillary (supportive) tests**, used when clinical tests are inconclusive or cannot be performed.

What is the protocol for declaring people brain dead?

- **Panel of doctors:** Certification is done by a team of four doctors, including a treating physician and specialists.
- **Repeated testing:** Brain death must be confirmed twice, with a gap of about 6 hours.
- **Clinical examination:**
 - Deep coma with known cause.
 - Absence of brainstem reflexes (no response to light, pain, gag reflex, etc.).
- **Apnoea test:** Checks if the patient can breathe independently; absence confirms brainstem failure.
- **Documentation:** Certification is recorded in prescribed legal forms under the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act.

- **Improves transplant outcomes:** Organs from brain-dead donors are often in better condition due to maintained blood circulation.

Challenges in Declaring People Brain Dead

- **Lack of uniform guidelines:** No single nationwide standardised protocol beyond basic legal provisions.
- **Limited awareness among doctors:** Many doctors lack adequate training in brain death certification.
- **Low consensus:** Differences in medical opinion create hesitation in declaring brain death.
- **Infrastructure gaps:** Smaller hospitals may lack expertise or facilities for proper certification.
- **Ethical concerns:** Fear of misuse in organ donation leads to public distrust.
- **Low organ donation rates:** Despite many potential donors, actual donations remain very low in India.

Way Forward

- **Standardise guidelines:** Develop a uniform national protocol for brain death certification.
- **Clarify role of advanced tests:** Define when EEG and angiogram should be mandatory or optional.
- **Capacity building:** Train doctors and healthcare staff in proper certification procedures.
- **Strengthen transparency:** Improve documentation and communication with families to build trust.
- **Decouple from organ donation:** Treat brain death as a medical and legal concept independent of transplantation to avoid ethical concerns.
- **Public awareness:** Increase awareness about brain death and organ donation to improve acceptance.

Journey Of EVMs Between Polling And Counting

Concerns over alleged tampering of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) during the West Bengal Assembly elections led to a clarification by the Election Commission of India (ECI), which reiterated that all procedures for handling EVMs are strictly regulated and secure.

Movement and Storage of EVMs during Elections

The EC's procedure for handling EVMs before, during and after polling is laid out in its **Manual on Electronic Voting Machines, 2023**.

- **Storage before polling:** EVMs are stored in secure warehouses under the control of the District Election Officer (DEO), who is typically the District Magistrate.
- **Randomisation process:** It is a digital process of randomly allocating **EVMs and VVPATs** to constituencies and polling stations to eliminate human bias. Before elections, EVMs are randomised in the presence of representatives of recognised political parties to ensure neutrality and prevent pre-allocation bias.
- **Movement to polling stations:** EVMs are then transported to polling booths from designated strongrooms under strict supervision and security.
- **Post-poll sealing and transport:** After voting concludes, EVMs are sealed in the presence of polling officials and candidates' agents and transported back to strongrooms with proper escort and documentation.
- **Strongroom security:** The strongrooms have a single entry/exit point, with all other doors and windows to be sealed. This door has a double-lock system. The key of the first lock are to be kept with the Returning Officer (RO), and that of the second with the Assistant RO. At least one platoon of armed police is deployed 24x7.
- **Monitoring and transparency:** Entry-exit logs are maintained, videography is conducted, and candidates are informed in advance so they can deploy representatives to observe security arrangements.
- **Daily oversight:** Returning Officers (ROs) conduct periodic inspections, review CCTV footage, and report security status to the DEO regularly.
- **Handling of reserve EVMs:** Used EVMs are stored separately from unused or reserve machines, which are kept in designated strongrooms.
- **Transportation for counting:** On counting day, EVMs are transported from strongrooms to counting centres under videography and in the presence of candidates' representatives.
- **Postal ballots handling:** Postal ballots are kept separately in secure envelopes and stored in designated strongrooms under the custody of the Returning Officer.
- **Overall safeguard mechanism:** The entire process—from storage to counting—is governed by detailed ECI protocols ensuring transparency, traceability, and multi-layered security to prevent tampering.

First Paperless State Judiciary

Chief Justice of India declared **Sikkim** to be the first paperless state judiciary in the country. A fully paperless judiciary is a system in which all legal processes are done electronically rather than through physical paper, using measures such as digital files, e-filing, online hearings, digital case tracking etc.

Such digital transformation of courts is being undertaken under **e-Courts Mission Mode Project**.

The **e-Courts Mission Mode Project** is a flagship initiative aimed at leveraging Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for the modernization and development of the Indian Judiciary. Spearheaded by the Department of Justice, Government of India, this transformative project is being implemented in close collaboration with the e-Committee of the Supreme Court of India. The decentralized approach ensures that the project is executed effectively through the respective High Courts, enabling tailored solutions that address the unique needs and challenges of each judicial region. By integrating cutting-edge technology into the judicial framework, the project seeks to enhance transparency, efficiency, and accessibility in the justice delivery system across the nation.

Phases of the Project:

- **Phase I (2007–2015):** Focused on basic computerisation of courts, installation of LAN & hardware, development of Case Information System (CIS) & training judicial officers in the UBUNTU-Linux OS
- **Phase II (2015–2023):** Expanded services such as e-filing, e-payments, National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG), and virtual courts.
 - Data Repository of orders, judgments, and case details of District & Subordinate Courts created as an online platform.
- **Phase III (2023–2027):** Aims at complete digital transformation, paperless courts, integration of all stakeholders (police, prisons, forensics, hospitals), e-Sewa Kendras and use of emerging technologies like AI.

AI Push To Solve Crimes

Delhi Police has launched a first-of-its-kind policing modernisation initiative in which senior officers of DCP rank and above will adopt around 100 police stations to implement targeted technology based reforms. The initiative aims to transform policing into a proactive, technology-driven and citizen-centric system.

Key Points About the Initiative

- Use of AI-enabled **predictive policing** tools to identify crime-prone areas.
- Deployment of **dashboards** to track response time, emergency handling and policing efficiency.
- **Expansion of CCTV networks** with facial recognition capabilities in public spaces.
- **Integration of databases** such as the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS) for real-time access to criminal records.
- **Transformation of police stations** into smart facilities with digital records and citizen service centres.

Other Measures to Improve Policing by Delhi Police:



- ◆ Special focus on tracking missing children and strengthening cybercrime response.
- ◆ Fast-tracking investigations related to crimes against women and children.
- ◆ Monitoring of habitual offenders and stolen electronic devices.
- ◆ Integrated picket checking and group patrolling to improve police visibility.
- ◆ Expansion of women help desks and all-women patrol units.
- ◆ Training of police personnel in cybercrime, financial fraud investigation, digital forensics, counter-terrorism and intelligence gathering.
- ◆ Leadership and ethics training to improve professionalism and accountability. Strengthen vigilance mechanism to curb corruption.
- ◆ Greater involvement of Mohalla Committees & Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) in community policing.
- ◆ Promotion of mobile applications for reporting crimes and grievances.
- ◆ Public awareness campaigns against online scams and digital fraud.
- ◆ Closer coordination with agencies such as I4C, CBI, NIA and NCW.

Significance:

- ◆ Marks a shift from **reactive policing to proactive and data-driven policing**.
- ◆ Expected to improve **crime prevention, investigation efficiency and emergency response**.
- ◆ Enhances **transparency and accountability** through technology integration.
- ◆ Strengthens **community participation** and public trust in policing.
- ◆ Could serve as a **model framework** for future police reforms across India.

- **GPS-enabled patrol vehicles** and Android-based response systems to improve mobility and field coordination.
- **Integration of command-and-control centres** for disaster management and counter-terror operations.
- **Greater use of body-worn cameras** to improve transparency and evidence collection. Use of drones during large gatherings and protests.

Language Policing And Its Implications

The Maharashtra government's move to mandate Marathi language proficiency for auto and taxi drivers has triggered debate over the broader implications of language-based regulations in public services. However, the immediate enforcement of this mandatory rule was postponed. While initially set for May 1, 2026 (Maharashtra Day), strict enforcement was deferred to August 15, 2026, allowing time for non-Marathi speakers to learn the language.

Key Aspects of the Language Policy

- **Requirements:** Drivers must be able to read, write, and speak Marathi.
- **Applicability:** The rule applies to all licensed auto-rickshaw and taxi drivers in the state.
- **Verification:** The Motor Transport Department's 59 offices are set to conduct checks to ensure compliance.
- **Support:** Reports suggest support mechanisms for non-Marathi-speaking drivers.

This policy is part of broader initiatives in Maharashtra to prioritize the state's official language.

Way forward

While promoting regional languages is important, making language proficiency a condition for livelihood can be counterproductive, harming both economic efficiency and social harmony.

Issues:

- **Impact on livelihoods:** The policy disproportionately affects migrant workers who depend on urban transport sectors for employment. It creates informal entry barriers, limiting opportunities for non-native speakers.
- **Economic implications:** Urban transport systems rely on labour mobility and flexibility, which such mandates can restrict. It may lead to inefficiencies, reduced availability of services, and increased costs.
- **Social implications:** Language-based restrictions weaken the idea of India as a shared civic space. They risk promoting exclusion, discrimination, and regional divides.
- **Political dimension:** Language is increasingly being used as a tool for mobilising regional identity. Such measures may encourage parochialism and tensions between locals and migrants.
- **Constitutional concerns:** These policies may conflict with principles of equality, unity, and freedom of occupation guaranteed under the Constitution.

Central Prabhari Officer Portal

NITI Aayog has launched the **Central Prabhari Officer (CPO) Portal** to strengthen real-time governance, improve coordination among stakeholders and accelerate last-mile delivery under the **Aspirational Districts Programme (ADP)** and **Aspirational Blocks Programme (ABP)**.

Aim: The portal aims to create a transparent, responsive and technology-driven governance ecosystem by connecting field observations directly with administrative action.

Key Features of the CPO Portal

- Enables Central Prabhari Officers (CPOs) to submit **field observations and recommendations** in real time through mobile devices.
- **Provides instant visibility of suggestions and feedback** to districts, state governments and central ministries.
- **Facilitates structured monitoring, accountability and faster implementation** of developmental initiatives.
- **Allows State Planning Secretaries** to coordinate across departments and monitor follow-up actions.
- **Enables NITI Aayog** and line ministries to monitor implementation progress and field-level issues simultaneously.

Role of Central Prabhari Officers (CPOs)

CPOs are senior-level officials (typically of the rank of Additional Secretary or Joint Secretary) appointed by the Central Government to act as key links between the Centre, States, and District administrations, accelerating development under the Aspirational Districts and Blocks Programs. They oversee the implementation of over 300 Central schemes, identify bottlenecks, and use a dedicated portal for real-time monitoring and reporting to improve last-mile service delivery.

National Panchayat Award

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj announced the **National Panchayat Awards (NPA) 2025**, recognising outstanding performance of Panchayats in promoting sustainable rural development, good governance and localisation of SDGs.

Key Highlights of National Panchayat Awards 2025

- A total of **42 Panchayats across 17 States and Union Territories** have been selected for recognition across multiple categories.
- **Karnataka** secured the highest number of awards (6), followed by **Andhra Pradesh and Odisha** (5 each).
- Financial incentives range from ₹50 lakh to ₹5 crore, depending on the category and level of Panchayat.

Categories of Awards

- **Deen Dayal Upadhyay Panchayat Satat Vikas Puraskar (DDUPSVP):** Recognises outstanding Gram Panchayats across 9 themes of Localisation of Sustainable Development Goals (LSDGs) such as:

Poverty-free and enhanced livelihoods	Healthy Panchayat	Child-friendly Panchayat	Water-sufficient Panchayat	Clean and green Panchayat
Good governance	Women-friendly Panchayat	Self-Sufficient Infrastructure	Social just & socially secured Panchayat	

- **Nanaji Deshmukh Sarvottam Panchayat Satat Vikas Puraskar (NDSPSVP):** Conferred on the best-performing District, Block and Gram Panchayats on an overall basis.
- **Special Categories:** Earlier, on National Panchayati Raj Day 2025, special awards were conferred under:
 - Climate Action Special Panchayat Award (CASPA)
 - Atma Nirbhar Panchayat Special Award (ANPSA)
 - Panchayat Kshamta Nirman Sarvottam Sansthan Puraskar (PKNSSP).

About National Panchayat Awards

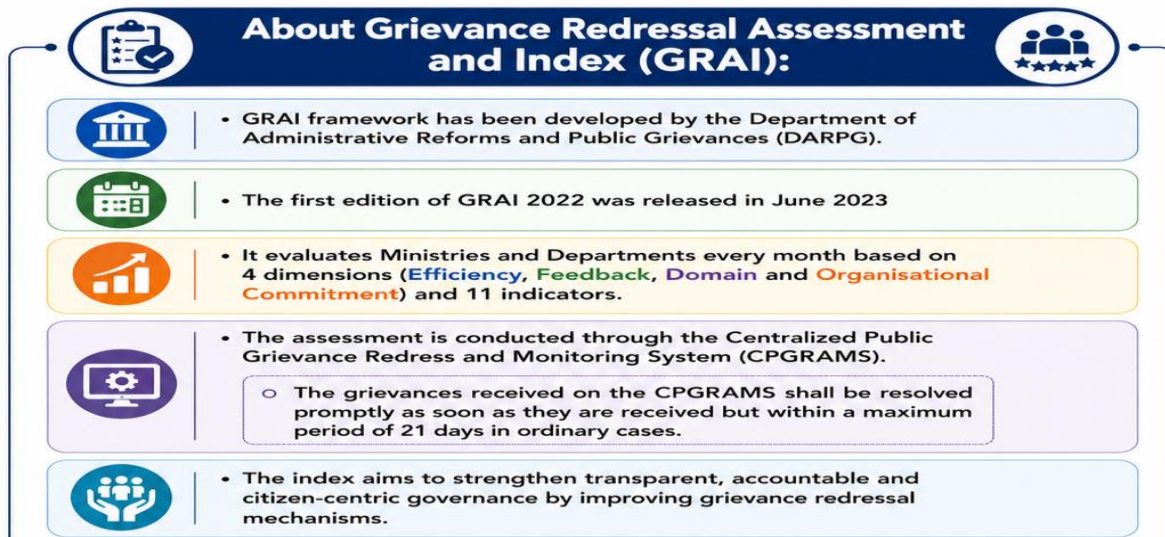
- These are annually conferred by the **Ministry of Panchayati Raj** to incentivise inclusive, participatory and sustainable local governance.
- They are implemented under the Incentivization of Panchayats (IoP) component of the Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA).
- Since 2023, the awards framework has been aligned with the nine themes of Localisation of SDGs (LSDGs) to make evaluation more transparent, holistic and data-driven.

Grievance Redressal Assessment And Index (GRAI) Rankings

The Department of Financial Services (DFS), Ministry of Finance, performed strongly in the **Grievance Redressal Assessment and Index (GRAI)** rankings for March 2026. The **Insurance Division** secured the **1st rank in Group A**, while the **Banking Division** retained the **5th position for the second consecutive month**.

Key Highlights

- DFS handles over **2.5 lakh public grievances annually** and has consistently remained among the **top 10 Ministries/Departments** in GRAI rankings since November 2025.
- The improved performance has been attributed to regular monitoring of grievances through CPGRAMS, weekly review meetings, monthly senior-level oversight and periodic review of closed grievances by the Secretary, Financial Services.



Jharkhand Treasury Scam

Jharkhand is facing a major alleged “treasury scam” involving fraudulent withdrawals of government funds through manipulation of the **Integrated Financial Management System (IFMS)**.

Investigators suspect the fraud could involve tens to hundreds of crores of rupees, raising comparisons with the infamous Fodder Scam of the 1990s. The case has raised concerns because the fraud allegedly occurred within a digital system designed to ensure transparency and accountability in government spending.

What is the Alleged Scam?

- The fraud allegedly involved government officials and treasury staff misusing the Integrated Financial Management System (IFMS).
- Officials allegedly manipulated authorised employee accounts to illegally withdraw money in the name of salaries, arrears, taxes and other payments.
- Funds were reportedly diverted into accounts linked to associates or “ghost accounts,” in some cases over several years.
- Investigators clarified that the scam did not involve external hacking or a cyber breach, but rather internal manipulation of the system.

Detection and Investigation:

- The irregularities were first identified during routine analysis and audit of treasury accounts by the Finance Department. The initial case emerged from **Bokaro SP's office** with suspected fraud of around Rs 3.15 crore.
- Investigations later expanded to multiple districts across Jharkhand.
- The probe is currently being conducted by the Crime Investigation Department (CID) and the Finance Department's Principal Accountant General.
- The State government has initiated investigations across all 24 districts.



How the Fraud Occurred?

- Government payment bills originate at the departmental level where clerks prepare and process them.
- The **Drawing and Disbursing Officer (DDO)** certifies the bills before they are processed through IFMS and sent to the treasury.
- Treasury officials largely relied on summary sheets and DDO certification rather than verifying individual accounts and transactions.
- High transaction volumes and dependence on multiple DDOs created systemic loopholes that enabled fraudulent entries to pass through several approval layers without detailed scrutiny.
- The absence of detailed individual verification allowed unauthorised payments and manipulation of account details.

Systemic Weaknesses Identified:

- Limited scrutiny of individual account details** due to large transaction volumes.
- Weak internal controls** and inadequate monitoring mechanisms within IFMS.
- Long-term persistence** of irregularities without timely detection.
- Previous warnings** about control failures in IFMS had already been flagged in a 2025 Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report.

IFMS is a digital platform used for budgeting, bill processing, treasury operations, salary payments, and e-disbursement of public funds through the Kuber portal.

***Note: PFMS (Public Finance Management System) is a central, web-based system for tracking funds in central schemes, while IFMS (often state-level) manages budgeting and treasury functions, with integration points existing between the two for payment processing and data sharing.*

***Data regarding budget allotment, grants, and expenditure for centrally sponsored schemes is shared from State IFMS portals to the PFMS portal*

Prison Statistics India (PSI) 2024

The **Prison Statistics India (PSI) 2024 Report**, released by the **NCRB**, provides data on prison infrastructure, inmate population, overcrowding, **high undertrial population**, staff vacancies, prison administration and correctional measures in India.

Key Findings:

- **Prison Infrastructure and Capacity:**
 - India had **1,333 prisons** in 2024, showing a marginal increase over the previous year.
 - Total prison capacity increased, while the inmate population witnessed a slight decline.
- **Overcrowding Continues:**
 - National prison occupancy rate stood at around **112.7%**, indicating overcrowding despite improvement from earlier years.
 - ⊖ **Delhi recorded the highest occupancy rate (194.6%).**
- **High Share of Undertrial Prisoners:**
 - **Undertrials constituted nearly three-fourths of prisoners (~74%)**, indicating continued delays in investigation and trial processes.
 - The high undertrial population reflects issues such as **judicial pendency, delays in bail and limited legal aid.**
- **Prison Demographics:**
 - Around **95.8% of inmates were male**, while women constituted about **4.14%** of prisoners.
 - India continues to have a limited number of **exclusive women prisons**, highlighting infrastructural constraints for gender-sensitive incarceration.
- **Staff Shortages:**
 - Significant vacancies persist in prison staff across States.
 - Shortages affect **security, inmate welfare, rehabilitation and correctional services.** For example, Jharkhand reported vacancy levels above **60%** in prison staffing.
- **Court Production and Digital Gaps:**
 - Large numbers of prisoners continue to be **physically produced before courts**, indicating limited use of digital court systems and video conferencing in several States.

Major Issues Highlighted:

- Overcrowding of prisons leading to poor living conditions, sanitation and healthcare.
- Excessive undertrial detention, making incarceration punitive before conviction.
- Limited rehabilitation, vocational training and reintegration mechanisms.
- Weak implementation of open prisons, legal aid and reformative approaches.

Way Forward:

- **Fast-track courts and bail reforms** to reduce undertrial population.
- **Expansion of video conferencing** and e-Prisons systems to reduce logistical burden.
- **Filling of staff vacancies** and strengthening prison administration.
- **Promotion of open prisons** (minimum-security correctional facilities without high walls, armed guards, or locked cells) and rehabilitation-based correctional systems.
- **Greater focus on mental health**, legal aid and vocational training for inmates.
- Implementation of recommendations of the **Mulla Committee (1983), Krishna Iyer Committee (1987) and recent Supreme Court directions** on prison reforms.

Joint Consultative Machinery

The 49th meeting of the **National Council of the Joint Consultative Machinery (JCM)** was held under the chairmanship of the Cabinet Secretary at New Delhi.

The meeting marked the Diamond Jubilee year (60 years) of the JCM Scheme, which was introduced in **1966** to institutionalise dialogue between the Government and its employees.

Key Highlights of the 49th JCM Meeting

- Representatives of both the Official Side (senior government officials and Secretaries) and Staff Side (employee representatives) participated in the meeting.

- The meeting discussed 24 agenda items submitted by employee representatives concerning employee welfare and service conditions.

Joint Consultative Machinery (JCM)

- JCM is a consultative framework for promoting cooperation and dialogue between the Government of India and its employees.
- It provides an institutional mechanism for discussing service conditions, employee welfare and grievance redressal, while avoiding disputes through consultation.
- JCM operates at three levels:
 - **National Council:** Chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for issues affecting all Central Government employees.
 - **Departmental Councils:** At ministry/department level for sector-specific concerns.
 - **Regional/Office-level Councils:** For local service matters.
- It excludes issues related to pay, allowances and disciplinary matters, which are dealt with through separate mechanisms.

Applicability

The Scheme covers all regular civil employees of the Central Government, except:

- Class I services;
- Class II services, other than Central Secretariat Services & the other comparable services in the headquarters organization of the Government;
- persons in industrial establishments employed mainly in managerial or administrative capacity, and those who being employed in supervisory capacity;
- employees of the Union Territories; and
- police personnel.

Supreme Court On Acid Attack Survivors

The Supreme Court has expanded the definition of “acid attack victims” under the **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (RPwD Act)** to include persons forcibly made to consume acid and victims suffering internal injuries even without visible external disfigurement. The judgment seeks to close a major legal gap that had denied several survivors access to disability certificates, compensation, rehabilitation and welfare schemes.

What Did the Supreme Court Hold?

- The ruling came in a petition filed by acid attack survivor Shaheen Malik, who argued that the RPwD Act unfairly excluded victims suffering internal injuries caused by acid ingestion.
- The SC Bench ruled that victims forcibly administered acid or suffering severe internal injuries must also be treated as acid attack survivors under the RPwD Act.
- The Court clarified that the expanded definition would apply retrospectively from the date the Act came into force in 2016.

Why Was Expansion of the Definition Necessary?

- **Limited definition:** The earlier definition under **Schedule 2(zc) of the RPwD Act** focused mainly on visible external disfigurement caused by acid attacks.
 - ✓ The Schedule identifies **21 categories** of disabilities, including physical, intellectual, mental, and neurological conditions, which entitle individuals to rights and protections.
- **Severe injuries:** Acid ingestion causes severe burns to the mouth, throat, oesophagus and stomach, often resulting in lifelong medical complications affecting eating, swallowing and digestion.
- **Exclusion from benefits:** Since disability certification under the RPwD Act is essential for accessing financial aid, medical treatment, rehabilitation schemes and reservation benefits, exclusion effectively denied state support to many survivors.
- **Constitutional argument:** The Court noted that distinguishing victims based on the “method of attack” rather than the extent of harm was arbitrary and unconstitutional.

Other Important Supreme Court Observations:

The Court stated that existing punishments for acid attacks have not acted as an effective deterrent.

It suggested considering:

- Shifting the burden of proof onto the accused once identified by the survivor
- Harsher punishment for acid attack convicts
- Criminal liability for illegal acid sellers
- Attachment of accused persons’ assets to compensate victims
- The Court also expressed concern over delays in acid attack trials and sought details of pending cases from High Courts.

Rehabilitation and Welfare Concerns:

- Recently, the Supreme Court has separately asked States and Union Territories to explain why dedicated employment and rehabilitation schemes for acid attack survivors have not been created.
- It suggested subsistence allowance or government employment support for survivors where rehabilitation remains inadequate.

Key Legal Provisions for Acid Attack Survivors:	Landmark Judgments Related to Acid Attacks:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Recognises acid attack survivors as persons with disabilities. ○ Ensures dignity, non-discrimination, rehabilitation and equal opportunities for persons with disabilities. ○ Now includes victims suffering internal injuries due to acid ingestion. ● Section 124, Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Acid attack causing grievous hurt is a cognizable and non-bailable offence. ○ Punishment ranges from 10 years imprisonment to life imprisonment along with fine. ○ Attempt to commit acid attack is also punishable. ● Section 397, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mandates free and immediate medical treatment for acid attack victims in all hospitals. ○ Requires mandatory police intimation. ● Victim Compensation Scheme (Section 396, BNSS): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provides compensation and rehabilitation support to victims of acid attacks and other crimes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Laxmi Acid Attack Case 2015: Supreme Court regulated over-the-counter acid sales. Directed stricter monitoring and identity verification for acid purchases. ● Parivartan Kendra Case 2015: Directed stronger rehabilitation and compensation measures for acid attack survivors.

Plea Bargaining

Plea bargaining is a pre-trial negotiated settlement in which an accused pleads guilty to a lesser offence or accepts a reduced sentence to avoid prolonged trials. Introduced in India through the **Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2005 under the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) 1973**, it applies to offences punishable with imprisonment of less than seven years.

Plea bargaining is governed by Chapter XXIII (Sections 289 to 300) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023. Despite its potential to reduce judicial backlog, plea bargaining remains severely underutilised in India.

Status of Plea Bargaining in India:

- NCRB data for 2023 shows extremely low utilisation of plea bargaining.
- Out of nearly 1.65 crore criminal cases tried, only 35,889 cases were resolved through plea bargaining.
- This reflects a disposal rate of only around **0.2%**, indicating widespread underuse of the mechanism.

Reasons for Limited Success:

- **Stigma of Conviction:** A successful plea bargain under **Section 294 (open court) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS)** still results in formal conviction, discouraging accused persons.
- **Preference for Compounding of Offences:** **Section 359 of BNSS** allows settlement of minor offences through compounding, often resulting in acquittal and making it more attractive than plea bargaining.
- **Lack of Awareness and Training:** Limited understanding among lawyers, prosecutors and judicial officers has affected implementation.
- **Institutional Indifference:** Courts and stakeholders have not sufficiently promoted the mechanism.
- **Absence of Clear Guidelines:** Lack of structured procedures creates uncertainty in implementation.

International Experience:

- **United States:** Around 90–95% of criminal cases are resolved through plea bargaining.
- **Canada:** About 85–90% of cases end through negotiated pleas.
- **Australia:** Around 80–90% of criminal cases are resolved similarly.

Suggested Reforms:

- Create a **high court-monitored implementation mechanism** with regular district-level reporting on plea bargaining outcomes.
- Establish dedicated plea bargaining **mediation cells** in district courts with trained facilitators and victim liaison officers.
- Provide **mandatory training** for judges, prosecutors and legal aid lawyers.
- Develop **clear guidelines** to reconcile plea bargaining with compounding of offences and avoid overlap.
- Introduce **acquittal-based negotiated outcomes** in suitable cases to incentivise participation.
- Extend benefits such as **parole, remission and aftercare support** to those opting for plea bargaining.

Significance

- Effective use of plea bargaining can reduce **judicial backlog and expedite justice delivery**.
- It can help courts **focus on serious offences** while ensuring speedy disposal of minor criminal matters.
- Better implementation could **strengthen efficiency, reduce undertrial burden and improve access to justice** in India's criminal justice system.

BCCI & RTI

The **Central Information Commission (CIC)** has ruled that the **Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI)** does not qualify as a **“public authority”** under the **Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005**, and therefore is not obligated to disclose information under RTI. The decision was made while **dismissing an RTI plea** seeking information from the cricket board. The CIC observed that although BCCI performs public functions related to cricket administration, it is **neither established by law nor substantially financed by the government**, which are essential criteria under the RTI framework.

Related Judgements and Legal Developments:

- **BCCI v. Cricket Association of Bihar (2015)**: The Supreme Court recognised that BCCI performs public functions in cricket administration and selection of the national team. However, the Court did not explicitly declare BCCI a “State” under Article 12 or a public authority under RTI.
- **Justice Lodha Committee Reforms (2015)**: Following allegations of misgovernance, the Supreme Court-appointed Lodha Committee recommended greater transparency, accountability and governance reforms in BCCI, though RTI coverage was not mandated.
- **Zee Telefilms Ltd. v. Union of India (2005)**: The Supreme Court held that BCCI is not “State” under Article 12 because it is not financially, functionally or administratively dominated by the government. However, it acknowledged that writ jurisdiction under Article 226 may still be invoked against BCCI because it performs public duties.
- **Thalappalam Service Cooperative Bank v. State of Kerala (2013)**: The SC clarified the meaning of “substantially financed” under the RTI Act. Mere regulation, supervision or indirect support by the government does not make an entity a public authority unless there is substantial financial assistance.

Public Authority under RTI Act, 2005:

- Defined under **Section 2(h) of the RTI Act**.
- A “public authority” includes any authority, body or institution of self-government established or constituted:
 - ◆ By or under the Constitution;
 - ◆ By any law made by Parliament;
 - ◆ By any law made by State Legislature;
 - ◆ By notification or order of the appropriate government.
- It also includes bodies that are:
 - ◆ Owned, controlled or substantially financed by the government; or
 - ◆ Non-government organisations substantially financed directly or indirectly through government funds.
- Since BCCI is registered under the **Tamil Nadu Societies Registration Act, 1975**, and functions autonomously without substantial government funding, the CIC held that it does not satisfy the criteria under **Section 2(h)**.



JPC On One Nation One Election

The **Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC)** examining the **‘One Nation, One Election’ (ONOE)** proposal stated that conducting simultaneous elections to the **Lok Sabha, State Assemblies and local bodies** could save nearly **₹7 lakh crore** and potentially increase **India's GDP growth by 1.6%**.

Key Highlights of the News:

- The JPC claimed that frequent elections lead to high public expenditure, administrative disruption and governance inefficiencies, which could be reduced through simultaneous polls.
- Savings generated through ONOE could be redirected toward infrastructure, healthcare, education, welfare schemes and development projects.

National Sports Governance Board And Tribunal Rules, 2026

The Union Government has notified the **National Sports Governance (National Sports Board) Rules, 2026** and **National Sports Governance (National Sports Tribunal) Rules, 2026** under the provisions of the **National Sports Governance Act, 2025**. The reforms aim to strengthen **transparency, accountability and speedy dispute resolution in sports governance** in India.

Key Features of the National Sports Governance Board Rules, 2026:

- **Creation of National Sports Board (NSB):** The Board will function as the central authority for granting recognition to **National Sports Bodies (NSBs)** and ensuring adherence to governance standards.
- **Composition of the Board:** The Board will consist of:
 - One Chairperson
 - Two Members
 - These will be appointed by the Central Government from a panel recommended by a Search-cum-Selection Committee.
- **Regulatory Role:** The Board will monitor compliance with:
 - Governance standards
 - Financial accountability norms
 - Ethical standards in sports administration.

Key Features of the National Sports Tribunal Rules, 2026:

- **Dedicated Sports Dispute Resolution Body:** A National Sports Tribunal (NST) will function as a specialised adjudicatory body for sports-related disputes.
- **Faster and Cost-Effective Justice:** The Tribunal aims to ensure independent, speedy and affordable settlement of disputes, reducing reliance on ordinary civil courts.
- **Single-Window Mechanism:** The Tribunal is expected to reduce multiplicity of litigation and provide a simpler, accessible mechanism for resolution of disputes concerning sports governance and administration.
- **Digital Governance Measures:** The rules provide for a dedicated online portal for:
 - Filing disputes and responses
 - Submission of documents and clarifications
 - Virtual hearings
 - Communication of notices and orders
 - Maintenance of digital records.

Sedition

The debate around the constitutional validity of the sedition law has resurfaced after the Supreme Court in **Kamran v. State of Madhya Pradesh**, allowed courts to proceed with **pending sedition trials under Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC)** if the accused gives consent. This comes despite the **Court's 2022 interim order** in **S.G. Vombatkere v. Union of India**, which had stayed fresh FIRs and coercive action under sedition while the constitutional validity of the provision was under review.

About Sedition Law

- **The Old Provision: Section 124A of IPC**
 - **Core Offense:** Criminalized bringing, or attempting to bring, into hatred or contempt, or exciting disaffection towards the "Government established by law in India".
 - **Definition:** Punished spoken or written words, signs, or visible representations that caused public unrest against the sitting administration.
 - **Punishment:** Imprisonment ranging from three years to life, along with a fine.
- **The New Provision: Section 152 of BNS**
 - **Core Offense:** Criminalizes exciting or attempting to excite secession, armed rebellion, subversive activities, separatist feelings, or acts that endanger the sovereignty, unity, and integrity of India.
 - **Scope of Action:** Expands the means of committing the offense to include not just words, signs, or **electronic communication**, but also financial means or other acts.
 - **Protection of Dissent:** Contains a specific explanation stating that criticism of government measures or administrative actions, aimed at altering them through lawful means, does not constitute an offense as long as it does not excite the restricted activities.
 - **Punishment:** Imprisonment for life or rigorous imprisonment of up to seven years, along with a fine
 - Critics call it "**sedition under a new name**", as concerns about misuse persist.

Key Concerns

- **Coerced Consent:** Accused persons, especially poor undertrials, may agree to trial not voluntarily but to escape prolonged incarceration.
 - This creates a “Hobson’s choice”—choosing between continued detention and a potentially unfair trial.
- **Inequality in Access to Justice:** Wealthier or politically connected accused may secure bail and litigate for years, whereas poorer accused may be compelled into consent-based trials.
- **Chilling Effect on Free Speech:** Sedition laws have historically been criticised for suppressing dissent, criticism and political opposition, affecting **Article 19(1)(a)** (freedom of speech and expression) of the Constitution.
- **Judicial Inconsistency:** The **Court’s 2026 clarification** appears inconsistent with the **2022 stay order**, which intended to pause the operation of sedition provisions pending constitutional review.

Related Judgements

- **Romesh Thapar v. State of Madras (1950):** Established that criticism of the government cannot be restricted unless it directly threatens state security.
- **Kedar Nath Singh v. State of Bihar (1962):** Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of sedition but restricted its application to acts involving incitement to violence or public disorder.
- **Balwant Singh v. State of Punjab (1995):** Mere sloganeering without incitement to violence was held not to amount to sedition.
- **S.G. Vombatkere v. Union of India (2022):** The Supreme Court directed the suspension of new FIRs under Section 124A, citing its incompatibility with modern democratic values.

Issues with Sedition Law

- Colonial legacy used to suppress dissent.
- Broad and vague language leading to misuse.
- Low conviction rates but high procedural punishment through arrests and prolonged trials.
- Potential incompatibility with democratic free speech guarantees.

Way Forward

- **Expedite Constitutional Review:** Supreme Court should decide the constitutional validity of sedition-related provisions conclusively.
- **Narrow Legal Scope:** Restrict use only to acts involving clear incitement to violence or armed rebellion.
- **Strengthen Bail Safeguards:** Prevent coercive “consent” by ensuring speedy bail for undertrials.
- **Protect Civil Liberties:** Ensure national security laws do not disproportionately curb legitimate dissent.
- **Clear Legislative Reform:** Parliament should define offences precisely to avoid misuse against political criticism or free expression.

National Council For Public Works (NCPW)

The **Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA)** held the **inaugural meeting of the newly constituted National Council for Public Works (NCPW)** in New Delhi. The Council has been created as a **national-level institutional platform** to improve coordination, innovation, standardisation and capacity building in India’s **public works and infrastructure ecosystem**. The meeting was chaired by the **Secretary, MoHUA**, who will also serve as the Chairman of the Council.

About National Council for Public Works (NCPW):

NCPW is a national level institutional mechanism under the **MoHUA**.

It aims to strengthen collaboration among agencies involved in public infrastructure creation and management. The Council will function with the **Central Public Works Department (CPWD)** acting as the coordinating agency.

Institutional Structure:

- **Headquarters:** National CPWD Academy, Ghaziabad (Uttar Pradesh).
- **Delhi Office:** India Habitat Centre, New Delhi.
- **Patrons:** Union Minister and Minister of State for Housing & Urban Affairs.

- **Chairperson:** Secretary, MoHUA.
- **Includes representatives from:**
 - Central and State Governments
 - Urban Local Bodies (ULBs)
 - Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs)
 - Academic and research institutions
 - Construction industry and domain experts.

Objectives of NCPW:

- **Strengthen Coordination:** Promote better coordination between Central ministries, State governments, Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), PSUs and technical institutions involved in public works.
- **Promote Innovation and Technology:** Encourage adoption of advanced construction technologies, digital tools and modern engineering practices in infrastructure development.
- **Standardisation of Practices:** Develop uniform standards, best practices and technical benchmarks for public works projects across India.
- **Capacity Building:** Improve institutional and technical capacity through training, skill development and knowledge sharing among stakeholders.
- **Sustainable Infrastructure Development:** Promote green construction, sustainability, resource efficiency and climate-resilient infrastructure.
- **Knowledge Sharing and Collaboration:** Act as a platform for technical collaboration, research partnerships and policy harmonisation.

Women Representation In IAS Reaches Record 41%

During an interaction with **IAS Officer Trainees (2024 batch)** under the Assistant Secretary Programme, Union Minister Dr. Jitendra Singh highlighted the changing character of India's civil services. He emphasised that the new generation of officers will play a crucial role in shaping governance as India moves towards Viksit Bharat@2047.

Change in Demography of Civil Services Officers:

- **Increasing Women Representation:**
 - Women officers account for nearly 41% of the 2024 IAS batch, reflecting increasing participation of women in higher education, competitive examinations and governance.
 - Indicates greater **gender inclusivity and democratisation of opportunities** in civil services.
- **Greater Regional Diversity:**
 - States that earlier had **limited representation in civil services** are increasingly producing successful candidates.
 - Traditionally dominant regions are witnessing changing career preferences towards private and global opportunities, resulting in a more geographically balanced bureaucracy.
- **Academic and Professional Diversification:**
 - The batch includes officers from varied backgrounds such as **engineering, medicine, law, management and humanities**.
 - Around **78 officers in the 2024 batch come from engineering backgrounds**, reflecting growing demand for **technology-driven governance and interdisciplinary policymaking**.
- **Younger and Tech-Oriented Bureaucracy:**
 - Civil servants are increasingly expected to develop expertise in **Artificial Intelligence (AI), digital governance, data analytics and public communication**.
 - Emphasis is shifting towards **citizen-centric, technology-enabled and accountable governance**.

Assistant Secretary Programme:

- Introduced in **2015** as part of IAS induction training to provide mandatory 8-week immersion training **to policymaking at the Union government level**.

- Officers work closely with Ministries to understand:
 - **Policy formulation and implementation**
 - **Inter-ministerial coordination**
 - **Central Secretariat functioning**
 - **Flagship government programmes and governance challenges.**

Right To Trauma Care Part Of Article 21

The Supreme Court, in *SaveLife Foundation v. Union of India*, held that the right to **trauma care** is an integral part of the **Right to Life under Article 21** of the Constitution. The Court observed that timely emergency medical assistance can be the difference between life and death, particularly in road accident cases, and therefore requires a robust nationwide framework.

Key Directions Issued by the Court:

- **Single Emergency Helpline (112):**
 - All States and Union Territories must integrate existing emergency numbers such as 100, 101, 102, 108, 1033 and 1091 into the unified emergency number 112 within three months.
 - The aim is to ensure quick and seamless emergency response across the country.
- **Implementation of PM RAHAT Scheme:**
 - States were directed to operationalise the **PM RAHAT (Road Accident Victims' Hospitalisation and Assured Treatment) Scheme**, which provides cashless treatment to road accident victims during the critical "golden hour".
- **Strengthening Good Samaritan Protection:**
 - It directed States to establish a functional Good Samaritan grievance redressal mechanism within three months to ensure that helpers are protected from harassment.
- **Uniform Trauma Care Framework:**
 - The Union and States were directed to work towards a standardized and efficient trauma-care system across India.
 - The Court emphasised the need for coordinated emergency response, standardised rescue protocols, ambulance compliance, trauma registries and public awareness programmes.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:**
 - Governments were asked to conduct multilingual awareness campaigns regarding helpline 112, Good Samaritan protections under the Motor Vehicles Act, Grievance redressal mechanisms, and PM RAHAT cashless treatment benefits.

Samadhan Didi

The **Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions** launched "**Samadhan Didi**", an AI-enabled voice chatbot integrated with the **Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS)**. The initiative was developed by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) in collaboration with **Bhashini**.

Key Features

- Citizens can lodge grievances simply by speaking in their native language without needing to identify the concerned ministry or department.
- The chatbot automatically understands the complaint, asks clarifying questions, identifies the appropriate ministry, department and category, and files the grievance with the correct authority.
- It combines Bhashini's multilingual language capabilities with AI models trained on CPGRAMS data, enabling seamless grievance registration across Indian languages.

SAFE TRAVEL ON NATIONAL HIGHWAYS A FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT

The Supreme Court has declared safe travel on **National Highways (NHs)** a **fundamental right** under **Article 21 (Right to Life)**. The Court ruled that the State has a positive obligation to preserve human life, making safe,

motorable, and hazard-free roads an enforceable constitutional right rather than just a policy goal. The judgment came in a **suo motu case** concerning fatal highway accidents and marks a significant expansion of constitutional protection relating to road safety.

Key Directives & Regulations

To enforce this right and curb fatalities on highways the Court and the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) have implemented strict guidelines:

{For more on Highway safety refer, The Recitals April 2026}

Fugitive Economic Offenders

- The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has declared 21 people, including businessmen Nirav Modi and Vijay Mallya, as fugitive economic offenders (FEOs) over the past seven years.
- As per the ED's annual report, proceedings under FEO have been initiated against 54 individuals to date, with 21 declared FEOs and assets worth around Rs 2,178.34 crore confiscated.

Process for Declaring an Individual an FEO

- Under the Act, **an application must be filed in the special court** asking that a particular individual may be declared an FEO.
- The application must be accompanied by:
 - **Reasons for the belief** that an individual is an FEO;
 - Any information available regarding the whereabouts of the FEO;
 - A list of properties or the value of such properties believed to be the proceeds of crime.
- The special court may then issue notice to the individual to appear at a specified place and drop the proceedings if the individual complies.
- If, however, the special court is satisfied that an individual is an FEO, it may, declare the person as an FEO. The court may then **order the confiscation of the properties** of the accused individual in India or abroad.

Other Provisions for Economic Offences

- Economic offences relate to **fraud, counterfeiting, money-laundering, tax evasion**, etc.
- Among the laws available for prosecuting these offences are **The Prevention of Money-Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002, The Benami Properties Transactions Act, 1988, and The Companies Act, 2013.**

Gold Repatriation by RBI

- The RBI brought 168.06 metric tonne (MT) of its gold to India in 2025-26 – the third year in a row it has done so. Gold repatriated by RBI was **107.21 MT in 2023-24 and 103.68 MT in 2024-25.**
- The **RBI now holds 77% of its 880.52 MT of gold holdings** (worth ~ \$122 billion) domestically. This is sharply higher than **38% as recently as March 2023.**
- While the RBI has been increasing gold stores domestically, RBI's gold holdings in volume terms has increased by only about 10% (86 MT) in the last three years.
- This is in stark contrast to some other central banks around the world, who have purchased gold heavily in the last couple of years as geopolitical conflicts force diversification of foreign exchange reserves.
- Despite little change in the amount of gold held in 2025-26, the share of gold in the RBI's foreign exchange reserves jumped from 11.7% (2024-25) to 16.7% due to global gold prices rising sharply on account of heightened trade and geopolitical uncertainty.

Fugitive Economic Offender

- An FEO is defined under **The Fugitive Economic Offenders (FEO) Act, 2018.**
- As per the act an FEO is any individual against whom **a warrant for arrest** in relation to a scheduled offence, where the total value involved in such offences is **Rs 100 crore or more**, has been issued by any court in India and:
 - ✓ The person has **left India to avoid criminal prosecution** or
 - ✓ While being abroad, **refuses to return to India to face criminal prosecution**

Need for the FEO law

- In 2017, Finance Ministry released a draft Bill to address cases of high-value economic offenders fleeing the country to avoid prosecution.
- It observed that existing civil and criminal laws did not contain specific provisions to deal with such offenders, and that a new legal framework was needed to prosecute them.
- The ministry also argued that procedures under these laws were time-consuming, led to roadblocks in investigation and impacted the financial health of banks.

Fugitive Economic Offenders (FEO) Act, 2018

- The Act replaced the The Fugitive Economic Offenders Ordinance, 2018, which was promulgated in April 2018.
- The FEO Act aims to provide for measures to discourage FEOs from escaping the process of law in India by staying outside the jurisdiction of Indian courts.

Gold Reserves

- Gold reserves refer to the physical gold bullion or coins held by a national central bank. These reserves are distinct from gold jewellery or privately held gold.
- In the past, gold played a central role in the international monetary system. Currencies were directly linked to the price of gold, meaning a specific amount of gold guaranteed the value of a nation's currency. It was known as the **gold standard**.
- However, this system ended in 1973 (collapse of the Bretton Woods gold standard). Though the gold standard is no more, gold reserves remain an essential asset for central banks.

Reasons for Transferring Gold back to India

- **Geopolitical considerations:** The RBI's ongoing move to hold increasingly more gold domestically is part of a new trend that took shape after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
- The attacks led to the **US freezing Russia's dollar-denominated foreign exchange reserves**, which led to a shift by central banks around the world towards holding more non-dollar denominated foreign currency assets.
- According to the World Gold Council's Central Bank Gold Reserves Survey 2025, 59% of central bankers picked 'domestic storage' for where they currently vault at least part of their gold reserves, up from 35% in 2023.
- **Security and Control:** Bringing gold back home will give the RBI more direct control and potentially reduce reliance on foreign vaults.
- **Cost savings:** Storing gold abroad incur storage and insurance fees. Bringing it to India could save on these costs.
- **Economic signal:** It could be a signal of confidence in the Indian economy and its financial stability.



Reasons for keeping gold reserves by RBI

- **Stability and Trust:** Gold has been considered a store of value for centuries. It is recognized globally and trusted for its intrinsic value. Thus, holding gold reserves provides financial security for a nation.
 - For instance, during the 2008 global financial crisis, gold prices surged as investors rushed towards safe-haven assets.
- **Risk management:** Central banks diversify their reserves to reduce risks. Holding a mix of currencies, bonds, and gold reduces the risk associated with any single asset class.
- **Protection against inflation:** Gold is an effective hedge against inflation. As the value of fiat money decreases with inflation, gold typically retains its value, preserving purchasing power.
 - For example, in the 1970s, when inflation rates were high globally, gold prices increased significantly, providing a buffer against the currencies' devaluation
- **Settlement of International Trade:** Gold is universally accepted and can be used to settle international trade balances. It is a liquid asset that can be converted into cash or other currencies within no time.
- **Central bank credibility:** Maintaining gold reserves boosts confidence in the central bank's financial strength and credibility. It reassures investors and international partners of the country's economic stability.
 - During periods of economic turmoil, such as the 1991 economic crisis in India, the RBI pledged part of its gold reserves to secure loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), demonstrating its financial stability and credibility.
- **Managing liquidity and stability:** Gold reserves can be used by central banks as a monetary policy tool to manage liquidity and stabilize the economy.

Reasons for storing gold overseas

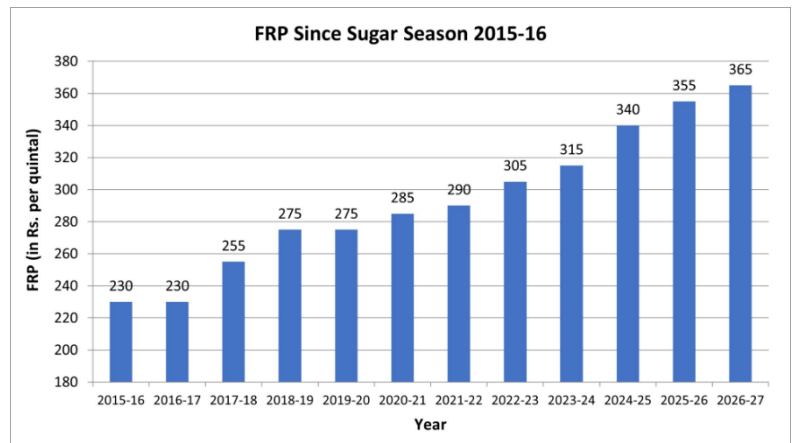
- Storing gold with foreign banks is a common practice in many countries, including India.
- The primary locations where RBI store gold overseas are **Bank of England in the United Kingdom** and **Bank for International Settlements (BIS) in Switzerland**.
- **High security:** Foreign banks, particularly those in major financial centers like London, New York, and Zurich, have state-of-the-art security measures. These institutions have **extensive experience and infrastructure** designed to safeguard large quantities of gold.
- **Market proximity:** Storing gold in major financial centres **ensures quick access to global gold markets**. These locations facilitate the **rapid buying, selling, or swapping of gold, enhancing liquidity**.
- **Diversification:** Diversifying storage locations internationally **helps reduce geopolitical risks**. In the event of political instability or conflict in one country, gold reserves stored abroad remain secure.
- **Professional handling:** Foreign banks specializing in gold storage offer professional handling and management services. The services include **regular audits, efficient transportation, and secure storage practices**.
- **Central Bank Cooperation:** Foreign banks in major financial centres often have strong relationships with global central banks, facilitating cooperation and coordination in times of financial need.

Fair and Remunerative Price of Sugarcane Announced

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved the Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) of sugarcane for Sugar Season 2026-27 (October - September) at Rs 365/quintal.
- The FRP for Sugar Season 2026-27 is **2.81% higher than current Sugar 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**.
- 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.



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 mid-sixties 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: Considers both **A2+FL** and **C2** costs
 - ✓ 'A2': Covers all paid-out costs directly incurred by the farmer in cash and kind on seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, hired labour, leased-in land, fuel, irrigation, etc.
 - ✓ 'A2+FL': Includes A2 plus an imputed value of unpaid family labour.
 - ✓ 'C2': It is a more comprehensive cost that factors in rentals and interest forgone on owned land and fixed capital assets, on top of A2+FL.
 - Market price trends (both domestic and international);
 - Inter-crop price parity;
 - The terms of trade (Ratio of prices of farm inputs to farm outputs), ensuring agriculture remains competitive relative to the non-agricultural sector.
 - A minimum of 50% as the margin over the cost of production; and
 - The likely implications of an MSP on consumers of that product.

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).

Ban on Sugar Exports

- The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) has prohibited export of raw, white and refined sugar with immediate effect till September 2026 in the backdrop of the ongoing West Asia conflict.
- The prohibition will not apply to sugar exports to the European Union and the US under the preferential quota.

Supply Situation

- Sugar production in the 2025-26 season (October-September) has been estimated at about 275 lakh tonnes (lt).
- With opening stocks of 50 lt, the total availability of 325 lt can comfortably meet the projected domestic consumption requirement of 280 lt.
- After accounting for domestic consumption and exports, the closing stocks of sugar will be at ~45 lt, which is the lowest since the 39.4 lt of 2016-17.
- That, by itself, shouldn't be cause for concern, as it is equivalent to about 1.8 months of domestic consumption. However, the government does not want to take any chances.
- India's five-year average buffer stock has typically been enough to cover around 2.5 months of demand.

Impact

- However, the export restriction may also create **challenges for the domestic sugar industry**. When exports are restricted, excess sugar remains within the domestic market, which may **bring down domestic prices and reduce the revenues of sugar mills**.
- Lower revenues can worsen the long-standing problem of **delayed payments** to sugarcane farmers.
- These unpaid dues reached nearly Rs 16,087 crore by February 2026, reflecting severe financial stress within the industry.
- Delayed payments may encourage farmers to **divert sugarcane towards jaggery production** rather than supplying it to sugar mills.
- Jaggery production requires simpler infrastructure and often provides quicker payments and better returns to farmers.
- The shift towards jaggery production would **reduce sugar and ethanol production in subsequent seasons**.
- This could recreate the same problem of lower sugar stocks and repeated export restrictions, thereby creating a cyclical instability in India's sugar economy.
- The long-term resolution of the issue depends heavily on favourable monsoon conditions, stable agricultural productivity and balanced policy management between domestic needs and export competitiveness.

Reasons for the ban

- ❑ **Threat of El Niño:** Most global climate models are forecasting a weak-to-moderate El Niño to emerge towards July, which can affect rains in the second half of the four-month southwest monsoon season (June-September).
 - The models also point to it persisting till at least the end of 2026, with significant probabilities of turning into a strong-to-very strong event.
 - While the current sugar crop will not face water shortage, the crop for the 2027-28 year may be impacted adversely.
- ❑ **Fertiliser shortage:** Sugarcane requires high doses of fertilisers, in addition to water, for optimal growth and yields.
 - The crop for the year 2027-28 can suffer from a shortage of fertilisers due to the ongoing West Asia supply crisis. This can significantly impact its yield.
- ❑ **Lack of clarity on stocks:** Sugar mills are supposed to file 'P-II' forms before the 15th of every month, furnishing data on the stocks held by them at the start of the month.
 - Based on this data filed online, the department of food and distribution then allots ("releases") the quota of sugar for each mill to sell in the whole of that month.
 - The government is not sure if all mills are actually holding the quantity of stocks declared in their monthly P-II returns. Such mills may have monthly release quota, but not the corresponding physical sugar to sell.
- ❑ **Ethanol blending:** Sugarcane is an important feedstock for ethanol production, which is blended with petrol to reduce India's dependence on imported crude oil.
 - At a time when global oil prices are rising due to geopolitical tensions in West Asia, maintaining adequate sugarcane availability for ethanol production has become strategically important.
 - Excessive sugar exports could **reduce ethanol feedstock availability and increase India's import dependence on fossil fuels**.
- ❑ **Curb inflationary pressures:** Sugar is a major raw material for industries such as food processing, beverages, confectionery, pharmaceuticals and fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG).
 - Restricting exports may help stabilise domestic sugar prices ahead of the festive season when demand generally rises significantly.
- ❑ **Weak export market:** Due to oversupply by Brazil in global markets, Indian exporters have already been facing losses in exporting sugar.
 - As a result, export activity had already slowed significantly before the export prohibition. Although the government had permitted exports of nearly 20 lakh tonnes during the 2025-26 season, actual exports stood at only around 7.5-8 lakh tonnes because mills were reluctant to enter new export contracts.

Vadinar Ship Repair Facility

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved the development of a **state-of-the-art ship repair facility in Vadinar, Gujarat**.
- The project will be jointly implemented by **Deendayal Port Authority (DPA) and Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL)**, with a combined investment of Rs 1,570 crore.
- The project is planned as a **brownfield facility** with a 650-metre jetty, two large floating dry docks, workshops and associated marine infrastructure.
- By enabling repair of vessels up to 300 m, the facility will allow high-value repairs of large vessels within India. This will significantly **reduce dependence on foreign shipyards and curb foreign exchange outflow**.
 - The facility will directly address a critical gap in India's ship repair infrastructure, as the country currently lacks adequate domestic capacity to repair large vessels exceeding 230 metres in length.
- Vadinar's natural deep draft, connectivity to major shipping routes, and proximity to key ports, such as Mundra and Kandla, make it an optimal location for repair operations, particularly for large commercial and foreign-flagged vessels.
- Enhanced turnaround times and strengthened repair capability on the western coast will **improve the overall competitiveness of Indian ports**.

Mission for Cotton Productivity

- The Union Cabinet has **approved Rs 5659.22 crore for Mission for Cotton Productivity (2026–27 to 2030–31)** to address bottlenecks, declining growth, and quality concerns in India's cotton sector.
- Despite being one of the world's largest cotton producers, India faces challenges such as low productivity, pink bollworm infestation, climate vulnerability, and rising cotton imports. The mission seeks to revive the sector, improve farmer incomes, ensure quality raw material supply to the textile industry, and strengthen India's position in global textile trade.
- It aligns with the **5F vision (Farm to Fibre to Factory to Fashion to Foreign)** of the government.
- The Mission will be implemented by the **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare and Ministry of Textiles**.
- It will also involve several institutes of Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), centres of All India Coordinated Research Project (AICRPs) on Cotton operating in different State Agricultural Universities (SAUs) of major cotton growing states.
- Initially, 140 districts will be focussed in 14 States through State Department of Agriculture and ICAR.
- It aims to accomplish the production of 498 lakh bales (170 kg lint each) of cotton by enhancing lint productivity from 440 kg/hectare to 755 kg/hectare by 2031.
- ~32 lakh farmers will be benefitted leading to self-reliance.

Key features of the Mission


- Development of high-yielding, climate resilient, pest-resistant seeds, and other production/protection technologies.
- Upscaling improved cotton production technologies like High Density Planting System (HDPS), Closer Spacing (CS), Integrated Cotton Management, and promotion of Extra Long Staple (ELS) Cotton.
- Augmenting quality of cotton through capacity building and promoting modernization of ginning and processing factories, including adoption of best processing practices.
- Strengthening cotton testing infrastructure across the country with modern, standardized, and accredited facilities to ensure reliable quality assessment and global benchmarking.
- Robust branding and traceability initiatives under Kasturi Cotton Bharat to position Indian cotton as a premium, sustainable, and globally trusted product.
- Empowering farmers through digital integration of market yards (mandis), enabling transparent price discovery, direct market access, and improved realization through e-platforms.
- Promotion of cotton waste recycling and circular economy practices to enhance resource efficiency, reduce environmental footprint, and generate additional value streams for the industry.
- Diversification of India's fibre base by including natural fibres like flax, ramie, sisal, milkweed, bamboo and banana and advancement of environmentally sustainable textile production and innovations.
- Strategic integration and promotion to complement cotton and align India's textile sector with evolving global demand patterns.

UDGAM Portal

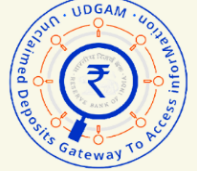
- The Reserve Bank of India recently told the Supreme Court that 30 banks have been integrated into its centralised web portal, **UDGAM (Unclaimed Deposits – Gateway to Access InforMation)**.
- As per Public Interest Litigation (PIL) funds lying in dormant or inoperative accounts were increasingly being transferred to government-managed pools, which have seen a sharp rise over the past decade.

Way Ahead

- Deposits held in *post offices, provident funds, and insurance schemes* have not been integrated into the UDGAM portal, thereby posing challenges for legal heirs seeking to claim such assets.
- The three silos — bank deposits, securities and investments, and post office deposits — should be brought under a single centralized search facility so that legal heirs can initiate the necessary steps to claim them.



UDGAM Portal



- UDGAM is a **centralised web portal** launched in 2023 by the RBI to help the public search for unclaimed bank deposits across multiple banks through a single platform.
- However, it **does not function as a claims deposit settlement mechanism**. The claim settlement happens through the respective bank.
- The portal was developed in response to the growing volume of unclaimed deposits in India.
- According to RBI, unclaimed deposits arise mainly when **savings or current accounts remain inoperative for ten years**, or when **fixed deposits are not claimed within ten years of maturity**.
- Such deposits are transferred by banks to the **Depositor Education and Awareness (DEA) Fund** a corpus set up by the RBI in 2014 to store unclaimed deposits from commercial and co-operative banks.
- The 30 banks integrated into the portal account for nearly **90% of the funds** held in the DEAF.
- An important feature of the portal is the generation of a **Unique Deposit Reference Number (UDRN)** for each unclaimed account transferred to the DEAF. This ensures privacy and facilitates seamless claim settlement by the concerned bank.
- There are around 20 lakh registered users who have carried out approximately 44 lakh searches on the portal.
- Thus, the portal helps to **promote financial inclusion, consumer protection, transparency, and easier recovery** of dormant financial assets.
- It also supports RBI's broader objective of improving depositor awareness and reducing idle financial assets in the banking system.

I4C - RBIH MoU on Mule Accounts

- The **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)** and **Reserve Bank Innovation Hub (RBIH)** have signed an MoU to strengthen collaboration in **combating cyber-enabled financial frauds and curtailing mule accounts** across the banking and digital payments ecosystem.
- The MoU aims to facilitate cooperation in the areas of fraud-risk intelligence sharing, analytical support, and operational coordination for strengthening proactive fraud detection and prevention mechanisms.
- It will help to swiftly detect and remove hidden mule accounts by feeding the data from the I4C's **Suspect Registry** to RBIH's AI-driven fraud detection systems, such as **MuleHunter.ai** implemented across banks.

Reserve Bank Innovation Hub (RBIH)

- RBIH – a **wholly-owned subsidiary of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** – is an organisation that works to enable frictionless finance for Indians.
- RBIH acts as an enabler and facilitator in the ecosystem, bringing together members from financial, technological, and academic institutions to promote and accelerate innovation across the financial sector.
- It aims not only to strengthen the Indian financial system but also to position India at the forefront of global financial innovation.

Women and Men in India 2025

- The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) has released the 27th edition of its publication titled **“Women and Men in India 2025: Selected Indicators and Data”**.
- It compiles gender-disaggregated data drawn from multiple ministries, departments and organisations and presents a broad overview of gender-related trends across population, education, health, employment and decision-making in India.
- It is intended to **support policymakers** and researchers in **designing gender-responsive policies**.

Key Findings

- The **sex ratio at birth** improved at the all-India level **from 904 in 2017-19 to 917 in 2021-23**, indicating **progress in female survival at birth**.
- As of 2023, **highest sex ratio** is in northeastern states of **Arunachal Pradesh (1085)**, where women outnumber men with a sex ratio of 1085, followed by **Nagaland (1007)** and **Goa (973)**.
 - The **worst performing** are **Jharkhand (899)** and **Bihar (900)**.
- The **Total Fertility Rate** in urban areas has shown a decline between 2019 (1.7) to 2023 (1.1).
- Across rural and urban areas, the **mean age at marriage** for women has shown a steady increase from 2021 onwards. (Urban - 24.3; Rural -22.4 years).
- **Maternal Mortality Ratio** has shown a steady and significant decline over the years, reducing from **254 to 88 from 2004-06 to 2021-23**.
- **Infant mortality rate** for both female and male infants has recorded a **significant and sustained decline** between 2008 and 2023 (male: 26 per thousand live births; Female: 25 per thousand live births)

Education

- ▶ **Gender parity** has been achieved **across all levels of school education** from Primary to Higher Secondary level.
- ▶ It also noted an improvement in **Gross Enrolment Ratio** in higher education, **rising from 28.5 to 30.2 for females** and from **28.3 to 28.9 for males** between 2021-22 and 2022-23.
- ▶ As of 2022-23, the **Mean Year of Schooling (MYS)** in formal education, in India is 8.4 for 15 years and above, while the female MYS is 7.4, making it 1.9 years lesser than male MYS.



Labour participation

- ▶ In 2025, the **Worker Population Ratio (WPR)** for ages 15 and above is 76.6 for males and 38.8 for females. For both genders, the WPR is higher in rural areas compared to urban areas.
- ▶ There has been an increase in **labour force participation rate (LFPR)** for ages 15 and above for both men and women. In particular, rural females have seen the highest increase in LFPR, going from **37.5% to 45.9%** between 2022 to 2025.
- ▶ The average time spent by men on unpaid domestic services is 88 minutes while women spent 289 minutes.

Leadership roles

- ▶ As of 2025, **women constitute 13.65% of Members of Parliament**, and **9.86% hold ministerial portfolios**.
- ▶ **Women account for 49.75% of elected Panchayat representatives** where 16 States report more than 50% women's representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions.
- ▶ It also highlighted **rising representation of women in leadership roles**. Between 2017 and 2025, the number of women engaged in managerial positions increased by 102.54%, compared to a 73.80% increase for men.



Crimes against women

- ▶ Crimes against women constitute **7.18% of total crimes** committed in year 2023.
- ▶ Cruelty by husband and relatives constituted the largest category of crimes against women (29.82 %), followed by kidnapping and abduction (19.77 %) and assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty, being the most frequently reported offences.
- ▶ **Cybercrime against women has expanded rapidly** with the growth of ICTs and digital platforms. Registered cases increased from 4,242 in 2017 to 19,510 in 2023, with cyber pornography and cyber stalking/bullying most frequently reported.



Mission SEHAT

- The **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)** and the **Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)** have jointly launched **Mission SEHAT (Science Excellence for Health through Agricultural Transformation)**.
- The initiative aims to connect agriculture, nutrition and public health through scientific collaboration.
- The mission brings together two key sectors — health and agriculture — through a **whole-of-government and whole-of-systems approach** that will integrate science, policy and implementation.

Priority areas

- ▶ The mission focuses on **five priority areas** of national significance:
 - ▶ **Development and evaluation of biofortified and nutrient-dense crop varieties** to address malnutrition and improve nutritional status;
 - ▶ **Strengthening integrated farming systems** to promote dietary diversification, enhance farm incomes, and build resilience;
 - ▶ Addressing **occupational health risks among agricultural workers** through targeted, evidence-based interventions;
 - ▶ Advancing agriculture-enabled strategies for the **prevention and management of non-communicable diseases** through the promotion of functional foods and nutritionally superior crop varieties; and
 - ▶ **Strengthening One Health preparedness** through integrated surveillance, diagnostics, and research at the human-animal-environment interface.

- The objective of this **national mission-mode programme** is to create a robust framework leading to **healthy food, farms and country**.
- The announcement comes at a time when the country is facing **dual challenges of malnutrition and rising non-communicable and lifestyle diseases**—such as hypertension, diabetes, and cancer.

Jute Crop Information System


- The evolution of India’s jute sector has entered a decisive new phase with the implementation of the Jute Crop Information System (JCIS)
- The **National Jute Board (NJB)** has been implementing the JCIS **since 2023** in collaboration with the **ISRO** and the **Jute Corporation of India** to monitor jute cultivation using remote sensing and field data.

Need for JCIS

- Prior to the introduction of JCIS, the jute ecosystem was marked by structural limitations that constrained both planning and productivity.
- **Crop area and yield estimates** were largely **based on fragmented inputs** and expert assessments, often resulting in inconsistencies and delays.
- **Field data collection remained manual, with limited standardization** and absence of geo-referencing.
- Satellite, weather, and ground-level data operated in silos, with little scope for scientific validation.
- In addition, the **lack of real-time mechanisms to detect crop stress** arising from floods, droughts, pests, or temperature variations led to delayed responses and higher crop losses.
- At a broader level, limited granular visibility restricted identification of high-potential areas and constrained targeted interventions and policy formulation.

National Jute Board

- It is a **statutory body under the Ministry of Textiles**. It was formally enacted in 2009.
- It is headquartered in **Kolkata, West Bengal**, which is the major hub of India’s jute industry.
- The Board functions as the apex body for coordinating activities related to the jute sector and acts as a link between the government, jute farmers, industries, exporters, research institutions, and other stakeholders.
- It advises the government on matters relating to cultivation, production, research, exports, and market development of jute products.
- Its objective is to promote the use of eco-friendly and biodegradable jute products and to enhance the competitiveness of Indian jute goods in domestic and international markets.



Jute Crop Information System

- ❑ JCIS represents a shift towards a more structured and evidence-based approach to crop monitoring.
- ❑ Conceived as a multi-source information system, it **integrates satellite-based mapping, weather analytics, vegetation indices, historical datasets, and mobile-based field inputs onto a single platform**.
- ❑ As part of this initiative, **two key tools** have been developed:
 - ➔ **BHUVAN JUMP**: A mobile app for on-field jute monitoring; and
 - ➔ **PATSAN**: Prospective Assessment of Jute Using Mobile App-Based Field Observations, a web-based platform that provides near-real-time jute surveillance and analytics to support informed decision-making by officials and stakeholders.
- ❑ The system enables near real-time estimation of crop area and production, supports continuous monitoring of crop conditions, and facilitates automated reporting along with timely alerts.
- ❑ This has improved both the reliability of estimates and the responsiveness of the overall monitoring framework.
- ❑ At the institutional level, JCIS outputs have been integrated into planning and monitoring processes within the sector.
- ❑ The availability of consistent, geo-referenced data has improved alignment between state and national estimates and enabled more precise interventions.
- ❑ Satellite-based assessments for recent years have provided a coherent picture of jute cultivation across major producing states, indicating improved methodological consistency.
- ❑ The system has also strengthened risk assessment capabilities. The development of a quantitative flood impact model, supported by satellite observations and field validation, has enabled objective estimation of yield and quality losses in affected areas.
- ❑ In parallel, the incorporation of weather analytics has supported an early warning framework, with alerts on rainfall patterns, dry spells, and temperature variations aiding district-level planning and response.
- ❑ The system's ability to generate actionable insights has improved the quality of decision-making across different levels, while also creating a basis for continuous refinement through feedback and capacity building.

South Coast Railway Zone

- The Ministry of Railways has notified the country's 18th railway zone, the South Coast Railway (SCoR) zone **headquartered at Visakhapatnam**.
- The zone has been created to improve railway administration in **Andhra Pradesh** and to fulfil commitments made under the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014 after the bifurcation of the State.
 - Earlier, railway administration in the State was divided mainly between South Central Railway and East Coast Railway, leading to administrative fragmentation.
- The new zone will consist mainly of the **Vijayawada, Guntur and Guntakal divisions** from South Central Railway along with the **newly formed Visakhapatnam division** carved out from the earlier Waltair Division of East Coast Railway.
- SCoR Zone is strategically important because Andhra Pradesh has a long coastline, major ports, industrial corridors, thermal power stations, cement industries, and mineral transport networks. Rail connectivity is crucial for freight movement in the region.
- The zone is expected to strengthen freight movement, port connectivity (to ports such as Visakhapatnam, Gangavaram, Krishnapatnam) and logistics infrastructure on the eastern coast.

Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme 5.0

- The Union Cabinet has approved the fifth version of the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS 5.0) to provide additional financial support to businesses facing liquidity pressures due to the ongoing West Asia situation.
- The scheme will enable banks and financial institutions to **extend additional credit** to eligible borrowers with **government-backed guarantees through the National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company Limited (NCGTC)**
- It aims to facilitate a **total additional credit flow of Rs 2.55 lakh crore**, including Rs 5,000 crore for the airline sector.

Features of the Scheme

- **Eligible borrowers:** MSMEs and non-MSMEs with existing working capital limits and scheduled passenger airlines having outstanding credit facilities, as of March 31, 2026, provided their accounts are classified as standard.
- **Guarantee coverage:** MSMEs will receive **100% guarantee coverage** on the additional credit extended, while **non-MSMEs and airlines will be covered up to 90%**.
- The guarantee will apply to the amount in default, reducing the risk for lending institutions.
- **Quantum of Support:** The scheme allows additional credit of up to 20% of the peak working capital utilised during the fourth quarter of FY 2025–26, with a cap of Rs 100 crore per borrower.
 - For airlines, the additional credit can go up to 100%, subject to a ceiling of Rs 1,500 crore per borrower and compliance with specified conditions.
- **Tenure of loan:** Loans under the scheme will have a **tenure of five years for MSMEs and non-MSMEs**, including a moratorium period of one year.
 - For **airlines** the loan tenure will be **seven years**, with a two-year moratorium.
- **Tenure of guarantee cover:** The guarantee cover will remain valid for the entire loan duration.
- **Scheme duration:** The scheme will be applicable to loans sanctioned from the date of issuance of guidelines by NCGTC **until March 31, 2027**.

Impact

- The scheme aims to enable businesses to tide over the challenges arising from the West Asia conflict.
- Additionally, this is expected to help businesses maintain their operations, protect jobs, and sustain supply chains. It will also promote uninterrupted domestic production.

Withholding Tax to be Reduced

- Capital outflows have eroded India's foreign exchange reserves by nearly \$38 billion since March this year amid the West Asia conflict.
- To address this, the government is considering to **reduce the withholding tax from 20% to the earlier 5%** as it looks to revive overseas inflows.
- The move assumes significance as the government has already proposed several measures to curb outflows and manage the external account, including cuts in expenditure and restrictions on foreign travel, gold imports etc.

Withholding Tax

- It is a **tax collected at the source of income**. Instead of waiting for an investor or foreign company to pay taxes at the end of the financial year, the government requires the payer to deduct a portion of the income before it is remitted to the recipient.
- The deducted amount is then **directly deposited with the government**.
- In simple terms, whenever income is earned — whether through employment, investments, royalties or other sources — the government ensures tax collection in advance through withholding tax.

Impact on FPIs

- The withholding tax reduces FPIs effective yields and overall investment returns because it is deducted at the source before interest, dividends or other investment income is remitted to them.
- This **reduces investors' post-tax returns, weakens the power of long-term compounding** and limits the amount of capital available for immediate reinvestment.
- For large global investors operating across multiple jurisdictions, such deductions can also create **short-term liquidity constraints by locking up funds** until tax credits or refunds are processed.
- In addition, FPIs often face significant **administrative and compliance burdens** in claiming relief under DTAA's.
- Higher withholding taxes may therefore reduce the attractiveness of a market by increasing transaction costs, lowering risk-adjusted returns and creating regulatory friction for overseas investors.

Need for Cutting or Eliminating Withholding Tax

- FPIs hold a relatively small share (~3%) of **India's government debt market**, though their exposure has risen sharply after India's inclusion in global bond indices such as the JPMorgan Government Bond Index-Emerging Market (GBI-EM)
 - At the end of March 2025, FPI investment in Indian dated securities jumped **by 43.2% to 43.9 billion** from its level of 30.6 billion at end-March 2024.
- Inclusion in global bond indices was delayed by taxation and procedural hurdles such as the high withholding tax.

Background

- ◆ India had introduced a concessional 5% withholding tax rate on interest earned by foreign investors from investments in government securities and certain rupee-denominated bonds under the Income Tax Act.
- ◆ However, the concessional regime expired in July 2023. Post that, the withholding tax applicable to many foreign investors reverted to around 20%, making India one of the relatively higher-tax jurisdictions for global bond investors.
- ◆ The higher tax burden reduced the attractiveness of Indian debt instruments at a time when the country was also seeking greater foreign capital inflows and inclusion in global bond indices.
- ◆ India's withholding tax regime has also evolved significantly over the decades in other areas. In 1976, withholding tax on royalties paid to non-residents was fixed at 40%, while fees for technical services (FTS) attracted a 20% levy.
- ◆ Between 1986 and 2005, the government sharply reduced the withholding tax rate on both royalties and technical services to 10% to lower technology acquisition costs for Indian companies and encourage foreign collaboration.

Scenario in other countries

- ◆ Most countries impose some form of withholding tax on foreign investors, especially on passive income such as dividends, interest and royalties.
- ◆ However, the rates, scope and exemptions vary widely depending on the country, the type of investor and whether a Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) exists with the investor's home country.
- ◆ The US imposes a 30% tax, Germany 26.4%, France 25% and China 10%. **Hong Kong and Singapore don't have a withholding tax.**

- The inclusion could imply \$45-50 billion of inflows over two years, and greater allocation from pension funds/endowments.
- Thus, lowering the withholding tax could improve post-tax returns for foreign investors, make Indian debt and other financial assets more attractive, and help stabilise forex reserves amid heightened global uncertainty.

Mission Arunachal Kiwi

The Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (MoDNER) has launched the **Mission on Arunachal Kiwi: The USP of Arunachal Pradesh**.

Kiwi Production in Arunachal Pradesh

- Arunachal Pradesh's high-altitude climate and organic farming conditions are ideal for premium kiwi cultivation, especially Hayward and Allison varieties.
- Kiwi farming has already expanded across 13 districts, covering more than 3,582 hectares and supporting over 1,500 farmers.
- Arunachal Pradesh's kiwi harvest season from November to January coincides with New Zealand's off-season, creating a unique opening in Southeast Asian, Middle Eastern and European markets
- Arunachal Pradesh currently contributes more than 50% of India's kiwi production, producing over 7,050 metric tonnes annually.
- However, despite its dominant position, local farmers receive significantly lower prices.

Mission details

- ✔ Launched with an outlay of around **Rs 167 crore**, it is aimed at transforming Arunachal Pradesh into India's **premium organic kiwi hub** with strong domestic and global market presence.
- ✔ It adopts a **cluster-based development model** covering **six major post-harvest management** hubs across Ziro Valley, Dirang, Kalaktang, Shi Yomi and Dibang Valley.
- ✔ It seeks to **strengthen the entire kiwi value chain** – from cultivation and post-harvest management to branding, exports and agri-tourism.
- ✔ It is built around **four strategic pillars** — **convergence, value addition, branding and market integration**.
- ✔ It aims to restore Arunachal Pradesh's lapsed National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP) certification, establish cold-chain infrastructure, reduce distress sales during the short 7–10-day harvest window, and improve value realisation for farmers.
- ✔ Its key targets include the creation of 2,000 metric tonnes of cold storage capacity, promotion of kiwi-based startups, improvement in processing facilities and expansion into export markets by 2028.
- ✔ It also aims to **promote kiwi orchard tourism and farm-stay experiences** in areas such as Ziro Valley and Dirang, combining horticulture with experiential tourism.
- ✔ There are plans to position "Arunachal Organic Kiwi" as part of the broader "Brand North East" initiative, alongside products such as Meghalaya's Lakadong Turmeric, Mizoram ginger, Nagaland coffee and Tripura's Queen pineapple.
- ✔ The Mission is expected to reduce post-harvest losses, improve farm-gate earnings, generate rural employment opportunities and encourage greater participation of youth and farmer producer organisations in the kiwi economy.
- ✔ It aligns with the government's vision of **Viksit North East** and aims to ensure that **farmers become stakeholders across the entire agricultural value chain** from farm to fork.

Q-SAFE Committee

- The RBI has constituted an eight-member Expert Committee for a "**Quantum Secure and Adaptive Financial Ecosystem (Q-SAFE)**" to explore and evaluate the potential benefits, risks and challenges of **Quantum Technology in the financial sector**.
- The committee is headed by **Prof. Anil Prabhakar** from IIT Madras and the FinTech Department of the RBI will provide secretarial support to the committee.
- Quantum technology represents a major technological shift as compared to traditional systems as it uses principles of quantum mechanics such as **superposition** and **entanglement**.
- This enables quantum systems to address complex financial problems such as portfolio optimisation, risk assessment, and macroeconomic modeling.
- However, quantum technologies can also introduce significant risks, particularly the potential to undermine certain existing cryptographic standards.
- India has one of the world's largest digital financial ecosystems, including UPI-based payments, digital banking, fintech platforms, and large-scale digital public infrastructure. As quantum computing advances

globally, securing financial systems against future quantum threats has become critical for maintaining financial stability, cybersecurity, and trust in digital transactions.

Key Tasks

- The committee will evaluate the financial sector’s cryptographic inventory through a Cryptography Bill of Materials (CBOM), assess crypto agility and identify the critical systems and processes most vulnerable to such threats.
- It will undertake a cross-country analysis and assess the adequacy of existing regulatory frameworks for the safe deployment of quantum applications.
- Further, it will evaluate industry preparedness for the adoption of quantum-safe cryptography, including the availability, scalability, and maturity of vendor tools and solutions.
- The committee will submit its report in six months and will recommend a roadmap and framework to quantum-secure the Indian financial system.

MoU between AYUSHEXCIL and Spices Board

- In a significant step towards strengthening India’s global leadership in traditional wellness and natural products, an MoU has been signed between AYUSHEXCIL and the Spices Board of India.
- The partnership aims to promote global cooperation in Ayush products and medicinal spices by focusing on export promotion, quality assurance, standardisation, research, innovation and international market development.
- Both organizations will work together on branding initiatives, traceability frameworks, scientific validation, capacity building, Codex engagement, and joint participation in international trade fairs and promotional activities.
- It is expected to create new opportunities for exporters, farmers, MSMEs, startups, women entrepreneurs, and stakeholders across the Ayush and spices sectors, thereby enhancing India’s export growth and global visibility in the wellness economy.
- It would also lead to employment generation, rural development and farmer empowerment.
- The partnership aligns with the vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat, Vocal for Local, Make in India and Heal in India
- The event also highlighted the proposed “**Spice and Heal**” initiative, that has the potential to emerge as a powerful branding campaign positioning India as a global leader in holistic health and natural healing solutions.



AYUSHEXCIL

- ❖ AYUSHEXCIL (Ayush Export Promotion Council), is an **export promotion body** supported by the **Ministry of Ayush** and the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**.
- ❖ It was incorporated in 2022, to promote exports of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Sowa-Rigpa and Homoeopathy) products and services globally.
- ❖ It also seeks to address trade-related challenges, improve international market access and strengthen India’s position in the global traditional medicine and wellness economy.
- ❖ One of its initiatives is the “**Ayush Quality Mark**” programme, which aims to establish internationally credible quality standards for AYUSH products and services.

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 the flagship organization for the development and worldwide promotion of Indian spices. It acts as an international link between the Indian exporters and the importers abroad.

Past Risk and Return Verification Agency

- The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has operationalised the Past Risk and Return Verification Agency (PaRRVA), aimed at **enhancing transparency and investor protection in the financial markets**.
- **PaRRVA** is a regulatory framework to ensure **independent verification of past performance claims** made by market intermediaries such as Investment Advisers and Research Analysts.
- The pilot phase of PaRRVA was launched in December 2025. Following its successful completion, the agency will begin regular operations from May 2026.
- **CARE Ratings Limited** has been **granted recognition as the PaRRVA**.

- The **National Stock Exchange of India Limited (NSE)** will function as the PaRRVA Data Centre (PDC) responsible for handling data infrastructure and processing.
- PaRRVA will bring standardisation in performance reporting, curb mis-selling and misleading advertisements, especially by unregulated influencers.
- It will enable regulated entities such as investment advisers, research analysts, and algorithmic trading service providers to showcase their verified performance in their advertisements.
- This will also allow investors to access reliable and authenticated performance data, enhancing investor confidence and improving informed decision-making.
- In the process it will eventually strengthen market integrity and regulatory oversight.

India's First Mega Greenfield Shipyard

- A landmark tripartite MoU has been signed for the development of the country's **first mega greenfield shipyard at Thoothukudi** in Tamil Nadu.
- The agreement was signed between HD Korea Shipbuilding & Offshore Engineering (HD KSOE), National Shipbuilding & Heavy Industries Park, Tamil Nadu Limited (NSHIP-TN), and Sagarmala Finance Corporation Limited under the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways.
- The project has been launched under the **India-Republic of Korea maritime cooperation framework 'VOYAGES'** (Shared Vision for Operation of Yard Assisted Growth with Efficiency and Scale).
- The mega facility will serve as the anchor unit of the **Thoothukudi Shipbuilding Cluster** being developed by NSHIP-TN.
- The proposed cluster has also received in-principle approval under the National Shipbuilding Mission.
- The proposed shipyard is expected to have an annual shipbuilding **capacity of 2.5 million Gross Tonnage (GT)**, making it one of the largest maritime infrastructure projects in the country.

Background

- ✦ The development is aligned with India's Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047, which aims to place India among the **world's top five shipbuilding nations with a targeted output of 4.5 million GT annually by 2047**.
- ✦ The Centre had earlier announced a comprehensive **Rs 70,000 crore shipbuilding policy package** in September 2025 to strengthen India's maritime manufacturing capabilities and attract global investment into the sector.
- ✦ Since the launch of the policy package, Indian shipyards have witnessed growing international interest and order inflows, reflecting increasing confidence in the country's shipbuilding capabilities and green technology readiness.

Impact

- ✦ The partnership under the VOYAGES framework would bring world-class technology, innovation and green shipbuilding capabilities to India, while strengthening the country's maritime ecosystem.
- ✦ The project will accelerate the growth of a broader maritime industrial ecosystem through ancillary manufacturing clusters, localisation of marine equipment supply chains, workforce training initiatives, and adoption of advanced digital and green shipbuilding technologies.
- ✦ It will facilitate specialised training for Indian professionals and workers at HD KSOE facilities in South Korea.
- ✦ It is expected to generate nearly 15,000 direct jobs after operations stabilise, besides creating substantial indirect employment opportunities.
- ✦ It will aid Thoothukudi to emerge as a major global maritime and industrial hub as India advances towards achieving the goals of Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047.

Achievements of PMFME Scheme

The Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI) shared the achievements of the Pradhan Mantri Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises (PMFME) Scheme.

Background

- The scheme was conceptualised to address the challenges faced by India's unorganised micro food processing sector.
- The unorganized food processing sector in the country comprises nearly **25 lakh food processing enterprises** which are **unregistered and informal**.
- The sector has historically faced **constraints** related to access to credit, modern technology, branding, packaging, quality standards and organised market linkages.

- Increasing food processing levels has been recognized as critical for reducing wastage, improving farmers' income realization, and generating employment.
- However, dedicated institutional support for modernization and scaling up of micro food processing enterprises remained limited.

Scheme Details

- PMFME was launched as a centrally sponsored scheme in 2020 under MoFPI as part of the Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan.
- It has an outlay of Rs. 10,000 crore, for implementation during 2020-21 to 2024-25 and has been extended till September 2026.
- PMFME scheme was specifically designed to bridge the gaps by addressing the challenges faced by micro-enterprises while utilising the potential of cooperatives to drive upgradation, formalization, and sustainable growth.

Key Components

- **Credit-Linked Subsidy:** 35% Subsidy for Individual Micro Food Processing Enterprises (maximum Rs10 lakh) to set up or upgrade their individual micro food processing enterprises.
 - ✓ **35% Credit-linked Subsidy** for Farmer Producer Organisation (FPO), Farmer Producer Company (FPC), Self Help Group (SHG), etc. to set up or upgrade **Common Infrastructure** (maximum Rs 3 Crore).
- **Seed Capital** of Rs. 40,000/- per SHG member engaged in food processing for working capital and the purchase of small tools.
- **Capacity Building:** provides structured training, including Entrepreneurship Development Programme (EDP) training for individual and group applicants.
- **Incubation Centres:** Establishment and strengthening of Common Incubation Centre, to function as local hubs for processing, training, testing and entrepreneurship development.
- **Branding & Marketing:** 50% financial grant for branding and marketing support to groups of FPOs/SHGs to develop and promote their existing or proposed brands.
- Support for ODOP brands in trademark registration, product standardization, packaging material, e-commerce and trade promotion.

Achievements

- MoFPI highlighted the scheme's growing impact on entrepreneurship, rural livelihoods, women-led enterprises and market integration of micro food processing units.
- A total of **1,96,270 individual micro food processing enterprises** have been supported under the Credit Linked Subsidy component with more than **40% of beneficiaries being women entrepreneurs**.
- Seed Capital assistance has been approved for more than 4 lakhs SHG members.
- The scheme has also covered 1,72,870 beneficiaries and other stakeholders under capacity building programme.
- 80 incubation centres have been approved, of which 31 centres have already been commissioned to facilitate technology adoption, innovation and entrepreneurship development.
- A total of 1,164 micro enterprises have directly benefited from branding and marketing assistance.
- Further, MoFPI has also signed an MoU with the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) to facilitate on boarding and market assistance for PMFME-supported enterprises on the GeM portal.
- The scheme has led to a significant increase in the formalisation of micro food processing enterprises across the country, with a growing number of entrepreneurs obtaining FSSAI registration and adopting improved food safety, quality and packaging standards.
- PMFME beneficiaries have actively participated in national and international exhibitions including World Food India, AAHAR and SIAL India, enabling enhanced market access and product visibility.
- It has also contributed significantly to local employment generation, by supporting livelihood opportunities for 5,88,810 individuals across the food processing value chain.
- By strengthening processing, preservation and value addition infrastructure at the grassroots level, the scheme has helped reduce post-harvest losses, enhance income opportunities for rural entrepreneurs and stimulate local economic activity.

Reforms Introduced under PM-WANI

- In a major step towards strengthening India's digital public infrastructure, the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has introduced user-friendly reforms under the PM-WANI (Prime Minister's Wi-Fi Access Network Interface) framework.
- The reforms are part of the government's vision to **provide accessible and affordable digital connectivity for every citizen**.

New Measures

Simplified Laptop Connection via QR Authentication

- The DoT now permits QR-based authentication for laptops & secondary devices to ease PM-WANI access.

- Users can connect by scanning a QR code using an authenticated smartphone app, reducing friction for a faster, secure experience.

Flexible Short-Duration Access Plans

- To assist users at public locations like transit hubs and malls, the DoT has advised operators to offer sachet-style validity plans of **15, 30, and 60 minutes**.
- These plans enhance affordability for commuters and students while boosting operator revenue and hotspot utilisation.

Standardised Hotspot Identification

- Service Set Identifier (SSID) nomenclature is now standardised with **PM-WANI branding** to help users identify authentic networks with enhanced reliability.
- SSID is a unique identifier that allows devices to connect to a Wi-Fi network. In simple terms, it is the public, human-readable name of the Wi-Fi network.

Earlier Reforms


- In 2024, DoT allowed PDOs to use regular Fibre-to-the-Home (FTTH) broadband connections, aggregate multiple access points, enable roaming across different PDOA networks, and integrate existing home or business Wi-Fi networks into the PM-WANI framework.
- In 2025, TRAI capped broadband connectivity charges for PDOs to make public Wi-Fi services more affordable and encourage further expansion of hotspots.

PM-WANI

- **Launched in 2020** by the **Department of Telecommunications (DoT)**, PM-WANI is a framework to promote the **large-scale deployment of public Wi-Fi hotspots** across India.
- It aims to improve affordable broadband access, strengthen digital connectivity, and bridge the digital divide, particularly in rural and underserved areas.
- It seeks to create a decentralized public Wi-Fi ecosystem by allowing small shopkeepers, local entrepreneurs, and establishments to provide internet services through Wi-Fi hotspots without requiring a telecom licence, registration, or fee from the government.
- This approach is intended to encourage **the ease of doing business and expand last-mile internet access**.
- As of February 2026, more than **4.09 lakh PM-WANI public Wi-Fi hotspots** (Public Data Offices (PDOs)) have been onboarded across the country.

Components: The framework consists of four major components:

- **Public Data Offices (PDOs)**, which establish and operate Wi-Fi hotspots and provide internet access to users;
- **Public Data Office Aggregators (PDOAs)**, which manage authorization, accounting, and related services for PDOs;
- **App Providers**, which develop applications for user authentication and hotspot discovery; and
- A **Central Registry**, maintained by **C-DoT (Centre for Development of Telematics)**, which stores details of PDOs, PDOAs, and app providers.



Country Strategic Opportunities Programme with IFAD

- The Union Government, in partnership with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), has launched a new eight-year Country Strategic Opportunities Programme (COSOP) for the period 2026–2033.
- The announcement was made at the **IFAD–India Partnership for Rural Prosperity event**
- It is aimed at enhancing rural incomes, strengthening resilience, and scaling sustainable livelihood opportunities across the country.

International Fund for Agricultural Development

- **Established in 1977**, in response to a global food crisis, IFAD is a **specialized United Nations agency** and an International Financial Institution focused on eradicating hunger and poverty in developing countries.
- **Headquartered in Rome**, it invests in rural communities to empower them to improve their food security, income and resilience.
- It finances projects giving rural populations access to financial services, markets, technology, land, and skills
- It supports climate adaptation, disaster preparedness, and sustainable resource management in fragile regions.
- India's partnership with IFAD spans nearly five decades, with **35 rural development projects** implemented across multiple states, supporting millions of rural households and contributing significantly to inclusive growth.
- IFAD's programs in India have remained closely integrated with national priorities – supporting agricultural transformation, livelihood diversification, women's empowerment, and institutional strengthening.



- The COSOP 2026–2033 focuses on **two strategic priorities**:
 - Enhancing the social, economic, and climate resilience of *rural communities*; and
 - Strengthening knowledge systems to scale proven development models across *India and other countries of the Global South*.
- It places strong emphasis on strengthening grassroots institutions such as SHGs, FPOs, and cooperatives, which serve as key platforms connecting finance, technology, infrastructure, and markets.
- It also aims to position India as a knowledge leader in *rural development*, facilitating the sharing of successful models—such as inclusive rural finance, cooperative governance, digital agriculture services, and climate-resilient value chains—with partner countries across Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America.

Scheme to Boost Coal Gasification

- The Union Cabinet has approved a Scheme for Promotion of Surface Coal/Lignite Gasification Projects.
- The scheme is a major step towards accelerating India’s coal/lignite gasification programme and advancing the national target of gasifying 100 Million Tonnes (MT) of coal by 2030.
- In a significant accompanying reform, the government has also extended coal linkage tenure up to 30 years under the *“Production of Syngas leading to Coal Gasification”* sub-sector in the Non-Regulated Sector (NRS) linkage auction framework.
- This provides long-term policy certainty for investment in coal gasification projects.

Background

- India holds one of the world’s largest coal reserves (~401 billion tonnes) and lignite reserves (~47 billion tonnes). Coal accounts for over 55% of the country’s energy mix.
- Gasification converts coal/lignite into ‘synthesis gas’ (syngas), a versatile feedstock for producing fuels and chemicals domestically, enabling India to substitute high-value imports and insulate itself from global supply disruptions and price volatility.
- India’s import bill for key substitutable products LNG, urea, ammonium nitrate, ammonia, coking coal, methanol, DME and others stood at approximately Rs 2.77 lakh crore in FY2025, a vulnerability further exposed by the ongoing geopolitical situation in West Asia.
- Building on the National Coal Gasification Mission (2021) the new Scheme builds on this momentum with significantly enhanced support.

Key features

- ❖ Total **financial outlay of Rs 37,500 crore** to incentivize new surface coal/lignite gasification projects for production of syngas and its downstream products, targeting **gasification of approximately 75 Million Tonne of coal/lignite**.
- ❖ Financial incentive will be provided at a maximum of 20% of the cost of Plant and Machinery.
- ❖ Selection will take place through a transparent and competitive bidding process, with an evaluation framework benchmarking project cost, coal input, and syngas output.
- ❖ Incentive will be disbursed in four equal instalments, linked to project milestones.
- ❖ Financial incentive for any single project capped at **Rs 5,000 crore**; for any single product (except Synthetic Natural Gas and Urea) capped at **Rs 9,000 crore**; and any single entity group capped at **Rs 12,000 crore** across all projects.
- ❖ Incentive under the Scheme is in addition to, and does not restrict access to, incentives under the commercial coal mining regime or schemes of other Central/State Government ministries.
- ❖ The scheme is technology-agnostic and adoption of indigenous technologies is encouraged.

Strategic and Economic Benefits

- ❖ It is expected that the scheme will lead to **investment mobilisation of Rs 2.5 to 3 lakh crore**.
- ❖ Coal/lignite utilization will lead to **revenue generation of Rs 6,300 crore annually** from 75 Million Tonne of gasification, plus downstream revenue from GST and other levies.
- ❖ It will strengthen India’s domestic surface coal gasification capability by advancing indigenous technologies and minimising reliance on foreign Engineering Procurement and Construction (EPC) contractors.
- ❖ It will strengthen the country’s energy security and reduce dependence on imports of key products such as LNG (more than 50% imported), urea (~20% imported), ammonia (~100% imported), and methanol (~80–90% imported).
- ❖ It is projected to create around 50,000 jobs across 25 projects in coal-bearing regions.

Capital Adequacy Norms Revised

- The Reserve Bank of India has revised guidelines related to the inclusion of quarterly profits in banks' Common Equity Tier 1 (CET1) capital for the computation of the Capital to Risk Weighted Assets Ratio (CRAR).
- Under the earlier framework, commercial banks — excluding local area banks and regional rural banks — were permitted to include quarterly profits in CRAR calculations only on certain conditions related to non-performing asset (NPA) provisions.
 - The revised norms apply to commercial banks, small finance banks and payments banks.
- The revised framework removes this qualifying condition related to NPA provisions, simplifying the process for banks.
- The revised norms are expected to streamline quarterly capital calculations and provide banks with a simpler framework for including quarterly profits in capital adequacy assessments.

Capital to Risk-Weighted Assets Ratio (CRAR)

- ▷ CRAR also known as the Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) is a key **bank safety and stability measure**. It measures a bank's financial strength by **comparing its capital to its risk weighted assets**. It shows **how well a bank can absorb losses**.
- ▷ A **high CRAR denotes higher safety** of the bank and a lower CRAR signifies underlying risks.

Common Equity Tier1 (CET1)

- ▷ CET1 capital includes the **core capital that a bank holds** in its capital structure. The **core capital of a bank** includes equity capital and disclosed reserves such as retained earnings.
- ✓ **Equity Capital** refers to that portion of the organization's capital, which is **raised in exchange for the share of ownership in the company**.
- ▷ CET1 ratio compares a bank's capital against its Risk-Weighted Assets (RWAs) to **determine its ability to prevent financial distress**.
- ▷ The additional CET1 requirement as a percentage of RWAs is set at 0.80% for SBI, 0.40% for HDFC Bank and 0.20% for ICICI Bank.

SARTHAK PDS

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved the continuation of the Scheme for Assistance in Ration Transport and Handling-Income with Automation in Public Distribution System (SARTHAK PDS).
- The scheme has been approved with an **outlay of Rs 25,530 crore**, for the duration of the **16th Finance Commission cycle (i.e. till March 2031)**.

Key features

- SARTHAK-PDS does not replace the existing PDS system but will ensure structural reform across the delivery of foodgrains, logistics, transportation, material handling, and grievance redressal
- It has been conceived as an **umbrella scheme** integrating the ongoing schemes:
 - Assistance to State Agencies for intra-State movement of foodgrains and FPS dealers' margin under National Food Security Act (NFSA) and
 - Scheme for Modernization and Reforms through Technology in Public Distribution System (SMART PDS).
- The merger is expected to strengthen the NFSA's implementation under a single administrative framework.
- It aims to provide assured financial support for intra-State movement, handling and Fair Price Shop (FPS) dealer's margin.
- It also envisages a unified citizen-centric, intelligent and interoperable PDS architecture for last-mile service delivery, and minimising leakages.
- Advanced technologies, including Artificial Intelligence, machine learning, blockchain, and natural language processing will enable real-time monitoring, grievance and analytics systems.
- It will also lead to data-driven oversight by State Command Control Centres, and ISO-certified process frameworks for security and transparency.

SHE-MART

The Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) has initiated a nationwide roadmap for the creation of **women-led** rural marketing ecosystems through SHE-MARTs (Self Help Entrepreneurs-Marketing Avenues for Rural Transformation).

Key Features

- **Community-Owned Retail Outlets:** Retail outlets owned and managed by local women's groups within cluster-level federations, ensuring community control and ownership.
- **Direct Market Access:** Creating structured retail platforms for women entrepreneurs to sell products and access formal markets without intermediaries.
- **Economic Growth:** Moving women up the economic value chain from income generation to enterprise ownership, transforming them from earners to business owners.

- **Permanent Infrastructure:** Permanent retail points for SHG-made goods with value-added product support, ensuring sustainable business operations.
- **Empowerment:** Greater control over markets, branding, and sustainable income generation, empowering women economically and socially.

Eligibility

- **Women Entrepreneurs:** Women running home-based or micro businesses;
- **Self-Help Group Members:** Active members of registered SHGs;
- **Rural Micro-Enterprises:** Small businesses operating in rural areas;
- **Women-led Cooperatives:** Cooperative societies led by women;
- **Agricultural & Allied Sectors:** Women in farming, handicrafts, textiles, food processing;
- **First-time Entrepreneurs:** Women starting their first business venture.

Factor	Lakhpati Didi (Scheme)	SHE Marts (Smart/Retail)
Primary Goal	Income generation (>1 Lakh/year).	Enterprise creation & market access.
Focus	Skills, micro-enterprise training, & credit.	Permanent retail presence & marketing.
Stage	Early/Stabilized Livelihood.	Business Expansion/Scaling.
Scale	Household level.	Retail ecosystem/Cluster level.
Economic Role	Participation (Self-Help Groups).	Ownership (SHG Federations).

ILO Complaint By Tea Workers

- Tea plantations workers in West Bengal have raised issues of labour rights violations with the International Labour Organization (ILO) by invoking the Article 24 of the ILO constitution.
- The complaint filed by the Paschim Banga Cha Majoor Samity (PBCMS), a trade union, has raised issues like poor working conditions, continued non-payment of dues, discrimination, and denial of basic labour protections.
- The issue is significant as West Bengal has more than **300 tea estates employing over three lakh workers**, particularly in the Darjeeling, Terai, and Dooars regions.
- The sector has been facing challenges such as low tea prices, rising production costs, climate-related stresses, closure of estates, and irregular employment.

Article 24

- Article 24 enables **industrial associations of employers or workers** to file a representation against any member state that has failed to secure the effective implementation of a ratified ILO convention within its jurisdiction.
- Individual citizens or private persons cannot directly invoke this provision.
- The complaint must relate specifically to the non-observance of a convention that the concerned country has formally ratified.
- Article 24 is significant because it provides an international platform to raise labour rights concerns and encourages governments to improve implementation of labour laws and international commitments.
- Although the ILO cannot impose direct economic sanctions, the mechanism creates international scrutiny and moral pressure on governments to address labour rights violations.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Deepening Russia-China Ties and the Challenge for India

- Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Beijing— just days after US President Donald Trump's visit.
- The back-to-back summits with the world's two most powerful leaders underscored China's emergence as the central hub of global diplomacy in an increasingly multipolar world.
- The contrast was striking:
 - Trump's visit yielded little in immediate concrete outcomes
 - Putin's visit produced a joint statement and over 40 agreements
- Without directly naming the US, Xi warned of "unilateral and hegemonic countercurrents running rampant" in the world.
- Both leaders reiterated support for: A multipolar world order; Democratisation of global institutions.

The Deepening Russia-China Strategic Partnership

- Russia and China have built a relationship of **strong political and economic interdependence** driven by complementary strengths (*given in table*)

- **Economic interdependence by numbers:**

- Western sanctions post-Ukraine war have made Russia heavily dependent on China.

- China now accounts for ~32% of Russia's total trade — approximately \$228 billion out of \$700 billion in 2025.

China Provides	Russia Provides
Markets, technology, and capital	Energy and defence products
Semiconductors and industrial technology	Power of Siberia gas pipelines
Automobiles, telecom, electronics (filling Western vacuum)	Strategic geopolitical partnership

- Bilateral trade increasingly conducted in yuan and ruble — signalling growing de-dollarisation.

Implications for India: A Shrinking Strategic Space

- The deepening Russia-China partnership poses a significant and growing strategic challenge for India.
- For two decades, India maintained a careful balance:
 - Deepening security ties with the United States
 - Preserving strong strategic relations with Russia
- This balancing act is now under serious strain as:
 - Russia grows increasingly dependent on China — reducing its strategic autonomy and its value to India as an independent counterweight.
 - The US is simultaneously engaging China — reducing Washington's utility as a clean counterbalance to Beijing.
 - Both Washington and Moscow are drawn closer to Beijing — squeezing India's diplomatic space from both sides.
- **Key Security Concerns for India**
 - **Defence supply chain** - India's dependence on Russian weapons systems (Su-30 MKI, T-90 tanks, S-400) becomes more complex as Russia aligns deeper with China.
 - **China's growing clout** - A Russia that is economically and diplomatically subordinate to China reduces India's ability to use Russia as a balancer against China.
 - **Continental security** - Reliance on the US for continental security balancing appears increasingly uncertain under current geopolitical conditions.
 - **Historical precedent** - The 1970s Sino-Soviet split enabled US-China rapprochement — adversely affecting India's security; today's Russia-China closeness could have a parallel impact.

What India Must Do?

- India may need to recalibrate its strategic approach — moving beyond its traditional two-pillar balancing strategy.
- Build greater strategic self-reliance in defence manufacturing (Aatmanirbhar Bharat).
- Deepen engagement with the Quad, Europe, and the Global South to diversify its strategic partnerships.
- Actively shape — rather than simply react to — the emerging multipolar order.

Conclusion

- China is no longer merely a rising power — it is the indispensable interlocutor in every major global crisis: the Iran war, Ukraine, trade, AI, and the future of the international order.
- Beijing is simultaneously managing its rivalry with Washington and deepening its alliance with Moscow — a dual-track strategy that maximises China's leverage.
- For India, sandwiched between a US-China managed rivalry and a deepening Russia-China axis, the strategic environment has never been more complex.

PM Modi's Visit to UAE

- PM Modi visited the UAE during a multi-nation European tour; held talks with UAE President Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan in Abu Dhabi.
- **Visit backdrop:** Iranian missile/drone attacks on UAE; concerns over disruptions in global energy supply via the Strait of Hormuz.
- UAE announced USD 5 billion in investments in India; several major agreements signed.

Key Outcomes of the Visit

- **Energy Security — The Central Pillar**
 - UAE: India's 4th-largest crude oil supplier and largest LPG supplier (~40% of India's LPG requirement).
 - **ISPRL–ADNOC Strategic Collaboration**
 - ♣ UAE participation in India's Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPRs) to increase to 30 million barrels.
 - ♣ India's SPR facilities: Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru, and Padur (ADNOC already stored 5.86 million barrels at Mangaluru in 2018).
 - ♣ Possible collaboration on LNG storage, LPG storage, and strategic gas reserves in India.
 - ♣ This strengthens energy resilience, reduces vulnerability to supply shocks, enhances strategic autonomy.
 - **IOCL–ADNOC Long-Term LPG Supply Agreement**
 - ♣ Ensures stable, long-term LPG supply for India's domestic cooking fuel demand.
 - ♣ Helps stabilise prices and supply chains.
- **Defence & Security Cooperation**
 - Finalised a framework agreement for a strategic defence partnership.
 - Areas covered: defence industrial collaboration, joint training & military exercises, maritime security, cyber defence, secure communications, and advanced technology.
 - Reflects India's growing security engagement in the **Gulf region**; enhances maritime cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- **Maritime & Shipping Cooperation**
 - MoU between Cochin Shipyard Limited and Drydocks World for:
 - ♣ Ship-repair cluster at Vadinar, Gujarat
 - ♣ Offshore fabrication under India's Maritime Development Fund Scheme
 - ♣ Skill development in shipbuilding and repair
- **Technology & Digital Cooperation**
 - C-DAC and G42 partnership to set up an "8 Exaflop Supercomputing Cluster".
 - Supports AI, climate modelling, defence simulations, and big data analytics.

- Reflects emerging India-UAE cooperation in frontier technologies.
- **Trade & Connectivity**
 - Virtual Trade Corridor (VTC) operationalised under the MAITRI (*Master Application for International Trade and Regulatory Interface*) framework.
 - Links customs and port authorities digitally — reduces logistics costs, cuts cargo transit time, improves customs coordination.
 - Deepens commercial integration; strengthens India's role in global supply chains.
- **UAE Investments in India**
 - The UAE announced investments worth USD 5 billion in India.
 - Investment components:
 - ♣ Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA) and NIIF (*National Investment and Infrastructure Fund*): Up to USD 1 billion in Indian infrastructure.
 - ♣ Emirates NBD: USD 3 billion investment in RBL Bank.
 - ♣ International Holding Company: USD 1 billion investment in Sammaan Capital.

India's Diplomatic Stand on West Asia Crisis

- Strongly condemned attacks on the UAE; reaffirmed India's solidarity.
- Emphasised dialogue and diplomacy for conflict resolution.
- Stressed the Strait of Hormuz must remain "free, open and safe".

Challenges from the India-UAE Gold Trade Deal

- Rising oil prices due to the **West Asia crisis** have pressured India's economy; PM Modi urged citizens to **reduce petroleum use, avoid non-essential foreign travel, and defer gold purchases** to conserve foreign exchange.
- India's gold import bill surged sharply in FY26, widening the **Current Account Deficit (CAD)** and weakening the rupee.
- Trade concessions granted to the **UAE under a bilateral deal** are suspected to have further accelerated gold imports, worsening the import bill.
- India's import system is heavily skewed toward **finished bullion** rather than **gold doré** (semi-processed gold) — limiting domestic refining and value addition.
- Tariff concessions under the UAE trade agreement **unintentionally made importing finished bullion more attractive than importing doré**, reversing the intended duty advantage for domestic processing.
- Result: Shift toward finished bullion imports has **increased the gold import bill** rather than supporting domestic value creation.

Conclusion

- The PM's UAE visit marks a decisive transformation of India-UAE ties — from a traditional energy relationship into a **multidimensional strategic partnership** spanning energy security, defence, technology, maritime cooperation, and trade.
- Given the volatile West Asia backdrop, the visit carries significance not just bilaterally but for **regional stability and India's global strategic positioning**.
{For detailed discussion on India-UAE relationship, refer The Recitals – January 2026}

India-Cyprus Relations: Elevated to Strategic Partnership

- Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides visited New Delhi — bilateral ties elevated to a Strategic Partnership.
- Cyprus currently holds the Presidency of the Council of the European Union — adding strategic weight to the visit.

Key Outcomes


- **Elevation to Strategic Partnership**
 - Reflects deepening convergence on global governance, connectivity, counter-terrorism, and economic resilience.
 - PM Modi described Cyprus as an "investment gateway" between India and Europe.
 - Both sides aim to double bilateral investment within the next five years.
- **Defence Cooperation**
 - MoU between Cyprus Defence and Space Industries Cluster and the Society of Indian Defence Manufacturers (SIDM) — paves the way for industrial collaboration.
 - Cyprus expressed interest in purchasing Indian defence equipment — potential new export market for India.
 - Cooperation areas: cybersecurity, maritime security, emerging technologies.
 - Increased military exchanges and training cooperation.

- Establishment of a dedicated Cybersecurity Dialogue.
- **Counter-Terrorism Pact**
 - MoU establishing a Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism.
 - Cyprus strongly condemned the Pahalgam terror attack and expressed unwavering solidarity with India.
- **IMEEC — Cyprus as Eastern Mediterranean Hub**
 - Cyprus has formed a '**Friends of IMEEC**' grouping within the EU — actively championing the corridor.
 - Offering transshipment facilities to address supply chain disruptions caused by the US-Israel-Iran conflict.
 - Cyprus's eastern Mediterranean location makes it a natural logistical and maritime node for IMEEC.
- **Economic & Connectivity Initiatives**
 - Direct flights between India and Cyprus to be launched soon — people-to-people and business connectivity.
 - New investment opportunities in India's shipping and maritime sectors for Cypriot investors.

Conclusion

- The elevation of India-Cyprus ties to a **Strategic Partnership** — though between a major power and a small island nation — carries outsized strategic significance.
- Cyprus's unique positioning as an EU member, IMEEC champion, eastern Mediterranean maritime hub, and investment gateway makes it a valuable partner for India's European and connectivity ambitions.
- The visit deepens India's **multi-nodal European engagement strategy** and reinforces India's growing role as a **balancing power** across the Indo-Mediterranean space.

India-Cyprus Bilateral Relations



- **Strategic & Diplomatic**
 - ✓ EU Gateway: Cyprus (EU member since 2004) serves as India's key bridge to the European Union.
 - ✓ UN Cooperation: Cyprus supports India's bid for permanent membership of a reformed UN Security Council.
- **Economic & Trade**
 - ✓ Bilateral trade: USD 140.47 million (April 2024 – March 2025) — modest but growing.
 - ✓ Cyprus is among India's top 10 foreign investors — Cypriot investment routes have historically been used by global investors to access Indian markets.
 - ✓ India-EU FTA — recently concluded — opens new opportunities; Cyprus positioned as a key access point.
- **Indian Diaspora**
 - ✓ ~15,500 Indians in Cyprus (April 2026).
 - ✓ Primarily professionals in shipping, IT, Fintech; also domestic workers, farmhands, and students.

Pakistan Inducts First Hangor-Class Submarine

- Pakistan officially inducted its **first Hangor-class submarine** into the Navy at a commissioning ceremony in Sanya, China.
- **The Hangor-Class Submarine — Key Features**
 - Based on China's Type 039A (yuan class) design
 - Armed with torpedoes and anti-ship missiles
 - Equipped with Air-Independent Propulsion (AIP) — allows longer submergence, enhancing stealth and operational range
 - Part of an agreement to acquire 8 such submarines in total from China
- **Concerns for India**
 - Induction of AIP-equipped submarines significantly raises Pakistan Navy's underwater endurance and stealth capability.
 - A fleet of 8 such submarines would mark a substantial shift in the naval balance in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
 - Commissioning on Chinese soil (Sanya) underscores the depth of Pak-China military nexus.
 - Pakistan's reference to "risks at global shipping choke points" signals Pakistan's intent to project power beyond its immediate waters.

Project Freedom & the Strait of Hormuz Crisis

- Recently, US announced Project Freedom to end Iran's blockade of the Strait of Hormuz and restore free navigation.
- A day later, the project was suspended after merchant ships and two US Navy destroyers were attacked and damaged.
- Trump cited "progress in Iran negotiations" as the reason — but Iran had effectively demonstrated its ability to escalate and deter.
- The episode exposes the limits of US power projection in the Persian Gulf in 2026 vs. the 1980s.
 - US had launched Operation Earnest Will in 1987–88. In this operation, US provided individual convoy escorts with minesweepers, warships, anti-missile batteries.
- The Strait of Hormuz — through which ~20% of global oil passes — remains a critical maritime choke point.
- Iran has leveraged asymmetric warfare (drones, mines) to offset US conventional superiority.
 - Low-cost weapons can inflict visible, disproportionate damage on merchant ships.
 - Even one hit from a drone swarm can spike insurance costs — indirectly shutting down traffic without a full military engagement.

India Retained in EU Draft List for Continued Seafood Exports

- The European Union has included India in its revised draft list of countries allowed to continue exporting aquaculture products to the EU market beyond **September 2026**.
- This reverses concerns created by an earlier EU regulation (**October 2024**), which had omitted India from the list of authorised countries for exporting animal-origin products meant for human consumption.

The development highlights the role played by Indian regulatory institutions like the Marine Products Export Development Authority (**MPEDA**) and the Export Inspection Council (**EIC**) to promote responsible aquaculture practices.

Key Food Safety Initiatives

- **National Residue Control Programme (NRCP)** - Tracks and controls antibiotic and chemical residues in aquaculture products.
- **Post-Harvest Testing Programme** - Ensures exported seafood meets safety standards after processing.
- **Rigorous Surveillance Systems** - Includes: Testing for banned antibiotics; Monitoring pharmacologically active substances; Continuous inspection and compliance checks.
- **Stakeholder Training** - Awareness programmes for: Farmers; Exporters; Processing units.

Why India Was Initially Excluded?

- The EU had introduced stricter regulations requiring exporting countries to ensure that:
 - ✓ No antimicrobial medicinal products are used for growth promotion in food-producing animals.
 - ✓ Antibiotics reserved for human treatment are not used in aquaculture production.
 - ✓ Exporting nations provide guarantees regarding compliance with these food safety norms.
- India's absence from the earlier list had raised concerns about disruption in seafood exports.

Why the EU Changed Its Position?

- The European Commission acknowledged that India had:
 - ✓ Met EU restrictions on antimicrobial use
 - ✓ Provided the necessary regulatory assurances
 - ✓ Strengthened food safety and residue monitoring systems
- This indicates growing EU confidence in India's regulatory framework.

Importance of the EU Market for Indian Seafood

- EU ranking: Third-largest market for Indian seafood exports
- Export value: US\$ 1.593 billion
- Share in total seafood exports: 18.94%
- Growth in export value: 41.45%
- Growth in export quantity: 38.29%



Aquaculture in India

- India's fish production has more than doubled over 10 years to **197.75 lakh tonnes** in 2024-25, making it the **second largest producer of marine products** in the world. India now accounts for **~8% of global fish output**.
- Concurrently, **seafood exports** expanded significantly, reaching **Rs 62,408 crore in FY 2024-25**. **Frozen shrimp** remains the **dominant export commodity**, with US and China serving as key markets.

- The fisheries sector accounts for ~**7.43% of Agricultural Gross Value Added (GVA)**, the highest share among the agriculture and allied sectors.
- Collectively, fisheries-related schemes implemented since 2014-15 have generated an estimated **74.66 lakh direct and indirect employment opportunities**.

Conclusion

- India's inclusion in the revised EU draft list is a significant diplomatic and trade achievement.
- It protects a major export market for Indian seafood and reflects international recognition of India's stronger food safety, traceability, and regulatory compliance systems.

Green Card Rule — New India-US Friction Point

The Trump administration's US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) announced a reversal of a 50-year-old immigration practice — requiring all foreign nationals temporarily in the US to return to their home country to apply for a Green Card.

- The move disproportionately impacts Indian nationals — the largest group in the employment-based Green Card backlog — and has emerged as a new diplomatic friction point between India and the US.

Bilateral Implications for India

- India's skilled diaspora in technology, medicine, research, and engineering is a major source of:
 - Remittances to India
 - Technology transfer
 - Soft power for India globally
- Disruption could trigger return migration of skilled Indians —
 - Brain gain for India
 - Talent drain for the US tech and innovation ecosystem
- Risks becoming a diplomatic friction point precisely when India and the US are deepening their strategic and technology partnership (TRUST initiative, critical minerals, semiconductors).

About Green Card

- Officially called a Permanent Resident Card — allows a foreign national to live and work permanently in the US.
- Critical stepping stone between temporary visa status and US citizenship.



What Was the Earlier Rule?

- Foreign workers could apply for "**Adjustment of Status**" from **within the US** — without leaving the country.
- Entire permanent residence process could be completed without ever departing.
- Applied to: H-1B workers (work visa holders), students, those married to US citizens, refugees, and asylum-seekers.

What Has Changed — The New Rule

- Foreign nationals temporarily in the US must now **return to their home country** to apply for a Green Card.
- USCIS will grant Green Cards to people inside the US only in "**extraordinary circumstances**".
- Described by USCIS as returning to "**the original intent of the law**" and closing a "**loophole**".
- Experts note the rule applies to **new applications** — existing applicants may not be immediately affected.

Why This Is Significant for Indians?

- India has outsized exposure to this policy change:
 - ✦ Indian Green Card holders in US - ~1.5 million
 - ✦ Indians stuck in employment-based backlog - ~1.2 million (including dependents) — already waiting years to decades due to country-specific caps
 - ✦ India is the second-largest country of origin for New permanent residents.
 - ✦ New Green Cards issued to Indians annually - Tens of thousands
- Most affected categories — H-1B workers, students, tourist visa holders — are disproportionately Indian.
- New rule requires them to leave the US, return to India, and file at a US consulate — logistically complex, financially burdensome, and professionally disruptive.

China's Hainan Free Trade Port

- China officially launched its island-wide Free Trade Port (FTP) in Hainan in December 2025, operationalising a plan first announced in 2020.
 - Hainan is China's southernmost province — a tropical island in the South China Sea, strategically positioned at the northern edge of one of the world's most contested and economically significant waterways.
- The FTP offers zero tariffs on trade within the island, low personal income taxes, visa-free entry for citizens of 86 countries, and simplified data and people flows — creating a neutral zone for international trade where regular Chinese mainland customs procedures do not apply.

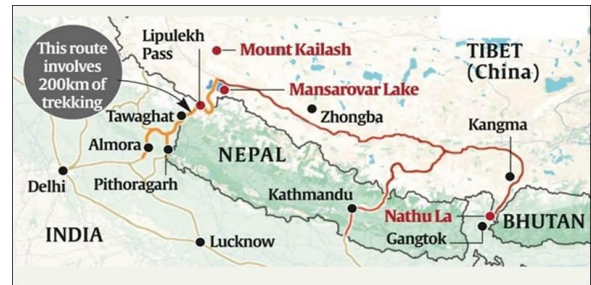
- Since launch, tariff-free product categories expanded from ~1,900 to 6,600, and over 3,265 foreign-invested enterprises registered within the first two weeks alone.
- Strategically, the FTP serves a dual purpose — it **advances China's economic liberalisation agenda** while simultaneously **strengthening its de facto presence** in the disputed South China Sea.
- It also functions as an implicit **alternative to Hong Kong** — offering similar economic openness but under full Chinese constitutional control, without the political complexities that increasingly encumber the SAR (*Special Administrative Region- Hong Kong*)

Lipulekh Pass & Kailash Mansarovar Yatra Dispute

- In April 2026, India announced resumption of Kailash Mansarovar Yatra (June–August) via Lipulekh Pass.
- Nepal's newly elected government filed a formal diplomatic protest to both India and China, calling the route part of its sovereign territory. This has revived longstanding boundary tensions.

What is Lipulekh Pass?

- Located at the India-Nepal-China tri-junction in the Himalayas.
- Key route for trade and pilgrimage (Kailash Mansarovar).
- India has used it for the Mansarovar Yatra since 1954.



Core Territorial Dispute

- **Nepal's Claim**
 - Based on the **Treaty of Sugauli (1816)** — argues that **Limpiyadhura, Lipulekh, and Kalapani**, lying east of the **Mahakali River**, belong to Nepal.
 - Published a new political map in **2020** incorporating these areas.
 - Demands halt to all Indian/Chinese activities (infrastructure, trade, pilgrimage) in the region.
- **India's Stand**
 - Calls Nepal's claims "unjustified and not based on historical evidence" — terms them "**artificial enlargement**" of territory.
 - Asserts **traditional/customary use** of Lipulekh for pilgrimage.
 - Prefers **bilateral dialogue** to resolve the dispute.
- **China's Role**
 - Resumed trade with India via Lipulekh (2025), adding a **trilateral dimension**.
 - Was informed by Nepal of its claims but remains **publicly silent**.

Why Lipulekh Matters to India?

- ❖ **Geopolitical** — Maintains Indian influence in Nepal amid growing Chinese presence.
- ❖ **Security** — Strategic control over Himalayan passes.
- ❖ **Cultural Diplomacy** — Continuity of a major religious pilgrimage route.

Key Issues & Challenges

- ❖ **Boundary ambiguity** — Differing interpretations of the Mahakali River's origin under the Sugauli Treaty.
- ❖ **Nationalism & domestic politics** — Issue is embedded in Nepal's constitution, limiting any government's flexibility to compromise.
- ❖ **Strategic sensitivity** — Tri-junction area has direct implications for India-China relations.
- ❖ **Bilateral vs. Trilateral approach** — Nepal wants China included; India insists on bilateral framework.
- ❖ **Cultural disruption** — Dispute risks derailing the Yatra, damaging people-to-people ties.



Conclusion

- The Lipulekh dispute reflects the intersection of history, geography, and nationalism in Himalayan boundary politics.
- The Yatra is the immediate flashpoint; the underlying territorial dispute remains unresolved. A calibrated diplomatic approach is essential to preserve India-Nepal relations and regional stability.

India-US Critical Minerals Framework

- On the sidelines of the 11th Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting, India and the US signed the **India-US Critical Minerals Framework** — formally titled "Securing of Supply in the Mining and Processing of Critical Minerals and Rare Earths".
- Immediate trigger:** China imposed a licensing regime on rare earth element exports (2025) — effectively choking global supplies during the US-China trade war. Indian industry began facing shortages of rare earth magnets by late 2025.

Key Objectives of the Framework

- Deepen cooperation across the entire critical minerals value chain — mining, processing, recycling, and related investments.
- Build resilient and diversified supply chains — reducing dependence on China.
- Promote collaboration in financing and scrap management of critical minerals and REEs.
- Accelerate R&D collaboration and investment across the value chain.
- Align domestic laws and regulations of both countries to facilitate supply chain access.
- Tighten controls to address national security requirements.

India Rejects Arbitration Award on IWT

- India categorically rejected the "award" issued by what it termed an "illegally constituted" Court of Arbitration (CoA) concerning disputes with Pakistan under the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT).
- The award reportedly concerns "**maximum pondage**" issues and supplemental treaty interpretations.
- Backdrop:** India had placed the IWT "**in abeyance**" following the Pahalgam terror attack — an unprecedented step in bilateral water diplomacy.
- India's Official Position**
 - MEA stated the CoA was "**illegally constituted**" — India has never recognised its jurisdiction.
 - Any award issued by the CoA is "**null and void**".
 - India's decision to keep the IWT **in abeyance remains in force**.

Grievance Redressal Mechanism — Three-Tier Structure (Article IX)

* Tier 1 — Permanent Indus Commission (PIC)

- ✓ One Commissioner from each country; meet regularly and conduct field inspections.
- ✓ Resolves minor technical/operational disputes through **mutual consensus**.
- ✓ If unresolved → matter escalates as a "**difference**".

* Tier 2 — Neutral Expert (NE)

- ✓ Appointed by the **World Bank** for unresolved technical differences.
- ✓ Strictly limited to factual and engineering questions.
- ✓ Decision is **binding** on both parties.
- ✓ If matter exceeds technical purview → escalates to a "**dispute**".

* Tier 3 — Court of Arbitration (CoA)

- ✓ 7-member ad hoc arbitral tribunal at The Hague.
- ✓ Handles broader legal or treaty interpretation disputes.
- ✓ Highest legal authority under the treaty.

India's Escalating Actions on the IWT

- 2023** - First-ever notice seeking "**modification**" of the treaty — citing Pakistan's obstructionism and procedural disagreements
- 2024** - Escalated to seeking "**review and modification**" — "review" signals intent to **renegotiate the treaty framework itself**
- 2026** - IWT placed "**in abeyance**" following Pahalgam terror attack — unprecedented shift in water diplomacy.

Current Deadlock — How It Arose

- * Pakistan simultaneously pursued proceedings before **both the NE and CoA** — India argues this directly **violates the graded mechanism** under the treaty.
- * India has **boycotted CoA proceedings**, insisting a party cannot pursue both tracks simultaneously.
- * India's position: disputes involving Kishenganga and Ratle hydropower projects should be resolved through the **NE mechanism**, not CoA.

EAM's Visit to CARICOM

- External Affairs Minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar embarked on a significant nine-day tour of the Caribbean.

- Focused primarily on **Jamaica, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago**, the trip aimed to deepen diplomatic ties, promote economic development, and strengthen connections with the *Girmitiya* (Indian-origin) diaspora in the region.
- The visit was aimed at deepening India's engagement with CARICOM (Caribbean Community) nations.

Key Highlights and Agreements

1. Jamaica

- **Medical Aid & Relief:** Reaffirming support following Hurricane Melissa, Jaishankar handed over 10 BHISHM emergency medical units and announced the supply of 30 dialysis units.
- **Livelihood & Infrastructure:** India provided 40 fishing boats with engines, 200 GPS devices, and committed to feasibility studies for an Artisan Empowerment Hub.
- **Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs):** Both sides signed agreements focused on health cooperation, the solarisation of the Hugh Lawson Shearer Building, and broadcasting.

2. Suriname

- **Bilateral Cooperation:** Jaishankar co-chaired the India-Suriname Joint Commission Meeting in Paramaribo. The countries reviewed progress on digital transformation, infrastructure, and agriculture.
- **Global Initiatives:** Suriname reaffirmed its participation in the International Solar Alliance and the International Big Cat Alliance.

3. Trinidad and Tobago

- **Heritage & Culture:** Along with Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Jaishankar visited the Nelson Island heritage site to commemorate Indian Arrival Day and inaugurated a plaque for an infrastructure upgrade project.
- A total of 8 Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) were signed between the two sides, covering:
 - **Tourism** - Bilateral tourism cooperation
 - **Renewable Energy** - Solarisation of Trinidad & Tobago's Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs building
 - **Public Health** - Vector control cooperation
 - **Heritage & Infrastructure** - Upgrade of Nelson Island — where Indian indentured immigrants were initially housed
 - **Traditional Medicine** - Setting up an Indian Chair on Ayurveda at the University of the West Indies
- **Agro-processing:** The nations signed an MoU on Integrated Automated Fruit and Vegetable Processing, paving the way for up to US \$1 million in Indian financing and technical assistance.

MEA Launches Drive to Register Indian Students Abroad

- Prompted by evacuation challenges during the Russia-Ukraine and US-Iran conflicts, the Ministry of External Affairs has launched awareness campaigns urging Indian students abroad to register with Indian embassies and high commissions.
- With over a million Indians studying abroad but no mandatory registration requirement, the government lacks a reliable database.
- The existing **MADAD portal** (launched 2015) has seen poor uptake — only 41,000 registrations.
- The MEA now plans to overhaul or replace it. Focus countries include the US, Canada, Germany, China, Malaysia, and emerging hubs like Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, where Indian medical students are increasingly enrolling.

India Formalises Sports Policy on Pakistan

- One year after the Pahalgam terror attacks and Operation Sindoor, India has issued a formal policy through a Sports Ministry Office Memorandum that clearly separates bilateral sporting ties from multilateral sporting commitments involving Pakistan.
- **The Dual-Track Policy: What It Says?**
 - **Bilateral Sports — Complete Freeze**
 - ♣ Indian teams will NOT participate in competitions held in Pakistan.
 - ♣ Pakistani teams will NOT be permitted to play in India in bilateral events.
 - **Multilateral/International Events — Full Participation**
 - ♣ Pakistani players and teams can participate in multilateral events hosted by India.
 - ♣ Indian teams and individual players will participate in international events that also include Pakistan.
- The formalisation is driven by several converging factors:
 - **Geopolitical reality:** Post-Pahalgam attacks, sporting relations with Pakistan hit an all-time low.
 - **Public outrage:** Government faced criticism over India playing Pakistan in the 2025 Asia Cup and T20 World Cup, and for granting visas to the Pakistani hockey team for the Asia Cup in Bihar (August 2025) and Junior World Cup in Chennai (December 2025).
 - **Avoiding ad hoc decisions:** Past handling of Pakistan-related sporting events had been inconsistent — the new policy removes ambiguity with a clear, formalised framework.

German-Netherlands Corps to Command Baltic Defence

- NATO is restructuring its eastern defence architecture in response to growing Russian military threat.
- Currently, NATO forces across **all three Baltic nations** (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) and **northern Poland** fall under a **single multinational headquarters** — the *Multi-National Corps Northeast, based in Szczecin, Poland*, which was established in **2017** following Russia's annexation of Crimea and has around 20 contributing nations.
- Under the new command structure, NATO will place allied troops in Estonia and Latvia under the command of the German-Netherlands Corps (headquartered in the German city of Muenster) during wartime.

France Repeals Code Noir

- The Lower House of the French Parliament (National Assembly) voted to repeal **Code Noir (Black Code)**, a colonial-era law that governed enslaved people across French colonies under King Louis XIV in 1685.
- The vote marks the formal removal of a law that had technically persisted on French books for nearly two centuries after slavery was abolished in 1848.
- Code Noir was a **60-article legal code** that systematically dehumanised enslaved Africans in French colonies:
 - Treated enslaved people as "movable property" — assets a master could acquire (Article 44)
 - Enabled enslaved people to be beaten, sold, raped, and murdered with legal sanction
 - Those who fled faced branding, amputation of ears, or death
- **France's Slave Trade — Scale and Legacy**
 - France ran the third-largest slave trade in history
 - Shipped approximately 1.4 million Africans to sugar plantations in the Caribbean
 - Profits from the slave trade helped build the French cities of Nantes and Bordeaux

SUMMITS AND ORGANISATIONS

UN Secretary-General Election — 2026

- Recently, four candidates presented themselves to the **UN General Assembly** in "informal, interactive dialogues" as part of the election process for the next **UN Secretary-General**.

- The Four Candidates are:

- Michelle Bachelet - Former President of Chile; former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
- Rebeca Grynspan - Head of UNCTAD (UN Conference on Trade and Development)
- Macky Sall - Former President of Senegal
- Rafael Grossi - Head of the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency)



Why This Election Is Crucial — The UN's Crisis

Financial Crisis

- UN Secretariat relies on mandatory assessed contributions from member states.
- Non-payment, partial payment, and delays have triggered an unprecedented financial crunch.
- Thousands of UN staff being laid off — including a fifth of peace and security staff; offices relocated; agencies being merged.

Political & Structural Crisis

- Security Council paralysed by acrimony and persistent P5 vetoes.
- Struggles to mobilise funds and troops — e.g., Haiti mission; forced withdrawal from Mali.

Credibility Crisis

- Conflicts in Gaza, Lebanon, Sudan, Ukraine, and Iran have raised serious questions about the UN's ability to prevent war — its founding purpose.
- Only 18% of SDG targets are on track to be met by 2030.
- Humanitarian system under severe strain — multiple conflicts, intensifying disasters, and erosion of international humanitarian law.

Achievements to Build On

- Key role in COVID-19 pandemic response.
- Advancing climate action via Paris Agreement.
- Promoting sustainable development through 2030 Agenda and SDGs.

Election Process

- Appointed by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the Security Council.
- The P5 (China, France, Russia, UK, USA) hold significant sway — effectively a veto over candidates.
- **Conventions & Customs**
 - Term is technically discretionary; but since 1981, incumbents voluntarily limit themselves to two terms.
 - Post rotates among five regions: Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, and Latin America & the Caribbean.
 - Current turn: Latin America & the Caribbean — though tensions exist between Spanish-speaking and English-speaking Caribbean nations backing different candidates.

Role of the UN Secretary-General

- Chief Administrative Officer of the UN — oversees the UN Secretariat.
- Fulfils functions entrusted by principal organs: General Assembly, Security Council, and ECOSOC (*UN Economic and Social Council*)
- Can bring to the Security Council's attention any issue threatening global peace and security.
- Can appoint Personal Envoys for specific conflicts (as Guterres did for West Asia).
- Widely described as the world's "chief diplomat" — speaks as the world's conscience on issues from arms race to climate change to inequality.

Conclusion

- The next UN Secretary-General inherits an organisation in deep crisis — financially strained, politically gridlocked, and credibility-tested.
- Reviving the UN's founding mission of peace and multilateral cooperation will demand bold leadership, institutional reform, and renewed commitment from member states.

World Health Assembly Recognises Stroke as a Public Health Priority

- The 79th World Health Assembly (WHA) adopted the **first-ever resolution on stroke** formally recognising it as a major global public health challenge.
- **Resolution titled:** "Reducing the burden of stroke: Strengthening prevention, acute care, rehabilitation and health-system readiness."
- **Proposed by:** Chile, Egypt, Georgia, Palestine, Paraguay, and Tunisia at the 158th WHO Executive Board session (February 2026).

Key Features of the WHA Resolution

- **Prevention**
 - Population-level control of hypertension, diabetes, obesity, and dyslipidemia.
 - Tobacco cessation, alcohol reduction, healthy diet promotion, physical activity, and reduction of air pollution.
- **Acute Care & Emergency Readiness**
 - Strengthen emergency care systems — rapid triage protocol, timely transport, access to imaging and reperfusion therapy.
 - Define stroke-ready facilities with minimum standards.
 - Scale up: intravenous thrombolysis, endovascular thrombectomy, and standardised protocols for intracerebral haemorrhage.
- **Rehabilitation**
 - Expand multidisciplinary stroke units and rehabilitation services.
 - Include: inpatient care, early supported discharge, community-based rehabilitation, and palliative care for survivors.
- **Health Systems & Data**
 - Develop national stroke registries — standardised data on incidence, mortality, risk factors, treatment timelines, and outcomes.
 - Integrate stroke within national cardiovascular/neurological strategies and Universal Health Coverage (UHC) frameworks.
- **Digital Health**
 - Integrate telemedicine, teleradiology, clinical decision support systems, and mobile health platforms for improved stroke care and follow-up.
- **Essential Medicines & Supply Chains**
 - Strengthen access to: antihypertensives, anticoagulants, thrombolytics, and basic imaging.
 - Build resilient supply chains for stroke medicines and diagnostics.
- **WHO Technical Guidance**
 - Mandates WHO to develop technical guidance supporting member states in building equitable, context-specific stroke prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation systems.

About World Health Assembly (WHA)

- ❖ Supreme decision-making body of WHO — attended by delegations from all (194) WHO member states.
- ❖ Functions: Determines WHO policies, appoints Director-General, supervises financial policies, approves programme budget.
- ❖ Held annually in Geneva, Switzerland.

What is Stroke

- ❖ A medical emergency occurring when blood flow to the brain is interrupted due to blockage (ischaemic) or bleeding (haemorrhagic).
- ❖ Interruption causes brain cell death — leading to permanent disability or death if untreated.
- ❖ Major (Preventable) Risk Factors: Hypertension, diabetes, tobacco use, obesity, physical inactivity, unhealthy diet, air pollution, alcohol misuse.

Stroke Burden in India

- ❖ India records 108–172 stroke cases per lakh population annually; one-month case fatality: 18%–42%.
- ❖ ICMR-led National Stroke Registry Programme (analysed ~35,000 cases from 30 hospitals, 2020–22) reveals:
 - ✓ 1 in 7 stroke patients in India is below 45 years — alarming young-age burden.
 - ✓ Only ~20% of patients reach hospital within the critical 4.5-hour therapeutic window — period during which clot-dissolving drugs (thrombolysis) and mechanical thrombectomy can significantly reduce brain damage.
- ❖ Key structural gaps: shortage of specialised neurological care, limited access to CT scans and stroke units, especially in rural areas.
- ❖ **Gender Dimension**
 - ✓ **Women:** Poorer functional recovery, higher mortality — due to older age at stroke, more severe strokes, pre-stroke dependency, and depression.
 - ✓ **Men:** Higher burden at younger ages — premature mortality and long-term disability.

Conclusion

- The WHA resolution is a landmark in global health governance — for the first time, stroke gets the same priority-level attention as conditions like cancer, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease.
- For India, the resolution is a call to action: with nearly 1 in 7 stroke patients below 45 years and only 1 in 5 reaching hospital in time, the country urgently needs investment in pre-hospital emergency systems, stroke unit infrastructure, and public awareness — priorities that align directly with the National Health Mission and India's Universal Health Coverage agenda.

UN Report on Sexual Violence in Conflict Zones

- The United Nations' 2025 annual review on conflict-related sexual violence has, for the first time, included the armed and security forces of Israel and Russia on its blacklist.
- Hamas continues to be listed for alleged sexual violence linked to the October 7, 2023 attack on Israel.
- The report identifies 77 state and non-state actors across 12 countries/ territories suspected of committing or enabling sexual violence in conflict situations and records a significant rise in such incidents in 2025 compared to 2024.
- **Israel**
 - Israel's armed and security forces have been listed for alleged sexual violence against Palestinian detainees.
 - The report marks the first time Israel has been included in the UN blacklist on conflict-related sexual violence.
- **Russia**
 - Russia's armed and security forces have also been blacklisted for the first time.
 - Allegations relate to sexual violence against prisoners of war and civilian detainees during the Ukraine conflict.

About UN Report on Sexual Violence in Conflict Zones

- The UN Report on Sexual Violence in Conflict is an annual assessment prepared by the UN Secretary-General and presented to the UN Security Council.
- The report is mandated under UN Security Council Resolution 1820 (2008), which recognised sexual violence as a tactic of war and a threat to international peace and security.
- Each year, the report publishes a "**list of shame**" — naming state armed forces, militias, and other groups credibly suspected of committing or enabling conflict-related sexual violence. Being listed triggers heightened UN scrutiny and can lead to targeted sanctions, arms embargoes, or diplomatic pressure.

India-Africa Forum Summit Postponed

- The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the African Union jointly announced the postponement of the **fourth India-Africa Forum Summit**, originally scheduled for May 28–31, 2026 in New Delhi.
- The official reason cited was the "evolving health situation in parts of Africa" — a reference to the ongoing **Ebola public health emergency** affecting multiple African countries.
- The postponement of IAFS-IV has been viewed as a setback to India-Africa ties, given that the last summit was held nearly 11 years ago in 2015.

India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS)

- It is India's **premier diplomatic platform** for engagement with the African continent.
- It is the **largest structured event** combining diplomatic, cultural, financial, and political interactions between India and African nations.
- The summits are jointly organised by India and the African Union (AU) and bring together heads of state, government officials, and institutional representatives from across Africa and India to set the agenda for bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

- **Timeline**
 - **IAFS-I** – 2008 - First ever summit — laid foundation of structured India-Africa engagement
 - **IAFS-II** – 2011 - Continued momentum of partnership
 - **IAFS-III** – 2015 - Originally planned for 2014 but postponed by one year due to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa
 - **IAFS-IV** - Scheduled May 28–31, 2026 - **Postponed**

India's Africa Policy Needs Structured Partnership

- Recently, Africa's global partnerships have deepened and diversified significantly:
 - The EU and Japan held Africa summits in 2025
 - South Korea convened ministerial consultations
 - Germany hosted discussions on the Sudan crisis
 - France is advancing its own Africa outreach
 - China continues structured engagement through the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)
- India retains significant goodwill on the continent, but the challenge now is to convert historical affinity into sustained, structured, and visible engagement.

The Core Problem: Commitment vs. Delivery

- One of the **persistent weaknesses** of the IAFS framework has been the gap between what is announced and what is actually delivered. Specifically:
 - Many broader IAFS initiatives — regional business forums, collaborations in agriculture, renewable energy, climate finance, digital economy, and counterterrorism — have **not been sufficiently institutionalized**.
 - In the absence of a **robust inter-summit mechanism**, engagement defaults to bilateral interactions only.
 - Without consistent engagement, India risks being perceived as an **episodic rather than a strategic partner**.

What India Should Do?

- **Reinstate the Three-Tier Africa Framework** - India's earlier framework — structured across bilateral, regional, and pan-African levels — remains conceptually sound.
- Institutionalise Engagement with the African Union Commission (AUC)
- Create a Track 1.5 India-Africa Strategic Dialogue
- Establish a Mid-Cycle Review Mechanism

Conclusion

- In 2018, addressing the Ugandan Parliament, PM Modi articulated the cornerstone of India's Africa policy: "African priorities would guide India's engagement."
- With IAFS-IV now postponed, India has an opportunity — and an obligation — to demonstrate that this principle is not merely rhetorical. When the summit does eventually convene, it must be process-driven, not declaration-driven.

The Indian Ocean Dialogue

- The Indian Ocean Dialogue — a **Track 1.5 conference** for officials, academics, and experts — was co-hosted by **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)** and India's Ministry of External Affairs.
- It was organised by the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), in Delhi.
- While the IORA charter explicitly excludes bilateral disputes from deliberations, the West Asia war has generated challenges that are impossible to ignore.
- **Key Incidents Raising Alarm**
 - US sinking of Iranian naval ship IRIS Dena (March 2026)

- o Iranian IRBM missile attacks on the US's Diego Garcia base on Mauritius's Chagos Islands — missiles missed their target but signalled a dangerous new escalation.

About Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)

- IORA is a 23-member intergovernmental organisation formed in 1997 (30 year in 2027).
- It brings together nations with coastlines on the Indian Ocean — spanning the East coast of Africa to Australia — to promote regional cooperation across eight priority areas:

Maritime Safety and Security	Trade and Investment	Fisheries Management	Disaster Risk Management
Tourism	Cultural Exchanges	Blue Economy	Women's Economic Empowerment

- India holds the Chair of the IORA for the 2025–2027 term.
- **IORA Membership**
 - o 23 Member States: Australia, Bangladesh, Comoros, France, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Oman, Seychelles, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, UAE, and Yemen
 - o 12 Dialogue Partners: China, Egypt, EU, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Türkiye, UK, and USA
- **India's Strategic Interest in IORA**
 - o The IORA holds particular relevance for India on multiple levels:
 - ♣ **MAHASAGAR maritime policy** — India's vision for the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace, prosperity, and security
 - ♣ **Indo-Pacific strategy** — IORA provides a non-contentious multilateral platform for maritime engagement
 - ♣ **Pakistan factor** — Unlike SAARC or SCO, Pakistan has never been admitted to IORA.
- Pakistan applied in the early 2000s but was denied membership as its refusal to grant India Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status violated the IORA charter's principle of "sovereign equality" — equal treatment of all member states.

BRICS Foreign Ministers' Meeting 2026

- The BRICS Foreign Ministers' Meeting was held, at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, under **India's BRICS Chairmanship for 2026**.
- It is described as the biggest multilateral brainstorming India has hosted since the Gulf conflict began on February 28, 2026.
- The meeting was attended by foreign ministers from Brazil, Russia, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, UAE, and Indonesia, among others.
- The Joint Statement remained elusive due to Iran-UAE tensions.
 - o The meeting was overshadowed by persisting differences among members, particularly between Iran and the UAE.
 - o Iran accused the UAE of trying to scuttle a joint statement by calling for condemnation of Iran's military strikes on the GCC member state.

India's Position at the Summit

- **On the Israel-Palestine Conflict**
 - o Reiterated India's traditional call for a "two-state solution"
 - o Called for a "sustained ceasefire" and humanitarian access in Gaza
 - o Described the Gaza conflict as having "grave humanitarian implications"

- **On Maritime and Energy Security**
 - Called for an end to "risks to maritime traffic and disruptions to energy infrastructure" in the Gulf
 - Emphasised that "safe and unimpeded maritime flows" through the Strait of Hormuz and Red Sea remain "vital for global economic well-being"
- **On Regional Conflicts**
 - Called for "coordinated diplomatic efforts" to address situations in: Lebanon, Syria, Sudan, Libya.
 - Supported dialogue and diplomacy as the primary tools for conflict resolution.
- **On Unilateral Coercive Measures**
 - Indirectly referenced recent US actions against multiple UN members
 - Flagged the "increasing tendency" toward "unilateral coercive measures and sanctions"
 - Termed such measures as "inconsistent with international law"
 - Described the overall geopolitical situation as "unprecedented"

5th BRICS Supreme Audit Institutions (SAI) Leaders'

- The 5th BRICS Supreme Audit Institutions (SAI) Leaders' Summit was held in Bengaluru, India, under India's BRICS Chairmanship.
- The summit was convened by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India, K. Sanjay Murthy, and attended by heads and delegates of SAIs from BRICS member countries.
- **Theme:** "Ease of Living with a Focus on Urban Mobility"
- Member countries unanimously adopted the **Bengaluru Declaration**. The declaration emphasizes:
 - Transparent public auditing.
 - Greater use of technology in audit processes.
 - Strengthened accountability in public expenditure.
 - Improved urban governance and sustainability.
- The summit finalized and adopted the BRICS SAI Work Plan 2027–28.
- The plan provides a framework for:
 - Joint audits among member nations.
 - Knowledge sharing and capacity building.
 - Exchange of best practices in public sector auditing.

SC's Landmark Framework Against Human Trafficking in India

- The Supreme Court of India issued comprehensive guidelines for the prevention of human trafficking and the protection and rehabilitation of victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSE).
- The judgment came in response to a PIL filed in 2004 by NGO Prajwala, which highlighted critical gaps in:
 - Laws and institutional mechanisms
 - Victim support systems for trafficked women and children

Human Trafficking: Key Highlights of the Judgement

- **An Assault on Constitutional Dignity**
 - The SC described trafficking as a "direct assault on constitutional dignity", emphasising the State's duty to protect vulnerable women and children from exploitation.
 - Trafficking for prostitution has evolved into a highly organised and profitable criminal enterprise driven by demand and facilitated by sophisticated networks
 - A disturbing decline in the age of victims was noted — traffickers increasingly targeting children and adolescents through false promises of: Employment; Marriage; Glamour; Financial security.
- **Nationwide Victim Protection Plan**
 - The Court directed the Union Government, all States, and UTs to implement a uniform victim protection protocol across the country.
 - **Standardised procedures** for: Rescue operations; Victim identification; Rehabilitation and reintegration; Investigation and prosecution of offenders.
 - **Stronger coordination** among:
 - ♣ Child Welfare Committees (CWCs)
 - ♣ Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs)
 - ♣ One Stop Centres
 - ♣ Legal Services Authorities
 - ♣ State protection and rehabilitation homes
 - **Objective:** Ensure a **survivor-centric and rights-based** response to all trafficking cases.
- **Critical Distinction: Trafficking vs. Voluntary Sex Work**
 - One of the most important aspects of the judgment is the clarification regarding consent.
 - **Court's position:**
 - ♣ Consent is the determining factor in distinguishing trafficking from voluntary adult sex work.
 - ♣ Authorities must conduct a preliminary inquiry before taking coercive action under anti-trafficking laws.
 - ♣ Rescue operations should not automatically presume trafficking merely because an individual is engaged in sex work.
 - However, where force, coercion, deception, abuse of power, or exploitation is established:
 - ♣ Consent becomes legally irrelevant.
 - ♣ The case must be treated as trafficking and exploitation.
 - This approach seeks to **prevent misuse** of anti-trafficking laws while protecting genuine victims.
- **Reforming Rescue Operations**
 - The Court directed that operations under Sections 15 and 16 of the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 (ITPA) must focus on:
 - ♣ Identifying exploitation, coercion, abuse, force, and trafficking networks
 - ♣ Prioritising action against traffickers and exploiters — not victims
 - The judgment explicitly discourages indiscriminate raids against consenting adult sex workers.

- **Rehabilitation as a Fundamental Right**
 - Rehabilitation is **not merely a welfare measure** but a **constitutional entitlement**
 - Flows from **Article 21** — Right to Life and Right to Live with Dignity
 - Marks a shift from a **rescue-centric** model to a **dignity-centric** rehabilitation framework
- **Integration with Child Protection Laws**
 - Anti-trafficking efforts must be integrated with:
 - ♣ Juvenile Justice Act 2015; POCSO Act, 2012
 - Ensures child victims receive specialised protection, care, and rehabilitation through existing child welfare mechanisms
- **Monitoring and Accountability**
 - Union Government and all States/UTs directed to **report compliance** with the Court's directions
 - Matter to be **reviewed after three months** — reflecting the Court's commitment to **sustained judicial oversight**

Human Trafficking in India: The Scale of the Crisis

- A pervasive human rights crisis driven by forced labour, commercial sexual exploitation, and illegal adoption/organ trade
- Key catalysts: Rural poverty, skewed sex ratios, and unmonitored labour migration
- Over half of all trafficking victims subjected to forced and bonded labour — in brick kilns, textile factories, etc.
- A significant number trafficked for the commercial sex trade

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 23(1), Constitution** - Explicitly prohibits human trafficking and forced labour
- **Section 143 BNS**- Comprehensive legal definition of trafficking — covering physical/sexual exploitation, slavery
- **ITPA, 1956** - Primary legislation addressing trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation
- **POCSO Act, 2012** - Strict legal protection for minors from sexual abuse, exploitation, and trafficking
- **Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976** - Elimination of forced labour and debt bondage

Government Initiatives

- **Specialised AHTU Networks** - Funded by MHA via **Nirbhaya Fund** — improve local investigation and rescue operations
- **NDSO (National Database on Sexual Offenders) & NDHTO (National Database of Human Trafficking Offenders) Databases** - To aid law enforcement in **tracking habitual offenders**
- **Ujjawala Scheme** - Institutional support for destitute and trafficked women
- **Mission Vatsalya** - Support and rehabilitation for marginalised women and children

Conclusion

- The Supreme Court's judgment represents a **landmark intervention** in India's anti-trafficking framework, achieving a careful balance between:
 - **Victim protection** and constitutional rights
 - **Effective law enforcement** against traffickers
 - **Dignity-centric rehabilitation** over punitive rescue operations
- By grounding rehabilitation in **Article 21**, clarifying the **consent distinction**, and mandating a **uniform national protocol**, the Court has set a new benchmark for how India must respond to one of its most serious human rights challenges.

TARA Weapon System

DRDO and IAF successfully conducted the maiden flight-trial of the **TARA** (Tactical Advanced Range Augmentation) weapon system off the coast of Odisha.

What is TARA?

- Type: Modular range extension kit — **India's first glide weapon system.**
- Core function: Converts unguided warheads into precision-guided weapons.
- Purpose: Enhances range, accuracy, and lethality of low-cost munitions for engaging ground-based targets.
- Developed by: Research Centre Imarat, Hyderabad (DRDO lab), in collaboration with other DRDO facilities.

India's Chopper-Launched Naval Missile Salvo Test

- DRDO and Indian Navy successfully conducted a salvo test of the indigenously developed **Naval Anti-Ship Missile Short Range (NASM-SR)** from a helicopter off the coast of Odisha.
- **Two missiles fired in quick succession** from the same platform — the first-ever successful salvo launch from a helicopter in India.
- Indian Navy currently uses **Sea Eagle missiles** (British-origin) on **Sea King 42B helicopters** — but these are now outdated (introduced in the 1980s), weighing ~**580 kg**, limiting the number a helicopter can carry.

NASM-SR: Design & Key Specifications

Advanced Capabilities — The Two Defining Features

o 'Man-in-Loop' Guidance

- ♣ Human operator can modify the missile's trajectory mid-flight via a two-way data link.
- ♣ Contrast with older "fire-and-forget" Sea Eagle — once launched, cannot be redirected.

o 'Waterline Hit' Capability

- ♣ Targets the area at or just above the waterline of an enemy ship — a structurally vulnerable point.
- ♣ A hit here causes severe damage, rapid flooding, and potential sinking.

- It marks a major leap in India's naval strike capability — combining precision, survivability, and multi-target engagement.

Feature	Detail
Weight	~380 kg (significantly lighter than Sea Eagle's 580 kg)
Range	55 km
Propulsion	Two-stage — solid booster rocket + long-burn sustainer engine
Guidance	Man-in-loop via two-way data link
Seeker	For target detection and tracking
Altitude control	Radio altimeter (measures height above sea level)
Detonation	Radio proximity fuse

Operation RAGEPILL

- The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) has successfully dismantled an international drug trafficking network under **Operation RAGEPILL**, leading to India's **first-ever seizure of Captagon**, a psychotropic drug widely abused in the Middle East.
- Captagon is a **synthetic psychotropic drug** containing substances such as **Fenetylline** and **Amphetamine**, both regulated under India's NDPS Act.
- The government described the operation as part of its **zero-tolerance policy against drugs.**
- Operation RAGEPILL represents a major success in India's fight against international narcotics trafficking. Beyond the large seizure, it exposes how global criminal networks exploit trade routes and underscores the need for continued international vigilance.

CBI Launches AI Helpbot 'Abhay'

- The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has introduced an AI-powered helpbot named "**Abhay**" to help citizens **verify the authenticity of CBI notices** and protect themselves from rising cyber fraud, especially **digital arrest scams.**

- o The CBI clarified that “digital arrest” has no legal validity under Indian law.

Why It Was Launched? With the rapid growth of technologies such as **AI, deepfakes, and cyber-enabled fraud**, it has become increasingly difficult for ordinary citizens to distinguish genuine communications from fake ones.

India, Algeria Hold First Joint Defence Commission Meet

- India and Algeria held their **first-ever Joint Defense Commission meeting in New Delhi**, marking a significant milestone in strengthening bilateral defence cooperation
- A major outcome of the meeting was the signing of the **Rules of Procedure** for implementing India-Algeria defence cooperation.
- India-Algeria defence ties have accelerated since the signing of a Defence MoU in 2024.

DRDO's New Drone-Launched Precision Guided Missile

- DRDO successfully completed the final development trials of the UAV-Launched Precision Guided Missile (ULPGM)-V3.
 - o **V1** - Basic free-fall precision missile
 - o **V2** - Added propulsion, longer range, and *mid-course target update capability*
 - o **V3** - Air-to-ground **and** air-to-air capability; advanced seekers; multiple warhead options; all-weather day-night combat
- Trials were conducted in both air-to-ground and air-to-air modes, paving the way for user trials by the armed forces.

Key Technical Features of ULPGM-V3

- **Guidance System** - Fitted with a high-definition dual-channel seeker — an advanced guidance system using multiple sensors to accurately track both ground and aerial targets
- **Two-Way Data Link** - Enables operators to change or update the target even after launch — a critical capability in fast-moving combat environments where targets shift rapidly
- **All-Weather, All-Condition Capability** - Engages both stationary and moving targets with precision in all-weather, day-and-night conditions
- Three Warhead Options
 - o **Anti-Armour Warhead** - Destroys heavily protected tanks and armoured vehicles — including those fitted with Rolled Homogeneous Armour (RHA) and Explosive Reactive Armour (ERA)
 - o **Penetration-cum-Blast Warhead** - Pierces and destroys bunkers and fortified structures — critical for counter-insurgency and conventional warfare against entrenched positions
 - o **Pre-Fragmentation Warhead** - Disperses high-speed metal fragments over a large area — effective against personnel and light vehicles.

1,200 Fishing Harbours to Come Under Unified Security Framework

- The Union Home Ministry has proposed to bring ~1,200 fishing harbours and fishing landing sites under the oversight of the **Central Industrial Security Force (CISF)** as part of a broader plan to fortify and secure India's coastline.
- This follows the earlier decision to assign security duties at over 250 seaports to the CISF.
- Since deploying CISF personnel physically at all fishing harbours is not feasible, the role of CISF will be to:
 - o Design the security template for fishing harbours and landing sites
 - o Guide local administration in managing security protocols
 - o Regulate movement of fisherfolk through a biometric attendance system
 - o Provide smart ID cards to fisherfolk
 - o Plug gaps in the existing multi-agency coastal security architecture

- Sensitise the local population about coastal security

Current Status of Fishing Harbours in India

- Total notified fish landing centres and fishing harbours - 1,547
- Number of coastal States and UTs covered – 13
- States/UTs covered - West Bengal, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Kerala, Karnataka, Goa, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Daman and Diu, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep
- **Management Structure**
 - **State-controlled harbours:** States handle post-construction management, maintenance, and operations
 - ⊕ **Central government harbours:** Managed under Port Trusts
- **The Problem**
 - Currently, multiple agencies are deployed along India's coastline with **no uniform security template:**
 - ♣ **Local Police** - Immediate coastal areas
 - ♣ **Indian Coast Guard** - Nearshore maritime zones
 - ♣ **Indian Navy** - Deep sea and offshore security
 - ♣ **CISF** - Major seaports (13 major ports)
 - The absence of a **unified security framework** across these agencies leaves critical gaps — particularly at fishing harbours and landing sites, which remain the most vulnerable points of entry.

Bureau of Port Security (BoPS)

- In December 2025, Union Home Minister convened a meeting for the constitution of a dedicated body — Bureau of Port Security (BoPS) — for the security of vessels and port facilities.
- Modelled on the lines of the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS).
- The body is still being constituted.

India's Third Recipient of UN Military Gender Advocate Award

- Major Abhilasha Barak, an Indian peacekeeper serving with the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), has been named the recipient of the 2025 United Nations Military Gender Advocate of the Year Award — one of the most prestigious recognitions in UN peacekeeping.
 - Major Barak is India's third recipient of this award. The other two are;
 - ♣ Major Suman Gawani - 2019 - UNMISS (UN Mission in South Sudan)
 - ♣ Major Radhika Sen – 2023 - MONUSCO (UN Organization Stabilisation Mission in DRC)
- She was recognised for her outstanding outreach and community engagement during her deployment in Lebanon, specifically for:
 - Outreach activities with women and adolescent girls in the conflict-affected region
 - Gender sensitisation training for fellow peacekeepers
 - Integrating a gender perspective into peacekeeping activities on the ground
- She was honoured at the UN Headquarters on May 29 — the International Day of UN Peacekeepers, marked annually by the United Nations.

Indian War Memorial Inaugurated in Seoul

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and South Korea's Minister of Patriots and Veterans Affairs Kwon Oh-eul jointly inaugurated the **Indian War Memorial** at Imjingak Park, Seoul on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the Korean War.
- The memorial was constructed to pay tribute to the courage, sacrifice, and humanitarian service of two key Indian formations that served during and after the Korean War:
 - 60 Para Field Ambulance — Indian Army medical unit
 - Custodian Force of India (CFI) — Post-armistice peacekeeping and repatriation force

- The memorial stands at the very site where the CFI had established "HIND NAGAR" in 1954.
 - HIND NAGAR housed nearly 22,000 prisoners of war prior to their peaceful repatriation.
 - The name itself stands as a lasting testament to India's physical and moral presence on the Korean Peninsula during one of the Cold War's most intense conflicts.

Note: Union Defence Minister inaugurated '**Nausena Shaurya Vatika**' — an open-air naval museum — in Lucknow. It is located near Ekana Cricket Stadium, Lucknow.

Exercises

PRAGATI 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The maiden multilateral military exercise 'Pragati 2026' concluded at Umroi, Meghalaya, with armies of 13 countries coming together. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ 13 Countries included – Bhutan; Cambodia; Indonesia; Laos; Malaysia; Maldives; Myanmar; Nepal; Philippines; Seychelles; Sri Lanka; Vietnam; India (Host) • The programme focused on counter-insurgency operations and building mutual trust among nations in the Indian Ocean Region. • PRAGATI stands for — Partnership of Regional Armies for Growth and Transformation in the Indian Ocean Region.
LAMITIYE-2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 11th edition of Exercise LAMITIYE-2026 was conducted at the Seychelles Defence Academy. • The exercise brings together the Indian Army, Navy, and Air Force alongside the Seychelles Defence Forces (SDF) — marking the first-ever tri-services edition of this bilateral exercise. • Exercise LAMITIYE is part of India's broader strategy of deepening defence partnerships with Indian Ocean island nations — a key pillar of India's SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) vision and MAHASAGAR maritime policy.
CINBAX-II 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Indian Army participated in the second edition of the India-Cambodia Joint Military Exercise — CINBAX-II 2026, at the Royal Cambodian Air Force Training Centre (Camp Basil) in Kampong Speu Province, Cambodia. • The exercise focuses on company-level joint operations in a sub-conventional environment. • CINBAX-II follows closely on the heels of Pragati 2026 — the maiden multilateral exercise hosted by India in Meghalaya, which also included Cambodia among its 13 participating nations. • Together, these exercises reflect India's systematic deepening of defence engagement across Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean Region, consistent with its Act East Policy and the vision of a free, open, and secure Indo-Pacific.

New CDS and Naval Chief Named

- The Union Government announced two significant appointments in India's top military leadership:
 - Lt. Gen. N.S. Raja Subramani — appointed as the next Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)
 - ♣ He will succeed General Anil Chauhan.
 - Vice Admiral Krishna Swaminathan — appointed as the next Chief of the Naval Staff
 - ♣ He will succeed Admiral Dinesh Kumar Tripathi.
- The appointment of a National Security Council Secretariat veteran as CDS signals continuity in strategic and joint defence planning.

INS Mahendragiri Delivered

- The Indian Navy took delivery of Mahendragiri— the sixth ship of the Nilgiri-class (Project 17A) and the fourth constructed by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL), Mumbai.
 - Designed by - Warship Design Bureau
 - Built by - Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (Mumbai) & Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (Kolkata)
- **Ships of Project 17A:** INS Nilgir; INS Udaygiri; INS Himgiri; INS Taragiri; INS Dunagiri; INS Mahendragiri; INS Vindhyagiri (yet to be delivered)
- Mahendragiri's delivery powerfully demonstrates India's growing self-reliance in defence manufacturing:
 - Indigenous content - ~75%
 - MSMEs engaged - Over 200
- **Project 17A Fleet**
 - **First ship:** INS Nilgiri — delivered approximately 17 months before Mahendragiri.
 - The pace of deliveries reflects India's strengthening indigenous naval-industrial complex.

ENVIRONMENT AND GEOGRAPHY

India's First Green Methanol Plant

India is building its first **green methanol** production plant at Kandla port, using **Prosopis Juliflora**, Kutch's most invasive weed as the feedstock to produce marine fuel.

About the Plant

- Prosopis Juliflora is a shrub native to Mexico, known as '**Veelayati Keekar**' in North India and **Seemai Karuvelam** in Tamil Nadu
- It has been ranked as one of the '**top 100 invasive species of the world**'
- In Kutch, it has threatened the native **Banni grasslands** for decades
- It was introduced by the British in the 1920s to 'green' Delhi and later taken by the Gujarat Government in 1960s to fight the growing salt Desert in Kutch
- Makes a good feedstock for green methanol as it is energy dense and a hardwood

About Methanol

- Methanol is a colourless, volatile and flammable liquid, typically produced using **natural gas (grey methanol) or from coal (brown methanol)**
- Uses of Methanol
 - chemical feedstock to make plastics, resins, paints
 - Alternative fuel, blended with petrol
 - Used in shipping as an alternative to bunker oil
 - Antifreeze and solvent

Green Methanol

- While conventional oil is produced from fossil fuels, **green methanol** is produced using **biomass from agricultural residue or captured CO₂ and green hydrogen**
- It can cut a vessel's CO₂ emissions by up to 95% and NO_x by up to 80%

About Green Methanol Plant

- The plant is sited at the **Deendayal Port Authority in Kandla, Gujarat**
- Production- **5 tonnes of methanol a day**
- Part of Government of India's plan to convert ports along the western coast into 'Green Ports'
- It will fulfil part of the demand for green fuel in the global

SIGNIFICANCE OF GREEN METHANOL FOR INDIA

- 1. Supports Net Zero Goals**
Enables deep decarbonisation in hard-to-abate sectors like shipping, aviation, chemicals, steel and heavy transport.
- 2. Energy Security**
Can be produced domestically using renewable energy and captured CO₂, reducing dependence on imported fossil fuels.
- 3. Ideal Marine Fuel**
IMO recognizes methanol as a promising low/zero-carbon fuel for global shipping. India, as a major maritime nation, can lead in green shipping.
- 4. Industrial Feedstock**
Key raw material for chemicals, plastics, paints, solvents, and formaldehyde – can decarbonize India's chemical industry.
- 5. Economic Opportunity**
India can become a global hub for green methanol production and exports, creating jobs, investments and new industries.
- 6. Leverages Renewable Potential**
Utilizes India's abundant solar, wind and emerging green hydrogen ecosystem.
- 7. Carbon Capture Utilization**
Provides a pathway to utilize captured CO₂ from industries (refineries, cement, steel, etc.).

CHALLENGES IN PRODUCTION

- 1. High Production Cost**
Green hydrogen and CO₂ capture are still expensive, making green methanol costlier than grey methanol (fossil-based).
- 2. Green Hydrogen Availability**
Large-scale, low-cost green hydrogen is not yet available; requires massive renewable capacity and infrastructure.
- 3. CO₂ Capture & Supply**
Capturing CO₂ is energy-intensive and costly. Reliable, large-scale CO₂ supply chains are still developing.
- 4. Technology & Scale**
Limited large-scale plants globally; technology still maturing in India.
- 5. Infrastructure Needs**
Requires new infrastructure for CO₂ transport, hydrogen handling, methanol plants, storage and distribution.
- 6. Policy & Market Support**
Needs clear policies, incentives, carbon pricing and offtake agreements to make projects bankable.
- 7. Competition**
Competes with other e-fuels (green ammonia, SAF, hydrogen) for investment and end-use markets.

shipping industry that has been mandated by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) rules

- Apart from Prosopis Juliflora, the plant will also be certified to run on agricultural residues such as **bagasse and cotton stalk**.

Coastal Atmospheric Research Testbed (C-ART)

The Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), Pune, under the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES), has established the Coastal Atmospheric Research Testbed (C-ART) at Andhra University, **Visakhapatnam**, under the ambit of Mission Mausam.

What is C-ART?

- C-ART is a **coastal meteorological observatory and research facility** designed to:
 - Improve weather observations along India's east coast
 - Study monsoon and coastal atmospheric processes
 - Enhance weather and climate prediction models
 - Improve forecasting of cyclones and extreme weather events
- It will function as a National User Facility for researchers across India
- It aims to expand India's weather observation network and improve spatial and temporal coverage of weather data

Why was Vishakhapatnam Chosen?

- Located on the Bay of Bengal coast, frequently affected by:
 - Cyclones, Thunderstorms, heavy rainfall, monsoon variability
- Ideal for studying coastal-atmosphere interactions and severe weather systems.

Ecocide and Environment Destruction

There has been a growing demand to recognize "**ecocide**" as an international crime under the **Rome Statute** of the **International Criminal Court (ICC)**. The debate has gained momentum due to wars, climate change, industrial disasters, and large-scale ecosystem destruction.

What is Ecocide?

- Large-scale, severe, or long-term destruction of the natural environment caused by human actions, whether during war or peacetime
- The term was first popularized in the 1970s in the context of environmental devastation during the Vietnam War
- Common Examples:
 - Massive deforestation, Mining damage and destruction of wetlands
 - Oil spills and toxic pollution

Why is Ecocide in news?

- Environmental groups and several countries have urged that ecocide be recognized as the fifth international crime under the Rome Statute, alongside:
 - Genocide
 - Crimes against Humanity
 - War Crimes
 - Crime of Aggression
- Currently, environmental damage is already covered under the Rome Statute as a war crime under very strict conditions. However:
 - A prosecution is possible only if the attack is intentional, damage is widespread and long-term and the environmental harm is disproportionately higher than the expected military advantage
 - But because these conditions are extremely difficult to prove, **no prosecution has yet succeeded under this provision**

- Countries currently leading the campaign include **Vanuatu, Fiji, Samoa.**

SkyCast

The Government of India has inaugurated SkyCast, India's first integrated aviation weather monitoring and forecasting system at Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi.

What is SkyCast?

- SkyCast is an advanced atmospheric remote-sensing system
- Supports pilots, airlines, airport operators, and air traffic controllers in making safer operational decisions
- It provides:
 - Real-time weather monitoring
 - Fog detection and forecasting
 - Turbulence monitoring
 - Wind profiling
 - Early weather warnings for aviation
- India has become the 19th country in the world to deploy such an integrated aviation weather monitoring system
- Provides advance weather alerts within short windows of 3 hours and reduces flight delays, diversions and cancellations.
- It is based on the findings from the Winter Fog Experiment (WiFEX), a joint initiative of Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology and India Meteorological Department started in 2015
- It is a flagship initiative under Mission Mausam
- The next SkyCast is planned at Jewar Airport in Uttar Pradesh, followed by expansion across major Indian airports

Rising Night-Time Temperatures in India

Night-time temperatures in India are rising faster than daytime temperatures in many regions, creating serious health risks because the human body is unable to recover from daytime heat stress.

The Changes that are happening

- Traditionally, temperatures fall significantly after sunset, allowing people and infrastructure to cool down
- However, night-time temperatures are remaining unusually high across many parts of India due to-
 - **Climate change, Urban Heat Island effect, increased humidity and increased cover trapping heat**
- This is particularly dangerous because-
 - Human body needs night-time cooling since the body dissipates heat during the night
 - When the night remains hot:
 - Body temperature stays elevated
 - Heart and lungs work harder
 - Sleep quality deteriorates
- About 57% of Indian districts face high to very high heat risk
 - These districts are home to around 76% of India's population

Block Level Monsoon Forecasting System unveiled by IMD

Recently, IMD has launched an AI driven Block level monsoon forecasting system to provide highly localized rainfall and monsoon onset predictions several weeks in advance.

Key Features

- The model determines monsoon based on a continuous five-day rainfall period and absence of the extended dry spells over the following month

- The forecasting model has been jointly developed by the IMD, the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), Pune, and the National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF)
- It integrates artificial intelligence with numerical weather prediction models and long term meteorological data sets to improve forecast precision
- Forecasts are generated every Wednesday and provide probabilistic predictions for monsoon movement and rainfall up to four weeks ahead
- The system currently operates across 3196 blocks in 15 states and one union territory, particularly in rain-fed agricultural regions where monsoon timing is crucial
- Authorities plan to gradually expand the coverage to the remaining parts of the country
- Earlier monsoon forecasts were mainly available at the district or state level, which often failed to capture variations within smaller areas.

India's Evolving Legal Metrology Ecosystem

The Government of India on the Meteorology Day (20th may) reiterated the strong legal base of India's metrology, highlighting the historical journey, laws and new initiatives in the field. The system is governed mainly through the **Legal Metrology Act, 2009**.

Metrology and Legal Metrology

- Metrology is the science of measurement, and it establishes standardized units for weight, length, volume, temperature, time etc
- Legal metrology regulates measurements used in trade and commerce

Major Government Initiatives

1. EMaap Portal

- Digital platform for legal metrology services
- Developed by the Department of Consumer Affairs, Legal Metrology Division
- Provides online registration for manufacturers, dealers, importers and repairers

2. One Nation, One Time Initiative

- Aims to establish highly precise Indian Standard Time synchronization
- developed by the Department of Consumer Affairs, Government of India, in collaboration with the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research-National Physical Laboratory (**CSIR-NPL**) and the Indian Space Research Organization (**ISRO**)
- Supports sectors such as banking, telecom, AI, navigation

3. OIML (*International Organization of Legal Metrology*) Certificate Recognition

- India became authorized in 2023 to issue internationally accepted OIML certificates
- Helps manufacturers export measuring instruments globally

India's Ancient Measurement System

- Indus Valley Civilization developed standardized measurement systems
- Mauryan empire used organized systems for trade and taxation
- Traditional units include Rati, Masha, Tola, Seer, Maund, etc.

Sperm Whale Clicks

A recent study on **sperm whales** suggests that their clicking sounds contain complex structures that resemble some features of human language. Researchers analyzed thousands of whale vocalizations and found patterns indicating that whale communication may be far more sophisticated than previously believed.

Key Findings

- Sperm whales communicate using sequences of clicks known as "**codas**"
- Scientists recorded and analyzed over **8,000 codas** from Caribbean sperm whales

- The clicks showed variations in:
 - Rhythm
 - Tempo
 - Duration
 - Combination patterns
- These variations can be rearranged in different ways, similar to how humans combine sounds and words to create meaning.

Why It Is Significant?

- Human language is considered unique because it combines a limited set of sounds into an enormous number of meaningful expressions
- Researchers found that sperm whales also use a structured system where small changes in click patterns may alter meaning
- This suggests a form of **combinatorial communication**, a feature previously thought to be largely exclusive to human language

About Sperm Whales

- Largest toothed predator on Earth
- Can dive to depths exceeding 2000 metres
- Uses echolocation to hunt squid in deep oceans and lives in highly social family groups
- Habitat preference-
 - Deep oceanic waters (deeper than 1000m), submarine canyons
- Found in Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal, around Lakshadweep, and Andaman and Nicobar Islands
- Conservation Status-
 - IUCN Red List- Vulnerable; CITES- Appendix I; WPA, 1972- Schedule 1

IITM Pune's WISE-2026 and Incubation Centre for Climate Startups

The Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), Pune, under the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES), inaugurated a dedicated *Incubation Center for Startups in Weather and Climate*. The event was marked by a one-day national meet titled 'Weather and Climate Innovation Meet for Startups and Entrepreneurs (WISE-2026)'. The initiative aims to accelerate climate-tech innovation and strengthen India's weather and climate services through startup participation.

Key Highlights

- New Incubation Centre
 - Functioning under the National Enterprise for Atmospheric Technology (NEAT) initiative and established to support
 - i. Weather forecasting
 - ii. Climate services
 - iii. Disaster management
 - iv. Agriculture advisories
- NEAT is a major component of Mission Mausam, launched by the Ministry of Earth Sciences with objectives such as developing a weather ready and climate smart nation, improving forecasting accuracy and promoting climate resilience

Outer Core- Changes Observed in the Direction of the Flow

Researchers from the University of Edinburgh and the British Geological Survey mapped 27 years of satellite data for iron movement in the Earth's outer core and found that around year 2010, liquid iron beneath the equatorial Pacific Ocean changed direction from a slow westward movement to a faster eastward surge.

Researchers Identified two Key Flow Patterns

- A steady westward flow, accounting for 95% of the movement, which explains the historical westward drift of the Earth's magnetic field.
- A second pattern showing the dramatic reversal in 2010, which began weakening around 2020
- The 2010 reversal was linked to seismic and geodetic shifts in the Earth's solid inner core
- The outer-core flow is approximately 10% lopsided between the Northern and Southern Hemispheres
- The findings could explain sudden "jerks" in magnetic field readings and suggest that deep-Earth liquids can change direction much faster than traditional theories predict.

Controlled Earthquakes

Recently, scientists at BedrettoLab beneath the Swiss Alps successfully triggered around 8000 tiny, 'controlled earthquakes' as part of an experiment called FEAR-2 (Fault Activation and Earthquake Rupture).


How was the Experiment Conducted?

- The underground laboratory is located about 1.5 km beneath the Swiss Alps inside a tunnel system in southern Switzerland
- Researchers drilled boreholes into an existing fault and injected about 750 cubic metres of water
- The injected water increased pore pressure and reduced friction along the fault, causing it to slip and generate micro earthquakes
- Thousands of sensors were installed to monitor fault movement in real time

Why the Research Matters?

- Findings can help reduce risks associated with-
 - Geothermal energy projects
 - Deep mining and tunnelling
 - Wastewater injection
 - Hydraulic fracturing (fracking)
- The research may improve earthquake forecasting and help prevent large human-induced earthquakes
- The study refers to the 2017 Pohang earthquake in South Korea (magnitude 5.4), which was linked to water injections at a geothermal project. Understanding induced seismicity can help avoid similar disasters in the future.

Species in News

<p>Rusty Spotted Cat</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One of the smallest cat species in the world (1-1.6 kg)• Primarily nocturnal, with 80% of the population found in India• Conservation Status-<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ IUCN Red List- Near Threatened○ WPA, 1972- Schedule I○ CITES- Appendix I• Habitat- Dry and moist deciduous forests, scrublands, grasslands across Central, Southern and Northern India• Recently found outside protected areas in Haryana
<p>Ganges Soft Shell Turtle</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recently, India's first satellite tagged Ganges Soft Shell Turtle was released in the Brahmaputra river in the Kaziranga National Park• Conservation Status-<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ IUCN Red list- Endangered (EN)○ WPA, 1972- Schedule I○ CITES- Appendix I



- A major river scavenger, helping clean aquatic ecosystems by consuming carrion
- Found in the Ganga, Mahanadi, Indus, Brahmaputra Basins and across India, Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh

White Bellied Heron



- Second largest heron species in the world, considered one of world's rarest birds with fewer than 250 mature individuals estimated to be existing today
- Sensitive to hydropower projects and river habitat alteration
- Found across

Arunachal Pradesh	Bhutan	Northern Myanmar
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- Conservation Status-
 - IUCN Red List- Critically Endangered
 - CITES- Appendix I
 - WPA, 1972- Schedule I

Hantavirus

A recent hantavirus outbreak onboard Dutch cruise ship MV Hondius has left three people dead and several others infected.

What is Hantavirus?

It is a group of **zoonotic viruses** spread mainly by rodents.

Transmission: Humans get infected through contact with infected rodent **urine, saliva, droppings**, or inhalation of contaminated dust. Rare human-to-human spread occurs only with **Andes virus**.

Diseases Caused:

- **Hantavirus Cardiopulmonary Syndrome (HCPS):** affects lungs & heart (mainly Americas)
- **Haemorrhagic Fever with Renal Syndrome (HFRS):** affects kidneys & blood vessels (Europe & Asia)

Diagnosis: RT-PCR and antibody tests.

Treatment: No specific antiviral drug or vaccine; supportive intensive care is the main treatment.

Manus AI

China's industry regulator recently prohibited foreign investment in Manus AI.

What is Manus AI?

Manus AI is an **autonomous AI agent** that can independently **plan, execute, and complete tasks**. Unlike traditional chatbots, it **takes action** instead of only answering questions.

Features: Works in a **virtual computer (sandbox)**, has **internet access** and memory, can **install software** and create tools. It delivers **complete results with minimal supervision**.

Importance: Represents shift from **AI assistants** to **AI agents** capable of end-to-end task execution.

Canine Distemper Virus

Five tigers, including a tigress and her four cubs, died in Kanha Tiger Reserve (Madhya Pradesh) due to a suspected outbreak of Canine Distemper Virus (CDV).

What is CDV? It is a highly contagious **viral disease** mainly affecting dogs and wild carnivores- caused by a **Paramyxoviridae** (related to measles virus). It spreads through **air droplets/direct contact** from infected animals.

Affected Animals: wildlife such as **tigers, foxes, wolves, and big cats**. High mortality in wild animals.

Prevention: **Vaccination of dogs** is the main preventive measure.

GalaxEye's Drishti Satellite

Indian space start-up GalaxEye recently launched satellite Mission Drishti, aboard SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket from California.

What is Mission Drishti?

It is the world's first **OptoSAR Earth observation satellite** launched by Bengaluru-based startup GalaxEye. It is India's largest privately developed Earth observation satellite (~190 kg).

Objective: Provide **all-weather, day-night Earth observation** capability and support- defence and border surveillance, agriculture monitoring, disaster management, maritime monitoring and infrastructure planning.

What Makes Mission Drishti Unique?

- **World's First OptoSAR Satellite:** First satellite to combine Optical Imaging (MSI) and Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) on a single synchronized platform.

- **Combines Advantages of Both Imaging Systems:** Optical images are clear and intuitive but fail during clouds/night. SAR works in all weather and night conditions but is difficult to interpret. Drishti merges both the features to provide **clear + all-weather imagery**.
- **Simultaneous Imaging of the Same Location:** Optical and SAR sensors operate in sync and eliminate parallax mismatch, temporal gaps and manual alignment of datasets.
- **Analysis-Ready Unified Data:** Generates a single integrated dataset instead of separate optical and SAR outputs. Useful for mission-critical applications like defence and disaster response.
- **AI-enabled Processing:** Uses AI models for sub-pixel co-registration, jitter correction, sensor-data fusion for highly accurate imaging.
- **Designed for Tropical Countries:** Particularly useful for countries like India with frequent cloud cover and unpredictable weather. It addresses limitations faced by conventional western Earth-observation systems.

Extra Mile: India's Private Space Companies

- **Skyroot Aerospace:** likely to become India's first privately launched orbital rocket- **Vikram-1**, a multi-stage launch vehicle capable of carrying satellites up to 350 kg to Low Earth Orbit (LEO). The rocket uses lightweight carbon-composite material and indigenously developed 3D-printed engines, making manufacturing faster and cheaper. Skyroot also became the first Indian private company to conduct a sub-orbital rocket launch in 2022.
- **Pixxel:** It is developing **Pathfinder**, India's first orbital data-centre satellite with Sarvam AI (India's full-stack sovereign AI platform, with speech-to-text, text-to-speech, translation, and conversational agents). Satellite will carry GPUs for AI training and inference in space.
- **Agnikul Cosmos:** Developed **Agnilet**, world's first single-piece 3D-printed rocket engine. Launched **Agnibaan SOrTeD** (*SubOrbital Technological Demonstrator*), India's first semi-cryogenic private rocket from private launchpad **Dhanush**.
 - ✓ Established in 2020 under the Department of Space, IN-SPACe is an autonomous single-window agency that promotes, regulates, and authorizes private participation in India's space sector. It acts as an interface between ISRO and private companies, facilitating launch vehicles, satellites, space services, and infrastructure sharing.

Psyche Spacecraft

NASA's Psyche spacecraft captured a stunning crescent image of Mars from nearly 5 million kilometres away.

About Psyche Spacecraft:

- It is a NASA mission launched in 2023 to study the metal-rich asteroid **Psyche** located between Mars and Jupiter. The spacecraft will reach the asteroid in **2029** after a gravity assist flyby of **Mars**. It will orbit the asteroid for about **2 years**, mapping its surface, composition, gravity, and magnetic properties.
- **Objective:** Understand how rocky planets and planetary cores formed.
- **Target: 16 Psyche**, believed to be the exposed iron-nickel core of an early planetesimal.
 - Psyche lies in **main asteroid belt** between Mars & Jupiter, about **three times farther from the Sun than Earth**.

Key Features:

- Uses **solar electric propulsion** for deep-space travel.
- Helps scientists understand the **formation of rocky planets and planetary cores**, including Earth's interior.

Fibre-Optic Drones

The fibre-optic-guided drones are proving to be a disruptive force in the Russia-Ukraine conflict and parts of the West Asia war.

What are Fibre-optic Guided Drones?

They are FPV (First Person View) attack drones controlled through a "**physical fibre-optic cable**" instead of radio signals. The cable transmits control signals and live video in real time.

Key Features:

- Immune to electronic jamming unlike RF drones.
- Provides stable real-time control even in contested battle zones.
- Enables high-quality battlefield visuals till impact.
- Low-cost, expendable, swarm-capable systems.
- Difficult to detect and intercept due to small size, low-altitude flight and silent movement.

Significance	Limitations & Environmental Concerns
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enables precise strikes in heavily contested electronic warfare zones.• Reduces dependence on expensive conventional systems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fibre spool increases drone weight and battery consumption.• Fibre cable can break due to winds, obstacles, or enemy cutting/snipping.• Less manoeuvrable than wireless drones.• Discarded polymer fibre cables in battle zones may release microplastics and toxic substances after explosions/fires, harming soil, water, wildlife, and birds.

Germanium-Free Drone Imaging Tech

Eon Spacelabs (Hyderabad-based startup) has developed India's first germanium-free thermal imaging drone payload, reducing reliance on Chinese supply chains.

Eon Spacelabs' Innovation: It replaced germanium with domestically manufacturable chalcogenide glass in its Lumira_E40I50 system designed for Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) missions. The lightweight system (800 g-2.2 kg) equipped with Edge AI can reportedly detect humans up to 2 km away and vehicles up to 8 km away while operating in temperatures from -20°C to +55°C.

Why does Germanium Matter?

- Germanium is widely used in military thermal cameras because it transmits infrared heat radiation efficiently.
- China dominates global germanium supply and has tightened exports, raising prices. India imports most of its germanium, creating defence supply-chain vulnerabilities.

Importance for India:

- **Defence Role:** Enables surveillance and targeting in darkness and bad weather.
- **Civilian Uses:** Disaster management, industrial inspection, and forest-fire detection.

Centre of Excellence for Space Technology

Karnataka recently launched India's first State-led Centre of Excellence for Space Technology (CoE SpaceTech Foundation) in Bengaluru.

About CoE SpaceTech Foundation:

- **Established By:** Karnataka Innovation and Technology Society in collaboration with SIA-India.
 - Satcom Industry Association-India (SIA-India) is a non-profit industry body representing the satellite and space communications ecosystem in India. It acts as a collective voice for the private space sector, fostering collaboration between industry, government, and international stakeholders to develop India's satellite and space economy
- **Objective:** Convert space R&D into commercial applications (space startups) and boost India's space economy.
- **Significance:**
 - Bridges gap between innovation and market-ready products.
 - Promotes jobs, investment, and private sector participation in space sector.
 - Supports shared infrastructure through Common Infrastructure Facility (CIF) model.

ISO International Subcommittee Meetings on 'Space Systems and Operations'

Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), the National Standards Body of India, recently organized the 35th Plenary and Working Groups meetings of the **ISO/TC 20/SC 14 'Space Systems and Operations'** subcommittee of International Organization for Standardization (ISO) at New Delhi.

About ISO/TC 20/SC 14: Established in 1992, it is a subcommittee of ISO that sets global standards for space systems, Satellites and launches, Space operations, safety, testing, and disposal.
Secretariat: American National Standards Institute (ANSI)-USA

MoU to Accelerate Responsible AI Adoption in Healthcare

India AI and the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) recently signed an MoU to accelerate responsible AI Adoption in healthcare.

Objective: To build a **national interoperable AI ecosystem** for healthcare and improve biomedical research, disease management and public health outcomes.

Key Features:

- **AIKosh Dataset Platform:** ICMR will provide anonymized and ethics-approved health datasets, AI models, and toolkits developed under the MIDAS framework (Medical Information Data for AI Solutions) to the AIKosh platform for wider research and innovation access.
- **Compute Infrastructure:** IndiaAI will provide GPU-based and high-performance computing (HPC) infrastructure at subsidized rates to support advanced AI research and healthcare applications.
- **AI-based Healthcare Solutions:** Both institutions will jointly develop AI-driven solutions for disease surveillance, diagnostics, and major public health challenges using ICMR's disease-burden data and IndiaAI's technology infrastructure.

About IndiaAI: It is a flagship AI mission under the Ministry of Electronics & IT (MeitY) to build a **responsible, inclusive, and indigenous AI ecosystem** in India. Its **key pillars include:**

- **IndiaAI Innovation Centre:** Develops indigenous Large Multimodal Models (LMMs) and domain-specific AI models.
- **Application Development Initiative:** Promotes AI solutions for socio-economic transformation.
- **AIKosh Platform:** Provides datasets, AI models, and sandbox tools for AI innovation.
- **Compute Capacity:** Builds large-scale AI infrastructure with 10,000+ GPUs through PPP mode.
- **Startup Financing:** Supports deep-tech AI startups through funding access.
- **IndiaAI FutureSkills:** Expands AI education and establishes AI/Data Labs in Tier-2 & Tier-3 cities.
- **Safe & Trusted AI:** Ensures ethical and responsible AI through governance frameworks and safety tools.

Model Collapse

Researchers recently found that single **real-world** (human generated) data point can prevent Artificial Intelligence (AI) collapse.

What is Model Collapse? It is the degradation of AI systems trained mainly on AI-generated data, causing outputs to become inaccurate, repetitive, biased or meaningless.

Causes

- Excessive use of synthetic (AI-made) data.
- Recycling of errors and biases in training.
- Decline in fresh human-generated data.

UMMID Programme

India recently took a major step towards expanding genome-based healthcare with the launch of the UMMID Programme and the UMMID Dashboard.

About UMMID Programme (Unique Methods of Management of Inherited Disorders)

- **Launched by:** Department of Biotechnology under Ministry of Science & Technology
- **Aim:** Early diagnosis, screening, counselling and management of rare/inherited genetic disorders.
- **Focus Areas:**
 - Genetic diagnostics
 - Newborn & prenatal screening
 - Genetic counselling
 - Clinician training
 - Community outreach
- **Key Features:**
 - UMMID Dashboard for monitoring & coordination.
 - UMMID Compendium for programme access and tracking.
 - Established nearly 30 NIDAN (National Inherited Diseases Administration Centres) Kendras to expand advanced genetic testing and counselling facilities beyond metropolitan cities into underserved and Aspirational Districts.

SMILE Mission

The Vega-C rocket recently launched the SMILE spacecraft from Europe's Spaceport beginning a mission to study solar storms, geomagnetic storms and space weather.

About SMILE (Solar wind Magnetosphere Ionosphere Link Explorer) Mission:

It is a joint mission of the European Space Agency and Chinese Academy of Sciences to study how the **solar wind interacts with Earth's magnetosphere.**

Key Features:

- First mission to observe Earth's magnetic shield using **soft X-ray imaging.**
- Equipped with:
 - **X-ray camera** → tracks impact of solar wind on magnetosphere.
 - **Ultraviolet camera** → observes auroras continuously for up to **45 hours.**
- **Orbit:** Operates in a highly elliptical orbit reaching about **121,000 km above Earth.**
- **Significance:** Improves prediction of **space weather** and helps protect **satellites, astronauts, navigation and communication systems.**

Information Agents

Recently, Google at its annual developer conference unveiled information agents.

What are Information Agents?

Information agents are AI-powered systems integrated into search engines and apps that continuously monitor the web on a user's behalf. They track updates such as housing listings, stock prices, travel deals, job alerts, and news.

How do they work? Users provide personal preferences and goals, after which the agent persistently crawls websites, gathers relevant information, filters it, and automatically delivers updates, summaries, or recommended actions.

Significance	Concerns
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Automation of Searches: Eliminates repetitive manual web searches and saves time.• Personalised Real-Time Updates: Provides customized	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Privacy & Data Collection: Agents require highly personal data for better performance like location, finances, health, preferences, political/religious views, etc. Companies can build extremely detailed user profiles. Unclear how long such sensitive data will be stored or used.• Increased Bot Traffic: AI agents continuously crawl websites, generating massive, automated traffic. Bots already account for over half of global

<p>alerts and recommendations based on user preferences.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater Convenience: Assists users in travel planning, shopping, finance, jobs, and research activities. • Advancement in AI Assistants: Represents the next generation of intelligent, always-on digital assistants. 	<p>web traffic. Could overload publishers' servers and increase infrastructure costs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harm to Publishers: AI agents may summarize content without sending users to original websites, reduce click-through traffic and advertising revenue for publishers. Publishers may block AI crawlers, reducing information quality online. • Regulatory & Ethical Issues: No clear liability if agents provide harmful financial or personal suggestions. Premium AI agents may widen the "information divide" between paid and free users.
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Ebola

Amid recent Ebola outbreaks in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Uganda, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the situation a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) under the International Health Regulations (IHR), 2005.

A PHEIC is an extraordinary health event that poses a cross-border disease risk and may require urgent international coordination and response.	The IHR 2005 is a legally binding global health framework involving 196 countries to prevent, detect and respond to the international spread of diseases while minimizing disruption to travel and trade.
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About Ebola:

It is a severe and often fatal viral haemorrhagic fever caused by the Ebola virus. The current outbreak is caused by the **Bundibugyo strain**, for which no approved vaccine or specific treatment currently exists.

Spread: Through direct contact with infected blood or bodily fluids and can lead to bleeding, organ failure and death.

Why is it dangerous?

- Causes **internal and external bleeding**.
- Leads to **organ failure and shock**.
- Has a **high death rate** (often 30-90%).
- Spreads quickly in healthcare settings and during unsafe burials.

Ferrocene Puzzle Solved

Researchers at IIT Madras and Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru have synthesized a novel **carbon-free molecule** replicating the unique "sandwich" structure of ferrocene, solving a 70-year-old chemistry challenge.

About Ferrocene:

- **Ferrocene** is an organometallic compound discovered in the 1950s.
- **Structure:** an **iron atom** sandwiched between **two carbon-ring molecules** ("sandwich structure"). It is known for its **high stability** and unique bonding.
- **Applications:** medicines, batteries, catalysts, advanced materials, and electronics.

What is the New Breakthrough?

Researchers have created a **completely carbon-free ferrocene-like molecule where-**

- **Osmium** replaces iron at the centre.
- **Boron-based rings** replace carbon rings retaining the same "sandwich" architecture as ferrocene.

Why is this Significant?

- **Solves a 70-year-old challenge:** Proves stable ferrocene-like "sandwich" structures can exist without carbon.
- **Expands chemistry research:** Opens possibilities for carbon-free organometallic compounds and new molecular designs.

- **Potential applications:** Could aid development of advanced materials, catalysts, electronics, and energy-storage systems.

Ayush Anudan Portal

In a major step towards strengthening digital governance and enhancing transparency in the Ayush sector, the 'Ayush Anudan Portal' was launched recently.

What is Ayush Anudan Portal?

It is a digital grant-management portal launched by the Ministry of Ayush under the **Ayush Grid initiative** to streamline **submission, processing, approval, and monitoring** of funding proposals under **Central Sector Schemes**.

✓ **Ayush Grid** is a flagship digital health initiative of the Ministry of Ayush. It aims to create an **integrated, transparent, and citizen-centric digital ecosystem** for the Ayush sector using modern technology.

Objective: To ensure **transparency, efficiency, accountability, easy accessibility**, and promote **paperless governance** and digital service delivery.

Key Features:

- **Online proposal submission** through a user-friendly interface.
- **Scheme-wise application management** for Ministry's different Ministry-schemes.
- **Real-time application tracking** at every stage.
- **Integration with NGO Darpan Portal** for faster verification, automated authentication, and improved credibility.

NGO DARPAN Portal is a government platform where Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) register to obtain a Unique DARPAN ID. The ID is mandatory for receiving **government grants**, opening/operating bank accounts, FCRA registration/renewal, availing tax exemptions under Section 80G. It improves transparency, authentication, and monitoring of NGOs/NPOs.

Blue Straggler Star

In a major breakthrough, Indian researchers have made the world's first confirmed discovery of a **blue straggler star** hosting a **brown dwarf** companion in an extraordinarily **compact binary system**.

What are Blue Straggler Stars?

They are stars in stellar clusters that appear unusually brighter, bluer, and younger than other stars of same cluster.

Why are they unusual?

Since stars in a cluster form at nearly the same time, they are expected to age similarly. However, blue stragglers appear "rejuvenated," contradicting normal stellar evolution.

How are they formed?

Blue stragglers are believed to form through mass transfer in binary systems, merger/collision of stars, or interactions in triple-star systems.

Significance of the Discovery: Improves understanding of **stellar evolution** and **binary star interactions**.

Chandrayaan-3 Hop Experiment

A new study conducted during the final phase of the Chandrayaan-3 mission when the Vikram lander performed a successful hop experiment has offered fresh insights on the moon surface.

About Chandrayaan-3: It was India's first successful Moon soft-landing mission (23 August 2023) near the lunar south pole. It made India the 4th country to soft-land on the Moon and the first near the south polar region.

Objectives: To demonstrate **safe and soft lunar landing, rover mobility** and conduct **in-situ scientific experiments** on the Moon.

Components: Vikram Lander, Pragyan Rover and Propulsion Module carrying the SHAPE payload (**Spectro-polarimetry of HAbitable Planet Earth**- used to observe Earth from lunar orbit and study how a life-supporting planet appears in reflected light).

What was the HOP experiment?

After landing on the Moon, the Chandrayaan-3 Vikram lander briefly re-ignited its engines and performed a small “hop” of about 50 cm using leftover fuel. During this maneuver, **ChaSTE (Chandra’s Surface Thermophysical Experiment)**- a lunar thermometer was reinserted into the lunar regolith (soil) at a new nearby location.

Key Findings of the HOP Experiment:

- **Surface Erosion Observed:** Engine exhaust during the hop removed the top loose dust layer (~3 cm), exposing denser material underneath.
- **Layered Lunar Soil:** Scientists discovered a **two-layer structure** in lunar regolith, showing long-term meteorite impacts shaped the surface.
- **Soil Becomes Denser Below Surface:** At deeper levels, lunar soil became more compact, denser, and highly cohesive (“sticky”).
- **Thermal Blanket Effect:** Upper regolith layer is highly porous and acts like a **thermal insulator**, helping preserve possible subsurface water-ice.
- **Twilight Temperature Study:** ChaSTE recorded rapid cooling during lunar twilight, helping understand heat loss on the Moon where no atmosphere exists.

Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission

In a significant step towards strengthening medicine safety and promoting rational use of medicines across the country, the Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC) has signed three MoUs with the Bihar State Pharmacy Council, Maharashtra State Pharmacy Council, and Mizoram State Pharmacy Council.

About IPC:

It is an autonomous body under the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, operational since 2009, that sets official standards for the quality, purity, and safety of drugs, APIs (Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients), and dosage forms in India to protect public and animal health.

Functions:

- Revises and publishes:
 - **Indian Pharmacopoeia (IP)**- the official book prescribing standards for drugs in India under the Drugs & Cosmetics Act, 1940.
 - National Formulary of India (NFI)
- Develops standards for drugs, APIs, excipients, herbal medicines, medical devices.
- Provides IP Reference Substances for quality testing.
- Acts as National Coordination Centre for **Pharmacovigilance Programme of India (PvPI)**.

Project Garud

Hyderabad-based Dhruva Space recently secured ₹105 crore under the Research, Development & Innovation Fund (RDIF) to power ‘Project Garud’, a major step towards strengthening India’s private-sector satellite capabilities.

About RDIF Scheme: It is a government initiative to support private-sector innovation in strategic technologies like Space, AI, Quantum, Robotics, Biotechnology, etc. It aims to strengthen **Atmanirbhar Bharat** and India’s global technological competitiveness.

About Dhruva Space: Hyderabad-based Dhruva Space is a full-stack space engineering company operating across the Space, Launch, and Ground segments. It provides integrated solutions including satellites, earth stations, and launch services for civilian and defence applications.

About Project Garud

- It is a **500 kg-class flat-pack communication satellite platform** designed for **constellation-scale deployment** with faster integration and launch efficiency.
- **Applications:** Telecommunications, National Security and Earth Observation.
- **Manufacturing Capacity:** Target production of up to **2 satellites/day** (~500-600 annually).
- **Orbital Missions:** Intended for **LEO** (Low Earth Orbit), **MEO** (Medium Earth Orbit) and future **GEO** (Geostationary Orbit) missions.
- **Significance:** Promotes indigenous satellite manufacturing, reduced foreign dependence and scalable satellite production.

PCOS Is Now Polyendocrine Metabolic Ovarian Syndrome (PMOS)

Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) has been renamed to polyendocrine metabolic ovarian syndrome (PMOS).

About PCOS/PMOS:

It is a **hormonal + metabolic disorder** affecting women, linked with irregular periods, excess male hormones, polycystic ovaries, insulin resistance, weight gain, acne, hair growth, infertility, etc. It affects about **1 in 8 women globally**.

Why was the name changed?

- The term **PCOS** was considered misleading because-
 - many women **do not actually have ovarian cysts**,
 - the disease affects the **whole body**, not just ovaries,
 - it involves **multiple hormones and metabolism**.
- So, **PMOS** better reflects:
 - **Polyendocrine** → many hormones involved,
 - **Metabolic** → insulin resistance, obesity, diabetes risk,
 - **Ovarian** → reproductive effects still present.
- The change aims to improve diagnosis, reduce stigma linked only to fertility, encourage holistic treatment and research.

Spinal Muscular Atrophy

A lightweight robotic device aids neuromuscular recovery in children with Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA), helping them to stand unaided, according to a study published in *Nature*.

What is SMA?

It is a rare inherited disorder causing progressive muscle weakness and wasting.

Cause: Mutation in the **SMN1 (Survival Motor Neuron 1) gene** leading to loss of motor neurons.

Main Symptoms: Weak muscles, difficulty walking, swallowing, and breathing.

Types: Type 0-4, ranging from severe infantile to mild adult-onset forms.

Diagnosis: Mainly through genetic testing.

Treatment: No cure; managed with medicines, physiotherapy, breathing, and feeding support.

Babesia

The Gujarat Forest Department recently intensified its disease-control measures in and around the Gir landscape after eight lion cubs died from suspected Babesia infection.

About Babesia

- It is a **tick-borne parasitic disease** caused by *Babesia* protozoa.
- **Vector:** *Ixodes* (deer) tick.
- **Reservoir:** Rodents (especially mice).
- **Target Organ:** Infects **red blood cells (RBCs)**, resembling malaria.
- **Transmission:** Mainly through **tick bites**; can also spread via **blood transfusion**.

CULTURE

Ru-Soam Bridges

- UNESCO has partnered with the Sikkim government to document the indigenous engineering heritage of Ru-Soam (cane bridges), in the Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve in the state.
- Ru-soam bridges are crafted by the **Lepcha community** from locally available materials such as bamboo, cane, and wood.
- Their bridge-building practices reflect indigenous communities' needs and understanding of diverse environments and structural mechanics.
- These practices demonstrate careful stewardship of natural resources and harmonious coexistence between humans and nature.
- The resilience of these structures was notably demonstrated during the Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF) in 2023, when several cane bridges withstood the impact of the flood and continued to provide critical connectivity to remote areas.
- The project with UNESCO will examine the durability, sustainability, and design features of these structures, while assessing their relevance for contemporary climate adaptation, disaster recovery, and resilient infrastructure planning.
- It will also bring this engineering approach into global scientific and environmental discussions.

Algoza

- Rajasthan's celebrated folk artist Taga Ram Bheel was conferred with Padma Shri in Art for preserving and promoting the traditional music of the Thar Desert through the rare folk instrument, the Algoza.
- Algoza is one of India's oldest surviving **folk wind instruments**. It is a traditional pair of **woodwind instruments**, widely associated with **Rajasthan, Punjab, Sindh**, and parts of western India and Pakistan, and it looks like **double flutes**.
- Its name comes from the idea of two flutes — because it is played using two wooden pipes simultaneously. One flute plays the melody, the other provides a continuous drone or rhythmic base. Together, they create a layered sound unique to desert folk music.
- Musicians have to master **circular breathing**, which is a demanding technique that allows them to blow continuously without stopping for breath.

Somnath Swabhiman Parv

- The Somnath Swabhiman Parv was recently celebrated at Somnath temple.
- The Parv marks 1000 years since the first recorded attack on the Somnath Temple in 1026. It also marks the 75th anniversary of the reopening of the Somnath Temple in 1951.

Somnath Temple

- Located at **Prabhas Patan** near Veraval in Gujarat, it is one of the most sacred pilgrimage centres of Hinduism. It is dedicated to **Lord Shiva** and is traditionally regarded as the **first among the twelve Jyotirlingas**, making it a major centre of Shaivite worship.
- The site of Somnath has been associated with the ancient **Prabhas Kshetra**, a sacred pilgrimage region situated near the confluence of the **Kapila, Hiran and Saraswati rivers (Triveni Sangam)**.
- According to legends, the **Moon God (Soma) worshipped Lord Shiva** here to regain his lost radiance, after being cursed by Daksha. This gave rise to the name "Somnath" meaning "Lord of the Moon."
- A defining feature of Somnath's history is its repeated destruction and reconstruction.
- Temple suffered its most famous attack in **1026 CE** when **Mahmud of Ghazni** raided and plundered it.
- Subsequently, it faced repeated attacks and desecrations under different rulers over the centuries.

- Despite these assaults, the temple was rebuilt multiple times by local rulers, devotees, and communities, making it a powerful symbol of civilisational resilience and cultural continuity.
- After India's Independence, the reconstruction of Somnath became a significant national project. **Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel** took the initiative for rebuilding the temple and it was inaugurated in 1951 by India's first President **Dr. Rajendra Prasad**.
- The present temple is built in the **Maru-Gurjara (Chaulukya/Solanki) style of architecture**, a prominent temple architectural tradition of western India.

Gift Diplomacy

During the Prime Minister's recent five-nation diplomatic tour, he presented the diplomatic leaders a diverse range of gifts showcasing India's cultural diversity.

- The Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni was offered heritage textiles from India's Northeast, including **Assam's prized Muga silk** and a stole inspired by **Manipur's rare Shirui Lily flower**.
- Italy's President received a handcrafted marble inlay box inspired by **Agra's famed Pietra dura craftsmanship**.
- The President of Iceland received a vibrant **Madhubani painting**, one of India's most celebrated folk art traditions **from Bihar**, known for its intricate motifs, vivid colours, and storytelling legacy.
- The gifts for Dutch leaders spotlighted India's artistic heritage. King Willem-Alexander received **Jaipur's iconic GI-tagged blue pottery**, Queen Máxima was gifted intricate **meenakari-kundan earrings**.
 - **Meenakari-Kundan earrings** are a fusion of two heritage Indian jewelry techniques.
 - **Meenakari** is the Persian art of colouring and enameling metal surfaces.
 - The **Kundan** technique involves setting precious or semi-precious stones into a metal framework using highly purified gold.
- Dutch PM Rob Jetten received a GI-tagged **Madhubani painting**, featuring a fish motif, a symbol of harmony, abundance, and ecological balance in the folk art tradition.
- India's gifts to Norwegian leaders celebrated biodiversity and traditional craftsmanship, featuring pressed orchid artwork, floral keepsakes, Kalamkari art, and a palm-leaf Pattachitra creation.
 - **Kalamkari** is an ancient Indian textile art form that originated in **Andhra Pradesh & Telangana**.
 - **Pattachitra** is an ancient, traditional cloth-based scroll art form from **Odisha and West Bengal**.
- The gifts for Sweden's Prime Minister, highlighted India's artisanal and regional heritage, including **Manipur's Laktak tea** and a traditional **Ladakh Pashmina stole**.
- He presented Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen with **Tenzing Norgay's iconic ice axe**, a powerful symbol of courage, adventure, and India's connection to mountaineering history.
- The UAE Queen Mother received a curated trio: **Manipur's aromatic Chak Hao black rice**, a **Karimnagar filigree box from Telangana** showcasing intricate silver craftsmanship, and elegant **Maheshwari silk fabric from Madhya Pradesh**.
- He also gifted a ceremonial dagger with intricate Koftgari work to UAE Crown Prince.
 - **Koftgari** is a traditional Indian metal inlay art primarily associated with Rajasthan, in which fine wires or thin sheets of precious metals such as gold and silver are intricately inlaid onto iron or steel surfaces to create decorative patterns.
- The term Koftgari is derived from the Persian word **koftan**, meaning **"to beat" or "hammer"**.
- GI-tagged **Kesar Mangoes of Gujarat**, and **Meghalaya's GI-tagged Pineapples** were gifted to UAE President.

AWARDS/ PERSONALITIES IN NEWS

Pulitzer Prize 2026

- Two Indian journalists **Anand RK and Suparna Sharma**, along with Natalie Obiko Pearson have won the Pulitzer Prize 2026.
- They were announced as the winners in the **Illustrated Reporting and Commentary category** for a project called **“traPPed”**, exposing cybercrime in India.
- Aniruddha Ghosal, a Hanoi-based reporter, was a winner in the International Reporting category for an investigation into the US Border Patrol’s secret use of mass-surveillance tools originally created in Silicon Valley and further developed in China

Pulitzer Prize

- It is one of the world's most prestigious awards in journalism, literature, music, and public service.
- It was established through the will of **Joseph Pulitzer**, a Hungarian-American newspaper publisher, and has been awarded annually since **1917**.
- The prizes are administered by **Columbia University** in New York, United States.
- Prizes are awarded yearly in 23 categories. In 22 categories, each winner receives a certificate and a US\$15,000 cash award. The winner in the public service category is awarded a gold medal.

National Florence Nightingale Awards 2026

- The President recently conferred the National Florence Nightingale Awards 2026 to fifteen Nursing professionals.
- The award has been given for their outstanding contribution in the field of nursing.
- The award was **instituted by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in 1973** as a mark of recognition for the meritorious services of the nursing professionals to the society.
- These prestigious awards are presented to Registered Nurses, Midwives, Auxiliary Nurse Midwives, and Lady Health Visitors serving across Central and State Governments, Union Territories, and voluntary organisations.
- Each award includes a Certificate of Merit, a cash prize of one lakh rupees and a medal.

International Booker Prize 2026

- Taiwanese writer **Yáng Shuāng-zí’s** Taiwan Travelogue, **translated from the Mandarin Chinese by Lin King** has won the International Booker Prize 2026.
- Taiwan Travelogue is the first book translated from Mandarin Chinese to win the International Booker Prize.

International Booker Prize

- Formerly known as the Man Booker International Prize, it 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.

Agricola Medal

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been conferred the prestigious Agricola Medal by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) at its headquarters in Rome, Italy.

- The Agricola Medal is the highest honour conferred by the Director-General of the FAO.
- The **term Agricola is derived from the Latin word for farmer**, reflecting the award's focus on agriculture and rural welfare.
- It is awarded to distinguished world leaders and individuals for exceptional and long-term contributions to global food security, sustainable agriculture, poverty reduction, and improved nutrition.

Padma Awards 2026

- The President recently presented Padma Awards for the year 2026 at the Civil Investiture Ceremony-I held at Rashtrapati Bhavan.
- For this year, the President has approved 131 Padma awards, including five Padma Vibhushan, 13 Padma Bhushan, and 113 Padma Shri.
- Instituted in **1954**, the Padma Awards are one of the highest civilian honours of India announced annually on the eve of Republic Day and are conferred by the President later.
- The Awards are given in **three categories: Padma Vibhushan** (for exceptional and distinguished service), **Padma Bhushan** (distinguished service of higher order) and **Padma Shri** (distinguished service).
- The **Padma Vibhushan is the second-highest civilian award** of the Republic of India, second only to the Bharat Ratna.
- The awards are given on the recommendations made by the **Padma Awards Committee**, which is constituted by the Prime Minister every year. The nomination process is open to the public. Even **self-nomination can be made**.
- All persons without distinction of race, occupation, position or sex are eligible for these awards. However, **government servants** including those working with PSUs, **except doctors and scientists, are not eligible** for these Awards.
- The awards can also be conferred on foreigners/Non-Resident Indians (NRI)/Person of Indian Origin (PIO)/Overseas Citizen of India (OCI).
- The award does not amount to a title and cannot be used as a suffix or prefix to the awardees' name.

Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science

- Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science (IACS) commemorated 150 years of its establishment.
- Located in **Kolkata**, IACS was founded in **1876** by **Dr. Mahendralal Sircar** with the objective of promoting modern scientific research and scientific education among Indians during the colonial period.
- It is widely regarded as the first research institution in Asia established by Indians for the cultivation of modern science through original research.
- Eminent personalities such as **Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar** and **Keshab Chandra Sen** were associated with its early development. Over the decades, IACS became associated with several renowned Indian scientists, including **Jagadish Chandra Bose, Meghnad Saha, S. N. Bose, and C. V. Raman**.
- **Sir C. V. Raman** conducted his research on the **Raman Effect** at this institution. This discovery earned him the **Nobel Prize in Physics in 1930**, which became India's first Nobel Prize in Science.