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- Paradox of stagnant rural wages
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Mandatory Accessibility Standards at Public Places for Disabled

A Supreme Court (SC) bench, led by former CJI DY Chandrachud held that the provisions of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act and its rules must be treated as mandatory, reaffirming accessibility as a fundamental right.

- ✓ SC directed the Union government to frame mandatory rules ensuring accessibility of public places and services for persons with disabilities (A person with not less than 40% of a specified disability).

About Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016

The **RPwD Act, 2016** aims to empower Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) to live with dignity, equality, and independence. The Act replaced the 1995 law and aligns with India's obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

- ✓**Article 9 of the CRPD** mandates measures to ensure accessibility to the physical environment, transportation, information, communication, and other public services for persons with disabilities.
- ✓The RPwD Rules (2017) were introduced to establish accessibility standards.
- ✓In India, Person with disabilities constitutes around 2.21% of India's total population (2011 Census).

Key Features of the RPwD Act

1. **Equality and Non-Discrimination (Section 3)**: PwDs are entitled to live with dignity, enjoy equality & be free from discrimination. The Act mandates government & authorities ensure these rights.
   - ✓ SDG 10 emphasizes reducing inequality, including equal access for persons with disabilities.
2. **Inclusive Education (Section 16)**: The Act requires all educational institutions to provide inclusive education and reasonable accommodation for children with disabilities.
3. **Employment Rights (Section 19)**: PwDs must not face discrimination in employment, and the government must implement schemes to support vocational training and self-employment.
4. **Access to Public Spaces and Services (Sections 40, 41, 44-46)**: The Act enforces accessibility in infrastructure, transportation, and public spaces, mandating that both new and existing buildings be accessible to PwDs.
5. **Protection from Abuse (Section 7)**: It ensures protection against abuse, violence, and exploitation, with provisions for support and rehabilitation.
6. **Legal Capacity and Guardianship (Section 14)**: PwDs are entitled to make legal decisions, with limited guardianship available for those unable to make binding decisions.
7. **Health and Social Security (Section 25)**: It guarantees free healthcare for PwDs from government facilities, and the government is obligated to provide preventive healthcare measures.
8. **Special Courts for Disabilities (Section 84)**: The Act establishes special courts to address crimes against PwDs & appoints grievance redressal officers in government establishments to handle complaints.
9. **Penalties for Non-Compliance**: Penalties for violations of the Act include fines and imprisonment for discrimination, fraud, and failure to implement provisions related to accessibility & protection.
   - For the first contravention of provisions or rules under the Act, a fine up to Rs 10,000, and for subsequent contravention, a fine of Rs 50,000 up to Rs 5 lakh can be imposed.

{For more details about RPwD Act, 2016; kindly refer The Recitals (July 2024)}

Background

1. **Writ Petition:** Rajive Raturi, a visually challenged person working with a human rights organisation, filed a Writ Petition before the SC in 2005 seeking directions to the respondents to take certain measures towards ensuring safety and accessibility in public spaces, such as roads, public transport and other facilities for visually challenged persons.

2. **Directions on Accessibility:** The SC in 2018 issued 11 action points for accessibility improvements in Government buildings, Railways and airports, ICT ecosystem and Transport carriers. All States and Union Territories, along with the Union of India, were directed to file compliance affidavits and submit compliance within three months.
3. **Non-Compliance Issues:** Most States and Union Territories failed to submit the required affidavits on time. Therefore, the Court appointed the Centre for Disability Studies, NALSAR University of Law ('NALSAR- CDS') to:
   - Assess on-ground compliance.
   - Recommend steps for improving accessibility standards for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs).
4. **NALSAR-CDS Report:** NALSAR submitted a report titled *"Finding Sizes for All: A Report on the Status of the Right to Accessibility in India"* highlighting following issues:
   a. **Accessibility in Courts:** Locomotor accessibility was relatively better in 30 High Court benches analyzed.
      - Only 2 courts provided tactile guiding strips and interpreters for the hearing impaired.
      - Awareness of intellectual and developmental disabilities was only 6.6%.
   b. **Accessibility in Prisons:** Facilities like wheelchairs, crutches, Western toilets, and counselling were limited to central and women's prisons; district and sub-jails were underserved.
      - Many states failed to recognize all disability categories under the RPWD Act, leading to underreporting.
      - There is severe shortage of mental health professionals in prisons.
   c. **Accessibility in Educational Institutions:** Sharp drop in enrolment from primary to higher grades; 4% of enrolled children never attended school.
      - Only 2% of students had access to school toilets.
      - Many schools failed to provide accessible transport, assemblies, or midday meals.
   d. **Accessibility in Employment:** Significant barriers to employment for PWDs, especially for those with benchmark disabilities and high support needs (reported by Enable India) were observed.
   e. **Accessibility in Buildings and Transport:** Newer facilities (e.g., Andheri Metro Station) adhered to accessibility standards, but older buildings lacked basic features like accessible restrooms. Disparity limits mobility and access to opportunities.
   f. **Right to Form Relationships:** PWDs face emotional and relational challenges, including lack of privacy for intimacy and self-expression. Public discourse often ignores private needs like love, desire, and intimacy.
   g. **Right to Health:** There were barriers in healthcare due to a pathologizing approach toward disabilities.
      - Lack of accommodations for disabled individuals pursuing healthcare careers.
      - Healthcare facilities and professionals are often untrained in accessibility.
   h. **Participation in Sports:** Only 21.4% of sports facilities had accessible restrooms, and 3.6% had sensory rooms.
      - Assistive listening systems were absent in 89.3% of venues.
      - Digital access was limited, with 25% of websites and 7.1% of apps meeting accessibility standards.
   i. **Political Participation:** Temporary ramps and facilities during elections are removed post-events, creating inconsistent access. Permanent infrastructure is needed to ensure reliable access for PWDs to vote.
   j. **Inconsistency in the Legal Framework:** which lies at the root of the slow progress.

Key Highlights from the SC Verdict in the Case

1. **Nature of Rule 15 of RPwD Rules, 2017:** which outlines accessibility standards, is beyond the authority of the RPwD Act and provided only **persuasive guidelines** rather than enforceable, **non-negotiable compulsory standards**. The Court noted that the rule contradicted the legislative intent of the RPwD Act, which requires mandatory compliance.

2. **Directed the Union Government** to create **compulsory accessibility standards** within three months and to align the same with the RPwD Act's intent to ensure enforceability. The government was instructed to consult stakeholders, including NALSAR's Centre for Disability Studies (CDS).
3. **Enforcement and Penalization:** Once mandatory rules are framed, the **Centre, State Governments, and Union Territories** must penalize non-compliance by withholding completion certificates and imposing fines.
4. **Reasonable Accommodation:** The Court underscored the principle of **reasonable accommodation** stating that adjustments must be made to address the specific needs of individuals with disabilities. It emphasized designing buildings and services to be **accessible from the outset** rather than making retroactive adjustments.

The court laid down following Principles of Accessibility while framing the rules:

1. **Universal Design:** by prioritizing designs usable by all individuals without requiring adaptations or specialized designs.
   - ✓ **Election Accessibility:** Provision of Braille ballot papers and wheelchair access in polling stations during elections under the **Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan)**.
   - ✓ **Universal Access to Educational Institutions:** Ramps and elevators in schools under the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan to make education accessible to children with disabilities.
2. **Comprehensive Inclusion Across Disabilities**: by addressing diverse disabilities, including physical, sensory, intellectual, and psychosocial disabilities. This includes provisions for specific provisions for conditions like autism, cerebral palsy, intellectual disabilities, sickle cell disease, and ichthyosis.
   - ✓ Provisions under the National Policy for Rare Diseases, 2021, which include financial assistance for treatment of rare genetic conditions like sickle cell anemia and ichthyosis.
3. **Mandating Assistive Technology Integration**: such as screen readers (Tools like JAWS (Job Access With Speech)), audio descriptions, and accessible digital interfaces to ensure inclusive digital and informational access.
   - ✓ Development of smartphones with speech-to-text features and haptic feedback under the Digital India Initiative.
4. **Ongoing Stakeholder Consultation:** by involving persons with disabilities and advocacy groups in continuous consultations to incorporate real-world experiences and insights.
   - ✓ **NGOs like the National Association for the Blind (NAB)** and disability rights groups contributed to accessibility guidelines for government offices, transportation, and digital platforms.

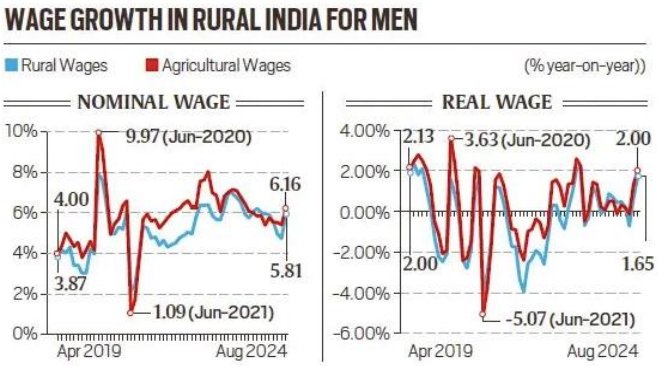
Implications of the SC Judgment

1. **Strengthened Accessibility Standards:** Mandatory, enforceable rules will replace the current recommendatory guidelines, ensuring universal compliance with the RPwD Act.
2. **Accountability Mechanisms:** Non-compliance will be penalized through measures like withholding completion certificates and imposing fines, promoting adherence to accessibility norms.
3. **Inclusive Design Priority:** Accessibility will shift from retroactive adjustments to proactive, universal design principles, fostering inclusivity in infrastructure and services.
4. **Enhanced Consultation Process:** Stakeholder input, including insights from persons with disabilities and experts like NALSAR's CDS, will ensure that rules are practical and comprehensive.
5. **Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs):** The judgment reinforces the rights of PwDs by mandating reasonable accommodations and addressing barriers in physical, digital, and social environments.

This judgment by directing to frame mandatory standards aims to create a more inclusive society, empowering millions of PwDs to fully participate in all aspects of life.

Paradox of Stagnant Rural Wages

- The **Indian economy** has grown at an **average annual rate of 4.6% from 2019-20 to 2023-24, and 7.8%** in the last three fiscal years (April-March) alone.
- The **farm sector's growth** has averaged **4.2% and 3.6%** for these respective periods. However, these macro growth numbers are not reflected in **rural wages.**
- The Labour Bureau compiles daily wage rate data for 25 agricultural and non-agricultural occupations, collected every month from 600 sample villages spread over 20 states.
- The wage growth has been estimated in both nominal (current value) and real (after deducting annual inflation based on the consumer price index for rural India) terms, and for all rural as well as agricultural occupations.
- The average nominal year-on-year growth in **rural wages** during the five years ended 2023-24 worked out to 5.2%. It was higher, at 5.8%, for only agricultural wages.
- But in **real inflation-adjusted terms**, the **average annual growth was -0.4% for rural and 0.2% for agricultural wages** during this period.



Note: Nominal wages are simple arithmetic all-India average for rural male labourers across 25 agricultural and non-agricultural occupations. For real wages, the Consumer Price Index (Rural) has been used. *Source: Labour Bureau*

Rise in Female Labour Force Participating Rates (LFPR)

- One reason is the rising female LFPR, especially in rural India. LFPR is the percentage of the population aged 15 years and above that is working or seeking/willing to work for a relatively long part of a particular year.
- The **all-India average female LFPR** was only **24.5% in 2018-19**. It rose to **41.7%** in the latest official Periodic Labour Force Survey for **2023-24 (July-June)**.
- Even more impressive has been the increase in the **rural female LFPR: From 26.4% in 2018-19 to 47.6%** in the following five years.
- During this period (2018-19 to 2023-24), the **male LFPR** has gone up only marginally, from **75.5% to 78.8% for all-India** and from **76.4% to 80.2% for rural India**.
- As per the Economic Survey 2023-24, the sharp jump in the rural female LFPR is due to the government's schemes such as Ujjwala, Har Ghar Jal, Saubhagya, and Swachh Bharat.
- As per the Survey, these flagship programmes, have substantially expanded household access to clean cooking fuel, electricity, piped drinking water, and toilets.
- This has freed up rural women's time and effort and has enabled them to deploy their energies towards more productive outside employment, instead of only household tasks.
- The rise in female LFPR has, however, also significantly boosted the aggregate size of the rural workforce.
- Due to this there are more people willing to work at the same or lower rates, which has exerted downward pressure on real rural wages.

Less Labour-intensive Growth

- A second, less-favourable, explanation looks at not the supply, but **demand side of labour**.
- While the rural female LFPR has risen, so has agriculture's share in the employment of this workforce – from 71.1% to 76.9% over this period.
- Thus, although more women are entering the rural labour force, they are working in greater numbers on farms. The **movement is from home to field, not to factory or office**.

- This is due to the nature of GDP growth. The economy may be producing more goods and services but that **process is becoming increasingly capital-intensive and labour-saving as well as labour-displacing**.
- If growth is coming from sectors or industries requiring fewer workers for every unit of output, it translates into a rising share of income generated from that accruing to capital (i.e. profits of firms) as against labour (wages/compensation of employees).
- The fact that rural non-agricultural wages have grown even less – actually fallen in real terms – shows a worse picture for non-farm labour demand.

The Mitigating Factor

- Capital-intensive, investment-led growth is good for cement, steel, and infrastructure-developing companies.
- But it isn't that good for fast-moving consumer goods, home appliances, durables, and two-wheeler makers. They benefit more from growth that is labour-intensive and consumption-led.
- Their sales and profits get impacted when jobs and incomes do not show growth comparable to wider GDP measures – as is the case now.
- The one mitigation factor here, however, has been the **income transfer schemes of both the Centre and state governments**. 13 States are currently implementing or have announced such schemes targeting women.
- The total annual payments under these schemes is around **Rs 2 lakh crore** and covering a fifth of India's adult female population.
- This is on top of the Centre's own Rs 6,000-per-year income transfer to some 11 crore farmer households and 5 kg/month free-grain scheme for over 81 crore people.
- The mitigating effect can be seen from the Maharashtra government's Ladki Bahin Yojana, which transfers Rs 1,500 per month to women from families with annual income below Rs 2.5 lakh.
- At Rs 50 per day, it is not small for the state's average rural female labourer who earned a daily wage of Rs 311.5 from tilling fields. In times like this, that is useful additional income.

SC Verdict on Private Property

A 9-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court (SC), in a majority judgment (8:1) in the *Property Owners Association v State of Maharashtra (2024) case* ruled that the government cannot acquire and redistribute all privately owned properties deeming them "material resources of the community" to be used by the government to serve the 'common good'.

Background

- **Law in Question**: The case before the SC involved a Maharashtra law allowing a public housing authority to acquire certain privately-owned, dilapidated buildings in Mumbai. This law included a 1986 amendment that claimed to give effect to Article 39(b) of the Constitution.
- **High Court's (HC) Decision**: In 1991, the Bombay HC upheld this law, reasoning that laws passed under Article 39(b) are safeguarded by Article 31C of the Constitution.

Related Judgments

1. **State of Karnataka v. Ranganatha Reddy (1977)**
   - **Context**: The case involved a Karnataka State law that nationalized private bus transport services.
   - **Verdict**: A seven-judge SC Bench upheld the state law, allowing the nationalization of private bus services.

- **Key Interpretations**: Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, in a separate opinion, interpreted the term "material resources of the community" in Article 39(b) broadly. He held that this phrase includes all national wealth, not limited to natural resources, but encompassing all private and public resources necessary for fulfilling material needs.
- **Impact**: Though a minority view, Justice Iyer's interpretation later influenced subsequent judgments.

2. **Sanjeev Coke Manufacturing Company v. Bharat Coking Coal Limited (1982)**: The Court upheld the nationalization of coke oven plants, referencing Justice Iyer's broader interpretation of "material resources."
3. **Mafatlal Industries Limited v. Union of India (1996):** The Court once again relied on Justice Iyer's interpretation from the Ranganatha Reddy case, reinforcing the expansive view of "material resources of the community" under Article 39(b) for matters involving state intervention and nationalization.

** The present ruling overturns the earlier interpretation formed in 1977 that has been followed by the SC till 1997.

Final Verdict by SC

Issue: Status of Article 31C **Petitioners Arguments**: Minerva Mills verdict effectively struck down Article 31C in its entirety. Thus, the Maharashtra law can be quashed on the grounds that it violated Article 14. **Verdict**: *Minerva Mills* judgment only struck down the words "all or any of the principles laid down in Part IV (DPSP)" reverting Article 31C to its original form upheld in *Kesavananda Bharati* (1973). • Thus, the Maharashtra law remained valid under the principles of Article 31C. • All justices, including concurring opinions by Justices Nagarathna and Dhulia, agreed on this interpretation.
Issue: Interpretation of Article 39(b) **Petitioners Arguments:** They relied on Justice Krishna Iyer's interpretation in *Ranganatha Reddy* (1977), which defined "material resources of the community" as including all resources, public and private, meeting material needs. **Verdict**: The court disagreed with Justice Iyer's broad interpretation, stating that it was too rigid and advocates excessive government control over private resources.
Issue: Scope of Distribute under Article 39(b) **Verdict**: The term "distribute" under Article 39(b) is broadly interpreted to include not only state acquisition but also redistribution to private players, as long as it serves the common good.
Issue: Definition of 'Material Resource of the Community' **Verdict:** The majority ruled that to qualify as a "material resource of the community," a resource must be "material" (i.e., essential in nature) and be "of the community" (meaning its use affects the community). The court gave four key factors for determining this: 1. The nature of the resource and its inherent characteristics. 2. The impact of the resource on the well-being of the community.

3. The scarcity of the resource; and
4. The consequences of the resource being concentrated in the hands of private owners.

For example, resources like forests, ponds, spectrum, mines, and minerals may be considered under Article 39(b) even if privately held, due to their essential nature and impact on the community.

Concurring and Dissenting Opinions

- **Justice Nagarathna**: Partially agreed with the majority, adding that all private resources, except for "personal effects" (e.g., apparel, jewelry), could become “material resources” for the community through nationalization or acquisition.
- **Justice Sudhanshu Dhulia** (Dissent): Supported Justice Krishna Iyer’s view, arguing that it is the legislature's role to decide how resources should be owned and controlled in the interest of public good.

Implications of SC Judgement

1. **Evolving Interpretation of "Material Resources of the Community":** The court has introduced context-dependent criteria (such as the resource’s impact on community welfare, its scarcity, and concentration in private hands) to determine if private property meets this definition. This marks a shift from past judgments where all private property could be included under "material resources," reflecting the changing economic philosophy of India from a strictly socialist to a more liberalized, mixed economy.
2. **Judicial Review Over Redistribution Laws:** This ruling expands judicial oversight by allowing the court to decide if a law genuinely aligns with Article 39(b) based on the newly established criteria. Thus, invoking Article 39(b) alone will no longer shield a law from judicial scrutiny; each case will be assessed on its specific merits to ensure that the "common good" is genuinely served.
3. **Future Property Redistribution Laws:** This ruling establishes principles but leaves open how these will apply in practice. Future cases will likely revisit this framework, particularly as courts determine whether specific laws comply with the court’s interpretation of Article 39(b).
4. **Rigorous Scrutiny**: Laws on private property acquisition and redistribution may now face more rigorous scrutiny to verify that they truly serve the common good as defined by the court, suggesting a more balanced approach to property rights and state control.

In essence, the SC judgment has redefined how private property is treated under the "material resources" clause, promoting judicial review and establishing that the state’s power to appropriate private property will be assessed against community welfare criteria on a case-by-case basis. This nuanced approach shifts the balance, ensuring that both state control and individual property rights are considered within India’s evolving socio-economic landscape.

SC Ruling on Minority Status of AMU

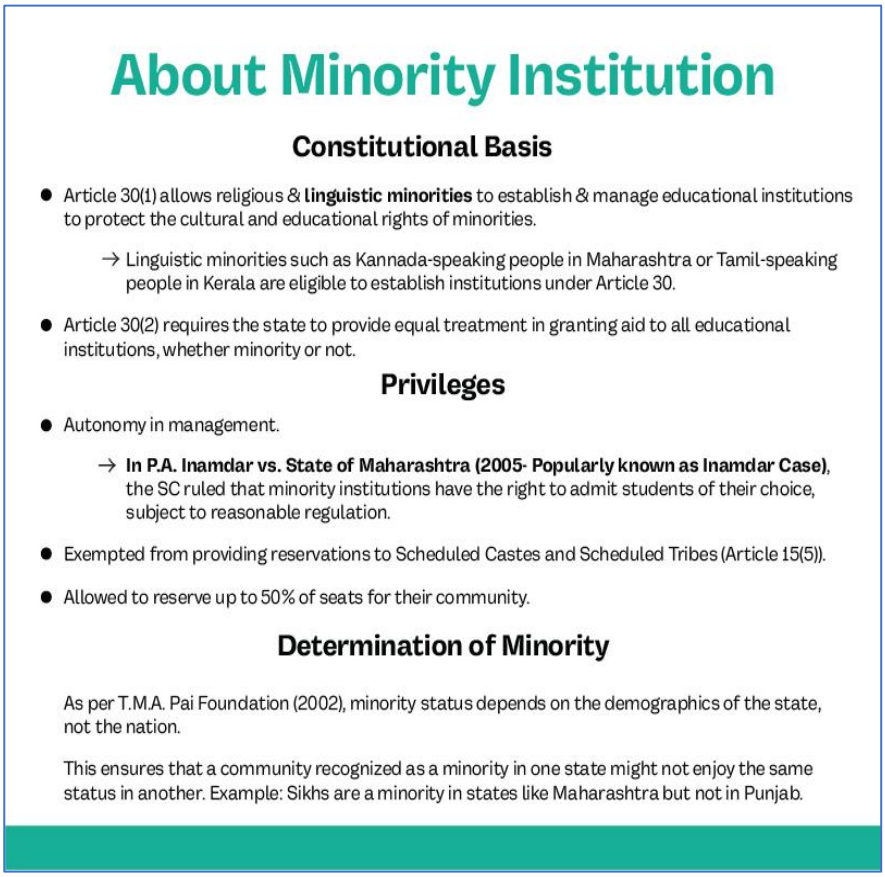
In a 4-3 majority, the Supreme Court (SC) overturned its 1967 decision in ***S. Azeez Basha vs. Union of India***, which had denied AMU minority status.

Background

- **Establishment of AMU**: It was established in 1875 by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan as Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College (MAO), intended to offer **modern British education** to Muslims.
- **Legislative History**: The 1920 Aligarh Muslim University Act incorporated MAO College and the Muslim University Association into AMU, allowing only Muslims on its governing body (Known as the Court), though students from other communities were also admitted.

- In 1951, the Muslim-only rule for Court (governing body) membership was removed. It also removed the compulsory religious education provided to Only Muslim students by the University and allowed non-Muslims to join the university.
- A 1965 amendment redistributed the Court's powers among other administrative bodies and allowed the President of India to nominate members.

- **1967 *Azeez Basha* Verdict**: SC ruled that AMU was not a minority institution as it was established through central legislation (1920 Act) and not by a community.
  - Protests followed, leading to a 1981 amendment recognizing AMU's minority status.



- **Challenges**
  - **2005**: AMU reserved 50% seats for Muslim students in postgraduate medical courses, which was struck down by Allahabad High Court (HC) on the ground that the university did not qualify as a minority institution as per the *Azeez Basha* ruling.
  - **2006**: SC stayed the reservation policy, referring the case to a larger bench.
  - **2019-2023**: Case referred to seven-judge bench led by CJI Chandrachud.

Case Arguments

Petitioners	Central Government
AMU was created to uplift the Muslim community, with a governing body initially composed entirely of Muslims.	AMU's founding aimed at promoting Western education, not solely for minority benefits, and the 1951 amendments aligned the AMU Act with the Constitution, removing exclusive Muslim governance and religious education requirements.

The Final Verdict

- **Key Interpretations**:
  - Institutions established before the Constitution can be protected under Article 30(1) if primarily intended for minority benefit.
  - Legal recognition by the state does not negate minority status.
- **Onus on Minority**: The minority community must prove the institution was primarily created for its benefit. For this purpose, the court defined the following "core essentials" for an institution's minority status under Article 30(1)-
  - **Purpose**: The institution should primarily aim to preserve minority language and culture, but this need not be its sole purpose.
  - **Non-Minority Admissions**: Admitting non-minority students does not impact its minority status.

- **Secular Education**: Minority institutions can offer secular education without losing their minority character.
- **Religious Instruction**: If government-aided, religious instruction cannot be mandatory; if fully state-funded, no religious instruction is allowed.

- **Two-Fold Test for Minority Status:** was established by the court which included-
  1. **Establishment:** Courts should examine the:
     - **Origins**: Identifying the "brain behind the establishment" through historical documents, such as letters and community discussions.
     - **Purpose**: The institution should predominantly serve the minority community, demonstrated through records or speeches highlighting the need for it.
     - **Implementation**: Key factors include who funded the institution, obtained land, and managed permissions and construction.
  2. **Administration:** The court ruled that a minority institution's administration need not be managed by the minority community and is not required to appoint minority members for daily operations. It laid down the following process:
     - **Evaluating Administrative Structure**: Courts may review if the administrative setup supports the minority community's interests. If not, it may indicate the institution was not intended for minority benefit.
     - **Historical Context for Pre-Constitution Institutions**: For institutions founded before 1950 (e.g., AMU), courts should assess if government regulations undermined the founders' control at that time.
- **Dissenting Opinions:**
  - **Justice Surya Kant**: objected on procedural grounds, suggesting that the referral to a 7-judge bench bypassed standard procedures.
  - **Justice Dipankar Datta**: questioned the need to review AMU's status after nearly a century, criticizing judicial activism and late revisions in the majority's draft.
  - **Justice S.C. Sharma**: argued that initial minority support doesn't automatically confer minority status, especially if the institution is government-controlled.

Implications of SC Judgement

1. **Affirmation of Minority Status:** By overturning the Azeez Basha ruling, the judgment reopens the possibility for AMU to be recognized as a minority institution, allowing it to reserve seats for Muslim students and retain autonomy in areas like admissions and hiring.
2. **Two-Fold Test for Minority Status:** establishes criteria to confirm if an institution has genuine minority character, focusing on its founding purpose and administrative structure. AMU must now demonstrate it was founded primarily to serve the Muslim community.
3. **Admission Flexibility and Autonomy:** If recognized as a minority institution, AMU can reserve up to 50% of seats for Muslim students, a privilege that will enhance its control over admissions and enable it to prioritize educational opportunities for its community.
4. **Impact on Religious Instruction:** As a government-aided institution, AMU cannot mandate religious instruction (Article 28). This ensures that government aid does not conflict with constitutional provisions for secular education in public institutions.
5. **Precedent for Other Minority Institutions:** The ruling clarifies the balance between minority rights and state oversight in education.
6. **Future Reassessment of AMU's Status**: by a new bench, based on the outlined criteria. This review will shape AMU's ability to maintain its unique identity as a minority-serving institution.

The judgment potentially restores AMU's minority institution status, granting it greater autonomy, but with clear boundaries on religious instruction and secular governance, it sets a precedent for minority educational institutions nationwide.

New Guidelines Restricting Misleading Ads by Coaching Centres

The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has **issued** *Guidelines for Prevention of Misleading Advertisement in Coaching Sector, 2024* to protect consumer rights and ensure transparency by addressing misleading advertisements in the coaching sector.

- ✓ "Coaching" includes academic support, education, guidance, tuition, or similar activities, but excludes counselling, sports, dance, theatre, and other creative activities.

About 'Guidelines for Prevention of Misleading Advertisement in Coaching Sector, 2024'

Objective: To safeguard students and the public from deceptive marketing practices commonly employed by coaching centers & to encourage coaching centers to adopt ethical & fair advertising practices.

Need for Guidelines

1. **Misleading Claims**: by coaching institutes such as 100% guaranteed success rates or job security, which mislead prospective students.
2. **Exaggerated Success Rates**: by many institutes presenting a skewed image of the effectiveness of their courses or associating themselves with students who did not enroll in their programs.
3. **Unfair Contracts**: by some coaching centres which impose unfair terms on students, often through hidden clauses or unclear refund policies, which could take advantage of students' lack of information (Students, especially from rural or economically weaker backgrounds).
4. **Concealing Important Information**: by Institutes such as realistic success rates, faculty qualifications, or course effectiveness. Example: A center claimed to have "highly experienced faculty" but did not disclose that many faculty members were guest lecturers with limited teaching hours.
5. **Protecting Students:** by ensuring that coaching institutes provide truthful and transparent information, enabling informed decision-making.

Applicability: The guidelines will be applicable to -

- **All Coaching Centers**: ensuring they provide truthful and transparent advertising.
  - ✓ A "Coaching Center" could be any establishment providing coaching to over fifty students, whether run or administered by individuals or groups.
- **Endorsers and Public Figures**: celebrities or influencers who promote coaching services. They will be held accountable for supporting false or misleading claims, such as exaggerated success rates or false guarantees. They must:
  - Ensure the accuracy of the claims they endorse.
  - Verify that the coaching centers' advertisements are truthful.

Key Highlights of the Guidelines

1. **Advertisement Regulation**: Coaching institutes are prohibited from making false claims regarding:
   - Course details, duration, faculty qualifications, fees, and refund policies.
   - Success rates, rankings, job security promises, and guaranteed admissions.
2. **Truthful Representation**: Institutes must accurately present their infrastructure, resources, and facilities, avoiding misleading representations.
3. **Student Success Stories & Fair Contracts**: Coaching centers must obtain written consent from students for using their names, photos, or testimonials in advertisements only after the student's success.
4. **Transparency and Disclosure**: Important details like course names, student ranks, and payment information must be disclosed clearly in ads, along with prominent disclaimers in the same font size.

5. **No False Urgency**: The guidelines ban tactics that create false urgency, such as claiming limited seats, to pressure students into quick decisions.
6. **National Consumer Helpline**: All coaching centers must partner with the National Consumer Helpline to help students report misleading ads and unfair practices.
7. **Enforcement and Penalties**: Violations will lead to penalties under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 ensuring accountability and preventing deceptive practices.
   - ✓ The Consumer Protection Act, 2019 aims to provide the timely and effective administration and settlement of consumer disputes.

Benefits of the Guidelines on Misleading Ads

1. **Prevention of Coercive & Unfair Practices and Enhanced Consumer Protection**: Safeguards students and parents from false promises and exploitation by coaching institutes.
2. **Transparency and Fairness**: by promoting clarity in advertisements, ensuring stakeholders make informed decisions based on truthful information.
3. **Equal Opportunity for All Institutes:** Smaller, genuine coaching centers gain a level playing field as they compete on quality rather than exaggerated advertising claims.
4. **Strengthened Regulatory Framework**: which complements existing regulations and enhances oversight in the coaching sector, contributing to the overall standardization of the industry.
5. **Broader Impact**: as it improves the educational ecosystem by fostering accountability among coaching institutes and benefiting the public at large.
6. **Collaborative Implementation**: by encouraging cooperation between CCPA, industry stakeholders, and consumer organizations to ensure effective compliance.

Extra Mile: Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA)

The CCPA, established under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, came into effect in 2020. It regulates violations of consumer rights, unfair trade practices, and false or misleading advertisements that harm the interests of consumers or the public.

Powers of CCPA

1. **Consumer Rights Enforcement**: It protects, promotes, enforces consumer rights as a group and prevents consumer right violations & Unfair Trade Practices.
2. **Advertisement Regulation**: by preventing false or misleading advertisements of goods or services. It prohibits publication of deceptive advertisements.
3. **Grievance Mechanism**: by regulating collective consumer grievances and individual complaints to be filed through the **National Consumer Helpline** or **e-Dhakil** (online case filing system for consumers & advocates) for Consumer Commissions.

Achievements

1. **Action Against Misleading Advertisements**:
   - **45 notices** issued to coaching centers for misleading advertisements.
   - Penalties totaling **₹54.6 lakhs** imposed on **18 coaching institutes**.
   - Directed institutes to discontinue misleading advertisements.
2. **Grievance Redressal via National Consumer Helpline (NCH)**:
   - Intervened at the **pre-litigation stage** to assist students in resolving disputes related to UPSC, IIT, and other exams.
   - Addressed 16,276 grievances in 2023-24.
3. **Refund Drive for Students**:
   - Addressed complaints about non-refunded enrollment fees by coaching centers and resolved grievances from across India promptly at the **pre-litigation stage**.

- Facilitated **₹1.15 crore refunds** to students between **September 2023 and August 2024**.

What is Ailing Urban Local Bodies in 18 States?

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) in its recent audit report has raised concerns about the health of Urban Local Self-Governments (ULSGs) in 18 states, serving 241 million residents, noting a 42% gap between resources and expenditure.

Background

Three decades after the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA) recognized ULSGs, their role is increasingly critical, with 50% of India's population projected to reside in cities by 2050. The CAG conducted performance audits in 18 states to assess ULSG implementation and their ability to ensure a good quality of life through robust urban governance aligned with the 74th CAA.

- ✓ 18 states audited were- Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Tripura and Uttarakhand.
- ✓ The 74th CAA, enacted in 1993, established a framework for democratic decentralization. It introduced grassroots democracy in urban areas through self-governing local bodies and empowered Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) to perform 18 functions outlined in the 12th Schedule of the Constitution.

Key Highlights from the CAG Audit Report

1. **Devolution of Functions**:
   - On average, 17 out of 18 municipal functions listed in the Twelfth Schedule were devolved to Urban Local Self-Governments (ULSGs).
   - Only 9 states fully devolved all 18 functions, while urban planning and fire services were the least devolved.
2. **Empowerment of ULSGs**:
   - Despite devolution, only 4 functions were exercised with complete autonomy by ULSGs.
   - Many functions were shared with state parastatals, limiting ULSGs' effectiveness.
3. **Financial Challenges**:
   - ULSGs generated only 32% of their revenue independently, with the rest coming from state and central governments.
   - On average, only **29 per cent** of current expenditure in the ULSGs was directed towards programmatic and development work.
   - On average, ULSGs of 15 States have **short receipt of grant revenue of ₹1,606 crore** recommended by State Finance Commissions.
   - Many states delayed the constitution of State Finance Commissions (SFCs), affecting financial transfers and planning.
4. **Human Resource Issues**:
   - ULSGs faced an average **37% vacancy rate** in staff positions.
   - **16 states** provided limited or no control to ULSGs over staff recruitment.
   - Only **7 out of 12 States** have training institutes for capacity building of their municipal functionaries.
5. **Institutional Mechanisms**:
   - Many states lacked or delayed constituting mandated bodies like Ward Committees, District Planning Committees (DPCs), and Metropolitan Planning Committees (MPCs).

- **1,600 out of 2,625 ULSGs** in 17 States did not have an active elected Council.
- Only **9 out of 18 states** had functioning Ward Committees in at least one ULSG.
- Only **4 out of 15 States** have empowered their State Election Commissions (SEC) with ward delimitation.
- Only **3 States prepared annual District Development Plans** (Kerala, Maharashtra, and Uttarakhand).

6. **Mayoral Elections and Representation**:
   - **Only 5 states** had directly elected mayors, and just 9 states ensured mayoral tenure was co-terminus with council terms.
   - **Six states exceeded** the constitutional mandate by reserving 50% of council seats for women.
7. **State Overreach**: States retained significant powers over ULSGs, such as the ability to dissolve councils, approve budgets, and frame rules, undermining the autonomy envisioned by the 74th Amendment.
8. **Overlapping Jurisdiction**: Significant overlap between ULSGs and **State parastatals** undermined decentralization. For instance, parastatals handle key areas like urban planning and water supply, limiting ULSG roles to implementation.

CAG Recommendations

1. **Strengthen Devolution**: by fully devolving all 18 municipal functions and resolving overlaps with parastatals.
2. **Empower ULSGs**: by increasing revenue-raising powers, reducing delays in SFC constitution and allowing ULSGs full authority over staffing and recruitment.
3. **Enhance Citizen Engagement**: by establishing functional **Ward Committees** and **Area Sabhas** to facilitate community participation.
4. **Improve Planning Frameworks**: by operationalizing **DPCs** and **MPCs** in all mandated areas, ensuring development plans address local needs.
5. **Reduce State Overreach**: by minimizing state intervention in ULSG operations to allow for more effective self-governance.
6. **Build Capacity**: by addressing staffing shortages and investing in capacity-building for municipal personnel to improve governance quality.

Suggestions to Strengthen ULBs

1. **Enhance Own-Source Revenue**: by-
   - reforming **property tax systems** with valuation-based formulas to reflect actual property values;
   - introducing **GIS-based property tax mapping** and digital tax collection platforms to improve compliance and reduce revenue leakages; and
   - rationalizing **user charges and fees** for services like water supply, sanitation, and waste management to ensure cost recovery.
2. **Boost Non-Tax Revenue**: by-
   - periodically adjusting charges for public services to reflect inflation and service costs.
   - improving monitoring systems to prevent pilferage and optimize collection mechanisms.
   - using **public communication campaigns** to encourage user fee payments.
3. **Reduce Reliance on State and Central Governments**: by increasing financial autonomy and generating more revenue locally rather than depending on state or central transfers. Predictable compensation formulas can also be developed that adjust for inflation and revenue foregone.
4. **Leveraging Technology**: by using **digital platforms and process automation** to streamline operations and reduce expenditures. Implementing **digital monitoring** to improve efficiency in tax and fee collection.
5. **Streamline Expenditures**: by optimizing committed expenditures through **digitalization and automation** to free up funds for capital investments.

6. **Explore Innovative Financing**: by expanding the use of **municipal bonds** for infrastructure projects, particularly by smaller ULBs. Developing **innovative financial instruments** to diversify funding sources and creating resource-pooling mechanisms to fund large-scale infrastructure projects.
7. **Promote Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)**: by engaging private investments through PPPs in sectors like urban transport, waste management, and renewable energy to improve service delivery.
8. **Focus on Service Quality**: by improving public service delivery by linking charges to enhanced quality, fostering public trust and willingness to pay.

New Rules under Water Act 2024 Notified

The Union Environment Ministry has notified the **Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) (Manner of Holding Inquiry and Imposition of Penalty) Rules, 2024**, effective immediately. These rules follow recent amendments to the Water Act, replacing criminal penalties for violations with monetary penalties.

✓ In July, the Ministry also exempted non-polluting 'white' category industries from prior permissions under the Act.

About the Water Act, 2024

The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act was enacted initially in 1974 to provide for the prevention and control of water pollution. It was amended in 2024 for:

1. **Simplifying Governance**: so that the act aligns with the principle that democratic governance should trust its people and institutions rather than penalizing them unnecessarily.
2. **Addressing Over-Penalization**: in the 1974 Act which prescribed imprisonment for minor violations, such as failing to inform the State Board about water abstraction, even when these did not cause harm to humans or the environment. Such provisions often led to harassment of businesses and citizens.
3. **Promoting Ease of Living and Doing Business**: as criminal penalties for minor infringements contradicted the government's initiatives to improve **Ease of Living** and **Ease of Doing Business**.
4. **Rationalizing Criminal Provisions**: by replacing imprisonment for minor violations with monetary penalties, ensuring more proportionate and business-friendly enforcement of environmental laws.

Water Act 1974 versus Water Act 2024

Feature	Water Act, 1974	Water Amendment Act, 2024
Purpose	Establishes Central and State Pollution Control Boards (CPCB and SPCBs) to prevent and control water pollution.	Retains CPCB and SPCBs but decriminalizes several violations, replacing them with penalties.
Applicability	Applicable nationwide.	Initially applies to Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, and UTs; other states may adopt it through resolutions.
Consent for Industries	Prior consent of SPCB required for industries discharging sewage or pollutants.	Allows the central government to exempt certain industrial categories from SPCB consent in consultation with CPCB.
Chairman of SPCB	Chairman is nominated by the state government.	Central government prescribes the nomination process and terms of service for the chairman.

Discharge of Pollutants	Violations punishable with imprisonment (1.5–6 years) and fines.	Removes imprisonment; imposes penalties ranging from Rs 10,000 to Rs 15 lakh.
Tampering with Monitoring Devices	Not explicitly addressed.	Penalized with fines between Rs 10,000 and Rs 15 lakh.
Penalties for Unspecified Offences	Imprisonment up to 3 months, a fine up to Rs 10,000, or both.	Replaces imprisonment with penalties ranging from Rs 10,000 to Rs 15 lakh.
Adjudicating Officer	No provision for adjudication officers.	Central government appoints adjudicating officers (Joint Secretary level or higher) to determine penalties.
Appeals Against Penalties	Not applicable.	Appeals against adjudicating officer's orders can be made to the National Green Tribunal after depositing 10% of the penalty.
Use of Penalties	No specific provision for penalty allocation.	Penalties credited to the Environment Protection Fund under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
Cognizance of Offences	Courts can take cognizance of offences based on complaints by CPCB/SPCB or private persons (with notice).	Adds adjudicating officers as authorized complainants.
Offences by Government Departments	Department heads deemed guilty unless due diligence is proven.	Department heads liable for penalties equal to one month's basic salary for violations.

About Newly Notified Rules under Water Act, 2024

The rules aim to notify the process for **inquiries and penalties** under the amended Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, replacing criminal provisions with monetary penalties.

Key Highlights of the New Rules

1. **Decriminalization**: Aligns with amendments decriminalizing violations of the Act, such as releasing industrial pollutants, and introduces penalties instead of imprisonment.
2. **Exemptions for White Category Industries**: Earlier rules exempted **non-polluting industries** ("white" category) from prior permissions under the Act.
3. **Role of Pollution Control Bodies**: Complaints about contraventions can be filed by:
   i. **CPCBs and SPCBs;**
   ii. **Pollution Control Committees; and**
   iii. **Integrated Regional Offices** of the Ministry of Environment.
4. **Adjudication Process**: Adjudication officers can issue notices detailing alleged contraventions under specific sections (41, 41A, 42, 43, 44, 45A, 48).
   - Alleged violators can provide explanations or defend themselves through a legal representative.
   - The inquiry process must conclude within **six months** from the issuance of notice.
5. **Focus Areas of Contraventions**: Sections addressed by the rules primarily deal with violations related to **industrial effluent discharge and pollutant norms**.

These rules aim to streamline the enforcement process under the amended Water Act, ensuring compliance while reducing the burden of criminal penalties.

Extra Mile: 'Bhu-Neer' Portal

Ministry of Jal Shakti recently launched the newly developed "Bhu-Neer" portal during the 8th India Water Week 2024 held in New Delhi from 17-21 September 2024.

Objective: Developed by the **Central Ground Water Authority (CGWA)** in collaboration with the **National Informatics Centre (NIC),** the portal aims to enhance **groundwater regulation** across India, ensuring transparency, efficiency, and sustainability.

Key Features:

- **Provides Comprehensive Legal Information**: on the legal framework governing groundwater extraction at national and state levels.
- **Centralized Database**: providing access to critical information on groundwater compliance, policies, and sustainable practices.
- **User-Friendly Interface**: which simplifies process for groundwater withdrawal permits with features like **PAN-based single ID system** or **NOC with QR code** for easy verification.
- **Improvement Over NOCAP**: Represents a significant upgrade from the previous **NOCAP (NOC to Abstract Ground Water) portal**, offering a more streamlined and accessible system.
- **Ease of Doing Business**: by making groundwater regulation a **seamless and faceless process**.
- **Public Utility**: It is accessible to project proponents for:
  - Groundwater withdrawal queries.
  - Tracking application status.
  - Payment of statutory charges.

Significance:

- **One-Stop Platform**: for managing and regulating groundwater usage, promoting sustainable and responsible practices.
- **Enhances Transparency:** and streamlines compliance processes for users nationwide.

Why were Kerala IAS Officers Suspended?

Kerala recently suspended two IAS officers- N. Prashant and K. Gopalakrishnan citing violation of service rules.

Charges Against Suspended IAS Officials

Against N. Prashant	Against K. Gopalakrishnan
• Accused of making **derogatory statements** on social media against his senior official which allegedly amounted to grave indiscipline and undermined the public image of the State's administrative machinery. • The remarks were deemed **"unbecoming of an officer"** by the government. • Prashant claimed the allegations were baseless and orchestrated by Jayathilak through false news reports.	• Accused of creating a religion-based WhatsApp group, **'Mallu Hindu Officers,'** promoting disunity and communal formations within the IAS cadre. • Denied the charge, claiming his phone was hacked, but a police inquiry found no evidence of hacking.

Relevant Rules for IAS/IPS/IFS Officials Under the All-India Services (Conduct) Rules, 1968

1. **Ethical Standards**: Officers must maintain **high standards of impartiality, ethics, integrity, honesty, political neutrality, accountability, and transparency** and must uphold **constitutional values**.
2. **Public Media Conduct**: Participation in public media is allowed only in the **Bonafide discharge of duties**. Officers are prohibited from **adversely criticizing government policies** through any public media

communication to ensure that public servants maintain decorum and do not jeopardize the government's credibility.

3. **Legal and Press Recourse**: Officers cannot approach the **court or press** to vindicate official acts criticized without prior government approval.
4. **General Conduct:** Officers must refrain from any actions deemed **'unbecoming of a member of the service.'**

Issues with the All-India Services (Conduct) Rules, 1968

1. **Ambiguity and Overbreadth**: The rules contain vague terms like **"unbecoming of a member of the service"** without clear definitions, allowing subjective interpretation and inconsistent application.
   - ✓ **Impact**: Inconsistent disciplinary actions; Fear among officers of being targeted unfairly.
2. **Curtailing Freedom of Expression**: Prohibitions on criticizing government policies in public media limit **freedom of speech and expression**, a fundamental right under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution. Officers may feel constrained from highlighting systemic issues or unethical practices, even in the public interest.
   - ✓ **Impact:** Discourages whistleblowing, even when systemic issues need public attention; Limits constructive criticism that could improve governance.
3. **Disproportionate Control by Government**: The requirement for **prior government sanction** to approach the court or media for vindication of official acts criticized can delay redressal of legitimate grievances. This provision undermines accountability and transparency by discouraging officers from defending themselves or addressing unfair criticism.
4. **Challenges to Political Neutrality**: Rules require officers to maintain **political neutrality**, but the enforcement is often selective, leading to perceptions of bias or political interference in disciplinary actions and Undermines public confidence in the neutrality of administration.
5. **Inadequate Safeguards Against Misuse**: of disciplinary powers can lead to **arbitrary suspension or disciplinary actions**, particularly in cases involving whistleblowing or dissent. As enforcement is typically carried out by senior officers or the government against junior officers, raising concerns of **bias** and **misuse of authority**.
6. **Impact on Innovation and Initiative**: The strict and restrictive nature of the rules discourages officers from taking bold or innovative decisions, fearing potential disciplinary action for unintended outcomes.
   - ✓ **Impact**: Stifles creative solutions to complex governance problems; Leads to a status quo mindset, hindering progress and reform.
7. **Lack of Social Media Guidelines**: The rules do not provide **explicit guidance** for officer conduct on social media platforms, leading to ambiguity and potential misuse in enforcement. The US Hatch Act provides clear social media guidelines for public servants, maintaining neutrality and decorum.
   - ✓ **Impact**: Increased risk of officers being perceived as politically biased or unprofessional; potential misuse of social media platforms for personal or political agendas.
8. **Expanding Scope of Regulations**: Repeated amendments have introduced new conduct guidelines that regulate both **the private and official lives** of officers, increasing the scope of government oversight.
   - ✓ **Impact**: Demoralizes officers who may feel overburdened by excessive compliance requirements.

Recommended Suggestions for Addressing Existing Issues

1. **Explicit Social Media Guidelines**: should be drafted in clear and detailed manner for officers' conduct on **social media platforms**, balancing the right to expression with the need for professional integrity. Examples of permissible and prohibited communication could be provided to reduce ambiguity.
   - ✓ **Global Example:** UK Civil Service Code provides clear rules for social media use, setting a benchmark for transparency and neutrality.
2. **Define Ambiguous Terms**: like **"unbecoming of a member of the service"** to prevent subjective interpretation and misuse by specifying actions or behaviors that qualify under this provision. Also provide illustrative examples of acceptable conduct to prevent overreach.

3. **Ensure Fair Enforcement**: by introducing **independent oversight mechanisms** to review disciplinary actions, ensuring fairness and transparency and allowing for an **appeals process** where officers can challenge decisions or enforcement actions.
   - ✓ **Global Example:** In Australia, **the Merit Protection Commissioner** provides a neutral forum for challenging disciplinary actions.
4. **Safeguard Junior Officers**: by establishing **protective provisions** for junior officers against arbitrary or biased enforcement by senior officials or the government. For instance, **whistleblower protection mechanisms or anonymous reporting** can be created for officers raising concerns about misuse of rules.
5. **Balance Private and Professional Lives**: by reviewing the amendments regulating private life to ensure the rules do not unnecessarily intrude on personal freedoms of the officers.
   - ✓ **Global Best Practices:** In Australia, the Australian Public Service Code of Conduct respects officers' private lives, provided it does not affect their duties.
6. **Regular Updation:** of the rules to address emerging challenges, such as technology use and evolving societal norms. **Training programs can be conducted** for officers on the updated rules, ethical conduct, and proper use of social media.
7. **Promote a Culture of Dialogue**: by encouraging **open discussions** between officers and the government about rules, grievances, and suggestions to foster mutual understanding and trust.
   - ✓ **Global Best Practice:** The UK's Civil Service Employee Engagement Forums encourage dialogue between officers and policymakers, improving job satisfaction.

The All-India Services (Conduct) Rules, 1968, are essential for maintaining discipline and integrity among officers. However, addressing issues like vague provisions, lack of social media guidelines, and potential misuse of authority is critical to ensure fairness and transparency.

A Call for Rethink on RCEP and CPTPP

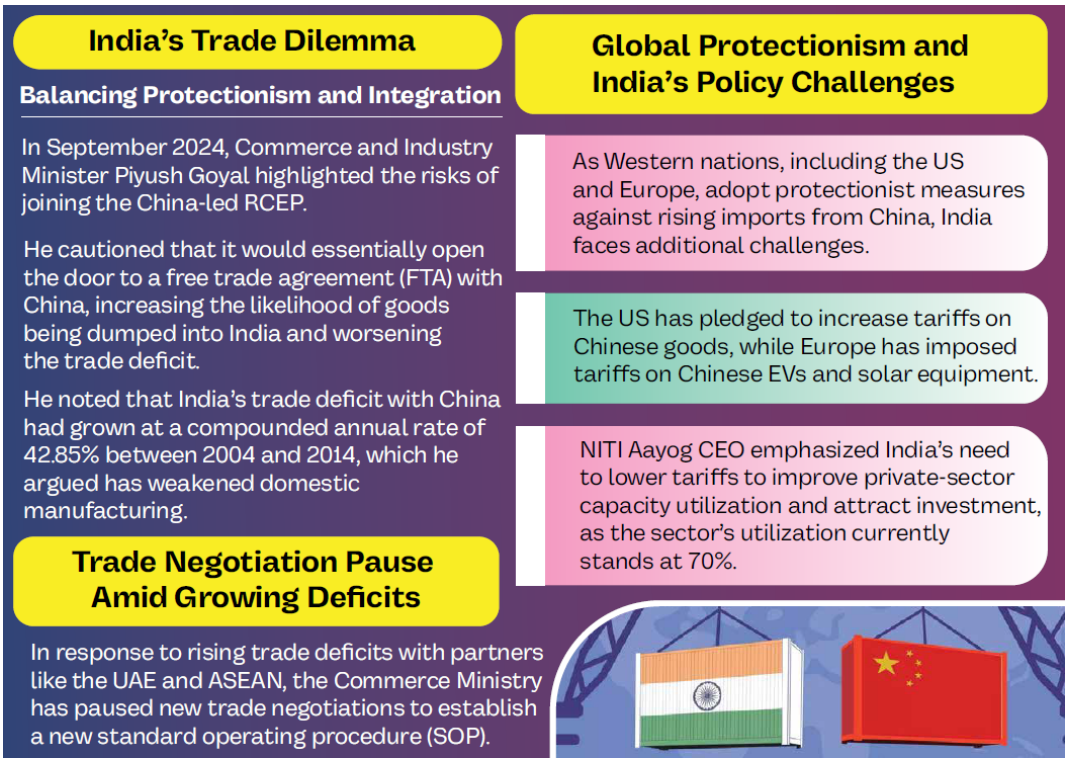
- With shifting global investments and export opportunities away from China, many Asian countries have capitalized on the "China-plus-one" strategy, leaving India lagging.
  - o India is missing opportunities in Global Trade Integration
  - o China Plus One, also known as Plus One or C+1, is a business strategy that involves diversifying manufacturing and sourcing away from China.
- The recent victory of Donald Trump in the US elections adds new uncertainties to American trade policies, sparking debate on India's trade strategies.
- Recently, NITI Aayog CEO BVR Subrahmanyam argued that India should consider joining major multilateral trade agreements, such as RCEP and CPTPP, to better integrate into the global economy.
  - o Highlighting that nations like Vietnam and Indonesia have gained significantly, he emphasized that India's MSME sector, which accounts for 40% of exports, would benefit from such trade alliances.

India Missing the China-plus-one Opportunity

- **India's Missed Opportunity in US-China Trade Shift**
  - o According to a recent Oxford Economics report, India has lagged behind other Asian countries in capitalizing on the US import demand shift away from China, especially in high-growth sectors.
  - o Although India has achieved production gains, they have not significantly contributed to domestic value addition, unlike in its peer economies.
    - ✓ The report notes a concerning trend in India's high-tech goods sector: while exports surged by 350% between 2017 and 2023, domestic value-added output actually fell by 18%.

✓ Manufacturing, by contrast, has shown some promise, with domestic value-added growth at 26%, though still trailing behind merchandise export growth of 44%.

- **Limited Gains in Electronics and Manufacturing**
  - The US-China tensions and tariff disputes from 2018-2019 spurred hopes for increased US demand for Indian goods, particularly in manufacturing.
  - In electronics, India's share in US imports has grown from 0.2% in 2017 to 2.1% in 2023, a result of the government's push toward high-tech exports.
  - However, competitors like Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Thailand continue to dominate, with each holding a substantially higher market share in US electronics imports.



Attracting Chinese FDI – Pros and Cons

- **Chinese Investment Abroad Hits Record High Amid Global Protectionism**
  - Amid escalating protectionist barriers from Western nations, Chinese companies have been ramping up their overseas investments, with overseas assets increasing by approximately $71 billion in Q2 this year — an 80% rise from last year.
  - However, India has seen limited Chinese investment due to ongoing border tensions, with India's share in China's outward direct investment to Asia dropping from 2.6% in 2019 to 1% in 2021.
- **Concerns Over Chinese Investment in India's Strategic Sectors**
  - Experts warned that while Chinese firms investing in India could boost short-term trade, this could undermine India's long-term economic security and strategic independence.
  - They cautioned that heavy reliance on Chinese companies could expose India to supply chain vulnerabilities and limit opportunities for local industries.
  - Additionally, Chinese firms might prioritize their own supply chain interests and potentially bring in foreign staff, which could curb benefits to the Indian workforce and hinder the growth of domestic firms.

Uncertainty with Trump's policy

- **Trump's Trade Policies: Potential Implications for India**
  - Donald Trump's return to the presidency has heightened concerns over potential tariff actions against India.
  - During his first term, Trump removed India's duty-free benefits under the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) program, impacting $5.7 billion worth of Indian exports.

- Additionally, Trump's tariff increases on Chinese goods could indirectly benefit India by driving investment interest toward the country.

- **Impact on WTO Dispute Resolution and Smaller Economies**
  - Trump previously blocked judge appointments to the WTO's dispute resolution body, effectively paralyzing it.
  - While large economies have managed to resolve trade disputes bilaterally, smaller nations remain in a difficult position.
- **Concerns Over Future Tariffs and Stringent Trade Terms**
  - Analysts fear that a Trump presidency could extend tariff policies beyond China, potentially targeting Indian goods.
    - ✓ Trump might press for reciprocal tariffs and apply increased tariffs on sectors critical to India, such as automobiles, textiles, pharmaceuticals, and wines.
  - This would reduce Indian competitiveness in the U.S. market, posing risks to revenue and market access for Indian exports.
- **Trump's Immigration Shift and Economic Proposals: Impacts on Indian Students and IT Sector**
  - Trump's mixed immigration stance includes a plan to curb both legal and illegal immigration, which could add inflationary pressure in a full-employment economy.
  - However, his recent **proposal to automatically grant green cards to foreign nationals graduating from US colleges is seen as a positive for Indian students**.
  - Additionally, Trump's plan to cut the corporate tax rate from 21% to 15% could boost budgets for US clients of Indian service providers, enhancing demand and driving gains in Indian IT stocks.

Italy-India Joint Strategic Action Plan 2025-2029

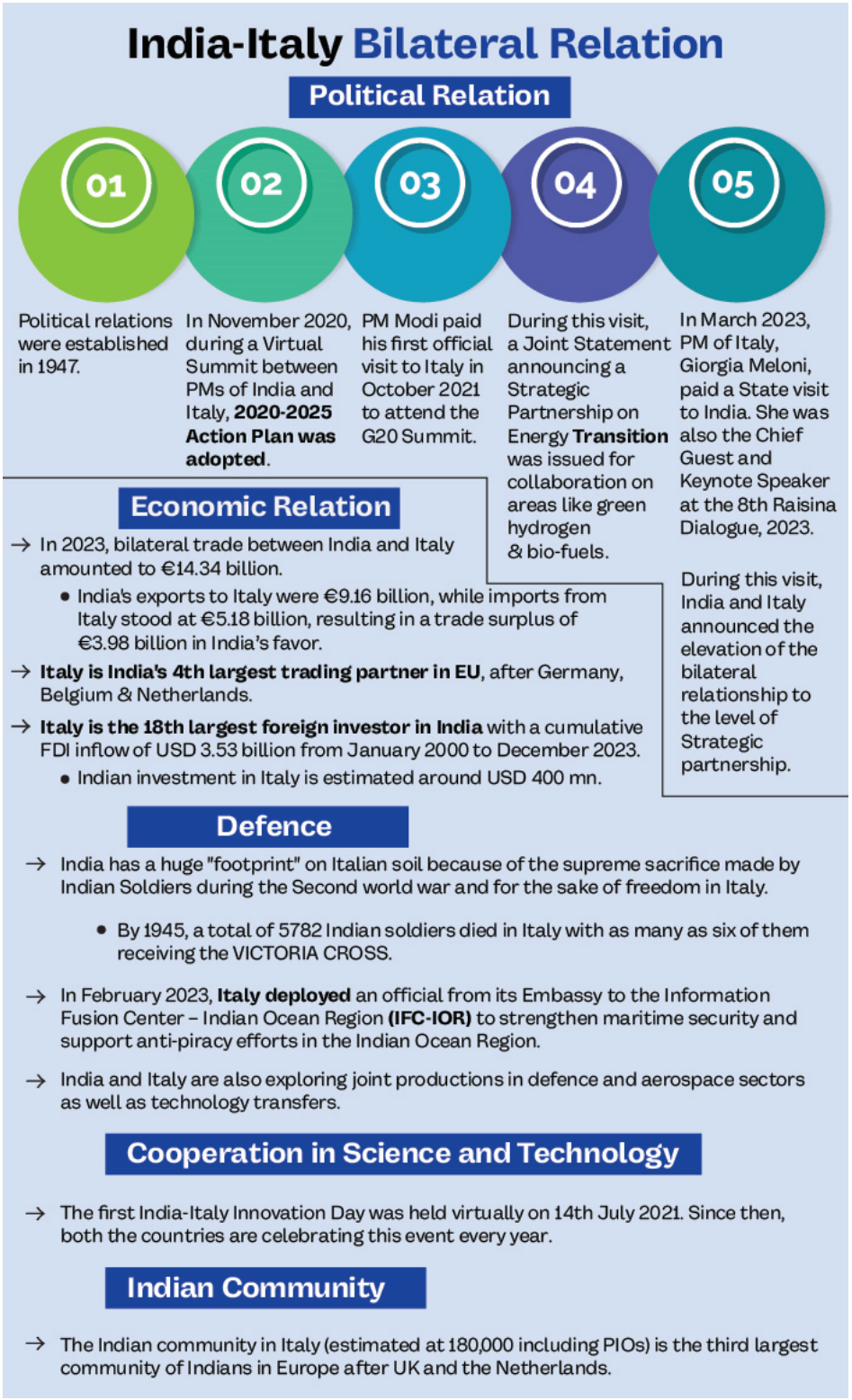
India and Italy outlined their vision for deepening bilateral cooperation in the **Joint Strategic Action Plan 2025-29**. This Action Plan was issued after a meeting between PM Modi and his Italian counterpart Giorgia Meloni on the sidelines of G20 summit in Brazil.

Key Highlights of Italy-India Joint Strategic Action Plan 2025-2029

- **Political Dialogue**
  - Regular meetings between Heads of Government, Trade, and Defence Ministers.
  - Annual bilateral consultations between the two Foreign Ministries.
- **Economic Cooperation and Investments**
  - Strengthen bilateral trade, investment, and joint ventures in high-potential sectors (e.g., green technologies, sustainable mobility, food processing, semiconductors).
  - Advance collaboration in automotive, infrastructure, and advanced manufacturing.
- **Connectivity & sustainable transport**
  - Enhance maritime and land infrastructure cooperation, including the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor.
  - Finalize a maritime and port cooperation agreement.
- **Science, Technology, IT, Innovation, and Start-ups**
  - Expand partnerships in critical technologies like AI, telecom, and digital services.

- Explore Industry 4.0, clean energy, and critical minerals initiatives involving academia and SMEs.
- Launch the Indo-Italian Innovation and Incubation Exchange Programme.

- **Space Sector**
  - Expand ASI-ISRO collaboration on Earth observation, heliophysics, and lunar exploration.
  - Organize an Italian space delegation visit to India by mid-2025.
- **Energy Transition**
  - Organize "Tech Summits" to foster industrial partnerships.
  - Collaborate on climate change, green hydrogen, biofuels, and renewable energy solutions.
  - Support the Global Biofuels Alliance and International Solar Alliance.
- **Defence Cooperation**
  - Hold annual Joint Defence Consultative meetings and Joint Staff Talks.
  - Enhance interoperability and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.
  - **Develop a Defence Industrial Roadmap** and MoU between Society of Indian Defence Manufacturers (SIDM) and the Italian Industries Federation for Aerospace, Defence, and Security (AIAD).
- **Security Cooperation**
  - Enhance cybersecurity, counterterrorism, and capacity-building efforts.
  - Hold yearly ***Joint Working Group*** meetings on international terrorism and crime.
  - Share best practices and conclude agreements on classified information protection.



- **Migration and Mobility**
  - Promote safe migration channels and labour training, with a pilot project for health professionals.
  - Enhance student, researcher, and academic mobility.
- **Culture, Academia, Cinema, and Tourism**
  - Foster exchanges between universities and technical education institutions.
  - Promote film co-productions and enhance tourism.
  - Strengthen cultural bonds and implement the **2023 Executive Programme of Cultural Cooperatio**n.

PM Modi's Visit to Guyana

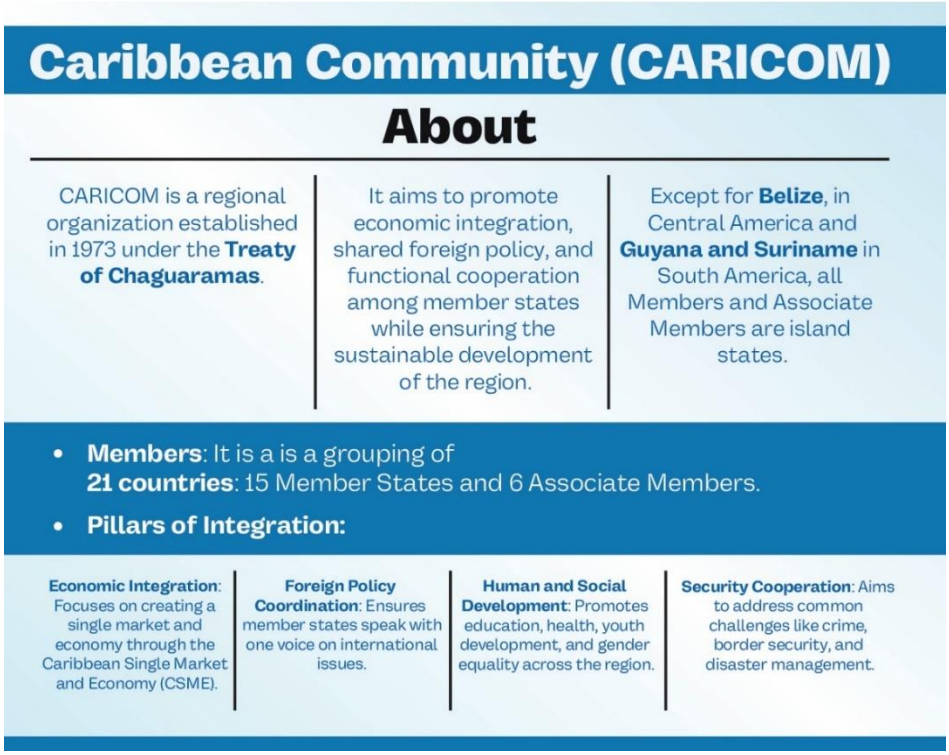
- PM Modi paid a visit to the small Caribbean country of Guyana, the **first visit by an Indian PM in 56 years**. He received a warm welcome in Guyana as President Irfan Ali broke the protocol to receive PM Modi at the airport.
- During this visit, PM Modi also co-chaired the **second India-CARICOM Summit** alongside Grenada's PM (who is the current Chair of CARICOM) and other CARICOM leaders.

Key Highlights Of The Visit

- **PM Modi conferred with The Order of Excellence of Guyana**
  - President of Guyana conferred upon PM Modi the highest national award of Guyana, "The Order of Excellence"
    - ✓ He became only the fourth foreign leader to be conferred with the highest National award of Guyana.
- **Agreements Across Key Sectors**
  - India and Guyana signed 10 MoUs to deepen cooperation in various sectors. These include:
    - ✓ **Health and Pharmaceuticals:** Collaboration on regulation and supply of affordable medicines, including to CARICOM countries.
      - India agreed to establish a Jan Ausadhi Kendra in Guyana to improve access to affordable medicines.
    - ✓ **Hydrocarbons:** Cooperation in crude sourcing, natural gas, infrastructure development, and the entire hydrocarbon value chain.
    - ✓ **Agriculture:** Joint activities, R&D, exchange of information and personnel, and food security initiatives.
      - Cooperation in agriculture was also expanded, with India contributing millet seeds to support Guyana's food security.
    - ✓ **Digital Transformation:** Capacity building, training, exchange of best practices, and public official collaborations.
    - ✓ **Banking and Payments:** Deployment of India's UPI-like real-time payment system in Guyana.
- **Defence and Capacity Building**
  - India committed to skill development and capacity building in Guyana, especially in defence.
    - ✓ Earlier this year, India had gifted two Dornier aircraft to Guyana.
- **Collaboration in New Areas like:**
  - ✓ **Education and Human Capital Development**
  - ✓ **Technology Transfer and Food Processing**
  - ✓ **Ayurvedic Medicine and Vaccine Manufacturing**
- **Symbolic Initiatives:** PM participated in the symbolic planting of a sapling under the *Ek Ped Ma Ke Naam* initiative.

Significance of this Visit

- **Strengthening Historical and Cultural Ties**
  - Guyana, home to one of the oldest Indian diasporas, has a population of approximately 3,20,000 people of Indian origin, constituting 43.5% of the country's total population.
- **Energy Security and Hydrocarbon Cooperation**
  - Guyana is emerging as a global oil hub, expected to surpass Venezuela in oil production by 2026. With massive reserves and rapid GDP growth driven by oil discoveries, Guyana offers India a crucial opportunity to diversify its crude oil imports.



- **Expanding Defence Partnerships**
  - India has strengthened Guyana's defence capabilities by supplying Dornier 228 planes and offering a Line of Credit for the purchase of patrol vehicles, radars etc.
    - ✓ This marks India's first-ever defence Line of Credit with a Caribbean nation.
  - Guyana's growing defence market aligns with India's strategic and economic interests.
- **Enhancing Trade and Economic Cooperation**
  - India is partnering with Guyana in diverse sectors, including agriculture, biofuels, IT, and pharmaceuticals. Key contributions include:
    - ✓ Building critical infrastructure like the **National Cricket Stadium and solar traffic lights.**
    - ✓ Supporting projects such as regional hospital upgrades, road linkages, and ocean-going vessels.
    - ✓ Promoting bilateral trade, which remains low but shows positive growth potential.
- **Competing with China's Influence**
  - Guyana's strategic location and rich resources have attracted significant Chinese investments in infrastructure
- **Global South and Strategic Alliances**
  - PM Modi's visit reflects India's broader strategy to enhance ties with smaller countries as part of its Global South agenda.

2024 G20 Summit

- The 19th summit of the G20 was held at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. It was hosted by the Brazilian G20 presidency.
- India was represented by PM Modi at the summit. Indian PM also addressed the opening session of the G 20 Summit on '**Social Inclusion and the Fight against Hunger and Poverty**'.

- The summit concluded with the **G20 Rio de Janeiro Leaders' Declaration**.
- **Presidency** - Brazil took over the annual G20 presidency from India on 1 December 2023.
- **Theme** of 2024 Summit - **'Building a Just World and a Sustainable Planet'**

Key highlights of the G20 Rio de Janeiro Leaders' Declaration

- **Taxation -** The declaration advocates for taxing the super-rich, while respecting fiscal sovereignty.
  - Brazilian presidency had proposed **2% global tax on billionaires**, aiming to address wealth inequality and generate resources for sustainable development initiatives.
- **Multilateralism -** The declaration emphasizes better representation of underrepresented regions in the UN Security Council.
- **Social inclusion -** The declaration includes commitments to promote equal participation of men and women in paid and unpaid care work.
- **Climate action -** Commitments to inclusive, technology-neutral approaches for low-emission energy.
  - The declaration does not go beyond the G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration.
  - In particular, it remains unclear from which sources the scaling-up of climate finance from billions to trillions should come.
- **Global trade -** Commitments to avoid discriminatory green economic policies.
- **Global health** Commitments to enhance equitable access to vaccines, therapeutics, and health technologies.
- **Highlighted achievements from the Brazilian presidency**
  - Such as the Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty, and the Task Force on a Global Mobilization against Climate Change.

G20

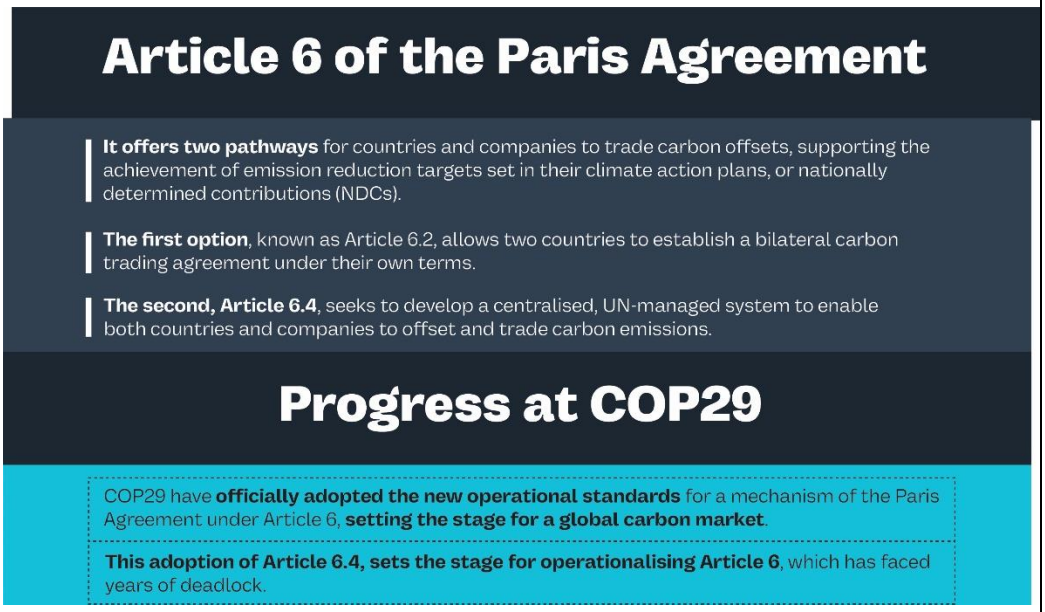
- **Overview**
  - G20, initially was a group of finance ministers and central bank governors from 19 individual countries and European Union. It was established in 1999.
  - It was elevated to a forum of Heads of State/Government in 2008 to effectively respond to the global financial crisis of 2008.
  - It is a **forum, not a legislative body**, its agreements and decisions have no legal impact, but they do influence countries' policies and global cooperation.
- **Members**
  - The G20 consists of 19 countries and the European Union (EU):
    - ✓ **Countries**: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
  - **Special Invitees**: Guest nations and organizations, including the United Nations and the World Bank, participate in G20 summits.
- **Aims/Objectives**
  - **Economic Stability**: Foster global economic growth and financial stability.
  - **Sustainable Development**: Promote policies addressing climate change and equitable development.
  - **Crisis Management**: Coordinate responses to financial and health crises (e.g., COVID-19).
  - **Global Collaboration**: Strengthen multilateral cooperation on trade, investment, and innovation.
  - **Inclusivity**: Represent voices of both advanced and emerging economies, including the Global South.

COP 29 UNFCCC

The 29th UNFCCC climate Change Conference (COP29) concluded in Baku, Azerbaijan.

Key Outcome

- **New Climate Finance Goal:** Developed nations have agreed to provide at least $300 billion per year (a three-times increase over their current mandate of $100 billion) to developing countries by 2035 to support their climate efforts.
  - Scale finance from public and private sources to USD 1.3 trillion annually by 2035.
- **Article 6 Agreement**: Countries have finalized the *remaining sections of Article 6,* which governs international carbon trading. This means all elements of the Paris Agreement have been finalized nearly 10 years after it was signed.
  - UK pledged £3 million to enhance REDD+ transparency and implementation for halting deforestation by 2030
  - ** REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation, plus the sustainable management of forests, and the conservation and enhancement of forest carbon stocks)
- **Global Stocktake**: Countries failed to reach an agreement on how to take forward the outcomes of last year's global stocktake, including a key pledge to transition away from fossil fuels. This decision has been pushed to COP30 next year in Brazil.



  - These responsibilities were fixed largely in line with the "polluter pays" principle. Since the developed countries were mainly responsible for emitting GHGs over the last 150 years, it was only fitting that they be asked to take responsibility for cleaning it up.
- **Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities**: Adopted the Baku Workplan and renewed the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP) Facilitative Working Group.
- **Gender and Climate Change:** A decision was made to extend the Lima Work Programme on Gender (LWPG) for another 10 years, reaffirming gender equality in climate action and the need for a new gender action plan to be adopted at COP30 (Belém, Brazil).
- **Global Climate Action:** Showcased real-world solutions under the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action. Launched the 2024 Yearbook of Global Climate Action, emphasizing non-Party stakeholder contributions.
  - UNFCCC organized #Together4Transparency, promoting transparent climate action with 42 events.

Challenges at the COP29

- **Lack of consensus on climate finance:**
  - A primary agenda for COP29 is finalising the **New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG)**, a commitment by developed countries to provide funds for climate action in developing nations, replacing the unmet $100 billion target from 2020.
  - However, **no progress has been made on this front**, with the G77-plus China group, representing over 130 developing countries, rejecting the initial draft of the finance agreement and demanding revisions.
  - There are **disagreements over the funding size, contributors, types, and coverage period**.
- **Demands of developing nations:**
  - Developing nations demand **a minimum of $1 trillion annually from 2026**, with G77 calling for $1.3 trillion.
  - They insist that this finance should be **new, predictable, and non-debt-inducing**, specifically dedicated to climate action rather than investments in clean technology counted towards existing commitments.
  - Developing countries also urged that any shortfall from the $100 billion annual goal in past years be **covered as arrears in addition to the NCQG**.
- **US Election Fallout:** The reelection of Donald Trump and his promise to roll back climate action and withdraw the US from the Paris Agreement once again cast a shadow over the negotiations.
- **Criticisms of the Presidency:** The Azerbaijani presidency faced accusations of conflict of interest, malpractice, and "stage-managing" the adoption of the climate-finance text.

India's Role in Shaping COP29's Legacy:

- **Call for an adequate and predictable finance mechanism:**
  - **India highlighted NCQG as a top priority**, advocating for significant financial commitments to the Global South.
  - Indian negotiators emphasise that finance should be grant-based, low-interest, and long-term, with a balanced focus on **adaptation, mitigation, and addressing loss and damage**.
- **Emphasis on adaptation for vulnerable communities:** Given that climate finance often favours mitigation projects, India and its G77 allies call for **stronger support in adaptation initiatives, particularly for communities at high risk from climate change impacts.**

Extra Mile: Discussion on Climate-Linked Trade Restrictions at COP29

Led by China and supported by countries like India, a formal request to discuss climate-driven trade restrictions delayed the plenary session.

Climate-Related Trade Restrictions

- **The EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)**
  - **The EU is a large market, accounting for about 15% of global imports.** It recently implemented **CBAM**, taxing specific imports based on their emissions.
  - This initiative **aims to limit carbon leakage**, where industries might otherwise shift production to countries with lax emissions standards.
  - CBAM is not the first-of-its-kind trade measure linked to climate change but likely to be the most impactful till now.
  - CBAM currently applies to only a handful of goods – emission intensive products such as steel, aluminium or cement - **but is set to be expanded on a large number of other items in coming years.**
- **Concerns regarding CBAM:** Other countries might also be tempted to bring in similar regulations. UK and Canada are already reported to be considering their own versions.
- **Concerns raised by the developing countries:**

- While designed to encourage higher global environmental standards, **it places developing countries like China and India at a disadvantage**, as their products may now face higher costs in EU markets.
- Developing nations argue that CBAM **contravenes principles of equity outlined in the Paris Agreement** and **adds unfair barriers to trade**.
- This measure **impacts the export competitiveness** of these nations while benefiting industries in the developed world that already adhere to strict environmental standards.

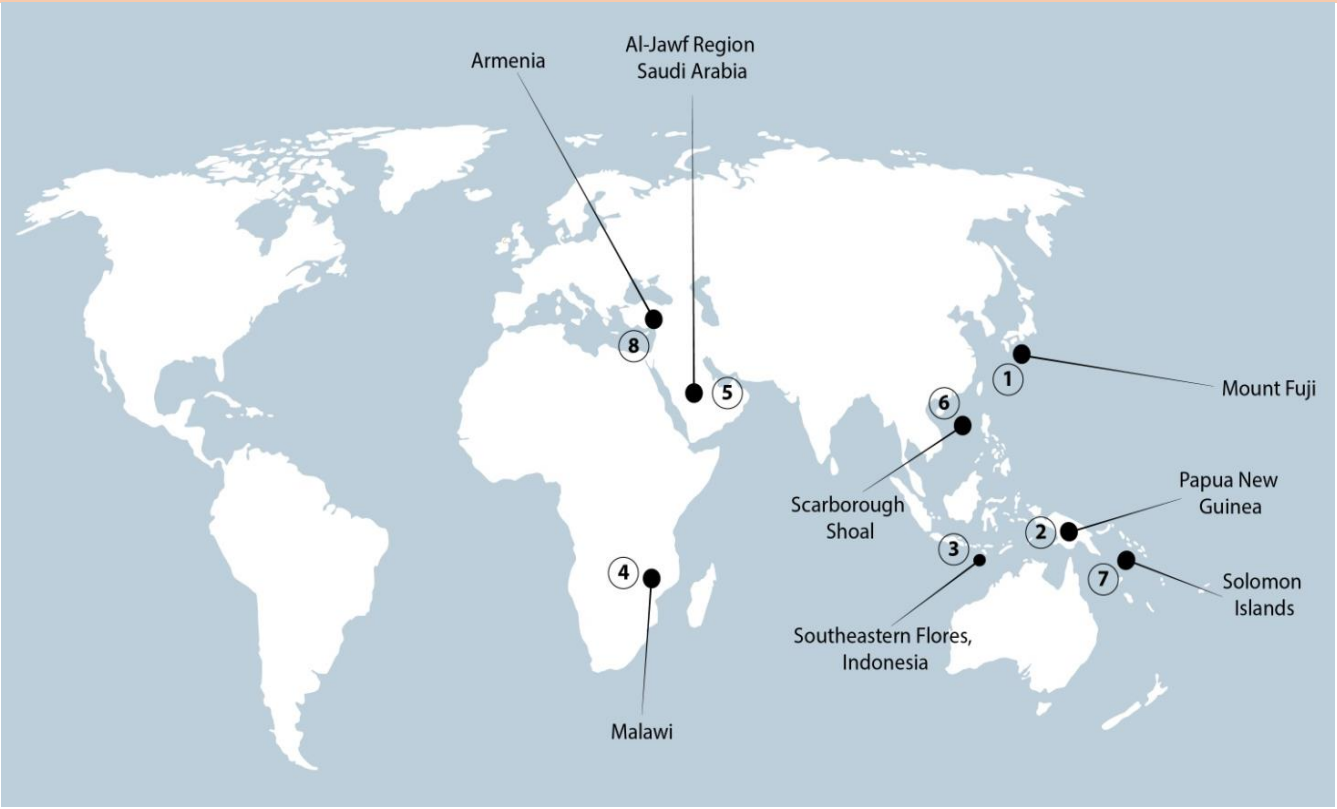
- **COP 28 (Dubai, UAE) on CBAM:** It acknowledged that measures taken to combat climate change, including unilateral ones, **should not constitute a means of arbitrary or unjustifiable discrimination** or a disguised restriction on international trade.
- **Discussion on CBAM at COP29:**
  - China, speaking on behalf of the **BASIC countries** (Brazil, South Africa, India, and China), raised concerns about CBAM during the climate conference, facing strong resistance from the EU.
  - The proposal for discussion was **deferred**, but **CBAM's scope and influence are expected to grow** as the EU considers applying it to more products.

Impact of Climate-Driven Trade Measures

- **On Global Supply Chains**
  - Natural disasters, worsened by climate change, have exposed **vulnerabilities in global supply chains**, prompting countries to move towards -
    - ✓ "**Nearshoring**" (producing closer to home) or
    - ✓ "**Reshoring**" (returning production domestically).
- **Rising Protectionism**
  - **Climate change has accelerated trade protectionism**, as nations increasingly impose measures to safeguard economic and strategic interests.
  - However, **not all climate-linked trade policies directly address emissions reduction**.
  - **For example,** the Inflation Reduction Act in the US incentivises domestic clean technology production, influencing trade but focusing on energy security rather than emissions reductions.
- **Case of China**
  - China's control over renewable resources and technology supply chains (e.g., solar, wind, batteries) has **led countries like the US to reconsider their reliance on foreign supply chains**, especially for strategic energy resources.
  - **This trend aligns with a broader protectionist approach**, though it diverges from traditional economic models favouring cost-effective international production.

MAPS: PLACES IN NEWS

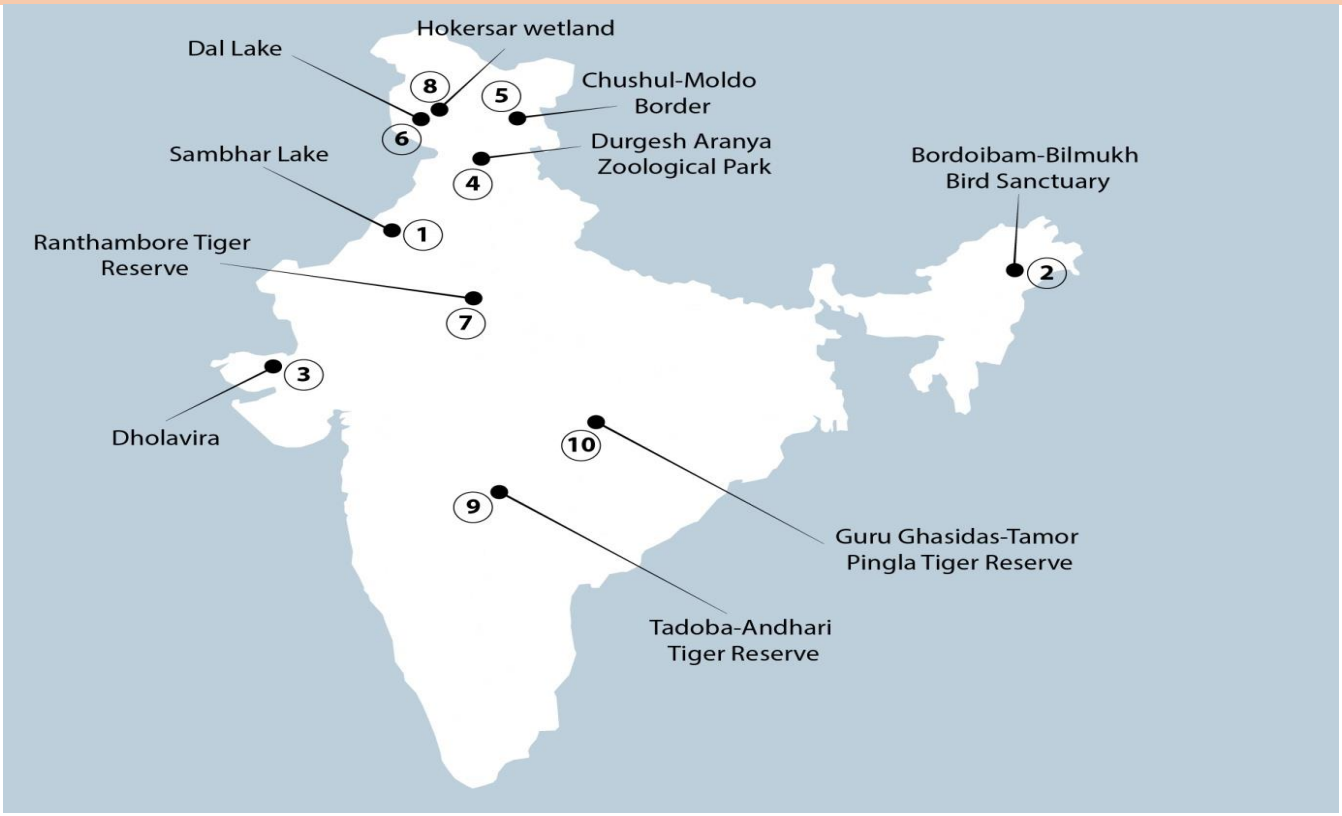
International Places in News



1	**Mount Fuji**	Japan's Mount Fuji remained snow-less recently. It is also known as Fuji-san, is the highest mountain in Japan, standing at 3,776 meters. It is situated close to the Pacific coast in Honshu. It is a strato-volcano that has been dormant since its last eruption in 1707 but is still generally classified as active by geologists.
2	**Papua New Guinea**	At 16th Conference of Parties (COP16) to the Convention on Biological Diversity, local environmental groups from Papua New Guinea called for international actions to stop illegal logging that is damaging one of the most biodiverse areas on the planet. It is an island country that lies in the south-western Pacific. It includes the eastern half of New Guinea (the world's second largest island) and many small offshore islands.
3	**Southeastern Flores, Indonesia**	Mount Lewotobi Laki-Laki, part of Indonesia's Lewotobi twin volcano complex in south-eastern Flores, erupted, causing earthquakes, fatalities, property damage, and mass evacuations. Located within the "Ring of Fire," the region is prone to intense tectonic activity
4	**Malawi**	The Tumaini Festival in Malawi brings together refugees and locals through music, art, and crafts, promoting unity and hope. Malawi, a landlocked country in Southeastern Africa, is bordered by Tanzania, Mozambique, and Zambia. It is known for its stunning highlands and Lake Nyasa (Lake Malawi), one of the world's deepest lakes, which covers more than one-fifth of the country's area.
5	**Al-Jawf Region Saudi Arabia**	The region experienced heavy snowfall and rainfall for the first time in recorded history. Al-Jawf is located in the northern part of Saudi Arabia and forms part of the

		Arabian Desert. The region is typically arid, with vast stretches of sandy terrain and a climate that predominantly features scorching summers and mild winters.
6	**Scarborough Shoal**	China recently released geographic coordinates marking baselines around the contested Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea. It (also known in English as the Scarborough Reef) is the largest oceanic coral atoll that developed on top of a seamount into a triangle shape in the eastern part of the South China Sea.
7	**Solomon Islands**	Scientists have uncovered the largest coral colony on Earth in the Solomon Islands, offering insights into marine ecosystem's resilience and the threats posed by climate change. It is located in southwest Pacific Ocean. It is composed of hard coral Pavona clavus, with colors ranging from brown, yellow, red, pink, and blue. Often referred to as "shoulder blade coral."
8	**Armenia**	It has become the 104th member of the International Solar Alliance. It is a landlocked country in the mountainous Caucasus region between Asia and Europe. Yerevan is the capital. It was the first state to adopt Christianity as its official religion. It underwent the Armenian genocide during World War I. After periods of independence and Soviet rule, it became independent in 1991.

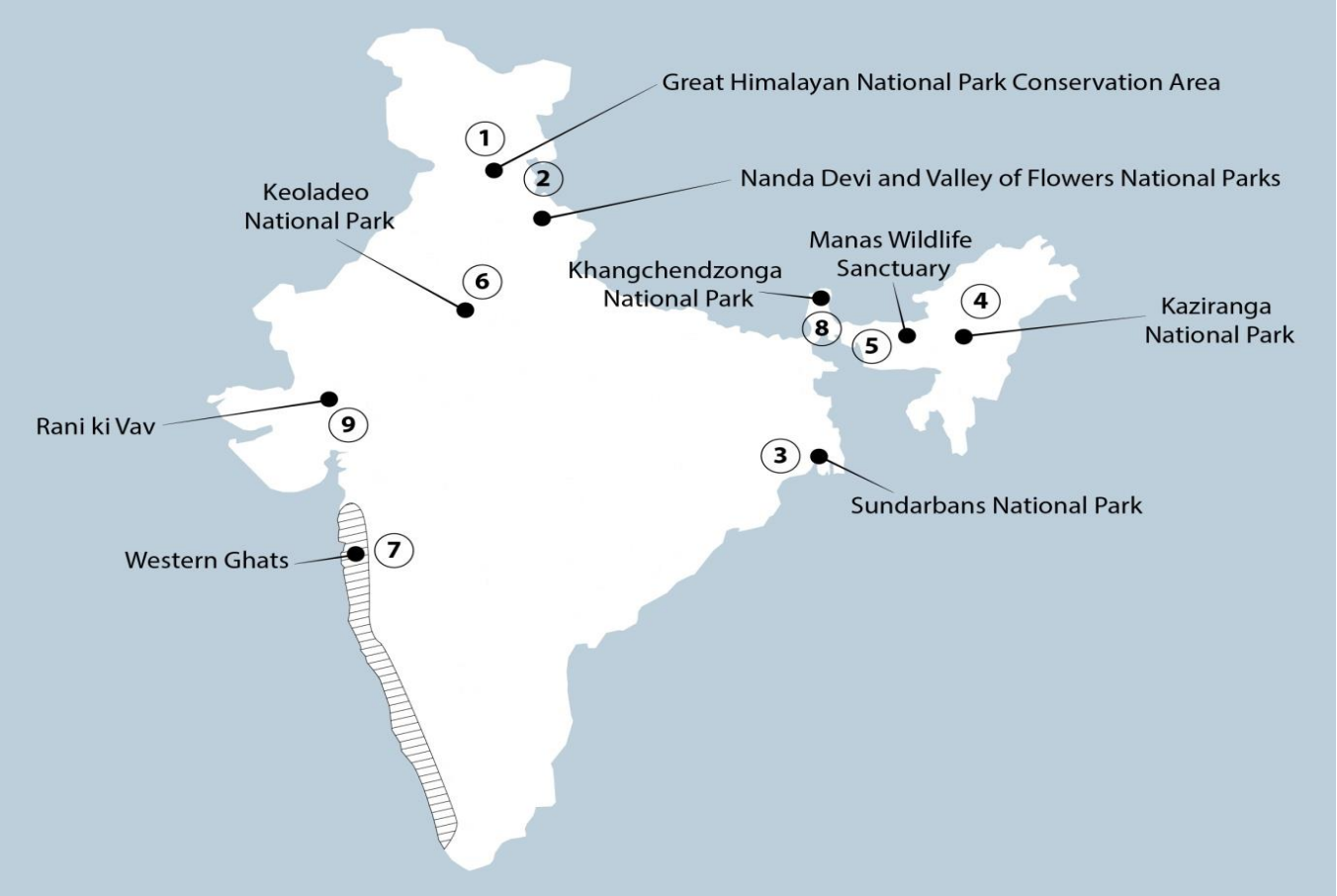
National Places in News



1	**Sambhar Lake**	Over 40 migratory birds, belonging to two to three different species, have been found dead around Sambhar Lake in Jaipur. It is the largest saltwater lake in India. It is located in the districts of Nagaur and Jaipur in Rajasthan. This saline wetland is elliptical in shape, and is surrounded on all sides by the Aravalli hills.
2	**Bordoibam-Bilmukh Bird Sanctuary**	Once a flourishing refuge for numerous bird species, Assam's Bordoibam-Bilmukh Bird Sanctuary now faces an alarming biodiversity crisis, with avian diversity plummeting by over 70%. It is a small wetland located at the boundary of the Dhemaji and Lakhimpur districts of Assam. It was part of the River Subansiri (tributary of

		Brahmaputra), which now flows 7 km away from the lake. The sanctuary experiences moist tropical climate with and receives about 2000mm rainfall every year.
3	**Dholavira**	The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has flagged concerns regarding the poor preservation, lack of tourist facilities, and halted excavation activities at Dholavira, an ancient Harappan city and UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is situated in Kutch District, Gujarat, between the seasonal streams of Mansar and Manhar.
4	**Durgesh Aranya Zoological Park**	Himachal Pradesh's upcoming Durgesh Aranya Zoological Park in Kangra's Dehra constituency is set to become India's first zoo certified by the Indian Green Building Council (IGBC) for sustainable and eco-friendly infrastructure. It is situated in the Bankhandi area of Kangra's Dehra assembly constituency. The park will feature 34 enclosures within its Van Vaibhav Path and Biodiversity Court, housing 73 species, including Asiatic lions, crocodiles, gharials, and indigenous birds.
5	**Chushul-Moldo Border**	The Indian and Chinese armies observed Diwali with an exchange of sweets and greetings at the Chushul-Moldo border point in Ladakh, reflecting a continued tradition of goodwill despite ongoing tensions. It is a key border meeting point situated in eastern Ladakh along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) between India and China. It is located close to Pangong Lake area, Chushul-Moldo has seen multiple military confrontations, making it crucial for diplomatic interactions.
6	**Dal Lake**	In a historic event, 150 women participated in the first-ever traditional shikara boat race on Dal Lake in Srinagar, breaking societal norms and showcasing their strength. Dal lake situated in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir, surrounded by the Pir Panjal mountains. It is called "Raad" locally.
7	**Ranthambore Tiger Reserve**	In the past year, around 25 tigers have "disappeared" from the population of ~75 in Ranthambore National Park (RNP) in Rajasthan. Located at the junction of the Aravallis and Vindhyas near Sawai Madhopur, the park features rivers like Chambal and Banas, along with the Great Boundary Fault. The flora includes tropical dry deciduous and thorn forests, mainly dominated by Dhok trees and grasslands.
8	**Hokersar wetland**	Lack of water due to excess deficit rainfall at the Hokersar wetland in the Kashmir Valley in recent years has impacted the arrival of migratory bird populations in the region. It lies to the north of the famous Dal Lake and is situated at an elevation. The wetland is a bird sanctuary, hosting a variety of migratory species, especially during the winter months. It is an important stopover for birds migrating along the Central Asian Flyway.
9	**Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve**	Ministry of Tribal Affairs has instructed the Maharashtra government to address complaints of "non-recognition of forest rights and forced eviction" from families living in Rantalodhi village, located within the core area of Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR). It was notified in 1955 and is situated in Maharashtra. The reserve is known for its dry deciduous forests, predominantly featuring teak trees, along with bamboo thickets and grasslands, which support a rich variety of wildlife.
10	**Guru Ghasidas-Tamor Pingla Tiger Reserve**	Situated in Chhattisgarh, it is India's 56th tiger reserve. It is the third largest tiger reserve in the country, located on the Chota Nagpur and Baghelkhand plateaus.

Natural/Mixed World Heritage Sites in India



1	**Great Himalayan National Park Conservation Area**	Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP) in Himachal Pradesh's Kullu district is home to over 375 species, including mammals like the Himalayan Black Bear, Himalayan Tahr, Snow Leopard, and birds like the Western Tragopan (state bird of Himachal Pradesh). The park features diverse ecosystems, from riverine forests to alpine meadows.
2	**Nanda Devi and Valley of Flowers National Parks**	Located in Uttarakhand's Western Himalayas, they are UNESCO World Heritage Sites, recognized in 1988 and 2005 respectively for their natural beauty and biodiversity. Dominated by the Nanda Devi peak, the second-highest mountain in India, the parks are home to rare and endangered flowers like blue poppies, primulas, and orchids, preserved by their remote and pristine location.
3	**Sundarbans National Park**	It is located southeast of Calcutta in West Bengal, is part of the Gangetic Delta and was added to the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1987. It is the world's largest mangrove forest, covering over 10,000 square kilometers, with a network of tidal waterways, mudflats, and islands. The park is home to diverse fauna, including 260 bird species, the Bengal tiger, and threatened species like the estuarine crocodile and Indian python.
4	**Kaziranga National Park**	It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1985. It is home to the world's largest population of one-horned rhinos. Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary, with the highest density of one-horned rhinos, ranks second in Assam after Kaziranga. Conservation efforts in Kaziranga focus on the 'big four' species: the rhinoceros, elephant, Royal Bengal tiger, and Asiatic water buffalo.

5	**Manas Wildlife Sanctuary**	Located in the foothills of the Himalayas in Assam, Manas National Park is contiguous with Bhutan's Royal Manas National Park. It holds multiple designations, including a Natural World Heritage Site, Tiger Reserve, Elephant Reserve, Biosphere Reserve, and Important Bird Area. It was included in the Project Tiger in 1973. The park's name is derived from the Manas River, named after the serpent goddess Manasa.
6	**Keoladeo National Park**	Located in Bharatpur, Rajasthan, it is a prime bird-watching destination. The park is home to over 365 bird species, including rare ones like the Siberian crane. It attracts birds from the northern hemisphere for breeding. In addition to its avian diversity, the park also shelters animals such as jackals, sambar, nilgai, wild cats, hyenas, wild boar, porcupines, and mongooses.
7	**Western Ghats**	Also known as Sahyadri Hills, they are known for their rich flora and fauna. The range is called Sahyadri in northern Maharashtra and Sahya Parvatham in Kerala. The region's coastal areas are known as the Konkan Coast (northern part), Kanara (central part), and Malabar Coast (southern part). The foothills are called Desh in Maharashtra, Malanadu in Karnataka, and Nilgiri Malai in Tamil Nadu. Recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Western Ghats are one of the world’s eight biodiversity hotspots.
8	**Khangchendzonga National Park (Mixed Heritage Site)**	Aso known as the Kanchenjunga Biosphere Reserve, it is located in Sikkim. It was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in July 2016, becoming India's first "Mixed Heritage" site. The park, part of the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme, is named after Kangchenjunga, the world's third-highest peak at 8,586 meters.
9	**Rani ki Vav (Mixed Heritage Site)**	It is a stunning stepwell in Patan, Gujarat, built in the 11th century as a memorial to a king. It is an exceptional example of subterranean water architecture, designed as an inverted temple with seven levels of steps leading to the water. The walls feature intricate sculptures of Hindu deities, mythological figures, and daily life scenes.

SOCIAL ISSUES

Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty

The Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty was officially **launched** during the G20 Leaders' Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Its primary objective is to accelerate efforts toward the eradication of hunger and poverty globally while promoting the achievement of SDGs.

Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty

- **About**
  - The G20 summit in Rio de Janeiro launched the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty, connecting nations with resources to tackle hunger.
  - Led by Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the initiative focuses on cash transfers, school meals, and support for farmers.
- **Aims/objectives**
  - The alliance aims to eradicate hunger and poverty by 2030, aligning with **SDGs**.
  - Its key objective is to remove all nations from the **FAO Hunger Map** by fostering collaboration and resource mobilization.
- **Membership and Structure**
  - **Members**: 148, including 82 countries; African Union and European Union; 24 international organizations; 9 financial institutions; 31 philanthropic and NGOs.
  - Available to non-G20 countries since July 2024.
- **Key Pillars of the Alliance**
  - **National:** Coordination of public policies specific to eradicating hunger.
  - **Knowledge:** Integration of data and technologies for evidence-based solutions.
  - **Financial:** Large-scale resource mobilization to fund programs.
- **Strategic Commitments**
  - **Income Distribution**: Reach 500 million people through income support programs by 2030.
  - **Provide school meals** to 150 million children in high-hunger regions.
  - **Financial Mobilization**: Leverage multilateral banks to raise billions for anti-poverty initiatives.
- **Funding (Estimated operational cost: $2-3 million annually)**
  - **No exclusive fund**; relies on contributions from members and institutions like FAO, UNICEF, and the World Bank.
- **Technical Office:** Based at FAO with functional autonomy.
  - It is expected that the headquarters of this alliance will be based in **Brasilia** or another Global South country.
- **Other features**
  - Includes a policy basket with over 50 instruments for targeted support in areas like: School meals; Cash transfers; Support for smallholder and family farming; Socio-economic inclusion programs; Maternal and early childhood interventions; Water access solutions.
  - The Alliance acts as a matchmaking platform, connecting countries in need with donors and support organizations.

First phase of One Nation One Subscription approved

The Union Cabinet has allocated ₹6,000 crore for the 'One Nation One Subscription' initiative.

This program aims to centralize journal subscriptions for ~6,300 government-run higher education institutions (HEIs), providing equitable access to 13,000 scholarly journals through a unified platform. It seeks to enhance academic resource availability across India.

Current Access to Journals in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

- **Library Consortia System:** HEIs access journals through 10 library consortia managed by various ministries.
  - Library consortia are collaborations among libraries to share resources & meet common needs.
- **Individual Subscriptions:** HEIs also subscribe to journals independently, supplementing consortium-based access.
- **Access Statistics:** Currently, around 2,500 HEIs have access to approximately 8,100 journals through consortia and individual subscriptions.

One Nation One Subscription (ONOS) initiative

- **Background**
  - The establishment of the **Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF**) underscores the government's commitment to fostering a strong research culture.
  - The Union Cabinet has approved the ONOS scheme, granting nationwide access to international research articles and scholarly journals.
- **Objective**
  - The ONOS scheme aims to **streamline and centralize** journal access for all state and central government HEIs, replacing the fragmented system currently in place.
- **Implementation Timeline:** The platform will go live on **January 1, 2025**
- **Key Features:**
  - **Access to 13,000 Journals**: Journals from 30 international publishers will be available.
  - **Unified Registration**: HEIs will need to register on the platform to access the journals.
  - **Implementing Agency**: Information and Library Network Centre (INFLIBNET) Centre has been designated as the implementing authority.
  - **Funding and Pricing:** The central government has allocated **₹6,000 crore** for the initiative covering three years (2025–2027).
    - ✓ A single subscription price was negotiated with each publisher for all institutions.
  - **Additional Subscriptions:** HEIs seeking access to journals beyond the 13,000 available can continue subscribing to them individually.
- **Role of the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF)**
  - The access and usage of subscription will be regularly monitored by the ANRF.
  - It will also contribute to the expansion of publications by Indian authors in participating.
- **Plans for future expansion**
  - The first phase included all 6,300 HEIs and research institutes under both central and state governments.
  - In the second phase, the government plans to expand this to the remaining HEIs in the country, both public and private.
  - Phase 3 will expand the access of ONOS to the entire country.

Benefits of the ONOS Scheme

- **Broader Access to Scholarly Resources:** Expands access to top-tier scholarly journals for **1.8 crore students, faculty, and researchers** across approximately **6,300 government HEIs**, including those in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities.

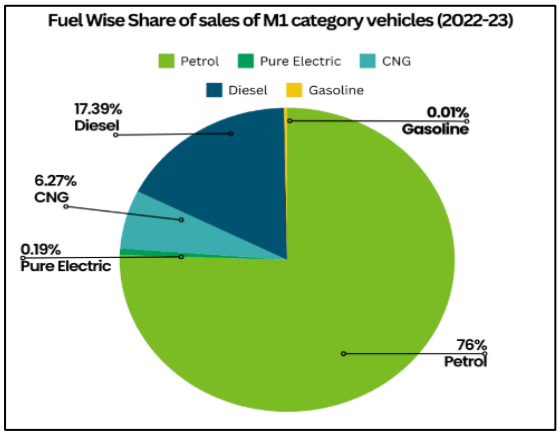
- Extending benefits to students residing in tier-2 and tier-3 cities will help in reducing the knowledge gap between urban and rural students.

- **Elimination of overlapping subscriptions:** reducing **expenditure** on duplicate resources.
- **Enhanced Bargaining Power:** Consolidates subscription under one platform, allowing the government to **negotiate better deals** with publishers.
- **Data-Driven Utilization and Planning:** Enables the Centre to monitor journal usage across HEIs, aiding **long-term planning** and promoting better utilization of resources in inactive institutions.
- **Alignment with national goals** like National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF), and the government's Viksit Bharat@2047 vision.

CAFE Norms

The Centre has identified eight automakers, including Hyundai, Kia, Mahindra, and Honda, for exceeding mandated fleet emission levels during the financial year 2022-23.

Non-compliance with **Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency (CAFE) norms** has led to an estimated penalty of ₹7,300 crore, with Hyundai alone facing over ₹2,800 crore in fines.



CAFE Norms

- **Introduced by:** The Bureau of Energy Efficiency (**BEE**) in **2017 under the Energy Conservation Act, 2001,** to regulate fuel consumption and carbon emissions for passenger vehicles.
- **Objective:** Reduce oil dependency and curb air pollution.
- **Scope:** Vehicles under 3,500 kg, including those powered by petrol, diesel, LPG, CNG, hybrids, and EVs.
  - M1 category: Motor vehicle used for the carriage of passengers, comprising not more than eight seats in addition to the driver's seat
- **Implementation:** These standards were introduced in two phases - the first CAFÉ norms stage I fuel consumption standards were introduced effective 2017-18, and the CAFÉ norms stage II standards came into force in 2022-23.
- **Compliance Criteria for FY23:**
  - **Fuel consumption:** ≤ 4.78 litres per 100 km.
  - **Carbon emissions:** ≤ 113 grams of CO_2 per km.
- **Penalties for non-compliance:** The financial year 2022-23 saw tighter CAFE norms come into effect, resulting in significant penalties for non-compliance.
- **Significance of CAFE norms:**
  - The CAFE framework **incentivises automakers to produce EVs, hybrids, and CNG vehicles** while **penalising reliance on fossil fuel-driven cars**.

PM Vidyalaxmi

Union Cabinet chaired by PM Modi approved a new **Central Sector Scheme**, PM Vidyalaxmi, which seeks to provide financial support to **meritorious students** applying for **higher education**.

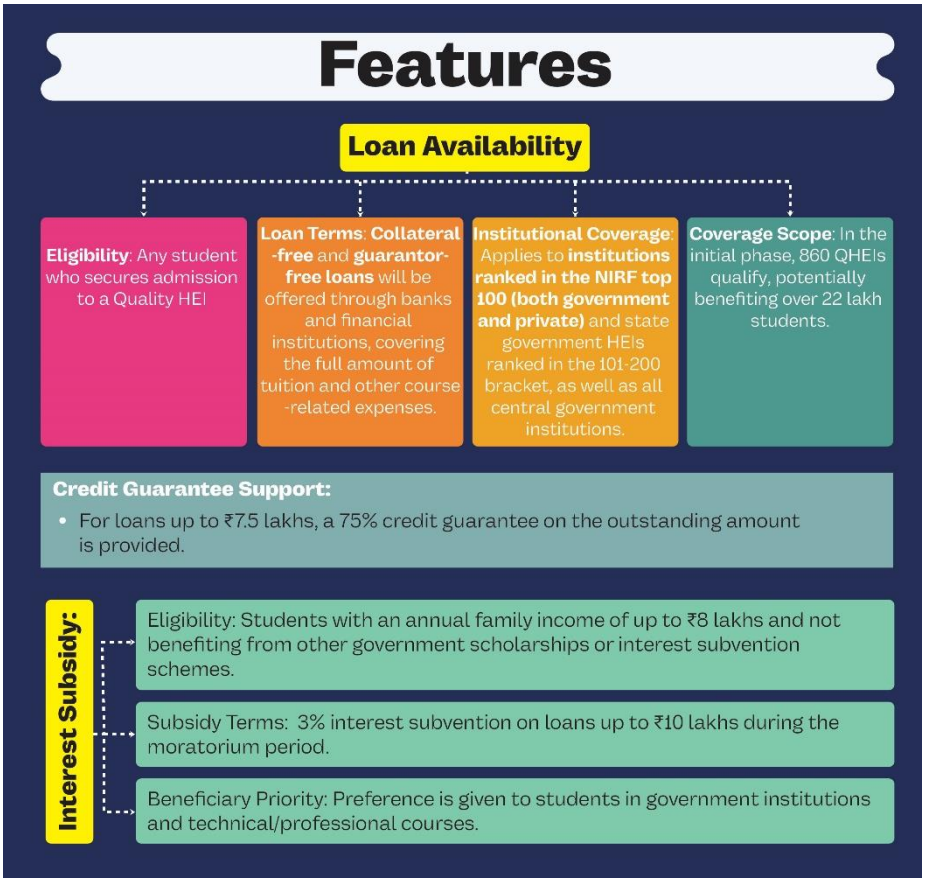
PM Vidyalaxmi

- **About:** This scheme is rooted in the National Education Policy, 2020, which advocates for financial assistance to deserving students across both public and private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).
- **Objectives**
  - **Ensure Financial Inclusion in Education**

- **Support Top Educational Institutions**: Applicable only to top-quality HEIs as per the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF).
- **Provide Transparent and Digital Access**: Use a fully digital, transparent, and student-friendly platform for loan processing and management.

How it is Different from Past Schemes?

- **Expanded Eligibility**
  - PM Vidyalaxmi covers middle-income families, unlike previous schemes which were limited to low-income groups, and offers benefits regardless of caste.
- **Simplified Loan Process and facilitates loan tracking.**
  - Students can apply through the **Vidyalaxmi portal**, which links to major public and private banks.
- **Focus on NIRF Rankings**
  - Eligibility is restricted to institutions ranked in the top 100 of the NIRF overall, category-specific, or domain-specific lists.
    - ✓ For earlier schemes, the eligible institutions needed to be accredited with the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and the National Board of Accreditation (NBA).
    - ✓ With 820 universities of NAAC and 15,501 colleges, along with 3,348 NBA institutions, the total was about 20,000 institutions.



Challenges Faced by PM Vidyalaxmi

- **Reduced Institution Coverage:** Only institutions ranked in NIRF are eligible, significantly lowering the number of qualifying institutions compared to past schemes.
- **Performance Stakes:** With eligibility tied to rankings, students must perform exceptionally well in entrance tests to access loans.
- **Exclusion Risks:** Students in non-NIRF ranked institutions face higher interest rates or loan rejection.
- **Institutional Competition:** Rankings become crucial, incentivizing institutions to seek higher NIRF standings to attract students benefiting from the scheme.

Resolving the Issue of Overcrowded Prisons in India

India's prison system faces acute challenges, particularly overcrowding, which hinders the efficiency of correctional facilities. A recent report by the Supreme Court's Centre for Research and Planning has proposed **using electronic tracking devices to address this issue**.

Key Recommendations in the Report on Prisons in India

- The report titled "**Prisons in India - Mapping Prison Manuals and Measures for Reformation and Decongestion**" was recently released by the President of India.
- It recommends -
  - A phased implementation of **electronic monitoring for releasing UTPs (Under trail Prisoners) to ease prison overcrowding.**
  - The target group in the initial phases will be **low and moderate-risk UTPs** with good conduct.
- The phased implementation will **assess community readiness and the feasibility** of electronic tracking for broader use.

Global Practices & Indian Legal Context on Electronic Monitoring of Prisoners

- **Indian legislative framework:**
  - **Model Prisons and Correctional Services Act, 2023:** Introduced electronic tracking devices as a condition for granting prison leave.
  - **Law Commission of India's 2017 Report:** Recognised the cost-saving and security benefits of electronic tagging while emphasising caution.
- **Judicial developments:**
  - Courts have **imposed location-tracking as bail conditions** in select cases.
  - The Supreme Court recently disapproved of constant surveillance of bailed individuals, underscoring the need for **clear guidelines to balance security and privacy.**

Benefits of Electronic Tracking of Prisoners

- **Prison decongestion; Cost-effectiveness**
- **Mental health benefits:** Improves family contact and reduces stress from isolation.
- **Rehabilitation incentives:** Encourages good conduct by linking it with parole or furlough opportunities.

Concerns and Safeguards for Electronic Tracking of Prisoners

- Universal application could lead to **misuse**, **infringing on civil liberties**.
  - Potential **operational challenge**s in ensuring equitable implementation.
- **Recommendations for ethical use:**
  - **Clear guidelines** for implementation to prevent undue violation of prisoners' rights.
  - **Strict safeguards** to protect against misuse while achieving the goal of decongestion.

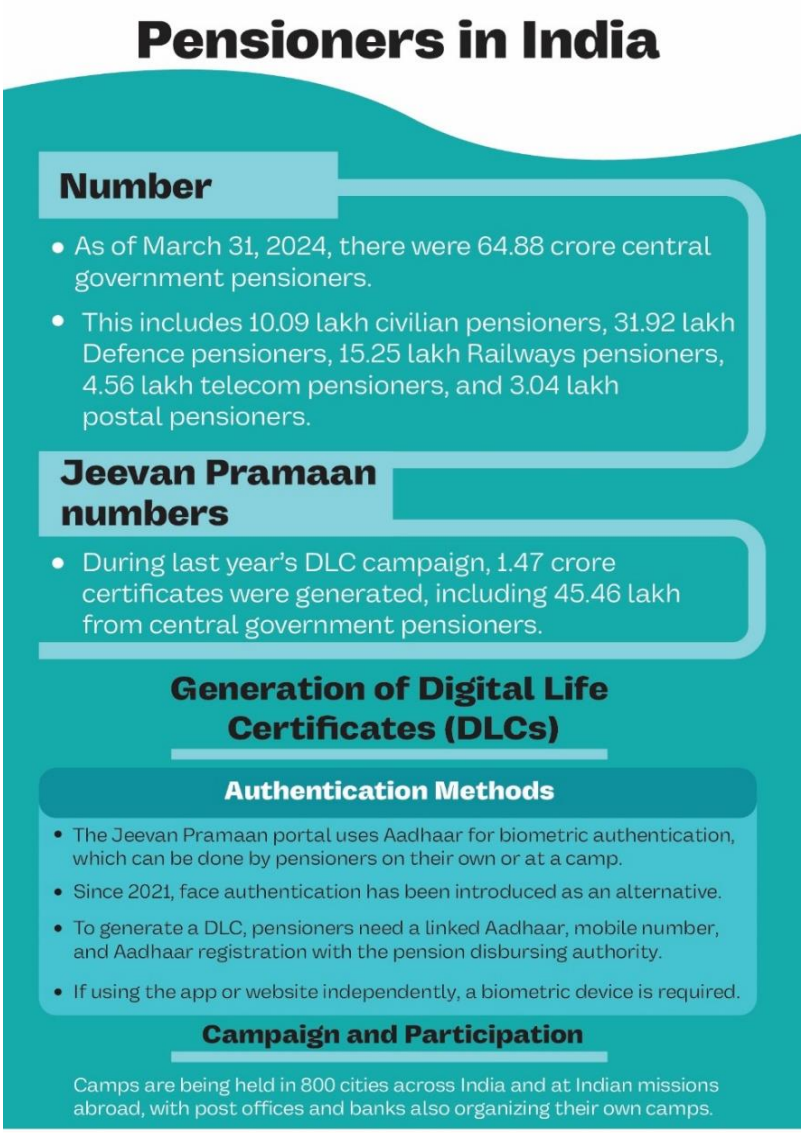
Jeevan Pramaan

- Pensioners, including retirees from government, Defence, Railways, PSUs, and educational institutions, must submit a life certificate annually in November to continue receiving pensions.
- Since **2014,** *Digital Life Certificates (**DLCs**)* via the ***Jeevan Pramaan*** system allow online submission without visiting banks or post offices.

- The Department of Pension and Pensioners' Welfare (DoPPW) ran a 3rd DLC campaign, with 1,900 camps to assist pensioners. Physical submission of life certificates at banks or post offices remains an option for those who prefer it.

Jeevan Pramaan

- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances, and Pensions through the Department of Pension and Pensioners' Welfare (DoPPW).
- **Features:**
  - **Digital Access**: Certificates are directly sent to pension-disbursing authorities via a digital platform.
  - **Wide Reach**: Facilitates submission at banks, post offices, and through biometric devices.
  - **Campaigns**: Annual campaigns (e.g., in November) with camps to assist pensioners in generating DLCs.
- **Challenges:**
  - **Digital Divide**: Limited access for pensioners in rural or remote areas lacking digital literacy or internet connectivity.
  - **Technical Glitches**: Biometric authentication failures due to age-related issues like faded fingerprints.
  - **Unawareness:** Some pensioners are unaware of the digital system and continue with physical submissions.



ECONOMICS

Agrovoltaic Farming

- At the 7th session of the International Solar Alliance (ISA), the practical implementation of agrivoltaic farming was showcased.
    - It was held in New Delhi under the presidency of India & co-presidency of France.
- Agrivoltaic farming primarily focuses on the simultaneous use of land for both agriculture and solar energy generation.
- It is the practice of **growing crops underneath solar panels**. Solar panels have to sometimes be elevated or suspended to allow plants to grow beneath them.
- Another option is putting them on the roofs of greenhouses. This allows enough light and rainwater to reach the crops, as well as providing access for farm machinery.

Benefits

- The shade from the panels cast on crops can affect their productivity, since they receive slightly less light but energy production compensates for this loss.
- The shade from the panels protects vegetables from heat stress and water loss and certain crops appear to thrive when grown in such environments.
- It increases land-use efficiency. If just 1 % of arable land were dedicated to produce solar energy, it would be possible to offset the world's energy demand.
- The use of solar energy in agricultural areas also encourages *photovoltaic self-consumption*, since farms' energy needs can easily be met with the electricity generated.
- Agrovoltaics also has close links with smart farming, which improves productivity through technology like AI, big data and the Internet of Things. In turn, it can also drive the development of smart villages.

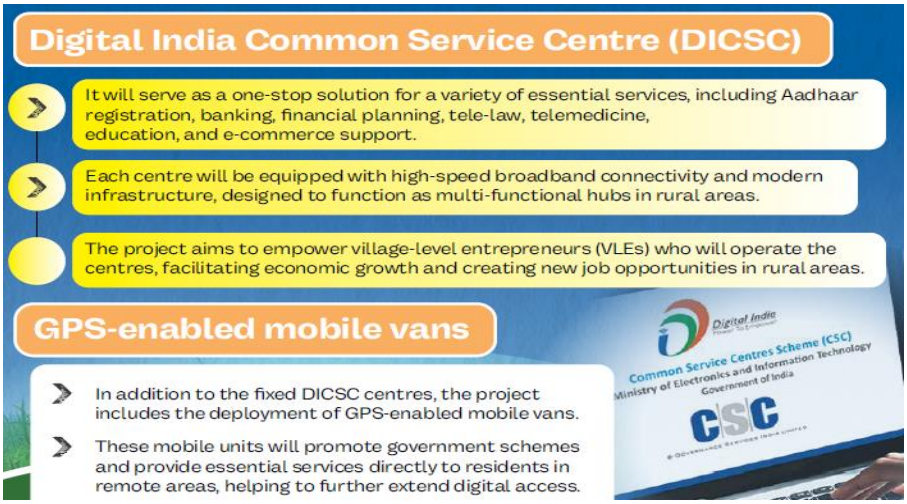
TULIP

- The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has launched a digital platform **TULIP (Traditional Artisans' Upliftment Livelihood Programme)**.
- The platform has been launched under the guidance of the **National Backward Classes Finance and Development Corporation (NBCFDC)**.
- It aims to empower marginalized artisans by providing them with a platform for global exposure and sales of their products through e-marketing.
- Under the TULIP brand, artisans from Scheduled Castes (SC), OBC, sanitation workers, and persons with disabilities will have an e-platform to market their products.
- It addresses key challenges faced by artisans, particularly the involvement of intermediaries, by facilitating direct sales & ensuring fair compensation for their work.

Digital India Common Service Centre Project

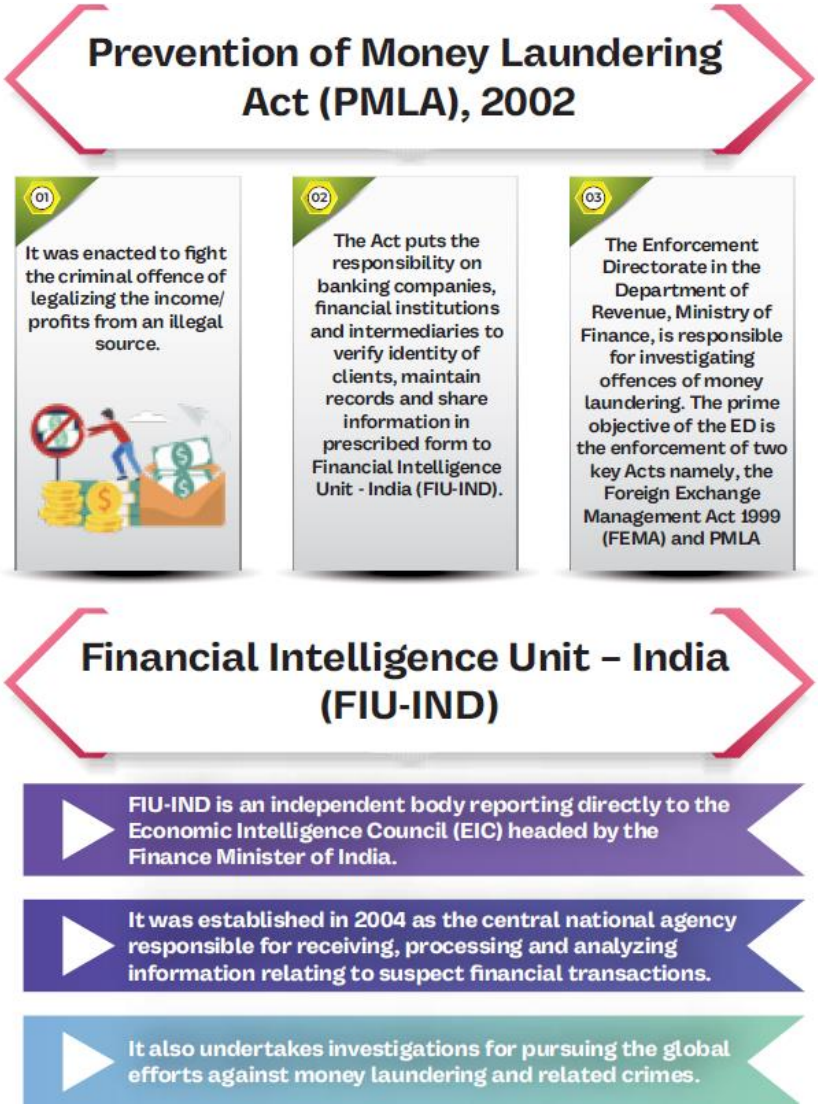
- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has announced the launch of the Digital India Common Service Centre (DICSC) project, with initial implementation set to begin in **Pilibhit & Gorakhpur, (UP).**
- The initiative aims to *bridge the digital divide in rural India* by providing citizens with accessible e-governance, financial, and commercial services.
- MeitY plans to establish **4,740 model DICSCs** in gram panchayats across 10 districts nationwide. It has allocated a budget of **Rs 31.6 crore** for initial six-month phase.

- The project's implementation and centralised technical monitoring will be handled by **CSC e-Governance Services India Limited**.
- This centralised technical oversight will enhance transparency and service quality, supporting MeitY's goal of establishing an integrated, accessible digital platform in rural India.



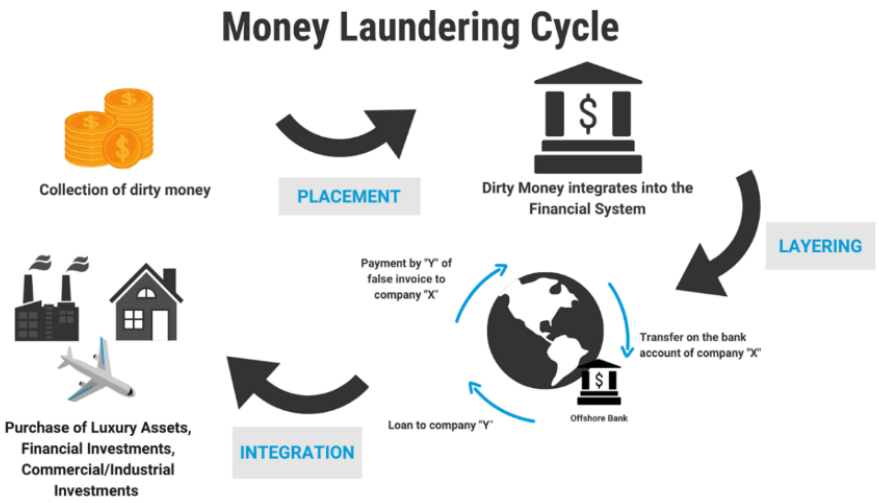
Mule Accounts

- The Union Home Ministry has issued an alert against illegal payment gateways created by transnational gangs of cybercriminals using mule bank accounts for facilitating money laundering.
- **Mule bank accounts** are accounts that are <u>used to facilitate illegal transactions and launder money</u>.
- These accounts are one of the significant contributors to the online financial scams that could potentially siphon off 0.7% of the country's GDP.
- The gateways are created by transnational cybercriminals who provide money laundering services using accounts of shell companies and individuals.
- A **shell company** is a <u>company without active business operations or significant assets</u>.
- The most common reason for a domestic company to set up a shell company is to <u>take advantage of a tax haven abroad</u>.
- A **tax haven**, or offshore financial center, is any country or jurisdiction that <u>offers minimal tax liability to foreign individuals and businesses</u>. Tax havens do not require businesses to operate.



Money Laundering

- **It** is the illegal process of converting money earned from illegal activities (such as drug trafficking) into "clean" money.
- Hawala, bulk cash smuggling, fictional loans, shell companies and trusts, real estate, gambling, and fake invoicing are some of the common methods of money laundering.

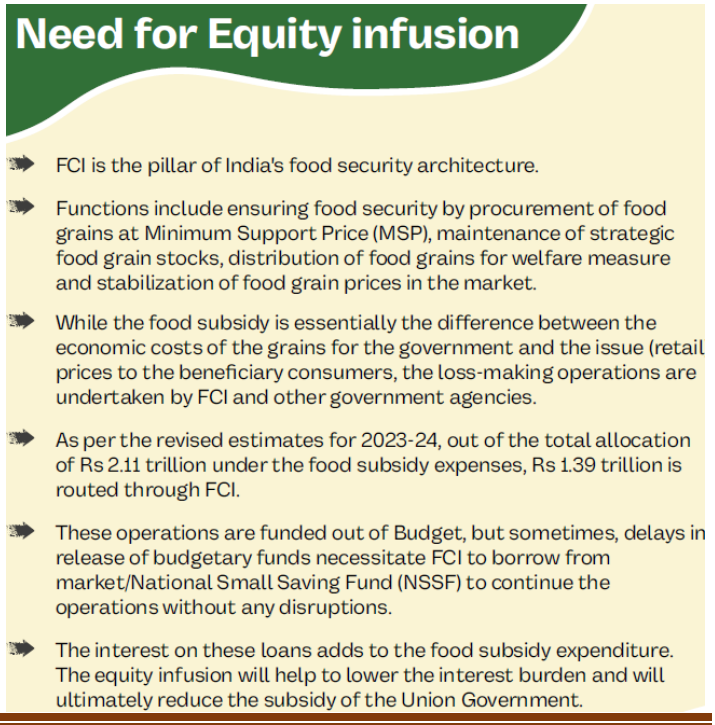


Uttarakhand Livability Improvement Project

- The Union Government has signed a $200 million loan deal with the **Asian Development Bank (ADB)** for Uttarakhand Livability Improvement Project (ULIP).
- The **European Investment Bank** is co-financing the project with $191 million on a parallel basis, while the state government is contributing $74.9 million—bringing the total project cost to **$465.9 million**.
- ULIP aligns with the Union Government's urban development agenda as well as Uttarakhand's initiatives to enhance urban services, aiming to boost livability and sustainability in cities.
- It aims to create urban infrastructure that is resilient to climate and environmental risks such as floods and landslides, ensuring the safety and health of Uttarakhand's population.
- It will also build the capacity of the state agencies in project management, climate-and disaster-resilient planning, own-source revenue generation, and gender mainstreaming.
- The project will enhance transportation, urban mobility, drainage, flood management, and overall public services in Haldwani, the economic hub of the state.
- Additionally, it will improve water supply delivery in four cities - Champawat, Kichha, Kotdwar, and Vikasnagar - by developing efficient and climate-resilient water supply systems.
- It will introduce initiatives for women, such as livelihood skills training on driving buses, bus ticketing, and the operation of electric charging stations.
- Given women's role in monitoring water supply systems, the project will build the capacity of women, including those from vulnerable households, in operating and managing water supply and sanitation services.

Equity Infusion for Food Corporation of India

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved infusion of equity of Rs.10,700 crore for working capital in financial year 2024-25 in Food Corporation of India (FCI).



- The decision is aimed at strengthening the agricultural sector and ensuring the welfare of farmers nationwide.

Food Corporation of India (FCI)

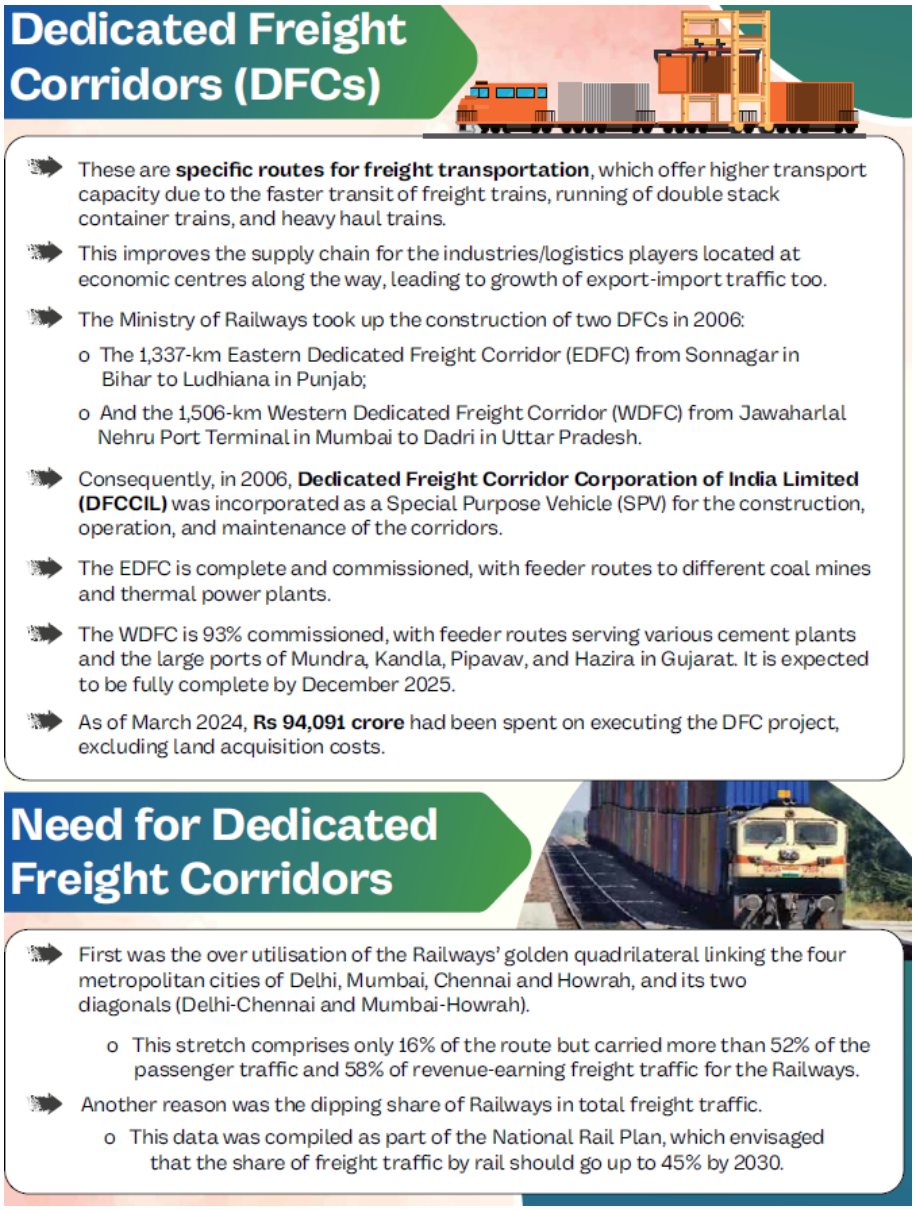
- FCI was **set up in 1965**, under the Food Corporation Act, 1964, as the country was facing major shortage of food grains, especially wheat.
- It is a **statutory body** under the **Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution**. Since its inception, FCI has played a significant role in India's success in transforming the crisis-management oriented food security into a stable security system.

Dedicated Freight Corridors (DFC)

- A study by the University of New South Wales has highlighted the positive impact of Dedicated Freight Corridors (DFCs) in India.
- The research is based on data including freight costs, industry inputs, and population data.
- It also factors in regions, industries, consumers and the overall improvements in the freight transport network.

Current Status and Impact

- DFCs are improving India's GDP and adding significantly to Indian Railways' revenue.
- The introduction of the DFCs provided great benefit due to **significant reductions in freight costs**, as the **freight trains on DFC are faster, heavier and safer**.
- DFCs has **helped reduce prices of commodities by up to 0.5%**, and the corridors have **contributed to 2.94% of the revenue growth** realised by the Railways between FY 2022–23 and FY 2018–19.
- More than 10% of freight running of Indian Railways is now handled by DFC. Currently, on an average, 325 trains are running per day, 60% more than last year.
- Since inception, the DFCs have carried over 232 billion Gross Tonne Kilometres (GTKMs) and 122 billion Net Ton Kilometers (NTKMs) payload.
- The findings also indicated a '**social-equalising effect**', with states that have a lower per-capita GDP experiencing significant benefits.



Future Plans: There are four more such proposed corridors:

- ✓ East coast corridor: Kharagpur to Vijayawada (1115 km);
- ✓ East-west sub-corridor-I: Palghar (Maharashtra) to Dankuni (W.B) (2073 km);
- ✓ East-west Sub-corridor-II: Rajkharsawan (Jharkhand) to Andal (W.B) (195 km);
- ✓ North-south sub corridor: Vijayawada (Andra Pradesh) to Itarsi (MP) (975 km).

Domestic Systemically Important Banks

- RBI retained the State Bank of India, HDFC Bank and ICICI Bank as Domestic Systemically Important Banks (D-SIBs).
- Systemically Important Banks (SIBs) are perceived as banks that are '**Too Big To Fail**' and their continued functioning is crucial for the uninterrupted availability of essential banking services to the real economy.
- The RBI had announced SBI and ICICI Bank as D-SIBs in 2015 and 2016, HDFC Bank was classified as D-SIB in 2017.

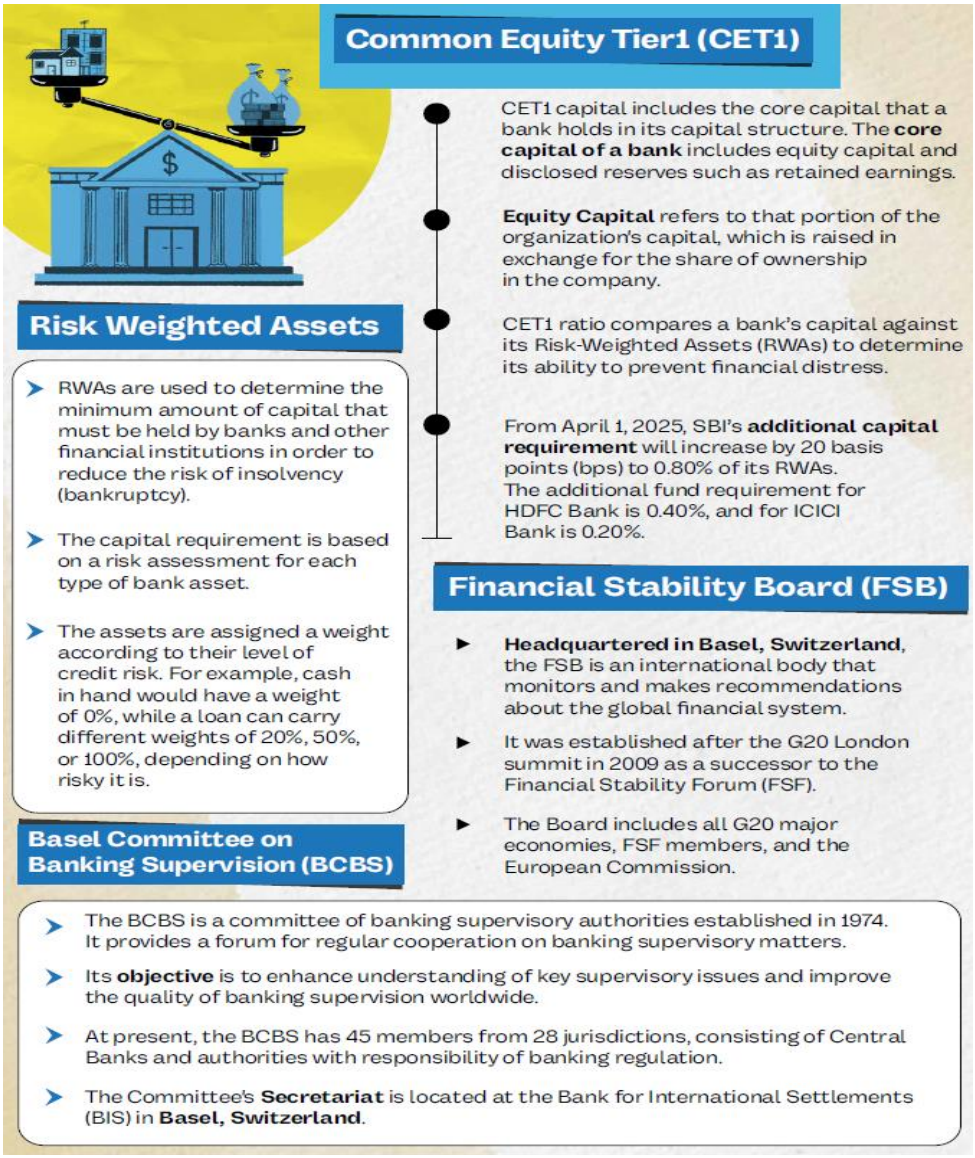
Background

- During the 2008 global financial crisis, it was observed that problems faced by certain large and highly interconnected financial institutions negatively impacted the economy. Thus, government intervention was considered necessary to ensure financial stability.
- In 2010, the Financial Stability Board (FSB) recommended that all member countries should have a framework to reduce risks related to Systemically Important Financial Institutions (SIFIs) in their jurisdictions.
- The Basel Committee on Banking Supervision (BCBS) developed a framework in 2011 for identifying the Global Systemically Important Banks (G-SIBs) and the amount of additional capital required to absorb losses in G-SIBs.
- BCBS further required all member countries to have a regulatory framework to deal with D-SIBs.

Global Systemically Important Banks(G-SIBs)	Domestic Systemically Important Banks (D-SIBs)
• G-SIB status is determined using **five main criteria**: cross-jurisdictional activity; interconnectedness; size; substitutability; and complexity. • Methodology is also used to rank a G-SIB's relative to other G-SIBs. • Since 2011, FSB has published a list of G-SIBs. • The list of G-SIBs is reviewed annually, and banks can move in or out of G-SIB classification or be re-classified at a different level of systemic importance.	• In India, RBI had issued the framework for dealing with D-SIBs in **2014**. The assessment methodology adopted by RBI is primarily based on the BCBS methodology for identifying the G-SIBs with suitable modifications to capture domestic importance of a bank. • The **indicators** used for assessment of D-SIBs are: **size, interconnectedness, substitutability and complexity**. • Based on the sample of banks chosen, a **Systemic Importance Score (SIS)** of banks is calculated. RBI determines a cut-off score beyond which banks are considered as D-SIBs. • These banks are then placed in **five different buckets (categories)** depending upon their **SISs**. Based on the bucket in which a D-SIB is placed, an additional common equity requirement has to be applied to it. • The Additional **Common Equity Tier 1 (CET1) requirement** for D-SIBs was phased-in from April 2016 and became fully effective from April 2019. • In case a foreign bank having branch presence in India is a G-SIB, it has to maintain additional CET1 capital surcharge in the country, proportionate to its Risk Weighted Assets (RWAs). • The framework requires the RBI to **annually** disclose the names of banks designated as D-SIBs starting from 2015.

Significance

- The too-big-to-fail tag also indicates that in case of distress, the government is expected to support these banks. Due to this perception, these banks are given certain advantages in funding.
- It also means that these banks have a different set of policy measures regarding systemic risks and moral hazard issues.
- In economics, moral hazard occurs when an entity has an incentive to increase its exposure to risk because it does not bear the full costs of that risk.
- D-SIBs are subjected to higher levels of supervision to prevent disruption in financial services in case of any failure.



World Intellectual Property Indicators 2024

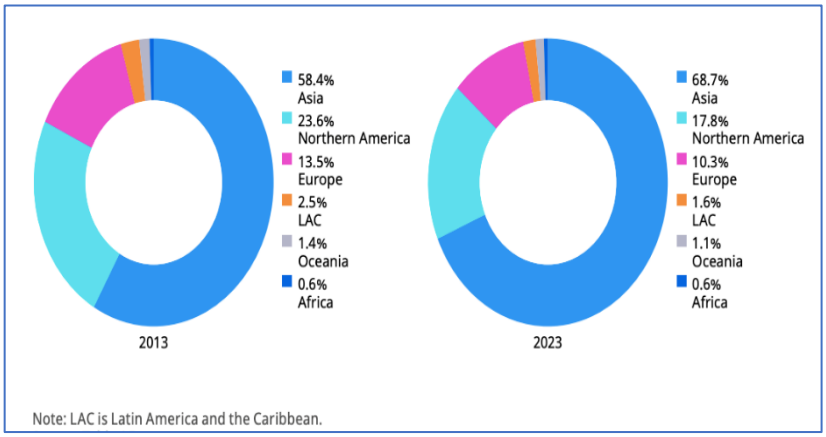
The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) has published the World Intellectual Property Indicators (WIPI) 2024, sharing global trends in intellectual property (IP) filings.

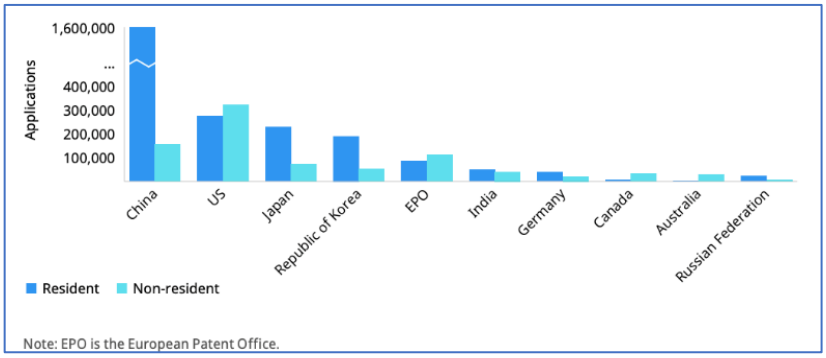
- The report reveals significant growth in patent, trademark, and industrial design applications across top economies.

Key Findings

- The report highlights continued growth in global IP filings, reflecting innovation resilience despite economic challenges.
- A record **3.55 million patent applications** were filed worldwide in 2023, up 2.7% from 2022 with notable contributions from leading economies in Asia.
- This increase was largely driven by residents in China, US, Japan, South Korea, and India.
- In 2023, **Asia received around 68.7% of patent applications filed globally**, an increase of 10.3% from a decade earlier in 2013.
- This growth trend emphasises a shift towards local innovation, with many countries aiming to strengthen their domestic IP landscapes.

- In 2022 – the latest year for which complete data are available – **computer technology** emerged as the most frequently featured technology (12.4%) in **published** patent applications worldwide.
- **Solar energy** accounted for more than half (54.4%) of all energy related applications published during 2020–2022.
- It was followed by wind energy (19.4%), fuel cell technology (13.2%), hydro energy (11.4%) and geothermal energy (1.5%).
- Women inventors accounted for 17.7% of all the patent applications in 2023. The proportion of women inventors has increased notably from 10.9% in 2009
- Moreover, the proportion of women inventors has expanded in every region of the world over the past decade.





Findings from India

- India continues to solidify its place as a global leader in IP landscape.
- India has secured a spot **in the global top 10 for** all three major IP rights—**patents, trademarks, and industrial designs**.
- India recorded the **fastest growth in patent (+15.7%) applications** in 2023 among the top 20 origins, marking the fifth consecutive year of double-digit growth.
- India ranks **sixth globally for patents with 64,480 applications**, with resident filings accounting for over half of all submissions (55.2%)—a first for the country.
- The patent office also **granted 149.4% more patents in 2023** compared to the previous year, underlining the country's fast-evolving IP ecosystem.
- The report indicates a steady rise (36.4%) in India's industrial design applications, which aligns with increasing emphasis on product design, manufacturing, and creative industries within India.
    - The top three sectors—Textiles and Accessories, Tools and Machines, and Health and Cosmetics—made up almost half of all design filings.
- Between 2018 and 2023, patent and industrial design applications more than doubled, while trademark filings increased by 60%.
- India's patent-to-GDP ratio also saw significant growth, rising from 144 to 381 in past decade.
- India ranked fourth globally in trademark filings, with a 6.1% increase in 2023. Nearly 90% of these filings were by residents, with key sectors including Health (21.9%), Agriculture (15.3%), and Clothing (12.8%)
- India's trademark office holds the second-largest number of active registrations worldwide, with over 3.2 million trademarks in force.

Uniform Protection Protocol

- The Central Electricity Authority (CEA) has approved the Uniform Protection Protocol (UPP) for users of Indian grid for implementation on pan India basis.

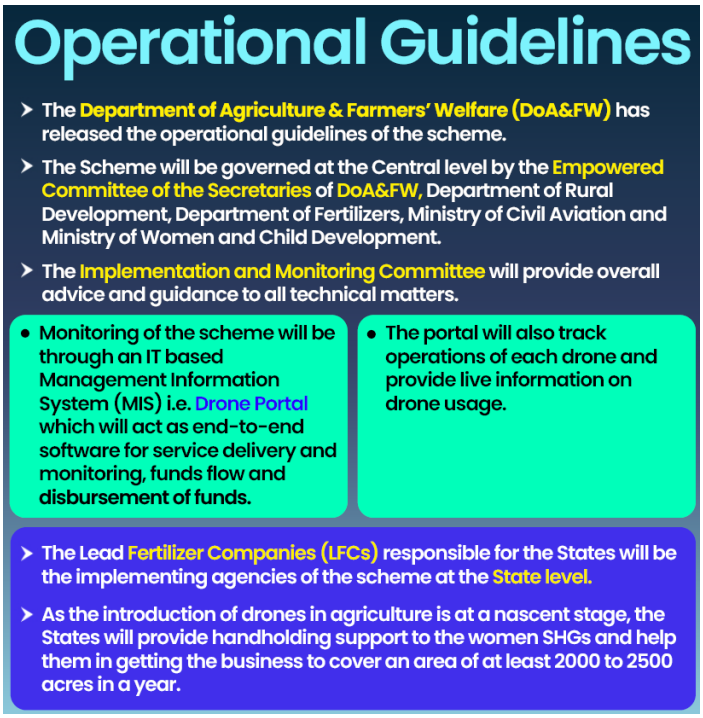
- As per Indian Electricity Grid Code (IEGC) 2023, a UPP should be there for proper co-ordination of protection system in order to protect the equipment/system from abnormal operating conditions, isolate the faulty equipment and avoid unintended operation of protection system.
- The UPP aims to ensure grid stability, reliability, security and also greatly supports the government's vision for integration of 450 GW renewable energy into the National Grid by 2030 and the target of 2100 GW of renewable energy by 2047.
- The Protocol addresses the protection requirements for thermal and hydro generating units, renewable energy generations (REGs), battery energy storage system (BESS), substations, transmission lines, and High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) terminals.

Namo Drone Didi Scheme

- The Union Government has approved the **Central Sector Scheme 'Namo Drone Didi'** for providing drones to Women Self Help Groups (SHGs) under DAY-NRLM, with an outlay of **Rs 1261 Crores**.
- The scheme aims to provide drones to **14500 selected Women SHGs** from **2024-25 to 2025-2026** for providing rental services to farmers for agriculture purpose - application of liquid fertilizers and pesticides.

Funding

- A **Central Financial Assistance at 80% of the cost** of drone and accessories/ancillary charges up to a **maximum of Rs 8 lakhs** will be provided to the women SHGs for purchase of drones as a package.
    - Under the scheme, not only drones but, drones as a package will be supplied. The package will consist of basic drone with spray assembly for spraying liquid fertilizers and pesticides, standard battery set, camera, battery charger hub etc.
    - The package also includes 15 days training for drone pilot and drone assistant, one year comprehensive insurance, 2 years annual maintenance contract.
    - The additional sets of batteries will ensure continuous drone flying which can easily cover 20 acres in a day.



- The Cluster Level Federations (CLFs) of SHGs/SHGs may raise the balance amount (total cost of procurement minus subsidy) as loan under **National Agriculture Infra Financing Facility (AIF)**.
    - **Interest subvention at 3%** on the AIF loan will be provided to the CLFs/SHGs.
    - The CLFs/SHGs will also have the option to access loans from other sources/programmes/schemes of Ministry of Rural Development.

Training

- One member of the women SHGs will be selected for 15 days training comprising of mandatory drone pilot training and additional training for agriculture purpose for nutrient and pesticide application.
- Another member of the SHG will be trained as a drone assistant to take up repairs of electrical goods, fitting and mechanical works.

Benefits

- The scheme will provide sustainable business and livelihood support to SHGs and they would be able to earn additional income for them.
- It will help in infusing advance technology in agriculture for improved efficiency, enhanced crop yield and reduced cost of operation for the benefit of farmers.

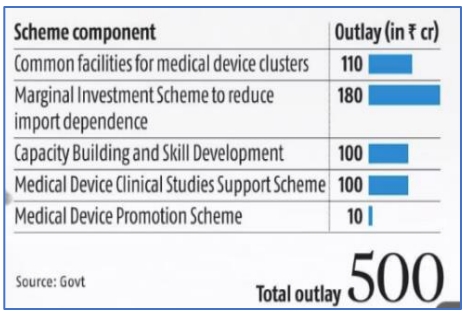
Scheme for Strengthening Medical Device Industry

- The Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilisers has launched the **Scheme for Strengthening the Medical Device Industry for 3 years**, up to financial year 2026-27 (FY27).
- It is a *comprehensive scheme* which targets critical areas of the medical device industry, covering manufacturing of key components and accessories, skill development, support for clinical studies, development of common infrastructure and industry promotion.

India's medical device market is valued at approximately **$14 billion** and is expected to **grow to $30 billion by 2030**.

Challenges in the Medical Device Industry in India

- Lack of adequate infrastructure and logistics, concentrated supply chains and high cost of finance.
- While the government is trying to simplify regulations and paperwork, the regulatory landscape is still complex; marked by the presence of many high-level government bodies at the state and central levels.
- Due to these factors, the India is dependent on imports of medical devices from China, US, Germany and Netherlands.



Components of the Scheme

Common Facilities for Medical Devices Clusters

- Central Government will provide *financial assistance* to medical device clusters for creating common infrastructure facilities such as R&D labs, Design and Testing Centre, animal labs etc. for the manufacturers located in the cluster.
- Support for strengthening existing Testing Facilities or setting up new ones will be provided to National/State/Private institutions.
- Grant of up to Rs. 20 Crore will be provided for Common Facilities and up to Rs. 5 crore for Testing Facilities.

Marginal Investment Scheme for Reducing Import Dependence

- It is designed to deepen the MedTech supply chain in the country, by focusing on manufacturing of key components, raw materials, and accessories within the country.
- Currently, most raw materials and key components are imported, making Indian manufacturers reliant on external supplies
- It offers a one-time capital subsidy of 10-20%, with a maximum cap of Rs 10 crore per project.

Capacity Building and Skill Development for Medical Devices

- Its goal is to develop a skilled technical workforce capable of designing and developing MedTech products.
- The Central Government will offer financial support for running various Masters and short-term courses.
- Support of up to Rs 21 crore for Masters' courses in central government institutions; Rs. 10,000 per candidate for short-term courses and Rs. 25,000 per candidate for Diploma courses to National Council for Vocational Education Training (NCVET) approved institutes will be available.

Medical Device Clinical Studies Support Scheme

- It is a pioneering initiative designed to assist both established companies and start-ups in conducting clinical studies.

- It enables medical device developers and manufacturers to apply for financial support for animal studies and if successful then for human trials to validate MedTech products. Financial support of up to Rs 2.5 Crore will be provided for animal studies.
- For clinical investigation of investigational devices and post-market clinical follow-ups on approved devices, a maximum of Rs 5 Crore is available to generate clinical data. Additionally, up to Rs 1 Crore can be granted for clinical performance evaluations of new in-vitro diagnostic products.
- It will promote safety and efficacy of medical devices produced in India and also help Indian manufacturers in obtaining product registrations in international markets.

Medical Device Promotion Scheme

- It aims to support industry associations and exports councils by providing financial assistance to organize conferences and other events that promote medical device-related activities. It will also support conduct of surveys and studies.

Benefits

- The comprehensive approach will not only benefit the industry but will also act as a significant step towards making India self-reliant.
- These measures will accelerate sectoral growth, reduce import reliance, and enhance India's position as a leading exporter of medical devices.
- The scheme will lead to higher economic growth and more jobs.

Basic Animal Husbandry Statistics 2024

- The Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying released the **Basic Animal Husbandry Statistics (BAHS) 2024** on the **National Milk Day (26th November)**.
- BAHS 2024 is a vital document that offers valuable insights into **livestock and dairy sector trends**.
- It is based on the outcomes of the **Integrated Sample Survey conducted for the period from 1st March 2023 to 29th February 2024.**
- It generates crucial data on the production estimates of Major Livestock Products (**MLPs)** such as milk, eggs, meat, and wool.
- It includes state-wise estimation of production and per-capita availability of MLPs including insights into the estimated number of animals involved in milk production, poultry egg-laying birds, animals slaughtered, and sheep shorn.
- Further, it presents valuable data on veterinary hospitals, polyclinics, gaushalas, state farms, and other infrastructure details, along with the number of artificial inseminations performed, and a global perspective on the livestock sector.

Milk Production

- The total Milk production in the country is estimated as 239.30 million tonnes during 2023-24 and registered a growth of 3.78% over 2022-23. It registered a growth of 5.62% over the past 10 years.
- The **top milk producing States** during 2023-24 was Uttar Pradesh (16.21% share), Rajasthan (14.51 %), Madhya Pradesh (8.91 %).

Egg Production

- India produced 142.77 billion eggs during 2023-24 and has increased annually by 3.18% over 2022-23.
- It registered a growth of 6.8% growth over the past 10 years
- The **top egg producing States** are Andhra Pradesh (17.85%) followed by Tamil Nadu (15.64 %), Telangana (12.88%).

Meat Production

- The total Meat production in the country was 10.25 million tonnes during 2023-24 and has increased by 4.95% over 2022-23. It registered a growth of 4.85% over the past 10 years
- **Major contribution** comes from West Bengal (12.62 %), followed by Uttar Pradesh (12.29%), Maharashtra (11.28 %)

Wool Production

- The total Wool production in the country is estimated as 33.69 million kg during 2023-24 and it registered a slight growth of 0.22% over last year.
- **Major contribution** comes from Rajasthan (47.53% share) followed by Jammu & Kashmir (23.06%), Gujarat (6.18%)

National Milk Day

- National Milk Day is celebrated in India on 26th November to commemorate the birth anniversary of '**The Milkman of India**', **Dr. Verghese Kurien**.
- He is credited with making India self-reliant in the sphere of milk production.
- Today, India is the **biggest milk-producing country in the world**, responsible for **25 per cent of the global milk output**.

GI Tag for Narasapuram Crochet Lace

- In recognition of India's rich textile heritage, Narasapuram crochet lace craft from the West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh received Geographical Indication (GI) tag. A special programme was held on in New Delhi by the ministry of textiles and the handloom export promotion council to promote GI-tagged products
- **Origin:** In 1844, Macrae and his wife from Scotland taught the lace craft to the local women when the duo was associated with a Christian missionary at Dummugudem (presently in Telangana).
- The craft has survived the Indian famine (1899) and the Great Depression (1929). Nearly 15,000 women are directly involved in the craft, producing three categories of products made of lace— garments, home furnishings and accessories.
- Despite the rich tradition of the Narasapur crochet lace craft, the market has faced significant challenges, including a lack of new orders and competition from China's machine-made lace products.

Atal Innovation Mission 2.0

- The Union Cabinet, has approved the continuation of its flagship initiative, the Atal Innovation Mission (AIM).
- The extension has an enhanced scope of work and an allocated budget of **Rs 2,750 crore** for the period till **March 31, 2028**.
- AIM 2.0 intends to expand, strengthen, and deepen India's already vibrant innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem.
- With India at rank 39 on the Global Innovation Index and home to world's third-largest start-up ecosystem, AIM 2.0 is expected to further enhance India's global competitiveness.
- While building on the accomplishments of AIM 1.0, AIM 2.0 marks a qualitative shift in the mission's approach.
- AIM 1.0 involved implementing programs that built new innovation infrastructure to strengthen India's then nascent ecosystem.
- AIM 2.0 involves piloting new initiatives designed to *fill gaps in the ecosystem and scaling successes* through central and state governments, industry, academia and community.
- AIM 2.0 is designed to strengthen India's innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem in three ways:

- By increasing **input** (i.e., ushering more innovators and entrepreneurs);
- By improving the **success rate or 'throughput'** (i.e., helping more startups succeed); and
- By improving the quality of **'output'** (i.e., producing better jobs, products and services).

Programs for Increasing Input to the Ecosystem

- **Language Inclusive Program of Innovation (LIPI):** 30 Vernacular Innovation Centers supporting 22 scheduled languages to be established in existing incubators.
  - This will help to lower the entry barrier confronting innovators, entrepreneurs and investors who don't speak English.
- **Frontier Program**: It will create customized templates for the innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystems of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), Ladakh, the North Eastern states (NE), Aspirational Districts and blocks where 15% of India's citizens live.
  - 2500 new ATLs will be created for template development.

Programs for Improving the Throughput of the Ecosystem

- **Human Capital Development Program:** Create a system for producing professionals (managers, teachers, trainers) to build, operate, and maintain India's innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem. The pilot will produce 5500 such professionals.
- **Deeptech Reactor:** To create a research sandbox for testing ways of commercializing research-based deep tech startups that require significantly longer time and deeper investment to get to market. Minimum 1 Deeptech Reactor will be piloted.
- **State Innovation Mission (SIM):** It will assist states/UTs with building a strong innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem that focuses on their areas of strength. SIM will be a component of the NITI Aayog's State Support Mission.
- **International Innovation Collaborations program:** It will take India's innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem international. Four areas of intervention are identified:
  - An Annual Global Tinkering Olympiad.
  - Creation of 10 bi-lateral, multilateral engagements with advanced nations.
  - As a knowledge partner, helping the United Nation's World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) spread the models of AIM and its programs (ATL, AIC) to the countries of the global south.
  - Anchoring the **Startup20 Engagement Group** of the G20 for India.

Programs for Improving the Quality of Output

- **Industrial Accelerator program:** It will increase industry involvement in scaling-up advanced startups. Minimum 10 Industry Accelerators in critical sectors will be created in Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode.
- **Atal Sectoral Innovation Launchpads (ASIL):** It will build (Innovations for Defence Excellence) iDEX-like platforms in central ministries for integrating and procuring from startups in key industry sectors. Minimum 10 launchpads will be built across key ministries.

Atal Innovation Mission (AIM)

- AIM is a flagship initiative **launched by the NITI Aayog in 2016** to promote innovation and entrepreneurship across the country. AIM 1.0 had the following programs:
  - Atal Tinkering Labs
  - Atal Incubation Centres
  - Atal New India Challenges and Atal Grand Challenges
  - Industry, Academia, Government and Global Collaborations

National Mission on Natural Farming (NMNF)

- The Union Cabinet has approved the launch of the National Mission on Natural Farming (**NMNF)** as a standalone **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** under the **Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare**.
- The scheme has a total outlay of **Rs 2481 crore** (Union Government share – Rs.1584 crore; State share – Rs.897 crore) **till 2025-26**.

Natural Farming (NF)

- It is a **chemical-free farming system** that only uses inputs produced using livestock and plant resources. It follows local agro-ecological principles rooted in local knowledge, location specific technologies
- There are many working models of natural farming all over the world, the zero-budget natural farming (ZBNF) is the most popular model in India. ZBNF was popularized by Subhash Palekar in India.

Background

- NMNF is an improvement of the **Bhartiya Prakritik Krishi Paddhti (BPKP)** implemented during 2019-24. BPKP was launched under an umbrella scheme of Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojna (PKVY).
- The Centre also promoted NF in a **five-kilometre belt along the Ganga River under the Namami Gange scheme** in FY2022-23.
- An overall area of **22 lakh hectares** has been brought **under NF to date**, with 34 lakh farmers engaged in the practice.
- This includes 4 lakh hectares under BPKP and 88,000 hectares under Namami Gange. About 17 lakh hectares are covered under various state government initiatives to promote NF.
- With a renewed focus the government has decided to upscale the experience gained from the BPKP into a mission mode through the NMNF.

Need for the Mission

- The mission aims to combat the excessive use of fertilisers. The Agriculture Ministry has identified **228 districts across 16 states with fertiliser sales above the all-India average (138 kg/hectare)** during 2022-23.
- In contrast, the number of farmers practising NF was minimal in these districts.
- Thus, the ministry will focus on districts with high chemical fertiliser sales (above 200 kg/ hectares), apart from the Namami Gange region (5 km area) along the main stem of river Ganga.

Details of the Mission

- In the next two years, NMNF will be implemented in **15,000 clusters** in Gram Panchayats, which are willing and reach 1 crore farmers and initiate NF in **7.5 lakh hectares**.
- Further, need-based **10,000 Bio-input Resource Centres (BRCs)** will be set-up to provide easy availability and accessibility to ready-to-use NF inputs for farmers.
- Around **2000 NF Model Demonstration Farms (MDFs)** shall be established at Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs), Agricultural Universities (AUs) and farmers' fields, and shall be supported by experienced and trained Farmer Master Trainers.
- The willing farmers will be trained in MDF on the NF package of practices, preparation of NF inputs, etc. near their villages in KVKs, AUs and practising NF farmers' fields.
- **18.75 lakh** trained willing farmers will prepare inputs like Jeevamrit, Beejamrit, etc. by using their livestock or procure from BRCs (Bio-input Resource Centres).
- *30,000 Krishi Sakhis/ Community Resource Persons (CRPS)* will be deployed for awareness generation, mobilisation and handholding of willing farmers in the clusters.
- Farmers will be provided with an easy **simple certification system and dedicated common branding** to provide access to market their NF produce.
- Real time geo-tagged & referenced monitoring of NMNF implementation shall be done through an online portal.

- Convergence with existing schemes and support structures of Union Government/ State Governments/ National & International Organisations shall be explored.
- This convergence will be used for enhancing local livestock population, development of NF MDFs, provide market linkages for local farmers' markets, APMC (Agricultural Produce Market Committee) Mandis, Haats, Depots, etc.
- Additionally, students will be engaged in NMNF through the Rural Agricultural Work Experience (RAWE) program and dedicated Undergraduate, Postgraduate & Diploma courses on NF.

Benefits

- NF practices will help farmers to reduce input cost of cultivation and dependency on externally purchased inputs.
- NF also reduces health risks from exposure to fertilisers, pesticides, etc. and provides healthy & nutritious food.
- It will encourage diverse cropping systems to enhance resilience as suitable to the local agroecology.
- It will help in rejuvenating soil health, fertility & quality and building resilience to climate risks like water-logging, flood, drought, etc.
- Through improvement of soil carbon content & water use efficiency, there is also an increase in soil microorganisms and biodiversity in NF.

National Federation of State Co-operative Banks Limited

- The Union Home Minister attended the diamond jubilee celebrations of the **National Federation of State Co-operative Banks Limited (NAFSCOB)**.
- NAFSCOB was **established in 1964** to facilitate the operations of State and Central Co-operative Banks in general and development of co-operative credit in particular.

Objectives

- Provide a common forum to the member banks to examine the problems of co-operative credit, banking and allied matters.
- Co-ordinate and liaison with the Union Government, RBI, respective State Governments, NABARD and other higher financing institutions for the development of co-operative credit.
- Provide research and consultancy inputs to the member banks.

Network Readiness Index 2024

- The Network Readiness Index (NRI) 2024 was published by the Portulans Institute, an independent non-profit research and educational institute based in Washington DC.
- The report maps the network-based readiness landscape of **133 economies** based on their performances in **four different pillars**: **Technology, People, Governance, and Impact**, covering a total of 54 variables.
- India has taken a significant jump in the global digital landscape and is now **placed at the 49th position** in NRI 2024, up from the 60th position in the 2023 report. India has also improved its score from 49.93 in 2023 to 53.63 in 2024.
- India has ranked **2nd in the group of lower-middle-income countries** after Vietnam.
- India leads in several indicators:
    - India secured 1st rank in 'AI scientific publications', 'AI talent concentration' and 'ICT services exports';
    - 2nd rank in 'FTTH (Fiber to the Home)/Building Internet subscriptions, Mobile broadband internet traffic within the country and International Internet bandwidth;
    - 3rd rank in Domestic market scale and
    - 4th rank in Annual investment in telecommunication services.

Notable Developments

- The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has made significant strides in advancing India's telecommunication infrastructure.
- Over the past decade, **tele density increased from 75.2% to 84.69%**, and **wireless connections reached 119 crore**.
- The Digital India program has expanded broadband access to rural areas through partnerships with technology companies, resulting in the sharp **rise in internet subscribers** from **25.1 crore to 94.4 crore**, with a substantial rise in wireless internet usage.
- Reforms in spectrum management, ease of doing business and consumer protection have further strengthened the sector.
- Furthermore, India launched 5G services in 2022, rapidly improving its global mobile **broadband speed ranking from 118 to 15**.
- Now, India aims to position itself as a leader in future telecom technologies with the Bharat 6G Vision.
- Coupled with investment in emerging technologies, impressive data capabilities and robust telecom infrastructure, India's performance in network readiness index is a testament to the country's digital progress and innovation.

CENVAT

- The Supreme Court has allowed telecom companies to claim **Central Value Added Tax (CENVAT)** credit for the installation of mobile towers and peripherals like pre-fabricated buildings (PFBs) for which they pay excise duties.
- The SC ruled that mobile towers and pre-fabricated buildings (PFBs) or shelters fall within the definition of 'capital goods' or 'inputs' under the CENVAT Rules, 2004.

Capital Goods

- Capital goods are physical assets a company uses to produce goods and services for consumers. Capital goods include fixed assets, such as buildings, machinery, equipment, vehicles, and tools.
- Capital goods differ from consumer goods, which are the end product of production and manufacturing.

CENVAT

- CENVAT allows a manufacturer to utilise the credit of excise duty/additional duty paid for the procurement of input services to **pay off** the excise duty on the *final product or output services*.
- It was introduced as a modification to the previously functioning **Modified Value Added Tax or MODVAT**.
- During the course of the manufacture of final products, the raw materials travel through various stages of production, wherein a duty is levied on every value-added at each stage.
- CENVAT, therefore, eliminates this double taxation, thereby simplifying taxation for manufacturers and consumers.
- In 2004, The government established '**The CENVAT Credit Rules**' in order to implement CENVAT across the country and offer Indian manufacturers of final products certain tax credits on the excise duty payable by them.

Reclassifying FPIs as FDI

RBI recently issued guidelines for Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) intending to reclassify their investments in Indian companies as Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) if their holdings exceed specified thresholds.

Guidelines on Investment Limits for FPIs

- **Regulatory framework and investment caps:**

- As per **the Foreign Exchange Management (Non-Debt Instruments) Rules, 2019**, an FPI's investment in an Indian company must remain below 10% of the total paid-up equity capital on a fully diluted basis.
- If an FPI breaches this limit, **they must either divest or reclassify the excess holdings as FDI within five trading days** after the trade settlement.

- **Approval requirements for reclassification:**
  - **To reclassify FPI holdings as FDI**, the concerned investor must obtain necessary approvals from the **government.**
  - **This includes compliance** with guidelines, particularly for investments from countries sharing land borders with India.
  - The acquisition must follow the prescribed norms under the FDI regulations, including entry routes, sectoral caps, and investment limits.
- **Role of the investee company:**
  - FPIs are also required to **secure consent from the investee company** to ensure adherence to sectoral caps and FDI prohibitions.
  - This compliance enables the investee company **to verify that the reclassified investment aligns with sectoral restrictions & approvals** under the existing FDI rules.
- **Sectoral restrictions on reclassification:**
  - In cases where the reclassification to FDI is prohibited in specific sectors, the RBI guidelines restrict the FPI from pursuing reclassification.
  - FPIs must clearly state their intent to reclassify and provide necessary approvals to their Custodian.

RBI Bringing Back its Gold Assets to India

RBI has brought back nearly 130 metric tonnes of gold owned by it and kept in safe custody of the Bank of England in the last two-and-a-half years.

This decision marks a shift in the RBI's approach to safeguarding its gold reserves, with a 60% increase in domestic gold holdings during this period.

Rise in the RBI's Domestic Gold Holding

- As of September 2024, the RBI's domestic gold holding has increased to 510.46 metric tonnes, up from 295.82 metric tonnes in March 2022.
- Presently, around 324 metric tonnes of the RBI's gold remains under the custodianship of the Bank of England, a reduction from 453.52 metric tonnes in March 2022.
- In value terms (USD), the proportion of gold in India's total foreign exchange reserves rose from 8.15% at the end of March 2024 to approximately 9.32% at the end of September 2024.

RBI's Trategy to Bring Back its Gold Assets to India

- **Central Banks Buying Gold**
  - Since the U.S. imposed sanctions on Russia in 2022 following the Ukraine invasion, central banks globally have been increasing their gold reserves as a hedge against inflation and to decrease reliance on the U.S. dollar.

- ✓ Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, **India has purchased gold at a faster pace than any other G20 country, surpassing both Russia and China**.

- This trend, termed "de-dollarisation," aims to diversify away from the dollar amidst a surge in gold prices. That's why central banks are buying gold.

- **Significance of this strategy**
  - **Sign of a strong economy**
    - ✓ In 1991, at the time of a severely difficult economic phase, RBI had to pledge some gold to raise funds.
    - ✓ At that time, it was also remembered as a sign of a weak economy.
    - ✓ Now, bringing back gold reflects the recovery and a major change in the strength of Indian economy.
  - **Optimizing financial resources**
    - ✓ Since RBI has gold deposits mostly held internationally, the decision to bring back some of it will save the cost of storage, which is being paid to foreign banks.
  - **Strategic significance**
    - ✓ India's decision to repatriate and store gold domestically aligns with this global trend and demonstrates a strong belief in the resilience of its economy.
  - **Rise in safe-keeping capacity**
    - ✓ The RBI has been steadily repatriating gold from the Bank of England, citing improved domestic capacity for physical storage.
  - **Diversification**
    - ✓ Increasing gold reserves allows India to diversify its foreign exchange holdings, reducing reliance on any single currency and mitigating risks from currency fluctuations and economic instability.
  - **Hedge Against Inflation & safeguard against currency devaluation**
    - ✓ Gold acts as a hedge against inflation, retaining or appreciating in value when currencies lose purchasing power.
    - ✓ By increasing gold reserves, a country protects its economy from inflation's negative effects, ensuring stability for long-term financial planning and investor confidence.

A Lesson from Constituent Assembly

On November 26, 2024, India commemorates the 75th anniversary of the adoption of its Constitution. As India celebrates this milestone, it is imperative to reflect on these foundational ideals and draw lessons for the present and future functioning of its Parliament.

The Spirit of the Constituent Assembly

- **A Commitment to Dialogue and Consensus Building**
  - **Members represented diverse ideological, cultural, and regional backgrounds**, fostering a pluralistic and inclusive environment.
  - This **diversity did not lead to chaos but rather enriched the process of drafting the Constitution.**
- **A Stark Contrast to Present Day Parliamentary Culture**
  - **This respectful engagement offers a stark contrast to the present-day parliamentary culture,** which is increasingly marred by polarisation and disruptions.

Evolution of Indian Parliamentary Democracy Over Past Few Decades

- **Parliamentary Democracy: A Diminished Legacy**
  - The **ideals set by the Constituent Assembly,** robust debate, consensus-building, and prioritising the nation's collective welfare, **have gradually been overshadowed by partisanship, disruptions, and procedural inefficiencies.**
  - This **decline is reflected across multiple dimensions**, including the number of sittings, the quality of legislative debates, and the transparency of the decision-making process.
- **Declining Parliamentary Sittings**
  - **In the early years** of independent India, **parliamentary sessions were more frequent, and debates were comprehensive.**
  - The **first Lok Sabha (1952–57) convened for 677 days, dedicating significant time to legislative and policy discussions.**
  - **Since the 1990s, Lok Sabha sessions have averaged only 345 days** over a five-year period.
  - The **17th Lok Sabha set a troubling precedent by sitting for just 274 days** during its entire term.
- **Erosion of Legislative Scrutiny**
  - Historically, this was achieved by referring bills to Parliamentary Committees, where members could analyse proposals in-depth, consult experts, and engage with stakeholders.
  - **This practice has witnessed a steep decline. In the 15th Lok Sabha, 71% of bills were sent to committees,** ensuring thorough examination.
  - **By the 17th Lok Sabha, this figure had fallen to a mere 16% and this shift undermines the legislative process,** as complex bills are often passed without adequate discussion.
- **Waning Debate on the Union Budget.**
  - **Prior to 1990, discussions on the budget spanned an average of 120 hours**, allowing members to thoroughly debate fiscal priorities and policies.
  - **This time has since dwindled to just 35 hours in recent years**, with instances like 2023, 2018, and 2013 seeing the entire budget passed without any discussion.
- **Disruptions and Polarisation**
  - Parliamentary **proceedings have increasingly been disrupted by partisan conflicts**, resulting in wasted time and resources.
  - **For example, the 15th Lok Sabha lost 37% of its scheduled time to disruptions**, while the **16th Lok Sabha lost 16%.**

Lessons for Today's Parliamentarians from the Constituent Assembly

- **Commitment to Consensus and Nation-Building**
  - **The spirit of consensus-building is frequently overshadowed by partisan conflicts** that hinder legislative progress.
  - **Today's parliamentarians must draw from the Constituent Assembly's example, setting aside differences to address critical national issues** like poverty, inequality, unemployment, healthcare, and education.
- **Embracing Constructive Dialogue and Respectful Disagreement**
  - **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar** acknowledged the valuable contributions of dissenters like **H.V. Kamath, K.T. Shah**, and others, even when their views diverged from the majority. **Their disagreements enriched the discussions** and refined the Constitution's provisions.
  - **For today's parliamentarians, this serves as a powerful reminde**r that dissent, when expressed respectfully, can be a driving force for progress.
  - The **current culture of frequent disruptions, walkouts, and hostile rhetoric diminishes the quality of parliamentary debate** and erodes public trust in the institution.
  - **By creating an environment where diverse perspectives are welcomed** and debated in good faith, **Parliament can become a forum for innovation and collective problem-solving.**
- **Bridging Ideological Divides**
  - The **Constituent Assembly was a microcosm of India's diversity**, encompassing members from various regions, communities, and political backgrounds.
  - **Despite this diversity, the Assembly succeeded in crafting a unified vision** for the country.
  - **Today's Parliament operates in a more complex political landscape**, with strong party systems and entrenched ideological positions.
  - However, **the need to bridge divides remains as urgent as ever.**

The 75th anniversary of the Indian Constitution is not just a celebration of a historic achievement but a call to action. **By learning from the Constituent Assembly's ethos, contemporary parliamentarians can address the democratic deficits** that have crept into India's parliamentary culture.

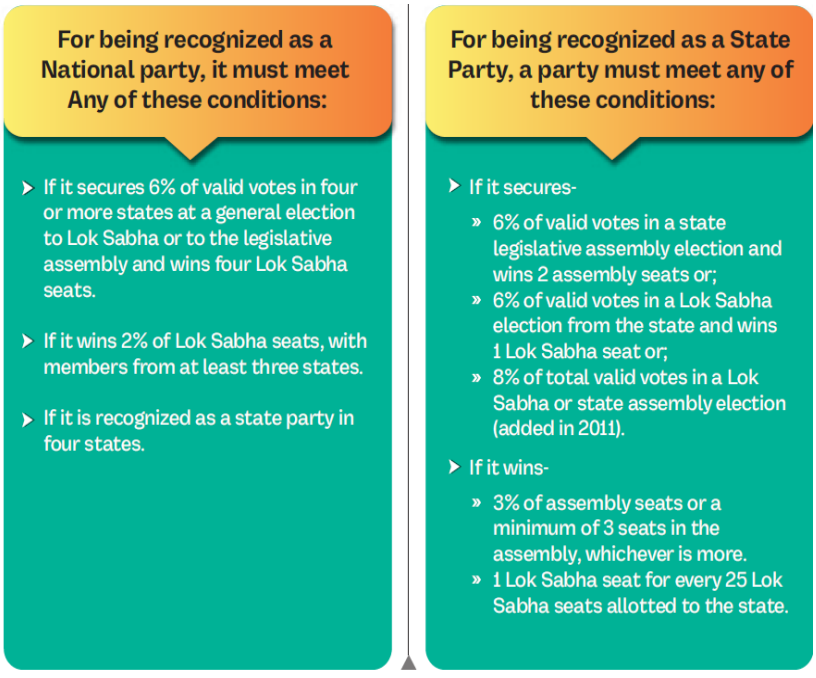
Poll Nomination Proposers

The recent conduct of the proposer who signed on former Jharkhand Chief Minister (CM) Hemant Soren's nomination for Barhait Assembly constituency has caused a stir in the state.

Who are the Proposers?

Proposers are ***registered electors*** in a *specific* Lok Sabha or Assembly **constituency** who endorse a candidate by signing their nomination papers. He/ she doesn't need to be a member of the candidate's party. As per the Representation of the People Act, 1951-

- Candidates from recognized national or state parties require only **one proposer**.
- Candidates from unrecognized parties or independents need **ten proposers**.



- For Presidential and Vice-Presidential elections, **at least 50 proposers and 50 seconders** are required. This higher number is intended to ensure that candidates have substantial backing and credibility.

What is the Role of Proposer in Nomination Filing?

- When the nomination papers are presented to Returning Officer (RO), the candidate or the proposer must be present.
- The RO must make sure that the name and electoral roll number of both the candidate and the proposer are correct.
- A candidate can file up to four nomination papers for the same constituency; only one can be accepted. The same proposer can sign more than one nomination paper for the candidate.

Can a Nomination be Rejected on Account of the Proposer?

Yes, a nomination can be rejected on account of the proposer if:

- It is not delivered within the deadline.
- It is delivered by someone other than the candidate or proposer.
- The signature of the candidate or proposer is found to be fake.

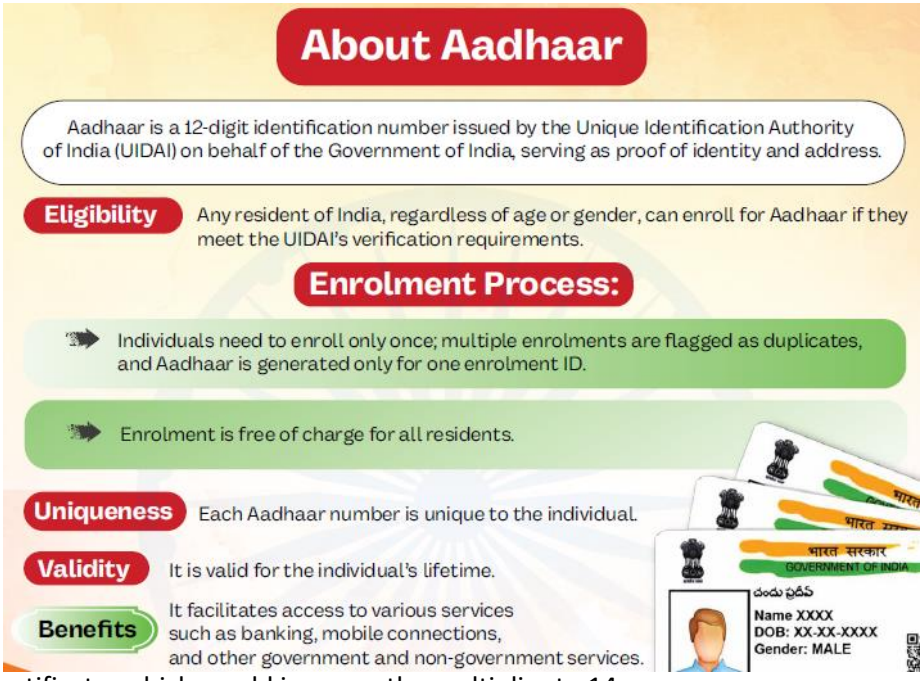
However, a proposer's association with rival parties or joining another party does not impact the nomination.

Aadhaar Cannot Be Used as Proof of Date of Birth

The Supreme Court (SC) held that Aadhaar cards cannot be used as proof of age, given that other official documents such as the School Leaving Certificate serve the purpose.

Background

- The SC was reviewing the compensation for the family of Sika Ram, who died in a motorcycle accident.
- In 2015, the Motor Accident Claims Tribunal in Haryana, directed the insurance company to pay compensation of Rs 19,35,400 but the Punjab & Haryana High Court (HC) reduced it to Rs 9,22,336, using a multiplier of 13 for Sika Ram's age of 47 as per his Aadhaar card.
- The family appealed, claiming he was 45 as per his School Leaving Certificate, which would increase the multiplier to 14.



Under the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, compensation in death cases is based on the deceased's income, age (used to calculate a multiplier), and number of dependents, reflecting potential future contributions.

The SC Judgement

1. **HC Overreach**: The SC criticized the Punjab & Haryana HC for overstepping, stating it should have only assessed if the tribunal's order had issues like perversity (unreasonable) or illegality.
2. **Age Determination**: The SC cited Section 94 of the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015, which allows a matriculation certificate as proof of age, and supported using the School Leaving Certificate over the Aadhaar card.
3. **Aadhaar Not Age Proof**: The Court referenced a 2018 ruling that defined Aadhaar as proof of identity only, not as proof of age, reinforced by a UIDAI circular.

4. **Compensation**: Based on a multiplier of 14, calculated using the age in the School Leaving Certificate, the SC awarded the family a compensation of Rs 15 lakh.

Expansion of Aadhaar's Mandate Over the Years

1. **Initial Purpose**: Aadhaar was initially proposed to provide a unique ID for Below-Poverty-Line (BPL) families to access government schemes, later expanding to cover all Indian residents. But the National Identification Authority of India (NIAI) Bill was rejected initially.
2. **Reintroduction and Legislation**: In 2016, the Aadhaar Bill was reintroduced as a money bill, allowing passage through the Lok Sabha without Rajya Sabha approval.
   - ✓ Article 110 of the Constitution of India authorizes the passage of a money bill as law to be passed by the Lok Sabha overriding Rajya Sabha objections, provided the Bill meets certain conditions.
3. **Supreme Court Ruling (2018)**: Following a legal challenge by former Karnataka HC judge, Justice K S Puttaswamy, the SC ruled that Aadhaar could not be mandatory for bank accounts, education enrollment, or mobile SIMs but upheld its use for linking PAN cards and verifying identities for government welfare schemes.
4. **Current Scope**: Although deemed 'voluntary' by the Court, Aadhaar is now essential for accessing numerous government schemes and is increasingly used by private entities like Amazon Pay and Aditya Birla Housing Finance. In January 2024, it was made mandatory for rural workers under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS).

Implications of Using Aadhaar

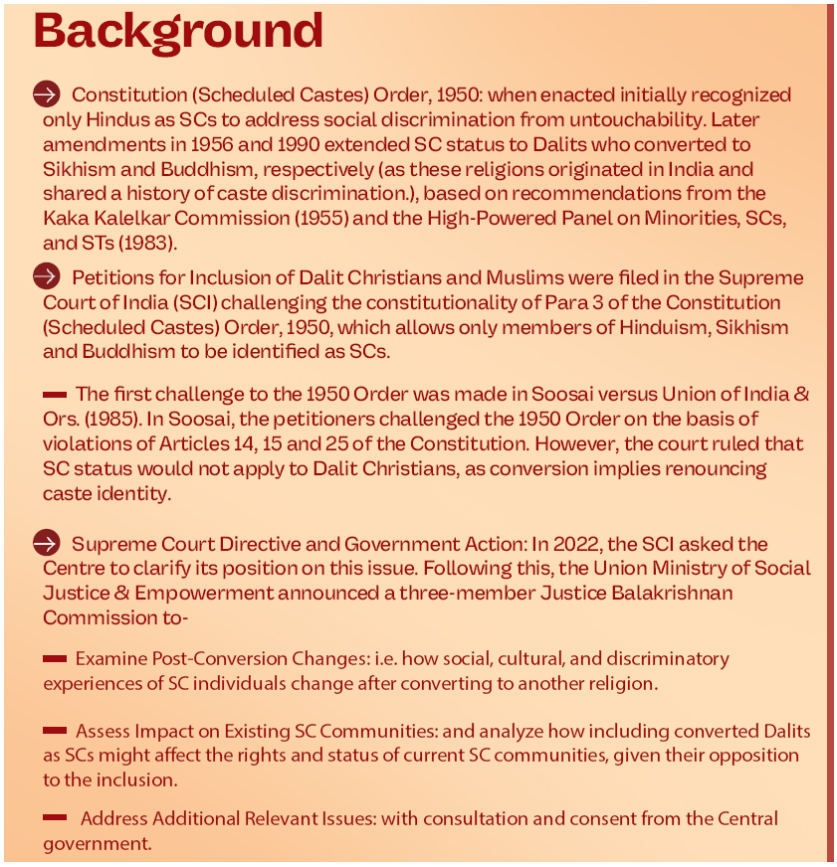
Positive	Negative
1. **Streamlined Welfare Distribution**: as it helps the government deliver subsidies and benefits directly to beneficiaries, reducing leakages and improving transparency in schemes like LPG subsidies and MGNREGS. 2. **Reduced Identity Fraud**: By providing a unique, biometric-linked ID, Aadhaar reduces the risk of identity fraud, making it harder to use duplicate or fake identities to access benefits. 3. **Financial Inclusion**: by simplifying Know Your Customer (KYC) requirements, especially for rural and unbanked populations, thus allowing easier opening of bank accounts and access to financial services. 4. **Efficiency in Governance**: as its digital infrastructure speeds up processes in various sectors, including healthcare, banking, and education, where identification verification is essential. 5. **Promotes Digital India**: by providing a foundational identity system, facilitating digital services, and enabling interoperability across various platforms.	1. **Privacy Concerns**: Storing personal and biometric data on a centralized system raises privacy issues, and concerns about potential misuse or unauthorized access have been prominent. 2. **Data Security Risks**: previous cases of data breach, highlights the vulnerabilities of Aadhaar and raises fears about data security and misuse of sensitive information. 3. **Exclusion from Welfare Services**: Technical issues, such as fingerprint mismatch or lack of connectivity, can prevent people from accessing essential services, especially in rural or marginalized areas where connectivity is limited. 4. **Potential for Surveillance**: Linking Aadhaar across services could enable government surveillance, tracking individuals' activities, and undermining privacy rights. 5. **Dependency on a Single System**: such as Aadhaar for multiple services means that system downtime, technical failures, or data errors can disrupt access to various services, creating dependency risks.

Panel Examining SC Tag for All Dalit Converts Gets One-year Extension

The three-member Commission of Inquiry headed by former Chief Justice of India Justice K.G. Balakrishnan to examine if Scheduled Caste (SC) status can be granted to all Dalit converts (except Hindu, Sikhs and Buddhists), was recently granted a one-year extension i.e. till October 10 2025, to submit its report.

Issues Faced by the Balakrishnan Committee

1. **Delayed Start of Field Visits:** The commission couldn't begin field visits until August 2023 due to a lack of essential staff, delaying this critical part of its work.
2. **Initial Operational Delays:** After formation in 2022, the commission operated without a permanent office or sufficient secretarial support for the first three months.
3. **Public Consultations and Data Collection:** The commission is actively conducting public hearings and consulting various states and UTs on socio-economic data regarding Dalit converts, an intensive process adding to its workload.



Reasons for Excluding Dalit Christians/Muslims from Scheduled Caste (SC) Status

1. **Impact on SC Population:** Including Dalit Christians and Muslims would significantly increase the SC population, potentially impacting resource allocation and representation.
   - ✓ In states like Tamil Nadu and Kerala, where conversion among Dalits to Christianity is more prevalent, extending SC status would amplify competition for limited resources allocated to SCs, such as **educational quotas, employment reservations, and political representation**.
2. **Ethnic Group Requirement:** Under Article 341, Clause (2), a "single ethnic group" is required for SC classification. According to RGI, Dalit converts to Christianity and Islam belong to varied caste backgrounds, not one single group, making them ineligible under this criterion.

3. **International Perception:** Including Dalit Christians and Muslims might be seen internationally as an attempt to impose the Indian caste system on these religions.
   - ✓ This may lead to criticism that India is perpetuating caste identities across all religions, which could affect India's global image as **a secular democracy**.
4. **Loss of Caste Identity Through Conversion:** and since untouchability is not a feature of Christian or Muslim practices, Dalit converts would not experience the same social disabilities as SCs in Hinduism.
   - ✓ Extending SC recognition would thus require reevaluation of "untouchability" as a criterion for SC benefits and might challenge the original intent of the classification.

Past Government Considerations for Including Dalit Christians/Muslims as SCs

1. **1996 Attempt by P. V. Narsimha Rao Government:** A Bill was introduced to amend the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order to include Dalit Christians, but it did not pass. The government then tried to issue an Ordinance for this inclusion, which was approved by the Prime Minister but ultimately not promulgated by the President.
2. **2000 Consultations by Atal Bihari Vajpayee Government:** when it sought opinions from the Office of the RGI and the NCSC and ST (Scheduled Tribes). Both bodies recommended against including Dalit Christians as SCs.
   - ✓ The RGI's recommendation against including Dalit Christians emphasizes the institution's role in upholding Article 341, which defines SC status.
3. **Repeated Attempts Through Private Member Bills:** Over the years, at least 20 Private Member Bills were introduced to amend the Constitution Order to include Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims as SCs, but none succeeded.

Centre's Position on Including Dalit Christians and Muslims as SCs

- **Justification for Exclusion Based on Foreign Origins** of Islam and Christianity justify (lack the inherent caste-based hierarchies that are central to the Hindu social structure in India) excluding Dalit Christians and Muslims from SC classification.
- **Deferral to Commission's Findings:** The Centre has requested the SCI to delay judgment until the commission completes its work.
- **Constitutional Basis: Authority Under Article 341-** Centre has cited court precedents, asserting that Article 341 vests final authority with the President and Parliament regarding SC classification, leaving no role for judicial intervention in this matter.
- **Social Question Beyond Judicial Adjudication:** It argues that identifying which groups qualify as SCs is inherently a social issue that should not be decided by the courts but by legislative and executive branches.
- **Argument Against Violation of Article 14:** The government contends that limiting SC status to specific religions does not violate the right to equality (Article 14) as it meets the requirement of "intelligible differentia"- a reasonable classification related to the law's objectives.
- **Intelligible Differentia and OBC Classification:** It asserts that Dalit Christians and Muslims benefit from OBC status in many states, addressing their backwardness through appropriate classifications.
  - ✓ In Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh, Dalit converts to Christianity and Islam are classified under the OBC category, granting them access to reservations in education, employment, and other social programs.
- **Concerns About Misuse of SC Reservations:** The Centre warns that indiscriminate extension of SC benefits to Dalit converts, without evidence of continued social disabilities, would harm the rights of existing SCs and misuse the legal framework for reservations.

Committee Recommendations on SC Status for Dalit Christians/ Muslims

1. **Ranganath Misra Commission (National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities-2004):** recommended the inclusion of Dalit Christians and Muslims in the SC list, citing ongoing social and economic disadvantages despite conversion. The Centre, however, declined to accept these findings and referenced a dissenting note in the report, concluding that such converts are ineligible for SC status.

2. **Rajinder Sachar Committee Report (2006):** observed that the socio-economic conditions of Dalit Muslims and Christians remain similar to those of Hindu Dalits, with little change after conversion. It thus recommended to include these groups in SCs.

New Rules for Appointing Police Chief

The Uttar Pradesh government has framed new rules for appointing the Director General of Police (DGP) after the Supreme Court (SC) issued notices to eight states, including UP, regarding the appointment of temporary DGPs in response to related petitions.

- ✓ The petitions highlight that UP has appointed four temporary DGPs over the past two years, with Prashant Kumar, a 1991 batch IPS officer, serving as acting DGP since January. Petitioners argue this violates the **SC's 2006 Prakash Singh** judgment on police reforms.
- ✓ Punjab government is also preparing to submit in the Supreme Court that it has cleared a Bill to select its own DGP — in a departure from the earlier process, under which it would send a list of names to the Union Public Service Commission.

New Rules for DGP Appointment in Uttar Pradesh

- As per the "Director General of Police, Uttar Pradesh Selection & Appointment Rules, 2024", the DGP will be appointed by a selection committee based on *remaining tenure, service record, & experience.*
- Only those officers who are currently serving in the DG role at Level 16 of the Pay Matrix will be considered.
- Only officers with **at least six months** remaining before retirement from the date of creation of the vacancy will be eligible for appointment as the state's senior-most police officer.
- Once appointed, the DGP would have a minimum tenure of two years.
- The Selection Committee headed by a retired High Court judge will include- UP Chief Secretary; A Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) nominee; Chairperson or nominee of the UP Public Service Commission; Additional Chief Secretary/Principal Secretary; Home Department representative; and A retired DGP.

Punjab State's New Appointment Process

- As per Punjab Police Amendment Bill, 2023, provides for constituting a seven-member committee, to be headed by a retired chief justice or a retired judge from the Punjab and Haryana high court.
- The other members of the selection panel include the chief secretary, a nominee of the UPSC, a nominee of Punjab Public Service Commission, administrative secretary of home department, a nominee of Union ministry of external affairs and a retired DGP of Punjab Police.
- The committee will prepare the **panel of three officers** from a pool of eligible names based on length of service, work record and range of experience.
- The DGP so appointed will have a minimum tenure of three years.

Current Appointment Process

- As per SC's 2006 Prakash Singh guidelines, states should submit a list of senior officers to UPSC, three months before retirement of the incumbent DGP.
- The UPSC reviews the list based on the officer's seniority, service record, integrity, and field experience, and sends the state a shortlist of three officers, one of whom the state is expected to appoint as the new DGP.
  - ✓ UP's new rules bypass UPSC involvement in sending a list, limiting central oversight.

Concerns Raised

1. **Partial Compliance with SC Directives:** UP's rules align with SC's directives on tenure and minimum remaining service but are framed under the 1861 Indian Police Act rather than a new state Police Act.
2. **Legal Concerns:** The selection committee lacks a Home Ministry representative. Also, the new rules could conflict with SC judgments in 2018 and 2019, which required states not to bypass SC directions on police reforms.

- **2018 Judgement**: SC directed states not to appoint temporary DGPs and ensure a two-year service term, indicating that any state rules conflicting with SC directions would be put on hold.
- **2019 Judgement**: SC reinforced the requirement of at least six months of remaining service and allowed state Acts to be reviewed for compliance with SC guidelines.

Comparison with Other States

- Most states with their own Police Acts either follow UPSC guidelines or form selection committees as per the Model Police Act by Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D) under the union Ministry of Home Affairs, considering seniority and service record for DGP selection.
- Many state governments argue that a more holistic evaluation (e.g., 360-degree assessment) may better determine an officer's suitability for the DGP role beyond seniority and service record alone.

SVASTIK

The second international conference, **Communication & Dissemination of Traditional Knowledge (CDTK)-2024**, was recently organized jointly by Council of Scientific & Industrial Research-National Institute of Science Communication and Policy Research (CSIR-NIScPR) and Gurugram University.

About SVASTIK (Scientifically Validated Societal Traditional Knowledge)

It is a CSIR-NIScPR initiative to communicate scientifically validated traditional knowledge of India. As a part of this initiative, simplified creative content on Traditional Knowledge are disseminated through digital platforms in English, Hindi and different regional languages.

Objective-

- Preserve and perpetuate scientific validated traditional practices to build public trust.
- Collaborate with research organizations, institutions, experts, and NGOs to document and promote traditional knowledge.

Features-

1. **Promotion of India's Scientific Heritage via Interdisciplinary Collaboration**: It emphasizes on India's rich heritage in **metallurgy, mathematics, and medicine**, showcasing how ancient practices are rooted in scientific principles of modern science.
   - The initiative aligns traditional knowledge with global recognition, exemplified in works like William Dalrymple's *The Golden Road*, which celebrates India's scientific legacy.
2. **Documentation:** It employs crowdsourcing, literature surveys, and expert input for identifying and evaluating traditional knowledge across domains.
3. **Public Engagement**: It conducts activities like quizzes and discussions on traditional knowledge, in partnership with MyGov, and has reached 22 million people. SVASTIK's social media handles alone have engaged approximately 3 lakh users.

Achievements

- Release of publications like **"Treasure of Indian Traditions"** in Hindi and Punjabi.
- Contribution to international platforms such as CDTK-2024 to showcase and discuss validated traditional knowledge.

About Communication and Dissemination of Traditional Knowledge (CDTK) Conference

The conference is organized biannually under the SVASTIK initiative to unite global experts and researchers in traditional knowledge across fields like agriculture, architecture, environment, health, and more.

Objective

- Explore the past, present, and future of traditional knowledge to benefit humanity.
- Spark discussions and activities to enhance understanding and integration of traditional knowledge.

Format: It includes lectures, oral presentations, panel discussions, workshops, and cultural programs.

Themes of CDTK-2024: The event will cover following eight thematic areas:

Agriculture and Food (Krishi evam Bhojan)	**Architecture** (Vastukala)	**Chemistry and Metallurgy** (Rasayan Vigyan evam Dhatukarm)	**Communication and Dissemination**(Sanchar Evam Prasar)
Education and Philosophy (Siksha evam Darshan)	**Health Sciences and Medicinal Chemistry** (Swasthya Vigyan evam Ausadhi Rasayan Vigyan)	**Mathematics and Astronomy** (Ganit Evam Khagol Vigyan)	**Water, Ecology & Environment** (Jal, Paristhitiki Evam Paryavaran)

Extra Mile: About CSIR-NIScPR

It was established in 2021 with headquarters in New Delhi through the merger of:

1. **CSIR-National Institute of Science Communication and Information Resources (CSIR-NISCAIR) (established in 2002)**
2. **CSIR-National Institute of Science, Technology and Development Studies (CSIR-NISTADS)- (established in 1980).**

✓ Both CSIR-NISCAIR and CSIR-NISTADS have decades of contributions to India's **Science, Technology & Innovation (ST&I)** system.

Role of CSIR-NIScPR

- Serves as a **'Think Tank'** for India's ST&I ecosystem.
- Aims to lead **ST&I communication and policy studies** at the national level.
- Addresses emerging national aspirations and needs in science and technology.

Debroy Committee Report

Economist Bibek Debroy (Chairman to Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister- (EAC-PM)) who headed the expert committee on Railway Reforms passed away recently.

About the Debroy Committee

The committee was setup by the Railway Board in 2014 to draft a reform blueprint for Indian Railways, focusing on resource mobilization and restructuring. The committee submitted its final report in June 2015, outlining key findings and recommendations across decision-making structures, financial management, human resources, and the need for liberalization within Indian Railways.

Key Recommendations of the Debroy Committee for Reforming Indian Railways

1. **Separation of Roles:** in Policy making, regulatory functions, and operations within Indian Railways to encourage private participation. It recommended the Ministry to focus only on policymaking and parliamentary accountability.
   - ✓ Due to opposition from railway unions and political parties, the government has not fully implemented this recommendation. Private participation is limited to selected Public-Private Partnership (PPP) projects, primarily in freight services.
2. **Establishment of an Independent Regulator:** with independent budgetary powers to oversee economic regulation, safety, service standards, licensing, and technical standards.
   - ✓ The **Rail Development Authority (RDA)** was approved in 2017, intended to provide expert advice on service pricing, enhance non-fare revenue, and foster competition.
3. **Addressing Financing Issues:** by focusing on projects with revenue potential, balancing passenger and freight traffic, reducing project delays to avoid cost escalation, and introducing financial oversight by exploring external funding sources.
4. **Decentralization and Restructuring**: Restructuring 17 zones and 68 divisions for strategic efficiency and granting greater autonomy and decision-making powers to zonal and divisional heads.

- ✓ The government has partially implemented this by empowering GMs and DRMs to make independent decisions, handle various tenders, and manage divisions as business units.

5. **Redesignation of Railway Board Chairman as CEO:** with final decision-making authority to expedite decision-making.
   - ✓ This was implemented in 2020, with the first Chairman and CEO of the Railway Board appointed, making the Board function more like a corporate entity.
6. **Focus on Core Activities and Outsourcing Non-Core Activities:** of running trains and reducing costs on non-core activities like operating schools, hospitals, and its own police force. Non-core functions could be outsourced or subsidized through private providers.
   - ✓ The government is considering this recommendation to reduce operational burdens and improve focus on core railway services.
7. **Accounting Reforms:** by implementing a commercial, accrual-based double-entry accounting system to provide a clear view of costs and liabilities, distinguish revenue and capital expenditures and help assess the financial viability of services and projects.
   - ✓ This recommendation was implemented through an Accounting Reforms project, with Indian Railways now preparing financial statements on both accrual and cash bases.
8. **Resource Mobilization**: by introducing **insurance surcharges** on tickets for emergencies. Exploring alternative funding like bonds, REITs, and contributions from state governments for branch lines.
9. **Merger of Services**: Merge Group A services into two: **Indian Railway Technical Service (IRTechS)** and **Indian Railway Logistics Service (IRLogS)**.
10. **Integration of Advanced Technology:** to modernize railway operations, with the introduction of high-speed trains like Vande Bharat and safety systems such as KAVACH.
    - ✓ The Gati Shakti Vishwavidyalaya aligns with this goal which has been established to develop skills in rail technology.
11. **Safety Measures and Rashtriya Rail Sanraksha Kosh (RRSK):** In response to safety concerns, the Rashtriya Rail Sanraksha Kosh (RRSK) was created in 2017 with ₹1 lakh crore for upgrading critical safety assets, and in 2022-23, an additional ₹45,000 crore was allocated for its extension.

Implementation Status of Recommendations

Of the total 40 committee recommendations-

- 19 were fully accepted (e.g., redesignating the Railway Board Chairman as CEO, accounting reforms, and setting up RRSK);
- 7 were partially accepted (e.g., empowering DRMs and decentralizing at the division level); and
- 14 were rejected, mainly due to union opposition or political factors, particularly regarding liberalization and private sector entry in passenger services.

The Debroy Committee Report provides a comprehensive roadmap for transforming India's railways, addressing key areas such as governance, safety, modernization, and operational efficiency. By accepting many of the committee's recommendations the government has made significant strides in enhancing the sector. Moving forward, continued focus on implementation and overcoming political and union resistance will be critical to realizing the full potential of these reforms and ensuring a robust, efficient, and safe railway system for the future.

Inter-State Council (ISC)

The Inter-State Council (ISC) has been reconstituted with Prime Minister as the chairman, all chief ministers and nine Union ministers as members, and 13 Union ministers as permanent invitees.

About Inter-State Council (ISC- Headquartered in New Delhi)

What is ISC

It is a constitutional body established under Article 263 in 1990 **(following the Sarkaria Commission's recommendations)** to foster coordination and cooperation between the Centre and states, and among states. By activating Zonal Councils and building an institutional framework, it promotes dialogue and collaboration for effective governance.

✓Article 263 of the Indian Constitution allows the President to establish an Inter-State Council if deemed necessary for public interest for-

- o advising on inter-state disputes;
- o discussing matters of common interest between states or the Union and states; and
- o recommending measures for better policy coordination.

Objective: to strengthen Centre-State and inter-state relations through regular meetings, addressing emerging issues, and monitoring the implementation of its recommendations.

Composition: The Council consists of: -

- Prime Minister (PM)- Chairman + Chief Ministers of all States- Members
- Chief Ministers of Union Territories having a Legislative Assembly and Administrators of UTs not having a Legislative Assembly- Members
- Six Ministers of Cabinet rank in the Union Council of Ministers nominated by the PM- Members.

** In case of President's rule in a state, the Governor of concerned State can attend the Council meeting.

** The Chairman can nominate permanent invitees from amongst the other Union Ministers.

Secretariat of Inter State Council: The Inter State Council Secretariat, led by a Secretary from the Government of India, also serves as the secretariat for the Zonal Councils.

Functions of the Inter-State Council (ISC)

1. **Policy Coordination and action**:
   - It investigates and discusses subjects of common interest between states or between the Union and states.
   - **Example: Goods and Services Tax (GST)** - The ISC facilitated discussions on GST implementation, ensuring alignment between the Union and States on the new taxation system.
2. **Deliberations on General Matters**: referred to it by the chairman of the Council.
   - Example: COVID-19 Pandemic Management; Language Policies; Cauvery Water Dispute etc.
3. **Promoting Cooperative Federalism**: by establishing a strong institutional framework among Centre and states.
   - The ISC is the only multilateral centre-state forum where topics like GST and contemporary issues like disaster management, terrorism and internal security can be taken up.
4. **Resolving Centre-State and Inter-State Issues**: by addressing pending and emerging issues and monitoring the implementation of recommendations made by the ISC and Zonal Councils.
   - Example: North-East Development (North-Eastern Zonal Council); Coastal Zone Management

What is the ISC Standing Committee

It was established in the second meeting of the ISC in 1996 under the Chairmanship of the Union Home Minister for continuous consultation and processing of matters for consideration of the Council and monitoring the implementation of the decisions taken on the Council recommendations.

Various Commissions Views on ISC

1. **First Administrative Reforms Commission (1st ARC), 1966:** chaired by initially by Morarji Desai and later by K. Hanumanthaiah proposed-
   - establishing an Inter-State Council under Article 263(b) and (c) to address national issues of shared interest while avoiding involvement in state disputes.

- replacing bodies like the National Development Council (NDC) and ministerial conferences with the Council, which would serve as a permanent consultative mechanism with a dedicated secretariat for efficient coordination.

2. **Sarkaria Commission**: established in 1983 under Justice R.S. Sarkaria, recommended-
   - broadening the duties of the ISC under Article 263 (excluding adjudication of disputes).
   - creating a permanent, independent secretariat modeled on the Union Cabinet Secretariat to enhance the Council's effectiveness and credibility.
3. **National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRWC), 2000**: established under Justice M.N. Venkatachaliah's chairmanship-
   - emphasized the underutilization of Article 263, which provides for the Inter-State Council, and highlighted its potential to resolve inter-state issues and policy matters efficiently.
   - recommended using the Council as a forum for consultation, especially on treaties and policies impacting states, to ensure better coordination and decision-making.
4. **Second Administrative Reforms Commission (2nd ARC), 2005:** in its report titled *"Capacity Building for Conflict Resolution: Friction to Fusion"*, recommended that:
   - ISC should utilize its mandate under Article 263 for conflict resolution and policy coordination, employing enquiry and advice mechanisms for mediation.
   - It should function on a need-based, flexible structure, replacing the current omnibus model with multiple tailored councils to ensure focused, time-bound solutions.
5. **Punchhi Commission, 2007:** established under Justice Madan Mohan Punchhi, analyzed legislative, administrative, financial relations, the role of governors, emergency provisions, resource sharing, and other governance aspects. It recommended that-
   - States be consulted through the ISC before introducing bills on matters listed in the Concurrent List (includes subjects on which both the State and Central governments can legislate).

Inter State Council Limitations

- **Infrequent Meetings:** While it is intended to meet regularly, the Inter State Council has convened only 11 times over 26 years, with the latest meeting held in 2016 after a decade-long gap.
  - ✓ Delayed meetings prevent proactive resolution of inter-State conflicts, such as the Sutlej-Yamuna Link canal issue between Punjab and Haryana.
- **Advisory Nature of Recommendations:** ISC's recommendations are non-binding, limiting their enforceability. States or the Union can choose to ignore them.
  - ✓ Recommendations made on river water disputes (e.g., Cauvery or Krishna river disputes) often failed to lead to lasting resolutions, as States are not compelled to comply.
- **Overlapping Roles with Other Institutions:** The ISC's functions often overlap with those of other institutions like the NITI Aayog, Zonal Councils, and Finance Commission, leading to redundancy and lack of clarity.
  - ✓ Economic planning and federal coordination, once the ISC's domain, are now handled by the NITI Aayog
- **Political & Regional Bias:** The ISC's functioning can be influenced by political considerations, especially if there is a conflict between the Centre & State governments led by different parties.

The ISC's ability to act as a consultative and advisory body makes it vital for achieving a harmonious and coordinated federal governance system in India. Despite infrequent sessions, the council remains essential for fostering dialogue, aligning policies, and strengthening Centre-state relations in India.

Constitution Museum

Country's first ever Constitution Museum was inaugurated recently at the O P Jindal Global University in Sonipat. The museum commemorates the 75th anniversary of the adoption of the Indian Constitution (November 26, 1949).

Key Highlights About the Constitution Musuem

1. **Provides Interactive Experiences (3D models, augmented reality (AR))** through-
   - **Talking Hologram**: Features Dr. B R Ambedkar in an interactive "Ask Me Anything" format.
   - **Time-Travel Radio**: Narrates significant historical events since 1940.
   - **Robotic Tour Guide**: Provides guided tours for visitors.
2. **Displays Constitutional Heritage**: through one of the **1,000 photolithographic reproductions of the Constitution** and mini busts of **300 Constituent Assembly members**, with a prominent bust of **B N Rau**, who helped draft the Constitution.
3. **Allows Interactive Activities**: like-
   - Visitors can take a photo recreating the **oath ceremony of August 14, 1947**.
   - **Digital quizzes** and sections like 'You Know, Right?' test knowledge of fundamental rights.
   - **Flip and Learn** explains constitutional terms interactively.
4. **Comprises of Audio-Visual Features**: like
   - **'Samvidhaan Theatre'**: Screens documentaries and films inspired by the Constitution.
   - **Armour-cabled headphones**: Play speeches from the Constituent Assembly and explanations of constitutional philosophy.
5. **Displays Art and History**: through-
   - Paintings of **judges and jurists** on black and yellow backgrounds.
   - A gallery that highlights the **75-year journey** of the Constitution through landmark judgments and amendments.
   - Contemporary artworks exhibited by various artists.

Telecommunications (Telecom Cyber Security) Rules, 2024

The Central government recently notified telecom cybersecurity rules under the Telecommunications Act 2023 to safeguard India's communication networks, mandating timely reporting of security incidents and disclosures by telecom operators.

✓ The Telecommunications Act, 2023 replaced the **Indian Telegraph Act 1885, Indian Wireless Telegraphy Act 1933 and Telegraph Wires, (Unlawful Protection) Act 1950** governing the provision, development, expansion and operation of telecommunication services, telecom networks and infrastructure, in addition to assignment of spectrum.

About the Telecommunications Cybersecurity Rules, 2024

These rules aim to establish a framework to enhance **telecom cyber security** by regulating telecommunication entities, ensuring secure networks, and preventing misuse of telecom equipment. The **key highlights of rules** include-

1. **Data Collection and Usage**: Central Government or authorized agencies can collect **traffic and other non-content data** from telecommunication entities.
   - ✓ **Message data** (e.g., text, audio, video) is excluded from the scope of government requests.
   - ✓ **Traffic data** includes information generated, transmitted, received, or stored in telecommunication networks, such as type, routing, duration, and timing.

- ✓ A telecommunication entity is any person providing telecommunication services, or establishing, operating, maintaining, or expanding a telecommunication network, including an authorised entity holding an authorisation.

Collected data may be analyzed and shared with security agencies or telecom entities for enhancing cyber security. Strict confidentiality safeguards are mandated to prevent unauthorized access.

2. **Cybersecurity Obligations for Telecommunication Entities**: Adopt a **Telecom Cybersecurity Policy** including risk management, vulnerability assessments, rapid incident response, mitigation measures, and forensic analysis to enhance security and prevent future incidents.
   - Conduct regular **cybersecurity audits** and share reports with the Central Government.
   - Establish **Security Operations Centers (SOC)** for monitoring incidents and maintaining logs for a specified duration.
   - Report **security incidents** to the government within 6 hours and provide detailed updates within 24 hours.
3. **Appointment of Chief Telecommunication Security Officer (CTSO)**: in every telecommunication entity is mandatory for coordinating compliance and reporting with the government.
4. **Telecom Identifier and Equipment Regulations**:
   - Manufacturers and importers must register **International Mobile Equipment Identity (IMEI) numbers** of telecom equipment with the government before their first sale.
   - Tampering with telecom identifiers or equipment is prohibited and punishable.
   - Government may direct blocking of tampered equipment from telecom networks.
5. **Incident Reporting and Response**: Immediate reporting of security incidents affecting telecom networks or services is required. Central Government may issue directives to mitigate identified risks or prevent potential incidents.
6. **Digital Implementation:** A **centralized portal** will be used for compliance, reporting, and secure communication between stakeholders and the government.
7. **Enforcement and Penalties**: Violations of the rules will be dealt with as per the **Telecommunications Act, 2023**. Penalties include suspension or disconnection of telecom services in case of non-compliance.

Key Provisions Unchanged from the Original Draft Rules

- The government can act against threat actors by disconnecting identifiers.
- Directions may be issued to telecom companies to prevent or address security incidents.
- Tampering with equipment identifiers remains strictly prohibited.

Concerns Raised

1. **Removal of Definition for 'Traffic Data'**: from the draft rules was removed, addressing concerns about ambiguity but increasing the risk of misuse, as the term remains undefined and open to interpretation.
2. **Purpose Limitation for Data Sharing**: Rule 3(2) now limits the use of shared data to ensure telecom cybersecurity, marking a step towards data protection. However, concerns persist about vague justifications for data sharing, lack of clarity on authorized entities, and no limits on data retention periods.
3. **Incident Reporting Timelines**: Telecom entities must report security incidents within six hours but now have 24 hours to furnish additional relevant information. This partial relaxation does not address calls for realistic timelines (e.g., 72 hours, as seen in global practices like the GDPR and U.S. cyber incident laws).
4. **Weak Data Protection Framework**: The rules fail to uphold robust data protection principles, leaving users' privacy inadequately protected.
5. **Compliance Burden:** The rules impose a **cumbersome and costly compliance regime**, making it challenging for telecom entities to effectively meet requirements.
6. **Lack of Meaningful Advancements**: The rules do not significantly advance the **privacy** or **cybersecurity** of Indian telecom users.

These rules reflect incremental improvements in telecom cyber security but leave significant concerns regarding privacy safeguards and reporting feasibility.

Know Your Medicine (KYM) App

The Union Minister for Youth Affairs & Sports recently launched a nationwide appeal to combat doping in sports, encouraging athletes, coaches, and the sporting community to use the National Anti-Doping Agency's (NADA) **'Know Your Medicine (KYM)' app**.

About the 'Know Your Medicine (KYM)' App

The KYM app has been developed by the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) to assist athletes, support personnel, and sports enthusiasts in verifying the prohibitory status of medicines and their ingredients.

Target Users

- Athletes and sports enthusiasts.
- Medical practitioners and support personnel for informed medicine recommendations.

Key Features

1. **Compliance with WADA (World Anti-Doping Agency):** prohibited List, helping athletes avoid inadvertent doping violations.
   - WADA was established in 1999 as an international independent agency to lead a collaborative worldwide movement for doping-free sport. WADA's governance and funding are based on an equal partnership between the sport movement and governments of the world.
   - The WADA updates the Prohibited List, identifying substances and methods banned in-competition, out-of-competition, and for specific sports. The list is published by October 1 and takes effect on January 1.
     → **In-Competition**: is the period starting at 11:59 p.m. the day before a competition until the end of the competition and the related sample collection process. WADA may approve alternative definitions for specific sports if justified by the International Federation.
     → **Out-of-Competition**: is any period not classified as In-Competition.
   - Substances are included if they meet two of three criteria: enhancing performance, posing health risks, or violating the "spirit of sport." They can also be banned if they mask other prohibited substances.
   - In the event that a prescribed medication is on The Prohibited List, you may need to apply for a medical exemption [either a Therapeutic Use Exemption (TUE) or medical review].
   - The **KYM** app only covers substance-based items.
   - AYUSH products, supplements (including but not limited to protein shakes, vitamins), etc. are not listed in the Know Your Medicine application/website.
2. **Image and Audio Search**: allows users to quickly and conveniently find information.
3. **Simple Interface**: Users can enter their sport and the medicine name to check its status instantly.

Significance

- **Promotes informed decision-making** about medications.
- **Reduces the risk of inadvertent doping**, ensuring fair play in sports.

About National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA)

Established: in 2005, as a registered society under the Societies Registration Act of 1860 and is aligned with the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA).
Objective: To ensure a dope-free sports environment in India.
Nodal Ministry: Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports.
Primary Functions:

- Implement the Anti-Doping Code for compliance across sports organizations.
- Coordinate a nationwide dope testing program along with research and education.

- NADA played a critical role in ensuring these grassroots-level games remain dope-free, setting a precedent for clean sports from an early stage.
  - ✓ The **"Say No to Doping"** campaign during the Khelo India Games.
- Ensures compliance with the UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport.

Bulldozer Justice

The Supreme Court (SC), while exercising its power under Article 142 of the Constitution issued guidelines to ensure fair procedure to be followed for the demolition of illegal structures.

Case Background

- **Issue**: The SC addressed the **"extra-legal" practice of demolishing properties** of individuals accused of crimes, often as a form of punishment highlighted in states like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand (under BJP governments), and Rajasthan (under Congress rule in 2022).
- **Triggering Incidents**:
  - **Ratlam, MP**: A family's ancestral home was demolished after the son was arrested for alleged cow slaughter in June.
  - **Udaipur, Rajasthan**: A tenant's house was demolished for alleged encroachment on forest land soon after the tenant's 15-year-old son was arrested for a communal stabbing incident.
- **Related Cases**: The court also heard pleas from the **Jamiat-Ulama-i-Hind** filed during demolition drives after communal violence in Delhi's Jahangir Puri in 2022.
- **Connection to "Bulldozer Justice"**: Former Chief Justice of India (CJI) D Y Chandrachud criticized such practices as **"bulldozer justice"**, noting its misuse in cases like illegal demolition for road widening projects in Uttar Pradesh.

SC Guidelines for Demolitions

1. **Notice:** A minimum of 15 days prior notice containing details about the unauthorized construction, specific violations, grounds for demolition, documents required for response, and the date of a **personal hearing** must be sent to the person to respond to before demolition is carried out, starting from the date that the owner or the occupier receives the notice.
   - An email with a digital acknowledgment must be sent to the collector's office to avoid backdating claims. The collector must assign a **nodal officer** and shares contact details for relevant authorities.
   - Municipal authorities must establish a portal within three months to publicly provide access to notices, replies, and orders.
2. **Personal Hearing:** Authorities must offer a **personal hearing** to the affected individual before demolition and minutes of the hearing must be officially recorded to ensure **transparency and accountability**. This upholds **natural justice** by giving individuals a chance to defend themselves.
3. **Final Order:** must address concerns raised during the hearing and provide **reasons for rejecting them**, if applicable. It should specify whether the construction is **compoundable** or partially/fully unauthorized and justify why full demolition is necessary and why alternatives like partial demolition or compounding are not viable.
4. **Appeal and Judicial Review**: Authorities must allow **15 days** for the owner/occupant to appeal or voluntarily remove the structure before demolition. The final order must be uploaded to the **digital portal** for transparency. Provides a recourse mechanism for affected parties, ensuring checks & balances.
5. **Procedure Before Demolition:** An Inspection Report should be prepared and signed by **two witnesses (panchas)** to ensure accountability. Demolition proceeds only if there is no legal stay from an appellate authority or court.

6. **Procedure During Demolition:** The demolition process must be **video recorded** to ensure transparency. A **Demolition Report must be prepared by the authotities** listing all involved personnel (police and civil) and be emailed to the municipal commissioner. The report, along with the video, should be uploaded to the **digital portal** for public access.

****Applicability of Guidelines:** These guidelines do **not apply** to unauthorized structures in public places (e.g., roads, streets, footpaths, railway lines, water bodies) or demolitions ordered by a court of law. This differentiates between public interest actions and private disputes.

Why did the SC issue Guidelines on Demolition of Structures?

1. **For Reinforcing the Rule of Law**: The court emphasized that no individual can be punished, or their property harmed without following **due process of law**. Arbitrary demolition of properties as a form of punishment undermines the principle of **innocence until proven guilty** and breaches constitutional safeguards. Judicial adjudication, not executive actions, must determine guilt or punishment.
   - ✓ Arbitrary demolitions violate the constitutional right to property under Article 300A of the Constitution, which protects citizens from unlawful deprivation of property.
2. **Separation of Powers**: The court affirmed that the **executive cannot assume the judiciary's role** in adjudicating and punishing alleged crimes. Arbitrary demolitions blur the separation of powers, a fundamental principle of the Constitution's basic structure.
3. **For Preserving Public Accountability and Trust**: The **executive is a trustee** of citizens and must act in ways that maintain public trust and fairness. Actions like arbitrary demolitions erode public confidence and violate the principle of **institutional accountability**.
4. **Protecting Right to Shelter**: It recognized housing as a **basic human right**, representing stability, security, and a family's future. Arbitrary demolitions disproportionately harm family members who share the home but are unrelated to the alleged crime, amounting to **collective punishment**.
5. **Preventing Arbitrary Punitive Actions**: The court noted suspicious timelines between arrests and demolitions, suggesting punitive motives rather than lawful enforcement. It highlighted the need to assess alternatives, such as **compounding unauthorized construction**, before demolishing entire buildings.
6. **Ensuring Proportionality in Actions**: Demolishing entire buildings for minor infractions or when only parts are unauthorized is **disproportionate and unjust**. Authorities must ensure lawful actions, avoiding the appearance of mala fide intent.

Critical Analysis of the Guidelines

1. **Challenges for Vulnerable Populations**: The 15-day notice and appeal period may be insufficient for economically disadvantaged individuals who lack legal knowledge or resources. These time constraints can disproportionately disadvantage those unfamiliar with legal or administrative procedures.
2. **Digital Portal Implementation**: While the portal is a step toward transparency, its effectiveness depends on proper implementation, user-friendliness, and accessibility, particularly for vulnerable populations. Without careful design, the portal could become a barrier rather than a tool for justice.
3. **Limited Procedural Detail**: The guidelines provide minimal detail on ensuring fair and accessible appellate reviews. For those unfamiliar with digital platforms or legal processes, the short appeal window may hinder their ability to challenge orders effectively.
4. **Risk of Arbitrary Actions**: Municipal authorities retain significant discretionary power, with no provisions for independent oversight or review. The lack of external review mechanisms raises concerns about potential misuse or conflicts of interest.
5. **Personal Liability for Illegal Demolitions**: Officers responsible for demolitions conducted in violation of court orders will bear personal liability, including restoration costs and additional damages. This provision is a critical step toward instilling responsibility and reducing arbitrary actions by municipal authorities.

The guidelines represent a progressive step toward ensuring fairness and transparency in demolitions but face challenges in implementation, accessibility, and oversight. Strengthening appellate mechanisms, ensuring inclusive digital access, and introducing independent review processes could address potential gaps and enhance the effectiveness of the guidelines.

Why is the Census Crucial for Delimitation and Women's Quota?

The Centre plans to begin the delayed Census next year, aiming for completion by 2026, enabling **delimitation of constituencies** and implementation of **women's reservation in elected bodies**.

About Census ("No governance without data, and no data without the Census." – Amartya Sen)

It is a decadal exercise of collecting, compiling, and analyzing demographic, social, and economic data about every individual in a country or region regardless of age, gender, or socio-economic status. It provides a comprehensive snapshot of the population at a specific point in time.

Objectives

- To determine the **size and composition of the population**.
- To collect data on various parameters such as **age, gender (Sex Ratio), literacy, occupation, religion, language, geographic distribution and housing conditions**.
- To serve as a basis for **policymaking, resource allocation**, and development planning.

Legal/Constitutional Status

- Population census is listed in **Union List (entry 69)** of Seventh Schedule in Indian Constitution.
- Census is conducted under the provisions of the **Census Act, 1948**. Section 11 of this Act penalizes non-cooperation during the enumeration process.

Historical Evolution

- India's first Census was conducted in **1872** during British rule under Lord Mayo.
- The first synchronous census was taken under British rule in 1881, by W.C. Plowden, Census Commissioner of India and it has been conducted every decade since then.
- Upcoming Census supposed to be the first digital Census in India, with the option for self-enumeration. This Census plans of inclusion of data on migration, transgender population, and household technology usage.
  - ✓ **Use of Technology:** Digital mapping and geotagging for enhanced accuracy. **Example**: GIS integration aids urban planning by identifying densely populated areas.
  - ✓ Mitra Committee Report (2017): Advocated inclusion of dynamic data points like disaster vulnerability.

Conducting Authority: The responsibility of conducting the decadal census rests with the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India, Ministry of Home Affairs.

Importance of the Census for Delimitation

About Delimitation (Balances population changes across constituencies)

Meaning and Purpose: Delimitation is the process of fixing the number of seats and determining the boundaries of **territorial constituencies** for the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. It also involves reserving seats for **Scheduled Castes (SC)** and **Scheduled Tribes (ST)**. It ensures representation follows the principle of **"one citizen-one vote-one value"**.

✓Delimitation exercises were conducted after the 1951, 1961, and 1971 Censuses.

Constitutional Basis: Article 82 (delimitation) and 170 (state assemblies) of the Constitution provide that the number of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative assemblies as well as its division into territorial constituencies shall be readjusted after each Census. This is carried out by the **Delimitation Commission**, established under an Act of Parliament.

✓In India, such Delimitation Commissions have been constituted 4 times- in 1952, 1963, 1973 and in 2002.

Current Status

- The number of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies has been frozen based on the **1971 Census** to promote population control and prevent states with higher growth from gaining more seats. This freeze, set by the **42nd Amendment Act** until 2000 and extended by the **84th Amendment Act** until 2026, will be re-evaluated after the 2026 Census.

- **Constitutional Mandate**: Article 82 of the Constitution mandates the readjustment of boundaries of constituencies after each Census.
- **Equal Representation**: Delimitation ensures that each constituency represents a roughly equal number of people, reflecting the latest population figures.
  - ✓ **Balancing Urban and Rural Representation Data for Socioeconomic Considerations:** Census data highlights the growth of urban populations relative to rural areas.
- **Timeline for Delimitation:** Delimitation has been on hold since 1976. A 2025 Census completed by 2026 could pave the way for delimitation in time for the 2029 Lok Sabha elections.
- **Southern State Concerns:** States with better population control (e.g., in the South) fear losing representation, as seat allocation may favor states with higher population growth (e.g., in the North).

Importance of Census for Women's Reservation

- **Constitutional Mandate:** The 106th Constitutional Amendment Act (2023) reserves 33% of seats in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies for women. The reservation will take effect only after delimitation based on Census data, aligning the allocation of seats with the new boundaries.
  - ✓ Delimitation tied to Census balances the representation of states in a federal structure, aligning electoral quotas with population growth.
- **Current vs. Post-Delimitation Scenario:** A 33% reservation in the 545 member Lok Sabha would reserve 182 seats for women, leaving only 363 seats for men. If Lok Sabha strength increases to 770 seats post-delimitation, 257 seats for women and 513 for men would ease the implementation of the quota.
- **Ensuring Political Stability**: A carefully managed process can prevent political instability and address concerns from various states and stakeholders. For example, delimitation based on census will help address male politicians' concerns by preserving their electoral prospects through increased seats.
- **Ensuring Fair Representation:** Census and delimitation will help ensure that the reserved seats for women are distributed to accurately reflect the population and demographic changes.
  - ✓ The SC/ST reservation formula post the 2001 Census ensured proportional representation for these groups in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.
- **Implementing Gender-Responsive Policies**: Accurate Census data will allow policymakers to understand population trends, including gender distribution, and plan for equitable representation.
  - ✓ Women's political participation is key to achieving SDG 5 (Gender Equality).
  - ✓ Example: The 2011 Census highlighted a decline in the child sex ratio, **leading to the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao** scheme.

The Census is indispensable for both delimitation and implementing women's reservation. It ensures fair representation, adjusts constituencies to reflect current demographics, and lays the groundwork for transformative policies like gender quotas in elected bodies. Without the Census, these critical reforms cannot proceed effectively or constitutionally.

National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT)

Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) highlighted that there is often a shortage of members in the National Company Law Tribunal and inadequate infrastructure to support their functioning.

About National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT)

Type: Quasi-judicial authority.

Purpose: Resolves **corporate disputes** of a civil nature arising under the **Companies Act, 2013**. It also adjudicates matters related to the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 (IBC).

Constitution: Established on **1st June 2016** under the Companies Act, 2013 to replace the Company Law Board (CLB) and the Board for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction (BIFR).

Origin: Recommended by the **Balakrishna Eradi Committee** to address insolvency and winding-up of companies.

Structure: The NCLT has a principal bench in New Delhi and other benches in cities such as Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, and Kolkata. Each bench is headed by a retired judicial member (as President) or a serving High Court judge, along with a technical member from the Indian Corporate Law Service (ICLS) Cadre.

Powers of NCLT

1. **Flexibility in Procedure**: It is not bound by the **Code of Civil Procedure (CPC)** and is guided by **natural justice principles** and provisions set by the Act and Central Government rules.
2. **Order Enforcement**: It enforces orders with the same authority as a court.
3. **Review Powers**: It can scrutinize and review its own orders.
4. **Procedural Regulation**: It has the autonomy to regulate its **own procedures**.
5. **Insolvency Adjudication**: It serves as the adjudicating authority for **insolvency resolution processes** of companies and Limited Liability Partnerships (LLPs) under the **Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016**.

Appeals: Decisions made by the NCLT can be appealed to **the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT)**. The NCLAT's decisions can then be challenged in the Supreme Court on a point of law.

Significance: The NCLT plays a crucial role in streamlining the resolution of corporate disputes and insolvency cases, ensuring faster and more efficient justice for businesses.

Press Council of India (PCI)

To recognize the vital contributions of media, National Press Day was celebrated recently on November 16th, honoring the essential role of a free and responsible press in our society. The theme for this year was- *"Changing Nature of the Press".*

✓ National Press Day also marks the day the Press Council of India (PCI) began its operations in 1966.

About Press Council of India (PCI)

It is a statutory, quasi-judicial body acting as a watchdog to uphold press freedom & ethics in India.

Historical Evolution

- **Establishment**- It was first set up in **1966** under the **Indian Press Council Act, 1965** on the recommendation of the **First Press Commission (**chaired by **Justice J.R. Mudholkar).**
- **Re-establishment**: It was dissolved during the Emergency in 1975 and re-established in 1979 under the **Press Council Act, 1978**.

Composition: It consists of a-

- **Chairman**: A retired Supreme Court (SC) judge nominated by a committee comprising of **Rajya Sabha Chairman; Lok Sabha Speaker;** and one representative of the council members.
- **Members**: 28, including journalists, media owners, and representatives from various fields.
- **Tenure**: **3 years**.

Functions & Powers

- **Regulatory Role:** Ensures **press freedom** and high ethical standards in journalism. The PCI has the power to receive complaints of violation of the journalistic ethics, or professional misconduct by an editor or journalist.

- **Adjudicatory Role:** Acts as a quasi-judicial authority to adjudicates complaints on unethical reporting & interference with press freedom.
- **Advisory Role:** Offers recommendations on laws affecting the press.
- The PCI is responsible for enquiring into complaints received. It may summon witnesses and take evidence under oath, demand copies of public records to be submitted, even issue warnings and admonish the newspaper, news agency, editor or journalist.
- Decisions of the PCI are final and cannot be challenged in court.

What are the Limitations on the Powers of the PCI?

(1) The PCI has limited powers of enforcing the guidelines issued. It cannot penalize newspapers, news agencies, editors and journalists for violation of the guidelines.

(2) The PCI only overviews the functioning of press media. That is, it can enforce standards upon newspapers, journals, magazines and other forms of print media. It does not have the power to review the functioning of electronic media like radio, television and internet media.

Key Initiatives

1. **2023:** Adopted guidelines for fair media representation of the **LGBTQ+ community.** It also issued norms for reporting on **natural disasters** with sensitivity.
2. **2022**: Updated **Norms of Journalistic Conduct** to ensure adherence to professional ethics.
3. **Global Engagement**: It collaborates with media councils in **Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Indonesia** and has established the **South Asian Alliance of Press Councils (SAAPC)**.
4. **Educational Initiatives**: It introduced **internship programs** like Summer Internship Program (SIP) and Winter Internship Program (WIP) to foster a sense of responsibility and awareness regarding press freedom.

Achievements

- Addressed **37,000+ complaints** (1979-2024) related to press norms and threats to freedom.
- **Issued guidelines** on election coverage, defense reporting and ensuring journalist safety.

Are there Other Bodies that Review Television Or Radio?

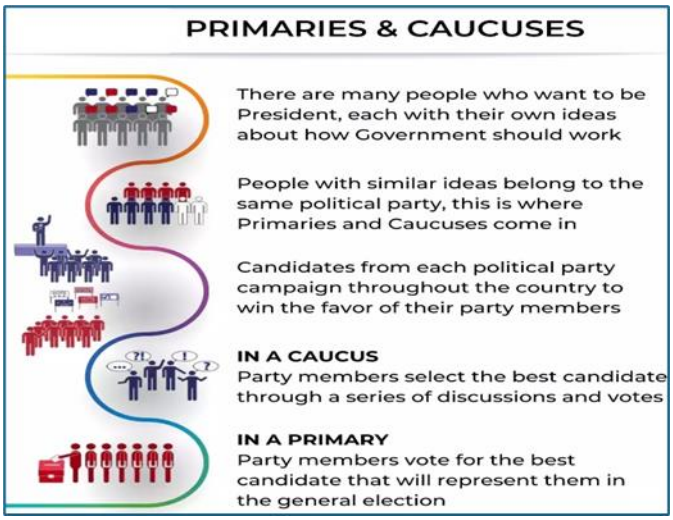
- For screening films including short films, documentaries, television shows and advertisements in theaters or broadcasting via television the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) sanction is required.
- The role of the CBFC is limited to controlling the content of movies and television shows, etc.
- Unlike the PCI, it does not have the power to issue guidelines in relation to standards of news and journalistic conduct.

2024 US Presidential Election

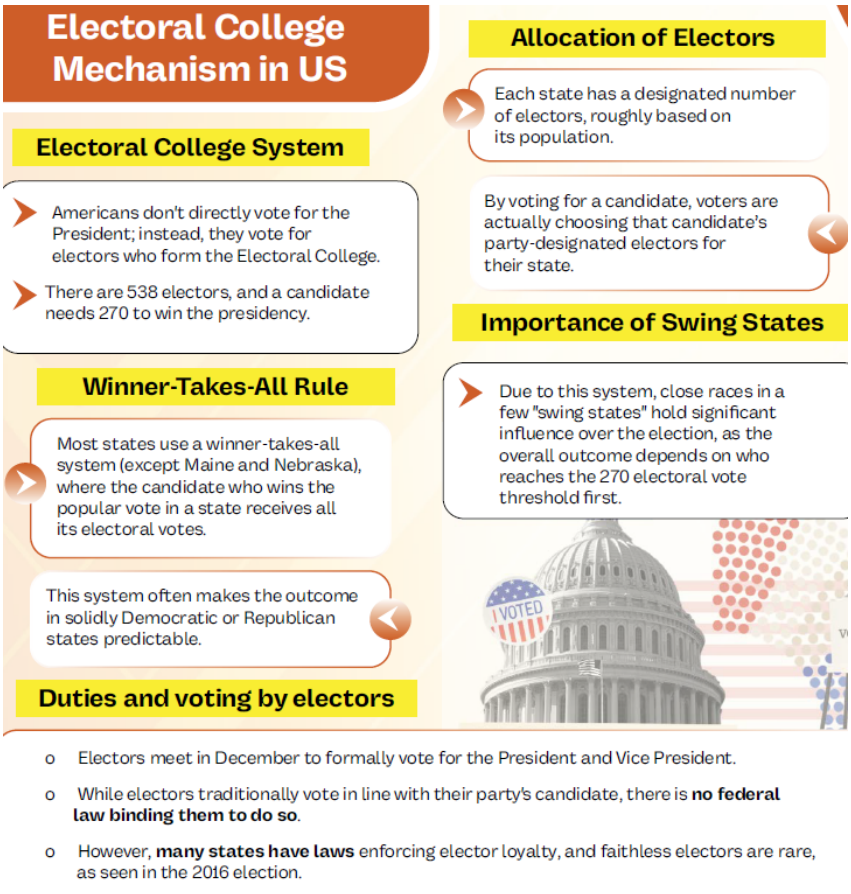
Former U.S. President and Republican Donald Trump won a second term in office, defeating Vice-President Kamala Harris, the Democratic nominee, to become the 47th President of the United States.

The Election Process

- **Overview**
  - The U.S. presidential election is held every **four years** to elect the President and Vice President of the United States.
  - **It follows an indirect voting process**, where citizens vote for a slate of electors who then choose the President and Vice President.



- **Constitutional requirements for presidential candidates**
  - The U.S. Constitution states that the president must:
    - ✓ Be a natural-born citizen of the United States
    - ✓ Be at least 35 years old
    - ✓ Have been a resident of the United States for 14 years
- **Primary Elections and Caucuses**
  - Primaries and caucuses are two ways that people help states and political parties choose presidential nominees.
  - These take place in each state and run from early in the election year until the summer.
  - During this stage, party members vote for their preferred candidates, and delegates are assigned to represent these choices at the national conventions.
- **National Conventions**
  - Following the primaries, each party holds a national convention where delegates officially nominate the party's candidates for President and Vice President.
  - The nominees then accept the party's nomination, and the general election campaign begins.



- **The General Election**
  - The general election occurs on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November.
  - Voters in each state cast their ballots for President, effectively choosing electors who will represent their state in the Electoral College.
- **Electoral College Voting and Inauguration**
  - In December, the electors meet in their respective state capitals to cast their official votes.
  - These votes are counted by Congress in early January, and the President-elect is formally declared.
  - The elected President is then inaugurated on January 20, marking the official start of their term in office.

Germany's Economic Struggles Deepen

- Germany's economic downturn deepens with a projected contraction in 2024, marking its second consecutive year of decline.
  - Germany's economy grew slightly (0.2%) in Q3 after a contraction, reflecting a broader crisis affecting key industries, including Volkswagen.
- Manufacturing struggles and global competition, especially from China, highlight structural issues.
  - For the first time in its 87-year history, Volkswagen, Europe's largest employer, is considering closing three of its 15 factories in Germany due to financial difficulties.

Economic Crisis in Germany

- **About**
  - Germany was the only G7 economy to shrink last year (2023) and is set to be the group's slowest-growing economy again this year.
  - According to the IMF, its GDP per head shrank 1% between 2019 and 2023.
- **Reasons behind this crisis**
  - Volkswagen's one of the main pillars of German economy, is struggling due to multiple factors including a **late shift to electric vehicles**.
    - ✓ Its reliance on internal combustion engines, rather than transitioning to electric vehicles, has left the industry lagging in the current energy landscape.
  - Germany's deeper economic challenges is also due to the factors such as such as dependence on Russian gas.
    - ✓ Germany's terms of trade deteriorated hugely after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as the price of natural gas soared.
  - Experts argue that Germany's reliance on authoritarian states like Russia and China and its failure to embrace the new digital economy have left the nation behind in global competitiveness.
  - Also, the post-pandemic rebalancing of global demand from manufactured goods towards services was also unfavourable for Germany's economy.

GERMANY'S ECONOMY – KEY INDICATORS

An assembly line at the Volkswagen factory in Zwickau, Germany. For the time in its history, Volkswagen may shut down three of its factories in Germany. *NYT*

Indicators	2023	2024	2025
GDP growth (%, y-o-y)	-0.3	0.1	1.0
Inflation (%, y-o-y)	6.0	2.4	2.0
Unemployment (%)	3.1	3.1	3.1
General government balance (% of GDP)	-2.5	-1.6	-1.2
Gross public debt (% of GDP)	63.6	62.9	62.2
Current account balance (% of GDP)	6.9	7.0	7.0

(Source: European Commission)

- **Structural issues**
  - The recent crisis highlights **deeper structural issues** within the German economy.
    - ✓ Germany was once a symbol of high-tech manufacturing but now seen as uncompetitive with a potentially reduced output outlook.
  - **High debt and deficit levels**, pushed by the government's need to satisfy a diverse coalition, have also raised concerns in the EU.
  - **Over-regulation & bureaucratic hurdles** further impact Germany's smaller & mid-sized firms.

1st Direct Cargo Ship from Pakistan Docks In Bangladesh

Recently, a cargo ship from Karachi docked at Chattogram port, marking the first-ever direct maritime contact between Pakistan and Bangladesh. This development signals a potential shift in the historically strained relationship between the two countries.

Analysis

- **The Lingering Shadow of 1971**
  - The atrocities committed by the Pakistani military during Bangladesh's Liberation War in 1971 have deeply impacted bilateral ties.
  - Pakistan's refusal to apologize for these war crimes has further strained relations.
- **Sheikh Hasina's Tenure: Justice and Alignment with India**
  - Sheikh Hasina's government (1996-2001, 2009-2024) focused on prosecuting 1971 war criminals through the International Crimes Tribunal, targeting collaborators like Jamaat-e-Islami leaders.
  - Her alignment with India, built on shared history and strategic interests, strengthened ties between Dhaka and New Delhi but created resentment among some Bangladeshis, who perceived India's involvement as excessive.
  - Anti-India sentiment culminated in incidents like the vandalism of Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre in Dhaka.
- **Post-Hasina Dynamics: A New Opening for Pakistan**
  - Three key factors have influenced the current thaw in relations:
    - ✓ **Shifting Priorities:** Younger Bangladeshis, less connected to the events of 1971, focus more on economic and social issues than historical grievances.
    - ✓ **Anti-India Sentiment:** Resentment over Hasina's perceived closeness to India has grown, contributing to her ouster.
    - ✓ **Islamist Influence:** The post-Hasina dispensation includes voices sympathetic to Pakistan's perspective on 1971, creating opportunities for Islamabad to engage with Dhaka.
- **Pakistan's Renewed Outreach to Bangladesh**
  - Pakistan is extending an olive branch, calling for a fresh start in relations. Editorials in Pakistan have advocated setting aside bitterness from 1971 to rebuild ties.
  - The interim government in Bangladesh, under Prime Minister Muhammad Yunus, has responded positively. This evolving dynamic could signal a significant recalibration of Bangladesh-Pakistan relations in the coming years.

Canada Govt Ends Fast-Track Student Visas for India, 13 Other Countries

- The Canadian government recently discontinued **the Student Direct Stream (SDS) visa program**, a decision that significantly impacts Indian students, who represent one of the largest groups of international students in Canada.
  - The SDS visa, introduced in 2018, was designed to simplify the visa application process for students from select countries, including India. It provided:

- ✓ **Faster Processing**
- ✓ **Reduced Fees** compared to the standard study visa.
- ✓ **Simplified Documentation**

- **Impact on India:** In 2022, over 189,000 Indian students applied through the SDS program, with an approval rate of 63%, compared to just 19% for non-SDS applicants.

Israel-Hezbollah Ceasefire Deal

Israel and Lebanon have entered into a ceasefire. This ceasefire has been modeled after UNSC Resolution 1701 from the 2006 conflict.

Key Takeaways from Israel-Lebanon Ceasefire

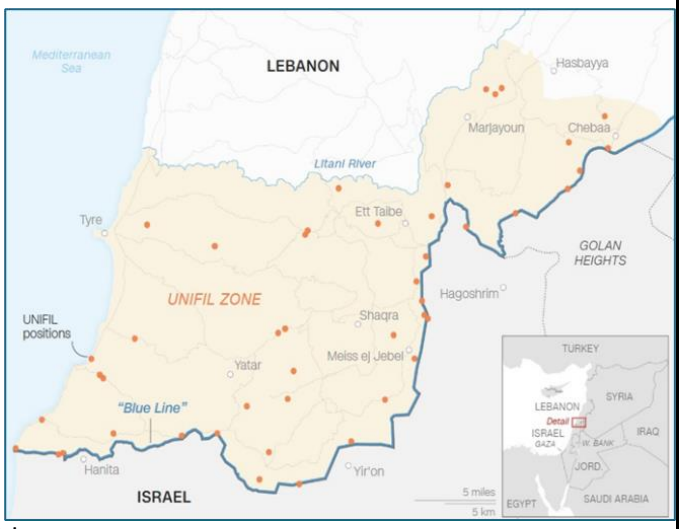
- **Cessation of hostilities -** A 60-day cessation of hostilities has been established as a framework for a lasting truce between Israel and Hezbollah.
- **Withdrawal of Forces**
  - o **Hezbollah**: Required to retreat approximately 40 kilometers (25 miles) from the Israel-Lebanon border.
  - o **Israel**: Committed to withdrawing its ground forces from Lebanese territory.
- **Basis of the Deal -** The agreement is rooted in UNSC Resolution 1701, which ended the 2006 war. Negotiations focused on the resolution's enforcement.
- **Enhanced Monitoring and Supervision**
  - o Lebanon will intensify its oversight of Hezbollah's movements south of the Litani River to prevent regrouping.
  - o **Monitoring responsibilities are shared by**:
    - ✓ United Nations peacekeeping troops.
    - ✓ The Lebanese military.
    - ✓ A multinational committee (A key update is the inclusion of the U.S. and France in the oversight mechanism, alongside Lebanon, Israel, and UNIFIL.)
- **Israel's Conditional Stance**
  - o Israel has warned it will resume military operations if the agreement is breached.
  - o The agreement does not mandate complete disarmament of Hezbollah in northern Lebanon.

Reasons for Israel's Ceasefire Decision

- **Focus on Iran**: Israel aims to direct its attention toward countering Iran.
- **Military Replenishment**: The ceasefire allows Israeli forces to regroup and replenish resources.
- **Separation of Fronts**: By halting conflict with Hezbollah, Israel seeks to isolate the Hamas and Hezbollah theaters of war.
- **Hezbollah's Parallel Front:** Hezbollah opened a secondary front in support of Hamas following Hamas's terror attack and Israel's subsequent bombardment of Gaza.
- **Additional Factors Influencing the Decision**
  - o **Civil-Military Dynamics in Israel**
    - ✓ Former Defense Minister and the IDF (Israeli Defence Force) Chief of Staff advocated for a ceasefire, questioning the government's military objectives.
  - o **Strategic Challenges in Lebanon**
    - ✓ Prolonged military presence in Lebanon risks wearing down the IDF and strengthening Hezbollah's domestic support.
  - o **Hezbollah's Resilience**
    - ✓ Despite heavy losses, Hezbollah retained the capability to strike, launching 250 rockets two days before the ceasefire.

- ✓ Israel's symbolic achievement of reaching the Litani River was followed by a ceasefire to avoid a prolonged and costly conflict.

Overview of UNSC Resolution 1701



- Adopted on August 11, 2006, seeks to end hostilities between Hezbollah and Israel, establish a buffer zone, and achieve a permanent ceasefire.
  - Resolution aimed to complete Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon along Blue Line & Golan Heights, following its partial withdrawal in 2000.
- **Key Provisions**
  - **Disarmament and Sovereignty**:
    - ✓ Full disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon, ensuring the Lebanese State's monopoly over weapons and authority.
    - ✓ Prohibition of foreign forces in Lebanon without government consent.
  - **Arms Control**: No sales or supply of arms to Lebanon without government authorization.
  - **Landmine Information**: Israel to provide maps of landmines in Lebanon to the UN.
  - **Buffer Zone and Ceasefire**:
    - ✓ Respect for the Blue Line by both parties.
    - ✓ Creation of a demilitarized zone free of armed personnel and weapons, apart from Lebanese authorities and UNIFIL, between the Blue Line and the Litani River.
  - **UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) Mandate:** The resolution authorized up to 15,000 UN peacekeepers to:
    - ✓ Monitor the cessation of hostilities.
    - ✓ Assist Lebanese troops in securing the buffer zone.
    - ✓ Ensure the safe return of displaced Lebanese populations.

US Cracks Down On Indian Companies For Supplies To Russian Firms

- The U.S. recently sanctioned around 400 entities and individuals, including 19 Indian firms and two Indian nationals, over links to Russia's war efforts in Ukraine.
- Sanctions typically restrict trade, investment, and financial transactions with targeted entities, aiming to curb their economic and operational activities by cutting off access to U.S.-based resources and systems.
- For firms, this can mean being barred from the U.S. market, losing American partners, and facing significant financial and operational limitations, potentially affecting global trade and their business operations.

India Becomes Top Source of International Students in US, Surpassing China

- India has overtaken China as the leading source of international students in the United States for the 2023-2024 academic year after 15 years, bringing the total to 3.3 lakh students.
- Together, the two nations account for half of the international students in the US, primarily pursuing STEM fields like computer science, engineering, and mathematics.
- These students contribute substantially to the US economy, **with Indian students alone adding $50 billion in fees and living expenses in 2023**.
- The trend of Indian students studying abroad extends beyond the US, as the UK also recorded a 39% increase in Indian students in 2022-2023, surpassing Chinese numbers.

PM Modi's Visit to Nigeria

- PM Modi visited Nigeria, marking the first visit by an Indian PM since 2007.
- During his visit, PM Modi met President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, held delegation-level talks, and addressed the Indian community in Abuja.
- During this visit, PM Modi was honored with Nigeria's prestigious **Grand Commander of the Order of Niger**, a national award previously bestowed only upon Queen Elizabeth II.
- Also, three MoUs were signed on cultural exchange, customs cooperation, and survey collaboration, alongside **India's provision of 20 tonnes of relief supplies for flood victims**.

India – Nigeria Bilateral Relationship

- **Strategic significance**
  - Nigeria's status as Africa's one of largest oil producer is critical for India, a major energy consumer. The partnership ensures a stable supply of crude oil and natural gas.
  - India's experience in defense manufacturing and Nigeria's strategic location in West Africa make this a mutually beneficial partnership.
  - India supports Nigeria's efforts to modernize its agriculture and improve food security. Joint ventures in ICT and technology transfer further bolster Nigeria's industrialization.
- **Historical Ties:**
  - It dates back to the colonial era, with both countries sharing a common struggle against colonialism.
  - India's independence in 1947 and Nigeria's in 1960 created a foundation for solidarity and cooperation.
  - Both nations have been members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).
  - Beginning with the first high-level interaction in 1962 between PM Nehru and Nigeria's first PM, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa.
  - Nehru pledged India's support in Nigeria's development by providing doctors, teachers, engineers, and administrators.
    - ✓ By the late 1960s, Indian experts were widely present in Nigeria, fostering goodwill that remains strong today.
- **Bilateral Trade:**
  - Trade Volume: Bilateral trade exceeds USD 14 billion annually, making Nigeria India's largest trading partner in Africa.
    - ✓ The trade between the two nations has declined in recent years due to India replacing some Nigerian oil imports with cheaper Russian alternatives.
  - **Key Imports and Exports**:
    - ✓ India's Imports from Nigeria: Crude oil dominates, accounting for over 70% of India's imports from Nigeria. India is one of the largest buyers of Nigerian oil.

- ✓ India's Exports to Nigeria: Pharmaceuticals, engineering goods, automobiles, agricultural machinery, and textiles are significant exports.
  - o Indian companies in Nigeria employ the second-largest workforce after the government, with investments worth $27 billion.

Dr Jay Bhattacharya Nominated by Donald Trump as NIH Director

- The United States President-elect Donald Trump has nominated Indian-origin Dr Jay Bhattacharya to be the director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH).
  - o NIH is a group of 27 premier research institutes in the country.
  - o It studies everything from nutritional supplements, behavioural and social sciences, women's health, and various diseases like cancers and diabetes.
  - o With an annual budget of $48 billion, the NIH is the largest public funder of biomedical research in the world.
- Dr. Bhattacharya, a Stanford professor of health policy and economics, is known for his research on vulnerable populations and public health policies.

U.S. Returns over 1,400 Antiquities to India

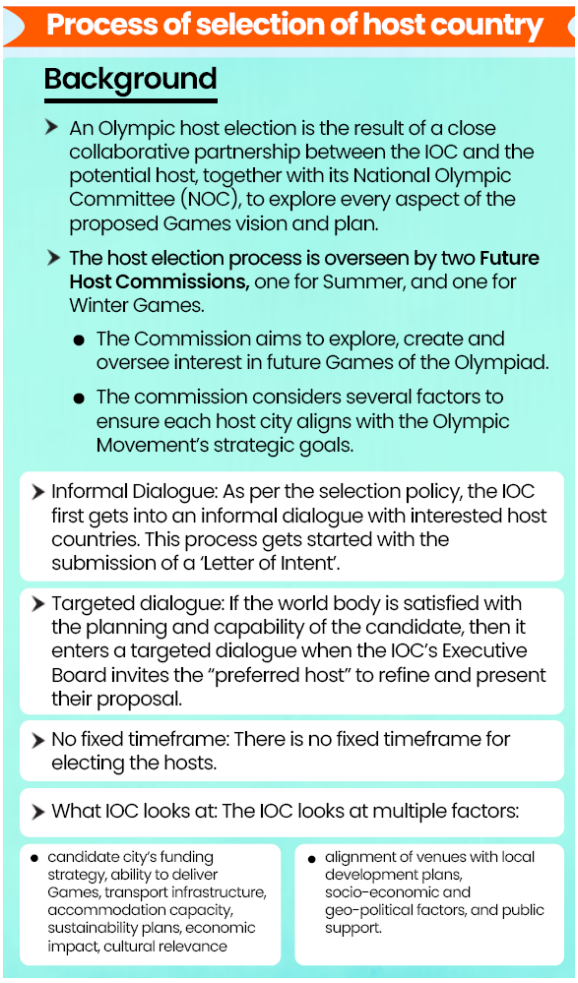
- The U.S. has returned over 1,400 Indian antiquities, collectively valued at $10 million, looted from India in the 1960s–1980s, with more than 600 additional pieces set for repatriation soon.
- Among the returned items are a sandstone sculpture of a celestial dancer, looted from a Madhya Pradesh temple in the 1980s, and the Tanesar Mother Goddess, a green-gray schist sculpture stolen from Rajasthan in the 1960s.
- The recoveries are part of ongoing investigations into trafficking networks linked to Subhash Kapoor and Nancy Wiener.

Taliban Appoint Ikramuddin Kamil as 'Acting Consul'

- The Taliban regime has appointed Ikramuddin Kamil as the "acting consul" in the **Afghan Mission in Mumbai**, marking the first such appointment in India since the Taliban's takeover in 2021.
- Kamil, an Afghan national who studied in India for seven years on an MEA scholarship, will serve Afghan nationals in India, though his official diplomatic status remains unrecognized by India.
  - o India does not recognise the Taliban regime that has been ruling Afghanistan since 2021.
  - o Despite this, India has been providing humanitarian aid, including wheat, medicines and medical supplies, to the Afghan people from time to time.
- India, which withdrew its diplomats from Kabul after the Taliban takeover, has not officially responded to the appointment.

India Makes Formal Bid to Host 2036 Olympics

- The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) submitted a 'Letter of Intent' to the International Olympic Committee (**IOC**) expressing India's interest in hosting the 2036 Olympics and Paralympics.
  - 2010 Commonwealth Games (New Delhi) was India's last major international multi-sport event.
  - Ahmedabad is currently a leading candidate to host the 2036 Games if India's bid is successful.
- With other strong contenders like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey also in the race, a decision won't be made until after the IOC elections next year.
- The competition among these countries will go through a rigorous selection process, led by the IOC's Future Host Commission.



International Olympic Committee (IOC)

- **Vision:** To Build a Better World through Sport.
- **As an organization:** In 1892, Pierre de Coubertin of France declared his intention to spearhead a movement to revive the ancient Greek Olympics.
  - His efforts led to the establishment of IOC in June 1894 as a not-for-profit independent international organisation.
  - It is based in Lausanne, Switzerland, the Olympic Capital.
- **Roles & Responsibilities**
  - IOC is the authority responsible for organising the modern (Summer, Winter, and Youth) Olympic Games.
  - It is the governing body of the National Olympic Committees (NOCs).

Riyadh Summit and Possible Impact on Gaza war

Saudi Arabia hosted a summit involving leaders from Arab and Islamic nations to address the escalating crisis in Palestine.

Riyadh Summit

- **Outcome**
  - In their closing statement, Arab and Islamic leaders condemned Israel's military actions in Gaza as "shocking crimes," including "genocide" and "ethnic cleansing."
  - They called for an independent international investigation into these acts.
  - The summit urged measures to end Israeli occupation.
  - It emphasized establishing a sovereign Palestinian state based on pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in line with the two-state solution and the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative.
- **Significance**
  - In recent years, some Arab nations normalized ties with Israel, bypassing the Palestine issue and deviating from the Arab Peace Initiative, which linked recognition of Israel to the creation of a Palestinian state.

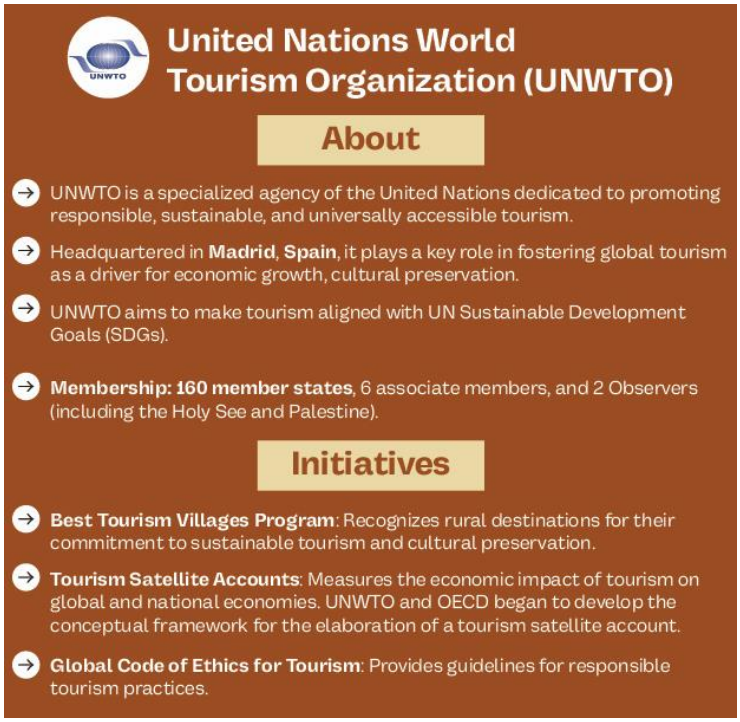
- The 2020 **Abraham Accords**, involving the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan, offered no concessions to Palestinians, unlike earlier agreements.
  - ✓ Earlier agreements such as Egypt's 1979 peace deal and Jordan's 1994 treaty, included steps towards Palestinian autonomy.
- Following the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack and Israel's retaliatory actions, Arab nations condemned Israel but avoided direct confrontation.
- At the Riyadh summit, they collectively expressed anger over Israel's actions and emphasized that resolving the Palestine issue is essential for lasting peace in West Asia.

Gaza War

- It refers to ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, the governing militant group in Gaza.
- Triggered by the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel, the war has escalated with Israel's extensive airstrikes and ground offensives in Gaza.

Dhudmaras among UNWTO's 'Best Tourism Villages'

- Dhudmaras, a tribal village in Chhattisgarh's Bastar district, has been selected by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) as one of the "Best Tourism Villages" globally, alongside 19 other villages from 60 nations.
- This acknowledgment highlights Dhudmaras's sustainable tourism & cultural preservation efforts.
- Located in **Kanger Valley National Park** and home to the ***Dhurwa tribe***, Dhudmaras promotes eco-tourism through activities like bamboo rafting, kayaking, trekking, and homestays.
- Tourism has provided an alternative to migration and the Naxal movement, offering steady employment to villagers.
- The Eco-Tourism Development Committee, involving members from 40 Dhurwa families, generates monthly earnings of ₹3–4 lakh from activities, half of which is reinvested in village development.
- Additional income sources include food stalls, sal leaf plate production, and cultural programmes like "Dekho Bastar."



South Asian Telecommunication Regulators' Council (SATRC 25) Meeting

- The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) hosted the 25th Meeting of SATRC) in New Delhi, which was organized by the Asia Pacific Telecommunity (APT).
- Delegations from eight member nations attended, including a notable presence from Taliban-controlled Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- During the meeting, TRAI Chairman **Anil Kumar Lahoti** was elected SATRC chair for the upcoming year.
- Topics discussed included: Expanding broadband access and addressing connectivity gaps; Tackling cybersecurity, spam, and the regulation of online platforms; Supporting inclusive development through ICT and smart city initiatives.

- The event showcased the importance of regional cooperation in addressing shared challenges in telecommunications and ICT development in South Asia.

10th Edition of the MED Mediterranean Dialogues

- The 10th edition of the **MED Mediterranean Dialogues** Conference was held at Rome, Italy.
  - The MED Dialogues, held annually in Rome, are led by Italy's Foreign Ministry and the Italian Institute for International Policy Studies (ISPI) to address Mediterranean security and socio-economic challenges.
- External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar represented India at the dialogues.
- While speaking, he emphasized the importance of strengthening India-Mediterranean ties, highlighting the region's opportunities and challenges in a volatile global context.
- He identified the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) as a potential "game changer".
- He noted India's annual trade with Mediterranean nations stands at $80 billion, with significant interests in energy, fertilisers, technology, defence, and more.

UN Advances Efforts Toward a Crimes Against Humanity Treaty

- The UN General Assembly's legal committee approved a landmark resolution on **November 22, 2024**, initiating negotiations for the first-ever treaty to prevent and punish crimes against humanity.
  - Sponsors of the resolution, led by **Mexico and Gambia** with the backing of 96 countries, emphasized the need to close legal gap in dealing with such crimes.
    - ✓ Existing treaties cover war crimes, genocide, and torture, but no treaty specifically addresses crimes against humanity, such as murder, rape, sexual slavery, and enforced disappearances.
- The resolution outlines a structured timeline, with preparatory sessions in 2026 and 2027 and formal negotiating sessions in 2028 and 2029.
- While some expressed disappointment at the extended timeline, the move is hailed as a significant step toward addressing impunity for grave human rights violations.

Necessity of a Separate Treaty for Crimes Against Humanity

- **Existing Legal Gaps**
  - No comprehensive international treaty specifically targeting crimes against humanity. This creates a legal vacuum, leaving many atrocities unaddressed and perpetrators unpunished.
- **Limitations of the International Criminal Court (ICC)**
  - The ICC can prosecute crimes against humanity but lacks jurisdiction over nearly 70 countries, including major nations like the United States, China, and India.
  - A treaty would strengthen the international legal framework by ensuring a **universal mechanism** for prosecution and accountability.
- **Broad Scope of Crimes Against Humanity**
  - A dedicated treaty would comprehensively define these crimes and establish uniform standards for prosecution.
- **Addressing Global Proliferation of Atrocities**
  - The rise of conflicts and state-sponsored atrocities in regions like Ethiopia, Myanmar, Gaza, Ukraine, and Sudan highlights the urgent need for a binding international instrument to combat impunity and protect civilians.
- **Universal Accountability**
  - By criminalizing such acts globally, a treaty would eliminate safe havens for perpetrators, ensuring that no region or individual is beyond the reach of justice.

Second India-CARICOM Summit

During his visit to Guyana, PM Modi co-chaired the **second India-CARICOM Summit** alongside Grenada's PM (who is the current Chair of CARICOM) and other CARICOM leaders.

Key Highlights

- **Seven Key Pillars to Strengthen India-CARICOM Relations – as enunciated by the PM**
  - **Trade**: Enhancing economic partnerships to foster mutual growth.
  - **Technology**: Promoting shared technological advancements and innovation.
  - **Tourism**: Boosting tourism ties between India and Caribbean countries.
  - **Talent**: Leveraging human resources and skills exchange for development.
  - **Tradition**: Celebrating & nurturing cultural connections between India and the Caribbean.
  - **Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)**: Continuing support for the SME sector, including a grant of 1 million dollars announced in 2023, with a focus on implementation.
  - **Renewable Energy and Climate Change**: Following up on discussions from 2019 on cooperative approaches to renewable energy and climate change, backed by a USD 150 million credit line.
- **Online Portal Proposal** - PM Modi suggested the creation of an online portal to facilitate collaboration among private sectors and stakeholders across the member nations, aligning with the vision of the **five Ts** — trade, technology, tourism, talent, and tradition.

ICC Issues Arrest Warrant against Israel's PM and Hamas Leader

- The **International Criminal Court (ICC)** has issued arrest warrants for Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, former defense minister Yoav Gallant, and Hamas leader Mohammed Diab Ibrahim Al-Masri for alleged **war crimes and crimes against humanity**.
- This follows ICC Prosecutor **Karim Khan's** announcement on May 20, seeking warrants for crimes linked to the **October 7 Hamas attack on Israel** and **Tel Aviv's military action in Gaza**.
- The ICC's arrest warrants are binding but rely on member states for enforcement.
  - If **Netanyahu** or **Gallant** travel to any of the ICC member states, those governments are obligated to arrest and extradite them to The Hague.
- The warrant serves more as a **moral victory for Palestine**, increasing international pressure on Israel and limiting Netanyahu's travel.

International Criminal Court (ICC)

- **About**
  - It is a permanent court to prosecute serious international crimes committed by individuals.
  - It tries crimes such as genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and aggression.
  - The court was established to fight global impunity and bring to justice criminals under international law, regardless of their rank or stature.
    - ♣ It is different from the United Nations' International Court of Justice, also at The Hague.
- **HQ:** The Hague, The Netherlands
- **Statute:** Before the ICC became functional in 2002, its founding treaty was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1998 in Rome, Italy, thereby making it the Rome Statute.
- **Membership**
  - To become a member of the ICC or State party to the Rome Statute, countries have to sign the statute and ratify it under their respective legislatures.
  - 124 countries are currently members of the ICC, with African countries making up the largest bloc.
  - Notably, countries including India, China, Iraq, North Korea and Turkey never signed the Rome Statute.
  - Others including the US, Russia, Israel and Syria signed, but never ratified it.

Second India-Australia Annual Summit

- PM Modi and Prime Minister Anthony Albanese of Australia held the 2nd India-Australia Annual Summit on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro.
    - The 1st Annual Summit was held in March 2023 in New Delhi during the State Visit of Prime Minister Albanese to India.
- Ahead of the **fifth anniversary of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2025**, they reviewed significant progress in areas like climate change, trade, defence, education, and cultural links.

Key Highlights

- **Economy, Trade, and Investment**
    - Highlighted increasing two-way trade under Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA).
    - Committed to advancing the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA).
    - Promoted collaboration between India's "Make in India" initiative and Australia's "Future Made in Australia" program.
    - Announced the extension of the Australia-India Business Exchange (AIBX) program for four years.
- **Energy, Science, Technology, and Space**
    - Launched the ***India-Australia Renewable Energy Partnership*** to advance solar PV, green hydrogen, and energy storage projects.
    - Strengthened critical minerals collaboration under an MoU between KABIL and Australia's Critical Minerals Office.
    - Enhanced space cooperation, including India's Gaganyaan mission and joint satellite launches.
- **Defence and Security**
    - Emphasized renewing the Joint Declaration on Defence and Security Cooperation in 2025.
    - Focused on maritime security, with plans for a joint maritime security roadmap and increased defence industry collaboration.
- **Parliamentary, Educational, and People-to-People Ties**
    - Acknowledged inter-parliamentary cooperation as vital to the strategic partnership.
    - Welcomed new consulates in Bengaluru and Brisbane to strengthen bilateral relations.
    - Highlighted Australia's Working Holiday Maker visa and the Mobility Arrangement for Talented Early-professionals Scheme (MATES).
- **Future Outlook**
    - Agreed to deepen ties for mutual and regional benefit.
    - Planned to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2025 and host the next Annual Summit in the same year.

APEC Summit 2024

- APEC Economic Leaders met in Lima, under Peru's theme of "***Empower. Include. Grow***."
- Leaders endorsed the ***Machu Picchu Declaration***, a consensus declaration to advance efforts to achieve APEC economies' ambitious economic growth objectives.
- Leaders also endorsed the ***Lima Roadmap*** to **Promote the Transition to the Formal and Global Economies (2025-2040)** and ***Ichma Statement*** on A ***New Look at the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific Agenda***.
- Leaders reaffirmed their support for the **rules-based multilateral trading system** and **APEC Putrajaya Vision 2024**, including sustainable and inclusive development through the **Aotearoa Plan of Action**.

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)

- It is a regional economic forum and was formed in 1989.

- **Aim** - "*leverage the growing interdependence of the Asia-Pacific and create greater prosperity for the people of the region **through regional economic integration***".
  - The focus of APEC has been on trade and economic issues and hence, it terms the countries as "**economies**".
- It has been operating on the basis of non-binding commitments with decisions taken through commitments and consensus undertaken on a voluntary basis.
- **Member Countries**: Currently, APEC has **21 members**.
  - The criterion for membership, however, is that each member must be an ***independent economic entity, rather than a sovereign state***.
  - The grouping's current members are Australia, Brunei, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Indonesia, China, Japan, South Korea, Russia, Canada, United States, Mexico, Peru, Chile, Malaysia, Vietnam, Singapore, Thailand and Taiwan.

First-ever Global Maritime Conference

India hosted its first-ever global maritime conference, ***Sagarmanthan: The Great Oceans Dialogue***, in New Delhi. The event was co-organized by the **Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways** and the **Observer Research Foundation (ORF)**.

- **Objective**
  - Highlighting India's growing focus on **global maritime trade and merchant shipping**.
  - Effort to align India's maritime aspirations with its status as the world's most populous nation and a leading economy.
- India contributed **16% of global growth in 2023** and is projected to become the third-largest global economy within three years.
- **Maritime governance** and **international collaborations** in commerce, trade, and connectivity are becoming increasingly critical for India's development.

U.S.-India Indian Ocean Dialogue

- India and the U.S. held the inaugural U.S.-India Indian Ocean Dialogue.
- **Agenda and Objectives**
  - Focus on promoting **security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region**.
  - Discussion on the **Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET) Intersessional** to enhance cooperation in **technological innovation and production**.
- **Background of India-U.S. Cooperation**
  - Partnership in Indo-Pacific region dates back to January 2015, with the **Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region** issued during President Barack Obama's visit to India.
- The dialogue underscores the strategic partnership between India and the U.S. in the Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific regions, with a focus on security, technological innovation, and multilateral cooperation.

Israel Bans UNRWA

- Israel formally notified the **United Nations** of its decision to sever ties with the **UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA)**.
- The Israel had alleged that many employees of UNRWA participated in the October 7 massacre. It further claims that many of the employees are Hamas operatives.
- As per Israel, UNRWA is part of the problem in the Gaza Strip and not part of the solution.
- **Potential Consequences of this action**

- **Employee Restrictions:** Fears of restricted movement for UNRWA staff in the occupied West Bank and loss of coordination for checkpoint crossings and permits.
- **Aid Restrictions:** UNRWA and other agencies accuse Israel of limiting humanitarian aid to Gaza, affecting the **2.4 million displaced residents**.

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)

- The **UNRWA** is a UN agency established in **1949** to provide support and assistance to Palestinian refugees displaced by the **1948 Arab-Israeli War** and subsequent conflicts.
  - It is the only UN agency dedicated specifically to one group of refugees.
  - It provides relief and essential services to **5.9 million registered Palestinian refugees.**
- **Geographical Areas of Operation:** UNRWA works in five regions: Gaza Strip; West Bank (including East Jerusalem); Jordan; Lebanon; Syria.

DEFENSE AND SECURITY

Digital Arrest Scams - ED Files Charge Sheet

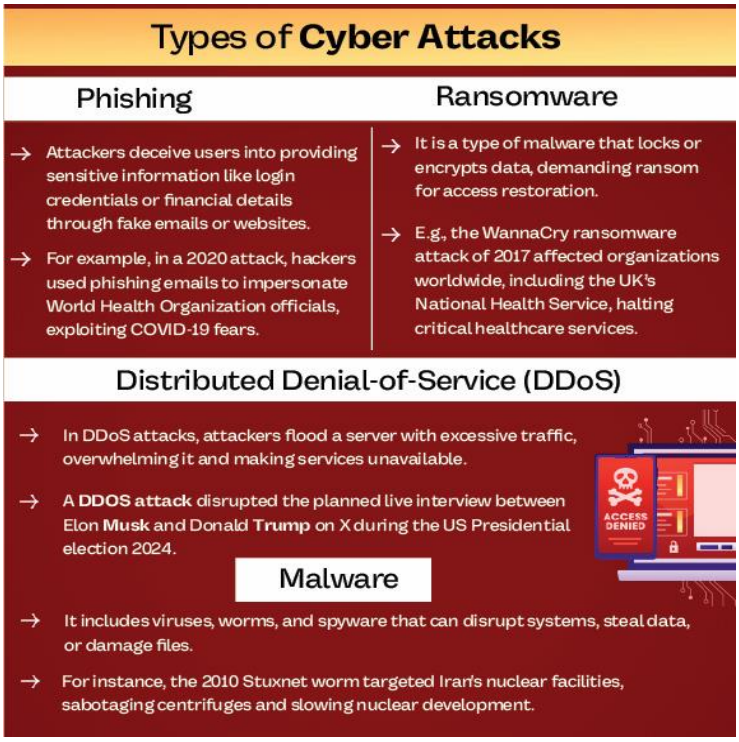
- The Enforcement Directorate (ED) filed a prosecution complaint under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) against eight individuals involved in cyber scams.
  - These accused allegedly defrauded people via fake IPOs and stock investments, primarily using social media platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, and Telegram.
    - ✓ Known as **'pig-butchering'** scams, stock market investment scams entice victims with promises of high returns.
    - ✓ They use fake websites and misleading WhatsApp groups that appear connected to reputable financial firms.
- The ED detailed how using digital arrest fraudsters disguised themselves as officials from Customs or the CBI, falsely accusing victims of legal violations to intimidate them into transferring large sums.
  - Funds from victims were funneled through "mule" accounts, converted to cryptocurrency, and transferred abroad.
  - Key accused individuals recruited directors for shell companies and facilitated bank account openings, knowingly assisting in money laundering.
- Also, Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) has issued a new advisory warning against digital arrests. It reminded citizens that legitimate officials do not make demands over video calls and urged people to report suspicious activity via the national cybercrime helpline (1930) or the cybercrime portal.

Report Reveals 2023 Ransomware Attack on Key Defence Unit

- According to the 2023-24 annual report of the Department of Personnel Training (DoPT), a crucial defence unit was affected by a ransomware attack in 2023.
- The CBI investigated multiple cybercrimes with national security implications, including ransomware, a massive DDOS attack on critical infrastructure, and a malware breach within a Ministry.

Key Highlights from the 2023-24 DoPT Report

- **Data Breach and Rising Cybersecurity Threats**
  - In October 2023, Resecurity reported a major data leak at the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), exposing Aadhaar and passport information of 81.5 crore Indians.
  - CERT-In documented 15,92,917 cybersecurity incidents in 2023, including website intrusions, phishing, and data breaches—a significant rise from 53,117 incidents in 2017.
  - Remedial measures were implemented in collaboration with stakeholders.
- **International Collaboration**
  - The CBI partnered with international agencies, including the FBI, Royal

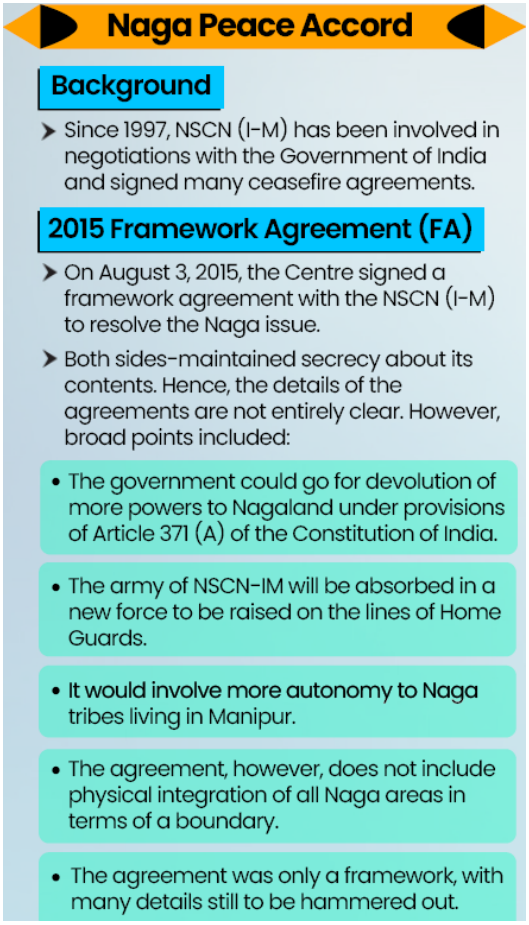


Canadian Mounted Police, and Singapore police, to dismantle fraud networks operating from India.
    - Notable cases involved cryptocurrency scams, call centre fraud targeting U.S. and Canadian citizens, and crypto fraud linked to Australian tax evasion.
- **Financial Fraud Investigations**
    - The CBI tackled cyber fraud impacting Indian citizens, including app-based investment scams originating in neighboring countries.
    - An IMPS fraud case initiated by RBI involved ₹820 crore in reversed transactions across banks.
- **Revised Cybersecurity Oversight and Coordination Roles**
    - In September 2023, the Cabinet Secretariat revised the Allocation of Business Rules.
    - The National Security Council Secretariat, under NSA Ajit Doval, was assigned to lead cyber security coordination.
    - The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology was designated to secure telecom networks and the Ministry of Home Affairs to handle cybercrimes.

{For more about cyber warfare, Please refer The Recitals June 2024}

NSCN (I-M) Demands Third-Party Intervention in Naga Conflict

- The Isak-Muivah faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN I-M) has requested third-party intervention to resolve the longstanding Naga political issue with the Indian government.
- Accusing the Centre of betraying the 2015 Framework Agreement, NSCN (I-M) warns it may resume armed resistance if this proposal is denied.
- **Issues with Framework Agreement**
    - **Issue of sovereignty due to Poor draft of the framework agreement (FA)**
        - ✓ The wordings of the FA are vague, leaving for both sides to interpret the deal according to their own convenience.
        - ✓ E.g., FA at one point says, "Inclusive peaceful co-existence of the two entities sharing sovereign power".
        - ✓ NSCN now argues that its sovereignty has to be retained. This is not accepted by the Government.
    - **Issue of separate flag and constitution**
        - ✓ NSCN(IM) contends that the idea of "sharing sovereign power" and "co-existence of the two entities" means:
            - Naga people will be entitled to their own national flag and constitution.
        - ✓ The FA was signed in 2015, when special status of Jammu and Kashmir existed.
        - ✓ However, the situation changed after scrapping of Article 370 and hence Centre cannot agree to such a demand.
    - **Smaller groups such as Naga National Political Group (NNPGs) got strengthened**



- ✓ Another obstacle in the talks was that smaller groups such as NNPGs got strengthened during the tenure of previous interlocutor N Ravi.
  - He used the strategy of dividing the groups by giving more prominence to the smaller groups.
  - This annoyed the larger groups such as NSCN(IM) and they stayed away from the talks.

o **Release of the copy of the sensitive Framework Agreement**

- ✓ In August 2020, NSCN-IM released a copy of the sensitive FA. This reduced the trust between the negotiating parties.

o **Trust deficit between the then Governor of Nagaland and NSCN**

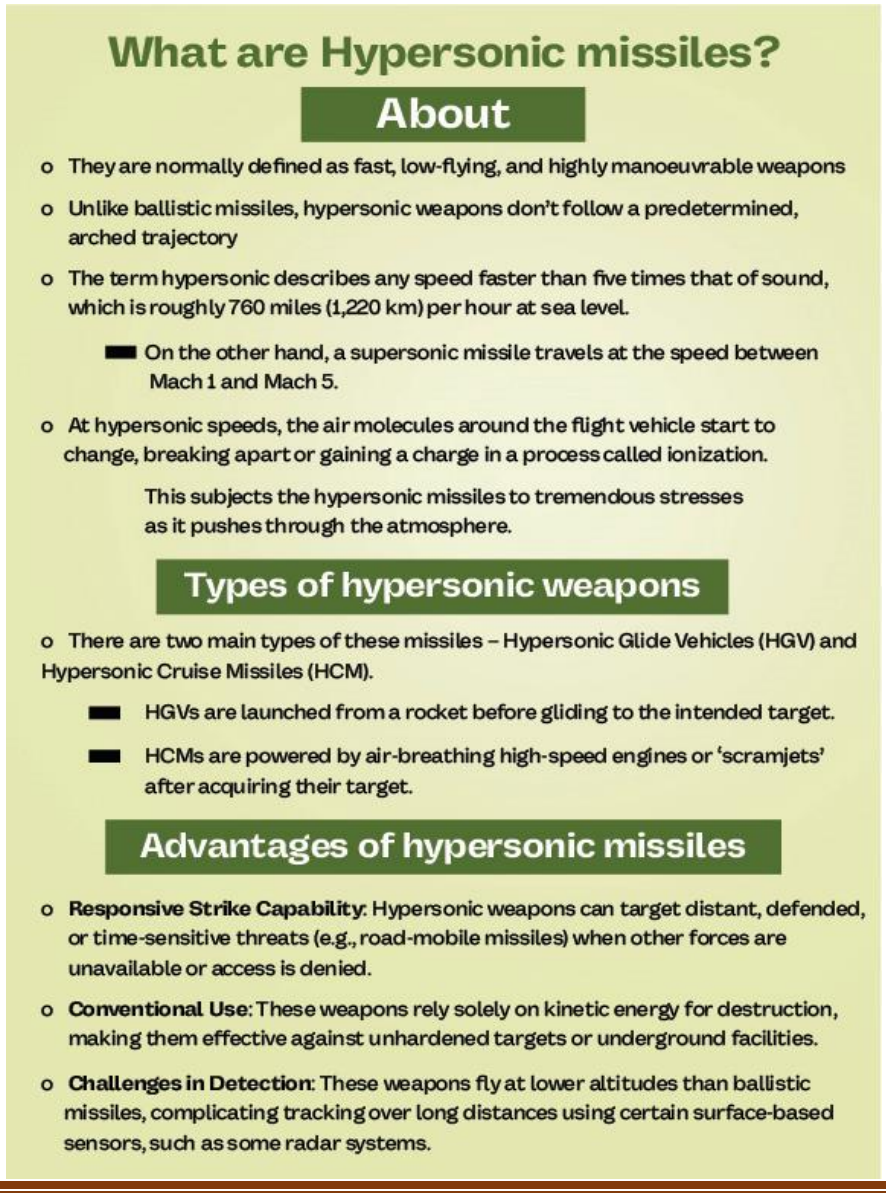
- ✓ The group accused the then Nagaland Governor N Ravi, an interlocutor, of deleting a keyword.
- ✓ In November 2017, Ravi signed an agreement with seven groups who had come together under the banner of the NNPGs.
  - This did not include the NSCN (IM), which considers itself the principal representative of Naga aspirations.
  - As a result, NSCN (IM) accused Ravi of attempting to "segregate the Naga civil society".
- ✓ Later, R N Ravi resigned as interlocutor for the Naga peace talks.

India Tests its 1st Hypersonic Missile

- Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) successfully flight-tested a long-range hypersonic missile off the coast of Odisha.
- The missile is capable of flying at Mach 6, executing mid-flight manoeuvres, and can carry various payloads for ranges greater than 1,500 km for the Armed Forces.
- It has been indigenously developed by laboratories of the Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Missile Complex, Hyderabad, along with various other DRDO labs and industry partners.

India's Journey in Hypersonic Technology

- **Initial Challenges**: The 2019 test of the Hypersonic Technology Demonstrator Vehicle (HSTDV) failed.
  - o HSTDV serves as a crucial building block in the development of long-range hypersonic weapons.



- **Milestone in 2020**: A second test demonstrated success with a scramjet-powered cruise vehicle achieving Mach 6 for 22-23 seconds.
- **Further Development**: Trials of longer duration and higher reliability are planned before deployment.

India Successfully Tests K-4 Nuclear-Capable Missile

- India has successfully test-fired the indigenously developed **nuclear-capable ballistic missile K-4** from the ***INS Arighaat***, a nuclear-powered submarine, in the Bay of Bengal.
- The K-4, with a strike range of over 3,500 km, enhances India's strategic deterrence and positions the nation among six countries with submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) technology, joining the US, Russia, China, France, and UK.
- The successful test validated both the missile's full operational range and the INS Arighaat's capability to launch long-range nuclear missiles, bolstering India's nuclear triad and aligning with its 'no first use' policy.
- This achievement underscores India's readiness in the Indo-Pacific region and its growing technological prowess, with further developments like the **K-5 SLBM underway**, boasting a range exceeding 5,000 km.

Four Mechanised Infantry Battalions Receive President's Colours

- Four battalions of the Army's Mechanised Infantry were presented President's Colours by Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi.
- The honoured units include the 26th and 27th Battalions of the Mechanised Infantry Regiment and the 20th and 22nd Battalions of the Brigade of The Guards.
- The President's Colours, a ceremonial flag symbolizing a unit's identity and achievements, is one of the highest military honors, acknowledging meritorious service and boosting troop morale.

Tri-Services Exercise 'Poorvi Prahar'

- The Army, Navy, and Air Force conducted a four-day joint exercise, *Poorvi Prahar*, in Arunachal Pradesh's Shi-Yomi district.
- The exercise validated joint structures for intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, rapid mobilisation, and operational logistics.

India, Japan Sign Agreement for UNICORN Masts for Indian Naval Warships

- India and Japan have signed a Memorandum of Implementation (MoI) for the co-development of the **UNICORN (Unified Complex Radio Antenna) mast**, designed to enhance the stealth and communication capabilities of Indian Naval warships.
- The UNICORN mast integrates communication systems to improve naval platform stealth.
- This marks the first instance of Japan exporting defence technology under the 2015 India-Japan Defence Technology Cooperation agreement.
- The agreement also aligns with ongoing India-Japan efforts to strengthen Indo-Pacific peace and stability, including exploring ship maintenance and defence assistance to third countries.

Meghalaya-based Insurgent Group HNLC Banned for Another Five Years

- The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has extended the ban on the Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC), a Meghalaya-based insurgent group, declaring it an "unlawful association" for five more years under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967.
- The MHA cited the group's involvement in violent activities, extortion, intimidation, and links with other northeastern insurgent groups.

- HNLC seeks the secession of Khasi- and Jaintia-dominated areas in Meghalaya, posing a threat to India's sovereignty and integrity.

Centre Reimposes AFSPA in 6 Volatile Manipur Areas

- The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has reimposed the "Disturbed Areas" status under the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) in six police station jurisdictions in Manipur's valley areas, including violence-hit Jiribam.
  - The AFSPA has been in effect in Manipur since 1980, with gradual withdrawals and reintroductions based on the security situation.
- The decision comes amidst ongoing ethnic violence that began a year and a half ago.
- This includes areas in the Imphal valley, such as Sekmai, Lamsang, Lamlai, Moirang, Leimakhong, and Jiribam. The status had been rolled back in these areas between April 2022 and April 2023, just before the ongoing ethnic violence began.

First Ever Space Exercise 'Antariksha Abhyas – 2024'

- The Defence Space Agency of the Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff conducted **'Antariksha Abhyas – 2024'**, a three-day exercise, to address threats to and from space-based assets and services.
- This first-of-its-kind exercise aims to:
  - Secure national strategic objectives in space.
  - Integrate India's space capabilities into military operations.
  - Enhance understanding of space-based dependencies and vulnerabilities.
  - Develop responses to potential denial or disruption of space services.
- The exercise involves:
  - Defence Space Agency and its allied units.
  - Personnel from the Army, Navy, Air Force, Defence Cyber Agency, Defence Intelligence Agency, and Strategic Forces Command.
  - Representatives from ISRO, DRDO, and academia.
- The exercise underscores India's commitment to safeguarding its space-based assets and fostering advancements in space and defence technologies.

MHA Approves First All Women Battalion for CISF

- The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has approved the creation of the **first all-women battalion of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF)**.
  - A battalion comprises around 1,000 personnel.
- Women currently make up over 7% of CISF personnel and prefer CISF among central armed police forces (CAPFs). The initiative will inspire more young women to join CISF.

DRDO Carries Maiden Test of LRLACM

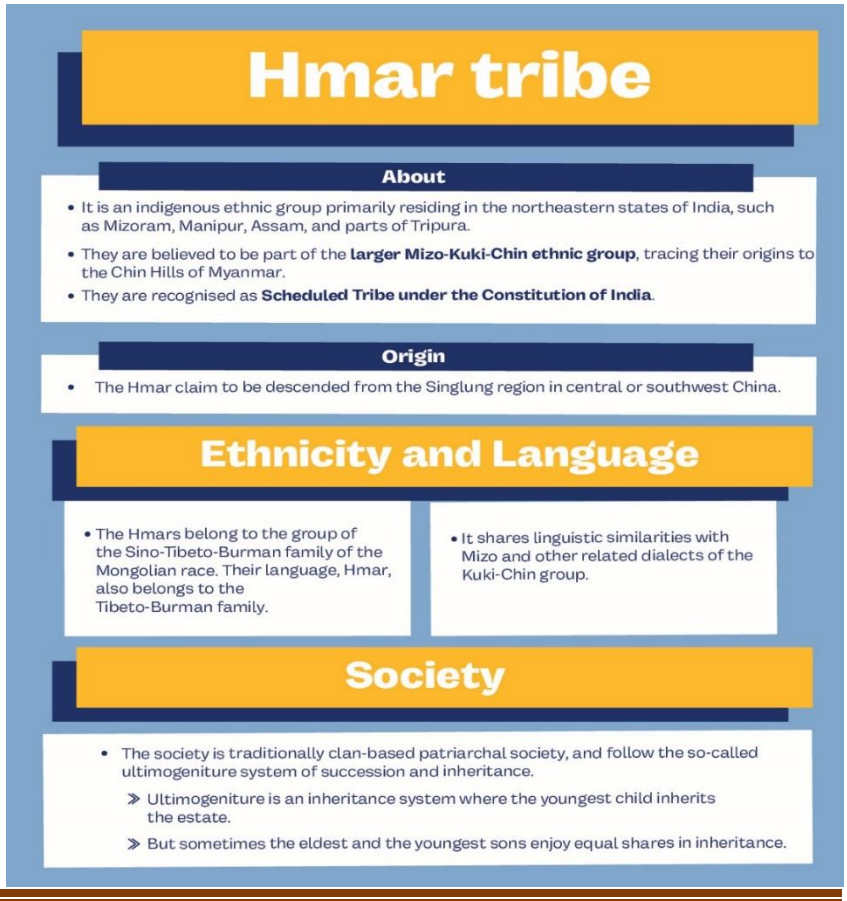
- DRDO conducted the maiden flight-test of a ***Long Range Land Attack Cruise Missile (LRLACM)*** with a range of 1,000 km from the Integrated Test Range in Chandipur, Odisha, using a mobile articulated launcher.
- This new variant of the **Nirbhay LRLACM** features improved capabilities, including advanced avionics, reliable performance, and way-point navigation for varied altitudes and speeds.
- Developed by the **Aeronautical Development Establishment** in Bengaluru with contributions from DRDO laboratories and Indian industries, the missile has Bharat Dynamics Limited and Bharat Electronics Limited as development-cum-production partners.

Project Shaurya Gatha

- Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan launched Project 'Shaurya Gatha' to conserve and promote India's military heritage through education and tourism.
- The project is an initiative by the *Department of Military Affairs and the United Service Institution (USI) of India.*
- It was unveiled during the second annual **Indian Military Heritage Festival**, which aims to engage various stakeholders, including think tanks, corporations, and scholars, on India's military history, national security, and self-reliance in defence under Aatmanirbhar Bharat.
    - The festival seeks to address public unawareness about India's military heritage and contemporary security issues.

Anti-terror conference 2024

- A two-day anti-terror conference 2024 in New Delhi was inaugurated by the Union Home Minister.
- The event, hosted by the National Investigation Agency (NIA), aimed to shape future counter-terrorism policies and strategies.
- Major issues discussed included the role of organized crime in terror funding in northeast India, the use of encrypted apps, connections between organized criminal gangs and terrorism, and the regulation of social media in terror cases.
- While addressing the conference, the Union Home Minister said that the Centre will soon bring a national counter-terrorism policy and strategy.
    - He highlighted a 70% reduction in terror incidents since 2014, attributing this to the government's zero-tolerance policy and proactive strategies.
    - The shelf life of terrorists has decreased from two years to a few days due to enhanced efforts by state and central agencies.
    - Violence in Jammu and Kashmir, Naxal-affected areas, and northeastern states has significantly declined.
- The Home Ministry introduced a vision for *model* Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) and Special Task Force (STF) structures for states and Union Territories.
- Standard operating procedures (SOPs) have been shared with states, allowing customization based on local needs.



10 Militants Die In Attack On Manipur CRPF Camp

In Manipur's Jiribam district, ten suspected militants, allegedly from the **Hmar community** under the Kuki-Zo umbrella, were killed in a shootout with security forces.

ENVIRONMENT AND GEOGRAPHY

Hasdeo Arand Forest

Recently a major protest erupted over clearing trees of Hasdeo forest in Chhattisgarh for mining of coal.

About Hasdeo arand (lungs of Chhattisgarh)

- Hasdeo Arand is the "largest un-fragmented forest in Central India consisting of pristine Sal (Shorea robusta) and teak forests as per The Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE).
- The Hasdeo River, a major tributary of the Mahanadi River, originates in this forest, providing water to millions of people. The forest is a catchment area for the Hasdeo Bango Dam.
- Numerous indigenous tribes, such as the Gond and Baiga, depend on the forest for their livelihoods and cultural practices.

Coral Triangle

Experts recommend the Coral Triangle be classified as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area. They also highlighted alarming facts about oil and gas activities in the Coral Triangle.

Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA)

- It is a specific area of the marine environment that requires special protection due to its unique ecological, socio-economic, or scientific significance. These areas are vulnerable to damage from international shipping activities.
- The International Maritime Organization (IMO) is responsible for identifying and designating PSSAs. Examples: The Great Barrier Reef, the Galapagos Islands, and the Wadden Sea.

Coral Triangle ("Amazon of the Seas")

- It is a marine region in the Western Pacific Ocean known for its exceptional marine biodiversity. It spans across six countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Solomon Islands, and Timor-Leste.

Key Features

- Marine Biodiversity Hotspot: It is home to the highest marine biodiversity on Earth, with over 75% of the world's coral species and 37% of reef fish species.
- The Coral Triangle Initiative (CTI) was established to promote conservation, focusing on sustainable fisheries, marine conservation, and adaptation to climate change impacts.

DANA- Weather Pattern in Spain

Flash floods caused by the DANA have led to several deaths of in the eastern Spanish region of Valencia.

About DANA

- Locally known as "gota fría" (cold drop), it is a meteorological phenomenon that occurs in the Mediterranean region, particularly along the Spanish Mediterranean coast.
- It's characterized by a mass of cold air that descends rapidly from the upper atmosphere, leading to intense rainfall, flooding, and severe weather conditions.
- In recent years, the term "DANA" (Depresión Aislada en Niveles Altos, or Isolated Depression at High Levels) has been adopted to refer to this phenomenon. This change was made to avoid sensationalism and better communicate the meteorological conditions associated with this event.
- However, the term "gota fría" is still widely used, particularly in popular media and by the general public.

Why is it Called a "Cold Drop"?

The term "cold drop" refers to the sudden influx of cold air from the upper atmosphere. This cold air mass can trigger intense thunderstorms and heavy rainfall, often causing significant damage and disruption.

Key Characteristics

- Isolated Low-Pressure System: A detached low-pressure system forms in the upper atmosphere.
- Rapid Descent: The cold air mass descends rapidly, bringing significant amounts of moisture.
- Intense Rainfall: This rapid descent can lead to heavy rainfall and flash floods, especially in mountainous regions.
- Localized Impact: While the exact location of the impact can vary, coastal areas are often particularly vulnerable.

COP-16 to CBD

The 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP-16) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), was held in Cali, Colombia.

About COP-16

- 190 countries discussed measures to achieve global biodiversity goals, including the ambitious 30-by-30 target.
- It aims to finalize mechanisms for implementing the *Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (**KMGBF**) targets*, which were set in 2022.
- **India's contribution:** India presented an updated biodiversity plan, projecting an expenditure of ₹81,664 crore for biodiversity and conservation from 2025-30, building on the ₹32,207 crore spent from 2018-22.

Key Outcomes from COP-16

- *Expanded Role of Indigenous Peoples*: COP-16 recognized the vital role of indigenous peoples and local communities in preserving biodiversity, and a new subsidiary body was established to preserve and integrate their traditional knowledge, innovations, and practices.
- *Cali Fund for Digital Sequence Information (DSI):* A fund was established to manage benefits from the use of DSI on genetic resources, ensuring equitable sharing, especially with indigenous and local communities.
- *Resource Mobilization Strategy*: COP-16 aimed to secure $200 billion per year by 2030 to fund biodiversity initiatives globally.
- *National Biodiversity Targets:* 119 countries submitted national targets aligned with 23 **KMGBF** targets.

7th Assembly Session of ISA

The 7thInternational Solar Alliance (ISA) Assembly session held in Delhi concluded with key leadership elections, the review of initiatives, and deliberations on advancing global solar energy adoption.

Outcomes of 7th Session

- India was unanimously elected President, and France won the contested Co-Presidency against Grenada. Eight Vice Presidents from ISA's regional groups were also selected, including Ghana, Seychelles, Australia, and Germany.
- SolarX Startup Challenge: Encourages innovative business ideas in the solar energy sector.
- STAR-C Initiative: Focuses on training and infrastructure to ensure high-quality solar products.
- Global Solar Facility: Aims to increase investments in areas lacking access to solar energy.
- First International Solar Festival: Promotes creativity and global cooperation for solar energy advancements.

- ISA released the 3rd edition of its World Solar Report series at the 7th Assembly, highlighting solar growth, investment trends, technological advancements, and green hydrogen's potential in **Africa.**

{For more details about ISA; kindly refer The Recitals (July 2024)}

River City Alliance

The Union Ministry of Jal Shakti inaugurated Ganga-Utsav 2024 in Haridwar under River City Alliance.

About River City Alliance (RCA)

- It is launched in November 2021 by the Ministry of Jal Shakti and the Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs to promote sustainable river development & Planning.
  - ✓ The Secretariat of the Alliance is set up at the National Institute for Urban Affairs (NIUA).
- Membership: Initially comprising 30 member cities, the RCA has expanded to include 110 river cities across India. The Alliance is open to all river cities of India. Any river city can join the Alliance at any time.

Global Partnerships

- Based on the success of the RCA, the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) launched the ***Global River Cities Alliance (GRCA)*** at COP28 in Dubai aiming to foster global cooperation in river management and conservation.
- GRCA is an alliance covering 275+ global river-cities in 11 countries, international funding agencies and knowledge management partners and is the first of its kind in the world.
- Participants: India, Egypt, the Netherlands, Denmark, Ghana, Australia, Bhutan, Cambodia, and Japan, as well as cities such as The Hague, Adelaide, and Szolnok.

Chonkus Cyanobacteria

Researchers found the mutant cyanobacteria Chonkus which could help in carbon capture. It is a unique strain of cyanobacteria discovered in the volcanic waters off the coast of Italy's Vulcano Island.

Key Characteristics

- Carbon-Hungry: Chonkus has a voracious appetite for carbon dioxide, making it a potential tool in combating climate change.
- Rapid Growth: It grows quickly in carbon-rich environments, further enhancing its carbon sequestration potential.
- Sinking Ability: Chonkus has a tendency to sink, carrying the absorbed carbon to the ocean floor, where it can be sequestered for long periods.

Applications

- Carbon Capture and Storage: Chonkus could be used to develop biological carbon capture technologies, helping to reduce atmospheric CO2 levels.
- Biofuel Production: Its rapid growth and high biomass production make it a potential candidate for biofuel production.
- Bioremediation: Chonkus could be used to clean up polluted waters by absorbing pollutants.

About Cyanobacteria (also called blue-green algae)

- These single-celled organisms using sunlight to make own food live in fresh, brackish (combined salt and fresh water), and marine water.
- In warm, nutrient-rich (high in phosphorus and nitrogen) environments, cyanobacteria can multiply quickly, creating blooms that spread across the water's surface.
- It blooms can form in warm, slow-moving waters that are rich in nutrients from sources such as fertilizer runoff or septic tank overflows.

Chhattisgarh's New Tiger Reserve

Indian government has notified the 56th Tiger Reserve of the country in Chhattisgarh i.e. Guru Ghasidas - Tamor Pingla Tiger Reserve

Guru Ghasidas - Tamor Pingla Tiger Reserve

- **About the reserve**
  - Guru Ghasidas-Tamor Pingla is the **fourth tiger reserve in Chhattisgarh** after **Achanakmar, Indravati**, and **Udanti - Sitanadi**.
  - With an area of 2,829 sq km, it is the third largest tiger reserve in India.
- **Geographical location**
  - The reserve is spread across **four districts in northern Chhattisgarh's Sarguja region**: Manendragarh-Chirmiri-Bharatpur (MCB), Korea, Surajpur, and Balrampur.
- **Connectivity**
  - Situated between Bandhavgarh (Madhya Pradesh) and Palamau (Jharkhand) Tiger Reserves, with proximity to Sanjay Dubri Tiger Reserve (Madhya Pradesh), forming the largest contiguous habitat for tigers.

Argentina Considering Leaving the Paris Agreement

Argentina's President Javier Milei is considering withdrawing from the Paris Agreement, following his government's decision to pull negotiators from the COP29 climate summit.

This review coincides with President-elect Donald Trump's plans to exit the accord for the second time, raising concerns over the future of global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Potential Impact of Argentina's Withdrawal from the Paris Agreement

- **Global Concerns**
  - Experts fear Argentina's exit could create a domino effect. This would jeopardize global climate goals, which require a 42% reduction in emissions by 2030 and 57% by 2035 to limit warming to 1.5°C.
- **Argentina's Role in Climate Policy**
  - As South America's second-largest economy and the **24th-largest GHG emitter**, Argentina plays a significant role in global emissions.
  - It holds substantial fossil fuel reserves, including the second-largest shale gas and fourth-largest shale oil reserves globally.
- **Economic and Diplomatic Risks**
  - Countries like the EU are introducing climate-related import duties, making Argentina less attractive as a trading partner.

Reports in News

State of climate report 2024 (Published annually by the WMO since 1993- The World Meteorological Organization)	• **Record-Breaking Temperatures:** 2024 is on track to be the warmest year on record, with global average temperatures surpassing pre-industrial levels by 1.5 degrees Celsius. • Ice Loss: Glaciers and ice sheets are melting at an alarming rate, contributing to sea-level rise. Global sea level rise accelerated to 4.77 mm/year (2014-2023), doubling the rate of 1993-2002.
Greenhouse Gas Bulletin 2024 (By WMO) (considers globally averaged surface mole fractions of CO2, methane (CH4) & nitrous oxide (N2O).)	• *CO2 Levels:* CO2 concentrations have increased by 11.4% in just 20 years, and the long lifetime of CO2 in the atmosphere locks in future temperature increases. • *CH4 and N2O Levels:* Both gases have reached record highs, with methane accounting for about 16% of the warming effect of long-lived greenhouse gases • Global Temperature Increase: The average global temperature is now more than 1.1°C above the 1850-1900 pre-industrial average.

Species in News

North Atlantic right whale (IUCN: Critically endangered) 	• A group of researchers that studies the whales said that the population of North Atlantic right whales increased about 4% from 2020 level after the whale's population fell by about 25% from 2010 to 2020. • These whales are migratory animals, spending the winter in warmer waters and migrating to the poles for cooler waters in late summer. • These whales inhabit the temperate and subpolar waters of the north Atlantic and north Pacific oceans. • There are three recognized species of right whales that occur in different parts of the world. These are Southern right whales (Eubalaena australis), North Atlantic right whales (Eubalaena glacialis) and North Pacific right whales.
Markhor (IUCN: 'Near Threatened') 	• It is the largest wild goat in the world. It is battling for survival in Jammu and Kashmir and measures must be taken to protect its habitat to increase its population. • It is indigenous to mountainous regions of Central and South Asia. • It is considered to be an apt flagship species for catalysing conservation in these mountain tracks. • It is known for its thick fur, flowing beard and corkscrew horns. • It is found in the moist to semi-arid mountain tracts of Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. • In J&K, Markhor's population is found in Shopian, Banihal pass to Shamsbari area of the Kazinag Uri and Pir Panjal range in Poonch.
Tuna Fish 	• The Department of Fisheries, under the Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying has notified the Development of Tuna Cluster in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY). • They are pelagic marine fish, spending their entire lives relatively near the surface of tropical, subtropical and temperate oceans and seas. • There are seven main species of tuna consumed by humans including albacore, skipjack, yellowfin and three species of bluefin tuna.

	• Habitat: They can be found in tropical and temperate regions of all oceans
Dicliptera polymorpha	• It is a unique plant species, that has been discovered in the Western Ghats, showcasing remarkable adaptations to fire-prone grassland ecosystems. • Spread: Grasslands of the northern Western Ghats, particularly Talegaon-Dabhade (Maharashtra). • It is fire-resilient and pyrophytic. It exhibits dual-blooming patterns. It is unique spicate inflorescence structure, a rarity among Indian species.
Amorphophallus titanium (Corpse flower)	• It is recently bloomed in Australia. • It has the largest unbranched inflorescence in the plant kingdom, growing up to 8 feet tall in cultivation and up to 12 feet in the wild. • It blooms for just 2-3 days every two to three years or more, depending on energy accumulation in its underground corm. • The plant is native to the tropical rainforests of Sumatra, Indonesia, and was first documented in 1878. • IUCN Status: Endangered
Eastern Imperial Eagle (Aquila heliaca)	• It is a rare and vulnerable bird of prey, was recently sighted in the Pulluzhi kole wetlands, a Ramsar-protected area in Kerala. • It is found in old forests, mountain and riverine forests, and isolated tall trees for nesting. • It exhibits reverse sexual dimorphism: females larger than males. • Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Ultra-Enforcement Concrete (UEC)

The Government is working to reduce the cost of the construction of public infrastructure by 25% with the use of ultra-enforcement concrete.

About Ultra-Enforcement Concrete (UEC- adapted from Malaysian technology)

- It is a specialized type of concrete that exhibits exceptional mechanical properties, such as high strength, durability, and resistance to cracking.

Key Characteristics

- High Strength: UHPC can achieve compressive strengths of up to 200 MPa, which is significantly higher than traditional concrete.
- Reduced Permeability: Its dense microstructure minimizes water penetration, enhancing durability and reducing the risk of corrosion.

Luminescent Nanomaterials

Scientists at the Institute of Nano Science and Technology (INST) have developed a novel security ink based on luminescent nanomaterials.

About Luminescent Nanomaterials

- These are nanoscale materials that emit light (luminescence) when excited by an external energy source, such as light, chemical reactions or an electric field. They possess unique optical properties that make them valuable for a wide range of applications.

Key Properties	Respective Applications
• Exhibit **size-dependent emission properties**, where smaller Quantum Dots (QDs) emit shorter wavelengths (blue light), and larger ones emit longer wavelengths (red light). • These are **nanoparticles doped with rare-earth elements** (e.g., europium, terbium), which show sharp and stable luminescent emissions. • Due to their sensitivity to changes in their environment, luminescent nanomaterials are used in **chemical and biological sensors** to detect pollutants, toxins, and other hazardous substances. • Their luminescence helps monitor the **location and release of drugs** within the body.	• They are used in bioimaging (as they reduce background autofluorescence), therapeutics, and security applications. • Used to create security features for banknotes, passports, and other documents. • Water Quality Sensors: Used to detect pollutants in water. Soil Sensors: Used to monitor soil health and nutrient levels. • **Drug Delivery and Therapeutics:** They are used in **photodynamic therapy**, where light-activated nanomaterials generate reactive oxygen species to kill cancer cells. • **Optoelectronic Devices:** Used in displays like TVs, LEDs, Lasers and smartphones to improve color gamut and efficiency

V404 Cygni: Black Hole Triple System

Scientists have discovered First ever "black hole triple" system named V404 Cygni located around 8,000 light years away in the constellation of Cygnus.

About Black Hole Triple System

- It is a rare astronomical phenomenon where three celestial bodies, including at least one black hole, are gravitationally bound and orbit each other.

- ✓ Two black holes orbit each other closely in the inner region **(Kozai-Lidov cycles)**, creating a binary black hole system. The third black hole orbits the inner binary at a larger distance.
- Many black holes discovered until now have been part of binary systems, consisting of a black hole and a secondary object (such as a star or another black hole).
- **Dynamical Interactions:** In dense star clusters or galactic centers, close interactions between binary black holes and additional black holes can also result in the capture of a third black hole, forming a triple system.

Key Characteristics & Significance of Black Hole Triple System

- Gravitational Dance: The three bodies, usually stars and a black hole, are locked in a complex gravitational dance. Scientists can gain a deeper understanding of the fundamental laws of physics and the nature of gravity.
- Extreme Conditions: The intense gravitational forces within such a system can lead to extreme physical phenomena, like accretion disks and powerful jets of radiation, providing a natural laboratory to test **Einstein's theory of General Relativity**.
- Triple systems are thought to contribute significantly to the formation of supermassive black holes in **galactic centers, influencing galactic evolution and the distribution of matter** in the universe.

Analog Space Mission

ISRO has launched India's first analog space mission in Leh, Ladakh.

About Analog Space Missions

- These are simulated missions conducted on Earth in environments that resemble extraterrestrial conditions.
- These missions are designed to prepare astronauts for the challenges of space exploration and to test technologies and equipment in realistic conditions.
- India's mission is a joint effort which involves the Human Spaceflight Centre of ISRO, AAKA Space Studio, the University of Ladakh, IIT Bombay, and is backed by the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council.

Key Objectives of Analog Space Missions

- **Testing Technology and Equipment; Human Health and Performance & Risk Reduction:** to monitor sleep patterns, nutrition, exercise routines, and psychological responses to isolation and stressful environments.
- **NASA's Artemis program**, aimed at returning humans to the Moon, is using analog missions to test equipment and train astronauts for lunar conditions.

- **Why Ladakh:** Ladakh's isolation, dry climate, and high-altitude, barren terrain provide Mars- and Moon-like conditions, making it ideal for analog simulations.
- **Popular Analog Sites:** These simulations are conducted in locations with extreme conditions—deserts, underwater habitats, volcanic landscapes, polar regions—or through specialized isolation facilities to recreate the psychological & physical challenges astronauts would face on other celestial bodies.
- **Examples of Analogue Missions:** NASA's NEEMO (NASA Extreme Environment Mission Operations), SIRIUS Program (UAE), Arctic Mars analogue Svalbard Expedition (AMASE)
  - ✓ Missions such as NASA's HERA (Human Exploration Research Analog) in Texas and the Mars Society's Mars Desert Research Station (MDRS) in Utah create a Mars-like habitat where participants are isolated from the outside world.
  - ✓ **The Pangaea-X program** by the European Space Agency (ESA) in volcanic areas trains astronauts to identify and analyze geological formations that are similar to those expected on Mars or the Moon.
  - ✓ In laboratory analogs like **SIRIUS** (Scientific International Research in a Unique terrestrial Station) in Russia and **NASA's Lunar and Mars Analog Habitat (LaMAH),** astronauts experience simulated isolation in high-tech laboratories.

Nickel Toxicity and Sterols

Researchers have observed that mammalian and fungal cells exposure to the heavy metal nickel resulted in sterol deficiency.

Sterols (a subgroup of steroids): These are essential components of cell membranes of plants, animals, and fungi, playing a crucial role in maintaining cell structure and function.

Common Examples of Sterols

- Cholesterol: A vital component of animal cell membranes.
- Ergosterol: A major sterol in fungi, which is converted to vitamin D upon exposure to UV light.
- Sitosterol: A plant sterol (Phytosterols) that can help lower blood cholesterol levels.

Key Functions of Sterols

- Maintaining membrane fluidity and integrity: Sterols help regulate the fluidity of cell membranes, ensuring they are neither too rigid nor too fluid.
- Precursor for hormones: Cholesterol, a type of sterol, is a precursor for steroid hormones like estrogen, testosterone, and cortisol.
- Cell signaling: Sterols play a role in cell signaling pathways, influencing various cellular processes.

How it Happens (Nickel Toxicity and Sterols)

Nickel is a heavy metal found in the environment and industrial products, such as batteries, stainless steel, and electronics. Exposure can occur through inhalation, ingestion, or dermal contact.

- Inhibition of Sterol Biosynthesis Enzymes: Nickel can inhibit the activity of enzymes involved in the sterol biosynthesis pathway. This can lead to a reduction in the production of sterols.
- Phytosterols have antioxidant properties that can help counteract nickel-induced oxidative stress.
  - ✓ A deficiency in sterols can lead to increased membrane permeability and cell damage.
  - ✓ A decrease in sterol levels can disrupt these processes, leading to cell dysfunction and death.

Titanium

India and Kazakhstan have signed an agreement to establish a joint venture company for the production of titanium slag in India.

Titanium (present in meteorites and the sun)

- It is a strong, lightweight, and corrosion-resistant metal and it is the 9th most abundant element on Earth. (Primary Ores: Rutile (TiO_2) and Ilmenite ($FeTiO_3$))
  - ✓ Titanium Slag is a byproduct obtained during the production of titanium dioxide pigment from ilmenite ore. It's a complex mixture of titanium oxides, iron oxides, and other minerals.
- It is used in industries requiring durability and lightweight materials. This includes aerospace components (aircraft engines, frames), medical implants (due to its biocompatibility), automotive parts, electronics, and even sports equipment.

Allulose

Allulose, a new sugar substitute is gaining prominence in South Korean market among consumers and food manufacturers.

About Allulose (also known as D-psicose - belongs to the monosaccharide category)

- It is a rare low calorie sugar (70% as sweet as regular sugar with similar taste) that occurs naturally in some foods like figs, raisins, and maple syrup.
- It is also commercially produced from beet sugar or corn using specific enzymes.
- It is approved in the U.S. and South Korea, but still classified as a "novel food" in the EU and Canada, with limited global regulatory approval.

Key Properties

- Minimal impact on blood sugar: Unlike regular sugar, allulose has little to no effect on blood sugar levels. This makes it a suitable option for people with diabetes.
- Low glycemic index: Allulose has a very low glycemic index, which means it doesn't cause significant spikes in blood sugar levels.
- Non-cariogenic: It does not promote tooth decay, unlike regular sugar.
- Digestive health: Allulose is not fully absorbed by the body (Minimal fermentation) and is mostly excreted in urine. This can contribute to improved digestive health.

Millimeter Wave Transceiver

The Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DOT) and IIT Roorkee have decided to develop a Millimeter Wave Transceiver aimed at improving 5G connectivity in rural areas under the Telecom Technology Development Fund (TTDF) scheme.

About Millimeter Wave Transceiver Technology (Operates between 30 and 300 GHz)

- High-Speed Data Rates: Millimeter waves offer significantly higher bandwidth (high-speed applications) compared to traditional lower-frequency bands, enabling extremely high data rates.
- Short Range: While the high frequency allows for high data rates, it also limits the range of the signal. This is why millimeter wave technology often relies on a dense network of small cells to provide coverage.
- Beamforming: Millimeter wave systems use advanced antenna technologies like beamforming to focus the signal and improve the signal-to-noise ratio.

Applications

- 5G and Beyond: Millimeter wave technology is crucial for enabling the high-speed data rates required for 5G and future wireless networks (such as laptops, smartphones, and IoT devices).
- Radar Systems: Millimeter wave radar systems offer high resolution and accuracy for applications like automotive radar and weather radar.

Challenges

- Complex Antenna Design & Propagation Loss: Millimeter waves are susceptible to atmospheric attenuation, especially in adverse weather conditions.
- Limited Range: The high frequency of millimeter waves limits their range, necessitating the deployment of dense networks of small cells.

Telecom Technology Development Fund (TTDF) Scheme

- Earlier called the Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) Scheme was established by the Indian Telegraph (Amendment) Act, 2003. It is operated by the Department of Telecommunications, Ministry of Communications.
- Objectives: To support R&D in telecom tech, enable affordable broadband and mobile services in rural/remote areas, and foster synergies between startups, academia, and industry.

Gravity Energy Storage

Gravity energy storage is emerging as a viable solution to address a major challenge of solar and wind power which is intermittent supply.

About Gravity Energy Storage

- It leverages the potential energy of gravity to store and release energy. It's a promising solution for grid-scale energy storage, especially in conjunction with renewable energy sources like solar and wind.

Recent Innovations and Examples

- **Energy Vault:** A startup using modular concrete blocks to store energy with crane-based systems. (Claimed efficiency: ~80-85%.)
- **Gravitricity:** UK-based company developing underground systems using mine shafts**.**

Working

- Energy Input (Charging Phase): During periods of excess energy generation, such as when solar or wind power is abundant, energy is used to lift a heavy weight to a certain height. This process stores energy in the form of gravitational potential energy.
  - ✓ **Heavy Mass:** Often concrete blocks, steel weights, or even water in pumped hydro systems.
  - ✓ **Lifting Mechanism**: Includes winches, cranes, or pulley systems powered by electric motors.
- Energy Release (Discharging Phase): When energy is needed, the weight is released, and its kinetic energy is converted into electrical energy through generators.

Advantages

- Long-Duration Storage: Gravity energy storage systems can store energy for extended periods, making them suitable for balancing intermittent renewable energy sources.
- High Efficiency: These systems can achieve high round-trip efficiency, meaning a significant portion of the stored energy can be recovered.
- Environmental Friendliness: Gravity energy storage is a clean and sustainable technology with minimal environmental impact.

Limitations

- High Initial Cost & Technical Complexity
- Significant Land Requirements to lift and lower heavy weights.

6G Technology

Based on the short time success of 5G deployment India is aiming to become a global leader in 6G technology by 2030 through the Bharat 6G Mission.

About 6G technology

- The next generation of wireless communication technology, promising to revolutionize the way we interact with the digital world. While still in its early stages of development, it's expected to offer significantly faster speeds, lower latency, and greater capacity than its predecessor, 5G.

Key Feature

- Ultra-High Speeds: Enabling seamless streaming of high-resolution video, instant downloads, and real-time applications (enabling the Internet of Things (IoT) to reach new heights).
- Ultra-Low Latency: Reduced latency will enable near-instantaneous responses, making real-time applications like remote surgery and autonomous vehicles more reliable and efficient.
- Enhanced Security & Improved Energy Efficiency: Advanced security measures will protect sensitive data and ensure the privacy of users.

Potential Applications

- Enhanced Reality: Immersive experiences like augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) will become more realistic and seamless. Example: In Smart Cities
- Autonomous Vehicles & Industrial IoT: 6G will enable vehicles to communicate with each other and their surroundings, leading to safer and more efficient transportation.
- Remote Healthcare (Telemedicine): High-definition video conferencing and remote surgery will become more accessible and reliable.

Government Initiatives

Bharat 6G Vision

- Launched in 2023: This vision document outlines India's roadmap for 6G development, aiming to make India a global leader in this field.
- Key principles: Affordability, sustainability, and ubiquity are the core principles of this vision.

Bharat 6G Alliance

- Focuses on 5G advancements, 6G product development, and patent generation.
- Aligns with global alliances like the Next G Alliance (US), 6G Flagship (Finland), and South Korea's 6G Forum.

Technology Innovation Group (TIG) on 6G: Established in 2021

- Constituted six task forces focusing on: Multidisciplinary solutions, Spectrum management, Devices and networks, International standards, Funding for R&D.

Operation Dronagiri

Operation Dronagiri was launched by the Ministry of Science and Technology.

About Operation Dronagiri (Public-Private Partnership)

- It is a pilot project launched under the National Geospatial Policy 2022.
- It aims to demonstrate potential applications of geospatial technologies (like drones, satellite imagery & GIS) & innovations in improving the quality of life of citizens & ease of doing business.
  - ✓ **Data Sharing:** The Integrated Geospatial Data Sharing Interface (GDI) will facilitate seamless data sharing and analysis.
- **Implementation:** Pilot projects will be implemented in Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Assam, Andhra Pradesh, and Maharashtra.

Objectives & Key Features

- Improve Efficiency & Sustainable Development: Optimize **resource allocation and decision-making** in agriculture, logistics, Transport and other sectors.
- Enhance Livelihoods: Empower farmers and rural communities through **data-driven insights**.
- Urban Planning: Support urban planning and development by providing **accurate spatial data.**
- Disaster Management: Enhance disaster response and recovery efforts through timely and accurate information.

GSAT-20

SpaceX's Falcon-9 launched GSAT-20 Indian satellite from Cape Canaveral in the United States.

About GSAT-20 (also known as GSAT N-2 + a mission life of 14 years)

- It is a high-throughput communication satellite launched by New Space India Ltd (ISRO's commercial arm) aboard a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket into a geosynchronous transfer orbit (GTO).
  - ✓ GSAT-20 is NSIL's second demand-driven satellite after GSAT-24 (or GSAT N-1), which was launched in 2022 and leased entirely to Tata Play.
- Weight: 4,700 kg , too heavy for India's own rocket, LVM-3—popularly known as 'Bahubali'—which can carry satellites weighing up to four tonnes to the GTO.
- The GSAT-N2 spacecraft structure is based on **the standard Carbon Fiber Reinforced Polymer** (CFRP)-based I4K bus.

Key Features

- High-Throughput Capacity (operating in the **Ka-band**): It offers a data transmission capacity of 48 Gbps, significantly enhancing broadband services across India.
  - ✓ The Ka-band refers to radio frequencies ranging from 27 to 40 GHz.
- Broad Coverage: The satellite will cover both urban and rural areas, including remote regions.
- In-Flight Connectivity: It will enable in-flight internet connectivity, providing high-speed internet access to passengers on domestic and international flights.
- The satellite is equipped with 32 user beams, comprising 8 narrow spot beams over the Northeast region and 24 wide spot beams over the rest of India.
- Smart City Applications: GSAT-20 will support various smart city applications, including IoT devices, surveillance systems, and digital services.

Cell-based Biocomputer

Researchers have developed a cell-based biocomputer using genetically modified bacteria.

Cell-Based Biocomputer

- Genetic Engineering: Living cells, often bacteria or yeast, are genetically modified to incorporate specific DNA sequences that act as logic gates.
- Living cells can naturally perform computations to carry out biological functions. For examples; Neurons in the brain communicate to make decisions, Immune cells collaborating to respond to threats.
- Biological Computation: These **genetic circuits** enable the cells to process information and make decisions based on environmental inputs.
  - ✓ Genetic circuits are synthetic biological systems engineered to perform specific functions. They are constructed by combining DNA sequences, known as genetic parts, to create circuits that can process information and execute tasks within living cells.
- Output: The output of these computations can be observed through various cellular responses, such as changes in gene expression or protein production.
  - ✓ Researchers have used cells engineered with CRISPR/Cas9 technology to create "central processing units" (CPUs) in cells, capable of executing sophisticated logic-based computations.

Applications of Cell-based Bio-computer

- Drug Discovery: To screen vast numbers of molecules to identify potential drug candidates.
- Environmental Monitoring: They can detect pollutants and toxins in the environment.
- Biosensors: Designed to sense and respond to specific biological or chemical signals.
- Synthetic Biology: To create novel biological systems with desired properties.

One Day One Genome Initiative

The Department of Biotechnology (DBT) and Biotechnology Research and Innovation Council (BRIC) have launched the 'One Day One Genome' initiative.

About One Day One Genome Initiative

- A major step towards understanding India's microbial diversity and its potential applications in various fields.
- **Goal**: To sequence and analyze the genomes of a large number of microorganisms found in India.
  - ✓ Microorganisms are crucial for our ecosystem. They play an important role in all biogeochemical cycles, soil formation, mineral purification, degradation of organic wastes and toxic pollutants along with methane production.

- ✓ Genome sequencing will allow the visualization of the hidden potential of the microbial world to the community at large. Sequencing data can be analyzed to identify genome encoded capacities for important enzymes, antimicrobial resistance, bio active compounds etc.
- It will highlight the unique bacterial species found in our country and emphasize their critical roles in environment, agriculture and human health.
- Fully annotated bacterial genomes, along with graphical summaries, infographics, and genome assembly details, will be made publicly available.

Benefits

- Environmental Applications: Understanding the role of microbes in soil health, bioremediation, and climate change.
- Agricultural Applications: Developing microbial-based solutions for sustainable agriculture, including biofertilizers and biopesticides.
- Healthcare Applications: Identifying novel drug targets and developing personalized medicine.
- Industrial Applications: Developing new industrial enzymes and biofuels.

BRIC

- **An** autonomous society under the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Ministry of Science and Technology. It was formed by subsuming 14 Autonomous Institutions (AIs) under it.
- **Goals:** Cutting-edge research, Fostering innovation, Developing indigenous technologies etc.

PACE Programme

Project Agreements have been signed by the Department of Scientific & Industrial Research (DSIR) under the Patent Acquisition and Collaborative Research and Technology Development (PACE) Programme.

About PACE program

- It focuses on innovative work, entrepreneurial activity and the development of new technologies for commercializing products and processes to address unmet industrial needs.
- Projects demonstrating proof-of-concept with an aim to address significant unmet industrial needs are supported under this program. The program supports projects with a duration of 1 to 3 years.

Objectives

- Supporting collaborative research and technology development between industry & academia.
- Providing financial support for the acquisition of patents and intellectual property rights.

CULTURE

Guru Tegh Bahadur

- Guru Tegh Bahadur's Martyrdom Day is observed every year on 24 November as **Shaheedi Diwas** to honour the sacrifice of the ninth Sikh Guru.
- Known as **Hind ki Chadar, or the Shield of India**, the Guru was born in Amritsar in 1621 to **Mata Nanki and Guru Hargobind, the sixth Sikh guru**, who raised an army against the Mughals and introduced the concept of warrior saints.
- As a boy, Tegh Bahadur was called **Tyag Mal** because of his ascetic nature.
- At the age of 13, Tegh Bahadur distinguished himself in a battle against a Mughal chieftain. His bravery and heroic swordsmanship in the battle earned him the name of Tegh Bahadur. ("Tegh" is 'sword' in Punjabi.)
- He traveled extensively to preach the teachings of Nanak and contributed many hymns to the Guru Granth Sahib including the Saloks, or couplets.
- He is regarded as the **saviour guru**, as during the reign of the Mughals, there were oppressions in which people were forced to convert to Islam under the Mughal ruler Aurangzeb.
- And in that period of time, he resisted the forced conversions of non-Muslims to Islam.
- Later, Guru Tegh Bahadur was executed on the orders of Aurangzeb in Delhi in 1675.
- The site of his martyrdom is now marked by Gurudwara Sis Ganj Sahib.

Lachit Borphukan

- The Prime Minister recently paid tributes to Lachit Borphukan on his 402nd birth anniversary, known as Lachit Diwas (24th November).
- Born in 1622, he is best known for leading the Ahom troops which **fought and defeated advancing Mughal troops** at the **Battle of Saraighat** on the outskirts of Guwahati in 1671.
- The Ahom army defeated the Mughal army by guerrilla tactics, psychological warfare, military intelligence and by exploiting the weakness of the Mughal forces.
- The Battle of Saraighat was a naval battle fought between the Mughal Empire (led by the Kachwaha raja, Ram Singh I) and the Ahom Kingdom (led by Lachit Borphukan).
- Borphukan is also considered as the inspiration behind strengthening India's naval force and revitalising inland water transport and creating infrastructure associated with it.
- Since 1999, the Lachit Borphukan gold medal is awarded to the best cadet from the National Defence Academy.

Ahom Kingdom

- The Ahom kings ruled large parts of what is now known as Assam for nearly 600 years, from the early 13th century to the early 19th century.
- It was a prosperous, multi-ethnic kingdom which spread across the upper and lower reaches of the Brahmaputra valley, surviving on rice cultivation in its fertile lands.
- The Ahoms engaged in a series of conflicts with the Mughals from 1615-1682, starting from the reign of Jahangir till the reign of Aurangzeb.

Saint Francis Xavier

- The decennial exposition of Saint Francis Xavier's sacred relics began on November 21 and will run until January 5 next year.
    - The "incorruptible" remains of St. Francis Xavier, a Spanish Jesuit and co-founder of The Society of Jesus, have been at the Basilica of Bom Jesus in Old Goa since 1624.

- St. Francis Xavier, also called "Goencho Saib" (Lord of Goa), arrived in Goa in 1542 to restore Christianity among Portuguese settlers.
- He died in 1552 off China's coast and was initially buried on Shangchuan Island. His body was later moved to Malacca, then to Goa in 1554, where it was first placed at St. Paul's College, later transferred to Casa Professa, and finally moved to the Basilica in 1624.
- His body was first exposed for veneration in 1554 on his death anniversary, and the tradition gained prominence after his canonization in 1622.
- The event became regular after Goa's liberation in 1961 and has been held every decade since 1964.

Ningol Chakkouba

- One of the biggest festivals of Manipur- **Ningol Chakkouba** was recently celebrated across the State.
- The festival is held every year on the **second day of the lunar month of Hiyangei of the Meitei calendar**.
- Ningol means 'married woman' and Chakouba means 'invitation for feast';so the festival is the one where the married women are invited to their parents' home for a feast.
- The invitation comes from the son(s) of the parental family of the ningols, generally a week in advance.
- The history of the festival dates back to the time when **King Nongda Lairen Pakhangba** ruled in Manipur.
- The **Queen Laisana** used to invite her brother **Poireiton** to the King's palace for a feast once in a year. So, it was known as Piba (brother/son) Chakouba rather than NingolChakouba.
- But the tradition changed during the time of **King Chadrakirti Singh (1831-1886)** in the 19th century. He invited his sisters for the feast as it was difficult for him to visit their places in one day.

Bodoland Mahotsav

- The 1st Bodoland Mohotsov was recently organised on 15th and 16th November in Delhi.
- It is a mega event on language, literature, and culture to sustain peace and build a Vibrant Bodo Society.
- It aims to integrate the indigenous Bodo people residing not only in Bodoland but also in other parts of Assam, West Bengal, Nepal, and other international border areas of the North East.
- The theme for the Mohotsov is '**Peace and Harmony for Prosperous Bharat**'
- The Mohotsov is also about celebrating the remarkable journey of recovery and resilience ever since the signing of the **Bodo Peace Accord in 2020**.

Bodo

- Bodos are a Tibeto-Burman speaking ethnolinguistic group native to the state of Assam.
- Bodos are a part of the greater Bodo-Kachari family of ethnolinguistic groups and are spread across northeastern India.
- They are concentrated mainly in the Bodoland Territorial Region of Assam.
- Bodos speak the Bodo language, a Bodo-Garo language of the Tibeto-Burman family, which is recognised as one of twenty-two Scheduled languages of India.
- The Bodo people are recognised as a plains tribe in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, and have special powers in the Bodoland Territorial Region, an autonomous division.

Konark Wheel Replicas at Rashtrapati Bhavan

Four replicas of the Konark wheels, made of sandstone, have been installed at Rashtrapati Bhavan Cultural Centre and Amrit Udyan.

Konark Sun Temple

- Konark Sun Temple is a 13th-century CE temple dedicated to sun god Surya, at Konark on the coastline of Odisha. It was built by **King Narasimhadeva I** of the **Eastern Ganga Dynasty** around **1250 CE**.

- Declared a **UNESCO world heritage site** in 1984, the temple is the culmination of Odishan temple architecture. The temple follows the **Kalinga or Orissa style of architecture**, which is a subset of the nagara style of Hindu temple architecture.
- The word 'Konark' is a combination of two Sanskrit words **kona** (corner or angle) and **arka** (the sun). The temple is conceived as a **giant stone chariot** with 24 wheels and 7 horses. The Konark wheels are symbols of India's cultural legacy.
- Once over 200 feet (61 m) high, much of the temple is now in ruins. The structures and elements that have survived are popular for their intricate artwork, iconography, and themes.
- It is a major pilgrimage site for Hindus, who gather here every year for the **Chandrabhaga Mela** around the month of February.
- This temple was called the **Black Pagoda** in European sailor accounts as early as 1676 because its great tower appeared black.
- Similarly, the **Jagannath Temple in Puri was called the White Pagoda**. Both temples served as important landmarks for sailors in the Bay of Bengal.

Ramappa Temple

- The Union government has approved a loan of Rs 141 crore to develop the **Telangana: Ramappa Region Sustainable Tourism Circuit**.
- The **Ramappa temple** also known as the **Rudreswara temple**, is located in the village of Palampet, about 200 km north of Telangana's capital Hyderabad.
- The temple complex consists of Kateshwara temple, Kameshwara temple, Pakashala, Nandi Mandapa, Inscription and Rudredhwara temple.
- Built in 1213 AD during the Kakatiya Empire by General Recharla Rudra, the presiding deity is Ramalingeswara Swamy.
- The temple's sculptures showcases regional dance customs and Kakatiyan culture.
- The Kakatiya dynasty ruled most of eastern Deccan region comprising present day Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, and parts of eastern Karnataka and southern Odisha between 12th and 14th centuries.Their **capital was Orugallu, now known as Warangal**.

First Asian Buddhist Summit

- The First Asian Buddhist Summit, was recently organized in New Delhi by the **Ministry of Culture and the International Buddhist Confederation (IBC)**. It saw participation from 32 countries.
- The **theme** of the Summit was '**Role of Buddha Dhamma in strengthening Asia**'
- The summit aligns with India's Act East Policy and Neighborhood First Policy, focusing on collective, inclusive, and spiritual development in Asia.

Buddhist Art, Architecture and Heritage: Buddhist art, architecture, and heritage hold immense significance, reflecting the deep cultural and spiritual connections within the tradition.

Buddha Cārikā and Dissemination of Buddha Dhamma

- Buddha Cārikā or the sublime wandering of the Buddha played an important role in the dissemination of the Buddha Dhamma.
- After attaining enlightenment, the Buddha travelled across India spreading his teachings among commoners.

Role of Holy Buddhist Relics

- Buddhist relics are vital in society as they serve as sacred symbols of the Buddha's teachings, inspiring devotion and mindfulness among practitioners.
- They preserve cultural heritage and traditions, acting as focal points for rituals and community gatherings.
- By attracting pilgrims and tourists, they also contribute to local economies while encouraging principles of peace and compassion within communities.

Significance of Buddha Dhamma in Scientific Research and Well-Being

- The significance of Buddha Dhamma in scientific research and well-being lies in its emphasis on mindfulness, compassion, and the interconnectedness of all beings.
- By integrating these ancient teachings with contemporary science, researchers are exploring holistic approaches to well-being that enhance psychological and physical health.

Role of Buddhist Literature and Philosophy in 21st Century

- Buddhist literature and philosophy explore the human condition, the nature of reality, and the path to enlightenment.
- Through these writings, the philosophy of Buddhism remains a timeless source of insight and understanding.

AWARDS/PERSONALITIES IN NEWS

Ballon d'Or Award

- Spanish midfielders Rodri and Aitana Bonmatí won the 2023 Ballon d'Or awards for the best male and female soccer players, respectively.
- The Ballon d'Or, awarded annually by *France Football* since 1956, recognizes the best football player of the year.
- Between 2010-2015, it was merged with FIFA's World Player of the Year as the FIFA Ballon d'Or, but they separated in 2016.
- Initially, the award was for European players only, but it expanded in 1995 to include non-Europeans playing for European clubs.
- Since 2007, national team coaches and captains have voted, and the award became open to all professional football players globally.

Booker Prize

- Britain's Samantha Harvey won the 2024 Booker Prize for her novel 'Orbital', a story about a single day aboard the International Space Station.
- Past winners of the prestigious Booker, which is open to works of fiction written in English, include Margaret Atwood, Salman Rushdie and Yann Martel.
- The Booker Prize is the **world's leading literary award** for a single work of fiction.
- It was formerly known as the **Booker Prize for Fiction** (1969–2001) and the **Man Booker Prize** (2002–2019).
- **Founded** in the **UK** in **1969**, it initially rewarded Commonwealth writers but is now **open to anyone regardless of origin**.
- It is awarded each year for the **best novel written in English** and **published in the United Kingdom or Ireland**.
- A sister prize, the International Booker Prize, is awarded for a book translated into English and published in the United Kingdom or Ireland.

Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament, and Development 2023

- The Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament, and Development for 2023 was recently given to classical pianist and conductor **Daniel Barenboim** and Palestinian peace activist **Ali Abu Awwad**.
- Mr. Barenboim was awarded for his contribution to foster peace through musical and cultural dialogue initiatives.
- Mr. Awwad was awarded for his advocacy for dialogue through his organization **Roots**, an outfit that he started after spending time in an Israeli jail. He is also a founder of the Palestinian peace movement **Taghyeer**.
- The award was instituted in the memory of Indira Gandhi by the **Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust in 1986**. It consists of a monetary award of **Rs 25 lakh** along with a citation.
- The award is given to individuals or organisations who work towards ensuring international peace and development, ensuring that scientific discoveries are used for the larger good of humanity, and creating new international economic order.
- A **written work**, in order to be eligible for consideration, should have been published.
- The recipients are chosen from a pool of **national and international nominees**.

Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puruskar

- 82 young artists were recently conferred with Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puruskar (UBKUP) for the years 2022 and 2023.
- In 2006 the **Sangeet Natak Akademi** instituted UBKUP in the name of Bharat Ratna Ustad Bismillah Khan for young performing art practitioners **upto the age of 40 years**.
- The award is given annually in the fields of music, dance, drama, folk & tribal arts and puppetry.
- It consists of a monetary award of Rs 25,000, a plaque and an angavastram.
- The purpose of the award is to encourage and motivate young artists in the above-mentioned art forms.

Project Veer Gatha 4.0

- More than 1.76 crore school students from all 36 States and UTs have participated in Project Veer Gatha 4.0.
- The students have sent poems, paintings, essays, videos, etc. in honour of the acts of bravery and sacrifice of the officers/personnel of the Armed Forces.
- Project Veer Gatha was **instituted in 2021** with the aim of spreading the inspiring tales of bravery and courage of the Gallantry Awardees among the students to inculcate the spirit of patriotism in them.
- Under the fourth edition this year, 100 winners will be selected, and their felicitation will be done jointly by the **Ministry of Education and Ministry of Defence**. Each winner will be awarded a cash prize of Rs 10,000.
- Also, there will be 4 winners each at the District level and 8 winners each at the State/UT level and all such winners will be felicitated by the respective District & State/UT.

National Gopal Ratna Awards 2024

- The Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying (DAHD) declared the winners of the National Gopal Ratna Awards (NGRA) 2024.
- NGRA is conferred with the objective to encourage individuals like farmers rearing indigenous animals, AI Technicians and Dairy cooperative societies/Milk Producer Company/Dairy Farmers Producers Organizations.
- The Award is conferred in **three categories**:
    - Best Dairy Farmer Rearing Indigenous Cattle/Buffalo Breeds.
    - Best Artificial Insemination Technician (AIT).
    - Best Dairy Cooperative/ Milk Producer Company/ Dairy Farmer Producer Organization.
- From this year onwards, the Department has incorporated a **Special award for North Eastern Region (NER) States**, in all the three categories, to encourage and boost the dairy development activities in NER.
- The award consists of a cash prize of Rs 5 lakh for 1st rank, Rs 3 lakh for 2nd rank, Rs 2 lakh for 3rd rank and Rs 2 lakh for Special Award for NER, along with a certificate of merit.