



the recitals

CURRENT AFFAIRS - DECEMBER 2024



Editor's Cut

- Reforming National Entrance Exams
- SC Mandates Prior Sanction to Prosecute Public Servants Under PMLA
- Merchant Shipping Bill 2024
- ANI versus Open AI
- Application Of POSH Act to Political Parties
- One Nation, One Election Bill 2024
- Places of Worship Act, 1991
- Oilfields (Regulation & Development) Amendment Bill, 2024
- Syrian Rebels Seize Control of Damascus
- India-Kuwait Elevate Ties to Strategic Partnership
- ICJ Begins Hearing On Landmark Climate Change Case
- ISFR-2023

INDEX

EDITOR'S CUT.....3-24

- Reforming National Entrance Exams
- SC Mandates Prior Sanction to Prosecute Public Servants Under PMLA
- Merchant Shipping Bill 2024
- ANI versus Open AI
- Application Of POSH Act to Political Parties
- One Nation, One Election Bill 2024
- Places of Worship Act, 1991
- Oilfields (Regulation & Development) Amendment Bill, 2024
- Syrian Rebels Seize Control of Damascus
- India-Kuwait Elevate Ties to Strategic Partnership
- ICJ Begins Hearing On Landmark Climate Change Case
- ISFR-2023

MAPS: PLACES IN NEWS.....25-28

SOCIAL ISSUES.....29-33

- Migration Trends in India
- WHO's World Malaria Report 2024
- Centre wants states to make snakebites notifiable disease
- Developing National Policy to Increase Female Workforce Participation
- Centre Scraps No-Detention Policy for Classes 5 and 8

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE.....34-52

- One-Stop Centres for Indian Women
- How the Supreme Court (SC) hears Cases?
- Impeachment of Judges
- No-Confidence Motion Moved Against Vice-President
- India Internet Governance Forum
- Amrit Gyan Kosh Portal
- UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs
- National Panchayat Awards 2024
- Coastal Shipping Bill 2024
- PM's 11 Pledges
- Ban on Buffalo and Bulbul Fights Reintroduced
- Can Leader of Opposition (LoP) be Arrested?
- Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA)
- Supreme Court Declares Coconut Oil as Edible Oil
- RS Passes Boilers Bill for Safety at Factories

- Railways Amendment Bill 2024
- Govt. Amends Rule to Restrict Access to Polling Footage
- Henderson Doctrine

ECONOMICS.....53-72

- Banking Laws Amendment Bill
- MoSPI Modifying CPI base year
- e-Daakhil
- Advisory Committee on National Accounts Statistics
- Anna Chakra
- NHAI Contractor Rating System
- National Legal Metrology Portal
- ADB loan for Horticulture
- 13th National Seed Congress
- Recovery in Core Sectors
- New RBI Governor Appointed
- Rajmarg Sathi
- World's Largest Grain Storage Plan
- Decline in 10-year bond yield
- Bima Sakhi Yojana
- UPI based credit lines for SFBs
- Credit Guarantee Scheme for e-NWR based Pledge Financing
- ADB loan for SMILE program
- Increase in REER
- Ken Betwa Link Project
- FREE-AI
- Kisan Kavach
- Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises 2023-24
- Collateral free loan limit raised
- Windfall Gains Tax abolished
- Jalvahak Scheme
- India top recipient of remittance
- HCES 2023-24

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS.....73-86

- UK's assisted dying Bill
- US court holds Israeli company NSO liable for targeting WhatsApp users
- Impeachment of South Korea's President Yoon Suk Yeol
- Joe Biden pardons his son Hunter in 2 cases
- Nepal, China sign 9-point agreement
- Freight train likely to link Pakistan, Russia
- Australia's Online Safety Amendment Bill

INDEX

- China to build world's largest hydropower dam in Tibet
- New Suez Canal channel extension
- Visit of Sri Lankan President to India
- India had limited success in capturing 'China Plus One' opportunity: NITI Aayog
- India and Bhutan Strengthen Bilateral Ties with Focus on Hydropower and Urban Planning
- Kash Patel - Trump's Indian-origin pick for FBI Chief
- Nepal Army Chief conferred honorary rank by President Murmu
- Suspension of MFN Clause in India-Switzerland Tax Treaty
- India's Eastern Maritime Corridor
- India-Australia ECTA marks two years of success
- India, Saudi Arabia Exploring Joint Ventures in Defence Sector
- India, France Sign Pact For Grand Museum in North, South blocks
- India, China agree to resume Mansarovar Yatra, border trade
- India's Reliance on China for Critical Minerals

DEFENSE AND SECURITY.....87-92

- 59th All India Conference of DGs/IGs of Police
- Protected Area Regime reimposed in Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram
- All police stations in the country linked through CCTNS
- Lothal to become global hub for Maritime Heritage
- Militants in Manipur using Starlink satellite internet
- Indian Ocean Region's survey ship INS Nirdeshak commissioned
- Stealth frigate INS Tushil commissioned
- RBI is leveraging AI to crack down on mule bank accounts
- 60th Raising Day of BSF
- Spike in cocaine, contraband cigarettes, and currency seizures

SUMMITS AND ORGANISATIONS.....93-94

- Sanjay Kaul appointed member of Bahrain International Commercial Court
- Former SC judge Madan Lokur to chair UN Internal Justice Council
- UNGA declares December 21 as World Meditation Day
- 20th Manama Dialogue
- India has contributed \$2 billion to BRICS Bank

GEOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENT.....95-102

- COP 16 of UNCCD & Related Initiatives across the World
- Manganese Water Contamination
- Lake-effect snow
- World Solar Report Series
- Coastal Hardening
- Santa Ana winds
- Hydroxy Methane Sulphonate (HMS)
- Emissions from Arctic Tundra
- Hydrothermal vent
- IPBES: Nexus Assessment Report
- Species in News

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY.....103-110

- Nafithromycin
- Extrachromosomal DNA (ecDNA)
- Hyperloop
- Willow Chip
- Environmental consequences of space activities
- Diamond Cooling Technology
- Melye-Amiley
- Carbon-14 diamond battery
- Expansion of Universe
- Mirror Bacteria
- Strategy for Infrared regulation
- IRIS² Project
- SpaDeX
- Parker Solar Probe

CULTURE.....111-113

- Yakshagana
- Hornbill Festival
- Veer Bal Diwas
- Akal Takht

AWARDS/ PERSONALITIES IN NEWS.....114-115

- Rashtriya Tansen Samman
- Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar
- Turner Prize 2024
- Wisam Mubarak al-Kabeer
- Sahitya Akademi Awards

A high-level committee, chaired by former ISRO chief **K Radhakrishnan**, has recommended significant reforms to ensure transparency and efficiency in conducting national entrance tests like NEET, CUET, and UGC-NET.

Issues Faced by NTA

- **Issue of Accountability**

- **Computer-based tests** ensure that high volume can be processed in a short period of time.
- As the NIC [National Informatics Centre] does not have the capacity or IT infrastructure needed, **third-party technical partners are being engaged**.
- This **takes accountability out of the government's hands** and leaves loopholes in the system which can be exploited by unscrupulous players.

National Testing Agency (NTA)

- **About NTA:**

- It was set up in **2017** as a **specialist, self-sustaining and autonomous organisation** under the aegis of the **Union Ministry of Education**.
- It is registered under the **Societies Registration Act 1860**, and falls under the Right to Information (RTI) Act.
- Its director general and governing body are **appointed by the Union government**.

- **Objectives:** It aims to

- **Conduct efficient, transparent and international standards tests** in order to assess the competency of candidates for admission, and recruitment purposes.
- **Undertake research on educational, professional and testing systems**
- **Identify experts and institutions in setting examination questions.**

- **Examinations conducted by the NTA:**

- JEE (Main), NEET-UG, Common Management Admission Test (CMAT), Graduate Pharmacy Aptitude Test (GPAT), University Grants Commission-National Eligibility Test (UGC-NET), etc.
- **The National Education Policy 2020** recommends a broader role for the NTA to conduct an entrance or aptitude test for all universities across the country.

- **Shortage of Manpower:** The agency was set up with only about 25 permanent staff positions and its functions have been outsourced to technical partners from the very beginning.

- **Absence of Robust Security Mechanisms**

- These are needed to handle a large-scale pen-and-paper examination, including the
 - Setting of the question paper and its encryption,
 - Selection of external printing presses and exam centres,
 - Transportation to printing presses,
 - Storage and distribution to examinees at examination centres and
 - Then the collection and transportation of answer sheets to evaluation centres.

Key Recommendations of the High-Level Committee for Secure Examinations

- **Election-style Examination Framework:**

- **State collaboration for test administration:**

- A collaborative approach between the Centre and state governments to conduct these exams, similar to how elections are managed.
- The state administrative machinery, including district collectors, would play a crucial role in ensuring smooth execution.

- **Presiding officers and protocols:** Each testing centre will have an NTA-appointed "presiding officer" responsible for overseeing operations, akin to polling booth management during elections.

- **Sealing and securing centres:**

- Testing centres are to be sealed before exams and unsealed only in the presence of district administration and NTA officials **mirroring EVM rooms**.

- **State and District-level Committees:**

- **State-level committees:** Headed by a Chief Secretary-nominated nodal officer, these committees will include representatives from state police, NTA, the Intelligence Bureau (IB), and the NIC.
- **District-level committees:** Led by district magistrates, to ensure the identification of secure testing centres and develop strategies for question paper transportation with police or paramilitary support.

- **Background Checks for Centers:** Testing centers will be vetted based on past records, ownership backgrounds, and intelligence inputs to avoid potential security breaches.
- **Reducing Dependence on 3rd-party Agencies:** Phasing out reliance on private test delivery agencies (TCS iON) and collaborating with Kendriya and Navodaya Vidyalayas to develop digital infrastructure for computer-based testing.
- **Digi-exam System:** Inspired by the **DigiYatra model**, the proposed "digi-exam" system will ensure candidate verification using biometric data and a one-time entry of primary identification information during the application process.
- **CCTV Monitoring and Sanitised Centers:**
 - Continuous CCTV monitoring of candidates during the exam.
 - Sanitisation of computer-based testing centres by third parties, with additional checks by NIC and NTA representatives.
 - District-level CCTV monitoring centres to oversee exam operations.
- **Redefining NTA's Role:** The NTA should focus solely on entrance exams for higher education, leaving recruitment exams for other bodies.
- **Flexibility in Exam Modes:** Regarding NEET, the decision on the mode of the exam - computer-based or pen-and-paper - will rest with the Health Ministry, with the NTA acting as a service provider.

The proposed reforms mark a significant shift towards ensuring fairness and efficiency in national entrance tests.



SC Mandates Prior Sanction to Prosecute Public Servants Under PMLA

Delhi Chief Minister (CM) Arvind Kejriwal and Congress MP P. Chidambaram recently sought a stay on their trials in the Delhi High Court, citing a recent Supreme Court (SC) ruling which mandated the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to obtain prior sanction to prosecute public servants for money laundering.

What is Prior Sanction Provision?

The **prior sanction provision** under **Section 197 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (CrPC)** prevents courts from taking cognizance of offenses allegedly committed by judges, magistrates, or public servants during their official duties without prior government approval. This safeguard aims to protect public servants from unwarranted or frivolous prosecution, enabling them to perform their duties without fear of legal harassment.

✓ **Example:** An IAS officer implementing a land acquisition order might face allegations but should not fear legal action without merit.

Key Features

1. Requirement of Government Sanction: by courts is mandatory before proceeding with cases involving public servants who were "acting or purporting to act in the discharge of official duty" at the time of the alleged offense.

2. Exceptions to Sanction Requirement: Sanction is not needed for certain serious offenses, such as crimes against women (e.g., rape, sexual harassment) and grave offenses like human trafficking, as specified in the explanation to Section 197.

✓ **Example:** No sanction is needed to prosecute a public servant for sexual harassment under the POSH Act, 2013.

✓ A similar provision exists under **Section 218 of the Bhartiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS)**.

3. Limitations of the Protection: The provision does not provide blanket protection for all actions by public servants while in service. Only acts or omissions directly linked to the discharge of official duties are covered.

✓ **Example:** Accepting bribes or indulging in personal misconduct is not covered under Section 197.

Judicial Interpretation: In **Devinder Singh v. State of Punjab (2016)**, the SC clarified that the provision offers protection as an assurance for honest and sincere officers to perform their duties effectively. However, this protection cannot be misused as a shield for committing crimes under the guise of authority.

About PMLA

The **Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002**, enacted in January 2003, aims to combat money laundering in India with three key objectives:

1. Prevent and control money laundering,
2. Confiscate and seize property acquired through laundered money, and
3. Address related issues.

Section 3 of PMLA

defines money laundering as directly or indirectly engaging in, assisting, or being involved in any process to disguise proceeds of crime as untainted property. The Act was amended in **2009** and **2012** to strengthen its provisions.

Is Prior Sanction Required in Other Cases?

Yes, prior sanction is also required under other laws, particularly the **Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA)**, for prosecuting public servants in specific circumstances like:


- **Section 19(1) of PCA:** requires prior sanction from the government before courts can take cognizance of offenses like accepting bribes (**Section 7**) or receiving undue advantages (**Section 11**) by public officials.
 - This sanction is typically obtained by the police or investigating agencies, and the public servant is given an opportunity to present their case before the government.
- **Section 17A (Introduced in 2018 Amendment):** prevents investigations into decisions or recommendations made by public officials in the discharge of official duties without prior government approval.
 - The SC is currently considering whether this provision applies to cases filed before its introduction in 2018.

Relevance to Current Cases


- Former Delhi CM has argued in the Delhi High Court (HC) that prior sanction was required for the ED's chargesheet in the excise policy case.
- He pointed out that the **Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)**, in a related case with similar allegations, sought sanction under **Section 19 of the PCA** before filing charges, reinforcing the necessity of sanction in his case as well.

Impact of the Prior Sanction Requirement on ED Cases Involving Public Servants

1. **Cognizance by Trial Courts:** While complaints and investigations under PMLA will proceed, trial courts may be barred from taking cognizance of chargesheets against public servants without prior sanction. This could lead to delays in prosecuting such cases until the necessary approvals are obtained. The sanction requirement can



Background



CONTEXT OF SC RULING

The SC ruling cited in the pleas of Arvind Kejriwal and P. Chidambaram pertains to the application of **Section 197(1) of CrPC to the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA)**.

What was the SC Case? The case involved IAS officers Bibhu Prasad Acharya and Adityanath Das, along with former Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy, facing charges of money laundering. The ED had challenged the Telangana High Court's decision to set aside the trial court order that took cognizance of the complaints against the officers without prior sanction.

SC'S KEY OBSERVATIONS

Applicability of Section 197(1) to PMLA: The court held that Section 65 of PMLA allows the application of CrPC provisions to PMLA proceedings unless inconsistent with PMLA. Section 197(1) of CrPC is consistent with PMLA and, therefore, applicable.

Public Servants under Section 197(1): The IAS officers met the criteria of being public servants, and the alleged offenses were connected to their official duties.

Overriding Effect of Section 71 of PMLA: The ED argued that Section 71 of PMLA, which gives it overriding power over other laws, excluded CrPC provisions. The SC disagreed, stating that Section 65 of PMLA ensures CrPC provisions, such as Section 197(1), remain applicable and cannot be overridden by Section 71.

Implications: Cognizance of offenses under PMLA against Acharya and Das was invalid as prior sanction under Section 197(1) was not obtained.

VAJIRAM AND RAVI

The Recitals (December 2024)

Page 5

be exploited by influential public servants to evade timely prosecution, undermining the credibility of the ED and other investigative agencies.

✓ **Example:** The Lalit Modi case saw delays due to procedural requirements, impacting the momentum of investigations.

2. **Weakened Investigative Momentum:** Delays in obtaining sanction may disrupt the ED's ability to pursue money laundering cases, especially those involving complex networks. Prolonged litigation and procedural hurdles can diminish the deterrent effect of PMLA, emboldening corrupt practices among public servants.

✓ **Example:** In multi-crore scams like the 2G spectrum case, procedural delays hinder swift action against key officials.

3. **Challenge to Convictions:** Public servants convicted by trial courts in such cases can argue during appeals that prior sanction was not obtained. If the appellate court accepts this argument, the conviction could be set aside, even if the trial process was otherwise valid.

4. **Timing of the Sanction Objection:** As established in **P.K. Pradhan v. State of Sikkim (2001)**, the absence of prior sanction can be raised at any stage- during the trial or even post-conviction. However, the accused must demonstrate that the alleged acts were performed in the course of their official duties.

✓ The SC in its Bibhu Prasad Acharya Judgment clarified that the absence of sanction can still be considered even after cognizance of the offense has been taken by the trial court under Section 4 of PMLA (punishment for money laundering). This allows the accused to challenge the validity of the proceedings on sanction grounds at any stage.

✓ In Devinder Singh v. State of Punjab (2016), the SC emphasized that genuine acts of governance are protected, but illegal acts cannot be justified under the guise of official duty.

Middle Path

- **Time-Bound Sanction Decisions:** Introduce a fixed timeline (e.g., 90 days) for deciding on sanction requests to prevent delays.
 - ✓ Example: The Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013 ensures time-bound action in corruption cases.
- **Strengthen ED's Autonomy:** Reduce procedural dependencies on government sanction for cases under PMLA involving public servants.
- **Judicial Oversight:** Establish a mechanism where courts can review and override unjustified denial of sanction, ensuring justice.
- **Guidelines for Application:** Clearly define the scope of "official duties" to prevent misuse of the provision for shielding corrupt practices.

The SC judgement reinforces the need for a clear demarcation between acts performed in official capacity and those outside it, to determine the applicability of the sanction provision.



Merchant Shipping Bill 2024

The Merchant Shipping Bill, 2024, introduced in the Lok Sabha this winter session, faced strong opposition and disruptions in the House.

About the Merchant Shipping Bill, 2024

The Merchant Shipping Bill, 2024 seeks to replace the Merchant Shipping Act, 1958, with updated provisions that align with international standards.

Objectives

- **Global Competitiveness:** by increasing Indian tonnage (ship ownership under the Indian flag) and enhancing India's presence in global trade.

- **Protect Seafarers:** by improving their welfare, rights, and working conditions.
- **Favorable Regulatory Environment:** to boost investment in the Indian shipping sector and reducing compliance burdens while improving operational efficiency.
- **Environmental Safeguards:** by ensuring marine pollution prevention and effective maritime incident responses.
- **Align with International Conventions:** by fulfilling obligations under global maritime treaties to which India is a signatory.

Need

- **Obsolete Legislation:** The Merchant Shipping Act, 1958, is outdated, overly complex, and fails to address modern industry needs, such as pollution control (e.g., MARPOL compliance) and gender equality (SDG-5).
- **Sector Modernization:** Updated laws are necessary to enhance competitiveness, attract investment, and support domestic shipping, critical for India's blue economy.
- **Marine Environment Protection:** Strengthened mechanisms are required for pollution management, green port initiatives, and compliance with global frameworks like MARPOL and IMO's Carbon Intensity Indicator (CII).
- **Offshore Vessel Regulation:** Addressing regulatory gaps for offshore vessels, which constitute 50% of Indian-flagged ships, is vital for safety and operational efficiency. Offshore drilling and unregulated vessels face safety and operational risks; piracy, cyberattacks, and trafficking also require targeted legislative action in line with UNCLOS.
- **Maritime Training:** A legal framework is needed to regulate private maritime training institutes, ensure quality education, and address unauthorized operations post-liberalization.
- **Seafarer Welfare:** Expanded welfare provisions are essential for the growing Indian seafarer workforce, particularly those on foreign-flagged vessels (85%), aligning with conventions like International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (**STCW**) and Maritime Labour Convention (MLC), 2006.
- **International Conventions:** The existing law only partially implements key IMO conventions, including MARPOL, Convention on Limitation of Liability on Maritime Claims (LLMC), and the Wreck Removal Convention.
- **Modern Maritime Administration:** A regulator-cum-facilitator model is proposed to replace outdated provisions and incorporate digital technologies like blockchain, AI, and IoT, similar to Singapore's practices.
- **Ship Recycling Challenges:** Addressing issues in registering vessels for demolition, critical for India as the second-largest ship recycling center.

Key Provisions of the Merchant Shipping Bill, 2024

1. **Vessel Registration:** It expands eligibility for Indian-flagged vessels; allows registration of foreign vessels chartered under **bareboat charter-cum-demise** contracts; enables temporary registration for vessels set for recycling under the **Recycling of Ships Act, 2019**.
 - ✓ A bareboat charter-cum-demise is a maritime contract where a vessel is leased without crew or provisions, with the intention that ownership will transfer to the charterer after a set period, functioning like a lease-to-own arrangement for the ship. This provision, particularly beneficial for capital-deficient entrepreneurs, facilitates entry into the shipping industry without upfront investment.
2. **Seafarer Welfare:** It adopts **Maritime Labour Convention (MLC)** regulations and establishes a **Seafarers Welfare Board** to advise on seafarer rights and welfare.
3. **Maritime Safety and Pollution Control:** It mandates safety inspections, surveys, and certifications for compliance with global standards. It aligns with **MARPOL** and the **Wreck Removal Convention** and enforces pollution containment measures, including:
 - i. Reducing **Sulphur content** in marine fuel to below 0.5%.
 - ii. Banning **single-use plastics** on Indian ships.

- iii. Launching the ‘Swachh Sagar’ portal for ship waste disposal.
- 4. **Liability and Compensation:** It provides frameworks for maritime claims like collisions, accidents, and cargo loss and introduces a **limitation fund** for settling claims efficiently.
- 5. **Regulatory Oversight:** It provides for constituting a body for **vessel and port security** with regulatory and oversight powers. It enhances coastal security post-26/11 Mumbai attacks, empowering authorities to regulate all vessel types.
- 6. **Repeal of Existing Laws:** i.e., **Merchant Shipping Act, 1958**, and the **Coasting Vessels Act, 1838** to streamline legal provisions.
- 7. **Maritime Education:** It introduces a legal framework to regulate **maritime training institutes**, ensuring standardized education, eliminating unauthorized institutes and ensuring high-quality training.
- 8. **Expanded Vessel Scope:** The new Bill expands the definition of ‘vessels’ to include various crafts like submersibles, hydrofoils, barges, Mobile Offshore Drilling Units (MODUs), and Mobile Offshore Units (MOUs), whether mechanized or not, ensuring transparency and comprehensive regulatory oversight in the offshore sector.
- 9. **Foreign Investment:** It reduces the ownership threshold for Indian entities from 100% to 51%, allowing Limited Liability Partnerships (LLPs), Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), and Overseas Citizens of India (OCIs) to invest while retaining majority Indian ownership. It also permits foreign entities to hold shares while ensuring majority ownership remains with Indian entities, NRIs, or OCIs.
- 10. **Temporary Registration for Demolition:** It introduces provisions for temporary registration of vessels destined for recycling, supporting hubs like **Alang** and boosting India’s ship recycling industry.
- 11. **Penalties and Enforcement:** It empowers officers to enforce penalties for contraventions and unsafe vessels. Central Government can detain vessels without nationality or in violation of laws.

The **Merchant Shipping Bill, 2024** is a forward-looking legislation designed to align Indian shipping laws with international practices. It focuses on improving operational efficiency, safeguarding seafarer rights, ensuring environmental sustainability, and boosting India’s competitiveness in global maritime trade.



ANI versus Open AI

Recently, Asian News International (ANI) sued OpenAI, the creator of the AI chatbot “ChatGPT” for unauthorized use and storage of its copyrighted work to train the company’s Large Language Model (LLM).

Background

- ANI has accused OpenAI of violating its intellectual property rights by using ANI's news content for training its AI model without proper authorization.
 - ✓ In the U.S., publishers like *The New York Times* and *Chicago Tribune* have sued OpenAI for unauthorized use of copyrighted content.

Arguments

ANI’s Allegations	Open AI’s Defence
<p>1. Unauthorized Use of Copyrighted Content: of ANI by OpenAI to train its AI model. ANI contends that its content, though online, is intended for limited use and requires authorization for access and storage.</p> <p>2. Licensing Offer Rejected: ANI claims it offered OpenAI a licensing agreement on October 3, 2024,</p>	<p>1. Fair Use/Transformative Use Defense: Similar to cases in the U.S., OpenAI contends that the outputs generated by its AI are transformative and add new meaning or expression, thus falling under “fair use” (a U.S. equivalent to India’s “fair dealing”).</p> <p>2. Jurisdictional Challenge: It contends that since its servers and offices are not located in India and no</p>

<p>but OpenAI declined, showing a disregard for intellectual property laws.</p> <p>3. Web Scraping Concerns: ANI views OpenAI's use of web scraping to gather data for training as equivalent to "serious theft," arguing that content creators have a right to determine how their work is used.</p> <p>4. Substantially Similar Outputs: ChatGPT generates responses that are either verbatim reproductions or substantially similar to its copyrighted content, amounting to direct infringement.</p> <p>5. Hallucinated Responses: ChatGPT creates fabricated news stories or interviews and falsely attributes them to ANI, damaging its credibility and reputation.</p> <p>6. Ineffectiveness of Opt-Out Mechanism: OpenAI blocked ANI's website following a notification in September 2024. However, ANI claims this was ineffective since its content is widely republished by third-party websites, allowing OpenAI's crawlers to access the material indirectly.</p> <p>7. Demand for Compensation: ANI seeks fair remuneration from OpenAI for the alleged use of its copyrighted content.</p>	<p>training of its LLMs occurred within Indian territory, the case lacks territorial jurisdiction.</p> <p>3. Commitment to Remedial Actions: It assured of resolving flagged instances of false attribution and pledged to avoid similar errors.</p> <p>4. Permissionless Innovation: It defended the practice of training AI models on freely accessible data, arguing that it promotes innovation and falls under text and data mining (TDM) exceptions.</p> <p>5. Expression vs. Facts: OpenAI argues that copyright law protects the specific expression of ideas, not the underlying facts or ideas themselves. Since LLMs do not directly reproduce ANI's exact expressions, it contends that no copyright infringement has occurred.</p> <p>6. ANI's Domain Blocked: by OpenAI and it has ceased using ANI's content for training its models.</p> <p>7. Standard Industry Practice: It defended its approach, asserting that training AI models on publicly available data is a common industry practice.</p> <p>8. Content Restriction Option: If content creators, such as ANI do not wish to allow data scraping by AI companies they could restrict access to their websites.</p>
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- **Court Proceedings:** The Delhi High Court (HC) appointed an *amicus curiae* to help on the intricacies of AI and the use of data for training. The specialist will share information about how ChatGPT and similar AI systems operate, with particular attention paid to the use of data to develop large-scale models.
 - The court declined to issue an interim order restraining OpenAI but rescheduled the next hearing for **January 2025** to allow for a detailed assessment.

Copyright Act, 1957

The **Copyright Act, 1957** governs copyright law in India. It was amended in 2012 to align with international standards like the WIPO Copyright Treaty (WCT) and the WIPO Performances and Phonograms Treaty (WPPT) and strengthen protection for authors and creators. The law provides protection for original works of authorship in the fields of **literary, artistic, dramatic, and musical works**, as well as **cinematographic films, sound recordings and computer programs** (treated as **literary works**).

✓ Software exports, especially by firms like Infosys and TCS, rely on copyright law to safeguard intellectual property. India's IT industry contributed \$245 billion in exports (FY 2023).

Rights Conferred by Copyright: Copyright grants the creator the exclusive rights to:

- **Reproduce** the work in any form.
- **Distribute** copies of the work.
- **Perform** the work publicly (for dramatic, musical, and artistic works).
- **Display** the work in public (for artistic works).
- **Make adaptations or derivative works** based on the original.
- **Transmit** the work through radio, television, or the internet.

Duration of Copyright

- For **literary, dramatic, and musical works**, copyright lasts for the **life of the author + 60 years**.
- For **cinematographic films, sound recordings, and photographs**, copyright lasts for **60 years** from the year of publication.
- In the case of anonymous or pseudonymous works, the term is **60 years** from the date of publication.

Moral Rights: The author of a work has **moral rights** to:

- Claim authorship of the work (Right of attribution).
- Object to any distortion, mutilation, or modification of the work that may harm the author's honour or reputation (Right of integrity).

Copyright Registration: While copyright protection is automatic upon creation of the work, **registration** of copyright with the **Copyright Office** is possible but not mandatory. Registration can be used as evidence in legal proceedings and to resolve disputes.

Infringement and Remedies: Copyright infringement occurs when a work is reproduced, performed, or distributed without the authorization of the copyright owner. Legal remedies include:

- **Civil remedies:** Injunctions, damages, and account of profits.
- **Criminal remedies:** Penalties, fines, and imprisonment for willful infringement.
- **Statutory damages:** The court may award statutory damages in the event of infringement.

Exceptions and Limitations: Copyright law allows certain exceptions, including:

- **Fair use:** Use of copyrighted work for purposes like criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching, research, etc., without infringing the copyright. **E.g.** Photocopying excerpts for university courses are allowed under fair use.
- **Library and educational use:** Limited reproduction for non-commercial use by libraries, educational institutions, etc.
- **Use of works in the public domain:** Works whose copyright has expired can be used freely.

Key Legal and Technological Questions Involved in the Case

1. **Jurisdiction:** Can Indian courts exercise authority over a foreign entity like OpenAI that operates without a physical presence in India?
2. **Fair Use/Fair Dealing:** Does OpenAI's use of ANI's publicly available content for training its AI models fall under the scope of "fair dealing" under Indian copyright law?
3. **Intellectual Property Rights and AI:** Should training AI models on publicly available but copyrighted data be considered a violation of intellectual property rights?
4. **Content Control by Creators:** To what extent are content creators responsible for implementing technological measures (e.g., access restrictions) to protect their content?

Fair Use Precedents: A similar issue arose in the U.S. when courts ruled in favour of Google's book digitization project without obtaining permission from copyright owners. This landmark case established a key precedent on how AI and digital technologies interact with copyright laws, fueling debate on what constitutes "fair use" in the digital era.

Global Conversations on AI Regulation

- **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), 2018:** Europe's GDPR (2018) provides robust data protection, while the proposed AI Act ensures ethical, transparent AI deployment through risk-based regulation (e.g., stricter controls for high-risk systems like healthcare).
 - ✓ **Case Study: The Cambridge Analytica** scandal demonstrated how opaque AI algorithms can manipulate public opinion.
- **Geneva AI Ethics and Regulation Conference (April 2024):** underscored ethical AI development, accountability, and labor rights protection, citing cases like ANI vs. OpenAI.

- ✓ UNESCO's AI Ethics Recommendation, adopted by 193 countries, sets global benchmarks.
- **Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) AI Principles:** advocates international cooperation to balance AI benefits with risks like data misuse and IP breaches (e.g. AI Policy Observatory aims to create shared databases for informed policymaking)
- **Cross-Border Data Flows:** The India-EU Trade and Technology Council addresses AI regulatory alignment for mutual benefit.

Implications: The outcome of this case could set a critical precedent for:

1. **Copyright Law Evolution:** Determining if AI-generated outputs, such as summaries or analyses, qualify as transformative and exempt from infringement claims. A ruling favoring ANI may require stricter licensing for training datasets.
2. **Jurisdictional Issues:** The case could define jurisdictional reach for global AI entities. **(In Google India Private Limited vs Visakha Industries (2020):** Clarified liability of foreign digital platforms operating in India.)
3. **Potential Precedent:** This case could set a landmark precedent for regulating AI models in India, influencing global standards for intellectual property protection and innovation in AI.
4. **Policy Recommendations:** Policymakers could adopt a "permissionless innovation" framework, ensuring protections for content creators through clear guidelines on AI training, TDM exceptions (Text and Data Mining), and licensing agreements.
 - ✓ Japan allows TDM for research purposes under copyright law exceptions. Adopting similar measures in India could balance innovation with creator rights.



Application Of POSH Act to Political Parties

The Supreme Court (SC) recently heard a PIL stating that the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 (POSH Act) should apply to political parties.

- ✓ The court directed the petitioner to approach the Election Commission of India (ECI) to urge political parties to establish an in-house mechanism for handling sexual harassment complaints in line with the POSH Act.

In a similar 2022 case- *Centre for Constitutional Rights Research and Advocacy v State of Kerala*, the Kerala High Court ruled that political parties do not have an "employer-employee relationship" with their members and do not operate as a "workplace" under the POSH Act. Therefore, political parties were not required to establish Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs).

Could the POSH Act apply to political parties?

Applying the POSH Act to political parties presents unique challenges due to their structure and operation which include:

1. **Representation of People Act, 1951 (RP Act):** under Section 29A, mandates groups seeking political party registration to apply to the Election Commission of India (ECI) with details like the party name, office location, office bearers, and rules adhering to the Constitution. However, it lacks provisions for workplace issues or mechanisms to address complaints like sexual harassment.
2. **Definition of Workplace:** Political parties employ many temporary workers, often in field roles without a defined office space. This decentralized and informal structure complicates the identification of a "workplace" within a political party.
3. **Employer Definition:** Setting up an ICC under POSH act is difficult to apply in case of political parties as there is no clear "employer" because members and workers may not have formal employment contracts. Party

constitutions, however, outline organizational hierarchies that could help identify decision-makers responsible for ICC formation.

4. **Employee Definition:** The Act's broad definition of "employee" includes temporary staff, volunteers, and contract workers, which could cover political party workers. However, clarifications would be needed for applying these provisions.
5. **Existing Mechanisms in Political Parties:** Political parties currently rely on internal discipline mechanisms for addressing misconduct. These mechanisms lack the impartiality, external oversight, and mandatory inclusion of women required by an ICC under the POSH Act.

About POSH Act, 2013
(Administered By: Union Ministry of Women & Child Development)

The **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013** was enacted to ensure women's safety and dignity in workplaces.

Background

- ◆ **Vishaka Guidelines (1997):** The act builds on the Vishaka Guidelines issued by the SC in 1997, which arose from the gangrape case of Bhanwari Devi, a Rajasthan social worker. The guidelines imposed three obligations on workplaces:
 - **Prohibition** of sexual harassment.
 - **Prevention** of harassment through awareness and mechanisms.
 - **Redressal of complaints** through the establishment of Complaints Committees.

Key Features of the POSH Act

1. **Definition of Sexual Harassment:** broadly encompasses physical contact and advances; demands or requests for sexual favors; sexually colored remarks; showing pornography and unwelcome physical, verbal, or non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature.
 - ✓ The Ministry of Women & Child Development further elaborates on harassment behaviors in its Handbook, including offensive remarks; Inappropriate inquiries about personal or sexual life; Intimidation or threats tied to sexual favors and displaying offensive material through emails, posters, or messages.
2. **Circumstances Amounting to Sexual Harassment:** The Act lists five specific scenarios:
 - a. Promises of preferential treatment in employment.
 - b. Threats of adverse treatment.
 - c. Threats affecting employment status.
 - d. Interference with work or creating a hostile environment.
 - e. Humiliating treatment impacting health or safety.
3. **Applicability:** The Act applies to **all women**, regardless of employment status, visiting or working at any workplace. Workplaces (defined under Section 3(1) of the act) include public and private offices, field locations, homes (for domestic workers), hospitals, sports venues, and any place visited during employment.
4. **Institutional Mechanism:** The Act mandates every employer with 10 or more employees to establish an Internal Complaints Committee (ICC).
5. **Internal Complaints Committee (ICC):** It is composed of a presiding officer (woman), at least two employees committed to women's welfare, and one external member from an NGO or related field.
6. **ICC's Complaint and Inquiry Procedure:** The victim or her legal heir (in cases of incapacity) can file the complaint to the ICC within 3 months of the incident. The ICC may extend this period if justified.
 - Both the accused and the complainant are given an opportunity to be heard.
7. **Redressal and Penalties:** If harassment is proven the employer acts as per company service rules, which may include dismissal, suspension, or financial penalties. The compensation is determined based on emotional distress, career impact, medical expenses, and the respondent's financial capacity.
 - ✓ If the complaint is found **false or malicious** the ICC may recommend action against the complainant.

Appeal Mechanism: Both the complainant and the accused can appeal the ICC's decision in court within 90 days of the ICC decision.

<p>Congress' Constitution and Rules- It provides for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A hierarchy of committees, enabling higher-level committees to act against subordinate committees and members. There is no requirement for women or external members. ● Being guilty of offences involving moral turpitude as "Breach of Discipline". 	<p>BJP 'Constitution and Rules'- It provides for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A seven-level organizational structure, from Local Committees to the national level with an exhaustive list of members and office bearers at each level. ● "Disciplinary Action Committee" at national and state levels. There is no requirement for women or external members. ● Acting in a way calculated to lower the prestige of the Party as "Breach of Discipline".
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Can ECI Direct Political Parties to Comply with Other Laws?

The Election Commission of India (ECI) derives its authority from **Article 324** of the Constitution which grants it the power of **superintendence, direction, and control** over elections for Parliament, State legislatures, the President, and the Vice-President. The **Representation of People Act (RP Act)** further strengthens these powers.

- While ECI's role has been defined in the RP Act clearly, when it comes to other laws, it's not as well-defined. It can only **issue advisories** to political parties to ensure compliance with various laws. For example, in 2013, the **Central Information Commission (CIC)** ruled that the **Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005** applies to political

parties. Following this ruling, petitions were filed in the SC seeking directions for political parties to appoint public information officers. However, political parties have not fully complied.

Implications of Applying POSH Act to Political Parties

1. **Establishment of Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs):** by political parties at local, state, and national levels, compliant with POSH Act with at least one woman member and an external expert.
2. **Liability for Sexual Harassment Complaints:** on Political parties within their organizations, ensuring timely, confidential handling, and setting up proper inquiry mechanisms. Failure to comply could result in legal consequences.
3. **Definition of Employer:** Political parties would need to define the "employer" within their decentralized structures to clarify responsibility for setting up the ICC and handling complaints.
4. **Political Sensitivity:** Applying POSH Act to political parties may face resistance due to the temporary, hierarchical nature of party structures and conflicts with the Act's requirements, such as the need for external members and transparency in handling complaints.
5. **Role of Political Leadership:** Political leaders would be responsible for ensuring POSH Act compliance and could be held accountable for mishandling complaints or failing to establish proper mechanisms.
6. **Increased Accountability and Transparency:** Enforcing the POSH Act in political parties would increase accountability, transparency, and require public disclosure of actions taken on harassment complaints, possibly reporting to the Election Commission.
7. **Potential for Abuse of Power:** In politics, power dynamics may lead to abuse, with victims fearing retaliation or career damage.
8. **Legal and Constitutional Issues:** can be raised about enforcement by the ECI and challenges from parties, arguing that political work doesn't fit traditional "workplace" definitions or regulations.



One Nation, One Election Bill 2024

The **One Nation, One Election (ONOE) Bill** was passed in the Lok Sabha with 269 votes in favor and 198 against. The proposal was first analyzed by a high-level committee chaired by President Ram Nath Kovind, and it is now set to undergo further scrutiny by a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC).

✓ India held simultaneous elections from **1951 to 1967**. Disruptions began with premature dissolution of assemblies in **1968–69**, leading to the current staggered system.

- JPC is formed by Parliament for specific tasks like scrutinizing a subject or Bill.
- It is established after one House passes a motion, and the other agrees. The number of members varies and is decided by Parliament.
- A JPC's mandate depends on the motion that creates it, and while its recommendations are persuasive, they are not binding. The government may act on its suggestions but is not compelled to.
- Previous JPCs have investigated issues such as telecom licenses, pesticide residues, stock market scams, securities irregularities, the Bofors contract, and the office of profit.

About the One Nation, One Election (ONOE) Bill 2024

The **ONOE Bill** proposes simultaneous elections for the **Lok Sabha** and **State Assemblies**, aiming to streamline India's electoral process. The initiative includes two Bills:

1. **Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024:** seeks to amend the Constitution to align the terms of Lok Sabha and State Assemblies and introduces Article 82A to mandate simultaneous elections and provides mechanisms for mid-term election scenarios.

2. **Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024:** amends existing laws for Union Territories and Delhi to enable simultaneous elections.

Key Features of the ONOE Bill

1. **Simultaneous Elections:** It aligns Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections. Municipal elections are excluded. This is expected to be implemented by the **2034 election cycle**, provided all terms align and necessary amendments are passed.
 - ✓ **South Africa:** Conducts national and provincial elections simultaneously, ensuring stability and cost savings.
2. **Mid-Term Elections:** In case of early dissolution, elections will be held for the remainder of the unexpired term. It also introduces clauses ensuring the new Lok Sabha or Assembly does not continue the legislative business of its predecessor.
3. **Constitutional Amendments:** It requires a **special majority** under Article 368 and ratification by at least half the states. It also amends Articles 83, 85, 172, 174, 324 among others, to synchronize election cycles and expand the Election Commission's role.

- **Article 83:** Concerning the duration of the Houses of Parliament, amendments are required to fix the tenure and timing for the dissolution of the Lok Sabha.
- **Article 85:** Pertaining to sessions, prorogation, and dissolution of Parliament, clear guidelines must be established to prevent arbitrary or ambiguous dissolution of sessions.
- **Article 172:** Governing the duration of State Legislatures, amendments are needed to synchronize their tenure with that of the Lok Sabha.
- **Article 174:** Deals with sessions, prorogation, and dissolution of State Legislatures. Amendments are required to standardize procedures and timelines.
- **Article 324:** Empowers the ECI to supervise, direct, and control the entire process of elections to the Parliament and State Legislatures, amendments are required to fix the tenure and timing for the dissolution of the Lok Sabha.

Benefits	Challenges
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Governance Stability: It will reduce frequent disruptions caused by staggered elections, enabling focus on development. Politicians will be encouraged to focus on long-term governance instead of short-term electioneering. 2. Economic Efficiency: It will help cut costs of repeated election cycles (e.g., ₹60,000 crore spent during the 2019 elections, a figure that could be reduced by nearly 50% with ONOE.). 3. Policy Continuity: It will help prevent policy paralysis caused by frequent enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct. 4. Increased Voter Turnout: Fewer elections will lead to less voter fatigue, possibly boosting participation. Countries like Indonesia witness high turnout rates due to simultaneous elections at multiple levels. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Synchronization Challenges: Coordinating elections for diverse regions and political environments may be difficult, especially if governments face confidence issues. Example: A state like Maharashtra may have just started its term, while Uttar Pradesh approaches the end of its tenure. Aligning these without disrupting ongoing governance is complex. 2. Federalism and Constitutional Concerns: The policy may require constitutional amendments to Articles 83, 85, 172, and 174, raising concerns about the centralization of power and impacting India's federal structure. Example: ONOE could dilute India's federal ethos, particularly for smaller states like Nagaland or Meghalaya, where regional identity plays a crucial role. 3. Voter Confusion: Simultaneous elections might lead to voter confusion between national and state-level issues. Example: In 2019 Lok Sabha elections, national issues like Pulwama overshadowed local concerns in states like Rajasthan and Haryana.

<p>5. Level Playing Field: It could create a level playing field, allowing smaller and regional parties to compete more effectively by reducing election costs, preserving local issue focus, and promoting inclusivity with greater political opportunities for diverse leaders.</p> <p>6. Mitigate Resource Diversion: Decreased need for frequent election-related deployments will allow officials to focus on core responsibilities. Example- Teachers deployed for election duties often neglect classroom teaching, affecting education outcomes in rural areas.</p>	<p>4. Reduced Accountability: Fixed election terms could reduce the need for governments to remain accountable to the public.</p> <p>5. Logistic Complexity: Organizing simultaneous elections would require significant resources, including vast numbers of voting machines and trained personnel.</p> <p>6. Political Impact: The policy could overshadow regional issues, favor national parties, and reduce the influence of state-specific concerns, raising concerns about political fairness and democratic values.</p> <p>7. Financial and Administrative Concerns: While ONOE reduces long-term election costs, the transition to this system requires significant initial investments in infrastructure, training, and capacity building. Example- The Election Commission of India (ECI) and state-level electoral bodies would need extensive reorganization to handle simultaneous elections effectively.</p>
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Places of Worship Act, 1991

The Supreme Court (SC) recently ordered a ban on civil courts registering new suits related to the ownership and title of religious places, as well as ordering surveys of disputed sites. This decision, made in light of ongoing petitions challenging the **Places of Worship Act, 1991**, also restricts pending suits from issuing "effective" interim or final orders, including surveys, until the next hearing on **February 17, 2025**.

About the Places of Worship Act, 1991

The **Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991** was enacted to maintain the religious character of places of worship in India as they existed on **August 15, 1947**, the day India gained independence. The law aims to prevent disputes regarding the ownership and religious identity of such places by freezing the status of these sites as they were on that date.

Objective: To **preserve communal harmony** and **prevent disputes** over the religious identity of places of worship that could arise in the future.

✓ Article 25 and 26: The Act aligns with the fundamental rights guaranteeing freedom of religion but also restricts these rights in public interest.

✓ It was a response to the **Ayodhya dispute**, which had stirred communal tensions. By freezing the religious character of all places of worship except for the Babri Masjid dispute, the law aimed to promote peace and reduce religious polarization.

✓ In the **S.R. Bommai Case (1994)**, the Supreme Court highlighted secularism as part of the basic structure of the Constitution. The Act echoes this commitment.

Key Provisions of the Act

1. **Prohibition on Conversion (Section 3):** It prohibits the conversion of the religious character of any place of worship from that which existed on **August 15, 1947**. It means no place of worship can be altered in terms of religion, e.g., a mosque cannot be converted into a temple, or vice versa.

2. **Judicial Review Restrictions (Section 4):** The Act essentially bars any judicial review of disputes regarding the title or religious character of places of worship that were in existence as of **August 15, 1947**, except for the Babri Masjid case.

3. Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid Exception (Section 5): The only exception to this rule is the **Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid** case, which was already sub judice (under judicial consideration) at the time the law was enacted. This specific case was exempted from the Act, allowing the legal proceedings to continue without being affected by it.

4. Retrospective Cut-off Date: The cut-off date of **August 15, 1947** was chosen as a historical marker, establishing that the religious character of all places of worship in India is fixed as it was on that date, with no retroactive claims allowed.

****Contemporary Relevance:** Ongoing legal cases related to Kashi Vishwanath-Gyanvapi Mosque and Mathura's Krishna Janmabhoomi-Shahi Idgah bring the Act into contemporary relevance.

Case Background

Petitions filed in **October 2020** have challenged the Act on two primary grounds:

- 1. Judicial Review:** Petitioners argue that the law limits the ability of the judiciary to review the ownership and title disputes over places of worship, which violates the principle of judicial scrutiny.
- 2. Arbitrariness of the Cut-off Date:** Some also argue that the retrospective date of **August 15, 1947**, is arbitrary and unfairly limits people's ability to pursue claims regarding places of worship that were affected by historical events.

Places of Worship Act: A Timeline

- **1991:** Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act enacted.
- **Oct 2020:** First petition filed challenging the Act; five more filed subsequently on grounds of arbitrariness on date, and the fact that it takes away judicial review.
 - ✓ This Raised questions about the scope of Section 3 (prohibition on conversion of the religious character).
- **Aug 2021:** Five women filed suit in Varanasi seeking permission to pray at the Gyanvapi mosque.
- **May 2022:** After case reached SC, then CJI D Y Chandrachud orally observed that a survey "may not necessarily fall foul" of the Places of Worship Act.
- **2022-2024:** At least six suits were filed claiming past existence of a Hindu temple at the site of a mosque or dargah. Surveys were ordered in three of these cases.
- **Dec 2024:** SC barred further survey orders, further "effective" orders, and the registering of fresh suits. Reinforced the core intent of the Act- preventing new disputes over places of worship and Reaffirmed the judiciary's role in preserving communal harmony.

- **Core Question Before the SC-** Whether district courts, when hearing civil suits related to the title or ownership of places of worship, can effectively undermine the purpose of the **Places of Worship Act, 1991?**
- **2022 SC Observations:** It clarified that ordering surveys of places of worship does not inherently violate the **Places of Worship Act, 1991**. It examined "hybrid character" sites, where symbols of different religions coexist, but did not rule on whether determining the religious character of such places would violate the Act's provisions, particularly **Sections 3 and 4**, which prohibit changing the religious character of a site from what it was on **August 15, 1947**.
- **Relevance of Ayodhya Verdict, 2019:** It reaffirmed that-
 - the **Places of Worship Act, 1991** is part of the **basic structure** of India's Constitution, vital for maintaining secularism and protecting religious sites.
 - historical wrongs should not disrupt present or future peace and that the Act plays a key role in healing communal wounds and ensuring harmony.

Key Directions Issued by the SC in Present Case

- **Suspension of Proceedings:** New suits may be filed, but no action will be taken, and ongoing proceedings will be paused.

Implications of SC Order

- 1. No New Civil Suits:** Civil courts are prohibited from registering new cases

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Union Government Clarification: The Union Government must clarify its stance on the constitutional validity of the Places of Worship Act within four weeks. • Detailed Examination Required: The constitutional validity, scope, and implications of the Act require thorough scrutiny. • Adherence to Ayodhya Judgment: Civil courts must follow the principles of the Ayodhya case and not bypass the SC. • Constitutional Bar on Religious Character Changes: Even without the Act, constitutional principles may prevent suits altering the religious character of worship places. • Judicial Review Concerns: The Court acknowledged challenges about the Act restricting judicial review, adding another layer of constitutional examination. 	<p>regarding the title or ownership of religious places of worship.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. No Surveys or Reports: Courts cannot order surveys or seek reports from bodies like the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) in pending or future cases. 3. Ongoing Cases Affected: Pending cases challenging religious titles or demanding surveys are also affected by this order, with no effective orders or interim rulings allowed until further directions from the Court. 4. Balance Between Religious Rights and Secularism: The 2024 SC ruling highlights ongoing tensions in balancing religious rights with maintaining India's secular constitutional framework.
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Oilfields (Regulation & Development) Amendment Bill, 2024

The Rajya Sabha has passed the Oilfields (Regulation and Development) Amendment Bill, 2024, with the aim of boosting domestic production of **petroleum and other mineral oils** while encouraging private investment. This amendment seeks to address gaps in the current law [**Oilfields (Regulation and Development) Act, 1948**], streamline regulations, and reduce India's dependence on imports. However, **the Bill** (introduced by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas) **has sparked criticism** over its potential impact on state rights and environmental concerns.

Background

- When the *Oilfields Act* was first passed it was known as the Mines and Minerals (Regulation and Development) Act, 1948.
- It governed and regulated oilfields, mines and minerals until 1957, when the present-day Mines and Minerals Act, 1957 came into force.
- To distinguish the spheres in which the two Acts would operate, the 1948 legislation was renamed the Oilfields (Regulation and Development) Act, 1948.
- Its language was also amended to replace references to “minerals” with “mineral oils”. However, the Act does not define “mineral oil”, an oversight that the current Oilfields Bill aims to correct.

Key Features of the Oilfields Bill

- **Clarification of Mineral Oil Definition**
 - The Bill defines "mineral oils" to include **hydrocarbons in various forms**, such as crude oil, natural gas (coal bed methane and shale gas etc), and petroleum.
 - **It excludes resources like coal, lignite, and helium**, as these fall under the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957.

- **Shift from Mining to Petroleum leases:**
 - Replaces term “**mining leases**” with “**petroleum leases,**” which are newly defined to include activities such as exploration, production, and disposal of mineral oils.
 - The Centre’s power to regulate petroleum leases **supersedes** earlier provisions for mining leases.
- **Encouragement of private investment:**
 - Introduces measures to **attract private players to boost domestic petroleum production.**
 - Maintains existing lease terms, ensuring no disadvantage to lessees during the lease period.
 - **Removes criminal penalties** for violations of the Act, replacing them with significant fines (up to ₹25 lakh) and additional daily penalties for persistent violations.
- **Adjudication of penalties:**
 - **The central government will appoint** an officer of the rank of Joint Secretary or above for adjudication of penalties.
 - **Appeals against the decisions** of the Adjudicating Authority will lie before the Appellate Tribunal specified in the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) Act, 2006.
 - The PNGRB Act, 2006 designates the **Appellate Tribunal for Electricity**, constituted under the Electricity Act, 2003, as the Appellate Tribunal.

Objectives and Potential Impacts of the Oilfields Bill

- **Boosting domestic production:**
 - Encourages private investment to reduce reliance on petroleum imports.
 - Modernises regulations to reflect industry needs and technological advancements.
- **Strengthening environmental oversight:** Expands the Centre’s authority to frame rules promoting renewable energy and reducing greenhouse gas emissions at oilfields.

Criticisms and Concerns Regarding the Oilfields Bill

- **Impact on state rights:**
 - Replacing “mining” with “petroleum” leases diminishes state powers **to tax and regulate activities.**
 - **The Supreme Court** recently upheld states’ rights to tax **mining** activities under the **State List** (7th Schedule of the Constitution), but the Bill’s focus on petroleum leases may shift regulatory power to the Union List.
- **Privatisation and environmental risks:**
 - Critics advocate **prioritising public-sector companies like ONGC.**
 - Concerns over the potential environmental impact of privatised operations and reduced criminal liability have been raised.
- **Demand for further review:** Opposition parties suggest sending the Bill to a select committee for a more detailed evaluation.



Syrian Rebels Seize Control of Damascus

- Syrian rebels toppled President Bashar al-Assad's 24-year regime in a swift offensive, forcing the 59-year-old leader to flee to Moscow, where he was granted asylum.
- The Islamist-led opposition declared the end of the 13-year civil war.

Syrian Civil War: A Brief Overview

- **Origin**
 - The Syrian Civil War began in March 2011 as part of the Arab Spring uprisings.

- Initially, peaceful protests demanding political reforms and greater freedoms erupted against President Assad's authoritarian regime.
- The government's violent crackdown on demonstrators escalated tensions, leading to armed conflict.

● **Reasons**

- **Authoritarian Rule:** Decades of oppressive governance under the Assad family created widespread resentment.
- **Economic Hardship:** High unemployment, corruption, and economic inequality fueled public dissatisfaction.
- **Sectarian Divide:** Syria's Sunni majority resented the dominance of the Alawite minority, to which Assad belongs.
- **Arab Spring Influence:** Protests in neighboring countries inspired Syrians to demand change.

● **Evolution into a Proxy War**



- **Internal Fragmentation:** The conflict fragmented into multiple factions, including the Assad regime, opposition groups, **Kurdish forces**, and extremist organizations like ISIS.
- **Regional Involvement:**
 - **Iran and Hezbollah:** Supported Assad to maintain influence in the region. Syria is part of Iran's "axis of resistance"
 - **Turkey:** Backed rebel groups to counter Kurdish autonomy near its border.
 - **Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS):** Initially formed as the Al Nusra Front with ties to the Islamic State and Al Qaeda, HTS emerged as a major jihadist faction by 2016.
- **Global Power Rivalry:**
 - **Russia:** Intervened militarily to support Assad, securing its interests in the Middle East.
 - **USA:** Supported Kurdish-led forces and moderate rebels to counter ISIS and Assad's regime.
- **Extremism:** The rise of ISIS and other jihadist groups turned the war into a battleground against global terrorism.



● **Timeline**

YEARS OF BLOODSHED AND DIVISION

The sudden collapse of Bashar al-Assad's rule over Syria marks the culmination of a nearly 14-year-old civil war that killed hundreds of thousands, displaced half the population and drew in outside powers. This is how it unfolded:

<p>2011: Security forces suppress protests against Assad with arrests and shootings. The uprising becomes an armed revolt.</p>		<p>2013: Lebanon's Hezbollah helps Assad to halt rebel momentum.</p>	<p>2015: Rebel groups gain more ground and seize northwestern Idlib. Russia joins Assad's side.</p>	<p>2017: Israeli air strikes against Hezbollah in Syria. U.S.-backed Kurdish forces defeat ISIS in Raqqa.</p>	<p>2019: Islamic State loses its last scrap of territory in Syria.</p>		<p>2023: Hamas attack on Israel on Oct 7 leads to reduced Hezbollah presence in Syria.</p>
<p>2012: Al Qaeda's Syrian affiliate, the Nusra Front bombs Damascus. Assad responds with airstrikes and the war escalates.</p>	<p>2014: Islamic State group seizes northeast Syria. The US builds anti-ISIS alliance, helping Kurdish forces.</p>	<p>2016: Turkey launches an incursion with rebels. Assad and allies defeat rebels in Aleppo. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham formation.</p>	<p>2018: The Syrian army recaptures eastern, central, and southern Syria territory.</p>	<p>2020: Russia-backed offensive ends with a ceasefire with Turkey. Kurdish forces control the northeast.</p>	<p>2024: Rebels launch a new assault on Aleppo, and enter Damascus in eight days. Assad flees country</p>		

● **The 2020 Ceasefire in Idlib**

- A ceasefire deal brokered by Turkey and Russia in March 2020 brought relative calm to Idlib province.
- Since the ceasefire, **HTS** has maintained de facto control of Idlib.
 - HTS, designated a terrorist group by the US, Russia, and Turkey, has a complex relationship with Turkey.

India-Kuwait Elevate Ties to Strategic Partnership

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to Kuwait marked a historic milestone in bilateral relations, as the two nations elevated their partnership to a **“strategic”** level.
- This significant development underscores **enhanced cooperation** in trade, defence, energy etc., and India's **growing role in the Gulf region amidst evolving geopolitical dynamics**.

Historic Significance of the PM's Visit to Kuwait

- **First visit in 43 years:** PM's visit was the first by an Indian Prime Minister since Indira Gandhi's visit in 1981.
- **Recognition of leadership:** Kuwait honoured Modi with its highest civilian award, 'The Order of Mubarak Al-Kabeer,' acknowledging his contribution to strengthening India-Kuwait ties.

- **Strengthening bilateral relations:**

- **Defence cooperation:** A comprehensive defence agreement was signed, covering areas:

- Training and exchange of personnel.
- Joint military exercises.
- Supply and research in defence technology.

- **Trade and economic ties:**

- Kuwait is one of India's top trading partners, with bilateral trade valued at **\$10.47 billion** (2023-24).
- Modi invited the Kuwaiti Investment Authority to explore opportunities in energy, pharma, food parks, and infrastructure in India.

- **Additional agreements:** 3 MoUs were signed in areas of: Sports, Culture, and Solar energy.

- **Expanding strategic cooperation:** The elevation to a strategic partnership aims to deepen collaboration in sectors like Pharmaceuticals; IT and FinTech; Infrastructure; Security.

- **Vision 2035 alignment:**

- PM Modi congratulated Kuwait on its developmental initiatives under 'Vision 2035.'
- Both leaders expressed mutual commitment to achieving shared goals through increased cooperation.

Implications of this Visit on the India-Kuwait Ties

- **People-to-people connections:** Acknowledgment of the 1 million-strong Indian community in Kuwait, appreciated for their contributions to the Gulf nation's development.

- **Regional and global implications:**

- **Collaboration with GCC:**

- India expressed interest in intensifying cooperation with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), leveraging Kuwait's Presidency.
- Focus on concluding the **India-GCC Free Trade Agreement** to boost trade volumes, which reached \$184.46 billion (2022-23).

- **Shared Vision for West Asia:**

- Discussion on ensuring **peace, stability, and prosperity** in the volatile West Asia region.
- Joint condemnation of terrorism and commitment to dismantling terror networks.

A Brief About India-Kuwait Ties

Background

- India and Kuwait enjoy **traditionally friendly relations**, which are rooted in history and have stood the test of time.
- India was one of the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with Kuwait following its independence from the British Protectorate in **1961**.
- India has been a natural trading partner of Kuwait and until 1961, Indian Rupee was a legal tender in Kuwait.

Current dynamics

- Kuwait is India's **6th largest crude oil supplier** and **4th largest LPG supplier**, meeting 3% of its energy needs.
- **Indian exports to Kuwait** surpassed \$2 billion for the first time. Kuwait Investment Authority's investments in India exceeded \$10 billion.
- **The Indian community** is Kuwait's largest expatriate group.

ICJ Begins Hearing On Landmark Climate Change Case

On December 2, the ICJ began hearings on a case seeking an advisory opinion on the obligations of countries under international laws regarding climate change and the legal consequences of those obligations.

Significance of This Hearing

• Nature and Potential Impact of the ICJ Advisory Opinion

- The hearing aims to produce an advisory opinion based on the UNGA resolution.
- While non-binding, the opinion could significantly influence global climate governance by broadening the legal basis for climate obligations and highlighting consequences for non-compliance.

• Historical Context of Climate Obligations

- Under the UNFCCC, about 40 developed countries were identified as primarily responsible for historical emissions.
- However, these countries have largely evaded these responsibilities, often shifting some burdens onto developing nations.

• Expanding the Basis of Climate Obligations


- The ICJ ruling may show that developed nations' climate obligations extend beyond the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement to other international legal frameworks.
- This could introduce new arguments in climate negotiations and bolster small island states' claims for compensation for climate-related damages.

• Potential Precedent for Climate Litigation

- An ICJ advisory opinion could strengthen thousands of climate lawsuits worldwide.
- As of 2023, over 2,600 cases have been filed globally, with several landmark rulings already delivered.
- For instance, the European Court of Human Rights ruled Switzerland's failure to meet emission targets violated its citizens' human rights.
- In April 2024, India's Supreme Court expanded fundamental rights to include protection from adverse climate impacts.

{For detailed discussion on ICJ, refer The Recitals - July 2024}

Background Of The Case



UNGA Resolution Initiated by Vanuatu

- The case stems from a UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution passed in March 2023, led by Vanuatu, a small Pacific Island nation severely threatened by rising sea levels.
- Vanuatu proposed seeking an ICJ advisory opinion on climate obligations in September 2021.
- The resolution, co-sponsored by 132 countries, received broad international support.
 - India had not joined the overwhelming majority of countries that co-sponsored the draft resolution.

Key Questions Raised in the Resolution

- The resolution seeks answers to two critical questions:
 - What are the obligations of countries under international law to protect the climate system?
 - What are the legal consequences for countries failing to meet these obligations and causing harm to the climate system?

Purpose of ICJ Advisory Opinion

- The UNGA resolution requests the ICJ to clarify the climate obligations of countries in light of these international laws and assess the legal consequences for non-compliance.

India's stand in the Hearings

- At the ICJ hearing on climate change, India
 - emphasized that developed countries have a greater responsibility to address climate change due to their high historical emissions.
 - Criticized developed nations for not providing sufficient climate finance to developing countries to help them adapt to and mitigate climate change.
 - Urged the ICJ to not create new legal obligations beyond existing international agreements, as they believe the current framework is sufficient and should be upheld.

The 18th biennial **State of Forest Report (ISFR-2023)** highlights a marginal gain of **156 sq km in forest cover** and a significant increase of **1,289 sq km in tree cover** since 2021. For the first time, India's green cover has surpassed the **25% threshold**.

✓ **ISFR** is published **every two years** by the **Forest Survey of India (FSI)** under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change. The first survey was published in **1987**.

Trends in Forest and Tree Cover Growth

- **Calculation:** Since 2001, **tree patches smaller than 1 hectare** have been measured separately as **tree cover**.
- **Trend**
 - The latest ISFR-2023 report shows the **sharpest growth in tree cover**, rising from **2.91% in 2021 to 3.41%** in 2023, marking **0.5% points increase in two years**.
 - In contrast, **forest cover growth has slowed**, increasing by only **0.05% points** since 2021.
- **Implication**
 - This aligns with the diminishing growth trend since forest cover surpassed the **20% threshold** in the early 2000s.
 - Between 2003 and 2013, forest cover grew by **0.61% points** (from 20.62% to 21.23%).
 - On the other hand, the next decade saw only a **0.53% point increase** to 21.76%.

Forests Within Forest

- **Classification of Forest Types in India**
 - In India, **tree patches measuring 1 hectare or more** with a **minimum canopy cover of 10%** are classified as forests, irrespective of land use or ownership.
 - Forests are categorized based on canopy density:
 - **Very Dense Forests (VDF):** Canopy density \geq 70%

Key Highlights of the India State of Forest Report 2023

◆ Forest and Tree Cover Statistics:

- Total forest and tree cover: **827,357 sq. km (25.17% of India's geographical area)**.
- Forest cover: **715,343 sq. km (21.76%)**.
- Tree cover: **112,014 sq. km (3.41%)**.
- Dense forests constitute **4,10,175 sq km**.

◆ Increase in Forest and Tree Cover:

- Total increase since 2021: **1,445 sq. km**.
- Forest cover increased by **156 sq. km**, and tree cover by **1,289 sq. km**.

◆ Top-Performing States:

- **Forest and Tree Cover Increases:**
 - Chhattisgarh: 684 sq. km.
 - Uttar Pradesh and Odisha: 559 sq. km each.
 - Rajasthan: 394 sq. km.
- **Forest Cover Increases:**
 - Mizoram: 242 sq. km.
 - Gujarat: 180 sq. km.
 - Odisha: 152 sq. km.

◆ State-Wise Leaders in Total Area Under Forest and Tree Cover:

- **Madhya Pradesh:** 85,724 sq. km.
- **Arunachal Pradesh:** 67,083 sq. km.
- **Maharashtra:** 65,383 sq. km.

◆ Highest Forest Cover in % :

- Lakshadweep: 91.33%.
- Mizoram: 85.34%.
- Andaman & Nicobar Islands: 81.62%.

◆ Significant Environmental Resources:

- Mangrove Cover: 4,992 sq. km.
- Bamboo-Bearing Area: Increased by 5,227 sq. km, totalling 154,670 sq. km.
- Growing Stock: Increased by 262 million cubic meters.

◆ Carbon Stock and Sequestration:

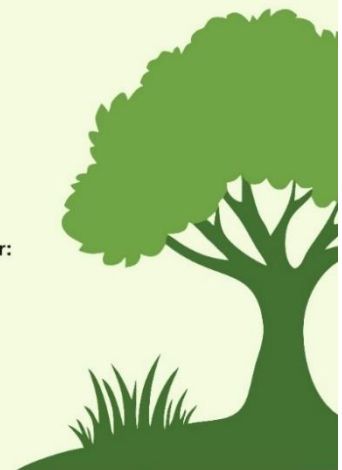
- Current carbon stock in forests: **7,285.5 million tonnes** (an increase of **81.5 million tonnes**).
- Targets under the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) for carbon sequestration: India's carbon stock has reached 30.43 billion tonnes of **CO2 equivalent**. This indicates that, compared to the base year of 2005, India has already added 2.29 billion tonnes of **carbon sink**, nearing the target of 2.5 to 3.0 billion tonnes by 2030

◆ States with Significant Forest Cover:

- 19 states/UTs have more than **33% geographical area** under forest cover.
- 8 states, including Mizoram, Lakshadweep, and Arunachal Pradesh, have over **75% forest cover**.

◆ Technological Advancements:

- Real-time fire alerts and forest fire services by FSI enhance forest management.



(classified since 2003).

- **Dense Forests:** Canopy density $\geq 40\%$.
- **Open Forests (OF):** Canopy density between 10-40%.
- **Non-Forest (NF):** Areas with $< 10\%$ canopy density, including shrubs.
- **Dynamic Changes in Forest Density**
 - Forests undergo transitions across density categories due to factors like **climate** and **biotic pressure**. For example:
 - A **VDF** may thin to a **Moderately Dense Forest (MDF)**.
 - An **OF** may improve to an **MDF**.
 - Forests may degrade to **NF** or **shrub areas**, indicating deforestation.
- **Limitations of Aggregated Data**
 - While aggregated data reflects the quantum of different forest types, it fails to capture the **dynamic transformation of forests**, where **natural forests degrade, disappear, or are replaced by plantations**.
 - Plantations often grow faster but do not replicate the ecological richness of natural forests.
- **Tracking Forest Change**
 - Since 2003, ISFR reports include a “**change matrix**”, detailing forest transitions across categories.
 - This data highlights **broad trends over two decades**, reflecting the dynamic nature of forest ecosystems.

Dense Forest Balance Sheet: Insights from ISFR-2023

- **Dense Forest Losses (2003-2023)**
 - India has lost **24,651 sq km** (6.3%) of its dense forests since 2003.
 - **2021-2023:** 3,913 sq km lost.
 - **2013-2023:** 17,500 sq km lost.
 - **2003-2013:** 7,151 sq km lost.
- **Plantation Gains Offset Dense Forest Losses**
 - Rapid transformation of **15,530 sq km of non-forested or scantily forested land** to dense forests over the past two decades has offset these losses.
 - Experts suggest these gains are predominantly **plantations**, as natural forests do not grow this quickly.
 - **2021-2023:** 1,420 sq km of plantations became dense forests.
- **Management and Density Improvements**
 - Better management practices have allowed **Open Forests (OFs)** to improve into **Moderately Dense Forests (MDFs)** over the last decade.
 - Combined with plantation gains, this has kept the dense forest cover largely stable.
 - The “change matrix” records a net increase of **1,370 sq km of dense forest** between 2003-2023.
 - **716 sq km of gains** were recorded in the 2021-2023 cycle alone.
- **Data Revisions and Paper Gains**
 - India’s dense forest cover officially grew by **21,601 sq km (6%)** between 2003-2023.
 - However, this figure includes **20,232 sq km of revisions** made in previous ISFR reports (2005, 2009, 2015, and 2021), raising questions about the accuracy of these gains.
- **Key Observation**
 - While plantations and management practices stabilize dense forest cover on paper, the ongoing **disappearance of natural dense forests** highlights the need for improved conservation measures.

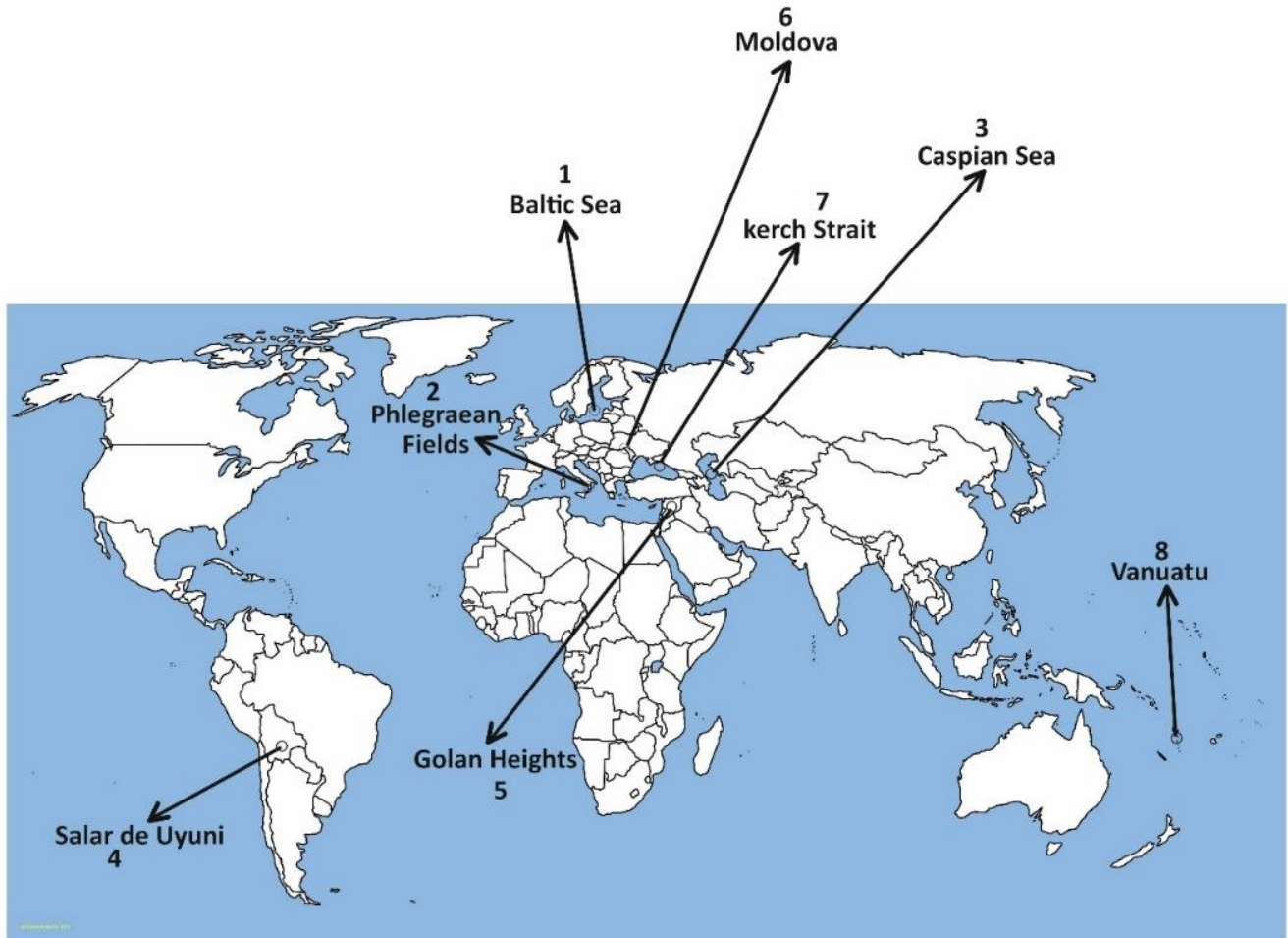
Implications of Forest Cover Trends

- **Criticism of Plantation-Based Forest Growth**
 - The apparent growth in forest cover through the **replacement of natural dense forests with plantations** has drawn criticism from experts.
 - Key issues include:

- **Uniformity and Vulnerability:** Plantations typically consist of trees of the same age and species, making them susceptible to **fire, pests, and epidemics**.
- **Barrier to Natural Regeneration:** Plantations hinder the regrowth of **biodiverse natural forests**, which provide a broader range of ecological benefits.
- **Ecological Superiority of Natural Forests**
 - **Biodiversity:** Natural forests support more species and complex ecosystems.
 - **Carbon Stock:** They store significantly more carbon, both in trees and soil, compared to plantations.
- **Climate Challenges of Plantation Forests**
 - **Rapid Growth Assumption:** In 2018, the **UNFCCC** flagged India's assumption that plantations reach the carbon stock level of natural forests in **just eight years**, which is unrealistic.
 - **Short-Term Gains, Long-Term Risks:** Plantations grow quickly and are promoted to meet carbon targets. However, they are often **harvested prematurely**, undermining long-term climate goals.
- **Conclusion**
 - While plantations may stabilize forest cover on paper and provide short-term carbon benefits, they fail to replicate the ecological and climate advantages of old natural forests, emphasizing the need for better conservation strategies.

MAPS: PLACES IN NEWS

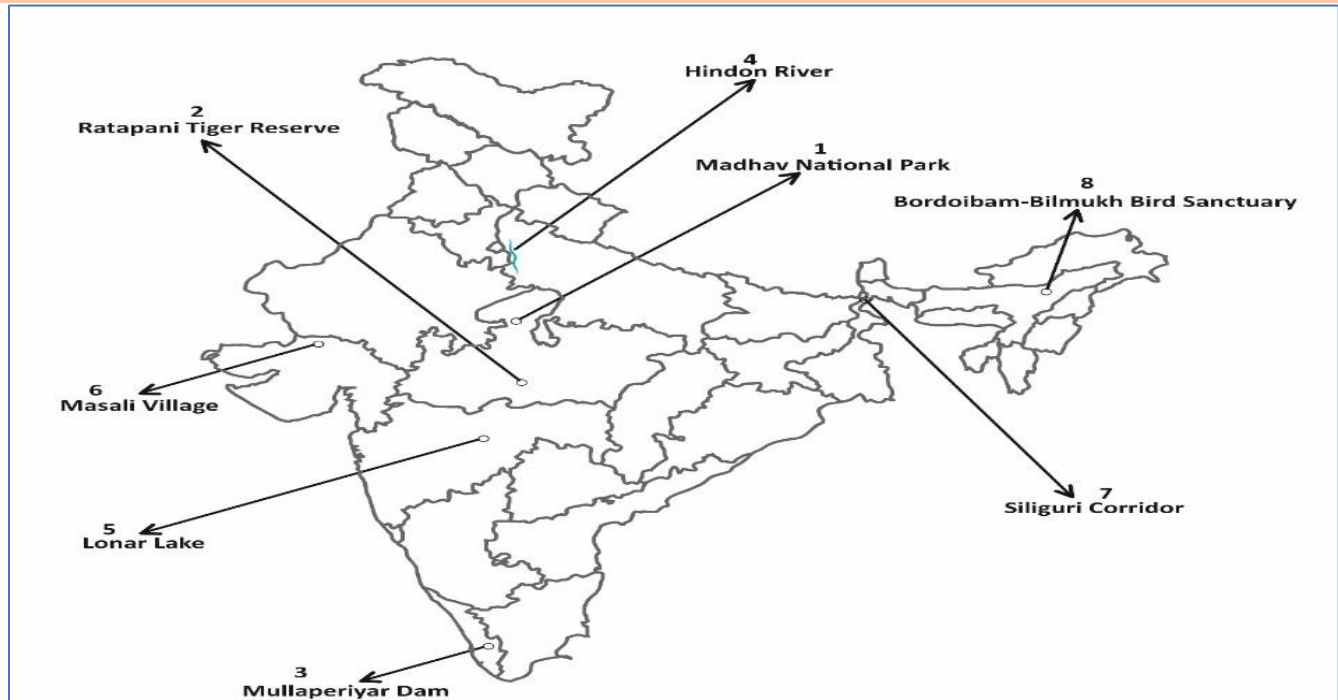
INTERNATIONAL PLACES IN NEWS



1	Baltic Sea	The cutting of undersea cables in the Baltic Sea has escalated geopolitical tensions, particularly in the context of the ongoing Ukraine war. Baltic sea is part of the North Atlantic Ocean, situated in Northern Europe, separating the Scandinavian Peninsula from continental Europe. Surrounding countries are Denmark, Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Russia, Finland, and Sweden.
2	Phlegraean Fields	It is an active super volcano (located in the vicinity of Naples, Italy) which is showing signs of increased activity. It is more of a volcanic system, with several centres situated within a depressed area called a caldera (essentially a deep sinkhole or cauldron).
3	Caspian Sea	Kazakhstan’s state-owned energy company said that it had decontaminated Soviet-era oil waste on the shores of the Caspian Sea. It lies between Europe and Asia, bordered by five countries: Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Iran, and Azerbaijan. It is the largest enclosed inland water body, often called a sea due to its size and salinity. Volga, Ural, and Kura rivers flow into the Caspian Sea.
4	Salar de Uyuni	It is the world’s largest salt flat in Bolivia, plays a pivotal role in the global energy transition due to its immense lithium reserves. This natural wonder, located in the heart of the ‘lithium triangle’ (Chile, Argentina, and Bolivia), highlights the strategic importance of salt flats in modern energy resources. It is Situated in southwest Bolivia, near the crest of the Andes.

5	Golan Heights	Israel recently agreed to double its population on the occupied Golan Heights. It is a strategically significant plateau located in south-western Syria, bordered by Israel, Lebanon, and Jordan. It offers a vantage point overlooking the Jordan River valley and the Sea of Galilee. It is bordered by the Yarmouk river in the south and the Sea of Galilee in the west.
6	Moldova	It has officially joined the International Solar Alliance (ISA) by signing its Framework Agreement. It is a landlocked country in the north-eastern Balkan region of Europe, bordered by Ukraine and Romania. Its capital is Chisinau. The country is drained by rivers such as Prut, Dniester, and Danube, and lies east of the Carpathian Mountains, with a well-developed network of streams and rivers flowing into the Black Sea.
7	Kerch strait	Two Russian oil tankers have been badly damaged in the Black Sea, causing an oil spill. The incident took place in the Kerch Strait, which separates Russia from Crimea (the Ukrainian peninsula illegally annexed by Moscow in 2014). It is a key route for exports of Russian grain, crude oil, fuel oil and liquefied natural gas. The Kerch Strait is a narrow waterway in Eastern Europe that connects the Black Sea with the Sea of Azov .
8	Vanuatu	A massive earthquake of magnitude 7.3 struck Vanuatu, an island nation in the South Pacific, causing significant damage and potential casualties. It is located in the South Pacific Ocean. Located at east of Australia, west of Fiji, and southeast of the Solomon Islands. The nation comprises 13 principal volcanic islands and many smaller islands, with active volcanoes like Yasur, Manaro, and Garet. Originally inhabited by Melanesians, it became a joint Anglo-French colony known as the New Hebrides, achieving independence in 1980.

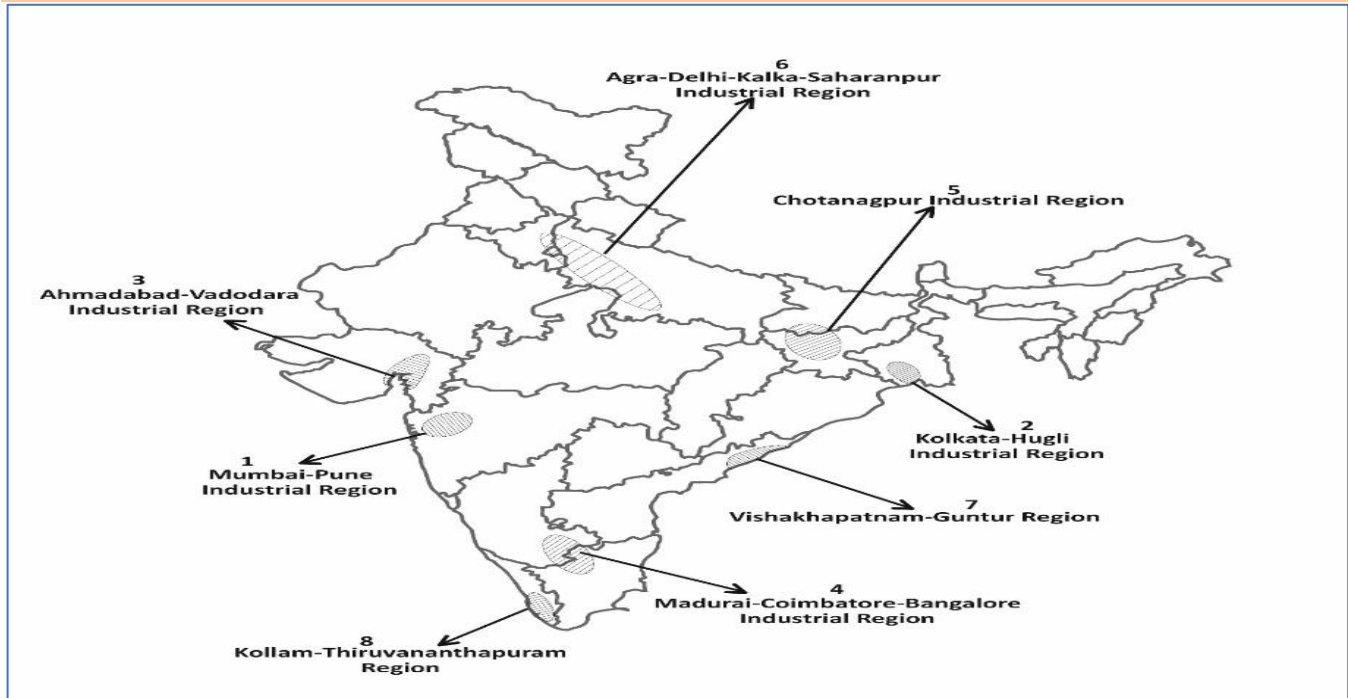
NATIONAL PLACES IN NEWS



1	Madhav National Park	National Tiger Conservation Authority has granted in-principle approval for the designation of Madhav National Park in Shivapuri district as 9 th tiger reserve of MP. It is situated on the northern fringe of the Central Highlands of India forming a part of the Upper Vindhyan Hills intermixed with plateaus, and valley sections. Sakhya
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		Sagar and Madhav Sagar are the two lakes in the southern part of the park, providing the aquatic biodiversity and lifeline for the terrestrial species. The park area forms a catchment of the Sind river which flows along the eastern boundary of the park.
2	Ratapani Tiger Reserve	The Madhya Pradesh government has officially notified the Ratapani Wildlife Sanctuary as the <i>state's 8th Tiger Reserve</i> . It is situated in the Vindhya Mountain Ranges across Raisen and Sehore districts of Madhya Pradesh. The Kolar River forms its western boundary, while the Dahod reservoir and Ratapani reservoir are key water sources within the reserve. It includes Bhimbetka rock shelters, a UNESCO World Heritage Site of international importance.
3	Mullaperiyar Dam	The Supreme Court scheduled in January 2025 a detailed hearing of a petition seeking to bring down the permissible water level of the Mullaperiyar Dam. It is a masonry gravity dam situated on the Periyar River in Thekkady, Idukki district, in Kerala. It is located 881 m above sea level, on the Cardamom Hills of the Western Ghats. The dam is built at the confluence of the Mullayar and Periyar rivers. The Periyar National Park is located around the dam's reservoir.
4	Hindon River	Once a lifeline for communities settled along its banks, the Hindon River in Western Uttar Pradesh, often called India's Sugar Bowl, has declared "Dead" by environmental experts due to severe pollution and lack of aquatic life. It originates in upper Shivalik Hills in Saharanpur district, Uttar Pradesh. Its major tributaries include Krishna & Kali Rivers, which significantly impact its flow and pollution levels.
5	Lonar Lake	Maharashtra government plans to submit a proposal to the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to include the famous Lonar Lake in Buldhana district in the Unesco World Heritage Sites list. It is one of only four known hyper-velocity impact craters in basaltic rock on Earth. The other three basaltic impact structures are in Brazil. It is a notified National Geo-heritage Monument. The lake's water is both saline and alkaline, making it unique. It is declared a Ramsar Wetland in November 2020.
6	Masali village	Masali village in Gujarat's Banaskantha district has become India's first fully solar-powered border village under the PM Suryaghar Yojana. It is 40 km away from the Pakistan border.
7	Siliguri corridor	Union Home Minister highlighted the significance of the Siliguri corridor as a crucial link to Northeast India. The Siliguri Corridor, often referred to as the "Chicken's Neck", is a strategically critical narrow stretch of land in the Indian state of West Bengal . It connects mainland India to its north-eastern states and is surrounded by Nepal to the west, Bhutan to the north, and Bangladesh to the south. It lies between the Himalayan foothills and Bangladesh.
8	Bordoibam-Bilmukh Bird Sanctuary	This Assam based Bird Sanctuary records a 72% decline in bird species count in 27 years. It is situated on the boundary of Dhemaji and Lakhimpur districts. It was originally part of the River Subansiri (a tributary of the Brahmaputra). It experiences a moist tropical climate with an average annual rainfall of about 2,000 mm. It is home to globally threatened species such as the Spot-billed Pelican and Lesser Adjutant

IMPORTANT INDUSTRIAL REGIONS IN INDIA



1	Mumbai-Pune Industrial Region	Located in Maharashtra, it is one of the most important industrial regions in India. It encompasses cities like Mumbai, Pune, Nashik, and Aurangabad. This region is known for its automobile manufacturing, information technology, and pharmaceutical industries.
2	Kolkata-Hugli Industrial Region	It is situated in West Bengal. Kolkata, Howrah, and Haldia are prominent cities within this region. It is known for its jute mills, steel plants, and chemical industries.
3	Ahmadabad-Vadodara Industrial Region	Located in Gujarat, it is renowned for its petrochemical, textile, and engineering industries. Ahmedabad and Vadodara are the major cities in this region.
4	Madurai-Coimbatore-Bangalore Industrial Region	Spanning across Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, it is a prominent manufacturing hub. This region is known for its textile, automobile, and information technology industries.
5	Chotanagpur Industrial Region	Situated in Jharkhand, it is known for its mineral-based industries. It is rich in coal, iron ore, mica, bauxite and steel reserves. Cities like Jamshedpur, Bokaro, and Dhanbad are important industrial centers within this region.
6	Agra-Delhi-Kalka-Saharanpur Industrial Region	Located in northern India, it is known for its leather goods, textiles, and handicraft industries. Agra and Delhi are major cities within this region, known for their historical significance and vibrant industrial activity.
7	Vishakhapatnam-Guntur Region	Located in Andhra Pradesh, it is an emerging industrial area. Vishakhapatnam, with its natural harbor, is a major center for industries such as shipbuilding, petrochemicals, and pharmaceuticals. Guntur is known for its agricultural processing industries, particularly in the field of spices and tobacco.
8	Kollam-Thiruvananthapuram Region	Situated in Kerala, it is a notable industrial region in the southern part of India. Thiruvananthapuram, the capital city of Kerala, is known for its information technology parks, educational institutions, and research centers. Kollam is renowned for its cashew processing and coir industries.

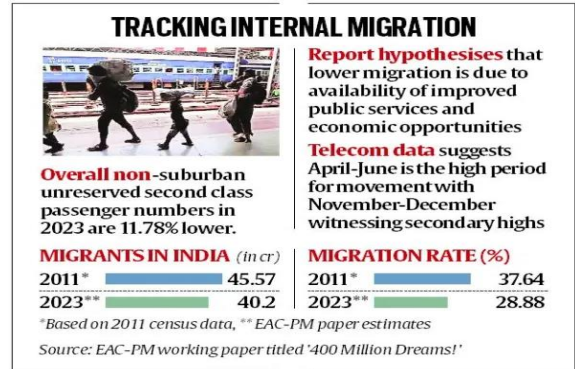
SOCIAL ISSUES

Migration Trends in India

- A recent working paper by the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM), titled "400 Million Dreams!", sheds light on the evolving migration trends in India.
- Similar exercise was undertaken in Economic Survey 2016-17.

Migration Trends in India Highlighted in the EAC-PM Report

- **Top states for migrant destinations:**
 - UP, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh remain prominent, while West Bengal and Rajasthan are new entrants, replacing Andhra Pradesh and Bihar.
 - **States showing the highest growth in incoming migrants:** West Bengal, Rajasthan, and Karnataka.
- **Decline in overall migration:**
 - The report notes an **11.78% reduction in the overall number of migrants** since the 2011 Census. This decline is attributed to **improved economic opportunities in smaller cities**, reducing the need for long-distance migration.



Major Migration Routes and District-Level Insights

Top state-to-state routes (2023):	Top destination districts for migrants	Emerging origin districts (2023)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Uttar Pradesh to Delhi ● Gujarat to Maharashtra ● Telangana to Andhra Pradesh ● Bihar to Delhi ● Bihar to West Bengal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mumbai ● Bengaluru urban ● Howrah ● Central Delhi ● Hyderabad 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Villupuram (Tamil Nadu) ● Saharsa (Bihar) ● Moradabad (Uttar Pradesh) ● Murshidabad (West Bengal)

- **Major intra-state movement:** The **Murshidabad-Kolkata route** is the most traveled path for general class passengers, reflecting significant intra-state movement.
- **Migration to major urban centers:**
 - **Delhi:** Major source districts include Agra, Patna, Kanpur Nagar, Jhansi, and Bareilly, with new entrants like Dausa (Rajasthan) and Ludhiana (Punjab).
 - **Mumbai:** Valsad, Surat, Nashik, Ratnagiri, and Varanasi remain key origin districts, with Sindhudurg as a notable addition.

Methodology of the EAC-PM Report and its Limitations

- **Methodology:**
 - The report analyses migration patterns using 3 datasets: **Indian Railways' unreserved ticketing data, mobile roaming data, and banking remittance records.**
 - 2nd-class in Mail Express and Ordinary trains is the most affordable travel option predominantly used by blue-collar workers.
- **Limitations:**
 - Lack of demographic details (age, gender, reasons for migration).
 - Data captures station-to-station travel rather than actual origin-destination routes.
 - These alternative sources were employed due to delays in the decennial Census, which is a more comprehensive but less timely data source.

WHO's World Malaria Report 2024

The 2024 'World Malaria Report' has been released by WHO. As per the report, India has made "significant progress" in reducing malaria incidence and mortality.

India Specific Observations in the WHO's World Malaria Report 2024

- **India Exits HBHI Group: Milestone in Malaria Control**
 - India has successfully reduced its malaria burden, exiting the High-Burden-High-Impact (HBHI) group of endemic countries.
 - The country's malaria cases decreased by 69%, from 6.4 million in 2017 to 2 million in 2023, and malaria deaths fell from 11,100 to 3,500 in the same period.
- **Key Strategies Behind India's Success**
 - **Artemisinin-Based Combination Therapy (ACT):** Artemisinin kills most malaria parasites, while a partner drug clears the remaining parasites.
 - **Long-Lasting Insecticidal Nets (LLIN):** These nets block and kill mosquitoes, reducing mosquito populations and their lifespan when widely used.
 - **Targeted Interventions:** Focused efforts in forested and tribal areas in Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and the North-East improved access to diagnostics, treatments, and drugs.
 - Deployment of new-generation insecticide-treated nets offered enhanced protection.
 - **Effective Monitoring and Case Management**

Centre Wants States To Make Snakebites Notifiable Disease

Union Health Ministry has urged states to classify snakebites as a notifiable disease, requiring both private and public hospitals to report cases. Diseases likely to cause outbreaks, result in fatalities, or require immediate public health action are classified as notifiable. Common examples include tuberculosis, HIV, cholera, malaria, dengue, and hepatitis.

Why Make Snakebites Notifiable

- Classifying as notifiable could improve surveillance and provide precise data on cases and deaths.
- This information would help allocate antivenoms and train healthcare workers in high-risk areas.
- **High-risk states** include Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Rajasthan, and Gujarat.

Snakebites in India

- ◆ **Statistics**
 - Snakebites pose a significant public health challenge in India, with 3-4 million cases and an estimated 58,000 deaths annually, according to the 2020 Indian Million Death Study.
- ◆ **National action plan**
 - To address this, the government launched the **National Action Plan for Prevention and Control of Snakebite Envenoming (NAPSE)** earlier this year, aiming to halve snakebite deaths by 2030.
 - NAPSE recommends making snakebites a notifiable disease.
- ◆ **Bites of which snakes can be fatal**
 - India has over 310 snake species, 66 venomous and 42 mildly venomous.
 - Of these, 23 species are medically significant, with the majority of bites caused by the "Big Four": **Indian cobra**, **Common krait**, **Russell's viper**, **Saw-scaled viper**.
 - Commercial **polyvalent antivenom is effective against bites** from these four species and covers 80% of snakebites.
- ◆ **Snakebite - a 'Disease'**
 - Snake bite can cause severe paralysis that can prevent breathing, can lead to a fatal hemorrhage, and damage different tissues.
 - Snakebites need to be treated with antivenom to prevent death and severe symptoms

Challenges of Treating Snakebites On Three Fronts

- **Treatment**
 - **Delayed or No Healthcare Access:** Victims often do not reach healthcare centers in time or rely on faith-based healers.
 - **Lack of Training:** Healthcare staff often lack adequate training to treat snakebites.
 - **Testing Gaps:** Tests to confirm snakebites are unavailable.
- **Antivenoms**
 - **Development of the antivenom**

- Almost all the venom that is used to develop the antivenom in the country comes from snakes caught by the ***Iruka tribe***, who live in the states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala.
- This is a major challenge, as the biochemical constituents and the effect of the venom from the same snake species may differ based on geography.
- **Venom potency changes with snake's age**
 - E.g. neonatal Russell's viper venom is more toxic than that of adults.
- **Other challenges related to antivenoms**
 - Antivenoms themselves cause various reactions.
 - There are also local snake species — such as the banded krait, monocled cobra, and green pit viper in the Northeast — against which the commercially available antivenom does not work.
- **Artificial interventions**
 - Due to these limitations of antivenoms, researchers are now developing artificially produced antibodies that can help neutralise the toxins across various snake species.
 - They are also looking at artificially designed peptides to fight the toxin.
- **Venom collection**
 - Experts recommend creating zonal venom collection banks to account for regional venom differences.
 - However, the **Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972** restricts access to snakes, complicating efforts to establish these banks.

Developing National Policy to Increase Female Workforce Participation

The Indian government is set to unveil a **comprehensive national policy** aimed at increasing female labour force participation, focusing on creating an enabling environment through a robust **care economy** framework.

About Care Economy

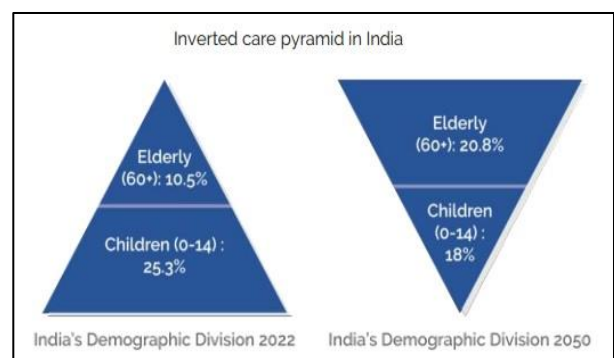
- It refers to the **sector of economic activity that encompasses the provision of care and support services**, particularly those related to **health, education, childcare, eldercare, etc.**
- It encompasses paid and unpaid care work crucial for **human survival, welfare, and labor force participation**.
- It helps to address material, emotional, and developmental requirements but is sometimes unrecognised or undervalued, resulting in a "**hidden care economy**".
- This dilemma prompted the **Beijing Platform for Action in 1995**, which pushed for identifying and appreciating women's contributions in caregiving, domestic work, and volunteerism.

Key Issues Related to the Care Economy in India

- **High percentage outside workforce:** Over half of India's women (53%) remain outside the labour force, largely due to unpaid caregiving duties, in stark contrast to only 1.1% of men.
- **Unpaid domestic and household work:** According to India's Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) for 2023-24, around 36.7% of females and 19.4% of the workforce are involved in unpaid household work.
- **Gender disparities in domestic work:** The National Statistical Office (NSO) Time Use Survey 2019 shows that 81% of Indian females aged 6 and above spend over five hours daily on unpaid domestic activities.
- **Caregiving time differences:** Among those 6 years and older, 26.2% of females spend over two hours daily on caregiving versus 12.4% of males, indicating the disproportionate share borne by women.

Key Features of the National Policy to Increase Female Workforce Participation

- **Focus on the care economy:** A care economy includes:
 - **Direct care:** Activities such as feeding children and caregiving.



- **Indirect care:** Tasks like cooking, cleaning, and other domestic services.
- **Broader services:** Healthcare, education, and personal assistance.
- **Caregiving infrastructure:** Developing support structures to reduce the caregiving burden on women and encourage labour market participation.
- **Core skilling package:** A specialised training program for caregivers, particularly for childcare, is under consideration.
- **Childcare for informal sector workers:** Childcare facilities, especially for workers under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), will be a critical component.



Key Barriers to Women’s Workforce Inclusion, Government Initiatives

- **Barriers:**
 - According to ILO report, **low educational attainment, limited job opportunities, and inadequate infrastructure** are critical factors keeping women out of the workforce.
 - **Cultural norms** around caregiving heavily restrict women’s labour market access, especially in **rural areas**, reinforcing existing gender inequalities.
- **Existing initiatives - Palna scheme:**
 - The Ministry of Women and Child Development operates the ‘Palna’ scheme, which provides **Anganwadi-cum-crèche facilities** for children aged 6 months to 6 years.
 - Key highlights of the scheme include:
 - **Services offered:** Nutritional support, health monitoring, immunisation, cognitive development, and education.
 - **Current status:** As of now, 1,000 Anganwadi creches are operational.

Way Ahead

- To address the high percentage of women outside India’s workforce due to care responsibilities, **substantial investments in the care economy** - especially in early childhood care and education (ECCE) - are essential.
- Such initiatives cannot only **foster gender equality** but also **unlock economic potential** by enabling more women to enter and thrive in the workforce.
- Nations like **Belarus, Bulgaria, and Sweden** maintain lower proportions of women outside the workforce (less than 10%) by investing in ECCE, roughly 1% of their GDP.

Centre Scraps No-Detention Policy for Classes 5 and 8

The Indian government has **abolished the no-detention policy** for Classes 5 and 8 across schools under its jurisdiction. This includes **over 3,000 central schools**, including Kendriya Vidyalayas, Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas, Sainik Schools, and Eklatya Model Residential Schools (under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs).

This significant policy change **aims to improve learning outcomes and accountability** while balancing the rights of students with academic standards.

It comes five years after the Right to Education Act, 2009, was amended in **2019** to include a clause that allowed the “appropriate government” to decide on holding back children in Classes 5 and 8

'NO-FAIL POLICY AFFECTING LEARNING'

- ▶ Right to Education Act, 2009, introduces no-detention policy up to Class VIII
- ▶ In 2017, Union cabinet scraps policy after 24 states demand it
- ▶ On Aug 11, 2017, amendment introduced. Sent to standing committee on HRD
- ▶ On Feb 13, 2018, panel backs proposal to abolish the policy
- ▶ On Jan 3, 2019, RS passes amendment, empowers states to detain students in the same class if they fail annual exams

Overview of the No-Detention Policy

- **Adopted the change** Since 2019 :18 states and UTs including Delhi, Rajasthan, and Tamil Nadu.
- **Pending decision:** Haryana and Puducherry.
- **Continuing No-detention policy:** Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Maharashtra, etc.

Reasons for Scrapping the No-Detention Policy:

- **Criticism of academic dilution:**
 - Experts argued that the policy led to a **decline in academic standards and student accountability.**
 - It was believed to have **transformed schools into mid-day meal hubs rather than centers of learning.**
- **State and expert advocacy:**
 - By 2016, most states supported scrapping the policy during a Central Advisory Board of Education (**CABE**) meeting.
 - The National Education Policy (**NEP**) 2020 emphasised improving learning outcomes while retaining educational access.
- **Balancing accountability with equity:** The policy change aims to instill seriousness in studies while providing remedial measures for underperforming students.

Key Provisions of the New Policy

- **Promotion and re-examination:**
 - Students failing the annual exams in Classes 5 or 8 will receive remedial instruction and an opportunity for a re-examination within two months.
 - Failure in the re-examination may lead to detention.
- **Competency-based assessments:** Examinations will focus on holistic development rather than rote memorisation or procedural skills.
- **Support for struggling students:** Teachers and school heads will provide targeted support, identify learning gaps, and closely monitor students' progress.
- **Safeguards for student rights:**
 - No child can be expelled before completing Class 8.
 - Detailed records of detained students and their progress will be maintained.

Reactions Towards the New Policy

- **Supporters:**
 - **Educators:** Applaud the move as a step toward restoring academic rigor and preparing students for real-world challenges.
 - **Parents:** See the policy as a means to encourage better academic preparation and outcomes.
- **Critics:**
 - **Detentions may increase dropout rates and undermine the RTE's goal of inclusive education.**
 - They highlight the need for integrating Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (**CCE**) with the policy.

Recommendations to Implement the New Policy

- **Preventive measures:**
 - Early identification of at-risk students to reduce failures.
 - Focus on addressing learning gaps throughout the academic year.
- **Implementation oversight:** School heads to monitor progress and ensure adequate support for detained students.
- **Holistic view:** Policies should integrate CCE to track progress and avoid stigma associated with failure.

One-Stop Centres for Indian Women

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) recently received approval from the Ministry of Women and Child Development to establish **nine One-Stop Centres (OSCs)** abroad.

Objective- To provide comprehensive support to women in vulnerable situations to act as a first point of contact.

Importance of Establishing One-Stop Centres (OSCs) for Women Abroad

- 1. Addressing Vulnerabilities:** by providing immediate support, safety and shelter to women in vulnerable situations, such as victims of domestic violence, abandonment, or exploitation.
- 2. Offering Legal and Counselling Support:** to women facing legal issues, particularly those abandoned by spouses or involved in disputes. Counselling Services helps women cope with emotional and psychological stress, empowering them to rebuild their lives.
 - ✓ **Madad Portal:** A grievance redressal mechanism for overseas Indians, where OSCs can be integrated for comprehensive support. Example: A woman facing domestic violence in the UAE can log her complaint, and the OSC can coordinate with Indian authorities for assistance.
- 3. Crisis Management:** by handling immediate needs such as boarding, lodging, and medical care for stranded women and facilitating the safe return of women to India when required.
 - ✓ In the Gulf countries, many Indian women depend on their spouses' visas, leading to a lack of autonomy and susceptibility to abandonment. OSCs provide an alternative support system.
- 4. Support for Indian Diaspora Women:** by addressing specific issues faced by Indian women living overseas, such as cultural isolation, dependency on spouses, and limited local support systems.
 - ✓ Women married through fraudulent NRI marriages, particularly in Canada or Australia, can seek redressal and repatriation through OSCs.
- 5. Strengthening Diplomatic Presence:** Establishing OSCs in key locations like the Gulf, North America, and Southeast Asia enhances India's ability to support its citizens globally.
- 6. Showcasing Responsibility:** It reflects India's commitment to upholding women's rights and welfare on an international scale.
 - ✓ By prioritizing the welfare of women abroad, India showcases its commitment to protecting women's rights and adhering to international obligations like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

How the Supreme Court (SC) Hears Cases?

The Supreme Court (SC) prioritizes cases based on their stage and urgency. Recently, it has focused on clearing backlogs of **Special Leave Petitions (SLPs)**—appeals awaiting admission—by hearing them three days a week. Mondays and Fridays are reserved for fresh cases. This approach limits the listing of detailed hearing matters, aiming to reduce pendency while streamlining the case disposal process.

Locations

With Shelter Homes: Seven OSCs to be set up in Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, UAE, and Saudi Arabia (Jeddah and Riyadh).

Without Shelter Homes: Two OSCs in Toronto and Singapore.

Role of Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF)

The **ICWF**, operational in Indian Missions worldwide, plays a vital role in providing welfare measures to distressed Indian nationals, particularly women. With its **expanded guidelines (2017)**, it provides emergency assistance for

- I. Boarding and lodging.**
- ii. Repatriation of mortal remains.**
- iii. Air travel for stranded individuals.**
- iv. Legal and counselling support for women abandoned by overseas Indian or foreign spouse.**
- v. Provision for payment of fines to secure the release of Indian nationals.**



- ✓ As per the National Judicial Data Grid, more than 82,000 cases are pending in the SC currently.
- ✓ The SC accepts only 14% of SLPs that are filed. In 2023, the SC dismissed 85% of fresh SLPs during miscellaneous hearings. In 2024, the SC streamlined over 12,000 pending SLPs.
- ✓ SLPs are essentially appeals (against an order of a High Court) but the SC has to grant “leave” for them to be heard. Dismissal of these cases means an immediate reduction in pendency.
- ✓ SLPs concerning state-level legislations often receive priority based on urgency.

SC's Process of Hearing Cases (follows a systematic and structured process)

The Supreme Court's process for hearing cases involves following steps:

1. Filing of Cases: An **Advocate-on-Record (AoR)**- a lawyer who is authorized to represent clients at the SC after passing a certification exam) files the case, either physically or through the e-Filing portal, along with necessary documents and a signed **Vakala Nama** (power of attorney). A **dealing assistant** verifies the AoR's credentials and assigns a permanent **diary number** to the case.

Role of the Registry and Technology

1) The SC Registry comprises two wings- administration and judicial:

The judicial wing is responsible for case management (incorporating technology), from the stage of filing to disposal. The administrative wing manages all the non-case management related work—exams, scheduling, human resources, inventory and more. These two wings are further divided into divisions, branches, sections and cells

2) These divisions are led by Registrars, with the entire Registry supervised by the Secretary General, who reports to the Chief Justice of India (CJI).

Technology in Case Management

1) The SC's e-filing portal and digital case management systems enhance efficiency. Example: Digital listing has expedited hearings for time-sensitive cases like election-related disputes.

2) The SC is exploring AI applications like SUPACE for legal research and workflow optimization.

2. Scrutiny and Registration: The Registry scrutinizes the petition for procedural defects, such as missing signatures or incorrect information. Defects must be rectified within 90 days. After the defects are resolved, the case is formally registered and sent to the **listing department**, which schedules it for a hearing.

3. Hearing Stages:

- **Miscellaneous Days (Mondays and Fridays):** Fresh matters are heard. These are cases presented for the first time. If not dismissed outright, the court issues a **notice** to the other party, and the case becomes an **“after notice miscellaneous matter.”**
 - ✓ “After notice miscellaneous matters” are cases in which the court issues “notice” to the other party in a “fresh matter”. A case becomes a “regular hearing matter” after it has been “admitted”.
- **Non-Miscellaneous Days (Tuesdays to Thursdays):** The court hears cases requiring detailed submissions, including deciding whether to admit the case. Constitution Bench hearings also occur during these days.
 - ✓ Landmark cases like *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala* (1973) and *Right to Privacy* (2017) were heard on non-miscellaneous days.

4. Admission and Final Hearing: Cases admitted after initial hearings are scheduled for **final hearings**, which involve detailed arguments and written submissions from both sides. After the final hearing, the court delivers its verdict.

Impeachment of Judges

Opposition in Rajya Sabha (RS) is planning to move an impeachment motion against Allahabad High Court (HC) Judge Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav for controversial remarks against minorities at a Vishwa Hindu Parishad event.

About the Impeachment Process:

The impeachment of a Supreme Court (SC) or High Court (HC) judge in India is governed by **Articles 124(4)** and **218** of the Constitution respectively. Judges can be removed only on the grounds of **“proved misbehavior”** or **“incapacity”**, following a stringent procedure detailed in the Judges Inquiry Act, 1968.

- ✓ The impeachment of judges is essential to maintaining the integrity and accountability of the judiciary. Judges hold significant power in interpreting the Constitution and ensuring justice. Therefore, the removal process must balance their independence with accountability.

The Impeachment Process Involves

1. **Initiation of Motion:** signed by at least **100 members of Lok Sabha (LS)** or **50 members of RS**.
2. **Inquiry Committee:** Once the motion is introduced, the Speaker (LS) or Chairman (RS) forms a **three-member inquiry committee** to investigate the charges, frame allegations, examine evidence, and call witness cross-examinations or medical tests (if the charge involves mental incapacity). The inquiry committee comprises of:
 - a. The **Chief Justice of India (CJI)** or a SC judge.
 - b. A **Chief Justice of a HC**.
 - c. A **distinguished jurist** chosen by the Speaker/Chairman.
3. **Committee Findings:** are submitted in a report to the Speaker/Chairman:
 - a. If the judge is found **not guilty**, the matter ends.
 - b. If found **guilty**, the report is placed before the House where the motion was initiated.
4. **Parliamentary Approval:** Both Houses of Parliament must pass the motion with:
 - i. A majority of the total membership of each House; and
 - ii. At least two-thirds of members present and voting in favor.

**** Both criteria must be met in the same session of Parliament.**
5. **Presidential Order:** Once Parliament approves the motion, the President issues an order to remove the judge from office.

Previous Impeachment Attempts in India

Since Independence, **six impeachment attempts** have occurred, none resulting in removal. Only two committees investigating Justices Ramaswami (1993) and Sen (2011) found judges guilty. Key cases include:

1. **Justice V Ramaswami (1993):** accused of financial impropriety, defended by Kapil Sibal, the motion failed as it lacked requisite parliamentary support.
 2. **Justice Soumitra Sen (2011):** found guilty of corruption; Rajya Sabha impeached him, but he resigned before Lok Sabha could act.
 3. **Justice S K Gangele (2015):** accused of sexual harassment; cleared by the committee.
 4. **Justice J B Pardiwala (2015):** faced impeachment for controversial remarks on reservation; the motion was dropped after the remarks were expunged.
 5. **Justice C V Nagarjuna (2017):** accused of misconduct; the motion fell short after MPs withdrew support.
 6. **Chief Justice Dipak Misra (2018):** motion rejected at the preliminary stage by the Chairman of Rajya Sabha.
- The stringent process of impeachment, requiring broad parliamentary consensus and strict adherence to legal norms, aims to protect judicial independence while ensuring accountability.

No-Confidence Motion Moved Against Vice-President

The Opposition recently submitted a no-confidence motion against Rajya Sabha (RS) Chairperson Jagdeep Dhankhar accusing him of biased conduct in overseeing the House. This marks the first such instance in India's parliamentary history. A similar move was considered during the Budget Session in August but was not pursued.

Process of Removal of the Rajya Sabha Chairman (Vice President)

1. **Role and Removal Process:** The Vice President serves as the ex officio Chairman of the Rajya Sabha under Article 64 of the Constitution. His/her removal is governed by Article 67, which states that:
 - The Vice President serves a five-year term but can resign by submitting a letter to the President or be removed via a resolution.
 - The resolution must be passed by a majority of all Rajya Sabha (RS) members (not just those present and voting - This quorum ensures that the removal has widespread support.) and then agreed upon by the Lok Sabha (LS) by a simple majority (50% of members present and voting).
 - A 14-day notice is required before moving the resolution. This ensures sufficient time for deliberation and avoids arbitrary decisions.

2. **After Notice:** After the 14-day notice, the resolution is taken up for discussion and voting in Rajya Sabha.
- ✓ In the present case, the 14-day notice could push the debate beyond the current session ending December 20. It is unclear if a resolution not addressed in the same session can carry over to the next session, as there are no precedents.

When a resolution for removal is being considered, Article 92 of the Indian Constitution bars the Chairman (Vice President of India) or Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha from:

- **Presiding over the House's Proceedings:** to ensure impartiality and avoid any conflict of interest during such deliberations.
- **Voting in the House:** on the resolution for their removal or any other matter under discussion during the proceedings related to the resolution.
 - ✓ Despite not being allowed to preside, the Chairman or Deputy Chairman is **permitted to speak** and actively participate in the discussion regarding their removal. This gives them an opportunity to present their defence or perspective (Adhering to the 'Principle of Natural Justice').

How Did Article 67 Come to be in the Constitution?

During Constituent Assembly debates, concerns were raised about vague language in Article 67, particularly regarding the Lok Sabha's agreement process to which Dr. B.R. Ambedkar clarified that:

- Lok Sabha must pass the resolution by a simple majority (50% of all members present and voting).
- Rajya Sabha's resolution requires a majority of all members, not just those present and voting.

How is the Removal Process of Vice-President Different from that of the Impeachment of President?

Aspect	Removal of Vice President (Art 67)	Impeachment of President (Art 61)
Grounds for Removal	Can be removed for violation of the Constitution or other valid reasons, but the term "impeachment" is not explicitly used.	Only for "violation of the Constitution".
Initiation Process	A resolution is introduced in Rajya Sabha.	The process starts in either House of Parliament.
Majority Needed to Pass Resolution	Requires an absolute majority (more than 50% of the total members) in Rajya Sabha, followed by a simple majority in Lok Sabha.	Requires a two-thirds majority of members present and voting in both Houses.
Nature of the Process	not as rigorous as the President's impeachment process.	Formal impeachment procedure with stringent conditions.

India Internet Governance Forum

Recently, the India Internet Governance Forum (IIGF) 2024 was held in New Delhi.

About India Internet Governance Forum (IIGF)

IIGF is the Indian chapter of the **United Nations Internet Governance Forum (UN IGF)**, established in 2021. It serves as a **multi-stakeholder platform** to address Internet governance challenges and opportunities, promoting open dialogue among representatives from government, industry, academia, civil society, and technical communities.

- ✓ With 900 million Internet users, India is a global leader in digital adoption. IIGF 2024 underscores India's role in shaping global Internet governance.

Objectives of IIGF

1. **Facilitating Dialogue & Collaboration:** by encouraging discussions & creating solutions on critical Internet governance issues like cybersecurity, digital inclusion, data privacy & emerging technologies

2. **National and Global Representation:** for ensuring that India’s perspectives are reflected in global Internet governance dialogues.
3. **Fostering Innovation:** and sustainable practices in the digital ecosystem.

About IIGF 2024

- **Theme:** “*Innovating Internet Governance for India.*”
- **Supporters:**
 - Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)
 - National Internet Exchange of India (NIXI)
- **Key Themes**
 1. **Bridging the Digital Divide:** by enhancing Internet accessibility and inclusion to empower marginalized communities and promoting digital rights and access across diverse demographics.
 2. **Trust and Safety:** Addressing cybersecurity threats, building a secure and trustworthy online environment to boost user confidence.
 3. **Responsible AI:** by emphasizing ethical and responsible use of Artificial Intelligence
 4. **Legal and Regulatory Frameworks:** Developing balanced policies that support growth while ensuring security and privacy and reviewing legal frameworks to address emerging Internet challenges.
 5. **Building a Greener and Sustainable Internet:** by highlighting energy-efficient technologies and environmentally sustainable practices in the digital space.

Amrit Gyan Kosh Portal

The Central government recently launched the "**Amrit Gyaan Kosh**" Portal to bolster governance training in India.

About Amrit Gyan Kosh Portal

- **Platform:** It is hosted on the iGOT platform (Integrated Government online Training), developed by the Capacity Building Commission (CBC) and Karmayogi Bharat.
 - ✓ CBC: It is an independent body established by the Government of India in April 2021. The CBC is responsible for driving standardization and harmonization across the Indian civil services.
 - ✓ The CBC is also the custodian of civil services capacity building reforms.
- **Content:** It is a repository of best practices, aligned with 15 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), covering diverse policy areas such as health, education, agriculture, and digital governance.
- **Accessibility:** It includes resources in Hindi and Braille.
- **Purpose:** To promote inclusivity and accessibility, fostering a "whole of government" approach.
- **Benefit:** The curated resources enable faculty to align their teaching with global standards while addressing India's unique administrative challenges.

About Karmayogi Bharat	About Mission Karmayogi
<p>Under Mission Karmayogi, Karmayogi Bharat- a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV)- forms a cornerstone of the institutional framework to operate the iGOT-Karmayogi platform, manage its overall governance and ensure that it meets the objective of anytime, anywhere, any-device learning for civil service officials to enhance their overall competency.</p> <p>Type: Incorporated on 31 January 2022 under Section 8 of the Companies Act, 2013, Karmayogi Bharat operates as a 100% Government-owned not-for-profit entity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The National Programme for Civil Services Capacity Building (NPCSCB), or Mission Karmayogi, aims to build a competent, citizen-centric civil service rooted in Indian values, aligned with national priorities, and capable of delivering effective public services. • It focuses on fostering behavioral, functional, and domain competencies to enhance ease of living and ease of doing business. • Vision: To empower civil servants to deliver in challenging environments and strengthen

<p>Key Functions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Platform Management: To design, operate, enhance the iGOT Karmayogi platform and associated digital assets and manage intellectual property rights (IPR) of all software, content, and processes on behalf of Government with an annual subscription-based revenue model. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ UK's Civil Service Learning (CSL): A comprehensive online training framework similar to iGOT-Karmayogi. Content Development and Validation: To curate, create, source, and validate platform content with relevant authorities. Assessment and Governance: To deliver proctored assessment services, govern and analyze telemetry data and share insights with identified authorities. Compliance and Oversight: To adhere to government guidelines, ensure quality checks, facilitate grievance redressal and support Department of Personal and Training (DoPT) in responding to Parliamentary and CAG oversight. 	<p>government-citizen interaction, making officials enablers for citizens and businesses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key Features: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Citizen-Centric Approach: by placing civil servants at the core of reforms to improve service delivery. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The digitization of public service platforms like UMANG for unified access to e-governance services. Six Pillars: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Policy Framework Institutional Framework Competency Framework Digital Learning Framework (iGOT-Karmayogi) Electronic HR Management System (e-HRMS) Monitoring and Evaluation Framework Coverage: Applies to all civil servants, including contractual employees, across ministries, departments, organizations, and agencies of the Union Government.
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UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs

India has been chosen to Chair the 68th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND).

About Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND)

The **CND** is the UN's principal policy-making body on drug-related issues, overseeing global drug trends, supporting balanced policies, and implementing international drug treaties. It functions under **United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)** and governs the **UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)**.

Purpose and Functions of CND

- Global Drug Policy Oversight:** It reviews and analyzes global drug situations, addressing supply and demand reduction. It also takes **policy decisions** through resolutions and actions.
- Supervision of Drug Treaties:** Established in 1946 by ECOSOC to supervise the application of international drug control treaties. In 1991, its role expanded to include **governance of UNODC**.
- Mandate for Drug Control:** The CND oversees substances under three international drug control treaties:

Treaty	Focus
<i>Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (1961)</i>	Limits production, distribution, and use of narcotic drugs to medical and scientific purposes.
<i>Convention on Psychotropic Substances (1971)</i>	Controls psychotropic substances like hallucinogens, stimulants, and sedatives
<i>UN Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs (1988)</i>	Combating drug trafficking and addressing money laundering

- Controlling Substances:** Based on recommendations from the **World Health Organization (WHO)** and **International Narcotics Control Board**, it can:
 - Place substances under international control.

- b. Adjust levels of control (**Example:** Cannabis Rescheduling (2020): CND voted to recognize cannabis's therapeutic benefits.).
 - c. Remove substances from control.
5. **Dual Role of the Agenda:**
- a. **Normative Segment** focuses on treaty-based and policy functions.
 - b. **Operational Segment** governs the UNODC's budgetary and administrative work.

Membership: It comprises **53 Member States** elected by ECOSOC for four-year terms, regionally distributed. Leadership includes a chairperson, three vice-chairpersons, and a Rapporteur (appointed or elected to report on the proceedings, discussions, and decisions of a meeting or organization).

Meetings: Annual sessions adopt policies and resolutions. Inter-sessional (held throughout the year) and year-end reconvened meetings address ongoing issues and governance.

India's Role as Chair of CND: As Chair, India has a significant responsibility to represent the interests of developing nations and the **Global South**, particularly in addressing drug policy issues. Key priorities include:

1. **Promoting Dialogue:** to bridge the gap between developing and developed nations and advocate for balanced approaches to global drug challenges.
 - ✓ **Example:** India highlighted the importance of a balanced approach during the discussions on Cannabis Rescheduling (2020). While some nations favored liberalizing cannabis for recreational use, India advocated for its scientific and medicinal use while warning against misuse.
 - ✓ **Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyan (Drug-Free India Campaign):** India supports initiatives to prevent youth from falling into drug abuse through education
2. **Strengthening International Cooperation:** by focusing on issues such as **illicit drug trafficking** and **substance abuse** and addressing the health and social impacts of drug misuse.
 - ✓ **Example:** India's participation in the **BIMSTEC Sub-Group on Combating Narcotic Drugs** promotes intelligence sharing and joint operations.
 - ✓ India has supported initiatives like the **UNODC Paris Pact on combating Afghan opiates** trafficking and works to strengthen enforcement mechanisms globally.
3. **Ensuring Accessibility:** by ensuring controlled substances are available for legitimate medical and scientific purposes.
 - ✓ **NDPS Act, 1985 (Amended in 2014):** India streamlined the process for access to opioids for palliative care, addressing the needs of cancer and terminally ill patients.
4. **Promoting Data-Driven Approaches:** and multilateral dialogue to develop inclusive, sustainable policies.
 - ✓ India provided data inputs for the **UNODC World Drug Report**, reflecting trends in heroin trafficking via the "**Golden Crescent**" (Afghanistan-Iran-Pakistan).

National Panchayat Awards 2024

The National Panchayat Awards 2024, recently held in New Delhi, honored 45 Panchayats for their contributions to sustainable and inclusive development in rural India.

- **Recognition:** Panchayats from diverse regions, including **Maharashtra, Odisha, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh**, and others, were celebrated for their innovative and impactful contributions.
 - ✓ **The Manyachiwadi Gram Panchayat in Maharashtra** won the Gram Urja Swaraj Vishesh Panchayat Puraskar for 2024 for its efforts in adopting renewable energy. The Panchayat has biogas plants in 65 households and solar-powered streetlights. 16 out of 25 farmers use solar-powered water pumps.
- **Achievements**
 - **42% of awardees were women-led Panchayats.**
 - **46 crore rupees** in prize money was digitally transferred to winners.

- Notable achievements included climate sustainability, renewable energy adoption, and significant improvements in health and infrastructure.
- **Special Initiatives:** A **booklet of best practices** and a **short film** showcased outstanding Panchayat efforts.

Significance of the Panchayat Awards

1. **Recognizing Transformative Role of Panchayats:** by acknowledging the crucial role of Panchayats in promoting **resilient and sustainable rural communities**.
2. **Encouraging Governance Innovation:** by motivating Panchayats to innovate and improve governance, the awards foster a **robust framework for achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** at the grassroots level.
3. **Commitment to Empowering Panchayati Raj Institutions:** the awards highlight the **Government of India's dedication** to strengthening and empowering Panchayati Raj Institutions as key agents of rural development.
4. **Celebrating and Inspiring Excellence:** These awards not only celebrate the **achievements of exemplary Panchayats** but also inspire others to adopt best practices, contributing to **sustainable and inclusive rural development** while fostering grassroots democracy.

About the National Panchayat Awards

The awards celebrate the exemplary work of Panchayats in areas such as **poverty alleviation, health, water conservation, sanitation, climate sustainability**, and more.

➤ **Objectives of the Awards**



- To promote **grassroots governance** and development.
- To motivate Panchayats to adopt **best practices**.
- To foster **inclusive growth** and align with the **Localization of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (LSDGs)** like poverty, health, water, governance, infrastructure, and women's empowerment.

➤ **Key Highlights of the Award Ceremony**

- **Multi-level Assessment:** Evaluation at Block, District, State/UT, and National levels.
- **Selection Process:** The selection involved **1.94 lakh Gram Panchayats** competing, with evaluations carried out by committees from Block to National levels. The rigorous and transparent process emphasized performance across the LSDG themes.
- ✓ A Panchayat in Odisha adopted data monitoring tools to improve its sanitation metrics and was recognized at the national level.

➤ **Award Categories:** The event recognized efforts under several categories, such as:

- **Deen Dayal Upadhyay Panchayat Satat Vikas Puraskar (DDUPSVP)** for achievements in 9 LSDG themes.
- **Carbon Neutral Vishesh Panchayat Puraskar** for achieving net-zero emissions.
- **Gram Urja Swaraj Vishesh Panchayat Puraskar** for renewable energy adoption.
- **Nanaji Deshmukh Sarvottam Panchayat Satat Vikas Puraskar** for overall excellence.
- **Panchayat Kshamta Nirmaan Sarvottam Sansthan Puraskar** for institutional support to Panchayats.

Coastal Shipping Bill 2024

The Coastal Shipping Bill, 2024 which seeks to promote coastal trade and encourage the participation of Indian-flagged vessels owned and operated by Indian citizens for national security and commercial needs was introduced in the Lok Sabha recently.

About the Coastal Shipping Bill, 2024

It aims to consolidate and amend laws regulating coastal shipping, promote coasting trade, encourage domestic participation, and ensure India has a coastal fleet owned and operated by its citizens for national security and commercial needs.

Key Provisions

1. **Regulation of Coastal Waters:** It regulates vessels engaged in trade within Indian **coastal waters**, covering **territorial waters** (up to 12 nautical miles/ about 22 km) and **adjoining maritime zones** (up to 200 nautical miles/ about 370 km).
2. **Expansion of Coasting Trade:** Coasting trade now includes **provision of services** (e.g., exploration, research) in addition to goods and passenger transport, except for fishing.

Coastal Shipping Industry in India & Potential of Coastal Shipping

The coastal shipping industry in India plays a crucial role in facilitating domestic trade, reducing the burden on road and rail transportation, and ensuring economic and environmental sustainability.

- ◆ India's **7,500 km coastline** and proximity to global shipping routes provide immense potential. Indian coastal shipping connects major industrial hubs, ports, and consumption centers.
- ◆ Coastal shipping is recognized as a **cost-effective** alternative to other transportation modes. Moving goods by sea costs approximately 60% less than by road.
- ◆ Major ports like Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT), Chennai Port, and Cochin Port handle significant coastal shipping operations.

Examples of Coastal Shipping Initiatives

- ◆ **SAGARMALA Project:** Focuses on port-led development and coastal economic zones, boosting container traffic (e.g., Kandla to Cochin).
- ◆ **National Waterways Act, 2016:** Converts rivers into navigable waterways, enabling cargo movement (e.g., Varanasi to Haldia on NW-1).
- ◆ **Short-Sea Shipping Services:** Cochin Port to the Lakshadweep Islands offers essential cargo services, ensuring connectivity for the island population.
- ◆ **Ropax Ferries:** Roll-on/roll-off ferries (e.g., Mumbai-Mandwa) improve passenger and cargo movement while encouraging tourism.

3. **Licensing:** Licenses will be required for vessels **not wholly owned by Indians** hired by Indian persons, NRIs, or OCIs, operating between Indian ports or international routes except for the vessels **wholly owned by Indian persons** engaged in coasting trade and OCIs hiring vessels operating exclusively outside India.
 - ✓ The licenses will be issued by the Director General of Shipping, who is appointed by the central government. The Director General may permit a vessel registered under the Inland Vessels Act, 2021 (operating in inland waterways) to engage in coasting trade.
4. **Revocation of Licenses:** Grounds for suspension, modification, or revocation include violations of license terms, existing laws, or failure to comply with **Director General's directions**. Licenses cannot be **suspended, revoked, or modified** without giving the holder a reasonable opportunity to be heard.
5. **Revised Penalties:** The Bill revises penalties for engaging in coasting trade without a license, increasing the maximum fine to **₹15 lakh** or **four times the gains** from an unlicensed voyage.
 - It replaces imprisonment for non-compliance with **civil penalties** of up to **₹5 lakh** or **twice the gains** for failing to follow Director General's directions.
 - For failing to provide information on transaction records or fares, the fine is increased to **₹50,000** from **₹500**.
6. **Vessel Detention:** Vessels can be **detained** for operating without a license, violating directions, or providing false information.
7. **Compounding of Offences:** Only select offences are **compoundable**, such as undertaking trade without a license, failure to furnish information, and violating a detention order.
8. **National Strategic Plan:** Requires the central government to prepare a **National Coastal and Inland Shipping Strategic Plan** within **two years** to promote coastal shipping.
9. **Powers to Exempt:** Central government can exempt specific classes of vessels from the Bill's provisions.
10. **Promoting Jobs and Shipbuilding:** Licenses will consider factors like **citizenship of crew** and vessel **building requirements** to create jobs for Indian seafarers and promote **shipbuilding in India**.
11. **National Database of Coastal Shipping:** will be created to enhance transparency and information sharing.

Significance of the Bill

- **Separation of Commercial and Technical Regulations:** The Bill separates commercial operations from technical regulations, removing the former from the Merchant Shipping Act and introducing a focused framework for coastal trade.
- **Alignment with the 'Sagarmala' Program and Gati Shakti Initiative:** by promoting coastal shipping through infrastructure development, dedicated berths, and improved hinterland connectivity (multi-modal logistics).
 - ✓ This Bill integrates coastal shipping with National Waterways to create a seamless logistics ecosystem.
- **Balanced Infrastructure and Regulatory Progress:** unlocks the economic potential of India's vast coastline while reducing logistics costs and enhancing maritime trade efficiency.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Coastal shipping emits significantly lower carbon dioxide per tonne-km compared to road transport. It reduces traffic congestion caused by over-reliance on road transport.

PM's 11 Pledges

Inspired by the Constitution and for the country's future, Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi recently proposed 11 pledges while replying to a two-day debate in Lok Sabha on the '**Glorious Journey of 75 Years of the Constitution of India**'.

About the Special Constitution Debate

The two-day session was held in the Lok Sabha (LS) and Rajya Sabha (RS) to commemorate a significant milestone in India's democratic journey, 75 years since the adoption of the Constitution on November 26, 1949.

Key reasons for Conducting the Debate:

- **Symbolic Commemoration:** Honor the Constitution's adoption to reflect its enduring significance in India's democracy.

- **Dialogue on Contemporary Issues:** To provide a platform for lawmakers to deliberate on evolving challenges in governance and constitutional interpretation.
- **Government's Commitment:** To reinforce its allegiance to constitutional values and address ideological concerns raised by the Opposition.

Key Themes of the Debate

- **Judicial-Legislative Balance:** The debate highlighted the tension between judicial activism/overreach and legislative authority/mandate, a recurring issue in India's democracy. Questions were raised on the judiciary's role in governance.
- **Religion in Public Life:** Discussions focused on the role of religion in governance and public policy, echoing debates from the Constituent Assembly. Concerns were raised about maintaining the secular character of the state amid growing communal polarization.
- **Fundamental Rights:** Evolving interpretations of fundamental rights were examined, including issues of free speech, equality, and individual freedoms. Recent controversies, such as restrictions on expression and the balance between individual and collective rights, were key points.
- **Constitutional Ideologies:** Varied interpretations of constitutional values were debated, reflecting ideological divides between the ruling party and the Opposition. The government's emphasis on duties alongside rights, and its push to address issues like corruption and nepotism, drew attention.

11 Pledges by PM Modi

1. **Performing Duties:** Emphasis on individuals and the government adhering to their duties, suggesting that citizens' responsibilities are integral to national progress.
2. **Inclusive Development:** Commitment to 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas,' ensuring equitable growth across all regions and communities.
3. **Zero Tolerance to Corruption:** Advocacy for no societal acceptance of corruption, a recurring theme of BJP's governance agenda since 2014.
4. **Respect for Laws and Traditions:** Encouragement to instill pride in India's laws, traditions, and the Constitution, urging its use for collective good rather than political gain.
5. **Breaking Colonial Mindset:** Promoting self-reliance and pride in India's heritage by discarding remnants of colonial influence.
6. **Global Women-led Development:** Aspiration for India to set an example in empowering women and achieving gender equality.
7. **National Development via Regional Growth:** Stressing the symbiotic relationship between state and national development.
8. **Opposition to Religion-based Quotas:** Affirming commitment to existing reservations but strongly opposing any religion-based reservations, aligning with BJP's ideological stance.
9. **Promoting Pride in Heritage:** Advocating for cultural pride and national identity as a unifying factor.
10. **Ending Dynastic Politics:** Criticizing dynastic governance, a frequent point of attack against Congress and other regional parties.
11. **Unity in Diversity:** Reinforcing the vision of 'Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat' to maintain India's unity and diversity.

Backdrop and Opposition Critique

1. **Context of Reservation:** Modi's stance on reservations came amidst allegations by the Opposition that the BJP might attempt constitutional amendments to undermine the existing reservation system. He countered by accusing Congress of playing political games with reservation policies.
2. **Allegations of Corruption and Favoritism:** Opposition leaders criticized Modi for not addressing issues like the Adani controversy and growing social divisions, accusing his government of favoring industrialists and failing to keep economic promises.

3. **Dynastic Politics:** Modi's focus on ending dynastic politics drew sharp reactions, especially from Congress and regional parties, who viewed it as political posturing.
4. **Opposition Reactions:** Congress MPs described the speech as repetitive and unengaging.

Ban on Buffalo and Bulbul Fights Reintroduced

The Gauhati High Court (HC) recently reintroduced a ban on traditional buffalo and bulbul (songbird) fights during Magh Bihu Assam while striking down a January 2024 notification issued by the Assam government which had attempted to revive these practices after nearly a decade.

- ✓ With the notification, the Assam government had sought to override provisions of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960, the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, and the Supreme Court's (SC) 2014 judgement which outlawed the use of bulls as performing animals in jallikattu, kambala and bullock cart races.

What are these Traditions?

- Buffalo and bulbul fights are traditional events associated with Assam's **Magh Bihu** festival in January, celebrating the winter harvest.
- **Buffalo Fights** are held in various parts of Assam, with Ahatguri in Nagaon district being the largest venue. Organized for decades, they attract massive crowds.
- **Bulbul Fights** are conducted at Hayagriv Madhab Mandir in Hajo, near Guwahati. Birds are reared before the festival and made to fight until one emerges stronger, a practice dating back to the Ahom dynasty (13th-19th century).

Background

- **2014 Ban:** The SC banned animal fights, directing the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) to prevent animals from being incited to fight. AWBI enforced this in Assam during Bihu, halting buffalo and bulbul fights.
- **Overturning the Ban (2023):** The SC overruled its 2014 ban by upholding amendments made by Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, and Karnataka governments to the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1960 to allow Jallikattu, Kambala and bullock cart racing.
- **New SOPs (January 2024) by Assam Government:** allowed resumption of buffalo and bulbul fights resumed during Magh Bihu with following conditions:
 - The fights are permitted in locations with a 25-year tradition, provided there is no deliberate cruelty, human-inflicted injuries, or use of drugs or sharp instruments to provoke the animals.
 - Moh Juj (buffalo fights) were allowed only between January 15 and January 25.
 - Bulbul fight SOPs mandated releasing birds unharmed after the game, with a five-year ban for violators.

- These events reflect Assam's rich folk culture and history.

What was the Case?

- **Challenge to SOPs:** PETA India challenged the Assam government's notification and SOPs in the Gauhati HC, citing violations of animal protection laws. **PETA claimed** that the buffaloes were subjected to pain, and bulbuls were being illegally captured and incited against their natural instincts to fight over food.
- **Court's Observations:** the court observed that:
 - Under the 1972 Wildlife Protection Act, the definition of "hunting" extends to "capturing, coursing, snaring, trapping, driving or baiting any wild or captive animal and every attempt to do so".
 - Under the **1972 Wildlife Protection Act**, bulbuls, protected under Schedule II, cannot be used in such practices. The act of trapping or provoking bulbuls to fight qualifies as "hunting" under Section 2(16).
 - **Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960:** Using animals in performances or fights constitutes cruelty, violating Sections 3 and 22. Buffaloes forced into violent confrontations endure physical and psychological distress.
 - The SOPs contradicted Section 22 of the 1960 Protection of Animals Act and a 2011 Central notification prohibiting the use of bulls as performing animals.
- **Judgement:** Assam had not amended the 1960 Act like Tamil Nadu (Jallikattu), Karnataka (Kambala), and Maharashtra (bullock cart races) to permit such events, relying instead on executive instructions, which the court deemed impermissible.

Significance of the Judgement: It highlights that such practices require legislative amendments, not executive orders, to align with legal and constitutional provisions. A middle path could involve reforming practices to retain cultural significance without harming animals. **Events like camel beauty** contests in Rajasthan reflect cultural pride without cruelty.

Can Leader of Opposition (LoP) be Arrested?

A First Information Report (FIR) has been filed against Lok Sabha (LS) Opposition Leader Rahul Gandhi over the recent parliamentary scuffle during its Winter Session, with charges carrying potential prison sentences of up to seven years.

Background

During the Winter session, INDIA bloc MPs protested near Ambedkar's statue, demanding Union Home Minister Amit Shah's resignation. BJP MP Pratap Singh Sarangi alleged Rahul Gandhi pushed Mukesh Rajput, causing injuries. Congress accused BJP MPs of blocking Rahul's entry and pushing Mallikarjun Kharge. Both parties filed counter-complaints.

Can Rahul Gandhi Be Arrested?

- Yes, as Sections 117 and 125 are cognizable offences, allowing arrest without a warrant, Rahul Gandhi can be arrested. Other sections are non-cognizable, requiring prior judicial approval for investigation and arrest.
- However, arrest is not mandatory for offences with jail terms up to seven years, per Supreme Court's 2014 guidelines. Police must provide written reasons for any arrest, ensuring adherence to due process.
- All charges are bailable, so Rahul would likely secure bail even if arrested.
- ✓ No Special Protection for LoP: The Leader of Opposition is a statutory position, recognized under the Salary and Allowances of Leaders of Opposition Act, 1977, but it does not grant immunity from legal actions.

Legal Charges and FIR Details: Delhi Police registered an FIR against Rahul Gandhi and other Congress MPs under the **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (BNS)** for the following offences:

- ✓ The FIR invoked sections under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023, including provisions for grievous hurt, criminal intimidation, and endangering personal safety.
 1. **Section 117:** Voluntarily causing grievous hurt (up to 7 years in prison and/or fine).
 2. **Section 115:** Voluntarily causing hurt (up to 1 year in prison and/or fine).
 3. **Section 125:** Endangering life or personal safety (up to 3 years in prison and/or ₹10,000 fine).
 4. **Section 131:** Assault or use of criminal force (up to 3 months in prison and/or ₹1,000 fine).
 5. **Section 351:** Criminal intimidation (up to 7 years in prison and/or fine).
 6. **Section 3(5):** Common intention in a criminal act.

Can Rahul Be Disqualified from Parliament?

Yes, but only if he is convicted and sentenced to over two years in prison, as per Section 8(3) of the Representation of People Act, 1951. Disqualification lasts from the conviction date until six years after release.

- ✓ Article 105 of the Constitution provides MPs immunity for speeches and votes within Parliament but not for criminal acts outside or within parliamentary premises.
- ✓ Rahul was disqualified last year after a Surat court convicted him of defamation. He was reinstated as an MP after the Supreme Court stayed his conviction, nullifying the disqualification grounds.

Legal Provisions for Disqualification of MPs/MLAs

1. **Constitutional Provisions: Articles 102 and Article 191** provide disqualification grounds for Member of Parliament (MPs) and Member of Legislative Assemblies (MLAs) respectively, such as holding an office of profit, being of unsound mind, insolvency, or lacking valid Indian citizenship.
2. **Tenth Schedule (Anti-Defection Law):** Disqualifies members for defection, such as voluntarily leaving a party or defying party directions during votes. In **Kihoto Hollohan (1992)**, court upheld the Speaker's authority under the Tenth Schedule but allowed for judicial review.
3. **Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1951:**
 - a. **Section 8:** Disqualifies MPs/MLAs convicted of certain crimes, such as bribery or election-related offenses.
 - **Section 8(3):** Disqualifies those sentenced to two or more years of imprisonment for any offence lasting until six years after release (by Lily Thomas v. Union of India (2013)).
 - b. **Section 9:** Disqualification for dismissal due to corruption or disloyalty.
 - c. **Section 9(A):** Disqualification for government contracts.
 - d. **Section 10:** Disqualification for holding office under government companies.
 - e. **Section 11:** Allows for the removal or reduction of disqualification periods by the President or Governor.

** The President's decision is final regarding disqualification of an MP as long as it's not a disqualification on the grounds of defection which is decided by the Speaker of the Lok Sabha.

**The Governor's decision on a MLA's disqualification is final except in the case of anti-defection, provided they must seek the Election Commission's opinion before acting.

** Judicial Review: Decisions of the Speaker or the Election Commission are subject to judicial review to ensure fairness.

Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA)

The PMGDISHA aimed to promote digital literacy in rural India, targeting 6 crore households has ended, with 6.39 crore individuals getting trained by March 31, 2024.

About PMGDISHA

It is a digital literacy initiative launched in 2017 by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) to empower rural populations in India by making them digitally literate.

Objective: To bridge the digital divide, empower rural citizens, and enable their participation in nation-building by fostering inclusion and helping marginalized communities leverage technology for daily tasks and the digital economy.

Target: The scheme aimed to train **6 crore people** in rural areas across India, reaching **40% of rural households**, by providing digital literacy to one person from each eligible household.

✓ Alignment with SDGs: Contributes to Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Goal 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure).

Eligibility:

- The scheme prioritizes marginalized groups such as **Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Below Poverty Line (BPL) families, women, differently abled persons, and minorities of rural households only.**

- ✓ In Kerala's Wayanad district, tribal students used PMGDISHA training to access online scholarships and tutorials.

- **One person per household, aged 14-60 years, is eligible for training.**

- Priority is given to those who are **non-smartphone users, from Antyodaya households, college dropouts, and adult literacy mission participants.**

- **Digitally illiterate students** from class 9 to 12 (if their schools do not provide ICT training) are also eligible.

Training Content: The training enables participants to use **digital devices** (computers, smartphones, tablets), send and receive **emails**, browse the **internet**, access **government services**, search for information, and perform **digital payments**.

Benefits

- Enables rural citizens to use digital devices like smartphones and tablets.

- ✓ In Jharkhand's Gumla district, PMGDISHA-trained women began facilitating digital payments for small businesses, boosting local commerce.

- Helps with accessing government services, information searching, and digital payments.

- **Boost to e-Governance:** Facilitates rural engagement with government services such as DigiLocker, PM-KISAN, and eNAM.

Supreme Court Declares Coconut Oil as Edible Oil

The Supreme Court (SC) recently resolved a 15-year-long tax classification ambiguity on coconut oil by clarifying that coconut oil should be classified as an edible oil and taxed at a 5% Goods and Services Tax (GST) rate, rather than 18% for haircare products.

✓ The decision was based on its primary use as a cooking medium, particularly when packaged in small quantities.

Tax on Coconut Oil

Pre-GST Tax Regime (Before 2017)	Post-GST Tax Regime (Since 2017)
Under the Central Excise Tariff Act, 1985 (CET Act), coconut oil was taxed differently based on its classification.	The introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) simplified and unified indirect taxes but retained differential rates for products based on their classification
<p>Coconut Oil as an Edible Product:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classified under Section III, dealing with "Animal or Vegetable Fats and Oils and their Cleavage Products." Subject to an 8% excise duty after the 2005 amendment. 	<p>Coconut Oil as an Edible Product:</p> <p>Taxed at 5% GST, aligning with the tax rate for other edible oils. Applicable regardless of container size, eliminating earlier ambiguities.</p>
<p>Coconut Oil as a Haircare Product:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Products labeled as "Preparations for use on the hair" were categorized under Section VI, dealing with "Products of the Chemical or Allied Industries." Taxed at a 16% excise duty due to its classification as a cosmetic product. 	<p>Coconut Oil as a Haircare Product:</p> <p>Specifically labeled as "Preparations for use on the hair" and taxed at 18% GST, consistent with other cosmetic and personal care products.</p>
<p>Classification Issues and Circulars:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2009, the CBEC issued a circular stating that coconut oil in containers of less than 200 ml would be taxed at 16% as hair oil. The classification was challenged in tribunals and courts, leading to the withdrawal of the circular in 2015. Judicial rulings emphasized that container size alone cannot determine usage, and packaging size should not imply non-edible purposes. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Facts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> India is the largest producer of coconuts globally and exports coconut oil to Gulf and ASEAN countries, making it a valuable forex earner. A fair tax structure incentivizes coconut farming, a sustainable agricultural practice that reduces carbon footprints.

What was the Case?

- In 2007, **Madhan Agro Industries** challenged central excise notices proposing higher tax on coconut oil, classifying it as a **hair care product** due to its small packaging.
- The Customs Excise and Service Tax Appellate Tribunal (CESTAT) ruled in favor of the company, classifying coconut oil as an **edible oil**.
- The Tribunal passed similar orders in challenges involving several Puducherry-based companies that sold coconut oil in small containers.
- The **Commissioner of Central Excise, Salem**, appealed to the SC against these orders.

View of SC

- In a 2018 split verdict, **Justice Gogoi** ruled coconut oil as **edible oil** regardless of package size, while **Justice Banumathi** argued small packages were typically considered **hair oil**.
- In the 2024 decision, the **Supreme Court** rejected the "Common Parlance Test" and ruled that coconut oil should be classified as **edible oil**, based on international **HSN norms**.
 - ✓ The Harmonized System of Nomenclature (HSN) code is a universal system for classifying goods that's used in over 200 countries. The HSN code helps classify goods for international trade, customs tariffs, and tax purposes.
- It emphasized that the mere use of coconut oil as a cosmetic does not change its classification, and that **small packaging** alone is not a sufficient criterion to classify it as **hair oil**.

The Common Parlance Test plays a critical role in resolving tax classification disputes. It is used to classify products when they could reasonably fall under two different tax categories. The court examines how the public or market typically perceives and uses the product. For example:

- In May 2023, the **SC** classified **homeopathic hair oil** as a **medicament** for tax purposes, not as a cosmetic. Medicaments attract lower tax rates compared to cosmetics, aligning with their essential nature for public health.
- In 2022, the **SC** ruled that **anardana** (dried pomegranate seeds) falls under "oil seeds" because they are commonly used for sowing, while fresh pomegranate is consumed as a fruit.

This principle ensures that taxation aligns with practical realities and public perception, reducing ambiguity and litigation.

RS Passes Boilers Bill for Safety at Factories

The Rajya Sabha recently passed the Boilers Bill 2024, replacing the Boilers Act of 1923 brought by the colonial administration.

About the Boilers Bill, 2024

- The 2024 Bill seeks to replace the Boilers Act, 1923 and regulate the design, manufacture, installation, operation, and maintenance of boilers to ensure safety and uniformity across India.
 - ✓ A boiler (under the concurrent list of the Constitution) refers to a vessel in which steam is generated under pressure. As of 2024, there are about 40 lakh steam boilers in the country.
- The proposed legislation retains most provisions of its predecessor while introducing updates for modern compliance and industrial needs. The key provisions include:
 1. **Central Boilers Board:** constituted by the Central Government will be responsible for making regulations and ensuring uniformity in boiler inspection and certification. It will include representatives from various sectors such as boiler manufacturers, users, state governments, and technical experts.
 2. **Inspection and Certification:** Boilers must be inspected and certified during manufacturing, erection, and repair stages to ensure compliance with safety standards. Only certified welders and recognized inspectors can work on boilers and their components. Use of unregistered or uncertified boilers is prohibited.
 3. **Inspection Authorities:** will include Chief Inspector, Deputy Chief Inspectors, and Inspectors appointed by the State Government. Inspectors will have powers to inspect, certify, and enter premises for compliance checks.
 4. **Registration and Renewal:** Boilers must be registered before operation, with certificates valid for up to 12 months. Renewal is required for continued operation. Also, alterations, repairs, and structural renewals of boilers must receive prior approval.
 5. **Safety and Compliance:** All accidents must be reported within 24 hours. Owners will be responsible for proper preparation and readiness of boilers for inspections and for the safety of personnel during maintenance.
 6. **Offences and Penalties:** The bill provides for:
 - Imprisonment (up to 2 years), fine (up to ₹1 lakh), or both for unauthorized alterations or additions to boilers/components or tampering with safety valves.
 - Fine (up to ₹1 lakh) for tampering with registration numbers and violating rules or regulations.
 - Fine (up to ₹5,000) for failure to produce required certificates or to report accidents.These provisions remain unchanged from the previous law.
 7. **Appeals:** The bill provides a multi-level appeals mechanism according to which:
 - Aggrieved persons can appeal to the **Chief Inspector** against orders or refusals by Inspectors within 30 days.
 - Appeals against the Chief Inspector's decisions, such as registration or renewal refusals, certificate revocations, or alteration directions, can be made to the Central Government. Revisions of the Central Government's decisions can be sought within 60 days.

- Penalties imposed by adjudicating officers can be appealed to a designated authority within 60 days, with decisions required within another 60 days.
8. **Exemptions:** Boilers with capacities below 25 liters, pressure under 1 kg/cm², and water heating below 100°C are exempted. State governments can exempt specific boilers or areas under certain conditions, such as emergencies or industrial growth requirements.
 - ✓ The Act also does not apply to steam engines and boilers used by armed forces.

Key Issues and Analysis

1. **Need for a Specific Boiler Law:** The rationale for separate legislation is questioned as other countries (e.g., UK, South Africa) regulate boilers under broader occupational safety laws. The Occupational Safety, Health, and Working Conditions Code, 2020 (Subsumed the Factories Act, 1948) which is yet to be implemented, could potentially include boiler regulations.
 - ✓ Factories Act, 1948 contains a whole chapter specifying safety norms for items such as machinery, hoists and lifts, explosive or inflammable gas, and pressure plants, and requires employment of safety officers.
2. **Blanket Exemptions:** The provision allowing state governments to exempt entire areas or classes of boilers raises concerns about compromising safety standards.
3. **Judicial Recourse:** Decisions by central and state inspectors are final, with no judicial recourse except through High Court writ petitions. The lack of an appellate mechanism for certain orders limits redressal options for affected parties.
 - ✓ Thus, an aggrieved individual will not have judicial recourse against a decision of the government. The only option available to them is to directly file a writ petition before the High Court under Article 226 of the Constitution.
4. **Inspection Safeguards:** Powers granted to inspectors for entry and inspections lack procedural safeguards, raising concerns of misuse.
5. **Simplification of Compliance:** Unlike certain states (e.g., Gujarat, Tamil Nadu), the Bill does not incorporate self-certification mechanisms, continuing reliance on external inspection.
6. **Time limits for approvals:** However, no timeline has been specified for completing inspections for manufacturing and erection of boilers, and approvals for alterations and repair. The Bill does not specifically provide that timelines for these will be specified through rules or regulations. Thus, it leaves timelines for these to administrative discretion.

Railways Amendment Bill 2024

The Lok Sabha (LS) recently passed the Railways (Amendment) Bill, 2024 which seeks to provide a unified framework for administration while addressing recommendations for structural and financial reforms.

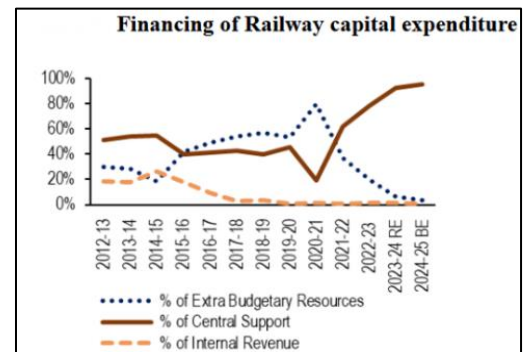
Key Provisions:

1. **Repeal of Indian Railway Board Act, 1905:** The Bill repeals the Indian Railway Board Act, 1905, and merges its provisions into the Railways Act, 1989, as recommended by earlier Joint Parliamentary Committees (JPC). This simplifies the legal framework, removing the need to refer to two separate laws.
2. **Constitution of the Railway Board:** The Railway Board, already established under the 1905 Act, will be formally constituted under the Railways Act, 1989. The Central Government will define its number of Board members, their qualifications, terms, and conditions for the appointment. The Board will retain its role in policymaking and administration, with its independence enhanced.
3. **Streamlined Communication:** Official decisions or directions of the Board will be binding if signed by the Secretary or an authorized representative.
4. **Decentralization of Powers:** The bill grants greater autonomy to railway zones for decision-making, including budgetary control and infrastructure development. The move aligns with long-standing recommendations from committees, including the Sreedharan Committee (2014).

- ✓ The Sreedharan Committee (2014) recommended devolving financial powers to railway zones, enabling them to make independent decisions on project tenders. The Committee on Restructuring Railways (2015) supported this, suggesting it would promote competition and accountability within zones.
 - ✓ There are 19 zones ((including Metro Railway, Kolkata) on the Indian Railways and 70 divisions in the Indian Railway system. Each division is directed by a DRM or Divisional Railway Manager, who reports to the GM or General Manager of the zone.
5. **Establishment of an Independent Regulator:** It proposes a regulator to oversee tariffs, safety standards and participation of the private sector. This move aligns with the 2015 Committee on Restructuring Railways' recommendation to improve competition and service quality.
6. **Streamlining Approvals and Operations:** It simplifies the process for approving new train services to fast-track infrastructure projects, including superfast train operations. For example, extending the Arunachal Express via the Siwan, Thawe, Kaptanganj, and Gorakhpur route to benefit regions like Bihar.

Key Issues and Recommendations

1. **Administrative Centralization:** The Bill retains the existing centralized structure of the Indian Railways. Expert Committees (including the Bibek Debroy Committee) have recommended decentralizing powers to railway zones for budget control, infrastructure decisions, and recruitment.
 - ✓ Experts Suggestions to improve Railways' finances include changing accounting methods, rationalising passenger fares, improving the freight basket, and raising revenue through private partnerships
 - ✓ The successful operation of metro rail systems in various cities, with decentralized management, can be replicated in the Indian Railways.
2. **Financial Challenges:** Railways face high operational costs, losses in passenger services, and reliance on cross-subsidies from freight. Freight contributes 65% of revenue, while passenger services contribute less than 30%, creating an imbalance. Recommendations include:
 - a. Rationalizing passenger fares.
 - b. Developing private partnerships for asset monetization, freight operations, and station maintenance. **Example:** Successful PPP models like Tejas Express and station redevelopment projects at Habibganj and Gandhinagar.
 - c. Restructuring accounting to reflect route-specific profitability.
3. **Independent Regulation:** An independent regulator for tariffs, safety, and private sector engagement has been proposed to improve competition and service standards. The Rail Development Authority, approved in 2017, is yet to be implemented.
4. **Outdated Accounting Practices:** Current accounting systems do not differentiate route-specific costs, making it challenging to identify profitable or loss-making routes. Transparency in financial reporting is minimal, discouraging private investments. Examples: **The Bibek Debroy Committee** (2015) recommended adopting commercial accounting practices to reflect actual profitability and costs.



Govt. Amends Rule to Restrict Access to Polling Footage

The Central Government recently amended Rule 93 of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, limiting public access to certain election-related documents. The move was initiated by the Ministry of Law and Justice based on the Election Commission of India's (ECI) recommendation.

- ✓ The amendment followed a Punjab and Haryana High Court (HC) ruling directing the ECI to provide all election-related documents, including electronic records like CCTV footage, to the petitioner.

What is Rule 93 of the Conduct of election rules, 1961 and the related amendment?

Rule 93 deals with the production and inspection of election papers.

Before Amendment	Post Amendment
Rule 93(2)(a) earlier stated that “all other papers relating to the election shall be open to public inspection”.	Rule 93(2)(a) now reads, “all other papers as specified in these rules relating to the election shall be open to public inspection.”

Rationale for the Amendment

- 1. Clarifying Ambiguities:** According to the ECI, the term “election papers” in the original rule was ambiguous and did not explicitly include electronic records. The amendment was meant to clarify and restrict access to certain sensitive materials.
- 2. Privacy Concerns:** Sharing CCTV footage of polling stations could compromise voter anonymity, especially in sensitive areas like **Jammu and Kashmir** and **Naxal-affected regions**.
- 3. Technological Risks:** Advances in **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** could enable tampering or manipulation of electronic footage.
- 4. Ensuring Safety:** Public access to such materials could potentially endanger voters and election personnel in volatile regions. Threats to election officials were reported during past elections in Maoist-affected regions.

Criticisms of the Amendment	Implications
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Transparency Concerns: RTI activists criticize the amendment as a "setback for transparency," arguing it restricts access to essential documents like Presiding Officer diaries, vital for assessing election fairness, along with other reports and returns filed by officials. 2. Documents Excluded: Several election-related records, such as observer reports and Returning Officer scrutiny reports, are not explicitly mentioned in the rules and may now be inaccessible. This could limit avenues for challenging electoral irregularities. 3. Political Allegations: The opposition has accused the government and ECI of eroding transparency by avoiding compliance with the HC ruling and amending the rules to limit public access. 4. Legal Challenge: Critics, including opposition parties, plan to contest the amendment in court, asserting it undermines citizens’ rights to access election-related information. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Voter Security and Privacy: will be strengthened especially in sensitive regions. However, it limits oversight over the electoral process, potentially reducing public confidence. 2. Transparency Trade-offs: While aimed at safeguarding sensitive information, the move raises concerns about reduced accountability and fairness in elections. 3. Broader Impact: It reflects broader tensions between privacy/security considerations and transparency, especially in a digital age where electronic records play a crucial role.

Way Forward: To balance security and transparency, the government and ECI could:

- **Introduce a Tiered Access System** to allow public access to sensitive materials with appropriate safeguards (e.g., anonymization of footage). Countries like Germany and Canada have robust electoral laws balancing privacy and transparency by anonymizing sensitive data before release.
- **Foster Greater Dialogue with Stakeholders**, including political parties and activists, to ensure trust in electoral processes.
- **Define Specific Accountability Mechanisms** to ensure elections remain fair and transparent. Sensitive materials can be made accessible to specific stakeholders (e.g., courts, political parties) under strict confidentiality agreements.

Henderson Doctrine

In a recent case, the Supreme Court (SC) explained Henderson doctrine, a natural corollary of the Indian doctrine of constructive Res-judicata.

About Henderson Doctrine

It was established in the English case *Henderson v. Henderson* (1843) to address all issues arising from the same subject matter of a dispute within a single lawsuit. Its key features include:

- **Prevention of Relitigation:** It prohibits parties from relitigating issues that could have been raised in earlier proceedings, aiming to avoid repetitive legal battles.
 - ✓ **Example:** If a contract dispute's terms are litigated, a related issue such as breach of payment cannot be litigated separately later.
- **Obligation to Present Full Case:** When a matter is taken to court, parties are required to bring forward their entire case, including all relevant claims. They cannot withhold issues that are connected to the dispute, even if they were not specifically addressed during the original litigation.
 - ✓ Corporate litigation often involves deliberate withholding of claims to pressure opponents, which the doctrine seeks to prevent.
 - ✓ Land disputes in India, a major source of litigation, can be resolved more efficiently when claims are consolidated.
- **Application of Res Judicata:** The doctrine expands on the principle of *res judicata*, asserting that not only the issues on which the court has already rendered judgment, but also any related issues that could have been raised, must be resolved in the initial case.
 - ✓ **Res Judicata** (Latin for "the thing has been judged") is a legal principle that prevents the re-litigation of issues either in the same court or another that have already been decided in a previous case involving the same parties. This principle, also known as claim preclusion, applies in both civil and criminal legal systems, ensuring that judicial decisions are final and preventing repetitive litigation.
- **Preventing Vexatious Litigation:** By ensuring that all possible claims are raised in one suit, the doctrine prevents parties from repeatedly challenging the same matters in multiple suits, which would otherwise cause unnecessary legal delay and burden the court system.
 - ✓ Under Section 11 of the Civil Procedure Code (CPC), 1908, constructive res judicata bars issues that "**might and ought**" to have been raised earlier.
 - ✓ With over 4 crore pending cases in Indian courts (as of 2024), applying the Henderson Doctrine aids in reducing frivolous or repetitive litigation.
- **Exception for Extraordinary Circumstances:** The principle enforces that any claims that could and should have been raised in the original proceedings are barred from being reintroduced in later litigation, except in rare or exceptional circumstances.

Relevance in Modern Contexts

1. **Administrative Tribunals:** Labor disputes or taxation claims before administrative tribunals often invoke similar principles to consolidate issues.
2. **Arbitration and ADR:** The doctrine is vital in arbitration to ensure that parties cannot relitigate issues post-award, enhancing arbitration's credibility as a final dispute resolution mechanism.
3. **Technology-Driven Disputes:** In cases involving intellectual property (IP) or data privacy, where disputes evolve rapidly, the doctrine encourages early consolidation of claims.

In the US legal system, doctrines of claim preclusion and issue preclusion operate similarly to the Henderson Doctrine, ensuring judicial finality.

Advantages and Criticisms

Advantages	Criticisms
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prevents judicial overburdening• Ensures finality and certainty in law• Promotes litigant responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May penalize parties unaware of latent claims• Rigidity might deny justice in evolving disputes• Complex for non-expert litigants

Banking Laws Amendment Bill

The Lok Sabha passed the Banking Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024. The Bill, introduced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, was passed via a voice vote.

Introduction: The Banking Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024, introduced in the Lok Sabha in August 2024, aims to amend multiple banking-related laws to streamline operations and modernize regulations. It amends the following Acts:

- Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Act, 1934
- Banking Regulation Act, 1949
- State Bank of India Act, 1955
- Banking Companies (Acquisition and Transfer of Undertakings) Acts, 1970 and 1980

Key Amendments & Provisions of Banking Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024

- **Redefinition of "Fortnight" for Cash Reserves:**
 - **Current Definition:**
 - A fortnight is defined as period *from Saturday to the second following Friday* (14 days).
 - **New Definition:**
 - From the 1st to the 15th of each month, or
 - From the 16th to the last day of the month.
 - **Impact:** This change affects how both scheduled and non-scheduled banks maintain cash reserves with the RBI.
- **Tenure of Directors in Co-operative Banks:**
 - **Existing Rule:** Directors (other than the chairman or whole-time director) cannot serve more than **8 consecutive years**.
 - **New Rule:** Extends the tenure to **10 consecutive years** for co-operative banks.
- **Exemption for Common Directors in Co-operative Banks:**
 - **Current Rule:** A director of one bank cannot serve on the board of another bank, except for RBI-appointed directors.
 - **Amendment:** Allows directors of central co-operative banks to also serve on the board of a state co-operative bank where they are a member.
- **Increase in Threshold for Substantial Interest in Companies:**
 - **Existing Threshold:** Substantial interest in a company is defined as holding shares worth more than ₹5 lakh or 10% of the company's paid-up capital, whichever is lower.
 - **New Threshold:** Raises this to **₹2 crore**. The government may modify this amount through notifications.
- **Nomination Rules for Deposits and Lockers:**
 - **Current Provision:** A single or joint deposit holder can appoint one nominee.
 - **New Provision:**
 - Allows up to **four nominees**.
 - **For Deposits:** Nominees can be named simultaneously or successively. In simultaneous nominations, the share is divided proportionally.
 - **For Lockers and Articles in Custody:** Successive nominations can be made, with priority based on the order of nomination.
- **Settlement of Unclaimed Amounts:**
 - **Current Rule:** Unpaid or unclaimed dividends are transferred to the Investor Education and Protection Fund (IEPF) after seven years.

- **Amendment:** Expands the scope to include:
 - Shares with unclaimed dividends for seven consecutive years.
 - Unpaid interest or redemption amounts for bonds for seven years.
 - Allows claimants to retrieve shares or funds transferred to the IEPF.
- **Auditor Remuneration:**
 - **Existing Rule:** The RBI, in consultation with the central government, fixes auditors' remuneration.
 - **Amendment:** Empowers banks to independently decide the remuneration for their auditors.

The **Banking Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024** introduces critical changes to enhance banking governance, improve efficiency, and protect customer interests.

MoSPI Modifying CPI Base Year

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) is modifying the Consumer Price Index (CPI) base year by updating CPI weights and baskets.

How CPI Is Calculated?

$$\text{CPI} = \frac{\text{Cost of Basket in Current Year}}{\text{Cost of Basket in Base Year}} \times 100$$

Base year serves as a reference point for comparison (currently 2012, likely to be revised to 2024).

Purpose of CPI:

- **Tracking Inflation:** CPI helps monitor the rate at which prices are rising or falling.
- **Policy Formulation:** RBI uses CPI as primary metric for inflation targeting, maintaining it at $4\% \pm 2\%$.
- **Wage and Pension Adjustments:** CPI is used to revise salaries and pensions, especially in government sectors.
- **Economic Analysis:** It provides insights into consumption trends and economic health.

Key Issues in the Current CPI

- **Exclusion of Free PDS Items:**
 - Free goods distributed under the Public Distribution System (PDS) are currently excluded as they do not involve direct monetary transactions.
 - This aligns with international practices and recommendations, such as those by IMF, which suggest excluding non-monetary transactions from CPI.
- **Challenges with PDS Inclusion:**
 - Redistribution of weights for free items has occasionally caused inflation spikes.
 - Free items complicate inflation calculation as their inclusion may distort the measure of consumer expenditure.

Proposed Changes in the New CPI Series


- MoSPI is revising the CPI methodology with 2024 as the new base year. Key changes under consideration include:
 - **Inclusion of PDS Items:**
 - Reflecting free PDS items at a zero price, with future adjustments as weights change.

Consumer Price Index (CPI)

- ◆ The CPI measures the average change in prices of a **fixed basket of goods and services** that households typically consume.
- ◆ **Components:** CPI includes various categories, such as:
 - **Food and Beverages:** Items like cereals, pulses, vegetables, milk, meat, and beverages.
 - **Housing:** Rent or imputed rent for self-occupied houses.
 - **Clothing and Footwear:** Costs of garments, footwear, and other related items.
 - **Fuel and Light:** Includes LPG, kerosene, firewood, and electricity.
 - **Miscellaneous:** Education, healthcare, transport, communication, and recreation expenses.

Types of CPI

- ◆ **CPI for Industrial Workers (CPI-IW):**
 - Base Year: **2016**
 - Used for wage adjustments in organized labor.
- ◆ **CPI for Agricultural Labourers (CPI-AL) and Rural Labourers (CPI-RL):**
 - Measures inflation for rural and agricultural laborers.
 - Base Year: **1986-87**
- ◆ **CPI (Urban), CPI (Rural), and CPI Combined:**
 - Measures retail inflation at a national level.
 - Base Year: **2012**
- ◆ **CPI Combined** is widely used as the official retail inflation rate in India.



- This could lower headline inflation figures but requires significant adjustments to the CPI calculation process.
- **Redistribution of Weights:**
 - Restrict redistribution to the same category (current practice).
 - Broader redistribution across the entire CPI basket for greater accuracy.
- **Stakeholder Consultation:**
 - The new CPI series is expected to roll out by the final quarter of FY26, post stakeholder consultations and technical adjustments.

Rationale Behind the Proposed Changes

- **Economic Representation:** The Chief Economic Advisor (CEA) and other experts argue that excluding free PDS items undermines the true representation of market conditions.
- **Alignment with Household Expenditure:** The updated CPI will derive weights from the 2022–23 Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES), ensuring the basket reflects current consumption patterns.

Methodological Challenges

- **International Norms:** Global practices recommend limiting CPI to monetary transactions
- **Mid-Series Adjustments:** Adapting ongoing CPI series to account for changes in PDS pricing—such as shifting from zero to positive prices—presents statistical challenges.
- **Impact on Headline Inflation:** Including free items may lower inflation figures, but it risks skewing the index's purpose of capturing monetary price movements.

Conclusion

- The ongoing deliberations on including free PDS items in CPI aim to enhance the index's robustness and accuracy.
- While aligning with international best practices, India's revised CPI could better capture the dynamics of consumer expenditure and inflation in a rapidly evolving economic landscape.

e-Daakhil

- The e-Daakhil portal is now operational in every State and UT of the country, after its recent launch in Ladakh by the **Department of Consumer Affairs**.
 - The portal was first launched in **September 2020** by the **National Consumer Dispute Redressal Commission (NCDRC)**, during Covid 19.
- The portal was introduced as an inexpensive, speedy and hassle-free mechanism for filing consumer complaints.
- It provides a convenient way for consumers to approach the relevant consumer forum, removing the need to travel and be physically present to file their grievances.
- At present more than **2,81,024** users have registered on the e-Daakhil portal, and **1,98,725** cases have been filed out of which **38,453** have been disposed of.
- In addition to the E-Daakhil portal, the government working to launch **e-Jagruti** which will further streamline case filing, tracking, and management, ensuring a hassle-free experience for consumers and other stakeholders. It will also facilitate seamless communication between all parties, allowing for faster resolution of disputes.
- By automating and digitizing the process, eJagruti will reduce delays, minimize paperwork, and ensure timely disposal of cases, ultimately contributing to a more effective and accessible justice system for consumers.

Advisory Committee on National Accounts Statistics

- A panel has been constituted to revise the base year of national accounts or Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from 2011-12 to 2022-23.
- The Advisory Committee on National Accounts Statistics (ACNAS) comprises representatives from the RBI, centre and state governments as well as academia.
- The 26-member ACNAS, constituted under the **Chairmanship of Biswanath Goldar**, is expected to complete the exercise by early 2026.
- The GDP data based on the 2011-12 series was released in January 2015.
- The base year of the national accounts is changed periodically to take into account the structural changes which take place in the economy and to depict a true picture of the economy through macro aggregates.
- The **first official estimates** of national income published in 1956 were prepared by the **Central Statistical Organisation (CSO)** with **base year 1948-49** for the estimates at constant prices.

Anna Chakra

The Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution has launched **Anna Chakra** and **SCAN (Subsidy Claim Application for NFSA) portal**.

SCAN Portal

- It aims to modernize the PDS and subsidy claim mechanisms of the States under National Food Security Act (NFSA)
- It will provide for a **single window submission of subsidy claims** by states, claim scrutiny and approval by DFPD facilitating quick settlement process.
- It will ensure end-to-end **workflow automation** of all the processes for release and settlement of food subsidy using rule-based processing.

Anna Chakra

- Anna Chakra is a Public Distribution System (PDS) supply chain optimisation tool.
- It is developed by the **Department of Food Public Distribution (DFPD)** in collaboration with the **World Food Programme (WFP)** and Foundation for Innovation & Technology Transfer (FITT), IIT-Delhi.
- The project uses advanced algorithms to **identify optimal routes and ensure seamless movement of food grains** across supply chain nodes involving multiple stakeholders starting from farmers to Fair Price Shops (FPS).
- It covers **4.37 lakhs FPSs** and around **6700 warehouses** involved in PDS supply chain.
- It is integrated with the **FOIS (Freight Operations Information System) portal** of the Railways through **Unified Logistics Interface Platform (ULIP)**
- It is also integrated with the PM Gati Shakti platform which maps geo-locations of FPSs and warehouses across the states.

Benefits

- It will lead to **improved efficiency and cost savings through the streamlined delivery routes reducing fuel consumption, time, and logistics costs**
- The route optimization assessment has been done for 30 states and the results show an estimated cost saving of about Rs 250 Crores per year.
- It also provides environmental benefits of lower carbon footprint due to reduced transportation-related emissions.

NHAI Contractor Rating System

- NHAI has introduced a comprehensive rating system for performance assessment of the concessionaires (contractors) engaged in the National Highway development and maintenance.
- This has been done to enhance accountability and assess the quality of construction and maintenance of National Highways.
- Under it, the contractors will be evaluated **every six months** and ratings will be uploaded on NHAI website and its social media handles.
- The assessment methodology will be based on **Pavement Condition Index (PCI)** as well as *defect rectification compliance on NHAI One App* where over 95 defects can be notified and monitored digitally.
- **80% weightage** would be given to **PCI** and **20% weightage** to compliance on **NHAI One App**.
- PCI is a scientific metric ranging from 0 to 100, reflecting pavement conditions from excellent to failed.
- PCI is calculated on **six functional parameters** that include roughness, potholes, cracking, rut depth, patchwork and ravelling (dislodging of coarse aggregate on the surface).

- The data for PCI value will be calculated using the latest technology such as Laser Crack Measurement Systems through Network Survey Vehicles (NSV). NHAH will deploy NSVs fitted with cameras and sensors on National Highways to assess the condition.
- As per the rating value, contractors will be divided under different categories. Contractors scoring less than 70 out of 100 rating will be declared 'non-performers', thus becoming ineligible to secure new National Highway projects till improvement in its rating.
- The assessment of the contractors will be done at two levels, first at individual project level and second at contractor level.
- The rating value at project level as well as combined contractor rating value would be reviewed every 6 months with every cycle of NSV survey.

National Highways Authority of India (NHAH)

- NHAH was constituted by the **National Highways Authority of India Act, 1988** under the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways
- It became operational in 1995 and was formally made an autonomous body.
- It has been set up as a Central Authority to develop, maintain and manage the National Highways for which the responsibility is given to it by the Union Government.
- The NHAH reserves the right to levy toll on identified highways.

National Legal Metrology Portal



Department of Consumer Affairs (DoCA) is developing the National Legal Metrology Portal (**eMaap**) to integrate State Legal Metrology Departments and their portals into a unified National System.

Need for the Portal

- Presently, State Governments are using their own portals for registration of packaged commodities, issue of licenses and verification/stamping of weighing & measuring instrument.
- However, the enforcement activities and compounding of offences, etc. are not online.
- Therefore, DoCA is integrating all the state portals in one as eMaap which will include all functions of Legal Metrology including enforcement and help to get a unified database.

Details of the Portal

- The initiative aims to streamline critical processes for issuing licenses, conducting verifications and managing enforcement and compliance.
- By creating a centralized database, eMaap eliminates the need for stakeholders to register on multiple State Portals, facilitating ease of doing business and transparency.
- For **traders and industries**, it minimizes compliance burdens, reduces paperwork and ensures timely adherence to the provisions of the **Legal Metrology Act, 2009**.
 - The portal is also expected to significantly boost manufacturing growth by facilitating efficiency and accountability.
- For **consumers**, eMaap ensures that trade instruments are verified for accuracy, enhancing confidence in market transactions.
 - It provides easy access to certificates and promotes awareness of rights and responsibilities.

 Legal Metrology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Metrology is the science of measurement. Legal metrology is the application of legal requirements to measurements and measuring instruments. • The objective of legal metrology is to ensure public guarantee from the point of view of security and accuracy of the weights and measurements.
Legal Metrology Act, 2009 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was passed to establish and enforce standards of weights and measures. • It also regulates trade and commerce for goods which are sold or distributed by weights, and measures. • The Department of Legal Metrology falls under the DoCA • The Act came into effect from 2011, by replacing the Standards of Weights and Measures Act, 1976 and Standards of Weights and Measures (Enforcement) Act, 1985. • The State and Union Territory governments have been given the authority to enforce the provisions of the Act and the Rules under it.

- For **Governments**, the portal enables data-driven decision-making, streamlines enforcement activities, and facilitates policy formation, ensuring a robust and efficient regulatory framework.

ADB Loan for Horticulture

- The Union Government and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) have signed a \$98 million loan to improve **horticulture crop farmers' access to certified disease-free planting materials**, to boost their crops' yield, quality, and resilience to climate impacts.
- The project will be **implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare through the National Horticulture Board and the Indian Council of Agricultural Research**.
- The project supports India's **Atmanirbhar Clean Plant Programme (CPP)** that enhances plant health management.
- It will help develop regulatory framework and institutional systems to effectively implement CPP for horticulture in the country.
- It will involve close consultation with private nurseries, researchers, state governments, and growers' associations to ensure its success and sustainability.
- It will also help farmers adapt to climate change, as rising temperatures not only cause extreme weather events but also affect pest and disease behaviour.
- This will be achieved through establishing **clean plant centres** dedicated to maintaining disease-free foundation materials.

Horticulture

- Horticulture, is a branch of plant agriculture **dealing with garden crops, generally fruits, vegetables, and ornamental plants**.
- The word is derived from the Latin hortus, "garden," and colere, "to cultivate". 



Significance of Horticulture

- Horticulture crops are a **source of variability in farm produce and diets**. These crops have **aesthetic value and protect the environment**. The crops are useful for cultivation in wasteland or poor quality soil.
- These crops are of **high value, labour intensive and generate employment** throughout the year.
- Horticultural produce serves as **raw material for various industries**, such as processing, pharmaceutical, perfumery and cosmetics, chemical, confectionery, oils and paints, etc
- They have national and international demand and are a **good source of foreign exchange**. The horticulture production in the country in 2023-24 (Second Advance Estimates) is estimated to be ~352.23 Million Tonnes, decrease of about 32.51 Lakh Tonnes (0.91%) over 2022-23 (Final Estimates).

{For more about CPP refer The Recitals- August 24}

13th National Seed Congress

- The 13th National Seed Congress (NSC) 2024, organized by the **Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare**, was held at the International Rice Research Institute South Asia Regional Centre (ISARC) in Varanasi.
- Theme of NSC 2024 is '**Innovating for a Sustainable Seed Ecosystem**'.
- NSC provides a vital platform for exchanging knowledge, fostering partnerships, and driving innovation to strengthen seed systems.
- The Congress reflects India's commitment to ensuring food security, addressing climate challenges, and empowering smallholder farmers with access to quality seeds.
- The participants resolved to work more on innovative seed technologies in the country. The focus will be on *hybrid and bio fortified crops, stress-tolerant varieties and accelerated breeding cycles*.
- The NSC also discussed the importance of policy frameworks in the seeds sector, including a new Seeds Bill, and enhancing seed entrepreneurship, improving supply chains, and building capacity among farmers.
- It featured three impactful plenary sessions
 - India's Role in the Global Seed Sector: Opportunities and Expectations
 - Fostering South-South Collaboration in the Seed Sector
 - Strengthening the Seed Sector through Public-Private Partnerships

Recovery in Core Sectors

Output in India's eight core infrastructure sectors, recovered to rise 3.1% in October, the best performance in three months in terms of growth as well as absolute levels.

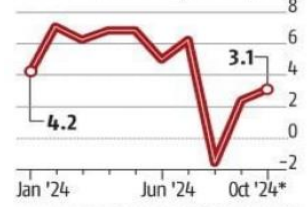
- The Index of Core Industries (ICI) which had slumped to a 10-month low in September, recovered on a sequential basis to a provisional number of 161.3 in October.

Index of Eight Core Industries (ICI)

- ICI gives an indication of the production performance of the industries which are of a 'core' nature. These industries have a major impact on the Indian economy and significantly affect most other industries as well.
- It measures combined and individual performance of production in **eight core industries**.
- The eight core industries in the **decreasing order of their weight** are Refinery Products, Electricity, Steel, Coal, Crude Oil, Natural Gas, Cement, Fertilizers.
- The eight core industries comprise **40.27%** of the weight of items included in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP).

RECOVERY PATH

Overall core sector growth (in %)



Oct '24* sectoral growth (in %)

Coal	7.8
Crude oil	-4.8
Natural gas	-1.2
Refinery products	5.2
Fertilisers	0.4
Steel	4.2
Cement	3.3
Electricity	0.6

*Provisional
Source: Ministry of Commerce & Industry

The **base year** of ICI is **2011-12** and it is prepared every month and released by the **Office of the Economic Adviser, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)**.

Index of Industrial Production (IIP)

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



Significance of IIP

- It provides a single representative figure to measure the general level of industrial activity in the economy on a monthly basis.
- It is used for the compilation of Gross Value Added (GVA) of the manufacturing sector in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on a quarterly basis.

Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)

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

New RBI Governor Appointed

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet has appointed Sanjay Malhotra as the 26th Governor of the RBI. He is a 1990-batch officer of the Indian Administrative Service and was serving as the Revenue Secretary.

Functions of RBI Governor

- Bank Licensing:** Grant licenses for the establishment of new banks in India.

Appointment of RBI Governor

- The RBI Governor is appointed under the provisions of the **RBI Act, 1934**.
- The Financial Sector Regulatory Appointment Search Committee, consisting of Cabinet Secretary, current RBI Governor, Financial Services Secretary and two independent members, prepares a list of people eligible to hold the post.
- Next, the shortlisted candidates are interviewed and sent to the Cabinet Committee on Appointments, which is headed by the Prime Minister.
- Once the Cabinet Committee approves the candidate, the appointment is confirmed by the central government.
- The RBI Governor is appointed for a term not exceeding **five years**, with the possibility of extension or reappointment by the central government.

Qualification Criteria

- RBI Act, 1934 **does not** mention any specific qualification for the governor. In general, essential eligibility criteria for the candidature are:
 - Must be a citizen of India & should be between the age of 40 and 60 years.
 - Should possess at least 20 years of experience in the banking, finance, economics, or related sectors.
 - Must have held a senior leadership role within prominent banking institutions, financial organizations, or reputable academic institutions.

- **Regulating the banking system:** Overseeing various types of banks such as state cooperative banks, private banks, regional rural banks, and local area banks.
- **Economic stability:** Managing economic stability through adjustments in monetary policies and ensuring adequate credit flow in the economy.
- **Monetary policy formulation:** Implementing policies aimed at controlling inflation, managing currency flow, and promoting financial stability.
- Managing & regulating foreign exchange market as per **Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA), 1999.**

Rajmarg Sathi

- NHAI aims to implement the upgraded and forward-looking *Incident Management Services*.
- The guidelines include updated specifications for new **Route Patrolling Vehicles (RPVs)** named '**Rajmarg Saathi**' and outlines design, functions, technology, components and manpower specifications for the RPVs.
 - RPVs conduct inspection of National Highway stretches to monitor and respond to emergency situations.
- A standout feature of the upgraded RPVs is the integration of dashboard cameras with AI-powered video analytics. These cameras can detect cracks, potholes, and other elements such as vehicles, pedestrians, road signs, and infrastructure assets.
- The captured footage and road distress data will be collected weekly and integrated into the **NHAI One application**, ensuring more efficient road maintenance.
- To maintain optimal service fitness, RPVs will be replaced after covering 3,00,000 kilometers or three years of operation.
- Emphasis has also been placed on their *branding and visibility*, with high-visibility designs and advanced communication tools ensuring effective highway patrol services.

World's Largest Grain Storage Plan

- Under the pilot phase of the **World's Largest Grain Storage Plan in the cooperative sector**, godowns have been successfully constructed at Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) in 11 states across India.
- The project has achieved a total storage capacity of **9,750 metric tonnes**.
- The initiative is supported by the **National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC), National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), and NABARD Consultancy Services (NABCONS)**.
- Encouraged by the success of the pilot phase, the government has extended the project.
- As of November 2024, over 500 additional PACS across the country have been identified for the construction of godowns, further advancing the plan to enhance storage infrastructure at the grassroots level.

Subsidy and Interest subvention

- The initiative integrates subsidies and interest subventions through various government schemes, such as the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF) and the Agricultural Marketing Infrastructure Scheme (AMI).
 - Under the AIF scheme, PACS receive a 3% interest subvention on loans up to Rs 2 crore, with a repayment tenure of seven years.
 - AMI scheme provides a 33.33% subsidy to PACS for constructing storage units. Margin Money requirement for PACS has been reduced from 20% to 10%.

Significance of the Plan

- Farmers will be able to avail bridge finance for the next cycle of crop and sell the produce at a time of their choice or sell their whole crop to the PACS at Minimum Support Price (MSP), which would enable them to **avoid distress sale of crops**. It will help in reduction of post-harvest loss.

- Through integration with the food supply management chain, farmers will be able to expand their market size and realize better value for their produce.
- Since PACS would be operating as procurement centre as well as Fair Price Shops (FPS), the cost incurred in transportation of food grains to procurement centres and again transporting the stocks back from warehouses to FPS would also be saved.
- Farmers will be able to get various agri inputs & services at Panchayat/ village level itself.
- Through diversification of business, farmers will be able to get additional sources of income.
- It would also help in ensuring food security at Panchayat/village level across the country, thereby benefitting the consumers.

Decline in 10-year Bond Yield

Indian government's 10-year benchmark bond yield fell to its lowest level in nearly 3 years, on growing optimism over the domestic central bank easing interest rates.

Factors Affecting Bond Yields

Many domestic and global developments that have an impact on bond yields.

- Major factors: Monetary policy of RBI, especially the interest rates & inflation.
- Inflation and interest rates are in turn affected by various other factors such as economic growth, sovereign rating, money supply, government borrowing, global liquidity and geopolitical developments.

Link Between Interest Rate And Bond Yields


- A fall in interest rates in the economy (e.g. the rate at which government lends to banks and banks further lend to businesses) leads to an increase in bond prices and bond yields fall.
- Similarly, rising interest rates cause bond prices to fall, and bond yields to rise.

Link Between Stock Markets And Bond Yields

- Traditionally, when bond yields go up, investors pull out their investments from stocks and invest that money into bonds, as they are much safer.
- Therefore, **generally bond yields are inversely proportional to equity returns** (returns from the stock markets).
- Also, a rise in bond yields raises the borrowing cost for companies, which in turn reduces the valuations of their stocks.

Impact of Bond Yield on Borrowing Cost


- When bond yields rise, the RBI has to offer higher yield to investors. This means borrowing costs will increase.



Bonds and Bond Yields

- Across the world, **governments sell bonds to raise money to meet their expenditure.**
- These bonds have a **selling price** and a **fixed coupon rate** (or the absolute amount of money that people earn).
- **Bond yield** is the **return an investor gets on that bond** or on a particular government security.
- For example, consider a **10-year** government bond (called Treasuries in the US, Gilts in Britain and G-Secs or government securities in India) is priced at \$100 and the coupon rate is \$5.
- This means that if person buys this bond from the government for \$100 today, the government will pay the person \$5 each year and return \$100 at the end of 10 years.
- In this example, the yield or the annual rate of return from the bond is 5%, but this **yield can change if the selling price of the bond changes.**

Change in bond yields



- For example, at the start of the second year, if investors feel that the prospects of the overall economy are not good, they might start investing in government bonds, as it is the safest form of investment.
- Due to this, the demand for government bonds will increase, which will increase the price of the bond.
- Consider that the price of the same 10-year bond rises by a dollar to \$101. Since the fixed coupon rate is still \$5, the effective return at the end of the second year will be only \$4.
- This leads to a yield of 3.96% — a fall from 5% yield bondholders earned in first year.

- Besides, as government borrowing costs are used as the benchmark for calculating loans to businesses and consumers, any increase in yields will increase the borrowing cost in the overall economy.

Impact of Bond Yield on FPI

- Traditionally, when bond yields rise in the US, FPIs move out of Indian stock market.
- A higher return on treasury bonds in the US, leads investors to move their funds from more risky emerging market investments to the US Treasury, which is the safest investment instrument.

Bima Sakhi Yojana

- The PM launched the Bima Sakhi Yojana, an initiative of Life Insurance Corporation (LIC).
- The scheme is designed to benefit women in the age group of **18-70 years, who have passed Class 10th.**
- LIC is targeting to enroll 100,000 Bima Sakhi in the next 12 months and 200,000 over a period of 3 years as part of its women empowerment drive.
- The aim is to penetrate the untapped areas and have at least one enrolled candidate in every panchayat area.
- Bima Sakhis will receive specialized training and a stipend for the first three years. They will get Rs 7000 stipend in the 1st year, Rs 6000 in 2nd year and Rs 5000 in 3rd year.
- After completion of three years of contractual work, LIC will help train these women and after a basic examination, they will be selected to join as Development Officer roles in LIC.
- The programme is expected to promote financial independence among women while expanding LIC's outreach in promoting insurance as a tool for economic security.

UPI Based Credit Lines for SFBs

- RBI has allowed Small Finance Banks (SFBs) to offer pre-sanctioned credit lines through Unified Payments Interface (UPI).
- Until now, only scheduled commercial banks were allowed to offer pre-sanctioned credit lines on the flagship payments platform.
- Under this facility, payments through a pre-sanctioned credit line issued by a bank to individuals/ small businesses, with prior consent of the customer, are enabled for transactions using the UPI system.
- UPI credit line can be utilised immediately for transactions through the payments platform.
- It facilitates availability and frictionless usage of credit lines, overdrafts and retail loans, facilitating economic growth and enhancing financial inclusion.
- Credit line on UPI has the potential to make available low-ticket, low-tenor products to 'new-to-credit' customers.

Small Finance Banks



- SFBs are specialised financial institutions established with the primary goal of enhancing financial inclusion by offering basic banking services to underserved and unbanked segments of society.
- SFBs bridge the financial gap in rural and semi-urban areas, focusing on small business units, micro and small industries, marginal farmers, and unorganized sectors.
- **Regulated by the RBI**, SFBs are registered as a **public limited company** under the **Companies Act, 2013.**
- **SFBs are like corporate entities** limited by shares and they have much more flexibility in raising finances from the banking system.
- These banks **can do almost everything that a normal commercial bank can do**, but at a much smaller scale.
 - (i) It can offer basic banking services, accept deposits and lend to underserved sections of customers.
- SFBs are **required to give 75% of their Adjusted Net Bank Credit (ANBC) to priority sector**, which includes those working in agriculture, and small enterprises and low-income earners.
 - (i) Also, **50% of their loan portfolio** have to be below **25 lakhs**. Further, these banks are also allowed to distribute third-party products such as mutual funds, insurance and pension products.
- SFBs leverage a high-tech, low-cost model to reach the last mile customer and can play an enabling role in expanding the reach of credit on UPI.

Credit Guarantee Scheme for e-NWR Based Pledge Financing

- The Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution has launched the *Credit Guarantee Scheme for e-NWR based pledge financing (CGS-NPF)*.
- It provides a corpus of Rs 1,000-crore for post-harvest finance to farmers to minimise distress selling by farmers.
- Farmers can get loans against **electronic negotiable warehouse receipts (e-NWRs)** after depositing commodities in Warehousing Development and Regulatory Authority (WDRA) accredited warehouses.
- The scheme majorly focuses on Small and Marginal Farmers, Women, SC, ST and Divyangjan (PwD) farmers with a minimal guarantee fee.
- Besides, small traders (MSMEs), Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) are also benefited under this scheme.
- Loans extended to small and marginal farmers up to Rs. 75 Lakhs will have coverage of 80-85%.
- Loans extended to MSMEs/FPOs /traders up to Rs. 200 Lakhs will have coverage up to 75% under the scheme.

Significance

- The scheme addresses the default arising out of both credit risk and warehouseman risk and thereby, improves trust by the banks.
- It is hoped that the scheme will boost the post-harvest lending to Rs 5.5 lakh crore in the next 10 years.

Pledge Financing

- Pledging is a process in which holder of the eNWR will get a loan from the financial institution using the underlying commodity of eNWR as collateral.
- When a pledge is marked, the eNWR balances will remain in the client's account (borrower) only but the control on the balance will be with the financial institution.
- Thus, the client will not be able to use the eNWR balances until the pledge in favour of the financial institution is active.
- Further, if the client has repaid the loan, the financial institution will release the pledge and upon such release, the balances of eNWR will be available in client's account for his use.
- However, if the client does not repay the loan or defaults the repayment, the financial institution will have absolute right to get the eNWR balances (ownership of eNWRs) transferred to financial institution's account.

NWR



- The negotiable warehouse receipt (NWR) system was **launched in 2011** allowing the transfer of ownership of a commodity stored in a warehouse without delivering it physically.
- These receipts are issued in negotiable form, making them eligible as collateral.
- It's done by enabling the financing of warehouse receipts through the **Warehouse (Development and Regulation) Act, 2007**.

E-NWR



- An e-NWR is **available only in electronic form**. It has a **time validity** that is co-terminus with the shelf-life of the commodity or withdrawal of the commodity fully from the warehouse, after which it expires.
- The single source of information for the e-NWR is the repository system where e-NWR is issued by registered warehouses.
- Confidentiality, integrity and availability of the e-NWR information is provided by the repository system.
- All e-NWRs can be traded through off-market or online-market in Commodity Exchanges platforms. It can also be **transferred fully or in part**.
- An **e-NWR can be auctioned** under certain conditions such as loan not repaid, on expiry and delivery not taken, and on likely damage or spoilage of the commodity in the warehouse.

BENEFITS OF E-NWR SYSTEM

- Avoidance of forgery/loss/tamper/mutilation of a physical NWR.
- Avoidance of multiple financing against the same NWR.
- **Reduction of monitoring costs** and building credibility amongst market participants.
- Market participants have **secured accessibility** to view and manage their warehouse receipts via online portal.
- **Easy access to finance** by enabling multiple transfers without physical movement of goods.
- Splitting of NWRs for partial sale/pledge/withdrawal.



ADB Loan for SMILE Program

- The Indian government and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) have signed a **\$350 million policy-based loan (PBL)** under the second sub-programme of the **Strengthening Multimodal and Integrated Logistics Ecosystem (SMILE)** program.
- The signatories to the agreement were Department of Economic Affairs (DEA), Ministry of Finance; Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry; and the ADB.
- The agreement represents a pivotal step towards revolutionising India’s logistics sector and seeks to position India as a global leader in efficient, resilient, and sustainable logistics systems.
- The SMILE program is a **programmatically policy-based loan (PBL)** to support the government in undertaking **wide-ranging reforms in the logistics sector** in the country.
- The programmatic approach comprises **two subprograms**, which aim to expand India’s *manufacturing sector* and improve the *resilience of its supply chains*.

Key Pillars of the Program

- **Strengthening institutional frameworks:** Developing capacities at national, state, and city levels for the seamless integration of multimodal logistics infrastructure.
- **Standardising warehousing:** To streamline supply chains and attract private investment.
- **Improving trade logistics:** Enhancing the efficiency of India’s external trade operations.
- **Promoting smart, low-emission systems** by utilising advanced technologies

Significance

- The reforms are anticipated to significantly reduce logistics costs, improve operational efficiency, and create substantial employment opportunities.
- Notably, the program emphasises gender inclusion, promoting equitable growth across sectors and ensuring broad-based benefits.

Increase in REER

- The rupee is hitting fresh lows against the US dollar each day, yet its exchange rate has scaled an all-time-high in “real effective” terms.
- The real effective exchange rate (REER) index of the rupee touched a record 108.14 in November, strengthening by 4.5 per cent during 2004.
- The rupee’s REER fell from 105.32 in January 2022 to 99.03 in April 2023. But since then, it has been on an appreciating trajectory.

Effective Exchange Rate (EER)

- The EER is an index of the weighted average of the rupee’s exchange rates vis-à-vis the currencies of India’s major trading partners.
- The currency weights are derived from the share of the individual countries to India’s total foreign trade.
- There are two measures of EER - NEER and REER



Nominal EER (NEER)

- RBI has constructed NEER indices of the rupee against a basket of six and also of 40 currencies.
- The former is a trade-weighted average rate at which the rupee is exchangeable with a basic currency basket, comprising the **US dollar, the euro, the Chinese yuan, the British pound, the Japanese yen and the Hong Kong dollar**.
- The latter index covers a bigger **basket of 40 currencies of countries** that account for about **88% of India’s annual trade flows**.
- The NEER indices are with reference to a **base year value of 100 for 2015-16**.
- Increases indicate the rupee’s effective appreciation against these currencies and decreases point to overall exchange rate depreciation.

Real EER (REER)



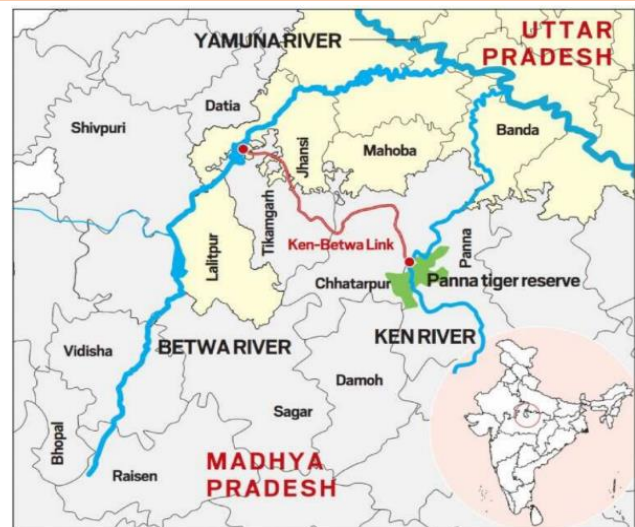
- The NEER is an index that captures movements in the external value of the rupee against a basket of global currencies. However, the NEER does not factor in inflation, which reflects changes in the internal value of the rupee.
- REER is basically the NEER that is **adjusted for the inflation** differentials between the home country and its trading partners and it is often used as an indicator of external competitiveness.
- If a country’s nominal exchange rate falls less than its domestic inflation rate, the currency has actually appreciated in “real” terms.
- Any increase in REER means that the cost of products being exported from India are rising more than the prices of imports into the country.
- REER depreciation tends to improve the trade balance as it makes Indian exports more competitive, while appreciation makes them more expensive.
- Several factors, including productivity differentials, terms of trade, government spending, and net foreign assets, influence REER.

Reason for Divergence

- The main reason for the divergence — the rupee’s simultaneous weakening and strengthening — is due to the dollar’s behaviour over the past three months, especially post Donald Trump’s victory in the US presidential elections.
- From a longer timeframe, the rupee has, since the start of 2022, dipped against the dollar, euro and pound, while strengthening only against the yen.
- Despite that, India’s REER has increased. And that is a result of inflation in India being higher relative to its major partners.
- Assuming the rupee was “fairly” valued in 2015-16, when the REER was set to 100, any value above 100 signifies overvaluation and the exchange rate not falling enough to offset higher domestic inflation.
- The rupee is, therefore, highly overvalued today, making imports into India cheaper and exports from the country less cost competitive.
- This also explains why the RBI is now allowing the rupee to fall — at least against the dollar.

Ken Betwa Link Project

- The Prime Minister recently laid the foundation stone of the Ken Betwa river Linking National Project.
- Ken Betwa Link Project (KBLP) is the first project under the **National Perspective Plan (NPP)** for interlinking of rivers, which was prepared in 1980.
 - NPP has 16 projects under its peninsular component, including the KBLP. Apart from this, 14 links are proposed under the Himalayan rivers development plan.
- KBLP involves transferring of water from the Ken river in Madhya Pradesh to the Betwa river in Uttar Pradesh, both tributaries of the Yamuna.



Details of the Project

- The Ken-Betwa Link Canal will be 221 km in length, including a 2-km tunnel. The project has **two phases**, with mainly four components.
- **Phase-I** will involve one of the components — **Daudhan Dam complex** and its subsidiary units
- **Phase-II** will involve three components — Lower Orr Dam, Bina Complex Project and Kotha Barrage.
- The total **cost** of KBLP has been assessed at **Rs.44,605 crore**. The Centre would fund Rs 39,317 crore for the project, with Rs 36,290 crore as a grant and Rs 3,027 crore as a loan.
- A Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) called Ken-Betwa Link Project Authority (KBLPA) has been set up to implement the project.

Benefits of KBLP

- The project has the potential to **irrigate 10.62 lakh hectares (8.11 lakh ha in MP and 2.51 lakh ha in UP)** of land and thus enable an increase in food grains production.
- It will **provide drinking water to 62 lakh people** across MP and UP, which will lead to fulfilment of SDG goals.
- It will also lead to generation of **103 MW of hydro power and 27 MW of solar power.**
- With groundwater recharge and drinking water supply, it has the potential to **generate local agricultural employment**, consequently reducing migration.

Concerns and Criticisms

- The Union environment ministry approved its construction inside the core of the Panna tiger reserve, despite no precedent of such heavy infrastructure projects deep within national parks and tiger reserves.
- The project will involve **large-scale deforestation with around 2 to 3 million trees being cut** inside the Panna National Park and Tiger Reserve.
- It will also lead to **submergence of around 98 sq km of Panna national park**, where tigers had gone locally extinct in 2009.
- The dam will **displace more than 6,500 families** in Panna and Chhatarpur district due to submergence and project-related acquisition.
- The acquisition process has faced a lot of protests related to inadequate compensation and low benefits for Panna district.
- It is also likely to affect the breeding pattern of **Critically Endangered Gangetic Gharial** population in the Ken Gharial sanctuary and other aquatic life along with **affecting vulture nesting sites**.
- An IIT-Bombay study found that moving large quantities of water as part of river linking projects can affect land-atmosphere interplay and lead to a mean **rainfall deficit by up to 12%** in the month of September.

FREE-AI

- The RBI has constituted an **eight-member committee** of experts to develop a **Framework for Responsible and Ethical Enablement of artificial intelligence (FREE-AI)** in the financial sector.
- The committee will be headed by **Pushpak Bhattacharyya**, Professor, Department of Computer Science and Engineering, IIT Bombay
- The Committee will submit its report within six months from the date of its first meeting.

Terms of Reference

- The committee will assess the current level of adoption of AI in financial services, globally and in India.
- It will review *regulatory and supervisory approaches* on AI with focus on the financial sector globally.
- It will identify potential risks associated with AI, if any and recommend an evaluation, mitigation and monitoring framework and compliance requirements for financial institutions, including banks, NBFCs, fintechs and payment system operators (PSOs).
- It will also recommend a framework including governance aspects for responsible, ethical adoption of AI models/applications in the domestic financial sector.

Kisan Kavach

- The **Department of Biotechnology** launched an **anti-pesticide suit** called Kisan Kavach.
- Designed to protect farmers from the harmful effects of pesticide exposure, it marks a transformative step in ensuring farmer safety.
- It is developed by **Biotechnology Research and Innovation Council (BRIC-inStem)**, Bangalore, in collaboration with Sepio Health Pvt. Ltd.
- Those who spray insecticide or pesticides usually cover themselves from head to toe with ordinary cloth.
- However, this approach is not advisable. Cloth over time tends to accumulate high quantities of poisonous chemicals that would eventually pass into the body.
- The kit consists of a trouser, pullover, and a face-cover made of **oxime fabric** that can chemically breakdown any common pesticides that get sprayed onto cloth or body. This prevents chemicals from leaching into the skin.
- Priced at Rs 4,000, the suit is washable, reusable, and can last up to two years with up to 150 washes.

Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises 2023-24

The **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)** has released the results of Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE) for 2023-24 for the reference period October 2023 – September 2024.

Unincorporated Enterprises

- These are enterprises in the unorganised or informal sector, comprising MSMEs, household units including those with hired workers, and own-account enterprises.
- The unincorporated non-agricultural sector plays a pivotal role in the Indian economy contributing significantly to employment, GDP and the overall socio-economic landscape.
- The sector also supports the incorporated sector by acting as suppliers and service providers, thereby forming an integral part of the domestic value chain.
- The survey was carried out for unincorporated non-agricultural establishments in **three sectors: manufacturing, trade, and “Other Services”**.
- Manufacturing units *other than those covered* under the Factories Act, 1948 and the organised manufacturing sector’s Annual Survey of Industries (ASI), have been surveyed.
- The survey collects data on various economic characteristics including number of workers, Gross Value Added (GVA), payments, fixed asset owned, outstanding loan, type of ownership, nature of operation, registration status, use of ICT, etc.

Key Findings

- The ASUSE 2023-24 results highlight significant growth in establishments, employment, and productivity in the unincorporated non-agricultural sector, demonstrating the sector's recovery from pandemic-related challenges.
- The **total number of establishments** in the sector increased substantially from 6.50 crore in 2022-23 to 7.34 crore in 2023-24, representing a healthy 12.84% growth.
- The number of establishments in the Other Services sector recorded a growth of 23.55% followed by a 13% increase in the manufacturing sector.
- **Gross Value Added (GVA)** rose by 16.52% driven by a 26.17% growth in Other Services sector.
- **Gross Value Added (GVA) per worker** which is a measure of labour productivity of the sector, rose to Rs. 1,49,742 in 2023-24 from Rs. 1,41,769 in 2022-23 in current prices showing a 5.62% increase.
- During the same period, the **Gross Value of Output (GVO) per establishment** also increased from Rs. 4,63,389 to Rs. 4,91,862

Strong Labour Market Performance

- The sector employed **more than 12 crore workers** during the period, marking an increase of more than 1 crore workers from 2022-23 and reflecting robust labour market growth.
- The "Other Services" sector showed the highest annual growth of 17.86% followed by 10.03% by manufacturing sector.
- The **percentage of female-owned proprietary establishments** has increased from 22.9% in 2022-23 to 26.2% in 2023-24.
- This trend indicates a positive shift in the participation of women in business ownership, highlighting an increase in the female entrepreneurship.
- The **average payment per hired worker** also increased by 13% in 2023-24 compared to 2022-23. The highest increase in this metric was observed in manufacturing sector with a growth of little more than 16%.
- This wage growth serves as a catalyst, strengthening the labour market, enhancing productivity, and fuelling broader economic demand.

Better Digital Penetration

- **Percentage of establishments using internet** has also grown significantly from 21.1% in 2022-23 to 26.7% in 2023-24.

Collateral Free Loan Limit Raised

- RBI has enhanced the collateral-free loan limit for **farmers** from Rs 1.6 lakh to Rs 2 lakh.
- The revised limit, is effective from 1 January 2025. The decision comes as inflationary pressures continue to hurt the agricultural sector, where small and marginal farmers—who account for over 86% of the farming community—often struggle to secure credit.
- The move is aimed to ease financial pressures on farmers and address escalating agricultural input costs.
- The new limit extends to loans for *allied activities*, providing farmers with opportunities to diversify income streams.
- This move aligns with government initiatives such as the Modified Interest Subvention Scheme (MISS), which offers loans of up to ₹3 lakh at a subsidized 4% interest rate for prompt payers.
- Together, these measures are part of a broader strategy to enhance sustainable agricultural practices and boost rural economic growth.

Windfall Gains Tax abolished

The Union Government has withdrawn the windfall gains tax (WGT) on domestic production of crude oil and export of diesel, petrol, and aviation turbine fuel (ATF).

Windfall Gains Tax (WGT)

- WGT was first imposed in July 2022, due to the rise in global oil and fuel prices after the Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
- As the price of crude oil produced in India is benchmarked to international prices, domestic oil prices also increased significantly.
- At the same time, margins on fuels were a lot more lucrative in other markets, incentivising refiners, particularly the private sector players, *to export fuels*. This had resulted in fuel supply disruptions in some parts of the country.
- The term was used to describe cesses under the ambit of central excise imposed on *fuel exports and domestic crude oil production*, to tax super-normal profits of fuel exporters and oil producers.
- In case of domestic crude oil and ATF exports, the windfall gains tax was in the form of **Special Additional Excise Duty (SAED)**.
- And on diesel and petrol, it was a combination of **SAED** and Additional Excise Duty (**AED**), the latter also known as **Road and Infrastructure Cess (RIC)**.
- The duties are reviewed every **fortnight** based on the movement in margins on fuels in the international market and global crude oil prices. In the first revision itself, the levy on petrol was reduced to nil and was not hiked since.
- India was not alone in imposing a windfall gains tax. Several other countries had imposed it to tax super-normal profits of energy companies.

Impact and Signal

- The country's oil industry has always been against the windfall tax regime.
- It was argued that it limited profitability of publicly listed companies, and created an environment that discouraged efforts to increase oil production in a country that depends on imports to meet over 85 per cent of its oil needs.
- Further, the *frequent review of the levies* made the taxation unpredictable.

- Lately, not much revenue was getting generated by through the WGT. This is mainly due to significant decline in prices of crude oil and the three major fuels in the international market.
- The total WGT collected was around Rs 25,000 crore in 2022-23 (FY23). It declined to around Rs 13,000 crore in FY24 and further to Rs 6,000 crore so far in FY25.
- The scrapping of the WGT may not have any notable impact on the financials of domestic oil producers.
- However, it acts as an assurance to the country's oil industry that the taxation regime will be reliable, predictable and stable.

Jalvahak Scheme

- The Union Government launched a major policy for cargo promotion - Jalvahak scheme, to boost long haul cargo movement via inland waterways across National Waterways **NW1** (Ganga), **NW2** (Brahmaputra), and **NW16** (Barak River).
- The scheme is jointly implemented by the **Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI)** and **Inland & Coastal Shipping Ltd (ICSL)**, a subsidiary of the Shipping Corporation of India.
- The Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways also inaugurated the fixed day scheduled sailing of vessels.
- The scheme aims to unlock the trade potential of inland waterways while reducing logistics costs and decongesting road and rail networks.
- Under the scheme, cargo owners transporting goods over distances exceeding 300 km via waterways on NW1, NW2 and NW16, will receive up to **35% reimbursement on operating costs**.
- The scheme will remain **valid for three years** and is designed to optimise supply chains for major shipping companies, freight forwarders, and trade bodies.
- It is projected to facilitate a **modal shift of 800 million tonne-kilometres** with an estimated investment of Rs 95.4 crore by 2027. This is nearly 17% of the current cargo of 4700 million tonne kilometres on national waterways.
- The fixed-schedule sailing service will ply vessels between Kolkata-Patna-Varanasi and Kolkata-Pandu (Guwahati) routes, demonstrating the readiness of waterways for efficient and eco-friendly cargo transportation.
- The fixed scheduled sailing service will ply vessels between Kolkata - Patna - Varanasi stretch of NW1 and between Kolkata and Pandu in Guwahati on NW 2 via Indo Bangladesh Protocol Route (IBPR), demonstrating the readiness of waterways for efficient and eco-friendly cargo transportation.
- To encourage the business proposition of vessel operators, the scheme encourages cargo owners to hire vessels owned or operated by government entities.

Inland Waterways

- India has an extensive network of inland waterways comprising rivers, canals, backwaters, and creeks.
- Of the total navigable length of 20,236 km, 17,980 km consists of rivers, and 2,256 km is made up of canals, both suitable for mechanised craft.
- However, freight transportation via waterways remains significantly under-utilised compared to countries like the U.S., China, and those in the European Union.
- Cargo volumes on national waterways have increased from 18.07 million tonnes in 2013-14 to 132.89 million tonnes in 2023-24, registering over 700% growth.
- The government aims to achieve 200 million tonnes by 2030 and 500 million tonnes by 2047.

Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI)

The IWAI is an autonomous body constituted in 1986, under the **Inland Waterways Authority of India Act, 1985**. It is primarily responsible for regulation, development & maintenance of National Waterways.

India Top Recipient Of Remittance

The World Bank recently released the remittance details across the world.

Remittance

- Remittance is derived from the word 'remit' which means 'to send back'.
- Remittances are the transfer of funds between parties as a bill, an invoice, or even a gift. However, "remittance" refers more broadly to the funds migrants send to their relatives in their home country while working and living abroad.

Key Findings

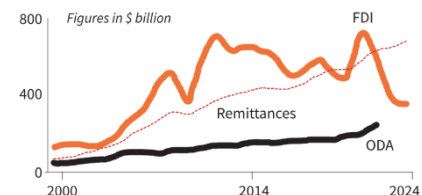
- The growth rate of remittances in 2024 is estimated to be 5.8%, compared to 1.2 % registered in 2023.
- In 2024, India received an estimated \$129.1 billion worth of remittances, the highest ever for a country in any year. Moreover, India's share in global remittances was 14.3% this year, the highest such share since the turn of the millennium for any country.
- India is followed by Mexico (\$68 billion), China (\$48 billion), the Philippines (\$40 billion), and Pakistan (\$33 billion).
- India's share has remained above the 10% mark for most of the years since 2000, with few exceptions. In fact, in the post-pandemic years, there has been a rapid increase in its share.
- In smaller economies, remittance inflows represent very large shares of GDP, highlighting the importance of remittances for funding the current account and fiscal shortfalls.
- Topping the list is Tajikistan (45% of GDP), followed by Tonga (38%), Nicaragua (27%), Lebanon (27%), and Samoa (26%).
- The recovery of the job markets in the high-income countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, has been the key driver of remittances.
- Remittances will likely continue to increase because of enormous migration pressures driven by demographic trends, income gaps, and climate change.
- Therefore, countries need to take note of the size and resilience of remittances and find ways to leverage these flows for poverty reduction, financing health and education, financial inclusion of households, and improving access to capital markets for state and non-state enterprises.

Regional Remittances

- By region, remittance flows to South Asia registered the highest increase in 2024, at 11.8%, driven mainly by continued strong flows to India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.
- Remittances to the Middle East and Africa is estimated to have increased 5.4 percent, primarily due to rebounded flows to Egypt, compared with a 14.6 percent decline in 2023.

Remittance v/s Other financial flows

- Remittances to low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) are expected to reach \$685 billion in 2024.
- Remittances have continued to outpace other types of external financial flows to LMICs and will continue to increase.
- In recent years, remittances have even surpassed FDI in LMICs. In the past decade, remittances increased by 57%, while FDI declined by 41%.
- Remittances are also much higher than the official development assistance (ODA) received by these countries.
 - ODA: Aid from rich countries to help poorer ones develop, often through grants/cheap loans.



HCES 2023-24

The Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) 2023-24 provides crucial insights into consumption patterns, inequality, and regional variations.

The report highlights a **significant reversal in the decade-long decline in the share of food expenditure in both rural and urban households.**

India's average household consumption spending on a per capita basis rose about 3.5% in real terms through August 2023 to July 2024 from a year ago.

Highlights of the HCES 2023-24

- **Rising food expenditure**
 - **Rural households:** The share of food expenditure increased to 47.04% in 2023-24 from 46.38% in 2022-23.
 - **Urban households:** A slight rise to 39.68% in 2023-24 from 39.17% in the previous year.
 - **Significance of this trend:** It also reflects the impact of higher food prices, as the figures are in nominal terms.
- **Urban-rural expenditure gap:**
 - The difference in average monthly consumption expenditure between rural and urban households narrowed to 69.7% in 2023-24 from 71.2% in 2022-23.
 - The gap has consistently reduced over the last decade, **indicating stronger growth in rural consumption spending.**
- **Average Monthly Per Capita consumption expenditure (MPCE):**
 - **Rural areas:** MPCE increased by 9.3% to Rs 4,122 in 2023-24 from Rs 3,773 in 2022-23.
 - **Urban areas:** MPCE rose to Rs 6,996, up from Rs 6,459 in the previous year.
 - **Historical context:** MPCE in 2011-12 was Rs 1,430 (rural) and Rs 2,630 (urban), showing significant growth over the years.
 - **Imputed consumption:** Including social welfare benefits, MPCE was Rs 4,247 (rural) and Rs 7,078 (urban) in 2023-24.

ABOUT HCES



- Released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), HCES is **designed to collect information on consumption and expenditure** of the households on **goods and services.**
- It provides data to determine and update the basket of consumer goods & services and weights used for the calculation of the Consumer Price Index.
- Data collected in HCES is also used to **measure poverty, inequality, and social exclusion.**
- The Monthly Per Capita Consumption Expenditure (MPCE) compiled from HCES is the **primary indicator** used for most analytical purposes.
- The estimates of MPCE of 2023-24 are based on the data collected from 2,61,953 households (1,54,357 in rural areas and 1,07,596 in urban areas) in the central sample spread **over all States and UTs** in the country.

Absolute terms	% terms
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Top 5%: Decline in MPCE for the top 5% of rural (Rs 10,137) and urban (Rs 20,310) households compared to 2022-23.● Bottom 5%: Significant increase in MPCE for rural (Rs 1,677) and urban (Rs 2,376) households.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Bottom 20%: Highest <u>percentage growth</u> in spending: 19.2% (rural) and 18% (urban).● Top 20%: Marginal growth of 1.5% (rural) and 1.1% (urban).

Income Distribution and Spending Trends

- **Consumption inequality:** The **Gini coefficient**, a measure of inequality, declined:
 - **Rural areas:** From 0.266 in 2022-23 to 0.237 in 2023-24.
 - **Urban areas:** From 0.314 to 0.284.
 - This indicates **reduced consumption inequality** across both rural and urban households.

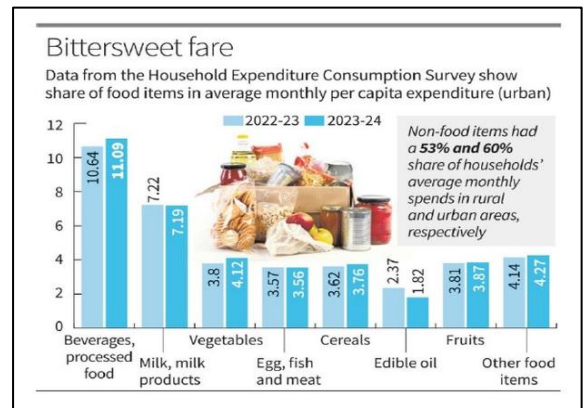
Sectoral and State-Wise Breakdown of Expenditure

- **Sectoral:**
 - **Food items:**
 - **Cereals:** Share increased slightly for both rural (4.99%) and urban (3.76%) households.
 - **Beverages and processed foods:** Highest share at 9.84% (rural) and 11.09% (urban).

- **Non-food items:**
 - **Rural:** 52.96% of expenditure, driven by conveyance, medical expenses, and clothing.
 - **Urban:** 60.32%, primarily on rent, entertainment, and durable goods.

- **State-wise consumption patterns:**

- **Higher spending states:** Maharashtra, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Kerala, Karnataka, Haryana, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh.
- **Lower spending states:** West Bengal, Bihar, Assam, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh.
- **Rajasthan:** An exception with higher rural spending but lower urban spending compared to the national average.



Conclusion

- The HCES 2023-24 reflects a notable shift in consumption trends, marked by increasing food expenditure, narrowing rural-urban disparities, and reduced consumption inequality (Gini coefficient).
- While most population segments experienced growth in spending, **the decline in top-tier expenditure and the methodological challenges in data collection warrant further analysis.**
- The full report, expected next year, will provide deeper insights.

INTERNATONAL RELATIONS

UK's Assisted Dying Bill

- The Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill was introduced in the UK to provide terminally ill patients with the option to seek assistance to end their lives.
 - The Bill will now be sent to a public bill committee which will vote on any proposed amendments before being voted on again in the House of Commons.
 - It will then be sent to the House of Lords, where further changes could be made, before a final vote is held.
- The Bill addresses ethical and humanitarian concerns for patients with no hope of recovery, ensuring dignity in their final days.
- Currently, both assisted dying and euthanasia are prohibited. Assisted suicide is a punishable offence with up to 14 years in prison.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF THE BILL

Eligibility Criteria

- **Age and Residency:** 18+, mentally capable and be deemed to have expressed a clear, settled and informed wish, free from coercion or pressure.
 - (i) resident in England/Wales for at least 12 months.
- **Terminal Illness:** Irreversible, worsening condition with a life expectancy of six months or less.
- **Exclusions:** Disabilities or mental disorders do not qualify.

Request and Assessment

- **First Declaration:** Signed by the patient in the presence of a coordinating doctor and witness; eligibility and voluntariness assessed.
- **Independent Review:** An independent doctor verifies eligibility after a 7-day reflection. Disagreements may lead to one additional review.

Judicial Review

- High Court verifies compliance, may question parties, and allows appeals to the Court of Appeal if rejected.

Final Confirmation and Administration

- **Second Declaration:** Signed after a 14-day reflection, with witnesses.
- **Self-Administration:** Approved substance provided to the patient, who must self-administer. Doctors are prohibited from administering it.

Definition

- **Assisted dying** generally refers to a person who is terminally ill receiving lethal drugs from a medical practitioner, **which they administer themselves.**
- **Assisted suicide** is intentionally helping another person to end their life, including someone who is not terminally ill.
 - That could involve providing lethal medication or helping them travel to another jurisdiction to die.

{For more on Euthanasia refer The Recitals-Sept 2024}

US Court Holds Israeli Company NSO Liable for Targeting WhatsApp Users

- Meta's WhatsApp secured a significant legal win as a US federal court found the Israeli firm NSO Group liable under federal and California laws for spyware attacks
- WhatsApp had sued NSO in 2019, accusing it of using Pegasus spyware to hack and surveil the phones of nearly 1,400 individuals during a two-week period in May 2019. The court will now determine the damages.

Key Highlights

- **Violation of Cybersecurity Laws**
 - The court ruled that NSO Group violated the **Computer Fraud and Abuse Act (CFAA)**, a federal law criminalizing unauthorized digital access, and California's **Computer Data Access and Fraud Act (CDAFA)**.
 - The ruling stated that NSO had exploited WhatsApp's servers to install Pegasus spyware and gain unauthorized access to users' devices.
- **Terms of Service Breach**
 - The court also concluded that NSO Group violated WhatsApp's terms of service by reverse-engineering and decompiling its source code.

- The court reasoned that NSO must have agreed to WhatsApp's terms to gain access to its software, further solidifying the breach.
- **Significance of the Ruling**
 - This ruling is notable as no prior court had held NSO Group accountable for its spyware.
 - It sets a precedent that surveillance companies cannot claim immunity or avoid liability for unlawful actions.

Pegasus Spyware

- It can infect phones via exploit links or missed video calls (no user interaction needed).
- **Capabilities of Pegasus**
 - Accesses private data, passwords, messages, calls, contact lists, calendar events, emails, SMS, and browsing history.
 - Activates the phone's camera and microphone for live surveillance.
 - Works on Android, iOS, BlackBerry, and Symbian devices.
 - Leaves no trace, has a self-destruct feature, and uses minimal resources to avoid detection.

Pegasus in India

- > Pegasus Spyware's use in Indian**
 - (i) In 2021, it was alleged that Pegasus was used to monitor over 300 Indian phone numbers, including those of Union Ministers, opposition leaders, journalists, and civil society members.
 - (ii) The NSO Group claims it only sells Pegasus to governments, but documents from the WhatsApp case revealed the company played a significant role in deploying the spyware, contrary to its claims of limited involvement.
- > Indian Government's Denial and Supreme Court Probe**
 - (i) The Indian government denied allegations of Pegasus misuse, with IT Minister calling the claims baseless and asserting that Indian surveillance laws prevent unauthorized monitoring.
 - (ii) Following public outcry, the **Supreme Court of India formed a technical expert committee in 2021** to investigate the allegations.
 - (iii) In its 2022 report, the committee found no conclusive evidence of Pegasus use but noted the Central Government's lack of cooperation. The report remains sealed and unreleased.

Impeachment of South Korea's President Yoon Suk Yeol

- South Korea's National Assembly initiated the impeachment process against Yoon Suk Yeol after securing a majority vote to proceed with the motion.
- The impeachment was based on allegations of abuse of power, violation of constitutional rights, and failure to uphold democratic principles.
 - Yoon's foreign policy, including attempts to mend ties with Japan and support for Ukraine, faced backlash both domestically and internationally.
 - His positions strained relations with Russia and China while increasing tensions with North Korea.
 - His unpopularity grew due to allegations against his wife and economic mismanagement, exacerbating political instability.
 - In December 2024, Yoon declared emergency martial law to suppress opposition protests, but the military and police reluctance and a vote in the National Assembly led to its withdrawal.
- **Key steps in the process included:**
 - **Filing of the Motion:** The impeachment motion was tabled by opposition lawmakers, citing Yoon's unconstitutional actions during martial law.
 - **National Assembly Vote:** A two-thirds majority in National Assembly approved the motion.
 - **Constitutional Court Review:** Following the parliamentary vote, the Constitutional Court began hearings to determine whether the impeachment met the constitutional threshold. After several weeks of deliberation, the court upheld the impeachment decision.
- **Third South Korean president to be impeached after Park Geun-hye in 2017.**
 - In 2004, President Roh Moo-hyun was impeached at parliament over an alleged election law violation but the court later overturned his impeachment and restored his presidential powers.

Joe Biden Pardons his Son Hunter in 2 Cases

U.S. President Joe Biden has issued a full and unconditional pardon to his son, Hunter Biden, for cases involving tax evasion and lying about drug use while purchasing a firearm.

- Biden is also considering **pre-emptive pardons** for allies, including Vice President Kamala Harris, former Chief Medical Officer Anthony Fauci, and Republican Congresswoman Liz Cheney, to protect them from potential prosecution under President-elect Donald Trump.

The US President's Power to Pardon

- **About**
 - The President of US has the constitutional right to pardon or commute sentences related to federal laws (*but not under state laws.*)
 - The US Supreme Court has held that this power is “granted without limit” and cannot be restricted by Congress.
 - Clemency is a **broad executive power, and is discretionary.**
 - The President is not answerable for his pardons, and does not have to provide a reason for issuing one.
- **Constitutional provision**
 - Article 2, Section II, Clause 1 of the U.S. Constitution grants the President the power to issue pardons for federal offenses, **except in cases of impeachment.**
- **Role of the Office of the Pardon Attorney**
 - The Department of Justice's ***Office of the Pardon Attorney*** processes pardon petitions, conducting initial reviews and FBI background checks.
 - The office makes non-binding recommendations to the President, who has the final authority.
- **Application Process for Pardons**
 - While the President can pardon federal crimes at any time, the DoJ requires individuals to **apply only after a five-year period following release from confinement**, demonstrating a law-abiding life during this time.
- **Limitations on Presidential Pardons: Federal Offenses Only; In Impeachment Cases**
- **Implied Limitation on Pardons**
 - A crime must first be committed for the President to issue a pardon.
 - As ruled in Ex Parte Garland (1866), a pardon can be granted at any stage: before legal proceedings, during them, or after conviction and judgment.
- **Impact and Interpretation of Pardons**
 - **No Erasure of Record:** A pardon **does not remove the conviction**; both the conviction and pardon remain on the individual's criminal record.
 - **No Declaration of Innocence:** A pardon does not imply innocence, nor is it definitively considered an admission of guilt.
- **Pre-emptive pardons**
 - The President cannot preemptively pardon future criminal acts, as clarified by the Ex Parte Garland ruling and the Constitution Annotated.

Nepal, China Sign 9-point Agreement

- Nepal and China signed a nine-point agreement during Nepalese Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli's four-day official visit to China.
- Key agreements included:
 - Construction of the Tokha-Chhahari tunnel road.

- Trade promotion and protocol for exporting thermally processed buffalo meat.
- Renovation of the Basantapur nine-storey palace.
- Cooperation in communication technology and Chinese language education.
- Economic and technical assistance, along with cash aid.
- Prior to the visit, Nepal accepted Chinese grant projects worth \$20 million and an additional 300 million Yuan (\$4.13 million).

Nepal, China Sign BRI Cooperation Framework

- Nepal and China signed a long-awaited **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Cooperation Framework Agreement**.
 - Though Nepal and China signed the BRI agreement in 2017, not a single project has been implemented under the framework.
- This agreement aims to enhance economic cooperation and facilitate the implementation of BRI projects, though specific project details remain undisclosed.
- The agreement replaces "grant" with "investment," with a compromise including "aid and technical assistance."
- The **Trans-Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity Network (THMDCN)** was also discussed as a key initiative under the BRI framework.

Freight Train Likely to Link Pakistan, Russia

- Russia and Pakistan are set to establish a freight train link passing through Iran and Azerbaijan, with a trial run expected in March 2025.
- This development follows the signing of eight MoUs during the 9th Inter-Governmental Commission meeting in Moscow. The agreements cover health, trade, industrial cooperation, and education.
- Pakistan has also expressed interest in joining the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), a 7,200 km trade route connecting Russia and Central Asia with India via Iran.
- Bilateral trade currently stands at approximately \$1 billion, though Pakistan seeks to address the trade imbalance by increasing its agricultural exports to Russia.
- Russia is exploring oil and gas projects in Pakistan, including refining and shelf exploration, and stable oil supplies to Pakistan are ongoing with efforts to diversify products.

Australia's Online Safety Amendment Bill

- Australia's House of Representatives recently passed the **Online Safety Amendment (Social-Media Minimum Age) Bill, 2024**, mandating social media platforms to take "reasonable steps" to prevent children under 16 from creating accounts.
- The Bill, which amends the **Age Discrimination Act, 2024**, will become law after Senate approval and Royal Assent.
- Platforms like TikTok, Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, and others will need to verify users' ages and ensure compliance. Non-compliance may result in fines up to \$49.5 million.
- The eSafety Commissioner will issue guidelines for "reasonable steps," to be taken by age-restricted social media platforms.
- **Global Context:**
 - Australia is the first country to attempt such legislation. The U.S. has historically tried similar measures, but most were struck down for violating constitutional rights.
 - Current U.S. laws, like the Children's Internet Protection Act, 2000, require filters in schools and libraries but don't restrict social media use for minors.

- **India's Position**

- India lacks laws restricting social media access for children. While laws punish online child exploitation, platforms are only required to follow "due diligence" under the IT Act, 2000.
- There are no signs of upcoming legislation to impose age restrictions on social media accounts.

China to Build World's Largest Hydropower Dam in Tibet

- China has approved the construction of the world's largest hydropower dam on the lower reaches of the Yarlung Tsangpo River (Brahmaputra) on the Tibetan plateau.
- The ambitious project aims to produce 300 billion kilowatt-hours (kWh) of electricity annually, more than tripling the capacity of the **Three Gorges Dam**, the current world leader in hydropower.

China's Brahmaputra Dam Project

- **About**

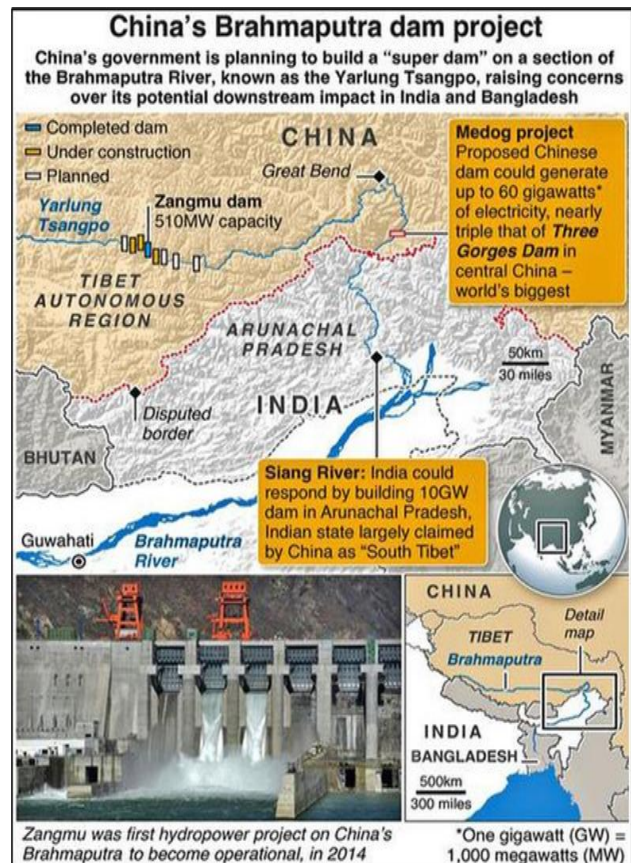
- China is constructing the dam in Medog County, Tibet Autonomous Region, where the Yarlung Tsangpo drops 2,000 meters, creating ideal hydropower conditions.
- The project is part of China's renewable energy initiatives, aiming to achieve carbon neutrality by 2060 while promoting regional development in Tibet.
- The project, costing \$137 billion, is part of China's 14th Five-Year Plan (2021–2025) and Long-Range Objectives through 2035.

- **Scale and Significance of the Project**

- The dam is projected to generate up to 60 gigawatts of power, triple the capacity of the Three Gorges Dam.
- It will produce 300 billion kWh of clean, renewable electricity annually, supporting Beijing's clean energy targets and bolstering water security.
- The project will generate 20 billion yuan (\$3 billion) annually for Tibet.

Concerns and Implications of China's Tibet Dam Project on India

- **Agriculture:** The dam could retain a significant amount of silt, which is crucial for downstream agriculture. Reduced silt deposits may negatively impact the fertility of agricultural lands in India.
- **Water Resources:** China claims the dam is a run-of-the-river hydropower project.
 - However, experts warn it could reduce water flow downstream during dry seasons and exacerbate flooding during monsoons if excess water is released, potentially causing disasters in Assam.
- **Potential Use of Water as a Weapon:** China's upstream position gives it control over the Brahmaputra's flow.
 - During geopolitical tensions, such as the 2017 Doklam standoff, China withheld hydrological data crucial for flood forecasting, raising concerns over the weaponization of water resources.
- **Seismological Threats:** Himalayan region's seismic vulnerability could pose risks to downstream populations due to the scale of infrastructure projects like this dam.



- **Ecological Impact:** The dam could disrupt the fragile Himalayan ecosystem, home to critically endangered species.
 - Combined with ongoing climate change effects, deforestation, and soil erosion, the ecological consequences may be severe.

India's Response

- India has urged China to safeguard downstream interests.
- Additionally, India is planning a 10 GW hydropower project in the Dibang Valley, Arunachal Pradesh, to counterbalance the potential impacts of China's dam.
- Also, data sharing between India and China on trans-border rivers, established under the Expert Level Mechanism (ELM) in 2006, remains critical.

New Suez Canal Channel Extension

- Egypt has successfully tested a new 10 km channel in the southern section of the Suez Canal, extending the two-way section from 72 km to 82 km and increasing the canal's total length to 193 km.
 - The Suez Canal is a man-made waterway that connects the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea in Egypt.
- The expansion aims to boost daily capacity by 6 to 8 ships and improve the canal's ability to handle emergencies.
- Following the 2021 grounding of the container ship Ever Given that blocked the vital waterway for six days, Egypt accelerated plans to extend the second channel in the southern reaches of the canal and widen the existing channel.
- Despite the improvements, the canal's revenue dropped over 60% in 2024, with losses of approximately \$7 billion, due to attacks by Yemen's Houthi militants on vessels in the Red Sea since November 2023.

Visit of Sri Lankan President to India

- Sri Lanka's President Anura Kumara Disanayake (AKD) visited India recently. This was his first trip overseas since becoming leader of his country.
- This visit saw some classic diplomatic deal-making, with give and take on both sides.

Key Highlights Of The Visit

- **Assurance on Anti-India Activities**
 - Sri Lankan President assured PM Modi that Sri Lanka's territory would not be used for activities harmful to India's interests.
 - This commitment addresses India's concerns regarding the frequent visits of Chinese "research vessels" to Sri Lankan ports.
 - The reiteration of this stance is significant, as AKD is perceived to be pro-China.
- **Tamil Minority Issue: Divergent Views**
 - AKD resisted India's push for the full implementation of the 13th Amendment to the Sri Lankan Constitution, which aims to empower the Tamil minority.
 - He opposes the amendment and investigations into alleged war crimes from the LTTE-Sri Lankan military conflict.
- **Rebuilding Sri Lanka with Focus and Clarity**
 - President AKD is pursuing an ambitious agenda to rebuild Sri Lanka after recent crises.
 - The India-Sri Lanka joint statement, titled "**Fostering Partnerships for a Shared Future,**" underscores this shared focus on development and collaboration.

- **Bilateral Development Cooperation**
 - Both leaders acknowledged India's significant contributions to Sri Lanka's socioeconomic growth through development assistance.
 - Key projects include:
 - Phase III & IV of the Indian Housing Project.
 - Three islands' Hybrid Renewable Energy Project.
 - High Impact Community Development Projects.
- **Advancing Connectivity and Energy Cooperation**
 - Digital collaboration includes implementing Aadhaar and UPI systems in Sri Lanka.
 - Energy initiatives under discussion:
 - LNG supply.
 - Development of Trincomalee as a regional energy and industrial hub.
 - Offshore wind power development in the Palk Strait.
 - High-capacity power grid interconnection.
- **Enhancing Physical Connectivity:**
 - Resumption of passenger ferry services between:
 - Nagapattinam and Kankesanthurai.
 - Rameswaram and Talaimannar (under review).
 - Discussions on rehabilitating Sri Lanka's Kankesanthurai port are underway.
- **Defence and Security Cooperation:**
 - Agreements to explore:
 - A framework Agreement on Defence Cooperation.
 - Provision of defence platforms and joint exercises.
 - Maritime surveillance, cyber security, and counter-terrorism under the Colombo Security Conclave mechanism.

Conclusion

- Despite new leadership in Sri Lanka, priorities and interests remain aligned.
- India views Sri Lanka's stability as critical to its strategic interests, while AKD seeks to make the next five years impactful through a mutually beneficial partnership.

India had Limited Success in Capturing 'China Plus One' Opportunity: NITI Aayog

The recently released **Trade Watch report by NITI Aayog** provides insights into India's trade prospects, challenges, and potential growth areas, particularly amidst the US-China trade conflict and the '**China Plus One**' strategy.

Key Findings of the NITI Aayog's Trade Watch Report

- **Limited success in 'China Plus One' strategy:**
 - India has had "limited success" in leveraging the 'China Plus One' strategy, where **multinational companies diversify supply chains away from China**.
 - Southeast Asian nations like Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, and Cambodia have outpaced India due to factors such as cheaper labour, simplified tax laws, lower tariffs, and proactive Free Trade Agreements (FTAs).
- **Trade fragmentation and export control measures:**
 - US has imposed strict export controls on Chinese goods, further fragmenting global trade.
 - India's key competitors in exports include Malaysia and Thailand, particularly in sectors like electrical machinery.

Future Prospects

• Impact of Trump's trade policies:

- The general US tariffs on imports (e.g., 10%) would not harm India.
- High tariffs on Chinese goods (e.g., 60%) could open significant market opportunities for Indian exporters.

• Focus on diversification and market expansion:

- India needs to explore new markets and products to increase its global trade share.

- Proactive policy measures and reforms could position India as a neutral, connecting economy amid ongoing geopolitical tensions.

Conclusion

- **India stands at a crossroads of opportunity and challenge in global trade.** While competitors have seized advantages under the 'China Plus One' strategy, India's potential remains untapped in several sectors.
- **Strategic preparation, diversification of trade partners, and reforms in policy and infrastructure** could enable India to capitalize on emerging opportunities amidst global disruptions.

[For more, refer the topic "India's Missed Opportunities in Global Trade Integration and A Call for Rethink on RCEP and CPTPP" from The Recitals – November 2024]

India and Bhutan Strengthen Bilateral Ties with Focus on Hydropower and Urban Planning

King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk of Bhutan and Queen Jetsun Pema visited India.

Key Highlights

• Support for Gelephu Mindfulness City Project

- PM Modi assured continued Indian support for **Gelephu Mindfulness City Project (GMC)**.
- GMC is a Special Administrative Region in Bhutan. The project aims to enhance Bhutan's prosperity, strengthen border area linkages, and boost economic cooperation.
- Adani Group is in talks with Bhutan for investments in infrastructure, renewable energy, and airport development for Gelephu.

• Progress in Hydropower Projects

- Both sides reviewed progress on the 1020 MW Punatsangchhu-II project, nearing completion.
- Discussed the early conclusion of the Punatsangchhu-I project and agreed to finalise modalities for new reservoir-based hydro projects.

• Connectivity Initiatives: Focus on cross-border connectivity through rail links and digital networks.

• Context of Regional Dynamics: Bhutan's cooperation with India comes amidst evolving regional geopolitics:

- Bangladesh's political transition and instability in ties with India.
- Nepal strengthening ties with China under PM Oli's government, signing a new Belt and Road Cooperation Framework.

Geopolitical Shifts and India's Opportunities

US-China trade conflict - A double-edged sword

- The escalating US-China trade war, marked by tit-for-tat trade restrictions, offers opportunities for India.
 - **US measures:** Restrictions on exports of high-tech materials to China.
 - **China's response:** Bans on critical materials like gallium and germanium.
- **India has a minimal share** (less than 1%) in such 70% of global coring untapped potential.
- NITI Aayog CEO B.V.R. Subrahmanyam emphasised a significant trade boom is possible if **India capitalises on these disruptions**.
- **India-US trade relations:** The US (India's largest trading partner), presents immense opportunities for growth in goods and services trade.

Sectoral Challenges and Policy Considerations for India

Iron and steel industry vulnerabilities

- India's iron and steel exports saw a sharp 33% decline in Q1 FY25, driven by weak domestic demand and oversupply in China.
- The EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) poses a significant challenge:
 - Tariffs of 20-35% could reduce competitiveness and demand.
 - Compliance with emissions reporting will increase costs.

Tariff policies - A balancing act

- Proposed 25% hikes in steel import duties face scrutiny. Suman Bery, Vice Chairperson of NITI Aayog, warned about lower competition and the ramifications for domestic users.
- India's response must balance principles and pragmatism, especially against countries with opaque industry practices and oversupply issues.

- **Recent High-Level Engagements**

- Bhutanese PM Tshering Tobgay's participation in the Global Cooperatives Conference in New Delhi.

Kash Patel - Trump's Indian-origin Pick for FBI Chief

- US President-elect Donald Trump has nominated Kashyap "Kash" Patel as the next FBI Director, replacing Christopher Wray.
- Patel, an Indian-American lawyer, is known for his "America First" stance & close ties with Trump.
- Patel has vowed to overhaul the FBI, targeting the "deep state," reducing its footprint, and pursuing critics, including journalists and bureaucrats.
 - Deep state — a term used to refer to allegations that actors within bureaucracy control and run the government.

Nepal Army Chief Conferred Honorary Rank by President Murmu

- President Droupadi Murmu conferred the honorary rank of 'General of Indian Army' on Nepal's Army Chief General Ashok Raj Sigdel in New Delhi.
 - There has been a tradition of conferring the title of Honorary General on each other's Army chiefs since 1950.
- The honor recognizes his military prowess and contribution to fostering Nepal-India relations.
- General Sigdel was on an official visit to India to deepen defence cooperation.

Suspension of MFN Clause in India-Switzerland Tax Treaty

- Switzerland has announced the suspension of the Most-Favoured-Nation (MFN) clause under the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) with India, effective January 1, 2025.
- This move could lead to higher tax burdens for Indian companies operating in Switzerland and Swiss investors in India, potentially impacting bilateral investments.

Implications of the Suspension of the MFN Clause

- **Higher tax rates:**

- Dividends paid after January 1, 2025, will be taxed at a **higher rate of 10%** in the source state.
- This **affects Swiss companies like Nestlé and challenges India's attractiveness as an investment destination.**

Background of the India-Switzerland Tax Treaty

Original agreement

- The DTAA between India and Switzerland was signed in 1994 and amended in 2010 to prevent double taxation of income.

Supreme Court ruling

- In 2023, the Indian SC ruled that the DTAA's provisions require explicit notification under the Income-Tax Act to be enforceable.
- This overturned a Delhi High Court decision that protected entities from double taxation.
 - ▶ Though companies like Nestlé and Concentrix argued for **reduced** withholding tax rates (on dividend income from their Indian arms) under OECD-member treaties, **the ruling rejected automatic applicability.**
- The court ruled that a country can claim DTAA benefits only from the treaty's date of enforcement, **not retroactively.**

Reason for suspension of the MFN clause

- Swiss government cited a **lack of reciprocity** as the basis for suspending the MFN clause.
- Swiss authorities stated that **they could not apply reduced tax rates unilaterally without mutual agreement from India.**

- **On European Free Trade Association (EFTA):** Switzerland's suspension poses risks to the \$100 billion investment commitment under the EFTA-India trade pact, signed in March 2024.
 - EFTA is an intergovernmental grouping of **Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway & Switzerland.**
- **On bilateral treaty dynamics:**
 - The decision underscores evolving international tax frameworks and India's stricter treaty interpretations.

- Indian entities operating in Switzerland may face higher tax liabilities/ increased financial burdens, reflecting broader global taxation trends.

Conclusion

- Switzerland's suspension of the MFN clause marks a significant shift in India-Switzerland tax treaty relations.
- The move could deter Swiss investments in India and complicate tax compliance for Indian entities.
- **The development emphasises the importance of mutual agreement and clarity in international tax treaties to ensure stability and fairness in cross-border trade and investment.**

Most Favoured Nation (MFN)

- An MFN clause mandates a country that provides a trade concession to one trading partner **to extend the same treatment to all trading partners.**
 - It is a founding principle of WTO. **For example**, if a WTO member country reduces a tariff on a product for one trading partner, it must also extend that same tariff reduction to all other WTO members.
- **Purpose:** MFN aims to replace power-based policies with a rules-based framework, where trading rights are not dependent on a country's economic or political clout.
- **Exemptions:** The WTO provides the following exemptions from MFN provisions -
 - When members strike **bilateral trade agreements** or when members offer **developing countries special access** to their markets.
 - **Trade blocs** like the European Union (EU), are allowed to discriminate against imports from outside the bloc.
 - **Trade barriers in response to unfair competition, etc.**
 - WTO members can impose any trade measures they want on **countries that are not members of the WTO** (Iran, North Korea, Syria, Belarus, etc).
- **Removal of MFN status:**
 - There is **no formal procedure** for suspending MFN treatment and it is unclear whether members must notify the WTO if they do so.
 - **For example**, India revoked Pakistan's MFN status following the Pulwama attack in 2019. Pakistan has never granted India MFN status.

India's Eastern Maritime Corridor

India has emerged as the largest buyer of Russian oil in 2024, surpassing China. Strengthening this trade relationship, the newly operational Eastern Maritime Corridor (EMC) between **Chennai and Vladivostok** has revolutionised trade logistics, reducing shipment times and costs significantly.

Key Highlights of the Eastern Maritime Corridor

- **Reduced transit time and costs:**
 - The Chennai-Vladivostok route reducing transit time to **24 days** compared to over 40 days via the traditional St. Petersburg-Mumbai route.
 - Savings are realised in both **shipment time and transportation costs**, making Russian crude oil more accessible and affordable for India.
- **Strategic ports in operation:**
 - **Vladivostok:** Russia's largest Pacific port, situated near the Sino-Russian border, serves as the primary starting point.



- **Indian ports:** Major eastern ports like Chennai, Paradip, Visakhapatnam, Tuticorin, Ennore, and Kolkata are utilised for receiving shipments based on cargo type and destination.

Strategic and Economic Significance of EMC for India

- **Strengthening bilateral ties:**
 - EMC facilitates greater economic engagement, helping **balance Moscow's increasing tilt toward China**.
 - A strong trade relationship aligns with India's broader strategic interests, including its defence reliance on Russia.
- **Diversification of energy supplies:**
 - With an 85% dependency on oil imports, India's growing trade with Russia **diversifies its energy portfolio**.
 - Affordable Russian oil bolsters India's energy security and economic stability.
- **Upcoming diplomatic engagement:** Russian President Vladimir Putin is scheduled to visit India in 2025, signaling the importance of this evolving partnership.

Conclusion

- The operationalisation of the EMC has emerged as a **game-changer in India-Russia trade**, significantly reducing transit times and costs.
- By leveraging this route, India has *solidified its position* as a major buyer of Russian crude while diversifying its energy imports.
- Beyond economic gains, the corridor enhances India's strategic leverage, ensuring deeper engagement with Russia amidst shifting global dynamics.

India's Crude Oil Imports from Russia

- **Dominance of the Urals crude grade:**
 - **India surpassed China** as the largest buyer of Russian oil in July 2024.
 - Despite a decline in overall imports in the latter half of the year due to refinery maintenance, imports of Urals crude reached a four-month high in October, **accounting for over 75% of Russian oil imports**.
- **Competitive pricing benefits:**
 - India capitalised on discounted Russian crude following Western sanctions post-Ukraine war (February 2022).
 - Although discounts have narrowed, the savings on bulk purchases and reduced shipping costs via the EMC continue to incentivise Indian refiners.

India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement marks two years of success

The India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (Ind-Aus ECTA) has successfully strengthened economic ties, boosting growth, MSMEs, businesses, and employment in both nations.

Key Highlights

- **Surge in Bilateral Trade**
 - Bilateral merchandise trade more than doubled, increasing from USD 12.2 billion in 2020-21 to USD 26 billion in 2022-23.
 - Trade moderated to USD 24 billion in 2023-24, with India's exports to Australia growing by 14%.
 - From April to November 2024, bilateral merchandise trade reached USD 16.3 billion, reflecting sustained growth.
- **Effective Implementation of ECTA**
 - Exchange of preferential import data between the two countries highlights 79% export utilization and 84% import utilization in 2023, showcasing the agreement's effective implementation.
- **Sectoral Growth and Diversification**
 - **Key growth sectors:** textiles, chemicals, and agriculture.

- **Diversified exports:** gold studded with diamonds and turbojets.
- **Imports fueling industries:** metalliferous ores, cotton, and wood products.
- **Growth potential:** electronics and engineering sectors.
- **Progress Towards CECA**
 - India-Australia Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) builds on ECTA's foundation, with 10 formal rounds and inter-sessional discussions held.
- **Vision for 2030 and Beyond**
 - Both nations are committed to deeper economic integration and achieving the trade target of AUD 100 billion by 2030.

India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (Ind-Aus ECTA)

- **Background:** In April 2022, India and Australia signed ECTA which came into effect on December 29, 2022.
- **About**
 - ECTA significantly reduces tariffs on Australian goods exports to India.
 - From 29 December 2022, over 85 per cent of Australian goods exports by value to India become tariff free, rising to 90 per cent in six years.
 - Similarly, 96 per cent of imports from India are now tariff free, rising to 100 per cent by 2026.
 - ECTA is a stepping stone towards a full Australia-India CECA

India, Saudi Arabia Exploring Joint Ventures in Defence Sector

- India and Saudi Arabia are strengthening defence cooperation, focusing on joint ventures, technology sharing, and localised production, aligning Saudi Vision 2030 and India's Make in India initiatives.
- Saudi Arabia recently signed a \$250 million contract for ammunition from Munitions India Limited.
- Saudi defence companies are keen on partnerships in shipbuilding, electronics, AI, and cybersecurity. Both nations, traditionally major defence importers, are now localizing defence production.
- Key developments include:
 - Joint training exercises like *Sada Tanseeq* and naval drills such as *Al Mohed Al Hindi*.
 - Saudi procurement of Indian defence equipment, including the 155mm ATAGS artillery guns.
 - Investment opportunities for Saudi companies in India's open defence sector.
 - The focus remains on 'invest, trade, localize' to boost defence-industry cooperation.

India, France Sign Pact For Grand Museum in North, South Blocks

- India and France have signed an agreement for the "**adaptive reuse**" of the North and South Blocks as part of the **Central Vista Redevelopment Project**, aimed at creating the world's largest national museum.
- The museum, covering 1.55 lakh square meters, will surpass the Louvre in Paris and is set to be implemented in two phases.
- 1st phase involves retrofitting the North Block into a museum, with a target completion date of June 2026.
- France's expertise in museum development, including the Grand Louvre, will guide the project.
- The North Block, currently housing the Ministries of Finance and Home Affairs, is expected to be vacated by March 2025, while the South Block, home to the Prime Minister's Office and Ministry of External Affairs, will be vacated later.

India, China Agree to Resume Mansarovar Yatra, Border Trade

- India and China have agreed on six key consensus points aimed at repairing bilateral ties, which were strained after the 2020 military standoff in Ladakh.

- The agreement follows talks in Beijing between National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who are the Special Representatives (SRs) for the border issue.
- The consensus includes:
 - Resumption of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra, cooperation on trans-border rivers, and Nathula border trade.
 - Continued efforts to maintain peace and tranquility in the border areas, linked to broader bilateral relations.
 - Commitment to a fair, reasonable, and mutually acceptable solution to the boundary issue, in line with a 2005 agreement.
 - Enhanced border management, confidence-building measures, and sustainable peace.
 - Enhancing coordination between diplomatic and military mechanisms
 - Future meetings between the SRs, with the next round to be held in India.
- The meeting comes ahead of the 75th anniversary of India-China diplomatic ties, and both sides expressed a desire for continued communication to resolve the border issue.

India's Reliance on China for Critical Minerals

- In 2023, the Ministry of Mines, in a report, identified 30 critical minerals essential for India's economic development and national security.
- The report highlighted a complete import dependency for 10 critical minerals but fell short of addressing India's reliance on China—a dominant player in the global critical mineral's ecosystem.

India's Dependency on China

- India's import data (2019-2024) reveals high dependency on Chinese supplies for six critical minerals:
 - **Bismuth (85.6%):** Vital for pharmaceuticals and chemicals
 - **Lithium (82%):** Core to EV batteries and energy storage
 - **Silicon (76%):** Crucial for semiconductors and solar panels
 - **Titanium (50.6%):** Key for aerospace and defense
 - **Tellurium (48.8%):** Used in solar and thermoelectric devices
 - **Graphite (42.4%):** Indispensable for EV batteries and steel production
- China's dominant global production shares in these minerals underscore India's supply chain vulnerabilities.

Why India Relies on Imports

- **Technological Barriers** - Limited ability to extract minerals like lithium from clay deposits in Jammu & Kashmir, despite having 5.9 million tonnes of resources.
- **Investment Gaps** - High-risk investments in exploration deter private sector participation.
- **Policy Shortcomings** - Lack of incentives and advanced mining technologies limit domestic production capabilities.

China's Dominance in Critical Minerals

- **Vast Resources:** China has discovered 173 types of minerals, including: 13 energy minerals; 59 metallic minerals; 95 non-metallic minerals.
- **Strategic Investments:** With \$19.4 billion invested in exploration in 2023, China discovered 132 new mineral deposits, including 34 large ones.
- **Processing Capabilities:** Dominates processing and refining: Rare earths (87%); Lithium (58%); Silicon (68%)
- **Global Investments:** Strategic stakes in overseas mining projects amplify its control over supply chains.

China's Export Strategy

- China strategically controls critical mineral exports, particularly targeting those crucial for semiconductors, batteries, and high-tech manufacturing. Key examples include:
 - **2010 Rare Earth Embargo:** Against Japan
 - **Restrictions on Gallium, Germanium, and Antimony**
 - **Ban on Rare Earth Technologies (2023)**
- China carefully balances its decisions against two constraining factors:
 - it avoids controlling minerals which heavily depend on Western raw material imports,
 - it refrains from actions that could disrupt its domestic industrial enterprises or export-dependent sectors.

DEFENSE AND SECURITY

59th All India Conference of DGs/IGs of Police

- PM Modi attended the 59th All India Conference of Director Generals/ Inspector Generals of Police at Bhubaneswar
 - The 58th All-India Conference was held in Jaipur, Rajasthan January 2024.
- The three-day conference was inaugurated by Home Minister Amit Shah
- This conference serves as an important platform for discussing national security issues, law enforcement strategies, and coordination among various security and police agencies across India.

Key Highlights of the Conference

- **Hosted by:** Intelligence Bureau (IB) in hybrid format
- **Outcomes**
 - Best practices from States and UTs were presented at the Conference so that States can learn from each other.
 - In depth discussions were held on existing and emerging challenges to national security, including counter terrorism, left wing extremism, cyber-crime, economic security, immigration, coastal security and narco-trafficking.
 - Deliberations were also held on emerging security concerns along the border with Bangladesh and Myanmar, trends in urban policing and strategies for countering malicious narratives.
 - Further, a review was undertaken of implementation of newly enacted major criminal laws, initiatives and best practices in policing as also the security situation in the neighborhood.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SPEECH DELIVERED BY PM MODI

Addressing Deepfakes and Digital Threats

- PM Modi emphasized the importance of using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to counter deepfakes and their potential to disrupt social and familial relationships.
- Special teams should be created to tackle digital frauds, with a focus on updating crime data and educating the public, such as during school parents-teacher meetings.
- PM Modi had earlier raised concerns about 'digital arrests' and deep fakes in his Mann ki Baat address and in November 2023.

Enhanced Police Engagement in Border Areas

- Police personnel in border regions were instructed to spend nights in villages with senior officials to understand local issues better and build community trust.

Combating Cyber Fraud and Crime

- The PM addressed the need to update crime data electronically and improve measures to counter cyber-related issues.
(i) **India reportedly lost approximately Rs 11,333 crore to cyber fraud until September 2024**, according to the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C).

Urban Policing and Emerging Security Concerns

- Modi suggested scaling successful urban policing initiatives to all 100 cities and advocated for the **SMART policing approach—Strategic, Meticulous, Adaptable, Reliable, and Transparent**.

Commemoration of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel

- PM Modi recalled Patel's "unparalleled contribution" to the MHA and urged the security establishment to commemorate his 150th birth anniversary by setting goals to enhance police image and professionalism.

Protected Area Regime Reimposed in Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram

- The Union Ministry of Home Affairs has reinstated the Protected Area Permit (**PAP**) in Manipur, Nagaland, and Mizoram due to security concerns stemming from the influx of individuals from neighboring countries.
- The move ensures that foreigners visiting these states must secure the necessary PAP under the Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958.
- The PAP regime was lifted from Manipur, Mizoram, and Nagaland in January 2011 to promote tourism.

- However, the current security situation necessitated its reimposition. The permit typically allows foreign nationals to stay for 10 days, with an option for extension, and can be issued by the Union Home Ministry or concerned state authorities.

Protected Area Permit (PAP)

- **About**

- PAP is a special permit required by foreign nationals to visit certain areas in India deemed sensitive due to their proximity to international borders.
- These areas fall between the "Inner Line" and the international borders as defined under the **Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958**.

- **Covered Area**

- The PAP regime covers **entire** states such as Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, *Mizoram*, *Nagaland*, *Sikkim* (partly in Protected Areas and partly in Restricted Area)
- & **parts** of Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Rajasthan, and Uttarakhand.

- **Purpose of the Protected Area Permit**

- **National Security:** To regulate the entry of foreigners in sensitive areas near international borders.
- **Preservation of Local Indigenous Communities**—and their unique cultural heritage.
- **Environmental Conservation:** To minimize ecological disturbances in fragile regions.

Key Features of the PAP Regime

- **Eligibility:** Foreigners, except Bhutanese citizens, need a PAP to enter & stay in these regions.
- **Permissible Visits**
 - › Group tourists (minimum of two persons).
 - › Restricted tourist circuits/routes specified in the permit.
- **Validity and Compliance**
 - › PAP is valid only for the specified area, route, and time.
 - › Permit holders cannot stay beyond the permit's validity.
 - › Photocopies of the permit must be deposited at entry and exit points.
- **Restrictions**
 - › Citizens of Afghanistan, China, and Pakistan (and those of Pakistani origin) require prior approval from the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).
 - › Diplomats and officials require special instructions from the Ministry of External Affairs.
- **Registration**
 - › Foreigners must register with the Foreigners Registration Officer (FRO) of the district within 24 hours of arrival.

- **Relevant Acts and Regulations**

- **Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958** – Defines areas as protected and prescribes the requirement for obtaining PAP.
- **Foreigners (Restricted Areas) Order, 1963** – Specifies Restricted Areas (such as Andaman & Nicobar Islands and parts of Sikkim) requiring a Restricted Area Permit (RAP).

All Police Stations in the Country Linked through CCTNS

- All 17,130 police stations in India are now connected through the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS).
- The last connections in Manipur, Nagaland, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Lakshadweep, and Odisha were completed recently, achieving 100% deployment.

Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS)

- **About**

- CCTNS is a **centralised online platform** launched by the **Government of India in 2009** to enhance the efficiency and transparency of the policing system across the country.

- **Objectives**

- **Centralised Database:** Establish a unified system to store and access data related to crimes and criminals.
- **Efficient Record Management:** Digitise FIRs, chargesheets, and investigation records

- **Data Accessibility:** Allow law enforcement authorities across the country to access real-time crime data.
- **Key features**
 - **Comprehensive Crime Records:** Includes information on accused persons, convicts, habitual offenders, missing persons, unidentified bodies, and stolen vehicles.
 - **Online Filing of Reports:** Facilitates the e- filing of FIRs and other investigation documents.
 - **Analytical Capabilities:** Generates reports and statistics at the police station level for better planning and resource allocation.
 - **Search Tools:** Allows the police to search for crime trends, missing persons, and stolen property.
- **Role in Criminal Justice System:**
 - Supports the integration of police data with **courts, prisons, prosecution, forensics, and fingerprint systems** through the Integrated Criminal Justice System (ICJS).
 - Enhances coordination among various arms of the criminal justice system.

Lothal to Become Global Hub for Maritime Heritage

- Lothal, an ancient city of the Indus Valley Civilization, is poised to become a global centre for maritime heritage with the development of the **National Maritime Heritage Complex (NMHC)** in Gujarat.
- This initiative, spearheaded by the Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways under the Sagarmala Programme, aims to showcase India's rich maritime history while contributing to the nation's economic and cultural development.

National Maritime Heritage Complex (NMHC)

- The NMHC is envisioned as a **world-class facility** combining education, tourism, and cultural preservation. **Key Features Include:**
 - **"Edutainment" Approach:**
 - Integrates *education and entertainment* to engage visitors.
 - Focuses on showcasing maritime history from ancient times to the modern era.
 - **Progress:**
 - 65% of construction work is complete.
 - Includes landmarks such as the **Lothal Jetty Walkway, Museum Block, and INS Nishank**, a decommissioned warship.
- **Economic and Social Benefits:**

Tourism Boost

Employment Generation

Maritime Education

Militants in Manipur using Starlink Satellite Internet

- Billionaire Elon Musk has denied claims that SpaceX's satellite internet service, Starlink, is being used by militants in Manipur, India.
- This follows the seizure of weapons and Starlink-branded devices by the Indian Army and police. The devices had markings linked to a Myanmar-based extremist group banned in India.
 - Similar Starlink devices were also found with smugglers in the Andaman and Nicobar islands.
- Starlink, which uses low Earth orbit satellites to deliver high-speed internet, is not yet authorized in India but plans to launch in neighboring countries like Bangladesh and Bhutan in 2025.

Key Highlights

- **Starlink Technology:** Starlink delivers internet via satellites orbiting at ~550 km and is popular in remote and disaster-struck areas. It uses encryption to prevent unauthorized access but faces challenges in precisely restricting coverage based on geographic borders.

- **Challenges in Regulation:** Starlink's hardware may be smuggled into restricted regions and used with VPNs or other methods. However, the functionality of these devices in unauthorized locations depends on features like geographic identifiers.
- **Indian Legal Framework:** Indian laws, including the Wireless Act and Telegraph Act, restrict the use of satellite-based communication devices to combat terrorism. Unauthorized devices are subject to confiscation and legal action.

Conclusion

- The discovery of Starlink hardware in Manipur raises concerns about compliance with Indian regulations.
- This could delay SpaceX's entry into the Indian market, where it competes with Reliance Industries.

Indian Ocean Region's Survey Ship INS Nirdeshak Commissioned

- INS Nirdeshak, the second ship of the **Survey Vessel (Large)** project, was commissioned into the Indian Navy at a ceremony held at Visakhapatnam Naval Dockyard.
- This ship is designed for hydrographic surveys, aiding navigation, and supporting maritime operations.
- It is equipped with advanced systems like Multi-Beam Echo Sounders, Side Scan Sonars, AUVs (Autonomous Underwater Vehicle), and ROVs (Remotely Operated Vehicle) for precise data collection and mapping.
- Built with over 80% indigenous content, the ship reflects India's commitment to self-reliance in defence manufacturing.
- The ship plays a crucial role in maritime safety, environmental health, and security in the Indian Ocean Region.
- It supports India's SAGAR initiative, fostering regional collaboration and scientific exploration.
- The ship's advanced systems enhance capabilities for deep-sea operations, mapping hazardous zones, wreck identification, and environmental studies, further boosting India's leadership in regional maritime cooperation.

Stealth Frigate INS Tushil Commissioned

- INS Tushil, the latest multi-role stealth-guided missile frigate, was commissioned into the Indian Navy, at the Yantar Shipyard in Kaliningrad, Russia.
- The ship, an upgraded **Krivak III class frigate**, is equipped with advanced weapons, including Brahmos supersonic cruise missiles, Shtil Surface-to-Air Missiles, anti-submarine torpedoes, and more.
- It also features advanced electronic warfare and stealth capabilities, enhancing its combat and survival skills.
- The ship's high degree of automation allows for enhanced efficiency in naval operations.

RBI is Leveraging AI to Crack Down on Mule Bank Accounts

- RBI announced the creation of an AI-powered model named **MuleHunter.AI** to tackle the growing issue of digital fraud involving "mule" bank accounts.
- Developed by the **Reserve Bank Innovation Hub (RBIH)** in Bengaluru, the model aims to assist banks in identifying and managing fraudulent accounts effectively.

MuleHunter.AI Initiative

- **Background**
 - **Evaluation of Current Systems:** RBIH worked with banks to assess existing methods for identifying and reporting mule accounts.
 - **Limitations of Rule-Based Detection:** Traditional systems often face high false-positive rates and slow processing, leading to undetected mule accounts.
- **About**
 - A pilot test of MuleHunter.AI conducted with two large public sector banks showed promising results.

- The tool was created after analyzing 19 different mule account behavior patterns with banks.
- Early testing has shown improved detection efficiency and accuracy.
- The RBI has urged banks to collaborate with its Innovation Hub to enhance the MuleHunter.AI model and address financial frauds effectively.
- **How MuleHunter.AI Works**
 - **AI/ML-Powered Solution:** Utilizes machine learning algorithms to process transaction data and account details, predicting mule accounts more precisely and quickly.
 - **Focus on Illicit Fund Flows:** The platform targets the identification of illicit fund movements into mule accounts, aiding banks in detecting fraud effectively.

● **Mule Accounts and Online Financial Frauds in India**

- The Centre recently froze approximately **4.5 lakh mule bank accounts** used for laundering proceeds of cybercrime.
 - Of these 4.5 lakh mule accounts, around 40,000 were detected in various branches of SBI.

60th Raising Day of BSF

- Union Home Minister Amit Shah, speaking at the 60th Raising Day Parade of the Border Security Force (BSF) in Jodhpur, Rajasthan, announced plans for India to establish a comprehensive anti-drone unit to counter drone threats.
- He highlighted the growing significance of drone-related challenges and mentioned the development of a laser-equipped anti-drone gun mount system through collaboration between various government departments.
- This system has successfully intercepted and neutralized 55% of drone intrusions along the Punjab border, a major improvement from 3% previously.
- He also discussed the government's Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS), currently undergoing pilot testing in Assam, which will be expanded to Pakistan and Bangladesh borders after improvements.
 - CIBMS integrates advanced technology like sensors, cameras, and drones to monitor sensitive border areas in real-time.
 - The project targets challenging areas such as riverine, hilly, and swampy regions, improving the Border Security Force's (BSF) situational awareness and response capabilities.

About BSF: Established in 1965, it is India's largest border guarding force, responsible for securing the country's borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Spike in Cocaine, Contraband Cigarettes, and Currency Seizures

- Seizures of drugs such as cocaine and methamphetamine, contraband cigarettes, and illicit foreign currency by the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) have seen a sharp rise over the past year.
- **Surge in Drug Seizures**
 - The DRI reported a significant increase in drug seizures. In FY24, the agency conducted 47 cocaine seizures, totaling Rs 975 crore—more than double the previous year's count.
 - The quantity of cocaine increased by 9%, reaching 107 kg. Methamphetamine smuggling has also surged, especially in Assam and Mizoram, with 136 kg seized in FY24 and 123 kg in the first half of FY25.
- **Rise in Contraband Cigarette Seizures**
 - Contraband cigarette seizures have grown by 19%, with 3.95 crore sticks seized in the first half of FY25.
 - Dubai's free trade warehousing zones are emerging as key transit points for smuggling from Southeast Asia.

- **Illicit Foreign Currency and Money Laundering**
 - Illicit foreign currency seizures surged, with Rs 13.8 crore seized in the first half of FY25.
 - A trade-based money laundering (TBML) racket involving Rs 576 crore was uncovered, where cheap goods were imported at inflated prices to funnel foreign exchange out of the country.
- **Decline in Gold Seizures**
 - Gold seizures slightly declined in FY24, with 1,319 kg confiscated compared to over 1,450 kg in FY23.
 - Land routes, especially from Myanmar, Bangladesh, and Nepal, contributed to 55% of the gold seizures.
- **Decreasing Seizures of Heroin and Ganja**
 - In FY24, 49 kg of heroin and 236 kg of mephedrone were seized.
- **Wildlife Smuggling and Seizures**
 - DRI seized 53.5 kg of elephant tusks and other wildlife items, such as leopard skins and live pangolins, in FY24.
 - The amendment of the Wildlife Protection Act in 2023 allows customs officers to seize illegally traded wildlife within India.
 - The DRI also rescued 643 turtles during crackdowns in the Gangetic plains.

SUMMITS AND ORGANISATIONS

Sanjay Kaul Appointed Member of Bahrain International Commercial Court

- **Retired Supreme Court judge** Sanjay Kishan Kaul has been appointed as a member of the **Bahrain International Commercial Court (BICC)** by King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa.
- Justice Kaul is among nine appointees, including leading arbitrator Jan Paulsson as president and former British judge Sir Christopher Greenwood as vice president.
- The BICC is a newly established court aimed at enhancing private sector investment in Bahrain by providing a platform for international commercial dispute resolution and arbitration-related matters.
- It was established in 2024 as part of Bahrain's "**Team Bahrain**" program.
- The BICC will have exclusive jurisdiction over international commercial disputes within Bahrain.
 - It is modelled on the Singapore International Commercial Court (SICC) in the pursuit of transnational justice.

Former SC Judge Madan Lokur to Chair UN Internal Justice Council

Retired Supreme Court judge Madan B Lokur has been appointed as the chairperson of the United Nations Internal Justice Council (IJC) for a term ending on November 12, 2028.

United Nations Internal Justice Council (IJC)

- **About**
 - IJC is a critical body within the UN's internal justice system. It is responsible for ensuring the independence, professionalism, and accountability of the internal justice mechanisms that resolve employment-related disputes within the UN system.
 - Established as part of the reforms to strengthen the UN's internal justice framework, the IJC oversees various entities that manage dispute resolution and legal assistance for UN staff.
- **Key Functions:**
 - **Oversight of Justice Entities:** The IJC supervises the functioning of:
 - **Office of Staff Legal Assistance (OSLA):** Provides legal advice and representation to UN staff.
 - **UN Dispute Tribunal (UNDT):** Handles first-instance disputes involving employment issues.
 - **UN Appeals Tribunal (UNAT):** Reviews decisions made by the UNDT.
 - **Appointment of Judges:** The IJC plays a vital role in selecting and recommending judges for the UNDT and UNAT to ensure their independence and competence.
 - **Advisory Role:** It advises the UN Secretary-General and the General Assembly on measures to enhance the internal justice system's efficiency and fairness.
 - **Monitoring and Accountability:** The council works to maintain transparency and accountability in the adjudication of disputes within the UN.
- **Composition:**
 - The IJC **comprises five members** appointed by the UN Secretary-General, including representatives from member states and individuals with expertise in law and dispute resolution.
 - The chairperson leads the council, ensuring smooth coordination and implementation of its mandate.

UNGA Declares December 21 as World Meditation Day

- The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) unanimously adopted a resolution to declare December 21 as World Meditation Day.
- The date, December 21, marks the **Winter Solstice** and the beginning of **Uttarayana** in Indian tradition, a time for inner reflection.

- It complements the **International Day of Yoga** celebrated on June 21, the Summer Solstice, underscoring India's leadership in promoting human well-being.
- The day was established to raise awareness about the benefits of meditation, which can improve mental and physical health, and to promote global peace and well-being.
- The UNGA resolution was co-sponsored by India, along with other countries including Liechtenstein, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Mexico, and Andorra.
- India's role in the initiative was in line with its civilizational dictum of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, which means "the world is one family".
- The UN has a Meditation Room at its headquarters in New York, which was opened in 1952. The room symbolizes the importance of silence and introspection in achieving global harmony.

20th Manama Dialogue

- The 20th Manama Dialogue was held in Bahrain. Its theme was- **'Middle East leadership in shaping regional prosperity and security.**
- India was represented by the External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar.

About Manama Dialogue

- It is considered one of the most important strategic events held annually in the Kingdom of Bahrain.
- It takes place in the fourth quarter of each year in the capital of Bahrain since its launch in 2004.
- The event is organized by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- The conference discussions primarily revolve around the Middle East region.

India has Contributed \$2 billion to BRICS Bank

- India has contributed **\$2 billion** to the BRICS New Development Bank (NDB) and is implementing 20 ongoing projects with loans totaling **\$4.867 billion** in areas like transportation, water conservation, food management, and rural connectivity.
 - NDB is an international financial institution that was established in 2015 by the BRICS countries.
 - The NDB's purpose is to support sustainable development and infrastructure projects in emerging markets and developing countries.
- In response to questions about a potential BRICS joint currency, the govt referred to a **2024 report by Russia during its BRICS chairmanship**, which emphasized that BRICS nations do not aim to replace the US dollar due to its dominance in the global economy.
- Instead, the bloc seeks to provide an alternative financial system to enhance market efficiency and promote inclusive globalization.
- The report also criticized the lack of competition in the current cross-border payments infrastructure, highlighting the reliance on centralized settlement mechanisms and reserve currencies as outdated.
 - Experts note that the US weaponization of financial systems, such as excluding Iran (2012) and Russia (2022) from SWIFT, has prompted countries to reduce dependence on the US dollar, which accounts for over 90% of global transactions.

GEOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENT

COP 16 of UNCCD & Related Initiatives across the World

The 16th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP16) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) took place in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

Aravalli Green Wall Project (AGWP)

India presented its innovative Aravalli Green Wall Project (AGWP) at UNCCD's COP16 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

✓ The UNCCD is the **only legally binding framework** set up to address desertification and the effects of drought.

About Aravalli Green Wall Project (States include Gujarat, Haryana, Rajasthan and Delhi)

- It aims to create a 1,400 km long and 5 km wide green buffer zone and Restoration of 1.15 million hectares of degraded land by 2027. (Prevent spread of Thar Desert into neighboring areas)
 - ✓ Aravalli is an old Fold Mountain Range formed during the Precambrian Era, making it one of the oldest mountain ranges in the world.
- It is inspired by Africa's Great Green Wall initiative (spans from Senegal to Djibouti)

Strategies:

- Afforestation: Planting native tree & shrub species on degraded land with Community Involvement and Scientific Research.
- Water Conservation: Rejuvenating 75 water bodies like ponds, lakes, and streams in initial phase.

World Drought Atlas

- World Drought Atlas is launched by UNCCD and the European Commission Joint Research Centre at 16th UNCCD conference in Riyadh.
- As per this Atlas, 75% of the global population will be affected by drought by 2050.

Business 4 Land Initiative (B4L)-launched by UNCCD

Aim: To engage private sector actors in sustainable land management strategies.

- It aims to restore 1.5 billion hectares of land by 2030, contributing to Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN under Bonn Challenge), a global commitment to achieve net zero land degradation by 2030, as well as enhancing drought resilience.
- This initiative aims for fostering collaboration between businesses, governments, and civil society to accelerate progress towards land degradation neutrality.

Manganese Water Contamination

A study revealed significant manganese (Mn) contamination in water as a contributing factor to rising cancer cases in Bihar's Gangetic region.

About Manganese & its Water Contamination

- Manganese is the fifth-most abundant metal on earth that exists in the form of oxides, carbonates and silicates.
- Manganese is an essential trace element necessary for human health in small amounts, but its presence in excessive concentrations in water can pose serious health risks.
- **Geological formation:** Manganese ore deposits in India are mainly metamorphosed bedded sedimentary deposits associated with the Gondite Series.
- According to Indian Standards for Drinking water (IS 10500:2012) manganese concentration in drinking water is 100 µg/L (acceptable limit) and 300 µg/L as permissible limit.
 - ✓ Elevated Mn levels were observed in blood samples (average: 199 µg/L; highest: 6,022 µg/L in a liver cancer patient) and household hand pump water.
- The primary geographical hotspots for manganese in India are located in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra (Vidarbha Region), and Odisha.

- **Global incidences** of high level of Mn in groundwater have been reported in countries such as Nigeria, Bangladesh, China, Greece, Japan and other countries.

Sources of Manganese

Natural Sources	Anthropogenic (Man made) Sources
Geological Factors: Manganese-rich rocks undergo a weathering process which releases Manganese into groundwater.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industrial Activities: Mining involving manganese ore • Agricultural Runoff (from Fertilizers and Pesticides) and Urban Runoff (from Stormwater and Sewage)

Health Impacts

- **Manganism:** This is a neurological disorder that can mimic Parkinson’s disease, causing symptoms like tremors, stiffness, and difficulty walking and talking.
- It can cause Cognitive Impairment; Behavioral Changes; Respiratory Problems and Reproductive Issues

Lake-effect Snow

Lake-effect snow has impacted the Great lakes region in North America.

About Lake effect snow

- It is a weather phenomenon that occurs when cold air moves across a large, relatively warm body of water.
- Lake-effect snow results in intense and localized snowstorms that can bring significant snowfall amounts to areas close to the lakes.

Regions Prone to Lake-Effect Snow: (found near other large bodies of water)

- **Great Lakes Region:** Areas downwind of the Great Lakes, particularly the eastern and southern shores, are prone to lake-effect snow.
- **Other Large Lakes:** Great Salt Lake in Utah
- In the Himalayas, snow-related hazards often mirror the impacts seen in lake-effect snow regions, including avalanches, transportation disruptions, and increased risk to human life.

Process

- **Cold Air Mass:** Cold air from the Arctic or Canada moves across the Great Lakes.
 - ✓ **Wind Direction and Location:** Lake-effect snow is influenced by the wind direction and the size of the lake. The phenomenon is most prominent when the wind direction aligns with the long axis of the lake, allowing the air to pick up maximum moisture.
- **Warming and Moisture:** As the cold air passes over the warmer lake water (Temperature Contrast), it picks up moisture and warms.
- **Rising Air:** The warmer, moist air rises, cools, and condenses into clouds.
- **Snowfall:** The moisture in the clouds falls as snow, often in heavy amounts, on the downwind shores of the lake

World Solar Report Series

The World Solar Report series 2024 by the International Solar Alliance (ISA) was released recently.

About the World Solar Report Series

- This series launched 4 reports namely World Solar Market Report, World Investment Report, World Technology Report, and Green Hydrogen Readiness Assessment for African Countries
- Each highlights a crucial area in the global shift towards sustainable energy.

Key Findings

- **The World Solar Market Report** reveals exceptional solar growth, with global solar capacity has grown from 1.22 GW in 2000 to 1,418.97 GW in 2023 (with a staggering 40% annual growth rate).

- Solar Manufacturing to Exceed Demand: By 2024, global solar manufacturing capacity is expected to exceed 1,100 GW, making solar energy more affordable.
- Green Hydrogen Potential: **The Readiness Assessment of Green Hydrogen African Countries** report highlights the potential of green hydrogen to decarbonize industries and support Africa's transition to cleaner energy.
- **The latest World Investment Report** highlights a global shift toward sustainable energy, with energy investments rising from \$2.4 trillion in 2018 to \$3.1 trillion by 2024.
- Technological Advancements: **The World Technology report** showcases advancements in solar technology, including record-breaking 24.9% efficiency in solar PV modules and a 90% drop in utility-scale solar PV costs.

Coastal Hardening

A new study has revealed that about 33% of the world's sandy beaches have hardened.

More About it

- **Geographical spread and order of Coastal Hardening:** Bay of Bengal (84%) >> Western and central Europe (68%)>> Mediterranean (65%)>>Western North America (61%) >> East Asia (50%)

Coastal Hardening

- It refers to the construction of physical structures designed to protect coastlines from erosion and flooding. These structures often involve the use of materials like concrete, rocks, and steel.
- These also include infrastructure constructed by humans such as seawalls, harbours, roads, highways, buildings, railway revetments or other urban structures.

Impact on Ecosystems

- Habitat Disruption: Coastal hardening can damage or completely destroy natural habitats such as wetlands, mangroves, coral reefs, and beaches.
 - ✓ Example: The construction of sea walls along parts of the Gulf of Mexico has led to the loss of vital mangrove ecosystems.

Alteration of Coastal Dynamics

- Hardening leads to changes in wave patterns, currents, and sediment transport, often exacerbating erosion elsewhere along the coast.
 - ✓ Example: Hardening along one section of the coast can cause increased erosion further down the coastline, as seen in several parts of the Netherlands.

Coastal Zone Management

- India has more than 7,500 kilometers of coastline, making coastal management critical. The Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Act aims to protect coastal areas from unregulated development, balancing protection with development.
 - ✓ Example: The Chilika Lake in Odisha, while under threat from coastal hardening, has been managed through careful regulations to preserve its biodiversity.
 - ✓ The use of "living shorelines" that combine vegetation, sand, and natural barriers to create more sustainable and ecologically friendly coastal protection.

Adaptation to Climate Change

- As climate change leads to rising sea levels and extreme weather events, India's coastal regions, such as Mumbai, Chennai, and Kolkata, are increasingly vulnerable. Coastal hardening may be seen as a temporary solution, but adaptation strategies must consider long-term sustainability.
 - ✓ Example: The Mumbai Coastal Road Project involves building sea walls, but the project also incorporates mangrove restoration efforts to balance hard and soft engineering solutions.

- ✓ The National Adaptation Fund for Climate Change (NAFCC) has supported various coastal resilience projects, including coastal afforestation and flood defense systems.

Santa Ana Winds

Santa Ana winds are significantly increasing the risk of wildfires and cause damage across affected regions of California.

About Santa Ana Winds (named after Southern California's Santa Ana Canyon)

- These are strong, extremely Dry, Hot downslope winds that originate inland and affect coastal Southern California and northern Baja California. (Similar to Foehn winds in the Alps and Chinook winds in North America.)
 - ✓ **Example:** The 2017 Thomas Fire in California, one of the largest in the state's history, was exacerbated by Santa Ana winds.
- Origin: They originate (occur primarily during fall and winter) from high-pressure air masses over the Great Basin, a desert region in the western United States.
- Downslope winds: As the air mass moves towards the coast, it descends from the higher elevations of the mountains (such as the San Gabriel and San Bernardino Mountains) towards the lower coastal areas
- Compression and heating: As the air descends, it is compressed and heated, leading to very dry and warm conditions
- Strong gusts: The winds can be very strong and gusty, often reaching speeds of 30-50 mph, with gusts sometimes exceeding 70 mph.
- Low humidity: The air is extremely dry, with humidity levels often dropping below 10%. This dryness further increases the fire danger

Hydroxy Methane Sulphonate (HMS)

A recent study revealed that hydroxy methane sulphonate, a secondary aerosol, forming in cold urban areas like Fairbanks, Alaska, reshaping understanding of aerosol chemistry.

About Hydroxy Methane Sulphonate (HMS)

- (HMS) is a chemical compound that's becoming increasingly important in the study of air pollution, particularly in understanding the formation of particulate matter (PM2.5).
- Traditionally, it was thought that HMS formation mainly occurred in warm and humid conditions, like in clouds and fog. However, recent studies have revealed that HMS can also form in extremely cold conditions (around -35°C) within supercooled aerosol particles (where liquid water remains unfrozen below its freezing point).
- India faces significant environmental challenges, particularly in urban and industrial waste management. The use of HMS in wastewater treatment can play a role in mitigating the impact of industrial effluents on local water bodies.
 - ✓ The National Clean Energy Fund (NCEF) in India encourages the adoption of cleaner technologies, which could include more sustainable use of chemicals like HMS in industrial processes.

Chemical Formation

- HMS is formed through a chemical reaction in the atmosphere involving:
- Sulfur dioxide (SO₂): A common air pollutant produced by the burning of fossil fuels and industrial processes.
- Formaldehyde (CH₂O): Another air pollutant that can come from various sources, including vehicle emissions, industrial processes, and even natural sources like vegetation.

- **Liquid water:** This reaction typically occurs in the presence of liquid water, such as in clouds, fog, or within atmospheric aerosols (tiny liquid or solid particles suspended in the air)

Role in Air Pollution

- **Secondary aerosol:** HMS is classified as a secondary aerosol, meaning it's not directly emitted into the atmosphere but forms through chemical reactions of primary pollutants (like SO₂ and formaldehyde).
- **Contribution to PM_{2.5}:** HMS is a component of PM_{2.5}, which refers to fine inhalable particles with diameters that are generally 2.5 micrometers and smaller. PM_{2.5} is a major air pollutant with significant health impacts.

Emissions from Arctic Tundra

Research says Arctic Tundra ecosystem has now become a source of CO₂ & methane CH₄ emissions.

Key Factors Contributing to Emissions

- **Thawing Permafrost:** Rising temperatures in the Arctic are causing permafrost (the permanently frozen layer of soil) to thaw. This releases vast amounts of organic matter trapped within the permafrost, which decomposes and releases CO₂ and CH₄ into the atmosphere.
 - ✓ **Example:** Methane release from Siberian permafrost regions is accelerating due to permafrost thaw. Wet tundra areas dominated by waterlogged conditions are hotspots for methane emissions.
- **Coastal Erosion:** Rising sea levels and reduced sea ice coverage increase coastal erosion in Arctic regions. Coastal permafrost erosion in Alaska and Siberia contributes significantly to local emissions.
- **Human Activities:** Oil and gas exploration, infrastructure development, and other human activities disturb tundra ecosystems. Infrastructure projects in Arctic Canada have been shown to increase localized thaw and emissions.
- The Arctic is experiencing more frequent and intense wildfires due to warmer temperatures and drier conditions. These fires release large amounts of CO₂ and other pollutants into the atmosphere.
 - ✓ **Example:** The 2020 "Zombie Fires" in Siberia burned through vast areas of permafrost, releasing significant emissions.
- **Albedo Effect and Feedback Loops:** Loss of snow and ice cover reduces surface reflectivity (albedo), causing more heat absorption.
- **Vegetation Changes:** Warmer temperatures and longer growing seasons alter vegetation patterns in the tundra. Increased shrub growth traps more snow, insulating the soil and promoting permafrost thaw.
 - ✓ **Example:** Expansion of shrubs in Alaskan tundra regions has been linked to localized permafrost thaw.
- 2024 recorded the second-highest Arctic surface air temperatures since 1900, further exacerbating emissions.

About Arctic Tundra (lies between 66.5°N to 75°N, stretching across regions in Alaska, Canada, Greenland, Scandinavia, and Russia.)

- It is a vast, treeless permafrost biome that encircles the Arctic Ocean and extends south to the coniferous forests of the taiga.
- Due to the harsh conditions, the tundra has low biodiversity. Plant life is dominated by low-growing shrubs, grasses, mosses, and lichens.
- Winters are long and bitterly cold, with average temperatures below -30°C (-22°F). Summers are short and cool, with average temperatures ranging from 3-12°C (37-54°F).
- Supports a variety of wildlife, including: Arctic foxes, polar bears, reindeer, musk oxen, lemmings, and wolves.

Hydrothermal Vent

Indian oceanographers have captured the image of an active hydrothermal vent located 4,500 metres below the surface of the Indian Ocean.

About Hydrothermal Vents

What are they?	Hydrothermal vents are fissures in the ocean floor that release geothermally heated water, mineral-rich fluids, and chemicals
Types	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Black Smokers: These vents emit dark, mineral-rich fluids that contain high concentrations of metal sulfides, giving them a dark, often black appearance• White Smokers: These vents emit lighter-colored fluids that are rich in barium, calcium, and silicon.
How do they form?	Seawater percolates through fissures in the ocean crust and is heated by magma, causing the water to reemerge as a hydrothermal vent
Where are they found?	Near volcanically active places, mid-ocean ridges, ocean basins, and hotspots ✓ Energy Potential: Geothermal energy harnessing from vents could provide a renewable energy source in the future.
Temperature	Seawater in hydrothermal vents can reach temperatures of over 700° Fahrenheit
Minerals Content	Hydrothermal vents contain valuable metals such as silver, gold, manganese, cobalt, and zinc (Example: Solwara 1 project in the Pacific Ocean explored mining potential.)
Life Support	Hydrothermal vents support diverse biological communities, including tubeworms, shrimp, clams, fish, crabs, and octopods
Origin of life	Vents are hypothesized to mimic early Earth conditions, providing clues to how life might have originated. ✓ Astrobiology: Study of vents informs the search for life on other planets, such as Europa and Enceladus, which have subsurface oceans.
Unique Ecosystems	Hydrothermal vents are unique ecosystems because the organisms that live there use chemosynthesis instead of photosynthesis to survive. ✓ Chemosynthesis uses chemical energy to convert carbon dioxide or methane into sugar, similar to how photosynthesis uses solar energy.
Environmental Dimension	Carbon Sequestration: Hydrothermal vents play a role in the ocean's carbon cycle by influencing carbon deposition and chemical transformations.
India's Perspective	India's Samudrayaan Mission under the Deep Ocean Mission aims to explore deep-sea biodiversity and resources. ✓ Example: Exploration of the Central Indian Ocean Basin (CIOB) for polymetallic nodules.

IPBES: Nexus Assessment Report

Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) has released an Assessment Report on the Interlinkages among Biodiversity, Water, Food and Health – known as the Nexus Report.

More About Report






- The report provides decision-makers with the most comprehensive scientific assessment of the interconnections across **five 'nexus elements'**: climate change, biodiversity loss, food insecurity, water scarcity, and health risks
- It noted that current economic activities significantly harm biodiversity, climate, food production, water, and health, with unaccounted costs estimated at \$10-25 trillion annually.

Key Takeaways

- Trade-offs and synergies: The report acknowledges that there are often trade-offs between different objectives. For example, increasing agricultural production to ensure food security can have negative impacts on biodiversity and water resources. However, it also highlights opportunities for synergies, where actions can have positive outcomes across multiple areas.

About IPBES (Established in 2012- headquartered in Bonn, Germany)

- Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform aims to strengthen the science-policy interface for biodiversity and ecosystem services for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, long-term human well-being and sustainable development
- IPBES (an independent intergovernmental organization) was established by 94 governments in Panama City. Although it receives secretariat services from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), IPBES is not a UN body.
- It is like the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) but for biodiversity.
- Key reports: Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (2019), Nexus Assessment Report (2024), Assessment Report on Sustainable Use of Wild Species (2022); ‘Assessment Report on Invasive Alien Species and their Control’ (2023).

Species in News	
<p>KaalingaSarpa (King cobra)</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • King cobra found in the Western Ghats and locally known as ‘KaalingaSarpa’ is officially named Ophiophagus Kaalinga. • It is endemic to the Western Ghats of south-western India. • King cobras are diurnal (active during the day), feeding primarily on snakes like rat snakes, dhamans, and other cobras. • IUCN Red List status: vulnerable • CITES: Appendix II
<p>Indian Star Tortoise</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As per the recent study, releasing confiscated Indian Star Tortoise back into the wild without proper scientific planning can be detrimental like they may carry diseases, have different genetic makeups or may have captive behavioral issues. • It is herbivorous and solitary; does not hibernate but becomes inactive in extreme weather. • Endemic to India and Sri Lanka, found in arid regions of northwest India, southern India, and Sri Lanka. • IUCN Red list status: Vulnerable. • CITES: Listed in Appendix I; Wildlife Protection Act, 1972: Schedule I
<p>Olive Ridley turtles</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carcasses of Olive Ridley turtles, which are currently in their breeding season, continue to wash ashore along the Visakhapatnam coast. • Habitat: They inhabit warm and tropical waters of the Pacific, Atlantic, and Indian Oceans. • These are carnivores, feeding mainly on jellyfish, shrimp, snails, crabs, mollusks, and various fish and their eggs. • They are best known for their unique mass nesting behavior called arribada, where thousands of females come together on the same beach to lay eggs. • IUCN Red List: Vulnerable • Wildlife Protection Act, 1972: Schedule 1; CITES: Appendix I
<p>Wroughton’s free-tailed bat</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It has been spotted at the Delhi Development Authority (DDA)’s Yamuna Biodiversity Park. • It is a highly rare species of molossus bat. • It is characterised by its large size, huge ears extending beyond the muzzle, and bicoloured velvet fur. It is known to be a powerful flier. • Primarily found in the Western Ghats, India, with a single known breeding colony. • IUCN Status: Data Deficient; Wildlife Protection Act 1972: Schedule I
<p>Ganges River dolphin (Common name: Susu)</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the first time, Indian wildlife experts successfully tagged a Ganges River dolphin. • It was declared as India's National Aquatic Animal in 2009. • It is found in freshwater river systems, including the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu in India, Nepal and Bangladesh. • They are nearly blind, relying on echolocation for navigation and hunting. They are carnivorous, feeding primarily on fish and invertebrates. • Lives exclusively in freshwater ecosystems. • IUCN Status: Endangered; CITES: Appendix I • Wildlife Protection Act, 1972: Schedule I

Nafithromycin

India formally launched the first indigenous antibiotic “Nafithromycin” for tackling Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR). Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is a condition in which bacteria, viruses, fungi and parasites no longer respond to antimicrobial medicines, which include antibiotics, antivirals, antifungals and antiparasitics.

About Nafithromycin (brought to market under the trade name "Miqnaf")

- It is antibiotic developed to combat drug-resistant bacteria, particularly those causing community-acquired bacterial pneumonia (CABP).
 - ✓ CABP is one of the most common infectious diseases and an important cause of mortality and morbidity worldwide.
- Developed by Wockhardt with support from the Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC) under the Department of Biotechnology

Key Features of Nafithromycin

- Enhanced Efficacy: It is significantly more potent than existing antibiotics like azithromycin, offering 10 times higher efficacy and 8 times higher lung exposure (with minimal side effects)
- Shorter Treatment Course: Nafithromycin requires a shorter treatment course of just 3 days compared to the longer durations of traditional antibiotics.

Extrachromosomal DNA (ecDNA)

Understanding the role of ecDNA in cancer has significant implications for cancer treatment and research.

About Extrachromosomal DNA (ecDNA)

- It refers to any DNA molecule that exists outside of a cell’s chromosomes.
- While most of a cell’s genetic material is organized into linear chromosomes within the nucleus, ecDNA exists as circular molecules.

Types and Functions of ecDNA

<i>Plasmids</i>	<i>Mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA)</i>	<i>Viral DNA</i>	<i>Viral DNA</i>
1) Common in bacteria 2) Often carry genes for antibiotic resistance	1) Essential for cellular energy production 2) Inherited maternally	integrate into the host genome or exist as extrachromosomal elements	Often carry multiple oncogenes, leading to rapid tumor growth and drug resistance

Role of ecDNA in Cancer

- Amplification of Oncogenes: ecDNA can amplify oncogenes, leading to increased protein production and accelerated tumor growth.
- Genomic Instability: ecDNA can contribute to genomic instability, leading to further genetic alterations and tumor progression.
- Drug Resistance: ecDNA can amplify genes that confer resistance to chemotherapy drugs, making treatment more challenging.

Implications for Cancer Treatment

- Targeted Therapies: Developing drugs that specifically target the amplified oncogenes on ecDNA.
- Personalized Medicine: Tailoring treatment plans based on the specific genetic alterations present in a patient’s tumor, including those associated with ecDNA.

Hyperloop

India's first hyperloop test track, a collaboration between Indian Railways, IIT-Madras, and TuTr Hyperloop, was inaugurated recently.

✓ India is exploring Hyperloop systems for routes like **Mumbai-Pune and Bengaluru-Chennai**.

About Hyperloop (firstly proposed by Elon Musk in 2013 as transportation mode)

- Hyperloop is a high-speed (1,100-1,300 km/h or even higher than conventional trains or airplanes) transportation system which travels through low-pressure tubes.

Concept and Working

- **Low-Pressure Tubes:** It involves propelling passenger or cargo-carrying pods through sealed tubes with significantly reduced air pressure. This near-vacuum environment minimizes air resistance, allowing for a highly energy-efficient mode of transportation.
 - ✓ Hyperloop systems are designed for often utilizing solar panels along the tube to generate electricity. (zero-emission transport mode if powered by renewable energy sources)
- **Pod Design:** Passengers or cargo are transported in a pod that levitates using magnetic or air-based levitation technology.
 - ✓ Pods are designed to accommodate passengers in a comfortable and safe environment, with seating and safety systems similar to modern aircraft.
- **Magnetic Levitation:** The pods would levitate above the track using magnetic levitation, further reducing friction with the track.

Willow Chip

Google has unveiled its next-generation quantum computing chip called 'Willow'.

About Willow Chip

- This new Quantum chip (developed at the company's quantum lab California) is able to solve a complex mathematical problem in just five minutes — a task that would have taken today's fastest supercomputers longer than the history of the universe.
- Unlike conventional chips that rely on sequential processing, it **uses parallel and asynchronous processing to improve efficiency, speed, and adaptability**. This technology is inspired by advances in artificial intelligence (AI), particularly in neural networks.
 - ✓ A quantum chip is a special type of computer chip designed to use the principles of quantum mechanics, the science of very tiny particles like atoms.
 - ✓ While regular chips use 'bits' (0 or 1) to process information, quantum chips use 'qubits', which can be 0 or 1 or both at the same time. This unique ability allows quantum chips to handle complex calculations much faster than traditional computers.
- It operates using superconducting transmon qubits—tiny electrical circuits exhibiting quantum behaviour at extremely low temperatures. These circuits are engineered to function like artificial atoms in a quantum state.
- Advanced Error Correction: Willow incorporates sophisticated error correction techniques, a crucial hurdle in building large-scale, reliable quantum computers.
- Google sees Willow as an important step in its journey to build a useful quantum computer with applications in areas such as drug discovery, fusion energy, and battery design.

Environmental Consequences of Space Activities

As the world becomes more reliant on space technologies for vital functions like climate monitoring, the environmental consequences of space activities also become increasingly urgent and in need of more attention

Consequences of Space Activities

Impact on Earth's Atmosphere

- Space activities currently fall outside international sustainability conventions like the Paris Agreement.
- Rocket emissions (CO₂, black carbon/Soot, water vapor) contribute to global warming.
- Chlorine-based propellants deplete the ozone layer increasing UV radiation exposure on Earth.
- Satellite re-entry and burn up releases metallic ash, potentially altering the atmosphere.
- Nitrogen Oxides (NO_x): Generated during rocket launches, contributing to local air pollution & acid rain.
- Energy-intensive satellite production and mining activities have significant carbon footprints.
- Spent rocket stages and other components can re-enter the atmosphere, with some parts surviving and falling to Earth that has Potential contamination of oceans or remote areas.
 - ✓ The uncontrolled re-entry of spent stages from China's Long March rockets highlights the risks of falling debris.
- The proliferation of satellites increases the risk of interference in the radio spectrum, impacting Ground-based radio astronomy.
- Rocket exhaust releases heat and chemical by-products into the mesosphere and thermosphere, potentially altering *local atmospheric dynamics*.

Challenge of Orbital debris

- Collisions between debris and active satellites or spacecraft can produce more debris, leading to **the Kessler Syndrome**, where a cascade of collisions makes certain orbits unusable.
- Debris interferes with scientific observations and communication systems.
 - ✓ Starlink's large satellite constellation has raised concerns about its cumulative impact on light pollution and orbital congestion.
- Poses a threat to the International Space Station (ISS) and human-crewed missions.

Initiatives to Counter Space Debris:

- United Nations' Guidelines for Long-Term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities: Non-binding recommendations for safe satellite operations, debris mitigation, and international cooperation.
- Active Debris Removal (ADR) Projects: Development of technologies like nets, harpoons, and lasers to capture or de-orbit debris (e.g., ESA and JAXA).
- Kessler Syndrome Mitigation (NASA): Studies and strategies to avoid cascading collisions in orbit by limiting debris generation.
- European Space Agency's (ESA) ClearSpace-1: A robotic mission to remove a single large piece of debris from orbit by 2025.

Diamond Cooling Technology

Akash Systems, renowned for its revolutionary Diamond Cooling technology for AI, has entered into a \$27 million partnership with NxtGen Datacenter and Cloud Technologies, India's largest sovereign cloud provider.

About Diamond Cooling Technology

- It leverages the exceptional thermal conductivity of diamond to efficiently dissipate heat generated by electronic devices, particularly high-power components like Laser diodes, Electric vehicles, High-power transistors and amplifiers, CPUs and GPUs.
 - ✓ Its hardness ensures durability in high-stress environments.

Key Principle & Features

- Diamond's exceptional property: Diamond possesses the **highest thermal conductivity** of any known natural material, several times greater than copper, which is commonly used in traditional heat sinks. This means it can transfer heat away from a source much more effectively.

- Integration with other materials: Diamond is often combined with other thermally conductive materials, such as gallium nitride (GaN), to create high-performance heat management solutions.
 - ✓ Example: GaN-on-Diamond semiconductors in 5G base stations.
- **Strategic Dimension (India's Perspective):** With initiatives like Make in India, India can focus on R&D in synthetic diamond production and cooling technology (crucial for Atmanirbhar Bharat (Self-Reliant India)).
 - ✓ **Example:** Collaboration between DRDO and semiconductor manufacturers for defense and space applications.

Challenges and Considerations

- Cost: Synthetic diamond production can be expensive, which can limit the widespread adoption of diamond cooling. However, advancements in manufacturing techniques are gradually reducing costs.
- Integration: Integrating diamond heat spreaders into existing device manufacturing processes can require specialized techniques

Melye-Amiley

A study has suggested anti-obesity properties in Melye-Amiley, the traditional fermented bamboo shoot from Tripura.

- ✓ The techniques of fermentation have been as old as human civilization that have passed through generations, mainly used to preserve food, enhance nutritional quality & also to enhance taste & flavour.

More About findings

- It suggests that Melye-Amiley can help reduce lipid accumulation and promote fat burning (increases fatty acid β -oxidation), making it a potential natural solution for weight management and metabolic health.
- It highlights the potential of India's rich biodiversity and traditional food systems in addressing modern health challenges.
- Also, the study demonstrates that treatment with Melye-amiley leads to the upregulation of thermogenic protein expression via the AMPK signaling pathway.

Carbon-14 Diamond Battery

Scientists have created the world's first carbon-14 diamond battery.

Features & Working

- The Carbon-14 Diamond Battery is a revolutionary technology that harnesses the radioactive decay of carbon-14 (C-14) isotopes to generate electricity.
- It utilizes carbon-14, a radioactive isotope with a half-life of approximately 5,700 years.
- Diamond Encapsulation: The carbon-14 is encapsulated within a diamond structure.
- Use of Nuclear Waste: C-14 is extracted from graphite blocks in nuclear reactors, providing a productive use for radioactive waste.
 - ✓ Example: Transforming nuclear waste into energy addresses disposal challenges.
- **Safety:** The radioactive material is encased in diamond, which prevents radiation leakage and enhances durability.

Key Advantages

- Long Lifespan: The long half-life of carbon-14 ensures a sustained power source for thousands of years.
- Compact and Durable: The diamond casing provides a robust and durable structure.
- The battery could also be used in extreme environments – both in space and on earth – where it is not practical to replace conventional batteries.
 - ✓ **Space Exploration:** Used in spacecraft, satellites, and rovers where maintenance is not feasible. Example: Powering Mars rovers or deep-space probes.

- **Low Power Output:** While the power output is relatively low, it's ideal for powering small devices like pacemakers or sensors
 - ✓ **Defense and Remote Sensing:** Power for sensors, drones, and equipment in inaccessible or hazardous areas.

Expansion of Universe

NASA's James Webb Space Telescope has confirmed that the universe is expanding faster than expected, corroborating observations made by the Hubble Space Telescope.

More About findings

- The expansion rate of the universe is known as the Hubble constant (H_0), and it's a fundamental parameter for understanding the evolution and ultimate fate of the cosmos.
 - ✓ **Hubble's Law:** The velocity of a galaxy moving away is proportional to its distance from Earth.
 - ✓ The value of the Hubble Constant is currently estimated to be around 70 km/s/Mpc (megaparsec), which means that for every megaparsec of distance between two galaxies, the distance between them will increase by about 70 kilometers per second.
- However, there's been a persistent difference between the value of the Hubble constant measured directly and the value predicted from the big bang afterglow, known as the "Hubble Tension"
 - ✓ **Cosmic Microwave Background Radiation (CMBR):** Residual radiation from the Big Bang supports the theory of an expanding universe.
- **Hubble Tension:** Data from James Webb Space Telescope have now validated the Hubble Space Telescope's earlier finding that the rate of the universe's expansion is faster — by about 8% — than would be expected based on what astrophysicists know of the initial conditions in the cosmos and its evolution over billions of years. The discrepancy is called the Hubble Tension
- The James Webb Space Telescope has made new measurements of the Hubble constant using Cepheid variables and Type Ia supernovae as "standard candles" to measure distances in the universe
- These measurements have confirmed the accuracy of 30 years of Hubble observations and have deepened the mystery of the Hubble constant tension

Evidence and Observations of Expansion of Universe

- **Redshift:** Light from distant galaxies shifts toward the red spectrum, indicating motion away from Earth.
- **Gravitational Lensing:** Distorted light paths from distant objects confirm cosmic expansion (Observations from the Hubble Space Telescope.)
- ISRO and collaborations with global organizations enhance India's role in cosmic research.
 - ✓ **Example:** India's ASTROSAT and its contribution to studying the universe's evolution.
- **Global Cooperation:** Participation in international projects like the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) positions India as a key player in space science.

Mirror Bacteria

A group of scientists working globally has sounded an alarm about the potential creation of mirror bacteria.

Mirror Bacteria

- It is a hypothetical concept in synthetic biology. They refer to organisms that would be composed of molecules that are mirror images of those found in naturally occurring life on Earth.
- Mirror bacteria would be synthetic organisms created in a laboratory, with all their molecular components (amino acids, sugars, DNA) having the opposite **chirality** compared to natural life.
- This would make them fundamentally incompatible with existing life on Earth. They wouldn't be able to metabolize natural nutrients, reproduce with natural organisms, or be affected by natural pathogens.

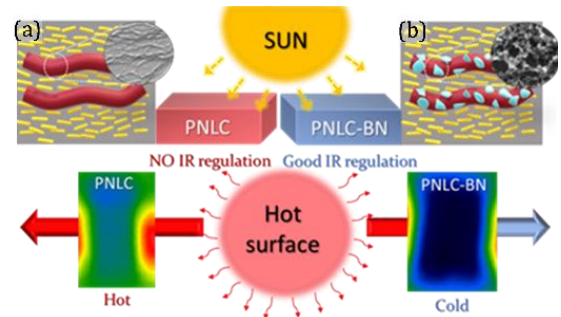
Potential Benefits & Implications (Theoretical):

- New Medicines: Mirror-image drugs could potentially be developed that are resistant to degradation by the body's enzymes, leading to more effective treatments for various diseases.
- New Food Sources: Mirror-image bacteria could potentially be engineered to produce novel food sources or biofuels.
- Environmental Remediation: Mirror bacteria could potentially be used to clean up pollution or remediate environmental damage without affecting natural ecosystems. **Example:** Degradation of plastics or complex hydrocarbons.
- Ethical Concerns: Risks of creating synthetic organisms with unpredictable ecological impacts and creation of Dual-use technologies that could be weaponized.

Strategy for Infrared Regulation

Scientists from the Centre for Nano and Soft Matter Sciences (CeNS), Bengaluru, have come up with a novel strategy to **control and regulate** IR radiation.

- ✓ CeNS is an autonomous institute of the Department of Science and Technology.



More About Strategy: It uses 2-dimensional nanosheets of a chemical called hexagonal boron nitride and has potential for deployment as radiative heat barrier, thermal camouflage and in thermal management applications.

Properties

- Invisible to the human eye but can be felt as heat.
- Travels in straight lines at the speed of light in a vacuum.
- Easily absorbed and emitted by matter, especially water and carbon-based materials.

Infrared radiation (Range of wavelength: from 700 nanometers (nm) to 1 millimeter (mm))

Electromagnetic radiation with a wavelength longer than visible light but shorter than microwaves.

Sources

Natural: Sun (Primary source), Earth, Stars, planets, and other celestial objects

Artificial: Heat Lamps, Electric Heaters, Industrial Processes, Infrared Saunas

IRIS² Project

The EU has launched a €10bn space programme to rival Elon Musk's Starlink, further widening the post-Brexit security gap with the UK.

About IRIS² (Infrastructure for Resilience, Interconnectivity and Security by Satellite)

- Purpose: To provide secure communication, location tracking, and security surveillance services primarily for governmental agencies, but also broadband internet to citizens and businesses.
 - ✓ During the Russia-Ukraine conflict, reliance on private systems like Starlink highlighted the need for secure, sovereign satellite networks.
 - ✓ Counters the dominance of private players like SpaceX and national programs like China's BeiDou and the US's GPS.
 - ✓ Compared to Starlink, which has already deployed over 7,000 low Earth satellites, the European Space Agency's IRIS² internet satellite service may sound minuscule, but it should be noted that the latter only plans to cover Europe.



- It is developed in partnership with SpaceRISE, an alliance of leading European satellite operators and space companies.
- Constellation: It will consist of 290 shorter satellites in different orbits (Low Earth Orbit and Medium Earth Orbit) to ensure comprehensive coverage and resilience.
 - ✓ During the COVID-19 pandemic, satellite internet enabled remote education and telemedicine in inaccessible regions.

Key Features

- Security: A major focus is on secure communication, using technologies like quantum cryptography (through the European Quantum Communication Infrastructure – EuroQCI) and a “secure-by-design” approach.
 - ✓ Comparable to SpaceX’s Starlink or the UK’s OneWeb, but with an emphasis on secure and sovereign communication.
- Resilience: The multi-orbit design enhances resilience against disruptions.
- Connectivity: It aims to provide high-speed internet, especially in areas with poor terrestrial connectivity.
 - ✓ Supports the EU’s Digital Decade Strategy, aiming for universal connectivity by 2030.
 - ✓ The OneWeb-Bharti Airtel collaboration has demonstrated the economic viability of LEO satellite networks for global connectivity.

SpaDeX

ISRO launches Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX) mission along with 24 PS4-Orbital Experiment Module (POEM-4) payloads.

- ✓ PSLV Orbital Experimental Module (POEM) repurposes the fourth stage of PSLV into an orbital station for scientific experiments.

About SpaDeX mission (by ISRO, by PSLV C60 Rocket from Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota)

- Objective: To master the complex technology of in-space docking and undocking. This capability is essential for various future space endeavors.
- India will become the fourth country (after US, Russia, and China) in the world to have a space programme capable of docking in space (upon its success)
 - ✓ The concept of space docking was first achieved by the Soviet Union in 1967 with the docking of Kosmos 186 and Kosmos 188.
- **Technologies Involved: (Similar technology was used in NASA's Apollo and SpaceX Crew Dragon missions.)**
 - ✓ **Proximity Operations Sensors:** To guide the spacecraft during the docking process.
 - ✓ **Automated Rendezvous and Docking (AR&D):** For precision control and maneuvering.
 - ✓ **Low-Thrust Propulsion:** To ensure fine control during docking.

Working

- Involves launching two small satellites, designated SDX01 (the “chaser”) and SDX02 (the “target”), into a low-Earth circular orbit (LEO- 470 km circular orbit at a 55-degree inclination.).
- These satellites will then perform a series of maneuvers to approach and dock with each other. After successful docking, they will also demonstrate undocking and separation.

Significance

- Space Stations: Building and maintaining a space station (For the development of the Bharatiya Antariksh Station (BAS)) requires docking multiple modules together in orbit.
 - ✓ The International Space Station (ISS) uses docking to assemble its modules, a model for India's future projects.

- Lunar and Interplanetary Missions: Future missions to the Moon or Mars may involve multiple launches and in-space assembly of spacecraft.
 - ✓ Docking technology is key for long-term missions like "Chandrayaan-4" and the planned Indian space station. It is also crucial for the eventual manned "Gaganyaan" mission.
- Sample Return Missions: Docking is necessary for retrieving samples from other celestial bodies and bringing them back to Earth.
- **Space Servicing Market:** SpaDeX can enable satellite repair, debris removal, and in-orbit refueling, tapping into the emerging \$4 billion on-orbit servicing market.
 - ✓ The European Space Agency's ClearSpace-1 mission demonstrates how docking technology can mitigate space debris.
- Ethical and Philosophical Dimensions: Ethical frameworks like the Outer Space Treaty emphasize peaceful uses of space technology, aligning with SpaDeX's objectives.

Parker Solar Probe

NASA scientists announced that the Parker Solar Probe survived the closest-ever approach to the Sun.

- ✓ In December 2021, the Parker Probe reached the atmosphere of the sun. Since then, it's been looping around the sun, drawing closer each time & sending back tons of data about everything it encounters.

About Parker Solar Probe (Launched in 2018 by NASA under Living with Star program)

Mission: To study the Sun's outer atmosphere, the corona, and in particular:

- The coronal heating problem: Why the corona is much hotter than the Sun's surface.
- The acceleration of the solar wind: Streams of charged particles flowing outward from the Sun

Key Features:

- Unprecedented Proximity: It's designed to fly closer to the Sun than any spacecraft before, venturing into the outer corona.
- Heat Shield: Equipped with a revolutionary heat shield to withstand the extreme temperatures near the Sun. (protects the probe from temperatures over 1,377°C.)
- Scientific Instruments: Carries a suite of instruments to measure the Sun's magnetic fields, plasma, and energetic particles
 - ✓ **Scientific Instruments:** Fields Experiment (FIELDS), Integrated Science Investigation of the Sun (ISIS), Wide Field Imager for Solar Probe (WISPR), Solar Wind Electrons Alphas and Protons (SWEAP).

** **Aditya-L1 Mission:** India's maiden mission to study the Sun will complement findings from the Parker Solar Probe.

Yakshagana

- Tulasi Raghvendra Hegde, a 15-year-old prodigy has gained recognition for being a Yakshagana performer. She was recently awarded the Young Achiever Award 2024 by the Rotary Club.
- Yakshagana is a traditional Indian theatre form, developed in Dakshina Kannada, Udupi, Uttara Kannada, Shimoga and western parts of Chikmagalur districts, in the state of Karnataka and in Kasaragod district in Kerala.
- It combines dance, music, dialogue, costume, make-up, and stage techniques with a unique style and form. It is believed to have evolved from pre-classical music and theatre during the period of the Bhakti movement.
- It is traditionally presented from dusk to dawn and its stories are drawn from Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagavata and other epics from both Hindu and Jain and other ancient Indic traditions.
- The show consists of both stage performances by talented artists and commentary (performed by the lead singer or Bhagawatha) accompanied by traditional music.
- Yakshagana is synonymous with massive headgears, elaborate facial make-up, vibrant costumes, ornaments and musical beads on the legs (Gejje).
- Usually recited in Kannada, it is also performed in Malayalam as well as Tulu (the dialect of south Karnataka), with percussion instruments like chenda, maddalam, jagatta or chengila (cymbals) and chakratala or elathalam (small cymbals) acting as the accompanying orchestra.

Hornbill Festival

- The Prime Minister recently congratulated the people of Nagaland on completion of 25 years of Hornbill Festival.
- The Hornbill Festival also called the 'Festival of Festivals', is a celebration held every year from 1 to 10 December, in Nagaland. The theme for Hornbill Festival 2024 was "Cultural Connect".
- The 10-day festival, which also coincides with the Statehood Day of Nagaland, is an annual tourism promotional event to showcase Nagaland's rich cultural heritage in all its ethnicity, and diversity.
- Nagaland attained statehood with the enactment of the State of Nagaland Act in 1962 by Parliament and the state of Nagaland was formally inaugurated on December 1, 1963.
- The festival is a tribute to the great Hornbill, which is the most admired and revered bird for the Nagas for its qualities of alertness and glory. It is celebrated at Naga Heritage Village, Kisama which is about 12 km from Kohima in Nagaland.
- The majestic bird is closely identified with the social and cultural life of the Nagas as reflected in tribal folklore, dances and songs.
- The festival is a cultural exhibition to revive, protect and preserve the richness and uniqueness of the Naga heritage, while for the visitors to this event it is a means to comprehensively understand the Naga people, their land and culture.

Veer Bal Diwas

The Prime Minister recently paid his tribute on 'Veer Bal Diwas' to mark the **martyrdom of Guru Gobind Singh's younger sons**, Sahibzada Zorawar Singh and Sahibzada Fateh Singh.

The History of Martyrdom

- Guru Gobind Singh founded the Khalsa in 1699 and was raising an army, which the neighbouring hill kings were not comfortable with. The Mughal empire and the hill kings saw the Khalsa as a threat.

- Guru Gobind Singh's four sons -- Ajit Singh, Jujhar Singh, Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh -- were all part of the Khalsa.
- The kings had fought several battles with the Sikhs in the last decade of the 17th century, but had been unable to dislodge them from Anandpur Sahib.
- Then came the attack of 1704 led by Bilaspur King Bheem Chand and Handuria King Raja Hari Chand.
- They cordoned off Anandpur Sahib with support from the Mughal empire and supplies to Anandpur Sahib were cut off for several months.
- Kings and Muslim Mughal governors reached an agreement with the Sikhs, and swore there would be no war if Guru Gobind Singh left Anandpur Sahib.
- The Sikh Guru agreed to give up the fort for the sake of his people. But Guru Gobind Singh and his followers were attacked near the river Sarsa, at a distance of about 25 kilometres from Anandpur Sahib.
- In the chaos, Guru Gobind Singh's family was separated, scattering in different directions.
- The Guru himself with his two eldest sons, Ajit Singh and Jujhar Singh, moved toward Chamkaur Sahib.
- And in the historic battle of Chamkaur Sahibzada Ajit Singh and Sahibzada Jujhar Singh both sacrificed their lives on December 22.
- Guru Gobind Singh's mother Mata Gujariji and his other two sons, Zorawar Singh (aged 9) and Fateh Singh (aged 7), were kidnapped by Sarhand's Mughal governor Nawab Wazir Khan.
- The two younger Sahibzade were offered riches and told to convert to Islam. However, they refused to convert or to bow to Wazir Khan.
- After efforts to make them give up their religion failed, Wazir Khan bricked the two boys alive. The same day, Mata Gujariji died of shock.
- A few years later, Baba Banda Singh Bhadur avenged the execution of the Sahibzade, by attacking and capturing Sarhand.

Akal Takht

A former Deputy Chief Minister of Punjab Sukhbir Badal was awarded religious punishment by the Akal Takht, the supreme temporal seat of the Sikhs.

Akal Takht

- The Akal Takht, which faces the Harmandir Sahib in the Golden Temple complex, was **established by the sixth Sikh master Guru Hargobind in 1606** following the execution of his father, Guru Arjan Dev, by the Mughals.
- Guru Hargobind used this platform for governance, and is believed to have issued the **first directive (Hukamnama)** from here, urging Sikh congregations to contribute horses and weapons to the Panth.
- The Guru is said to have requested two swords, symbolizing **miri (temporal power)** and **piri (spirituality)**. The sword representing miri was slightly shorter, indicating the primacy of spiritual authority over temporal power.
- The Akal Takht was also a symbol and representation of the Sikh resistance of Mughal authority.
- The 12-foot-high platform of the Akal Takht symbolised a challenge to the Mughal government in Agra (and later Delhi), where Emperor Jahangir (1605-27), sat on an 11-foot-high throne, and prevented anyone else from doing so.
- Guru Arjan Dev was executed on the orders of Emperor Jahangir.

Functioning of Akal Takht after the Last Guru - Guru Gobind Singh

- The Akal Takht became the focal point for Sikhs during the difficult period following the execution of Banda Singh Bahadur, the general of the Khalsa army, in 1716.

- As the Sikhs faced massive persecution from the Mughal state, members of the community would gather at the Akal Takht on Baisakhi and Diwali for **Sarbat Khalsa** assemblies where crucial decisions would be made.
- The tradition of the Sarbat Khalsa continued, and one of the last assemblies was convened by Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1801-39), the founder of the Sikh empire, in 1805 to discuss on supporting the Maratha prince of Indore, Jaswant Rao Holkar, against the British.

Appointment of Jathedar (head) of the Akal Takht

- Initially, the Sarbat Khalsa appointed the Akal Takht Jathedar during the annual congregations.
- After the British established control over the country, however, the appointment of the Jathedar came under the influence of the Darbar Sahib committee, which was dominated by leaders who were loyal to the regime.
- Following the enactment of the **Sikh Gurdwaras Act in 1925**, the Jathedar began to be appointed by the **Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC)**, a body formed in 1920 to manage Sikh shrines and free them from British-supported mahants.
- The SGPC is currently the apex governing body of all Sikh gurdwaras in the states of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh, and the Union Territory of Chandigarh.
- The Jathedar must be baptised, possess deep knowledge of Sikh history and scriptures, and should be free from moral shortcomings.

Religious Punishment Tankhah by Akal Takht

- As the head of the highest seat of temporal power of the Sikhs, the Jathedar of the Akal Takht is the supreme temporal and religious authority of the Sikhs, and the final word on the affairs of the community.
- Any person who identifies as a Sikh can be summoned to the Akal Takht, tried, and sentenced.
- The Takht calls only those who affirm their Sikh identity, and tankhah (religious punishment) is intended to remove ego and instill humility.

AWARDS/ PERSONALITIES IN NEWS

Rashtriya Tansen Samman

- Eminent tabla player Padma Shri **Pandit Swapan Chaudhuri** from Kolkata was presented 'Rashtriya Tansen Samman' for the year 2023 at the Tansen Sangeet Samaroh 2024.
- Tansen Samaroh is a tribute to Indian musical legend, **Shri Ramtanu Misra**, famously known as Tansen.
- Held every year in December in Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, it is a 5-day musical extravaganza.
- It is organized jointly by Ustad Alauddin Khan Kala Evam Sangeet Academy and Department of Culture, Government of Madhya Pradesh.
- **Established in 1980**, the Tansen Samman is awarded by the Madhya Pradesh government. The award carries a sum of Rs. 5 lakh.
- The purpose of this award is to honour significant contributions in the field of arts and to acknowledge the contributions of citizens to the cultural domain.
- Further, **Sanand Nyas Sanstha** from Indore was awarded the **Raja Mansingh Tomar Samman** for the year 2023.
- Sanand Nyas Sanstha has been working in the field of classical music, drama and cultural festival in Indore for the last 35 years.
- Raja Mansingh Tomar Samman is given by the Madhya Pradesh government to an organisation doing excellent work in the field of art and culture.

MianTansen

- MianTansen (born as Ramtanu Misra) was a prominent Indian classical music composer, musician and vocalist known for a large number of compositions.
- He was also an instrumentalist who popularised and improved the plucked rabab (of Central Asian origin).
- **Tansen** was the title given to him by **Raja Vikramjit of Gwalior**. Tansen was a court musician in the darbar of Raja Ramachandra of Bandavagarh (Rewa).
- Later he became one of the **Navaratnas** (nine jewels) at the court of the Mughal Emperor Jalalud-din Akbar. **Akbar gave him the title Mian**, an honorific, meaning learned man.
- He composed many dhrupads on Ganesha, Shiva, Parvati and Rama. **Kalpadruma** is a compilation of 300 of his dhrupads.
- He invented the night raga Darbari Kanhra, morning raga Mian Ki Todi, mid-day raga, MiankiSarang, seasonal raga Mianki Malhar. His descendants and disciples are called Seniyas.

Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar

- The President recently conferred the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar (PMRBP) to 17 children.
- PMRBP is given to children in the age group of 5 – 18 years for exceptional achievements in their fields. Each awardee receives a medal and a certificate.
- The award celebrates extraordinary accomplishments in **seven categories**: art and culture, bravery, innovation, science and technology, social service, sports and environment.
- PMRBP is **organised by the Ministry of Women and Child Development**. The selection of awardees is made by the National Selection Committee under the chairpersonship of the Minister of Women and Child Development.

Turner Prize 2024

- Indian-origin Scottish artist **Jasleen Kaur** has won the prestigious Turner Prize 2024 for her exhibition, “**Alter Altar**”, that reflects on plurality, personal and political themes.
- It was **established in 1984**, to encourage wider interest in contemporary art and is awarded to a ‘British’ artist. ‘British’ can mean an artist working primarily in Britain or an artist born in Britain working globally.
- The prize focuses on their recent developments in British art rather than a lifetime's achievement.
- Named after the **English painter J.M.W. Turner**, it was founded by a group called the **Patrons of New Art** under the directorship of Alan Bowness.
- Between 1991 and 2016, only artists under the age of 50 were eligible (this restriction was removed from the 2017 award).
- Indian-origin British artist **Anish Kapoor** won the prize in 1991.

Wisam Mubarak al-Kabeer

- Prime Minister was recently awarded the Wisam Mubarak al-Kabeer or the Order of Mubarak the Great, by Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Amir of Kuwait.
- The Order of Mubarak Al-Kabeer is the highest national award of Kuwait. It is conferred by the Kuwaiti government on Heads of State, Sovereigns of foreign countries, and on members of foreign royal families as a sign of friendship and goodwill.
- The award was instituted in 1974, in the memory of Mubarak Al Sabah — also known as Mubarak al-Kabeer or Mubarak the Great — who ruled Kuwait from 1896 to 1915.
- Under his reign, Kuwait got more autonomy from the Ottoman Empire. Mubarak is known for playing a major role in shaping the future of Kuwait.
- Previous recipients include Queen Elizabeth II of England, former American Presidents George HW Bush and Bill Clinton, King Salman of Saudi Arabia, former French President Nicolas Sarkozy, among others.

Sahitya Akademi Awards

- Hindi poet Gagan Gill and English writer Easterine Kire are among the recipients of the annual Sahitya Akademi Awards.
- Gill was selected for her book on poetry **Main Jab Tak Aai Bahar** and Easterine Kire made it to the list for her novel **Spirit Nights**.
- **Established in 1954**, the award is a **literary honour** in India, conferred by the SahityaAkademi. It is conferred annually on writers of the most outstanding books of literary merit published in any of the **24 major Indian languages**.
- Besides the 22 languages enumerated in the Constitution of India, the Sahitya Akademi has recognised English and Rajasthani.
- The winners receive a plaque, a shawl and an amount of Rs. 1 lakh.

Sahitya Akademi

- Inaugurated in 1954, Sahitya Akademi - **India's National Academy of Letters**, is the central institution for literary dialogue, publication and promotion in the country.
- Functioning as an **autonomous organization**, it is the only institution that undertakes literary activities in 24 Indian languages, including English.
- It also gives special awards called **Bhasha Samman** to significant contribution to the languages not formally recognized by the Akademi and for contribution to classical and medieval literature.