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CURRENT AFFAIRS - JANUARY 2025



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Centre-State Clashes on Vice Chancellor Appointments

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has proposed new regulations for appointing Vice Chancellors (VCs) in universities, sparking disputes between states and the Centre.

New Regulations for Appointing VCs in Universities

Name: The draft UGC (Minimum Qualifications for Appointment and Promotion of Teachers and Academic Staff in Universities and Colleges and Measures for the Maintenance of Standards in Higher Education) Regulations, 2025.

How VCs are Appointed?

Central universities	State universities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central universities are established under parliamentary Acts and administered by the Centre, with the President of India acting as Visitor. VC appointment committees include two nominees from the university's <i>Executive Council</i> and one from the Visitor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State-specific laws often determine the composition of search committees. Typically, the Chancellor (usually the Governor) selects the VC based on committee recommendations. For instance, Kerala's law includes nominees from the <i>university Senate, UGC Chairman, and Chancellor</i>.

Private universities: Private institutions follow similar procedures, with UGC playing a limited role through its nominee in the search committee.

Key Provisions of the Draft Regulations 2025

- Committee composition changes:**
 - The new rules specify that the **search-cum-selection committee** will have three members, including one each nominated by the Chancellor/Visitor, the UGC Chairman, and the university's apex body (e.g., Senate or Syndicate).
 - This grants a majority to Centre-aligned nominees in the committee.
- Eligibility expansion:** Besides professors, individuals from senior roles in industries, public policy, administration, or public sector undertakings may now qualify as VCs.
- Chancellor's role:** The Chancellor/ Visitor will directly constitute the search committee.

Core of the Dispute

- UGC's Stance:**
 - Regulation 7.3 of the **UGC Regulations, 2018** mandates the inclusion of a UGC nominee in VC search committees.
- State Government's Argument:**
 - State University Acts, passed by State legislatures, have their own provisions for VC appointments.
 - States, like Tamil Nadu, argue that imposing UGC nominees erodes their autonomy.
- Legal Complexity:**
 - Conflicting judgments from the Supreme Court have further complicated the issue.
 - While some rulings uphold UGC regulations as mandatory, others deem them advisory for State universities unless explicitly adopted by the State.

Constitutional Questions at Play

- Federal Structure and Delegated Legislation:**
 - The Constitution's **Article 254(1)** states that Central laws prevail over State laws in the Concurrent List, but this applies only to **plenary laws**, not delegated legislation like UGC regulations.
- Judicial Interpretations:**
 - Landmark rulings like **Ch. Tika Ramji v. State of Uttar Pradesh (1956)** and **Indian Express Newspapers v. Union of India (1984)** clarify that subordinate legislation cannot override plenary laws.
 - Recent cases like **Annamalai University v. Secretary, Tourism (2009)** and **Kalyani Mathivanan v. K.V. Jeyaraj (2015)** offer conflicting interpretations, leaving ambiguity.
 - Some rulings have erroneously equated subordinate legislation with plenary laws, further complicating the legal landscape.

Judicial Precedents on UGC Authority

- Supporting UGC Regulations:** Cases like **Gambhirdan K. Gadhvi v. State of Gujarat (2022)** upheld UGC's authority, emphasizing the uniformity of higher education standards.
- Advisory Nature of UGC:** The Supreme Court in **University of Delhi v. Raj Singh (1994)** ruled that UGC guidelines are advisory unless adopted by States.

Impact of the Debate

- **Administrative Paralysis:** Leadership vacancies in universities delay critical decisions, including staff appointments and degree conferrals.
- **Academic Implications:** Hinder the universities' ability to achieve academic & research excellence.

State vs Centre Disputes over VC Appointments

- **Kerala** passed a Bill to replace the Governor as Chancellor, which awaits Presidential assent.
- **West Bengal:** The Supreme Court is involved in resolving disputes over interim VC appointments made unilaterally by the Governor.
 - The state Assembly's move to replace the Governor with the Chief Minister as Chancellor is stalled
- **Karnataka:** Proposed legislative reforms aim to remove the Governor as Chancellor.
- **Maharashtra:** Attempts to limit the Governor's role in VC appointments were reversed under the new government in 2022.
- **Tamil Nadu:** The DMK-led government's efforts to appoint VCs without Governor approval remain blocked.

Federalism Concerns over VCs Appointments

- **State governments** have raised alarms over the draft regulations, citing:
 - **Erosion of State autonomy:** States argue that these rules centralize power in the hands of Governors, undermining federal principles.
 - **Democratic concerns:** Critics see it as a move to weaken democratically elected state governments.
 - **E. g. Kerala CM:** Described the draft as “anti-federal” & an overreach into state rights.
- **UGC's stance:** UGC Chairman defended the regulations as necessary for aligning with the **National Education Policy 2020** and ensuring transparent, high-quality leadership in higher education.

What Needs to be Done?

- **Constitutional Clarity:** A ruling by a **Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court** is essential to resolve ambiguities, particularly on the applicability of Article 254(1) to delegated legislation.
- **Revised UGC Approach:** The UGC should limit its role to advisory and collaborative functions, respecting State autonomy.
- **Balanced Governance Framework:** States and the Centre should work together to develop mechanisms that balance uniform academic standards with local governance needs.



Should Voter IDs be Linked with Aadhaar?

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) have accused each other of tampering with electoral rolls ahead of the Delhi Assembly elections, reviving the debate over linking voter IDs with Aadhaar.

Background

- **NERPAP Initiative (2015):** The Election Commission (EC) launched the National Electoral Rolls Purification and Authentication Program (NERPAP) in 2015 to eliminate duplicate entries in electoral rolls by linking voter IDs (EPIC) with Aadhaar. Over 300 million voters were linked within three months.
- **Supreme Court Intervention (2015):** SC restricted mandatory Aadhaar use to welfare schemes and PAN linking, leading to the discontinuation of NERPAP.
- **Post-Puttaswamy Judgment (2017):** After the SC upheld the constitutional validity of the Aadhaar Act in 2018, the EC sought amendments to the Representation of the People Act, 1950 (RPA, 1950) to enable EPIC-Aadhaar linking.
- **Legal Amendments (2021):** Parliament amended the **RPA** and the **Registration of Electors Rules, 1960** to allow Aadhaar linkage. Voters were required to submit Aadhaar information via **Form 6** for new registrations (to establish identity) and **Form 6B** for authentication by existing voters.
 - Submission of Aadhaar was made voluntary, and alternate documents (e.g., PAN, Passport, Driving License) could be provided if Aadhaar was unavailable.
- **SC Challenges (2023):** The amendments were contested in court. The EC clarified to the SC that Aadhaar submission is not mandatory and promised clarificatory changes to the forms. However, Forms 6 and 6B have not been updated and still require a declaration if Aadhaar is not provided.

Benefits of Linking Aadhaar with Voter ID	Issues with Mandatory Aadhaar-Voter ID Linking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elimination of Duplicate Entries: or multiple entries in electoral rolls, ensuring cleaner and more accurate voter lists. • Streamlined Electoral Rolls: With over 650 million Aadhaar numbers already linked, this process enhances the efficiency of maintaining electoral rolls. • Improved Electoral Integrity: Reducing duplicate entries minimizes the risk of voter fraud, enhancing trust in the electoral process. • Facilitation of Voter Mobility: For citizens who relocate, linking Aadhaar with Voter ID simplifies the process of updating their information, ensuring they remain eligible to vote in their new place of residence without bureaucratic hurdles. • Cost Savings and Resource Optimization: By maintaining cleaner and more accurate electoral rolls, the government can reduce the resources required for voter verification processes during elections, leading to significant cost savings. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Exclusion Risks: Mandatory submission of Aadhaar may disadvantage those who lack it, especially marginalized groups, despite provisions for alternate documentation. 2. Legal and Proportionality Concerns: Aadhaar linkage must meet the “<u>necessary and proportionate</u>” test outlined in the <i>Puttaswamy</i> judgment. Mandating Aadhaar infringes on informational autonomy, as individuals should have the right to choose alternative identification documents. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ In <i>Puttaswamy</i>, the SC ruled that mandatory Aadhaar-bank account linkage violated proportionality by depriving individuals of rights for non-linkage. ✓ The SC in <i>Lal Babu Hussein (1995)</i> emphasized that the right to vote cannot be denied by insisting on specific proofs of identity; voters should have the flexibility to use any valid identification. 3. Right to Privacy: Linking Aadhaar’s demographic data with voter ID details risks potential misuse, privacy violations, and surveillance concerns. Effective data protection regulations are essential to mitigate these risks. 4. Aadhaar as Proof of Residence: Aadhaar establishes residence, not citizenship, meaning it cannot identify non-citizens on electoral rolls and only helps eliminate duplicates. 5. Error Rates in Biometric Authentication: Biometric errors are significant (12% error rate reported in 2018). Also, past linkage attempts, like in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana (2015), led to the disenfranchisement of 30 lakh voters, raising concerns about reliability. 6. Alternative Verification Challenges: Verifying voter rolls through other means, such as door-to-door surveys, may be resource-intensive but avoids reliance on potentially flawed Aadhaar data.

Way Forward

1. **Upholding the Right to Vote:** a constitutional right and a cornerstone of free and fair elections, which forms part of the basic structure of democracy cannot be restricted through legislative action.
2. **Engaging Citizens:** by conducting awareness campaigns highlighting the benefits of Aadhaar-EPIC linking, such as eliminating duplicate entries and strengthening electoral integrity.
3. **Addressing Concerns:** to reassure voters that Aadhaar-EPIC linkage does not compromise the secrecy of their vote and mitigating privacy fears through enforceable data protection measures and clear communication.
4. **Amending Forms:** 6 and 6B immediately to ensure alternate identification options are prominently stated to prevent implicit pressure on voters to provide Aadhaar.



New Data Protection Rules Notified

The Union government released the draft Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Rules, 2025 to enforce the provisions of the DPDP Act, 2023. Passed over a year ago, the Act establishes a legal framework for "data

fiduciaries" (entities collecting personal data) to protect user data and penalize violations. The draft rules are now open for public consultation.

Objectives of DPDP Rules 2025

- To enhance user privacy and data security.
- To promote transparency and accountability in data processing.
- To balance innovation and compliance with robust safeguards.

Key Provisions of DPDP Rules, 2025

1. **Notice to Data Principals:** Data Fiduciaries (entities processing personal data) must provide clear and easily understandable notices to Data Principals (users). Notices should be in simple language and must not be bundled with other terms, ensuring clarity and informed consent. These notices must specify- types of data collected; purpose of processing; and user rights including how to withdraw consent or file complaints.
2. **Consent Managers:** Registered entities called Consent Managers will help users manage their data permissions. They will maintain detailed records of user consents and are subject to government audits. They must:
 - Have strong financial and operational capacity (minimum ₹2 crore net worth).
 - Ensure transparency, security, and independence.
3. **State Data Processing:** The government and its agencies can process personal data to provide benefits, subsidies, or services. But the processing must adhere to:
 - Specific legal or policy standards.
 - Transparency and accountability measures outlined in Schedule II.
 - Minimum data usage and secure handling.
4. **Security Safeguards:** Data Fiduciaries must implement stringent security measures, including encryption, access controls and breach detection systems. They must also ensure Data Processors (third-party entities) follow these safeguards.
 - ✓ **Examples:** Companies like banks and e-commerce platforms must ensure that they collect only essential personal information, such as contact details and payment information, while implementing robust encryption measures.
5. **Data Breach Notification:** Data Fiduciaries must promptly inform affected users and the Data Protection Board (DPB) of any personal data breaches. Notifications to users should explain the breach's nature, extent, timing, potential consequences, mitigation measures, and safety tips. The Board must be notified within 72 hours (or longer if permitted) with detailed reports on the breach's cause, mitigation actions, responsible parties, and future preventive measures.
6. **Data Retention and Erasure:** Personal data must be deleted if unused for a defined period (e.g., three years for e-commerce). Users must be notified 48 hours before erasure, giving them a chance to act if they wish to retain their data.
 - ✓ **Withdrawal of Consent:** Individuals can withdraw consent at any time, and fiduciaries must ensure compliance with such requests promptly.
7. **Contact Information:** Data Fiduciaries must display easily accessible contact details, such as those of a Data Protection Officer (DPO), on their website or app for addressing queries about personal data processing. These details should also be included in responses to users exercising their rights, ensuring transparency and accountability.
 - ✓ Entities meeting certain thresholds, such as processing large volumes of data, are designated as Significant Data Fiduciaries (SDFs). These SDFs are subject to additional compliance requirements, including appointing Data Protection Officers (DPOs), conducting periodic audits, and implementing risk assessments.
8. **Right to Information:** Individuals (data principals) have the right to know how their data is being processed and stored.

9. Right to Correction and Erasure

10. **Verifiable Consent for Children's and PwD Data Processing:** Data Fiduciaries must obtain verifiable consent from a parent or legal guardian before processing the personal data of children or Persons with Disabilities (PwD). They must ensure the consent giver is identifiable and an adult verified using reliable identity details or a Digital Locker service, to comply with legal requirements.
11. **Exemptions in Children's Data Processing:** Certain Data Fiduciaries, such as healthcare professionals, educational institutions, and childcare providers, are exempt from specific obligations related to children's data.
- ✓ These exemptions apply to essential activities like health services, education, safety monitoring, and transportation, ensuring processing is limited to what is necessary for the child's well-being and safety.
 - ✓ Part B of the schedule outlines specific purposes for which the exemptions apply, such as legal duties, issuing subsidies, creating user accounts for communications, and preventing access to harmful content, provided data processing remains within a defined and limited scope, such as verifying age.
 - ✓ These provisions balance protecting children's data with enabling critical services.
12. **Significant Data Fiduciaries:** Entities classified as "Significant" must conduct yearly Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIAs) and undergo annual audits and report findings to the Data Protection Board. They must verify algorithms used for data processing to prevent risks to user rights.
13. **Cross-Border Data Processing:** Personal data transfer to foreign entities is regulated to ensure compliance with Indian laws and user protection. Data processing for research, archiving, or statistical purposes is exempt from certain rules to ensure academic and policy research can continue without compromising data protection.
- ✓ **Example:** An Indian financial institution sharing user data with its European counterpart must ensure compliance with both Indian and EU data protection standards.
14. **Data Protection Board (DPB):** It will be a regulatory body tasked with overseeing data protection matters. The Chairperson and Members are appointed by the Central Government through a Search-cum-Selection Committee, which includes key government officials and subject matter experts. The Board aims to conduct its operations digitally and is empowered to summon individuals and examine them under oath. The Board is required to complete inquiries within six months, with an optional three-month extension.
15. **Appeal to Appellate Tribunal:** The rule outlines the process for appealing to the Appellate Tribunal for those dissatisfied with the Board's orders. Appeals must be submitted digitally with a fee, which the Chairperson may reduce or waive. The Tribunal operates digitally, allowing for efficient proceedings without requiring physical presence, though it can summon individuals and administer oaths when necessary. The Tribunal has the authority to regulate its procedures.
16. **Government Data Requests:** The Central Government can require Data Fiduciaries or intermediaries to provide specific information. Disclosure may be restricted for matters related to national security or India's integrity unless prior permission is obtained. This is part of our legal obligations under Section 36 of the Act. The government may request data for national security, legal compliance, or to assess Data Fiduciaries' status. These provisions aim to balance individual privacy rights with regulatory requirements, enhancing transparency and accountability in personal data management.



Blood Money (Diya)

The death sentence given to Kerala nurse by a Yemen court for murdering her business partner has sparked debates on her acquittal and repatriation. This includes discussions around 'blood money' and its implications, with compensation paid to the victim's family.

What is Blood Money?

'Blood money,' or 'diya,' is a concept in Islamic Sharia law which requires the perpetrator of a crime (usually unintentional murder or culpable homicide) to pay monetary compensation to the victim or their family.

✓ It promotes reconciliation and social harmony by allowing a non-violent resolution to grievous offenses.

Objective: Not to place a price on human life but to alleviate the victim's family's suffering, especially in cases where they might lose income. (where the deceased was the sole breadwinner)

Conditions for 'Blood Money'

- **Unintentional Murders:** Primarily invoked in cases of unintentional murder or culpable homicide where there is no premeditation.
- **Reconciliation:** It is used when the victim's family opts not to pursue retribution (known as 'qisas'/ death penalty) under Sharia.
- **State & Community Role:** Even if the parties reconcile through 'blood money,' the community and state may still impose additional punishments or deterrent penalties to maintain social order.

Contemporary Applications

- **Saudi Arabia:** 'Blood money' is mandated in traffic accidents and unintentional killings, with a Sharia court determining the amount. The law also imposes prison terms on perpetrators. Gender and religious biases persist for compensation.
 - ✓ Recent proposals suggested equal payments for all individuals, regardless of gender or religion, but these changes have not yet been fully implemented.
- **Iran:** 'Blood money' varies by religion and gender—women receive half the compensation of men. A Supreme Court ruling in 2019 aimed to equalize payments, but full implementation is pending.
- **Pakistan:** 'Diya' and 'qisas' are part of the legal system through the Criminal Laws (Amendment) Ordinance, 1991. Wealthy offenders have occasionally exploited this system to avoid punishment by paying blood money.
 - ✓ In 2011, the family of Raymond Davis (a CIA contractor) accepted blood money after he killed two men in Lahore, sparking national outrage.
- **Yemen:** Compensation agreements can be reached by the parties, with judicial oversight, to ensure fairness in the compensation amount.
- **United Nations (UN) Conventions:** Blood money as compensation is debated for being contrary to international human rights frameworks, which advocate for justice and equality.

India's Stand on 'Diya' (Blood Money)

India does not formally include provisions for granting or receiving 'blood money' in its legal framework. Instead, it has a system called **plea bargaining**, which allows the accused to negotiate with the prosecution. While it is not directly equivalent to 'blood money,' it allows the defendant to plead guilty in exchange for concessions which can involve lesser charges or reduced sentences.

Plea Bargaining in India

It was introduced through the **Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2005** and added as **Chapter XXI A** to the **Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1973**. It may allow the victim to receive compensation under Section 265E of the CrPC (Disposal of cases).

- ✓ **Section 320 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC)** allows compounding of certain offences by mutual agreement between parties for less severe crimes.

Historical Practices Similar to 'Blood Money'

- **Brehon Law (Ancient Ireland):** Éraic (body price) and Log nEnech (honour price) were systems of compensation for crimes, with amounts determined by the severity of the offense or the victim's social status. Capital punishment was avoided, and disputes were settled through payments.

<p>✓ Section 357 of the CrPC allows courts to order monetary compensation to victims, though not as a substitution for punishment in murder cases.</p> <p>Comparison with Blood Money: While ‘blood money’ has a broader application and involves direct monetary compensation to the victim or their family, plea bargaining is limited to specific offences and conditions.</p> <p>Applicability:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Offences: It can only be used for crimes punishable by imprisonment of less than seven years. ○ Ineligibility for Serious Crimes: like crimes against women or children, or heinous crimes such as murder or rape. ○ Previous Convictions: It is unavailable if the accused has been previously convicted for a similar offence. <p>Ongoing Reforms: Discussions are ongoing in India to refine and expand plea bargaining, similar to reforms seen in Islamic nations regarding 'blood money' to make it more inclusive and equitable.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Galanas (Early Welsh Law): Compensation was based on the victim's social status. A 'blood fine' was required for murder, except in justified or excused killings. • Wergeld (Early Medieval Germany): A payment system for homicide or serious crimes, resembling 'blood money', where compensation was paid to the victim's family. • Medieval States: Several medieval societies set standards for payments to the victim's family in cases of homicide or serious crimes, similar to 'blood money'. <p>** Disparities in compensation based on social hierarchy were common, challenging modern notions of equality.</p>
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Blood Money vs. Indian Legal Provisions

Aspect	Blood Money (Diya)	Indian Legal Provisions
Purpose	Compensation as an alternative to punishment	Compensation alongside punishment
Scope	Applies to intentional and unintentional murder	Limited to non-serious crimes
Compensation	Monetary compensation negotiated between families	Court-directed compensation
Offence Type	Includes murder and culpable homicide	Excludes heinous crimes
Legal Outcome	Can substitute capital punishment	Punishment remains mandatory for heinous crimes

Previous Cases of Blood Money in India: Indian nationals have often relied on **blood money** payments to secure pardons in Gulf and Middle Eastern countries under Sharia law. Notable cases include:

- ✓ **Arjunan Athimuthu (2019):** Death sentence in Kuwait commuted to life after paying ₹30 lakh.
- ✓ **Abdul Rahim (2006):** Pardoned for killing a Saudi boy after paying ₹34 crore but remains in prison.
- ✓ **Ten Indians in UAE (2017):** Pardoned for murder after paying 200,000 dirhams (~₹40 lakh).
- ✓ **17 Indians in UAE (2009):** Released after a ₹4 crore payment for a Pakistani man's murder.

These cases highlight the critical role of diplomacy and community support in navigating such legal challenges.

Relevance in Current Times (Geopolitical Instances)

- ✓ **U.S.-Saudi Relations:** Cases of Americans killed in Saudi Arabia were controversially resolved through blood money.
- ✓ **Iran and Afghanistan:** Instances where tribal settlements include blood money practices persist.
- ✓ **Evolving Legal Reforms UAE** has introduced reforms to ensure gender neutrality in blood money laws.
- ✓ **Ethical Debates in Global Legal Forums:** Advocacy for reforms to align blood money laws with international human rights conventions continues.



Karnataka HC Struck Down Green Energy Rules by Centre, State

The Karnataka High Court (HC) invalidated key green energy rules introduced by the central government and adopted by the Karnataka government. The court ruled that the central government exceeded its authority under the Electricity Act, 2003, in framing these rules, which pertain to green energy open access. The court emphasized that only the State Electricity Regulatory Commissions have the power to regulate such matters under the Act.

- The court made this decision while hearing hydropower companies' objections to two Karnataka government rules based on the central Electricity (Green Energy Open Access) Rules, 2022.

Electricity Act, 2003

It is a comprehensive law that governs the generation, transmission, distribution, trading, and use of electricity in India.

Objective: To promote the development of the electricity industry, encourage competition, protect consumer interests, and ensure efficient, transparent, and environmentally friendly policies.

Key Features:

- **Consolidation of Laws:** Merges earlier electricity-related laws into one unified framework.
- **Regulatory Framework:** Establishes bodies like the Central Electricity Authority (CEA), Central and State Electricity Regulatory Commissions (CERC and SERCs), and an Appellate Tribunal for Electricity.
- **Open Access:** Allows consumers to purchase power directly from producers, promoting competition.
- **Consumer Protection:** Ensures reliable electricity supply, rational tariffs, and transparent subsidy policies.
- **Renewable Energy:** Encourages the adoption of environmentally sustainable electricity generation.

Key Rules Struck Down

- **Electricity (Promoting Renewable Energy Through Green Energy Open Access) Rules, 2022:** Central government regulations enabling consumer purchase of green energy directly through the open market.
- **Karnataka Regulatory Commission (Terms and Conditions for Green Energy Open Access) Regulations, 2022:** State-level rules aligning with the central regulations, allowing open market access for renewable energy.

Court's Observations

- **Authority under the Electricity Act:** The Electricity Act, 2003, assigns the regulation of electricity generation, transmission, and supply to the SERCs. It does not empower the central government to regulate "open access," which involves allowing consumers to directly procure energy from producers bypassing distribution companies (like BESCO in Bengaluru).
- **Section 86(1)(e):** This section specifies that the responsibility to regulate renewable energy generation and grid connectivity lies with the SERCs, not the central government.
- **Judicial Precedents:**
 - **Naresh Chandra Agrawal v The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India, 2024:** The Supreme Court (SC) held that rule-making bodies cannot overstep the boundaries set by their enabling statutes.
 - **Kerala State Electricity Board v Jhabua Power Limited, 2024:** The SC stated that SERCs are guided but not strictly bound by central or state directions, reinforcing their independent authority.

Court's Reasoning: It highlighted that the central government cannot use its residual powers to override specific provisions of the Electricity Act. Open access, being a substantive provision of the Act, is exclusively under the purview of the "appropriate commission," meaning the SERCs.

Implications of the Judgment

- **Regulatory Jurisdiction:** The judgment reaffirms the autonomy of SERCs in managing renewable energy and open access.

- **Green Energy Policy:** It limits the central government's ability to directly enforce green energy policies that bypass state mechanisms.
- **Distribution Companies:** Conventional power distribution companies (like BESCOM) retain their dominant role unless open access is implemented under state-regulated frameworks.

This ruling underscore the federal structure of India's electricity regulation, ensuring that rule-making aligns strictly with the statutory framework provided by the Electricity Act, 2003.

Extra Mile: Green Energy Open Access Rules, 2022

These rules were introduced to promote renewable energy generation, consumption, and access in line with India's updated climate targets.

Objective: To make green energy affordable, reliable, and accessible to all, encouraging India's transition to a low-carbon economy.

Key Features and Benefits

- **Promoting Green Energy:** Encourages generation and use of renewable energy, including Waste-to-Energy plants.
- **Reduced Threshold for Access:** Open access transactions are allowed for consumers with a minimum load of 100 kW, down from 1 MW, enabling smaller consumers to procure renewable energy.
- **Obligation for Distribution Companies (Discoms):** Discoms must supply green energy to eligible consumers upon demand.
- **Cost Certainty and Incentives:** Caps on cross-subsidy surcharges and removal of additional surcharges makes green energy more cost-effective and certainty in charges like transmission, wheeling, and banking fees.
- **Voluntary Purchase:** Commercial and industrial consumers can voluntarily purchase green power.
- **Renewable Purchase Obligation (RPO):** Uniform RPOs apply to all obligated entities, including green hydrogen and ammonia production.
- **Green Certificates:** Consumers of green energy will receive certificates as proof of their contribution to sustainability.
- **Centralized Platform:** The Green Open Access Registry (GOAR), managed by the Grid Controller of India Limited, provides a single-window platform for registration, application submission, tracking approvals, rejections, and updates.
- **Streamlined Approval Process:** A national portal ensures transparency and uniformity, mandating approvals within 15 days, failing which approvals are deemed granted.
- **Tariff and Cost Structure:** Tariffs for green energy are determined by the Appropriate Commission and include average pooled power purchase costs, cross-subsidy charges (if applicable) and service charges for distribution licensees.

Impact

- ✓ Aligns with India's 2030 climate goals to cut emissions by 45%.
- ✓ Expands renewable energy access to smaller consumers.
- ✓ Encourages industries and businesses to adopt greener practices by lowering costs and regulatory barriers.



Appointing Retired HC Judges On 'Ad Hoc' Basis

The Supreme Court (SC) recently suggested appointing retired judges temporarily on an ad hoc (as required) basis to address the growing backlog of pending criminal cases before several High Courts (HCs). It also suggested modifying the top court's 2021 SC decision, which allowed ad hoc judge appointments only in certain situations.

- ✓ According to National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG), there are 18,21,800 criminal cases pending in HCs across the country at present with 78.39% cases more than a year old.

About SC 2021 Verdict

It allowed the Chief Justice (CJ) of a HC to initiate the process of recommending a judge's appointment, if:

- Vacancies exceed 20% of the sanctioned strength of judges.
- Cases in a particular category have been pending for over five years.
- More than 10% of pending cases are over five years old.
- The rate of disposal is lower than the rate of case intake, either in a particular subject or generally in the court.
 - ✓ The appointment process can only be initiated after the regular vacancy filling process has been triggered but remains unfilled.
 - ✓ A "panel" of retired judges may be created by the CJ for potential appointments, with terms generally lasting 2-3 years.

Appointment of Ad Hoc Judges

1. **Legal Basis:** Article 224A of the Indian Constitution allows the CJ of a HC to request a retired judge to act as an ad hoc judge for the HC with the prior consent of the President of India.
 - The appointed judge enjoys the same powers and jurisdiction as a sitting judge but is not officially deemed as one.
 - Both the retired judge and the President must consent to the appointment.
2. **Appointment Procedure:** After the retired judge's consent, the CJ forwards the name and appointment details to the concerned state's Chief minister (CM).
 - The CM sends the recommendation to the Union Law Minister, who consults the Chief Justice of India (CJI) before forwarding it to the Prime Minister (PM).
 - The PM advises the President on the approval, as per the 1998 Memorandum of Procedure (MOP).
 - The SC has ruled that the recommendation must go through the SC collegium (CJI and two senior-most judges).

Past Appointments of Ad Hoc Judges

- **Justice Suraj Bhan (1972):** in Madhya Pradesh HC for one year to hear election petitions.
- **Justice P. Venugopal (1982-83):** in Madras HC for two years.
- **Justice O P Srivastava (2007):** in Allahabad HC to hear Ayodhya title suits.

*** Since 2021, there have been no recorded appointments of ad hoc judges.*

SC's Recommendations

- Judges should be appointed from a panel created by the CJ, ensuring the system's review for effectiveness.
- The use of Article 224A is considered a temporary solution to judicial vacancies and pending cases, emphasizing the need for long-term reforms in judicial appointments.

Comparative Global Practices

- **United States:** Retired judges are designated as "senior judges" and continue to hear cases voluntarily.
- **United Kingdom:** "Deputy High Court Judges" are appointed from retired senior judges for temporary assignments.
- **South Africa:** Appointment of "acting judges" from among retired members of the judiciary.

Pros of Appoint Ad-hoc Judges	Cons of Appointing Ad-hoc Judges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faster Case Resolution: Address backlog of cases. • Experienced Judges: Retired judges bring years of experience, helping to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of Continuity: They being temporary, may lack long-term commitment and familiarity with ongoing cases, leading to potential disruptions in case proceedings.

maintain the quality of judgments and providing expertise in handling complex cases.

- **Temporary Solution:** They offer a quick, temporary solution to judicial vacancies, especially when regular appointments are delayed or pending.
 - ✓ Ad-hoc judges provide stability during transitional phases between appointments of permanent judges.
- **Relieves Pressure:** Ad hoc judges can alleviate the workload of sitting judges, reducing their case load and ensuring timely disposal of cases.
- **Cost-Effective:** They are usually compensated with allowances, which can be more cost-effective compared to the appointment of new, full-time judges.
- **Flexibility in Judicial System:** Article 224A provides flexibility to appoint retired judges, allowing the judiciary to adapt to urgent needs without waiting for permanent judicial appointments.
- **Strengthening Specialized Benches:** Retired judges can be appointed for handling niche legal issues such as tax laws, intellectual property, and commercial disputes.

- **Limited Accountability:** As temporary appointees, they may not be as accountable as permanent judges in terms of their performance and adherence to judicial norms.
- **Not a Long-Term Solution:** Ad hoc appointments are a temporary fix that don't address the root causes of judicial vacancies, potentially delaying long-term reforms and the strengthening of the judicial workforce.
- **Potential Bias:** If not carefully selected, ad hoc judges may face challenges in maintaining impartiality or avoiding external influences, especially if their appointment is politically motivated.
- **Disruption of Collegiality and Court Dynamics:** The appointment of retired judges may disrupt the established working environment of courts.
- **Limited Knowledge of Current Legal Trends:** Legal developments may change the landscape of law, and retired judges may struggle to remain current with modern jurisprudence, which could lead to discrepancies in rulings.
- **Limited Jurisdiction:** Ad hoc judges are appointed for specific cases or timeframes, potentially creating limitations on their jurisdiction and scope of work. Their role might be limited to temporary assignments, leaving gaps in addressing long-term judicial needs.
- **Constitutional Concerns:** Critics argue that the use of ad hoc judges may undermine the integrity of the judicial process by deviating from constitutional requirements for a fully staffed judiciary.
 - ✓ Some legal experts argue that Article 224A was intended for rare situations, not routine case backlogs.
- **Health and Efficiency:** Older judges may face health issues impacting their performance.



Electoral Trusts

Following the Supreme Court's (SC) scrapping of electoral bonds in February 2024, political party donations via have electoral trusts surged, as per Election Commission of India's reports for the last financial year.

- ✓ Nearly 75% of the ₹1,075.7 crore donated to the Prudent Electoral Trust, the highest recipient, came after the SC's 2024 ruling. Donations to the trust nearly tripled from ₹363.16 crore the previous year to ₹1,075.7 crore last financial year i.e. 2023-24.

An electoral bond was a promissory note issued by designated State Bank of India (SBI) branches, enabling companies or individuals to donate to registered political parties. Introduced under the **Electoral Bond Scheme, 2018**, it operated with specific rules on issuance, purchase, and validity.

About Electoral Trusts

An Electoral Trust (ET) is an organization registered under the Companies Act, 1956, established exclusively to receive contributions from individuals and companies and distribute them to political parties.

- At present, nineteen electoral trusts are active, with the biggest being Prudent Electoral Trust, which has multiple corporate donors.

Objective: To ensure transparency in political funding, reduce the influence of unaccounted money, and provide a structured mechanism for donations to political parties.

Governing Laws: In 2013, the Central Government amended the Income Tax Rules, 1962, inserting Rule 17CA to define the functions of electoral trusts approved by the CBDT. It also introduced the **Electoral Trusts Scheme, 2013**, outlining eligibility, registration procedures, and registration formats for such trusts.

Key Features of Electoral Trusts

- **Contributions:** Contributions must be made through cheques, bank drafts, or electronic transfers.

Eligible Contributors	Non-Eligible Contributors
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Indian citizens.• Companies registered in India,• Firms, and Hindu Undivided Families (HUFs).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Foreign entities.• Non-Indian citizens or residents.• Other registered electoral trusts are not allowed.

- **Distribution of Contributions:** ETs must distribute **up to 95%** of the voluntary contributions received (along with any surplus from the previous year) to eligible political parties. A maximum of **5% or ₹3 lakh**, whichever is lower, can be retained for administrative expenses.
- **Restrictions:** Contributions cannot be used for the direct or indirect benefit of ET members or contributors. ETs are prohibited from engaging in activities unrelated to their primary purpose of distributing contributions to political parties.
- **Transparency and Accountability:** ETs must maintain detailed records of donors, amounts contributed, funds distributed, and expenses incurred. Accounts must be audited, and an annual report, including details of contributors and fund disbursement, must be submitted to the Commissioner of Income Tax.
 - This mechanism allows visibility into donors and beneficiaries. However, if multiple contributors and recipients are involved, it becomes challenging to identify which donor funded which party.

Advantages of Electoral Trusts	Disadvantages of Electoral Trusts
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transparency in Political Funding: They ensure detailed reporting of contributions and distributions, reducing the use of opaque funding channels like cash donations.<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ According to the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), the use of Electoral Trusts has significantly improved the traceability of donations• Regulation of Donations: Contributions are strictly limited to Indian citizens, registered companies, firms, or HUFs, preventing foreign influence in political funding.<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ The prohibition of foreign funding aligns with the provisions under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), 2010• Streamlined Fund Distribution: A requirement to distribute at least 95% of collected funds to eligible	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limited Identification of Donor-Recipient Links: When multiple contributors and beneficiaries are involved, it becomes unclear which donor funded which political party, reducing complete transparency.• Operational Restrictions: Electoral trusts must limit their operational expenses to 5% of their funds (capped at ₹3 lakh), potentially creating challenges for effective management.<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Contrast with more flexible systems like the Political Action Committees (PACs) in the U.S., which have greater operational expenditure flexibility.• Exclusion of Foreign Donations: While this prevents external influence, it may limit funding opportunities for parties that could legally receive foreign contributions under other frameworks.

<p>political parties ensures that contributions serve their intended purpose.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal and Tax Compliance: They operate under clear rules and must submit audited accounts, enhancing accountability and compliance with tax regulations. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Donors receive tax exemptions under Section 80GGB and 80GGC of the Income Tax Act, incentivizing lawful contributions. • Anonymity with Transparency: While overall contributors and beneficiaries are disclosed, individual allocations can remain anonymous if multiple donors and parties are involved, balancing privacy with transparency. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Balances concerns of Right to Privacy (Article 21) with the Right to Information (RTI) for public accountability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Many democracies, like the U.K. and Canada, allow limited foreign contributions but under strict regulatory oversight. • Dependence on Voluntary Contributions: Electoral trusts rely on voluntary donations, which could fluctuate and may not provide a consistent funding source for political parties. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Trusts like the Prudent Electoral Trust have seen fluctuating donation patterns year-to-year, influenced by corporate priorities. • Potential for Influence: Although transparent, large contributions from corporations or individuals through trusts could still raise concerns about undue influence over political parties. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Risks of crony capitalism where businesses influence public policy in their favor.
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Electoral trusts are a significant step toward transparency and regulation in political funding. However, limitations in donor-recipient clarity and operational challenges highlight the need for further reforms to maximize their effectiveness.



Arunachal Pradesh's Anti-Conversion Law

The Arunachal Pradesh government is working to revive a 1978 Act aimed at preventing "forceful" conversions by formulating rules for its implementation, 46 years after the legislation was originally enacted.

What is Arunachal's Anti-Conversion Law

Enacted by Arunachal Pradesh's first Legislative Assembly in 1978, the law aims to prevent forced or induced religious conversions amidst fears of erosion of indigenous faiths like Donyi-Polo and traditional Buddhist practices.

- ✓ **China's Proximity:** Arunachal shares a border with China, which claims the state as "South Tibet." Preservation of indigenous identities is seen as vital to counter Chinese cultural and ideological influence in the region.

Key Provisions

- **Criminalization of Forced Conversions:** It prohibits conversions achieved through force, inducement, or fraud, with offenders facing up to two years of imprisonment and a fine of ₹10,000.
- **Mandatory Reporting of Conversions:** Converts and those facilitating conversions are required to report the act to the Deputy Commissioner, with penalties for non-compliance.
- **Protection of Indigenous Faiths:** The law safeguards "indigenous" faiths, including Donyi-Polo worship and various forms of Buddhism practiced by communities like the Monpas and Sherdukpens.

Need

- Arunachal Pradesh is home to diverse tribal communities with distinct cultural and religious practices.
- Unlike other northeastern states, Christianity gained a foothold in Arunachal Pradesh only after the 1950s due to earlier restrictions under the **Inner Line system**.
- Missionary activity led to rapid growth in Christian converts, sparking debates on preserving indigenous faiths. This triggered the demand for legislation to regulate conversions.

Why Has the Act Remained Dormant?

- **Initial Opposition and Controversy:** The Act faced resistance even before receiving Presidential assent. **Bakin Pertin**, a Christian MP from Arunachal Pradesh, opposed the Act. The **Nagaland Legislative Assembly** also passed a resolution against it.
- **Advocacy for Repeal:** The **Arunachal Christian Forum (ACF)** was formed in response to the Act's enactment which termed it an "anti-Christian law" with the potential for misuse by authorities. The ACF continues to advocate for its repeal.
- **Demographic Changes and Political Sensitivities:** The **2011 census** showed Christians as the largest religious group in Arunachal Pradesh, making up **30.26%** of the population. This growth in numbers has bolstered opposition to the Act. Political leaders have been reluctant to implement the law due to the increasing influence of the Christian population and concerns about potential misuse.
- **Political Statements and Backtracking:** In 2018, the state government indicated that the government was considering repealing the Act. This remark drew criticism, including from an RSS functionary, who clarified that the statement referred only to evaluating the Act's efficacy.
- **External Influences and Cultural Dynamics:** Opposition groups express concerns about potential interference from external forces, such as the **RSS** and its affiliates, who see indigenous faiths as extensions of **Sanatana Dharma**. This dynamic has further complicated the Act's implementation.

Why is the Act Back Now?

- **Legal Push for Implementation:** In 2022, **Indigenous Faiths and Cultural Society of Arunachal Pradesh (IFCSAP)**, filed a PIL in the Itanagar bench of the Gauhati High Court seeking court intervention over the state government's failure to frame rules for implementing the Act.
 - On **September 30, 2023**, after the Advocate General informed the court that draft rules had been prepared and would be finalized within six months, the court closed the petition, expecting timely finalization of the rules.
- **Concerns Over Rapid Conversions:** According to IFCSAP's General Secretary, the Act is essential to counter rising conversion rates in some districts, allegedly reaching **90%**. As conversions lead people to abandon their traditional practices, often labeling them as "alien" or "evil," thus threatening indigenous cultural preservation.
- **Cultural and Religious Context:** The **2011 census** reported Hinduism as the second-largest religion in the state (29.04%), followed by **Other Religions** (26.2%) and Buddhism (11.77%).
 - A report from the **1971 census** observed that many tribal followers of indigenous faiths identified their religion as Hinduism due to perceived similarities, such as the multiplicity of deities and customary rituals.
 - Sudden demographic changes due to religious conversions may disrupt the socio-cultural fabric, creating communal tensions.
 - The diminishing share of indigenous faiths fuels apprehensions about their survival.
- **Preservation Efforts by Indigenous Groups:** Groups like the IFCSAP emphasize documenting and institutionalizing indigenous beliefs and practices as a cultural safeguard. The revival of the Act is seen as a protective measure against what they perceive as cultural erosion caused by conversions.

Anti-Conversion Laws Across Indian States

- **Orissa Freedom of Religion Act, 1967: First anti-conversion law in India.** Prohibits conversions through force, inducement, or fraud. Punishment: **1-year imprisonment, ₹5,000 fine, or both.**
- **Gujarat Freedom of Religion Act, 2003 (Amended 2006, 2021):** Punishes forced conversion with **3 years imprisonment** and up to **₹50,000 fine**. Higher penalties for cases involving women, minors, SC/ST. Includes provisions related to interfaith marriages; sections stayed by the High Court in 2021.
- **Chhattisgarh Religion Freedom (Amendment) Act, 2006:** Requires **30 days prior approval** from the DM for conversion. Punishment: **3 years imprisonment, ₹20,000 fine, or both.**

- **Chhattisgarh Religion Freedom (Amendment) Act, 2006:** Requires **30 days prior approval** from the DM for conversion. Punishment: **3 years imprisonment**, ₹20,000 fine, or both.
- **Jharkhand Freedom of Religion Act, 2017:** Imposes strict penalties, including **4 years imprisonment** and ₹1 lakh fine for converting minors, women, or SC/ST persons. Non-bailable offences, requiring DM's prior permission for conversions.
- **Uttarakhand Freedom of Religion Act, 2018:** Penalizes forced conversions with **1-5 years imprisonment** (2-7 years for minors, women, SC/ST). Non-bailable offences; complaints can be filed by family members.
- **Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Act, 2020:** Mandates declarations for conversion to the DM **1-2 months in advance**. Punishment: **1-10 years imprisonment**, higher for minors, women, SC/ST. Marriages for the sole purpose of conversion can be declared void.
- **Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, 2020:** Prohibits conversion through force, fraud, or marriage. Requires a **60-day prior declaration** to the DM. Punishment: **3-10 years imprisonment**, depending on the case.

Judicial Precedents

The Supreme Court in **Rev. Stanislaus v. State of Madhya Pradesh (1977)** upheld anti-conversion laws in Madhya Pradesh and Orissa, asserting that "propagation" does not imply the right to convert others forcibly or fraudulently.

However, any misuse of such laws could violate Articles 14 (Equality) and 21 (Right to Life and Liberty).

- **Karnataka Protection of Right to Freedom of Religion Act, 2021:** Penalizes forced conversions with **3-10 years imprisonment** and fines up to ₹1 lakh. Declares marriages for forced conversion purposes as void. Requires **30 days prior notification** to the DM.
- **Haryana Prevention of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Act, 2022:** Punishment: **1-10 years imprisonment**, higher for minors, women, SC/ST. Concealing religion for marriage is punishable by **up to 10 years imprisonment** and ₹3 lakh fine.

Key Features Across States

- ✓ **Mandatory Reporting:** Most laws require prior declarations or permissions for conversion.
- ✓ **Higher Penalties:** Stricter punishments for converting minors, women, and SC/ST individuals.
- ✓ **Marital Provisions:** Some laws declare marriages solely for conversion purposes as void.
- ✓ **Cognizable and Non-Bailable Offences:** Offences under these laws are serious, requiring police intervention without prior approval.

International Parallels

Countries like Nepal and Myanmar have enacted stringent anti-conversion laws to protect indigenous religious practices. These laws, however, face criticism for being discriminatory against minorities.

Analysis of Anti-Conversion Laws

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Protection of Vulnerable Communities: The laws aim to protect economically or socially disadvantaged groups from being coerced or induced to convert through fraudulent means or material inducements. 2. Preservation of Indigenous Cultures: Many tribal and indigenous communities see religious conversion as a threat to their cultural and spiritual heritage. Anti- 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Violation of Fundamental Rights: Article 25 of the Indian Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of religion, including the right to propagate one's faith. Critics argue that these laws infringe upon individual freedom to choose their religion and share their beliefs. 2. Scope for Misuse: Anti-conversion laws are often criticized for being vaguely worded, leading to their misuse against minority communities. False

conversion laws are viewed to preserve these unique traditions.

3. Prevention of Social Tensions: In a country as diverse as India, mass conversions- whether voluntary or not- can lead to social unrest. Supporters claim these laws help maintain communal harmony.

4. Accountability and Transparency: Requiring prior notice or permission for conversions ensures oversight and prevents unlawful activities, such as forced or fraudulent conversions.

accusations of forced conversions can result in harassment or intimidation.

3. Stigmatization of Religious Minorities: These laws often disproportionately affect religious minorities, fueling narratives that they are involved in unethical conversion practices. Such perceptions may worsen inter-religious relations.

4. Lack of Evidence for Forced Conversions: Opponents argue that there is insufficient empirical evidence to suggest that large-scale forced conversions are occurring in India. Many believe the laws are driven by political motives rather than genuine concerns.



First Advance Estimates

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) released the First Advance Estimates (FAE) of India's GDP growth for the current financial year (**2024-25 or FY25**).

First Advance Estimates (FAE)

- The FAE, which were first introduced in 2016-17, are typically published at the end of the first week of January. They are the "first" official estimates of how GDP is expected to grow in that financial year.
- But they are also the "advance" estimates because they are published long before the *financial year (April to March) is over*.
- Even though the FAE are published soon after the end of the third quarter (October, November, December), they do not include the formal Q3 GDP data, which is published at the end of February as part of the Second Advance Estimates (SAE).
- Since the SAE will be published next month, the Union Finance Ministry uses the FAE to decide the next financial year's Budget allocations.

GDP Forecast

- The GDP is essentially the monetary measure of all the goods and services produced within a country's borders in a year. It provides the size of the economy.
- **India's nominal GDP** is expected to be **Rs 324 lakh crores** by March-end. This is a **growth of 9.7 percent** over the last financial year (FY24).
- The nominal GDP is used to arrive at the US dollar equivalent figure for the size of the Indian economy. At an exchange rate of 85 rupees to a dollar, India's GDP in FY25 will be **\$3.8 trillion**.

Calculation of FAE

- The FAE are derived by extrapolating the available data. **Extrapolation** is a process of estimating the values of a particular metric by assuming that existing trends will continue.
- The sector-wise estimates are obtained by extrapolating indicators like:
 - Index of Industrial Production (IIP) of first 7 months of the financial year.
 - Financial performance of listed companies in the private corporate sector available for Q1 and Q2 of 2024-25
 - The 1st Advance Estimates of crop production.
 - Production estimates of Major Livestock Products for summer & rainy season,
 - Fish Production; Production/Consumption of Cement, Steel etc;
 - Net Tonne Kilometres and Passenger Kilometres for Railways;
 - Passenger and Cargo traffic handled by Civil Aviation;
 - Cargo traffic handled at Major Sea Ports;
 - Sales of Commercial Vehicles;
 - Bank Deposits & Credits;
 - The accounts of central & state governments;
 - Data on outward Supplies of Goods and Services available from GSTN upto November 2024.

- This nominal GDP is lower than the budget estimates presented last February in the Interim Budget (Rs 328 lakh crore) as well as the full Union Budget presented in July (Rs 326 lakh crore).
- However, it is the “real” GDP that matters. It tells the extent to which India produced more goods and services. The **real GDP is derived by removing the effect of inflation** from nominal GDP.
- The nominal GDP of a country can go up either because the country produces more goods and services or because the prices of existing goods and services have gone up (due to inflation). Mostly, both these factors lead to an increase in GDP.
- **India’s real GDP will be Rs 184.9 lakh crore in FY25 — that’s just 57% of the nominal GDP;** the remaining part is the effect of prices going up.
- As the table shows, the **rate of growth of India’s economic output (GDP) is decelerating**. However, it does not mean that the economic output is falling; only the rate at which it is growing from one year to another is getting lower.
- Since FY20 (the year before Covid), India’s real GDP has grown at a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of just 4.8%.
- This is in contrast to the almost 7% average annual growth rate that India had since the 1991 economic reforms.
- On the nominal GDP front, annual increases of less than 10 percent are in contrast to India’s record in the recent past. Between 2003-04 and 2018-19, nominal GDP grew at an average rate of around 13.5 percent.

Decelerating trajectory of India's GDP since 2014				
Year	Nominal GDP (in Rs)	Nominal GDP Growth Rate (in %)	Real GDP (in Rs Lakh Crore)	Real GDP Growth Rate (in %)
2013-14	112.3		98	
2014-15	124.7	11	105.3	7.4
2015-16	137.7	10.5	113.7	8
2016-17	153.9	11.8	123.1	8.3
2017-18	170.9	11	131.4	6.8
2018-19	189	10.6	139.9	6.5
2019-20	201	6.4	145.3	3.9
2020-21	198.5	-1.2	136.9	-5.8
2021-22	236	18.9	150.2	9.7
2022-23	269.5	14.2	160.7	7
2023-24	295.4	9.6	173.8	8.2
2024-25	324.1	9.7	184.9	6.4
CAGR since 2014-15	10.1		5.9	
CAGR since 2019-20	9.4		4.8	

Reasons for Declining Rate of GDP

- GDP is calculated by adding up all the money spent in the economy. There are **four main categories** in which all spending is categorised; these can be seen as the four engines of GDP growth in the economy.

Year	PFCE (private spending) (in Rs Lakh Crore)	Growth rate in PFCE (in %)	GFCE (Govt spending) (in Rs Lakh Crore)	Growth Rate in govt spending	GFCF (spending for investments) (in Rs Lakh Crore)	Growth rate of investments	Net Exports (in Rs Lakh Crore)	Growth in Net Exports (in %)
2013-14	55.6		9.8		31.9		-1.8	
2014-15	59.1	6.4	10.5	7.6	32.8	2.6	-1.6	-11.8
2015-16	63.8	7.9	11.3	7.5	34.9	6.5	-1.4	-9.1
2016-17	69.0	8.1	12.0	6.1	37.9	8.5	-1.3	-5.7
2017-18	73.3	6.2	13.4	11.9	40.8	7.8	-4.8	257.6
2018-19	78.5	7.1	14.3	6.7	45.4	11.2	-4.4	-8.2
2019-20	82.6	5.2	14.9	3.9	45.9	1.1	-5.1	16.1
2020-21	78.2	-5.2	14.8	-0.9	42.6	-7.3	-2.8	-44.0
2021-22	87.3	11.6	14.8	0.1	50.1	17.7	-1.5	-47.0
2022-23	93.2	6.8	16.1	8.8	53.5	6.8	-0.7	-52.7
2023-24	96.9	4.0	16.5	2.5	58.3	9.0	-4.0	459.7
2024-25	104.0	7.3	17.2	4.2	62	6.3	-1.1	-72.7
CAGR since 2014-15	5.9		5.3		6.2		-4.4	
CAGR since 2019-20	4.8		3.1		5.3		-20.6	
Source: MoSPI, CMIE, Indian Express research								

Private Final Consumption Expenditure (PFCE)	Government Final Consumption Expenditure (GFCE)	Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF)	Net Exports
PFCE covers the spending by people in their individual	GFCE is the <u>total amount of money spent by the government on goods</u>	GFCF is the second biggest component of the GDP and accounts for almost 30% of	It is the net spending as a result of Indians spending on imports

<p>capacity. It accounts for almost 60% of India's GDP.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If this growth rate is low then it not only drags down overall GDP, it also discourages private sector from investing in the economy. • For the current year, PFCE is expected to grow by 7.3%, but it has a CAGR of just 4.8% since FY20. • If the biggest engine of GDP growth itself is growing at less than 5% it is not surprising that overall GDP growth rate since the start of April 2019 has also been at 4.8%. 	<p><u>and services for the country</u>. This includes the cost of running schools, hospitals, salaries and other public services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What distinguishes governments from every other player in the economy is that governments can potentially spend in excess of their incomes; and almost all governments do. • When the rest of the economy is struggling, governments are expected to borrow money (and/or even print it) and spend it in the manner that re-energises the economy. • However, the government's own spending has barely grown — just 4.2% in the current year and an average of 3.1% since the start of 2019. 	<p>the GDP. It includes spending towards boosting the productive capacity of the economy, also called investments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This could be in the form of governments making roads, companies building factories or buying computers for their offices etc. • Typically, such spending goes up either because private businesses find it profitable to expand capacity (in the hope of selling to the general public) or because governments boost capital expenditure (that is, spending towards physical infrastructure). • In the current year, this spending is expected to rise by 6.3% but since 2019 it has gone up by just 5.3% annually. • This is not surprising because unless private consumption rebounds, businesses will not invest in fresh capacity, irrespective of the tax incentives. 	<p>and foreigners spending on Indian exports.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When data for any particular year shows up with a negative sign, it suggests Indians are importing more than they are exporting • Since India typically imports more than it exports, <u>in most years net exports is a negative number and this component drags down India's overall GDP</u>. • Therefore, negative growth rates in this category are a good development. For the current year as well as <u>in the recent past, this gap between exports and imports has reduced</u>.
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Analysis

- On the surface, India's economy has registered high growth rates of GDP after the Covid pandemic.
- But, as the data above shows, a large part of India's recent high growth rates is **because of the low base of GDP, due to a contraction of GDP in 2020-21**.
- If a slightly longer period is covered by including 2019-20 (the year just before Covid), it shows that India's real economy is growing at less than 5% per annum — almost half the rate at which it should ideally grow if it wants to become a developed country by 2047.



Indonesian President as Chief Guest in Republic Day Celebration

President of Indonesia, Prabowo Subianto paid a State Visit to India. He also attended the celebrations of the 76th Republic Day of India as the Chief Guest.

Key Outcomes of the Visit

- **Strengthening Maritime Cooperation and cyber security cooperation**
 - Agreement to establish a **bilateral maritime dialogue and cyber security dialogue**.
 - Renewal of the **MoU on Maritime Safety and Security Cooperation**
 - Ongoing discussions on the **White Shipping Information Exchange agreement**.
 - Indonesia to position an **International Liaison Officer** at India's **Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), Gurugram**.
 - Commitment to **unimpeded lawful maritime commerce** and peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with **UNCLOS 1982**.
- **Boosting Defence and Security Ties**
 - Commitment to **regular high-level bilateral dialogues**, including the **India-Indonesia Security Dialogue, Consular Dialogue, and Policy Planning Dialogue**.
 - Ratification of the **Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA)** to deepen military ties.
 - Agreement to hold the next **Defence Ministers' Dialogue** at an early date.
 - Strengthened defence cooperation through:
 - ✓ **Cadet exchanges** between Naval Academies and National Defence Universities.
 - India to support Indonesia's **defence modernization** through experience sharing.
- **Regional Stability and South China Sea Disputes**
 - Commitment to peaceful resolution of disputes in the South China Sea.
 - Support for the full implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties (DOC).
 - Call for an effective and substantive Code of Conduct (COC) in line with UNCLOS 1982.
- **Food Security and Social Initiatives**
 - India to support Indonesia's mid-day meal scheme by sharing expertise.
 - Facilitation of Indonesian officials' visits to India to study food security measures.
 - Invitation for Indonesian officials to collaborate with the Food Corporation of India.
- **Diplomatic and Strategic Engagements**
 - Establishment of a Track 1.5 dialogue mechanism between think tanks of both countries.
 - Recognition of the importance of regular ministerial and official-level dialogues.

India – Indonesia Bilateral Relationship

- **Historical and Cultural Bonds:**
 - Hinduism, Buddhism, and later Islam travelled to Indonesia from India, shaping its cultural and religious landscape.
 - The epics **Ramayana** and **Mahabharata** continue to influence Indonesian art and folklore, creating a unique cultural connection.
 - Both the countries were significant voices in the **Non-Aligned Movement**.
- **Defense and Security Cooperation:**
 - India and Indonesia have a long-standing defense relationship, formalized in 1951 and further strengthened by agreements in 2001 and 2018. Key initiatives include:

- **Joint Military Exercises:** Exercises like *Garuda Shakti* (Army), *Samudra Shakti* (Navy), and coordinated patrols (**IND-INDO CORPAT**).
- **Defense Industry Collaboration:** The inaugural India-Indonesia Defense Industry Exhibition in 2024 showcased opportunities for cooperation in defense technology and manufacturing.
- **Economic and Trade Relations:**
 - **Bilateral Trade:** Indonesia is India's second-largest trading partner in ASEAN. Trade between the two nations was **\$29.4 billion in 2023-24**, driven by:
 - **Indian Imports:** Coal, crude palm oil, and rubber.
 - **Indian Exports:** Refined petroleum, telecommunication equipment, and agricultural products.
 - **Investment and Connectivity:**
 - ✓ **Indian Investments:** Indian businesses have invested over \$1.56 billion in sectors like mining, textiles, and infrastructure.
 - ✓ **Connectivity Boost:** Direct flights between major cities like Mumbai-Jakarta and Delhi-Bali have strengthened people-to-people ties and boosted tourism.
- **Cultural and Educational Collaboration:**
 - **Cultural Engagement:** India operates two cultural centres in Jakarta and Bali, promoting yoga, classical dance, and music.
 - **Educational Cooperation:** Indonesia is a key recipient of Indian scholarships under programs like ITEC (*Indian technical and economic cooperation*) and ICCR (*Indian Council for Cultural Relations*). Discussions on higher education MoUs aim to deepen collaboration in knowledge sharing.
- **Multilateral Cooperation:**
 - India and Indonesia are active participants in multilateral forums like the **G20, ASEAN, IORA** and **BRICS**.
 - Their partnership extends to maritime security, sustainable development, and regional stability.
- **Challenge of navigating the China factor**
 - While Indonesia's deep economic ties with China may influence its policies, Prabowo's **independent policy making** offers space for cooperation with India beyond Beijing's influence.
- **Future Prospects:**
 - India and Indonesia commemorate 75 years of diplomatic relations in 2024, with numerous initiatives celebrating their shared history and future aspirations.
 - Strengthening trade, defense, and cultural cooperation remains central to their relationship, ensuring mutual growth and stability in the Indo-Pacific.



India, Afghan Taliban Govt. Hold Key Meet In Dubai

A high-level meeting between Afghan Taliban leadership and senior Indian officials was held in Dubai, with Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and Taliban Acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi in attendance.

Key Highlights Of The Meeting

- **Key Discussion Areas**
 - **Security Concerns**
 - ✓ India emphasized the importance of preventing anti-India terror groups from operating on Afghan soil.

- ✓ India raised concerns about Pakistan-based terror groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM).
- ✓ Afghan side acknowledged and expressed sensitivity to India's security concerns.

o **Development and Humanitarian Aid**

- ✓ India pledged to evaluate development projects in Afghanistan alongside ongoing humanitarian assistance.
- ✓ India has already dispatched significant aid, including food, medicines, vaccines, and earthquake relief materials. Additional support for healthcare and refugee rehabilitation was agreed upon.

Background of India-Taliban Engagement

■ **India's Stance on Taliban Governance**

- India, like other major powers, **does not officially recognize the Taliban regime due to its lack of inclusivity and treatment of women and girls.**
- However, India's engagement aims to strengthen ties with the Afghan people and support humanitarian and developmental needs.

■ **Evolution of India-Taliban Engagement**

- Initial Contact (2021): Indian Ambassador Deepak Mittal met Taliban leaders in Doha days after the Taliban seized power.
- Subsequent Meetings: Indian officials maintained low-key engagements, including Joint Secretary meetings with Taliban leaders in 2022.
- Increased Engagement: A technical team was stationed at the Indian embassy in Kabul to ensure continuity in projects.

■ **The Current Meeting**

- The meeting occurred against the backdrop of Afghanistan's strained ties with Pakistan over the activities of the Pakistan Taliban and retaliatory airstrikes.
- Dubai was chosen as a neutral venue for this high-level meeting, facilitated by the UAE government, which maintains strong ties with both India and the Taliban.

o **Chabahar Port for Trade and Aid**

- ✓ Both sides agreed to promote the use of Iran's Chabahar port to facilitate trade and humanitarian aid to Afghanistan.
- ✓ India's use of the port has received a reprieve from US sanctions.

o **Strengthening Sports Ties**

- ✓ Enhanced cooperation in cricket was discussed, with India supporting Afghan players in training and providing facilities in Noida.

- **Humanitarian Assistance Delivered So Far:** India has sent: 50,000 MT of wheat; 300 tons of medicines; 27 tons of earthquake relief aid; 40,000 liters of pesticides; Millions of vaccine doses and hygiene kits; Winter clothing and stationery kits.
- **Notable Omissions:** MEA's statement did not address issues such as women's rights, minority inclusion, or broader human rights concerns under the Taliban regime.

Key Factors Behind India's Engagement

● **Pakistan-Taliban Strains**

- o Once allies, Pakistan and the Taliban are now adversaries, with tensions escalating over border issues and Pakistani airstrikes on Afghan territory.

● **Iran's Diminished Role**

- o Iran is preoccupied with internal and external conflicts, including restoring deterrence after attacks by Israel, reducing its focus on Afghanistan.

● **Russia's Reorientation**

- o Russia is caught in its war with Ukraine and shifting towards cooperation with the Taliban as a counter-terrorism ally.

● **China's Growing Influence**

- o China has established diplomatic ties with the Taliban and is pursuing development projects and resource exploration under its Belt and Road Initiative.

● **US Policy Uncertainty**

- o With Donald Trump's return to the White House, potential re-engagement by the US with the Taliban is anticipated, prompting India to act swiftly.

Challenges	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suppression of women's and minority rights by the Taliban. • Security threats from groups like Islamic State Khorasan Province. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased stability in Afghanistan. • Taliban's willingness to safeguard Indian interests and collaborate on development initiatives.

Conclusion

India's engagement with the Taliban in Dubai signals a calculated approach to secure its strategic interests while balancing regional stability and humanitarian goals. This dialogue positions India at the forefront of shaping Afghanistan's future amidst a complex geopolitical landscape.

Although India has not granted official recognition to the Taliban government, this engagement aims to protect national and security interests, especially as regional power dynamics evolve.



Border Fencing Row With Bangladesh

- India summoned Bangladesh's Acting High Commissioner over border security and fencing issues after Bangladesh expressed concerns about alleged violations by the Border Security Force (BSF).
- The tension escalated when Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB) attempted to obstruct fencing construction along the West Bengal-Malda border.
- The 4,096.7 km India-Bangladesh border remains a longstanding source of disputes over barbed wire fencing and border management.

India-Bangladesh Border Guidelines

- **1975 Border Guidelines Between India and Bangladesh**
 - The 1975 Joint India-Bangladesh Guidelines prohibit constructing defence structures within 150 yards of the international boundary (zero line).
 - India does not classify wire fencing as defence structures, but Bangladesh and Pakistan do.
- **Challenges Due to Border Complexity**
 - The approximately 2,217 km-long border in West Bengal is marked by villages, rivers, and enclaves, complicating fencing construction.
 - Villages and houses often lie within the fencing line or directly on the international border.
 - For example, the Dahagram–Angarpota enclave in Jalpaiguri, a Bangladeshi territory within India, has fencing on the zero line.

India – Bangladesh Border (IBB)

- The India-Bangladesh border is India's longest border measuring 4096.7 km.
- It passes through **West Bengal** (2216.7 km), **Assam** (263 km), **Meghalaya** (443 km), **Tripura** (856 km) and **Mizoram** (318 km).
- The India-Bangladesh border is highly porous and a hotspot of illegal immigration, cattle smuggling, human trafficking and other illegal cross border activities.

Status of Fencing Along the India-Bangladesh Border

- **Overall Fencing Coverage**
 - Out of 4096.7 km, 3141 km have been fenced, covering eastern states including West Bengal.
- **Fencing in West Bengal**
 - As of 2023, 81.5% of 2216.7 km had been fenced, with small patches remaining unfenced due to:
 - Objections from villagers.
 - Challenging terrain.
 - Ongoing negotiations with Bangladesh.
- **Challenges in Fencing Completion**
 - The Ministry of Home Affairs highlighted delays caused by:
 - Non-cooperation from the West Bengal government.
 - Pending land acquisition in the state.
 - **Riverine Borders** - Over 900 km of the border is riverine, making fencing impossible.
 - These areas are secured by the BSF's water wing.



- **Exceptions to the 150-Yard Rule**
 - In cases where terrain, population, or water bodies make fencing at 150 yards impractical, construction near the border is negotiated with Bangladesh.
 - Villages located within 20 yards of the boundary are not relocated; instead, fencing is built close to the zero line.
- **Facilitation for Residents**
 - Gates are installed along the fencing to ensure residents' movement, with timings determined in consultation with villagers and local administration.
 - In emergencies, BSF soldiers have standing instructions to open gates immediately.
- **Negotiation and Approval for Fencing**
 - The BSF informs the BGB when exceptions to the guidelines are necessary.
 - After mutual agreement, fencing construction begins in sensitive or challenging areas.

Reasons for the Dispute

- **Violation of the 1975 Agreement:** Bangladesh opposes fencing within 150 yards of the international border, citing the 1975 India-Bangladesh guidelines.
 - They argue that even single-row fencing (SRF) breaches this agreement.
- **Impact on Border Residents:** Fencing causes inconvenience to residents living along the border, restricting their movement and activities.
- **Indian Perspective on SRF:** SRF is intended to control animal movement and curb trans-border crimes, not as a defence structure.
 - Unlike concrete walls, bunkers, or ditch cum bandh (DCB), SRF has no defence potential.
- **Objection to Smart Fencing:** Bangladesh objects to smart fencing, which includes CCTV and electronic surveillance, claiming it enables India to monitor their territory.
 - Smart fencing is primarily installed in areas where villages are within 150 yards of the border or on the boundary itself.
- **Issue of Trans-Border Crimes:** Around 60% of trans-border crimes occur in areas without fencing, especially where villages are located on the international boundary.
 - India argues that fencing would help reduce such crimes, but Bangladesh remains unyielding.



150 Years of IMD

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) celebrated its 150th anniversary on January 15, 2025.

Improvements in Forecasting by IMD

- **Enhanced Observation Network from 2014-2024**
 - **Doppler Weather Radars:** Increased from 15 to 39
 - **Automatic Weather Stations:** Increased from 675 to 1,208.
 - **High Wind Speed Recorders:** Increased from 19 to 37.
 - **Rainfall Monitoring Stations:** Increased from 3,995 to 6,095.
- **Introduction of New Systems:**
 - Seven automated weather observing systems.
 - Heliport weather observing systems.
- **Satellite Monitoring:**

- 2 **geostationary satellites**, INSAT 3DR and 3DS, monitor weather round-the-clock (replacing INSAT 3D in 2014).
- **Improved Weather Model Resolution**
 - Medium-range forecast resolution improved from 25 km to 12 km.
 - ✓ Better resolution enables forecasting for smaller areas with greater accuracy (12 km x 12 km grids).
- **Significant Gains in Forecast Accuracy**
 - **Heatwave Prediction:** 95% accuracy up to two days in advance (compared to 50% in 2014).
 - **Thunderstorm Detection:** Hourly detection accuracy improved to 86% (from 50% in 2017).
 - **Heavy Rainfall Prediction:** Accuracy up to three days in advance increased to 78% (from 50% a decade ago).
 - **Cyclone Track Prediction:** Accuracy improved by 35-40%, leading to zero loss of human lives.

India Meteorological Department (IMD)

► About

- The IMD is responsible for weather forecasting, seismology, and meteorological observations. It was established in **1875** and is headquartered in New Delhi.
- It has hundreds of observation stations across India and is the country's National Meteorological Service.

► Mandate: The IMD's mandate includes:

- Observations: Taking meteorological observations
- Forecasting: Providing current and forecast information for weather-dependent activities
- Warnings: Giving warnings against severe weather phenomena
- Statistics: Providing met-related statistics
- Research: Engaging in research

► Nodal Ministry: Ministry of Earth Sciences of the Indian Government

Towards Zero-Error Forecasting by IMD

- **Vision Document 2047**
 - **Objective:** To make India climate-smart and weather-ready by 2047, the centenary year of independence.
 - **Roadmap:** Upgradation of IMD's capabilities over the next two, five, 10, and 22 years.
- **Forecast Accuracy Goals**
 - **Zero-Error Block-Level Forecasts:**
 - ✓ Aim: Accurate severe weather predictions up to 3 days in advance by 2047.
 - **Accuracy Targets for Extended Forecasts:**
 - ✓ Five-day advance forecasts: 90% accuracy.
 - ✓ Weekly forecasts: 80% accuracy.
 - ✓ 10-day advance forecasts: 70% accuracy.
- **Enhanced Monitoring and Warnings**
 - **Goal:** Eliminate human fatalities from severe weather events within 20 years.
- **Improved Weather Model Resolution** (Current resolution: 12 km)
 - Target resolution: 5-6 km for hyper-localised weather forecasts at the village panchayat level.

From Forecasting to Weather Management

- **Transitioning to Weather Management**
 - IMD aims to evolve from a weather forecaster to a weather manager, focusing on managing rain, hail, and fog.
 - Mission Mausam, inaugurated by PM Modi, lays the foundation for weather modification and management.
- **Key Initiatives under Mission Mausam**
 - **Cloud Chamber at IITM, Pune:**
 - ✓ First-of-its-kind in India, it aims to enhance understanding of cloud physics.

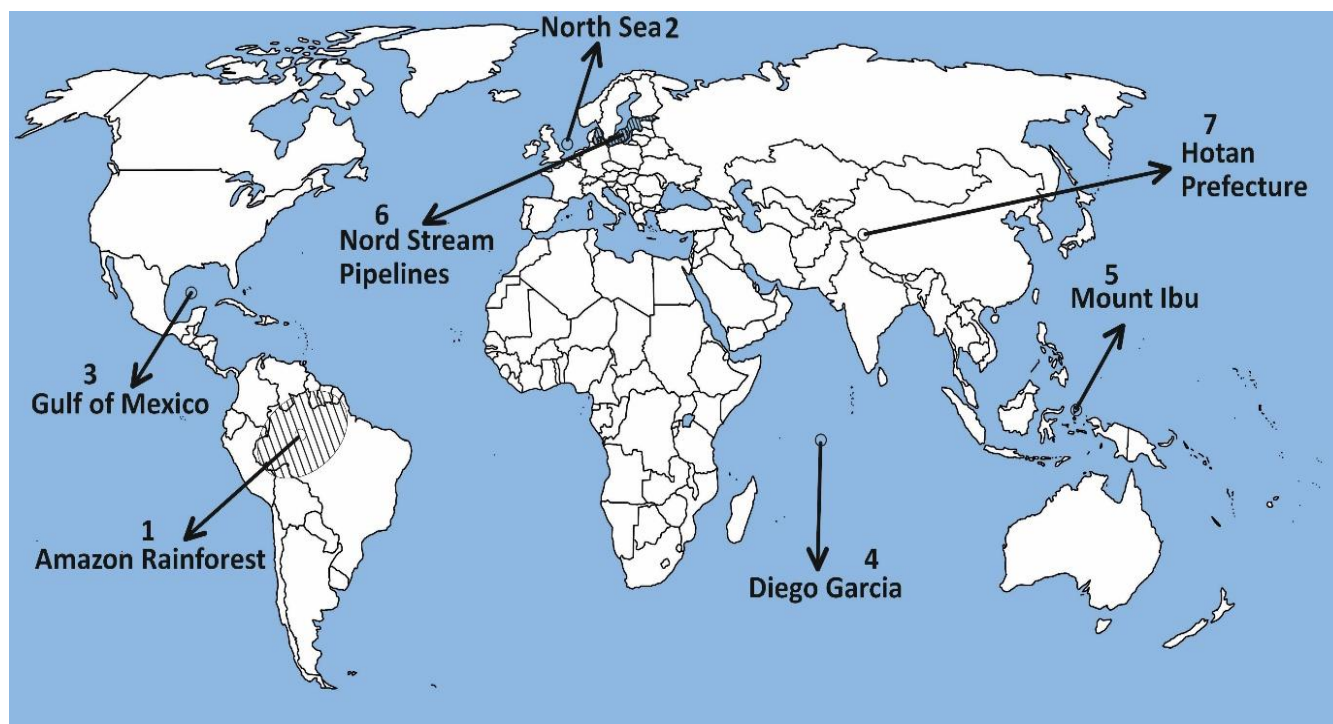
- ✓ Focus on perfecting cloud seeding to modify precipitation through human interventions.
- **Advanced Observation Systems**
 - **Technological Innovations:**
 - ✓ Use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), automated weather stations, and IoT-based sensors for data collection in remote areas.
 - ✓ Establishment of regional climate reference stations and smaller Meteorological (Met) centres.
 - **Upper Atmosphere Monitoring:**
 - ✓ Round-the-clock monitoring at 100 km x 100 km grids using satellites, aircraft-based profilers, radars, and wind profilers.
- **Enhanced Forecasting Accuracy**
 - Goal: 100% detection capabilities for all weather phenomena.
 - Improved data collection and analysis to minimise forecasting errors and enhance weather model performance.

IMD's Role in Global And Regional Meteorology

- Secretary General of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), **acknowledged India's six-decade representation at the WMO**, the longest in the Asia-Pacific.
- **WMO also highlighted India's critical role in supporting neighboring countries**, including Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, with weather forecasts.
- **For example, India's Flash Flood Guidance system** provides vital data to neighboring nations.

MAPS: PLACES IN NEWS

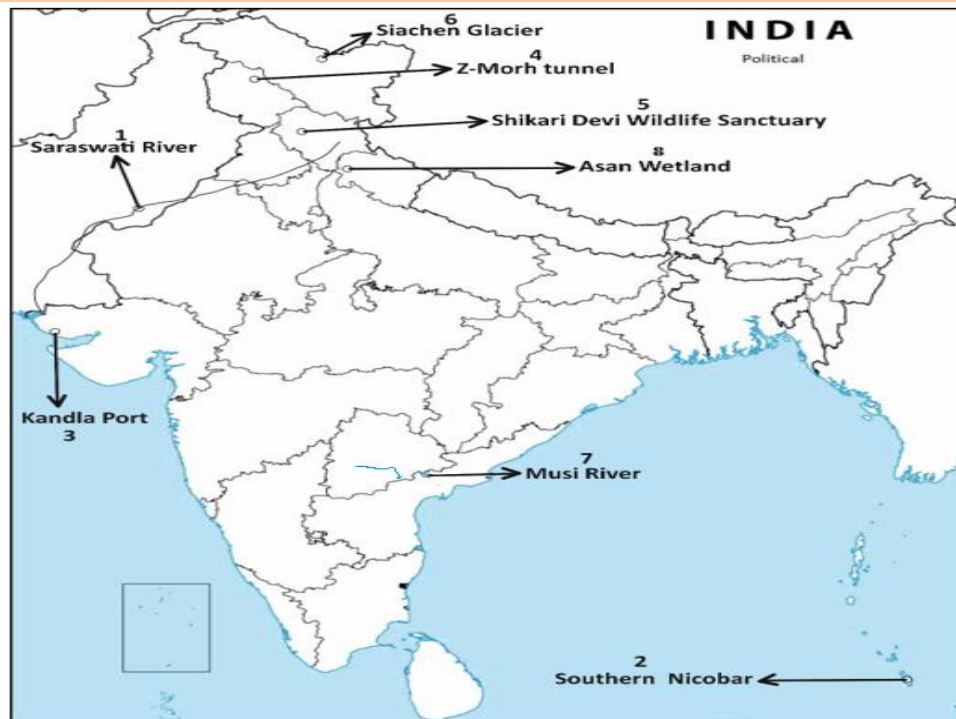
International Places in News



1	Amazon Rainforest	2024 was a devastating year for the Amazon rainforest, hit hard by wildfires and severe droughts that affected its crucial role in fighting climate change. The Amazon, (“lungs of the Earth”) the world’s largest tropical rainforest, spans across the Amazon River Basin, including countries like Brazil, Peru, Colombia, and others. It has a humid, equatorial climate with temperatures between 25–30°C and year-round rainfall.
2	North Sea	U.S. President Donald Trump called to “open up” the North Sea. This marginal sea of the Atlantic Ocean, is bordered by UK, Norway, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, and France. It lies between Great Britain to the west and mainland Europe to the east, connecting to the Atlantic Ocean via the English Channel and to the Baltic Sea via the Skagerrak Strait.
3	Gulf of Mexico	The suggestion to rename Gulf of Mexico to “Gulf of America” has sparked debate over historical, political, and cultural implications. The Gulf is shared by the United States, Mexico, and Cuba, with overlapping economic zones. It connects Atlantic Ocean via the Straits of Florida, and to the Caribbean Sea through the Yucatán Channel. Major Draining Rivers are Mississippi River, Rio Grande.
4	Diego Garcia	Group of ten fishermen from Thothoor village has been arrested by the British Navy near Diego Garcia Island. This coral atoll located in the central Indian Ocean, is a part of the Chagos Archipelago and British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT). It hosts strategic military base jointly operated by the United Kingdom and the United States.
5	Mount Ibu	Mount Ibu, one of Indonesia’s most active stratovolcanoes, erupted over 1,000 times in January 2025. It is located on the northwest coast of Halmahera Island, in North Maluku province.

6	Nord Stream pipelines	The Nord Stream pipeline leaks released an estimated 465 ± 20 thousand metric tons of methane into the atmosphere. Nord Stream the longest subsea pipeline, is an export gas pipeline which runs under the Baltic Sea carrying gas from Russia to Europe. The gas for Nord Steam comes mainly from the Bovanenkovo oil and gas condensate deposit in Western Siberia.
7	Hotan Prefecture	India has protested China's creation of two new counties, He'an and Hekang, in the Hotan Prefecture, which encompasses parts of the disputed Aksai Chin region. Hotan is an administrative division in southwestern Xinjiang, China, bordering Tibet to the south, and Ladakh and Gilgit-Baltistan to the west.

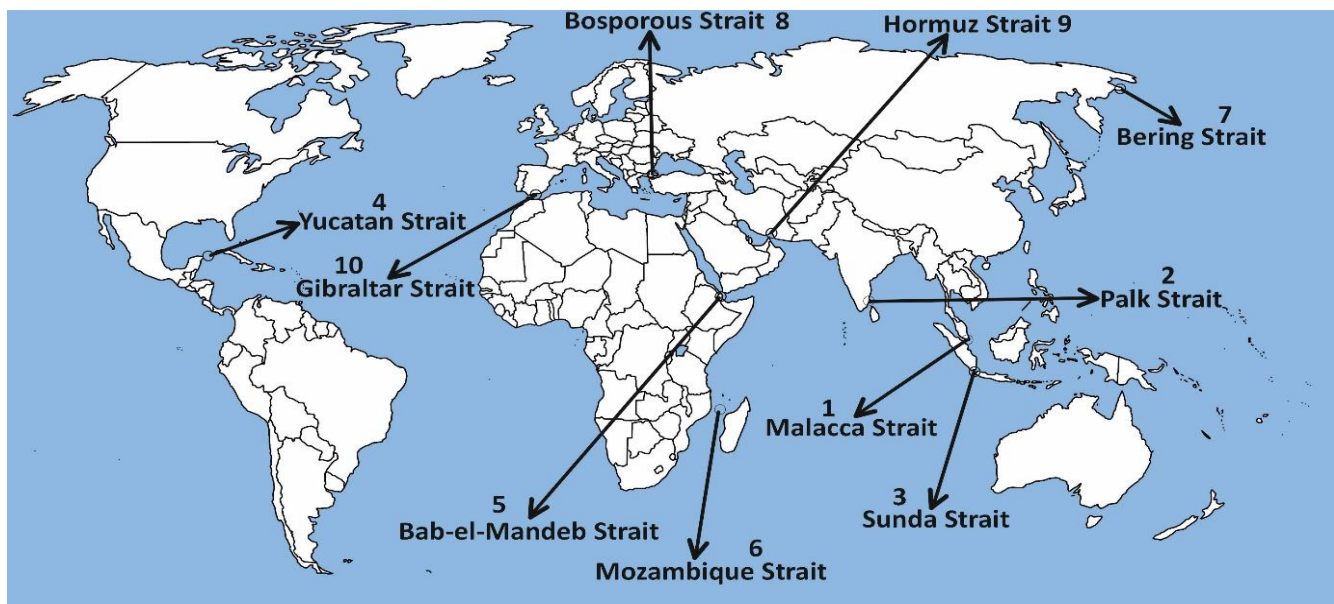
National Places in News



1	Saraswati River	A sudden geological event in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan caused water and gas to erupt during tube well drilling, igniting debate about the resurfacing of the Saraswati River. It passes through Haryana, Rajasthan, and Gujarat, with traces seen near Badrinath, Uttarakhand. It originates from Kapal Tirth in the Himalayas, near Kailash, flowing southward towards Mansarovar. It had played a vital role in the Harappan Civilization.
2	Southern Nicobar	The proposed establishment of three wildlife sanctuaries in southern Nicobar has sparked concerns over the deprivation of indigenous tribes from their ancestral lands. The Nicobar Islands located southeast of the Indian subcontinent, in Bay of Bengal, form the Nicobar district within the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Indira Point, on Great Nicobar Island, is the southernmost point of India. Other islands in the southern group include Little Nicobar, Kondul Island, and several smaller islands.
3	Kandla Port	Also known as the Deendayal Port it is a located on the Gulf of Kutch. It is currently the largest port in India by cargo volume.
4	Z-Morh tunnel	Located in Ganderbal district, Jammu and Kashmir, it connects Gagangir and Sonamarg along the NH1 Srinagar-Leh Highway. It enhances connectivity to Kargil, Baltal, and Ladakh.

5	Shikari Devi Wildlife Sanctuary	The Government of India has designated areas around Shikari Devi Wildlife Sanctuary, in Mandi district, as eco-sensitive zones (ESZs) to reduce the impact of urbanisation and developmental activities on the surrounding protected. Located in middle altitudinal range of the Himalayas(1,800 to 3,400 m), the sanctuary showcases transition from pine through oak to alpine meadow. It is home to different species of animals and birds, including the goral, monal, black bear, barking deer, musk deer, cat leopard, and the Himalayan black bear.
6	Siachen Glacier	Siachen Glacier, the world's highest and coldest battlefield, is now-equipped with high-speed 4G and 5G connectivity. Located in the Karakoram Range, it is a Piedmont glacier. The world's second-longest non-polar glacier after Tajikistan's Fedchenko Glacier. It lies between the Saltoro Ridge to the west and the main Karakoram Range to the east.
7	Musi River	The 'Musi River Historic Buildings' in Hyderabad have been put on the 2025 World Monuments Watch. The river flows through Telangana and is a tributary of the Krishna River, joining it near Wazirabad in Nalgonda district. Himayat Sagar and Osman Sagar are the two dams that are constructed over the river.
8	Asan Wetland	The Asan Wetland in Uttarakhand recently hosted the Asian Waterbird Census, recording 5,225 birds across 117 species. Located near the borders of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh in Dehradun district, it sits at the confluence of the Asan River and the Eastern Yamuna Canal. Declared as Uttarakhand's first Ramsar site in 2020, it is a critical habitat for globally endangered species like Brahminy duck, red-crested pochard, gadwall, and mallard, migrating from Central Asia.

Important Straits of the World



1	Malacca Strait	The Strait of Malacca is a narrow waterway between the Malay Peninsula (Peninsular Malaysia and southern Thailand) and the Indonesian island of Sumatra. It connects the Andaman Sea (Indian Ocean) to the South China Sea (Pacific Ocean). It's the primary route connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans. This passage is crucial for global trade, especially for the transport of oil, containers, and other goods.
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2	Palk Strait	The Palk Strait is a narrow waterway between the south-eastern coast of India (Tamil Nadu) and the northern coast of Sri Lanka. It connects Palk Bay in the northeast (Bay of Bengal) with the Gulf of Mannar in the southwest (Laccadive Sea). The strait contains several islands and a chain of shallow sandbanks known as Adam's Bridge (or Ram Setu). It stretches between India's Pamban Island (Rameswaram Island) and Sri Lanka's Mannar Island.
3	Sunda Strait	The Sunda Strait is a crucial waterway located in Indonesia, between the islands of Java and Sumatra. It connects the Java Sea (Pacific Ocean) to the Indian Ocean and separates the Java to the east from Sumatra to the west.
4	Yucatan Strait	The strait separates the Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico from the island of Cuba. It connects the Yucatán Basin of the Caribbean Sea with the Gulf of Mexico . It facilitates flow of water and marine life between these two bodies of water. The Yucatán Current, flowing from the Caribbean into the Gulf, influences the strait's strong currents and is a key part of the Gulf Stream system, impacting the climate of the Atlantic Ocean and surrounding regions.
5	Bab-el-Mandeb Strait	It is a strategically important waterway between the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. It separates Yemen from Djibouti and Eritrea. It connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden, leading to the Indian Ocean. It is one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, particularly for oil tankers. It's a key part of the sea route connecting Europe and Asia, especially for ships traveling through the Suez Canal.
6	Mozambique Strait	It is a crucial waterway in the western Indian Ocean, separating Madagascar from mainland Africa. It borders Tanzania (on the African mainland) and the Comoros archipelago (at its northern entrance). The strait is influenced by complex ocean currents, including the Mozambique Current, which flows southwards and contributes to the Agulhas Current.
7	Bering Strait	The Bering Strait is a narrow waterway separating Asia and North America. It lies between the easternmost point of the Chukchi Peninsula in Russia (Cape Dezhnev) and the westernmost point of Alaska in the United States (Cape Prince of Wales). Located just south of the Arctic Circle, it serves as a significant biogeographic boundary, dividing the flora and fauna of the two continents.
8	Bosporous Strait	It is a narrow, natural strait in northwestern Turkey serving as a crucial link between the Black Sea and the Sea of Marmara, and connecting to the Mediterranean Sea. It acts as the dividing line between Europe and Asia although both sides are part of Turkey.
9	Hormuz Strait	It connects the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea, making it a crucial chokepoint for global oil transportation. It separates Iran (north) from the Arabian Peninsula (south) . The Strait of Hormuz is considered the world's most important oil chokepoint. A significant percentage of the world's oil supply passes through this narrow waterway.
10	Gibraltar Strait	It is located at the southern tip of the Iberian Peninsula. It connects the Atlantic Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea and separates Gibraltar and Peninsular Spain in Europe from Morocco in Africa. On the northern side are Spain and Gibraltar (a British overseas territory); while on the southern side are Morocco and Ceuta (a Spanish autonomous city in northern Africa).

De-notified Tribes Classification

After three years of research, the Anthropological Survey of India (**AnSI**) and Tribal Research Institutes (**TRIs**) have for the first time systematically categorized 268 denotified, semi-nomadic, and nomadic tribes across India.

Key Findings of the Study

- **268 communities classified:** For the first time, these tribes have been systematically documented.
- **179 communities recommended for SC/ST/OBC inclusion:** This

Historical Background and the Need for Classification

- Denotified tribes were once labelled as "criminal" under the **Criminal Tribes Act of 1924**, which was repealed in 1949.
However, since then, various commissions—including the **Kaka Kalelkar Commission** (1955), the **Mandal Commission** (1980), the **Renke Commission** (2008), and the **Idate Commission** (2017)—have attempted but failed to fully classify these communities.
- The **Idate Commission's 2017 report identified over 1,200 denotified, semi-nomadic, and nomadic tribes** and highlighted 267 unclassified communities.
- This led the Indian government to form a Special Committee under the NITI Aayog in 2019, which assigned AnSI and TRIs the task of ethnographic classification.

inclusion aims to provide reservation benefits.

- **63 communities found untraceable:** These groups may have merged with other communities, changed names, or migrated.
- **Political and legal implications:** The classification has sparked debates on reservations and special status.

Impact on Reservation and Welfare Policies

- With this classification, denotified tribes could access government welfare schemes reserved for SCs, STs, and OBCs, including education and employment opportunities.
- However, this move has also raised political concerns.
- There are two competing views within the **Development and Welfare Board for Denotified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Communities**:
- **Support for Inclusion in SC/ST/OBC Lists**
 - Ensures access to education, jobs, and social welfare schemes.
 - Provides legal recognition and identity to these communities.
- **Demand for a Separate Reservation Category**
 - Advocates argue that denotified tribes should have their own classification, similar to SCs and STs, rather than being merged into existing categories.
 - Some fear that merging them into SC/ST/OBC groups might dilute reservation benefits for other communities.

Challenges and Concerns

- **Political Controversies:** Activists are questioning the basis of classification, fearing it may impact existing reservation structures.
- **Delays in Implementation:** Despite multiple commissions advocating for classification, government action has been slow, delaying welfare benefits.
- **Historical Misclassification:** Earlier census data mistakenly categorized some tribes as castes, creating confusion over their identity and legal status.

Way Forward

- AnSI and TRIs have submitted their final report to the Special Committee under the NITI Aayog.
- Currently, the committee is reviewing recommendations before preparing a final report for the government.
If the recommendations are accepted:

- State governments will have an easier pathway to include these tribes in reservation lists.
- New welfare policies could be introduced to address socio-economic inequalities faced by these communities.
- The debate on creating a separate category for denotified tribes may gain momentum.

ASER (Rural) 2024

- **The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2024** is a nationwide rural household survey (facilitated by NGO Pratham) to assess children's schooling status and their basic reading and arithmetic skills.
- Key findings of the ASER 2024 survey are presented separately for **three groups of children**: Pre-primary (age group 3-5), elementary (age 6-14), and older children (age 15-16).
- The findings highlight a **strong recovery from pandemic-induced learning losses** and point towards the effectiveness of recent educational reforms.

Performance of Government Schools

- **Enrollment trends:** Government school enrollment, which increased during the pandemic, has **nearly returned to pre-pandemic levels** - 66.8% in 2024, compared to 65.6% in 2018 and 72.9% in 2022.
- **Improvements in learning outcome:**
 - In **arithmetic**, government schools witnessed a 36.6% improvement in subtraction skills in Class III, compared to a 10.2% rise in private schools.
 - The number of Class III children in government schools who can read a Class II textbook stands at 23.4%, up from 16.3% in 2022 and 20.9% in 2018.

Factors Behind The Improvement

- The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020's focus on foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) appears to have played a crucial role.
- The Union Education Ministry's **Nipun Bharat Mission** has been a key driver of learning initiatives in primary education.

State-wise Progress

- **Remarkable recovery in low-performing States:**
 - States like **UP, Bihar, MP, and Tamil Nadu** have shown significant learning gains.
- **Improvement in high-performing States:**
 - States like **Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttarakhand, Haryana, and Odisha** showed a 10-percentage point increase in reading levels from 2022 to 2024.
 - Uttarakhand recorded a sharp rise in Class III reading levels from 24.7% in 2018 to 35.6% in 2024.

The data underscores a nationwide effort to ensure foundational literacy and numeracy among primary school children, marking a **historic milestone** in India's education system.

Key Findings from ASER 2024

► Enrollment trends:

- The overall school enrollment rate among 6-14-year-olds stood at **98.1%** in 2024, close to 98.4% in 2022.
- **Pre-school enrollment** among 3-5-year-olds increased, with a sharp rise among 5-year-olds from 58.5% in 2018 to 71.4% in 2024.

► Recovery in reading skills:

- The proportion of **Class III** students able to read at a Class II level has fully recovered from the pandemic setback, reaching 27.1% in 2024 (up from 20.5% in 2022).
- For **Class V** students, the percentage of children who can read Class II level text has risen to 48.7% in 2024, compared to 42.8% in 2022, approaching the 50.4% level of 2018.

► Progress in arithmetic skills:

- The percentage of **Class III** students able to do basic subtraction rose to 33.7% in 2024, the highest in a decade.
- The proportion of **Class V** students who can perform division increased to 30.7% in 2024, surpassing pre-pandemic levels of 27.8% in 2018.

► Digital literacy insights:

- ASER 2024 included a section on digital literacy for the first time, focusing on **smartphone access, ownership**, and basic digital skills among 14-16-year-olds.
- **More boys (85.5%)** than girls (79.4%) reported knowing how to use a smartphone.

UDISE+ Highlights

The latest data from the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) highlights critical aspects of India's school infrastructure and enrolment trends.

Single-Teacher and Zero Enrolment Schools

- The number of **single-teacher schools** in India has decreased from **1,18,190 in 2022-23 to 1,10,971 in 2023-24**, marking a significant improvement.
- This decline has also been accompanied by a drop in student enrolment in these schools, which fell from **47.43 lakh to 39.94 lakh** over the same period.
- On the other hand, the number of schools with **zero enrolments** has seen a worrying increase.
- From **10,294 schools in 2022-23**, the count rose to **12,954 schools in 2023-24**, an increase of **2,660 schools**. States such as **West Bengal (3,254 schools)**, **Rajasthan (2,167 schools)**, and **Telangana (2,097 schools)** report the highest numbers.
- Officials attribute this phenomenon to the possibility of schools awaiting new batches of students; however, if enrolment fails to resume, these schools risk closure.

Basic Amenities in Schools

- Among India's **14.71 lakh schools**, infrastructural gaps remain evident:
- Electricity:**
 - 1.52 lakh schools** still lack functional electricity.
 - Government schools account for the majority, with **9.12 lakh out of 10.17 lakh government schools** having functional electricity.
- Drinking Water:**
 - While **14.47 lakh schools** claim to have drinking water facilities, only **14.11 lakh** have them functional.
 - Approximately **24,580 schools** lack any drinking water facility.
- Toilets:**
 - 14.50 lakh** have toilets, but **14.04 lakh** are functional.
 - Government schools constitute the majority of the **67,000 schools** operating without functional toilets.
- Access for Differently-Abled Students:**
 - Only **33.2% of government schools** have disabled-friendly toilets, and of these, only **30.6% are functional**.
 - 77% of schools** have ramps, but just **52.3% have ramps with handrails**, limiting accessibility.
- Technology & Co-Curricular Activities:**
 - 50% of schools** lack access to functional computers for teaching.
 - Only **17.5% of schools** have dedicated arts and crafts rooms, with government schools lagging further at **9.9%**.
 - Among schools with secondary sections, only **1.6 lakh out of 2.86 lakh** have integrated science laboratories.
- Renewable Energy Adoption:**
 - The uptake of solar panels is minimal, with only **1.54 lakh schools (10.5%)** equipped with solar energy systems.
 - Government schools fare worse, with only **8.8%** having installed solar panels.
- Regional Disparities:**
 - Madhya Pradesh** leads in the number of single-teacher schools (**13,198**), followed by **Andhra Pradesh (12,611)**.
 - West Bengal** has the highest number of schools with zero enrolments.

Uttarakhand Adopts Uniform Civil Code

Uttarakhand government officially implemented the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) making it the first Indian state to adopt the UCC post-Independence.

The UCC, which excludes Scheduled Tribes and natives who have migrated out of the state, was passed by the State Assembly in February 2024.

Uniform Civil Code (UCC)

- The Uniform Civil Code is a law that seeks to establish a common set of legal provisions for all citizens, regardless of religion or community.

- It will standardise marriage, divorce, inheritance, property rights, and adoption laws.
- **Vision**
 - UCC as a constitutional measure aims to eliminate discrimination and ensure women's empowerment.
 - It promotes equality and does not discriminate based on gender, caste, or religion.

Key Highlights of Uttarakhand's UCC

- **Key Features of the UCC**
 - **Banned Practices:** Halala, iddat, and talaq from Muslim Personal Law.
 - **Equal Rights for Women:** Ensures equal property and inheritance rights.
 - **Mandatory Online Registrations:** Marriage, divorce, and live-in relationships must be registered on the government portal ucc.uk.gov.in.
- **Marriage Laws**
 - Legal marriage age: 21 years for men and 18 years for women.
 - Prohibits polygamy, child marriage, and triple talaq.
- **Inheritance and Property Rights**
 - Equal inheritance rights for sons and daughters.
 - Recognizes children of live-in couples as "legitimate," granting them equal inheritance rights.
- **UCC Online Portal**
 - **Aadhaar-Based Verification:** Ensures user authenticity.
 - **Multilingual Translation:** AI-based service translates content into 22 languages.
 - **Integrated Database:** Linked with 13 government departments, including police and courts.
 - **Tatkal Facility:** Emergency processing available for a nominal fee.
- **Registration Deadlines**
 - **Marriages Since 2010:** Must be registered within six months.
 - **New Marriages:** Register within 60 days of marriage.
 - **Live-In Relationships:** Register within one month of UCC implementation.
- **Live-In Relationship Rules**
 - Mandatory registration for couples aged 21 and above.
 - ✓ Parental consent required for couples under 21 years.
 - Applicable to Uttarakhand residents, including those in live-in relationships outside the state.
 - **Termination:** Can be applied for online or offline, requiring mutual consent.
 - **Pregnancy Notification:** Mandatory to report pregnancy within 30 days of childbirth.
 - **Housing Rights:** Landlords cannot deny housing to registered live-in couples.
- **Registration of Wills:** The UCC portal offers three methods for will registration:
 - Online form submission.
 - Uploading handwritten/typed wills.
 - Recording a three-minute video.
- **Registration Process**
 - Applications are reviewed within 15 days or 3 days in emergencies.
 - Sub-registrars and registrars will handle documentation and appeals.
 - Appeals against rejections must be filed within 30 days, with decisions taken within 60 days.
- **Penalties for Violations**
 - Initial warnings for non-compliance.
 - Fines for repeated violations.

National Health Mission (NHM)

The National Health Mission (NHM) has played a crucial role in enhancing India's public health by significantly reducing maternal mortality, tuberculosis (TB), and sickle cell anemia. It has also expanded human resources in healthcare and developed an integrated response to health emergencies.

These achievements were highlighted by the Central Government in its 2021-24 assessment report presented to the Union Cabinet.

Key Achievements of NHM (2021-24)

• Expansion of Human Resources

- Engagement of healthcare workers:
 - ✓ FY 2021-22: 2.69 lakh workers, including 90,740 CHOs (community health officers).
 - ✓ FY 2023-24: 5.23 lakh workers, including 1.38 lakh CHOs.
- Enhanced grassroots healthcare delivery.

National Health Mission (NHM)

- **Background:** NHM was launched by the government of India in 2013 subsuming the National Rural Health Mission (Launched in 2005) and the National Urban Health Mission (Launched in 2013).
- **Implementation Strategy**
 - The **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare** provides financial and technical support to states and UTs to ensure accessible, affordable, accountable, and effective healthcare up to the District hospital level.
- **Key Components of NHM**
 - **Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Adolescent Health (RMNCH+A):** Focuses on improving maternal and child health, reducing child mortality, and enhancing nutritional outcomes.
 - **Health Systems Strengthening:** Includes the improvement of healthcare facilities, human resources for health, and governance structures.
 - **Non-Communicable Disease Control Programmes**
 - **Communicable Disease Control Programmes**

• Reduction in Maternal and Child Mortality Rates

- **Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR):** Declined by 83% since 1990 (higher than the global decline of 45%).
- **Under-5 Mortality Rate (U5MR):** Reduced from 45 (2014) to 32 (2020).
- **Infant Mortality Rate (IMR):** Decreased from 39 (2014) to 28 (2020).
- **Total Fertility Rate (TFR):** Dropped from 2.3 (2015) to 2.0 (2020).

• Disease Control and Elimination

- **Tuberculosis (TB):**
 - ✓ Incidence reduced from 237 per 1,00,000 (2015) to 195 (2023).
 - ✓ Mortality rate decreased from 28 to 22 (2015-2023).
- **Malaria:** Cases and deaths declined by 13.28% and 3.22%, respectively, in 2021 compared to 2020.
- **Kala-Azar:** Endemic blocks achieved the target of less than one case per 10,000 by 2023.

• Vaccination Achievements

- **Measles-Rubella Elimination Campaign:**
 - ✓ Vaccinated 34.77 crore children under Intensified Mission Indradhanush 5.0.
 - ✓ Achieved 97.98% coverage.

• Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

- Administered over 220 crore vaccine doses (January 2021–March 2024).
- Implementation of the India COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health Systems Preparedness Package (ECRP) in two phases.

• Specialized Health Initiatives

- **Pradhan Mantri TB Mukh Bharat Abhiyaan:** 1.56 lakh Ni-kshay Mitra volunteers supporting 9.40 lakh TB patients.
- **Pradhan Mantri National Dialysis Programme (PMNDP):** Over 62.35 lakh hemodialysis sessions provided to 4.53 lakh patients in FY 2023-24.
- **National Sickle Cell Anemia Elimination Mission:** Over 2.61 crore individuals screened in tribal areas.

- **Digital Health Innovations**
 - U-WIN platform launched in January 2023 for real-time vaccination tracking, covering 65 districts by FY 2023-24.
- **Healthcare Infrastructure Development**
 - Certification of 7,998 public health facilities under National Quality Assurance Standards (NQAS).
 - Operational Ayushman Arogya Mandir centers increased to 1,72,148, with 1,34,650 offering 12 key healthcare services.
 - 24x7 services introduced in 12,348 Primary Health Centres (PHCs) and 3,133 First Referral Units (FRUs).
 - Mobile Medical Units (MMUs) expanded to 1,424, supported by the MMU Portal launched in 2023.
- **India's Progress Towards SDG Targets**
 - NHM's efforts have put India on track to meet U.N. Sustainable Development Goals for maternal, child, and infant mortality well before 2030.

Supreme Court Emphasizes Sensitization in Abetment of Suicide Cases

The Supreme Court stressed the need to sensitize investigation agencies and courts regarding cases under **Section 306 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860 (IPC)**, which deals with abetment of suicide.

A Bench highlighted that misuse of the provision should be avoided and called for adherence to legal principles laid down by the court.

The Bench emphasized that while genuine cases meeting the legal threshold should be prosecuted, the provision should not be misused to appease the grieving families of the deceased.

The remarks were made while acquitting a bank manager accused of abetting the suicide of a borrower who allegedly took his life due to an inability to repay loans.

Abetment of Suicide in Criminal Law

- **Definition of Abetment**
 - Under **Section 107 of the IPC** (equivalent to **Section 45 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023**), abetment involves:

Instigating a person to perform an act	Conspiring with others to commit an act	Intentionally aiding an act through action or illegal omission
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 - To prove abetment of suicide, it must be demonstrated that the accused directly instigated or aided the deceased in taking their life.
- **Punishment for Abetment of Suicide**
 - Abetment of suicide is an offence tried in a Sessions court and is cognizable, non-bailable and non-compoundable in nature.
 - As per Section 306 of the IPC (equivalent to **Section 108 of the BNS**):
 - ✓ Imprisonment: Up to 10 years.
 - ✓ Fine: Additional monetary penalty.
- **Conviction Rates for Abetment of Suicide:** According to **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) 2022** data:
 - ✓ Conviction rate for **Section 306 IPC**: **17.5%**.
 - ✓ Overall conviction rate for all IPC crimes: **69.8%**.
 - ✓ Conviction rate for cognizable offences: **54.2%**.

This highlights a relatively low conviction rate for abetment of suicide compared to other crimes.

Supreme Courts's Precedents on Abetment of Suicide

■ October 2024 Judgment

- The Supreme Court quashed a case of abetment of suicide where a salesperson died by suicide due to alleged workplace harassment related to a voluntary retirement scheme.
- The court emphasized avoiding “unnecessary prosecutions” in workplace-related suicide cases. It highlighted that:
 - A **higher bar of proof** is required in cases where the relationship between the deceased and the accused is official (e.g., employer-employee).
 - Evidence must show the **accused intended to cause the suicide**.
 - The prosecution must demonstrate **direct and alarming incitement or encouragement** by the accused.

■ M Mohan v. The State (2011)

- Proof requires an active or direct act by the accused that leaves the deceased with no option but suicide.

■ Ude Singh v. State of Haryana (2019)

- There must be proof of direct or indirect incitement to the act of suicide.
- However, if continuous acts or conduct by the accused create a situation where the deceased sees no other option, it may fall under Section 306 IPC.

Blinkit's 10-Minute Ambulance Service

A day after Blinkit, announced the launch of a 10-minute ambulance service, Union Commerce Minister emphasized the need for the initiative to adhere to India's legal framework.

- The announcement has sparked discussions about regulatory compliance, healthcare accessibility, and the state's accountability in providing basic services.

India's Need for Ambulance Services

- **Current landscape:** India has 17,495 operational Basic Life Support (BLS) ambulances and only 3,441 Advanced Life Support (ALS) ambulances.
 - Regional disparities persist, with northeastern states particularly underserved.
- **Importance of ALS ambulances:** These are crucial for trauma-related emergencies during the “golden hour” and are better equipped for critical care.

Government's Caution and Legal Obligations

- **Compliance with laws:** Union Minister Piyush Goyal underscored that Blinkit must meet legal requirements under Indian law, including guidelines outlined in the **Central Motor Vehicle Rules and Automotive Industry Standard (AIS) 125**.
- **State-level variations:** For ambulances supported by the National Health Mission (NHM), compliance depends on agreements between operators and state governments.
- **Concerns raised:** Regulatory gaps and the pressing issue of ambulance shortages in India.

Blinkit's Ambulance Service Details:

- **Service launch:** The initiative will start with five ambulances in Gurugram, with plans to expand to all major cities within two years.
- **Features and pricing:** Each ambulance is equipped with essential life-saving equipment like oxygen cylinders, AEDs, monitors, and emergency medicines, staffed by a paramedic, an assistant, and a trained driver. The service is priced at a flat Rs 2,000 fee.
- **Non-profit motive:** Aims to address critical healthcare gaps rather than generate profit.

Government and Market Dynamics

- **National Ambulance Services (NAS):**
 - The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare supports one ALS ambulance per 5 lakh population and one BLS ambulance per 1 lakh population.
 - States can request additional ambulances to address regional needs.
- **Market growth:** The Indian ambulance market, valued at \$1,502.8 million in 2022, is projected to grow at a 5.12% CAGR from 2024 to 2028.
- **Registration trends:** Ambulance registrations peaked in 2021 but have since declined, indicating reduced focus on healthcare post-pandemic.

As private players like Blinkit step in, the government must simultaneously strengthen its healthcare delivery systems to meet the growing demands of the population.

Transgender People Can Change Their Name & Gender On Birth Certificates

Five years after the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 was enacted, the Karnataka High Court intervened to allow a transgender woman to change her name and gender on her birth certificate.

This step was necessary as she was earlier denied the change, despite such provisions being explicitly allowed under the 2019 Act and its rules.

Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019

- **About**

- The act allows transgender individuals to obtain a "**certificate of identity**" (Section 6) and revise it after **sex-reassignment surgery** (Section 7).
- The Act mandates that gender recorded on this certificate must appear on all official documents.
- It also explicitly permits changing the first name and gender in the birth certificate and other identity documents based on this certificate.

- **Rules and Procedures Under the 2020 Rules**

- The *Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Rules, 2020* outline the procedure for obtaining the certificate and include a list of official documents eligible for revision, with the "Birth Certificate" as the first entry.

Karnataka HC's Ruling

- **Conflict Between the 1969 Act and the 2019 Act**

- The *Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969* restricts changes to birth certificates to cases of "erroneous," "fraudulent," or "incorrect" entries (Section 15).
- However, the Karnataka HC found this general law to be in conflict with the Transgender Persons Act, 2019, a special law aimed at protecting transgender rights.

- **Legal Principle: Special Law Prevails Over General Law**

- The HC applied the principle of *generalia specialibus non-derogant* ("the special shall prevail over the general"), holding that the specific provisions of the 2019 Act override the general provisions of the 1969 Act.
- The court also emphasized that this must be followed "until suitable amendments are made to the 1969 Act."

Application Process for Certificate of Identity

- **Application Process**

- Under the *Transgender Persons Rules*, individuals must file an application with the District Magistrate (DM) along with an affidavit declaring their gender identity.
- The DM will process the affidavit and issue an identification number as proof of application.
- Within 30 days, the DM will either issue the certificate of identity and a transgender identity card or reject the application with reasons.

Background of the case

- **Ms. X vs. State of Karnataka (2024)**

- In *Ms. X vs. State of Karnataka (2024)*, the petitioner, diagnosed with gender dysphoria, underwent sex-reassignment surgery and changed her name to align her official documents with her gender identity.
- She successfully updated her Aadhaar card, driving license, and passport but faced rejection when applying to change her name and gender on her birth certificate.

- **Registrar's Rejection**

- The Registrar of Births and Deaths in Mangalore denied her request, citing **Section 15 of the Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969**.
- The provision permits changes to birth certificates only if the information is "erroneous" or entered "fraudulently or incorrectly."

- **Challenge in Karnataka High Court**

- The petitioner challenged the restrictive interpretation of Section 15, arguing that it curtailed her right to life with dignity under Article 21 of the Constitution.
- She emphasized that inconsistent documentation creates a "dual life," exposing her to harassment and discrimination.

- **Revised Certificate for Post-Surgery Applicants**
 - Transgender individuals who undergo reassignment surgery can request a medical certificate from the Medical Superintendent or Chief Medical Officer.
 - Using this medical certificate, they can reapply to the DM for a revised certificate of identity, which must be issued within 15 days.
- **Exemption for Pre-Act Changes**
 - Individuals who recorded a change in gender before the Act came into force are not required to apply for a certificate of identity under the Act.
- **Obligation to Update Official Documents**
 - Authorities responsible for issuing official documents (e.g., Aadhaar, driving license, birth certificate) must update the name, gender, photograph, or any related information within 15 days of receiving an application from a transgender person with a valid certificate of identity.

Memorials for Former Prime Ministers

With the recent passing of former Prime Minister (PM), the Union Home Ministry declared seven days of State mourning and a state funeral. Mr. Manmohan Singh was cremated at Nigam Bodh Ghat in Delhi, marking a first for any former PM. The Congress criticized the absence of a separate funeral site and demanded a memorial at the cremation location.

Rule Related to Memorials

While there are established guidelines for State funerals, no specific rule or government order mandates the allocation of a designated space for memorials of former PMs. Typically, former PMs are cremated at designated locations, recognizing their unique status. But in the case of Manmohan Singh, there was a deviation from established convention.

- ✓ Memorials for former Prime Ministers are not governed by any constitutional mandate but are a matter of policy and convention.

Past Trends- Historically, all former PM of India, except Vishwanath Pratap Singh, have been honored with memorials, mostly in Delhi and other parts of the country. For example,

Jawaharlal Nehru: Shanti
Vana

Lal Bahadur Shastri:
Vijay Ghat

Charan Singh:
Kisan Ghat

Indira Gandhi:
Shakti Sthal

Rajiv Gandhi:
Vir Bhumi

- P.V. Narasimha Rao received a memorial at Ekta Sthal in Delhi in 2015, 10 years after his death.

In 2013, citing limited space, the Congress government decided that all future memorials would be constructed at **Smriti Sthal**, a consolidated site for honoring national leaders. This trend of creating dedicated memorials underscores the societal and governmental recognition of the legacy of former Prime Ministers.

Who Maintains the Memorials?

Memorials of various prominent personalities are primarily maintained by the respective State Governments and local municipalities. However, certain exceptions are directly managed by the Central Government through the Ministry of Urban Development which oversees the upkeep of:

- Samadhis near **Rajghat**, New Delhi.
- **Morarji Desai's Samadhi** at Abhay Ghat, Ahmedabad.
- The **Rajiv Gandhi Memorial** at Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu.

Congress's Demand- Establishing a dedicated memorial for former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

Government Response- Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) clarified that the government would allocate space for a memorial after a Trust is formed. The case of Atal Bihari Vajpayee was cited as a precedent. Vajpayee was cremated at Smriti Sthal on August 16, 2018, and a memorial was constructed at the same site within 45 days. The memorial, funded by the "Atal Smriti Nyas Society," was built at a cost of ₹10.51 crore, fully borne by the society.

Does Offering a Bribe Constitute a Crime Even If It Is Refused?

The Supreme Court (SC) is set to decide if offering a bribe is punishable under the pre-2018 Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA), 1988, even if the bribe is refused. While the 2018 amendment explicitly criminalized bribe offers, conflicting High Court (HC) rulings exist for cases before the amendment.

Is an Unsuccessful Bribe Considered 'Abetment' Under the PCA?

Section 12 of Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA) punishes anyone who abets(*encourage*) an offence under the Act, regardless of whether the offence is ultimately committed. However, differing interpretations by the Bombay and Madras HC on whether offering an unsuccessful bribe constitutes abetment have led to a legal debate.

Case Background

- **Illegal Gutka Operation and Police Raid:** In a 2016 case, the police raided godowns of Rabindra Kumar Patra- proprietor of Maa Biraja Products in Berhampur (Orissa) and seized large quantities of illegal gutka, Zarda gutka, and manufacturing equipment. Patra was summoned to produce documents to verify the legality of his business.
- **Bribe Offer to Inspector:** Patra offered Rs. 2 lakhs to the inspector in charge, asking him to stop further legal action and release the seized items. But the inspector refused the bribe and warned Patra of legal consequences if the offer was repeated.
- **Formation of Trap Team:** The inspector informed the Superintendent of Police (SP) about the bribe offer. A trap team was formed, and Patra was caught red-handed offering bribe to the inspector.
- **Legal Charges Under PCA:** Patra was charged under Section 12 of PCA for abetting an offence under Sections 7 and 11 of PCA.
 - **Section 12** punishes abetment of offences under the PCA with imprisonment of 3–7 years & a fine. In *CBI v. Dr. Anup Kumar Srivastava*, the Supreme Court emphasized that abetment under PCA could be prosecuted regardless of whether the act was completed.
 - **Section 7** punishes public officials who accept bribes in exchange for official functions.
 - **Section 11** punishes public officials for accepting valuable items without adequate consideration.
- **Petition for Discharge:** Patra filed a petition under Section 239 of CrPC for discharge, arguing the allegations were groundless. The trial court rejected the discharge plea. The Orissa HC upheld the trial court's decision. The case is now before the SC for final judgment.
 - In *State of Punjab v. Baldev Singh*, the SC reinforced the need for robust evidence in cases involving corruption.

Bombay High Court's Interpretation (<i>Kishor Khachand Wadhvani v. The State of Maharashtra, 2019</i>)	Madras High Court's Interpretation (<i>Ghanshyam Aggarwal v. The State, 2020</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Case: Accused caught offering Rs. 5 Lakh to a police sub-inspector during a trap.● Ruling: Before the 2018 PCA amendment, offering a bribe was not an offence. The amendment explicitly criminalized bribe-giving. Additionally, no offence under Section 7 was established as the police officer did not demand the bribe.● Conclusion: Offering a bribe was not punishable as abetment pre-2018.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Rationale: The 1988 PCA replaced Indian Penal Code (IPC) provisions, including Section 165A, which punished abetment of crimes under Sections 161 and 165, similar to PCA Sections 7, 11, and 12.● Ruling: Past Supreme Court rulings held that offering a bribe alone was punishable under Section 165A IPC. The Madras HC held this principle continued under the PCA, making bribe offers a substantive offence even before 2018.● Conclusion: Offering a bribe, even if refused, was always punishable under the PCA.

Core Legal Debate

- The Bombay HC emphasized the absence of explicit criminalization of bribe-giving before 2018, focusing on textual changes in the law.
- The Madras HC relied on historical continuity and legislative intent, asserting that the act of offering a bribe has long been punishable under Indian anti-corruption laws.
- This divergence in reasoning forms the crux of the case now before the SC.

Kerala Forest (Amendment) Bill, 2024 Faces Stiff Opposition

The Kerala government is facing protests against the proposed Kerala Forest (Amendment) Bill, 2024 to amend the 1961 Forest Act, aimed at strengthening forest protection, especially in the Western Ghats. The bill is set for debate in the state Assembly later this month.

- The Forest Rights Act, 2006, was enacted to recognize the rights of forest-dwelling communities, emphasizing the need for participatory governance. The Kerala Forest (Amendment) Bill was perceived as contradictory to this ethos.

Objectives

- To enhance forest conservation, protect ecosystems, and combat pollution by introducing stricter penalties and new offenses.
- To empower forest officials with greater authority, promote sustainable practices like sandalwood cultivation, and improve administrative efficiency in managing forest resources and addressing violations.

Key Provisions and their Opposition

1. **New Definitions Added:** of words such as "bark," "fishing," "wild animal," and "waste material," expanding the Act's scope to include specific terminologies for better clarity.
2. **New Offenses and Prohibited Activities:** It explicitly penalizes activities like dumping plastic or waste materials in forests, poisoning water bodies, and using explosives. Entry into forests with guns, teasing or molesting wild animals, and fishing or poisoning rivers in protected areas are now offenses.
 - **Opposition:** It can impact farmers and tribals living near forests by potentially criminalizing routine activities like fishing, collecting firewood, or bathing in rivers. Also, the bill fails to address human-wildlife conflicts effectively, which have caused significant loss of life and property, and instead prioritizes punitive measures.
3. **Increased Penalties:** for various offenses have been significantly raised to reflect modern deterrent standards, such as increasing fines from Rs. 1,000 to Rs. 5,000 and from Rs. 25,000 to Rs. 50,000 for certain violations.
 - **Opposition:** The proposed increase in fines is being viewed as punitive and burdensome for rural and economically disadvantaged communities.
4. **Empowers Forest Officers:** including beat officers with greater authority to arrest without a warrant for forest-related offenses and to search premises or vehicles when required. It introduces the role of an "Appellate Officer" for handling appeals related to licensing decisions. Forest officials (range officer and above) are empowered to determine whether a product qualifies as forest produce.
 - The bill proposed to broaden the definition of 'Forest Officer' to include positions such as Tribal Watchers and Beat Forest Officers.
 - **Opposition:** Excessive powers to officials raises fears of harassment, overreach, and abuse. Provisions allowing officials to search homes without warrants and seize materials are seen as infringing on personal privacy and threatening livelihoods, particularly for subsistence farmers and forest dwellers.
5. **Sandal Tree Regulations:** It relaxes restrictions on cutting sandal trees from private lands, provided they are not part of government-reserved areas, promoting cultivation and sale through the Forest Department.
 - Religious institutions, such as the Syro-Malabar Church, highlighted potential hardships for communities dependent on forest resources.
6. **Control Over Rivers Flowing into Forests:** Rivers flowing into forests, along with those within forests, will come under the forest Act's conservation framework.
 - **Opposition:** It has raised concerns that forest officials might exercise authority over areas outside forest boundaries, impacting settlements that depend on these water bodies.
7. **Recognizes Waste Management:** issues, classifies littering and dumping waste in forests as punishable offenses to protect ecosystems.
8. **Structural and Legal Adjustments:** It proposes updated fines and processes for compounding offenses to align with contemporary standards and clarifies roles and responsibilities within forest management and legal proceedings.
 - **Opposition:** Opposition leaders and organizations describe the bill as "anti-people" and "anti-farmer," claiming it could lead to the displacement of farmers and create a "Forest Raj."

The National Anthem Controversy

Recently, the Tamil Nadu Governor walked out of the Legislative Assembly on the opening day of the first session of the year without delivering his customary address, citing the absence of the national anthem before his speech.

The Arguments

Governor's Perspective	Tamil Nadu Government's Defence
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Raj Bhavan (Governor's office) accused the Tamil Nadu Assembly of insulting the Constitution and the national anthem by not playing it before the Governor's address.• The Raj Bhavan emphasized that playing the national anthem before and after the Governor's address is a fundamental duty under the Constitution.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The State government followed its long-standing convention of playing the State anthem, Tamil Thai Vazhthu, at the beginning and the national anthem at the end of the Governor's address.• This practice, introduced in 1991 during the AIADMK government, is unique to Tamil Nadu and has been consistently followed since then.

Practices in Other Legislatures

Protocols for playing the national anthem vary across states and there is no uniform rule for playing the national anthem in all Legislative Assemblies. For instance, in Nagaland, the national anthem was not played at all for several decades and was played for the first time in February 2021 under Governor R.N. Ravi, while in Tripura, it was first played in March 2018.

Parliamentary Practice: In Parliament, the national anthem is played twice i.e., when the President arrives and leaves during the customary address at the Central Hall.



Constitutional and Legal Provisions



- Article 51(A)(a) of the Constitution states that citizens must respect the Constitution, the national flag, and the national anthem.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) provides detailed guidelines for playing the national anthem, on Following Occasions:
 - ◆ During civil and military investitures
 - ◆ With the national salute for the President, Governor, or Lieutenant Governor
 - ◆ During parades, regardless of dignitaries' presence
 - ◆ During the Beating Retreat Ceremony, marking the end of Republic Day celebrations.
 - ◆ At formal State and government functions upon the President's arrival and departure.
 - ◆ Before and after the President's address to the nation on All India Radio.
 - ◆ At formal State functions for Governors or Lieutenant Governors upon arrival and departure.
 - ◆ When the national flag is paraded.
 - ◆ During regimental color presentations.
 - ◆ For naval color hoisting ceremonies.
- The full anthem with mass singing should be played during the national flag unfurling, at cultural or ceremonial events (excluding parades), and when the President arrives at or departs from government or public functions (excluding formal State and mess functions).

Court Precedent: The Madras HC dismissed a petition seeking mandatory rules for playing the national anthem at all official functions, clarifying that it is a customary, not mandatory, practice.

Global Practices

- United States: The anthem is mandatory at sporting events and public ceremonies.
- China: Legal provisions mandate respect for the anthem, with penalties for violations.

Key Takeaways from the Controversy

- The controversy stems from differing interpretations of protocol and respect for the national anthem.
- While the Governor views the omission of the national anthem before his address as a constitutional breach, the Tamil Nadu government asserts it is adhering to its long-standing tradition.
- Practices across India vary, with no universal mandate on the sequence of playing the national anthem in legislative proceedings.

Extra Mile: The National Anthem- Related Facts and Controversies

Origin: Written by Rabindranath Tagore in Bengali as *Bharoto Bhagyo Bidhata*, it was first sung at the 1911 Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress (President- Pandit Bishan Narayan Dar).

Adoption: Declared as the national anthem in 1950; It was labelled 'national anthem' by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose for the first time during the meeting of the German-Indian Society in 1942.

Duration: Official playing time is 52 seconds. (A shortened version (20 seconds) is allowed on specific occasions.)

Translations: Translated into English by Tagore in 1919 as *The Morning Song of India* and into Hindi-Urdu by Captain Abid Hasan Safrani as *Subh Sukh Chain*.

**** The Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971, prescribes penalties for disrespecting the anthem.**

Past Controversies-

1. **Colonial Allegation:** In the 1930s, it was wrongly believed to praise King George V. Tagore refuted this, explaining it celebrated India's eternal destiny (*Bhagya Vidhata*).
2. **Supreme Court Ruling (2016- Shyam Narayan Chouksey Case):** The anthem's mandatory playing in cinemas sparked debate over patriotism enforcement.

Panchayat Se Parliament 2.0

The Lok Sabha speaker recently inaugurated the **Panchayat Se Parliament 2.0** program to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of tribal icon Birsa Munda.

Significance of Panchayat se Parliament 2.0

1. **Empowering Grassroots Women Leaders:** It focuses on women representatives from STs in PRIs, enhancing their knowledge of governance, constitutional provisions, and parliamentary procedures and equips them to address local issues effectively and advocate for their communities. Thus, fostering mutual understanding and collaboration.

✓ **Example:** The Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan in Rajasthan has demonstrated

how women-led panchayats can effectively advocate for single women's welfare.

2. **Promoting Inclusivity and Representation:** It brings together women from STs across 22 states and UTs, fostering diversity in leadership development while bridging the gap between grassroots governance and higher legislative institutions.

✓ **Example:** Tribal-dominated panchayats in Madhya Pradesh have effectively implemented Forest Rights Act, 2006, demonstrating how informed leadership can leverage laws for community welfare.

3. **Celebrating Tribal Heritage:** It honours the tribal icon Birsa Munda, symbolizing recognition of tribal contributions to India's heritage and progress and reinforces the importance of tribal communities in India's democratic framework.

✓ **Example:** Initiatives like Jharkhand's Birsa Harit Gram Yojana have utilized tribal knowledge for afforestation and employment generation.

4. **Strengthening Democracy:** It provides participants with firsthand experience of democratic institutions through guided tours of Parliament and Rashtrapati Bhavan and helps enhance their understanding of the legislative process, encouraging informed participation in democracy.

5. **Building Leadership and Capacity:** Interactive workshops and expert-led sessions aim to develop leadership skills, confidence, and problem-solving abilities in women representatives- encouraging them to take active roles in decision-making at local and national levels.

✓ **Example:** Women sarpanches in Odisha's Ganjam district have demonstrated remarkable leadership in implementing the MGNREGA program, creating sustainable livelihoods.

About Panchayat Se Parliament 2.0

It is a program designed to educate over 500 women representatives from Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) across India, particularly from Scheduled Tribes (STs) about the Constitution, parliamentary procedures, and governance to foster effective leadership among them in grassroots institutions.

- **Bridging Gaps:** Create a synergy between local governance (Panchayats) and national governance (Parliament) by exposing participants to democratic practices at higher levels.
- Leverage constitutional provisions like Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (**PESA**), 1996.

Activities Involved:

- Workshops and interactive sessions moderated by experts and MPs.
- Visits to key landmarks like the new Parliament House, Samvidhan Sadan, Pradhanmantri Sangrahalaya, and Rashtrapati Bhavan.
- Insights into the legislative process and democratic institutions.

New Student Visas

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) recently introduced two special category visas for international students intending to pursue higher education in the country:



E-student visa: For eligible international students registered on the **Study in India (SII)** portal.

E-student-x visa: For dependents of e-student visa holders

Key Features and Process

- **Mandatory Registration:** Students must register on **SII** portal and may proceed with their visa applications only after receiving an **admission offer** from one of SII's partner institutions.
- **Eligibility:** Applicable for students admitted to full-time undergraduate, postgraduate, PhD, or other formal programs at recognized Indian institutions. Eligible international students can apply for the e-student visa through the SII portal, while their dependents are eligible for the e-student-x visa.
- **Application Verification:** Visa applications are processed via indianvisaonline.gov.in, verified using a unique SII ID.
- **Duration:** E-student visas are valid for up to five years, depending on the course length, and can be extended.

Significance

- This initiative simplifies and centralizes the admission and visa process for international students, promoting India as a hub for higher education.
- Increased enrollment from Africa underlines India's commitment to fostering South-South cooperation.
- Builds goodwill among foreign students who often become informal ambassadors of Indian culture in their home countries.

About Study in India (SII) Portal

- The SII, a Ministry of Education initiative, partners with over 600 institutions to offer 8,000+ courses across diverse fields, including engineering, management, sciences, arts, law, paramedical sciences, and specialized areas like Buddhist Studies and Yoga.
- It offers undergraduate, postgraduate, doctoral, and certification programs.
 - Universities like JNU and BHU host students from over 100 countries, enriching academic and cultural discourse.
- Students can manage admissions, visa applications, and track progress using their unique SII ID.
- **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** emphasizes internationalization, and the SII portal is a crucial step in this direction.

Pravasi Bhartiya Diwas

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the 18th Pravasi Bhartiya Divas (PBD) convention held in Bhubaneswar, Odisha from 8-10 January 2025. The theme for this year was "Diaspora's Contribution to a Viksit Bharat".

Key Highlights of the 18th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas

- **Chief Guest:** Christine Carla Kangaloo, President of the Republic of Trinidad & Tobago, virtually addressed the convention.
- **Global Representation:** 27 individuals and organisations from 24

About Pravasi Bhartiya Diwas (PBD)

The day is celebrated on 9 January to commemorate the return of Mahatma Gandhi from South Africa to India in 1915. 1st PBD Convention was organized in **2003** to mark the contribution of the overseas Indian community to the development of India. Since 2015, under a revised format, PBD Convention has been organized once every 2 years.

- A High-Level Committee on Indian Diaspora, headed by **LM Singhvi**, had recommended in 2002 that the government must renew and strengthen linkages of overseas Indians to their place of origin, and with each other.

What is Pravasi Bhartiya Samman Award (PBSA)

It is the highest honor given to overseas Indians for their significant contributions in various fields including science, technology, community service, business, and more. The award is conferred during the PBD convention and is presented by the **President of India** to:

- NRIs.
- Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs).
- Organizations/ institutions established and run by NRIs/ PIOs.

countries, including Malawi, Fiji, Spain, Romania, the US, and the UK.

• **Notable PBSA Awardees:**

- ✓ **Lekh Raj Juneja (Japan):** Awarded in the ‘**Science & Technology**’ category. Former pharma CEO in Japan; now heads a snack company.
- ✓ **Robert Masih Nahar (Spain):** Honoured in the ‘**Community Service**’ category. First person of Indian origin in the Spanish Senate (2017). Promoted cricket in Catalonia, earning the title “**godfather of local cricket**”.
- ✓ **Syed Anwar Khursheed (Saudi Arabia):** Recognized in the ‘**Medical Services**’ category. Royal protocol physician for the Saudi royal family.

Indian Diaspora: Key Statistics and Influence

Population:

- USA: 5.4 million; UAE: 3.5 million; Canada: 2.8 million; Saudi Arabia: 2.4 million

Economic Contribution: The diaspora sent \$125 billion in remittances to India in 2023. (Kerala and Punjab are heavily reliant on remittances, with the funds driving economic growth and social development in these states.)

Political and Diplomatic Influence:

- The Indian diaspora plays a vital role in strengthening bilateral relations.
 - ✓ Sundar Pichai (CEO of Alphabet) and Satya Nadella (CEO of Microsoft) represent the technological leadership of Indian Americans.
 - ✓ During the US-India nuclear deal, Indian-American advocacy groups played a significant role in garnering Congressional support.
 - ✓ Indian-origin professionals in healthcare, such as Dr. Vivek Murthy, the US Surgeon General, symbolize the community’s global impact.
- Many members are becoming increasingly active in politics, particularly in the US and Canada.
 - US President Donald Trump appointed several Indian Americans to key positions in his second-term Cabinet, reflecting a shift in diversity and the growing influence of Indian American professionals in shaping US policy across sectors like AI and public health.
- The 2019 "Howdy Modi" event in Texas highlighted the diaspora's influence, with PM Modi and US President Donald Trump addressing one of the largest gatherings of Overseas Indians.

National Youth Festival (NYF)

India celebrated National Youth Day on January 12, commemorating Swami Vivekananda's birth in 1863- a philosopher and advocate for youth empowerment whose vision inspires millions. Since 1985, the Government of India has marked this day as National Youth Day, which also begins National Youth Week.

NYF 2025: It has been reimaged & restructured as the **Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue**. This transformation reflects the commitment to involve young Indians in governance and nation-building, in alignment with Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s vision of

a “**Viksit Bharat**” (**Developed India**) by 2047. Key highlights include:

- **Theme:** *Innovation in Science and Technology*; **Venue:** **Bharat Mandapam**, New Delhi.
- **Youth-Centric Leadership Dialogue:** for direct interaction between youth and national leaders, including **Prime Minister Narendra Modi**. Thus, it emphasizes the role of youth as both **agents** and **beneficiaries** of change.
- **Viksit Bharat Challenge:** A four-stage competition to identify and nurture young talent which includes:

About National Youth Festival (NYF- Started in 1995)

What is NYF? It is an annual event organized every January under the "Promotion of National Integration" component of the National Programme for Youth and Adolescent Development (NPYAD). The festival runs from **January 12 to 16**.

Organizers: Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, in collaboration with a host State/UT.

Funding: The expenses are shared between the Central Government and the host State/UT.

- **Viksit Bharat Quiz:** hosted on the **Mera Yuva Bharat (MY Bharat)** platform, testing participants' knowledge of India's progress.
 - ✓ The MY Bharat platform was launched in 2023 to empower youth with equal opportunities, resources, and tools for nation-building.
- **Essay/Blog Writing:** Topics include "*Tech for Viksit Bharat*" and "*Empowering Youth for Viksit Bharat*."
- **Viksit Bharat Vision Pitch Deck:** Participants pitch development ideas at the state level.
- **National Championship:** State winners present their ideas in New Delhi, with a chance to interact with the Prime Minister.
- **Diverse Participation:** Around **3,000 youth** from various backgrounds like:
 - Innovators and thinkers from the Viksit Bharat Challenge.
 - Talented individuals from state and district-level festivals, showcasing skills in **painting, science, and cultural performances**.
 - Youth icons from fields like **sports, technology, and entrepreneurship**.
- **Viksit Bharat Exhibition:** to showcase youth-focused projects by states and ministries.
- **Cultural Performances:** celebrating India's diverse heritage and achievements.

National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organization (NOTTO)

Central government employees who donate organs will receive 42 days of special casual leave to cover hospitalization and recovery, as announced by the *National Organ & Tissue Transplant Organization (NOTTO)*.

Key Objectives

- India has a low organ donation rate (0.52 per million population in 2022) compared to countries like Spain (46 per million). NOTTO aims to bridge this gap.
- **Green Corridor Creation:** Collaborates with local authorities to establish special traffic-free routes for organ transport.
 - ✓ **Example:** Chennai's green corridor reduced the transport time of a heart to 11 minutes.

About NOTTO

- It is a central-level body under the **Directorate General of Health Services**, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoH&FW) headquartered at **New Delhi**. It oversees organ and tissue donation, retrieval, and transplantation at the national level.
- The organization was established under the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act, 1994 (THOTA), which regulates organ donation and transplantation.
- Revisions to the Act in 2011 included tissue donation and stricter penalties for illegal activities.
- **NOTTO**, Regional Organ and Tissue Transplant Organizations (**ROTTOs**), and State Organ and Tissue Transplant Organizations (**SOTTOs**) work together to facilitate the sharing of organs across India.
 - **Jeevan Daan Initiative:** A program in Telangana that effectively integrates ROTTO and SOTTO for better coordination in organ donation.

At the National Level

- Act as an apex body for organ and tissue transplantation activities.
- Coordinate with state and regional networks.
- Publish and maintain a national registry.
- Facilitate the safe and efficient allocation of organs and tissues.

For Delhi & NCR

- Maintain waiting lists for transplants.
 - Network with transplant and retrieval centers.
 - Oversee organ and tissue matching, allocation, and transportation.
- AIIMS Delhi has been a key player in promoting organ transplantation, performing over 300 kidney transplants annually.

Divisions

1. **National Human Organ and Tissue Removal and Storage Network:** Established under the **Transplantation of Human Organs (Amendment) Act 2011**, it acts as a **nodal agency** for organ/tissue procurement, allocation, and distribution, starting in Delhi with plans to expand nationwide. Its functions are to:

- Develop national guidelines and maintain a registry for organ/tissue donation.
 - Coordinate organ allocation and promote awareness of organ donation.
2. **National Biomaterial Centre (National Tissue Bank):** created to address the demand for tissue donation and ensure quality assurance. It handles tissues like **bone, skin, cornea, heart valves**, and vessels, with plans for expansion. Its activities include:
- Tissue procurement, storage, screening, and sterilization.
 - Develop guidelines and provide training for tissue banks.

Elephant Incident in Kerala Sparks Debate

A male elephant recently injured 24 people during a mosque festival in Malappuram, Kerala, reigniting debates on animal welfare and public safety. The Supreme Court (SC) in December 2024 invoked the principle of *volenti non fit injuria* to say that devotees willingly take the risk by attending festivals where elephants are paraded.

- ✓ Kerala lost 24 captive elephants in 2024 and 154 since 2019, while domestic elephants killed 196 people at festivals from 2011 to 2023.

Background

- **Judicial Intervention by Kerala High Court (HC):** Taking Suo motu action in the case, the Kerala HC in November 2024 issued strict measures to be followed during festivals such as spacing requirement for elephants, flaming torches and fireworks indirectly limiting the number of elephants paraded.
- **Appeal in SC:** The restrictions impacted Thrissur Pooram, Kerala's largest religious festival, started in the late 18th century by Sakthan Thampuran, Maharaja of Kochi. Festival organizers argued that maintaining fix distance between elephants was impractical and approached the SC.
 - ✓ **Thrissur Pooram:** Known as the “Mother of All Festivals” in Kerala. In this the event, the use of caparisoned elephants (decorated elephants) symbolizes divinity, grandeur, and cultural continuity in Kerala's traditions.
- **SC Verdict:** The SC stayed the Kerala HC order, stressing courts should avoid law-making, and reinstated safety norms under the 2012 Kerala Captive Elephants Rules (often violated).
 - ✓ Activists highlight frequent breaches under the rules, such as the January 5 parade of five elephants in Thrissur's Thiruvambady temple.

Judicial Activism vs. Judicial Overreach

- The Kerala HC's intervention can be seen as judicial activism aimed at addressing gaps in animal welfare enforcement.

About Volenti Non-Fit Injuria

- The doctrine of Volenti Non-Fit Injuria means “to a willing person, no injury is done” i.e. if a person voluntarily consents to harm, then he cannot claim legal remedies under tort law. The doctrine is commonly used as a defense by defendants in cases where the plaintiff willingly assumed the risk of injury.
- ◆ **A tort** is a civil wrong, distinct from breaches of contract or trust, for which the remedy is a common law action seeking unliquidated damages.
- ◆ **Unliquidated damages** are damages that are not predetermined in a contract, but are instead assessed by a court after a breach of contract. They are a form of compensation for a loss suffered by one party due to the actions of another party
- The doctrine is not absolute i.e. it doesn't apply if the defendant **acted negligently or exceeded the scope of consent**. Mere knowledge of risk does not imply consent.
- ◆ **Example:** Patients consenting to medical surgeries acknowledge certain risks. Complications arising from the known risks do not make the doctor liable.
- ◆ However: If the doctor acts negligently or exceeds consent (e.g., performing an unauthorized procedure), the doctrine does not apply.
- ◆ **Limitations:**
 1. **Rescue Cases:** Rescuers facing harm due to the defendant's negligence are exempt from this defense.
 2. **Illegal Acts:** Consent to unlawful acts is invalid (e.g., consenting to be shot).
 3. **Statutory Breach:** The defense doesn't apply if the harm arises from the violation of a legal duty.

Volenti Non-Fit Injuria reflects the interplay between individual freedom and societal protection. While it upholds the principle of autonomy, its limitations ensure fairness and prevent exploitation.



- The SC's stay on the HC order reflects concerns about judicial overreach, emphasizing the need for courts to refrain from policy-making.
- Past cases like *Animal Welfare Board of India v. A. Nagaraja* (2014) (Jallikattu case) underline the judiciary's role in balancing cultural practices with animal welfare.

Elephant Welfare Concerns

- **Extreme Stress:** Elephants face extreme stress from long ceremonies, loud noise, bright lights, and repetitive movements, leading to health issues like hyperglycemia, immune suppression, and neuronal damage (*Center for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) study, 2019*).
✓ Unlike devotees, elephants have no choice in participating, often returning to work shortly after incidents of aggression or injury.
- **Captive Elephant Supply:** Wild elephants continue to be illegally captured and falsely registered as captive-bred due to loopholes like gifting provisions and misuse of microchips. Efforts to curb this include mandatory DNA profiling of captive elephants, initiated in 2022.
- **Challenges in Captivity and Breeding:** Captive breeding is difficult due to the aggressive nature of males in musth (a condition of heightened aggression, elevated testosterone levels) and the limited success of forest breeding programs with wild bulls. Growing man-elephant conflict fuels proposals to relocate problematic wild elephants to temple service.
- **Cultural and Legislative Balance:** Elephants are deeply embedded in Kerala's culture, making their removal from festivals contentious. The 2022 Wildlife Act amendment allows transfers for "religious and other purposes," creating regulatory ambiguity.

Way Forward

1. **Finding a Middle Ground:** Activists urge cultural sensitivity while enforcing stricter regulations to ensure elephant safety in festivals. Courts can set safety standards without overstepping into policymaking, as highlighted by the Kerala HC's practical directives.
2. **Steps Toward Regulation- DNA Mapping:** To curb the misuse of microchips in identifying captive elephants, detect captive bloodlines and to ensure better regulation of elephant ownership and transfer, the Centre launched a DNA profiling initiative in August 2022. Within six months, 270 captive elephants were genotyped.
3. **Promoting Cultural Alternatives:** Use of life-sized mechanical elephants or digital projections in festivals as sustainable substitutes.
 - **Example:** The Irinjalakuda Koodalmanikyam Temple in Kerala has adopted a mechanical elephant.

Central Suspect Registry

In just three months since the launch of the **online** 'suspect registry,' the Centre has blocked six lakh fraudulent transactions, saving ₹1,800 crore.

About Central Suspect Registry

The **Suspect Registry**, launched in **2024** is a centralized database developed by the **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)** to combat financial fraud and cybercrimes by consolidating data on cybercriminals and potential threats.

- ✓ The registry integrates information from the **National Cybercrime Reporting Portal (NCRP)** and contains records of 1.4 million cybercriminals linked to various offenses.

Key Features

1. **Purpose:** Enhance fraud risk management across India's financial systems by identifying and blocking cybercriminal activities in real-time. (Complements initiatives like Digital India and National Cyber Security Policy, 2023.)

2. **Data Collaboration:** Developed in partnership with banks and financial institutions, it provides a shared database accessible to states, UTs, and central investigation agencies.

- **Privacy Concerns:** Inclusion of individuals without robust evidence may violate the Right to Privacy (Puttaswamy Judgment, 2017).

3. **Integration with Banking:** RBI has directed all banks to adopt the registry for fraud prevention.

Impact (as of December 1, 2024)

- **Fraud Prevention:** Over 6.1 lakh fraudulent transactions blocked, saving ₹1,800 crore.
- **Mule Accounts and Devices:** 8.67 lakh mule accounts frozen. 7 lakh SIM cards and 1.4 lakh mobile devices blocked.
- **Content Regulation:** 1,03,151 suspicious online content has been blocked under the IT Act, 2000.
- **Financial Crime Mitigation:** Through the **Citizen Financial Cyber Frauds Reporting and Management System (CFCFRMS)**, launched in 2021, ₹3,850 crore worth of fraudulent transactions have been averted.
 - The CFCFRMS has been established under the I4C to enable prompt reporting of financial frauds and to prevent fraudsters from siphoning off funds.

Cyber Fraud Mitigation Centre (CFMC): Simultaneously launched with the registry, CFMC fosters collaboration among: Banks and financial institutions; Telecom service providers; Law enforcement agencies from states and UTs.

- CFMC acts as a model of "Cooperative Federalism," ensuring swift and coordinated action against online financial crimes.

Fast Track Immigration – Trusted Traveller Programme (FTI-TTP)

The Home Ministry's Fast Track Immigration-Trusted Traveller Programme (FTI-TTP) was inaugurated at Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Cochin and Ahmedabad airports.

Working of FTI-TTP

- **Online Registration:** Applicants must register on the online portal (<https://ftittp.mha.gov.in>), fill in personal details and upload required documents.

- ✓ Documents required include a recent passport-size photograph meeting Indian passport standards, a scanned copy of their passport (valid for at least six months). OCI

cardholders need to provide a scanned copy of their OCI card.

- **Verification and Whitelist Creation:** After verification, a list of 'Trusted Travellers' is generated for implementing the program via e-gates.
- **Biometric Capture:** Biometrics of 'Trusted Travellers' are captured at the Foreigners Registration Office (FRRO) or during their passage through the airport.
 - ✓ The EU Entry/Exit System (EES) captures and verifies biometric data for non-EU citizens at entry points, enhancing security.
- **Registration Validity:** The registration is valid until the passport's expiration or for five years, whichever comes first. It is renewable after the validity period.

What is FTI-TTP?

The government launched the FTI-TTP in 2024 at Delhi Airport to make international travel easier and more secure by providing world-class immigration facilities with an accelerated pathway and automated screening gates to Indian nationals and OCI passengers. The program is part of India's vision for 'Viksit Bharat @2047,' aiming for national development by the centenary of independence.

- **Dedicated Immigration Lanes:** These lanes offer quicker processing at immigration counters.

Examples of Trusted Traveller Programs

- **Global Entry (USA):** Offers expedited clearance for low-risk travelers entering the U.S.
- **NEXUS (Canada-USA):** Simplifies travel between the two countries.
- **Registered Traveler (UK):** Facilitates faster immigration processing for frequent travelers.
- **Smart Gate (Australia/New Zealand):** Uses facial recognition technology for quick processing.
- **APEC Business Travel Card (Asia-Pacific):** Streamlines travel for businesspersons across member economies.

- **E-Gate Process:** At the airport, passengers scan their boarding pass at the e-gates to retrieve flight details. Then, they scan their passport, and biometrics are authenticated. Upon successful authentication, the e-gate opens, granting immigration clearance automatically.

Implementation: The FTI-TTP will be implemented at **21 major airports** across India in two phases:

- **Phase 1:** Covers Indian citizens and OCI cardholders.
- **Phase 2:** Expands to include foreign travellers.

****** Airports under the **GAGAN (GPS-Aided Geo Augmented Navigation)** program can be leveraged for real-time system integration.

Benefits of FTI-TTP	Challenges of FTI-TTP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faster Immigration: It speeds up the immigration process with automated e-gates, reducing wait times. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Integration with initiatives like DigiYatra can enable paperless and biometric-driven air travel. • Enhanced Security: It utilizes biometric authentication for secure and seamless entry. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Integration with Aadhaar-based biometric verification can strengthen internal and cross-border security. • Convenience: It simplifies travel for Indian nationals, OCI cardholders, and eventually foreign travelers. • Global Standards: It aligns with international travel standards, boosting India’s global connectivity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical Issues: Reliance on technology may cause delays or failures if systems malfunction. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Airports in Tier-2 cities may lack systems to handle such failures. • Limited Initial Scope: It is initially limited to Indian nationals and OCI cardholders, with expansion required for foreign travelers. • Privacy Concerns: Use of biometric data raises potential privacy and data protection issues. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The Aadhaar data breach controversy in India underscores the need for robust safeguards. • Infrastructure Needs: Airports (under the UDAN scheme) may need upgrades to accommodate new systems and processes efficiently.

Internet Governance Internship and Capacity Building Scheme

The **National Internet Exchange of India (NIXI)** announced the launch of its **Internet Governance Internship and Capacity Building Scheme**.

<p>About NIXI</p> <p>It is a not-for-profit organization setup in 2003 under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeiTY) focusing on expanding internet access and usage in India.</p> <p>Mission: To enhance India's internet infrastructure and ecosystem to make it more accessible and efficient for its citizens and to promote sustainable and inclusive digital growth.</p> <p>Services Provided:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internet Exchange Points (IXPs): Connects Indian internet service providers (ISPs), reducing reliance on international connections and improving internet speeds within the country. • .IN Registry: Manages the registration of domain names ending in ".in" (e.g., example.in), a crucial part of online identity. (Promotes India-specific online identity) • IRINN (Indian Registry for Internet Names and Numbers): Promotes the adoption and utilization of IPv4 and IPv6 internet protocol addresses, essential for internet connectivity. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ IPv6 Adoption: The program encourages innovation in adopting emerging technologies, including IPv6, which is critical for IoT and next-gen internet services.
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About Internet Governance Internship and Capacity Building Scheme

It is a program designed to prepare individuals for active participation in global internet governance processes.

Objectives:

- **Building Expertise:** To allow participants gain in-depth knowledge of internet governance through interaction with leading organizations like Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), Internet Society or Information Security Operations Center (ISOC), Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE), Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) and others.
 - ✓ **Digital Sovereignty:** As India advances its Digital India initiative, nurturing local talent is essential for asserting sovereignty in internet governance.
- **Global Collaboration:** To enable engagement with international experts to understand and contribute to global internet governance.
 - ✓ **Diplomacy and International Relations Perspective:** Active involvement in forums like the UN's Internet Governance Forum (IGF).
- **Domestic Talent Development:** To nurture a pool of professionals capable of addressing internet-related issues with a strong focus on inclusivity and accessibility. Foster the next generation of leaders in digital policy and governance.

Internship Structure: The program is conducted twice a year and offers two tracks- a six-month program and a three-month program.

Key Features:

- **Mentoring by Experts:** Each intern is mentored by experts, including members of international organizations (e.g., ICANN, APNIC, APTLD), special Interest Group representatives, retired senior government officials and academic advisors from leading institutions.
- **Stipend:** Interns receive a **stipend of Rs. 20,000 per month.**
- **Mandatory Outreach Programs:** are supported to enhance learning and application.

Benefits:

- **Global Exposure:** Engage with international organizations and experts.
- **Practical Understanding:** Gain hands-on experience in internet governance.
- **Networking:** Build connections with global leaders and institutions.
- **Contribution:** Influence digital policy development and promote inclusive internet growth.

Entity Locker

Entity Locker- a Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) for streamlined business document management has been developed by the National eGovernance Division (NeGD), under MeITY.

Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) refers to foundational digital systems and platforms designed to enable the efficient delivery of public and private services. These include technologies for identity verification, payments, data exchange, and governance, fostering inclusion, innovation, and seamless collaboration across stakeholders while ensuring accessibility, security, and scalability.

About Entity Locker

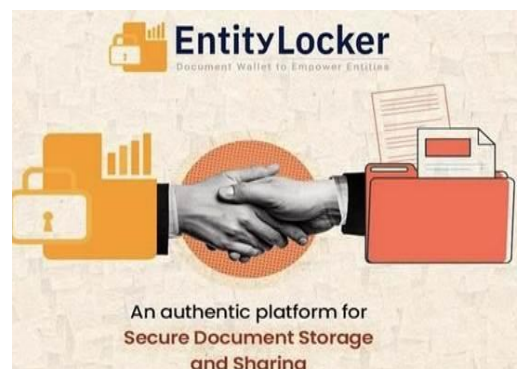
It is a secure, cloud-based platform designed to simplify and streamline the management, sharing, and verification of business and organizational documents.

- ✓ This initiative aligns with India's vision for enhanced digital governance and ease of doing business, as highlighted in the Union Budget 2024-25.

Strategic Vision

Entity Locker is not just a technological tool, but a strategic initiative aimed at:

- ✓ Reducing administrative friction.



- ✓ Enhancing productivity and operational efficiency for businesses.
- ✓ Promoting a digitally empowered ecosystem to drive economic growth.

Key Features of Entity Locker	Benefits of Entity Locker
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Real-Time Document Management: Instant access and verification of documents by integrating with government databases thus ensuring businesses have up-to-date and easily accessible records. • Cloud-Based Storage: It provides 10 GB of encrypted cloud storage for secure and centralized document management, data encryption and secure access to prevent unauthorized use. • Consent-Based Sharing: Sensitive information is shared securely using consent-based mechanisms, ensuring privacy and accountability. • Role-Based Access Management: Aadhaar-authenticated role-based access ensures that only authorized personnel can handle specific documents. • Digital Signatures: It facilitates legally valid digital signature authentication to verify and approve documents efficiently. • Integration with Government Systems: It seamlessly connects with major regulatory and government platforms for real-time access and verification, such as- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA): For company filings and documentation. ✓ Goods and Services Tax Network (GSTN): For vendor registrations and compliance. ✓ Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT): For trade-related documentation. • Use Cases: The platform supports various use cases, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Vendor verification on the procurement portal. ✓ Expedited loan applications for MSMEs. ✓ FSSAI compliance documentation. ✓ Vendor verification during registration in Goods and Services Tax Network (GSTN), Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) and tendering process. ✓ Streamlined corporate annual filings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficiency and Productivity: Reduces administrative overhead by consolidating document storage and sharing processes and speeds up business operations by minimizing delays in document verification and approvals. • Regulatory Compliance: Simplifies adherence to government regulations and reporting requirements by integrating with key systems like Goods and Services Tax Network (GSTN) and the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT). • Enhanced Security: Tracks document-related activities to ensure accountability and transparency. Provides a secure platform for storing sensitive business documents. • Improved Collaboration: Facilitates seamless document sharing with partners, stakeholders, and government agencies. • Time-Saving: Expedites document-related processes such as loan applications, vendor verification, and compliance documentation.

National Voters Day

The **15th National Voters' Day (NVD)** was celebrated on **25th January** marking **75 years of the Election Commission of India (ECI)** and celebrating India's electorate, now nearing the **100-crore mark**.

- ✓ Since 2011, NVD has celebrated voters, raised electoral awareness, and promoted youth enrolment, with ceremonies at all levels honoring new voters and distributing Elector Photo Identity Cards (EPIC).
- ✓ **Increased Youth Enrollment:** Consistent rise in voter registration among 18–19-year-olds through campaigns like SVEEP (Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation).

Theme for 2025: "Nothing Like Voting, I Vote for Sure,"- emphasizing voter participation and pride in democracy.

- Aligns with the motto "No Voter to be Left Behind."

Global Examples of Voter Engagement

1. **Australia:** Compulsory voting laws ensure high voter turnout
2. **Estonia:** Fully digital voting system makes participation seamless
3. **South Korea:** High-tech election management systems ensure accuracy and trust

Key Highlights of the Event

- **Hon'ble President Smt. Droupadi Murmu** was the Chief Guest and **Union Minister Shri Arjun Ram Meghwal** was the Guest of Honour.
- **Best Electoral Practices Awards** was presented to officials excelling in election management and voter participation initiatives.
- **Launch of ECI publications:**
 - *"India Votes 2024: A Saga of Democracy"* documenting the 2024 Lok Sabha Elections.
 - *"Belief in the Ballot"* highlighting human stories from the elections.
- **Release of a preview for "India Decides,"** a docu-drama on India's electoral history by Warner Bros Discovery.
- **Multimedia exhibition:** showcasing key aspects of the 2024 Lok Sabha Elections.

Additionally, a **global conference on election management** was held on January 23-24, bringing together international experts.

Use of Loudspeakers not Essential to Religion

The Bombay High Court (HC) recently ruled that the use of loudspeakers or public address systems is not an essential religious practice. Therefore, denying permission for their use does not violate the right to practice religion under Article 25 of the Constitution (right to freedom of religion).

- ✓ Residents of Mumbai's Nehru Nagar and Chunabhatti had filed a writ petition citing excessive noise from mosques and madrasas, with police confirming noise levels far exceeding permissible limits, such as 79.4 and 98.7 decibels.

Noise Pollution Regulations

Loudspeakers must comply with the Noise Pollution (Regulation and Control) Rules, 2000 which state that: (The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986: Empowered the government to frame rules for controlling pollution, including noise.)

- ✓ Maximum noise levels in residential areas should be 55 decibels (day) and 45 decibels (night).
- ✓ Use of loudspeakers beyond these limits, particularly during prohibited hours (10 PM–6 AM), is not allowed.
- ✓ There is a four-step penalty system for noise violations:
 - **First offense:** Warning.
 - **Repeat violations:** Fines on trusts or organizations responsible.
 - **Continued violations:** Seizure of loudspeakers.
 - **Persistent non-compliance:** Cancellation of licenses and legal complaints.

****In Re: Noise Pollution** - Implementation of Laws for Restricting Use of Loudspeakers (2005): The court reinforced the need to adhere to permissible decibel levels.

HC Verdict: The court directed the state government to-

- Implement mechanisms to control decibel levels of loudspeakers, such as "auto-fixation" or calibration.
- Equip police officers with tools like decibel-measuring mobile apps to enforce noise pollution rules.
- Ensure protection for Complainants reporting noise violations to prevent harassment or ill-will against them.

Reference to Previous Rulings

1. **2016 HC Ruling (Dr. Mahesh Vijay Bedekar v State of Maharashtra):** It was held that:
 - a. Loudspeakers are not essential to any religion.

- b. Fundamental rights under Articles 19(1)(a) (freedom of speech) and 25 (freedom of religion) do not extend to loudspeaker usage.
 - c. **Article 19(1)(a) vs. Public Order:** Freedom of speech is subject to reasonable restrictions in the interest of public order and health.
 - d. **Article 21:** The right to life includes the right to a pollution-free environment, including protection from noise pollution.
 - e. Prohibitions on:
 - ✓ Loudspeakers between 10 PM and 6 AM, except on 15 days per year for religious or cultural occasions (excluding silence zones).
 - ✓ Horn use in silence zones and residential areas during night hours.
 - f. Silence zones include areas within 100 meters of schools, colleges, hospitals, religious places, and courts.
2. **Supreme Court (SC) Observations:** Loudspeaker use must align with constitutional principles and cannot override noise pollution laws or public interest.

Implications of the Judgement

- **Respect for Public Safety:** The ruling reinforces that religious practices must respect public safety and environmental norms. Encourages adoption of green technologies for noise control.
 - ✓ Japan uses advanced acoustic engineering to minimize urban noise.
- **Stricter Enforcement:** It ensures stricter enforcement of noise pollution laws to balance individual rights with community welfare.
- **Accountability:** Religious places, like other entities, are held accountable for adhering to noise regulations.

RG Kar Rape Case- Rarest of Rare Case Scenario

A sessions court in Kolkata convicted Sanjoy Roy under sections for rape, causing death or persistent vegetative state, and murder of a junior doctor at RG Kar College and Hospital. Despite strong protests following the incident, the court ruled it was **not** a "rarest of rare" case, and Roy was sentenced to life imprisonment "until his last breath."

- CBI and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee sought the death penalty due to the gravity of the crime.

About "Rarest of Rare Case" Test

It is a legal standard established by the Supreme Court (SC) of India in the case of **Bachan Singh v. State of Punjab (1980)** to determine when the death penalty should be imposed. This doctrine seeks to ensure that the death penalty is applied only in exceptional circumstances and not arbitrarily.

- ✓ It emerged to balance the constitutional mandate for the protection of life under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution with the provision for capital punishment in cases deemed exceptional.

Key Elements of the "Rarest of Rare" Test:

- **Applicability:** Death penalties are reserved for cases where the crime exhibits extreme brutality, and there is no possibility of reforming the convict.
- **Factors for Consideration:**

Aggravating Circumstances	Mitigating Circumstances
<p>Macchi Singh v. State of Punjab (1983): The judgment further elaborated on situations where the doctrine could be applied, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-planned and extremely brutal murders. • Crimes showing "exceptional depravity." 	<p>Factors that may tilt the decision against the death penalty, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accused's mental or emotional disturbance at the time of the crime. • Young or old age of the accused and possibility of reform and rehabilitation

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Murders of public servants or law enforcement officials during duty. <p>E.g. Delhi Gang Rape Case (Nirbhaya, 2012): Death penalty was awarded based on the brutality of the crime and societal outrage. This case highlighted the court's approach to considering societal conscience.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ In cases like Ramnaresh v. State of Chhattisgarh (2012) and Ramesh v. State of Rajasthan (2011), the Supreme Court viewed the young age of accused persons (below 30) as a sign of potential for reform. • Accused of acting under coercion or influence. ✓ Over time, the SC has expanded the scope of mitigating factors, including the socio-economic background of the accused.
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- **Possibility of Reform:** The court must presume the convict can be reformed unless proven otherwise by clear evidence.
 - ✓ In cases like **Santosh Bariyar v. State of Maharashtra (2009)**, the SC emphasized objective evidence to determine the impossibility of reform.
- **Nature of Offence:** In **Shankar Kisanrao Khade v. State of Maharashtra (2013)**, the SC stated that courts should compare a case with similar offences to avoid subjective application of the "rarest of rare" doctrine.
 - ✓ **Machhi Singh v. State of Punjab (1983)** allowed death penalties in cases that shock the "collective conscience" of society. The **Law Commission** noted that this focus on the crime's circumstances overlooked the criminal's potential for reform.
- **Judicial Procedure:** A separate sentencing hearing must be conducted after conviction to evaluate whether the death penalty is justified. This ensures a meaningful and effective opportunity to present mitigating factors.

Challenges

- **Lack of Uniformity:** Sentencing decisions in death penalty cases often vary based on the judge's perspective, as highlighted in **Shankar Kisanrao Khade v. State of Maharashtra (2013)**.
- **Disadvantage to Convict:** Mitigating factors are typically only presented during sentencing, after conviction, leaving the convict at a disadvantage.
- **Judicial Discretion:** Subjectivity in determining "rarest of rare" cases leads to inconsistency.

Recent Developments: In Suo motu proceedings in 2022 (IN RE: Framing Guidelines Regarding Potential Mitigating Circumstances to Be Considered While Imposing Death Sentences), the SC acknowledged:

- ✓ the imbalance caused by unequal consideration of aggravating and mitigating circumstances and referred the matter to a larger bench to establish consistent guidelines.
- ✓ that aggravating circumstances form a part of the record of a case and are always available to a judge, whereas mitigating circumstances are only placed on record after a conviction and before sentencing.
- ✓ **Data from Project 39A (Death Penalty Report):** Highlighted disproportionate sentencing against marginalized groups.
- ✓ European nations emphasize rehabilitation over capital punishment. Nations like China and Saudi Arabia continue to impose the death penalty, often for non-violent crimes.

The "rarest of rare" doctrine aims to strike a balance between justice for heinous crimes and the possibility of reform, ensuring the death penalty is reserved for only the most extraordinary cases.

National Critical Minerals Mission

The Indian government has approved the **National Critical Minerals Mission (NCMM)** with a total outlay of ₹34,300 crore over seven years.

- Government expenditure of ₹16,300 crore, while an additional ₹18,000 crore is expected to be invested by PSUs and private companies.

Impact on India's Energy Transition

The NCMM is expected to:

- **Secure mineral supply chains** for India's clean energy sector (Wind turbines, solar panels, and electricity networks)
- **Boost domestic manufacturing** of EV batteries and renewable energy components.
- **Strengthen India's position** in the global critical minerals market.
- **Attract foreign and private investment** in mining and mineral processing.

Challenges & Way Forward

- **Geopolitical Risks:** Acquiring mineral assets overseas can be influenced by global political dynamics.
- **Environmental Concerns:** Increased mining activities must balance ecological conservation.
- **Investment Risks:** Private sector participation needs strong policy support.

To address these challenges, the government plans to collaborate with **research institutions, industries, and international partners** to ensure a sustainable & efficient implementation of the mission.

Objectives and Features of the Mission

- **Enhancing Domestic Exploration:** A significant portion of the mission's funds will be allocated to intensifying mineral exploration across the country and in offshore areas.
- **Reducing Import Dependence:** India heavily relies on imports for critical minerals like lithium, cobalt, nickel, and rare earth elements, essential for electric vehicles (EVs), battery manufacturing, and renewable energy technologies.
- **Developing Processing and Recycling Capabilities:** The mission will encourage investment in mineral processing parks, recycling technologies, and research on sustainable extraction methods.
- **Overseas Mineral Acquisitions:** Public sector enterprises and private companies will be encouraged to acquire mineral assets abroad to ensure a steady supply.
- **Regulatory and Financial Support:** The mission will streamline regulatory approvals and offer financial incentives for mineral exploration and development.

Key Implementation Measures:

- **Expedited Mining Approvals:** The mission will establish a **fast-track regulatory process** for mineral mining projects.
- **Stockpile Development:** A strategic stockpile of critical minerals will be built to safeguard India's supply chains.
- **Policy Reforms:** In 2023, the **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957** was amended, enabling the auction of **24 strategic mineral blocks**.
- **Geological Survey of India (GSI) Exploration Projects:** Over the past 3 years, **GSI has initiated 368 mineral exploration projects**, with **227 projects planned for 2025-26**.
- **Import Duty Waivers:** The government has removed **customs duties** on several critical minerals in the **FY25 budget** to encourage domestic processing and manufacturing.

SEBI's When-Listed Mechanism

SEBI plans to launch a "when-listed" platform for trading of shares of companies that have finished their initial public offering (IPO) and are yet to be listed on stock exchanges.

Benefits of the "When-Listed"

Facility for Investors

- **Regulated Trading:** Investors who have received IPO allotment can sell their entitlement in a regulated market, instead of the unregulated grey market.

When-Listed Platform

- This platform will facilitate trading of shares between IPO allotment and official listing, addressing concerns around unregulated markets.
- **Reducing Grey Market Activity**
 - ◆ It operates in cash with no actual delivery of shares.
 - ◆ Many retail investors use grey market premiums to evaluate IPO investments.
- **Addressing Grey and Kerb Trading**
 - ◆ SEBI aims to eliminate **grey and kerb trading** during the T+3 period (time from IPO closure to listing) by introducing a regulated alternative.
 - Grey market trading and kerb trading both refer to buying and selling shares outside official stock exchanges with premium based on demand.
 - The term "kerb trading" comes from the idea of trading on the street, highlighting its unofficial nature.

- **Reducing Market Volatility:** By ensuring all trading is monitored by the regulator.
- **Protecting Retail Investors**

Pig Butchering Scam

- The Union Home Ministry's annual report highlighted that victims are being manipulated into losing significant sums of money through the **pig butchering scam**.
- Also known as the '**investment scam**', pig butchering scam is a type of cyber fraud that involves scammers building a long-term relationship with victims to "fatten them up" emotionally and financially before exploiting them.
- The name originates from the metaphor of fattening a pig before slaughter. It is believed to have started in China in 2016.
- Scammers reach out to potential victims through social media platforms, messaging apps, dating sites, or even email. They often pose as friendly strangers, potential romantic partners, or financial advisors.
- The scammer spends weeks or even months gaining the victim's trust by forming a personal connection. This is the "fattening" phase.
- Once trust is established, the scammer introduces the victim to fake investment opportunities, often in cryptocurrency or stocks, claiming high returns with little to no risk.
- Victims are initially allowed to make small profits to further convince them of the scheme's legitimacy. This encourages them to invest larger sums.
- When victims try to withdraw their earnings/investments, they are blocked, ignored, or asked for additional "fees." By this stage, the scammer disappears with the money.
- This scam is a global phenomenon and involves large-scale money laundering and even cyber slavery.
- *Google Advertisement* platform provides a convenient facility for targeted advertisement from across the border.
- According to the report, WhatsApp is the most misused social media platform for cybercrime in India, followed by Telegram, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube.

ADB Loan for Sustainable Infrastructure

- The Union Government and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) have signed a \$500 million loan to support green and sustainable infrastructure projects aligned with the country's climate commitments.
- The ADB loan, *with a sovereign guarantee*, will be extended to the India Infrastructure Finance Company Limited (IIFCL).
 - IIFCL is a **wholly-owned Government of India** company **set up in 2006** to provide long-term financial assistance to viable infrastructure projects through the Scheme for Financing Viable Infrastructure Projects.
- IIFCL has **funded about 21% of the country's national highway capacity**, comprising nearly 30,000 km roads. Till 30 June 2024, IIFCL has made cumulative gross sanctions of about **Rs. 2,69,608 Crore** to more than 770 projects
- To meet its net-zero commitments, the country needs immense private capital investment that will require innovative financing platforms and risk-mitigation instruments.
- As a strategic development finance institution, IIFCL is well-suited to meet these needs.
- IIFCL's operations are designed to utilise private sector resources that necessitate the expansion of its product offerings for potential institutional investors.
- ADB financing will help IIFCL provide long-term capital for infrastructure projects focusing on connectivity and energy transition as well as under-resourced sectors like urban projects, education, and health care.

- The project will build the institutional capacity of IIFCL to integrate green and best practices into the infrastructure projects.
- A sustainability unit and an environmental sustainability framework and scoring method to assess the sustainability rating of the projects will also be established.

Jammu Railway Division

- The Prime Minister inaugurated the **Jammu Division** of Indian Railways. Until now, Jammu fell under the Ferozpur division of Northern Railway zone.
- There are 17 operational zones of Indian Railways. The zones are headed by a General Manager and are further sub-divided into divisions.
- Each division is headed by a Divisional Railway Manager (DRM), who is responsible for the operation and maintenance in the respective divisions.
- With the creation of the Jammu division, the **Indian Railways will have 70 divisions under its 17 zones.**
- The Jammu division includes sections such as Pathankot-Jammu-Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla; Bhogpur Sirwal-Pathankot; Batala-Pathankot and Pathankot to Joginder Nagar sections with the combined length of 742.1 km.
- It will not only benefit J&K but also Himachal Pradesh and several cities of Punjab and Leh-Ladakh.
- The new division will create employment opportunities, infrastructure development, promote tourism and lead to overall socio-economic development of the region.
- Further, the completion of the **Chenab Bridge, the world's highest railway arch bridge**, will play a key role in connecting the region with the rest of India providing convenience to the people of Leh and Ladakh.

India's First Glass Bridge Over Sea

- The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister inaugurated **India's first glass bridge over the sea** connecting **Tiruvalluvar Statue and Vivekananda Rock Memorial** in Kanniyakumari.
- The inauguration was part of the silver jubilee celebrations of the Tiruvalluvar Statue installation. The statue is also known as the **Statue of Wisdom.**
- Designed by renowned sculptor V. Ganapathi Sthapathi, the statue stands at a combined height of 133 feet, which **denotes the 133 chapters of Tirukkural.**
- The bridge has been built to address the issues faced by ferries, as the rough sea and low tides prevent the ferries from docking near the Statue.
- Built at a cost of Rs 37 crore, the 10-metre-wide bridge spans 77 metres.

Tirukkural

- The Tirukkural also known as the Kural is a classic **Tamil language text** consisting of 1,330 short couplets, or kurals, of seven words each.
- The text is divided into three books with teachings on virtue (aram), wealth (porul) and love (inbam), respectively.
- Written by **Tiruvalluvar**, it is widely acknowledged for its universality and secular nature.

Anji Khad Bridge

- Indian Railways has successfully conducted a trial run of a tower wagon on the Anji Khad Bridge - **country's first cable-stayed rail bridge, located in Jammu and Kashmir's Reasi district.**
- It marks a significant milestone in enhancing railway connectivity in the region.
- The Anji Khad Bridge rises **331 metres above the riverbed** and ranks as India's **second-highest railway bridge after the Chenab Bridge**, which holds the **world record at 359 metres** above the riverbed.

- Both structures are a key part of the **Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Railway link (USBRL)** project, aimed at improving connectivity in Jammu and Kashmir.
- The USBRL project spans 272 kilometres, with 255 kilometres already completed. Upon completion, the project will reduce travel time between Srinagar and Jammu from 6 hours to 3.5 hours.

InvITs, REITs and Municipal Bonds

The chairperson of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has said that real estate investment trusts (Reits), infrastructure investment trusts (InvITs) and municipal bonds will see strong fund raising in the coming decade.

Municipal bonds

- A municipal bond is a kind of **debt instrument** where investors give loans to local governments (ULBs).
- It **helps to raise funds from the stock market**. Bidding takes place on an electronic trading platform after the bond is listed on the exchange.
- Municipal bonds are **issued by civic bodies for specific projects** and usually have a 10-year tenure. The ULB pays the annual interest on the bonds to the investor at the decided rate.
- E.g. Indore municipal corporation has floated a public issue of rated, listed, taxable, redeemable and non-convertible green municipal bonds. They have a face value of Rs 1,000 each and a minimum application of Rs 10,000.

Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvIT)

- InvITs are **institutions similar to mutual funds**. Its objective is to **facilitate investment into the infrastructure sector (like roads, power plant, telecom etc) in India**.
- InvITs collect investment from various categories of investors and invest them into revenue-generating infrastructure projects.
- It thus **enables investment of money from individual and institutional investors** in infrastructure projects to earn a small portion of the income as return.
- InvITs are **regulated by SEBI**. SEBI had notified the SEBI (Infrastructure Investment Trusts) Regulations, 2014 for registration and regulation of InvITs in India.

Structure of InvITs

- There are four important parties to an InvIT — **sponsors, investment managers, project managers and the trustee**.
- **Sponsors** are **promoters of the company that set up the InvIT**. In case of public-private partnership (PPP) projects, it refers to the infrastructure developer or a special purpose vehicle (SPV) developing the project.
- The **investment manager** is given the **task of supervising the assets and investments of the InvIT** and the **project manager** is **responsible for the execution of the project**.
- The **trustee** (certified by Sebi) has the responsibility to ensure that the **functions of the InvIT, investment manager and project manager comply with SEBI rules**.

Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT)

- REIT is an investment tool that **owns and operates income producing real estate properties** like offices, residential units, hotels, shopping centers, warehouses, etc.
- It allows individual investors to invest using this platform. The money collected from individual investors is invested in income-generating real estate.
- The structure of REITs is similar to that of a mutual fund. However, unlike mutual funds, where the mutual funds invest in bonds, stocks and gold, **REITs invest in physical real estate**.
- In India, REITs are conceptualised as SPVs providing investors an opportunity to earn dividend-based income.
 - A **dividend** is a distribution of profits by a corporation to its shareholders.

Advantages of REIT investment

- Real estate has always been an attractive investment opportunity, but the high investments required in the real estate market made it difficult for many people to invest.
- However, **through REITs even small investors can invest in the Indian property market**, as the minimum investment limit has been kept very low.
- Since REITs are required to distribute **nearly 90%** of their earnings in the form of dividends to the REIT investors, the **investors are assured of high income**.
- **REITs are regulated by SEBI, which will ensure greater transparency**. REITs are designed to be **tax efficient**, and the government has given them **pass-through status**. This means, when the REIT receives the rentals and distributes to its shareholders, **it will be treated as a pass-through flow and will not be taxed**.

Hush Money

- President-elect Donald Trump was formally sentenced in the hush money case, but the judge declined to impose any punishment.

- The outcome cements Trump's conviction while freeing him to return to the White House without the threat of a jail term or a fine. It was the first criminal trial of any former U.S. President.
- Hush money is a term for an arrangement in which one person or party offers another a sum of money in exchange for remaining silent about some illegal, stigmatized, or shameful action or other fact about the person or party who has made the offer.
- Alternatively, it can be money paid to a displeased opponent who may disclose embarrassing information, even if untrue.
- This is to save the intended person the harm and hassle of dealing with defamation.

EmpowHER Biz

- The Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP) of **NITI Aayog** has launched **EmpowHER Biz – Sapno Ki Udaan** in partnership with **New Shop**, India's largest 24/7 convenience retail chain under its **Award to Reward (ATR) program**.
- It aims to empower women entrepreneurs by equipping them with the skills and resources needed to succeed in the organized retail sector.
- Through this collaboration, WEP aims to create a robust retail ecosystem that empowers women entrepreneurs and drives sustainable growth in the sector.
- It will offer mentorship and comprehensive training, covering retail management, digital tools, financial literacy and business development to aspiring women entrepreneurs.
- Under the initiative, **fifty participants aged 18–35**, will be selected through an online application process based on specific criteria.
- **Top twenty** of these participants will receive a **100% waiver on New Shop franchise fees**, empowering them to own and operate their retail businesses with significantly reduced barriers to entry.
- The program is being launched for women from Delhi NCR, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat.

Women Entrepreneurship Program (WEP)

- ◆ WEP was incubated in NITI Aayog in 2018 as an aggregator platform and transitioned into a public-private partnership in 2022.
- ◆ WEP aims to empower women entrepreneurs by providing support across pillars such as entrepreneurship promotion, access to finance, market linkages, training and skills development, mentoring and networking, and access to business development services.
- ◆ With over 30 public and private sector partners, WEP facilitates collaboration to develop scalable and impactful programs that benefit women entrepreneurs.
- ◆ Since 2023, the 'Award to Reward' initiative under WEP offers a plug and play framework.



Mandatory Farmer ID for PM Kisan

- The Centre has made it mandatory for **new applicants** to obtain a farmer ID for enrolment into the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-Kisan) to get benefits under the scheme.
- **Kisan Pehchaan Patra or farmer ID** is an Aadhaar-like unique digital identity linked dynamically to the state's land records with information like demographics, crops sown, and ownership details.
- The **database created through the farmer ID** will be known as **Farmer's Registry**. It is one of the three registries under the **Agri-Stack** component of the **Centre's Digital Agriculture Mission** for the creation of digital public infrastructure in the farm sector.
 - The other two registries under Agri-Stack are **Geo-referenced Village Maps** and **Crop Sown Registry**.
- The government has set a target of creating 6 crore farmer IDs by March 2025. Till January 2025, one crore farmer IDs have been created.
- The farmer ID guarantees that the applicant-farmer owns the land, and thus, the PM-KISAN registration process would be vastly simplified. It will ease the process for farmers to avail the benefits of PM KISAN scheme.

- The system of mandatory farmer IDs has come into force across 10 states - Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh from January 1, 2025. In the remaining states, it will be made mandatory at a later date.
- These 10 states account for about 84% (9.25 crore) of 11 crore PM-Kisan beneficiaries.

PM KISAN



- PM Kisan is a **central sector scheme**, with 100% funding from the Union Government. The scheme was started to **increase the income of the farmers by providing income support** to eligible landholding farmers' families across the country.
- Under the scheme, which became effective from 2018, the Centre provides **Rs 6,000 per year** to eligible farmers in three equal instalments of Rs 2,000.
 - ◆ Recently, a Parliamentary panel has recommended doubling the yearly payouts to Rs 12,000 per annum.
- It aims to supplement the financial needs of the farmers in procuring various inputs to ensure proper crop health, appropriate yields as well as to meet domestic needs.
- The **state governments and Union Territory administration identify the farmers** who are eligible for the scheme and share the list with the Centre.
- The central government then directly transfers the fund to the bank accounts of the beneficiaries.

Eligible farmers

- The Scheme initially provided income support to all Small and Marginal Farmers' families across the country, holding cultivable land upto 2 hectares.
- In June 2019, the scheme was **extended to cover all farmer families** in the country irrespective of the size of their land holdings.

Exclusion criteria

- However, the following categories of people holding cultivable land have been excluded from the scheme:
 - ◆ Institutional landholders.
 - ◆ Present or retired officers and employees of state/central government as well as PSUs and government autonomous bodies.
 - ◆ Former and Present (Ministers / State Ministers; Members of Lok Sabha / Rajya Sabha / State Legislative Assemblies / State Legislative Councils; Mayors of Municipal Corporations, Chairpersons of District Panchayats).
 - ◆ Income Tax payers in last assessment year.
 - ◆ Farmer families holding constitutional posts.
 - ◆ Professionals like doctors, engineers and lawyers.
 - ◆ Retired pensioners with a monthly pension of over Rs 10,000.



Capacity Expansion of Kandla Port

- The Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways announced two major initiatives aimed at enhancing the capacity of Kandla Port, worth an **investment of Rs 57,000 crores**.
- The projects include the construction of a new Mega Shipbuilding Facility and the development of a new cargo terminal outside Kandla Creek.

Additional Projects

- In addition, the Deendayal Port Authority is undertaking several projects to enhance Kandla Port's capacity.
- These include a mega cargo terminal with a capacity of 2.19 million TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent unit) under the PPP mode and a proposed multi-cargo terminal at Tuna Tekra that will add 18.33 MTPA capacity.

Mega Shipbuilding Facility

- The Mega Shipbuilding Facility, with an investment of Rs 30,000 crores, aims to create technical capabilities for manufacturing Very Large Crude Carriers (VLCC) or vessels of similar class with a capacity of up to 3,20,000 tonnes.
- Facility will have the capacity to produce 32 new ships & repair 50 older ships annually.
- Spread over 8,000 acres, it will include a marina, fishing harbour, townships, and a marine industrial cluster.
- The project is likely to unlock tremendous value for trade interests as well as employment in the region, especially in the ancillary manufacturing and assembly units to come and operate in the cluster.

New Cargo Terminal

- To restructure the Port, a new state of the art port is being developed outside the Kandla Creek, towards Tuna. This new port will be developed using the 6 kms available waterfront.
- With an investment of Rs 27,000 crores, an additional capacity of 135 MTPA will be developed to the existing capacity of Kandla port.
- The new port will handle all existing cargo jetties handling dry bulk cargo, with modern cargo handling equipment and more efficient evacuation systems.
- This will allow Kandla to be converted into Liquid Jetties, hence, building tremendous scope to handle liquid cargo.
- This will tremendously improve the waiting time of Liquid Tanker Vessels and improvement in the turnaround time of liquid vessels.
- Considering the new port's proximity to the navigation channel, the dredging requirement will come down considerably, allowing bigger vessels to dock here.

- Three oil jetties and additional facilities for liquid cargo handling at Vadinar are also under construction, which will increase capacity by 24.5 MTPA. A ship repair facility capable of servicing 32 vessels annually is also planned at Vadinar.

Kandla Port

- Also known as Deendayal Port, it is in Kutch district. It is one of the 13 major ports of India and is located in **Kandla Creek** (near the **Gulf of Kutch**).
- It was constructed in the 1950s as the chief seaport serving western India. It was renamed as Deendayal Port in 2017 under the Indian Ports Act, 1908.
- The port infrastructure is located at three different locations along the Gulf of Kutch, which are **Kandla Creek, Tuna Tekra and Vadinar**.

Securities Transaction Tax

- Despite the volatility in the stock market, the Securities Transaction Tax (STT) collection has increased by over 75% to Rs 44,538 crore as of January 2025 as against Rs 25,415 crore raised in the same period in 2024.
 - The rise in collections comes despite a hike in STT on futures & options (F&O) of securities that was levied to curb speculative market activity in the F&O segment.
- STT is a kind of financial transaction tax which is similar to tax collected at source (TCS).
- It is a direct tax levied at the time of purchase and sale of securities that are listed on the recognised stock exchanges in India.
- STT was introduced in 2004, by replacing the earlier system of Stamp Duty, to avoid tax evasion on the gains made through buying and selling securities. It is governed by the Securities Transaction Tax Act.
 - Securities are tradable investment instruments such as shares, bonds, debentures, equity-oriented mutual funds (MFs) etc.

National Turmeric Board

- In a move to enhance the production and export of turmeric, the Ministry of Commerce & Industry inaugurated the National Turmeric Board (NTB).
- The **headquarters** of NTB has been set up at **Nizamabad**, with **Palle Ganga Reddy** as its **first Chairperson**.
- The Board will promote R&D of new turmeric products, provide value addition of turmeric related products for marketing abroad and promote awareness of the turmeric's medicinal and essential properties.
- It will work on improving turmeric yield, enhancing logistics and supply chains, and exploring new international markets for turmeric.
- It will also ensure quality and safety standards of turmeric production and exports
- Board will include representatives from various ministries, exporters, & producers' bodies

Turmeric

- Turmeric is a flowering plant in the ginger family Zingiberaceae.
- Also known as **Golden Spice**, it is a **perennial, herbaceous plant** native to the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia that requires temperatures between **20-30 °C** and **high annual rainfall** to thrive.

Turmeric production in India

- **India is the largest producer, consumer and exporter** of turmeric in the world.
- India is responsible for over **70% of the world's turmeric production**, with 30 varieties of turmeric being grown in the country.
- In 2023-24, turmeric cultivation covered an area of **3.05 lakh hectares** in India, with a **yield of 10.74 lakh tonnes**.
- India holds a **62% share in the global turmeric trade**, exporting 1.62 lakh tonnes of turmeric valued at \$226.5 million in 2023-24.

Rise in Outward FDI

As per the RBI, the outward foreign direct investment (OFDI) by domestic firms has seen a jump of nearly **17%** to \$37.68 billion in 2024, from \$32.29 billion in 2023.

Significance

- The fact that Indian companies are investing in their own subsidiaries indicates that they are expanding outside. This also shows that local companies that have joint ventures are collaborating more with companies in overseas territories.
- Overseas investments in joint ventures (JV) and wholly owned subsidiaries (WOS) have been recognised as important avenues for promoting global business by Indian entrepreneurs.
- Joint ventures are perceived as a medium of economic co-operation between India and other countries.
- Transfer of technology and skill, sharing of results of R&D, access to wider global market, promotion of brand image, generation of employment and utilisation of raw materials available in India and in the host country are other significant benefits arising out of such overseas investments.
- They are also important drivers of foreign trade through increased exports of plant and machinery and goods and services from India and also a source of foreign exchange earnings by way of dividend earnings, royalty, technical know-how fee and other entitlements on such investments.

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)

- FDI is a category of cross-border investment in which an investor resident in one country establishes a lasting interest in an enterprise in another country.
- With FDI, foreign companies are directly involved with day-to-day operations in the other country. This means they aren't just bringing money with them, but also knowledge, skills and technology.

Outward Foreign Direct Investment (OFDI)

- An OFDI is a business strategy in which a domestic firm expands its operations to a foreign country.
- Employing OFDI is a natural progression for firms if their domestic markets become saturated and better business opportunities are available abroad.
- American, European, and Japanese firms have made extensive investments outside their domestic markets. China has emerged as a large OFDI player in recent years.
- OFDI has three components — equity, loans and guarantee issued.
- In 2024, overseas FDI by local companies in the form of equity stood at \$12.69 billion, a rise of 40% from 2023.
- Under the loan category, OFDI by Indian companies was \$8.7 billion in 2024, compared to \$4.76 billion in the previous calendar year.
- The guarantee issued by domestic firms declined to \$16.29 billion in 2024, as against \$18.44 billion in 2023.
- The sectors where Indian companies invest in overseas markets include hotels, construction, manufacturing, agriculture, mining and services.
- The countries that have seen total financial commitment by way of OFDI are Singapore, US, UK, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Malaysia.

Key Initiatives of Tobacco Board

- The Tobacco Board has undertaken several strategic activities to ensure the sustainability and growth of the tobacco industry.
- These include **crop planning** and **regulation of production** to meet both domestic and export demands.
- The Board supports farmers by providing handholding assistance to produce tobacco of requisite quality to meet the standards of importing countries.
- Financial assistance is extended to farmers through banks.
- Additionally, export promotion activities are carried out to sustain and improve India's tobacco exports.
- To ensure better price discovery and secure remunerative prices for farmers, the Board has implemented an IT-enabled electronic auctioning system for Flue Cured Virginia (FCV) tobacco.

Tobacco Board

- It is a statutory body **established in 1976** under the **Tobacco Board Act, 1975**
- The Board's primary role is to ensure the sustainable & smooth functioning of the farming system and to ensure fair and remunerative prices for tobacco farmers and the promotion of exports.
- Its functions extend to production, distribution (for domestic consumption and exports) and regulation of FCV tobacco.

Tobacco Production in India

- India is the 2nd largest producer of tobacco in the world after China. India is the 4th largest producer of FCV tobacco in the world after China, Brazil and Zimbabwe.
- India is the 2nd largest exporter of unmanufactured tobacco after Brazil.
- During 2023-24 the value of Indian tobacco exports reached Rs.12005 crore. Tobacco farmers income has also doubled over the last 5 years.

Tobacco Curing

- To create smoking tobacco, the tobacco leaves need to be cured, or dried out.
- It is a well standardized process especially in FCV tobacco to achieve the desirable qualities in the cured leaf.
- The wet, green tobacco leaves of a tobacco plant initially contain too much moisture to catch fire. They also have a higher chlorophyll content.
- By releasing a certain amount of chlorophyll from the leaves during the drying out process, the natural tannins come out giving the smoked tobacco its flavour and scent. The curing process makes the leaf dry enough to smoke while increasing the sugar and natural tannins found in each leaf to create the sweetly aromatic and mild taste tobacco is known for.
- There are different types of tobacco curing methods traditionally used: **Air-Cured, Sun-Cured, Fire-Cured, and Flue-Cured.**
- Each of the curing methods results in a tobacco product that is distinguishable by both its nicotine content and its aroma.

Key Characteristics of FCV

- Produces primarily cigarette tobacco.
- Contains a high sugar content.
- Contains medium to high levels of nicotine.
- Rich in natural tannins which creates its distinct mild and slightly sweet flavour and aroma.

Anti-dumping Duty on Cypermethrin

China has imposed anti-dumping duty on cypermethrin imported from India, due to the adverse effect on its domestic industry.

Cypermethrin

- It is a synthetic pyrethroid used as an **insecticide** in large-scale commercial agricultural applications as well as in consumer products for domestic purposes.
 - A **pyrethroid** is an organic compound similar to the natural pyrethrins, which are produced by the flowers of pyrethrums
- Cypermethrin is a **broad-spectrum insecticide**, which means it kills beneficial insects as well as the targeted insects.
- It can kill ants, cockroaches and agricultural insects. It controls pests on crops such as cotton, vegetables, corn, and flowers.
- It is a synthetic insecticide that **acts as a neurotoxin** to kill insects by disrupting their central nervous system.
- Exposure to sunlight, water and oxygen accelerates its decomposition. It is easily degraded on soil and plants but can be effective for weeks when applied to indoor inert surfaces.

Anti-dumping Duty

- An **anti-dumping duty** is a protectionist tariff that a domestic government imposes on foreign imports that it believes are priced below fair market value.
- Dumping** is a process in which a company exports a product at a price that is significantly lower than the price it normally charges in its home (or its domestic) market.
- Anti-dumping duty is imposed with the rationale that these imported products have the potential to undercut local businesses and the local economy.
- While the intention of anti-dumping duties is to save domestic jobs, these tariffs can also lead to higher prices for domestic consumers.
- In the long-term, anti-dumping duties can reduce the international competition of domestic companies producing similar goods.

Fiscal Health Index Report

- The NITI Aayog launched the inaugural issue of the Fiscal Health Index (FHI) 2025.
- The report provides a comprehensive assessment of the fiscal health of **18 major States for FY 2022-23**.
- It ranks States on the basis of **five major sub-indices** viz. Quality of Expenditure, Revenue Mobilisation, Fiscal Prudence, Debt Index, and Debt Sustainability, along with insights into state-specific challenges and areas for improvement.
- The FHI aims to highlight the fiscal status at the **sub-national level** and guide policy reforms for sustainable and resilient economic growth.
- It offers a comprehensive and systematic approach to measuring state-level fiscal performance and provides valuable insights into broader fiscal trends, allowing for a better understanding of fiscal health across the country.
- By focusing on major fiscal indicators, it encourages states to align their fiscal strategies with national objectives.
- It offers a roadmap for achieving fiscal consolidation, improving transparency, and facilitating effective resource management.
- It will also underscore the critical role of cooperative federalism in strengthening India's governance framework.

Rankings

- With a cumulative score of **67.8**, Odisha tops the ranking in fiscal health followed by Chhattisgarh and Goa with scores of 55.2 and 53.6, respectively.
- The achiever States display strong fiscal health, excelling in revenue mobilization, expenditure management, and debt sustainability.
- Improvements are seen in states like Jharkhand, which has strengthened fiscal prudence and debt sustainability, while Karnataka faces a decline due to weaker performance in expenditure quality and debt management.
- While Punjab and Kerala struggle with low-quality expenditure and debt sustainability, West Bengal has issues related to revenue mobilisation and debt indices.
- Andhra Pradesh struggles with a significant fiscal deficit, and Haryana's weak debt profile worsens its financial difficulties.
- These interstate disparities highlight the need for targeted reforms to address specific fiscal challenges and ensure sustainable growth.

Diamond Imprest Authorization Scheme

- The **Department of Commerce** has introduced the Diamond Imprest Authorization (DIA) scheme to enhance the global competitiveness of India's diamond sector. The scheme will be implemented **from April 2025**.
- The diamond industry is witnessing a steep decline in exports and job losses for the workers.
- The scheme is in response to policies undertaken in various natural diamond mining countries like Botswana, Namibia Angola etc where diamond manufactures have to open *cut and polishing* facilities for a minimum percentage of value addition.
- The scheme allows **duty-free import** of *Natural Cut and Polished* Diamonds, of less than ¼ Carat (25 Cents).
- It mandates export obligation with a value addition of 10%.
- Diamond exporters holding Two Star Export House status and above and having \$15 million exports per year, are eligible for availing the benefit under the scheme.

Significance

- The scheme is aimed towards retaining India's position as a global leader in the entire value chain of diamond industry.
- It is designed to provide a level playing field for Indian diamond exporters, particularly MSME exporters, enabling them to compete effectively with larger peers.
- It aims to prevent the potential flight of investments by Indian diamantaires to diamond-mining destinations. It is also expected to create employment opportunities for skilled craftsmen in diamond industry.
- It ensures compliance with international standards while facilitating ease of doing business.

India's First Organic Fish Cluster

- The Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying launched the **country's first organic fisheries cluster in Sikkim** under Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY).
- The development is intended to promote organic fisheries and aquaculture in alignment with Sikkim's organic farming practices.
- Organic fisheries cluster focuses on ecologically healthy fish farming system avoiding the use of harmful chemicals, antibiotics and pesticides.
- This also ensures minimal environmental pollution and prevents damage to aquatic ecosystems, contributing to sustainable fish production practices.
- Key fish species including amur carp will form part of this initiative.
- **NABARD** will support the cluster by funding infrastructure, building capacities, and forming fisheries-based Farmer Producer Organizations (FFPOs).
- The initiative will also encourage private investment in aquaculture infrastructure and technology, branding of Sikkim cold water fisheries, attract tourism as well as strengthen the value chain, empower local fishers and fish farmers.

50 Projects under PMMSY

- The Ministry also laid the foundation stone for 50 key projects worth Rs 50 crore under PMMSY, covering all northeastern states except Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram.
- **Launched in 2020**, PMMSY is a flagship scheme launched for a period of five years till **FY 2024-25**, with an investment of **Rs 20,050 crore**.
- It aims to address critical gaps in fish production and productivity, quality, technology, post-harvest infrastructure and management.
- PMMSY implements a cluster-based approach designed to enhance competitiveness, create economies of scale, and strengthen fisheries' value chains across India.

Objectives of PMMSY	Impact of PMMSY
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Add an additional fish production of 70 lakh metric tonnes by 2024-25;• Enhance aquaculture productivity from the national average of 3 tonne to 5 tonne per hectare;• Reduce post-harvest losses from 25% to around 10%;• Generate about 55 lakh direct and indirect employment opportunities;	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The concerted efforts through various initiatives/schemes have resulted in:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Increase of annual fish production in the country from 141.64 lakh tonne during 2019-20 to a record of 175.45 lakh tonne in 2022-23.○ Creation of direct and indirect employment opportunities of about 58 lakh in fishing and aquaculture related activities.○ Increase in fisheries export to Rs 60524.89 crore in 2023-24.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance fisheries exports from Rs 46,589 crore (2018-19) to Rs 1 lakh crore by 2024-25, Enhance per capita fish consumption from the current 5-6 kg to 12 kg; Encourage private investment and facilitate growth of entrepreneurship in fisheries sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced per capita fish consumption to 12-13 kg. Enhanced aquaculture productivity to 4.7 tonne per hectare; and Reduction of post-harvest losses to 10-15%.
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Transitioning Industrial Clusters Initiative

33 industrial clusters from 16 countries, including **five from India** joined the World Economic Forum's Transitioning Industrial Clusters Initiative (TICI).

Industrial Clusters

- Industrial clusters are geographically concentrated areas or hubs where interconnected industries, companies and institutions collaborate to drive economic growth.
- Industrial clusters account for approximately 15% to 20% of global carbon dioxide emissions, making them an attractive target for impactful emissions reductions.
- As they comprise of co-located energy supply, they can advance the deployment of clean-energy infrastructure worldwide.

Transitioning Industrial Clusters Initiative (TICI)

- The initiative was first launched at COP26 climate summit in 2021, and is developed in collaboration with Accenture and Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI).
- It aims to create a global movement to accelerate the transformation of industrial clusters needed for net-zero emissions.
- It is the largest coalition of co-located companies and public institutions pledging to reduce their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions while boosting economic growth and job creation.
- The 33 signatories together represent potential CO₂-equivalent emissions reductions of 832 million tonnes - approximately the annual emissions of Saudi Arabia
- They also make a direct contribution of USD 492 billion to GDP and support 4.3 million jobs.

Five Indian Clusters in TICI

- Kerala Green Hydrogen Valley:** This zone is central to India's decarbonization efforts by scaling hydrogen-powered transport.
- Gopalpur Industrial Park:** Strategically located in Odisha, the industrial park provides an ideal ecosystem to attract investments from sectors utilising cutting-edge technology, including green energy.
- Kakinada Cluster:** This port-anchored hub in Andhra Pradesh works to provide industrial decarbonization solutions, including green ammonia, hydrogen and sustainable aviation fuel.
- Mundra Cluster:** Located in Gujarat, it integrates green power initiatives with infrastructure to support large-scale industrial projects.
- Mumbai Green Hydrogen Cluster:** This industrial hub in Maharashtra is accelerating the green hydrogen economy, linking industries with sustainable energy sources.

Rise in RB-IOS Complaints

- The Reserve Bank - Integrated Ombudsman Scheme (RB - IOS), saw a **32.81% rise in complaints** from banking customers, reaching **9.34 lakh** during the year ended March 2024.
- This significant increase suggests a decline in customer service standards within the banking sector, highlighting the need for improvement.

- Chandigarh, Delhi, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Uttarakhand were the top five contributors to the complaints in FY 2023-24.
- Mizoram, Nagaland, Ladakh, Manipur and Lakshadweep were the lowest contributors.

Reserve Bank - Integrated Ombudsman Scheme, 2021

- It integrates the following three pre-existing Ombudsman schemes of RBI:
 - The Banking Ombudsman Scheme, 2006;
 - The Ombudsman Scheme for Non-Banking Financial Companies, 2018; and
 - The Ombudsman Scheme for Digital Transactions, 2019.
- Having evolved over different periods of time, the three schemes had different grounds of complaints, and had different compensation structures, resulting in uneven grievance redressal across customers of different entities.
- Thus, there was a need to simplify the procedure by integrating the schemes.

Features of RB-IOS, 2021

- The scheme is based on the concept of '**One Nation One Ombudsman**' with one portal, one email, and one address for the customers to lodge their complaints. It also removes the jurisdictional limitations of each ombudsman's office.
- Unlike earlier, it is no longer necessary for a complainant to identify under which scheme he/she should file complaint with the Ombudsman.
- The Scheme also defines 'deficiency in service' as the ground for filing a complaint, with a specified list of exclusions. Therefore, the complaints are no longer rejected simply on account of "not covered under the grounds listed in the scheme".
- "**Deficiency in service**" is a shortcoming or an inadequacy in any financial service which the Regulated Entity (RE) is required to provide. It may or may not result in financial loss or damage to the customer. It covers all REs like commercial banks, Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs), Payment System Participants, Primary (Urban) Cooperative Banks, and Credit Information Companies.
- It also covers Non-Scheduled Primary (Urban) Co-operative Banks with a deposit size of ₹50 crore.

Benefits

- It provides **cost-free** grievance redressal for customers of Regulated Entities.
- Further, it enables the customers to file complaint, submit documents, track status of complaints and provide feedback, from anywhere at any time.
- It **ensures uniformity** and provides a streamlined user-friendly mechanism which facilitates customer satisfaction and financial inclusion.

Business Ready Report

- According to Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) India may face challenges in achieving good scores in the Business Ready (B-READY) report.
- B-READY is the World Bank's new flagship report benchmarking the business environment and investment climate in most economies worldwide.
- It is a key instrument of the World Bank Group's new strategy to facilitate private investment, generate employment, and improve productivity to help economies accelerate development in inclusive and sustainable ways.
- It replaces and improves upon the World Bank Group's earlier Doing Business report. In 2020, the World Bank decided to pause the publication of its Doing Business report following a number of irregularities.

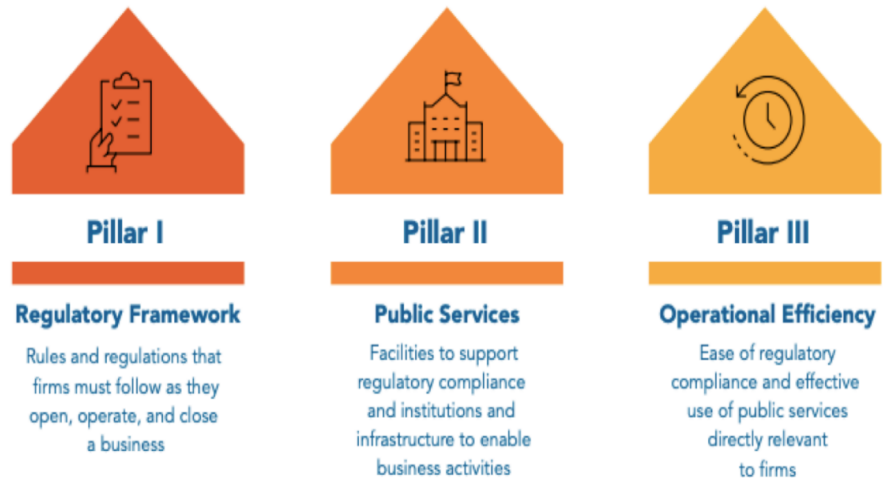
- It reflects a more balanced and transparent approach toward evaluating an economy's business and investment climate. The project aims to ensure that the data produced are both comparable across economies and representative within each economy.
- It covered **50 economies in 2024** and plans to cover 180 economies by 2026.

Analytical Framework

- B-Ready's analytical framework includes: **ten topics; three pillars; and three cross-cutting themes.**
- **Ten topics:** B-READY is organized according to topics essential for private sector development that correspond to various stages of the life cycle of a firm while opening, operating (or expanding), and closing (or reorganizing) a business.



- **Three cross-cutting themes:** Across the 10 topics, the assessment includes data on three cross-cutting areas increasingly important in modern economies: **digital adoption, environmental sustainability, and gender.**
- **Three Pillars:** For each topic B-Ready considers three pillars. **Pillar I: Regulatory Framework; Pillar II: Public Services; and Pillar III: Operational Efficiency.**
- Across all topics and pillars, B-Ready analyses **nearly 1200 indicators.**
- B-READY produces two sets of scores: one consisting of 10 topic scores and another comprising three pillar scores.



Topic and pillar scores can range from a minimum of 0 to a maximum of 100.

Challenges for India: *India did not participate in the 2024 B-READY Report. However, there are some India-specific observations by the think tank GTRI.*

- In Business Entry, countries like Singapore offer online business registration within a day at minimal cost. In India, businesses still face multiple steps and incomplete digital integration. India is likely to score moderately on this parameter.
- Similarly, in labour regulations, India has introduced the four labour codes, but their implementation remains slow and uneven across states, leading to a moderate low score.
- In international trade, Germany and Singapore simplify customs to promote trade. India, however, struggles with customs delays, inconsistent enforcement, and high logistics costs, which limit trade efficiency.
- Further, for business location parameters, India struggles with delays and inconsistent regulations.
- However, India is expected to get good scores in three key parameters - Quality of Regulations, Effectiveness of Public Services, and Operational Efficiency.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Gaza Ceasefire Agreement

- Hamas has agreed to a draft ceasefire agreement in the Gaza conflict. Israel's government has also approved the new deal with Hamas.
- The conflict began in October 2023 when Hamas launched attacks on Israel, resulting in 1,200 deaths, followed by an Israeli military offensive in Gaza.

Three-Phase Ceasefire Plan Overview

- **Phase 1: Ceasefire and Hostage Exchange**
 - A six-week ceasefire will commence, requiring a full Israeli military withdrawal from all populated areas in Gaza.
 - Hamas will release 33 Israeli hostages, including women, the elderly, and the wounded, in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners.
 - All civilian captives — living or dead — will be released by the end of this phase.
 - Humanitarian aid will be sent into Gaza, with 600 trucks entering daily.
 - Palestinians will return to their homes, although widespread destruction poses challenges.
- **Phase 2: Further Hostage Release and Israeli Withdrawal**
 - Hamas will release remaining captives, mainly male soldiers, in exchange for additional Palestinian prisoners.
 - Israel will execute a “complete withdrawal” of its forces from Gaza.
 - *This phase is expected to see a “permanent cessation of military and hostile operations”*
- **Phase 3: Gaza Reconstruction**
 - A large-scale reconstruction plan for Gaza will begin.
 - Any remains of deceased hostages will be returned to their families.

New US AI Export Rule Excludes India From Benefits Of Closest Allies

- The Joe Biden administration introduced a regulatory framework titled ‘*Framework for Artificial Intelligence Diffusion*’ that categorizes countries into **three tiers for AI hardware export restrictions**.
 - The first tier includes 18 close US allies with minimal restrictions, while the third tier severely restricts exports to countries of concern.
- The rules aim to maintain US control over advanced AI chips and models, but their enforcement will depend on the incoming Trump administration.

■ Three-Tier Framework for AI Hardware Export Restrictions ■

Tier 1: Closest US Allies

- Includes 18 countries like Australia, Canada, Germany, Japan, and the UK.
- No restrictions on computing power deployment by US companies.
- Security requirements are minimal.

Tier 2: Majority of Countries, Including India

- Limited to importing around 50,000 advanced AI chips through 2027, which could double with a US agreement.
- India is placed in the middle tier, facing some limitations on importing GPUs, potentially impacting its plan to acquire 10,000 GPUs for the IndiaAI Mission.
- Large AI data centers could face challenges, but smaller firms remain unaffected.

Tier 3: Restricted Countries (severely restricts exports to countries of concern)

- Includes nations like Russia, China, North Korea, and Libya.
- Export of US AI technology to these countries is nearly prohibited.

Special Provision for India and China

- The law also envisions a special review called the General Validated End User.
- **This list includes only two countries: India and China.**
 - **India** - Indian companies that get this authorisation can use the exported items for civilian and military purposes, but not for nuclear use.
 - **China** - Chinese companies with this authorisation can only use the technology for civilian use.

Potential Impact on India

Short-term Impact	Long-term Concerns
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Experts feel that India's initial plan to procure 10,000 GPUs for the ₹10,000-crore IndiaAI Mission is unlikely to be affected.• Subsidised GPUs will be provided to startups, academia, and researchers for training AI models.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Licensing uncertainties and trade negotiations may challenge large-scale AI deployments.• Companies like Reliance and Yotta, aiming to build AI compute infrastructure, could face delays.• Scaling up AI data centers requiring several hundred thousand GPUs may become difficult.

India's Response and Options

- Current demand can be fulfilled, but future scaling may require reassessment of restrictions by the incoming Trump administration.
- India could secure *General Validated End User* authorisations due to its non-re-exporter status and support from Nvidia and AMD.
- The country's AI market is projected to grow to \$17-20 billion by 2027 at an annual rate of 25%-35%.

Southern California Wildfires 2025

- Wildfires in Los Angeles, California, have killed many people, forced over 130,000 evacuations, and destroyed homes, including those of celebrities like Paris Hilton and Billy Crystal.
- Major fires, such as the Palisades, Eaton, Sunset, Hurst, and Lidia fires, continue to burn, affecting areas like Hollywood Hills.
- Although wildfires are common in California, the intensity and speed of these winter wildfires are unusual.

Southern California has a Mediterranean climate characterized by hot, dry summers and mild, wet winters. This makes the region naturally prone to wildfires, especially during periods of drought.

- 2020 Bobcat Fire in Los Angeles (largest fires in the county's history) was fueled by dry conditions and high winds.

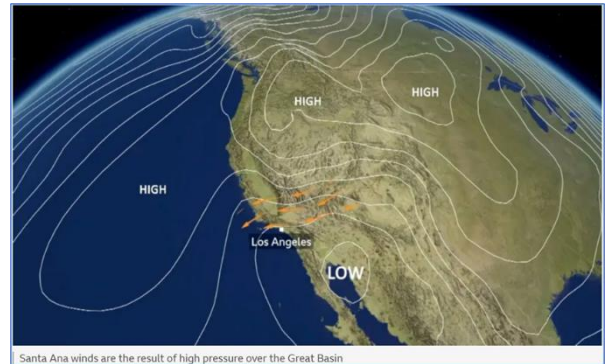
Possible Cause of California Wildfires

The exact trigger remains unknown, but power cables blowing in the wind are a likely cause.

- **Three Key Factors Behind the Conflagration**
 - **Wet Weather Followed by Extreme Dryness**
 - ✓ Unusually wet winters in 2022 and 2023 led to dense vegetation growth in the Los Angeles region.
 - ✓ The winter of 2024-25 has been exceptionally dry, turning the vegetation into dry kindling.
 - ✓ **NASA Report:** Since October, Southern California has had negligible rainfall, with Los Angeles recording its driest start to a water year since 1944.
 - ✓ *According to a study by climate attribution group ClimaMeter, three wildfires that have devastated large parts of Los Angeles city are mainly due to a 'hydroclimate whiplash'*
 - *Hydroclimate Whiplash is an extreme and rapid shifts between very wet and very dry conditions in a particular region*
 - **Santa Ana Winds (explained below):** Common in the region but unusually strong this year.
 - ✓ Result: Fast, dry, and warm winds that rapidly spread flames over dry vegetation, power cables, and flammable wooden structures.
 - **Impact of Climate Change** has intensified extreme weather events, including wildfires.
- **Key Observations:**
 - Rising global temperatures, warmer springs, and early snow melts have extended and intensified dry seasons, increasing vegetation moisture stress.

What are Santa Ana Winds?

- These are strong, dry, and warm winds that blow from the inland deserts of Southern California toward the coast. They are most common in fall & winter months but can occur any time of the year.
 - They are known for their ability to quickly spread wildfires due to their dry and powerful nature.
- **Causes of Santa Ana Winds**
 - **High-Pressure Systems in the Great Basin**
 - ✓ Santa Ana winds are caused by high-pressure systems that develop over the **Great Basin**, a desert region that spans parts of Nevada, Utah, and California.
 - ✓ These high-pressure systems create a clockwise circulation of air, pushing winds toward lower-pressure areas along the California coast.
 - **Descending Air**
 - ✓ As the winds move **westward**, they descend from higher elevations (like the Sierra Nevada and Santa Ana Mountains) toward lower elevations near the coast.
 - ✓ During this descent: The air *compresses, heats up, and loses humidity*.
 - **Narrow Passages and Speed Increase**
 - ✓ The winds are funnelled through mountain passes and canyons, which *increase their speed significantly*.
 - ✓ Gusts can reach over **100 mph (160 km/h)** in some areas.
- **Characteristics of Santa Ana Winds**
 - **Warm and Dry:** Air warms as it descends, making the winds hot and dry.
 - **Strong Gusts:** Winds can reach extreme speeds, causing power outages & property damage.
 - **Fuel for Wildfires:** The dryness and speed help spread flames rapidly by drying out vegetation and acting as a natural bellows.



Mitigation

measures: Fire prevention and education, Vegetation management, Building codes and regulations, Early detection and suppression; Use of satellite technology and AI for real-time monitoring and predictions

Australia: Similar Mediterranean climate and fire-prone ecosystems. Lessons can be drawn from Australia's advanced early warning systems.

Pink fire retardant is being used to curb California wildfires

- Authorities have deployed planes and helicopters to combat the blaze. Nine planes are spraying pink fire retardant, a long-used product, and 20 helicopters are dropping water.
- Fire retardant is a chemical mixture designed to extinguish or slow the spread of fires.
- It is commonly used to combat wildfires, with **Phos-Chek** being the most widely used brand in the US.
- Phos-Chek is primarily a mixture of water, fertilizer (**ammonium phosphate**), and rust-based red color.
 - Ammonium phosphate, helps slow the spread of fires by cooling and coating fuels, depleting oxygen, and altering how fuels burn. Unlike water, it does not evaporate easily and remains effective for a longer duration.
- The formulation may also include thickening agents to control viscosity and prevent the material from drifting.
- A pink dye is added to the fire retardant for visibility against the landscape, enabling firefighters to create fire lines effectively.
- According to experts, pink is the most visible and aesthetically pleasing option.

Extra Mile: Forest Fires in India

- The study, '**Managing Forest Fires in a Changing Climate**', found that there has been a ten-fold increase in forest fires in the past two decades.

- **The Forest Survey of India (FSI)** estimates that 36% of India's forests are prone to frequent forest fires. **More than 62 % of the Indian states** are at risk from severe forest fires.
 - ✓ Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, and Jammu & Kashmir experience frequent forest fires due to dry pine forests and steep terrains.
 - ✓ Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh see fires linked to shifting cultivation and forest clearing.
 - ✓ Northeast India: Slash-and-burn (jhum cultivation) contributes significantly to forest fires.

Trump Signs Executive Order To End US Birthright Citizenship

On his first day in office, US President Donald Trump signed several executive orders, including a controversial one aimed at ending birthright citizenship for children of parents **without legal status**.

Key Highlights

- **Categories Excluded from Birthright Citizenship**
 - Individuals *not subject to the jurisdiction of the US Constitution* fall into two main categories:
 - ✓ **Unlawful Presence**
 - When the mother was unlawfully present in the US at the time of birth.
 - The father was neither a US citizen nor a lawful permanent resident.
 - ✓ **Lawful but Temporary Presence**
 - When the mother was lawfully in the US temporarily (e.g., under a visa or the Visa Waiver Program).
 - The father was neither a US citizen nor a lawful permanent resident.
- **Interpretation**
 - President Trump's executive order challenges the traditional interpretation of the 14th Amendment.
 - It emphasizes that birthright citizenship is not universally applicable.
 - It argues that the amendment excludes individuals born in the US who are *not "subject to the jurisdiction thereof."*

Impact on the Indian Community

- The executive order seeks to revoke automatic citizenship for children born in the US to non-citizen parents, potentially impacting immigrant communities, including Indian Americans.
- **H-1B Visa Holders and Green Card Backlogs**
 - Indian professionals on **H-1B visas and Green Card applicants** will be affected as their US-born children *may lose automatic citizenship*.
 - Families already waiting for Green Cards face additional uncertainty about their children's future in the US.
- **Indian Students in the US**
 - Indian students, who form a significant group of international students in the US, will face difficulties securing citizenship for children born during their study tenure.
- **Discouragement from Moving to the US**
 - Indian professionals, students, and families may opt for immigration-friendly countries like Canada and Australia instead.
- **Economic Impact**
 - The Indian community contributes significantly to the US tech industry, healthcare, and education sectors. Revoking birthright citizenship could reduce these contributions.

About Birthright Citizenship in the US

- Birthright citizenship automatically grants citizenship at birth.

- In the US, it exists in two forms: **jus soli** (citizenship based on birthplace) and **jus sanguinis** (citizenship based on ancestry, for children born abroad to US citizens).
- The **Fourteenth Amendment of the US Constitution**, adopted in **1868** after the Civil War, guarantees birthright citizenship.
 - It states that “all persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside.”

U.S. Withdrawal from Paris Agreement

- Among the first executive orders that Donald Trump signed after taking over as President on January 20 was to withdraw the U.S. from the Paris Agreement of 2015.
- This makes it the third time the U.S. has withdrawn from a treaty signed under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
 - **Kyoto Protocol (2001)**: President Bush withdrew, citing economic harm and the exemption of major developing economies like China and India from compliance.
 - **Paris Agreement (2017)**: The withdrawal, finalized in November 2020, was reversed by President Joe Biden in January 2021.
 - ✓ The Paris Agreement aims to limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C or below 2°C compared to pre-industrial levels.
- **Potential Fallout of U.S. Exit**
 - The exit affects the Paris Agreement but not the broader UNFCCC framework.
 - Developing nations may adopt less ambitious climate targets.
 - The U.S.'s reduced reliance on coal and its influence in anti-coal positions may offset some negative impacts.
 - Analysts argue the U.S. exit has limited significance, as global emissions have not been significantly curbed by existing targets.

China's Population Falls For Third Straight Year

- China's population declined for the third consecutive year, standing at 1.408 billion by the end of 2024—a decrease of 1.39 million from the previous year.
- **Global and Regional Trends**
 - This mirrors trends in East Asia, including Japan, South Korea, and Hong Kong, as well as parts of Eastern Europe, where populations are falling due to declining birth rates.
- **Key Reasons for Decline**
 - Rising costs of living discourage marriage and childbirth.
 - Younger generations prioritize higher education and careers.
 - Longer life expectancy fails to offset the drop in birth rates.
- **Implications for China**
 - The decline highlights significant challenges for China, including an ageing population and a shrinking workforce, which may affect its economic and social stability in the long term.

Russian Gas Exports To Europe Via Ukraine Halted

- Russian natural gas exports to Europe via Soviet-era pipelines through Ukraine were stopped as the transit deal expired, with no agreement reached between Moscow and Kyiv. This marks the end of Russia's oldest gas route to Europe.

- **Urengoy-Pomary-Uzhgorod Pipeline**

- o The pipeline transports gas from Siberia through Sudzha, located in Russia's Kursk region, now under Ukrainian military control.
- o It flows through Ukraine to Slovakia, branching into the Czech Republic and Austria.
- o Transdnistria, bordering Ukraine, receives Russian gas via Ukraine.

Panama Canal Treaty

- U.S. President Donald Trump criticized over the Panama Canal, calling the 1999 transfer treaty "foolish" and threatening to take back control of the canal.
 - o The Panama Canal is an artificial waterway connecting the **Atlantic and Pacific Oceans**, facilitating global trade by reducing travel time.
- His concerns stem from two key issues:
 - o high transit fees applied to U.S. vessels by the Panama Canal Authority (ACP) after drought-related disruptions in 2023, and
 - o the growing Chinese presence in Panama, particularly through investments linked to China's Belt and Road Initiative.
- The Panama Canal, a vital international trade route, was controlled by the U.S. until 1999 when it was handed over to Panama under the **Torrijos-Carter Treaties**, which also established its neutral status.
- The U.S. retains certain rights, like ensuring its neutrality and prioritizing military passage in emergencies.

DeepSeek: A New Chatbot Rival to ChatGPT

- Chinese startup DeepSeek has launched AI models that compete with top U.S. models at a much lower cost.
- It is a free AI-powered chatbot that functions similarly to ChatGPT. It can perform various tasks, though its effectiveness compared to rivals remains debated.
- DeepSeek's R1 model is reportedly as powerful as OpenAI's o1, excelling in mathematics and coding.
- It is a "reasoning" model that processes responses incrementally, using less memory and reducing operational costs.
- DeepSeek claims to have trained its model for just \$6 million, significantly lower than the over \$100 million OpenAI spent on GPT-4.

IT TOOK ONLY \$5.6mn TO CREATE	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Founded in May 2023 by Liang Wenfeng, who also founded and runs a hedge fund called High-Flyer > DeepSeek's headquarters is in the Chinese city of Hangzhou > Paid access to its new model reportedly comes at 3% of what OpenAI charges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > The AI model sidetracks questions on itself and Chinese politics > DeepSeek's first AI model – launched in Nov 2023 – was called DeepSeek Coder > DeepSeek became #1 downloaded free app on Apple App Store, displacing ChatGPT which, though, has higher total downloads

India's Strategic Role in the AI Race

- **PM Modi's Participation in AI Summit**
 - o India's participation in the upcoming AI summit in Paris highlights the need to assess the implications of the US-China AI rivalry, especially after the release of DeepSeek R1.
- **The DeepSeek-Sputnik Parallel**
 - o DeepSeek R1's launch is compared to the Soviet Union's 1957 Sputnik launch, marking a significant escalation in the technological rivalry between the US and China.
- **US-China AI Rivalry: A Bipolar Landscape**
 - o China's strong AI investments make it a key competitor to the US.
 - o The AI race is expected to remain dominated by the US and China, leaving other nations, like India, struggling to keep pace.
- **Innovation with Limited Resources: Lessons for Middle Powers**

- DeepSeek showcases how limited resources can still drive technological innovation, offering hope to middle powers like India and France to remain relevant in AI through strategic innovation.
- **Sovereign AI and Strategic Partnerships**
 - India and France advocate for "Sovereign AI" — balancing cooperation with the US and independent AI development. India must address concerns over technology leakage to Russia to strengthen partnerships.
- **Cooperation Amid Rivalry**
 - Historical examples like the US-Soviet cooperation in space suggest that global AI governance may eventually see collaboration between the US and China to prevent misuse and control destabilizing effects.
- **India's Role in Global AI Governance**
 - India must avoid being sidelined, as it was in nuclear governance, and actively shape global AI governance by defining its strategic AI vision.

Conclusion

India faces both challenges and opportunities in the AI race. By leveraging partnerships, investing in innovation, and ensuring strategic clarity, India can play a key role in the global AI landscape.

Escalation of Conflict in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

- M23 rebels, backed by Rwanda, captured Goma, the capital of North Kivu province.
- The group then pushed south into South Kivu, clashing with Congolese forces and their allies, including Burundian troops.
- Reports of Rwandan troops crossing into South Kivu have heightened concerns of a broader regional conflict.
 - Rwanda is accused by the *DRC, UN officials, and Western powers* of supporting the M23 rebels by sending troops and heavy weapons into Congolese territory.
 - Rwanda denies backing the M23, claiming its actions are defensive in nature, in response to the FDLR's attacks on Tutsis in both countries.

About M23 Group

- M23, named after the March 23, 2009 accord that ended a previous Tutsi-led revolt, is the latest **ethnic Tutsi insurgency group** in eastern Congo.
- The group accuses the Congolese government of failing to honor the peace deal and integrate Congolese Tutsis into the military and administration.
- M23 defends Tutsi interests, especially against ethnic Hutu militias like the FDLR, composed of Hutus who fled Rwanda after the 1994 genocide.

US Immigration and Deportation of Indian Nationals

- Newly appointed US Secretary of State Marco Rubio raised the issue of "irregular immigration" with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar.
- As of November 2024, 20,407 Indians are facing deportation, with 17,940 under "final removal orders" and 2,647 detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).
- **Deportation Process**
 - It is a process of removing non-citizens from the US for immigration violations, including criminal acts or violations of visa conditions.
 - An expedited removal process is in place for those who entered the US illegally or without proper documents, created by the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996.

- **Deportations of Indians:**
 - Deportations of Indian nationals to the US have increased over the years:
 - In 2020: 2,312 Indians deported.
 - 2021-2023: Significantly lower deportations (292, 276, and 370).
 - In 2024: 1,529 Indians were deported, with India ranking above China and almost on par with Brazil for deportations from the US.

Trump's Withdrawal from Global Corporate Minimum Tax Deal

- President Trump declared the global corporate minimum tax deal "has no force or effect" in the U.S.
- With this, he effectively pulling the U.S. out of the 2021 agreement negotiated under the Biden administration.
- **About Global Corporate Minimum Tax Deal**
 - Signed in 2021, the deal, which was proposed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), imposes a *minimum effective rate* of 15% on corporate profits.
 - The policy is aimed at ending the benefit of shielding multi-billion-dollar profits in tax havens.
 - It is also intended to remove the incentive for nations that operate as tax havens for corporate giants.
- **Global Corporate Minimum Tax and U.S. Stance:**
 - The global corporate minimum tax, set at 15%, has been adopted by the EU, Britain, and other countries.
 - However, the U.S. Congress never approved measures to comply with it, as the U.S. has a 10% global minimum tax under Trump's 2017 tax cut package.
 - Countries with 15% minimum tax are imposing "top-up" taxes on U.S. companies paying a lower rate, which Trump termed "retaliatory."

US Eases Curbs to push Nuclear Deal

- US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan announced plans to remove Indian government entities, including Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research (IGCAR), and Indian Rare Earths Limited (IREL), from the **US entity list**.
 - The US Entity List includes foreign individuals, businesses, and organizations subject to **export restrictions** and **licensing requirements** for specific goods and technologies.
 - Compiled by the Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) under the U.S. Department of Commerce, it aims to prevent unauthorized trade that could support: Terrorism; Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) programs; Activities against US foreign policy or national security interests.
- This move aims to facilitate collaboration between India's nuclear institutions and US companies.

Indo-US Civil Nuclear Deal

- The Indo-US Civil Nuclear Deal, signed in **2008**, marked a watershed moment in India-US relations.
 - It allowed India to engage in nuclear trade despite not being a signatory to Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).
 - The agreement granted India access to nuclear fuel, reactors, and technology for civilian purposes while committing to the separation of its civilian and military nuclear programs under IAEA safeguards.
- **Progress**
 - The deal received initial enthusiasm, leading to amendments in US laws like the **Hyde Act** to accommodate India's unique status.
 - ✓ India signed agreements with several countries for nuclear fuel & reactor technologies.
 - However, the operationalization of the agreement has been slow, with limited progress in the construction of nuclear reactors or the flow of significant US investments.

- **Why Progress Has Been Slow?**

- **Key Legal Barriers**
- **High Costs:** Setting up nuclear reactors involves significant costs, making nuclear energy less competitive.
- **Regulatory and Bureaucratic Hurdles:** Long-standing regulatory issues, including delays in clearances and approvals.
- **Public Opposition:** Concerns over nuclear safety, particularly after incidents like the Fukushima disaster (2011), have slowed reactor projects due to protests and resistance.
- **Geopolitical Factors:** Divergences over non-proliferation commitments and strategic priorities, as well as legacy issues in bilateral relations.
- **Technological Constraints in India's Nuclear Programme**
 - ✓ India's civil nuclear programme primarily relies on Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs) using heavy water and natural uranium.
 - ✓ PHWRs are becoming outdated compared to the more widely adopted Light Water Reactors (LWRs), where the US, Russia, and France lead in technology.

Key Legal Barriers to Indo-US Civil Nuclear Deal



- **US Regulatory Impediments (10CFR810):**

- Part 810 of Title 10, Code of Federal Regulations, under the US Atomic Energy Act of 1954, restricts US nuclear vendors from manufacturing equipment or performing nuclear design work in India.
- This limitation hinders India's aspiration to participate in the manufacturing value chain and co-produce nuclear components for joint projects.

- **India's Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010:**

- The Act holds suppliers liable for damages in case of a nuclear accident, deterring foreign vendors like GE-Hitachi, Westinghouse, and Orano from investing in India's nuclear sector.
- Concerns about future liability remain a significant hurdle for international players.

World Bank Neutral Expert on Indus Water Treaty Dispute

- Michel Lino, the World Bank-appointed Neutral Expert (NE), declared he is "competent" to decide differences on hydroelectric projects under the Indus Water Treaty (IWT), 1960.
 - India welcomed the decision, emphasizing that all seven technical disputes fall within the NE's jurisdiction.
- The IWT allocates the three eastern rivers (Sutlej, Beas, Ravi) to India and the three western rivers (Indus, Jhelum, Chenab) to Pakistan.
 - Signed in 1960, the treaty aimed at equitable water sharing between the two nations.

Background of the Dispute

- The dispute between India and Pakistan centers on the Kishenganga and Ratle hydroelectric projects.

Kishenganga Project: On the Kishenganga River, a tributary of Jhelum

Ratle Project: On the Chenab River

- India advocates resolution through a **NE**, as outlined in the IWT of 1960, while Pakistan supports the involvement of the **Permanent Court of Arbitration (CoA)** in The Hague.
 - Pakistan raised objections to these projects, initially seeking the appointment of a **NE** in 2015.
 - However, in 2016, Pakistan unilaterally withdrew this request and sought adjudication by a **CoA**, violating the dispute resolution mechanism outlined in Article IX of the treaty.
 - ✓ Pakistan bypassed the sequence mentioned in dispute redressal mechanism under IWT and sought arbitration directly in 2016.
 - India then requested the matter to be referred to a Neutral Expert.
- **Parallel Mechanisms and Legal Challenges**
 - Pakistan's move for a CoA led to World Bank facilitating both a Neutral Expert and a CoA in 2022.
 - India has refused to participate in the CoA, calling it "illegally constituted" and contrary to treaty provisions.

- **Engagement on Treaty Review**

- India and Pakistan are also in contact under Article XII (3) of the IWT for the review and potential modification of the treaty.
- India issued formal notices to Pakistan for review (August, 2024) and modification (January 2023) of the treaty.
- ✓ Pakistan has not formally responded despite four letters from India.

Dispute Resolution Mechanism under the Indus Water Treaty (IWT)

- The IWT 1960 outlines a three-tiered dispute resolution process to address disagreements regarding projects on the Indus rivers.
- Article IX of the treaty defines this structured mechanism.
- **Level 1: Permanent Indus Commission (PIC)**
 - **Initial Notification:** Both parties must inform each other about any planned projects on the Indus rivers, sharing all relevant information.
 - **Role of PIC:** Established under the IWT, it is responsible for managing and overseeing the treaty's objectives.
 - **Outcome:** If the PIC fails to resolve the disagreement, the issue is escalated to the next level.
- **Level 2: Neutral Expert Appointment**
 - **World Bank's Role:** If the PIC is unable to resolve the dispute, the World Bank appoints a neutral expert to mediate the issue.
 - **Resolution Attempts:** The neutral expert's goal is to resolve the dispute through technical assessments and recommendations.
 - **Escalation:** If the neutral expert cannot resolve the matter, it is considered a formal dispute and moves to the final level.
- **Level 3: Court of Arbitration (CoA)**
 - **Final Step:** When a dispute persists after the neutral expert's intervention, it is referred to the Court of Arbitration (CoA).
 - **Chairperson:** The chair of the CoA is appointed by the World Bank.
 - **Final Decision:** The CoA is the final body to adjudicate the dispute, with its decisions considered binding.

Gurpatwant Pannun Assassination Plot: Proposal by Govt. Panel

The Indian government has taken steps to address allegations of an assassination plot targeting Khalistan separatist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, based on inputs provided by the United States.

Gurpatwant Pannun Assassination Plot Case

- **Background of the case:** The US authorities provided evidence alleging the involvement of Vikash Yadav, a former Indian official, in a plot to assassinate Pannun, a US-Canada dual citizen and leader of the banned Sikhs for Justice group.
- **Formation of committee:**
 - The Indian government established a high-powered committee to probe the matter, investigate leads, and ensure due process.
 - The committee conducted independent inquiries.
 - Collaborated with US authorities, exchanging visits and scrutinizing evidence.
- **Key findings of the committee:**
 - The committee **identified criminal links and antecedents of the implicated individual.**
 - Recommended expeditious legal action against the accused.

- Proposed systemic and procedural improvements to prevent similar incidents.

Visit of President of the Republic of Singapore to India

- Tharman Shanmugaratnam, President of Singapore was on a five-day State Visit to India.
- India and Singapore are deepening cooperation in key sectors like advanced manufacturing, semiconductors, and renewable energy, marking a "new trajectory" in bilateral ties.
- During this visit, both sides explored new initiatives, including:
 - a data corridor between Gujarat's GIFT City and Singapore for secure financial data exchange, and
 - the possibility of a renewable energy corridor.
- Shanmugaratnam noted Singapore's status as India's largest investor and highlighted robust business and defense ties.
- The visit also commemorated the upcoming 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations in 2025, with the unveiling of a joint logo featuring elements from both nations' national symbols, symbolizing enduring friendship.

Thaw in India-China chill

After three months of negotiations, India and China have agreed to concrete measures to resume ties. After a prolonged military standoff at the **Line of Actual Control (LAC)** and disruptions caused by the **COVID-19 pandemic**, both nations are taking steps to restore bilateral ties.

- The disengagement process completed in November 2024 marked a significant diplomatic breakthrough.

Key Agreements and Initiatives

- **Resumption of Kailash Mansarovar Yatra**
- **Direct Flights and Visa Services** for media, think tanks, and business representatives.
- **Hydrological Data Sharing:** Dialogues will resume under the India-China Expert Level Mechanism to discuss data sharing on trans-border rivers, a critical issue for downstream water management.
- **Enhancing People-to-People Ties:**
 - As part of the **75th anniversary of diplomatic relations in 2025**, India and China plan to organize cultural events, media exchanges, and academic collaborations.

US Opens Consulate in Bengaluru

- The United States inaugurated **its fifth consulate in India in Bengaluru**, temporarily located at the JW Marriott Hotel on Vittal Mallya Road.
- While visa services are not yet available, the consulate aims to strengthen economic, political, and diplomatic ties, particularly in technology and innovation.
- Later, EAM S. Jaishankar announced plans to open an Indian diplomatic mission in Los Angeles.

India Hands over Defence Equipment and Stores to Maldives

- India and the Maldives took steps to restore defence ties as India handed over defence equipment worth ₹35 crore, including utility vehicles and berthing equipment, at the request of the Maldivian government.
- India decide to extend the lease of Indian-gifted aviation platforms, and enhancing the Maldives National Defence Force's capabilities.
- India also urged progress on the 'Ekatha' harbour project at Uthuru Thila Falhu, a key grant-in-aid initiative to enhance the Maldives' naval security and infrastructure.

India Protests China's New Counties in Aksai Chin and Mega Dam on Brahmaputra

- India has lodged a **"solemn protest"** with China over the creation of two new counties—He'an and Hekang—in Hotan Prefecture, which includes parts of Aksai Chin, a region India claims as its own.
- The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) reaffirmed that India **does not recognize China's illegal occupation** and warned that the move does not alter India's sovereignty claims.
- India also raised concerns over China's plan to build the **world's largest dam** on the Yarlung Tsangpo (Brahmaputra) near the Indian border.
 - The project is planned at the "Great Bend" of the river in Medog county, Tibet, where it makes a U-turn before entering Arunachal Pradesh.
- India emphasized that China had not **officially notified India**, as required between riparian states. It urged **transparency, consultation, and protection of downstream interests**, stressing its established rights over the river's waters.

Existing Coordination Mechanism on Transboundary Rivers Between India and China

- India and China have several agreements for cooperation on transboundary rivers:
 - **Umbrella MoU (2013)**: Covers overall cooperation on transboundary rivers and has no expiry date. However, no activity is currently being undertaken under this agreement.
 - **Brahmaputra MoU**: Signed for data sharing and renewable every five years. It lapsed in 2023, and its renewal is under process via diplomatic channels.
 - **Sutlej MoU**: Initiated after the 2004 Parechu Lake incident but does not provide year-round data. This MoU is also pending renewal.
- **Expert Level Mechanism (2006)**
 - This mechanism facilitates annual meetings between India and China to discuss transboundary river issues. However, interruptions have occurred in recent years.
- **International Framework**
 - While neither India nor China is a signatory to the **1997 UN Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses**, both countries abide by its key principles.
 - These include equitable and reasonable water use and ensuring that actions of one country do not significantly harm another.

SUMMITS AND ORGANISATIONS

India Joins UN-CEBD

- India has joined the prestigious **UN Committee of Experts on Big Data & Data Science for Official Statistics (UN-CEBD)**.
- This inclusion comes shortly after India's membership in the **United Nations Statistical Council (UNSC)**, highlighting the country's growing global stature in leveraging data and technology for informed decision-making.
 - UNSC (established in 1946) is the highest decision-making body for *international statistical activities*. It is a functional commission of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).
- India's initiatives, such as the Data Innovation Lab and exploration of non-traditional data sources like satellite imagery and machine learning, will be showcased on this global platform.
- The engagement aligns India's advancements with international goals, positioning the country as a leader in transforming statistical processes.

VOLUME	VARIETY	VELOCITY	VERACITY	VALUE	VARIABILITY
The amount of data from myriad sources.	The types of data: structured, semi-structured, unstructured.	The speed at which big data is generated.	The degree to which big data can be trusted.	The business value of the data collected.	The ways in which the big data can be used and formatted.

6 V of Big data (given in figure)

UN-CEBD

- UN-CEBD**, established in 2014, aims to enhance the use of Big Data for official statistics. Its mandate includes:
 - Providing strategic vision and coordination for Big Data programs.
 - Promoting practical applications while addressing challenges (methodological, legal, security).
 - Building capacity and public trust in Big Data usage.
 - Advocating for Big Data in policymaking.
- Organisational Structure**
 - Leadership: Initially chaired by Australia, leadership transitioned to Denmark in 2016, and currently, South Africa leads as Chair, with Denmark and the UK as vice-Chairs.
 - Membership: 31 member states (Including India) & 16 international organizations.
- Management Bodies**
 - Advisory Board: Provides strategic direction and oversees the UN Global Platform and Regional Hubs.
 - UN-CEBD Bureau: Handles day-to-day operations.
- Significance for India:** Membership in UN-CEBD complements India's efforts to:
 - Streamline statistical production and innovation in data collection and analysis.
 - Build a modern, resilient statistical ecosystem for governance and policy formulation.
 - Reinforce its position as a global leader in leveraging data for sustainable development and informed decision-making.

Indonesia Becomes Full Member of BRICS

Indonesia has officially joined BRICS as a full member.

- BRICS is an intergovernmental organization that initially consists of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.
 - With recent expansions, BRICS now also includes **Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and UAE**, reflecting its growing influence among developing nations.

- As the world's fourth most populous country, Indonesia had long sought to join BRICS to strengthen alliances among emerging economies and support the Global South.
- Its membership was unanimously approved during the 2023 BRICS summit in Johannesburg, but the finalization occurred after Indonesia's 2024 Presidential election, which brought President Prabowo Subianto to office.
- Brazil, holding the BRICS presidency in 2025, emphasized Indonesia's shared commitment to reforming global governance and fostering cooperation in the Global South.

Nigeria Admitted as Partner Country of BRICS Bloc

- Nigeria has been admitted as a "partner country" of BRICS, joining eight others.
 - The other 8 partner countries are **Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Thailand, Uganda, and Uzbekistan.**
- Brazil highlighted Nigeria's economic significance and role in South-South cooperation.

ILO Report On International Migrants

- The fourth edition of 'Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers' has been released by the International Labour Organization (ILO).
- As per the report, international migrants (IMs) play a key role in addressing labour shortages in host nations while contributing remittances to their home countries.
 - In 2024, India received an estimated **\$129.1 billion** in remittances, marking the highest-ever amount recorded by any country in a single year.
 - This also represented India's largest share of global remittances since 2000.

Key Highlights of the Report

- **Labour Force Participation**
 - In 2022, IMs constituted 4.7% of the global labour force (167.7 million), an increase of over 30 million since 2013.
 - Of these, 155.6 million were employed and 12.1 million were unemployed.
 - The share of IM men in global employment was **4.7%**, while that of IM women was **4.4%**.
- **Gender and Age Distribution**
 - **IM Men:** 61.3% employed (out of 102.7 million).
 - **IM Women:** 38.7% employed (out of 64.9 million).
 - ✓ Women's participation in the IM workforce has steadily risen since 2015, but remains lower due to their overall lower representation in migrant populations.
 - **Prime-age workers (25-54 years)** formed the largest share at **74.9% (125.6 million)**.
 - **Young workers (15-24 years):** 9.3% (15.5 million).
 - **Older workers (55-64 years):** 12.5%, while those **above 65** were 3.4%.
- **Sectors Employing IMs**
 - **Services:** **68.4%** of IMs, with **women dominating (80.7%)** compared to men (60.8%).
 - **Industry:** 24.3% of IMs, similar to non-migrants (24.2%).
 - **Agriculture:** IMs accounted for **7.4%**, much lower than non-migrants (24.3%).
 - The dominance of IMs in the services sector has remained above 67% since 2013.
- **Host Countries and Regional Distribution**
 - **High-income countries** host the largest share (**68.4% or 114 million**) of IMs, especially in care-related jobs.
 - **Upper-middle-income countries:** 17.4% (29.2 million).
 - **Regional Breakdown (2022):**

- ✓ **Europe (North, South, West):** 23.3% (slight increase since 2013).
- ✓ **North America:** 22.6% (slight decline over the decade).
- ✓ **Arab States:** 13.3% (down by three percentage points since 2013).

- **Future Trends**

- With ageing populations, rising demand in the care economy, and better economic opportunities, **high-income countries will remain the primary destinations** for IMs in the coming years.

International Labour Organization (ILO)

- **ILO** is a specialized agency of the United Nations that promotes social justice and internationally recognized labour standards.
 - Established in **1919** as part of the Treaty of Versailles, it aims to improve working conditions, enhance employment opportunities, and protect workers' rights globally.
- **Headquarters:** Geneva, Switzerland.
- **Members:** The ILO has **187 member states**, comprising representatives from governments, employers, and workers, making it the only tripartite UN agency.
- **Major Reports Published by ILO:**
 - **World Employment and Social Outlook (WESO)** – Analyzes global labour market trends.
 - **Global Wage Report** – Examines wage trends and income distribution worldwide.
 - **World Social Protection Report** – Reviews social security and protection systems.
 - **Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers** – Role of migrant workers in the global economy.
 - **ILO Monitor on the World of Work** – Tracks labour market disruptions and policy responses.

US Withdrawal from WHO

- President Donald Trump signed an executive order withdrawing the U.S. from the World Health Organization (WHO).
- With this, Trump has made a second attempt to withdraw the U.S. from the **WHO**, citing dissatisfaction with its COVID-19 response, political biases, and financial burdens.
 - His first withdrawal in 2020 was reversed by Biden in 2021.

Key Reasons for the Withdrawal

- **Mishandling of the COVID-19 Pandemic:** Trump criticized WHO's delayed response to the pandemic and its handling of China's accountability in the initial stages of the outbreak.
- **Perceived Political Bias:** The administration accused WHO of being overly influenced by certain member states, including China.
- **Financial Burden:** The U.S. contributes the highest assessed membership dues, ranging between \$100 to \$122 million annually, and nearly \$1.3 billion in voluntary funding in 2022-2023.
 - Trump labelled this burden "unfair" when compared to China's significantly lower contributions.

Implications of the Withdrawal

- **Financial Strain on WHO:**
 - The U.S. contributes nearly 20% of WHO's funding. Losing this would severely impact the organization's ability to support health programs, including vaccine development, eradication of diseases like polio, and pandemic preparedness.
- **Program Disruptions in Developing Nations:**
 - WHO aids various global health programs, including India's immunization and disease surveillance efforts. Reduced funding could hinder these initiatives, particularly in low-resource countries.

- **Loss of Expertise:**
 - The withdrawal would sever collaboration between WHO and U.S. institutions like the CDC (*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*), which are instrumental in global health surveillance and response.
- **Limited Access to Global Health Data:**
 - The U.S. would lose access to critical information on emerging infectious diseases, potentially leaving the country vulnerable to new health threats.
- **Vaccine Preparedness:**
 - Exiting the WHO could impact access to influenza strain samples, essential for producing effective vaccines.
- **Reduced Influence in Global Health Policy:**
 - By withdrawing, the U.S. would relinquish its leadership role, creating a vacuum likely to be filled by countries like **China**.
 - This shift could reduce America's diplomatic leverage in international health.

World Health Organization (WHO)

- **WHO** is a specialized agency of the **United Nations** responsible for international public health. It was Established on **April 7, 1948**.
- **Headquarters:** Geneva, Switzerland
- **Major Reports Published by WHO:**

World Health Report (WHR)	Global Tuberculosis Report	World Malaria Report	Global Status Report on Road Safety	Mental Health Atlas
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- WHO plays a crucial role in global health emergencies, including pandemics, and leads initiatives like **COVAX** for vaccine distribution.

World Economic Forum (WEF) Annual Meeting 2025

- The World Economic Forum (WEF) Annual Meeting was held in Davos, Switzerland.
- Founded in **1971** by **German professor Klaus Schwab**, WEF was initially called the **European Management Forum**. It promotes **stakeholder capitalism**, emphasizing long-term value creation over short-term profits.
- Initially focused on management practices, WEF expanded its scope after global economic disruptions in the 1970s. It played a role in China's economic partnerships (1979), German reunification talks (1990), and South Africa's transition (1992).
- It publishes influential reports, such as the **Global Competitiveness Report** and **Global Gender Gap Report**.
- Past discussions have revolved around AI, climate change, geopolitical uncertainties, and economic slowdowns.
- The G20 concept was also first discussed at Davos before being formalized in 2008 to tackle the global financial crisis.

Top ICJ Judge Nawaf Salam Set To Be Lebanon's New PM

- Nawaf Salam, an international judge and former Lebanese ambassador to the UN, has been appointed **Lebanon's Prime Minister**.
- His appointment follows Hezbollah's weakening after its war with Israel and the loss of its Syrian ally, Bashar al-Assad.
- Salam was Lebanon's UN envoy from **2007 to 2017** and later became **presiding judge at the ICJ**.
- He previously ruled Israel's presence in Palestinian territories as "**illegal**", boosting his reformist image.

Paris AI summit

- Amid concerns over regulating AI without stifling innovation, global leaders will meet in Paris on February 10 for a two-day AI Action Summit.
 - This builds on the **2023 AI Safety Summit in Bletchley Park**, which focused on "doomsday" concerns and resulted in 25 states, including the US and China, signing the Bletchley Declaration on AI Safety.
 - Additionally, the **2024 Seoul summit** saw 16 leading AI companies voluntarily commit to transparent AI development.
- The Paris AI Summit, an initiative of French President, focuses on global AI governance, innovation, and advancing public interest.
- Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will co-chair the summit and has accepted the invitation to attend.
- **Key Objectives**
 - The summit aims to tackle the concentration of power in the AI market, particularly concerning foundational models controlled by companies like Microsoft, Alphabet, Amazon, and Meta.

Diverse Approaches to AI Regulation

- Policymakers worldwide have intensified regulatory scrutiny of generative AI, focusing on three key concerns: **privacy, system bias, and intellectual property violations**.
- However, their approaches differ significantly.
- **European Union: Strict and Use-Based Regulation**
 - The EU has proposed a stringent regulatory framework that categorizes AI based on its use case, degree of invasiveness, and associated risks, reflecting its cautious stance on AI governance.
- **United Kingdom: Light-Touch Approach**
 - The UK has adopted a more lenient, innovation-friendly approach, emphasizing minimal regulatory barriers to foster growth in this emerging field.
- **United States: Balanced but Shifting**
 - The US approach has been moderate, positioned between strict regulation and innovation promotion.
 - However, recent developments could lead to further deregulation.
- **China: Structured Measures for Control**
 - China has introduced its own regulatory measures, balancing AI advancements with oversight, particularly in areas critical to state interests.
- **India: Emphasis on Safety and Trust**
 - India advocates for AI to ensure safety, trust, and ethical use, while also recognizing its transformative potential.
 - The government emphasizes addressing the "weaponization" of technologies like social media to create a secure digital landscape.

BHARATPOL Portal Launched



- Union Home Minister Amit Shah inaugurated the 'Bharatpol' portal, developed by the CBI to enhance international police cooperation.
- The portal serves as a broadcast hub for real-time action against transnational crimes, enabling central and state law enforcement agencies to connect efficiently with Interpol and expedite investigations.

About Bharatpol

- **Background - CBI as Interpol Liaison for India**
 - The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), functioning as the National Central Bureau (NCB-New Delhi) for Interpol in India facilitates connections between Indian law enforcement agencies (**LEAs**) and those in 195 countries.
 - ✓ Interpol is an international police organisation made up of 196 member countries. It does not work under UN.
 - ✓ It is not a police force in the traditional sense—its agents are not able to arrest criminals.
 - ✓ It is more of an information-sharing network, providing a way for national police forces to co-operate effectively and tackle international crime ranging from human trafficking and terrorism to money laundering and illegal art dealing.
 - Currently, coordination happens through letters, emails, and faxes, often causing delays in investigations.
- **About Bharatpol**
 - Developed to streamline international cooperation, it addresses delays by making police collaboration more seamless. It enables **real-time assistance for criminal investigations**.
 - The portal was introduced in response to the rise in transnational crimes such as cybercrime, financial crimes, online radicalisation, organised crimes, drug trafficking, and human trafficking.

Key Features of Bharatpol Portal

- **Unified Platform for LEAs:** Bharatpol connects CBI (NCB-New Delhi) with all **LEAs** in India, including SPs and CPs, ensuring seamless integration.
- **Rapid Information Dissemination:** The portal enables the CBI to quickly share criminal intelligence and inputs from Interpol member countries with LEAs across India.
- **Enhanced Utilisation of Interpol Notices**
- **Capacity Building and Training**



5 MODULES OF BHARATPOL

- **Connect:** Enables Indian LEAs to function as an extension of Interpol's NCB-New Delhi.
- **INTERPOL Notices:** Facilitates streamlined requests for Interpol Notices to enhance international crime tracking.
- **Broadcast:** Provides real-time access to requests for assistance from Interpol's 195 member countries.
- **References:** Organises and manages references for international investigations.
- **Resources:** Simplifies the exchange and management of documents, templates and training materials for efficient international collaboration.

Manipur Governor Suggests Use Of NSA Against Miscreants

- Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla held a security review meeting, to address the State's law and order situation, particularly in border areas.
- He urged the use of legal measures, including the **National Security Act, 1980**, against troublemakers and emphasized creating employment opportunities for misguided youth.
 - Violence was reported in Yaingangpokpi, a buffer zone between the valley and the hills, where bunkers set up by Kuki-Zo volunteers were dismantled by security forces.

- ✓ Buffer zones have been created since June 2023 to prevent clashes between Meiteis (valley) and Kuki-Zos (hills).
- ✓ Intermittent firing between the communities, particularly from bunkers in strategic locations, has fuelled tensions.

- Armed cadres of Kuki-Zo insurgent groups, who had signed a Suspension of Operations agreement in 2008, were seen on the streets trying to control the unrest, a violation of ground rules requiring them to stay in designated camps.

- The Governor also directed security agencies to prepare dossiers on key suspects inciting violence.

National Security Act, 1980

It is a preventive detention law that empowers the central or state government to detain individuals to prevent activities jeopardizing national security or disrupting public order.

➤ Historical Background

• Colonial Era Laws:

- **Bengal Regulation III (1818)**: Empowered the arrest of individuals for criminal intent.
- **Rowlatt Acts (1919)**: Allowed imprisonment without trial.

➤ Post-Independence Evolution:

- **Preventive Detention Act (1950)**: Expired in 1969.
- **Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA, 1971)**: Introduced by Indira Gandhi, repealed in 1977 by the Janata Party.
- **NSA (1980)**: Brought back by Indira Gandhi after her return to power, drawing parallels with MISA.

• Constitutional Basis

- **Article 22(3)**: Allows preventive detention for state security and public order.
- **Article 22(4)**: Restricts detention beyond three months unless approved by an advisory board comprising High Court judges.
- **44th Amendment Act (1978)**: Reduced the detention period without advisory board approval to two months, though this provision is not yet enforced.

• Grounds for Detention

- No formal charges are necessary during the detention period.
- Under Section 3 of the NSA, the Central/State Government has the power to order any person's detention and detain them if it thinks it is necessary to prevent them from harming:

national
defence

relationship with
foreign countries

national
security

public order

essential supplies and
services

• Period of Confinement

- **Maximum detention period**: 12 months (extendable with fresh evidence).
- Detainees can be held for 10 days without being informed of charges.
- **Legal Process**: The detainee can appeal to the advisory board but is denied legal representation during the trial.

• Criticism of the NSA

- Authorities have been accused of using NSA as an extra-judicial power.
- Detainees are often held without formal charges, leading to concerns about human rights violations.

Pralay Missile Showcased At Republic Day Parade

- The DRDO showcased the **Pralay short-range quasi-ballistic missile** at this year's **Republic Day parade**.
- It is India's first ballistic missile for **conventional strikes** (for Army and Air Force).
- With a **400 km range**, Pralay complements **BrahMos** and **Prahar** missiles, offering **standoff strike capabilities** along the **LoC and LAC**.
- Its development trials are complete, and induction has been approved.
- The missile features a **solid-propellant motor** with a **500-1,000 kg payload** and advanced **navigation and guidance systems**.

- Additionally, **Sanjay**, an **automated battlefield surveillance system (BSS)**, was also be featured.
- Developed by the **Indian Army and Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL)**, it integrates **ground and aerial sensors** to provide a **real-time surveillance picture** over secured network.

Vibrant Villages Programme to Boost Border Connectivity and Development

- Union Home Minister Amit Shah announced that by June 2025, 362 villages along the northern border will receive 4G connectivity under the **Vibrant Villages Programme**.
 - The Vibrant Village Programme is a centrally sponsored programme launched by the Government of India in April 2023 to develop selected villages along India's *northern* borders comprehensively.
- Since its launch, the initiative has covered **662 villages along the China border**, improving infrastructure and livelihoods.
- So far, **113 border roads** have been sanctioned. The programme includes **626 infrastructure projects** (community halls, eco-tourism, track routes) and **901 employment-linked projects**.

La Perouse 2024

- **La Perouse 2024** is a multilateral naval exercise hosted by **France** in the **Malacca, Sunda, and Lombok Straits**, involving **nine Indo-Pacific nations**, including **India** (INS Mumbai).
- The exercise, led by the **French Carrier Strike Group**, focuses on **maritime security, interoperability, and crisis response** in a region critical for global trade and security, especially amid increasing **Chinese naval presence**.
- Participating navies will train in **IORIS**, a coordination system used by navies, and conduct maritime surveillance, air defence, and VBSS (*Visit, Board, Search & Seizure*) operations.

INS Surat, INS Nilgiri and INS Vaghsheer commissioned

Three frontline combatants were commissioned into the Indian Navy at the Naval Dockyard in Mumbai:

- ✓ **INS Nilgiri**, the lead ship of the Project 17A stealth frigate class;
- ✓ **INS Surat**, the fourth and final ship of the Project 15B stealth destroyer class; and
- ✓ **INS Vaghsheer**, the sixth and final Scorpene-class submarine.

INS Nilgiri

- **Nilgiri-Class Stealth Frigates: An Overview**
 - The Nilgiri-class stealth frigates, developed under Project 17A, are advanced follow-on vessels of the **Shivalik-class (Project 17)**.
 - These multi-mission frigates are designed for blue-water operations, capable of handling both conventional and non-conventional threats.
- **Key Features and Capabilities**
 - Integrated construction for faster building times.
 - Equipped with supersonic surface-to-surface missiles, Medium Range Surface-to-Air Missiles (MRSAM), upgraded 76 mm guns, and rapid-fire close-in weapon systems.
 - Versatile roles in anti-surface, anti-air, and anti-submarine warfare.
- **Other Ships in the Class**
 - The remaining six frigates — **Himgiri, Taragiri, Udaygiri, Dunagiri, Vindhyagiri** — are under construction at Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL), Mumbai, and Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (GRSE), Kolkata.

INS Surat

- **INS Surat: Overview of Project 15B Destroyers**

- INS Surat is the fourth and final stealth guided missile destroyer under Project 15B, following **INS Visakhapatnam**, **INS Mormugao**, and **INS Imphal**, commissioned over the last three years.
- It represents an advanced iteration of the **Kolkata-class destroyers** built under **Project 15A**.
- **Key Features of INS Surat**
 - **India's First AI-Enabled Warship:** Utilizes indigenously developed artificial intelligence solutions for enhanced operational efficiency.
 - **Specifications:**
 - ✓ Displacement: 7,400 tonnes.
 - ✓ Speed: Achieved speeds exceeding 30 knots (56 km/h) during sea trials.
 - **Advanced Armaments:** Equipped with state-of-the-art surface-to-air missiles, anti-ship missiles, torpedoes, and modern sensors for network-centric warfare.

INS Vaghsheer

- **INS Vaghsheer: Overview of the Kalvari Class Submarine**
 - INS Vaghsheer is the 6th and final submarine of the modern Kalvari class built under Project 75, designed for stealth and versatility in naval operations.
 - ✓ Kalvari class submarines take their names from decommissioned classes, including Kalvari, Khanderi, Karanj, and the Vela class (which included Vela, Vagir, Vagshir)
- **Design and Capabilities**
 - **Based on the Scorpene Class:** Developed from the Scorpene design by French defence major Naval Group and Spanish entity Navantia.
 - **Silent Diesel-Electric System:** Primarily "attack" or "hunter-killer" submarines, known as one of the world's most silent & versatile diesel-electric submarines.

Silver Notice More Efficient Than MLATs for Tracking Offshore Illicit Wealth

- CBI Director Praveen Sood stated that Interpol's newly introduced *Silver Notice* is a more effective tool than Mutual Legal Assistance Treaties (MLATs) for tracking offshore illicit wealth.
- The *Silver Notice* enhances international cooperation by facilitating asset tracing across borders, surpassing MLATs, which often face delays and bureaucratic hurdles.
- While MLATs remain useful, the *Silver Notice* holds greater global acceptance and is expected to yield better results.
- **About mutual legal assistance treaty (MLAT)**
 - MLAT is an agreement between countries to exchange information and provide assistance to enforce criminal and public laws.
 - MLATs allow countries to work together to investigate and prosecute crimes, and to prevent criminals from escaping justice.
- **About Silver Notice of Interpol**
 - It is a tool used to request information on assets linked to criminal activity.
 - India played a key role in developing the notice, which was formalized during the **2022 Interpol General Assembly** hosted by India and further refined at the **2023 Vienna Assembly**.
 - A pilot involving 52 countries has now been launched and will run until November 2025.

Community Notes by Meta

- Meta has ended its independent fact-checking program in the US, replacing it with a *Community Notes* system similar to X (formerly Twitter).
- The move has sparked criticism and debate over tackling misinformation on social media.

About Community Notes

- Community Notes, originally launched as *Birdwatch* on X (formerly Twitter) in 2021, is a crowdsourced fact-checking system where users **add context to flagged posts**.
- The system includes reasoning, source links, and a "Readers added context" tag. Other users vote on whether the added context should stay or be removed.

How Community Notes Work on X

- **A Crowdsourced Fact-Checking Model**
 - Users add context and facts to posts, which become visible only if rated as "helpful" by enough contributors. The system improves with broader participation and diverse perspectives.
- **Contributor Requirements and Process**
 - Contributors must have a six-month-old account, a verified phone number, and no rule violations.
 - Initially, they rate existing notes; later, they gain the ability to write their own, which others evaluate.
- **Transparency and Accessibility**
 - All Community Notes contributions are publicly available for download, allowing for trend analysis.

Challenges with Community Notes

- **Being crowdsourced Vulnerability to Manipulation**
 - X uses a *bridging algorithm* to prevent mass voting by ensuring agreement among previously disagreeing users.
- **Ensuring Diverse Perspectives**
 - X proactively invites contributors with differing viewpoints via a '*Needs Your Help*' tab to balance perspectives.
- **Contributor Protections**
 - Contributors are given auto-generated aliases to prevent targeting.
 - Those writing low-quality or unhelpful notes face temporary restrictions.
- **Limitations of Community Notes**
 - The system struggles with misinformation spreading to other platforms.
 - It may lack the depth needed for fact-checking complex political news.

Regional Conference on Drug Trafficking and National Security

Union Home Minister Amit Shah chaired a regional conference on "Drug Trafficking and National Security" in New Delhi. The conference, is organized by the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), with a special focus on eight states and UTs of northern India.

- **Major Announcements & Initiatives**
 - Launch of Drug Disposal Fortnight - 44,792 kg of seized narcotics (worth ₹2,411 crore) to be destroyed.
 - Inauguration of the NCB Bhopal Zonal Office.
 - Expansion of the MANAS-2 Helpline to all 36 states and UTs.

India-U.S. Sonobuoy Co-Production Agreement

- India and the U.S. have announced a groundbreaking partnership for the co-production of U.S. **sonobuoys** to enhance the Indian Navy's Undersea Domain Awareness.
 - Sonobuoys help in **tracking submarines** in deep seas and oceans.
- Ultra Maritime (UM) and Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL) will co-produce U.S. sonobuoys in India.
 - Final assembly will take place in India with an operational production line expected by **2027**.
- Co-produced sonobuoys will be interchangeable and interoperable across the U.S., Indian, and allied naval aircraft like P-8, MH-60R helicopters, and MQ-9B Sea Guardian drones.

- Indian Navy's Advanced Surveillance Assets
 - o India operates P-8I long-range maritime patrol aircraft and MH-60R helicopters.
 - o Indian Navy leased two MQ-9A HALE drones and recently signed a \$3.5 billion deal for:
 - ✓ 31 MQ-9B-15 Sea Guardians (for the Navy).
 - ✓ 16 Sky Guardians (eight each for the Army and Air Force).

INSV Tarini Begins Third Leg Of Circumnavigation

- The Indian Navy's sailing vessel, INSV Tarini, currently on a global circumnavigation expedition, has passed through **Point Nemo**, the remotest point on Earth.
 - o A ship is considered to have completed a global circumnavigation expedition when it travels around the Earth, crosses all longitudes, passes equator at least once, covers at least 21,600 nautical miles, and returns to its starting point without using land transport.
- Located in the Southern Pacific Ocean, Point Nemo is about 2,688 km from the nearest landmass.
- Two Indian Navy women officers, **Lt Cdr Dilna K** and **Lt Cdr Roopa A**, are leading the expedition.
- They began the third leg of their journey from Lyttelton Harbour, New Zealand, heading towards Port Stanley in the Falkland Islands.
- At Point Nemo, the officers collected water samples for analysis by the National Institute of Oceanography to study oceanic conditions, marine biodiversity, and chemical composition, contributing to global oceanographic research.

Annual Groundwater Quality Report 2024

The Annual Groundwater Quality Report 2024 has pointed out concerns regarding ground water in various parts of the country arising from nitrates, arsenic, fluoride and uranium among others.

About Report (By Central Ground Water Board (CGWB))

- **Geochemical Composition:** Groundwater in India is predominantly of the Calcium-Bicarbonate type. Analysis of Sodium Adsorption Ratio (SAR) and Residual Sodium Carbonate (RSC) revealed that over 81% of groundwater samples are suitable for irrigation.
 - ✓ However, localized issues with high sodium content and RSC values necessitate targeted interventions to prevent long-term soil degradation.
 - ✓ Seasonal trends observed in parameters like Electrical Conductivity (EC) and fluoride provide evidence of positive monsoon recharge effects, which improve water quality.
- A little more than half of India's 779 districts having excessive nitrate, or more than 45 mg/L (milligram per litre- as permissible limit set by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)).
 - ✓ The number of districts with excessive nitrate in their groundwater has risen from 359 in 2017 to 440 in 2023
 - ✓ High nitrate levels can lead to methemoglobinemia, commonly known as "blue baby syndrome,"
- Fluoride concentrations exceeding the permissible limit are a major concern in Rajasthan, Haryana, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana.
- High arsenic levels (more than 10 parts per billion) were found in several states, particularly in the floodplains of the Ganga and Brahmaputra rivers.
- The elevated levels of uranium in several regions. Forty-two per cent of samples with uranium concentrations exceeding 100 ppb (parts per billion) came from Rajasthan, and 30 per cent from Punjab, indicating regional hotspots of uranium contamination
- The North-Eastern States exhibited excellent groundwater quality for irrigation, with 100% of samples falling within safe limits.

Net-Zero Banking Alliance (NZBA)

Wall Street's biggest banks have quit The Net-Zero Banking Alliance

About NZBA

- It was launched in April 2021 and is convened by UN Environment Programme Finance Initiative (UNEP FI).
 - ✓ The alliance is governed by a Steering Group, which includes representatives from member banks and the UNEP FI.
- It is a group of leading global banks committed to aligning their lending and investment portfolios with net-zero emissions by 2050.
 - ✓ Green Financing: India requires an estimated \$10.1 trillion to achieve net-zero emissions by 2070. NZBA can catalyze foreign and domestic investments.
- The NZBA has grown rapidly since its launch, with over 100 member banks representing around 40% of global banking assets. (Members include HSBC, Bank of America, Deutsche Bank, and ICICI Bank from India.)
 - ✓ State Bank of India (SBI) launched green bonds to finance renewable energy projects.

Objectives:

- Setting ambitious targets (setting science-based targets to reduce emissions from their lending and investment portfolios in line with the Paris Agreement goals & Glasgow Climate Pact.), Focusing on high-

impact sectors (carbon-intensive sectors like energy, transportation, and real estate), Promoting collaboration, Ensuring transparency

- ✓ **Energy Transition:** Banks can fund India's shift from coal to renewable energy under initiatives like PM-KUSUM and National Green Hydrogen Mission.

Artesian Condition

Residents of Taranagar village in Jaisalmer (Rajasthan) experienced a unique phenomenon when large amounts of water unexpectedly gushed out from underground.

About Artesian Condition

- An artesian condition refers to a scenario in hydrogeology where groundwater in a confined aquifer is under **sufficient pressure** to rise above the top of the aquifer when tapped by a well.
- It occurs when groundwater is trapped and pressurized between impermeable layers of rock, such as clay or shale.

Advantages of Artesian Water Systems

- **Natural Water Supply:** Flowing artesian wells reduce the need for energy-intensive pumping, providing a cost-effective and sustainable source of water.
- **Geothermal Potential:** In volcanic regions, artesian aquifers can also provide geothermal energy.
 - ✓ **Example:** Iceland taps into artesian geothermal resources for heating and electricity.

Key Factors for Artesian Conditions

- **Confined Aquifer:** The water-bearing layer (aquifer) must be confined between impermeable layers that prevent water from easily escaping.
- **Pressure Gradient:** The water in the aquifer must be under pressure, typically due to the elevation of the recharge area (where the water enters the aquifer) being higher than the well site.
- **Recharge Area:** There needs to be an area where water can infiltrate the ground and replenish the aquifer.

Examples of Artesian Conditions

- The Great Artesian Basin in Australia: One of the largest artesian basins in the world, providing water for much of inland Australia.
- Many desert regions: Artesian wells are crucial for human settlements and agriculture in deserts like the Sahara and parts of the Middle East.

Environment Relief Fund (Amendment) Scheme, 2024

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has announced amendments to the Environment Relief Fund Scheme (2008) through the Environment Relief Fund (Amendment) Scheme, 2024.

About Environment Relief Fund (Amendment) Scheme, 2024

Background

- The Environment Relief Fund (ERF) was originally established in 2008 under the Public Liability Insurance Act (PLIA), 1991.
- It aims to provide immediate relief to victims of accidents involving hazardous substances and to restore environmental damage.

Key Amendments in the 2024 Scheme

- **Fund Ownership:** The ERF is now explicitly vested in the Central Government
- **Fund Sources:** Compensation or relief for environmental damage remitted under Section 24 of the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010, Penalties and additional penalties under Sections 14, 15, or 17 of the Public Liability Insurance Act, Interest or returns earned on fund investments.

- **Fund Management:** A significant change is the appointment of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) as the fund manager for a period of five years, starting January 1, 2025. Previously, United India Insurance Company Limited held this role.
 - ✓ Regular independent audits and detailed reporting by the CPCB/SPCBs to the Central Government ensure responsible fund utilization and build public trust.

Payment and Disbursement Mechanism

- **Modernized Transactions:** Payments to the fund can now be made via Demand Draft or electronic modes, facilitating ease of transactions.
- **Timely Disbursements:** The Fund Manager is mandated to release funds within 30 days of receiving orders from the District Collector or the Central Government, ensuring prompt relief.
- **Increased Allocation:** The permissible allocation for administrative expenses has been raised from 1% to 2% of the fund, allowing for better management and operational efficiency.

Recalculation of India's Coastline

The recalculation of India's coastline was conducted under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), guided by the National Maritime Security Coordinator.

Old vs. New Length

- The previously accepted figure for India's coastline was 7,516 km (based on measurements from around 1970).
- Recent recalculations have placed the length at 11,098 km (as of 2023-24), an increase of approximately 48%.

Reasons for the Change: The adoption of a new, more precise methodology for measuring the coastline. The older method used a simplified, straight-line approach. The new method takes into account: Bays, Estuaries, Inlets and various coastal landforms like creeks, deltas, and islands.

State-wise Changes

- **Gujarat:** Experienced the largest increase in absolute terms, almost doubling its coastline from 1,214 km to 2,340 km. It remains the state with the longest coastline in India.
- **West Bengal:** Saw the highest percentage increase, with its coastline expanding by 357% from 157 km to 721 km.
- **Tamil Nadu:** Its revised coastline of 1,068 km now makes it longer than Andhra Pradesh's, which is now measured at 1,053 km.
- **Puducherry:** Uniquely, Puducherry's coastline decreased by 4.9 km (a 10.4% reduction).
- **Kerala:** Saw the smallest increase, with an addition of only 30 km (5%)

Soapstone Mining

The Uttarakhand High Court pulled up the authorities for unregulated soapstone mining in Bageshwar, district.

About Soapstone Mining (Soapstone is also known as Steatite)

- It refers to the extraction of soapstone, a metamorphic rock composed primarily of talc. It's known for its softness, soapy feel, and heat resistance, making it useful for various applications.
- According to the Indian Bureau of Mines, India has significant soapstone deposits, particularly in states like Uttarakhand (25%), Rajasthan (57%), and Andhra Pradesh
 - ✓ Indian soapstone exports have markets in Europe and the Middle East.
- Major producing countries: China, India, Brazil, USA and Finland

Formation of Soapstone

- Most often forms at convergent plate boundaries where broad areas of Earth's crust are subjected to heat and directed pressure.
- Peridotites, dunites, and serpentinites in this environment can be metamorphosed into soapstone.
- On a smaller scale, soapstone can form where siliceous dolostones are altered by hot, chemically active fluids in a process known as metasomatism.

Methods of Extraction

- Open-pit mining: This is the most common method, especially for large deposits. It involves creating large open pits or quarries to access the soapstone.
 - ✓ **National Mineral Policy (NMP), 2019:** Focuses on sustainable mining practices. **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957:** Regulates mining leases and royalty payments.
- Underground mining: Used for deeper deposits or when surface mining is not feasible due to environmental or land-use constraints.

Uses of Soapstone: Construction, Sculptures and Carvings, Cookware, Industrial Applications **Environmental Concerns:** Habitat Destruction, Soil Erosion and Land Degradation & Land Subsidence, Water Pollution, Air Pollution

Blue Flag Certification

Kappad and Chal beaches in Kerala have earned the Blue Flag certification.

About the Blue Flag Certification (by Denmark-based Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE))

- Started in France (1985) and expanded globally in 2001.
- It signifies: Clean and safe beaches, Sustainable tourism, High-quality facilities, Environmental responsibility (Aligns with global sustainable development goals (SDG 14: Life Below Water))
- Criteria: To achieve it beaches, marinas, and tourism boats must meet 33 strict criteria covering four main areas: Environmental Education and Information, Bathing Water Quality, Environmental Management, Safety and Services.
- Indian beaches in the blue list are **Shivrajpur**-Gujarat, **Ghoghla**-Diu, **Kasarkod & Padubidri**-Karnataka, **Rushikonda**- Andhra Pradesh, **Golden**-Odisha, **Radhanagar**- Andaman and Nicobar, **Kovalam** in Tamil Nadu, **Minicoy Thundi & Kadmat** – Lakshadweep and **Eden** in Puducherry.
 - ✓ Golden beach on the Konark coast of Odisha has become Asia's first beach to get the Blue Flag certification.
 - ✓ India has achieved significant milestones in sustainable beach management under the BEAMS (Beach Environment & Aesthetic Management Services) program, initiated by the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (MoEF&CC).
 - ✓ BEAMS comes under ICZM (Integrated Coastal Zone Management) project which was launched by the Society of Integrated Coastal Management (SICOM).

Biennial Update Report (BUR-4)

India has submitted its Biennial Update Report (BUR-4).

About (BURs) (submitted by developing countries to the UNFCCC, as per the obligations under the Paris Agreement)

- They are submitted by non-Annex I Parties (developing countries) to track their progress in reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and implementing climate change mitigation actions.

Key Features of BUR

- Regular Reporting: Submitted every two years.
- Comprehensive Data: Include updated national GHG inventories, detailing sources and amounts of emissions.
- Mitigation Actions: Outline actions taken to reduce emissions, such as renewable energy projects, energy efficiency measures, and afforestation programs.
- Support Received: Detail the financial, technological, and capacity-building support received from developed countries to assist in climate change mitigation efforts under the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR).

India's BURs

- India has achieved a 36% reduction in emissions intensity of GDP between 2005 and 2020 (puts India on track to meet its nationally determined contribution (NDC) target of a 45% reduction by 2030)
- Total GHG emissions in 2020 were 2,959 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent, after accounting for carbon sequestration by forests and other land uses, net emissions were 2,437 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent (A 7.93% decrease in total GHG emissions compared to 2019)
- 46.52% of India's electricity capacity came from non-fossil sources in 2024. **Example:** Rewa Solar Park in Madhya Pradesh is one of Asia's largest solar power plants.
- **Global Leadership:** India's BUR-4 reinforces its leadership in climate diplomacy. **Example:** The LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) campaign aims to influence global consumption patterns.

2024: Warmest Year

The World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) declared the year 2024 to be the warmest ever since measurements began.

More About it

- The year had surpassed the critical 1.5°C threshold above pre-industrial levels (a significant marker under the Paris Agreement). While India also recorded its warmest year, the extent of warming was relatively lower compared to the global average.
- **Global Temperature Increase:** Global temperatures in 2024 were 1.28°C higher than NASA's baseline (1951–1980), breaking previous records.
- **Land vs. Ocean Warming:** The temperature rise over land exceeded 1.6°C, while oceans warmed by approximately 0.9°C.
- **Decadal Trend:** The past decade has been the warmest in recorded history, with every year exceeding previous temperature averages.

Factors Responsible: Greenhouse Gas Emissions, El Niño Effect, Volcanic Eruption Impacts, Decreased Aerosol Pollution, Loss of Arctic Ice; Urban Heat Island Effect

Reasons for India Experiencing Low Global Warming: Tropical Location, High concentrations of aerosols (Reflects sunlight and offsets warming) and PM, Monsoon Dynamics (helping to regulate the surface temperatures), Ocean Influence (Proximity to the Indian Ocean buffers temperature extremes).

Boreal Forests

A new study has revealed Nearly half of the global boreal forests are undergoing major transitions due to climate change, making them increasingly vulnerable to forest fires and altering their role as a key carbon sink.

✓ The most prevalent type of fire is a crown fire, which spreads quickly from treetop to treetop.

About Boreal Forests (also known as Taiga/ snow forest- only located in Northern Hemispheres)

- One of the world's largest land biomes, characterized by coniferous trees, cold temperatures, and short growing seasons.
- They form a nearly continuous belt across North America (primarily Canada and Alaska), Europe (Scandinavia), and Asia (mostly Russia) (**typically found between 50° and 70° north latitude**)
 - ✓ **Temperature:** Long, harsh winters (-40°C); short, mild summers (10-20°C)
 - ✓ **Precipitation:** 300–850 mm annually, mostly as snow
 - ✓ Canada's boreal forest covers 28% of the world's boreal zone.
- Vegetation: coniferous trees like spruce, fir, pine, and larch, which are well-adapted to the cold climate (**Limited diversity of plant species due to harsh conditions.**)
 - ✓ Boreal forest is second only to the Amazon in terms of its vital role in ensuring the future of the planet.
- Wildlife: Moose, caribou, bears, wolves, lynx, foxes, and various small mammals,
- Soils: Are usually acidic and nutrient-poor (which have limited root penetration), formed under cool, moist conditions which slow down the decomposition of organic matter. This results in a thick layer of litter on the forest floor.

Kashmir Chinars (Platanus Orientalis)

The Jammu and Kashmir government has launched a “Digital Tree Aadhaar” program to conserve the Chinar trees.

About Kashmir Chinars ("state tree" of Jammu & Kashmir now it became Union Territory)

- Also known as Oriental plane tree, it is a maple-like tree with a huge canopy and is found in cool climate regions with sufficient water. It takes 30-50 years for a tree to mature and 150 years to reach its full size.
- The government installed QR code-based GIS plates (a geo-tagging process) on Chinar trees for conservation.
- Spread / location: Throughout Kashmir, particularly in the Eastern Himalayas (native to Greece and Southern Europe)
 - ✓ **Mughal Connection:** Jahangir, planted Chinars in gardens like Shalimar Bagh & Nishat Bagh, where they continue to thrive.
- It is associated with Char Chinar (an island on **Dal Lake**, Srinagar), named after 4 Chinar trees present there.
- Applications: Medicinal Use, Wood, Dye Production, Cultural Significance

Wetland City Accreditation Program

Indore and Udaipur have become the first two Indian cities to join the global list of accredited wetland cities.

Background

- **Indore (cleanest city in India):** Sirpur Lake, being developed as a bird sanctuary a Ramsar Site has been recognised for water bird congregation.
- **Udaipur:** the city is surrounded by Five major wetlands, namely, Pichola, Fateh Sagar, Rang Sagar, Swaroop Sagar, and Doodh Talai have considered.




Wetland City Accreditation Program (part of the Ramsar Convention, originated during COP12,2015)

- It is a **voluntary accreditation scheme** that provides an opportunity for cities that value their **natural or human-made wetlands** to gain international recognition
- It needs to satisfy Six international criteria including cities having Ramsar Sites, adopting Conservation Measures, implementing Restoration and Management measures, Urban Planning practices, promoting Public Awareness, and local committee for wetland management
- As of January 2025, 74, cities from 17 countries have received this prestigious accreditation.
- It is valid for 6 years, after which it must be renewed, providing that it continues to fill each of the 6 criteria.

Ramsar Convention & India's Wetlands

- An international convention on wetlands, adopted in 1971 in the Iranian city of Ramsar.
- Provides a framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources across its 172-member countries including India.
 - ✓ At present, 85 wetlands in India are protected under the treaty.
 - ✓ **Mission Amrit Sarovar:** It is aimed at developing and rejuvenating 75 water bodies in each district of the country as a part of celebration of Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav.
 - ✓ Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017 is the legal framework for wetland conservation in India.

Species in News

Pallas's Catmanul 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The first photographic proof of Pallas's cat, in Himachal Pradesh has been found. • It is a small, long-haired cat. They have dense, silvery-grey fur, flat faces, and rounded ears. • Habitat: primarily found in Central Asia, with their range extending to western Iran, Mongolia, China, Russia (on the border of Mongolia and China), Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. • They inhabit rocky steppes and cold deserts at elevations up to 5,000 meters. • IUCN Red List: Least Concern; CITES: Appendix II
Mucuna bracteata 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Tamil Nadu Forest Department, along with an NGO from Kanniyakumari, is engaged in a pilot project to remove Mucuna bracteata from rubber plantations and forest areas in the district. • It is an invasive cover crop. It is a leguminous vine which was introduced to rubber plantations as a weed protectant and nitrogen regulator valued for its drought tolerance.
Utricularia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A rare and unique carnivorous plant 'Utricularia' has been found in Rajasthan's Keoladeo National Park in large numbers this season. • It typically found in regions like Meghalaya and Darjeeling. • The plant entraps creatures such as protozoa, insects, larvae, mosquitoes, and tadpoles in its bladder-like traps. Once trapped, the organism dies inside the bladder. • Terrestrial species of Utricularia thrive in soil filled with water, where they capture small swimming creatures.

Guillain-Barré Syndrome

The Union Health Ministry has sent a team to Pune following a Guillain-Barré syndrome outbreak, with 73 reported cases.

Treatment Overview

- GBS has no known cure, but effective treatments are available to aid recovery. While most people achieve near-full recovery, some may experience lasting muscle weakness.

Key Treatments

○ Plasma Exchange

(Plasmapheresis): The plasma is removed, treated to eliminate antibodies attacking the nerves, and then returned to the body.

- **Intravenous Immunoglobulin (IVIG) Therapy:** Immunoglobulin proteins are injected to neutralize pathogens and reduce the immune system's attack on the nerves.

About Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS)

- It is a rare autoimmune neurological disorder in which the immune system attacks the peripheral nerves, causing muscle weakness that may progress to paralysis.
- It can develop over a few days or several weeks and affects people of all ages, though it is more common in adults and males.
- The estimated incidence is 1-2 cases per 100,000 population.

Causes and Risk Factors

- The exact causes of GBS are not fully understood, but it is often triggered by infections or other conditions:

- **Common Triggers:** Viral or bacterial infections, including **Campylobacter jejuni** (a common cause of gastroenteritis with symptoms like nausea, vomiting, and diarrhoea).
- **Other Infections:** Flu, cytomegalovirus, Epstein-Barr virus, and Zika virus.
- **Rare Triggers:** Vaccinations, though the risk is extremely low.

Cubic Kilometre Neutrino Telescope or KM3NeT

Two telescopes are being deployed **underwater in** Mediterranean Sea to detect high-energy neutrinos, also known as ghost particles.

- ✓ The two telescopes are part of the Cubic Kilometre Neutrino Telescope or KM3NeT.

About KM3NeT (major European research infrastructure consisting of two neutrino telescopes)

- It aims to instrument a volume of at least one cubic kilometer of seawater.
 - ✓ Neutrinos are tiny particles, very similar to electrons, but without any electric charge.
 - ✓ They are one of the fundamental particles the universe is built of, and are the second most abundant subatomic particles after photons.
- These telescopes are much like the **IceCube Neutrino Observatory**, which can detect high-energy neutrinos from deep space but is under the **frozen ice** in the Antarctic rather than being in the water.
- Uses advanced water Cherenkov detectors to study high-energy neutrinos.

Two Telescopes

- **ARCA (Astro particle Research with Cosmic in the Abyss):** Located offshore (Sicily, Italy) & designed to study high-energy cosmic neutrinos from distant sources.
- **ORCA (Oscillation Research with Cosmic in the Abyss):** Located offshore (Toulon, France) & optimized for measuring the properties of neutrinos themselves.

Scientific Goals

- **Astrophysics:** Investigate the origin and properties of high-energy cosmic neutrinos, providing insights into extreme astrophysical phenomena like supernovae, gamma-ray bursts, and active galactic nuclei.
- **Particle Physics:** Study neutrino properties, such as their mass and oscillation patterns, which have significant implications for our understanding of fundamental physics.
- **Oceanography:** Contribute to oceanographic research through long-term monitoring of the deep-sea environment.

Methylcobalamin

Recently, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has provided clarity on use of methylcobalamin.

About Methylcobalamin (a form of vitamin B12- water-soluble vitamin)

- A crucial nutrient that your body needs but cannot produce on its own. It regulates body functions like cell growth, blood formation, and protein synthesis.
 - ✓ It also participates in the production of neurotransmitters such as serotonin and dopamine, which are critical in controlling mood, emotions, and general mental health.
- It is one of the two coenzyme forms of vitamin B12 that are directly used in the body. This means it doesn't need to be converted into another form to be utilized.
- **Source:** It's a naturally occurring form of B12 found in foods like meat, fish, eggs, and milk.

Functions & Biological Significance

1. **Nerve function:** It helps in the development & maintenance of the myelin sheath (a protective covering around nerve fibers). (Deficiency may lead to neurological disorders like peripheral neuropathy and diabetic neuropathy.)
2. **Red blood cell (RBC) formation:** It's essential for the production of healthy red blood cells, which carry oxygen throughout your body. (deficiency can lead to fatigue, weakness, numbness or tingling in the hands and feet, and anemia)
3. **DNA synthesis:** It's involved in the synthesis of DNA, the genetic material in cells.
4. **Methylation Reactions:** Acts as a cofactor in converting *amino acid* homocysteine to methionine, reducing cardiovascular risks.

Indigenous Paracetamol Drug

Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) has developed an indigenous paracetamol drug.

About Paracetamol (N-acetyl-para-aminophenol/ Absorbs rapidly in the gastrointestinal tract)

- It is widely used for pain relief (analgesic) and fever reduction (antipyretic).
 - ✓ Overdose can lead to severe liver damage (hepatotoxicity).
- Most countries (including India) use the name "paracetamol" while United States and Japan, it is called acetaminophen (derived from its chemical structure)
 - ✓ Included in the WHO Model List of Essential Medicines.
- **Working:** It works by inhibiting prostaglandins, which amplify pain, and targets the hypothalamus for fever reduction.
- **Paracetamol vs Aspirin:** Aspirin has anticoagulant properties and is not suitable for certain populations, whereas paracetamol is generally safer.

Tidal Tail

A study has revealed the formation of an **ultra-diffuse galaxy** at the end of the longest **tidal tail ever discovered**. This tidal tail is associated with the galaxy **NGC 3785**, located 430 million light-years from Earth in the Leo constellation.

About Tidal Tail

- It is a long, thin stream of stars, gas, (mostly hydrogen) and dust that gets pulled away from the main body of a galaxy due to gravitational interactions.
- **Gravitational Interactions:** Occur during galaxy collisions or mergers. The differential gravitational force pulls stars, gas & dust, creating elongated structures (long, trailing tails- extending for millions of light-years).

- Tidal Forces: These forces are stronger on the near side of a galaxy facing the other galaxy and weaker on the far side. This difference in gravitational pull stretches the galaxy.
- **A galaxy** is any of the systems of stars and interstellar matter that make up the universe. Many such assemblages are so enormous that they contain hundreds of billions of stars.

Characteristics of Tidal Tails

- Shape: They often appear curved or arched due to the orbital motion of the interacting galaxies. Some systems have two tails, while others have only one.
 - ✓ **Example:** Missions like Gaia (ESA) and AstroSat (ISRO) enhance the understanding of galactic structures.
- Faintness: They are generally faint and diffuse, making them challenging to observe directly.
 - ✓ Instruments like the **Hubble Space Telescope** and **James Webb Space Telescope** capture high-resolution images of tidal tails.

Importance of Tidal Tail

- Evidence of Interactions: Tidal tails are a clear sign that galaxies have interacted or are currently interacting (galaxies evolve, merge, and change their shapes).
 - ✓ **ALMA** (Atacama Large Millimeter/submillimeter Array) is used to study gas content in tidal structures.
- Star Formation: Star formation can occur within tidal tails, as the ejected gas clouds can become dense enough to collapse and form new stars.
 - ✓ **Examples:** The Antennae Galaxies, The Mice Galaxies, The Tadpole Galaxy
- Observing tidal tails provides evidence for galaxy mergers, supporting the Big Bang Theory and the hierarchical model of galaxy formation.

SSI Mantra

Using the SSI Mantra 3 Surgical Robotic System India achieved the successful completion of robotic cardiac surgeries via telesurgery.

About SSI Mantra (developed by SS innovations)

An indigenous surgical robotic system designed for performing advanced robotic surgeries, including telesurgery.

Features

Ultra-low latency (35-40 milliseconds): seamless real-time remote surgical procedures.

Capacity to handle with precision the complex surgeries such as Totally Endoscopic Coronary Artery Bypass (TECAB).

The first robotic system globally to receive regulatory approval for telesurgery by Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO).

- ✓ **CDSCO (Headquarters: New Delhi)** is the National Regulatory Authority (NRA) of India for the medical devices industry under the provisions of the Drugs & Cosmetics Rules.
- ✓ It works under the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.
- ✓ Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) is the head of CDSCO.

Silver Nanowire-Based Conductive Ink Technology

Indigenous knowhow of silver nanowire-based conductive ink technology was transferred to two Indian startups.

- ✓ It has been developed under a project funded by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).

About Silver Nanowire-Based Conductive Ink Technology:

- It's a specialized material that, when applied to a surface, creates an electrically conductive path.

- The key ingredient is silver nanowires – incredibly tiny, thread-like structures of silver. These wires are dispersed within a liquid carrier, forming the ink
- When the ink dries, the silver nanowires create a network that conducts electricity effectively.
- Properties: Flexibility (can be applied to flexible substrates like plastic, fabric, and even curved surfaces), Transparency (used in thin layers, the ink can be transparent, making it ideal for touchscreen), High Conductivity, Versatility of diverse applications
 - ✓ India imports ink worth ~\$15,72,000 every year. The USA, China, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Taiwan are the major exporter countries.

Applications

- Flexible Electronics & Solar Cells: Foldable smartphones and tablets (as sensors), Wearable technology (smartwatches, fitness trackers), E-textiles (conductive fabrics for clothing)
- Semiconductor, solar photovoltaic, and RFID market.
- Enabling the printing of electronic circuits onto various surfaces, revolutionizing manufacturing processes.

India's First Private Satellite Constellation

India's first private satellite constellation named Firefly was launched by Pixxel (a Bengaluru-based space tech startup).

About Firefly (India's First Private Satellite Constellation)

- It consists of six hyperspectral imaging satellites launched by Pixxel (backed by Google with collaboration from SpaceX, which facilitated the launch).
 - ✓ Pixxel aims is to create a constellation to monitor the Earth.
- Launched from Vandenberg Space Force Base, California, USA.
- Aim: To provide high-resolution hyperspectral imaging to improve insights in agriculture, mining, environmental monitoring, defense, and resource management.
- It is part of a plan to launch 18 additional satellites by 2029 to expand capabilities and meet growing demand.

Bacterial Enzymes Degrading Plasticizer

IIT Roorkee has successfully tested the degradation of plasticizer using bacterial Enzymes.

- IIT-R uses an enzyme (Esterase enzyme) to break down diethyl hexyl phthalate (DEHP) plasticizer.
 - ✓ Esterase enzyme is produced by soil bacteria *Sulfobacillus acidophilus*.
 - ✓ **Plasticizers** (such as phthalates and adipates) are added to plastics to enhance their flexibility and durability. However, their persistence in the environment has raised serious health concerns. (Plasticizers can be absorbed through the skin, making them a direct threat to human health.)
 - ✓ The degradation of plasticizers by bacterial enzymes is an emerging solution to address plastic pollution.
- It breaks down the DEHP plasticizer into two products — mono-(2-ethylhexyl) phthalate (MEHP) and 2-ethyl hexanol.
- Esterase enzyme, along with other enzymes identified has potential to convert high molecular weight phthalate plasticizers into water and carbon-dioxide.
- Applications: Waste Management, Bioremediation, Industrial Scale Degradation

Third Launch Pad (TLP)

The Union Cabinet approved the establishment of the Third Launch Pad (TLP) at **Satish Dhawan Space Centre** of ISRO at Sriharikota (Andhra Pradesh).

About Third Launch Pad (TLP)

- **Purpose:** The TLP is primarily being built to support ISRO's Next Generation Launch Vehicles (NGLV- which are currently under development). It will also serve as a backup launch pad for the existing Second Launch Pad (SLP) at Sriharikota.
 - ✓ First Launch Pad (FLP): Designed for Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) and supports Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV)
 - ✓ Second Launch Pad (SLP): Dedicated to Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) & LVM3 (Launch Vehicle Mark-3)
- **Capabilities:** The TLP is designed to be versatile and adaptable, capable of supporting not only the NGLV but also existing launch vehicles like the LVM3 (which is used for Chandrayaan & Gaganyaan missions) and potentially even larger configurations in the future.
 - ✓ This includes accommodating vehicles with semi-cryogenic stages.

Why Multiple Launch Pads Matter?

- **Increased Capacity:** To manage the growing number of satellite launches.
- **Diversity in Missions:** Separate facilities for small and heavy satellite launches.
- **Support for Human Spaceflight:** Ensuring dedicated infrastructure for the Gaganyaan program.
- **Strategically:** Expanding India's capability as a global space hub for commercial satellite launches.

Extra Mile: Rocket Launching Sites in India

Present (Three rocket sites)	Upcoming
1. Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre, Thiruvananthapuram (Thumba), Kerala	Kulasekarapattinam Space Port (Tamil Nadu, near Thoothukudi)
2. Satish Dhawan Space Centre (Sriharikota- Andhra Pradesh)	Significance: Aims to reduce dependency on Sriharikota and provide flexibility for launching smaller payloads.
3. Dr Abdul Kalam Island (Odisha)	

Planet Parade

Venus, Saturn, Jupiter, and Mars have aligned in the night sky, creating a rare celestial phenomenon known as a "planet parade."

About Planet Parade

- A Planet Parade is an astronomical phenomenon where several planets appear to align or gather closely in the sky from the perspective of Earth. This alignment is not exact but close enough to be visually striking, creating a celestial spectacle.
- **Types of Alignments:** Mini Parade (3 planets align); Medium Parade (4-5 planets align); Grand Parade (6 or more planets align, which is rare)

Significance of Planet Parade

- **Technological Advances:** Such events have inspired projects like the Voyager missions, where alignments were used to slingshot (*gravitational pull*) spacecraft to explore the outer planets.
- **Historical Perspective:** In many civilizations, such as the Mayans and Babylonians, planetary alignments were considered omens of change, prosperity, or calamity.
- **Global Accessibility:** Unlike rare celestial events like eclipses, Planet Parades can be observed without specialized equipment, often visible to the naked eye under clear skies.
- **Astro tourism Potential:** India's sites like Hanle Observatory in Ladakh have gained prominence, emphasizing conservation of dark skies.

LID 568

NASA's James Webb Space Telescope and Chandra X-ray Observatory has discovered LID-568, a low-mass supermassive black hole from 1.5 billion years after the Big Bang.

About LID 568

- It has a mass of about 10 million times that of the Sun, which is considered relatively low for a supermassive black hole.
 - ✓ A black hole is an extremely dense object whose gravity is so strong that nothing, not even light, can escape it.
 - ✓ The Milky Way's supermassive black hole, Sagittarius A*, is about 4 million solar masses but is still more massive than LID-568.
- LID-568 is notable for its extraordinary accretion rate, consuming matter at a pace over 40 times the Eddington limit.
- It's feeding on matter at a rate far exceeding the **Eddington limit**, which is the theoretical limit for how fast a black hole can grow by accreting matter (Rapid Growth).
 - ✓ **Eddington limit:** It is the maximum rate at which a black hole or star can accrete matter without its outward radiation pressure counteracting the gravitational pull. If this limit is exceeded, the infalling matter is pushed away, preventing further accretion.
 - ✓ **Exception in LID-568:** The black hole continues to feed despite surpassing this theoretical limit, indicating the presence of a different accretion mechanism.
 - ✓ Direct collapse theories or mergers of smaller "seed" black holes may explain such rapid growth.

Mission SCOT

The Prime Minister of India lauded the Indian space startup Digantara at the success of Mission SCOT, a significant milestone in the realm of space situational awareness (SSA).

About Mission SCOT (Space Camera for Object Tracking)

- It is one of the world's first commercial satellites dedicated to tracking objects in space. This marks a shift towards private sector involvement in critical space infrastructure
 - ✓ Launch Vehicle: SpaceX's Transporter-12 mission
 - ✓ Placed in a sun-synchronous orbit, allowing it to efficiently track objects in LEO.
- The primary objective is to track Resident Space Objects RSOs, which include defunct satellites, rocket parts, and other debris orbiting Earth.
- It can monitor smaller RSOs (as small as 5 cm), filling a crucial gap in current tracking systems that often struggle with such small objects.

Importance

- Mission contributes to mitigating the risk of Kessler Syndrome, a scenario where the density of objects in low Earth orbit (LEO) becomes so high that collisions create more debris, leading to a cascading effect.
 - ✓ Supports international initiatives like the Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines by the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA).
- National Security: It helps monitor potential threats from other nations' satellites or space-based weapons.
- It aims to provide more accurate tracking data and higher revisit rates (frequency of observing an object) compared to existing ground-based systems.

Extra Mile: India's Efforts in Space Situational Awareness (SSA)

- **NETRA Project (Network for Space Object Tracking and Analysis):** which involves establishing a space surveillance and tracking network using radars and optical telescopes, managed by the ISRO Space Situational Awareness Control Centre (SSACC) in Bengaluru.

- India collaborates with institutions like the Aryabhata Research Institute of Observational Sciences (**ARIES**) to enhance SSA capabilities.
- **IS4OM**: ISRO System for Safe and sustainable Space Operations Management (IS4OM) has been established to focus all efforts related to spaceflight safety and debris mitigation
- **Debris Free Space Mission (DFSM)**: An initiative to promote responsible space operations by encouraging all Indian space actors to minimize debris generation during launches and missions, with a target of achieving debris-free missions by 2030.

Rhodamine B (RhB)

Rhodamine B is under intense scrutiny including global ban by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and various Indian states for its harmful carcinogenic effects.

- ✓ In 2024, The Karnataka government prohibited usage of Rhodamine B artificial colour in 'gobi manchurian' and 'cotton candy'.

About Rhodamine B (RhB)

- It is a synthetic organic compound belonging to the rhodamine family of dyes.
- **Appearance**: a reddish-violet powder and dissolves readily in water to produce a bright pink or reddish-purple fluorescent solution.
- **Fluorescence**: it absorbs light at one wavelength and emits light at a longer wavelength. This property makes it useful in various fluorescence applications
- **Uses**: Textile Industry, Paper Industry, Microscopy (as a fluorescent stain in biological and medical research to visualize cells and tissues), Flow Cytometry (cell sorting and analysis), laser dye in certain types of lasers
 - ✓ Its low cost, however, also makes it a popular choice for food colouring.
 - ✓ It often enters the body when mixed with food, thereby causing oxidative stress on cells and tissues. The use of Rhodamine B in food for a long time leads to liver dysfunction or cancer
- **Concerns**:
 - ✓ Toxic and potentially carcinogenic
 - ✓ Illegally used as a food coloring agent, particularly in spices & sweets, to enhance their color

NVS-02 Satellite

In its 100th launch, the ISRO send-off 2250 kg NVS 02 navigation satellite on-board GSLV-F15.

- ✓ NVS-01 was launched on board GSLV-F12 in 2023 and carried India's first indigenous atomic clock.

About NVS-02 Satellite (a power capacity of around 3 kW)

- It is the second of the five second-generation satellites to replace the existing satellites in the country's navigation constellation Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (will replace older NavIC satellite (IRNSS-1E).
 - ✓ **NavIC** offers two types of services—Standard Positioning Service (SPS) for general users and Restricted Service (RS) for strategic applications. It promises a position accuracy of better than 20 meters and a timing accuracy within 40 nanoseconds.
- Orbit: Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit
- It has a longer lifespan of 12 years and also equipped with indigenously developed more accurate atomic clocks. (called the Rubidium Atomic Frequency Standard (RAFS))
- It is configured with navigation payload in three frequency bands L1 (widely used in the US GPS system), L5 and S in addition to ranging payload in C-band like its predecessor-NVS-01
- This makes NavIC signals compatible with a wider range of devices including smaller ones like fitness trackers and wearables

WASP-127b

Jet-stream winds reaching 33,000 km/h have been observed on the exoplanet WASP-127b, making them the fastest planetary winds ever recorded.

About WASP- 127b (an exoplanet, meaning it orbits a star outside of our solar system)

- WASP-127b is discovered as part of the Wide-Angle Search for Planets (WASP) program.
- It's classified as a "hot Jupiter" – a gas giant similar to Jupiter in composition but orbiting much closer to its star. Its discovery was announced in 2016.
- Size and Mass: It is about 30% larger than Jupiter in diameter, but only has about 16% of Jupiter's mass. (Planet Type: Gas Giant)
- Its composed mainly of hydrogen and helium, its atmosphere also contains carbon monoxide and water, making it a valuable subject for atmospheric studies.

Organophosphates (OPs)

Organophosphate, used in pesticides, likely behind 17 deaths that spread panic in J&K village.

About Organophosphate (formed through the esterification of phosphoric acid and alcohol)

- The toxicity of organophosphates is primarily due to their ability to inhibit acetylcholinesterase (AChE), an enzyme that breaks down the neurotransmitter acetylcholine
 - ✓ Common examples include Malathion (for fruits and vegetables), Parathion, Diazinon, and Chlorpyrifos (for soil treatment).
 - ✓ Acetylcholine is essential for nerve impulse transmission, and when AChE is inhibited, acetylcholine accumulates in the nervous system, leading to overstimulation of muscles and organs.
- Applications: Pesticides, Nerve agents in chemical warfare (such as Sarin and VX nerve agents), Flame retardants, plasticizers in the production of plastics.
- Treatment: Pralidoxime is used in some cases to reverse the bond between organophosphates and AChE, though it is time-sensitive and dependent on the type of organophosphate.

Extra Mile: Pesticides: Regulations in India & World

National Initiatives	International Frameworks
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Insecticides Act of 1968: Regulates the manufacture, sale, and use of pesticides in India.• Draft Pesticides Management Bill, 2020: Aims to strengthen pesticide regulation by ensuring safer alternatives.• Promotion of Organic Farming: Initiatives such as Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) reduce the dependence on chemical pesticides.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stockholm Convention: Addresses persistent organic pollutants (POPs), some of which include OP derivatives.• Rotterdam Convention: Regulates the international trade of hazardous chemicals and pesticides.• WHO Guidelines: Highlight safe usage and alternatives for chemical pesticides.

Parakram Diwas

- On the occasion of Parakram Diwas 2025, a grand celebration was held from 23rd January to 25th January, 2025 at Barabati fort in the city of Cuttack, the birthplace of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.
- The celebration will honour the legacy of Netaji on his 128th birth anniversary.
- In 2021, the Centre had announced that **January 23** will be celebrated as **Parakram Diwas or the Day of Valour/Courage**.
- In 2022, a hologram statue of Bose was unveiled at the India Gate and in 2023, 21 unnamed islands in the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago were named after the 21 Param Vir Chakra Awardees.

Subhash Chandra Bose

- Born in 1897 in Cuttack, Bose was an Indian nationalist in the era of British colonialism in India.
- After completing his education in India, Bose left for London to prepare for the Indian Civil Services exam and cleared it.
- He had mixed feelings about working under the British and eventually resigned in 1921 as a symbol of boycotting the British after the incident of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre.

Role in Freedom Struggle

- After returning to India, Bose joined the Indian National Congress (INC) under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi and started the newspaper "Swaraj".
- In the year 1923, he became the President of the All India Youth Congress and became the editor of the newspaper "Forward" started by C.R. Das.
- In 1928, the Motilal Nehru Committee demanded Dominion Status in India but Bose along with Jawaharlal Nehru demanded complete independence of India from the British.
- He was sent to jail in 1930 during the Civil Disobedience movement and was released along with other prominent leaders in the year 1931 when the Gandhi-Irwin pact was signed.
- In 1938, he was elected as President at the Haripura session of the INC. After re-election as President in 1939, differences arose between him and Gandhi.
- The senior leadership in the Congress supported Gandhi, and Bose resigned as president and formed another group called the Forward Bloc.
- He started a mass movement against using Indian men in the wars of foreign countries which received immense support and which led him to be put under house arrest in Calcutta but he left the house in disguise in January 1941 and reached Germany.
- His attempts to get rid of the British with the help of the Nazi party and Imperial Japan during the time of the second world war left him a troubled legacy.
- In July 1943, he arrived in Singapore and took over the reins of the Indian Independence Movement started by Rash Behari Bose and organized the Azad Hind Fauj also known as the Indian National Army (INA).
- The INA liberated the Andaman and Nicobar Islands but when it reached Burma, bad weather conditions, as well as the defeat of Japan and Germany in the Second World War, forced him to retreat.
- He is said to have died in a plane crash in Taipei, Taiwan in 1945.

Praja Mandal Movement

- January 20 marks the death anniversary of **Sewa Singh Thikriwala**, who led the Praja Mandal movement (self-rule movement).
- He died in jail while he was on a hunger strike in 1935. Since then, a memorial has been held annually in his native village from January 18 to January 20.

Praja Mandal Movement

- Praja Mandal or self-rule movement was held against the rulers of Punjab's former princely states.
- The focus of the movement was to protect the civil liberties of the masses, protest against oppressive taxes, seek reforms in the peasants' conditions, open educational institutions, and have a responsible government.
- Spread over 600 princely states of British India, in Punjab, the movement was active in the Patiala, Nabha, Jind, Malerkotla and Faridkot princely states initially.

Sewa Singh Thikriwala

- Sewa Singh Thikriwala was born in the late 19th century in Thikriwala village, then part of princely state Patiala and now in Barnala, Punjab.
- His father Dewa Singh was a high-ranking official in the court of Maharaja Rajinder Singh. Sewa Singh was later appointed as a health officer.
- Despite being born into a rich family and holding an official post, he left his job to join the Singh Sabha movement.
- The Singh Sabha movement emerged in the late 19th and early 20th century, in reaction to the Christian conversion activities following the annexation of the Sikh empire by the British.
- Sewa Singh's direct criticism of the prince's rule led the state to implicate him on a theft charge. Though it couldn't be proven, he was jailed.
- The Punjab Riyasat Praja Mandal was formed then with Sewa Singh as its president. He came out of jail in 1928.
- He was arrested again by the police in August 1933 and sentenced to three years in jail.
- He died in 1935 in prison on hunger strike for ill-treatment by the prison authorities.
- The Praja Mandal movement then lost a major leader.

Savitribai Phule

- The Prime Minister Modi paid tribute to Savitribai Phule on her 194th birth anniversary
- She was a pioneer who challenged oppressive social norms for women's education, equality and justice, Savitribai Phule is formally recognised as India's first woman teacher.
- A Dalit woman from the Mali community, Savitribai was born on January 3, 1831, in Maharashtra's Naigaon village.
- Married off at the age of 10, her husband Jyotirao Phule is said to have educated her at home. Later, Jyotirao admitted Savitribai to a teachers' training institution in Pune.
- At a time when it was considered unacceptable for women to even attain education, the couple went on to open a school for girls in Bhidewada, Pune, in 1848. This became the **country's first girls' school**.

Opposition to Phule's Schools

- The Phules opened more such schools for girls, Shudras and Ati-Shudras (the backward castes and Dalits, respectively) in Pune, leading to discontent among Indian nationalists like Bal Gangadhar Tilak.
- They opposed the setting up of schools for girls and non-Brahmins, citing a loss of nationality, and believing not following the caste rules would mean a loss of nationality itself.
- Savitribai herself faced great animosity from the upper castes, including instances of physical violence.

Phule's Role as a Social Reformer, Beyond Education

- Savitribai Phule also advocated inter-caste marriages, widow remarriage, and eradication of child marriage, sati and dowry systems, among other social issues.
- In 1873, the Phules set up the **Satyashodhak Samaj** ('Truth-seekers' society'), a platform open to all, irrespective of their caste, religion or class hierarchies, with the sole aim of bringing social equity.

- As an extension, they started **Satyashodhak Marriage** – a rejection of Brahmanical rituals where the marrying couple takes a pledge to promote education and equality.
- The couple also set up **Balyata Pratibandak Gruha**, a childcare centre for the protection of pregnant widows and rape victims.
- The Phules also adopted Yashwantrao, the child of a widow, whom they educated to become a doctor.
- Setting an extraordinary example of living a life of compassion, service and courage, Savitribai became involved in relief work during the 1896 famine in Maharashtra and the 1897 Bubonic plague.
- She herself contracted the disease while taking a sick child to the hospital and breathed her last on March 10, 1897.

Savitribai's Literary Works

- Savitribai Phule published her first collection of poems, called **Kavya Phule** ('Poetry's Blossoms'), at the age of 23 in 1854.
- She published **Bavan Kashi Subodh Ratnakar** ('The Ocean of Pure Gems'), in 1892.
- Besides these works, **Matushri Savitribai Phlenchi Bhashaneva Gaani** (Savitribai Phule's speeches and songs'), and her letters to her husband have also been published.

Swami Vivekanand

- On the occasion of **National Youth Day**, commemorating the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda, the Prime Minister participated in the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue 2025.
- January 12 this year marked the 162nd birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda, also observed as **National Youth Day**.
- Swami Vivekananda, known in his pre-monastic life as **Narendra Nath Datta**, was born in an affluent family in **Kolkata** on 12 January 1863.
- Born with a yogic temperament, he used to practise meditation from his boyhood, and was associated with **Brahmo Samaj**, dedicated to eliminating child marriage and illiteracy.
- In **1897** he founded a unique type of organization known as **Ramakrishna Mission**, in which monks and lay people would jointly undertake propagation of Practical Vedanta, and various forms of social service.
- Swami Vivekananda played a major role in the upliftment of the society by educating women and lower castes. He also highlighted the importance of unity among all the religions.

Vedantic Humanism

- Swami Vivekananda believed that there is only one Self in the universe. There is only one Existence. He saw the entire universe as a manifestation of the absolute One.
- On the coexistence of various faiths, he believed religious acceptance, and not tolerance was important. He claimed that tolerance comes out of a superiority complex.
- For him, the most desirable path for self-realisation was the selfless service of man.
- He was an exponent of vedantic humanism.

Kokborok Day

- Kokborok day was recently celebrated in the state of Tripura.
- Observed on **19th January** every year, Kokborok day (Tripuri language day) is a festival celebrated in Tripura to celebrate the development of the Kokborok language.
- **Kokborok is an official State language of Tripura** along with **Bengali and English**. The day is chosen to commemorate its initial **recognition as an official language in 1979**.
- **Kok** means language and **borok** means people. Kokborok was formerly known as **Tiprakok/Tripurikok**.

- It is the native language of Tripura and is one of the ancient **Tibeto-Burman languages** widely spoken in the North Eastern part of India.
- It is mainly spoken by Tripuri clans like Debbarma, Kalai, Reang, Jamatia, Tripura, Noatia, Rupini, Murasing and Uchoi.
- Kokborok was originally written in the **Koloma script**, which is widely considered to be lost.

Rani Velu Nachiyar

- The Prime Minister recently paid tributes to Rani Velu Nachiyar on her birth anniversary.
- Born in Ramnathpuram in 1730, Velu Nachiyar was the first queen to have ever actively opposed the British rule. She fought against the colonial rulers many years before the Sepoy Mutiny.
- At the time of death of her husband, King of Sivagangai, she was drawn into the conflict.
- In collaboration with Hyder Ali and Gopala Nayaker, she waged a war against the British and emerged victorious.
- Eventually she went on to produce the first human bomb as well as establish the first army of trained women soldiers in the late 1700s.
- Nachiyar was trained in many methods of combat, including war match weapons usage, and martial arts like Valari, Silambam.
- She was a scholar in many languages and was proficient in languages like French, English and Urdu.
- She was succeeded by her daughter Vellacci in 1790, and died a few years later in 1796.

Etikoppaka Toys

- At the 76th Republic Day parade on Kartavya Path, the Andhra Pradesh tableau showcased Etikoppaka toys.
- Etikoppaka Bommalu is a **400-year-old craft** that has become synonymous with eco-friendly creativity and cultural heritage. Etikoppaka is a small village on the banks of **Varaha River**.
- The toys are known for their seamless curves, vibrant colours, and delicate details.
- Their motifs range from Raja Rani figurines to spinning tops, musical instruments, and intricate decorations that tell stories of a bygone era.
- Etikoppaka toys stand apart for their commitment to sustainability.
- The toys are made from **Ankudu tree (Wrightia tinctoria)**, whose soft, malleable wood allows to make intricate carvings, transforming raw timber into exquisite figurines.
- Artisans use natural dyes extracted from plant-based sources like seeds, roots, leaves, and bark, to colour the toys in saffron, emerald, and indigo colours.
- The process culminates in a **lacquer-turning technique**, an ancient method where lac resin (secretion of numerous insects) is used to seal the colours.
- Vegetable dyes are further mixed to the lac, during the process of oxidation. After this process, the end product obtained is rich and coloured lacquer.
- In **2017**, the toys received official recognition with a **Geographical Indication (GI) tag**.

AWARDS/ PERSONALITIES IN NEWS

National Sports Awards 2024

The Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports announced the National Sports Awards 2024. The awardees received their awards from the President of India at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

List of Awards

Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award

- **Established in 1991-92**, it is named after the Indian hockey legend, Major Dhyan Chand and is considered **India's highest sporting honour**.
- It is given for the most outstanding performance in the field of sports by a sportsperson over the period of the **previous four years**.
- This year it was awarded to: Gukesh D (Chess), Harmanpreet Singh (Hockey), Praveen Kumar (Para-Athletics), Manu Bhaker (Shooting).

Arjuna Award for outstanding performance in Sports and Games

- Named after Arjuna from the ancient Indian epic Mahabharata, the **Arjuna Award** was **instituted in 1961**. It was India's highest sporting honour before the Khel Ratna.
- It is given for good performance over a period of the previous four years and for showing qualities of leadership, sportsmanship and a sense of discipline.
- This year it was awarded to 32 athletes.

Dronacharya Award for outstanding coaches in Sports and Games

- **Instituted in 1985** it is **India's highest sports honour for coaches**.
- It is given to coaches for doing outstanding and meritorious work on a consistent basis and for enabling sportspersons to excel in international events.
- This year it was awarded to: Subhash Rana (Para-Shooting); Deepali Deshpande (Shooting); Sandeep Sangwan (Hockey).

Dhyan Chand Award for "Lifetime achievement" in Sports and Games

- **Established in 2002**, it is given to honour sportspersons who have contributed to sports by their performance and who continue to contribute to promotion of sports event after their retirement.
- This year it was awarded to: S Muralidharan (Badminton); Armando Agnelo Colaco (Football)

Rashtriya Khel Protsahan Puruskar

- **Established in 2009**, it is given to organisations or corporates (both private and public) and individuals for playing a role in the area of sports promotion and development over the last three years.
- It was awarded to *Physical Education Foundation of India*

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (MAKA) Trophy

- **Instituted in 1956–1957**, it is the **oldest National Sports Award in India** and is given to the overall **top performing university** in inter-university tournaments.
- It was awarded to Chandigarh University.

Athletics Federation of India

- Bahadur Singh Sagoo was recently elected as the President of the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) replacing the earlier president Adille Sumariwalla.
- Sagoo won a gold medal at the 2002 Busan Asian Games and competed in the 2000 and 2004 Olympics.

- Established in **1946**, AFI is a non-governmental, non-profit, autonomous body. It is the apex body for managing athletics in India.
- It is **affiliated to** the **World Athletics**, the **Asian Athletics Association (AAA)**, and the Indian Olympic Association. The AFI has as many as 32 affiliated state units and institutional units.

Kho Kho World Cup

- India won both the men's and women's titles at the inaugural Kho Kho World Cup 2025.
- Sanctioned by the International Kho Kho Federation and backed by the Indian Olympic Association (IOA), the tournament was held in New Delhi. It was played under the seven-a-side fast format.
- While the exact origin of Kho Kho is hard to determine, it is believed that certain aspects of the game have been mentioned in the ancient Indian epic of **Mahabharata**, in the iconic **Chakravyuha** incident.
- Experts believe that Kho Kho originated in the Maharashtra region and in the ancient times was played on chariots and was called Rathera. Rath is the Hindi translation for a chariot.
- Present version of Kho Kho, played by individuals on foot, originated in 1914 at the time of first World War.
- Pune's Deccan Gymkhana club** first came out with formalised rules and regulations for Kho Kho. These gave the sport a structured look.

Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar 2025

- The Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) has been selected for the Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar (SCBAPP) 2025, in the Institutional Category, for its outstanding work in Disaster Management.
- SCBAPP is a national award to recognise and honour the contributions of individuals and organizations in the field of disaster management.
- The award is announced every year **on 23rd January**, the birth anniversary of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. It carries a cash prize of Rs 51 lakh and a certificate in case of an institution and Rs 5 lakh and a certificate in case of an individual.

Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS)

- INCOIS was established in **1999 in Hyderabad**. It is integral to India's disaster management strategy, specializing in early alerts for ocean-related hazards.
- It established the **Indian Tsunami Early Warning Centre (ITEWC)** which provides tsunami alerts within 10 minutes, serving India and 28 Indian Ocean countries. It has been recognized by UNESCO as a top Tsunami Service Provider.
- It also provides high-wave, cyclone, and storm surge forecasts, helping to safeguard coastal areas and maritime operations.
- INCOIS has developed the **Search and Rescue Aided Tool (SARAT)** to assist the Indian Coast Guard, Navy and Coastal Security Police, in locating individuals or objects lost at sea.
- INCOIS has also established the **SynOPS visualization platform** which integrates real-time data to strengthen response coordination during extreme events.
- INCOIS received the Geospatial World Excellence in Maritime Services Award in 2024 and the Disaster Risk Reduction Excellence Award in 2021.

ISRO Chairman Appointed

Rocket scientist **Dr. V Narayanan** has succeeded S. Somanath as the Chairman of ISRO. Narayanan has also been appointed as the **Secretary, Department of Space (DoS)**. Narayanan, a distinguished scientist at the ISRO, has nearly four decades of experience and has held various key positions within the Indian space organisation.