

Monthly Current Affairs Magazine

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— Your Monthly Gateway to UPSC Success —

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MONTHLY CURRENT AFFAIRS MAGAZINE

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— Every Mark Matters —



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CONTENT



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General Studies, Political Science and International Relations, Sociology,
CSAT



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Capacity Building for Energy Efficiency - SHIKSHAM

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) launched Mission SAKSHAM, a mission-mode, sector-wide, all-India capacity-building training initiative for UCBs (Urban Co-operative Banks).

- » UCBs are subset of cooperative banks operating primarily in urban and semi-urban areas.

Mission SAKSHAM

- » It aims to conduct a large number of training programmes (in-person and e-learning courses) for UCBs.
- » Covers Various Target groups including Board Members, Senior Management, Heads of Risk, Compliance and Audit functions, and employees working in IT functions and other critical areas.

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- » Designed in consultation with Umbrella Organisation of UCBs and National / State Cooperative Federations.

Citizenship Rules 2026 Issued by Home Ministry

It aims to streamline processes concerning Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cardholders and tightening passport norms for minors.

Key Highlights

- » Dual Passport Ban for Minors: A new proviso mandates that a minor child cannot at any time hold the passport of any other country while also holding the Indian passport.
 - Under the 2009 rules, parents registering the birth of a child born outside India at an Indian consulate had to declare that the child did not hold any other country's passport.
- » e-OCI: OCI status can now be issued in an electronic format (e-OCI) alongside traditional physical cards.
- » Mandatory Online OCI Applications: OCI processes, including registration, are now completely online via a designated portal (ociservices.gov.in).
- » Digital Renunciation: Streamlines renunciation and cancellation procedures of OCI, including mandatory surrender of physical cards and digital acknowledgment.
- » Fast Track Immigration (FTI) Consent: OCI applicants may now consent to share biometric data for automatic registration under the Fast Track Immigration Programme.
- » Appellate Mechanism: Revisions against OCI-related orders will now be handled by an authority one rank higher than the original deciding authority.

Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) scheme

- » Introduced via the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2005 of the Citizenship Act, 1955.
 - In 2015, the Person of Indian Origin (PIO) card scheme was merged with it.
- » Eligibility:

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- Who were citizens of India on 26th January, 1950 or there after or were eligible to become citizens of India on 26th January, 1950
- Exceptions: Who is or had been a citizen of Pakistan, Bangladesh or such other country as the government may specify.
- » Benefits:
 - Multiple entry, multi-purpose lifelong visa to visit India.
 - Exemption from reporting to Police authorities for any length of stay.
 - Parity with NRIs in financial, economic and educational fields except in the acquisition of agricultural or plantation properties.
- » Does not confer political rights such as voting or holding constitutional posts.
- » OCI is a privilege, not an entitlement, and is liable to cancellation for violations of Indian law.

Global Push to Transition Away from Fossil Fuels

Key Takeaways from First Conference On Transitioning Away From Fossil Fuels, co-hosted by Colombia and the Netherlands in Santa Marta, Columbia.

Key Takeaways

- » Institutional continuity: Countries agreed to convene second conference in 2027, co-hosted by Tuvalu and Ireland.
- » New coordination architecture: Bring together stakeholders working on different aspects of transition, while linking 30th Conference of Parties to UNFCCC or COP30 processes.
- » Workstreams Launched: Three tracks on transition roadmaps, finance reforms, and producer-consumer coordination.
- » Integration with global climate processes: Conference outcomes to feed into COP30 Presidency roadmap, contribute to second Global Stocktake under Paris Agreement.
- » Science Panel for the Global Energy Transition: Launched to guide countries with evidence-based pathways aligned with 1.5°C target.

Hepatitis : Global Liver Health Challenge

Global Hepatitis Report 2026 released by World Health Organization (WHO).

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- » As per the report, India is among top contributors to global hepatitis deaths, particularly from hepatitis B and C.

Hepatitis

- » It is an inflammation of the liver, caused majorly by Hepatitis viruses, however, other infections, toxic substances (e.g. alcohol, certain drugs), and autoimmune diseases can also cause it.
- » 5 main hepatitis viruses: Type A, B, C, D and E.
 - Types B and C lead to chronic disease and are most common cause of liver cirrhosis and cancer.
 - Hepatitis A and E typically caused by ingestion of contaminated food/water.
 - Hepatitis B, C and D occur usually due to parenteral contact with infected body fluids.

India's Aarogya Maitri Aid & Tourism RecoveryJamaica (Capital: Kingston)

India deployed its flagship Aarogya Maitri portable healthcare infrastructure in Jamaica.

- » 'Aarogya Maitri' project is a humanitarian initiative that extends India's commitment to global health and disaster relief.
- » Bharat Health Initiative for Sahyog Hita & Maitri (BHISHM), part of Aarogya Maitri, contains compact, portable "mini cubes" filled with essential medicines and equipment.

Political Features

- » Location: Island country of West Indies;
- » Neighbouring Countries: Haiti (East); Cuba (North).

Geographical Features

- » Third largest island in Caribbean Sea, after Cuba and Hispaniola.
- » Major Mountains: Blue Mountains, John Crow Mountains, Don Figuero Mountains, Santa Cruz, etc.
- » Major Rivers: Rio Minho (longest) Black River, Rio Cobre, etc.

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IS-PCMR: Boosting India's Critical Mineral Recycling

Ministry of Mines approved 58 companies under IS-PCMR as eligible for participation.

IS-PCMR

- » Notified on October 2025, scheme is a part of National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM).
- » Ministry: Ministry of Mines
- » Aim: Develop domestic recycling capacity for critical minerals reducing import dependence, and supporting clean energy and advanced manufacturing sectors.
- » Tenure: 6 years (from FY 2025-26 till FY 2030-31).
- » Financial Outlay: ₹1,500 crore.
- » Eligible Feedstock: E-waste, Lithium Ion Battery (LIB) scrap, and scrap other than e-waste & LIB scrap e.g. catalytic converters in end-of-life vehicles.

Nilgiri Hills: Biodiversity Hotspot

Nilgiris forest fire contained in Tamil Nadu.

Nilgiris Hills

- » The Nilgiris are among the oldest mountain ranges in India.
- » They are named as Blue Mountains, linked to the seasonal bloom of kurinji flowers.
- » Located at the tri-junction of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka, they form part of the Western Ghats.
 - Major hill stations include Ooty, Coonoor, and Kotagiri.
- » Diversity: Includes tropical evergreen, semi-evergreen, moist and dry deciduous forests, montane sholas and grasslands.
- » Key Fauna: Lion-tailed macaque, Nilgiri tahr, tiger, elephant, and gaur.
- » Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve: 1st in India; Part of the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme.

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Prosopis	juliflora:	Invasive	Species
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Prosopis juliflora, to be used as feedstock for India's first green methanol production plant, designed to fuel ocean-going ships.

Prosopis juliflora

- » Leguminous tree highly resistant to drought and salinity, recognized as one of the world's most dominant invasive species.
- » Native to Mexico, first introduced by British in 1920s to 'green' Delhi and by Gujarat forest department in 1961.
- » Ecological Impacts:
 - It is a Phreatophyte, a deep-rooted plant that absorbs water from the phreatic zone below water table, exacerbating hydrological drought.
 - Reduces native plant diversity, posing a serious threat to Phyto diversity.

RBI Notes Dip in Net FDI Amid Strong Gross Inflows

As per RBI, gross FDI amounted to \$88.3 billion, while net FDI inflows were \$6.3 billion (April 2025- February 2026).

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)

- » Meaning: Investment through equity instruments by a person resident outside India in an unlisted Indian company; or in 10% or more of the post issue paid-up equity capital on a fully diluted basis of a listed Indian company.
- » Regulation: Consolidated FDI Policy (2020); Foreign Exchange Management (Non-Debt Instruments) Rules, 2019.
- » Gross and Net FDI
 - Gross FDI: Total investment made by foreign entities directly into productive assets of India.
 - Net FDI: Difference between inward FDI flows and outward FDI flows (Repatriation by foreign firms + Outward FDI by Indian firms).

Key Reasons for Lower Net FDI

- » Rising Repatriation: Including disinvestment by foreign investors limiting net inflows; repatriation is a sign of mature market where investors can enter/exit smoothly.

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- » Higher Overseas Direct Investment (ODI): Overseas expansion of domestic firms and their integration into global value chains; stronger corporate balance sheets, liberalised ODI framework (2022).
- » Geopolitical Headwinds: Geopolitical strife and tightening financial conditions have cooled greenfield project announcements globally.

Key Measures to Increase FDI in India

- » Sectoral Reforms: Increased FDI caps in Sectors like Defence, Insurance, Pension, Coal Mining, Civil Aviation, etc.
 - Almost 90% of FDI is through automatic route.
- » Improving Business Environment: Business Reforms Action Plan (BRAP) 2024 rankings; Logistics Ease Across Different States (LEADS) 2024; Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Act, 2023, etc.
- » Global Partnerships: India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA); India-Oman Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA); etc.

Regulatory Push: TRAI's V2X Consultation Paper

- » 2X relies on two main wireless technologies: Dedicated Short-Range Communication (DSRC) and C-V2X.
 - DSRC uses Wi-Fi whereas C-V2X is a more comprehensive standard, leveraging cellular networks.

V2X Communication

- » V2X refers to a communication system where a vehicle exchanges real-time information (E.g. position, speed) with other vehicles, infrastructure, pedestrians, and networks using short-range and/ or direct communications.
- » It is a core component of Intelligent Transport Systems and connected mobility.

Significance of V2X

- » Road Safety: Enables safety applications like collision avoidance, intersection management, and emergency vehicle warning systems, reducing accidents and fatalities.
 - SDG 3.6 aims to halve global road traffic deaths and injuries by 2030.

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- E.g. Forward Collision Warning System (USA) showed a 9% decrease in rate of forward collision conflicts.
- » Traffic Efficiency: Optimizes traffic flow and reduces congestion through smart signal coordination.
- » Autonomous Vehicle Support: Enhances decision-making for self-driving systems with external data inputs.
- » Environmental Benefits: Lowers fuel consumption and emissions contributing to UN SDGs.

5G & Smart City Integration: Enables low-latency communication for connected urban mobility systems.

Standard Model: Framework of Fundamental Particles & Forces

New study finds the Standard Model of Particle Physics remains accurate, with no discrepancy.

- » Refined theoretical calculations have resolved the muon (subatomic particle similar to electron but heavier) "anomaly" which challenged the Standard Model.

Standard Model of Particle Physics

- » Basic building blocks of matter: The Standard Model classifies all visible matter using quarks (which build protons and neutrons) and leptons (such as electrons).
- » Fundamental Forces: It describes how three of nature's forces (electromagnetic, strong nuclear, and weak nuclear) govern subatomic behavior.
- » Force-carrying particles: It explains interactions through bosons (which act as force carriers), such as photons (electromagnetism), W and Z bosons (weak force), and gluons (strong force).

Strengthening India's Healthcare Framework

The Union Health Minister launched key health initiatives at the 10th National Summit on Innovation and Inclusivity.

New Initiatives Launched

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- » Swasth Bharat Portal: A one-stop integrated platform designed to bring multiple national health programmes onto a single digital interface.
 - It is ABDM-compliant and integrates with ABHA (Ayushman Bharat Health Account).
- » JANANI Portal (Journey of Antenatal, Natal and Neonatal Integrated Care): Tracks Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Adolescent Health (RMNCH) data and adopts a lifecycle approach to ensure continuum of care.
- » Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK) 2.0 & Guidance document on Diabetes in Children and adolescent: Updated guidelines (from 2013) addressing evolving child health needs, including emerging conditions and non-communicable diseases among children.

Unified Payments Interface Completes a Decade

Demonstrating extraordinary scale and momentum, UPI has emerged as backbone of India's digital payments ecosystem.

UPI

- » Launched: April 2016 by National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) under Regulatory Oversight of Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
- » Meaning: System that powers multiple bank accounts into a single mobile application (of any participating bank), merging several banking features, seamless fund routing & merchant payments into one hood.

Key Achievements of UPI

- » Annual Transaction Volume: From 2 crore in FY 2016-17 to 24,162 crore in FY 2025-26.
 - In 2025, it processed approximately 22,000 crore transactions, with a daily average of about 60 crore transactions.
- » Banks Onboarded on UPI: Increased from 44 banks in FY 2016-17 to 703 banks by FY 2025-26 covering public sector, private, small finance, payments, cooperatives, etc.

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- » Global Reach: UPI accounts for nearly 49 % of world's real-time payment transaction volume (2024), a feat recognized by IMF.
 - Operationalised in Countries including UAE, Singapore, France, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Qatar.

National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)

- » About: Umbrella organisation for operating retail payments and settlement systems in India.
- » Initiative of: Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and Indian Banks' Association (IBA).
- » Legal Framework: Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007.
- » Nature: "Not for Profit" Company under Section 8 of Companies Act 2013.
- » Key Products offered by NPCI: Immediate Payment Service (IMPS); National Automated Clearing House (NACH); Unified Payments Interface (UPI); RuPay; Aadhaar enabled Payment System (AePS); etc.

Whitley Award: Green Oscars for Conservation

Barkha Subba and Parveen Shaikh won the Whitley Awards for protecting the Himalayan salamander and Indian skimmer habitats.

Whitley Award

- » Given by the Whitley Fund for Nature, a UK-based nature conservation charity.
- » Purpose: Supports conservationists in protecting wildlife and ecosystems.
- » Recognition: Known as the Green Oscars, awarded each year.

Himalayan salamander

- » It is a rare, semi-aquatic amphibian found in the Eastern Himalaya.
 - Endemic to India, Nepal and Bhutan, also found in Myanmar, Thailand, etc.
- » Classified as vulnerable by IUCN.
- » Salamanders return to their natal site to breed and lay eggs, a process known as philopatry.

Indian Skimmer

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- » It is one of the three bird species that belong to the skimmer genus Rynchops.
- » Classified as Endangered by IUCN.
- » India is home to more than 90% of the global population, especially in Chambal River.
- » Known for their bright orange bills, they skim the surface of rivers by inches to catch fish. They nest on sandbars, mid river islands that appear seasonally.

Windfall Tax: Levy on Unexpected Profits

Centre cuts windfall tax on diesel & jet fuel exports in line with the price fluctuations in the international market due to the West Asia war.

Windfall Tax

- » It is a government levy on extraordinary profits earned by companies or individuals due to unexpected circumstances.
- » This occurs when global events, such as geopolitical tensions or commodity price surges, lead to windfall gains for certain sectors (E.g. oil and gas).
- » Objective: To capture a portion of these unexpected gains to fund public projects, reduce deficits, or redistribute wealth.

BIS: Ensuring Quality Through Standardization

Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) has published standards for medical assistive technologies like Elbow crutches, Walking sticks, Multi-legged walking sticks, etc. as a part of the NLEAP (National List of Essential Assistive Products) initiative.

BIS

- » National Standards Body of India under the Bureau of Indian Standards Act 2016.
- » Headquarters: New Delhi
- » Regional Offices: Kolkata, Chennai, Mumbai, Chandigarh, Delhi
- » Core Functions
 - Standards Formulation: Develops standards across 17 sectors, e.g., Agriculture, Electronics, Environment, Health

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- Product Certification: BIS Standard Mark (ISI mark) ensures conformity to Indian Standards.
 - Hallmarking: Ensures purity of Gold (since 2000) and Silver (since 2005)
- Laboratory Services: 8 BIS labs + NABL accredited labs for testing product conformity & certification

Directorate of Enforcement Marks 70 Years with FY 2025–26 Report

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- » Requirement of prosecution sanction under Section 197 CrPC (now Section 218 BNSS).
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- » ED is entrusted with the implementation of the following legislations:
 - » The Foreign Exchange Regulation Act, 1973
 - » The Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999
 - » The Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002
 - » Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018

Gig Workers in Focus: India's New Labour Force

Karnataka operationalised a grievance redressal mechanism for gig workers and Telangana becomes fifth state to adopt gig workers legislation, following Karnataka, Rajasthan, Bihar and Jharkhand.

Gig workers

- » Definition: The Code on Social Security, 2020, defines a gig worker as a person who works outside a traditional employer-employee relationship.
- » Types: Platform and Non platform-based workers.
 - Platform workers are those whose work is based on online apps or digital platforms. E.g., Ola, Zomato, Urban Company, etc.
 - Non-platform gig workers are generally casual wage workers and own account workers in the conventional sectors, working part-time or full time.

India's Critical Minerals Imports in Focus

A recent study by Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis highlights that India's critical mineral imports remain heavily concentrated in a few countries.

- » Highlights of report

Key Mineral Suppliers of India:

- Cobalt: Finland

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- Copper: Tanzania, Japan
- Lithium: Ireland, Chile, China
- Graphite: China
- Nickel: Australia, Belgium
- » Import Dependence: India is 100% import-dependent for lithium, cobalt, and nickel.
- » Chile has emerged as India's largest critical mineral supplier (FY19–FY25), mainly due to copper ore and lithium-linked imports.
- » China's Dominance: In global graphite production, cobalt processing, and battery supply chains, creating strategic vulnerabilities.

India's e-Court Mission Transforms Judiciary

Chief Justice of India declares **Sikkim to be the first paperless state judiciary** in the country.

- » A fully paperless judiciary is a system in which all legal processes are done electronically rather than through physical paper, using measures such as digital files, e-filing, online hearings, digital case tracking etc.
- » Such digital transformation of courts is being undertaken under e-Courts Mission Mode Project.

e-Court Mission Mode Project

- » Pan-India initiative to computerise and digitise the judiciary for delivering efficient and accessible justice services.
- » Launch: Launched in 2007 under the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP).
- » Implementing Authority: Department of Justice under the guidance of the e-Committee of the Supreme Court of India.

Indian Navy Expands with Project 17A Class Frigates

Mahendragiri, the sixth ship of Nilgiri-class (Project 17A) and fourth ship of the class built at Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDSL), was delivered to the Indian Navy.

- » Other P17A ships are Dunagiri, Taragiri, Udaygiri, Himgiri, Nilgiri.

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Project 17A

- » Project 17A frigates are versatile multi-mission platforms, designed by the Warship Design Bureau (WDB) and overseen by the Warship Overseeing Team (Mumbai).
- » P17A ships are fitted with an advanced weapon and sensor suite as compared to the P17 (Shivalik-class) and include anti-surface, anti-air, and anti-submarine warfare systems.
- » These ships are configured with Combined Diesel or Gas (CODOG) propulsion plants, comprising a diesel engine and a gas turbine.

Legacy Landfills Blamed for India's Microplastic Surge

A recent study by Council of Scientific & Industrial Research-National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (CSIR-NEERI) warns that India's decades-old garbage dumps are emerging as major sources of microplastic pollution.

- » Microplastics are synthetic plastic particles smaller than 5 mm formed from the breakdown of larger plastics or manufactured directly for industrial use.
 - Types:
 - Primary: Intentionally manufactured small plastics (e.g., microbeads, industrial pellets).
 - Secondary: Generated from degradation of larger plastic waste due to sunlight, heat, and physical abrasion.

Key Findings of the Study

- » Dispersion: Landfill leachate and seasonal winds transport microplastics into groundwater, farmlands (soil), urban areas, and coastal ecosystems.
 - These tiny, toxic particles pose a direct threat to local agriculture, drinking water, food webs, and human health.
- » Primary Culprits: Polyethylene and polypropylene are the most frequently identified plastics, which dangerously pollute soils and compost used for growing food.

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- » Policy Gap: Existing initiatives such as the Swachh Bharat Mission lack dedicated mechanisms for monitoring microplastic emissions during landfill remediation.
- » Governance Deficit: Absence of India-specific standardised monitoring frameworks hinders effective regulation and evidence-based waste management.

Challenges of Landfills Management in India

- » Waste Management Deficit: Poor waste segregation, inadequate landfill infrastructure, etc. due to weak financial and technological capacities of Municipal bodies hinder scientific waste processing.
- » Urban Sustainability Challenge: Rapid urbanisation and rising municipal waste generation (nearly 1.62 lakh tonnes daily) are placing immense pressure on existing landfill capacities.

Initiatives to deal with Legacy Landfills in India

- » Swachh Bharat Mission: Focuses on scientific waste management and legacy landfill remediation under SBM-U 2.0.
 - Under the Dumpsite Remediation Accelerator Programme, 2,479 legacy dumpsites have been identified and over 61% of legacy waste has already been processed.
- » Waste Management Rules: Solid Waste Management Rules (2026), Plastic Waste Management Rules (2016), and E-Waste Management Rules (2022) promote segregation, recycling, and Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR).
- » GOBARDhan Schem: Converts biodegradable waste into biogas and organic manure to reduce landfill burden.
- » Legacy Waste Biomining: Municipal bodies are reclaiming old dumpsites through biomining and bioremediation.
- » Single-Use Plastic Ban (2022): Prohibits identified single-use plastic items to curb plastic pollution.

NISAR: Earth's Eyes in Orbit

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NASA's NISAR satellite observations revealed rapid land subsidence in Mexico City due to excessive groundwater extraction.

NISAR (NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar) Satellite

- » Nature: First joint Earth observation satellite mission between ISRO and NASA.
- » Launch Vehicle: GSLV-F16 (GSLV Mk-II)
- » Orbit: Sun-synchronous polar orbit
- » Mission Life: 5 years
- » Dual Bands: First satellite to use both L-band and S-band Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) from a single platform Unique Feature.
- » Imaging Capability:
 - Fully polarimetric and interferometric data
 - ~240 km swath coverage
 - Revisits Earth every 12 days
- » Technique Used: Advanced SweepSAR technology for high-resolution wide-swath imaging.

Provisions for Survivors: Justice and Support

Supreme Court has expanded definition of “acid attack victims” under Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPwD), 2016 by including forcible acid ingestion victims and victims with internal injuries (even without visible disfigurement).

- » SC has also suggested a shift in Burden of Proof on acid attack accused.
- » RPwD Act, 2016 ensures that all PwDs can lead their lives with dignity, without discrimination and with equal opportunities.

Legal provisions for acid attack survivors in India

- » Section 124, Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS, 2023): Acid attack causing injury/deformity is cognizable, and non-bailable offence with punishment up to 10 years to life and fine.
- » Section 397, Bharatiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS): Free, immediate treatment in all hospitals; police intimation mandatory
- » Victim compensation scheme: Under Sec 396 Bharatiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS).

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- » Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF) Assistance: Up to ₹1 lakh aid and recognised for welfare schemes.
- » Landmark Judgments:
 - Laxmi case: Regulated acid sale
 - Parivartan Kendra: Action against illegal suppliers
- » After Vietnam, many countries codified it in its domestic laws.

Super El Niño Triggers Extreme Weather Events

Forecasts of a potential “super” El Niño in late 2026 have raised concerns over intensified heatwaves, droughts, floods, and extreme weather events.

Super El Nino

- » An exceptionally strong El Niño event in which sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific rise by more than 2°C above normal for a sustained period.
- » El Nino is a warm phase of ENSO (El Niño–Southern Oscillation) marked by abnormal warming of the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean, often weakening the Indian monsoon.

Tanzania in News: India–Tanzania Trade Talks & Kilimanjaro SpotlightTanzania (Capital: Dodoma)

Recently, 5th India–Tanzania Joint Trade Committee Meeting was held to strengthen bilateral economic cooperation.

Political features

- » Location: Largest East African country situated just south of Equator.
- » Bordering Countries: Kenya and Uganda to North; Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda to the West; Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique to the South.
- » Bordering water bodies: Lake Victoria in North; Indian Ocean in the East; Lake Tanganyika in West; and Lake Nyasa in Southwest.

Geographical features

- » Major lakes: Lake Tanganyika (World's second deepest lake).

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- » Highest Peak: Mountain Kilimanjaro (Dormant volcano and highest mountain in Africa).
- » Major Rivers: Ruvuma, Rufiji etc.
- » Islands: Zanzibar, Pemba and Mafia.

UAE: Hub of Global Diplomacy

United Arab Emirates (UAE) (Capital: Abu Dhabi)

UAE accused Iran launched first attack since ceasefire and drone strike at Fujairah oil facility injures three Indians.

Political Features

- » UAE is a federation of seven emirates including Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah.
- » Bordering Countries: Saudi Arabia (west and south), Oman (southeast).
- » Maritime Boundary: Gulf of Oman (east), Persian Gulf (north and northwest).
 - Strategic location along the Strait of Hormuz, a transit point for crude oil.

Geographical Features

- » It is located in the Eastern part of the Arabian Peninsula.
- » Climate: Desert (hot and humid in summer, warm and sunny in winter); cooler in eastern mountains.
 - It has no perennial streams or regularly occurring bodies of surface water.
- » Tropic of Cancer passes through UAE (Abu Dhabi emirate).

USTR Releases Special 301 Report on IPR

India was retained on Special 301 Report Priority Watch List indicating concerns over intellectual property rights (IPR) protection and enforcement.

Special 301 Report

- » Released by: Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR), under Trade Act 1974.
- » The report identifies countries that are considered by the US as not providing adequate and effective protection of Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) or fair and equitable market access to IP rights holders from the US.

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- » Not legally binding but used as pressure tool in trade negotiations.

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India Reignites Buddhism as Soft Power Tool

India's Buddhist diplomacy which is a significant aspect of India's cultural diplomacy is constrained by several bottlenecks.

India's Buddhist Heritage

- » Civilization core: India's sacred geography holds defining arc of Buddhist faith, including enlightenment at Bodh Gaya, first sermon at Sarnath, and mahaparinirvana at Kushinagar.
- India currently has seven of eight most significant Buddhist sites globally including Nalanda, Shravasti, Rajgir, and Kapilvastu apart from above three sites.

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- » Historical Networks & Cultural Linkages: Deeply rooted in trans-Himalayan exchanges, tracing back to Emperor Ashoka's envoys and development of Mahayana Buddhism during Kushana period.
- » Pilgrimage: India is the source of Theravada traditions defining spiritual identity of followers in Sri Lanka, Japan, Thailand, and South Korea, which forms most of Buddhist tourism in India.

Underutilization of Buddhist Heritage for Soft Diplomacy

- » Global Buddhist tourism market: India receives less than 1% of it.
- » Lack of Integrated Branding: India still treats its Buddhist heritage as a set of isolated tourist stops rather than a cohesive national civilizational mission.
- » Institutional & Academic Constraints: Academic and cultural initiatives, such as the revival of Nalanda University, have suffered from delays and domestic politics, falling behind regional competitors like China.

Way Ahead

- » Need for Institutional Mechanism: Establish a dedicated Buddhist Heritage and Pilgrimage Development Authority to coordinate conservation, transport, and destination branding.
- » Infrastructure Modernisation: Through genuine international airport ecosystems (e.g., Gaya), high-speed rail circuits, and specialized fast-track Buddhist pilgrim visas.
- » Knowledge & Cultural Diplomacy Push: India must move beyond symbolic gestures by backing knowledge creation, such as offering fellowships in Pali and Buddhist studies.

Countering Regional Competition: Leverage India's historical legitimacy as the birthplace of Buddhism, along with the presence of the Dalai Lama, to counterbalance China's growing footprint in Asian Buddhist diplomacy.

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Comprehensive NCRB Data Highlights Fatalities

The Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India 2024 provides data on Accidental Deaths due to Forces of Nature and Other Causes including Traffic and Road Accidents.

Key Highlights of the Report

- » Rate of Accidental Deaths (per lakh population): Increased to 33.3 (2024) from 31.9 (2023) with maximum causality reported in age of 30 to below 45 years (31.3%).
- » Accidents due to Forces of Nature: 7,903 deaths (35.7% deaths due to 'Lightning', 23.2% deaths due to 'Heat/Sun Stroke' and 10.5% deaths due to 'Exposure to cold').
 - Madhya Pradesh (577), Bihar (360), Uttar Pradesh (275) accorded maximum of lightning deaths.
- » Accidents due to Other Causes: Accounted for 4,59,954 deaths with a greater share of men than women.
 - Major causes: 'Traffic Accidents' (43.4%), 'Sudden Deaths' (16.5%), 'Drowning' (8.7%), 'Falls' (5.7%), 'Poisoning' (4.7%) and 'Electrocution' (3.4%).

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- Fire Accidents: 5,971 cases of reported fire accidents caused 5, 888 deaths in 2024.
- Road Accidents: Road Accidents (87.8%) contributed to the largest share (railway accidents reported nil deaths) among Traffic Accidents.
 - Major Cause: Over speeding was prime cause contributing to 61.2% of road accidents.
 - Regional Extent: Greater accidents were reported from the rural areas (59.7%) compared to urban areas (40.3%).
 - Location of Occurrence: 31.2% of total road accidents were reported near residential areas.

Exploring the Deep: INS Sagardhwani

INS Sagardhwani arrived in Vietnam marking a significant step towards scientific cooperation.

- » It was flagged off for 5th edition of the Sagar Maitri (SM-5) initiative.
- » Sagar Maitri is a flagship collaborative initiative of Indian Navy and DRDO, aligned with 'Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions (MAHASAGAR)' vision.

INS Sagardhwani

- » Specialised oceanographic research vessel commissioned in July 1994.
- » Designed by Naval Physical and Oceanographic Laboratory (NPOL) of DRDO and built by Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers (GRSE).

Hydro Projects and Teesta River Concerns

Bangladesh seeks China's support for Teesta project.

About Teesta River

- » Origin: Tso Lhamo Lake in North Sikkim. Pahunri Glacier, Khangse Glacier and Chho Lhamo Lake are also considered its sources.
- » Course: Flows through Sikkim and West Bengal in India before entering Bangladesh, where it joins the Brahmaputra River at Fulchori.
- » Major Tributary: Rangit River is the main tributary of the Teesta in Sikkim.

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- » Teesta Water Treaty: In 2011, a draft agreement was proposed where India would get 42.5% and Bangladesh 37.5% of Teesta's water during the dry season.
 - Implementation was halted due to objections from West Bengal.

JANANI – Innovation in Maternal Health

Recently, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare launched **JANANI (Journey of Antenatal, Natal and Neonatal Integrated Care)** platform.

JANANI

- » Service-oriented digital platform to comprehensively monitor and maintain digital health records of women during reproductive age.
- » An upgraded version of existing RCH (Reproductive and Child Health) portal, creating a longitudinal health record by capturing key service delivery events across continuum of care.
- » Key Features:
 - Interoperability: Enabling integration with national platforms like U-WIN and POSHAN.
 - Unique Identifiers: Like ABHA, Aadhaar (OTP and biometric) and mobile number for registration of beneficiaries.
 - Others: QR-enabled digital Mother and Child Health (MCH) Cards; automated alerts for high-risk pregnancies, real-time dashboards for supervisory review, etc.

NCRB Publishes Comprehensive PSI 2024 Report

The Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India 2024 report highlighted that Rate of Suicides (per lakh population) decreased from 12.3 (2023) to 12.2 (2024).

Key Highlights of the Report

- » Causative Factors of Suicides: 'Family Problems (other than marriage related problems)' (33.5%), 'Illness' (18.0%) and 'Drug abuse/addiction' (7.6%) together accounted for 59.0% of total suicides in the country during 2024.

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- » State wise distribution: Majority were reported in Maharashtra followed by Tamil Nadu.
 - Delhi reported highest number of suicides (2,905) among UTs, followed by Puducherry.
- » Education Status of Victims: Only 5.6% of total suicides victims were graduate and above.
 - 10.1% victims of suicide were illiterate.
- » Trends in Cities: Suicide rate in cities (16.3) was higher compared to all-India suicide rate (12.2).
- » Professional Status of Suicide Victims: Among male suicides, maximum suicides were committed by daily wage earners.
 - Amongst females, highest number was of house-wives.
 - In farming sector, 10,546 persons (6.2%) accounted for total suicide victims.
- » Overall male: female ratio: Stood at 73.5 : 26.5.

Key Measures taken to curb Suicide in India

- » Acts/Policies: National Mental Health Policy (2014); Mental Healthcare Act (2017); National Mental Health Programme (NMHP), etc.
- » National Suicide Prevention Strategy (NSPS): Launched in 2022, to cut suicide mortality by 10% by 2030.
- » Schemes/Initiatives: Ayushman Bharat Scheme, Manodarpan by Ministry of Education; Tele Manas, etc.

Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP)

PMEGP has demonstrated robust performance during the 15th Finance Commission cycle.

- » Women beneficiaries: Account for ~40% of the total micro-enterprises.
- » SC/ST/OBC categories: ~54% of the beneficiaries.
- » Rural: ~80% of the enterprises established under PMEGP are located in rural areas.

PMEGP

- » Ministry: Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises

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- » Implementation Agency: Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) (with KVIB, DIC and Coir Board)
- » Mechanism: Supports prospective entrepreneurs in establishing new micro-enterprises in the non-farm sector by providing Margin Money (MM) subsidy on bank loans.
- » Maximum Project Cost allowed: Rs.50 lakhs for manufacturing unit and Rs.20 lakhs for Service Unit.

States to Follow Standard GSVA Compilation Norms

MoSPI has released the Uniform Guideline for Compilation of Gross State Value Added (GSVA) Estimates with Base Year 2022-23.

The Guidelines

- » Aim: To improve the compilation of GSVA and Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) and ensure consistency and comparability of economic data across all States/UTs.
- » Key Priorities: Expanding data integration, updating methodology to capture emerging and unincorporated sectors, and standardizing methods across all States/UTs.
- » Aims to include previously excluded UTs like Lakshadweep and Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu for 100% national coverage.

Significance of GSDP Estimates

- » Used for tracking state-level growth, industrial output etc.
- » Used by the Finance Commission and Ministry of Finance to allocate resources and distribute Central taxes.

Suriname Highlights Cultural & Diplomatic LinksSuriname (Capital: Paramaribo)

India and Suriname reviewed bilateral ties at 9th Joint Commission meeting outlining a six-point approach.

- » Concerning people-to-people ties, Suriname's development, defence cooperation, development partnership projects, trade and tourism, and sharing India's digital and AI expertise.

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- » Political Features
- » Location: Northern coast of South America.
- » Boundaries: Atlantic Ocean (North), French Guiana (East), Brazil (South), and Guyana (West).

Geographical Features

- » Major Rivers: Courantyne, Suriname, Maroni, etc.
- » Climate: Tropical.
- » Highest Peak: Juliana Top, in Wilhelmina Mountains.

Technology Development Board – Bridging Ideas to Industry

TDB entered into an agreement with private firm to establish an advanced manufacturing facility for production and commercialisation of indigenously developed Type-IV Composite CNG Cylinders.

- » Type-IV composite cylinders represent next-generation alternative to conventional steel cylinders offering upto 75% weight reduction, improved vehicle efficiency and reduced carbon emissions.

TDB

- » Statutory Body: Under Technology Development Board Act, 1995.
- » Ministry: Department of Science & Technology, Ministry of Science and Technology.
- » Purpose: Development and commercialization of indigenous technology and adaptation of imported technology for wider application.

Tracking Justice: GRAI Report Card for Institutions

Insurance division of Department of Financial Services topped Group A Category in GRAI ranking with Banking Division retaining 5th position for second month in a row for month of March 2026.

GRAI

- » Developed by: Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG).
- » Purpose: Evaluates ministries and departments on effectiveness and timeliness of grievance resolution through Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS).

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- CPGRAMS is a 24x7 online platform designed for citizens to lodge grievances against government service delivery.
- » Based on 4 dimensions (corresponding to 11 indicators): Efficiency, Feedback, Domain and Organisational Commitment.

Atacama Desert: Land of Extremes

Light pollution threatens world's darkest skies in Atacama Desert impacting Astronomical Observations.

Atacama Desert

- » Location: Northern Chile, South America.
 - Coastal non-polar hyper arid desert running North to South between Pacific Ocean (west) and Andes Range (east).
- » Aridity: Caused by Humboldt Current (cold ocean current) flowing off Pacific Coast.
- » Features: salt pans, alluvial fans, dunes, and volcanic cones, supports astronomical observations due to clear skies.
- » Major Astronomical Observatories in Atacama: Atacama Large Millimeter Array; Paranal Observatory, etc.

Beyond-Lithium Batteries: Powering the Future

Battery alternatives like Sodium and Fluoride ion batteries offer huge potential apart from lithium ion batteries.

Sodium-Ion Batteries

- » Meaning: Function similarly to lithium-ion batteries but use sodium- ions (Na⁺) as charge carriers.
 - Rechargeable battery that generates electricity by moving ions between two electrodes: a positive electrode (cathode) and a negative electrode (anode).

Benefits Offered:

- » Availability: Sodium being abundant, inexpensive, and globally available.
- » Safer: Lower risk of catching fire compared to Lithium batteries when operated in extreme conditions.

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- » Transportation and storage: Typically safer compared to lithium.

Fluoride-Ion Batteries

- » Meaning: Rechargeable system in which fluoride ions (anions) serve as mobile charge carriers between electrodes during cycling.
- » Benefits Offered:
- High Energy Densities: Could deliver more than 2000Wh/kg (compared 500 Wh/kg for Lithium ion batteries).
 - Availability: Fluorine is far more abundant than lithium with a larger supply chain.

Lithium-Ion Batteries

- » About: Rechargeable battery, widely used in portable electronics and electrified transportation.
- Anode and cathode store lithium, electrolyte carries positively charged lithium ions from anode to cathode and vice versa through separator.
- » Benefits: Higher energy densities compared to lead-acid batteries (75 Wh/kg) and sodium ion batteries (100-160 Wh/kg); low maintenance; low self-discharge rate (1.5-2% per month); does not contain toxic lead or cadmium.
- » Constraints: High import dependence and supply chain disruptions issues(depends on scarce lithium, graphite, cobalt, nickel), slow charging rate, etc.

Bongos: Small Drums, Big Sound

Four mountain bongos arrived in Kenya on their way to their native forests after years in the care of a zoo in the Czech Republic.

Bongo Antelope (Tragelaphus eurycerus)

- » Characteristics:
- World's largest forest antelope.
 - Recognised by its reddish-brown body with white stripes and long spiral horns.
 - Two subspecies: Western Bongo and Eastern (Mountain) Bongo.

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- » Habitat: Dense rainforests and forest-savanna ecosystems, in Central and East African forests.
- » IUCN Status: Western Bongo (Near Threatened); Eastern Bongo (Critically Endangered).
- » Threats: Habitat loss and poaching.

Dual-use Satellites: War or Peace?

Cyber-attacks impacting satellite networks and GPS spoofing incidents brought to focus the issues concerning dual use satellites and modern space warfare.

Space in Modern Warfare

- » Meaning: Refers to military conflict conducted into or from outer space, aimed at disrupting or destroying satellites and other space assets.
 - It involves Kinetic (Anti-satellite weapons) and Non-kinetic weapons (cyber warfare and electromagnetic pulses (EMPs)).

Consequences of Space Warfare

- » Swift and Scale: Space amplifies weapon platforms by increasing velocities for missile trajectories, thus, enhancing speed and accuracy, potentially escalating conflicts.
- » Military Actions: Impair military operations like distant Drone operations, Anti-Access and Area Denial (A2/AD), and Manned Unmanned Teaming (MUMT) missions, etc.
- » Debris: A minuscule fragment of wreckage from an obliterated satellite can harm spacecraft like International Space Station.
- » Disruption of Essential Services: Including GPS Systems, Banking and power grids causing blackouts, etc.

Key Measures Preventing Warfare in Space

- » Outer Space Treaty (1967): Prohibits deployment of weapons of mass destruction into space.
- » The Liability Convention (1972): Expands upon Article 7 of Outer Space Treaty, establishing absolute liability for launching states for damages caused.

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- » The Moon Agreement (1984): Moon and other celestial bodies be used exclusively for peaceful purposes.
- » Key Indian Initiatives: Defence Space Agency (DSA) to protect Indian interests in outer space; Guidelines for Space Cyber Security by Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In), etc.

Empowering Villages: Samarth Panchayat Portal

Centre to expand rollout of Samarth Panchayat Portal to states like Assam, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra.

Samarth Panchayat Portal

- » Ministry: Ministry of Panchayati Raj
- » Purpose: Digital platform that empowers Panchayats to enhance and transparently monitor their tax and non-tax revenue sources.
 - Helps Panchayats strengthen their Own Sources of Revenue (OSR) through UPI-based online tax assessment and seamless tax payment at the Gram Panchayat level.

Hantavirus: Rare but Deadly

Hantavirus outbreak has trapped 150 people on Dutch flagged cruise ship MV Hondius leaving 3 persons dead.

Hantavirus

- » Zoonotic viruses carried by rodents (rats and mice) that can cause severe disease in humans.
- » Transmission: People usually get infected through contact with infected rodents or their urine, droppings or saliva.
- » It causes 2 types of syndromes:
 - Hantavirus Cardiopulmonary Syndrome (HCPS): A rapidly progressive condition affecting the lungs and heart.
 - Haemorrhagic fever with renal syndrome (HFRS).
- » There is no specific cure available.

High-Tech Push in Defence Sector

At North Tech Symposium, Defence Minister stressed the urgent need for India to accelerate innovation in cutting-edge defence technologies in emerging domains.

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Emerging domains of Defense Technology

- » Directed Energy Weapons (DEWs): Ranged weapons that use concentrated electromagnetic energy like lasers, microwaves, or particle beams, rather than kinetic energy.
- » Hypersonic weapons Systems: Include Hypersonic Glide Vehicles (HGVs) and Hypersonic Cruise Missiles (HCMs) operating at speeds exceeding Mach 5 and altering their flight paths mid-course which makes their interception extremely difficult.
 - E.g., Russia's Oreshnik Hypersonic missile.
- » Artificial Intelligence (AI): For cyber defence (detecting anomalies and countering intrusions), predictive maintenance (assessing aircraft component health to reduce downtime), and sophisticated training simulations.
- » Quantum Technologies:
 - Quantum computers to optimize complex military logistics and supply chains.
 - Quantum Key Distribution (QKD) to enable secure, un-hackable communications with instant detection of interception.
 - Quantum sensors to enhance detection of submarines, sea mines, stealth vehicles, and underground bunkers.

Government Initiatives for emerging Defence Technology

- iDEX (Innovations for Defence Excellence): To foster innovation & indigenisation in defence and aerospace.
- ADITI (Acing Development of Innovative Technologies with iDEX): To develop 30 critical deep-tech and strategic technologies to reduce import dependence.
- Technology Development Fund (TDF) Scheme: It funds industries, MSMEs, startups, and academic institutions to develop indigenous defence and dual-use technologies.
- Institutional Framework for AI: Through Defence AI Council (DAIC) and Defence AI Project Agency (DAIPA).

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Hypersonic Weapons Development: E.g., 'Dhvani' Hypersonic Glide Vehicle (indigenous model).

ILO Article 24: Complaint Mechanism for Workers

Tea plantation workers in West Bengal invoked Article 24 of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Constitution, alleging labour rights violations and poor working conditions in tea gardens.

- » Article 24 allows workers' or employers' organisations to file a representation against a member state for non-compliance with ratified labour conventions.

International Labour Organisation (ILO)

- » Established: 1919 under the Treaty of Versailles
- » Objective: Promote labour rights, decent work and social justice
- » Headquarters: Geneva, Switzerland
- » Members: 187 member states (India is a founding member)
- » Other key information:
 - Tripartite structure involving governments, employers and workers.
 - First specialised agency of the United Nations (1946)
 - Awarded the Nobel Peace Prize (1969) for promoting social justice and workers' rights.

India Launches AI Orbital Data Center

To be built with partnership of Space-tech firm, Pixel and AI startup, Sarvam where former will design, build, launch, and operate pathfinder satellite, while latter would provide AI backbone.

- » The ODC, along with enhancing country's space computing capabilities, would promote technological sovereignty by operating independently of foreign cloud infrastructure.

Orbital Data Centres (ODCs)

- » Meaning: Scalable, cloud-enabled data processing and storage infrastructure operating directly in space.
 - Work either in conjunction with terrestrial cloud infrastructure or independently.

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Significance of ODCs

- » Abundant, Uninterrupted power: In a dawn-dusk sun-synchronous orbit (SSO), it can leverage continuous, high-intensity solar power, unhindered by night-time, weather, or atmospheric attenuation.
- » Free radiative cooling: Deep vacuum of space serves as a gigantic, cold heatsink having effective ambient temperature of around -270 Celsius, eliminating freshwater needs for cooling.
 - Single 40 megawatt (MW) terrestrial cluster can consume over 1 million tons of water annually for cooling.
- » Scalability and speed of deployment: ODCs can be linearly scaled almost indefinitely through modular design, and be launched faster compared to building terrestrial infrastructure.
- » Overcome Limitations of Terrestrial Data Centres:
 - Huge Power Consumption: Large data centres consume approximately 1.5% of global power (WEF).
 - Land and permitting constraints: Hyperscale data centres require significant land along with extensive planning, rights-of-way and environmental reviews.

Pathfinder

- » 200-kilogram-class satellite, expected to reach orbit by fourth quarter of 2026.
- » Key Features:
 - Data Center-grade GPUs (Graphics Processing Unit): Unlike traditional satellite systems relying on low-power processors, it offers high performance computing in space.
 - Hyperspectral Imaging Camera: To be deployed for first time on a satellite, offering faster and real time decision making

India's E-Waste Crisis: Need for Action

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At the Paryavaran NITI Manthan, policymakers flagged gaps in Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) implementation as India loses recoverable e-waste materials worth nearly ₹51,000 crore.

Issues related to E-Waste Management in India

- » Weak Enforcement: Allows spurious and non-operational recyclers to distort EPR markets through fraudulent certification.
- » Informalization: India's formal recycling rate is 10%, compared to global average (~22%), and USA (56%).
- » Narrow focus: EPR coverage in E-waste recycling is limited to Gold, Copper, Iron, and Aluminium.
- » Other issues: Low skills; accessibility of advanced recycling processes; collection inefficiencies; low consumer awareness etc.

Status of India's E-Waste

- » India is 3rd largest e-waste generator globally.
- » E-waste generation increased from ~2.76 MMT (2020) to ~6.19 MMT (2024)
 - Projected to reach 14 MMT by 2030.

Government Measures for E-waste management

- » E-Waste (Management) Rules, 2022: Strengthened EPR framework for producers and recyclers.
- » EPR E-Waste portal & Trading Platform: Developed by CPCB for registration, tracking and monitoring of e-waste, along with EPR certificate trading mechanisms.
 - Battery Waste Management Rules (BWMR), 2022: Mandates collection, recycling, and refurbishment targets, prohibiting landfill disposal and incineration.
- » National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM): Aims to develop domestic recycling capacity for critical minerals from lithium-ion batteries, e-waste and industrial scrap.

Way Forward

- » GST-linked verification: To improve traceability and reduce discrepancies in recycling claims.

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- » Expanding EPR coverage: To other high-value metals and critical minerals.
- » Promote Advanced Recycling Technologies: Like hydrometallurgy, AI-based material recovery systems etc.
- » Other measures: Increase authorised collection centres; integrate informal workers through training, certification and financial incentives; etc.

Naegleria fowleri: Hidden Danger in Water

Scientists warn that rising temperatures due to climate change can spread the risk of disease-causing amoeba, particularly, brain-eating amoeba.

Brain-Eating Amoeba

- » Lives in soil and warm freshwater lakes, rivers, ponds, and hot springs around the world.
- » Enters the body through the nose, and attacks the brain tissues.
 - Can cause an infection called Primary Amebic Meningoencephalitis (PAM).
 - PAM is a rare, fulminant infection of central nervous system, that is always fatal.

ANEEL Fuel: Driving Sustainable Power

Clean Core Thorium Energy (CCTE) successfully completed high-burnup irradiation testing for its patented 'ANEEL' fuel at the Idaho National Laboratory's Advanced Test Reactor.

ANEEL (Advanced Nuclear Energy for Enriched Life) Fuel

- » It is a unique blend of thorium and a small amount of enriched uranium (High Assay Low Enriched Uranium).
 - The fuel is named to honour Dr. Anil Kakodkar, one of India's foremost nuclear scientists.
- » Significance of ANEEL Fuel:
 - Significant reductions in nuclear waste
 - Enhancing India's energy security using domestically available thorium
 - Saves money by safely generating more power from current reactors while reducing their day-to-day running costs.

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Bhitarkanika: Home of Saltwater Crocodiles

A study revealed presence of microplastics and toxic heavy metals across sampled sites in Odisha's Bhitarkanika Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS).

- » Microplastics are plastic particles smaller than 5 millimetres.

Bhitarkanika WLS

- » Location: Kendrapara district, Odisha.
- » Geography: Formed by the estuarine delta of the Brahmani, Baitarani, and Mahanadi rivers.
- » Ecosystem: India's second-largest mangrove ecosystem, second only to the Sundarbans in West Bengal.
- » Designations: National Park and Ramsar Wetland of International Importance.
- » Key Fauna: Saltwater Crocodiles, rare white (albino) crocodiles etc.
 - o Gahirmatha Beach is largest known rookery (Arribada) for Olive Ridley Sea Turtles.

Cabinet Clears ECLGS 5.0

ECLGS was initially was announced as part of the Atma Nirbhar Bharat Package in 2020 to help businesses including MSMEs to meet their operational liabilities and resume businesses in view of the distress caused by the COVID-19 crisis.

- » The scheme provides Member Lending Institutions (MLIs), 100 percent guarantee against any losses suffered by them due to non-repayment of the ECLGS funding by borrowers.
- » The scheme is under the operational domain of the Department of Financial Services (DFS), Ministry of Finance.
- » National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company Ltd (NCGTC) has been set up as a company to manage and provide guarantees to these loans.

Key Features of the ECLGS 5.0

- » Aim: Provide credit guarantee coverage to MLIs by National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company Limited (NCGTC) for the amount in default under the additional credit facility extended to the eligible borrowers to tide over any short-term liquidity mismatches in view of West Asia Crisis.

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- » Eligible borrowers: MSMEs and non-MSMEs with existing working capital limits and scheduled passenger airlines having outstanding credit facilities, as of March 31, 2026, provided their accounts are standard.
- » Guarantee coverage: 100% for MSMEs and 90% for non-MSMEs as well as airline sector.
- » Tenor of Loan: 5 years (including moratorium of 1 year) for MSMEs/Non-MSMEs and 7 years (including moratorium of 2 years) for airline sector.

Cabinet Nod: Cotton Productivity Mission

Aligning with the government's "5F" vision (Farm to Fibre to Factory to Fashion to Foreign), the mission aims to make India's textile sector globally competitive and self-sufficient.

The Mission

- » Aim: Improve Cotton Productivity to address stagnation in yields, quality concerns, and supply bottlenecks etc.
- » Total Period: 2026-27 to 2030-31 (₹5,659.22 crore outlay)
- » Joint Implementation: Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare and Ministry of Textiles.
- » Targets: To increase lint productivity from 440 kg/ha to 755 kg/ha and boost total production from 297 lakh bales to 498 lakh bales by 2030-31.
- » Coverage: Initially 140 districts in 14 cotton-producing states

Key Features:

- Technology Development: Create high-yielding, climate-resilient, and pest-resistant seeds; advanced crop protection technologies.
- Modern Cultivation: Upscale advanced practices like High-Density Planting (HDPS), Closer Spacing, and Extra Long Staple (ELS) cotton.
- Branding & Traceability: Position Indian cotton as a premium, sustainable global product through the Kasturi Cotton Bharat initiative.
- Digital Empowerment: Integrate local mandis digitally for transparent price discovery and direct market access.

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- Fibre Diversification: Expand India's textile base by integrating sustainable natural fibres (e.g., flax, bamboo, banana, sisal, ramie) to meet evolving global demands.

Caracal: The Elusive Wildcat

Rare caracals (locally called padang) spotted in Thar Desert near India-Pakistan border.

- » According to the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), only around 50 caracals remain in India.

Caracal (Caracal caracal)

- » Characteristics: Secretive, nocturnal animal known for its quickness and ability to catch flying birds.
- » Habitat: Dry savannah and woodland areas, scrubland, rugged mountainous regions, deserts.
- » Distribution: Africa, Middle East, Central Asia, arid areas of Pakistan and India (Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh).
- » Threat: Habitat loss, fragmentation, and retaliatory killings etc.
- » Conservation Status: Least concern (IUCN); Schedule I (WPA, 1972).
- » Conservation Efforts: Caracal listed as critically endangered species under Species recovery program.

EAC-PM Working Paper: Rethinking Care

The paper calls for a paradigm shift, treating care as a foundational social and economic infrastructure rather than private household responsibility.

Care Economy (Or Purple Economy)

- » It encompasses activities (paid or unpaid) essential for the well-being of children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities (PwDs).
- » GDP Contribution: Unpaid domestic and care work (largely by women), is valued at ~15–17% of India's GDP.

Recommendations by EAC-PM

- » Innovative Financing

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- Parivar Seva Kosh/Family Care Fund: For community-driven care infrastructure and services.
- Carepreneur Fund: For concessional finance for entrepreneurs in the sector.
- LeveragePPPs: E.g. World Bank funded Tamil Nadu's Women Employment and Safety Programme to provide childcare for working women.
- » Care Workforce: Skill Gap assessment, standardised training and certifications etc.
- » Policy Reforms
 - Gender-neutral childcare leaves: Phased reforms from extending paternity leave to private sector to gender-balanced parental leave.
 - Urban Planning Integration: Recognising care facilities as essential social infrastructure.
 - Strengthening Maternity benefits: E.g. Sikkim's monthly financial assistance for mothers in private sector.
 - Others: Support formation of Care Cooperatives; Co-location of childcare within government schools; Quality Assurance Mechanisms etc.

Need for Development of a Formal Care Economy

- » Economic Opportunity: Investing 2% of GDP can create 11 million jobs (majorly for women).
 - E.g. India needs 31-38 million formal care workers by 2050.
- » Gender Imbalance: Women spend ~289 minutes daily on unpaid domestic work, against ~88 minutes by men limiting their access to education and employment (time poverty).
- » Demographic Transition and Ageing: By 2050, elderly population will reach 21% from 10%, while children will form 18% (from 24%).
- » Weakening Traditional Support: Due to urbanisation and nuclear families, requiring additional care infrastructure.

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- » Informal Workforce: Care workers like ASHA and Anganwadi workers, face high caseloads, limited social security, and honorariums instead of fixed wages.

Ecocide: Law for Planetary Protection

Activists called for inclusion of Ecocide as one of the international crimes under the Rome Statute that governs International Criminal Court.

- » Currently, Rome Statute recognises 4 crimes: genocide; crimes against humanity; war crimes; aggression.
- » About Ecocide
- » It refers to harms caused to environment by human actions, usually on a major industrial scale or affecting a huge area.
 - It was coined in 1970 by Prof Arthur W Galston to describe Agent Orange's (Herbicide) use in the Vietnam War.
- » After Vietnam, many countries codified it in its domestic laws.

EGRs: A New Era in Gold Trading

National Stock Exchange of India launched **EGRs**, to formalise India's gold market.

- » The Bombay Stock Exchange was the first exchange in India to launch EGRs in 2022.

EGRs

- » They are dematerialised securities that represent ownership of physical gold, which is stored in SEBI's accredited vaults and held electronically through depositories.
 - Each EGR is fully backed by physical gold with assured quality and can be traded on exchange, integrating gold into financial system.
 - They can be redeemed anytime in exchange of gold, unlike Gold ETF (cash settlement).
- » Regulated by: Securities Exchange Board of India (SEBI)
- » Asset Class: Securities under the Securities Contracts (Regulation) Act (SCRA), 1956

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- » Market Participants: Retail Investor, Jewellers, Bullion Traders, etc.

India Semiconductor Mission: Strategic Tech Push

Recently Cabinet approved two more semiconductor manufacturing units under ISM.

- » It includes country's first commercial Mini/Micro-LED display facility based on GaN (Gallium Nitride) Technology in Dholera, Gujarat.
- » GaN, a semiconductor, is a core material for blue/green micro-LEDs and is better suited for high power and high-frequency applications.

ISM

- » Launched: In 2021 with an aim to build a strong semiconductor and display ecosystem, positioning India as a global hub for electronics manufacturing and design.
- » Ministry: Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.

Four Sub-Schemes:

- Semiconductor Fab Scheme
- Display Fab Scheme
- Compound semiconductor and ATMP scheme
- Design Linked Incentive Scheme

MARS: Tracking Methane Emissions

MARS will now cover coal mines and waste facilities after analysis identified Kanjurmarg landfill, Mumbai among the world's top 3 methane emitting sites.

- » Until now, MARS focused on oil and gas facilities in countries that are part of UNEP's Oil and Gas Methane Partnership 2.0.

MARS

- » It is first public global satellite detection and notification system providing data on very large methane emissions (super-emitters) around the world.
- » Nodal Agency: United Nations Environment Programme's International Methane Emissions Observatory.
- » Launched at: COP27 climate summit, Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt (2022).

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- » Assists implementation of Global Methane Pledge, which aims to cut global methane emissions by at least 30% from 2020 levels by 2030.

Migration in Focus: WMR 2026

International Organisation for Migration released the World Migration Report 2026.

Key Highlights

- » Global Migration: ~304 million people were living outside their country of birth in 2024, accounting for 3.7% of the global population, up from 2.9% in 1990.
- » Top Corridors: Mexico-US (1st), Afghanistan-Iran (2nd), Syria-Turkiye (3rd), Russia-Ukraine (4th), India-UAE (5th) and India-US (6th).
- » Migration driving development: Remittances reached an estimated \$905 billion globally in 2024, including \$685 billion to low- and middle-income countries
- » India related:
 - Indian migrants in UAE were over 3 million while Indians in US were around 3.2 million (second-largest after Mexicans).
 - India had a higher share of female immigrants than male immigrants.
 - Male Emigration from India: Largely due to labour migration to Gulf etc.

Pulitzer Prize: Legacy of Truth and Art

Two Indian journalists Anand RK and Suparna Sharma, won the Pulitzer Prize for their work in Illustrated Reporting and Commentary category for exposing cybercrime in India.

Pulitzer Prize

- » What is it: Prize in journalism, literature and music composition, recognising excellence in reporting and storytelling.
- » It is the highest journalism awards in the US, awarded annually in 23 categories.
- » Administered by: Columbia University
- » Established: 1917 by provisions in the will of Joseph Pulitzer, an Hungarian-American newspaper publisher.

SC Judges Flag PIL Misuse

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The judge observed that PILs, originally meant to advance social justice and improve access to justice, are increasingly being misused as private, publicity, political and even paisa interest litigations.

Public Interest Litigation

- » Definition: It refers to the litigations, filed by a party without any locus standi (i.e., the party who is not aggrieved), to protect the general public interest.
- » Origin: PIL concept began in the late Nineteenth Century in the United States, with the landmark Gideon's case forming its foundation.
 - Efforts of Justice P N Bhagwati and Justice V R Krishna Iyer were instrumental in initialization of PILs in India.
 - In India, first reported instance of PIL is when Justice Bhagwati ordered release of 70 undertrial prisoners in Hussainara Khatoon Case, 1979.
- » The Supreme Court and the High Courts have the right to admit PILs under Articles 32 and 226, respectively.

Challenges

- » Misuse of PIL: PIL has often been used for publicity purposes, personal gains, vendetta politics, thus weakening public trust.
- » Burden on Judiciary: PIL cases are often prioritised over ordinary pending cases, increasing pressure on courts and delaying other matters.
- » Judicial Overreach Concerns: PIL has faced criticism for the judiciary overstepping its jurisdiction and facing difficulties in ensuring implementation of its orders.
- » Others: Frivolous Litigation, Abuse of liberal locus standi etc

Union Cabinet Clears SC Judges Amendment

The bill seeks to amend the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Act, 1956 to increase the judge strength of the Supreme Court from present 33 to 37 (excluding the Chief Justice of India (CJI)).

- » Article 124 of the Constitution of India provides for the establishment of the Supreme Court and empowers Parliament to determine the number of judges over time.

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- Parliament enacted The Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Act, 1956 to fix the number of judges of SC at 10 (excluding the CJI).
- SC's strength was then subsequently increased by amendments in 1977, 1986, 2008 and 2019.
- » Once the amended law comes into force, the Supreme Court Collegium would recommend judges to the government for appointment to the top court.
- Chief Justice of India (CJI), in consultation with collegium members, initiates the proposal for appointment of judges in Supreme Court.
- Collegium's recommendations are sent to Union Law Minister, who submits them to the Prime Minister, who in turn advises President to formally appoint the judges.
- » Significance: Additional judges will help in faster disposal of cases, timely delivery of justice, and reducing pendency of cases.
- Presently, Supreme Court has total 92,926 pending cases.

Vadinar: Crude Oil Terminal of India

Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved the development of a state of the art Ship Repair Facility at Vadinar, Gujarat.

- » This project will be jointly implemented by Deendayal Port Authority (DPA) and Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL).
- » It will be developed as a brownfield facility.
- » Reason for Selecting Vadinar: Natural deep draft, proximity to major ports, global connectivity.
- » Significance: Enables domestic repair of large vessels up to 300 metres, improves port turnaround times on the West Coast.

AERB: Safeguarding India's Atomic Future

Atomic Energy Regulatory Board(AERB) allows major equipment installation at unit 5 and 6 of the Kundakulam Nuclear Plant

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Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (Tamil Nadu) is India's largest nuclear power plant, developed with Russian collaboration and operated by Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited.

Atomic Energy Regulatory Board

- » Established: by President in 1983 as per the provision of the Atomic Energy Act, 1962.
 - SHANTI Act, 2025 granted statutory status, defined regulatory powers, enforcement authority and greater institutional autonomy to AERB
- » Mission: To ensure the use of ionizing radiation and nuclear energy in India does not cause undue risk to the health of people and the environment.

Algeria in Focus: Current Affairs

Algeria (Capital: Algiers)

India-Algeria Joint Commission agrees to further expand defence cooperation during the first meeting.

- » Political Features
- » Located in the Maghreb region of North Africa.
 - Maghreb region comprises Atlas Mountains and coastal plain of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya.
- » Land Boundary: Tunisia (Northeast), Libya (East), X Niger & Mali (South), Mauritania & Western Sahara (Southwest), Morocco (West).
- » Maritime Boundary: Mediterranean Sea (North)
- » Geographical Features
- » Landscape is dominated by high plateaus and the Sahara Desert, with the Atlas Mountains in the north and the Ahaggar Massif in the southeast.
- » M'zab Valley: 5 fortified oases towns is a UNESCO World Heritage site.
- » Climate: Mediterranean in north to desert type in south.

Crime in India 2024: NCRB Insights

Key Highlights of Report (compared to 2023)

- » Crime rate per lakh population: dropped to 418.9 from 448.3.
- » Overall case registrations: decrease of 6.0%.
- » Crimes Against Vulnerable Groups:

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- Women: decreased by 1.5% to ~4.4 lakh cases, with 'Cruelty by Husband' making up the largest share (~42%).
 - A new category called 'Offences against Women and Child' was introduced under the BNS.
- Children: increased by 5.9% to ~1.8 lakh cases.
- Senior Citizens: rise of 16.9% over 2023, with theft and fraud being the most common offenses.
- Scheduled Castes (SCs) & Scheduled Tribes (STs): Crimes against SCs decreased by 3.6%, and crimes against STs decreased by 23.1%.
- » Specific Crime Categories:
 - Cyber Crimes: surged by 17.9%, with fraud accounting for nearly 73% of these incidents.
 - Economic offenses: increased by 4.6%, dominated by forgery, cheating, and fraud.
 - Juveniles in conflict with the law: increased by 11.2%, with the vast majority (77.7%) falling in the 16 to 18 age bracket.

National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)

- » Establishment: in 1986, on recommendations of the Tandon Committee, National Police Commission (1977-81), and MHA's Task Force (1985).
- » Core Mandate: Functions as a central repository of information on crime and criminals to assist investigators in linking crimes to perpetrators.
- » Major Initiatives:
 - CCTNS (Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems), 2009: Has connected 15,000+ police stations across India.
 - National Digital Police Portal, 2017: Police can search criminals/suspects on CCTNS, and citizens can file online complaints, verify tenants, etc.
- » Key Databases: National Database of Sexual Offenders (NDSO); Online Cyber-Crime Reporting Portal, etc.
- » Specialized Tools: CyTrain (training portal for cybercrime investigation); Cri-MAC (Crime Multi-Agency Centre- facilitates inter-agency coordination), etc.

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- » Other Key Publications: Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India; Prison Statistics India.
- » Other Portals Managed by NCRB: Central Finger Print Bureau; NAFIS (National Automated Fingerprint Identification System), etc.

EAC-PM Paper: Rethinking PSL in India

The paper titled 'Economic Impact Analysis of Priority Sector Lending' was released by the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM).

Key Highlights of Report

- » Issues with Current Framework:
 - Bank Performance Gap: Private Banks consistently fall short of the 40% target via direct lending and heavily rely on indirect mechanisms like Priority Sector Lending Certificates (PSLCs) and Rural Industrial Development Fund (RIDF) deposits sold by Nationalised Banks & Small Finance Banks (SFBs).
 - Economic Efficiency Trade-offs: Mandated lending reduces Total Factor Productivity (TFP), encourages capital hoarding, and finances lower-yield projects.
 - PSL portfolios also face high administrative costs and elevated default risks.
 - Limited Growth Impact: District-level analysis (using nighttime luminosity as output proxy) shows insignificant effects on economic output.
 - Geographical Skew: Less than 10% of districts (mainly state capitals, industrial hubs, and southern/western regions) account for over 45% of total Priority Sector Advances.
- » Policy Recommendations:
 - Shift to Social Equity Focus: Treat PSL primarily as a social tool rather than growth engine.

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- Exclude legacy categories (e.g., corporate farmers), strictly target small/marginal farmers, micro-enterprises, and weaker sections.
- Consider lowering overall targets for greater bank flexibility.
- Holistic Approach: Avoid pure top-down credit mandates in lagging areas, which are inefficient.
 - Pair targeted credit with fiscal interventions addressing core constraints such as infrastructure, skills, and market linkages.

PSL Framework in India

- » PSL is an initiative by the RBI that mandates banks to allocate a portion of their lending to priority sectors.
 - Priority Sector means those sectors which Government and RBI consider important for the country's development but remain underserved due to
 - information asymmetry
 - preference of banks to lend to larger firms
 - deep-rooted social or caste-based biases.
- » Credit Targets:
 - Domestic commercial banks and foreign banks (with 20+ branches): 40%
 - Small Finance Banks (SFBs) and Urban Cooperative Banks (UCBs): 60%
 - Regional Rural Banks (RRBs): 75%
- » Status of Credit: Rose 85% to ₹42.73 lakh crore (2024) from ₹23.01 lakh crore (2019).

Extragalactic Jets: Cosmic Powerhouses

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Scientists discovered that the composition of plasma can lead to the strikingly different appearances of extragalactic jets emerging from the regions surrounding black holes.

Extragalactic Jets

- » They are highly energetic, narrow streams of plasma and radiation ejected from regions surrounding supermassive black holes at galactic centres.
- » Speed & Extent: Travel at nearly the speed of light and extend thousands of light-years into space.
- » Radiation Spectrum: across the electromagnetic spectrum, from radio waves to gamma rays.
- » Source of Energy: Powered by accretion of matter onto supermassive black holes and guided by strong magnetic fields.

Fair and Remunerative Price: Policy in Practice

Union Cabinet raises sugarcane FRP by ₹10 per quintal.

FRP

- » FRP is the minimum price declared by the Central Government at which sugar mills are legally bound to procure sugarcane from farmers.
- » Objective: Ensures assured and remunerative prices to sugarcane farmers.
- » Legal Basis: Introduced under the Sugarcane (Control) Order, 1966.
- » Institutional Mechanism: Recommended by the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) and approved by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA).
- » Criteria: FRP is fixed considering factors such as production cost, sugar recovery rate, alternative crop returns, by-product value, consumer interest, etc.

State Advised Price (SAP): Some States such as Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana and Uttarakhand announce SAP, which is generally higher than FRP.

Geocells: Reinforcing the Ground

CSIR-CRRI and BPCL, received recognition from India Book of Records and Asia Book of Records for constructing first roadblock section using Technical Textile geocell made from end-of-life plastic waste.

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Geocells

- » Structure: Geocells are three-dimensional, honeycomb-like cellular structures consisting of a regular open network of synthetic strips, cells filled with soil, gravel, sand, concrete, or recycled materials for ground stabilization.
- » Applications: Widely used in embankments, river channels, retaining walls, airport runways, and urban green infrastructure.
- » Significances: They improve slope stability, prevent erosion and landslides, reduce construction cost and material use, and enhance road durability.

India–Vietnam Ties Elevated to Enhanced Comprehensive Strategic Partnership

The “Enhanced Comprehensive Strategic Partnership” marks an elevation of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership established between India and Vietnam in 2016.

- » This decision was taken during the visit of the President of Vietnam to India.

Key Highlights / Outcomes of Visit

- » Trade & Economic Cooperation: Bilateral trade target set at \$25 billion by 2030 (currently around \$16 billion).
 - Both sides pushed for Early review and conclusion of ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA).
- » 13 strategic MoUs Signed: Across critical minerals cooperation, Digital Connectivity & FinTech, healthcare, digitisation of ancient Cham manuscripts, etc.
- » Defence & Security Cooperation: Both countries will establish Strategic Diplomacy–Defence Dialogue (2+2).
- » Maritime Integration: Vietnam joined Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI).
 - IPOI is a voluntary, non-treaty initiative launched by India at East Asia Summit 2019 in Thailand to promote a free, open, and rules-based Indo-Pacific region.

Significance of Vietnam for India

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- » Act East Policy: Vietnam is a core partner of India in ASEAN and a critical partner in India's Act East policy, Vision MAHASAGAR and the Indo-Pacific vision.
- » Geostrategic location: Vietnam's position in the Indo-Pacific is crucial for maintaining secure and stable trade routes.
- » Countering China: Both support freedom of navigation and a rules-based order in the South China Sea in accordance with the 1982 UNCLOS.
- » Supply Chain Diversification: Vietnam's cooperation in imports and rare earths supports India's manufacturing ecosystem, helps reduce global dependence on Chinese supply chains.

Energy security: Indian companies have invested in oil and gas exploration projects in Vietnamese waters in South China Sea which are extremely rich in hydrocarbon reserves.

Mission Mausam: Connecting Coastal Cultures

Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM) established a state-of-the-art Urban Testbed and Aerosol Observatory at the SRM Institute of Science and Technology in Chennai under 'Mission Mausam'.

Mission Mausam

- » Launched: In 2024.
- » Ministry: Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES).
- » Implementing Agency: India Meteorological Department (IMD), the National Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF), and IITM.
- » Budget: ₹2,000 crores over 2 years.
- » Aim:
 - To make the nation 'Weather Ready' and 'Climate Smart'.
 - To improve weather and climate services, ensuring timely and precise observation, modeling, and forecasting information for multiple sectors, including agriculture, disaster management, and rural development.

Structural Gaps in India's Healthcare

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Recently, India approved 43 new medical colleges, 20,649 additional MBBS and PG seats for 2025-26. However, rural CHCs still face persistent gaps in public healthcare delivery.

Challenges in Public Healthcare delivery System

- » Acute Shortage of Specialist: Rural Community Health Centres (CHCs) face nearly 80% specialist vacancies, with only 4,413 specialists available against the requirement of 21,964.
 - Despite addition of 72,627 PG seats across 731 medical colleges since 2014, expansion in medical education has not translated into adequate specialist availability in public healthcare facilities.
- » Weak Health Governance Framework: Of the 43 newly approved medical colleges for 2025-26, 27 are private institutions with limited accountability towards public health workforce deployment.
- » Reluctance of Doctors to Serve in Rural Areas: Newly graduated specialists are often unwilling to work in remote and underserved areas.
- » Flawed Budgetary Priorities: The central health budget heavily prioritizes capital expenditure and building infrastructure rather than functional operations.

Measures required for improving Public Healthcare delivery System

- » Align PG Medical Education with Public Health Needs: Link postgraduate medical admissions and specialist training with vacancies in CHCs and district hospitals.
 - Aspirant doctors should be required to sign an undertaking to serve in a designated government facility, with priority given to candidates willing to commit to a 10-year service bond in difficult-area CHCs.
- » Promote Rural Specialist Deployment: Provide financial incentives, housing, quality schooling and career progression benefits for doctors serving in difficult and remote areas.
- » Adopting the "All or None" Deployment Strategy: A CHC should either receive the full required team of five specialists or none at all, which distributes the workload better.

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Initiatives taken to strengthen Health System

- » Human Resource Development: E.g., Expansion of AIIMS, medical colleges, and nursing institutions. .
- » Digital Health Reforms: E.g., Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission for digital health IDs and electronic health records.
- » Affordable Healthcare Initiatives: E.g., Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) to reduce out-of-pocket expenditure.
- » Public Health and Preventive Care: E.g., National Health Mission (NHM) to strengthen rural and urban healthcare systems.
- » Governance and Regulatory Reforms: E.g., National Medical Commission reforms to improve transparency and quality in medical education.

Swasth Bharat Portal was launched recently by the Health and Family Welfare Ministry.**Swasth Bharat Portal**

- » Nature: Functions as a unified digital layer that integrates existing standalone programme systems via an API-based federated architecture.
- » ABDM-Compliant: Portal seamlessly integrates with Ayushman Bharat Health Account, Healthcare Professionals Registry and Health Facility Registry enabling secure exchange of interoperable patient health records.
- » Empowering Frontline Workers: Provides a single interface for ASHAs, ANMs, CHOs, and Medical Officers (MOs), eliminating the need for multiple logins and repetitive data entry.

Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM)

- » Objective: To develop a robust digital backbone to support the integrated digital health infrastructure and bridging gaps among stakeholders in India's healthcare ecosystem.
- » Type: Central Sector Scheme
- » Tenure: 5 years
- » Implementing Agency: National Health Authority (NHA)

Swasth Bharat: Transforming Healthcare Digitally

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As per a study of IIT Delhi, India could prevent an estimated 1,24,564 deaths every year by fully mitigating sulphur dioxide (SO₂) emissions through systems like Flue Gas Desulphurisation (FGD).

SO₂

- » It is a colorless, toxic gas with a pungent, choking odor.
- » Role in secondary pollutants: SO₂ reacts in the atmosphere to form secondary inorganic aerosols, including sulphate, nitrate and ammonium.
 - These pollutants add to PM_{2.5}, the fine particulate matter linked to cardiovascular and respiratory diseases.
- » It is a pollutant monitored under the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) notified by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).
 - NAAQS includes NO₂, PM₁₀, PM_{2.5}, Ozone, Lead, CO, Ammonia, Benzene, Benzo(a)pyrene, Arsenic, and Nickel.
- » Major sources: coal-fired power plants (largest), smelting metallic ores, petroleum refining, volcanic eruptions, and emissions from transportation (ships/locomotives).

Trade & Technology Council: India-EU Partnership

India and EU launched €15.2 million (~₹169 crore) joint initiative to strengthen EV battery recycling under the India-EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC)-working group-

- » The initiative will be funded through the EU's Horizon Europe programme and India's Ministry of Heavy Industries.
- » About India-EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC)
- » Launch: February 2023.
- » Objective: It aims to push both regions toward strategic autonomy by actively reducing the EU's dependence on China and India's reliance on Russia.
- » Three Core Working Groups (WGs):
 - WG 1: Strategic Technologies, Digital Governance and Connectivity.
 - WG 2: Green and Clean Energy Technologies.
 - WG 3: Resilient Value Chains, Trade and Investment.

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Hasdeo-Arand: India's Green Heart Under Threat

Rajasthan's state-owned electricity producer sought to divert 1,742.6 hectares of prime forest and fell 4.48 lakh trees in Hasdeo-Arand forest.

About Hasdeo-Arand Forest

- » Location: Spans Korba, Surguja and Surajpur districts in Chhattisgarh.
- » Type: Dense Sal forests.
- » Fauna: Home to nine Schedule-I species, including leopards, sloth bears and elephants.
- » Significance: Often called the "lungs of central India"; catchment for Hasdeo River and Bango Dam; dispersal corridor for tigers; vital resource for tribal communities.

Long-Term Care Emerging as Key Policy Priority

Ageing is a natural process leading to decline in physical and mental capacity and increasing risk of diseases and death.

- » It is also associated with life changes such as retirement, relocation and loss of friends or partners.
- » India's elderly population is projected to reach 347 million (~20%) by 2050, up from 8.6% in 2011. (UNFPA 2023)

Challenges Associated with Geriatric Healthcare

- » Hospital-Centric Model: Systems treat individual diseases, while elderly people often suffer from multiple long-term health conditions requiring continuous and integrated care.
- » Mental Health & Social Isolation: Issues like Dementia, Alzheimer's, and depression are often undiagnosed.
 - Preference for nuclear families has increased social isolation and "empty nest syndrome."
- » Financial Insecurity: High out-of-pocket health expenditure frequently pushes households into poverty.

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- 78% of elderly lack pension coverage and 70% are economically dependent.
- » Feminization of Ageing: Women live longer but often have fewer assets and lower access to healthcare, making them more vulnerable.
- » Others: Fewer trained geriatricians, Lack of Social Security, Digital Access, Rural-Urban Divide etc.

Way Forward

- » Strengthen Long-Term Care (LTC): Develop integrated elderly-care systems including skilled workforce, infrastructure, and financing.
- » Strengthen Digital Healthcare: Promote teleconsultation and integrated electronic health records under the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM).

Banking Regulation: CRAR

RBI has revised the capital adequacy norms for commercial banks, small finance banks and payments banks.

- » RBI has now allowed banks to include quarterly profits earned in Common Equity Tier 1 (CET1) capital for the computation of the CRAR.

CRAR

- » Capital to Risk-Weighted Assets Ratio (CRAR): Also known as the Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR), it is the primary metric used by the RBI to ensure a bank can absorb a reasonable amount of loss before it becomes insolvent.
- » Formula: $CRAR = \frac{\text{Tier 1 Capital} + \text{Tier 2 Capital}}{\text{Risk Weighted Assets}}$.
 - Tier I capital is a bank's highest quality capital because it is fully available to cover losses.
 - E.g. CET1 Capital which includes common shares, stock surpluses, and retained earnings.
 - Tier II capital (certain reserves and subordinated debt) has a lower loss absorption capacity than Tier I capital.

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- » Features: Massive crocodilian, with males 3 to 6 meters in length and females 2.5 to 4 meters, weighing between 150 and 250 kg, with bulbous knob on the end of the snout.
- » Habitat and Distribution: Now only survive in India and Nepal (population ~800), they are primarily in the Ganges tributaries and Mahanadi.
 - However, this recent sighting confirms their presence in the Brahmaputra river system as well.
- » Conservation Status:
 - Critically Endangered under the IUCN Red List.
 - Protected under Schedule I of India's Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

EFTA Agreement Highlights

Indian Commerce Secretary is on visit to Switzerland to advance the implementation of the India–EFTA Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA).

About European Free Trade Association (EFTA)

- » EFTA is an intergovernmental organisation established in 1960 through the Stockholm Convention.
- » Objective: Promotion of free trade and economic integration between its members.
- » Members: Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.
 - Initial Founding members: Austria, Denmark, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.
- » India is the EFTA's fifth-largest trading partner after the European Union, the United States, Britain and China.
- » Among EFTA, Switzerland is the largest trading partner of India, followed by Norway.

GCCs in India Cross 2,100

According to the latest NASSCOM-Zinnov report, India's total GCCs are estimated at 2,117

- » These centres employ over 2.3 million professionals and generate revenues nearing \$100 billion.

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- » 1,200+ GCCs in India have AI/ML capabilities and India has become second largest employer of enterprise AI talent globally.

GCCs

- » These are offshore units set up by companies to deliver a range of services for their parent organisations.
- » GCC's areas of expertise include information technology, research and development, customer support, and other business operations.
- » Enablers for GCC Growth: Strong infrastructure, skilled workforce, innovation ecosystem, startup support, favourable policies (such as GENESIS, Startup India, Future Skills Prime, SEZ Reforms) etc.
- » Significance: Contribution to economic growth, employment creation, fosters innovation and R&D, adoption of global standards and boost local economies especially in Tier-II and Tier-III cities.

Challenges with GCCs

- » Executive Support: Lack of executive sponsorship and long-term management backing.
- » Operating Model: Fragmented processes, unclear ownership and weak GCC structure.
- » IT Services Overlap: Concerns exist over increasing overlap and competition between GCCs and traditional IT services companies.
 - **Others:** Widening talent gaps, cyber threats, fiscal pressures etc.

Genetic Neurodegenerative Disorder

Huntington's patients seek rare disease status for the disease

About Huntington's Disease

- » Nature: Huntington's Disease is a hereditary neurodegenerative disorder causing gradual breakdown of brain nerve cells.
- » Affects: Movement, behaviour, cognition and personality.
- » Cause: Caused by genetic mutation inherited from a parent.
- » Types:
 - Adult-Onset: Most common form, usually appears between 30–50 years.
 - Juvenile: Rare form occurring in children/adolescents.

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- » Major Symptoms: Uncontrolled movements, Cognitive decline, Behavioural and psychiatric problems and Progressive loss of motor functions.

Litchi – Bihar's Famous Fruit

Centre forms Expert Panel to assess Litchi Stink Bug damage in Bihar.

- » Panel will be headed by the Director of the National Research Centre on Litchi, Muzaffarpur.
- » India is the world's second-largest producer of litchi after China.

Litchi (Litchi chinensis)

- » It is a Juicy subtropical fruit known for sweet translucent edible flesh (aril). Botanically it belongs to the Sapindaceae family.
- » Agro climatic requirement: Moist subtropical climate, low elevation (up to 800 m), deep well-drained loamy soil rich in organic matter with pH 5.0-7.0.
- » Major Producing States: Bihar (largest), West Bengal, Assam, Punjab, Jharkhand, Tripura etc.

Musi River – Telangana

Telangana Government releases comprehensive guidelines for Phase-I of Musi Riverfront Development Project.

About Musi River

- » Origin: Ananthagiri hills, Rangareddy district (Telangana).
- » It is one of the major tributaries of Krishna River and flows into the Osmansagar and Himayatsagar reservoirs.
- » It consists of 2 rivulets - Esi and Musa which then converge into Musi River.
- » Importance: Major water sources for Hyderabad.

NIA – Counter Terrorism Agency

Supreme Court directed that at least one special court be established to deal with 10 to 15 trials in cases probed by the National Investigation Agency (NIA).

About National Investigation Agency (NIA)

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- » Establishment: Under the National Investigation Agency Act, 2008, which was enacted in the aftermath of the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks.
- » Objective: To investigate and prosecute offences (mentioned in schedule) that threatens India's sovereignty, security, and integrity, friendly relations with foreign States, matters relating to international treaties etc
- » Headquarters: New Delhi with 2 Zonal offices at Guwahati & Jammu.
- » Headed by: Director-General (DG), who is a senior Indian Police Service (IPS) officer.

NTBs Costlier than Tariffs

UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in its 'Invisible Barriers: The Costs of Non-Tariff Measures' Report highlights that global trade is increasingly being shaped by regulatory restrictions, technical standards and geopolitical trade interventions.

Key Findings of the Report

- » Dominance of Non-Tariff Measures (NTMs): NTMs now impose higher export costs than tariffs for 88% of countries.
- » Double Burden on Developing Nations: of both rising tariffs and heavy NTM compliance costs.
- » Modern trade negotiations: have shifted away from simply lowering tariffs to focusing heavily on regulatory easing. E.g. EU-India Trade Deal.
- » LDCs lose approximately 10% of their exports to G20 markets as they often lack the financial resources and accredited testing facilities to navigate complex regulations

Recommendations of UNCTAD:

- » Enhance Transparency: It can reduce trade costs associated with non-tariff barriers by about 19 %.
- » Fostering Regulatory Cooperation and Alignment: Aligning domestic regulations with international standards can reduce NTM related trade costs by 15-30% without compromising safety.
- » Boosting South-South Trade Integration: Leveraging transparency and regulatory cooperation can strengthen trade among developing countries.

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- » Others: Capacity-Building and Technical Support, Empowering LDCs in Trade Diplomacy etc.
- » Examples: Codex Alimentarius, International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) etc.

UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD)

- » HQ: Geneva, Switzerland.
- » Genesis: Established as a permanent intergovernmental body by the United Nations General Assembly in 1964.
- » It is a part of the UN Secretariat and United Nations Development Group.
- » Objective: To aid developing countries, particularly the least developed ones, and transitioning economies, in integrating effectively into the global economy.
- » Members: 195 nations (including India)
- » Key Reports: Trade & Development report, World Investment report, Least Developed Countries report etc

Strategic Location – Oman**Oman (Capital: Muscat)**

- » Oman's ports Sohar and Salalah are emerging as key lifelines for Indian exporters and GCC countries by helping bypass disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz.

Political Features:

- » It is located on the southeastern edge of the Arabian Peninsula.
- » Bordering Countries: It is bounded by Yemen (South-west), United Arab Emirates (North-west), and Saudi Arabia (West).
- » Maritime Boundaries: Arabian Sea (South and East) and Gulf of Oman (North).

Geographical Features:

- » Mountain Ranges: Hajar and Dhofar.
 - Jebel Shams (Mountain of the Sun") is the highest peak.

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- » Natural Resources: Fuel resources (petroleum and natural gas), minerals resources (copper, marble, asbestos, chromium, gypsum, and limestone), and fish.
- » Climate: Hot and dry in the interior and hot and humid along the coast.

Supreme Court Flags Drug Crisis

Geographical Location: Between two major illicit drug-producing regions - Golden Crescent (Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan) and the Golden Triangle (Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand).

- » Porous Borders: Peddlers/smugglers are using technologies including drones for smuggling of narcotics across India-Pakistan border in Punjab State.
- » Easy availability of synthetic drugs: Like 3,4-Methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA) or ecstasy, has manifested in the form of increasing drug addiction cases.
- » Economic, Social and Psychological Factors: Unemployment, family breakdown, depression, academic pressure, and urban isolation contribute to drug abuse.
- » Online Drug Trade: Technology such as use of dark web and encrypted platforms have enabled anonymous drug transactions.

Key measures taken to curb drug menace in India

- » Nasha Mukh Bharat Abhiyaan (NMBA): Launched in 2020 to make India drug-sensitised and resilient against substance abuse.
- » NDPS Act 1985: Make stringent provisions for the control and regulation of operations relating to narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.
- » National Policy on NDPS 2012: To combat the drug menace in a holistic manner.
- » National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (NAPDDR) (2018–2025): A multi-pronged strategy focusing on education, de-addiction, and rehabilitation of individuals and families.
- » International convention: India is a signatory to Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961, Convention on Psychotropic Substances, 1971 and

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Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic
Substances, 1988.

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Supreme Court: Tyranny of Elected

Current Appointment Procedure of Election Commission of India (ECI)

- » Constitutional Provision: Article 324(2) provides for CEC and ECs to be appointed by the President, subject to any law made by Parliament.
- » Statutory Provision: The CEC and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023 (replaced the 1991 Act), enacted in response to the Supreme Court's 2023 Anoop Baranwal judgment (which had mandated a selection panel of PM, LoP, and CJI until Parliament legislated).
- » Process includes:
 - Search Committee (headed by Cabinet Secretary) prepares a panel of 5 eligible candidates.
 - Selection Committee recommends one name to the President.
 - Selection Committee consists of Prime Minister (Chair), One Union Cabinet Minister & Leader of Opposition (or leader of largest opposition party in Lok Sabha).
- » Eligibility: Persons who hold/have held a post equivalent to Secretary to the Government of India.

Concerns Regarding the Appointment Procedure:

- » Executive Dominance: Government enjoys 2:1 majority in Selection Committee (PM + Cabinet Minister vs LoP).
- » Search Committee Bypass: Selection Committee can ignore the shortlisted panel and pick "any other person".
- » Appointments despite vacancies: Appointments allowed even if Selection Committee has vacancies, enabling ruling party dominance.
- » Other: Bureaucratic Monopoly (Only Secretary-rank officers eligible); Status Downgrade (Salaries and conditions aligned with Cabinet Secretary, not Supreme Court judge level).

Suggestions on Composition of Selection Committee for Appointment of CEC & ECs

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- » Tarkunde Committee (1975), Goswami Committee (1990) and Law Commission (255th Report, 2015): Recommended a three-member collegium consisting of the Prime Minister, LoP in the Lok Sabha, and the CJI.
- » National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (2002): recommended a panel comprising of Prime Minister, LoP in Lok Sabha, LoP in Rajya Sabha, Speaker of Lok Sabha & Deputy Chairman of Rajya Sabha.
- » 2nd ARC Report (2007): A collegium consisting of the PM, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, LoP in the Lok Sabha, Law Minister and the Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha.

Global Best Practices:

- » United Kingdom: The recruitment of electoral commissioners is overseen by the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, which includes MPs.
- » The recommended candidates are then approved by the House of Commons and formally appointed by the monarch.
- » United States: The Commission is appointed by the President and must be confirmed by the Senate.
 - Members are barred from holding other federal executive, legislative, or judicial positions at the time of their appointment.

TARA – Defence Innovation

DRDO and the Indian Air Force (IAF) successfully conducted the maiden flight trial of the Tactical Advanced Range Augmentation (TARA) weapon in Odisha.

TARA

- » It is India's first indigenous glide weapon system that converts unguided warheads into precision-guided weapons.

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- » Developed by: the Research Centre Imarat, Hyderabad, along with other DRDO laboratories.
- » Advantage: Its stand-off capability allows pilots to release bombs from outside hostile air defence coverage.
- » Once deployed, the bombs glide at high subsonic speeds (>650 km/h), with a range of more than 80 km, making interception difficult.
- » Other glide bomb in India: Gaurav (Long Range Glide Bomb - LRGB), SAAW (Smart Anti-Airfield Weapon), etc.

UN Habitat in News

UN-Habitat launched the Catalogue of Solutions 2026-2029

- » The Catalogue directly supports the UN-Habitat Strategic Plan 2026-2029, adopted in 2025, which prioritises adequate housing, land, and basic services for all.

About UN-Habitat

- » Genesis: In 1977, Habitat I provided the foundations of the United Nations Human Settlements Program (or UN-Habitat).
- » Mandate (by the UN General Assembly): to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities.
- » Headquarter: Nairobi, Kenya
- » Important documents:
 - Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements (Habitat I),
 - Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements (Habitat II),
 - The New Urban Agenda (Habitat III) in Quito, Ecuador.

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Caspian Energy & Ecology

The Caspian Sea has emerged as a backdoor for military and commercial logistics between Russia and Iran amidst the ongoing West Asian conflict.

About Caspian Sea

- » It is the world's largest inland water body (or largest lake), located at the intersection of Eastern Europe and Western Asia.
- » Borders five countries: Russia (northwest), Kazakhstan (northeast), Turkmenistan (southeast), Iran (south), and Azerbaijan (West).
- » Inflow & Outflow: The Volga River is its primary source, providing approximately 80% of its water inflow.
 - Since there is no outlet, water is lost only through evaporation, which results in its brackish (salty) nature.
- » Current Status: Rich in oil and natural gas, the Caspian Sea has shrunk by 46% between 2001 and 2024, largely due to high evaporation rate and construction of dams on Volga River.

CDS: Military Chief Integrator

The Government has appointed Lieutenant General NS Raja Subramani (Retd) as the next Chief of Defence Staff (CDS).

About CDS

- » Genesis: The post of CDS was created in 2019 on the recommendations of a Group of Ministers (GoM) in 2001, based on the 1999 K. Subrahmanyam Committee (or Kargil Review Committee) Report.
- » Roles and Responsibilities of CDS:
 - Principal Military Adviser to the Raksha Mantri on all tri-service matters.

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- Head of Department of Military Affairs (DMA): As the ex-officio Secretary, the CDS oversees Armed Forces Affairs, Procurement (excluding capital acquisitions), and Integration (promoting "jointness" in training, logistics, etc.).
- Permanent Chairman of Chiefs of Staff Committee: acting as "first among equals" to coordinate between the three Service Chiefs.
- Strategic Mandates: Theatre Commands, Nuclear Authority (Military Adviser to the Nuclear Command Authority) and Policy & Planning.

Divyastra – Multi Target Power

India conducted the 2nd successful flight-trial of 'Divyastra' Missile from Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam Island, Odisha.

'Divyastra' Missile

- » It is an advanced Agni Missile equipped with Multiple Independently Targeted Re-Entry Vehicle system (MIRV) system.
- » MIRV system: Originally developed in the early 1960s, it allows a single missile to carry multiple nuclear warheads, each capable of striking different targets independently.
- The United States of America (first country to develop MIRV technology), Russia, the United Kingdom, France, and China also have MIRV Technology.

Eco Friendly Fertilizer Drive

Indian Biogas Association (IBA) has called for 10% mandatory blending of fermented organic manure (FOM) with chemical fertilizers by 2030.

FOM

- » FOM is a type of organic fertilizer produced through a controlled fermentation process of organic materials like manure, crop residues, and compost.
- » It is a byproduct of operational biogas or compressed biogas (CBG) plants used as a fertilizer.

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- » Uses: FOM supplies essential plant nutrients, rejuvenates soil health, enhances beneficial microbial activity, and strengthens climate resilience in agricultural systems.

Micro Irrigation Expansion Mission

This target will be achieved over a period of 5 years from 2025-26 to 2029-30 through the Per Drop More Crop (PDMC) initiative under the broader National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA).

About NMSA:

- » Launched: in 2014-15 under the framework of the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC).
 - Since 2022-23, it has been included under Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana.
- » Ministry: Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare.
- » Aim: To enhance agricultural productivity while focusing on integrated farming, water use efficiency, soil health management and synergizing resource conservation.
- » Four Major Interventions/Components
 - On Farm Water Management (OFWM) / Per Drop More Crop (PDMC): Promotes precision irrigation (mainly drip & sprinkler systems) to improve water-use efficiency.
 - Coverage: ~109 lakh hectares under micro-irrigation since 2015-16.
 - Since 2015-16, PDMC initiative has been subsumed under the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana for its implementation as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme.
 - Rainfed Area Development (RAD): Uses "watershed plus framework" for natural resource conservation.
 - It promotes Integrated Farming Systems (IFS) that combines multi-cropping with allied activities (horticulture, livestock, fishery, agro-forestry) to boost income and reduce risk.

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- Soil Health Management (SHM): Focuses on location- and crop-specific nutrient management. It is delivered through Soil Health Cards (SHC) Scheme to promote balanced fertilization, residue management, organic farming, and reduced urea overuse.
- Climate Change and Sustainable Agriculture: Monitoring, Modeling and Networking (CCSAMMN): Facilitates two-way flow of climate information between farmers and scientists for better climate adaptation through pilot projects.

Nobel Laureate Tagore

The Prime Minister pays heartfelt tributes to Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore on the occasion of Pochishe Boishakh.

About Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)

- » Birth: Born in Calcutta to Debendranath Tagore and Sarada Devi.
- » He was a renowned Bengali poet, philosopher, composer, playwright, painter and social reformer.

Key Contributions:

- » Composed Jana Gana Mana and Amar Shonar Bangla, the national anthems of India and Bangladesh respectively.
- » Founded Visva-Bharati University and Shantiniketan School.
- » Advocated universal humanism, global peace and cultural exchange.
- » Major literary work:
 - Poetry: Gitanjali, Manasi, Sonar Tari, Gitimalya and Balaka
 - Plays: Raja, Dakghar, Achalayatan, Muktaghara and Raktakaravi.
 - Novels: Gora, Ghare-Baire and Yogayog.
- » Recognition: He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913.
 - Knighted by the British in 1915, later he renounced his knighthood in protest against the Jallianwala Bagh massacre.
- » Values: Nationalism, courage, humanism, etc

NPA 2025 – Local Governance in Focus

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Ministry of Panchayati Raj has announced National Panchayat Awards 2025 with Mizoram's Kawrthah North Village receiving top rank in 'Clean and Green Panchayat' category of DDUPSVP.

National Panchayat Awards

- » Core Purpose: Awarded annually to recognize best-performing Panchayats and promote inclusive, participatory, and sustainable development in rural India.
- » Assessment Framework: Align with nine themes of the Localization of Sustainable Development Goals (LSDGs).
- » Two award categories:
 - Deen Dayal Upadhyay Panchayat Satat Vikas Puraskar (DDUPSVP): Recognizes outstanding Gram Panchayats based on their performance in nine thematic areas.
 - Nanaji Deshmukh Sarvottam Panchayat Satat Vikas Puraskar (NDSPSVP): Honors the overall best-performing Panchayats at the District, Block, and Gram Panchayat levels.

PCA Act: Protecting Animals

National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) for first time, has compiled national-level statistical data specifically tracking crimes under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960.

- » Highest number of cases: Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, and Tamil Nadu.

Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960:

- » Objective: To prevent infliction of unnecessary pain or suffering on animals.
- » Act defines "animal" as any living creature other than a human being.
- » Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI): Statutory body as established by Central Government under Section 4, to advise on making rules to prevent animal suffering and promotes animal welfare education.

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River Reptile & Dragonfly Diversity

Gharial was recently spotted in Assam's Kaziranga National Park after a long time and a recent survey recorded 143 Odonata species across Western Ghats, highlighting 35% shortfall in known diversity.

Gharial

- » Features: Massive crocodilian, with males 3 to 6 meters in length and females 2.5 to 4 meters, weighing between 150 and 250 kg, with bulbous knob on the end of the snout.
- » Habitat and Distribution: Now only survive in India and Nepal (population ~800), they are primarily in the Ganges tributaries and Mahanadi.
 - However, this recent sighting confirms their presence in the Brahmaputra river system as well.
- » Conservation Status:
 - Critically Endangered under the IUCN Red List.
 - Protected under Schedule I of India's Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

Odonata:

- » Classification: Comprised of dragonflies (suborder Anisoptera) and damselflies (suborder Zygoptera).
- » Habitat: Around 6,000 known living species globally distributed in every region except Antarctica (highest in the tropics).
- » Characteristics: Adult odonates are recognizable by their two pairs of transparent wings, an elongated abdomen, and a sloping thorax.

Scramjet = Supersonic Combustion Ramjet

DRDO successfully conducted a test of its Actively Cooled Full Scale Scramjet Combustor, achieving a run-time of over 1,200 seconds (earlier 700 seconds).

- » Scramjet Propulsion System
- » Concept: Scramjet stands for Supersonic Combustion Ramjet.
 - It is an advanced air-breathing jet engine designed to operate efficiently at hypersonic speeds by allowing the combustion of fuel to occur supersonically.

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- » Operating Mechanism: Vehicle's forward motion to "ram" and compress external air into the combustor.
 - It uses atmospheric oxygen as its oxidizer as it flies through the air.
- » Fuel Types: Hydrogen or advanced liquid hydrocarbon endothermic fuels.
- » Advantages: Reduce total weight of vehicle, making it a highly efficient propulsion system for low-cost, reusable access to space and an ideal foundation for hypersonic cruise missile development.

Somnath Legacy @ 75

It also marks 1000 years since the first attack on the temple in 1026 A.D by Mahmud Ghazni.

Somnath Temple

- » One of twelve Aadi Jyotirlingas.
 - Jyotirlinga means 'column or pillar of light'.
- » Location: Prabhas Patan along the Saurashtra coast in Gujarat.
- » Literary Sources: Dwadasha Jyotirlinga Stotram (Places Somnath first among the twelve Jyotirlingas), Skanda Purana, Prabhasa Khanda, Rig Veda and Bhagavat.
- » Mythology Associated: Built by Chandra Dev, the Moon God, who worshipped Lord Shiva here to free himself from a curse. Som means Moon. Nath means Lord.
- » Religious Sects Associated: Shaivism, Vaishnavism, Shaktism.
- » Foreign Travellers Associated: Mentioned by the Arab traveler Al-Biruni.
- » Architecture: Chalukya style also called Kailash Mahameru Prasad Style.
- » Features:
 - Vesara Style: Blends Nagara-style with Dravidian-style.
 - Constituents: Shikhara, Garbhagriha, Sabha Mandap, Nritya Mandap, traditional carvings, a spacious clean courtyard, and Baan Stambh pointing toward the South Pole.
 - Material: Built of sandstone.
- » Restoration:
 - 12th century: Kumarapala

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- 13th century: King of Junagadh
- 18th century: Ahilyabai Holkar
- 1951: Pran Pratishtha (consecration) done by Dr. Rajendra Prasad. It was
- It was initiated by Sardar Patel in 1947.

Workforce Pulse Indicators

Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Quarterly Bulletin (Jan-Mar 2026) estimated declining Unemployment Rate (UR) in urban areas while Regular wage employees in rural areas witnessed a rise.

- » There was an increase in rural employment in both secondary and tertiary sector.

Key Labour Force Indicators

- » Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR): 55.5%.
 - LFPR is the percentage of persons in the labour force (i.e. working or seeking or available for work) in the population.
- » Worker Population Ratio (WPR): 52.8%.
 - WPR is the percentage of employed persons in the population.
- » Unemployment Rate (UR): in urban areas stood at 6.6%.
 - UR is the percentage of persons unemployed among the persons in the labour force.

Agri Health Link Mission

SEHAT – Science Excellence for Health through Agricultural Transformation is a joint initiative of Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).

Key Highlights of SEHAT

- » Vision: Transform agriculture from food production system into powerful driver of nutrition, health, and well-being for India.

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- » Five Priority Areas of National Significance:
- » Development and evaluation of biofortified and nutrient-dense crop varieties: Address malnutrition and improve nutritional status.
- » Biofortification increases nutrient density of food crops through conventional plant breeding, and/or improved agronomic practices and/or modern biotechnology without sacrificing key characteristics.
 - E.g., enriching with zinc, iron and other nutrients.
- » Strengthening Integrated Farming Systems: Promote dietary diversification, enhance farm incomes, and build resilience.
- » Addressing Occupational Health Risks: Among agricultural workers through targeted, evidence-based interventions.
- » Prevention and management of non-communicable diseases: Advancing agriculture-enabled strategies through promotion of functional foods and nutritionally superior crop varieties.
- » One Health preparedness: Integrated surveillance, diagnostics, and research at human–animal–environment interface.
- » Significance
- » Proactive, Preventive, and Holistic approach to Healthcare as against reactive and curative model.
- » Address Dual burden of undernutrition and overnutrition rising non-communicable diseases like diabetes, hypertension and cancer, etc.
- » “Whole of government” and “Whole of systems” approach integrating science, policy making and implementation.

Architect of Unity

Prime Minister paid tribute to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel at Somnath, Gujarat.

- » Born in Nadiad (Gujarat) he was often referred to as the "Iron Man of India".
- » He led successful campaigns against oppressive policies and taxation imposed by British authorities in Kheda Satyagraha (1918) and the Bardoli Satyagraha (1928).

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- » He mobilised support for non-violent movements like Quit India Movement of 1942.
- » He presided over the 46th session (Karachi) of the Indian National Congress in 1931 which was called upon to ratify the Gandhi-Irwin Pact.
- » He became the first Deputy Prime Minister and first Home Minister of India.
- » He contributed to the integration of over 560 princely states into the Indian Union.
- » Values: Patriotism, courage, leadership

Fastest Cat Returns

Two cheetahs brought from Botswana were released in the Kuno National Park, Madhya Pradesh.

About Cheetah

- » World's fastest Mammal and the only large carnivore to be extinct in India (1952).
- » Unlike other big cats (lions, tigers, leopards, and jaguars) cheetahs don't roar.
- » Two Species of Cheetahs:
 - African Cheetah (IUCN Status- Vulnerable).
 - Asiatic Cheetah (IUCN Status- Critically Endangered).
- » Habitat: Asia (only in arid regions of eastern Iran and India (After Reintroduction); Africa (grasslands, scrublands and open forests E.g. Botswana, Namibia and South Africa)

Project Cheetah (2022)

- » Objective: To translocate African cheetahs to India.
- » Implementing Agency: National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).
- » World's first intercontinental large wild carnivore translocation initiative
 - Checkpoint proteins act like switches which turn the immune response on or off and regulate its degree of activation.

Food Geopolitics Report

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Released by IPES-Food, International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems, examines how new geopolitics of food is reshaping food systems.

Key Factors Driving New Geopolitics of Food

- » Trade Wars and Economic Chaos: E.g. shift in US tariff policy is impacting countries exporting agricultural products to USA.
- » Military Conflicts: Food could be used as weapon of war and coercion, deepening crises in the world's "hunger hotspots".
- » Crisis of multilateralism: Global institutions including United Nations, are facing both budget shortfalls and a crisis of legitimacy.

Market Management Tools and Associated Concerns:

- » Public food stockholding (PSH): Involving strategic procurement, storage and management of food by public entity and release via auctions or public food distribution programs.
 - E.g., India's PSH program backed National Food Security Act of 2013 and managed by Food Corporation of India (FCI).
 - Concerns: fiscal and infrastructure costs; issues with management capacity, coordination across stakeholders, and corruption.
- » Supply Management Mechanisms: Including marketing boards having exclusive authority to buy/sell a given commodity, and production quotas limiting quantity of food commodities that producers can sell.
 - E.g., Supply management in Canada's dairy, poultry, and egg sectors; Farmer-owned cooperatives in Norway's supply management system.
 - Concerns Associated: Inefficiencies and market-distorting effects, etc.

Way Forward

- » Resilience Food Systems: Transition away from systemic dependencies through self-reliance; targeted fiscal measures, tax reduction on essential goods, export reductions, etc.
- » Role of civil society and social movement: Mobilize pressure, open debate, build consensus, and generate support for food systems that meet needs of vulnerable.

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- » Food sovereignty: Stronger policies to curb corporate concentration, financial market regulation, reform of trade agreements, etc.

Governor's Discretion in Govt Formation

In the recent Tamil Nadu Assembly elections, no single party secured a clear majority (hung assembly), making the role of Governor in government formation crucial.

Role of the Governor in forming a governmentConstitutional provision:

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

Sarkaria Commission (1987) Recommendations:

- » When a single party secures a clear majority in the Assembly, the Governor invites the leader of that party to form the government.
- » However, in case of no party having a clear majority, it suggested an order of preference for selecting a CM:
 - Pre-poll alliance,
 - Largest single party with outside support,
 - Post-poll coalition,
 - Post-poll alliance with external support.
- » Potential Concerns: Governors have, on certain occasions (E.g. Goa and Manipur in 2017), appointed Chief Ministers without following order of preference.

Supreme Court judgements related to Governor's discretionary powers

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- » S. R. Bommai v. Union of India (1994): The Governor must invite the leader of the party commanding a majority in the House, or the single-largest party/group, to form the government.
- » Rameshwar Prasad case (2006): It held that 'floor of the House' is the constitutionally ordained forum for testing the majority support enjoyed by a government.

Suggestions:

- » Punchhi Commission (2010): Advocated for clear guidelines on the Governor's discretionary powers during a hung assembly to limit arbitrary choices.
- » Justice Kurian Joseph Committee: Incorporate a new schedule into the Constitution to codify the rules governing the Governor's use of discretionary powers.

Indian Ocean Rim Spotlight

India hosted the 10th Indian Ocean Dialogue (IOD) under the theme "Indian Ocean Region in a Transforming World."

- » IOD is a flagship Track 1.5 platform under Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)

IORA

- » Genesis: An inter-governmental organization established in 1997.
- » Objective: Encourage regional cooperation and sustainable development within the Indian ocean region.
- » Secretariat: Ebène, Mauritius
- » Members: 23 member states and 12 dialogue partners.
- » Institutional Mechanisms of IORA:
 - IORA Council of Ministers: Highest decision-making body.
 - IORA Chair: The Council of Ministers, on voluntary offer by Member States, elects a Chair of the Association for a period of two years.
 - India has assumed the Chairship of IORA for the 2025-27 period

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Justice on Time: Bail First

Expressing concerns over mounting pendency and repeated delays in listing, Court gave suggestions to High Courts to strengthen systemic efficiency.

Key Suggestions:

- » Listing: Bail matters to be listed on weekly or fortnightly basis through an automatic software-based mechanism.
- » Fresh applications to be listed on alternate days or within a week of filing, with mandatory representation from Union or State.
- » Automatic re-listing of matters not be taken up, fixation of an outer timeline for disposal.
- » Status Reports: Mandatory filing of status reports before first hearing, and advance service of bail petitions by Advocate General or designated government agencies.
- » Discourage Causal/Avoidable Adjournments: Sought by government counsels.

Need for Expediting Disposal of Bail Application

- » Upholding Fundamental Rights: Article 21 of Constitution guarantees right to life and personal liberty and Bail serves as mechanism to ensure this liberty is not arbitrarily curtailed prior to conviction.
- » Overcrowding of Prisons: Occupancy rate in prisons stood at 112.7% in 2024 with around 3.7 lakh undertrial prisoners (Prison Statistics India, 2024).
- » Upholding Indian criminal jurisprudence: SC has in multiple cases upheld the principle of “bail is the rule and jail is the exception”.

Legal Provisions Concerning Bail:

- » Bail in bailable offence [Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023]

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- Section 478: Person accused of a bailable offence at any time while under arrest without a warrant and at any stage of the proceedings has the right to be released on bail.
- Section 479(1) : Release on bail for individuals who have undergone detention for up to one-half of the maximum imprisonment period specified for the offense.

Jute Mission – NJB

NJB stepped up implementation of Jute Crop Information System (JCIS)..

- » JCIS was launched in 2023 in collaboration with Indian Space Research Organisation and Jute Corporation of India to monitor jute cultivation using remote sensing and field data.
- » Has two key tools: BHUVAN JUMP, mobile app for on-field jute monitoring, and PATSAN (Prospective Assessment of Jute Using Mobile App-Based Field Observations).

National Jute Board (Hq: Kolkata, West Bengal)

- » Governed by National Jute Board Act, 2008.
- » Ministry: Ministry of Textiles
- » Function: research and human resource development to explore new and innovative use of jute; increase global share of Indian jute goods consumption.

Shiksha Poshan Mission

Centre granted temporary extension to two flagship schemes, Samagra Shiksha and PM Poshan till September 30, 2026.

Samagra Shiksha:

- » Aim: Integrated scheme for school education covering entire gamut from pre-school to class XII.
- It subsumed the erstwhile Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan, and Teacher Education Scheme.

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- » Launched in 2018.
- » Ministry: Ministry of Education

PM POSHAN (Formerly Mid-Day Meal Scheme)

- » Type: Centrally Sponsored Scheme.
- » Ministry: Ministry of Education
- » Aim: Provide one hot cooked meal in Government and Government-aided schools covering all school children studying in pre-primary and Classes I-VIII.

Smart MLFF Tolling

Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways launched MLFF tolling system in a part of Urban Extension Road-II in NCR

MLFF Tolling

- » Integrates Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) technology with FASTag-based electronic toll collection to automate user fee collection with minimal human intervention.
- » Implementation: National Highway Authority of India (NHAI).
- » Significance:
 - Reduce operation costs in toll collection (from 15% to 3-4%).
 - Save nearly 250 crore litres of fuel annually.
 - Reduce approximately 81,000 tonnes of carbon emissions.

Su Sahay: Citizen Support Portal

The Chief Justice of India launched two major digital initiatives to streamline judicial administration and enhance access to justice.

About the Digital Initiatives

- » One Case One Data: A unified case management system integrating multi-level databases of taluka courts, District Courts, High Courts and Government.

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- Aim: Automates data retrieval and verification, enabling seamless tracking, reducing duplication, and extending reciprocal access to High Courts and government departments.
- » Su Sahay: An AI-powered assistance chatbot developed by the National Informatics Centre and the Supreme Court Registry.
- Integrated into the Supreme Court website, it aims to help stakeholders access case information and navigate court services efficiently.

Vaccine Against Malaria

A study found that the world's first approved malaria vaccine (RTS, S/AS01E) reduced overall child deaths by 13 % in parts of Africa.

- » Malaria is a life-threatening disease mostly spread to people through the bites of some infected female Anopheles mosquitoes.
- » It does not spread from person to person.

Malaria vaccines (RTS, S/AS01E)

- » It was recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2021 for use among children living in sub-Saharan Africa and other regions with P. falciparum malaria transmission.
- » R21/Matrix-M vaccine is the second malaria vaccine approved by WHO in 2023.

Viksit Bharat Gramin Mission Act - 2025

The Act will come into force on 1 July, 2026 and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005 will stand repealed.

- » To ensure seamless transition, existing e-KYC verified MGNREGA Job Cards shall remain valid until Gramin Rozgar Guarantee Cards are issued.

Salient Features of the VB-G RAM G Act

- » Viksit Bharat @2047 Alignment: Shifts towards integrated rural development and durable asset creation.

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- » Thematic Public Works: Prioritizes four areas- water security, core rural infrastructure, livelihood-related assets, and extreme weather mitigation.
- » Tech-Enabled Governance: Integrates face authentication for attendance, GIS, AI-enabled analytics, real-time dashboards, and Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT).
- » Participatory Planning: Execution relies on bottom-up Viksit Gram Panchayat Plans (VGPPs) seamlessly integrated into the Viksit Bharat-National Rural Infrastructure Stack (VB-NRIS).

Key Statutory Provisions:

- » Centrally Sponsored Scheme: Shared responsibilities between Centre and States.
- » Enhanced Guarantee: Mandates a statutory 125 days of guaranteed unskilled wage employment per rural household annually.
- » Prompt Payments & Penalties: Wages must be paid weekly or within 15 days from closure of muster rolls; delays incur a daily compensation rate of 0.05% of unpaid wages.
- » Unemployment Allowance: If employment not provided within 15 days, mandates an allowance at one-fourth of the notified wage for the first 30 days, and one-half thereafter.
- » Agricultural Balance: Empowers States to notify up to a 60-day pause during peak sowing/harvesting seasons to secure farm labour.

AI for Business Transformation

OpenAI and Anthropic are expanding into enterprise AI solutions, a trend that may disrupt the traditional outsourcing-driven Indian IT industry.

Enterprise AI:

- » Enterprise AI refers to the integration of Artificial Intelligence technologies such as machine learning, Natural Language Processing (NLP) and computer vision into large organizations to improve efficiency and decision-making.

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- » Application: Used in supply chain, finance, HR, healthcare, cybersecurity and customer service.
 - Enables automation, fraud detection, predictive analytics and personalized services.
- » Challenges: Requires scalable, secure and governed systems with high-quality data infrastructure and may compromise data privacy, cybersecurity risks and workforce displacement.

Banking Fraud: Mule Accounts

Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) signed MoU with Reserve Bank Innovation Hub to curtail mule accounts.

Mule Accounts

- » Mule accounts are bank accounts used by cyber criminals to illegally transfer or launder stolen money obtained through cyber frauds.
- » Often opened using fake identities or by exploiting unsuspecting individuals.
- » Used to hide the real beneficiary and create layers in digital financial fraud.
- » MuleHunter.AI, an AI-based system for detecting and preventing mule accounts, has been launched by the RBI in 2024.

COSOP: Inclusive Growth Strategy

The Country Strategic Opportunities Programme (COSOP) is an International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) led framework to produce a positive impact on the poverty which will be implemented for the period 2026–2033 in India.

COSOP 2026–2033 for India

- » Aim: To strengthen rural incomes, improving resilience and expanding sustainable livelihood opportunities across India reducing poverty.
 - Extreme poverty dropped from 40 per cent in 2004 to 2.3 per cent in 2022, though 11 per cent of the population remains multidimensionally poor.

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- » Strategic goal: Building comprehensive rural prosperity and resilience within the framework of Viksit Bharat@ 2047.
- » The country programme has two strategic objectives:
 - Strategic objective 1: Social, economic and climatic resilience of rural communities is enhanced in line with India's commitment towards poverty-free villages.
 - Strategic objective 2: Enhanced performance, visibility and scalability of interventions through strengthened knowledge systems.

Target group:

- » Geographic: Poorer and climate-vulnerable Himalayan states, particularly the 10 poorest states, and 112 aspirational districts.
- » Poverty targeting: Households below the poverty line, small/marginal farmers, landless people, fishers, women-headed households, youth and persons with disabilities.
- » Social Group: SCs, STs, pastoralists, fishers and forest-dependent communities.

About International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD):

- » It is a specialized United Nations agency and an International Financial Institution that tackles hunger and poverty in rural communities.
- » Year of Establishment: 1977.
- » HQ: Rome, Italy.
- » Member States: 180 (India is a founding member).

Digi Locker Spotlight

Gujarat, along with five other states, was felicitated for its exceptional contribution to the large-scale integration and adoption of DigiLocker across State government services

DigiLocker

- » It aims at 'Digital Empowerment' of citizen by providing access to authentic digital documents to citizen's digital document wallet.

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- » It is a flagship initiative of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology under Digital India Programme.
- » Documents are legally valid under IT Rules, 2016.
- » Benefits:
 - Enables paperless governance and reduces administrative burden.
 - Provides real-time verification and secure document exchange.
- » Ensures faster delivery of services in education, health, employment and financial inclusion.

Displacement Trends 2026

Released by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).

Key Highlights

- » Over 82 million people were internally displaced across 104 countries by 2025.
 - Conflict and violence displaced 68.6 million people, far exceeding disaster-related displacement.
- » Sudan, Palestine, Iran, and Democratic Republic of the Congo were among the worst-affected regions.

Exam Ecosystem in Crisis

The cancellation of National Testing Agency (NTA) NEET-UG 2026 exam after the paper leak reflects larger concern of failure of Exam Ecosystem in India.

- » NTA, established under Societies Registration Act (1860) in 2017 by Ministry of Education, conducts standardized entrance and recruitment examinations in India.

Reasons for Failure of Exam Ecosystem:

- » Unequal Education Standards: Wide gap between CBSE, State Boards, and International Baccalaureate (IB) creates unequal competition.

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- » Corruption and paper leaks: Scams like the Vyapam scam (Madhya Pradesh) undermine trust in examinations.
- » Over-Centralization of Examinations: “One Nation, One Exam” approach ignores regional and educational diversity creating excessive pressure on a single test.
- » Weak cybersecurity: Poor digital security exposes online question papers to leaks and unauthorized access.
- » Cultural: In some parts of India, there's a degree of social acceptance of cheating in exams. E.g., Incidents of mass cheating reported from Bihar.

Ethical Aspects affected due to failure of exam system:

- » Fairness: Equal and unbiased opportunity is compromised raising question on Integrity and Transparency, accountability of exam process.
- » Violates deontological ethics: Students have adopted unfair means (cheating) for favorable ends (results).
- » Virtue Ethics: Virtues of truth, trust, and excellence of character do not support deception or dishonesty.
- » Equity: Disadvantaged students affected more impacting their liberty and right to access.

Legal Provisions related to Exam Ecosystem:

- » Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024: Aimed at curbing leaks, malpractices as well as organized malpractices in recruitment examinations.
- » Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Rules, 2024 were published under the act which mandate, Venue-in-charge must file FIRs in cases of exam malpractice and Committees will probe involvement of management or service providers.

Forests Off Track – 2026

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The report is prepared by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF) Secretariat.

- » It assessed progress towards the 6 GFG set for 2030 and the associated targets of the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests (2017–2030), launched during the 21st UNFF session.
- UNFF (established in 2000), an intergovernmental body composed of all UN members and members of specialised agencies, aims to promote the management, conservation, and sustainable development of all types of forests.

Key Highlights of Report

- » Reduction in Forest Area: Shrank by over 40 million hectares between 2015 and 2025.
- » Major Drivers: Agricultural expansion and surging demand for fuelwood and charcoal.
- » Barriers to Sustainable Forest Management: Weak governance, insecure land tenure, illegal trade, and limited institutional capacity.
- » Degradation Intensification: Due to climate-linked pressures such as droughts, wildfires, heatwaves, pests, and diseases.
- » Finance Gap: Despite reaching a record US\$84 billion in 2023, finance remains far below the estimated US\$300 billion needed annually by 2030.

Recommendations:

- » The report emphasizes stronger coordination, higher forest financing, deforestation-free supply chains, and cleaner energy access to reduce dependence on fuelwood and charcoal.

India's 5 Diplomatic Principles

Amid a shifting global order marked by geopolitical rivalry, regional conflicts, and economic realignments, India's diplomacy should be guided by five key strategic principles.

Five Core Principles for India's Diplomacy

- » Reciprocity: India's foreign policy should be guided by mutual support and trust with strategic partners.

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- E.g., Despite the ongoing Iran conflict, the Prime Minister is set to visit the UAE which has consistently backed India on issues such as Kashmir and counter-terrorism.
- » Diversification: India should broaden its diplomatic and economic engagements beyond traditional partnerships to reduce strategic dependence and access new opportunities.
 - E.g., expanding cooperation with Europe in trade, advanced technology, etc.
- » Strategic Flexibility: India must adopt a pragmatic and interest-based approach amid changing global power equations and evolving geopolitical alignments. E.g., engagement with both BRICS and Quad.
- » Strategic Expansion: India should deepen outreach to emerging regions of economic and geopolitical importance to secure markets, resources, and connectivity.
 - E.g., growing India–Africa cooperation in trade, critical minerals and development partnerships.
- » Domestic Renewal: Strong diplomacy must be backed by domestic economic resilience, technological capacity, and institutional reforms to effectively navigate global uncertainties.
 - E.g., focus on manufacturing, innovation, and technological self-reliance.

India's AI Forecasting Duo

Two systems include first ever AI-enabled “Forecast of Monsoon Advance over Different Parts of the Country” and a “High Spatial Resolution Rainfall Forecast for Uttar Pradesh” as a pilot service.

AI-enabled advanced weather forecast systems

- » Ministry: Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES).
- » Developed by: Jointly by the India Meteorological Department (IMD), Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), Pune, and National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF).

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- » Aim: To deliver hyper-local, impact-based and AI-driven weather services and to provide Localized Weather Information up to 10 Days in Advance.
- » Coverage: AI-enabled Systems will provide Hyper-Local Weather forecasts generating 'block' level forecasts for 16 States and Over 3,000 Sub-districts.
 - Hyper-local weather refers to weather data and forecasts that focus on a very small, precisely defined geographic area, often at the scale of a neighborhood, city block etc.
- » AI enabled pilot project for Uttar Pradesh: It will generate rainfall forecasts at 1-km spatial resolution.

Significance of Hyperlocal Weather Forecasting

- » Urban Planning: Monitors air quality, heat distribution, and rainfall for disaster management/prevention.
- » Agriculture: Provides precise soil moisture, temperature, and precipitation data for crop management.
- » Events and Recreation: Delivers accurate weather information for sporting events, outdoor activities etc.

Government Initiative for Efficient Weather Forecasting:

- » Mission Mausam: To enhance the accuracy, resolution and lead time of forecasts.
- » Integration of the Bharat Forecast System (BFS) under Mission Mausam.
- » Mobile applications: such as MAUSAM, MEGHDOOT, DAMINI, and UMANG to disseminate public information.
- » Mausamgram portal: By India Meteorological Department for accessibility of forecast.

Maritime Insurance Reform – India

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The government issued the first insurance covers under its \$1.5-billion Bharat Maritime Insurance Pool.

Bharat Maritime Insurance Pool

- » Purpose: Ensures continuous and affordable insurance despite withdrawal of foreign insurers during conflicts.
- » Coverage: All maritime risks including hull, machinery, cargo, protection and indemnity (P&I) and war.
- » Significance: strengthens trade security and self-reliance.

NSAP – Social Security Net

A recent study has found that the Centre's old-age pension assistance of ₹200–500 under the NSAP has been significantly eroded over time due to inflation.

- » The study has recommended a National Floor Pension (NFP) on the lines of the National Floor Level Minimum Wage set by the Ministry of Labour and Employment.

National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP), 1995

- » Provides social assistance to Below Poverty Line elderly, widows, disabled persons and bereaved families.
- » Centrally Sponsored Scheme, administered by Ministry of Rural Development
- » Based on Article 41 of DPSP related to public assistance.

Key schemes:

- National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS)
- National Widow Pension Scheme (IGNWPS)
- National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS)
- National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS)
- Annapurna Scheme
- » Implemented across rural and urban areas with support of States/UTs.

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- » It promotes social security, dignity and financial inclusion of vulnerable groups.

Panel for CBI Chief Appointment

Leader of Opposition has recorded his dissent on selection of next CBI chief.

About CBI Director Selection Committee:

- » As per the Section 4A of Delhi Special Police Establishment (DSPE) Act 1946, the CBI Director is appointed by the Central Government on the recommendation of a 3-members committee consisting of
 - Prime Minister (Chairperson)
 - Chief Justice of India (or Judge of the Supreme Court nominated by him)
 - Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha (or the leader of the single largest opposition party in Lok Sabha).
- » Tenure: 2 years, extendable to 3 more years (1 year at a time).

PD 1 Inhibitors – Cancer Immunotherapy

Scientists have found that drugs called PD-1 inhibitors can make the blood-brain barrier more permeable.

PD-1 inhibitors

- » PD-1 inhibitor stands for Programmed Cell Death Protein-1 inhibitor.
- » A PD-1 inhibitor is a type of immunotherapy drug (checkpoint inhibitor) that blocks the PD-1 checkpoint protein, helping the immune system recognize and attack cancer cells more effectively.
 - An immune checkpoint inhibitor (or just checkpoint inhibitor) is a type of monoclonal antibody, a lab-made protein designed to block checkpoint proteins.
 - Checkpoint proteins act like switches which turn the immune response on or off and regulate its degree of activation.

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- » Immunotherapy is a broad category of cancer therapies that triggers the body's immune system to fight cancer cells.

Sikh Warrior & Martyr

Sirhind Fateh Divas has been observed.

- » Sirhind Fateh Divas is observed annually to commemorate the historic conquest of Sirhind by Baba Banda Singh Bahadur in 1710.

Baba Banda Singh Bahadur (1670–1716)

- » Great Sikh warrior and commander of the Khalsa army.
- » Born as Lachman Dev in Rajouri region of present-day Jammu & Kashmir.
- » Later became a disciple of Guru Gobind Singh and came to be known as Banda Singh Bahadur.

Martyrdom

- » Captured by Mughal ruler Farrukhsiyar.
- » Refused religious conversion despite severe torture.
- » Attained martyrdom at Mehrauli, Delhi, where a memorial stands in his memory.

Values:

- » Courage, Sacrifice, etc.

Agarwood: Aromatic Asset of India

Assam ships first legal agarwood chips to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Agarwood (Oudh or Gaharu)

- » Overview: A highly valuable fragrant resinous wood used in perfumes, incense and traditional medicine.
- » Formation: Produced when Aquilaria trees are infected by fungi and generate resin as a defence mechanism.
- » Species in India: India has three Aquilaria species, including agarwood-producing Aquilaria khasiana and Aquilaria malaccensis.
- » Traditional Use: Mentioned in Ayurveda, Unani and Chinese medicine systems.

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- » Protection Status:
 - Appendix II of CITES.

Agri Exports Surge Despite Global Trade Hurdles

India's agricultural exports have grown rapidly, surpassing \$50 billion in FY 2025–26, despite steep tariffs imposed by the United States.

Reasons for growth in India's farm exports:

- » Market Diversification: E.g. marine product exports saw rising shipments to China, Vietnam, Japan, Belgium.
- » Global Dynamics: Lower crop yields in the world's biggest coffee producers (Brazil and Vietnam), created a lucrative gap for Indian exports.
- » Value Addition: Share of processed food exports has risen consistently, from ~15 % in FY18 to ~20 % in FY25.

Key Government Initiatives to promote farm exports:

- » Agriculture Export Policy 2018 (AEP): designed to double agri-exports, diversify the export basket, and promote indigenous, organic, and traditional products.
- » Krishi Udan Yojana 2.0: Enhances air transport for perishable agri-products, particularly from the Northeast and tribal areas.
- » District as Export Hubs (DEH) Initiative: Identifies specific products with export potential in each district (One District One Product - ODOP) to promote local exports.

APEDA Initiatives:

- » Farmer Connect Portal: A platform for providing opportunities for Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) and cooperatives to interact with exporters.
- » BHARATI Initiative: to support 100 agri-food startups with a focus on high-value, GI-tagged, and organic products to achieve \$50 billion in exports by 2030.

BOT Model Powers India's Infra Push

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways is opening build-operate-transfer road projects to large institutional investors.

BOT Model

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- » It is a type of Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model commonly used for financing large infrastructure projects.
- » Working Mechanism: Private company finances, designs, builds and operates the project for a fixed concession period and collects user charges.
 - It involves high private sector participation in construction, operation and maintenance over a long duration.
- » Ownership Transfer: After the concession period ends, ownership is transferred back to the government/public authority.
- » Risk Sharing: Private entity bears major risks such as financial risk, traffic/volume risk and sometimes pricing risk.

Chile in Global SpotlightChile (Capital: Santiago)

Republic of Chile's Foreign Minister leads a High-Level Delegation to India to strengthen economic and commercial cooperation.

Political Features:

- » Location: South- western part of South America.
- » Land Borders: Peru (North), Bolivia (North-East), Argentina (East).
- » Maritime Boundary: Pacific Ocean on the West.

Geographical Features

- » Landforms: Andes Mountains (world's longest continental mountain chain) form most of the border with Argentina.
- » Desert: Atacama (driest non-polar desert on Earth).
- » Major River: Loa and Baker.
- » Mineral resources: Part of the Lithium triangle (along with Argentina and Bolivia) and world's top copper producer.

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- » Highest Peak: Ojos De Salado (world's highest active volcano).

DGFT: Gateway to Global Commerce

The government banned export of sugar until September this year to cool domestic prices.

- » The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) has amended the export policy from 'Restricted' to 'Prohibited'.

DGFT

- » Ministry: Attached office under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry
- » Headed by: Director General of Foreign Trade.
- » Function: Formulates and implements India's Foreign Trade Policy.
- » Role: To promote and facilitate exports/imports, keeping in view the interests of the country.
- » Headquarters: New Delhi and 24 regional offices across India.

Focus on Core Objective: Highlights promotion of gasification, which is the central policy thrust.

The scheme will help realize target of gasification of 100 MT of coal by 2030 under the National Coal Gasification Mission, 2021.

- » Coal gasification is a thermochemical process that converts coal into a versatile, combustible gaseous mixture known as synthesis gas (or syngas).
- » Syngas is a mixture of CO and hydrogen and is used to produce downstream products like urea, methanol, synthetic natural gas (SNG), and ammonia.
- » Status of Coal/Lignite in India: Coal reserves (401 billion tonnes); Lignite reserves (47 billion tonnes).

Key Features of the Scheme

- » Target: To gasify approximately 75 million tonnes (MT) of coal and lignite by incentivizing domestic industries.
- » Financial Outlay: Rs. 37,500 crore.

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- » Financial Incentives: maximum of 20% of the cost of Plant and Machinery, disbursed in four installments linked to project milestones.
- » Funding Caps: ₹5,000 crore for single project, ₹9,000 crore for single product-centered projects (excluding SNG and urea), and ₹12,000 crore for any single entity group across all projects.
- » Policy Support: To provide long-term investment certainty, the government has extended the coal linkage tenure up to 30 years under Non-Regulated Sector (NRS) linkage auction framework.

Significance of Scheme

- » Energy Security: Reduces exposure to global price volatility and import dependence on ammonia (~100% imported), methanol (80-90%), LNG (>50%), and urea (~20%).
- » Environmental Benefits: Better emission control, reducing pollutants like sulfur dioxide (SO₂), nitrogen oxides (NO_x), etc.
- » Economic Impact: Expected to attract major investments and generate ₹6,300 crore annual revenue and supports Atmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India initiatives.
- » Employment: Likely to create around 50,000 direct and indirect jobs

Golden Root in Global Trade

Recently, Mizoram Ginger Mission was launched by the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (MDoNER) and Government of Mizoram for cultivation Mizoram's GI-certified ginger.

Ginger:

- » Scientific Name: Zingiber officinale Rosc (Family: Zingiberaceae).
- » Status: India is a leading global producer of ginger.
- » Major Producing States: Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh.
- » Agro-Climatic Requirements

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- Climate: Warm and humid (up to an altitude of 1500m).
- Temperature: 12-35°C.
- Rainfall: Requires moderate rainfall for sowing (around 1500mm annually), and dry weather before harvesting.
- Soil: well-drained friable sandy loam, clay loam, or lateritic loam rich in humus.

Significances:

- » Antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties.
- » Highly effective in treating nausea, managing blood sugar (HbA1c) and cholesterol levels, etc.

India's Nuclear Vision 2047: TERI Roadmap

Presently, India operates 25 nuclear reactors across seven sites, with a total installed capacity of 8.8 GW.

Key Highlights of the Report

- » Capacity Expansion: Large PHWRs need to anchor base-load power, while Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) will target hard to abate sectors like steel & cement.
- » SMRs are miniaturised versions of large nuclear power plants, generating up to 300 MWe per module and offering advantages such as –
 - Modularity through factory-made parts for faster assembly and lower costs,
 - Scalability via incremental deployment based on energy demand, and
 - Enhanced safety through passive systems enabling automatic shutdown without human intervention.
- » Massive Investment Mobilization: Scaling the capacity will require an estimated capital outlay of ₹23–25 lakh crore.

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- » Workforce Expansion: The construction phase alone will demand 1.2–2 lakh personnel, requiring a massive push in specialized skills training.

Challenges before India

- » Regulatory framework remains outdated for SMR deployment and private participation.
- » SHANTI Act (2025) lacks clear operational rules, ownership models, and financing clarity.
- » High capital costs (₹20–25 Cr/MW), fuel import dependence, and waste management issues.

Recommendations

- » Green Financing: Include nuclear energy in India's green taxonomy to unlock global environmental, social, and governance (ESG) capital flows.
- » Regulatory Reform: Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) to adopt phased, design-certified licensing and update siting norms for SMRs.
- » Private Sector Clarity: Define PPP/SPV models under SHANTI Act such as allowing private entities to provide capital and NPCIL to retain safety/operations.
- » Skilling: Launch “Nuclear Mitra” programme via ITIs for rapid workforce training.
- » Other: Create a centralized national framework for fuel and waste, dedicated fund for transparent public outreach on nuclear energy.

LEADS 2025: India's Logistics Scorecard

LEADS is the flagship assessment of logistics performance across States and Union Territories released by Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT).

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- » LEAPS 2025 (Logistics Excellence, Advancement and Performance Shield) awards were also given across 13 categories covering Core Logistics, MSMEs, Startups, Special Categories etc.

LEADS

- » It was conceived on the lines of the Logistics Performance Index (LPI) of World Bank in 2018.
- » LEADS 2025 provides a four-tier performance framework (earlier three tier).
- » It uses objective indicators (nearly 59% weightage) like regulatory support and logistics enablers, and perception indicators such as logistics infrastructure, services and sustainable logistics.

India's Logistics sector:

- » Logistics cost: ~8% of GDP(2023 to 2024).

Key Issues:

- » Infrastructure Gaps: Poor road quality, port congestion and weak rail connectivity.
- » Skewed share: Over 60% freight movement through roads raises fuel consumption, congestion and transit costs.
- » Fragmentation: Dominance of small players leads to operational inefficiencies.
- » Others: Regulatory Complexity; Slow Technology Adoption; etc.

Initiatives to strengthen Logistics Sector:

- » National Logistics Policy (NLP) 2022: Aims to lower the cost of logistics in par with other developed countries.
- » PM GatiShakti National Master Plan: Integrated infrastructure master plan to ensure seamless movement of people and goods.
- » Logistics Data Bank 2.0: Syncs with Unified Logistics Interface Platform (ULIP) APIs, offering exporters and MSMEs real-time visibility across road, rail, sea etc.
- » Others: Dedicated Freight Corridors (DFCs); Strengthening Multimodal and Integrated Logistics Ecosystem (SMILE) program; Multi-Modal Logistics

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Parks (MMLPs); E-Way Bill System; Infrastructure Status to Logistics Sector; Logistic Efficiency Enhancement Programme etc.

SC Upholds Constitution over Majority Rule

The Supreme Court observed that while India is a constitutional democracy where majority rule prevails, courts must test decisions against constitutional principles.

- » These remarks were made by a nine-judge Constitution bench reviewing the scope of religious freedom.

Constitutionalism

- » It refers to a system in which the government's power is limited by a constitution.

Significance

- » Safeguards Rights: Protects fundamental freedoms from state interference.
 - » Upholds Rule of Law: Ensures that everyone is subject to fair and stable laws. E.g., Article 14 (Equality before law).
 - » Protects Democracy: Guarantees fair elections and ensures power rests with the people.
 - » Ensures Accountability: Uses independent oversight (e.g., CAG) to keep the government transparent.
 - » Separation of Power: Divides authority among branches to prevent any single entity from dominating.
 - » Checks Majoritarianism: Ensures that majority rule does not infringe on rights of marginalized groups. E.g., Article 29,30 safeguarding rights of linguistic and religious minorities.
- High prevalence rates of preventable risk factors: Rising Global anaemia prevalence in women of reproductive age and Violence against women.

Challenges with Constitutionalism

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- Rise of authoritarian tendencies undermining constitutional principles
- » Judicial Overreach challenging the principle of separation of power.
- » Governance Issues such as corruption can erode public trust in democratic institutions.

Cases Related to Constitutionalism:

- » Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala (1973): Established the Basic Structure Doctrine and held that amendments cannot alter the core principles of the Constitution.
- » Rameshwar Prasad v. Union of India (2006): Observed that Constitutionalism abhors absolutism and is premised on the rule of law.
- » I.R. Coelho v. State of Tamil Nadu (2007): Stated that the principle of Constitutionalism requires control over governmental power to ensure that democratic principles are not undermined.

Shipbuilding Powers India's Blue Economy

MoU signed for developing India's First Mega Greenfield Shipyard at Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu under India- Republic of Korea Comprehensive Framework 'VOYAGES'.

- » Proposed shipyard will have 2.5 Million GT annual capacity and generate 15,000 direct jobs.

'VOYAGES' (Shared Vision for Operation of Yard Assisted Growth with Efficiency and Scale)

- » Signed in April, 2026, it promotes India-South Korea cooperation in shipbuilding, shipping and maritime logistics via technology transfer, green shipbuilding and training of Indian professionals in South Korea.

Overview of India's Shipbuilding Sector

- » Global Standing: India holds less than 1% of global share, far behind China (47%), South Korea (25%) and Japan (18%).

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- » Aging Fleet: Average Indian fleet age is 21 years, creating demand for nearly 2,500 new vessels.
- » Market Growth: Sector projected to grow from US\$90 million (2022) to US\$8.12 billion by 2033.

Silent Epidemic of Forgetfulness

India's first Alzheimer's disease therapy "donanemab" was launched recently.

Alzheimer Disease

- » Definition: A progressive brain disorder and the most common cause of dementia (60–70% of cases).
 - Dementia is a condition involving decline in memory, thinking and behaviour that interferes with daily life.
- » Cause: Linked to factors such as genetics, lifestyle and ageing.

Sovereign AI Mission – Building Trust in Tech

A report by IBM and IndiaAI, highlighted that India's AI strategy is being decisively shaped by the rise of sovereign cloud and sovereign AI as foundational guardrails.

- » The report highlighted that AI could add over \$500 billion to India's economy by 2030 and 83% of Indian AI startups focus on applying existing models.

Sovereign AI

- » It is a nation's ability to design, develop, and regulate AI systems using its own domestic infrastructure, national data, and indigenous workforce.
- » IndiaAI Mission, launched in 2024, promotes sovereign AI through development of shared national AI compute infrastructure model, IndiaAI Innovation Centre for development of indigenous foundational models or Large Language Models, IndiaAI Datasets Platform (AIKosh), etc.
- » Indian Sovereign AI models: Sarvam AI's models, Vachana by Gnani.ai (text-to-speech model), Param2 17B by BharatGen.

Significance of Sovereign AI

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- » Data Sovereignty: Compliance with data residency, privacy and consent requirements, ensuring national control over sensitive citizen and strategic data.
- » National Security: Strengthens cyber resilience and protection of critical infrastructure.
- » Strategic Autonomy: Reduces dependence on foreign AI platforms and technologies.
- » Trusted AI Ecosystem: Enables secure data-sharing and cloud infrastructure in banking, healthcare and manufacturing.
- » Inclusive AI Development: Improves AI relevance for local languages and socio-cultural contexts.

Agriculture Price Support

Government approved an increase in MSP for 14 Kharif Crops for Marketing Season 2026-27.

MSP

- » Definition: Mechanism through which government supports farmers by purchasing their crops at a pre-determined price.
- » Recommendation: The Commission for Agricultural Costs & Prices (CACP), Ministry of Agriculture
- » Final approval: Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by PM.
- » Legal Status: MSP does not have any statutory (legal) backing.
- » Crops Covered: 22 crops. In addition, MSP for Toria and De-Husked coconut is also fixed on the basis of MSPs of Rapeseed & Mustard and Copra.
 - 14 Kharif Crops (e.g., Paddy, Jowar, Bajra, Maize, Ragi, Arhar, Moong, Urad, Groundnut, Soybean, Sunflower, Sesamum, Nigerseed, Cotton).
 - 6 Rabi Crops (e.g., Wheat, Barley, Gram, Masur/Lentil, Rapeseed/Mustard, Safflower).
 - 2 Commercial Crops (Raw Jute, Copra).

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Cybersecurity Compliance Authority

India nominated as Chair of CCDB from April 2026 to April 2028, during 1st Quarter Meeting of Common Criteria Recognition Arrangement (CCRA) in Japan.

CCDB

- » Serves as technical core of CCRA, managing international work program for Common Criteria (CC) and Common Methodology for Information Technology Security Evaluation (CEM).
- CCRA is foundational international treaty enabling mutual recognition of IT security certificates across borders comprising 20 certificate-authorizing and 18 certificate-consuming nations.
- » India and CCDB: India has been active member of CCRA since 2013 as Certificate Authorizing Nation.
- Through Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY) and STQC Directorate, as the official Certification Body for IT security evaluations in India.

Global Health Trends 2026 – WHO

It is annual compilation of health and health-related indicators, been published by World Health Organization (WHO) since 2005.

Key Highlights

- » Global progress towards health and health-related SDGs: Remains uneven and too slow to meet 2030 targets.
- » Infectious Diseases: Global long-term declines for infectious diseases between 2010 and 2024 for HIV infections, tuberculosis, neglected tropical diseases, etc.
- However global malaria incidence rose 8.5% since 2015.
- » High prevalence rates of preventable risk factors: Rising Global anaemia prevalence in women of reproductive age and Violence against women.

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- » Air pollution: Estimated 2.0 billion people worldwide still rely on polluting cooking fuels and technologies in 2024.
- » Progress towards Universal Health Coverage: About a quarter of global population faces financial hardship due to out-of-pocket health spending.
 - 1.6 billion people are living in/have been pushed into poverty because of health expenses as of 2022.
- » Global life expectancy and HALE (Healthy Life Expectancy): COVID 19 pandemic erased nearly decade of progress with both falling to 2011 levels in 2021.

Measures to Strengthen Mortality Surveillance for Effective Policy Actions

- » Sustained investment in robust CRVS (civil registration and vital statistics) systems: Improved medical certification of cause of death.
- » Investments in digital health infrastructure: Like interoperable platforms, secure data architecture and scalable digital tools, ensuring national data sovereignty.
- » Adhering to Global Binding Standards: WHO Nomenclature Regulations 1967, integrating International Classification of Diseases, ICD-11 into national systems.
- » Best Practices: E.g., Morocco transitioned from centralized to decentralized digital cause-of-death reporting platform.

Global Security Alert: TATP

National Investigation Agency (NIA) highlights the use of rare explosive mixture TATP in the 2025 Red Fort blast.

TATP (C₉H₁₈O₆)

- » Also known as “Mother of Satan” and acetone peroxide, it is a semi-stable crystalline solid, attractive as a terror weapon as it is relatively easy to prepare.

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- » Key Characteristics: belongs to a class of organic peroxide explosives.
 - extremely sensitive to impact, friction, static electricity, and heat.
 - extremely dangerous, and even small quantities (1gram) can cause injury and damage.
- » Terror Linkages: Used in major terror attacks like Paris (2015), Brussels (2016), Manchester Arena (2017), etc.

Government Ups Precious Metal Duty

The government further imposed a 100 kg cap on gold imports under the Advance Authorization (AA) scheme, which allows jewellery exporters to import raw materials duty-free.

- » The Advance Authorisation Scheme is a trade facilitation measure by the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) that allows duty-free import of raw materials to manufacture export products.
- » These measures were taken following Prime Minister's appeal to avoid buying gold for a year to ease pressure on Indian foreign exchange reserves

Impact of rising gold demand on Indian Economy

- » Trade Deficit: India's merchandise trade deficit reached \$333.2 billion in FY26, a significant rise from \$284.5 billion the previous year.
 - India's gold imports in FY26 totaled \$71.98 billion, marking a 24.08% increase year-on-year.
- » Increased Current account deficit (CAD): Due to rising trade deficit in its April 2026 projections, the IMF said India's current account deficit could widen in 2026 roughly around 2% of GDP.
 - Current account deficit refers to the situation where a country's total imports of goods, services, and transfers exceed its total exports and transfers out.
- » Depreciates Indian Rupee: As a result imports become costlier and it force RBI to use foreign exchange reserves to stabilize the currency.

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- » Dead Capital: As gold stored privately remains outside the formal financial system and cannot support investment, infrastructure, or job creation.

Gold Consumption status

- » India
 - India is the world's 2nd largest consumer of gold, just after China.
 - Approximately 90% of India's gold is imported, making domestic prices highly sensitive to international trends.
 - Gold Ore: The largest resources in terms of gold ore (primary) are located in Bihar (43%), followed by Rajasthan (24.92%), and Karnataka (20%).
- » Karnataka is the leading producer of gold accounting for 97% followed by Andhra Pradesh and Jharkhand.
- » World
 - Major Holders of Gold Reserves: United States, followed by Germany and Italy.
 - Major Exporters: Switzerland, followed by the United Arab Emirates and United Kingdom (World Population Review).

India's Strategic Autonomy in a Changing World

Strategic autonomy refers to nation's ability to make sovereign decisions in foreign policy and defence without being constrained by external pressures or alliance obligations.

- » It is not synonymous with isolationism or neutrality rather implies flexibility, independence and capacity to engage with multiple powers on one's own terms.
 - India's Strategic Autonomy Challenges
- » Fragmented World Order: American dominance, China's assertiveness, and Russia's revisionism.
- » Western Pressures: Navigating sanctions and diplomatic opposition (by USA) regarding India's strategic energy and defence ties with Russia.
- » China Challenge: India's deepening of strategic partnership with United States being viewed in opposition to China.

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- » Others: Weakened international institutions, use of force replacing rule of law in recent military conflicts, technological, digital and financial fragmentation, shift towards protectionism, etc.
 - India's Measures to Maintain Strategic Autonomy
- » Recalibrating Relationships with Major Powers: Deepening relations with United States while balancing strained economic ties due to tariffs and sanctions.
- » Balancing Act with China: Despite border and diplomatic tensions, India participates in multilateral forums like BRICS, and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, where China plays a leading role.
- » Firmness in Relations with Russia: Despite Russia's growing closeness with China and global isolation following Ukraine conflict, India maintains defence and diplomatic ties.
- » Defence Diversification: BrahMos missiles, jointly developed with Russia, French made Mirage 2000 fighter jets, along with Israeli-made weapons like SCALP-2000 bombs.
- » Trade Diversification: India is pursuing Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements (CEPAs) aligning them with geopolitical realities.
- » Further, measures like Digital sovereignty, energy security, resilient supply chain, inclusive growth with vision of self-reliance (Atmanirbharta) would ensure continued pursuit of strategic autonomy for India.

Latvia's Rising ProfileLatvia (Capital: Riga)

Latvian Prime Minister announced resignation over government's handling of multiple incidents involving stray drones suspected from Ukraine.

Political Features

- » Location: Northeastern Europe and middle of the three Baltic states.

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- » Baltic States comprises of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.
- » Land Boundaries: Estonia (North), Russia (East), Belarus (Southeast), and Lithuania (South).
- » Maritime Boundaries: Baltic Sea and Gulf of Riga.

Geographical Features

- » Highest point: Gaizinkalns
- » Major rivers: Daugava, Gauja, Venta

MSMEs Boost Grassroots Economies

The MSMEs encompasses more than 7.47 crore enterprises and 31 of GDP contribution across manufacturing, services, and trade activities of which large share of these enterprises operates in rural and semi-urban areas providing boost to economy.

Role of MSMEs in Rural and Semi-Urban Economies

- » Labour-Intensive Employment: MSMEs generate high employment with low capital investment, employing approximately 32.8 crore people, primarily in rural areas; second only to agriculture.
- » Check on Distress Migration: Creates local livelihood opportunities in agro-processing and rural services, reducing distress migration.
- » Women-led Entrepreneurship: Rural India has higher women-owned MSMEs (22.24%) than urban areas.
- » Local Resource-Based Development: Utilizes local raw materials, traditional skills promoting decentralized, sustainable production.
- » Integration in formal economy: Institutions like Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) are integrating rural enterprises with formal credit, and supply chains totaling overall 48.5% export share in economy.

Government initiatives :

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- » Digital MSME Ecosystem: Platforms such as Udyam (online MSME registration), GeM (government procurement marketplace), TReDS (invoice financing), SAMADHAAN (delayed payment resolution), etc.
- » PM Vishwakarma Scheme: Supports traditional artisans through skill, and market linkage support.
- » CGTMSE: Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises for collateral-free credit.
- » PMEGP (Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme): A credit-linked subsidy scheme
- » ASPIRE (A Scheme for Promotion of Innovation, Rural Industries and Entrepreneurship): Promotes rural entrepreneurship.
- » SFURTI (Scheme of Fund for Regeneration of Traditional Industries): Supports cluster-based development of traditional industries.

Revision in classification criteria for MSMEs announced in Union Budget 2025-26

Types of Enterprises	Changes In Investment Limit	Changes In Turnover Limit
Micro Enterprises	Rs1-2.5 crore	Rs5-10 crore
Small Enterprises	Rs10-25 crore	Rs50-100 crore
Medium Enterprises	Rs50-125 crore	Rs250-500 crore

Neanderthals - The Lost Humans of Europe

A study suggests Neanderthals carried out dental procedure around 59,000 years ago based on a molar found in Chagyrskaya Cave in Siberia, Russia.

Neanderthals (Homo neanderthalensis)

- » Period: from about 400,000 to 40,000 years ago.
- » Location: Evolved in Europe and southwest and central Asia whereas our species, Homo sapiens - were evolving in Africa.

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- » Appearance: Long and low skull, large nose and brain, strong double-arched brow ridge, relatively short and stocky bodies and didn't have much of a chin.
- » Diet: largely carnivore but also ate plants
- » Features: skilled tool makers, proficient hunters, able to communicate, made fire and jewellery.
 - However no clear examples of them creating representational art copied from real sources such as animals.

Next-Gen Cancer Treatment: CAR-T

Technology Development Board entered into an agreement is under the Indo-Singapore collaborative framework to develop treatment for Multiple Myeloma (incurable blood cancer) using CAR- T cell therapy.

CAR-T cell therapy

- » CAR-T cell therapy is called a "living drug" because it uses the patient's own living immune cells (T-cells).
- » It is a type of immunotherapy which modifies immune cells, specifically T-cells, by turning them into potent cancer fighters known as CAR-T cells.
 - T-cells are special cells (types of white blood cells) whose primary function is cytotoxic, meaning killing other cells.
 - T cells are taken from patient blood and are changed in the lab by adding a gene for a man-made receptor (called CAR) then returned to patient.
 - CARs are proteins that assist the T-cells to recognise and attach to a specific protein present on cancer cells.

PMOS: The Hidden Health Issue

International panel has renamed polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) as PMOS.

- » PCOS is a common hormonal condition affecting women of reproductive age.

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- » In this, ovaries produce excess androgens (hormones regulating masculine characteristics), causing irregular menstruation, ovarian cysts, acne, weight gain and fertility difficulties.
- » “PCOS” was considered misleading because many women diagnosed with it do not have polycystic ovaries; narrowing down both diagnosis and treatment.

PMOS

- » PMOS highlights multiple hormonal pathways, central metabolic dysfunction and broader systemic risks.
- » Polyendocrine: involvement of multiple hormone-producing systems.
- » Metabolic: connection with metabolic dysfunction, insulin resistance and cardio-metabolic dysfunctions as central features.
- » Ovarian: irregular menstruation, infertility and ovulation problems
- » Syndrome: complex multisystem disorder and not single-organ complication.

Power Rivalry Trap

The Chinese President raised the “Thucydides Trap” and Peloponnesian War in talks with the US president in Beijing.

Thucydides Trap:

- » Origin: The term was coined by Harvard political scientist Graham Allison.
 - He named it after the ancient Greek historian Thucydides who chronicled the Peloponnesian War.
- » Peloponnesian War was long war between Athens and Sparta started in 431BC.
- » Meaning: It describes the danger that emerges when a rising power threatens to displace a dominant one, leading to conflict.

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- » Modern Relevance: it is used to analyze the complex and tense geopolitical relationship such as between the United States (established power) and China (rising global power).

Sudden Storms Leave Trail of Tragedy in UP

Thunderstorms are severe local storms of short duration, occurring over small area but violent causing significant harm to lives and infrastructure.

Thunderstorms

- » They are well grown cumulonimbus clouds producing thunder and lightning, caused by intense convection on moist hot days.
- » They fall in category of Meso-gamma weather systems with spatial extent of around 2~20 km and temporal scale of few hours.
- » Types: Considering their intensity, the thunderstorms in India are categorised as
 - » Moderate: Loud peals of thunder with associated lightning flashes, moderate to heavy rain and maximum wind speed of 29 to 74 kmph.
 - » Severe: Continuous thunder and occasional hailstorm, and maximum wind speed exceeding 74 kmph.
- » Occurrence: Frequency and intensity are maximum during summer months (March to June) due to intense heating up of atmosphere at surface level.

Life Cycle of Thunderstorms

- » Developing Stage: Marked by cumulus cloud being pushed upward by a rising column of air (updraft); that soon looks like a tower.
- » This stage has little to no rain but occasional lightning.
- » Mature Stage: While Updraft continues to feed the storm, precipitation begins to fall out of the storm, creating a downdraft (column of air pushing downward).
- » Causes hail, heavy rain, frequent lightning, strong winds, and tornadoes.
- » Dissipating Stage: Eventually, large amount of precipitation is produced and the updraft is overcome by the downdraft beginning the dissipating stage.

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- » NDMA through its Guidelines for Prevention and Management of Thunderstorms, 2018 provide comprehensive measures to tackle it by way of Hazard mapping, structural mitigation measures, etc.

Trade Price Index

Wholesale inflation jumps to 3.5-year high of 8.3% in April 2026 due to war in West Asia.

WPI:

- » Meaning: It is a measure of the average change of prices of a fixed set of goods at the first point of bulk sale in a commercial transaction in the domestic market over a given period of time.
- » Released by: Office of the Economic Adviser, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, Union Ministry of Commerce & Industry.
- » Base Year: 2022-23
- » Composition of Basket: Categorized into three major groups:
 - Primary Articles (Weight 22.62%): Consists of 4 sub-groups: Food Articles; Non-Food Articles; Minerals; and Crude petroleum and natural gas
 - Fuel & Power (Weight 13.15%): Consists of 3 sub-groups: Coal; Mineral Oils; Electricity.
- » Manufactured Products (Weight 64.23%): Consists of 22 sub-groups. Nearly 80% of the human population in the region belongs to Ho, Munda, Oraon and some primitive tribes.

Harnessing Knowledge Capital: India's New Growth Driver

Released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, it seeks to measure the contribution through knowledge in capital, labour, innovation, and digital sectors.

Knowledge-based Economy

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- » Definition: It is a system of consumption and production that emphasizes the use of human capital like information, skills, technical expertise, and intellectual property over physical inputs and natural resources.
- » Types of Knowledge:
- » Codified Knowledge: Information that can be easily documented and transmitted digitally (e.g., know-what and know-why).
- » Tacit Knowledge: Experience-based skills and capabilities that are harder to codify and transfer (e.g., know-how and know-who).
- » Significance of a Knowledge-Based Economy
 - Driven by Increasing Returns: Generate increasing returns through innovation spillovers, repeated use, and sustained long-term economic growth.
 - Transformation of Value Creation: Commercializes science and innovation through IPRs like patents and copyrights, with knowledge-based activities contributing over 50% of GDP in major OECD economies.
 - High-Skill Employment: Creates high-wage jobs and increases demand for skilled “knowledge workers”.
 - National Innovation Systems: Relies on dynamic networks linking academia, government, and industry for interactive learning and innovation diffusion.
- » Examples: Digital India by Meit0059, Traditional Knowledge Digital Library, Ayush, GI Tags, etc.

Antarctica's Vanishing Ice – 2015

Overall, Antarctica lost approximately 12,800 sq km of grounded ice between 1996 and 2025 and researchers have identified that destabilisation of Southern Ocean surrounding Antarctica as a factor for sudden decline since 2015.

- » Destabilisation happened due to a combination of deep ocean heat, powerful winds and a self-reinforcing feedback loop.

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- Deep Ocean Heat: Southern Ocean was strongly layered – with cold fresh water sitting on top of warmer, saltier water below – stopping the heat from reaching surface. That barrier weakened by 2015.
- Powerful Winds: Stronger Westerly winds (strengthened due to ozone hole and GHG emissions) acted like a pump, gradually drawing warm, salty deep water closer to the surface.
- Reinforcing Feedback loop: The then rising deep water brings heat and salt to the surface.
 - The heat melts sea ice, while the extra salt makes the surface waters denser and easier to mix with warmer waters below. That allows even more heat to rise upwards, making it harder for new sea ice to form, and so on.

Role and Significance of Antarctic

- » Climate Regulator: Antarctica reflects solar radiation and helps regulate Earth's climate and temperature.
- » Freshwater Reserve: It stores nearly 70% of the world's freshwater in its ice sheets.
- » Ocean Circulation: Antarctic Circumpolar Current, world's strongest ocean current forms part of the global ocean conveyor belt connecting the Pacific Atlantic and Indian oceans and supplies water, heat and nutrients around the globe.
- » Biodiversity Support: Supports unique ecosystems and species like krill, penguins, seals, and whales.
- » Carbon and Heat Sink: Southern Ocean absorbs excess heat and carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

Chola Copper Plates Back to India

The artefacts have been in possession of Leiden University and are popularly known as Leiden copper plates.

- » During the visit, two countries also elevated their relations to Strategic Partnership.

Leiden Copper Plates

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- » Consists of 21 large and 3 small copper plates fastened with a bronze ring bearing the seal of Chola king Rajendra Chola I and another set carrying the seal of Kulottunga Chola I.
- » Language: Tamil and Sanskrit.
- » These plates were brought to Netherlands in 1712 from Nagapattinam by Florentius Camper, a Dutch missionary, associated with Dutch East Indies Company.
- » Significance: Provide insights into Chola Empire's administration, taxation, land reforms, irrigation systems, and trade practices.
- » Records grant of Anaimangalam village to Buddhist vihara built by Srivijaya rulers of Southeast Asia, signifying religious harmony and links with Southeast Asia.

Copper Plate Inscriptions

- » Official records engraved on copper sheets and usually tied together with a ring bearing the royal seal.
- » They usually recorded grants of land, lists of royal lineages carrying royal seal, religious grants, donations etc.
- » Earliest known copperplate inscription is Sogaura Copperplate of Mauryan Era mentioning hunger relief efforts (prakrit language and Brahmi script).
- » Majority of the copper plate inscriptions are concentrated in the southern states.

Imperial Cholas (850 – 1279 AD):

- » Referred to as Muvendhar in Sangam Literature, it was a major Tamil dynasty alongside Cheras and Pandyas.
- » Major Rulers: Vijayalaya (Founder), Parantaka Chola (Maduraikonda), Rajaraja Chola I (Conquered northern Sri Lanka and Maldives), Rajendra Chola I (Conquered Srivijaya Kingdom, founded Gangaikondacholapuram).
- » Cultural Patronage: Flourishing of Tamil literature and composition of works such as epic poem "Kalingattupparani" and devotional hymns "Thevarams" by Nayanars.

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- » Architecture: Brihadeeswarar Temple in Thajavur, Airavatesvara Temple in Darasuram and the Gangaikonda Cholapuram Temples.
- » Metal Sculpture: Solid metal sculptures made through lost wax method using alloy of five metals (copper, silver, gold, tin and lead).

Demographic Dividend in India

Andhra Pradesh has recently announced financial incentives for 3rd child and 4th child to transition Demographics.

- » India's replacement fertility rate is 2.1 while South Indian states have 1.5 (Below replacement level).
 - Replacement Rate refers to the average number of children a woman needs to have to replace exactly herself and a partner in a given population.

Demographic Transition Theory (DTT)

- » DTT describes the transition from a stage of high fertility and mortality to a stage of low fertility and mortality.
- » It explains how a country's population structure transforms as it develops economically.
- » DTT was first coined by Warren S. Thompson (1929) and later on by Frank W. Notestein (1945).

Implications of Demographic transition on India:

- » Inter-State divergences: States with a high share of young population (e.g., Bihar, Uttar Pradesh) have a wider window of opportunity.
- » Changing Dependency Ratio: By 2050, one in five Indians will be aged 60 or above—347 million people, up from ~149 million.
- » Fiscal: Ageing states may experience shrinking tax bases, rising pension and healthcare expenditure, and greater fiscal stress due to higher debt and interest burdens.
- » Political: Delimitation and political representation with higher population states gaining greater parliamentary representation.

Ebola the viruses

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World Health Organization declares Ebola outbreaks in Congo and Uganda a Public Health Emergency of International Concern.

Ebola Virus

- » *Ebola virus disease (EVD)* is a rare but severe illness in humans.
- » Zoonotic Transmission: Meaning it is transmitted to people from wild animals (such as fruit bats, porcupines and non-human primates) and then spreads in the human population.
- » Transmission Medium: Contact with the blood, secretions, organs or other bodily fluids of infected person.

Golden Sweetener in News – Jaggery

India accounts for over 70 percent of global jaggery production. This makes it the world's largest jaggery producer.

Sharkara:

- » Recognized as a superfood, a natural, nutrient-rich alternative to refined sugar.
 - Jaggery is produced from concentrated sugarcane juice without chemical refining. It therefore retains essential minerals and micronutrients.
- » Minerals: Like calcium, magnesium, potassium, phosphorus, sodium, iron, zinc, copper, and manganese.
- » Benefits: Sustains Energy, Aids in Treating Anaemia, Strengthens Immunity, Treats Throat and Lung Infections, Supports Digestion etc.
- » Production: Uttar Pradesh contributed 48.5 percent of total production, followed by Maharashtra (24.1 percent) and Karnataka (10.5 percent).

Green Jewel of Jharkhand-saranda

Supreme Court has directed Jharkhand to notify the ecologically significant Saranda Forest as a wildlife sanctuary amid concerns over mining, elephant habitats, and conservation of sal forest landscape.

Saranda Forest

- » It is the largest Sal forest in Asia located in Jharkhand.
- » Sal Tree is a moist deciduous tree.

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- » Saranda means 'the land of seven hundred hills'.
- » Fauna: It is home to endangered species of flying lizards and elephants.
- » Flora: Sal, Kusum, mushroom, Mahua etc.
- » Nearly 80% of the human population in the region belongs to Ho, Munda, Oraon and some primitive tribes.

India Rejects Indus Verdict

India has never recognised the establishment of CoA and India has kept the Indus Water Treaty in abeyance.

- » CoA is a five-member arbitral panel constituted in 2023 at the Pakistan's request after it challenged the design of India's Kishenganga and Ratle hydroelectric projects.
- » India, however, has refused to participate, arguing that the dispute fall within the remit of Neutral Expert appointed by the World Bank.

IWT:

- » Origin: Signed in 1960 between India and Pakistan with World Bank (signatory) as facilitator to determine distribution of the waters of the Indus and its tributaries.
- » Extent of Treaty: The Treaty extends to main rivers of Indus basin i.e. Sutlej, Beas, Ravi (Eastern rivers) and Jhelum, Chenab and Indus (Western rivers).
- » All the waters of the Eastern Rivers were allocated to India for her unrestricted use while India is under obligation to let flow all the waters of the Western Rivers, except for the domestic, non-consumptive and other uses permitted in the Treaty.
- » Dispute Resolution under IWT:
 - **Step 1:** Permanent Indus Commission (PIC) with a commissioner from each country. (Meets annually alternatively in both countries)
 - **Step 2:** Neutral Expert appointed by World Bank and involves rendering a binding decision.
 - **Step 3:** Court of Arbitration upon agreement between parties or at the request of either party. India and EFTA (includes Norway and Iceland) signed the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) aimed for

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investment of USD 100 billion leading to creation of 1 million direct jobs in India.

Indonesia's Global MomentIndonesia (Capital: Jakarta)

- » Dukono volcano erupted in Indonesia's North Maluku province.

Political Features

- » Location: Between Indian and Pacific Oceans, off mainland Southeast Asia.
- » Major Islands: Sumatra, Java, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Papua.
- » Boundaries: Shares land borders with East Timor, Papua New Guinea, and Malaysia.
- » Global Role: Founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) along with India.

Geographical Features:

- » Tectonic Setting: Located at the convergence of tectonic plates, part of the Ring of Fire, making it highly disaster-prone (earthquakes and volcanic eruptions).
- » Volcanism: Presence of 100+ active volcanoes (e.g., Mount Merapi, Mount Krakatoa).
- » Climate: Tropical climate due to its location along the equator.

Migratory Marvels

Union Environment Minister highlighted the return migration of satellite-tagged Amur Falcon, showcasing successful community-led conservation efforts in Manipur.

Characteristics

- » It is locally known as 'Kahuaipuina' in Manipur.
- » Migratory raptor: Make voyage from breeding grounds in Russia and China (Far-East Asia) to southern Africa via India.
 - 22,000 km journey (longest sea crossing of any raptor)
 - Passes through Manipur and Nagaland.
- » Feeds on dragonflies that follow a similar migration path over Arabian Sea.
- » Conservation status:

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- IUCN: Least concern

White Gold Spotlight

Government shifts silver imports to the “restricted” category and imposes a 15% import duty to curb rising imports.

Silver:

- » It is a relatively soft, shiny metal.
- » Applications: Highest electrical and thermal conductivity makes it indispensable for electronics, circuit boards, connectors, batteries, and automotive systems.
 - Silver's antibacterial properties are used in wound dressings, medical-device coatings, catheters, surgical instruments, water purification systems, and pharmaceutical compounds.
- » Natural Abundance: Silver occurs in ores such as argentite and chlorargyrite (horn silver).
- » Leading producer: Mexico.

Chabahar Port: Linking India to Central Asia

Iran's Foreign Minister highlighted Chabahar Port as a key India-Iran cooperation symbol, calling it a golden gate to Central Asia.

In 2018, an Indian company, India Ports Global Limited (IPGL) took over the operations of Chabahar Port.

In 2024, a 10-year contract was signed for operating the Shahid Beheshti Terminal of Chabahar Port.

Chabahar Port

- » Location: Sistan and Baluchestan province on the Makran coast in South-eastern Iran, on the Gulf of Oman.
- » Two terminals: Shahid Kalantari and Shahid Beheshti.
- » It is the only Iranian port with the direct access to the Indian Ocean.
- » It is a key component of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), enhancing trade between India, Central Asia, and Russia.

Historic Bhojshala Complex

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- » The Madhya Pradesh High Court recently declared the disputed Bhojshala complex a Hindu temple, quashing a 2003 Archaeological Survey of India order.
- » Origins: Established by Parmara King Raja Bhoja in 11th-century Dhar, Madhya Pradesh.
- » It was turned into the Kamal Maula Mosque by the subsequent Muslim rulers of Dhara.
- » Temple of Goddess Vagdevi Saraswati (idol now in the British Museum, London)

Key Features:

- » Served as a premier college and centre of Sanskrit learning.
- » Engraved slabs contain two odes to the Kurmavtara or crocodile incarnation of Vishnu written in Prakrit, classical poetry etc.
- » Two sarpabandha pillar inscriptions detailing Sanskrit grammar.

India's Dam Safety Upgrade – 2025

India is undertaking one of the world's largest dam rehabilitation and safety modernisation programmes focused on strengthening ageing water infrastructure.

Status of Dams in India

- » India has the world's third-largest dam network with 6,628 specified dams after the United States and China.
- » Around 98.5% of these dams are owned by the State Government.
- » Maharashtra has the highest number of specified dams, followed by Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat.

Key issues of Dam safety in India

- » Ageing: About 26% (1,681 dams) of these dams are more than 50 years old.
- » Sedimentation: Reservoirs have lost an average of 19 % of their gross storage capacity due to sedimentation.
- » Seismic vulnerability: E.g. The earthquake in Bhuj (Gujarat) in 2001, led to liquefaction in the foundation of Chang Dam.

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- » Vulnerability to Glacial Lake Outburst: E.g., in 2023, Chungthang Dam (Sikkim) was washed away during flash floods caused by a glacial lake outburst.
- » Other: Changing hydrological patterns and increasing climate variability

Initiative taken to ensure Dams Safety in India

- » Dam Rehabilitation & Improvement Programme (DRIP): It is a multi-phase programme started in 2012 with the help of World bank in 3 phases to focus on structural rehabilitation, dam safety inspections, and emergency action planning.
- » Dam Safety Act, 2021: It provides for surveillance, inspection, operation and maintenance of specified dams.
- » The Act created a 4-tier institutional structure: National Committee on Dam Safety (NCDS), the National Dam Safety Authority (NDSA), State Committees on Dam Safety and State Dam Safety Organisations (SDSOs).
- » Others: Dam Health and Rehabilitation Monitoring Application (DHARMA) platform, Mandatory Inspections to carry out pre-monsoon and post-monsoon inspections of all specified dams etc.

India's Stealth Fighter AMCA

Defence Minister laid foundation stone for AMCA programme facility in Andhra Pradesh.

About Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA)

- » AMCA is India's indigenous 5th-generation medium-weight stealth multirole fighter jet.
- » Developed by: Aeronautical Development Agency, DRDO.
- » Variants: AMCA Mk1 with GE-F414 engines; Mk2 planned with indigenous engines.
- » Timeline: Prototype expected by 2028-29 and induction targeted by 2034-35.

Characteristics of 5th Generation Fighter Jet

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- » Twin-engine: Provides higher level of air safety in case of engine failure.
- » Stealth Capabilities: Minimizes radar, infrared and visual signatures to delay or prevent enemy detection and engagement.
- » Super cruise: Ability to maintain supersonic flight (speeds >Mach 1) without engaging fuel-heavy afterburners, significantly increasing its operational range and efficiency.
- » Others: Integrated Avionics, AI Integration to enhance pilot-aircraft interface, Resilient Networking and Communication.
- » Examples of Operational 5th Generation Fighter Jets: F-22 and F-35 (United States), Sukhoi Su-57 (Russia), Chengdu J-20 (China).

Strategic Importance of 5th Generation Fighter Jet AMCA

- » IAF Modernisation: Fills critical capability gap post-MiG-29/Mirage phaseout, helps restore IAF's depleted squadron strength.
- » Technological Sovereignty: Reduces dependency on foreign platforms, enhances long-term defence autonomy through Make in India.
- » Atmanirbhar Bharat: Enhances India's indigenous defence capabilities by fostering a robust domestic aerospace industrial ecosystem.

India's Unique Soft-shell Species

India's first satellite-tagged Indian soft-shell turtle has been released in Kaziranga National Park.

- » About Indian Soft-shell Turtle Trade: It is also known as the Ganges Softshell turtle.
- » Characteristics:
 - o Found in freshwater habitats
 - o Distinguished by its prominent, tube-like snout and flattened shell.
 - o Differentiated from other riverine turtles by its distinct arrowhead-shaped markings on the top of the head.

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- » Distribution and Range: Found throughout the northern plains of the Indian Subcontinent, in the Indus, Ganga, Narmada, Mahanadi basins and Brahmaputra basin.
 - o It is also found in countries like Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan
- » Conservation Status:
- » WPA, 1972: Schedule I
- » CITES: Appendix
- » IUCN: Endangered

India-UAE Defence Accord

During the visit of the Indian Prime Minister, both countries signed the Framework for the Strategic Defence Partnership

- » Framework - will promote Defence Industrial collaboration, innovation and advanced technology, training, exercises, education and doctrine, special operations and interoperability, etc.

Other Key Highlights

- » Promotion of Strategic Petroleum Reserves: Signed MoU to enhance energy security via crude storage in India's Strategic Petroleum Reserves (Vishakhapatnam/Chandikol).
- » Ship Repair Cluster at Vadinar, Gujarat: MoU between Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL) and Drydocks World (DDW) to establish a repair and offshore fabrication cluster.
- » MAITRI: Both countries welcomed the operationalization of Virtual Trade Corridor using MAITRI (Master Application for International Trade and Regulatory Interface interface).
- » Significance of India-UAE Relations
- » Trade & Investment: Bilateral trade hit \$101.25 billion (FY25-26), targeting \$200 billion by 2032.
- » The UAE is India's 7th largest investor, with economic ties streamlined by the 2022 Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), the 2024 Bilateral Investment Treaty, and the INR-AED settlement system.

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- » Energy: The UAE is India's 4th largest crude and largest LPG supplier, and the sole foreign participant in India's Strategic Petroleum Reserve program.
- » Strategic and Security Cooperation: E.g., I2U2 (India-Israel-UAE-USA) and UFI (UAE-France-India) Trilateral
- » People-to-People: The 3.5 million Indian diaspora forms the largest expatriate group in the UAE, driving strong remittance inflows.

Launchpad to Pollution

A study found that the explosive rise of satellites launched into space since 2019 is causing potent, long-lasting black carbon or soot pollution in the upper atmosphere.

- » Black carbon is a component of fine particulate air pollution (PM_{2.5}). It is formed by incomplete combustion of wood, waste and fossil fuels.

Impact on the atmosphere

- » Deposition of soot particles is reducing the amount of sunlight (acting like a form of geo-engineering) reaching the Earth's surface.
- » The soot lingers in the upper layers of the atmosphere longer than soot from earthbound sources resulting in a 500-fold greater impact on the climate.
- » Satellite launches can also release chemicals such as chlorine into the atmosphere that can degrade ozone by reacting directly with it

Maritime Insurance Pact – India

The 'Bharat Maritime Insurance Pool' (BMI Pool) aims to facilitate continuous maritime insurance coverage and insulating India's maritime trade from global volatility.

BMI Pool?

- » It is a government-backed maritime insurance pool with a capacity of \$1.5 billion and sovereign guarantee of ₹12,980 crore (\$1.4 billion).
- » Ministry: Department of Financial Services, Ministry of Finance
- » Coverage: Major maritime risks, including Hull and Machinery, Cargo, Protection and Indemnity (P&I) and War risks for -
- » Indian flagged or controlled vessels.
- » Vessels destined to or starting from India.
- » Governance:

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- » Pool Administrator: General Insurance Corporation of India (GIC Re)
- » A Governing Body and an Underwriting Committee to oversee the pool's functions and risk management respectively.

How BMIPool Operates:

Domestic insurers issue policies using the combined capacity of the pool members.

- » Combined underwriting capacity of the Pool is ~Rs.950 crore.
- » Claims Handling: Up to \$100 million (by the Pool own capacity); Exceeding \$100 million (triggers sovereign guarantee as a contingent safety net of last resort)

Rajasthan Manufacturing Hubs Launched

Union Minister inaugurated new Manufacturing facilities in Rajasthan.

About the Facilities:

- » India's first Small and Medium Enterprise (SME)-led Semiconductor facility at Bhiwadi, Rajasthan.
- » ATMP (Assembly, Testing, Marking, and Packaging) and OSAT (Outsourced Semiconductor Assembly and Testing) facility.
- » Developed under MeitY's Scheme for Promotion of Manufacturing of Electronic Components and Semiconductors (SPECES)
 - o SPECES scheme provides 25% financial incentive on capital expenditure for targeted electronic goods.
 - o The sunset date for applications under SPECES was 31 March 2024.
- » ELCINA Electronics Manufacturing Cluster (EMC) at Salarpur.
 - o EMC Scheme provides financial assistance for building infrastructure to attract global investments and boost domestic electronics manufacturing.

Freedom to Innovate Plan

Tripura became the first state to complete all priority areas under Deregulation Phase-II of the National Compliance Reduction and Deregulation initiative.

- » **Deregulation** is reduction or elimination of government oversight of an industry.

About National Compliance Reduction and Deregulation initiative:

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- » Genesis: Task Force on Compliance Reduction and Deregulation was constituted in 2025 under the chairmanship of the Cabinet Secretary.
- » Objective: Identifying redundant or outdated compliances and recommending their rationalisation; guiding states in amending laws and procedures to align with principles of minimal regulation.
- » The Task Force identified 23 Priority Areas across 5 broad sectors.
- » Phase II was rolled out in January 2026 to cover priority areas, including land, building and construction, utilities and permissions, environment, education, health, labour, and overarching reform.

Sukhdev Thapar – Freedom Fighter in Focus

Shaheed Sukhdev Thapar's birth anniversary was observed on May 15.

- » About Sukhdev Thapar (1907 - 1931)
- » He was Born in Ludhiana Punjab.

Key Contributions:

- » He was regarded as a key strategist of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA).
- » He was arrested along with Bhagat Singh and Rajguru for their involvement in the assassination of British police officer J.P. Saunders (Lahore Conspiracy Case).
- » He was Hanged on March 23 1931 in Lahore Jail, along with Shaheed Bhagat Singh and Shivaram Rajguru, observed as Shaheed Diwas (Martyr's Day).
- » Values: Sacrifice, patriotism, valour etc.

Survival Wages

In context of worker protests in Noida, Supreme Court highlighted State's obligation to provide a "living wage" to workers, in accordance with the Constitution's Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP).

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- » Article 43 (DPSP): mandates that the State shall endeavor to secure a "living wage" and a decent standard of life for all workers.

Living Wages:

- » A living wage, or living income, is the remuneration received for a standard workweek that is sufficient to afford a decent standard of living for a worker and their family.
- » Often, the living wage is higher than the minimum wage.
- » Minimum wages are the lowest legally mandated remuneration that employers must pay their workers.

- **The Ocean's Fragile Connectors**

Recent proposal by Iranian state media to impose charges on undersea cable operators in the Strait of Hormuz highlights the growing vulnerability of global undersea cables.

Undersea Cables:

- » Undersea, or submarine, cables are fibre optic lines laid on the ocean floor to carry global data and serve as the backbone of modern digital connectivity.
- » These "invisible highways" transmit between 95% and 99% of all international data traffic.
- » United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 2010 had described Submarine cable as "critical communication infrastructure".
- » Subsea cables carry a much larger bandwidth and are more efficient, cost-effective, and reliable than satellites.
- » Narrow maritime corridors such as the Red Sea, Strait of Hormuz, where multiple undersea cables converge, are often referred to as "digital chokepoints."

Threats to the Undersea Cables Network

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- » State-sponsored Intervention: The IRGC proposed licensing fees and annual "protection" payments from tech giants (Meta, Amazon, Microsoft).
- » Gray-zone warfare: Increasingly weaponised in hybrid conflict.
- » Espionage & Cyber Threats: State-sponsored wiretapping for intelligence gathering and attacks on network management systems.

Implications for India

- » Financial Sector: E.g., Stock trading and banking systems relying on fast connectivity could face paralysis within minutes.
- » IT and Outsourcing Sector: E.g., India's IT-BPM industry relies on uninterrupted global connectivity for providing services to international clients.
- » Strategic and National Security Risks: E.g., Military communications and intelligence sharing

Western Hoolock Gibbon: Vanishing Voice of the Forest

A canopy bridge was constructed bypassing railway track in Assam's Hollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary for Western Hoolock Gibbon.

Western Hoolock Gibbon (Hoolock hoolock)

- » It is the only ape species native to India.
- » Found in: India (between south of the Brahmaputra river and east of the Dibang river in the northeastern states); Bangladesh and Myanmar.
- » Habitat: Tropical evergreen rainforests, semi-evergreen forests, tropical mixed deciduous forests, and subtropical broadleaf hill forests.
- » They swing from tree to tree in a mode of locomotion known as Brachiation.
- » Threats: Hunting, logging, Mining & quarrying etc.
- » Conservation Status: Endangered (IUCN), Schedule 1 of WPA 1972

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- Eastern hoolock gibbon is listed as Vulnerable.

Citizenship (Amendment) Rules, 2026 Spotlight

The Ministry of Home Affairs has amended Citizenship Rules, 2009 and notified Citizenship (Amendment) Rules, 2026.

New rule

- » Applicants seeking citizenship under the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), 2019, will have to submit an affidavit declaring whether they hold a valid or an expired passport from Pakistan, Afghanistan or Bangladesh.

Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019

- » It facilitates citizenship to persons belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian communities from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who entered India before December 31, 2014.

Consensus – Key to Federal Balance

The book A Sixth of Humanity: Independent India's Development Odyssey by former CEA Arvind Subramanian and Devesh Kapur highlights growing concerns over India's federalism and consensus building as a solution.

Challenges to Federalism in India

- » **Divergent Regional Performance:** Southern and western states have grown faster economically than the northern states, creating disparities.
- o Developed states feel penalized for better economic performance, with growing gap between states' economic contribution and Finance Commission transfers.
- » **Combative Federalism:** Increasing unilateral Centre decisions have weakened consultation and cooperative federalism, eroding trust between Centre and states.
- o E.g. 2020 Indian farm laws even agriculture is state subject under seventh schedule of Indian constitution
- » **Rising Democratic Deficit:** Frozen Representation in Lok Sabha based on 1971 Census to avoid penalizing states controlling population growth affect democratic reforms mandated in original constitution.

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- » **Increasing instances of Centralization:** The improper use of assenting powers of the Governor in under Article 200 where opposite party to centre is in power.

Initiatives

- » Inter-State Council: Set up under Article 263 to promote coordination between Centre and States.
- » GST Council: A joint forum (Article 279A) with members from both Centre and States to decide GST policies.
- » Others: 10% horizontal Tax devolution based on Contribution to GDP (16th Finance Commission recommendation), 73rd & 74th constitutional Amendments for local bodies creating a third tier of government etc.

Solutions to promote federalism

- » Implementing Sarkaria Commission's recommendations (1983): Shift all residuary powers (except taxation) to the Concurrent List.
- » Promoting Equitable Development: As recommended by the Punchhi Commission (2007).
- » Enhancing Consensus through Key Institutions: Such as Inter-State Council, GST Council, NITI Aayog etc.

Energy Security via Bioenergy

Decentralised bioenergy systems present a solution for the uncertain global energy supply chains and rising fuel prices in India

About Decentralised Bioenergy Systems

- » It **refers** to the local production and consumption of heat, electricity, or biogas from organic waste and crop residues.
- » Key Technologies involved:
 - o Biomass Gasification: Converts dry agricultural residues (husk, stalks) into combustible producer gas to run small engines or provide industrial heat.
 - o Biogas & Anaerobic Digesters: Converts wet waste (food scraps, animal manure) into biogas for cooking and electricity.

Significance

- » Waste Management: Turns municipal solid waste and farm residues into valuable resources.

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- » Energy Security: Provides off-grid and micro-grid solutions to remote or underdeveloped regions.
- » Economic Empowerment: Drives local job creation and supports small-scale farming and MSME operations.

Initiatives taken for Promoting Bioenergy

- » National Bioenergy Programme (NBP): It includes Waste to Energy, Biomass and Biogas Programme.
- » National Policy on Biofuels (2018, Revised 2022): Advanced the target of 20% blending of ethanol in petrol to 2025-26.
- » SATAT (Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation): To establish an ecosystem for production of Compressed Bio Gas (CBG) from various waste/ biomass sources.
- » GOBAR-Dhan Scheme (Galvanizing Organic Bio-Agro Resources): Converts biodegradable wastes like cattle dung, agricultural residue into wealth and energy.
- » Pradhan Mantri JI-VAN Yojana: Provides financial support for advanced biofuels projects.

India-Norway Ties

The partnership aims to deepen cooperation in sectors ranging from Clean Energy to Climate Resilience, Blue economy to green shipping as Indian Prime Minister is on the official visit of Norway.

- » The Indian Prime Minister was awarded the Grand Cross of the Royal Norwegian Order of Merit by His Majesty King Harald V of Norway.

Other outcomes

- » Indo Pacific Ocean Initiative: Norway announced its participation in India's Indo Pacific Ocean Initiative(IPOI).
- » IPOI was launched by India at the East Asia Summit in 2019, builds upon the "Security and Growth for All in the Region" (SAGAR) initiative.
- » India-Norway Digital Development Partnership: Establishes a framework for cooperation on digital public goods, etc.
- » Other Agreements: Digital and Health Partnership, Space Sector Cooperation etc.

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o India and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), including Norway, signed the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) to strengthen economic cooperation.

Evolving partnership between India and Norway

- » Economic Relations:
- » Blue Economy Cooperation: Both countries are collaborating in areas such as tsunami early warning systems, ocean ecosystem services and accounting (INECO) etc.
- » Arctic/Polar: India established 'Himadri,' its first permanent Arctic research station, in July 2008 at Ny Alesund, Norway, and has held Observer Status in the Arctic Council since 2013.
- » Space Cooperation: ISRO uses Norway's Svalbard Ground Station for satellite data reception.
- » UN reforms: Norway support for India's permanent membership in UN Security Council.

Nano-Gold in Research

Scientists at the Institute of Nano Science and Technology (INST) have developed a highly efficient, ultrathin, and flexible film embedded with Nano-gold particles.

Nano-gold particles

- » Nano gold is tiny particles of gold that are so small they're measured in nanometers.
- » Color: It can look red, orange, or even blue, depending on the size and shape of the nanoparticles and the distance between them.
- » Applications of Gold Nano Particles:
 - » Medicine & Diagnostics: Targeted delivery of drugs to cancer cells, medical imaging and photo-thermal therapy etc.
 - » Environmental Applications: Detects heavy metals and pollutants in water and soil.
 - » Others: Used in sensors, and Nano-electronics.

Persian Gulf Strait Governance

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Iran has announced the establishment of a new regulatory body (PGSA) to oversee and manage operations in the strategically significant Strait of Hormuz.

About Persian Gulf Strait Authority (PGSA)

- » It is responsible for monitoring developments and coordinating operations related to the vital shipping corridor.
- » Under the new system, vessels will be required to follow directives issued by the authority and secure transit permits before entering the Strait of Hormuz.
- » It will operate transit toll mechanism for the Strait of Hormuz which is not been unveiled by Iran yet.

Shaheed-VeerGundadhur

Union Home Minister inaugurates Shaheed Veer Gundadhur Seva Dera Jan Suvidha Kendra in Bastar.

- » The Suvidha Kendra aims to provide welfare services, Aadhaar registration, and other benefits in tribal areas.
- » Born in Netanar village of Bastar in the Dhurva tribal community.
- » He emerged as a prominent tribal leader against British colonial rule in Bastar.
- » He is known for guerrilla warfare tactics, courage and leadership during the anti-colonial struggle.

Key Contributions:

- » Led Bhumkal Rebellion (1910): Against British rule and exploitative local administration in Bastar.
- » Despite brutal suppression of the rebellion, he was never captured by the British.
- » Organised tribal communities: Through the Bhumkal Sabha to resist oppression and injustice.
- » Innovative Coommunication Method: Used Dara Miri (dry red chilli and mango twigs) to secretly spread messages of rebellion across villages.

SHGs – Grassroots Women Power

Ministry of Rural Development has launched a nationwide roadmap for SHE-MARTs (Self Help Entrepreneur Marts).

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- » SHE-MART, announced in Union Budget 2026-27, aims to empower women entrepreneurs by creating community-owned retail outlets within cluster-level federations of Self-Help Groups (SHGs).
- » The initiative highlights the significance of SHGs in women empowerment.

Role of SHGs in Women's Empowerment

- » Financial Inclusion: Promotes savings, access to institutional credit, insurance, and digital banking among rural women.
 - o E.g., Bank Sakhi Programme trains SHG women as banking correspondents.
- » Entrepreneurship Development: Supports women-led enterprises through skill development, market linkages, and SHG networks.
 - o E.g., Mahila Arthik Vikas Mahamandal provides entrepreneurship skills to women.
- » Political Empowerment: Enhances leadership, decision-making, and political participation.
 - o E.g., Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) represents women workers of the informal economy.
- » Poverty Alleviation & Rural Development: Strengthens livelihood security, reduces dependence on moneylenders, and promotes inclusive rural growth.
 - o E.g., Kudumbashree model of women-led poverty eradication and local governance.
- » Social Reform: Helps combat social evils like child marriage, dowry, alcoholism, and gender discrimination through collective awareness and action.

Key Government Initiatives for Women SHGs

- » Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM): A centrally sponsored programme that mobilised over 10.05 crore women into 90.90 lakh SHGs for financial inclusion.
- » Lakhpati Didi Initiative: Functions under DAY-NRLM Scheme to enable SHG women to earn a minimum annual income of ₹1 lakh.
- » Others: Self Help Group-Bank Linkage Programme (SHG-BLP); SARAS Mela etc.

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SMILE**Mission**

The SMILE mission successfully launched aboard a Vega-C rocket from Europe's Spaceport in French Guiana (South America).

- » Joint Mission: European Space Agency (ESA) and the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS).
- » Objective: to capture the first-ever panoramic imaging of the interaction between the solar wind and Earth's magnetosphere, helping scientists understand space weather phenomena like geomagnetic storms.
- » Instruments: Light ion analyser, Magnetometer, Soft X-ray imager, Ultraviolet aurora imager.
- » Key Technological Innovations:
 - » World's First Space-Borne Soft X-ray Imager (SXI): To visualize the previously "invisible" boundaries of Earth's magnetosphere.
 - » Integrated Observation System: To simultaneously capture global-scale imaging and take direct measurements of solar wind parameters.

Transparency & Accountability – RTI

The Central Information Commission (CIC) held that the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) does not fall within the ambit of a “public authority” under the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005.

- » It is defined in Section 2(h) of the RTI Act.
- » It states: "Public authority" means-
 - o Any authority or body or institution of self-government established or constituted
 - by or under the Constitution (E.g., Election Commission of India)
 - by any other law made by Parliament/State Legislature (E.g., Reserve Bank of India)
 - by notification issued or order made by Government (E.g., NITI Aayog)
 - o Body owned, controlled or substantially financed by Government (E.g., Coal India Limited) non-Government organizations substantially financed, directly or indirectly by funds provided by Government (E.g., Educational societies such as the DAV College Trust)

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Blended Ethanol Fuels Regulation

Recently, the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) published two major fuel standards:

- » IS 19850: 2026 (for Ethanol Blended Fuels): This standard outlines the specifications for E22, E25, E27, and E30 fuels, which are admixtures of completely free-of-water (anhydrous) ethanol and motor gasoline.
 - E22, E25, E27 and E30 fuels are higher Ethanol-Petrol blends at 22%, 25%, 27% and 30%, respectively.
 - Ethanol Blending is a process of mixing ethanol with petrol. E.g. E20 (20% Ethanol in petrol).
 - Current status: India has achieved 20% Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) target set under the National Policy on Biofuels (2018) and aims to move towards 30% blending by 2030.
- » IS 18698 : 2026 (for DME Blended LPG): This standard replaces the older 2024 standard for Dimethyl Ether (DME) blended Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG).
 - DME is a clean-burning synthetic fuel that behaves almost exactly like LPG.
 - 2 production pathways:
 - Indirect route (syngas to methanol to DME) and
 - Direct route (syngas to DME).
- » China accounts for nearly 90 % of global DME production capacity.

Role of BIS in Fuel Standard Setting

- » Formulating Fuel Specifications: BIS establishes technical specifications (covering fuel composition, blending requirements, permissible impurity levels, etc.) for various fuels, including petroleum products, lubricants, gaseous fuels, biofuels, and e-fuels.
- » Biofuel and Green Fuel Standards: BIS has developed specific standards for anhydrous ethanol, biodiesel (B100), Biogas (Biomethane), ED95 automotive fuel, and paraffinic (green) diesel derived from 2G feedstock.

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- » Developing Alternative Fuel Norms: Beyond ethanol, BIS sets standards for alternate fuels such as Hydrogen and Dimethyl Ether (DME) blended with LPG.
- » Ensuring Safety and Tangibility: Through its standard formulation, BIS ensures that fuels distributed in the national economy are safe, reliable, and minimize health hazards to consumers.

EGRs – Transparent Gold Investment Mechanism

National Stock Exchange of India (NSE) has announced the launch of Electronic Gold Receipts (EGRs).

- » About Electronic Gold Receipts (EGRs)
- » EGRs are exchange-traded securities linked to standardised gold, enabling market-based price discovery, electronic holding, and the flexibility to buy and sell in defined denominations and purity.
- » It has the option to convert to/from physical gold as per the prescribed process.
- » Regulator: Securities Exchange Board of India (SEBI)
- » Benefits: Unified pricing (one nation, one price), Easily tradable on exchange, convenient than physical gold, etc.

Hop-Experiment–**Scientific****Study**

Scientists have revealed groundbreaking details about the Moon's upper surface at the Shiv Shakti landing site of Chandrayaan-3, utilizing data gathered during the "hop" experiment.

Hop Experiment

- » Executed toward the end of the Vikram lander's planned active mission life, this maneuvers demonstrated ISRO's capability to reignite the lander's engines.
- » The thrust successfully lifted the vehicle off the lunar surface, proving a critical capability for future sample-return missions.

Key Findings

- » Layered Structure: The lunar surface has distinct layered "cake-like" strata formed by long-term micrometeorite impacts.
- » Soil Variability: Lunar soil becomes denser and more cohesive just a few centimeters below the surface.

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- » Twilight Thermal Changes: Chandra's Surface Thermophysical Experiment recorded rapid temperature drops at lunar twilight due to the Moon's airless environment.

India Nordic Summit 2026 – Oslo

Nordic group is a highly advanced regional bloc consisting of 5 countries (Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, and Denmark).

Key outcomes of the Summit

- » Green Technology: India elevated its relations with the Nordic region to a "Green Technology and Innovation Strategic Partnership".
- » UN Security Council Reform: The Nordic Prime Ministers officially reiterated their support for India to become a permanent member.

Why are Nordic countries significant for India?

- » Economic and Trade: The Nordic bloc is an advanced region with a combined GDP of around \$2 trillion.
 - Bilateral trade between India and the Nordics reached \$19 billion in 2024.
 - India and EFTA (includes Norway and Iceland) signed the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) aimed for investment of USD 100 billion leading to creation of 1 million direct jobs in India.
- » Strategic Access to the Arctic Region: As all 5 Nordic nations are members of the Arctic Council (India is an observer state), a vital gateway to Arctic engagement serves as a counterweight to China's "Polar Silk Road" initiative in the region.
- » Technological and Green Expertise: E.g., Iceland offers deep expertise in geothermal energy, Sweden provides strength in advanced manufacturing, Finland specializes in telecommunications

Judicial Accountability – Judges Inquiry Act

The Judges Inquiry Committee submitted its report to Parliament in accordance with the statutory requirements under the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968.

- » The committee was constituted by the Lok Sabha Speaker to inquire into allegations against former High Court judge Justice Yashwant Varma.

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Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968

- » It is an Act to regulate the procedure for the investigation and proof of the misbehaviour or incapacity of a judge of the Supreme Court or of a High Court.
- » Procedure:
 - A removal motion signed by 100 members (in case of Lok Sabha) or 50 members (in case of Rajya Sabha) is to be given to the Speaker/Chairman.
 - If admitted, the Presiding Officer appoints a 3-member judicial committee (typically a Supreme Court Judge, a High Court Chief Justice, and an eminent jurist) to investigate the charges.
 - If guilt or incapacity is proven, both Houses must pass the motion with a special majority (Not less than two-thirds of the members present and voting) in the same session.
 - Thereafter, an address is sent to the President for removal.

NHRC – Transgender Welfare Advisory

Advisory highlights concerns related to education, health, property, and legal rights of transgender persons.

- » Advisory 1.0 was issued in 2023

Key highlights of Advisory

- » Inclusion of distinct categories: such as 'Intersex,' 'Transmen,' etc. in the Census and surveys and separate from 'transgender persons' category.
- » Intersex individuals are born with sex characteristics (Reproductive organs, chromosomal patterns Sexual anatomy etc.) that do not fit typical binary notions of male or female bodies (UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner).
- » Transman is a man who was assigned female at birth i.e. despite physical characteristics of female, their gender identity is male
- » Legal Reform: review laws, like Registration of Births and Deaths Act 1969, Juvenile Justice Act 2015, and succession laws, to ensure recognition of self-identified gender

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- » Educational Inclusion: Admission to institutions based on self-identified gender without requiring medical proof, along with gender neutral facilities
- » Right to Inheritance: Ensuring equal inheritance, succession, and housing rights without discrimination
- » Protection of Intersex Children: Prohibiting coercive or non-consensual medical procedures on them, except in life-saving situations.
- » Legal Support: Establishing dedicated legal aid cells, helplines and independent grievance-redressal mechanisms for transgender and gender-diverse persons facing discrimination, violence or custodial abuse;
- » Others: establishing transgender-inclusive community shelters, gender-sensitisation training for teachers, etc.

SC Issues New Directions on Dog Euthanasia

SC refused to recall its November 2025 directions on complete removal of stray dogs from public places (such as schools, hospitals, railway stations, and airports).

- » The Court clarified that dogs occupying these institutional premises cannot be categorized as "street dogs" or "community dogs" under the Animal Birth Control (ABC) Rules, 2023, and therefore do not have an absolute right to occupy them.
- » SC also observed that Article 21 of the Constitution encompasses the right to access public places without the constant fear of physical attacks or dog bites.

Major Directions Issued by the Court

- » Euthanasia Permitted: Authorities can legally euthanize rabid or dangerously aggressive dogs to protect human lives.
- » Official Protection: Local body officials performing duties are shielded from FIRs/criminal complaints.
- » Highway Safety: NHAI directed to clear highways of stray cattle menace.
- » Enforce AWBI Rules: States/UTs must strictly enforce the Animal Welfare Board of India Rules.
- » ABC Centres: At least one Animal Birth Control (ABC) centre must be established in each district.

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- » Anti-Rabies Supply: Adequate anti-rabies vaccines and immunoglobulins must be ensured.
- » Judicial Oversight: High Courts will monitor compliance through suo motu cases.

Ethical issues of allowing Euthanasia of stray dogs

- » Compassion vs. Mercy Killing: It risks being misused as a convenient population-control tool rather than a humane last resort.
- » Animal Rights vs. State Authority: The State's duty to protect citizens may conflict with animals' right to life and freedom from cruel treatment.
 - SC, in Jallikattu Case 2014, has interpreted the right to life and liberty (Article 21) as extending to animals as well.
- » Risk of Arbitrary Classification: Deciding which dogs are "dangerous" or "aggressive" creates ethical concerns of bias, misuse of authority, and wrongful killing.

Alternatives to Euthanasia

- » Global Best Practice: "RandAgiamo" Project of Italy offers training, socialization and advertising of adult shelter dogs.
- » Mandatory Registration and Responsible ownership: Following World Organisation for Animal Health Terrestrial Animal Health Code.

Status Report on Buildings & Construction

10th edition of the Global Status Report for Buildings and Construction (Buildings-GSR) has been published by UNEP and the Global Alliance for Buildings and Construction (Global ABC).

Key Finding of the Report

- » Buildings and construction contribute 11–13% of global GDP and employ about 9% of the global workforce
- » It accounts for 37% of global emissions, 50% of material extraction (largest of any sector), and 28% of global energy use.
- » Energy efficiency improvements: Global building floor space expanded by 20%, while energy demand rose by 11% (2015 -2024)

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- » In 2024, renewables supplied just 17.3% of buildings' energy demand, far below what is needed for a net zero pathway.
- » Highlights several Indian initiatives like Energy Conservation and Sustainable Building Code 2024, administered by Bureau of Energy Efficiency,

TEAM – Strengthening Trade & Market Linkages

Ministry of MSME is accelerating the digital transformation of India's smallest businesses through the TEAM Initiative.

TEAM Initiative

- » Type: Central Sector Scheme, launched in 2024.
- » Objective: To provide end-to-end e-commerce support to Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs), enabling them to participate effectively in digital commerce ecosystems through the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC).
 - ONDC aimed at promoting open networks for all aspects of exchange of goods and services over digital or electronic networks.
- » It is a transformative sub-scheme under the World Bank-supported Raising and Accelerating MSME Performance (RAMP) Programme.
 - RAMP Programme launched in 2022 to scale up the implementation capacity and coverage of MSMEs.
- » Duration : 3 years from 2024 to 2027
- » Implementing Agency: National Small Industries Corporation (NSIC)

UAV Ecosystem – Strategic Focus

India is undergoing a significant transformation by shifting from a buyer of foreign unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to a developer of indigenous sovereign technologies.

- » Recently, a ₹32,350 crore programme was approved to acquire 87 Medium Altitude Long Endurance (MALE) drones for the Army, Navy, and Air Force.

Need for Building Sovereign Capability in UAVs

- » Constituent of Core infrastructure: Drones are moving from tactical adjuncts to core infrastructure.
 - E.g., In recent conflict, Iran deployed UAVs for Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) and air strike missions against Israel.

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- » Strategic autonomy: Achieving self-reliance in UAV mission systems, electronics, and secure supply chains.
- » Military Capability: Recent conflicts between Indo-pak, Indo-china require Sensing and strike, expanding tactical flexibility, and delivering precision.
- » Tactical and Logistics: High-altitude posts, island territories, exposed last-mile routes, and theatre-level mobility require UAVs.

Requirements for Building Sovereign Capability in UAVs

- » Certification: Ensure safe and reliable military UAV standards.
- » Testing Infrastructure: Develop common drone testing and simulation facilities for industry, startups, and defence agencies.
- » Procurement: Focus on reliability and performance.
- » Trusted Technology: Develop secure indigenous components and software.
- » Supply Chains: Build resilient domestic manufacturing ecosystems involving MSMEs, startups, and defence PSUs for critical UAV components.

UAV/Drones in India

- » ISR Drones (Surveillance & Reconnaissance): Used for intelligence gathering and monitoring. Examples: TAPAS-BH-201, Rustom, Heron.
- » Loitering Munitions: Hover over target areas and strike once targets are identified. Examples: Nagastra, Warmate.
- » Armed/Combat Drones (UCAVs): Capable of missile strikes and bomb delivery. Examples: Ghatak, Heron TP.
- » Swarm Drones: Multiple drones operate together to overwhelm enemy defences; being developed by Defence Research and Development Organisation and private firms.

ULPGMV3–DefenceInnovation

DRDO completes development trials of ULPGM-V3.

ULPGM-V3

- » A fully indigenous, lightweight, fire-and-forget, precision-guided missile designed to be launched from Unmanned Aerial Vehicles.

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- » Developed by: DRDO along with Bharat Dynamics Limited, and Adani Defence Systems.

Key Capabilities

- » Range: up to 10 kilometres
- » Dual Operational Modes-
 - Air-to-Ground Mode: for anti-armour and anti-tank precision strikes.
 - Air-to-Air Mode for drones, helicopters, and other low-flying airborne threats.

Other:

- » Integrated Ground Control System; Dual-channel seeker for high accuracy and day and night operations.

Vietnam – Strategic & Economic HubVietnam (Capital: Hanoi)

- » India and Vietnam exchanged a Memorandum of Understanding in artificial intelligence and quantum technology.

Key Contributions:

- » Location: It is situated in Southeast Asia along the eastern coast of the Indochinese Peninsula.
- » Land Borders: China (North) and Cambodia and Laos (West).
- » Maritime boundaries: The Gulf of Tonkin (Northeast), South China Sea (East and South), Gulf of Thailand (Southwest).
- » Political System: It is a one-party Communist state, and has been one of south-east Asia's fastest-growing economies.

Geographical Features:

- » Major rivers: Mekong River and Red River.
- » Both rivers form deltas while draining into the South China Sea.
- » Major Mountain: Annam Cordillera, extending from northwest to southeast in central Vietnam.

VOM – India's Mission to Venus

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Sweden joins India's Shukrayaan (Venus Orbiter) mission.

- » Venus, the closest planet to Earth and believed to have formed in conditions similar to Earth.

Venus Orbiter Mission (VOM)

- » It is India's first scientific mission designed to explore the planet Venus, approved in 2024.
- » Objective: For a better understanding of the Venusian surface and subsurface, atmospheric processes and the influence of the Sun on the Venusian atmosphere
- » It is planned to be launched in March 2028.
- » ISRO will be responsible for the development of the spacecraft and its launch.
- » LVM-3 has been identified as the candidate launch vehicle which will place the spacecraft in an Elliptical Parking Orbit (EPO).

Zwan-Wolf Effect Detected – Plasma Phenomenon

Recently, scientists using data from NASA's MAVEN mission made the first-ever observation of the Zwan-Wolf effect occurring in a planetary atmosphere rather than just a magnetosphere

- » MAVEN (Mars Atmosphere and Volatile Evolution) spacecraft is a robotic orbiter dedicated to surveying the upper Martian atmosphere.
- » A magnetosphere is the region around a planet dominated by the planet's magnetic field.

Zwan-Wolf effect

- » It is a phenomenon where electrically charged particles are squeezed along magnetic structures known as flux tubes, similar to toothpaste being squeezed out of a tube
- » This effect plays a key role in deflecting solar wind around the planet

Arunachal's Green Gold: Kiwi

Union Minister for Development of North Eastern Region and Communications launched Mission on "Arunachal Kiwi: The USP of Arunachal Pradesh."

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- » Mission is within "Brand North East" — one USP for every State: Organic State (Sikkim), Ginger (Mizoram), Queen Pineapple (Tripura), Coffees (Nagaland), Lakadong Turmeric (Meghalaya).

Arunachal Organic Kiwi

- » Major cash crop of Arunachal Pradesh, embedded with indigenous farming practices of Lower Subansiri district.
- » Favourable Conditions: Temperate climate, well-defined seasons, fertile soil enriched with organic matter.
- » Organic Certification: Arunachal Pradesh became India's first state to receive organic certification for kiwi cultivation in 2020 under Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North Eastern Region(MOVCD-NER).

Bhagirathi Eco-sensitive Zone

Union government informed Supreme Court that is it not in favour of permitting any other new hydro-electric project in Alaknanda and Bhagirathi river basin.

Bhagirathi Eco-sensitive Zone

- » Notified in 2012.
- » Coverage: 4179.59 sq. kilometre area from Gaumukh to Uttarakashi.
- » Zonal Master Plan (ZMP): Mandates Uttarakhand Government to prepare ZMP based on watershed approach.
- » Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZ): Serve as "Shock Absorber" for specialized Ecosystem, such as Protected Areas or other natural sites.

Boosting Innovation: R&D Ease Report

As per the report, India's Gross Expenditure on Research and Development (GERD) stands at around 0.65% of GDP, lower than USA (~3.5%), China (~2.4%), and Republic of Korea (~4.5%).

- » Further, Global Innovation Index (GII) report 2025, shows the number of Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) researchers in India remains 262 per million, compared to USA (4,821), China (1,585).

Key Challenges across India's R&D ecosystem

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- » Inadequate R&D Funding: Not only GERD in India is low, it is heavily dependent on public funding (~64%), compared to other leading economies having 60% of R&D budget contributed by private sector.
- » Attracting and Retaining Quality Human Resource: Due to instances of delays in scholarships disbursement, Lack of incentive for researchers to translate their patents/publications into products.
- » Technology Translation & Commercialization: Few R&D institutions, like CSIR labs, have Independent Business Divisions (IBD) to deal with translational aspect of technologies.
- » R&D in State Institutions: Poor R&D funding and Infrastructure along with burden of Affiliations which consumes maximum time and energy of faculty.

Key Recommendations

- » Enhance Gross Expenditure on R&D to increase to at least 2% in next four to five years.
- » Create 'Vigyan Nidhi', unified Fellowship system to address fellowship funding and disbursement delays.
- » Establish State-level RDI Clusters by integrating HEIs, R&D institutions, MSMEs, PSUs, and industry.
- » National Institute for Science Policy and Governance (NISPG) similar to STEPI (South Korea) and NISTEP (Japan) may be established to bridge policy, implementation and monitoring gaps.

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**Key Initiatives for Promoting
Research in India**RAJA SIR'S
IAS ACADEMY
— SINCE 2005 — FEEL THE PULSE OF UPSC**Research Development and Innovation (RDI)****Scheme:** Launched in 2025, RDI Scheme Fund of ₹1 lakh crore aims at strengthening R&D.**Anusandhan National Research Foundation****(ANRF):** Established through ANRF Act, 2023 aims to mobilise funds amounting to ₹50,000 crore during 2023–28.**National Missions Driving Frontier Research:**

National Quantum Mission (NQM); National Mission on Interdisciplinary Cyber-Physical Systems (NM-ICPS); etc.

**One Nation One Subscription:** Provides access to high-quality scholarly journals and publications.**Building Stability: US–China Partnership**

Agreed during the recent Beijing Summit, idea of **Strategic Stability** as per USA is based on fairness and reciprocity, while for China, it carries an additional tone of keeping competition within proper limits, and respecting China's core interests.

key Highlights of the Summit

- » Establishing U.S.-China Boards Of Trade And Investment: To manage bilateral trade and investment.
- » Taiwan question: While China mentions Taiwan as most important issue in U.S.-China relations, USA completely omitted its mention from its Fact Sheet.
- » Global Security: Both sides reached a consensus on unblocking of Strait of Hormuz.
- » Framework for Bargaining, Not Clear Settlement: While for USA the summit produced key results on aircraft sales, agricultural purchases, restored market access, etc., China described these outcomes to be pending finalization.

Key Irritants in USA-China Relations

**General Studies, Political Science and International Relations, Sociology,
CSAT**

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- » Zero-Sum Game Belief: Generally argued that China's gain corresponds to America's loss.
 - China's One Belt Road Initiative, Creation of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), etc., is viewed as counter to USA hegemony.
- » Ideological Differences: China's authoritarianism and communist state further forces containment in their approach.
- » Russian Axis: Russia's growing closeness with China (post Ukraine invasion) and its policy of strategic pivot eastward, toward Asia serve as an irritant.
 - Recent, USA-China summit was immediately followed by China-Russia meet where two issued strong warnings over US Golden Dome missile defence system.

While a relatively stable U.S.-China relationship reduces risks to global growth, the new dynamics of coexistence of competition in calibrated and transactional form requires India to devise a calibrated approach in its policy.

Celebrating World Storytelling

Yang Shuang-zi, Taiwanese writer and author of 'Taiwan Travelogue' and translator Lin King win International Booker Prize 2026.

International Booker Prize

- » It is awarded annually for a single book, translated into English and published in the UK or Ireland.
- » It was established in 2005 as the Man Booker International Prize.
- » Indian Winners of International Booker Prize:
 - **Geetanjali Shree-Tomb of Sand (2022)**, translated by Daisy Rockwell. It was the first Hindi work to win this prize.
 - **Banu Mushtaq- Heart Lamp (2025)**, translated by Deepa Bhasthi which was the first Kannada work to win this prize.

Note: International Booker Prize is different from Booker Prize which rewards work written in English.

Currency Swap: USD-INR

RBI announced a \$5 billion dollar-rupee swap auction for a tenor of three years to inject liquidity.

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- » The swap is in the nature of a simple buy/sell foreign exchange swap from the Reserve Bank side.
- » A bank shall sell US dollars to the RBI and simultaneously agree to buy the same amount of US dollars at the end of the swap period.

Dollar-Rupee Swap

- » Forex liquidity management tool in which the Reserve Bank of India exchanges US dollars and Indian rupees with an agreement to reverse the transaction at a future date.
- » Purpose: To manage rupee liquidity, stabilize forex markets and reduce exchange rate volatility.

Honoring Excellence in Agriculture

FAO honours India's Prime Minister with its prestigious Agricola Medal.

- » FAO's Agricola Medal is the organization's highest honour, awarded to extraordinary leaders for their commitment and contributions towards FAO's mission of eradicating hunger, reducing poverty, and ensuring global food security and nutrition.

FAO(Food and Agriculture Organization)

- » Genesis: Established in 1945.
- » It is a specialized agency of the United Nations leading international efforts to defeat hunger.
- » Headquarters: Rome, Italy
- » Members: 193 Member Nations, one Member Organization, and two Associate Members.
- » Flagship Reports: The State of Food and Agriculture, The State of the World's Forests etc.

India-Italy Upgrade Partnership to Special Strategic Tier

During Indian Prime Minister's official visit to Italy, India and Italy deepened cooperation in elevated bilateral ties from a Strategic Partnership to a Special Strategic Partnership

Key Outcomes of the Visit

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- » Trade & Investment Cooperation: India and Italy set a target to expand bilateral trade to €20 billion by 2029, supported by India–EU FTA.
- » Defence Industrial Roadmap adopted: Focusing on co-design, co-development and co-production of defence platforms.
 - Maritime Security Dialogue to be launched for increased maritime cooperation.
- » Connectivity: Reaffirmed commitment to India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). Italy's Mediterranean ports are potential European endpoints for IMEC.
 - IMEC, announced in 2023, aims to link India, the Middle East, and Europe through an integrated rail and shipping corridor.
- » Critical Technologies & Innovation: Announced INNOVIT India, an innovation hub in India to bridge startups and university research in AI, semiconductors, quantum computing, and fintech.
- » Culture: Declared 2027 as the "Year of Culture and Tourism between India and Italy."
 - MoU for Italy's participation in developing the National Maritime Heritage Complex at Lothal, Gujarat.
- » Others: Space cooperation, critical minerals, mobility agreement for Indian nurses, Social Security Agreement (SSA).

Significance of India-Italy Relations

- » Economic Importance: Italy is India's 4th largest trading partner in the EU.
- » Bilateral trade reached US\$13.76 billion in 2024–25.
- » Diplomatic Significance: Italy is a key partner in India's Europe and Mediterranean outreach, with cooperation expanding across G20, Indo-Pacific, IMEC and India–EU frameworks.
- » Diaspora Linkages: ~1.87 lakh Indians reside in Italy, strengthening people-to-people relations.
- » Joint Strategic Action Plan (2025-2029): Deepening cooperation across strategic, economic, technological and people-centric sectors.

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Kink	Waves:	Unlocking	Plasma	Secrets
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ew Study on Wave-driven turbulence generated by Alfvénic/kink waves may explain the extremely high temperature of the Sun's corona compared to its surface.

- » Solar Corona: Outermost layer of the Sun's atmosphere extending millions of kilometres above the surface into space.
- » Temperature Paradox: Corona temperature reaches about 1 million °C, much hotter than the Sun's surface/photosphere (~5,500°C).

Alfvénic/Kink Waves

- » Alfvénic/Kink Waves: Transverse magnetohydrodynamic (MHD) waves that travel along magnetic field lines in the Sun's corona, causing sideways oscillation of coronal plasma structures.
- » They play a crucial role in understanding coronal heating.

Korea's Global Headlines

Republic of Korea (Capital: Seoul)

India, South Korea agree to deepen defence ties during the Indian Defence Minister's visit.

Political Features

- » Location: East Asian country located on the southern part of the Korean Peninsula.
- » Boundary: Shares a land boundary with North Korea in the north.
 - 38th Parallel: The 38°N latitude broadly separates South Korea from North Korea.
 - Maritime Boundaries: Sea of Japan (East), East China Sea (South) and Yellow Sea (West)

Geographical Features

- » Strait: Korea Strait separates South Korea from Japan's Tsushima Islands.
- » Highest Peak: Hallasan on Jeju Island.
- » Major Rivers: Han, Geum, and Nakdong Rivers.

PRAGATI 2026 Military Exercise

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- » PRAGATI stands for Partnership of Regional Armies for Growth and Transformation in the Indian Ocean Region.
- » Multilateral military exercise led by the Indian Army at Umroi Military Station, Meghalaya.
- » Participating Countries: 12 nations (Bhutan, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Seychelles, Sri Lanka and Vietnam)

Shortest Stellar Binary System

Researchers discovered one of shortest-period stellar binary systems known so far, featuring a blue straggler star paired with rare brown dwarf companion in ultra-compact orbit.

- » Blue straggler stars: Appear brighter and bluer than other stars of similar age in star clusters, defying standard models of stellar evolution.
- » Brown Dwarfs: Celestial objects too massive to be planets but too small to sustain nuclear fusion like stars.

Details of Binary System Discovered

- » It lies within “brown dwarf desert”, a region where such companions are considered extremely rare.
- » Orbital Period: 5.6 hours (0.234 days).
- » Mass of Companion: Nearly 0.056 times of Sun, placing it below hydrogen-burning limit.

Single Election, Stronger Unity

The Joint parliamentary committee (JPC) on One Nation One Election held that simultaneous polls could save nearly Rs. 7 lakh crore and boost GDP growth by up to 1.6%.

- » The JPC is scrutinising two proposed legislations related to simultaneous elections: The Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024 and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

One Nation One Election

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- » It refers to the idea of conducting simultaneous elections for all three tiers of government- the Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies, and local bodies (Panchayats and Municipalities).

Significance:

- » Financial Savings & Growth: Simultaneous elections will reduce costs of conducting elections and streamline the time-consuming process, aiding economic growth.
- » Prevent Policy Paralysis: Frequent elections lead to repeated imposition of Model Code of Conduct, which disrupts developmental activities.
 - Simultaneous elections will promote long-term development and welfare policies.
- » Resource Preservation and Sustained Governance: Minimizes the frequent diversion of administrative machinery such as teachers and security forces.

Expert Institutions recommending Simultaneous Elections

- » Law Commission of India (170th Report of 1999, 255th Report of 2015, Draft Report 2018)
- » Parliamentary Standing Committee Report (2015)
- » Working Paper of NITI Aayog (2017)
- » High-Level Committee Chaired by Former President Ramnath Kovind (2023)
 - Recommended phased implementation: Elections to Lok Sabha and State Assemblies together and to local bodies within 100 days after that.

Challenges in Implementation

- » Constitutional and Legal Hurdles: Amendments to constitutional provisions (e.g. Articles 83, 172, 327) and changes to the Representation of the People Act, 1951 are required.
- » Premature Dissolutions: E.g. Managing a "Hung Assembly" or a government falling to a no-confidence motion before completing its term.
- » Logistical Deficits: Demands a massive infrastructure scale-up, including an estimated Rs 9,300 crore for additional EVMs, VVPATs. (NITI Aayog)

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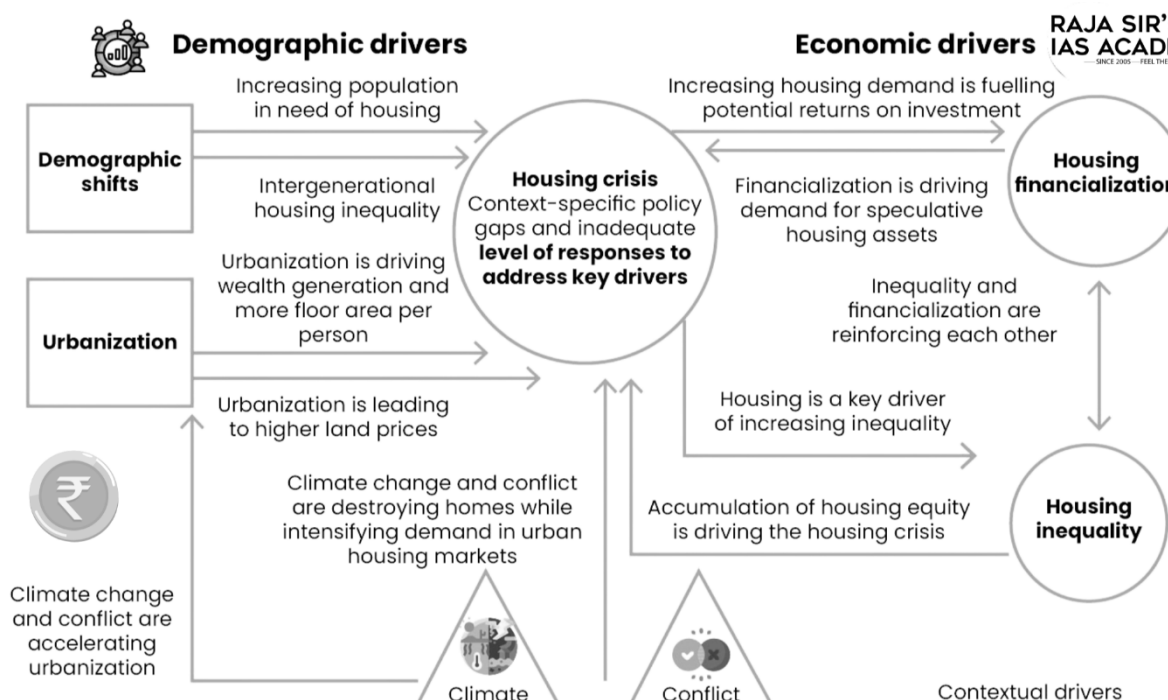
- » Overshadowing of Local Issues: May lead to "nationalization" of local issues, potentially marginalizing regional parties and local developmental issues.

UN-Habitat Urban Report 2026

Titled “The Global Housing Crisis Pathways to Action”, report highlights affordability constraints, pervasive informality, increasing climate-related risks, etc., as interlinked and mutually reinforcing challenges.

- » Key Highlights of the Report
- » Housing Crisis: Up to 3.4 billion people worldwide lack access to adequate housing.
 - Homelessness rate for India stand at 13 per 10,000 as per Institute of Global Homelessness.
- » Climate-related hazards: Projected to destroy 167 million homes by 2040.
 - Housing alone is responsible for an estimated 17- 21% of total emissions.
- » Ineffective National Housing Policies: Fail to fully incorporate key dimensions of adequacy like affordability, tenure security, accessibility, etc.
- » Housing Prices: Average price-to-income ratios increasing from 9.5 in 2010 to 11.7 in 2023 globally.
 - India's Mumbai and Delhi record price-to-income ratios of 14.3 and 10.1.

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Key Recommendations

- » Comprehensive Affordability Strategies: Strengthening land governance, expanding rental and non-market housing options, streamlining regulatory processes, etc.
- » Affordable housing finance: Prioritize vulnerable and low-income groups, including informal workers, female-headed households.
- » Climate-resilient housing policies: Prevent exclusionary outcomes like green gentrification and green grabbing.

Measures Towards Addressing Housing Crisis in India

- » Scheme: Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana - Urban (PMAY-U) 2.0 'Housing for All' Mission from 2024 supports 1 crore additional eligible beneficiaries in next five years in urban areas.
- » Supreme Court Judgements: Olga Tellis and Others v Bombay Municipal Corporation (1985), etc. interpreted Article 21 (Right to Life) to encompass housing, livelihood.

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- » Key Best Practices: Yerwada project in Pune (India) implemented strategic construction measures to mitigate environmental risks; Bhubaneswar Affordable Housing Project, a fully structured PPP in India, etc.

Deep-Diving Sperm Whale

A study has found that the clicking sounds (called codas) used by sperm whales to communicate contain complex sound patterns similar to vowel sounds in human speech.

Sperm Whales

- » They are found in all deep oceans, from the equator to the edge of the pack ice in the Arctic and Antarctic.
- » Characteristics
 - Largest toothed whale with the biggest brain of any known animal.
 - Massive head contains spermaceti, a waxy fluid aiding buoyancy during deep dives.
 - Produces ambergris, a valuable substance used in perfumes.
 - Only living cetacean (order of mammals that includes whales, dolphins, and porpoises) with a single left-sided blowhole.
- » Conservation status
 - IUCN Red List Status: Vulnerable

Deepening Russia-China Bond

Russian President's recent China visit highlighted Russia's growing dependence on China, with both sides signing 40+ agreements and reaffirming support for a multipolar world order against Western dominance.

Reasons for the Increasing Russia-China Nexus

- » Shared Geopolitical Rivalry: Both view US-led order as a threat to their core interests.
- » Economic Complementarity: Western sanctions increased Russia's dependence on China.

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- » De-dollarisation & Alternative Institutions: Growing trade in Yuan and Ruble. Use of BRICS and SCO to promote a non-Western Eurasian security architecture.

Implications on India

- » Erosion of Russia as a Strategic Balancer: Russia's growing dependence on China weaken its neutrality in India-China tensions.
- » Defence Vulnerabilities: India's reliance on Russian arms faces risks due to delays in supplies (e.g., S-400, stealth frigates) and transfer of advanced platforms to China affects India's security.
- » Emerging Russia-China-Pakistan Convergence: E.g., Russia is expanding ties with Pakistan through arms sales, discounted oil exports, etc.
- » Challenges in Multilateral Forums: E.g., Cooperation between Russia and China in Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
- » Pressure on India's Strategic Autonomy: Russia-China proximity and uncertain US policies constrain India's multi-alignment strategy.

Fertility & Mortality Trends 2024

Report released by Office of the Registrar General of India (ORGI) is one of the largest demographic surveys globally providing annual estimates of India's vital statistics.

Key Highlights of Report

- » Fertility Trends
 - Sub-Replacement Fertility: Total Fertility Rate (TFR) remained flat at 1.9, staying below replacement level for fifth consecutive year.
 - The "replacement level" fertility is the rate at which population size remains constant from generation to generation, crudely defined as 2.1 births per woman.
- » Mortality Trends:
 - Crude Death Rate (CDR): CDR at 6.4 in 2024; overall death rate remains higher than pre-pandemic levels.
 - Infant Mortality: Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) declined to 24, drop of 6 points over last five years. (Kerala lowest IMR 8).

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- Infant mortality rate is the probability of a child born in a specific year or period dying before reaching the age of one. (Expressed as a rate per 1,000 live births).
- Under-Five Mortality Rate (U5MR): Stands at 28.
 - U5MR is the probability that a child born in a specific year or time period will die before reaching the age of five. (Expressed as a rate per 1,000 live births).
- » Causes of Death Concerns:
 - From motor vehicle accidents deaths rose to 3.2% and deaths by suicide increased to 2.8%.
- » Demographic & Social Indicators:
 - Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB): Marginal improvement, rising to 918 females per 1,000 males in (2022-2024).

Govt Tweaks NADA 2022

The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports has proposed amendments in Act to address the growing trafficking and distribution of prohibited performance-enhancing substances and methods.

- » The 2022 Act was enacted to provide for the constitution of the National Anti-Doping Agency for regulating anti-doping activities in accordance practices evolved by the World Antidoping Agency.
- » The proposed amendments are aligned with India's commitments under the UNESCO Convention against doping in sport.

Key proposed Amendment

- » Targeting Supply Chains & Personnel: Shifts focus on prosecuting the organized trafficking ecosystem, making it a criminal offense for support staff (e.g., doctors, coaches) to administer banned substances.
- » Medical & Promotional Rules: Provides safeguards for athletes with valid Therapeutic Use Exemptions (TUEs) and for bona fide medical practitioners acting in emergency situations.

Doping

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- » Doping is the use of prohibited substances or methods (under the World Anti-Doping Code) by athletes to enhance athletic performance.
 - E.g., Anabolic steroids, human growth hormones, stimulants, and diuretics.
- » India reported the highest Anti-Doping Rule Violations (ADRVs) for three consecutive years. (WADA 2024 Report)

Key Anti-Doping Measures

- » The NIDAMS (NADA India Data Administration and Management System) portal digitalizes anti-doping planning, sample collection, and athlete testing to improve transparency and efficiency.
- » Program for Education and Awareness on Anti-Doping in Sports (PEADS), launched by NADA, for education and awareness regarding doping.
- » In-Competition and Out-of-Competition Testing, NADA conducts testing both during competitions and outside competitions, including at training venues and HPTCs.
- » Other: The 'Know Your Medicine' (KYM) App allows users to check the status of various medicines.

Kanha – Home of Barasingha

Officials are closely monitoring over a hundred Kanha National Park tigers following six tragic deaths from Canine Distemper Virus (CDV).

- » CDV is a lethal, airborne Paramyxovirus commonly affecting dogs and also other animals that severely damages respiratory and nervous systems.

Kanha National Park

- » Located in Mandla and Balaghat districts of Madhya Pradesh.
 - Area of 1,945 sq km within the Maikal hills of the Satpura.
- » Designated a national park in 1955 and a tiger reserve under Project Tiger in 1973.
- » Inhabited by two indigenous tribes the Gonds and the Baigas.
- » Fauna: Bengal tigers, Barasingha (Swamp Deer) etc.
- » Flora: Highland consist tropical moist dry deciduous type, slopes can be discovered differently.

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- » Said to have inspired Rudyard Kipling's classic "The Jungle Book".

Myopia: Common Eye Disorder

Myopia is a rapidly growing global health concern; estimates suggest that nearly half the world's population will have myopia by 2050.

Myopia

- » Definition: Myopia (Nearsightedness) is a common refractive eye disorder where nearby objects appear clear, but distant objects are blurred.
 - In Hyperopia (farsightedness), nearby objects appear blurry because light focuses behind the retina instead of directly on it.
- » It occurs when the eyeball is too long from front to back or the cornea is too steeply curved.
- » This abnormal shape causes incoming light rays to focus in front of the retina instead of directly on it, resulting in blurred distance vision.

North vs South Korea War

Indian War Memorial inaugurated at Imjingak Park, Seoul (South Korea), in the backdrop of the 75th anniversary of the Korean War.

- » It honours the sacrifice and service of the 60 Para Field Ambulance and Custodian Force of India.
- » About the Korean War
- » After World War II, Korea was divided along the 38th Parallel:
 - North Korea (backed by Soviet Union and China)
 - South Korea (supported by USA)
- » North Korea invaded the South in 1950, igniting a Cold War proxy conflict.
- » A 1953 armistice divided the peninsula at the 38th parallel, roughly aligning with the Demilitarised Zone.

State of Carbon Markets 2026

India emerged as a major global carbon market with the launch of its Carbon Credit Trading Scheme according to a new World Bank report.

Key Findings from "State and Trends of Carbon Pricing 2026"

- » Global Coverage: Carbon pricing policies cover 29% of global GHG and may reach nearly one-third of global emissions by 2030.

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- » Revenue Generation: Carbon taxes and Emission trading system (ETS) generated over \$107 billion in 2025.

India's Carbon Market Ecosystem

- » Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS): Launched in 2026 as a GHG emission intensity-based trading system for hard-to-abate sectors. Industries exceeding targets earn tradable Carbon Credit Certificates.
- » Global Standing: India's ETS is among world's largest after China, EU and South Korea.

UN General Assembly Resolution

The UN General Assembly backed an ICJ advisory opinion declaring that states hold legal obligations under international law to tackle climate change.

Key Details of the Resolution

- » Tabled by Vanuatu, a Pacific island nation facing existential threats from rising sea levels.
- » Vote tally: 141 nations in favour, 8 opposed, 28 abstentions (including India).
- » Obligations: All member states must avoid environmental damage, curb border emissions, and fulfill Paris Agreement pledges.
- » Liability: Though not legally binding; Inaction could expose governments to international litigation, major liability claims, and full reparations.

Vayu – Life Breath Symbol

Indigenous Vayu Astra-1 successfully completed high-altitude trials.

- » About Vayu Astra-1
- » It is a loitering munition (also referred as kamikaze/suicide drone) capable of hovering, surveillance and precision strikes.
 - Suicide drone is an unmanned aerial weapon that can hover over a target area before crashing into and destroying the target with an onboard explosive payload
- » Range and Payload: 100 km range tested with a 10-kg warhead.
- » Features: Precision & night capability, high-altitude endurance, intelligent combat features, etc.

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AIIB – Multilateral Development Bank

AIIB launched an Energy, Food Security and Economic Resilience Facility to support members whose development may be affected by the conflict in the Middle East.

- » It offers a time-bound financing envelope of up to USD10 billion over two years.

About AIIB

- » Establishment: Multilateral Development Bank established in 2016.
- » Headquarters: Beijing, China.
- » Objective: To promote sustainable infrastructure development, regional connectivity and economic growth in Asia.
- » Membership: Over 111 approved members worldwide.
 - India is a founding member and the second-largest shareholder after China.
- » India is also the largest borrower from AIIB.

Cyprus: Geopolitical FocusCyprus (Capital: Nicosia)

India and Cyprus elevated their ties to Strategic Partnership, unveiled 5-year roadmap for defence cooperation (2026-2031) and Cyprus announced joining Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative.

Political Features

- » Location: An island country in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea.
- » It is a member of the European Union (EU) despite being geographically in Asia.
- » Geographical Features
 - » It is the third largest island in the Mediterranean Sea after Sicily and Sardinia.
 - » Mountain Range: Kyrenia and Troodos Mountains.
 - » Highest Point: Mount Olympus.

Digital Health Milestone – ABHA

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ABHA, an initiative under the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission, serves as a unique consent-based digital health identity that enables citizens to securely link and access their medical records across hospitals, clinics, laboratories, etc.

Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM)

- » Launched: In 2021 by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare as a Central Sector Scheme.
- » Implementing Agency: National Health Authority (NHA).
- » Objective: To develop integrated, interoperable, and citizen-centric digital health infrastructure in India.
- » Digital Components of ABDM
 - ABHA ID: 14-digit unique digital health ID.
 - Health Facility Registry (HFR): National database of public and private healthcare facilities.
 - Healthcare Professionals Registry (HPR): Database of registered healthcare professionals including AYUSH practitioners.
 - Unified Health Interface (UHI): Open digital platform for tele-consultation, appointments and healthcare services.
 - Health Information Exchange and Consent Manager (HIE-CM): Consent-based Health Information Exchange system for secure sharing of health records.
 - National Health Claims Exchange (HCX): Digital platform for faster and standardised insurance claim settlement.

Key Initiatives under ABDM

- » Scan and Share: QR-based OPD registration system reducing patient waiting time.
- » Digital Health Incentive Scheme (DHIS): Provides incentives up to ₹4 crore for adoption of digital health ecosystem.
- » Microsite Project: Cluster-based network to promote ABDM adoption among private healthcare providers.

Significance of Digital Healthcare in India

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- » Universal Healthcare Access: Expands healthcare delivery to remote and underserved regions through telemedicine and digital platforms.
- » Efficient Service Delivery: Reduces waiting time, duplication of tests and administrative burden through integrated digital records.
- » Strengthening Public Health: Enhances disease surveillance, epidemic monitoring and data-driven policymaking.
- » Financial Protection: Enables faster insurance claims and targeted healthcare delivery under schemes like PM-JAY.
- » Boost to Health-tech Ecosystem: Promotes AI-driven healthcare, digital innovation and growth of health-tech startups.

Egocentric Data – Wearable Cameras

The rapid growth of egocentric data collection has triggered ethical questions around surveillance, consent and labour displacement.

Egocentric Data

- » Egocentric data refers to video and sensor recordings captured from the perspective of the person performing a task.
 - Typically collected using cameras mounted on the head, chest or wrist, the footage shows exactly what a human worker sees while carrying out an activity including hand movements, object interactions, navigating spaces etc.
- » Significance:
 - Designed to mimic the visual viewpoint a robot itself would have during deployment.
 - Valuable for training Vision-Language-Action (VLA) models, which are AI systems that combine visual understanding, language instructions and physical movement.
- » Related Issues: Surveillance, privacy, ownership, compensation.

Global Recognition in Astronautics

India's Chandrayaan-3 mission was honored with prestigious 2026 Goddard Astronautics Award by the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics (AIAA).

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Award

- » Significance: Highest honor bestowed by AIAA for notable achievements in the field of astronautics.
- » Background: Named after Robert H. Goddard, a pioneer in liquid rocket engine development, and received its current widened criteria in 1975.
- » Chandrayaan-3 Mission
- » Historic Landing: On August 23, 2023, Chandrayaan-3 made history by becoming the first spacecraft to achieve a soft landing near the Moon's South Pole.
- » Mission Life: One lunar day (~14 Earth days).
- » Components: Vikram Lander and Pragyan Rover.

Index-Based Insurance Model

As India faces intensifying heatwaves due to climate change, parametric insurance is emerging as a tool for automatic financial relief during extreme heat events.

Parametric Insurance

- » Parametric insurance is a non-traditional model that pays out a pre-agreed, fixed sum when a specific, measurable event (e.g., temperature, rainfall, wind speed) occurs, rather than compensating for actual physical damages.
- » Significance: Ensures faster financial relief during disasters like heatwaves, floods and droughts; useful for climate-risk management and vulnerable communities.

India's Smart Border Initiative

The proposed Smart Border Project will be equipped with drones, radars, modern cameras, and other advanced technologies, making entire borders with Bangladesh and Pakistan impenetrable.

Need for Smart Border Project in India

- » Vast Land Border: India shares 15,106.7 kilometres of land border with seven countries (Bangladesh, China, Pakistan, Nepal, Myanmar, Bhutan and Afghanistan).
- » Countering Illegal Activities: To curb illegal infiltration, organized crime, smuggling of narcotics, cattle, weapons and counterfeit currency.

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- » Tackling Emerging Security Threats: Such as cyber threats, hybrid warfare, and drone-based intrusions.
- » Managing Difficult Terrain and Climate: Varied terrain such as deserts, glaciers, lakes, rivers, snow-covered peaks, swampy marshes, fertile lands, and tropical forests not suitable for sustaining manpower.
- » Enhancing Efficiency Through Technology: To ensure integrated, real-time, and technology-driven border security management.

Initiatives taken for Smart Border Management

- » Anti-Drone Systems: Integration of jamming and detection tech to counter aerial threats. E.g. IG T-Shul Pulse Anti-Drone System.
- » Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS): Deployment of smart fencing, sensors, radars, CCTV cameras, and command-control systems for real-time border monitoring.
- » BOLD-QIT (Border Electronically Dominated QRT Interception Technique) project: It is a high-tech "smart fencing" initiative launched by the Border Security Force (BSF) along the Indo-Bangladesh border.

IN-SPACe – Boosting Space Startups

The Department of Space (DoS) has approved establishment of Common Technical Facilities (CTFs), to be built with the support of IN-SPACe, in Gujarat (Khoraj) and Tamil Nadu (Thoothukudi).

- » These CTFs will be located within plug-and-play manufacturing clusters exclusively designated for space activities (spacecraft, payload systems, etc.).

IN-SPACe (Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre)

- » It is an autonomous body under the Department of Space (DoS).
- » Established as part of Space Sector Reforms (2020) to enhance private sector participation and strengthen India's space economy through public-private collaboration.
- » Key Functions:
 - Promotion: Drives the private space ecosystem via funding and technology transfers from ISRO.

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- Enabling: Reduces startup costs by providing access to ISRO's infrastructure and laboratories.
- Authorization: Serves as the primary regulator for clearing private launches and ground operations. Etc.

Mental Health Burden 1990–2023

Lancet study estimates nearly 1.17 billion cases of mental disorders globally in 2023.

- » Key Findings of the Study
- » Disability Burden: Mental disorders is a leading cause of disability, accounting for over 17% of total Years Lived with Disability (YLDs) worldwide.
- » Major Contributors: Anxiety and depression emerged as the leading contributors to rising mental health burden.
- » Gender Impact: Women were disproportionately affected, especially by anxiety and depressive disorders.
- Neurodevelopmental and behavioural disorders such as ADHD, conduct disorder and autism were found to be more common in males.
- » Age Group Impact: Highest mental disorder burden observed among the 15–19 years age group, highlighting need for early intervention.
- » India Scenario: The prevalence rate increased from 2,591.9 cases per lakh in 1990 to 5,792.8 per lakh in 2023.
- » Drivers of Rising Mental Disorders
- » Economic Insecurity: Poverty, unemployment, inequality and financial stress aggravating psychological distress.
- » Social Isolation: Declining social connectedness, loneliness and weakening family/community support systems.
- » Violence & Abuse: Domestic violence, child maltreatment and gender-based violence contributing to trauma and mental disorders.
- » Digital & Lifestyle Stress: Excessive social media use, cyberbullying, FOMO and performance pressure increasing anxiety and depression among youth.

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- » Climate & Conflict Stress: Climate change, disasters, wars and displacement increasing anxiety and PTSD, e.g., Gaza conflict and refugee crises.

Pregabalin — **Controlled Drug**
Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare moved **Pregabalin** to **Schedule H1**, following widespread misuse among youth for its sedative, euphoric, and dissociative effects.

Pregabalin

- » Medical Uses: Pregabalin (or Lyrica) is primarily prescribed to treat nerve pain, chronic pain, neuropathies, fibromyalgia, and manage seizures in people with epilepsy.
- » Health Risks: Suicidal thoughts and central nervous system (CNS) depression.

Schedule H1

- » About: Schedule H1 is a highly restrictive category under the Drugs Rules, 1945 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940.
- » Strict Prescription Rule: Under Schedule H1 medicines can only be sold against a valid prescription issued by a Registered Medical Practitioner (RMP).
- » Retailer Accountability: Chemists and retailers have to maintain a separate register that records all details.
- » Mandatory Warning Labels: Manufacturers must prominently display a "Schedule H1 Drug Warning" label on the packaging.

RBI Intervenes in Forex Market

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) recorded a total net sale of \$53.1 billion in FY26, an increase of \$12 billion, compared to net sales of \$41.1 billion in FY25.

- » Other measures taken by RBI to prevent Rupee Depreciation
- » Liquidity Injections & Swaps: RBI has initiated a \$5 billion USD/INR buy/sell swap to boost rupee liquidity and enhance market stability.
- » Offshore NDF & Derivative Limits: The central bank is restricting domestic banks from rupee Non-Deliverable Forward (NDF) contracts to decouple from volatile offshore markets.

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- It has capped net open forex positions for banks at \$100 million to curb speculative trading.
- » About Currency Depreciation
- » Definition: Depreciation of a currency occurs when its value declines relative to foreign currencies in the open market.
- » Factors Driving Depreciation of Indian Rupee
 - Other: Gold import bill has almost doubled to \$72 billion in 2025-26 in two years; Outflow under LRS for foreign travel accounted for \$15 billion in FY26, etc.
- » Global economic factors: Such as high crude oil prices (past \$100 per barrel) due to the Strait of Hormuz crisis, US Federal Reserve interest rate hikes, etc. have led to higher demand for foreign currency, weakening the rupee.
- » Capital Outflows: For e.g. total outflows by Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) from the equity market have crossed ₹2 lakh crore in 2026.

RBI Surplus Transfer to Govt

RBI approved its highest-ever surplus transfer of ₹2.86 lakh crore to the Central Government for the Financial Year 2025–26.

RBI Surplus

- » Surplus implies excess of income over expenditure.
 - RBI's Income Source: Interest on holding of rupee securities, liquidity adjustment facility (LAF), marginal standing facility (MSF), loans & advances and foreign sources.
 - RBI is not liable to pay income-tax or super-tax on any of its income, profits or gains.
 - RBI's Expenditure: Printing of notes, agency charges which includes commission to banks, primary dealers etc. and employee cost.

Provisions regarding transfer of RBI surplus to the government

- » Sections 47 of RBI Act, 1934: Allocation of surplus profits to the Central Government is mandatory after making provisions for bad/doubtful debts, depreciation in assets, and other standard banking cushions.

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- » Following the Malegam Committee (2013) and Bimal Jalan Committee (2019) recommendations, surplus transfers to the government have increased significantly.

Saudi Arabia Becomes 26th IBCA Member

International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) was first proposed by Indian Prime Minister during Global Tiger Day celebration in July 2019 to form an alliance of global leaders to curb poaching, eliminate demand, and halt illegal wildlife trade.

- » About IBCA
- » Establishment: Launched in 2023 by India.
- » Headquarter: New Delhi, India.
- » Objective: Global conservation of seven big cat species - Tiger, Lion, Leopard, Snow Leopard, Cheetah, Jaguar, and Puma.
- » Organizational Nature: IBCA is a multi-country, multi-agency coalition comprising of 95 big cat range countries, non-range countries, conservation partners, scientific organizations, business groups and corporates with an interest in big cat conservation.
 - Presently, it consists of **26 member countries** and **5 observer nations**.
- » Nodal Agency: Established by the Government of India through the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) under the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (MoEFCC).
- » Need for Conservation of Big Cats
- » Ecosystem Balance: Loss of apex predator can set off trophic cascade in which the disrupted food chain sends the ecosystem spiralling out of control.
- » Conservation of Other Species Habitat: For instance, more than 30% of Asian elephant populations live within tiger landscapes, Snow leopards share their home with Tibetan Gazelle, Argali and Chiru etc.
- » Climate Change Mitigation: Forest landscapes safeguarded for tigers store more carbon than other forests in Asia.
- » Support to Economy: Alternative sources of income for people who cohabit the space like tourist homestays, dairy enterprises, and fruits and vegetable farming.

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WTO Dispute Settlement System

India blocked China's first request to set up a dispute panel at the World Trade Organization (WTO) claiming Indian tariffs and incentives (IT and solar energy products) discrimination.

- » A country can block the first request for a panel. However, at the next DSB meeting, the panel's establishment is automatic unless there is a unanimous consensus against it.
- » About WTO Dispute Settlement Body (DSB)
- » DSB is the institution responsible for resolving trade disputes between member countries.

Key Features

- Composition: It consists of representatives of all WTO member countries.
 - Main Function: It administers the WTO's dispute settlement mechanism under the Dispute Settlement Understanding (DSU).
 - Functions of the DSB: Establishes dispute settlement panels; Adopts panel and Appellate Body reports; Authorizes compensation or trade sanctions if rulings are not followed, etc.
- » Since 2019 WTO's Appellate Body has been non-functional due to a lack of quorum (judge appointments blocked by the US).

BHAVYA Scheme Blueprint**Bharat Audyogik Vikas Yojna (BHAVYA) Scheme**

- » Scheme Type: Central Sector Scheme
- » Ministry: Ministry of Commerce & Industry via DPIIT.
- » Objective: Transform the country into a globally competitive manufacturing hub by providing supportive industrial ecosystems that help investors easily ground their investments, thereby deepening domestic supply chains and increasing employment.
- » Target: Develop 100 plug-and-play industrial parks in partnership with States, Central Public Sector Undertakings and private sector.

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- Plug-and-play industrial parks are ready-to-use manufacturing sites offering pre-built infrastructure. E.g., roads, power, water, and approvals,
- » Duration: 6 years (2026-27-2031-32)
- » Outlay: Rs 33,660 crore
- » Eligibility: Greenfield and eligible brownfield industrial parks
- » Minimum land requirements: 100 acres for non-hilly states and 25 acres for hilly states, NE states, Union Territories, and smaller states.
 - Also permits larger parks up to 1000 acres.
- » Funding Framework: Financial assistance is provided through the National Industrial Corridor Development and Investment Trust (NICDIT), primarily in the form of equity contribution.
 - Funds up to ₹ 1 crore per acre in equity mode for each project (except for private developer) for-
 - Core infrastructure (internal roads, ICT and administrative systems).
 - Value-added infrastructure (ready-built factory sheds, warehousing).
 - Social infrastructure (worker housing and support amenities).
 - Support for external infrastructure up to 25% of project cost would also be provided.

Bridging Classrooms to Careers

1st meeting of the High Powered 'Education to Employment and Enterprise' Standing Committee was recently convened by NITI Aayog.

About the committee

- » Origin: Union Budget 2026-27 proposed its establishment
- » Objective: to help India achieve a 10% share of the global services market by 2047 by aligning education, skilling, employment, and entrepreneurship with emerging economic opportunities.
- » Composition: chaired by CEO, NITI aayog, it has representation from Union and state government, Industry bodies and other experts.

Cross-Border Investments, Shared Prosperity

Total FPI outflow from equity market crossed 2.22 lakh crore rupees so far in 2026.

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FPI

- » Meaning: Any investment made by person resident outside India through equity instruments where such investment is less than 10% of the post-issue paid-up share capital on a fully diluted basis of listed Indian company.
 - Or less than 10% of paid-up value of each series of an equity instrument of a listed Indian company.
- » Regulation: Securities and Exchange Board of India [(Foreign Portfolio Investors) Regulations, 2019 last amended in 2022]
- » Nature: Short-term investment done to diversify investment portfolio and unlike FDI, does not involve transfer of knowledge or technology.

Fisheries in the Chill Zone

India's cold-water fisheries sector is emerging as an important pillar of the country's Blue Economy.

About Cold Water Fisheries

- » They are practiced in high-altitude snow-fed rivers, streams, lakes, and reservoirs.
- » Regions: Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, etc., along with hill districts of West Bengal, Kerala, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu.
- » Current Status: Contribute nearly 3 % of inland fish production in India.
- » Key Cold-Water Fishes: Mahaseer, Snow trout and Indian hill trout
- » Government Initiatives: It is supported under initiatives like Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana, Fisheries and Aquaculture Infrastructure Development Fund (FIDF), etc.

Fueling the Future

Recently, Oil India Limited discovered a new natural gas reserve in Rajasthan.

- » The discovery marks the first-ever confirmed gas presence in the Sanu Formation of the Dandewala field.

Natural Gas in India

- » Composition: Mainly composed of methane (CH₄) with smaller amounts of natural gas liquids and nonhydrocarbon gases, like CO₂ and water vapor

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- » Estimated reserves: ~1,000 billion cubic meters, with largest reserves being in Western Offshore region followed by eastern offshore.
 - Enabling: Reduces startup costs by providing access to ISRO's infrastructure and laboratories.
 - Authorization: Serves as the primary regulator for clearing private launches and ground operations. Etc.

Global Defence Hub Vision

Observations were made by Defence Minister during the inauguration of Defence Manufacturing Complex of a private sector company, NIBE Group' at Shirdi, Maharashtra.

- » 'Suryastra', India's first 300 KM Universal Rocket Launching System was also flagged-off.

Significance of Private Sector Participation in Defence

- » Fostering Economic Resilience and National Security: In present times of weaponisation of trade and supply chains to even rare earth minerals.
- » Empowerment and Employment: Boost MSMEs, small-scale industries and local economy along with empowering them with cutting edge technological skill sets.
- » Defence Research: Income, technological and production capabilities of the private sector could be leveraged in research and development activities.
- » Defence Entrepreneurship: It would avoid bureaucratic hurdles commonly encountered in government institution and state owned companies.
- » Promote Indigenisation: India targets ₹3 lakh crore in defence production by 2029.

Key Reforms to Push Private Participation in Defence

- » Liberalized FDI Policy: Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) up to 74% FDI allowed through automatic route.
- » Priority for Domestic Procurement: Procuring capital items from domestic sources under Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP)-2020.

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- » Defence Industrial Corridors: Set up in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu to boost defence manufacturing.
- » Industry as Partner: Promotes collaborative ecosystem involving private sector companies, start-ups, and MSMEs through initiatives like Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX), etc.

Global Health Assembly 2025 Ends

Global Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance (GAP-AMR) for 2026–2036

- » About: 2nd edition of GAP-AMR that builds on a decade of implementation of first GAP-AMR adopted in 2015.
- » Aim: Attainment of 2024 UN General Assembly target of 10% reduction in bacterial AMR-associated deaths in humans, reducing antimicrobial use in agrifood systems, and minimizing environmental pollution from resistant microbes by 2030.
- » Technical support and Coordination: Provided with WHO and Quadripartite partners, i.e., Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH).

AMR

- » Meaning: Occurs when bacteria, viruses, fungi and parasites no longer respond to antimicrobial agents like antibiotics, antivirals, antifungals, etc.
- » Burden: AMR can cause up to 39 million deaths by 2050.
- » Key Initiatives:
 - India: National Action Plan on AMR (NAP-AMR); Red Line Awareness Campaign, etc.
 - Global: WHO's Global Antimicrobial Resistance and Use Surveillance System (GLASS)

Other Key Resolutions Adopted at 79th WHA

- » First Resolution on Radiation and Health: Covering both ionizing and non-ionizing radiation to strengthen national systems for radiation protection.

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- » Strategy on the economics of health for all (2026–2030): Outlines actions to ensure that health is systematically integrated into economic, fiscal and industrial policies.

Guardians of Knowledge in the Age of Misinformation

Recently, Google unveiled Information Agents, a feature built into Search to monitor the web.

- » Apart from Google, Microsoft and Meta are also working on it.

Information Agents (IA)

- » Refers to persistent, background processes that continuously scan the web, social media, news outlets, finance data, and real-time sources on user's behalf, and alerts them when something relevant surfaces.
- » Key Concerns: Type of agentic feature that works best when fed with a lot of user data; can use user data as feed for ad tech industry; accelerate automated traffic on internet, etc.

India's First Geothermal Plant

Ladakh's Lt. Governor approved a five-year extension to MoU with Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) to set up this plant at an altitude of 14, 000 feet in Puga Valley.

- » Under the revised MoU, ONGC will establish a 1-MWe pilot geothermal power plant and prepare a detailed project report (DPR) for large-scale commercial exploitation of geothermal resources in Ladakh.
- » About Geothermal Energy
- » Meaning: It harnesses heat stored within Earth's crust.
 - Geothermal system consists of multiple components including production and reinjection (wells, pumps), transport (pipelines), distribution (heat exchangers) and end-use application.
- » Sources
 - High-enthalpy resources: Volcanic regions, geysers and hot springs primarily for electricity generation.

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- Low- to medium-enthalpy resources: Like hot rocks and shallow ground layers, better suited for direct-use applications (e.g. heating and cooling, agri-food, aquaculture), etc.
- » Potential In India
 - Geological Survey of India (GSI) identified 381 hot springs with surface temperatures ranging from 35°C to 89°C.
 - It has also identified 10 geothermal provinces in India including Himalayan Geothermal Province; Andaman Nicobar Islands, etc.
 - A potential of about 10,600 MW of geothermal power has been estimated with Puga and Chumathang areas appearing to be most promising.
- » National Policy on Geothermal Energy (2025): Establishing geothermal energy as major pillars of India's renewable energy landscape, contributing to 2070 Net Zero Goal, and energy security.

NPT and the Future of Global Peace

The eleventh Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) concluded without agreement on a consensus outcome document.

NPT

- » It is international treaty whose objective is to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, promote peaceful uses of nuclear energy and to further the goal of achieving nuclear disarmament.
- » Treaty establishes a safeguards system under the responsibility of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).
 - Safeguards are used to verify compliance with the Treaty through inspections conducted by the IAEA.
- » It is binding in nature.
- » Opened for signature in 1968, the Treaty entered into force in 1970.
- » Members: 191 (including five nuclear-weapon States i.e. USA, Russia, China, UK and France).
 - India has not joined NPT.

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The Silent Sentinel of the South China Sea

Chinese Coast Guard ship was recently spotted near Taiwan's strategically located Pratas Islands at top of South China Sea.

Pratas Island

- » Also known as Dongsha Island, are a small group of three islands forming a coral atoll located in the South China Sea, governed by Taiwan.
- » Characterized by circular atoll structure, with Dongsha Island being only island above sea level, while other two (North Vereker Bank and South Vereker Bank) are submerged.
- » Contested between China and Taiwan.
- » Other Islands of South China Sea: Spratly Islands, Paracel Islands, and Scarborough Shoal.

Trends in Peace Operations 2025

In it, the SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) highlighted the key challenges confronting multilateral peace operations.

Key Challenges faced by Peacekeeping Operations

- » Funding Shortfall: Unpaid donor contributions (from countries like the USA) caused a \$2 billion UN shortfall, forcing deep cuts to peace personnel numbers.
- » Geopolitical Gridlock: UN Security Council veto threats complicate mandate renewals. E.g., U.S. is pushing for the termination of missions like the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)
- » Defunding of Regional Missions: E.g., EU redirecting its European Peace Facility (EPF) funding from Africa towards Ukraine and West Asia.
- » Rise of Ad Hoc Interventions: E.g., Middle powers (like UAE) are using bilateral military agreements that prioritize short-term security over long-term conflict resolution.
- » Unequal Burden on the Global South: All top 10 military and police-contributing nations including India are from the Global South.

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- » Historic Lows in Personnel Deployments: There were 58 active peacekeeping operations in 34 countries in 2025, dropping below the threshold of 60 for the first time since 2016.

Strengthening peacekeeping operations requires predictable funding, greater burden-sharing by developed countries, and stronger cooperation with regional organizations to address evolving global security challenges.

UN Peacekeeping

- » Genesis: Began in 1948 with the establishment of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) in the Middle East.
- » Principles of Peacekeeping: Consent of the parties, Impartiality and Non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate
- » Deployment: UN Peacekeeping Missions are deployed, by the UN Security Council, to support ceasefires and peace agreements.

Key Peacekeeping Missions:

- » UNMISET (UN Mission of Support in East Timor): Operated from 2002 to 2005
- » MINUSTAH (UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti): Operated from 2004 to 2017
- » MINURCAT (UN Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad): Operated from 2007 to 2010
- » UNMIL (UN Mission in Liberia): Operated from 2003 to 2018
- » UNMOGIP: (UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan): Started in 1949

Uniform Civil Code Explained

The government has highlighted that special provisions have been made to exclude all tribal communities from the ambit of the UCC, thereby ensuring full protection of their customary rights and cultural traditions.

UCC

- » It seeks to replace religion-based personal laws with a common law applicable to all, irrespective of religion, caste, creed, gender, or sexual orientation.

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- » Constitutional provision: Article 44 (Directive Principles of State Policy (Part IV)) Provides that State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a UCC throughout the territory of India.
- » Current Status: No nationwide implementation, but only applicable in some states. E.g., Gujrat, Uttarakhand (1st in Independent India), and Goa
 - Goa follows a form of common civil code based on the Portuguese Civil Code.

Assam Tables UCC Bill

If the bill is passed, Assam will become the first state in the northeast and third state in the country to pass a UCC bill, following the example of Uttarakhand, and Gujarat.

- » In Goa, a form of common civil code is in practice from pre-independence under the Portuguese Civil Code of 1867.

Key highlights of the Bill

- » Marriage/divorce: Compulsory registration of marriages and divorces within 60 days.
- » Inheritance: Includes spouse, children, and parents of the deceased for inheritance of properties.
- » Live-in relationships: Mandatory registration within one month, children born out of a live-in relationship to be considered fully legitimate.
- » Polygamy: It will be prohibited with imprisonment upto 7 years.
- » Tribal Exclusion: It will not be applicable to any of the Scheduled Tribes residing in Assam.

Need of UCC

- » To Uphold Secularism: A secular republic like India needs a common law for all citizens rather than differentiated rules based on religious practices.
- » Gender Justice: It will promote gender justice by removing the inbuilt discriminatory provisions of personal laws.
- » Supporting National Integration: It realizes "one nation, one law," ensuring religious practices do not obstruct legal uniformity.

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» Others: To provide equal status to all the citizens, Simplification of Laws, etc.

Uniform Civil Code (UCC)

- » Definition: A UCC refers to a unitary system of personal laws applicable to all irrespective of religion including marriage, divorce, maintenance, inheritance, adoption, and succession.
- » Article 44 of the Constitution, under the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP), directs the state to strive for a UCC for all citizens across India.
- » Supreme Court (SC) in various cases (such as Sarla Mudgal Case (1995, etc.)) highlighted need of implementing UCC for gender justice.

Belgorod Region: Between Conflict and Resilience

Missile and drone strike on Russia's Belgorod region caused casualties and damaged critical energy infrastructure.

The Belgorod Region

- » Established: 6 January 1954.
- » Location: Situated in southwestern Russia, also shares a state border with Ukraine.
 - lies along the upper Donets River and serves as the administrative capital of the Belgorod oblast.
- » Climate: moderate continental climate.
- » Economy: Industrial hub, it produces one-third of Russia's iron ore and leads in agriculture.

Fertilizer Import Concerns Escalate

'3F' (Fuel, Fertilizer, Foreign exchange) concerns combined with a depreciating rupee, threatens to push the 2026-27 fertilizer import bill past the \$33.4 billion record of 2022-23.

Status of India's Fertilizer Sector

- » Production: India remains the second-largest consumer and third-largest producer of Fertilizers globally.
 - The total Fertilizer production has increased from 385.39 Lakh Metric Tonnes (LMT) in 2014–15 to 503.35LMT in 2023–24.

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- » Consumption: India's total annual consumption of Fertilizer in 2023–24 was around 601 LMT of which 177 LMT came through imports.
- » India's fertilizer subsidy: It is projected to exceed in FY26, against the Budget Estimate of ₹1.67 trillion, driven by excessive consumption of urea and DAP.

Challenges

- » Heavy dependence on imported fertilizers: Also inputs such as LNG, rock phosphate, ammonia, and potash due to limited domestic mineral reserves, exposing the sector to global conflicts, price volatility, and foreign exchange pressures.
 - In FY26, total import bill reached ~\$27.2 billion (fertilizers and inputs).
- » Subsidy vs. Productivity paradox: The Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) warns that removing fertilizer subsidies might reduce crucial fertilizer usage, potentially hurting agricultural yield.
- » Delayed Disbursals: Delays in the payout of government subsidy claims create critical working capital crunches for private and cooperative manufacturing units.

Way forward

- » (Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP)) in price policy report for the 2026-27 kharif season given some suggestion,
- » Leveraging digital platforms like AgriStack to promote balanced soil nutrient usage to manage the subsidy burden.
- » Changing All India Ratio of nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), and potassium (K) of 4:2:1 should be revisited in view of changing agro-climatic factors, cropping and irrigation patterns.
- » Promotion of use of micro and secondary nutrients and strategies to improve soil organic carbon.

Finance Commission & Transfer Issues
Concerns have emerged over whether Finance Commission transfers adequately

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balance fiscal equity among States while addressing the Centre's growing expenditure needs.

- » About the 16th FC (2026-31)
- » Constituted under Article 280; chaired by Dr. Arvind Panagariya.
- » Recommendations:
 - States' share in the divisible pool of central taxes remains unchanged at 41%.
 - Total grant-in-aid worth ₹9.47 lakh crore for local bodies and disaster management over 5 years.
 - Revenue-deficit, sector-specific, and state-specific grants have been discontinued.

Challenges Related to Devolution and Equity

- » Shrinking Divisible Pool: Rising non-shareable cesses and surcharges reduce actual funds available to States.
- » Equity vs. Performance: High income distance weightage heavily favors less developed states.
 - Developed states feel penalized for their economic and demographic success.
- » Conditional Transfers: Tied grants may constrain States' spending flexibility.
- » Vertical Imbalance: States bear major expenditure responsibilities in health, education, and welfare, but possess limited taxation powers.
 - E.g. restructuring of National Rural Employment Guarantee programme requires States to bear 40% of programme costs.
- » Removal of Revenue-deficit Grants: Raises issues of equity and targeting specific state needs, described as "tyranny of the base year".

Way Forward

- » Rationalise cesses and surcharges to expand the divisible pool and foster cooperative federalism through wider state consultations.
- » Refine criteria to balance equity with incentives for fiscal discipline.
- » Ensure predictable, untied transfers to enhance State-level developmental autonomy.

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Heat Dome Effect: When the Sky Locks Heat

Heat dome over Europe scorches UK, France, Spain.

Heat Dome

- » It is a high-pressure atmospheric system that traps warm air near the Earth's surface for prolonged periods, leading to extreme heat conditions.
 - Because hot air expands, it creates a bulging dome that traps heat within it.
- » Mechanism: Descending air gets compressed and heated, while high pressure prevents cloud formation and traps hot air near the surface.
- » Impacts: Leads to heatwaves, droughts, wildfires, and severe health risks.

IIP Trends in Focus

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) released the Report of the Technical Advisory Committee on Base Year Revision of the All-India Index of Industrial Production (TAC-IIP).

IIP

- » Composite indicator that measures the short-term changes in the volume of production of a basket of industrial products during a period with respect to a base period.
- » Released By: National Statistics Office (NSO) under MoSPI.
- » Coverage: Three sectors- Manufacturing (77.63%), Mining (14.37%), Electricity (7.99%)
- » Base Year: 2011-12 (in new series it will be 2022-23)
- » Major Changes in New Series of IIP:
 - Broadens coverage: Includes Minor Minerals, Rare Earth Minerals, Gas Supply, Water Supply, and Sewerage & Waste Management
 - Separate indices for electricity generated from renewable and non-renewable sources.
 - Mining and Quarrying sector is split into three sub-indices: Fuel Minerals, Metallic Minerals, and Non-Metallic Minerals.

India Notifies New Sports Rules 2026

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These rules are notified under the National Sports Governance Act, 2025.

- » The Act aims to promote sports, ensure athlete welfare, strengthen good governance and fair play, and provide an effective mechanism for resolving sports disputes.

As per the Act, National Sports Board (NSB) is designed as an apex regulatory body empowered to grant, renew, suspend, or cancel recognition of National Sports Bodies.

Details of National Sports Governance (National Sports Board) Rules, 2026

- » Composition: Chairperson and two Members appointed by the Central Government based on recommendations of a Search-cum-Selection Committee.
- » Term of Office: 3 years or until attaining 65 years of age, whichever is earlier.
 - Eligible for reappointment for one additional term.
- » Powers and Functions of the Board
 - Maintaining records of the National Sports Election Panel and National Sports Bodies.
 - Frame model guidelines for sports governance and committee functioning in National Sports Bodies.
- » Audit: CAG is empowered to audit the accounts of the Board.

Details of National Sports Governance (National Sports Tribunal) Rules, 2026

- » Term of Office
 - Chairperson: 5 years or until the age of 70 years, whichever is earlier.
 - Members: 5 years or until the age of 67 years, whichever is earlier.
 - Eligible for re-appointment for one additional term.
- » Techno-legal measures for digital implementation through a dedicated portal.

National Sports Tribunal (NST)

Under the Act, NST is established for the independent, speedy, effective and cost-efficient disposal of sports-related disputes.

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- » Composition: Chairperson and two other members appointed by the Central Government.
- » Eligibility Criteria:
 - Chairperson: Current/former Supreme Court Judge or a former Chief Justice of a High Court.
 - Members: Eminent persons with expertise in sports, public administration and law.
- » Jurisdictional Exclusions: Cannot hear disputes related to major sporting events (Olympics, Asian Games etc.), doping, or matters under the exclusive jurisdiction of sports bodies, international federations etc.
- » Powers and Functions
 - It possesses powers vested in a civil court under the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908.
 - Appeals against Tribunal orders lie with the Supreme Court within 30 days.

India's Fight Against Child Labour

SC issued notice to Government seeking stricter child labour prohibition in entertainment and hospitality sectors.

- » Provisions Against Child Labour
- » Constitutional
 - Article 24: Prohibits employment of children below 14 years in factories, mines, or hazardous occupations.
 - Article 39: It directs the State to ensure health and strength of workers and the tender age of children are not abused.
 - Article 23: Prohibits traffic in human beings, begar (forced labour) etc.
- » Legal
 - The Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 (amended in 2016): Prohibits employment of children below 14 years in all occupations and adolescents (14-18 years) in hazardous occupations.

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- Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015

MachFin Mart: Smart Finance, Strong Future

The Union Finance Minister recently launched key SIDBI initiatives on its 37th Foundation Day to strengthen the MSME ecosystem.

- » SIDBI is a statutory body that serves as the principal financial institution responsible for the promotion, financing, and development of the MSME sector.

About MachFin Mart

- » This digital platform enables MSMEs to easily purchase modern machinery.
- » It integrates equipment discovery with faster, digitized loan processing.
- » About The Modernization of Rural Enterprises (MoRE)
- » The initiative provides targeted financial assistance to local grassroots businesses.
- » Aims to modernize 10,000 rural and handicraft enterprises over the next three years.

National Honours – Padma 2026

The President of India presented Padma Awards for the year 2026 in Civil Investiture Ceremony-I at Rashtrapati Bhavan, while remaining awardees will be honoured in the second round of the ceremony later.

- » This year total 131 awards will be given including 19 women, 6 persons from Foreigners/NRI/PIO/OCI category, and 16 posthumous awardees. There are 2 Duo cases (counted as one).
- » About Padma Awards
- » Instituted: In 1954, they are one of the highest civilian Awards of country.
- » Conferred by: President in three categories, namely:
 - Padma Vibhushan: For exceptional and distinguished service.
 - Padma Bhushan: For distinguished service of high order.
 - Padma Shri: For distinguished service in any field.
- » Announced: Every year on the occasion of Republic Day except during the years 1978 and 1979 and 1993 to 1997.
- » Activities/ Disciplines: All fields such as Art, Social Work, Public Affairs, Science, etc. involving public service.

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- » Eligibility: All persons without distinction of race, occupation, position or sex are eligible. However, Government servants including those working with PSUs, except doctors and scientists, are not eligible.
 - Normally not conferred posthumously. However, in highly deserving cases, it is awarded.
- » The total number of Awards which can be given in a year (excluding posthumous cases and Foreigners/NRIs/OCIs) is 120.
- » Padma Awards Committee: (headed by the Cabinet Secretary), constituted annually by the Prime Minister select awardees.
- » A higher category: Can be conferred only after at least five years than earlier Padma award.

PAIMANA Portal: Powering Policy Access

PAIMANA (Project Assessment Infrastructure Monitoring and Analytics for Nation-Building) Portal strengthens monitoring of Central Sector Infrastructure Projects

- » The Portal Tracks 1,981 Infrastructure Projects worth ~ ₹43 lakh crore as of April 2026.
- » About PAIMANA Portal
- » Purpose: A centralized web-based portal for monitoring of Central Sector Infrastructure Projects worth ₹150 crore and above.
 - Operationalised by the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (MoSPI).
 - Replaces the OCMS-2006 (Online Computerized Monitoring System).
- » Key Feature: Operates on the “one data, one entry” principle for streamlined monitoring.
- » Integration: Linked with DPIIT's Integrated Project Monitoring Portal (IPMP/IIG-PMG) through APIs for automatic updation of over 70% project data.
- » Significance: Serves as a national repository to standardize infrastructure monitoring and support informed decision-making.

Stroke: Silent Killer, Loud Warning

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World Health Assembly recognizes stroke as a public health priority for the first time.

Stroke

- » Definition: Stroke is a medical emergency caused by interruption of blood flow to the brain due to blockage or bleeding, leading to brain cell death.
- » Types: Includes ischemic stroke (blood clot), hemorrhagic stroke (bleeding in brain), and transient ischemic attack (temporary blockage).
- » Symptoms: Sudden dizziness, vision loss, facial droop, arm weakness, and slurred speech.
- » Treatment: Requires immediate CT/MRI diagnosis, thrombolytic therapy, and rehabilitation.
- » Prevention: Lifestyle changes and effective management of high blood pressure can significantly reduce the risk of stroke.

Wi-Fi 7: The Future of Connectivity

India enters Wi-Fi 7 Era as TP-Link has started local manufacturing of Wi-Fi 7 devices.

Wi-Fi 7

- » Wi-Fi 7 (officially IEEE standard 802.11be) represents the next generation of wireless networking technology.
- » Aim: Enhance performance, speed, and efficiency compared to its predecessors, Wi-Fi 6 and Wi-Fi 6E.
- » Key Features of Wi-Fi 7:
 - Speeds 4.8× faster than Wi-Fi 6 (accelerates throughput up to 46 Gbps)
 - Multi-Link Operation (MLO) across 2.4/5/6 GHz bands,
 - 4× lower latency than Wi-Fi 6/6E,
 - Wider channel bandwidth (more data transmitted simultaneously) and
 - enhanced Target Wake Time (TWT) reducing power consumption and improving battery life,

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- Advanced interference management: 'Preamble Puncturing' to keep traffic moving even when part of a channel has interference.

Aerosol Hotspot Alert: Pollution in Focus

Recently a study identified Bihar and West Bengal as major aerosol pollution hotspots.

Key highlights

- » Expanding Hotspots: Particulate matter (PM) pollution rose by over 20% across Indo-Gangetic Plain (IGP), Himalayas, and North East (NE) India with Bihar and West Bengal emerged as major hotspots.
- » Driving factors: Biomass burning due to cooking and slash and burn agriculture
- » Changing Composition of PM: Organic carbon and sulphate both associated with biomass burning, increased by almost 50%
 - Carbonaceous aerosol remain dominant in Eastern IGP, while dust remained dominant in Western IGP.

Aerosol

- » Aerosols are small microscopic solid or liquid particles that float in the air.
- » They are emitted by both natural events and human activities.
- » Some aerosols (light coloured) cool the climate, and others (dark coloured like black carbon or soot) have a warming effect.

AGEL Powers Ahead: BESS Commissioned at Khavda

It is the world's largest single-location battery storage deployment outside China with a capacity of 3.37 Gigawatt-hour (GWh).

Battery Energy Storage System (BESS)

- » It is an electrochemical setup that captures excess electrical energy and stores it for later use.
 - It offers flexibility in grid connection and can operate in local mode when the grid is unavailable.
- » Significance: ~336 GWh of energy storage capacity is needed by 2029-30 to facilitate reliable integration of renewable energy. (Central Electricity Authority)

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» Types of BESS

- Traditional Solid Rechargeable Batteries: Stores Energy in solid metal electrodes. E.g., Lead Acid Batteries, Lithium-Ion Batteries, Zinc Air Batteries, etc.
- Flow batteries: Energy is stored in flowing liquid electrolytes kept in tanks separately. E.g., vanadium redox flow batteries, zinc-iron flow batteries, zinc-bromine batteries, etc.

» Challenges: Limited storage capacity; high upfront costs; Dependency on imports for input material (lithium, cobalt); improper disposal pose environmental risks etc.

Initiatives for BESS deployment in India

- » National Framework for the Promotion of Energy Storage Systems 2023: For the development and deployment of Energy Storage Systems.
- » Production Linked Incentive Scheme for National Programme on Advanced Chemistry Cell Battery Storage: To manufacture advanced chemistry cells in India.
- » Viability Gap Funding (VGF) scheme for development of 4,000 MWh of BESS projects by 2030-31.
- » Explicit recognition to ESS: As an integral part of the power system by amending Electricity Rules in 2022.

Article 142: Balancing Bench Power

Using its power under Article 142, the Supreme Court of India recently declared the Right to safe travel on National Highways as a fundamental right, as an integral component of the Right to Life under Article 21.

- » The Court issued wide-ranging directives and held that providing safe, well-maintained, and motorable roads is a binding constitutional duty of the State, moving it beyond a mere policy objective.
- » About Article 142
- » Under the Article, SC is empowered to pass necessary orders or decree to deliver complete justice where existing laws fail to provide a specific remedy.

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- » Not available to High courts: These powers under Article 142 are constitutionally conferred only on SC.
- » Significance: Fills legislative vacuums if a situation arises where a gross injustice is apparent but there is no explicit law, Article 142 allows the Court to step in and provide an immediate remedy.
 - E.g. Vishaka Guidelines (1997) formulated to tackle sexual harassment at workplaces as there was a complete absence of statutory law at the time.
- » Criticism: While a 'constitutional safety valve' to legal gaps, it may cause judicial overreach upon Executive or Legislature.
 - Judicial Overreach refers to a situation where judiciary crosses its constitutional boundary and interferes in the functions of executive or legislature.

Concerns associated with Judicial Overreach

- » Violation of the Separation of Powers: E.g. SC set up the Lodha Panel to reform Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI).
- » Reduced accountability: As principle of checks and balances is diluted. E.g. SC struck down National Judicial appointments commission (2015) to maintain its dominance in judicial appointments.
- » Lack of Subject-Matter Expertise: SC invoked article 142 to ban liquor sale within 500 meters of any national or state highway (Tamil Nadu Vs K. Balu) led to overnight job losses.
- » Ignoring Executive Constraints: Courts may issue directives without considering resource or infrastructure limits.
 - E.g. MC Mehta vs UoI (2018): SC invoked Article 142 to ban sale of BS-IV vehicles, ignoring the government's grace period imposing logistical and financial constraints.

CPEC: Corridor of Connectivity

China and Pakistan recently agreed to accelerate the development of the upgraded phase of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC 2.0) and develop Pakistan's port of Gwadar.

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CPEC

- » It is the flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) launched in 2015.
 - Gwadar Port was officially inaugurated in 2016 as part of the larger CPEC.
- » It connects Pakistan's Gwadar Port to Kashgar City in northwestern China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR).
- » India opposes CPEC as it passes through parts of Jammu & Kashmir illegally occupied Pakistan, violating India's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Critical Minerals Cooperation: India-US Framework Signed

The Framework on "Securing of Supply in the Mining and Processing of Critical Minerals and Rare Earths" builds on earlier India-US partnerships such as the U.S.-led Pax Silica and FORGE initiatives.

- » It aims to strengthen cooperation on supply chains of critical minerals and rare earths, including financing, recycling, and supply diversification.

About Critical and Rare Earth Minerals

- » **Critical Minerals:** Critical minerals are those that are essential to countries' economies or development, and their classification varies from country to country, depending on their level of access, usage, export value and national supply risks.
 - Most countries' critical mineral lists include copper, lithium, nickel, cobalt, graphite and rare earth elements.
 - All rare earth minerals are critical minerals, but not all critical minerals are rare earths.
- » **Rare Earth Elements:** These are a group of 17 elements, comprising the elements scandium, yttrium and the 15 lanthanides, as defined by the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry.
- » **Application:** Both Critical and Rare Earth Minerals are used in critical sectors such as the Defence sector (radars and others), electronics, clean energy

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technologies such as solar panels, AI, Robotics, Space exploration equipment etc.

- » China's dominance: According to IEA, China has 49% of the world's rare earth reserves, produces 69% of rare earth minerals, and controls 90% of their processing and refining.
 - In other critical minerals, China commands 99% of gallium refining, over 90% of graphite and manganese processing and 58% of global lithium refining.

How this New Framework Benefits India?

- » Supply Chain Security: Helps India reduce overdependence on China for critical minerals and rare earth processing.
- » Boost to Clean Energy & Manufacturing: Supports India's EV, battery, semiconductor and renewable energy ambitions through better access to critical minerals.
- » Technology & Investment Support: It can bring investment, advanced processing technology and cooperation in mining, recycling and refining sectors

Equity Pulse: India's Market on the Rise

India's Stock Market

Taiwan has overtaken India as the world's Fifth-Largest Stock market.

- » According to Bloomberg, Taiwan's overall market capitalization rose to \$4.95 trillion, while India's market value declined to \$4.92 trillion.
- » Unlike Taiwan, India does not yet have globally dominant listed semiconductor makers or AI hardware companies.
- » World's Top 4 Stock Markets by Size: New York Stock Exchange (NYSE), USA; NASDAQ, USA; Shanghai Stock Exchange (SSE), China; Japan Exchange Group (Tokyo Stock Exchange), Japan.

India Stock market

- » Regulator: Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).
- » India primarily has two stock exchanges:
- » Investors can trade on these exchanges for either the short-term (debt investments) or the long-term (equity investments).

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- » Oldest: Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE), established in 1875.
- » Largest: National Stock Exchange (NSE), established in 1992.
- » Investors can trade on these exchanges for either the short-term (debt investments) or the long-term (equity investments).

Hormozgan Province: Gateway to the Persian Gulf

US strikes near Strait of Hormuz in Iran's Southern Hormozgan raise ceasefire tensions.

- » The US said the strikes were defensive actions targeting missile sites and mine-laying boats to protect American troops.

Hormozgan Province

- » Location: Southern province of Iran along the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman.
- » Capital: Bandar Abbas, located on the northern coast of the Strait of Hormuz.
- » Strategic Importance: Situated near the Strait of Hormuz, a major global oil trade route.

IBC Amendment Act: Speeding Up Debt Recovery

The Ministry of Corporate Affairs recently notified the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) Amendment Act, 2026.

About IBC amendment act 2026

- » New Creditor-Initiated Insolvency Resolution Process (CIIRP): This is a new, hybrid out-of-court resolution mechanism introduced under Chapter IV-A of the Code.
 - It allows notified classes of financial creditors to initiate early-stage resolution against eligible corporate debtors.
- » Strict timelines:
 - Application Admission: The National Company Law Tribunal must admit insolvency applications within 14 days of a default.
 - Liquidation Process: Must be completed within 180 days (extendable by a maximum of 90 days).
- » Cross-Border and Group Insolvency: The Act provides an enabling framework for managing cross-border and group insolvency cases.

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- » Reinforcement of the "Clean-Slate Principle": It establishes that once a resolution plan is approved, prior claims against the corporate debtor are extinguished unless otherwise specified.

Mekedatu Debate: Development vs. Dispute

Supreme Court rejects review plea by Tamil Nadu on Mekedatu project.

- » The Court in 2025 had rejected Tamil Nadu's plea challenging the Karnataka's proposed Mekedatu project as "premature."

Mekedatu Project

- » It is a proposed ₹9,000-crore multi-purpose balancing reservoir, designed to provide 4.75 TMC of drinking water to Bengaluru and generate 400 MW of power.
- » Location: Located on the Cauvery River near the Sangama confluence of the Arkavathy tributary in Karnataka's Ramanagara and Chamarajanagar districts.

Nine Suns of Nautapa: Climate in Crisis

Northern India has entered the hottest stretch of the season during the Nautapa.

About Nautapa

- » It is a traditional nine-day weather phase in the Hindu calendar that marks the peak of the summer heatwave.
- » Derived from the words Nau (nine) and Tapa (heat) that begins when the Sun enters Rohini Nakshatra in late May.
- » This year, Nautapa is expected to last from May 25 to June 2 and coincides with the lingering effects of a strong El Niño.
- » Nautapa are found in ancient astrological texts like Surya Siddhanta.
 - El Nino refers to the warming of surface waters in the tropical Pacific Ocean, which often leads to hotter summers in India.

One-Shot Gene Therapy: Cholesterol Breakthrough

The experimental therapy called VERVE-102 reduced harmful LDL (low-density lipoprotein) cholesterol by up to 62% in patients with inherited high cholesterol and early heart disease.

VERVE-102

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- » It is an investigational in vivo base editing medicine.
 - Base editing is a form of genome editing that can directly convert a single DNA base (C or A) to another base (T or G).
- » VERVE-102 consists of a messenger RNA which encodes an adenine base editor and a guide RNA (gRNA) targeting the PCSK9 (Proprotein Convertase Subtilisin/Kexin type 9) gene.
 - PCSK9 is a liver secretory enzyme that regulates blood cholesterol.
 - mRNA is a genetic molecule that contains instructions or recipe that directs cells to make a protein using its natural machinery.

What is Gene Therapy?

- » It is a technique that uses a gene(s) to treat, prevent or cure a disease or medical disorder.
- » It works by adding new copies of a gene that is broken, or by replacing a defective or missing gene in a patient's cells with a healthy version of that gene.
- » Applications: Both inherited genetic diseases (e.g., hemophilia and sickle cell disease) and acquired disorders (e.g., leukemia) have been treated with gene therapy.

PM-AJAY: Empowering Scheduled Castes

Union Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment launched PM-AJAY Portal and AJAY

Mobile App.

- » PM-AJAY Portal will enable real-time monitoring, transparent governance and milestone-linked fund flow for Adarsh Gram, Grants-in-Aid (GIA) and Hostel components under PM-AJAY.

PM-AJAY (Pradhan Mantri Anusuchit Jaati Abhyuday Yojna)

- » Launched in: FY 2021-22.
 - » It is a merger of 3 erstwhile Centrally Sponsored Schemes-
 - Pradhan Mantri Adarsh Gram Yojana (PMAGY)
 - Special Central Assistance to Scheduled Castes Sub Plan (SCA to SCSP)
 - Babu Jagjivan Ram Chhatrawas Yojana (BJRCY).

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- » Objective: Socio-economic upliftment of Scheduled Castes (SCs).
- » Focus areas: Reducing poverty, enhancing educational opportunities, and improving infrastructure in SC-dominated areas
- » Funding: 100% funded by the Central Government.
- » Implemented by: Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment
- » Coverage: Implemented in 28 States/ UTs
- » Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Dadra Nagar Haveli, Daman & Diu, Ladakh & Lakshadweep are not covered under this scheme.

PM-WANI: Public Wi-Fi for All

Prime Minister's Wi-Fi Access Network Interface (PM-WANI) gets major user-friendly upgrade.

- » QR-based login, short-duration plans and standardised hotspot names were introduced to improve accessibility under the scheme.

PM WANI

- » Ministry: Ministry of Communications
- » Genesis: Launched by the Department of Telecommunication in 2020.
- » Aim: To enhance the proliferation of public WiFi hotspots to create robust digital communications infrastructure in the country, especially in rural areas.
 - Scheme encouraging local entrepreneurs to set up and operate Wi-Fi hotspots based on techno-commercial viability.

QUAD 11: Diplomacy in Delhi**Key Initiatives Announced**

- » Quad Critical Minerals Initiative Framework: It is a \$20 billion critical minerals initiative to coordinate investments in mining, processing, and recycling to strengthen global supply chains.
- » Indo-Pacific Maritime Surveillance Collaboration (IPMSC) Initiative: Initially focused on Indian Ocean Region, it enhances real-time information sharing and maritime awareness using QUAD Members' combined surveillance capabilities.

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- » Quad Initiative on Indo-Pacific Energy Security: Through this initiative, Quad partners will work to identify areas of cooperation in technology, management, policy, international market analysis, and emergency response exercises to ensure open, stable energy markets and diversified supply chains.
- » Indo-Pacific Connectivity: Pledged to connect all Pacific Island Forum countries via undersea cables by 2026 and committed to advance port infrastructure in Fiji under Quad Ports of the Future Partnership.

Other Outcomes

- » Commitment to UNCLOS: The Quad ministers heavily emphasized the importance of adhering to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) for maintaining navigational rights, freedoms, overflight, and flow of lawful global commerce, esp. in the Strait of Hormuz, Red Sea and the East and South China Seas.
- » Coast guard led Quad-at-Sea Ship Observer Mission: To be hosted by India, after success of 1st mission from Palau to Guam, to address unlawful maritime activities.
- » Next-Gen Communication Standards collaboration announced, specifically on 6G development.

Quad

- » It is an informal strategic grouping comprising India, US, Japan, and Australia.
- » Origin: It originated to coordinate humanitarian assistance after 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami.
 - 2007: Formally proposed as dialogue by then-Japanese PM Shinzo Abe, but went dormant.
 - 2017: Revived over concerns about challenges to the rules-based order and Indo-Pacific assertiveness.
- » Global Footprint: Represents 24% of the world's population, 35% of global GDP, and 18% of global trade.

Significance of Quad for India:

- » Counterbalancing of Chinese hegemony (e.g. Annual Malabar Exercises) in Indian Ocean Region.

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- » Other: Economic Cooperation (e.g. Quad Investors Network, 2024); Climate Cooperation (e.g. Quad Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Package), etc.

TEXPROCIL: Weaving India's Trade Success

Recently Finance minister reiterated the textile target of \$100 bn exports and \$250 bn production by 2030 during TEXPROCIL Export Awards 2023–24 ceremony.

TEXPROCIL

- Origin: 1st Council set up after Independence by the Government of India in 1954.
- Headquarters: Mumbai.
- Nodal Ministry: Ministry of Textile.
- Type: government-sponsored, autonomous, nonprofit body.
- Role: It is the international face of cotton textiles from India facilitating exports worldwide.

Union Government Acts on Demographic Change

The committee will study the demographic changes arising from illegal immigration and other abnormal reasons, and to suggest measures to deal with these demographic changes.

- » Chaired by Justice Prakash Prabhakar Navlekar (Retd.), the committee includes the Census Commissioner and three distinguished experts.

Key Terms of Reference

- » To deliberate and study causes and challenges of demographic changes such as cross-border factors etc.
- » To analyse structural population changes at the level of religious or social communities.
- » To recommend institutional and operational mechanisms for border management, identification, detention, deportation of illegal immigrants etc.

Reasons for high Illegal immigration in India

- » Destination for individuals fleeing persecution: E.g. Rohingyas from Myanmar.
- » Economic Factors: It includes poverty, lack of economic opportunities, stagnation of income, etc. in neighbouring states.

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- » Environmental Factors: E.g. Frequent floods, cyclones and riverbank erosion in Bangladesh.

Key Implications

- » National Security Threats: Illegal migrants are more vulnerable to getting recruited by terrorist organizations and illegal cross-border activities like smuggling etc.
- » Socio Economic Burden: Illegal migrants can put pressure on limited resources, disturb the labour market, and lead to land encroachment.
- » Social Tensions: E.g. ethnic and religious frictions in Assam due to illegal migration from Bangladesh

Conclusion

Thus, India should adopt a balanced approach by strengthening border security, creating a clear refugee policy, and enhancing regional cooperation to address illegal migration effectively.

Consumer Watchdog: CCPA in Action

Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has initiated regulatory action against the unauthorized online sale and advertisement of hazardous chemicals, explosive substances on digital platforms.

- » The action aims to strengthen consumer safety, public security, and responsible e-commerce practices.

CCPA - Central Consumer Protection Authority

- » Established: under Section 10 of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019.
- » Ministry: Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution.
- » Functions:
 - Protect, promote, and enforce the rights of consumers as a class
 - Prevent violation of consumer rights
 - Prevent unfair trade practices, etc

Digital Playtime: Online Gaming on the Rise

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- » Supreme Court upheld the GST authorities' decision to levy 28% GST retrospectively on online gaming platforms as constitutionally valid.
- » Ruling: Online gaming activities, including fantasy sports and other digital games involving stakes on uncertain outcomes, constitute betting and gambling under GST framework.

Online Gaming

- » Indian online gaming market generated INR 232 billion in 2024 and is projected to grow to INR 316 billion by 2027.
- » Government enacted Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming (PROG) Act, 2025 and notified corresponding rules for online gaming governance.
 - These establish a strong legal framework to curb harmful online money gaming and protect users from the financial, psychological, and social distress caused by predatory gaming platforms.

Electoral Roll Revision: SC Endorses EC's Powers

The Court in ADR vs. ECI Case (2025) held that the Election Commission has the power to conduct SIR under Article 324 of the Constitution, read with Representation of the People Act, 1950, and its Rules.

Key Highlights of Supreme Court's Judgement

- » SIR satisfies the three requirements of proportionality –
 - Fulfils Legitimate Purpose – Maintaining credible electoral process through accuracy of electoral roll.
 - Means pursued are not excessive – Structured house-to-house enumeration, verification and scrutiny by designated officers and availability of remedies.
 - Least Restrictive Option – Statewide SIR was proportionate to scale of the problem.
- » Election Commission is empowered to examine questions bearing upon citizenship but consequence of such citizenship determination is limited.

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- It affects the individual's entitlement to be included in the electoral rolls and thereby the right to participate in the electoral process.
- It does not, however, operate to divest the individual of claims to citizenship, nor does it foreclose decision on citizenship by the competent authority under the Citizenship Act.

SIR

- » SIR refers to a large-scale, intensive revision of electoral rolls by the Election Commission of India under its constitutional and statutory powers.
- » Legal and Constitutional Framework:
 - Article 324 (1): Grants the ECI superintendence, direction and control of elections to Parliament and State Legislatures.
 - Representation of the People Act, 1950: Section 21(3) empowers the ECI to order special revision of electoral roll.
 - Section 16 disqualifies a non-citizen from being enrolled in the electoral roll.
 - Registration of Electors Rules, 1960: Specifies procedures for enrolment, revision, etc.

FAC: Key Body for Forest Clearances

FAC has granted in-principle approval for the diversion of over 3,000 hectares of forest land across several states for key infrastructure projects.

FAC-Forest Advisory Committee:

- » Overview: Statutory body constituted under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980.
- » Chairman: Director General of Forests.
- » Function: It plays a crucial role in evaluating proposals for the diversion of forest land for non-forestry purposes like mining, dam construction, and road building.

IBC Completes 10 Years of Implementation

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IBC, enacted in 2016 and last amended in 2026, is an umbrella legislation consolidating Indian laws relating to the reorganization and insolvency resolution of corporate persons, partnership firms, and individuals.

Achievements of IBC

- » Decline in NPAs: Bank GNPA levels fell sharply from 11.5% in FY18 to 2.3% in FY26.
- » Improved Recoveries: IBC accounted for 52.3% of total bank recoveries in FY25 with total recoveries crossing ₹4.11 trillion.
- » Record PSB Profits: Public Sector Banks (PSBs) reported a combined net profit of ₹1.98 trillion in FY25.
- » Shift in Control under IBC: The IBC has shifted decision-making power from defaulting promoters to creditors.

Issues Associated with IBC

- » Delays in Corporate Insolvency Resolution: Reaching 744 days as of March 2026, against the mandated time limit of 330 days.
- » Decreased Recovery: Relative to liquidation value has reportedly fallen by about 30 per cent.
- » Implementation: Insolvency and Bankruptcy Fund provided for in the original Code remains unoperationalised.
- » Technological Deficit: While e-courts exist, there is a lack of technological fluency among some judges.

Way Forward:

- » Strengthening Institutional Capacity: Expansion of NCLT/NCLAT Benches and establishment of special fast-track courts.
- » Operationalise individual insolvency: To address defaults in partnerships and proprietorships, which form the backbone of Indian entrepreneurship.
- » Improving Asset Valuation: Shift from liquidation value to enterprise value to better reflect a company's potential and reduce the haircuts taken by creditors.

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 (IBC)

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- » Applicability: The Code applies to companies incorporated under the Companies Act, Limited Liability Partnerships (LLPs), personal guarantors to corporate debtors, partnership firms, and individuals.

Four Pillars of IBC Code:

- » Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI): The regulator responsible for overseeing IPs and IUs.
- » Insolvency Professionals (IPs): Regulated professionals who manage corporate debtors (CD) and resolution processes.
- » Information Utilities (IUs): Electronic repositories that collect and validate financial data to provide evidence of default.
- » Adjudicating Authority (AA): NCLT adjudicates insolvency proceedings for Companies/LLPs and DRT for Individuals/ Partnerships.

India Advances Green Tech with Hydrogen Fuel Cells

Indian Railways has approved introduction of Hydrogen Fuel Cell-based trainset on Jind-Sonipat section.

Hydrogen fuel cell

- » Definition: It is an electrochemical device that converts chemical energy directly into electrical energy by combining hydrogen and oxygen.
- » Mechanism: Unlike traditional internal combustion engines, fuel cells generate power without burning fuel, resulting in zero harmful emissions. The only by products are water and heat.
 - Overall Reaction: $\text{H}_2 + \frac{1}{2}\text{O}_2 \rightarrow \text{H}_2\text{O} + \text{Electricity} + \text{Heat}$.
- » Major Types of Fuel Cells: Proton Exchange Membrane (PEMFCs), Solid Oxide fuel cell (SOFCs), Alkaline Fuel Cells (AFCs), etc.

International Criminal Court Upholds Rule of Law

Hungary's Parliament approves continued membership in International Criminal Court

International Criminal Court (ICC)

- » Headquarter: Hague, Netherlands

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- » Origin: Founded by Rome Statute (Adopted in 1998 and entered in force in 2002) as the world's first permanent international criminal court.
- » Jurisdiction: investigate, prosecute, and try individuals (not groups or States) accused of committing serious crimes
 - Crimes under ICC's jurisdiction: Genocide, Crimes against humanity, War crimes, crime of aggression.
- » Membership: 125 member countries
 - India, Israel, US, Russia and China are not parties to the Rome Statute.
- » Funding: mainly by States Parties
- » Enforcement: ICC's decisions are binding

Judicial Independence via Collegium System

The Supreme Court Collegium has recommended the elevation of five persons as Judges of the Supreme Court (SC).

Collegium System

- » President appoints the judges of Supreme Court and High Court (HC) under Article 124 and 217 of the Constitution respectively.
- » The judges are recommended for appointment by the collegium consisting of:
 - Chief Justice of India and four other senior-most SC judges for recommending appointments in SC.

Chief Justice of HC and two other senior judges of the concerned HC for recommending appointments in HC

Long-Tailed Duskhawker: A New Biodiversity Find

Long-Tailed Duskhawker (*Gynacantha khasiaca*), a dragonfly, was recorded from the Namdapha National Park.

- » Dragonflies belong to the order Odonata, rank among the world's fastest flying insects and have nearly 360-degree field of view.
- » They are crucial components of freshwater ecosystems and are instrumental in controlling mosquito population.

Namdapha National Park

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- » Location: Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh at the tri-junction point of India, Myanmar and China.
- » It comprises catchment of Noa-Dihing River, a tributary of Brahmaputra River.
- » Highest point in park is Dapha Bum.
- » Bordered by Kamlang Wildlife Sanctuary, Patkai Hill Ranges, and international border with Myanmar.
- » Fauna: All four big cats i.e., Tiger, Leopard, Clouded leopard and Snow leopard in a single Protected Area.

Queen Pineapple: Sweet Success Story

Mission Queen Pineapple launched for promoting GI-tagged Queen Pineapple.

- » Pineapple declared State Fruit of Tripura.

Mission Queen Pineapple

- » Ministry: Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (MDoNER) with Tripura Government.
- » Timeline: Three-year roadmap (Q2 FY2026 to Q4 FY2028)
- » Objective: To integrate farmers across the entire pineapple value chain from production to exports.

Pineapple (Ananas comosus)

- » Origin: Native to tropical and subtropical America.
- » Distribution: Introduced globally by Portuguese during the 16th century.
- » Major producers: Costa Rica, Brazil, China, India and Thailand.
- » Fruit Type: Botanically classified as a Multiple Fruit (Composite Fruit).

SARTHAK-PDS: Cabinet Nod for Modern PDS

The Scheme for Assistance in Ration Transport and Handling-Income with Automation in PDS (SARTHAK-PDS) integrates two schemes:

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- » Assistance to State Agencies for intra-State movement of foodgrains and FPS dealers' margin under NFSA”
- » Scheme for Modernization and Reforms through Technology in PDS (SMART PDS).

SARTHAK-PDS

- » Duration: Up to 31 March 2031 (16th Finance Commission cycle).
- » Outlay: ₹25,530 crore over five years.
- » Coverage: Around 81.35 crore NFSA beneficiaries.

Key Features:

- Unified national databases, AI-enabled analytics dashboards, automated grievance redressal systems, etc to monitor distribution networks in real time.
- Standardised digital processes and ISO-certified protocols to improve transparency.
- » Aim: Provides financial support for intra-state transport, handling, and FPS margins, while creating a unified, citizen-centric and interoperable PDS to improve last-mile delivery and reduce leakages.

Public Distribution System (PDS)

- » Eligibility under National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA): Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) households are eligible to receive 35 kg of foodgrains per family per month, whereas the Priority Households (PHH) beneficiaries are eligible to receive 5 kg of foodgrains per person per month.
- » Ministry: Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution.
- » Operated Jointly:
 - Centre (through Food Corporation of India): Procurement, storage, transportation and bulk allocation of food grains.
 - States: Operational responsibility including allocation within State, identification of eligible families, issuing of Ration Cards and supervision of Fair Price Shops.

Union Health Ministry Publishes NHA Data

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NHA 2022-23 is the tenth report on health expenditure estimates prepared by the National Health Accounts Technical Secretariat (NHATS), National Health Systems Resource Centre, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare using the System of Health Accounts (2011) framework.

- » System of Health Accounts is an internationally standardized framework for tracking health expenditures and resource flows in health systems.

Key Findings:

- » Government Health Expenditure (GHE) as a share of the country's GDP grew from 1.15% to 1.43% over the period 2013-14 to 2022-23.
- » Expenditure on Primary Health Care by Government has more than doubled from ₹0.5 Lakh Crores to ₹1.4 Lakh Crores between 2013-14 and 2022-23
- » Out-of-Pocket Expenditure (OOPE) dropped from 64.2% to 43.4%.
- » Social Security Expenditure (SSE) on healthcare increased from 6% to 9.9% between 2013-14 and 2022-23.

Government Initiatives for Healthcare

- » National Health Mission (NHM): Provide accessible, affordable and quality health care to the rural population, especially to the vulnerable groups.
- » Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY): Provides cashless health cover of ₹5 lakh per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization.
- » Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP): To provide high-quality generic medicines at prices 50% to 90% cheaper than branded equivalents.

Water Budgeting Initiative Revives Rural India

During the assessments conducted under Atal Bhujal Yojana in 2023-24 and 2024-25, 180 out of 229 blocks have shown measurable improvement in groundwater levels.

Water Budgeting

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- » Definition: A systematic assessment that calculates water availability against demand within a defined geographical unit (village, watershed, block, etc.) to ensure balanced use.
- » Calculation: Weighs inputs (rainfall, surface inflows, groundwater recharge) against outputs (evapotranspiration, runoff, groundwater discharge).
- » Balancing Demand & Supply
 - Agriculture Alignment: Water budgeting aligns crop planning with local water availability, improving productivity and reducing risk.
 - Livestock Integration: Accounts for rising water demand from allied sectors such as livestock and fisheries, supporting diversified rural livelihoods.

Government Initiatives aiding Water Budgeting

- » Atal Bhujal Yojana (2019): Mandates Gram Panchayat level water budgets and revives traditional conservation systems like Gokatte, Bawdi, Johad, and Tanka.
- » National Water Mission (NWM): Promotes water budgeting as a core element of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) and emphasizes women-led participation.
- » Varuni App: Developed under Indo-German project with NITI Aayog support; automatically generates block-level water budgets using rainfall, land-use, etc data.
- » State-Level Action:
 - Mukhyamantri Jal Swavlamban Abhiyan (Rajasthan): Launched in 2016 based on "Four Waters Concept"; led to about a 4% rise in groundwater levels.

Jalyukt Shivar Abhiyan (Maharashtra): Launched in 2014 using geotagging and app-based monitoring; helped make over 11,000 villages drought-free

Yamuna Conservation Drive Gains Momentum

Supreme Court constituted a committee under Union Home Secretary to prepare a comprehensive plan to clean up the river Yamuna.

Yamuna River

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- » Longest tributary of the Ganga and one of India's most sacred rivers.
 - It was once a tributary of River Ghaggar (most likely the Saraswati River referred to in the Veda).
- » Origin: Rises from the Yamunotri Glacier on the slopes of the Bandarpunch Massif in the Great Himalayas, Uttarakhand.
- » Course: Flows through Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Delhi, and Uttar Pradesh.
 - Joins the Ganga River at Prayagraj (Triveni Sangam).
 - Longest river in India which does not directly flow to the sea.
- » Major Tributaries: Tons (largest), Chambal (longest), Sindh, Betwa and Ken.

Banni Grasslands: A Fragile Landscape Under Threat

NTPC's proposed solar project in the Banni grasslands threatens fragile ecosystem.

Banni Grasslands

- » Located in Kutch district of Gujarat, this is a unique salt-tolerant grassland ecosystem.
- » Asia's largest tropical grassland, which has emerged from the sea due to tectonic activities.
- » Inhabited by various pastoral communities, such as the Maldharis, Rabaris, Mutwas, and Meghwals.
- » Strange light phenomena (Chir Batti or Ghost lights) are observed here where mysterious lights are observed on the flats after sunset.

Chhari Dhand wetland in the grasslands is designated as a Ramsar site in 2026

Climate Futures: Global Annual to Decadal Report (2026–2035)

The Global Annual to Decadal Climate Update 2026-2035 report warns of exceptional global heat and climate extremes for the next five years (2026-2030).

Key Details of the Update

- » Released by: World Meteorological Organization (WMO), produced by the UK's Met Office.

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- » Key Findings:
 - 2026-2030 global temperatures will range 1.3°C to 1.9°C above pre-industrial levels.
 - A 91% probability exists of temporarily exceeding 1.5°C before 2030.
 - Arctic winters will average 2.8°C warmer than recent historical baselines.

World Meteorological Organization (WMO)

- » A specialized agency of the United Nations (UN).
- » Hq: Geneva, Switzerland
- » Mandate: Responsible for promoting international cooperation in meteorology, climatology, hydrology, and related geophysical sciences.
- » Members: 193 Members, including 187 Member States and 6 Territories

Demographic Turning Point: India's Falling Fertility Rate

India's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has dropped to 1.9, according to the recently released Sample Registration System (SRS) Statistical Report 2024.

What is the Total Fertility Rate?

- » It refers to the average number of children a woman would have over the end of her reproductive period (15-59 years).
- » Replacement Level Fertility: A TFR of about 2.1 children per woman is considered the replacement level, where each generation has enough children to replace itself, resulting in a stable population over time.
 - A TFR higher than 2.1 indicates a growing population, while a TFR below 2.1 generally indicates a shrinking and aging population.
- » High-TFR States: Bihar (2.9), Uttar Pradesh (2.6), Madhya Pradesh (2.4)
- » Low-TFR States/UTs: Delhi (1.2), Kerala (1.3), Tamil Nadu (1.3).
- » Reasons for Declining TFR in India: Increased women's education, Family Planning Initiative, delayed marriage, etc.

Implications of Declining Fertility Rate

- » Positive Impacts
 - Resource Conservation: Lower fertility reduces pressure on land, water, and other natural resources, supporting environmental sustainability.

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- Educational Efficiency: Fewer children can improve educational outcomes by increasing per-child resource availability without additional public spending.
- » Negative Impacts
 - Higher Dependency Ratio: Sustained low fertility increases the share of elderly people relative to the working-age population.
 - Labour Shortages: A shrinking workforce may reduce productivity, economic growth, and labour market stability. E.g., Korea, Japan, etc.
 - Migration Pressures: Ageing societies may rely more on immigration to fill workforce gaps.
- » Fauna: Home to nine Schedule-I species, including leopards, sloth bears and elephants.
- » Significance: Often called the “lungs of central India”; catchment for Hasdeo River and Bango Dam; dispersal corridor for tigers; vital resource for tribal communities.

Dowry Deaths and the Struggle for Women's Rights

Nearly 16 women died every day due to dowry-related violence as revealed by the National Crime Record Bureau's (NCRB) Crime in India 2024 report.

- » As per the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, dowry is “any property or valuable security given or agreed to be given either directly or indirectly, by one party to a marriage to the other party, at or before or any time after the marriage”.

Current Status (as per NCRB 2024 Data)

- » Crime against women: Of 4,41,534 cases 27.2% cases were registered under ‘Cruelty by Husband or Relatives’.
- » Dowry deaths: Despite marginal long-term decline, India recorded 5,737 dowry deaths in 2024.
- » Uttar Pradesh reported the highest number of cases (2,038), followed by Bihar and Madhya Pradesh.

Related Legal Provisions

- » Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961: Criminalizes the act of giving, taking, or demanding dowry.

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- » Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS): Section 80 (formerly Section 304B of the IPC) strictly penalizes dowry deaths, while Section 85 (earlier IPC Section 498A) addresses cruelty by a husband or his relatives.
- » Domestic violence: Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005: Enacted to protect women from domestic violence.
- » Evidentiary Backing: Section 118 of the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA) (previously Section 113B of the Evidence Act, 1872) raises a presumption of guilt against the accused.

Supreme Court Directions of 2025

- » Supreme Court gave directions in the case of State Of U.P. V. Ajmal Beg as follows,
- » Appointment of Dowry Prohibition Officers (DPOs) under Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961.
- » Training for Officials: Police and judicial officers should periodically receive training.
- » Expeditious Disposal of Pending Cases: High Courts are requested to take stock of the number of cases.

Other: Grassroots Awareness Programs by district administration, change in education curriculum for awareness.

Evaluating e-Governance: Insights from NeSDA

Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG), Government of India, launched the Portal NeSDA, 2025.

NeSDA 2025

- » It is a biennial assessment framework by DARPG.
- » Based on Online Service Index of the UN e-Government Survey.
- » Objective: To measure effectiveness of e-Governance service delivery mechanisms from the citizen's perspective.
- » All Government Portals assessed under NeSDA are classified into two categories, viz., (i) State, UT, City and Central Ministry Portals and (ii) State, UT, City and Central Ministry Service Portals.

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- » Parameters: assesses multiple parameters across availability, accessibility and maturity of online service delivery across States, Union Territories and Central Ministries/Departments.

Covers: G2C and G2B services across key sectors

From Earth to Orbit: Advancing Stem Cell Science in Space

Astronauts aboard the International Space Station are continuing research efforts to manufacture large quantities of stem cells for therapies on Earth through the Hematopoietic Stem Cell Expansion in Space (InSPA-StemCellEX-H2) investigation.

- » InSPA-StemCellEX-H2 Investigation aims to demonstrate large-scale production of blood stem cells for pharmaceutical and clinical use.
- » Microgravity helps maintain stem cell quality during expansion, potentially increasing production efficiency and reducing the risk of rejection in patients.

What are Stem Cells?

- » Stem cells are foundational cells from which all other specialized cells—such as blood cells, brain cells, and heart muscle cells—are generated.
- » Capacity for self-renewal: They possess the unique ability to divide and create identical copies of themselves.
- » Capacity for differentiation: They have the natural ability to transform into a variety of specialized cell types that perform different functions throughout the body.

Types:

- On the basis of Source: Embryonic Stem Cells (ESCs), Adult/Somatic Stem Cells, Induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs), etc.
- On the basis of Differentiation Potential: E.g., Totipotent cells (Able to differentiate into all possible cell types), Pluripotent cells (Differentiated into most tissues of body but are unable to produce all tissue), etc.

Hog Deer Conservation: Protecting a Vulnerable Species

Recently an albino hog deer has been spotted in Kaziranga National Park.

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- » Albinism is a rare, inherited genetic condition where the body produces little to no melanin, the pigment responsible for the color of skin, hair, and eyes.
- » About Hog Deer
- » It gets its name from the hog-like manner in which it runs.
- » Distribution: Found across the Indo-Gangetic plains and parts of South and Southeast Asia, including India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar.
- » Conservation Status:
 - IUCN Red List: Endangered

Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972: Schedule I protection in India

Kalai-II Wetlands: A Haven for the White-Bellied Heron

Environment Ministry's Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) has granted in-principle forest clearance to Kalai-II hydel project amid White-Bellied Heron concerns.

Kalai-II Hydel Project

- » Location: Anjaw District, Arunachal Pradesh.
- » River: Lohit River (tributary of Brahmaputra).

White- Bellied Heron

- » Other names: Imperial Heron, Great White-bellied Heron.
- » Current Range: Restricted to the southern foothills of the eastern Himalayas, primarily across Bhutan, Northeast India (Assam and Arunachal Pradesh), and Northern Myanmar.
- » The global population is perilously small, estimated to be less than 60 individuals, with the population in India being as low as 10 individuals.
- » Conservation Status:
- » IUCN Status: Critically Endangered.
- » WPA status: Schedule-I species under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

Lokayan-26: Bridging Ideas and Action

INS Sudarshini arrived at Antigua and Barbuda (a Caribbean Island) under Lokayan 2026/Lokayan26.

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Lokayana26

- » It is a 10-month, 22,000 nautical miles transoceanic expedition spanning 13 countries and 18 ports.
- » Flagged off from Southern Naval Command, Kochi in January 2026.
- » Significance: Showcases India's prominence in global maritime activities and vision of MAHASAGAR.

INS Sudarshini

- » It is Indian Navy's second indigenously-built Sail Training Ship after INS Tarangini
- » Built by Goa Shipyard Limited and based at Kochi.

The International Security Forum: Shaping a Safer World

Recently National security advisor attended the 1st International security forum meeting in Russia

1st ISF

- » It was held in Moscow under the Security Council of the Russian Federation.
- » Participation: Representatives from 120 countries.
- » Objective: to address the global security challenges
- » Note: There is another ISF which was established as a nonprofit organisation in 2016 under the patronage of the Minister of National Defense of the Republic of Poland.
 - Its primary focus via its annual summit is on transatlantic security, cooperation, and relations between Europe and North America.

The Role of Nickel in Modern Industry

Supply uncertainty from the West Asia conflict has raised concerns over nickel availability.

Nickel

- » Classified as a critical mineral by India.
- » Features: lustrous silvery-white metal with low thermal & electrical conductivities, etc.

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- » Occurance: doesn't occur in pure native state and is derived using mond process.
- » Mond process (or carbonyl process) is used to refine impure nickel into a highly pure metal through a unique two-step thermal decomposition method.
- » Applications: Electric Vehicles, Stainless steel making etc.
- » Global: Indonesia has largest resources ((42%) and Production (54%).
- » India: Entire demand is met through imports

Largest resources: Found in Odisha (93%), followed by Jharkhand

Timely Justice in India: Confronting Court Delays

President promulgated Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Ordinance, 2026 under Article 123 of Constitution; to increase Supreme Court judges from 34 to 38 (Including CJI) in the wake of increasing case pendency.

- » From Supreme Court existence on 26 January 1950 this is the 7th time that strength has been increased under section 2 of Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Act, 1956.

Current Status of Judicial Pendency (National Judicial Data Grid)

- » Supreme Court (SC): Nearly 93,000 cases, including 22 five-judge, 5 seven-judge and 2 nine-judge; Constitution Bench matters.
- » Subordinate Courts: The crisis deepens at the grassroots; High Courts carry over 6.4 million pending cases, while district courts are burdened with approximately 49 million.

Causes of pendency

- » Non-linear Impact of Expansion: Historical judge expansions (2008 and 2019) indicate that merely increasing judicial numbers does not sustainably reduce the caseload as complexity of cases also rises.
- » Inadequate Judge/population ratio: India has just 21 judges per million people against the recommended fifty Judges per million (120th Report of Law Commission).

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- » Dilution of Core Mandate: Routine admission of Special Leave Petitions (SLPs) under Article 136 has transformed the SC into a high-volume appellate.
- » Financial Constraints: India spends only 0.1% of GDP on judiciary.
- » Government as Litigator: Government responsible for around 50% of litigation.
- » Systemic Bottlenecks: Procedural delays at the admission, severe infrastructure and subordinate staff shortages etc.

Government Initiatives

- » Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADR) Mechanisms: Settling disputes outside regular courts, reducing burden through Lok Adalats, Mediation, Arbitration etc.
- » National Mission for Justice Delivery and Legal Reforms (NMJDRLR-2011): Reduction of arrears & delays.
- » Other: Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) for Development of Infrastructure for Judiciary, Appointment of Ad-hoc Judges, e-Courts Mission Mode Project etc.

Trauma Care as a Fundamental Right

In *SaveLIFE Foundation v. Union of India* case, the Supreme Court recognized the Right to Trauma Care as an integral part of right to life under Article 21.

- » SC also direction for improving trauma care such as integration of all emergency helplines into 112, operationalisation of the PM RAHAT cashless treatment scheme and establishment of Good Samaritan grievance redressal systems.
- » Article 21 guarantees the fundamental right to protection of life and personal liberty.
- » Judicial interpretations have expanded it to include the right to privacy, clean environment, etc.

Why Trauma Care matters?

- » India annually records nearly 4.67 lakh accidental deaths (NCRB).

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- » Nearly half of road-crash fatalities could be avoided with timely medical intervention (The Law Commission's 201st report).
- » Delays in emergency care contribute to at least 30% of trauma-related deaths. (NITI Aayog-AIIMS Emergency and Injury Care Report, 2021)
 - In farming sector, 10,546 persons (6.2%) accounted for total suicide victims.

Unlocking Lunar Secrets: Chandrayaan-2's Ice Discovery

Researchers from the Physical Research Laboratory (Ahmedabad) made this discovery by analyzing data from the Chandrayaan-2 Orbiter's Dual-Frequency Synthetic Aperture Radar (DFSAR).

- » DFSAR is the first fully polarimetric SAR (Synthetic Aperture Radar) designed to study the Moon.

The Research

- » Research focused on doubly shadowed craters, e.g., Faustini crater, small craters inside larger permanently shadowed craters within permanently shadowed regions.
 - Permanently shadowed, these regions remain extremely cold (~ -248.15 degrees Celsius).
- » Key Evidence: Radar Signatures and lobate rim morphology of craters.
 - Lobate rim morphology refers to a crater rim that has a distinctive flow-like or lobed appearance

Significance of the findings

- » In-Situ Resource Utilisation (ISRU): Utilizing these local lunar resources means space agencies will not have to launch every kilogram of supplies from Earth at an enormous cost. E.g., drinking water, rocket fuel (water to be split in Hydrogen and oxygen)
- » Scientific Leadership: India is not just taking part in the lunar race; it is producing critical data that could influence future lunar mission.
 - It is in line with NASA led Artemis Accords (India has signed), which calls for transparent data sharing.

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Chandrayan 2

- » Launched in 2019 using GSLV MkIII-M1 from Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC), Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh.
- » Mission Components:
 - Vikram Lander and Pragyan Rover: Designed for a soft landing in South Polar region. However, communication was lost
 - Payloads: had 8 payload on board- e.g., CHandra's Atmospheric Compositional Explorer 2 (CHACE 2) which detected Argon 40, a noble gas in lunar exosphere

Other Lunar Missions by India

- » Chandrayan 1: India's first lunar probe, launched in 2008
- » Chandrayan 3: Launched using LVM3 in 2023, comprising Propulsion module, Vikram lander and Pragyan Rover.
 - Made India first country to soft-land near lunar South Pole, and only fourth to achieve a lunar soft landing

Blue Bonds: Protecting Our Oceans

Sagarmala Finance Corporation, India's first maritime-focused state-owned non-banking financial company (NBFC), is set to launch India's first blue bonds this fiscal year.

Blue Bonds:

- » They are innovative financing instruments that earmark funds exclusively for ocean-friendly projects and critical clean water resources protection.
- » The Republic of Seychelles launched the world's first sovereign blue bond in 2018.

Canada Today: Politics, Economy, and SocietyCanada (Capital: Ottawa)

Canada-India launches Trade and Investment Forum as a platform that brings together Canadian and Indian business leaders and fosters new commercial partnerships and increased business engagement.

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Political Features

- » Location: Occupies northern half of North America, bordered by Atlantic Ocean (east), Pacific Ocean (west), and Arctic Ocean (north).
- » Neighbors: Shares world's longest land border with the United States; maritime borders with France (Saint Pierre and Miquelon) and Denmark (Greenland).

Geographical Features

- » Size: World's second-largest country after Russia.
- » Landscape: Includes Arctic tundra, vast boreal forests, Rocky Mountains, and fertile prairies.
- » Freshwater: Holds about 20% of the world's freshwater reserves through its lakes and rivers.
- » Great Lakes: 5 Great Lakes (Superior, Michigan, Huron, Ontario, and Erie) form a natural boundary between Canada and the United States.

Of the 5 lakes, only Lake Michigan lies entirely within the US

Future of India's Semiconductor Industry: NITI Aayog's RoadmapKey Targets Include:

- » Build a resilient USD 120–150 billion semiconductor value chain by 2035.
- » Capture 10–13% of the global semiconductor market, emerging as a top-3 destination for advanced packaging and OSAT (Outsourced Semiconductor Assembly and Test).
- » Achieve 15–25% chip self-sufficiency by 2030, scaling to 35–50% by 2035.
- » Attain 55–70% value self-sufficiency for every chip consumed domestically by 2035.

Roadmap: 5 Strategic Pillars

- » Pioneering (R&D and Design IP): Building sovereign capabilities in frontier research and chip design, with a target to create over 100 advanced semiconductor IPs by 2035.
- » Policy and Investment:

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- Mobilizing an estimated USD 135–180 billion in long-term growth capital.
- Creation of an autonomous 'National Semiconductor Nodal Agency' with a full-stack incentive regime, offering predictable, long-term policy visibility and demand-creation mandates.
- » Production: Strategically focusing on areas of structural advantage (such as defense, aerospace), specifically targeting advanced packaging, mature and compound wafer fabrication (28–65 nm), and critical materials.
- » People: Developing a comprehensive "National Semiconductor Talent Pyramid" to train the workforce at all levels, from fab-ready cleanroom technicians to advanced system-level solution architects.
- » Partnerships: Establishing outcome-driven alliances with trusted nations (such as the US, Japan, and the EU) and global industries to secure critical mineral supply chains, integrate into global R&D networks, and accelerate technology transfer.

Why India Must Act Now?

- » Economic Opportunity: India's semiconductor demand is projected to reach USD 200 billion by 2035 (19% CAGR).
- » Supply Chain Risks: 90–95% of semiconductors are currently imported, exposing key industries to global supply risks.
- » Forex Drain: India spent ~USD 150 billion on semiconductor imports (FY17–FY25), projected to hit USD 240 billion annually by 2035.
- » National Security Risk: Heavy reliance on imported chips for defense, aerospace, and UAVs threatens strategic autonomy.
- » Societal Impact: Domestic chips are critical for affordable 5G/6G expansion, digital inclusion, precision agriculture, and remote healthcare.

Ghepan Lake: Serenity in the Himalayas

Rapidly melting of Ghepan Glacier are posing threat to Sissu village in Himachal Pradesh.

Ghepan Lake

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- » Also known as Ghepang Ghat glacial lake, it is situated at an altitude of 4,068m above Sissu.
- » Ghepan Lake is a moraine-dammed glacial lake, which means it formed behind a natural dam of rocks, sand and debris deposited by the retreating glacier.
- » Threat: Between 1989-2022, the lake nearly tripled in size (National Remote Sensing Centre report).
 - National Disaster Management Authority classified the lake as “highly vulnerable” making Sissu susceptible to an event of Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs).

Justice Against Exploitation: SC's Stand on Sex Trafficking

Invoking powers under Articles 32 and 142 of Constitution, SC held trafficking to be a "direct assault on constitutional dignity" rooted within Article 23 of Constitution.

- » Article 23 prohibits trafficking in Human beings and forced labour.

Key Highlights of SC Directions

- » Role of Consent: SC held "consent" to be central legal differentiator in determining whether a case involves trafficking or voluntary adult sex work.
 - Police/rescue authorities to not criminalize vulnerable individuals involved in sex work based on consent to prevent misuse of anti-trafficking machinery.
- » Essential Elements of Trafficking: Action, Means, and Exploitation (Based on Palermo Protocol).
 - UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons (opened for signature in Palermo, Italy, 2000) is first legally binding instrument with internationally recognized definition of human trafficking.
- » Child Protection and Rehabilitation: Right to rehabilitation flows directly from Article 21 forming part of right to live with dignity.
- » Victim Protection Plan: Minimum standards for shelter homes, mental health support, vocational training, legal aid, reintegration measures, etc.

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Human Trafficking in India

- » Status: 6,018 victims have been reported to be trafficked including 2,297 children (National Crime Records Bureau's Crime in India 2024)
- » Anti-Trafficking Framework
 - Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023: Recognizes trafficking as a cognizable and non-bailable offence.
 - Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023: Section 143 defines trafficking and Section 144 deals with exploitation of trafficked persons, including sexual exploitation.
 - Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 (ITPA): Prevents prostitution and trafficking of persons for commercial sexual exploitation.
 - National Investigation Agency (NIA): Investigates cases human trafficking having inter-state, national and international ramifications.
- » Mandate: Responsible for promoting international cooperation in meteorology, climatology, hydrology, and related geophysical sciences.
- » Members: 193 Members, including 187 Member States and 6 Territories

Kill Switch: Safety Mechanism

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in its annual report 2025-26 mentioned that it is exploring the possibility of introducing a 'Kill switch' mechanism.

Kill Switch

- » Meaning: Allows a system, device, account, or service to be disabled or blocked immediately in an emergency or under suspect of attack by fraudsters.
- Currently, customers have the option to switch domestic and international card transactions on or off and RBI is intending to extend it all digital payment modes including UPI, internet banking, etc.
- » Significance: Customer Fraud protection; preventing digital arrest scams; greater customer control over control of transactions, etc.

Navigating the Future: India's Digital Maritime Initiatives

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Developed by the Directorate General of Shipping (DGS), these Digital Governance Platforms enhance service delivery, transparency, and accountability in the shipping sector.

Initiatives Include:

- » Unified Ship Recycling Credit Note Module: A portal was launched under the new 'Ship Recycling Credit Scheme' where ship owners recycling vessels at Hong Kong Convention (HKC)-compliant Indian yards receive a credit note equal to 40% of the vessel's scrap value, redeemable for new shipbuilding projects in India.
 - The scheme is part of the Government's ₹70,000-crore maritime development package announced in 2025.
 - Significance: Promotes domestic shipbuilding and creates a circular maritime value chain.
 - The Hong Kong International Convention for the Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships (HKC): A global treaty (in force since June 2025) under the International Maritime Organization (IMO) ensures that ships, when recycled, do not pose risks to human health or the environment.
 - It requires ships of 500 GT and above to maintain an Inventory of Hazardous Materials (IHM) and use authorized, compliant recycling yards.
- » 24x7 Grievance Redressal Module (e-Navik): Enables Indian seafarers to file grievances from anywhere through the e-Navik portal, WhatsApp, toll-free helplines, or email.
 - It strengthens India's commitment to the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006.
- » Ship Registration Module (e-Samudra): Simplifies vessel registration procedures to align Indian maritime administration with global standards.
- » Medical Practitioner Module: Streamlines the registration and monitoring of doctors authorised to certify seafarers, aiming to reduce fraudulent certifications.

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Related News: Logistics Port Performance Index (LPPI), 2024-25

- » The Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways also launched the LPPI for FY 2024-25 under the Sagar Aankalan framework.
- » The LPPI serves as a national benchmarking tool to assess and improve the operational performance of Indian ports.
 - It supports key national strategies, including the PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan, Maritime India Vision 2030, and Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047.
- » The index evaluates ports in three cargo segments (Equal weight to 'absolute performance' and 'year-on-year improvement') using key operational indicators such as cargo handled, vessel turnaround time, berth idle time, etc.
 - Dry bulk (Top performer: Paradip Port);
 - Liquid bulk (Sikka Port);
 - Container cargo (Mundra Port).

NSR: Ensuring Seed Availability in Emergencies

Union Agriculture Minister announced the establishment of National Seed Reserve of 1 lakh 74 thousand quintals.

National Seed Reserve (NSR)

- » An intervention under National Food Security and Nutritional Mission (NFSNM) under Krishionnati Yojana (KY).
- » Aim: Ensuring availability of high quality certified and foundation seeds for farmers, especially during times of crisis or natural calamities.
- » Implementing Agencies: National Seeds Corporation, State Seeds Corporations and Department of Agriculture of State Governments/UTs (where State Seeds Corporations are not there).
- » Seed kept in NSR shall be produced through SATHI (Seed Traceability, Authentication and Holistic Inventory) Portal.

SIDE 2026: India's Digital Transformation Journey

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SIDE, an annual report since 2023, has been released by ICRIER-Prosus Centre for Internet and Digital Economy (IPCIDE).

Key Highlights

- » Proposes Connect–Harness–Innovate–Protect– Sustain (CHIPS) framework: Broader concept of digitalisation capturing both benefits and risks associated with digital technologies.
- » Global Digitalisation: India's rank improved from eighth (2025) to fifth (2026) with CHIPS score of 36.90 (USA followed by China occupy top ranks).
- » Global digital leadership: Shifted to Indo-Pacific region housing three of top five economies, i.e., China, Singapore, India.
- » Global digital landscape: 72% of AI users are in developing countries, with India and China together accounting for nearly two-fifths of worldwide AI adoption.

SkyCast: Forecasting the FutureSkyCast System

- » SkyCast is an advanced atmospheric monitoring and forecasting system designed to enhance aviation safety through real-time weather intelligence.
- » It integrates technologies such as Radar Wind Profiler, SODAR, Microwave Radiometer, Ground-based Fog Aerosol Spectrometer (GFAS), and CL61 Lidar-based Ceilometer.
 - Radar Wind Profiler measures wind speed, direction, turbulence, vertical velocity, and boundary-layer dynamics up to 3 km altitude.
 - GFAS analyzes fog droplets, aerosols, and aerosol-fog interactions.
 - CL61 Ceilometer tracks the vertical structure of fog.
- » SkyCast is based on insights from the Winter Fog Experiment (WiFEX) launched by IITM and IMD under the Ministry of Earth Sciences at Delhi's IGI Airport in 2015.

The Decline of International Law in a World of Dominant States

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Modern international law is neither truly public, reliably international, nor consistently enforceable; it largely serves the convenience of superpowers, who follow rules only when they align with their strategic interests.

Erosion of International Law in Recent Years

- » Violation of the UN Charter's Prohibition on the Use of Force: E.g. Russia's invasion of Ukraine (2022), U.S.-Israeli war on Iran (2026).
- » Disregard for UNCLOS: E.g. China's refusal to accept the Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling on the South China Sea; maritime blockade of Strait of Hormuz by US and Iran.
- » Violations of International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law: E.g. Indiscriminate civilian casualties in Gaza and China's treatment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang.
- » Weakening of Arms-Control Regimes: E.g. the termination of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty between the US and Russia, acceleration of Iran's nuclear program, etc.
- » Failure to Enforce Environmental Commitments: E.g. Illegal deforestation in the Amazon despite global climate commitments.
- » Weak Institutions: E.g. UN Security Council deadlocks and the International Criminal Court's inability to prosecute major powers.

Way Forward

- » Strengthen Multilateral Institutions: Make them more representative, effective, accountable and capable of enforcing norms, including stronger judicial and monitoring bodies.
- » Revitalize Arms Control: Update key agreements and promote compliance.
- » Ensure Compliance with Global Norms: Strengthen monitoring, financing, and enforcement for environmental obligations, human rights, and humanitarian law.
- » Foster Rule-Based Conduct: Encourage diplomacy, restraint, and peaceful dispute resolution.

What is International Law?

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International law serves as the foundation of the rules-based international order, regulating relations among states, protecting human rights, preserving global commons, and promoting peace and security.

- » Foundational Frameworks and Treaties: UN Charter (1945), Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (1969), etc.
- » Human Rights and Humanitarian Law: Geneva Conventions (1949), Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948, etc.
- » Environmental Law: Montreal Protocol (1987), Paris Agreement (2016), etc.
- » Global Commons (Sea & Space): UNCLOS (1982), Outer Space Treaty (1967), etc.

Zero Coupon Zero Principal: A New Funding Tool

“The Ministry of Corporate Affairs has enabled companies to fulfill their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) obligations through the ZCZP Instrument by expanding the scope of Schedule VII of the Companies Act, 2013.”

ZCZP Instrument

- » It is a SEBI-regulated fundraising instrument issued by not-for-profit organizations listed on the Social Stock Exchange for eligible social projects.
- » Unlike stocks or bonds, it offers neither interest nor repayment of principal.
 - Investors contribute funds to generate measurable social impact rather than financial returns.
- » 10% Limit: A company's expenditure on subscribing to ZCZP instruments cannot exceed 10% of its total Corporate Social Responsibility expenditure for that specific financial year.

CSR

- » Legal Provision: CSR is a mandatory requirement for certain companies under Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013, compelling them to undertake activities that contribute to the social, environmental, and economic development of the country.

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- » Fund Allocation: Companies are obligated to allocate at least 2% of their average net profit of the preceding three years to CSR activities.
- » Schedule VII of the Act enumerates the activities that can be undertaken as CSR.