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**CURRENT
AFFAIRS**

**2025
DECEMBER**

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- Internationalisation of Higher Education in India
- Health Security Se National Security Cess Bill, 2025
- Indian Statistical Institute Bill, 2025
- The SHANTI Act, 2025
- Karnataka Hate Speech & Hate Crimes (Prevention) Bill, 2025
- Independent Creators v/s Media Giants
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- VB – G RAM G Act
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- Visit of Indian PM to Jordan, Ethiopia & Oman
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Internationalisation of Higher Education in India

- **NITI Aayog** released a report titled “Internationalisation of Higher Education in India: Prospects, Potential, and Policy Recommendations”.
- The report **aligns** with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and comes soon after the introduction of the **Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishtan Bill, 2025**.
- The focus is on **correcting the severe imbalance** between inbound and outbound student mobility.

Rationale for Internationalisation:

- In 2024, for every 1 international student studying in India, 28 Indian students went abroad (1:28 ratio).
- As of 2022, India hosted only about 47,000 international students, despite a 518% increase since 2001.
- Forecasts suggest 7.89–11 lakh international students by 2047, depending on policy intensity.
- Internationalisation is seen as crucial for **knowledge diplomacy**, talent circulation, reducing brain drain, and economic sustainability.

Key Findings of the Report

- **Economic and strategic concerns:**
 - Outward remittances under RBI's Liberalised Remittance Scheme (**LRS**) increased by about 2000% in the last decade.
 - Indian students' overseas education expenditure is projected at ₹6.2 lakh crore by 2025 (~2% of GDP).
 - This spending equals about 75% of India's trade deficit (FY 2024–25).
 - **Concentration** of 8.5 lakh out of 13.5 lakh outbound students in high-income countries (USA, UK, Australia).
 - Over 16 lakh Indians renounced citizenship since 2011, indicating **long-term talent loss**.
- **Perception and institutional gaps:**
 - 41% of institutes cited limited scholarships/financial aid as a key barrier.
 - 30% institutes flagged perception of education quality in India.
 - **Other constraints** include inadequate international infrastructure, limited global programme offerings, weak international student support systems, and cultural adaptation challenges.

Major Policy Recommendations:

- **Strategic and financial measures:**
 - **Bharat Vidya Kosh:** As a national research sovereign wealth fund (suggesting a \$10 billion corpus, of which 50% can be raised from diaspora/philanthropy + 50% from Centre).
 - **Vishwa Bandhu scholarship:** To attract foreign students.
 - **Vishwa Bandhu fellowship:** To attract foreign research talent and faculty.
 - **Bharat ki AAN (Alumni Ambassador Network):** To leverage diaspora Indians who have studied at top India universities into acting as ambassadors for Indian higher education.
- **Mobility and global partnerships:**
 - **Europe's Erasmus+ like programme:**
 - To suggest the creation of a “**multilateral academic mobility framework**” tailored to specific country groupings like ASEAN, BRICS, BIMSTEC, etc.

- This could be called the “**Tagore framework**”, named after Asia’s first Nobel laureate, Rabindranath Tagore.
- Promotion of “campus within campus” and more international campuses in India.
- **Regulatory and governance reforms:**
 - Easier entry-exit norms for foreign students and faculty.
 - Fast-track tenure pathways for foreign faculty.
 - Competitive, internationally benchmarked salaries.
 - **Single-window clearance** system for visas, bank accounts, tax IDs, housing & administrative needs.
 - Alignment with *non-binding internationalisation frameworks* under the proposed **Manak Parishad** (Standards Council).
- **Rankings and outreach:**
 - Expansion of **NIRF** parameters to include outreach and inclusivity, globalisation and partnerships.
- **Curriculum and academic culture:** Updated and globally relevant curricula. Emphasis on international research collaboration and cross-cultural learning ecosystems.

Challenges Identified and Way Forward

- **Persistent quality perception gap:** Leverage diaspora capital, soft power, and civilisational knowledge.
- **Fragmented regulatory ecosystem:** Ensure policy coherence between NEP 2020, regulatory reforms, and global engagement.
- **Weak internationalisation culture:** Treat internationalisation as a strategic national priority, not merely an academic reform.
- **Risk of continued brain drain and capital flight:** Shift from student export model to a global education destination model.



Health Security Se National Security Cess Bill, 2025

The Parliament cleared the Health Security Se National Security Cess Bill, 2025.

Objective of the Bill To levy a cess on the production of goods such as pan masala and any other goods that may be notified by the central government.

Key Provisions of the Bill

- **Levy and Collection of Cess:** Any person who owns, operates, or controls machines, or undertakes processes used to manufacture specified goods (currently pan masala; others may be notified) will be liable to pay the cess. Payable **monthly**. Taxable persons must **self-assess** the cess and file a **monthly return**. Delay in payment beyond the due date attracts **interest** on the unpaid cess.
 - The proceeds of this cess will flow into the Consolidated Fund of India and will support the Government in meeting expenditure related to National Security and Public Health.
- **Registration, Declaration, and Verification Framework:** Any person owning, operating, or controlling machines or processes used to manufacture specified goods must register with the proper officer and file a self-declaration detailing all machinery or processes, including maximum rated speed, weight per pack, and packaging type. These declared particulars may be verified or calibrated by the proper officer, with the taxpayer given an opportunity to be heard.

- **Monthly Cess Amounts:** The cess is **capacity-based**, levied per installed machine or per manual production unit, irrespective of actual output.
 - **For Machine based process:** ₹101 lakh/month, as prescribed (cess for item - up to 500 Number of pouches per minute, each pouch weighing up to 2.5g).
 - **For Manual process:** ₹11 lakh/month flat, as prescribed.
- **Power to Increase Cess:** The Central Government may **increase cess rates up to twice** the specified amount in **public interest**. Increased rates apply **only for a notified period**.
- **Audit and Verification:** Officers **not below the rank of Commissioner** may conduct audits to verify the correctness of cess paid. If discrepancies or non-payment are detected, officers may initiate **recovery of cess, interest, and penalties**.
- **Offences:** Key offences include-
 - Operating machines/processes for specified goods **without declaration**.
 - **Failure to pay** cess within the stipulated period.
 - **Failure to obtain registration** when liable.
 - **Disposal or tampering** of lawfully seized goods.
- **Penalties:** ₹10,000 or amount equal to cess payable/evaded, whichever is higher. **Aiding or abetting** will be punishable with a penalty up to ₹1 lakh. **Criminal prosecution** will be triggered where **fraud, willful misstatement, suppression**, or cess evasion exceeds ₹1 crore with punishment: **1 to 5 years imprisonment**, a **fine**, or both.

- **Appeal Mechanism (Three-Tier):** An aggrieved person may file-

- **First appeal:** To the **Appellate Authority** (Commissioner-rank), within **3 months** of the order.
- **Second appeal:** Before the **Customs, Excise and Service Tax Appellate Tribunal (CESTAT)**.
- **Further appeal:** To the **High Court**, on a **substantial question of law**.

Key Concerns Raised About the Bill	Way Forward
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Mandatory Health Allocation: The cess is not earmarked for tobacco-control or public health programmes. • Livelihood Impact: Higher cess threatens incomes of tobacco farmers and beedi-rolling women workers. • Revenue-Driven Intent: Seen as a fiscal measure to offset lost compensation cess rather than a genuine health or security initiative. • Illicit Trade Risk: Higher taxes may push consumers toward smuggled products. • No Devolution Clarity: The Bill does not address revenue-sharing with States, despite underutilization of other cesses. • Design Flaw: Levy based on machine capacity, not production, potentially hurting small units without curbing output. • Harsh Penalties: Criminal sanctions appear disproportionate for a taxation-related issue. • Surrogate Advertising Unchecked: The Bill ignores indirect advertising by tobacco companies (elaichi, mouth fresheners, bottled water). • Limited Impact on Consumption: Affordability and marketing loopholes remain, so actual reduction in tobacco use is unlikely. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Earmark Revenue: Allocate part of the cess directly to tobacco-control and public health programmes. • Support Livelihoods: Provide crop diversification incentives for tobacco farmers and alternative employment for beedi workers. • Tackle Illicit Trade: Strengthen track-and-trace systems, border checks, and coordination among enforcement agencies. • Ban Surrogate Advertising: Close loopholes that allow brand-extension ads for elaichi, mouth fresheners, etc. • Clarify State Devolution: Specify how a share of cess revenue will be transferred to States. • Use Balanced Enforcement: Apply graded penalties and provide compliance support for smaller manufacturers. • Reduce Accessibility: Introduce plain packaging, stronger awareness campaigns, vendor licensing, and ban single-stick sales. • Improve Monitoring: Combine capacity-based assessment with digital production tracking for better oversight.

- **Powers of Inspection, Search, and Seizure:** Officers of rank **Joint Commissioner or above** may:
 - **Inspect** premises where specified goods are manufactured or stored.
 - **Search and seize** goods, machines, documents, or records where cess evasion is suspected.

Seizure and enforcement powers support recovery of **evaded cess**, imposition of penalties, and **prosecution**.

The draft Indian Statistical Institute Bill, 2025, released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), has triggered strong opposition from academicians and students of the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI).

About ISI

- Founded in 1931 by P.C. Mahalanobis, ISI is one of India's premier institutions in statistics, mathematics, and quantitative sciences.
- Declared an **Institution of National Importance (INI)** under the ISI Act, 1959, it has played a foundational role in shaping India's planning and policy framework.
- **National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO)** originated at ISI, laying the basis of India's official statistical system.
- The institute has produced globally renowned scholars such as **C.R. Rao** and **S.R.S. Varadhan**.

About the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) Bill, 2025

The Draft ISI Bill, 2025 seeks to **replace the Indian Statistical Institute Act, 1959** and convert ISI from a **registered society into a statutory body corporate**, while retaining its status as an **INI**.

Objectives of the Bill:

- **Institutional Upgradation** aligning it with other INIs like IITs & IIMs.
- **Global Excellence:** Position ISI as a world-class centre for education & research in statistical and allied sciences.
- **Governance Reforms:** Establish a structured and accountable statutory governance framework.

Key Provisions of the Draft ISI Bill, 2025

- **Statutory Incorporation and Structure of ISI:** ISI will be converted into a **statutory body corporate** with perpetual succession and legal powers to own property, enter contracts, and sue or be sued. All assets, liabilities, contracts, employees, students, and ongoing legal proceedings of the existing ISI stand transferred to the new entity, with service and academic conditions protected. The Bill affirms ISI's **not-for-profit character** and mandates **inclusive, merit-based admissions** in line with Central reservation laws.
- **Governance Structure of ISI:** President of India acts as Visitor with powers of review, inquiry, and issuing binding directions.
 - **Board of Governors** is the principal executive and policy-making body comprising a Chairperson, government nominee, eminent external experts, and internal representatives; Registrar acts as Secretary.
 - **Board Tenure:** Non-ex officio members serve **three-year terms**, renewable once, with provisions for vacancies and meeting allowances.
- **Academic Council:** The **principal academic body** of ISI. Chaired by the Director and includes Centre-Directors, Heads of Divisions, senior faculty, and Deans; Dean of Studies acts as Convenor. It will meet at least once a year, with additional centre-level meetings as required.
- **Financial and Accounting Provisions:** The Bill provides for **Central Government grants** and empowers ISI to generate revenue through fees, consultancy, research, IP, donations, and partnerships. It mandates a dedicated **Institute Fund and corpus for sustainability**, with strict accounting, CAG audit, parliamentary oversight, and annual financial and performance reporting to ensure transparency and accountability.
- **Performance Review and Oversight:** The Bill provides for **multi-level performance review** through the Visitor, Board, and independent experts. The Director must submit **annual performance reports** covering academic, research, governance, and strategic outcomes, while periodic external reviews ensure accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement.
- **Regulations and Standing Orders:** The Bill empowers the **Board** to frame regulations on governance, academics, staffing, finance, infrastructure, and administration, with initial regulations requiring **Central Government approval**. The **Academic Council** may issue Standing Orders on admissions, courses, examinations, and student discipline, subject to review and modification by the Board.
- **Miscellaneous Provisions:** The Bill ensures **institutional continuity** by protecting decisions from procedural defects, mandates transparency under the **RTI Act**, and empowers the Centre to frame rules and resolve implementation difficulties.

- **Interdisciplinary Focus:** Promote collaboration across statistics, mathematics, economics, and data-driven disciplines.
- **Financial Sustainability:** Enable diversified funding while preserving ISI's not-for-profit character.

Concerns Raised over the Draft ISI Bill, 2025

- **Erosion of Institutional Autonomy:** Converting ISI from a *registered society* to a *statutory body corporate* undermines the original compact between the ISI society and the government under the 1959 Act. They contend that repealing the Act without clear justification violates the spirit of academic self-governance.
- **Federalism and Legal Jurisdiction Issues:** Bypassing the West Bengal Societies Registration Act to create a centrally controlled statutory body infringes upon state jurisdiction and goes against the principle of *cooperative federalism*.
- **Excessive Government Control in Governance:** Vesting extensive powers in the **Board of Governors**, is being perceived as government-dominated. Critics highlight that, unlike the earlier Council-based system with significant academic representation, faculty and internal stakeholders are now marginalized.
- **Threat to Academic Freedom and Basic Research:** A shift towards a *corporate-style funding model*, with emphasis on revenue generation (fees, consultancy, sponsored research), may disadvantage long-term basic research that does not yield immediate financial returns.
- **Centralization of Appointments:** All key appointments are to be routed through the Board of Governors, raising fears of political interference. Earlier, ISI members had elected representation in governance bodies, which is now removed.
- **Stakeholder Dissent:** The Bill has triggered widespread protests by students and faculty, including public demonstrations, and has drawn opposition from several political parties, with demands to withdraw or reconsider the draft.

Government's Stand on the Bill: The Bill aims to modernize governance, implement expert committee recommendations notably the 2020 Mashelkar Committee which recommended major reforms to strengthen governance, expand academic programmes, and make ISI globally competitive.

Way Forward

- **Reinforce academic autonomy** by ensuring greater representation of faculty & internal stakeholders in the Board of Governors.
- **Limit executive overreach** through clearly defined checks on government nominees, especially in appointments and academic matters.
- **Safeguard basic research funding** by ring-fencing public grants and reducing over-reliance on revenue generation.
- **Deepen stakeholder consultation** with faculty, students, alumni, and State authorities before finalizing the Bill.
- **Adopt a calibrated reform approach** that balances global competitiveness with ISI's legacy of independent, long-term research.



The SHANTI Act, 2025

President Murmu has granted assent to the Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Bill, passed by Parliament during the Winter Session.

About the SHANTI Bill

It replaces two key legislations:

- **Atomic Energy Act, 1962**- which regulated the development, control and peaceful use of atomic energy in India. Subsequent amendments in 1986, 1987 and 2015 gradually expanded nuclear power activities from exclusive Central Government control to include government companies and their joint ventures.
- **Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage (CLND) Act, 2010**- provided for civil liability for nuclear damage and prompt compensation to the victims of nuclear incident through a no-fault liability regime.

Objectives

- Scale up **clean, reliable nuclear energy** to meet net-zero goals and rising baseload demand.
- Enable **regulated public-private participation** to mobilize capital for rapid nuclear expansion.
- Support **advanced technologies** (SMRs, thorium reactors, AI- and data-driven sectors).
- **Strengthen safety, regulation, and liability frameworks** while promoting nuclear research and non-power applications.

Key Provisions

- **Grant of License and Safety Authorization:** The Centre may license government entities, **Indian** private firms and Joint Ventures for specified nuclear activities, with mandatory licensing for plants, fuel handling and related trade. Licenses are time-bound, capability-based and non-transferable, and may be refused, suspended or cancelled on grounds of national security, public safety, hostile ownership, regulatory violations or financial distress. Upon cancellation, the Government may take over facilities to ensure safety and continuity.
 - *Radiation-related activities* require **Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB)** safety authorization, while strategic functions like enrichment, spent fuel reprocessing and heavy water production remain under exclusive Central Government control.
- **Radioactive Substances & Radiation Facilities:** The Bill mandates safety authorization for the manufacture, use, transport, import, export and disposal of radioactive substances and radiation facilities. In public interest, the Central Government may prescribe licensing requirements, issue directions during radiological emergencies, conduct inspections, maintain a national registry and assume control of radioactive materials or equipment to prevent radiation hazards.
- **Mining and Processing of Uranium and Thorium:** are reserved exclusively for the Central Government or its controlled entities, subject to licensing and safety authorization. Any discovery must be reported to the Centre, ownership of extracted material vests in the Government, low-grade residues are treated as hazardous waste, and compulsory acquisition is permitted in public or national interest.
- **Research and Innovation:** Peaceful nuclear and radiation research is permitted without licensing, except for activities reserved for the Central Government or involving national security concerns. Such research must ensure the safety of individuals, the public, and the environment, and limited quantities of prescribed substances may be permitted under specified conditions.
- **Duties and Liabilities:** Licensees and operators bear primary responsibility for nuclear safety and safeguards and must comply with regulatory conditions, inspections and financial security requirements. The Bill follows a **no-fault liability regime** with **graded caps on operator liability** subject to an overall cap of **300 million Special Drawing Rights** (or a higher amount notified), excluding interest and legal costs.
 - Liability beyond the operator's cap is borne by the Central Government, which may assume full liability in public interest.
 - Operators must maintain insurance (except government installations) and have a **limited** right of recourse only through contract or deliberate acts.
- **AERB** is granted **statutory status** as the apex nuclear and radiation safety regulator. It will set safety standards, grant safety authorizations, conduct inspections, enforce compliance, and advise on nuclear emergencies. It comprises a Chairperson, one whole-time member and up to 7 part-time members, appointed by the Centre on

the recommendation of a search-cum-selection committee of the Atomic Energy Commission. The Chairperson and whole-time member must be eminent nuclear experts.

- The Chairperson and Members of the Board serve a three-year term, extendable by the Central Government for up to three years at a time.

- **Inspection, Investigation and Enforcement:** The Central Government and AERB are empowered to inspect, investigate, search and seize nuclear and radiation-related facilities, materials and records. They may issue binding directions, seal facilities, suspend activities or cancel licenses to ensure public safety, environmental protection and regulatory compliance.

- **Central Government Powers:** It will have overarching authority over nuclear policy, safety, waste management and emergency response. It may acquire and control nuclear materials and installations, regulate tariffs, patents and restricted information, issue exemptions and binding directions, and assume full control of nuclear facilities during public or national emergencies, with compensation as prescribed.

- **Review Application and Appeal:** It establishes an **Atomic Energy Redressal Advisory Council** to review and settle disputes against orders of the Central Government or AERB (excluding compensation matters). Appeals from the Council or penalties lie with the **Appellate Tribunal for Electricity**, strengthened with technical members for nuclear expertise, and a further appeal may be made to the **Supreme Court (SC)**.

- **Restricted Information**

(Section 39): The Central Government may declare sensitive nuclear-related information covering nuclear materials, facilities, technologies, operations, research, and regulatory submissions as “restricted” in the interest of national security or public interest. Such information cannot be disclosed, obtained, or published without government authorization and is **explicitly exempt from the Right to Information Act, 2005**.

- **Compensation for Nuclear Damage:**

The Bill enables **no-fault compensation** for nuclear damage occurring in India, its maritime zones, or certain foreign territories. Claims are decided by designated **Claims Commissioners or a Nuclear Damage Claims Commission (NDCC)** within **three months**, with final and binding awards,

Significance	Concerns Raised
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Modernizes India's Nuclear Governance Framework: by consolidating the Atomic Energy Act, 1962 and the CLND Act, 2010 into a single, updated legislation aligned with contemporary technological and safety needs. ● Enables Large-scale Nuclear Expansion: essential for India's net-zero commitments, energy security and reliable baseload power, especially as renewable energy penetration increases. ● Facilitates Regulated Private Participation: helping mobilize capital, technology and innovation for advanced reactors such as Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) and thorium-based systems. ● Strengthens Regulatory Architecture: by granting statutory status to the AERB, enhancing safety oversight, inspections and compliance enforcement across nuclear and radiation activities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Earlier AERB functioned only as a delegated authority under the Atomic Energy Act, 1962. ● Provides Legal Certainty on Liability and Compensation: through a no-fault regime with defined caps, time-bound adjudication and enforceable awards, improving investor confidence while ensuring victim compensation. ● Enhances National Security and Emergency Preparedness, by empowering the Central Government to control strategic materials, restrict sensitive information, and assume operational control during nuclear or national emergencies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Dilution of Supplier Liability: Statutory supplier liability under the CLND Act, 2010 is removed, limiting recourse to contracts or proof of deliberate intent, weakening accountability and reviving fears of repeating the Bhopal Gas Tragedy precedent, where foreign suppliers escaped liability. ● Inadequate Liability Cap: Operator liability is capped at ₹3,000 crore, widely seen as insufficient compared to global nuclear disasters (Fukushima cleanup costs (~\$180 billion), Chernobyl's long-term impact (~\$700 billion)), shifting long-term environmental and health costs to the public exchequer. ● Risk of Privatization without Adequate Safeguards: Private entry in a high-risk strategic sector raises concerns of cost-cutting, safety dilution and concentration of control among large corporates. ● Weak Regulatory Independence: Despite statutory status, AERB appointments remain executive-dominated, raising concerns over regulatory autonomy, credibility and public trust. ● Executive Overreach: Wide Central Government powers to exempt facilities, acquire assets and assume liability risk excessive centralization with limited parliamentary oversight. ● Limited Victim-Centric Focus: Procedural timelines and absence of mandatory public hearings, Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) or community consent may constrain access to justice for affected populations. ● Insurance Exemption for Government Plants: Exemption of government-owned installations from mandatory insurance increases fiscal risk and reduces transparency in accident compensation. ● Overriding the RTI Act: The Bill creates absolute secrecy by excluding RTI safeguards, raising concerns over transparency, oversight and whistleblowing, especially with greater private sector participation.

clear limitation periods and awarded amounts must be deposited by insurers and operators and **disbursed within 15 days**, recoverable as arrears of land revenue in case of default.

- **NDCC:** will comprise of a Chairman (*min qualification:* either a serving or retired High Court judge) and 6 members. A person is eligible for appointment as a Member only if they have served as an **Additional Secretary (or equivalent) with legal expertise or have five years' experience as a Claims Commissioner**. The Chairperson and Members of the Claims Commission will serve a **3-year term**, are **eligible for one reappointment**, and **cannot hold office beyond 67 years of age**.

- **Offences and Penalties:** The Bill provides graded monetary penalties for regulatory breaches ranging from ₹50,000 to ₹1 crore based on severity. Serious, repeated or willful violations, unauthorized nuclear activities, and safety or security breaches may attract imprisonment. Liability extends to companies, responsible officials and government departments, with controlled prosecution and limited compounding of offences.

- **Miscellaneous:** Central Government grants to the AERB, mandatory budgeting, CAG audit and parliamentary reporting; bar civil court jurisdiction and protect actions taken in good faith. The Centre is empowered to amend penalty and liability schedules, make rules and regulations, and issue directions.

Way Forward:

- Ensure **independent and transparent regulation** by strengthening AERB autonomy.
- Revisit **liability caps and insurance coverage** to better protect victims and public finances.
- Introduce **clear safeguards for private participation**, with strict safety and accountability norms.
- Enhance **victim-centric mechanisms** through wider public consultation and easier access to compensation.



Karnataka Hate Speech and Hate Crimes (Prevention) Bill, 2025

The Karnataka Hate Speech and Hate Crimes (Prevention) Bill, 2025, was tabled in the Winter Session of the Legislative Assembly in Karnataka recently.

Need to Regulate Hate Speech

- **Rising Frequency of Hate Speech:** India Hate Lab recorded 1,165 hate speech events in 2024, with incidents peaking during politically charged periods.
- **Targeting of Minorities and Threat to Social Cohesion:** An overwhelming share of hate speech targeted Muslims, with Christians also affected, often involving calls for violence, boycotts, or destruction of property- undermining fraternity and constitutional values.
- **Political and Organized Amplification:** Hate speech frequently occurred at political rallies, religious processions and public gatherings. Organized participation such as the sharp rise in events linked to political affiliates- risks normalizing intolerance.
- **Weak Enforcement and Impunity:** Broad public-order provisions like Section 196 BNS/153A IPC yield low conviction rates (20.2% in 2020 according to National Crime Records Bureau data), weakening deterrence and enabling repeated mobilization around hate rhetoric.
- **Risk of Violence, Radicalization, Polarization and Democratic Erosion:** Unregulated hate speech fuels discrimination, mob violence, and social fragmentation, distorting democratic competition and deepening communal divides.
- **Legal Vacuum Due to Absence of a Clear Definition:** The lack of a statutory definition of "hate speech" leads to inconsistent policing, selective application of law, and procedural misuse- highlighting the need for precise, balanced regulation.

- **Creates Fear and Marginalization:** Produces insecurity among vulnerable groups

Related Supreme Court (SC) Judgements:

- **Tehseen S. Poonawalla v. Union of India (2018):** The court issued detailed guidelines on preventing mob lynching and hate-motivated violence: appointment of nodal officers, fast-track courts, compensation schemes, and district-level preventive measures.

- **KM Joseph & Hrishikesh Roy Bench (2022):** Observed a “prevailing climate of hate” and directed Delhi, UP, Uttarakhand police to take **Suo motu** action against hate-speech offences

without waiting for complaints. These directions were extended pan-India in 2023: all States/UTs must register **Suo motu FIRs** for hate speech (under provisions like 153A, 153B, 295A, 505 IPC) or risk contempt.

- Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta Bench (2025): The court clarified that it **cannot monitor every hate speech incident**, stressing that **police stations and High Courts are competent to act**. It reiterated reliance on the **Tehseen Poonawalla (2018) guidelines**, including appointing nodal officers and enforcing preventive measures against mob violence.

About the Karnataka Hate Speech and Hate Crimes (Prevention) Bill, 2025

What is it? It is the first state-level legislation in India specifically targeting hate speech and hate crimes across the state.

Objective: To regulate inflammatory statements in public, impose stringent jail terms and fines, and introduce organizational liability along with mechanisms to block online content that spreads hate.

Key Provisions of the Bill:

- **Broad Definition of Hate Speech:** Covers any spoken, written, visual or electronic expression causing injury or hatred against individuals or groups based on religion, caste, gender, sexual orientation, language, disability, tribe, etc.
- **New Offence of “Hate Crime”:** Criminalizes making, publishing, circulating or promoting hate speech; punishable with 1-7 years imprisonment + a Rs 50,000 fine for first-time offenders and 2-10 years + Rs 1 lakh fine for repeat offenders.
- **Strong Enforcement Measures:** Offences are cognizable and non-bailable; courts can award victim compensation; preventive action allowed by Executive Magistrates and senior police officers.
- **Organizational & Online Liability:** Organizations involved can be held responsible unless they prove due diligence; a designated officer may direct online platforms to block/remove hate content.
- **Safeguards & Alignment:** Good-faith material for public good, education, art, or religion is exempt; aligns with Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNS), 2023, and the Information Technology Act, 2000; protects officials acting in good faith.

Current Framework for Hate Speech Regulation in India

Constitutional Framework

- **Article 19(2):** Permits reasonable restrictions in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality, contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence.
- **Articles 14, 15, 21, 25:** Protect equality, non-discrimination, life and dignity, and freedom of religion- all undermined by hate speech and targeted violence.

Legal Framework

- **Criminal Provisions (BNS/IPC):**
 - **Section 196 BNS (153A IPC):** Promoting enmity between groups.
 - **Section 299 BNS (295A IPC):** Deliberate, malicious acts insulting religious beliefs.
 - **Section 353 BNS (505 IPC):** Statements likely to incite offences against the State or communities.
 - **Issue:** These are **public-order focused**, broad, and often misused; conviction rates remain low.
- **Information Technology (IT) Framework:** Currently, online hate is tackled mainly through BNS provisions (196, 299, 353) read with Section 69A of IT Act, 2000 & Blocking Rules, which permit blocking of content “in the interest of public order” etc.
- **Election and Media Regulations:**
 - **Representation of the People Act, 1951 (Sections 123(3)/123(3A):** classify appeals to religion, race, caste, community, language and promotion of enmity as “corrupt practices” during elections.
 - **Model Code of Conduct:** Prohibit inflammatory, communal campaigning; Election Commission can censure and temporarily bar leaders.
 - **Programme and Advertising Codes:** under the Cable TV Network Rules and similar guidelines for OTT/intermediaries attempt to curb incitement to violence or communal disharmony.

Previous Attempts to Define Hate Speech

- **Law Commission of India (267th Report -2017):** Proposed insertion of:
 - **Section 153C IPC-** “Prohibiting incitement to hatred.”
 - **Section 505A IPC-** “Causing fear, alarm or provocation of violence in certain cases.”

These provisions focussed on **incitement to hatred and violence**, not mere offence, but were never enacted by Parliament.

- **Private Member's "Hate Speech and Hate Crimes (Prevention) Bill, 2022":** Introduced in the Rajya Sabha; sought formal definitions of "hate speech" and "hate crime," and proposed omitting Sections 153A and 295A of IPC in favour of more precise provisions. It lapsed without being passed.

Way Forward:

- **Adopt a Clear, Narrow Statutory Definition** that targets *incitement to discrimination or violence*.
- **Strengthen Enforcement with Safeguards:** Ensure uniform application of laws through trained police and nodal officers; introduce mandatory, time-bound review of FIRs to prevent misuse and selective targeting.
- **Enhance Online Regulation with Due Process:** Create transparent standards for blocking or removing digital hate content, with written orders, appeal mechanisms and platform accountability.
- **Improve Investigation and Prosecution Capacity:** Establish specialized units, digital forensics support and fast-track courts to address low conviction rates and ensure timely justice.
- **Political and Electoral Reforms:** Empower the Election Commission to impose stronger sanctions for hate speech during campaigns and enforce strict codes of conduct for political actors.
- **Community-Level Prevention and Counter-Speech:** Promote civic education, interfaith initiatives and responsible media practices to counter inflammatory narratives and rebuild trust.



Independent Creators v/s Media Giants

An acclaimed photographer-filmmaker recently sued Zee Media Corporation Ltd (ZMCL) for copyright infringement, alleging unauthorized broadcast of his exclusive cheetah translocation footage without credit or compensation.

Case Background

- ➔ **Copyright Infringement Suit:** Filmmaker-photographer **Ronny Sen** filed a copyright infringement suit against ZMCL seeking **over ₹18 crore** in damages. The **Commercial Court at Rajarhat (West Bengal)** admitted the suit and issued notice to **ZMCL**. The case highlights tensions between independent creators and large media networks.
- ➔ **Footage in Dispute:** relates to a **12-second video clip** filmed during the **September 2022 cheetah translocation to Kuno National Park, Madhya Pradesh**. Sen was reportedly the **only photographer inside the aircraft** transporting cheetahs from South Africa. The clip, showing a cheetah inside its transport crate, was produced under a **National Geographic contract**, with Sen **retaining copyright and licensing rights**.
- ➔ **Allegations Against Zee:** Sen alleges that **Zee News** broadcast and streamed the clip in **September, 2022** without permission. The channel allegedly labelled the footage "**super exclusive**", implying exclusive access. Sen claims this **misrepresented authorship** and denied him **credit and compensation**.

Copyright and Moral Rights involved in the Case: The suit is based on the **Copyright Act, 1957**, which grants the copyright owner exclusive rights to reproduce and publicly communicate a work; unauthorized use amounts to infringement.

- ➔ Sen's core argument relies on **Section 57 (moral rights)**, which operate independently of economic rights. Moral rights include the **Right of Attribution** (to be identified as the author) and the **Right to Protect the Work from Distortion or Misrepresentation** that harms the creator's reputation.

Why is the claim over ₹18 crore?

- ➔ **Statutory fines are limited:** While the Copyright Act prescribes fines of ₹50,000-₹2 lakh for infringement, Sen's claim is a **civil damages suit**, not a criminal penalty.
- ➔ **Loss of licensing revenue:** Sen argues that international broadcasters would have paid a premium for the rare footage but allegedly refrained after Zee branded it as "super exclusive".
- ➔ **Loss of artistic value:** Mass telecast in a sensational news format, he claims, diminished the footage value as collectible art and high-end documentary material.
- ➔ **Loss of future OTT opportunities:** The "exclusive" claim allegedly cast doubt on Sen's ownership, affecting potential documentary deals with global OTT platforms.
- ➔ **Punitive damages:** A major component seeks punitive damages, arguing the infringement was willful, profit-driven, and part of a wider industry practice requiring deterrence.

What about the Fair Dealing Clause?

Media outlets typically invoke **fair dealing** under Section 52(1)(a)(iii) for reporting current events. Sen argues this defence fails here because **source attribution is mandatory**, which Zee allegedly did not provide.

Implications for Independent Creators

- **Precedent-setting value:** The case could clarify and strengthen legal protections for independent artists against unauthorized use by large media corporations.
- **Recognition of moral rights:** A clear ruling would reinforce creators' rights to **attribution and integrity**, not merely monetary compensation.
- **Deterrance against misuse:** Substantial damages could discourage media houses from misappropriating creators' work and branding it as exclusive content.
- **Bargaining power:** A favourable judgment would improve the negotiating position of independent creators when dealing with major broadcasters.
- **Industry-wide signal:** The case may prompt media organizations to adopt stricter compliance and licensing practices.



SC Stays Delhi HC Order in Sengar Case

The Supreme Court (SC) recently **stayed the Delhi High Court's (HC) order** that had suspended the sentence of Unnao rape case convict **Kuldeep Singh Sengar** and directed his conditional release. As a result, the **impugned High Court order will not operate**, and the convict **shall continue to remain in custody**.

Legal Definition of "Public Servant" & Why MPs/MLAs Are Excluded

- **General Criminal Law (IPC/BNS 2023):** Defines "public servant" as government officials such as bureaucrats, police, judges, and defence personnel who are **in the service or executive pay of the government**.

- While legislators get remuneration (salary/allowances), it's for legislative, not executive, roles, meaning they aren't directly "in the pay of the Government" in the executive sense.

- **Status of MPs/MLAs:** Elected legislators are **not government employees**; they are not appointed by the State and are paid from the **Consolidated Fund**, not as salaried servants.

Case Background

- **The Unnao Rape Case:** Kuldeep Singh Sengar, a four-time Uttar Pradesh MLA later expelled from the BJP, was convicted in the Unnao rape case involving severe abuse of power.
- **Convictions and Appeals:** Sengar had **two convictions under appeal** before the **Delhi HC**-
 - In 2019, he was awarded **life imprisonment** under the POCSO Act for rape of a minor, convicted under **Section 5(c)** (aggravated penetrative sexual assault by a public servant).
 - ✓ In 2020, in a separate case, he was sentenced to **10 years' imprisonment** for culpable homicide not amounting to murder in connection with the death of the survivor's father in judicial custody.
- **Delhi HC Verdict:** The court granted relief to Sengar on the ground that a sitting MLA is **not a "public servant" under the IPC or POCSO Act**. It held that the trial court **erroneously relied on the Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA), 1988** which includes MPs/MLAs, to apply **Section 5(c) of the POCSO Act**. The HC stated that:
 - ✓ **POCSO does not define "public servant" on its own.**
 - ✓ It allows reliance on definitions in the **IPC, CrPC, Juvenile Justice (JJ) Act, and Information Technology Act**. Therefore, the **IPC definition (Section 21)** must apply, not the PCA definition.
 - Section 21 of IPC covers government officers, judges, police, defence personnel, and persons in government service or pay. Legislators are **not considered to be in the service or pay of the government**.
 - ✓ The **Supreme Court (SC)** has consistently held that MPs/MLAs are **not public servants** under general criminal law. Hence, the HC made a **prima facie finding** that Sengar could not be punished under Section 5(c) POCSO.
- **Life Sentence Suspended:** While deciding suspension of sentence pending appeal, the court noted:
 - ✓ The **core legal issue** (whether Section 3 POCSO applies) requires full examination at the final appeal stage. Even if **Section 3 (penetrative sexual assault)** applies, under **Section 4 POCSO as it stood before the 2019 amendment**, the **minimum punishment was 7 years**.
 - ✓ Sengar has already undergone **7 years and 5 months** of imprisonment. Given delay in disposal of the appeal, this weighed in favour of suspension.

Hence, they are excluded under IPC/BNS.

- **POCSO Act:** Follows the IPC definition of “public servant”; therefore, MPs/MLAs are **not covered**.

Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988: Explicitly includes MPs/MLAs as “public servants” **only for corruption offences**.

Judicial clarification: The SC confirmed MPs/MLAs as public servants under the PCA (1997) and later clarified (2024) that they can be prosecuted for **both taking and giving bribes**, without parliamentary immunity.

What did the SC Rule?

The Court observed that it ordinarily does not stay bail or release orders without hearing the released person. However, given the **peculiar facts** including Sengar’s **separate conviction and continued custody under Section 304 Part II IPC** (*culpable homicide not amounting to murder*), the Court found it appropriate to **stay the HC’s order**. The Court clarified that the **victim/survivor has an independent statutory right** to approach the SC.

Concerns and Wider Implications of Delhi HC’s Verdict

- **Dilution of Legislative Intent of POCSO:** The POCSO Act was enacted to impose **stricter liability and enhanced punishment** on offenders, particularly those exercising **authority or influence** over children. Excluding elected representatives from scope of “public servant” risks **undermining the aggravating framework** built into the law.
- **Unequal and Selective Accountability:** Exclusion of MPs and MLAs under general criminal law and POCSO creates **inconsistency in legal accountability**, allowing legislators to invoke public servant status selectively.
- **Erosion of Public Confidence in Criminal Justice:** Suspension of sentence in cases involving **serious sexual offences by powerful political figures** may generate perceptions of preferential treatment.
- **Need for Legislative Clarification and Reform:** The case highlights the need to **re-examine statutory definitions of “public servant”**, especially where crimes involve **abuse of authority, power asymmetry, or public office**. Clear legislative intent is required to prevent interpretative loopholes in grave offences.



VB – G RAM G Act

The Viksit Bharat – Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB – G RAM G) bill, which replaces the now repealed Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has received President’s assent

Key provisions

- ✓ The bill enhances the statutory wage employment guarantee to **125 days (from 100 days under MGNREGA)** per rural household in every financial year, for adults who volunteer to undertake unskilled manual work.
- ✓ Every State Government is required to prepare a scheme for giving effect to the guarantee proposed under this bill, within six months of the commencement of the Act.
- ✓ It will operate as a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS)**, with a fund sharing pattern of 90:10 for North-Eastern and Himalayan States/UT and 60:40 for all other States.
- ✓ To promote inclusive growth and equitable distribution of financial resources in a fair manner, the bill provides for **Normative Allocation to States based** on objective parameters.
- ✓ Under the Bill, **wage rates will be notified by the Central Government** and, until such notification, the existing MGNREGA wage rates will continue to apply.
- ✓ It provides for **Unemployment allowance** if employment is not provided within 15 days, at prescribed rates, to be paid by the State Governments.
- ✓ All works under the new scheme shall be originated from the **Viksit Gram Panchayat Plans (VGPPs)** consolidated at the Block, District and State levels.
- ✓ This will be further aggregated into the **Viksit Bharat National Rural Infrastructure Stack**, creating a unified national framework for rural public works. The stack will encompass four thematic focus domains:
 - ✓ Water security through water-related work;
 - ✓ Core rural infrastructure;
 - ✓ Livelihood-related infrastructure;
 - ✓ Works for the mitigation of extreme weather events.
- ✓ These plans will be integrated with the **PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan**.
- ✓ The Bill mandates a comprehensive governance ecosystem built on digital public infrastructure, including biometric authentication, spatial-technology-enabled planning and monitoring.
- ✓ It incorporates mobile-based reporting with real-time dashboards, AI-enabled analytics and strengthened social audit mechanisms, ensuring transparent, efficient and high-integrity

Issues with the bill

Increased funding burden for States

- In contrast to MGNREGA, VB-G RAM G Act proposes a higher share of states in the funding.
- Under the MGNREGA, the Centre was required to make **100% payment for wages and share 75% of material and administrative costs** with states.
- In FY 2024-25, the total expenditure on MGNREGA was Rs 1.04 lakh crore, of which Rs 85,640.55 crore was borne by the Centre.
- Of the total spending, Rs 73,337 crore was the wage bill paid entirely by the Centre. On an average, the Centre funded 90% of the scheme's overall fiscal burden, with the states paying for the remaining 10%.
- However, a majority of the states would have to pay much more now, with the new scheme proposing 60:40 funding ratio.
- The Ministry of Rural Development estimates that the annual expenditure on the new scheme would be around Rs 1,51,282 crore.
- In this the Central share would be Rs 95,692.31 crore, with the remaining amount of Rs 55,589.69 crore to be released by the states.
- Based on the FY 2024-25 expenditure date, the new funding pattern is expected to put an **additional annual fiscal burden of around Rs 30,000 crore annually**.
 - This additional fiscal burden on states comes at a time when their own revenues are growing moderately, and debt remains high.
- For fiscally weaker states that already depend heavily on Union transfers, even small percentage increases translate into **difficult trade-offs across other social sectors such as health, education, and nutrition**.

Normative allocation

- The new normative allocation formula transforms the method of allocation of resources into a purely top-down process (budget-capped), unlike MGNREGA which was a bottom-up process (demand driven).
- As per the Bill, the Central Government shall determine the state-wise normative allocation for each financial year, based on objective parameters as prescribed by the Central Government.
- Any expenditure incurred by a State in excess of its normative allocation shall be borne by the State Government.
- This provision is likely to affect states that see a higher demand under MGNREGA.

Pause in the scheme

- Unlike the MGNREGA, the bill introduces provisions for pausing the scheme for 60 days during sowing and harvesting to ensure adequate agricultural labour availability. States will have to notify the 60-day period in advance.
- While the provision for pause may address the concerns over non-availability of labour for farm work during the peak agricultural season, it would effectively result in a shorter window to avail the new scheme.
- India has a diverse agriculture calendar with crops varying from one region to another.
- Thus, they will have to issue distinct notifications for different areas based on agro-climatic zones, local patterns of agricultural activities or other factors.

India–Russia Summit 2025

- Russian President Vladimir Putin paid an official state visit to India to attend 23rd India–Russia Summit.
- The Indian govt. extended an exceptionally warm welcome to Russian President Vladimir Putin, with PM Modi personally receiving him at the Delhi airport, hosting a private dinner, and later attending a state banquet held by President Droupadi Murmu.
- PM Modi described the India–Russia partnership as steady and reliable “like a pole star.”

Strengthening the Strategic Partnership

- The summit reaffirmed the long-standing India–Russia strategic partnership built on defence, energy, and technological cooperation.
- Despite Western sanctions on Russia, bilateral trade crossed **USD 65 billion** in 2024, largely driven by discounted Russian crude.

Key Outcomes and Strategic Significance

- **Programme 2030: Expanding Economic Cooperation**
 - India and Russia adopted *Programme 2030* to deepen strategic economic ties.
 - Key goals include:
 - ♣ Facilitating bilateral trade settlement in **national currencies**
 - ♣ Removing non-tariff barriers
 - ♣ Diversifying the trade basket
 - ♣ Boosting investments in non-energy sectors
 - Sectors like fertilizers, railways, pharmaceuticals, minerals, and critical raw materials are central to India’s growth, and Russia’s vast resources make it a natural partner.
 - Achieving **\$100 billion in trade by 2030** is considered feasible if these steps succeed.
- **Labour Mobility Agreement**
 - A new regulated labour mobility pathway was launched.
 - Allows Indian workers—from construction, healthcare, services—to take up jobs in Russia under safe and formalised channels.
 - Benefits include: Safer migration; Addressing Russia’s labour shortages; New employment opportunities for Indian youth.
- **Advancement in Nuclear Energy Cooperation**
 - Expanded collaboration on:
 - ♣ Small Modular Reactors (SMRs)
 - ♣ Additional Kudankulam units
 - ♣ Nuclear fuel supply, safety, and training
 - SMRs positioned as vital to India’s long-term clean energy strategy.
- **Boost to Defence Manufacturing & Technology Sharing**
 - Focus on deeper technology transfer and co-production in India under ‘Make in India’.
 - Discussions included:
 - ♣ Stabilising spare parts supply chains
 - ♣ A long-term roadmap for defence industrial cooperation

- o Before the visit, there was widespread speculation about major defence deals involving aircraft, missiles, drones, and air-defence systems.

- o However, the meeting ended without any announcements, signalling that defence cooperation did not move forward in any significant way.

- **Trade Expansion & Logistics Connectivity**

- o Aim to rebalance trade currently skewed due to oil imports.

- o Key initiatives:

- ♣ Expanding Indian exports (pharma, textiles, machinery, food products)
- ♣ Creating a **bilateral payment settlement system** resilient to geopolitical shocks
- ♣ Progress on the **Chennai–Vladivostok maritime corridor**

- o Industry sees major opportunities in FMCG, engineering goods, agri-tech.

- **Free 30-Day e-Tourist Visa for Russians**

- o India announced free, double-entry 30-day e-tourist visas for all Russian nationals.
- o Expected to: Increase tourism inflow; Strengthen cultural ties; Boost hospitality, retail and wellness sectors
- o Russia likely to consider reciprocal easing for Indian travellers.

- **Technology, Space & Energy Cooperation**

- o **Technology**

- ♣ Plans for joint work in cybersecurity, AI, digital public infrastructure.
- ♣ Russian firms keen to partner with Indian IT and fintech companies.

- o **Space**

- ♣ Continued cooperation on astronaut training, satellite navigation, and joint research.

- o **Energy**

- ♣ Reviewed: Long-term crude supply; LNG procurement; Indian investments in Russian petroleum projects.



India–Russia Summit: Strategic Optics and Geopolitical Signalling



High-Profile Optics and Diplomatic Messaging

- ✓ President Putin's warm reception in India conveyed deliberate strategic signalling.
- ✓ For India, it reaffirmed confidence in its long-standing Russia partnership amid global polarisation.
- ✓ For Russia, it reinforced India's continued relevance in Moscow's foreign policy priorities.

Sensitive Timing and Global Context

- ✓ The summit occurred at a pivotal moment:
 - Russia holds battlefield advantage,
 - Ukraine faces severe setbacks,
 - The U.S. is less directly engaged.
- ✓ India's call for broader peace aligns with Washington's support for the Trump-led initiative.
- ✓ Europe remains the main dissenting voice in the emerging peace framework.

Strategic Recalibration in a Changing World

- ✓ The most important outcome of the summit is the **strategic reshaping of the India–Russia partnership**.
- ✓ Both countries are adapting their ties to the shifting U.S.–China power equation, which increasingly nudges them closer together.

India's Position on Europe and the Ukraine Crisis

- ✓ India believes sustainable peace in Ukraine requires direct dialogue between Russia and Europe, not Indian mediation.
- ✓ Its stance reflects historical diplomatic lessons — understanding when to intervene and when to stay neutral.

India's Broader Strategic Vision

- ✓ India positions itself as a trusted partner to multiple sides, navigating polarisation without aligning exclusively with any bloc.
- ✓ This balanced approach strengthens India's credibility as a stable actor in global diplomacy.

- ❖ Energy remains the backbone of bilateral engagement.
- **Investments in Fertilizer Supply Chain**
 - Indian and Russian fertilizer companies signed an MoU to build a urea production plant in Russia, strengthening India's fertilizer security and supply chain stability.

Visit of Indian PM to Jordan, Ethiopia & Oman

Prime Minister Narendra Modi undertook a three-nation visit to Jordan, Ethiopia and Oman. This visit was aimed at strengthening India's ties with key partners in West Asia and Africa.

1. Visit to Jordan

- At the invitation of King Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein, PM Modi visited Jordan to review the full spectrum of bilateral relations and exchange views on key regional issues.
- The visit coincided with the **75th anniversary** of India–Jordan diplomatic relations. This was the first such visit by an Indian Prime Minister in 37 years.
- Jordanian Crown Prince Al Hussein bin Abdullah II personally drove PM Modi to the Jordan Museum. This reflects the warmth of ties between India and the Arab nation.
 - The Jordan Museum in Amman's Ras al-Ein district is the country's largest museum, documenting the region's history from prehistoric times to the present.
 - It houses rare artefacts such as 1.5-million-year-old animal bones and the 9,000-year-old Ain Ghazal statues.
- During this visit, 5 MoUs were signed in the areas of renewable energy, water resource management, cultural exchange, digital solution and twinning between Petra and Ellora.
- India proposed raising **bilateral trade to USD 5 billion** over the next five years.
- The Prime Minister also suggested collaboration between Jordan's digital payment systems and India's UPI.

2. State Visit to Ethiopia

- In the second leg, at the invitation of Abiy Ahmed Ali, the PM Modi undertook his first-ever visit to Ethiopia. During this visit, PM Modi addressed the Joint Session of Ethiopian Parliament.
- **Highest Civilian Honour to PM Modi**
 - Ethiopian Prime Minister conferred the country's highest award, the Great Honor Nishan of Ethiopia, on Prime Minister Modi.
- **Elevation of Bilateral Relations**

India – Jordan Bilateral Relation

- India and Jordan share warm and longstanding ties rooted in mutual respect and diplomatic goodwill.
- Diplomatic relations were formalised in 1950, following the 1947 agreement on friendship and cooperation.

■ Trade and Economic Cooperation

- Economic ties form a central pillar of the relationship. India is currently Jordan's **third-largest trading partner**, with bilateral trade reaching nearly USD 2.9 billion in 2023–24.
- Fertilisers—especially phosphates and potash—are the cornerstone of trade, supported by major joint ventures such as the Jordan India Fertiliser Company (JIFCO).
- Indian investments are also prominent in Jordan's garment and manufacturing sectors.

■ Science, Technology and Digital Collaboration

- A flagship initiative is the India–Jordan Centre of Excellence in Information Technology at Al-Hussein Technical University, established with Indian support.

- India and Ethiopia agreed to elevate their relationship to a **Strategic Partnership**, reflecting deeper political trust and long-term cooperation.
- **Economic and Investment Ties**
 - Ethiopia highlighted strong economic growth and rising foreign investment, noting that India is the leading source of FDI, with over 615 Indian companies operating in Ethiopia.
 - Indian investments exceeds USD 6.5 billion in sectors like manufacturing and pharmaceuticals.
- **Other Outcomes of the visit**
 - Agreement on Co-operation and Mutual Administrative Assistance in Custom Matters
 - MoU for Establishing Data Centre at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia
 - Implementing Arrangement for Co-operation in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations Training
 - Signing of the MoU on Debt Restructuring in respect of Ethiopia under the G20 Common Framework
 - Doubling of scholarships to Ethiopian scholars under ICCR scholarship programme
 - Specialized short term courses to the students and professionals of Ethiopia in the field of Artificial Intelligence under the ITEC programme
 - India to help augment the capacity of the **Mahatma Gandhi Hospital in Addis Ababa** in the fields of maternal healthcare, neonatal care.

3. State Visit to Oman

- In the final leg, at the invitation of Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, PM Modi visited Oman for the second time. The visit marked **70 years** of diplomatic relations and builds on the Sultan's State visit to India in December 2023.
- This visit to Oman yielded significant outcomes aimed at deepening the **India–Oman Strategic Partnership**, with a strong focus on economic integration, maritime cooperation, agriculture, education, and cultural ties.
- **Economic Integration and Trade Expansion**
 - A **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)** was concluded to strengthen economic and commercial integration.
 - ♣ This made Oman the **second West Asian country** after the **UAE** to conclude such an agreement with India
 - The agreement aims to reduce trade barriers, boost bilateral trade and investment flows, create jobs, and unlock

India – Oman Bilateral relation

- ◆ Oman is a core pillar of India's West Asia engagement. The relationship gained strategic depth with the 2008 Strategic Partnership Agreement, and Oman's invitation as a guest nation during India's G20 Presidency in 2023 reflected growing mutual trust.
- ◆ **Strong Defence and Security Cooperation**
 - ▶ Defence cooperation is guided by a 2005 MoU and is among India's most advanced in the Gulf.
 - ▶ Oman is the **first Gulf country** to conduct tri-services exercises with India.
 - ▶ Indian naval operations in the Gulf of Oman and the **2018 Duqm Port logistics agreement** enhance India's maritime reach and security presence.
- ◆ **Expanding Economic and Investment Ties**
 - ▶ Economic relations have grown steadily, with bilateral trade reaching \$10.6 billion in FY 2024–25.
 - ✓ Oman is India's **third-largest export** destination within the GCC.
 - ✓ India is also Oman's fourth-largest source of non-oil imports and third-largest market for non-oil exports.
 - ▶ Omani investments in India exceed \$600 million, supported by the Oman–India Joint Investment Fund, underscoring long-term economic partnership.
- ◆ **Digital and Fintech Cooperation**
 - ▶ Fintech has emerged as a new area of collaboration. The linkage of payment systems through an MoU between the Central Bank of Oman and NPCI led to the launch of RuPay cards in Oman, extending India's Digital Public Infrastructure globally.

opportunities across major economic sectors.

- **Maritime Heritage and Cultural Cooperation**
 - An MoU on Maritime Heritage and Museums was signed to promote collaboration in maritime museums, including India's National Maritime Heritage Complex at Lothal.
 - It facilitates exchanges of artefacts and expertise, joint exhibitions, research, and capacity building to enhance tourism and cultural linkages.
- **Agriculture and Allied Sectors Cooperation**
 - An MoU on Agriculture and Allied Sectors established an umbrella framework covering agriculture, animal husbandry, and fisheries.
- **Millet Cultivation and Agri-Food Innovation**
 - An Executive Programme on Millet Cultivation and Agri-Food Innovation was adopted, leveraging India's scientific expertise and Oman's agro-climatic conditions to advance millet production, research, and promotion.
- **Joint Vision on Maritime Cooperation**
 - India and Oman adopted a Joint Vision Document on Maritime Cooperation, strengthening collaboration in regional maritime security, the blue economy, and the sustainable use of ocean resources.

India-New Zealand FTA

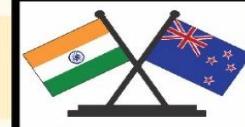
- India and **New Zealand** have concluded negotiations on a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA), granting India tariff-free access to New Zealand's market.
- The pact aims to double bilateral trade to \$5 billion within five years and will be formally signed in the first half of 2026.

Key Highlights

- **Trade, Investment and Strategic Scope**
 - The FTA is designed to deepen economic engagement and broaden cooperation beyond trade, covering defence, education, sports, innovation and people-to-people ties.
 - New Zealand is expected to invest \$20 billion in India over the next 15 years as part of the deal.
- **Tariff Liberalisation and Market Access**
 - **95% of New Zealand's exports** will see tariffs eliminated or reduced.
 - **57% of exports to India** become duty-free from day one, rising to **82%** on full implementation; the remaining **13%** will face substantial tariff cuts.
 - India has safeguarded sensitive sectors, offering no concessions on dairy, onions, sugar, spices, edible oils, rubber, rice, wheat and soya.
- **Sectoral Gains and Employment Impact**
 - The agreement is expected to boost India's labour-intensive sectors such as apparel, leather, textiles, rubber, footwear and home décor, while also promoting exports of automobiles, auto components, machinery, electronics, electrical goods and pharmaceuticals.
- **Services, Mobility and Health Cooperation**
 - **Mobility:** 5,000 temporary employment visas annually for Indian professionals, valid up to three years.

- o **Services Access:** Market access across **118 services sectors** and MFN status in **139 sectors**, including IT, engineering, healthcare, education and construction.
- o **Health Annex:** A dedicated health and traditional medicine annex—New Zealand's first with any country—facilitates trade in healthcare and traditional medicine services.
- **Overall Significance**
 - o The India–New Zealand FTA strengthens economic ties, expands services and workforce mobility, protects sensitive domestic sectors, and positions the partnership as a broad-based strategic and economic collaboration.

India – NZ Bilateral Relation



⦿ Historical Foundations

- **India and New Zealand** established diplomatic relations in 1952.
- Ties are rooted in Commonwealth membership, common law traditions and shared democratic values.
- Long-standing sporting and tourism links—especially cricket, hockey and mountaineering—have nurtured goodwill.

⦿ Strategic Vision and Policy Frameworks

- New Zealand has prioritised India through initiatives such as Opening Doors to India (2011) and the NZ Inc. India Strategy.
- The India–NZ 2025: Investing in the Relationship strategy aims to build a deeper, long-term partnership across political, economic and people-centric domains.

⦿ Trade and Economic Engagement

- Bilateral trade (2024–25): US\$ 2.4 billion.
- Key sectors: education, tourism, dairy, food processing, pharmaceuticals, renewable energy and critical minerals.
- Indian exports: pharmaceuticals, gems & jewellery, textiles, vehicles.
- Indian imports: logs, forestry products, wool, edible fruits and nuts.

⦿ Defence and Maritime Cooperation

- Growing defence ties include regular Indian Navy port calls, leadership exchanges and cooperation under Combined Task Force-150, supporting maritime security and Indo-Pacific stability.

⦿ Education and Knowledge Partnerships

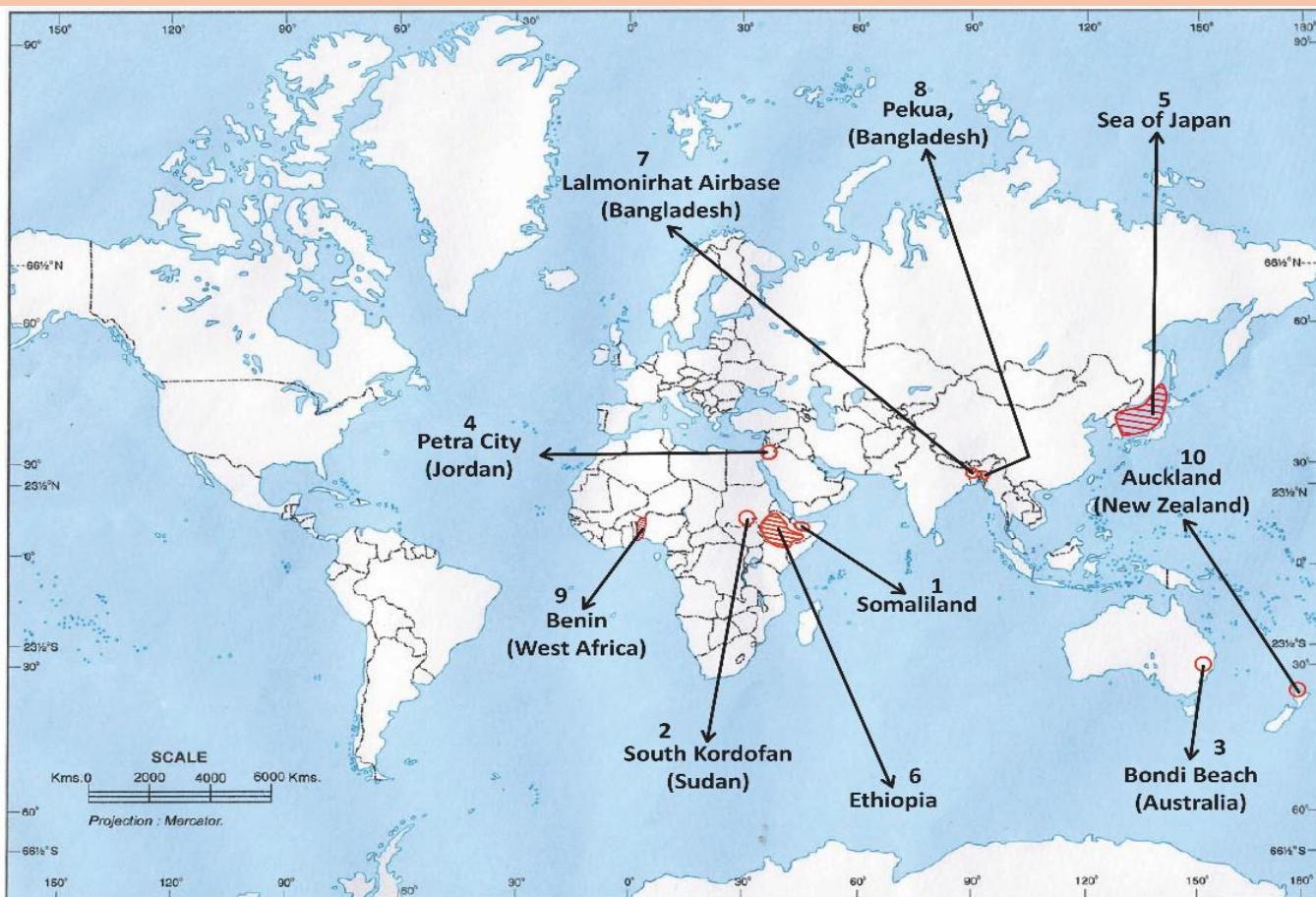
- India is the second-largest source of international students in New Zealand (~8,000).
- Collaboration spans the NZ Centre at IIT Delhi, joint research (cancer, robotics, cybersecurity, waste management), and education links with GIFT City and IIM Ahmedabad.

⦿ People-to-People and Cultural Links

- Indian-origin population in New Zealand: ~292,000; Hindi is the fifth most spoken Language.

MAPS: PLACES IN NEWS

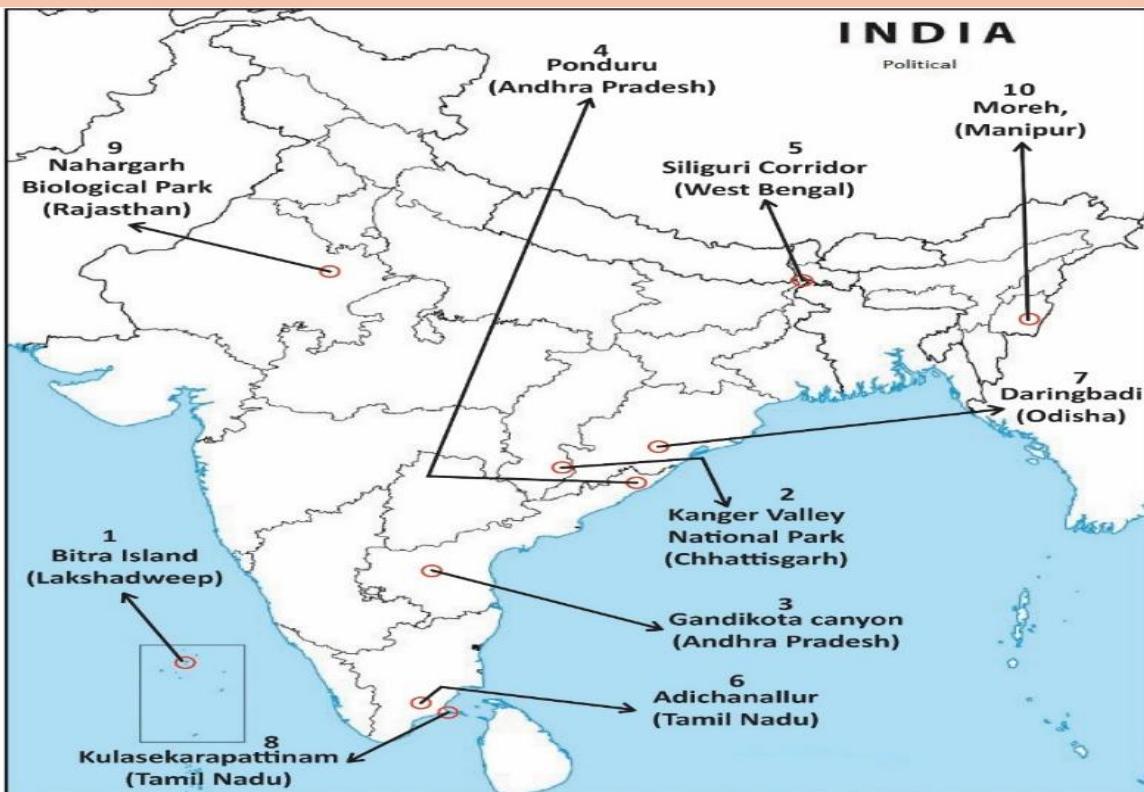
International Places in News



1	Somaliland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Israel became the first country to formally recognise the self-proclaimed Republic of Somaliland as an independent state on December 26, 2025. • The move drew strong condemnation from Somalia and neighbouring countries, reopening debates on sovereignty and regional stability in the Horn of Africa. • Geographical location <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Somaliland is located in the Horn of Africa, occupying the northwestern part of the Somali Peninsula, with its northern border on the strategic Gulf of Aden. ◦ It shares land borders with Djibouti to the northwest, Ethiopia to the west and south, and Somalia (specifically the Puntland region) to the east, with its capital in Hargeisa. • Somaliland: A Brief Historical Background <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Somaliland traces its origins to British Somaliland, a protectorate (1884–1920) that became a formal colony in 1920. ◦ It gained independence in June 1960 but voluntarily merged with Italian Somaliland to form the Somali Republic. 	
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Following decades of repression under Siad Barre's regime, particularly against the Isaaq clan, the Somali National Movement (SNM) defeated the regime. o In 1991, Somaliland declared independence and has since functioned as a de facto state with its own currency, passport, police and political institutions, though it lacked international recognition until now. <p>Maritime Importance: It overlooks the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, a critical global "choke point" through which nearly 10-12% of world trade and oil passes.</p>
2	South Kordofan (Sudan)	<p>The UN Security Council has strongly condemned drone attacks on UN peacekeepers in Sudan's South Kordofan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location & Borders: It shares a sensitive international border with South Sudan and domestic borders with North Kordofan, West Kordofan, and White Nile states • Ethnic Diversity: Home to the Nuba people (a collection of diverse African ethnic groups) and Arab pastoralist tribes like the Misseriya and Hawazma.
3	Bondi Beach (Australia)	<p>A terrorist attack occurred at Bondi Beach in Sydney, Australia, during a celebration of the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Located 7 km east of the Sydney on the Pacific Ocean coastline. • Beach Type: It is a Crescent-shaped Embayed Beach, approximately 1 km long. • It's a densely populated coastal suburb. It benefits from sea breezes that can help moderate local temperatures and partially counteract urban heat island effects.
4	Petra City (Jordan)	<p>Jordan and India have signed an agreement to twin the UNESCO Heritage sites city of Petra with the Ellora Caves (Maharashtra).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Petra, known as the "Rose Red City," is a historical and archaeological marvel in southern Jordan. It was the capital of Nabataean Kingdom (4th century BC – 106 AD). • Location: Situated between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba, in a basin surrounded by mountains forming the eastern flank of the Arabah valley. • Hybrid Style: The architecture is a "Melting Pot," blending Hellenistic (Greek), Roman, and native Nabataean styles.
5	Sea of Japan	<p>U.S. nuclear-capable B-52 bombers flew over the Sea of Japan alongside Japanese fighter, following Chinese and Russian drills around U.S. allies Japan and South Korea.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Sea of Japan (referred to as the East Sea in South Korea) is a marginal sea of the western Pacific Ocean. • Boundaries: It is bordered by Japan to the east and south, Russia to the north, and North and South Korea to the west. • Security Flashpoint: The sea is a frequent site for North Korean missile tests and joint naval drills between the US, Japan, and South Korea, as well as Russia and China.
6	Ethiopia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Roof of Africa": Ethiopia is dominated by the Ethiopian Highlands (Abyssinian Massif), forming the largest continuous high-altitude area in Africa. • The Great Rift Valley: This tectonic trough bisects the country diagonally from the northeast (Afar Triangle) to the southwest.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highest & Lowest Points: Ras Dashen (highest peak in Ethiopia) and the Danakil Depression (one of the hottest, driest and lowest place on Earth)
7	LaMonirhat Airbase (Bangladesh)	<p>China is constructing the runway of the Bangladesh Air Force's LaMonirhat Airbase.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Situated in the LaMonirhat district of Rangpur Division, barely 12–15 km from the Indian border (West Bengal's Cooch Behar district). • The "Chicken's Neck" Threat: The airbase is approximately 135 kms from the Siliguri Corridor. • Historical Overview: Built in 1931 by the British, the airfield spans about 1,166 acres with a 4-km runway. It was briefly reactivated for civilian use in 1958 before remaining largely dormant for decades. • Proximity to Himalayan Frontiers: Its location allows for aerial oversight of both the Indian plains and the sensitive mountainous tri-junction of India, Bhutan, and China.
8	Pekua, (Bangladesh)	<p>China is also building a base for 8 submarines in Pekua, Bangladesh.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pekua is a coastal Upazila of the Cox's Bazar district in southeastern Bangladesh. • BNS Pekua (Submarine Base): Formerly known as BNS Sheikh Hasina, this is Bangladesh's first full-fledged submarine base was built with Chinese assistance. • Matarbari Connection: Pekua is located immediately north of Matarbari Island, where Bangladesh's first deep-sea port (financed by Japan/JICA) is scheduled to begin full commercial operations in late 2026.
9	Benin (West Africa)	<p>The Benin events mark the 3rd coup attempt and first failed coup this year in the Sahel region.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topography: The Atakora Mountains: In the northwest, these are the highest points in the country. • There have been 17 coup attempts in Africa since 2020, including 11 successful coups. • This makes the African coup belt stretching across the Sahel and west Africa the global epicentre of coups.
10	Auckland (New Zealand)	<p>A Sikh religious procession in Auckland had to pause when a New Zealand Citizens blocked it with a Haka display.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Auckland is New Zealand's largest city and economic powerhouse. • The Auckland Volcanic Field: Auckland is built upon a dormant but potentially active monogenetic volcanic field. • Dual Harbour Location: It is one of the few cities in the world with harbours on two separate major bodies of water: the Waitematā Harbour (Pacific Ocean) to the east and the Manukau Harbour (Tasman Sea) to the west.



1	Bitra Island (Lakshadweep)	<p>The Chief of Staff of the Southern Naval Command said the Navy is setting up a detachment in Bitra Island.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scale & Shape: A tiny, oval-shaped island measuring just 0.105 Sq Km The Massive Lagoon: Despite its minute land area, Bitra possesses the largest lagoon in Lakshadweep. The "Triple Sentinel" Grid: Bitra joins INS Dweeprakshak (Kavaratti) and INS Jatayu (Minicoy) to form a three-point maritime surveillance grid in the Arabian Sea.
2	Kanger Valley National Park (Chhattisgarh)	<p>The Chhattisgarh government has stepped up efforts to secure Kanger Valley National Park for the official status of a UNESCO World Heritage Site.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Topography: It lies on the Bastar Plateau, forming a transition zone between the Eastern Ghats and the Central Indian Highlands. Geomorphological and Ecological Significance: It is noted for karst limestone caves with well-developed speleothems and represents an ecotone where the northern limit of teak forests overlaps with the southern limit of sal forests.
3	Gandikota canyon (Andhra Pradesh)	<p>Gandikota canyon is emerging as tourist attraction as a major geological and heritage site.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gandikota, popularly known as the "Grand Canyon of India," is a breathtaking gorge on the right bank of the Penna River in the Kadapa district of Andhra. Rock Formation: It is primarily composed of ancient reddish Gandikota Quartzite (part of the Cuddapah Supergroup). Terrain: The region falls under a semi-arid tropical monsoon climate. It is a classic example of fluvial erosion in a sedimentary landscape.

4	Ponduru (Andhra Pradesh)	<p>Ponduru in Srikakulam gained national attention for getting GI tag for Ponduru Khadi.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ponduru is a small village in the Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh, widely regarded as the "Khadi Capital of South India" for its ultra-fine hand-spun khadi. • Mahatma Gandhi in 1921 praised and preferred Ponduru khadi over all other varieties, which is traditionally made from indigenous cotton varieties- Hill (short-staple), Punasa, and Red cotton.
5	Siliguri Corridor (West Bengal)	<p>Siliguri Corridor remained under intense surveillance due to reports of military infrastructure upgrades in neighboring border regions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encircling Nations: It is uniquely wedged between Nepal (Northwest), Bhutan (Northeast), and Bangladesh (South). • Topography: Situated in the Eastern Himalayan foothills, it is defined by the Mahananda and Teesta rivers. The terrain is a mix of dense forests, tea gardens, and flood-prone plains. • The "Chumbi Valley" Threat: To the north lies China's Chumbi Valley (Tibet), a "dagger-shaped" territory that sits just 60–130 km away. Military control of this valley allows China to potentially overlook and strike the corridor.
6	Adichanallur (Tamil Nadu)	<p>Madurai Bench of Madras High Court prohibits sand mining near Adichanallur archaeological site to protect its historical significance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Proximity: It is located near Korkai, the ancient capital and port city of the Early Pandyan Kingdom • Mining Center: Recent studies suggest Adichanallur was primarily an industrial mining site for copper, iron, and gold before being used for burials. • The "burial pits" were often repurposed shallow mining shafts. • Early Literacy: Fragments of pottery found here contain rudimentary Tamil-Brahmi (Tamizhi) inscriptions, providing early evidence of Tamil literacy & evolution of script.
7	Daringbadi (Odisha)	<p>Daringbadi, popularly known as "Kashmir of Odisha", is experiencing an intense cold wave.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The Kashmir of Odisha": This nickname is earned due to its high altitude (approx. 915 meters) and its unique winter phenomenon. • It is the only place in Odisha where snowfall (technically frozen dew) is recorded when temperatures frequently drop below 0°C. • Topography: Nestled in the Eastern Ghats, the region is characterized by lush pine forests, rolling valleys, and plateaus.
8	Kulasekarapattinam (Tamil Nadu)	<p>As per ISRO chairman V Narayanan statement, Rockets will be launched from Kulasekarapattinam from 2027.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India's Second Spaceport: Kulasekarapattinam is the site of ISRO's new Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV) complex. • The "Dogleg" Advantage: Unlike Sriharikota, which requires rockets to perform a fuel-intensive "dogleg manoeuvre" to avoid flying over Sri Lanka, rockets from Kulasekarapattinam can launch directly south over the Indian Ocean.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proximity to Mahendragiri: The site is close to the ISRO Propulsion Complex (IPRC) in Mahendragiri, significantly reducing the logistics and time required to transport rocket motors and components.
9	Nahargarh Biological Park (Rajasthan)	<p>A group of 15 tourists had a narrow escape from bus fire during a lion safari at Nahargarh Biological Park.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Location: Situated on the Jaipur-Delhi Highway (NH-8), about 12 km from Jaipur. It is part of the Nahargarh Wildlife Sanctuary (established in 1980). Topography: Nestled in the Aravalli Range, one of the world's oldest mountain systems. The terrain is characterized by rugged hills, seasonal streams, and rocky outcrops. Climate: Semi-arid, featuring Tropical Dry Deciduous and Thorny Scrub forests.
10	Moreh, (Manipur)	<p>Moreh highlights ongoing ethnic tensions along with, border trade issues near the Myanmar border</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gateway to Southeast Asia: Moreh is the starting point of the India-Myanmar-Thailand (IMT) Trilateral Highway and a key node for the Asian Highway 1 (AH1). Border Fencing & FMR: In response to the 2023–2025 ethnic conflicts and the civil war in Myanmar, the Government of India has scrapped the Free Movement Regime (FMR). As of early 2026, smart fencing and a strict border-pass system are being implemented to regulate movement. Cosmopolitan Character: Unlike many other Manipuri towns, Moreh is a "mini-India." It is inhabited by Kukis, Meiteis, Tamils, Punjabis, Nepalis, and Muslims.

Major Deltas of the World



1	Sundarbans (Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spanning across India (40%) and Bangladesh (60%), it is the <i>largest contiguous mangrove forest</i> in the world (Vital carbon sink) Active Delta: It is characterized by a "living" landscape of ever-shifting mudflats, tidal creeks, and islands. About one-third of the land surface "disappears and reappears" daily during high tides. Fauna: It is the only mangrove habitat in the world for the Royal Bengal Tiger. Conservation Status: It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, a Ramsar Site (Wetland of International Importance), and a Biosphere Reserve.
2	Nile Delta (Nile)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classic Arcuate Delta; "Cradle of Civilization." Extent: It stretches from Cairo in the south to the Mediterranean Sea in the north, covering about 160 km in length & 240 km of coastline from Alexandria to Port Said. Population Density: Although it covers only 2.4% of Egypt's total area, it hosts nearly 50% of the country's population and accounts for 63% of its arable land. Facing "<i>sediment starvation</i>" due to the Aswan High Dam; critical for Mediterranean geopolitics.
3	Mekong Delta (Mekong)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Rice Bowl of Vietnam"; crucial for ASEAN food security. Flagship Species: Home to the critically endangered Mekong Giant Catfish (one of the world's largest freshwater fish) and the Irrawaddy Dolphin. Connectivity: It is a low-lying region (mostly <2m above sea level) characterized by a "flood pulse" system where the Tonle Sap River in Cambodia reverses its <u><i>flow seasonally to fill/drain</i></u> the Great Lake. Impacted by upstream "Dam Diplomacy" in China; faces severe saline intrusion.
4	Mississippi Delta (Mississippi)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Type: A classic River-dominated Delta or Bird-Foot Delta. It forms because the river's current is stronger than the waves or tides of the Gulf of Mexico, allowing the river to "finger" out into the sea. Energy Hub: It houses the Port of South Louisiana and the Port of New Orleans, making it one of the busiest commercial waterways in the world for grain and energy exports. Sedimentation: It drains 40% of the continental United States, carrying sediment from 32 states and 2 Canadian provinces.
5	Indus Delta (Indus)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Climate: Unlike the humid Sundarbans, the Indus Delta is an Arid Delta, receiving very low rainfall (25–50 cm annually) and experiencing extreme temperatures. Key Creeks (Strategic): Sir Creek: A 96 km long tidal estuary that forms the disputed maritime border between India and Pakistan. Maritime Border Dispute: The interpretation of the "Thalweg Principle" (mid-channel boundary) in Sir Creek is a long-standing issue affecting the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and rich fishing grounds in the Arabian Sea.

6	Volga Delta (Volga)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Europe's largest Inland Delta (Caspian Sea). Type & Shape: A classic Arcuate Delta (fan-shaped), characterized by one of the most complex hydrographic networks in the world, with over 500 channels and distributaries. Famous for sturgeon (caviar) and as a major stopover for migratory birds; unique "Baer Knolls" topography.
7	Lena Delta (Lena)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> World's largest Arctic Delta located in Russia; frozen most of the year. Unique permafrost landscape; Scale: Covering approximately 30,000 Sq km. it features over 6,500 distributary channels, 30,000 lakes, and 1,500 islands. Critical indicator for monitoring Arctic climate change. Carbon Sink: The delta holds vast quantities of Dissolved Organic Carbon (DOC). It acts as a massive "carbon vault"
8	Huang He Delta (Yellow River)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lobate Delta; "Sorrow of China" due to frequent course shifts. Highest sediment load globally. The "Wandering" River: The Huang He is famous for its frequent course changes. Over the last 4,000 years, its mouth has shifted more than 800 km between the north and south of the Shandong Peninsula. The Muddiest River: It carries the world's highest sediment load—nearly 1.6 billion tons annually. This silt originates from the Loess Plateau, where the river erodes fine, wind-blown soil.
9	Danube Delta (Danube)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Danube Delta, shared primarily between Romania (86%) and Ukraine (14%), is the second-largest river delta in Europe (after the Volga). Best preserved delta in Europe. UNESCO Biosphere Reserve; Natural Filter: It acts as a massive "biological kidney," purifying the waters of Danube (which picks up waste from 10 countries) before they reach Black Sea. currently a strategic "Grain Corridor" amid the Russia-Ukraine conflict.
10	Niger Delta (Niger)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Location: Situated on the Gulf of Guinea (Atlantic Ocean), it separates the Bight of Benin from the Bight of Bonny. Formation: Created by the accumulation of silt from the Niger River and its main tributary, the Benue River. Central to Africa's oil production. Characterized by severe environmental degradation (oil spills) and resource conflicts (Gulf of Guinea). <p>"Rice Bowl of Myanmar": The delta accounts for nearly 60% of Myanmar's rice production. The fertile alluvial soil supports intensive paddy cultivation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mangrove Ecosystem: The delta was historically covered in dense mangroves (locally called <i>Kanazo</i>). However, it has one of the highest rates of mangrove loss in the world due to charcoal production and rice farming. Vital for Myanmar's agriculture; hit by Cyclone Nargis (2008).

Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishtan Bill 2025

The Union Government has proposed the **Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishtan Bill, 2025**, aimed at overhauling India's higher education regulatory system by replacing the UGC, AICTE, and NCTE with a new umbrella commission.

- This Bill was listed in the Winter Session of Parliament.

Core Objectives of the VBSA Bill

- The Bill states that its primary purpose is to enable and empower universities to achieve excellence in teaching, learning, research, and innovation. This is to be achieved through:
 - Better coordination between regulatory bodies
 - Clear determination of academic and institutional standards
 - A unified governance mechanism for higher education
- The Statement of Objects and Reasons emphasises the NEP 2020 principle of a “light but tight” regulatory structure, ensuring reduced bureaucratic complexity while maintaining strong accountability.

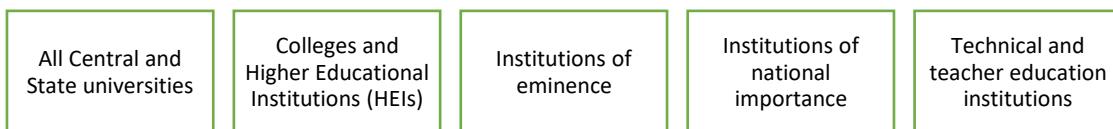
Structure of the VBSA Commission

At the centre of the proposed reforms is the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishtan (VBSA), a 12-member umbrella commission that functions as the apex authority. It will oversee three specialised councils:

- **Viksit Bharat Vinyaman Parishad (Regulatory Council)**
 - Responsible for maintaining regulatory standards
 - Coordinates governance norms in universities and colleges
- **Viksit Bharat Gunvatta Parishad (Accreditation Council)**
 - Supervises accreditation processes
 - Builds an independent ecosystem for institutional and program accreditation
- **Viksit Bharat Manak Parishad (Standards Council)**
 - Establishes academic standards
 - Ensures harmonisation of policies and quality benchmarks
- Each council can have up to 14 members. The VBSA will include members from the Education Ministry, State higher education institutions, and eminent experts.

Institutions Covered Under the Bill

- The proposed law applies to:



- However, professional programmes such as Medicine, Dentistry, Nursing, Law, Pharmacology, and Veterinary Sciences are exempted and will continue under their respective regulators.
- The Council of Architecture will remain the professional standards-setting body for architecture but will not have regulatory powers.

Key Changes Proposed Under the Bill

- **Replacing Existing Bodies**

- The VBSA Bill seeks to subsume the UGC, AICTE, and NCTE, integrating their regulatory, accreditation, and standardisation functions under one framework.
- **Separation of Funding from Regulation**
 - A major shift is the removal of grant-disbursal powers from the UGC. Funding functions will now be performed through mechanisms devised by the Ministry of Education.
 - This separation aligns with NEP-2020's recommendation to delink academic regulation from financial control.
- **Enabling Foreign Universities and Global Outreach**
 - The Regulatory Council will:
 - Set standards for foreign universities to operate in India
 - Facilitate high-performing Indian universities to set up offshore campuses
 - Prevent the commercialisation of higher education
- **Enhanced institutional autonomy:**
 - Graded and time-bound autonomy for HEIs.
 - Shift from micromanagement to self-governance.
 - Regulator to play a facilitator, not controller.
 - Single technology-driven window for approvals and compliance.
- **Outcome-based evaluation framework:**
 - Moves away from input-based UGC norms (infrastructure, faculty count), and focuses on learning outcomes, student skills, employability, societal and real-world impact.
 - It aligns with global best practices and accountability standards.

Criticism and Concerns

- Earlier attempts to reform the higher education framework, such as the **2018 Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) Bill**, faced strong criticism for placing excessive central control and weakening the role of States. Similar concerns have resurfaced.
- Key criticisms include:
 - The possibility of the Centre having disproportionate influence in appointments
 - Removal of grant-disbursal powers from an autonomous body
- However, unlike the HECI Bill, the VBSA Bill includes State representation in all three councils, partly addressing federal concerns.

Graded Penalties and Enforcement Mechanisms

- The VBSA will have significant punitive powers, including:
 - Fines beginning at Rs. 10 lakh and going up to Rs. 75 lakh
 - Possible closure of institutions for repeated non-compliance
 - Power to suspend an institution's authority to grant degrees or diplomas
 - Institutions operating without accreditation may face fines of Rs. 2 crore or more

Child Marriage in India

The Union government launched a 100-day awareness drive to mark one year of the **Bal Vivah Mukt Bharat Abhiyan**, reaffirming India's pledge to end child marriage by 2030.

While child marriage has declined over the past decade, progress remains uneven across States and socio-economic groups, leaving substantial gaps to meet the UN target.

Global Push to End Child Marriage: Targets, Stakes, and Slow Progress

- Ending child marriage is central to **SDG 5** on gender equality, with **Target 5.3** aiming to eliminate child, early, and forced marriages.
- Progress is measured by the share of women aged 20–24 married before 18.
- Experts warn that failure to end child marriage will derail at least nine SDGs, spanning poverty, health, education, economic growth, climate action, and peace.
- In 2023, UNICEF estimated **64 crore women worldwide** were married as children, with India accounting for one-third.
- At current rates, progress must accelerate 20-fold to meet the 2030 goal.

Child Marriage in India:

- **Sharp Decline, Slower Momentum** - India reduced child marriage significantly from 47.4% (2005–06) to 26.8% (2015–16), a steep 21-point fall. However, progress slowed thereafter, declining only to 23.3% by 2019–21.
- **Wide Regional Variations** - Rates remain highest in West Bengal (42%), Bihar (40%), and Tripura (39%), with several other States above the national average. In contrast, Lakshadweep, J&K, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Goa, and Nagaland report the lowest prevalence.
- **Education and Income Gaps** - Child marriage is strongly linked to socio-economic status. Nearly half of girls with no education marry before 18, compared to just 4% with higher education. Similarly, 40% of girls from the poorest households marry early, against 8% from the richest quintile.

Tackling Child Marriage in India:

- India enacted the **Prevention of Child Marriage Act, 2006**, after which child marriage rates halved.
- The **Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012** further strengthened protection.
- However, experts stress that laws alone are insufficient without changing social norms—especially by expanding girls' education, the most effective factor in delaying marriage.
- **Bal Vivah Mukt Bharat Abhiyan: On-Ground Action**
 - Under the campaign, 54,917 **Child Marriage Prevention Officers** have been appointed nationwide.
 - In one year, 1,520 child marriages were prevented through persuasion or administrative action, with Madhya Pradesh and Haryana leading.
 - Still, 198 cases could not be stopped, requiring police or child welfare intervention.
 - The campaign also works with faith leaders, youth groups, and community networks to encourage reporting and shift attitudes at the grassroots.
- **Girls' Empowerment and Welfare Schemes**
 - The **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao** scheme focuses on improving child sex ratio and girls' education, though implementation has been uneven.
 - Complementary measures include financial incentives (**Laadli schemes**), improved school sanitation, and cycles for safe travel, aimed at keeping girls in school longer.
- **State-Level Incentives: Mixed Signals**
 - Some States support girls' education through targeted aid.
 - For example, West Bengal's **Kanyashree scheme** provides annual support to girls aged 13–18 and a lump sum for those delaying marriage and pursuing higher education.

- Some women's activists argue that the State with the highest child marriage rates is sending a confusing message through the **Rupashree** scheme.
- While the scheme gives ₹25,000 to poor families only if the daughter is over 18, offering money at the time of marriage may still encourage early marriages instead of delaying them further.

Debate on Raising the Legal Age of Marriage for Women

- The Centre has proposed increasing the minimum marriage age for women to **21 years**, aligning it with men to support higher education, skill development, economic independence, and better maternal and child health.
- However, the proposal has faced opposition seeking deeper scrutiny.
- Critics caution that without parallel social reforms, the change could criminalise large sections of society, as **61% of women** aged 20–24 were married before turning 21.

CAG Findings on PM Kaushal Vikas Yojana

The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has flagged serious implementation gaps in the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) in an audit report tabled in Parliament.

Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana: An Overview

- PMKVY is the flagship skill development scheme of the Government of India, launched in July 2015 under the Skill India Mission.
- The scheme is implemented by the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) through the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC).
- The core objective of PMKVY is to **enable Indian youth to acquire industry-relevant skills**, improve employability, and address the problem of educated unemployment.
- The scheme focuses on short-term training, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), certification, and placement support.
- PMKVY has been implemented in several phases:

PMKVY 1.0 (2015-16)	PMKVY 2.0 (2016-20)	PMKVY 3.0 (2021-22)	PMKVY 4.0 (2022-26)
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- Across these phases, the scheme aimed to provide skill training and certification aligned with the **National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF)**.

Key Features of PMKVY

- PMKVY provides **free skill training** to eligible youth across a wide range of sectors such as construction, manufacturing, healthcare, electronics, retail, and services.
- Training is conducted through approved Training Centres and Industry Partners.
- A distinctive feature of the scheme is outcome-based funding, where payments to training partners are linked to certification and placement.
- Each certified candidate is eligible for a monetary reward of Rs. 500, transferred through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT).
- The scheme also emphasises digital monitoring through the Skill India Portal (SIP), Aadhaar-based authentication, and third-party assessments to ensure transparency.

Achievements of the Scheme

- Since its launch, PMKVY has emerged as one of the largest skill development programmes in the world.
- Between 2015 and 2022, the scheme had a cumulative financial outlay of approximately Rs. 14,450 crore.

- According to official data, around 1.32 crore candidates were targeted for training and certification, out of which about 1.1 crore candidates were certified across the three phases.
- PMKVY has helped expand the skill ecosystem by:
 - Creating a nationwide network of training centres
 - Standardising skill certification through NSQF (National Skills Qualification Framework)
 - Promoting Recognition of Prior Learning for informal workers
 - Integrating skill development with Digital India and DBT mechanisms
- The scheme plays a crucial role in India's demographic dividend strategy, especially when youth unemployment in the 15-29 age group remains high.

CAG Findings on PMKVY

- A recent CAG audit report, tabled in the Lok Sabha, has highlighted serious deficiencies in the implementation of PMKVY between **2015 and 2022**.
- One of the most glaring findings was the use of **invalid bank account numbers**, including entries such as "1111111111", blank fields, or repeated account numbers for multiple beneficiaries.
- The audit found that over 94% of candidate records lacked reliable bank account details, raising concerns about beneficiary identification.
- The CAG also flagged that **payouts to more than 34 lakh certified candidates were pending**, even years after completion of training.
- Despite the ministry's claim that Aadhaar-linked DBT would resolve payment issues, only 18.44% of candidates received successful DBT payments under PMKVY 2.0 and 3.0.
- Additionally, the audit revealed shut training centres, instances where training was shown as ongoing even when centres were physically closed, and the reuse of identical photographs for multiple beneficiaries across states such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan.
- The CAG also questioned the credibility of "Best-in-Class" employers involved in skill certification and highlighted weak monitoring of training quality and outcomes.

Government Response and Corrective Measures

- In response to the audit, MSDE stated that the scheme has since been significantly strengthened. Measures include:
 - Aadhaar-authenticated e-KYC
 - Face authentication and geo-tagged attendance
 - QR-coded digital certificates
 - Enhanced inspections through Kaushal Samiksha Kendras
 - Penalty framework, blacklisting, and recovery from non-compliant entities
- The government claims that these reforms aim to ensure transparency, accountability, and better beneficiary tracking.

IndiGo Meltdown

IndiGo has faced widespread flight cancellations and delays in recent days, disrupting thousands of passengers. The core reason is an acute crew shortage triggered by the rollout of the **new Flight Duty Time Limitation (FDTL) norms**, whose final phase took effect last month.

India's largest airline, which handles over 60% of domestic traffic, was not adequately prepared for the stricter duty and rest requirements.

Why IndiGo Is Hit Harder Than Other Airlines?

- The new FDTL (Flight Duty Time Limitation) rules technically apply to all domestic airlines, but IndiGo has suffered disproportionately. Industry insiders point to several reasons:
- **Massive Scale and High-Frequency Network**
- **Heavy Late-Night and Early-Morning Operations** - IndiGo runs a significant share of “red-eye” and early-morning flights—segments most affected by stricter rest requirements under the new FDTL norms.
- **Extremely High Crew and Aircraft Utilisation** - IndiGo’s operational model relies on squeezing maximum utilisation from crew and aircraft.

What the New FDTL Norms Changed?

- The revised Flight Duty Time Limitation (FDTL) norms introduced multiple fatigue-mitigation measures:
 - **Weekly rest** increased from 36 to 48 hours
 - **Night landings** capped at two, down from six
 - Definition of **night hours** extended by one hour
- These changes significantly tightened crew availability and operational flexibility, particularly for airlines with heavy night operations.
- **Implementation Timeline and Industry Pushback**
 - The norms were originally planned for June 2024, but airlines opposed immediate rollout, arguing they needed more crew and a phased transition.
 - The DGCA implemented the rules in two phases (July and November) after a Delhi High Court directive.
 - **Phase 1:** Longer weekly rest — IndiGo handled this relatively well
 - **Phase 2:** Stricter night-time limits — hit IndiGo disproportionately

Scale of Disruptions and Decline in On-Time Performance

- IndiGo’s on-time performance (OTP) fell sharply from 84.1% in October to 67.7% in November, and has deteriorated further in December, undermining its long-held reputation for punctuality.
- **IndiGo’s Explanation: Multiple Operational Stress Points**
 - The airline attributed the disruptions to several “unforeseen operational challenges”, including:
 - Minor technology glitches
 - Winter schedule adjustments
 - Adverse weather conditions
 - Rising congestion in the aviation system
 - Full implementation of the new FDTL rules
 - Together, these factors compounded crew shortages and amplified delays.

The DGCA approved a one-time exemption from parts of the new Flight Duty Time Limitation (FDTL) norms for IndiGo’s Airbus A320 pilots. These relaxations aim to help the airline recover after being grossly unprepared for stricter crew rest requirements.

Sanchar Sathi

The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) recently withdrew its earlier directive requiring smartphone makers to pre-install the government's Sanchar Saathi app from next year.

Key Privacy Concerns Regarding the App

- **Lack of Meaningful User Consent:** DoT's directive mandated pre-installation, required the app to be "readily visible" and its functions "not disabled or restricted", contradicting later verbal claims that it is optional. This creates forced default installation, weakening real consent since users rarely change default settings.
- **Possible Violation of Fundamental Right to Privacy:** Experts argue the mandate fails the Puttaswamy test (2017) of legality, necessity, proportionality:
 - **No Statutory Backing-** issued via executive order, not law.
 - **Necessity Unproven-** less intrusive alternatives (web portals) exist.
 - **Disproportionate-** forces a government app on all devices without user choice.
- **Risks of Surveillance & "Function Creep":** The app requests sensitive permissions- location, camera, SMS/call logs, phone state- raising fears of tracking, profiling, or expansion of functions later. Creates a single point of failure if compromised by hackers. Government exemptions under DPDP Act, 2023 increase distrust.
- **System-Level / Root Access Concerns:** Pre-installed apps often get elevated OS privileges. Experts warn this may allow over-the-air updates to expand permissions without explicit user approval.
- **Automatic Registration Without Explicit Consent:** On Android, the app auto-detects phone numbers and sends an automatic SMS for registration, weakening informed consent.
- **Weak Privacy Policy & Data Governance:** Privacy policy lacks user rights (correction/deletion), opt-out mechanisms, clarity on data retention. Despite collecting personal data, the app store declarations claim "no data collected", undermining transparency.

Background:

- **Power to Regulate:** DoT recently gave itself new powers to regulate **Telecommunication Identifier User Entities (TIUEs)**, allowing it to issue directions even to non-telecom entities that use phone numbers.
- **Issue:** Using these new powers, DoT secretly ordered phone manufacturers to **preload the Sanchar Saathi app** on all smartphones from 2026. The leaked order triggered strong backlash from users, civil society, and the Opposition over privacy and forced government app installation.
- **Reversal:** DoT withdrew the mandate, **saying surging organic downloads** after the controversy showed that compulsory preloading was unnecessary.

About Sanchar Sathi Application

Launched in 2023, it is a **citizen-centric, privacy-first portal** to help users **report suspicious calls**, combat rising cyber fraud, and strengthen India's **telecom security ecosystem**.

Objective: To let citizens **secure their mobile identity, report telecom fraud, and block/track lost devices** through a single platform.



Key Features:

- **Report Fraud (Chakshu):** Users report suspicious calls/SMS/WhatsApp scams, especially fake KYC-update frauds.
- **IMEI Block & Tracking:** Allows blocking and tracking of lost/stolen phones nationwide; supports police tracing.
- **Check Mobile Connections:** Shows all SIMs issued in your name; suspicious ones can be flagged and disconnected.
- **Verify Device Genuineness:** Confirms if a handset is genuine.
- **Report Illegal International Calls:** Report calls appearing with Indian (+91) numbers but originating abroad.
- **Know Your ISP:** Identify wireline Internet Service Providers by PIN code/area.

Impact

- 42+ lakh stolen/lost devices blocked, 26 lakh traced, 7.23 lakh returned.
- 1.43 crore fraudulent mobile connections removed. Fraud Risk Indicator helped prevent ₹475 crore loss.

Privacy & Legal Alignment

- Works only with user consent; can deactivate/delete anytime.
- Minimal data collection; shared only with law enforcement when required.
- Complies with IT Act 2000 and Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023 (transparency, accountability, user control).

- **Overbroad Legal Powers (TIUE Expansion):** Telecom Cybersecurity Rules expanded DoT's authority to regulate any entity using phone numbers, enabling mandates on apps/devices without Parliamentary oversight.
- **Economic & Governance Concerns:** Pre-installation mandate affects phone manufacturers, OS architecture, and user trust. Lack of public consultation and secrecy around the directive worsens concerns.

Government's Justification	Way Forward
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cybersecurity imperative: Rising fraud, counterfeit devices, and IMEI cloning require stronger protective tools. • Citizen safety: Pre-installation ensures awareness and easy access for less tech-savvy users. • Voluntary use (as claimed verbally): Users can delete or choose not to register; app stays "dormant". • Legal basis: Draws authority from Telecom Cybersecurity Rules 2025 and the expanded TIUE framework. • Public-good rationale: App helps block stolen phones, verify connections, and reduce telecom fraud. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure legal basis & transparency: through a clear law, not executive directives. • Adopt a voluntary, opt-in model: with no forced pre-installation or auto-registration. • Reduce data permissions: and follow privacy-by-design with strict purpose limitations. • Strengthen privacy policy: with user rights, deletion options, and clear retention rules. • Create independent audits: and open-source the code for public scrutiny. • Use less intrusive alternatives: like portals/SMS for IMEI verification. • Consult industry & civil society: to balance security with rights.

Centre's Authority Over Citizenship Scrutiny Is Limited, EC Informs SC

The Election Commission of India (ECI) informed the Supreme Court (SC) that the Centre's power over citizenship scrutiny is limited to examining cases where Indian citizens voluntarily acquire foreign citizenship.

Case Background

- **Trigger for the Dispute:** The ECI initiated a **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** of electoral rolls in certain States. The exercise was challenged by Opposition parties in **Tamil Nadu, Kerala and West Bengal**.
- **Opposition's Allegations:** SIR was portrayed as a **backdoor citizenship screening exercise**. It was alleged to be a **"de novo National Register of Citizens (NRC)"** conducted under the guise of voter list revision.
- **Core Legal Objection:** Opposition parties argued that **only the Union government** has the exclusive authority to **scrutinize and determine citizenship**. They claimed the ECI exceeded its constitutional mandate by seeking proof of citizenship from electors during SIR.
- **Matter Before the SC:** In response to these challenges, the ECI submitted an **affidavit** to the SC to **clarify the scope of the Commission's powers and rebut allegations of constitutional overreach**.

EC's Clarification on Citizenship Powers

- **Limited Scope of the Centre's Exclusive Authority:** The ECI relied on **Section 9 of the Citizenship Act, 1955**, which deals with termination of Indian citizenship in cases of **voluntary acquisition of foreign citizenship**. It pointed out that the Centre's exclusive jurisdiction under Section 9 is **strictly confined** to determining:
 - *when and how* an Indian citizen acquired foreign citizenship, and
 - whether such acquisition warrants **termination of Indian citizenship**.
- According to the ECI, this exclusivity exists **only for this narrow purpose**. All other aspects relating to citizenship can be examined by **other competent authorities**, depending on the context.
- **Citizenship Status vs Electoral Eligibility:** The Commission stressed that **SIR does not determine or cancel citizenship**. It merely assesses citizenship **for electoral registration**, as required under **Article 326**, which restricts voting rights to Indian citizens. Seeking proof during SIR serves a **limited functional purpose**- ensuring voter eligibility, not citizenship adjudication.
- **Constitutional Basis of ECI's Authority:** The ECI asserted that its power to scrutinize citizenship for electoral purposes flows directly from **Article 324** (grants ECI plenary powers to supervise and conduct elections) and **Article 326**. Parliamentary laws under **Article 327** cannot override or dilute these **constitutional powers**, essential for free and fair elections.

- **Statutory Support under the RPA, 1950:** The Commission cited the **Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1950:**
 - **Section 16** disqualifies non-citizens from being included in electoral rolls.
 - **Section 19** requires electors to be Indian citizens and “ordinarily resident” in the constituency.
 - **Section 21(3)** permits SIRs when “felt necessities” arise, such as outdated or inaccurate voter lists.
- **Rebuttal to Procedural and Burden-of-Proof Criticism:** The ECI rejected claims that SIR unfairly shifts the burden of verification onto electors. It described the process as **voter-friendly and cooperative**, noting that:
 - Electors receive **pre-filled Enumeration Forms (EFs)** at their homes. Most electors need only **verify and sign**.
- **Purpose- Electoral Roll Integrity, Not Exclusion:** Finally, the ECI clarified that enrolment is **not an end in itself**. Electoral rolls must reflect living voters, ordinary residents, and eligible citizens. Dead, permanently shifted, or ineligible persons like non-citizens must be removed to maintain **purity of electoral rolls**, a prerequisite for **free and fair elections**, which is a **Basic Feature of the Constitution**.

Conclusion

The ECI maintains that **SIR is a constitutional, statutory, and limited exercise** aimed solely at ensuring accurate electoral rolls. It neither determines nor alters citizenship status, and the Centre's exclusive authority under the Citizenship Act remains confined to cases of voluntary acquisition of foreign citizenship.

SC Highlights Lapses in Pay-outs, Critical Care for Acid Attack Victims

The Supreme Court (SC) will review a plea claiming that many acid attack survivors have not received the full ₹3 lakh compensation and are being denied free treatment, despite repeated judicial directions. A Bench has decided to examine the systemic delays in compensation and care.

SC's Latest Directions (2025)

- **Strengthening Compensation Delivery:** Chief Secretaries to ensure timely fund flow: State Govt → State Legal Services Authority → District Authorities → Survivors.
- **Mandated detailed records:** Victim names, Date of compensation request, Date of payment, Pending cases & delays
- **Enforcement of Free Medical Treatment:** Principal Health Secretaries to ensure all private hospitals comply. Non-compliance can invite criminal liability.
- **Data Collection & Transparency:** NALSA directed to collect and submit detailed information from all States on compensation disbursed.

Case Background

- **Beginning of Judicial Oversight (2006):** SC took Suo motu cognizance after Laxmi's assault. It marked the start of continuous judicial monitoring of acid attack cases.
- **Key Directives Issued by the SC (2013 & 2015):**
 - **Compensation Framework:** Minimum ₹3 lakh; ₹1 lakh within 15 days, rest within two months.
 - **Free Medical Treatment:** Mandatory in private hospitals, covering medicines, surgeries, bed, food, and specialized care; refusal attracts criminal liability.
 - **Regulation of Acid Sale:** Ban on over-the-counter sale of acid.
 - **Institutional Mechanism:** District Legal Services Authorities (DLSAs) designated as Criminal Injuries Compensation Boards.
 - **Grievance Redressal:** Survivors allowed to approach Legal Services Authorities for delays (reiterated in 2024–25).
- **Persistent Issues Highlighted Before the Court (2025):**
 - **Non-payment of Full Compensation:** Survivors in several States (e.g., Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh) received only the initial ₹1 lakh; no support for costly reconstructive surgeries.
 - **Denial of Free Treatment:** Private hospitals continued demanding full payment upfront, violating SC orders; critical care withheld.
 - **Administrative Failures:** Many States/UTs did not file affidavits; submitted reports lacked victim-wise details; weak monitoring by Legal Services Authorities.
 - **NALSA's Submission:** Reported ₹484 crore disbursed (Mar 2024-Apr 2025), but SC demanded detailed State-wise and victim-wise data due to lack of transparency.
 - The National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) has been constituted under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 to provide free Legal Services to the weaker sections of the society and to organize Lok Adalats for amicable settlement of disputes. The Chief Justice of India is the Patron-in-Chief of NALSA.

Way Forward

- **Enhance Compensation:**

Update the minimum amount beyond ₹3 lakh; create a central fund for reconstructive surgeries.

- **Strengthen Enforcement:**

Penalize hospitals denying treatment; periodic audits of DLSA performance.

- **Digital Transparency:**

Develop a NALSA-run portal tracking real-time compensation and treatment status.

- **Fast-Track Courts:**

Establish dedicated courts for acid attack cases with day-to-day hearings.

- **Stricter Acid Sale Regulation:**

Aadhaar-based tracking, licensing of sellers, and stringent penalties for misuse.

- **Holistic Rehabilitation:**

Provide disability recognition, pensions, psychological counselling, skill training, and livelihood support.

Constitutional and Legal Basis for Support to Acid Attack Victims

Constitutional Provisions:

- **Article 21:** Right to life with dignity includes timely medical care and rehabilitation.
- **Article 14:** Equal protection of the law for vulnerable victims.
- **Article 15(3):** State's obligation to protect women.

Legal Framework

- **CrPC Section 357A/ Section 396 BNS:** Victim compensation scheme; strengthens the SC's directives.

Significance of SC's Directives

- **Upholding Rule of Law:** Reinforces State accountability by ensuring compliance with judicial orders on compensation and treatment.
- **Strengthening Victim Rights:** Positions compensation and free medical care as legal entitlements, not discretionary support.
- **Gender Justice:** Protects predominantly women victims of acid attacks, addressing patriarchal violence through institutional safeguards.
- **Human Dignity under Article 21:** Ensures survivors receive immediate medical care, rehabilitation, and financial support essential to living with dignity.
- **Administrative Streamlining:** Mandates coordinated functioning between State governments, Legal Services Authorities, and private hospitals.
- **Deterrence:** Criminal liability for hospital refusal and regulated acid sale strengthens deterrence against future attacks.

Implementation Challenges

- **Weak Monitoring Systems:** No robust mechanism to track compensation status, hospital compliance, or victim rehabilitation.
- **Poor Coordination Across Agencies:** Gaps between State departments, Health Secretaries, DLSAs, and NALSA.
- **Data Gaps:** States often submit aggregated, outdated, or incomplete victim-wise data.
- **Persistent Illegal Acid Sale:** OTC sale continues in several markets despite the SC ban.
- **Judicial Delays:** Trials in acid attack cases often extend beyond a decade due to low prioritization and heavy court pendency.

Extra Mile: Categorizing Acid Attack Survivors as Persons with Disabilities

The Chief Justice of India recently held that acid attackers must be shown zero sympathy by courts, and the "entire system" must respond against them while hearing a survivor's plea seeking recognition of acid attack survivors as persons with specified disabilities under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016.

The Court was hearing a PIL plea filed by a 2009 acid-attack survivor and founder of NGO Brave Souls Foundation, Shaheen Malik, who sought that the victims of forceful acid ingestion must be recognised and included in the definition of "acid attack victims" under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (RPwD Act).

Government's Position: It supported the plea, stating survivors **must be treated as disabled** and covered under the law. Centre asked to consider bringing an **ordinance** for inclusion.

National Forensic Infrastructure Enhancement Scheme

The National Forensic Infrastructure Enhancement Scheme (NFIES) is a central scheme which was approved in 2024 with a total financial outlay of ₹2254.43 crore to be implemented from financial year 2024-25 to 2028-29.

Funding: from Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).

Key Components of the Scheme:

- **Expansion of NFSU (National Forensic Sciences University):** Establishment of **9 new off-campuses** across India, upgradation of existing NFSU Delhi Campus with the aim to produce **trained forensic manpower**.
- **Establishment of New CFSLs (Central Forensic Science Laboratories):** **7 new CFSLs approved under NFIES**. Additionally, **8 CFSLs were approved earlier (2023-24)** to reduce case pendency & improve access to forensic services.

Rationale	Expected Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Criminal Laws (2023) mandate forensic investigation for offences punishable with ≥ 7 years, increasing workload of FSLs. • India faces a shortage of trained forensic experts. • Need for modern, scientific, timely forensic examination to strengthen the criminal justice system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced forensic capacity & reduced pendency in labs. • Creation of world-class forensic professionals. • Strengthened scientific evidence system will help achieve India's goal of securing higher conviction rates (>90%). • Better preparedness for technology-driven crime and evolving methods.

National Film Heritage Mission

The Ministry of Information & Broadcasting (MIB) informed the Lok Sabha that 1,469 film titles, amounting to about 4.3 lakh minutes, have been digitized so far under the National Film Heritage Mission (NFHM).

About NFHM

- **Launched:** 2015
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Information and Broadcasting
- **Implemented by:** National Film Development Corporation (NFDC)-National Film Archive of India (NFAI)
- **Objective:** To preserve, restore, and digitise India's cinematic heritage threatened by decay.

Key Components:	Significance:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Condition assessment of film reels. • 2K/4K restoration of picture and sound. • Digitization and creation of archival vaults. • Training, capacity building, and IT-based archiving. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saves culturally important films across Indian languages. • Restores classics to global standards. • Ensures long-term access for future generations.

About NFDC-NFAI: Headquartered in Pune, the **NFDC-NFAI** is the national custodian of India's cinematic heritage, housing over **30,000 film titles**. It collects, preserves, restores, and digitizes films using modern archival facilities, under the **NFHM**. It also serves as a centre for film research, education, and public access.

Need Policy to Make Non-Scheduled Drugs Affordable: House Panel

A Parliamentary Standing Committee (PSC) has warned that the absence of regulation over **non-scheduled drugs** is enabling profiteering. It has directed the **Department of Pharmaceuticals** and the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) to urgently frame a policy to close this pricing loophole.

What is the Current Mechanism to Control the Drug Prices?

- Drug prices are regulated under the **DPCO, 2013**.

About NPPA

- **Established:** 1997; attached office under the Department of Pharmaceuticals.
- **Role:** Independent regulator for **drug pricing** to ensure medicines remain **affordable and accessible**.
- **Functions:**
 - Fixes and revises prices under **Drugs (Prices Control) Order (DPCO), 2013**.
 - Sets **ceiling prices** for scheduled drugs (928+ formulations).
 - Fixes **retail prices** of new drugs (3000+).
 - Using its powers under Para 19 of DPCO (public interest clause), NPPA regulates prices of key non-scheduled drugs/devices (e.g., stents, knee implants, anti-diabetics, anti-cancer drugs).
 - Monitors drug availability and enforces compliance.
- **Key Initiatives:**
 - **Trade margin rationalization** (e.g., anti-cancer drugs).
 - Price caps on essential devices during COVID (oxygen concentrators, oximeters, etc.).
 - **Digital platforms:** **Pharma Sahi Daam**, **Pharma Jan Samadhan**, **Integrated Pharmaceuticals Database Management System (IPDMS) 2.0**.
 - Price Monitoring and Research Units (PMRUs) are set up in 36 States/UTs for monitoring at grassroots level.



- **Scheduled drugs** (in the essential medicines list) have a **ceiling price** set by NPPA; this list is periodically updated by an expert committee. Ceiling prices are **revised annually** based on the **Wholesale Price Index (WPI)**.
- NPPA cannot fix the initial launch price of non-scheduled drugs under the current legal framework. **Non-scheduled drugs** can increase prices by up to **10% per year**.

Significance of the Recommendations

- **Strengthening Health Governance:** Addresses a major cause of high **out-of-pocket expenditure** in India and supports constitutional mandate of **right to health** (Article 21 jurisprudence).
- **Promoting Equity:** Prevents households, especially vulnerable sections, from being pushed into poverty.
- **Enhancing Market Efficiency:** Transparency + regulated margins reduce **information asymmetry** and distortions in the pharma supply chain.
- **Supporting India's Pharma Sector:** A balanced pricing regime preserves India's position as the "**Pharmacy of the World**" while ensuring domestic affordability.

Concerns Raised by the PSC	Key Recommendations of the Committee
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excessive Markups & Profiteering: The committee found abnormally high trade margins on common medicines (Cetirizine- 953% markup; Pantoprazole- 920%). Several drugs showed margins between 600-1800%, indicating systemic pricing distortion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive Trade Margin Rationalization (TMR): Expand TMR to cover all non-scheduled drugs, not just those in emergencies. Fix maximum permissible margins across the supply chain to curb profiteering. A TMR policy usually fixes the margin of profit for manufacturers and the supply chain on specific products.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulatory Loophole for Non-Scheduled Drugs: Inability of NPPA to regulate initial prices, allows companies to launch drugs at inflated MRPs. Actual price hikes have averaged 5.6% (2020-25) and initial price inflation remains the core loophole. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening NPPA's Regulatory Powers: Empower NPPA to regulate initial launch prices for non-scheduled drugs. Close loopholes allowing companies to set extremely high MRPs at entry.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of Pricing Transparency: Price-to-stockist (PTS) data is not disclosed. High information asymmetry makes it difficult for regulators and consumers to detect profiteering. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing Transparency & Data Systems: Establish a real-time pricing data mechanism integrating manufacturers, distributors, and hospitals. Mandate disclosure of PTS to improve public accountability.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rising Prices of Cancer Drugs and Stents: High prices partly attributed to hospital infrastructure costs. Committee noted conflict of interest in seeking pricing inputs from the Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance (IPA). Stents saw price rise: 44% (bare-metal) and 29% (drug-eluting) between 2017-24. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GST Linkage Reform: Link GST to actual MRP, not procurement price, this will discourage artificially inflated margins.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak Monitoring of Online Pharmaceutical Sales: Deep discounts on cancer drugs on e-platforms raised concerns about authenticity and regulatory oversight. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rationalizing Prices of High-Cost Medicines & Devices: Independent price assessment for cancer drugs; avoid reliance on industry bodies like IPA. Strengthen monitoring of online pharmacies for quality and authenticity. Review and regulate stent prices more rigorously.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urgent Policy Review: Five years after the TMR pilot, a comprehensive national policy is still pending. The Committee stresses fast-tracking reforms to ensure affordability.

PM Internship Scheme Sees Poor Uptake

Despite exceeding its target of 1.25 lakh internship opportunities, the PM Internship Scheme's (PMIS) pilot project has seen low uptake among youth, Parliament was informed.

About PMIS

- **Launched:** by the **Ministry of Corporate Affairs** (Budget 2024) to provide **1 crore internships** over **five years** in India's **top 500 companies**. It works **independently** of existing skilling, apprenticeship, or student-training schemes.
- **Internship duration:** 12 months; at least 50% of the period must be spent in real workplace settings.
- **Objective:** Give youth exposure to real business environments, bridge the gap between academic learning and industry needs. Improve employability through hands-on experience.
- **Pilot Project Performance:** Offers made (two rounds combined): **1.65 lakh**; Offers accepted: **33,300 (20%)**; Dropouts among those who joined: **6,618 (~20%)**.

Key Challenges Identified	Way Forward
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low Acceptance of Offers: due to- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Location mismatch: Youth prefer workplaces within 5-10 km from home; many offers were farther away. ◦ Role Mismatch: Interns are reluctant to accept roles that did not match their interests or qualifications. ◦ Long duration: A 12-month internship is longer than typical skilling or internship programs, discouraging many candidates. ◦ High Dropout Rates: Many who joined left early due to unsuitable job roles, long commitment period and travel constraints. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer location-flexible or hybrid options to address travel constraints. • Reduce or make the 12-month duration more flexible to improve uptake. • Align roles with candidates' skills and interests for better acceptance. • Strengthen counselling and orientation to set expectations and reduce dropouts. • Increase company participation incentives to improve role diversity and quality. • Use data-driven matching to pair candidates with suitable internships.

SC to Review 2025 Order Contradicting Assam Accord

A Supreme Court (SC) Bench led by Chief Justice of India (CJI) issued notice to the Union government on a petition filed by Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) challenging Clause 3(1)(e) of the Immigration and Foreigners (Exemption) Order 2025 as violating the Assam Accord.

AGP's Key Arguments

- **Extension of Cut-off Date:**

Allowing undocumented migrants to stay until December 31, 2024 effectively shifts the legally mandated cut-off from 1971 to 2024, violating the Assam Accord and Section 6A.

Clause 3(1)(e) of the Immigration and Foreigners (Exemption) Order 2025 exempts persecuted religious minorities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan (Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, and Christians) from passport and visa requirements if:

- They entered India on or before December 31, 2024, and
- They either entered without valid travel documents, or with valid documents whose validity has since expired.

This exemption allows them to stay in India legally despite lacking valid passports or visas.

What does the Assam Accord Mandate?

The Assam Accord (1985) was designed to stop large-scale immigration from Bangladesh and to protect the demographic and cultural identity of Assam. It mandated:

- Identification and deportation of all foreigners who entered Assam on or after March 25, 1971.
- Insertion of Section 6A into the Citizenship Act, 1955, which bars citizenship for immigrants who entered Assam after the 1971 cut-off date.

This statutory protection has been upheld by a Constitution Bench of the SC.

- **Clause Rendered Accord Opaque:** Clause 3(1)(e) indirectly legalizes post-1971 illegal immigration, nullifying the Accord's core protections.

- **Statutory Inconsistency:** The clause ignores that Section 6A overrides all other laws in force.

- **Challenge to Section 33 of Immigration and Foreigners Act 2025 Act:** AGP questions the constitutional validity of Section 33, arguing that:

- It grants the Centre unfettered powers to allow illegal immigrants to stay indefinitely.
- It is discriminatory and inconsistent with the Citizenship Act, 1955.
- The 2025 Exemption Order, issued under Section 33, is therefore legally flawed.

Significance: The challenge raises fundamental questions about:

- The sanctity of the Assam Accord as a constitutional and legislative safeguard.
- Whether executive orders can dilute statutory protections upheld by the SC.
- The balance between humanitarian considerations and demographic protections unique to Assam.

State Must Not Prosecute Citizens Without Reasonable Prospect of Conviction

The Supreme Court (SC) in *Tuhin Kumar Biswas v. State of West Bengal, 2025* cautioned the State against prosecuting citizens without a reasonable chance of conviction.

Case Background: The case arose from criminal charges of voyeurism, intimidation, and wrongful restraint filed by a woman against two brothers in Kolkata. The complainant claimed she was a tenant; however, evidence revealed she was only a *prospective* tenant, and there was an ongoing civil property dispute. The complainant refused to give a judicial statement, and the FIR lacked material evidence.

Judicial Concerns Highlighted by SC

- **Impact on Judicial Backlog:** Filing weak charge sheets burdens already strained courts, contributing to massive pendency. Judicial resources must be reserved for serious and prosecutable cases.

- **Duty of the State:** Criminal prosecution is a coercive tool and cannot be exercised casually. The verdict stresses accountable investigation and prosecutorial responsibility.

Significance of the Verdict:

- **Reinforces due process:**

Emphasizes constitutional protection against arbitrary prosecution.

- **Strengthens criminal justice reform discourse:**

Highlights systemic issues- poor investigation, lack of filtering, backlog.

- **Guidance for police reforms:** Need for better training, evidentiary standards, and adherence to law.

- **Improves understanding of misuse of criminal law:** Important for ethics, governance, law-and-order debates.

- **Illustrates judicial activism in safeguarding rights.**

Key Principles Laid Down by SC

- **Protection of Fair Process:** State cannot prosecute citizens without a reasonable prospect of conviction. Half-baked investigations and charge sheets violate Article 21 (right to fair procedure).
- **Role of Police and Courts as "Initial Filters":** At the charge sheet stage, police must ensure sufficient evidence exists. At the charge framing stage, courts must check whether strong suspicion arises from legally tenable material. Only cases with substantial prosecutable evidence should proceed to trial.
- **Avoiding Abuse of Criminal Law in Civil Disputes:** When civil disputes exist (such as property ownership), police and courts must act with heightened caution. Criminal law must not be used to pressure parties or settle civil scores.

Assessment of Charges in This Case

Voyeurism: Requires capturing images of a woman engaged in a private act. Neither the FIR nor the charge sheet alleged a private act; hence ingredients of the offence were absent.

Criminal Intimidation: Requires a threat causing alarm. Allegations were vague and unsupported by statements; therefore no offence made out.

Wrongful Restraint: Complainant had no legal right to enter the property as she was not a tenant. Hence, no unlawful restraint occurred.

Parliament's Institutional Health

As the Winter Session of Parliament began, a likely standoff between the government and the Opposition over discussions on the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls raised fresh doubts about the House's effective functioning, underscoring broader concerns over the institutional health of Parliament.

Factors Affecting Parliament's Institutional Health

- **Declining Legislative Productivity:** Parliamentary sittings are increasingly getting disrupted, leading to low utilization of scheduled time. In the recent Monsoon Session, the Lok Sabha (LS) functioned only **29%** of its scheduled time and the Rajya Sabha (RS) **34%**.
- **Shrinking Deliberation on Legislation:** Several Bills are passed with minimal debate, undermining informed law-making under **Article 107** (requires bills to be agreed by both houses). Among the Bills which were passed during the session, key legislations, such as the Regulation of Online Gaming Bill and Merchant Shipping Bill, were cleared within minutes, reflecting procedural compliance without substantive scrutiny.
- **Weakening of Accountability Mechanisms:** **Question Hour**, a critical tool for holding the executive accountable, has been severely curtailed. During the Monsoon Session, only **23%** of Question Hour time in the LS and **6%** in the RS was utilized. Budget discussions have also steadily declined since the 1990s.
- **Marginalization of Parliamentary Committees:** Referral of Bills to Standing Committees has sharply reduced from over **60%** in the 14th and 15th LS to around **20%** in 16th and 17th LSs. This weakens expert scrutiny, stakeholder consultation, and bipartisan consensus-building.
- **Breakdown of Government-Opposition Dialogue:** Persistent communication gaps between the Treasury Benches and the Opposition have led to repeated stalemates. While the Opposition resorts to protests over unaddressed issues, the government accuses it of deliberate obstruction, resulting in legislative gridlock.
- **Institutional Imbalances and Erosion of Conventions:** The absence of a **Deputy Speaker** during the entire 17th LS (2019-2024) and continuing into the 18th- violates constitutional convention and limits institutional balance. Concerns have also been raised over declining neutrality of presiding officers.

- **Long-Term Structural Decline:** Parliament's weakening is not regime-specific but structural: Average sittings declined from **121 days/year (1952-70)** to **68 days since 2000**. The 17th LS met for only **55 days/year**, the lowest among full-term LSs.

Implications of Declining Institutional Health

- **Poor Quality of Legislation:** Reduced debate and committee scrutiny lead to hastily drafted laws, increasing the risk of ambiguity, litigation, and frequent amendments.
- **Weak Executive Accountability:** Disruption of Question Hour and curtailed debates diminish Parliament's capacity to scrutinize government actions, weakening checks and balances.
- **Erosion of Democratic Deliberation:** Parliament risks becoming a **rubber-stamp legislature**, undermining its role as a forum for reasoned debate and consensus-building.
- **Marginalization of the Opposition:** Reduced space for dissent weakens pluralism and representative democracy, especially in a diverse polity like India.
- **Decline in Public Trust:** Frequent disruptions and rushed legislation reduce citizens' faith in Parliament as an effective and responsive institution.

Way Forward

- **Restore Government-Opposition Dialogue** through regular institutional meetings to prevent deadlocks.
- **Protect Deliberation and Question Hour** by ensuring minimum guaranteed debate time and uninterrupted accountability sessions.
- **Strengthen Parliamentary Committees** by mandating referral of most Bills for expert scrutiny and bipartisan consultation.
- **Increase Parliamentary Sittings** to reverse the long-term decline in working days.
- **Uphold Constitutional Conventions** by promptly appointing the Deputy Speaker and ensuring neutrality of presiding officers.
- **Enforce Rules Against Disruptions** while safeguarding the Opposition's right to dissent.

Repealing and Amending Act, 2025

The Repealing and Amending Act, 2025 (Act) received assent of the President. The Act provides for the repeal of certain enactments and the amendment of certain other enactments.

Objective of the Bill: To repeal enactments that have ceased to be in force or have become obsolete, eliminate the need for retaining certain laws as separate Acts, and rectify minor amendments and formal defects identified in existing legislation.

Key Provisions of the Act

- **Repeal of Laws:** It repeals **71 Acts**. **65 of these are Amendment Acts**, whose purposes have already been served. **6 are Principal Acts** that are no longer relevant. **Notable Acts repealed include:** Indian Tramways Act, 1886, Levy Sugar Price Equalization Fund Act, 1976, Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (Determination of Conditions of Service of Employees) Act, 1988.
- **Amendments to Existing Laws:** The Bill amends **four Acts**, primarily for technical and procedural clarity:
 - **General Clauses Act, 1897:** Updates terminology relating to registered posts to reflect current practices.
 - **Code of Civil Procedure, 1908:** Similar updating of terminology concerning service of documents.
 - **Indian Succession Act, 1925:** Removes the requirement of **court validation of wills in certain cases**, simplifying succession procedures.
 - **Disaster Management Act, 2005:** Rectifies a **drafting error**; the government clarified that the intent is technical correction, not dilution of safeguards.

Significance:

- Streamlines India's statute book and improves legal certainty.
- Reduces colonial-era and redundant legislation.
- Enhances **accessibility of law** for citizens and administrators.
- Supports governance reforms through legal simplification.

Nayi Chetana 4.0

Minister of State for Rural Development launched State-Level Nayi Chetana 4.0 in Guntur.

What is Nayi Chetana?

Nayi Chetana is a national initiative launched in **2021** under the **Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM)** to address **gender-based violence (GBV)** and promote **women's safety, dignity, and empowerment** in rural India.

Significance: Nayi Chetana links **women's safety with national development**, recognizing women's empowerment as a cornerstone of **inclusive, sustainable, and resilient growth**.

Nature of the Initiative

- Envisioned as a **people's movement**, not just a government scheme.
- Powered by **women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs)**.
- Emphasizes **collective responsibility** and community-led action.

Key Objectives

- Achieve zero tolerance towards gender-based violence.
- Ensure safety, dignity, and access to justice for women.
- Strengthen women's collectives and leadership.
- Promote economic independence of women.
- Encourage participation of men and boys in changing social norms.

Key Interventions

- Awareness and behaviour-change campaigns at the grassroots.
- Establishment of **Gender Resource Centres (GRCs)** as one-stop support systems offering counselling, legal assistance, referrals, livelihood linkages and improved access for women to land, banking, and technology.

Scale and Reach

- Nearly **10 crore SHG women** involved nationwide
- Over **4 crore rural citizens** reached
- Implemented through **13+ lakh meetings and events**
- Coordinated with **12 Central Ministries**.

Sanchar Mitra Scheme

In a written reply to a question in the Lok Sabha, the Minister of State for Communications and Rural Development said that 222 institutions are currently participating in the Sanchar Mitra Scheme.

About Sanchar Mitra Scheme

- It is a youth-oriented initiative by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT), Ministry of Communications.
- Objective:** To engage youth (Yuva Shakti) as volunteers to promote **digital empowerment & safe telecom usage**.
- Target Group:** Students from technical institutions offering **telecom, electronics, computer science, cybersecurity**, or related programmes.
- Role of Sanchar Mitras:**
 - To conduct awareness drives in communities, schools, and public spaces.
 - To promote **citizen-centric telecom services, fraud prevention, mobile security, & responsible telecom use**.
- Implementing Authority:** DoT through its **LSA (Licensed Service Area) field offices**.
- Coverage:** Implemented across **all States and UTs**.

Sujalam Bharat App

The Union Ministry of Jal Shakti launched the Sujalam Bharat App, a digital initiative to strengthen rural drinking water governance.

What is Sujalam Bharat App?

It is a national digital platform launched under the **Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM)** to strengthen **rural drinking water governance** through real-time, geo-referenced data access.

Developed by: Department of Drinking Water & Sanitation (DDWS) with technical support from **Bhaskaracharya National Institute for Space Applications and Geo-informatics (BISAG-N)**.

Core Objectives:

- To improve **transparency and accountability** in rural water supply.
- To strengthen **community ownership** and oversight.
- To enable **data-driven planning, monitoring and O&M (Operations and Maintenance)**.

Key Features:

- Sujalam Bharat Database:** Integrates data on water sources, assets, scheme design, supply performance, water quality, O&M records and community feedback.
- Sujal Gaon ID:** A unique digital ID for every scheme and habitation, clearly mapping **which scheme supplies water to which households**.
- Advanced Geo-referencing:** GIS-based mapping of rural water infrastructure, integrated with **PM Gati Shakti GIS**.
- Real-time Monitoring:** Supports States and districts in structured digital operations and maintenance.

Governance & Implementation:

- Nationwide participation of all States/UTs.
- Emphasis on **timely data integration and adoption**, as highlighted by DDWS.
- Training and orientation** conducted by BISAG-N to ensure smooth on-ground implementation.

Significance:

- Creates a **unified digital view of every rural water scheme**.
- Enhances **service reliability, water quality monitoring, and long-term sustainability**.
- Acts as the **digital backbone of JJM**.

SC's Ruling on Narco Tests

The Supreme Court (SC) ruled that forced or involuntary Narco tests are unconstitutional, setting aside the Patna High Court's (HC) order in *Amlesh Kumar v. State of Bihar (2025)* for violating the guidelines laid down in *Selvi v. State of Karnataka (2010)*.

A Narco test is an investigative technique in which the accused is sedated with drugs such as sodium pentothal to lower inhibitions and extract concealed information. It is a non-violent method, akin to polygraph and brain-mapping tests.

Why Are Narco, Polygraph, And Brain-mapping Tests Problematic?

- **Violation of Fundamental Rights:** Article 20(3)- **Right against self-incrimination** prohibits compelling an accused to testify against themselves. In *Selvi v. State of Karnataka (2010)*, the SC held that involuntary Narco, polygraph, and brain-mapping tests violate this guarantee and any information so obtained is inadmissible. Such coercion undermines the democratic balance between the rights of the victim and the accused.
- **Article 21- Personal Liberty, Privacy, and Due Process:** Article 21 protects mental privacy and bodily autonomy; forced testing infringes both. The 'procedure established by law' must be **fair, just, and reasonable**, as laid down in *Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India (1978)* which also articulated the **Golden Triangle** (Articles 14, 19, and 21). Any Narco test without strict procedural safeguards violates this constitutional framework.
- **Evidentiary Value: Courts' Position:** In *Manoj Kumar Saini v. State of MP (2023)* and *Vinobhai v. State of Kerala (2025)*, courts held that narco test results **do not establish guilt**. At best, information obtained may assist in investigation but must be **independently corroborated** by admissible evidence.
- **Consent and Procedural Safeguards:** The SC has mandated that consent must be free and informed; recorded before a magistrate and accompanied by medical, legal, and procedural safeguards.
- **Ethical and Natural Justice Concerns:** Informed consent is rooted in **individual autonomy**, a core principle of natural justice.

Legal Framework for Revoking Passports

The Ministry of External Affairs is reviewing the Goa government's request to revoke the passports of Saurabh and Gaurav Luthra, operators of the Birch by Romeo Lane nightclub, where a fire killed 25 people recently.

Legal Framework for Revoking Passports: The **issuance, impounding, and revocation of passports** in India are governed by the **Passports Act, 1967**, primarily **Section 10(3)**. This power is **not absolute** and cannot be exercised arbitrarily. A passport may be revoked only on **specified legal grounds**, including:

- **Pending criminal proceedings** before an Indian court.
- Issuance of a **summons, warrant, or arrest warrant** by a court.
- Actions taken in the **interest of the general public** or where the holder's conduct is **prejudicial to India's sovereignty, integrity, or security**.
- **Suppression or misrepresentation of material facts** (such as citizenship or criminal history) while obtaining the passport.
- A **court order restraining the individual from leaving India**.

Thus, passport revocation is a **regulated and legally constrained measure**, subject to statutory grounds and judicial oversight.

Since the Supreme Court (SC) has recognized the right to travel abroad as part of personal liberty under Article 21, any passport revocation is subject to strict judicial scrutiny and due process.

Due Process and Right to Be Heard: Since passport revocation affects a **fundamental right, strict due process** is mandatory. Under **Section 10(5) of the Passports Act**, the authority must **record reasons in writing and communicate them to the passport holder.**

SAMPANN

More than One Lakh pensioners are currently being serviced by Principal Controller of Communication Accounts/ Controller of Communication Accounts offices all over India via SAMPANN.

What is SAMPANN?

Launched in 2018, SAMPANN (System for Accounting and Management of Pension) is an online pension processing and payment system for **Department of Telecommunications (DoT)** pensioners.

Implemented by: Controller General of Communication Accounts (CGCA) under the DoT, Ministry of Communications.

Objectives:	Key Features:	Significance:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To ensure timely settlement of pension cases. To provide a single-window, transparent, and efficient pension system. To enable direct credit of pension into pensioners' bank accounts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> e-Pension Payment Order (e-PPO). Individual pensioner login for payment history and details. Online grievance submission with SMS alerts. Faster reconciliation, auditing, and accounting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves service delivery, transparency, and efficiency. Reduces administrative delays and costs. Flexible and scalable system to meet future pension management needs.

Bureau of Port Security

Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) convened a meeting for the constitution of a dedicated body, the Bureau of Port Security (BoPS), for the security of vessels and port facilities.

Role of CISF: Earlier, Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) was designated as **Recognized Security Organization (RSO)** for ports. Its responsibilities include:

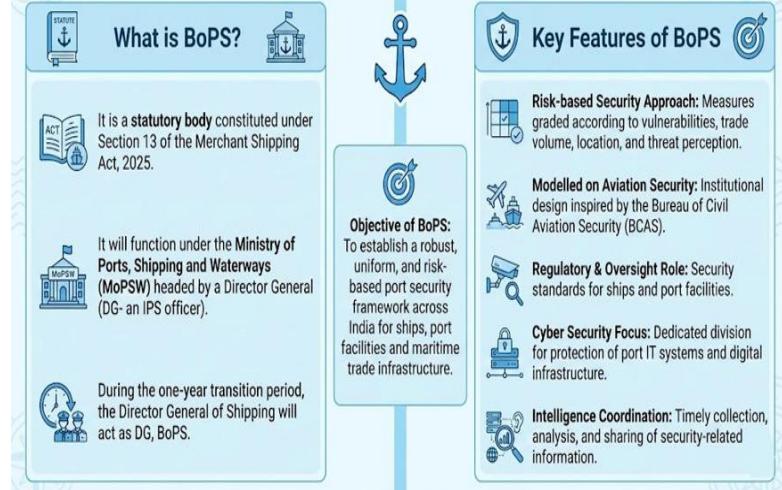
- Conducting security assessments of ports.
- Preparing port security plans.

Judicial Checks on State Power:

- Mandatory Natural Justice:** Courts require a **show-cause notice, a fair hearing, and a reasoned ("speaking") order** before passport revocation. In 2013, the Delhi High Court (HC) set aside a revocation for denial of hearing.
- Prohibition on Pressure Tactics:** Passport powers cannot be used to coerce private settlements. In 2017, the Delhi HC held that impounding a passport to force resolution of a **private dispute** was unlawful; Justice Vibhu Bakhrul ruled this did not constitute public interest.
- Evidence, Not Allegations:** A **bald allegation** without material evidence or a court order cannot restrict travel. Revocation must rest on **sufficient cause**, not mere suspicion.
- Distinguishing Misconduct from Mistake:** The Punjab and Haryana HC clarified that **inadvertent or bona fide errors** in applications do not justify revocation; only **intentional suppression (mischief)** attracts action under the Act.
- Liberty-Oriented Judicial Oversight:** Overall, courts act as a **check on arbitrariness**, ensuring executive restraint and protection of **personal liberty.**

Consequences of Passport Revocation:

- Loss of Valid Travel Document:** Once revoked, the passport becomes invalid and cannot be used for international travel.
- Deportation if Abroad:** If the individual is overseas, lack of a valid passport usually leads to **deportation to India**, as visas are typically passport-linked.
- Criminal Liability for Misuse:** Under **Section 12 of the Passports Act**, knowingly using a revoked passport is an offence punishable with **up to two years' imprisonment.**



- Training and capacity-building of **Private Security Agencies (PSAs)**.
- Ensuring only licensed and certified PSAs operate in port security.

Centre Revises Guidelines to Help Poor Prisoners Unable to Pay Fines

Citing sub-optimal implementation by several States and UTs, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) recently revised the “Support to Poor Prisoners” scheme guidelines, introducing fixed timelines and mandating oversight by senior officials.

- Union government has allocated an annual fund of ₹20 crore to bail out poor prisoners

What is the Support to Poor Prisoners Scheme?

Launched in **2023**, the scheme is an initiative of the MHA aimed at providing **financial assistance to indigent (poor) undertrial and convicted prisoners** whose release is delayed solely due to their inability to pay bail or court-imposed fines because of economic hardship. Funds are routed to States/UTs through the **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)**, which has been designated as the **Central Nodal Agency (CNA)**.

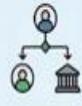
Objectives of the Scheme:

- To prevent prolonged incarceration caused solely by poverty rather than criminal culpability.
- To reduce prison overcrowding and alleviate hardship faced by poor prisoners.

Provisions after Revision:

- **Institutional Mechanism:** Constitution of a **District-level Empowered Committee** comprising:
 - Nominee of the District Collector/District Magistrate
 - Secretary, District Legal Services Authority (DLSA)- Convener
 - Superintendent of Police
 - Superintendent/Dy. Superintendent of the concerned prison
 - Judge in-charge of the prison (nominated by the District Judge)
- **District-level Empowered Committee:** examines individual cases, assesses the requirement of financial assistance for bail or fine payment, and authorizes release of funds in a transparent manner.
 - The Committee may appoint a **Nodal Officer** and seek assistance from Jail Visiting Lawyers, Paralegal Volunteers, civil society representatives, social workers, or District Probation Officers.
- **Undertrial Prisoners:** If not released within **7 days** of a bail order, jail authorities must inform the DLSA. After verification of financial incapacity, assistance of up to **₹40,000 per case** may be provided to secure bail.
- **Convicted Prisoners:** If release is delayed due to non-payment of fine, the *Jail Superintendent must inform the DLSA within 7 days*. Financial assistance of up to **₹25,000** may be sanctioned to pay the fine and facilitate release.
- **Funding Mechanism:** States/UTs must open a **subsidiary account under the CNA (NCRB)** and map it on the Public Financial Management System (PFMS). A **Nodal Officer of the State/UT Prison Headquarter** draws funds from the CNA based on recommendations of the Empowered or Oversight Committee and releases them to the concerned prison account.
- **Oversight:** A **State-level Oversight Committee** may be constituted, comprising senior officials from Home/Jail, Law Department, State Legal Services Authority, Prison administration, and the High Court Registry, to monitor implementation and approve higher amounts where necessary.

Key Changes Introduced

	Clearer definition of roles and responsibilities of district and state-level authorities.
	Mandatory time-bound reporting and verification processes.
	Strengthened involvement of senior administrative and judicial officials.
	Streamlined fund-flow mechanism through NCRB-led CNA structure.

- **Exclusions:** The scheme does not apply to prisoners accused of offences under the Prevention of Corruption Act, PMLA, NDPS Act, UAPA, and other notified heinous offences such as terrorism, rape, trafficking, dowry death, and POCSO offences.

Rationale for Revision

- Poor and uneven implementation since the issuance of the original guidelines in 2023.
- Lack of clear timelines and weak institutional ownership, resulting in delays and dilution of the scheme's objectives.

Constitution of India Released in Santhali Language

The President released the Constitution of India in the Santhali language.

About Santhali Language

- **Language Family:** Belongs to the **Austroasiatic (Munda branch) language family**, distinct from Indo-Aryan (Hindi, Bengali) and Dravidian languages (Telugu, Tamil).
- **Speakers:** Spoken mainly by the **Santhal tribal community**.
- **Geographical Spread:** Predominantly used in **Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, and Bihar**.
- **Script:** Written in **Ol Chiki script**, developed in 1925 by **Pandit Raghunath Murmu** to preserve Santhali identity and literature. The script is written left to right, has 30 letters and two styles (print *Chapa* style and cursive *Usara* style).
- **Constitutional Status:** Included in the **Eighth Schedule of the Constitution** by the **92nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003**.
- **Significance:** Constitutional recognition promotes its use in **education, administration, and cultural preservation**, and strengthens the linguistic inclusion of tribal communities.

One Nation, One License, One Payment

A Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)-led committee's working paper on balancing AI innovation and copyright has invited public feedback on a proposed new framework that recommends a **mandatory blanket licensing regime**, under which AI companies would be required to pay royalties to creators for using copyrighted works in AI training.

Background: The DPIIT-led committee was constituted to address growing legal uncertainty around the use of copyrighted works for training Generative AI systems. The core concern identified was that large-scale, unlicensed ingestion of human-created content for commercial AI systems risks:

- Undermining copyright as an economic incentive for creators
- Weakening India's creative economy (including news, music, literature, audiovisual works)
- Creating legal uncertainty for AI developers due to pending and fragmented litigation

The committee therefore sought a systemic, predictable, and scalable framework that balances innovation with creator protection, rather than relying on piecemeal litigation or private contracts.

Significance of the Recommendations: If implemented, India would-

- Become the **first jurisdiction** with a statutory, government-administered AI training license.
- Provide **legal certainty** to AI developers.
- Protect **small creators & unorganized cultural sectors**.
- Prevent concentration of royalties among a few large players.
- Align AI growth with India's broader goals of cultural preservation and inclusive development.

DPIIT Recommendations

Rejection of existing models  <p>The committee rejects voluntary licensing and Text and Data Mining (TDM) exceptions, as they lead to high transaction costs, unequal bargaining power favouring big players, exclusion of small creators, fragmented access to data, and uncompensated commercial use of copyrighted works.</p>	Adoption of a hybrid statutory framework  <p>It proposes a mandatory blanket licence for AI training combined with a statutory right to remuneration for creators, captured in the principle "One Nation, One License, One Payment." Copyright holders cannot block AI training but are legally guaranteed compensation.</p>	Scope of the blanket license  <p>Applies to all lawfully accessed copyrighted works used for commercial AI training, without overriding paywalls, contracts, or technological protection measures.</p>	Central royalty collection mechanism  <p>Establishment of a government-designated umbrella body, Copyright Royalties Collective for AI Training (CRCAT), to act as a single-window system for collection and equitable distribution of royalties across different classes of works.</p>
Royalty rate setting  <p>Rates to be fixed by a government-appointed expert committee, based on economic and market analysis, reviewed periodically, subject to judicial review, and preferably calculated as a percentage of global revenue from commercial AI systems.</p>	Retroactive royalties  <p>AI developers already earning revenue from systems trained on copyrighted works must pay retrospective royalties, as a corrective (not punitive) measure.</p>	Transparency and distribution  <p>AI developers must disclose broad details of training datasets; CRCAT will distribute pooled royalties proportionally to usage across categories of works.</p>	Enforcement mechanism  <p>In disputes, courts will presume the creator's claim to be valid, shifting the burden of proof to AI developers to show lawful use and payment.</p>

Sahyog Portal

Over 2,300 blocking orders were issued to 19 online platforms- including WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram- via the Union Home Ministry's Sahyog portal between October 2024 and October 2025, according to RTI data.

Significance of Sahyog Portal

- **Faster Enforcement** against cyber fraud, impersonation, and organized online crime.
- **Centralized Coordination Mechanism:** It brings together authorized government agencies, IT intermediaries, and Internet Service Providers (ISPs) on a single platform.
- **Operationalization of Section 79(3)(b), IT Act:** It provides a structured mechanism to enforce intermediary due-diligence obligations, strengthening accountability of social media and digital platforms.
- **Enhanced National Cybersecurity:** It supports proactive disruption of criminal networks through large-scale blocking of fraudulent accounts, contributing to safer cyberspace.
- **Judicially Endorsed Compliance Tool:** Backed by court directions, it encourages intermediaries to onboard and comply.

What is the Sahyog Portal?



It is a centralized digital platform launched in 2024 by the **Union Home Ministry** to expedite the issuance of **content-blocking notices** to internet intermediaries under Section 79(3)(b) of the IT Act, 2000. It is maintained by the **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (ICCC)**.

Objective:

- To automate notices for **removal or disabling unlawful online content**.
- To enable enforcement of intermediary due diligence obligations under the IT Act.
- To support court-directed and executive blocking orders.

How It Works?	Key Features:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flagging: Authorized agencies (Centre, State Police, LEAs) flag objectionable content. • Notice Issuance: Directly to IT intermediaries/social media platforms, or routed via Department of Telecommunications (DoT) for action by ISPs. • Action & Reporting: Platforms take action and update status on a national dashboard; intermediaries may seek additional information if required. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single-window platform connecting authorised agencies, intermediaries, and ISPs. • Faster, coordinated responses to online violations. • Transparency through action-status visibility to stakeholders.

Concerns Raised

- **Risk of Over-Blocking and Censorship:** Civil society and platforms argue that expedited blocking without robust safeguards may suppress lawful speech and dissent.
- **Limited Transparency:** Orders and reasons for blocking are not always publicly disclosed.
- **Due Process and Natural Justice:** Absence of prior notice or hearing for affected users/content creators may conflict with principles of procedural fairness.
- **Executive Overreach:** Heavy reliance on executive discretion under Section 79(3)(b), rather than judicial oversight.
- **Compliance Burden on Intermediaries:** Smaller platforms may face technical and legal challenges in responding to frequent, time-bound notices.

New Safeguards to Protect Great Indian Bustard from Power Lines

After six years, the Supreme Court (SC) issued its final order on conserving the **critically endangered Great Indian Bustard (GIB)**, revising priority conservation areas while balancing renewable energy development in Rajasthan and Gujarat.

Case Background:

- **Origin of the Case (2019):** A PIL sought urgent judicial intervention to prevent extinction of the GIB. **Collisions with overhead power transmission lines** from solar and wind projects emerged as a major cause of mortality.
- **Scientific Basis:** The **Wildlife Institute of India (2018)** warned that without immediate mitigation of power-line collisions, **GIB extinction was inevitable** as GIBs have **poor frontal vision and heavy bodies**, limiting their ability to avoid linear infrastructure in flight.

About Great Indian Bustard (GIB)

Status & Range  Once widespread across the Indian subcontinent, now survives in isolated pockets. Fewer than 150 birds remain in the wild, primarily in Desert National Park, Rajasthan, and parts of Kutch, Gujarat.	Key Threats  Grassland loss and fragmentation due to agriculture, irrigation and infrastructure. Fatal collisions/electrocution from high-voltage power lines linked to wind and solar projects.
Population Decline  Gujarat's population has declined from 48 birds (2007) to about three females, while Rajasthan hosts nearly 95% of the remaining population.	Reproductive Challenge  The species has very low reproductive rates (one egg per breeding season), making recovery slow.
Conservation Urgency  The failure of protection efforts at Karera Wildlife Sanctuary (Madhya Pradesh) underscores the urgency of timely and effective conservation action.	

Interim Judicial Developments:

- **2021 Orders:** SC prohibited new overhead transmission lines over ~99,000 sq km, directed undergrounding of power lines and mandated bird flight diverters.
- **Challenges:** Union Ministries (Power, Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE), Ministry of Environment and Forest Climate Change (MoEFCC) objected citing technical infeasibility, high costs, and conflict with India's renewable energy and climate goals.
- **2024 Orders:** The Court modified its blanket ban noting that **undergrounding alone would not save the species**. It constituted an **Expert Committee** to balance **biodiversity conservation** with **climate change mitigation**.

Final SC Verdict: Based on the Expert Committee's field studies and stakeholder consultations, the Court issued following **final and binding directions**, applicable across Rajasthan and Gujarat-

Revised Priority Conservation Areas:

- **Rajasthan:** Expanded from **13,163 sq km to 14,013 sq km**.

- **Gujarat:** Expanded from **500 sq km to 740 sq km.**
- These “priority areas” represent **core breeding and high-use habitats.** Some contested eastern areas (e.g., Rasla-Degrav Oran) were excluded, despite objections from conservationists.
- **Creation of Dedicated Powerline Corridors:** The Court accepted the creation of **dedicated powerline corridors** to reroute overhead transmission lines away from critical GIB habitats.
 - In **Rajasthan**, corridors up to **5 km wide** will be located **at least 5 km south of the Desert National Park.**
 - In **Gujarat**, **1-2 km wide corridors** will evacuate power from wind and solar projects in coastal **Kutch.**
 - The Court further directed that where multiple lines originate from different green energy pooling stations but terminate at a common grid station, routes must be **optimized through shared corridors** to minimize ecological impact.
- **Restrictions on Renewable Energy Projects:** Within revised priority areas-
 - No new **overhead power lines** (except 11 kV and below).
 - No new **wind turbines**.
 - No new **solar parks/plants above 2 MW.**
 - No expansion of existing solar parks.

This marked a **clear ecological red line** for infrastructure development.
- **Voltage-Based Powerline Mitigation:** Instead of blanket undergrounding, the Court adopted a **graded, voltage-based approach-**
 - In **Rajasthan**, immediate undergrounding of **80 km of 33 kV lines.** Remaining lines to be undergrounded, rerouted, or insulated. All work to be completed **before 2028.**
 - In **Gujarat**, immediate undergrounding of **79.2 km of 33 kV lines and 64.9 km of 66 kV lines. 250 km of critical lines** (identified by WII) to be undergrounded within **2 years. 11 kV and below** allowed, preferably with **insulated cables.** Undergrounding encouraged in forest or critical areas.
- **Bird Flight Diverters:** The Court **did not mandate universal installation** of bird flight diverters and accepted the committee’s view that their effectiveness is **not conclusively established.** High cost and maintenance issues exist. The committee will submit a **scientific assessment** before any future mandate.

- **Conservation Measures Beyond Powerlines:**

Rajasthan	Gujarat
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Grassland restoration, conservation and consolidation. ● Predator management (free-ranging dogs, reptiles). ● Enclosure improvement. ● Food and water management. ● Community participation. ● Continuation of Project GIB. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Adoption of the “Jump-Start” conservation method: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Translocation of fertile eggs from Rajasthan. ○ Incubation by wild females. ● GPS tagging and monitoring birds.

Implications of the Verdict:

- **Ecological Significance:** It provides the **strongest judicial protection** yet to India’s grassland ecosystems by moving conservation from **species-centric** to **landscape-level planning** and recognizing powerline collision as a **key extinction driver**, not a marginal threat.
- **Renewable Energy Governance:** It ends regulatory uncertainty created by the 2021 blanket ban, allows renewable energy growth, but **within clearly demarcated ecological limits** and introduces **corridor-based transmission planning**, reshaping Green Energy Corridor projects.

- **Constitutional Balance:** The Court explicitly balanced **Article 21** (right to life, including ecological health), **Environmental protection duties** (Articles 48A, 51A(g)) and India's **climate change and renewable energy commitments**. Thus, clarifying that **climate action cannot come at the cost of irreversible biodiversity loss**.
- **Precedential Value:** Science-based adjudication, use of expert committees in complex techno-ecological conflicts, and harmonizing **development, conservation, and climate goals**.

Draft Content Syndication Policy, 2025

Prasar Bharati, the government-owned national broadcaster, recently uploaded a **draft Content Syndication Policy, 2025** on its website for public consultation.

What is the Draft Content Syndication Policy, 2025?

It is a framework proposed by **Prasar Bharati** to regulate the **licensing, distribution, and monetization** of its TV, radio, and digital content across third-party platforms.

Objectives of the Policy:

- **Monetization of public broadcasting content** to ensure financial sustainability.

- **Promotion of cultural outreach** and dissemination of Indian heritage.

- **Expansion of access** to Prasar Bharati's vast archival and live content.

- **Strategic collaboration** with domestic and global media platforms.

- **Balancing commercial use with public interest**, editorial independence, and constitutional values.

- **Strengthening India's global cultural presence and soft power**.

Significance of the Policy:

- **Economic Value Realization:** It unlocks value from decades of publicly funded archival content and creates new revenue streams, reducing dependence on budgetary support.

Key Features of the Policy

- **Wide Content Coverage:** It will cover content produced by **Doordarshan and Akashvani**, Archived national and regional programmes, Live coverage of Government events, Festivals, Sports and national occasions, digital-first content from Prasar Bharati's OTT platforms, commissioned, co-produced, licensed, and owned content.
- **Multiple Syndication Models:** It proposes-
 - **Public / non-commercial syndication** for education and awareness
 - **Commercial syndication** for broadcasters, OTTs, telecom and IPTV platforms
 - **International syndication** for diaspora platforms and foreign broadcaster.
- **Flexible Monetization and Licensing:** The policy adopts flexible, market-aligned monetisation models to suit different platforms and audiences. These include-
 - **Flat Fee Licensing** for one-time content use;
 - **Revenue-Sharing Arrangements** based on actual earnings; and
 - **Minimum Guarantee (MG) with revenue share**, which combines assured upfront payment with performance-linked returns.

Pricing is designed to be **platform-specific, territory-specific, and content-specific**, allowing differentiated valuation for archival, live, premium, domestic, or international content.

- **Strategic Collaborations:** The policy promotes **partnerships with domestic and international platforms** to expand the reach of Prasar Bharati's content beyond traditional broadcasting. These collaborations aim to enhance **cultural diplomacy**, strengthen India's global cultural presence, and encourage **innovation** in content distribution and consumption across emerging digital and OTT ecosystems.
- **Rights Management and Safeguards:** The policy establishes a robust rights-management framework by clearly defining **exclusive or non-exclusive rights**, along with limits on **territory, platform, duration, and language** of use. It mandates **branding and attribution** to protect public ownership of content, restricts **unauthorized modification and sub-licensing**, and incorporates **audit, reporting, and compliance provisions** to ensure transparency, accountability, and protection of public assets.
- **Institutional Oversight:** The policy provides for institutional oversight through a **Syndication Review Committee**, which evaluates syndication proposals for editorial, legal, and commercial suitability. It also mandates **periodic monitoring and reporting**, along with defined **dispute-resolution mechanisms**, to ensure transparency, accountability, and effective implementation.

- **Digital and Market Integration:** It integrates public broadcasting with the OTT and wider digital ecosystem and aligns Prasar Bharati with contemporary, market-oriented media practices.
- **Soft Power and Cultural Outreach** through wider global dissemination.
- **Institutional Transformation:** It positions Prasar Bharati as a **content provider**, not merely a broadcaster and reflects a shift towards **modern, market-aligned public media governance**.
- **Public Interest Balance:** It balances commercial viability with the **public service mandate** and constitutional obligations.

PESA Mahotsav

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) celebrated a **two-day PESA Mahotsav: Utsav Lok Sanskriti Ka** in Visakhapatnam, **Andhra Pradesh** which marks the anniversary of the **Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act, 1996**.

What is the PESA Act, 1996?

The **PESA Act, 1996** extends the provisions of the **73rd Constitutional Amendment to Fifth Schedule (Scheduled) Areas** and provides a **legal framework for self-governance** in tribal areas by empowering **Gram Sabhas** and Panchayats.

Salient Features of the PESA Act:

- **Primacy of Gram Sabha:** Gram Sabha is empowered to approve development plans, programmes, and projects; Identify beneficiaries of welfare schemes and protect **customs, traditions, cultural identity**, and community resources.
- **Consonance with Customary Law:** State laws must be in **conformity with tribal customary practices**. Administrative boundaries cannot override traditional village structures.
- **Control over Natural Resources:** Ownership of **Minor Forest Produce (MFP)**, planning and management of **minor water bodies**. Consultation mandatory for land acquisition, rehabilitation and resettlement, mining leases for **minor minerals**.
- **Socio-Economic Regulation:** Power to regulate **village markets, money-lending, sale and consumption of intoxicants**. Authority to prevent **alienation of tribal land** and restore unlawfully alienated land.
- **Political Representation:** **Proportional reservation** for STs in Panchayats. Chairperson positions reserved for STs. Provision for **nomination of ST members** if adequate representation is not achieved.

Government Initiatives under PESA

- **PESA Mahotsav:** Organized by the MoPR to commemorate the PESA Act for awareness generation and celebration of community-led governance.

Objectives of the PESA Act:



- ✓ To extend **Panchayati Raj provisions to Fifth Schedule Areas**.
- ✓ Tribal communities constitute about **8.6% of India's population**, and regions with significant tribal presence are notified as **Scheduled Areas by the President under Article 244 of the Constitution** to ensure tribal control over local resources, development, and social life.
- ✓ At present, 10 states have Fifth Scheduled Areas: Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Telangana have framed their PESA Rules. Odisha and Jharkhand have framed their draft PESA Rules.
- ✓ To restore and protect the rights of tribal communities over their land, water, forest resources, culture, and **governance systems**.
- ✓ To place the **Gram Sabha at the center of governance** in Scheduled Areas.

Need for the PESA Act: The **73rd Constitutional Amendment (1993)** did not automatically apply to Scheduled Areas. Tribal regions have distinct customary laws, community-based resource ownership and traditional dispute resolution mechanisms.

- ✓ Conventional Panchayati Raj systems were inadequate to address historical exploitation and displacement of tribals, centralized decision-making and weak protection of land and forest rights.
- ✓ PESA was required to: bridge the governance gap in Scheduled Areas and constitutionally safeguard tribal autonomy and livelihoods.

- **Capacity Building:** Over 1 lakh elected representatives trained across Scheduled Areas (2024–25). State- and district-level master trainer programmes.
- **PESA-Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) Portal:** Enables hamlet-wise and village-wise planning aligned with tribal priorities and facilitates effective utilisation of Finance Commission grants (central/state) and scheme funds.
- **Institutional Support:** Creation of a dedicated **PESA Cell** in the MoPR and translation of PESA manuals into **regional and tribal languages**.
- **Centres of Excellence on PESA:** Established in central universities to institutionalize training, documentation and research.

Significance of the PESA Act	Challenges Faced in PESA Implementation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening Grassroots Democracy: in tribal areas by empowering local institutions and ensuring meaningful participation of tribal communities in decision-making. • Community Control over Natural Resources: like land, forests, water bodies and minor minerals in the community, safeguarding traditional resource rights. • Protection against Displacement and Alienation: of tribal land. • Promotion of Sustainable and Culturally Sensitive Development: aligned with tribal customs and traditions. • Enhanced Accountability through Gram Sabhas: to improve transparency and accountability at the grassroots level. • Advancing Constitutional Decentralization and Social Justice: for tribal communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incomplete Rule Framing: Some States have only draft PESA Rules or weak implementation. • Administrative Resistance: Reluctance of line departments to cede power to Gram Sabhas. • Low Awareness: Limited understanding of PESA provisions among tribal communities. • Conflict with Sectoral Laws: Overlaps with forest, mining and wildlife laws dilute Gram Sabha authority. • Capacity Constraints: Inadequate technical and financial capacity of Gram Sabhas. • Tokenism: Gram Sabha consultations often reduced to procedural formalities.

Delhi HC Can Test Constitutional Validity of Special Marriage Act Provisions

The Delhi High Court (HC) will now examine the constitutional validity of sections 6 and 7 of the Special Marriage Act (SMA), 1954. This follows the Supreme Court's (SC) recent order dismissing the Law Ministry's plea to transfer the challenge from Delhi HC to SC.

- **Section 6** requires issuance of a public notice inviting objections to the intended marriage.
- **Section 7** outlines the process for how Marriage Officers handle those objections, including conducting inquiries and potentially refusing to solemnize the marriage if the objections are found to be valid under the law

Case Background: The petition was filed by an interfaith couple whose marriage faced parental opposition. They challenged the SMA's 30-day public notice and objection process, arguing it enables families to obstruct inter-caste and inter-religious marriages, violates privacy, and endangers life and liberty by exposing a private decision to public scrutiny.

About SMA, 1954

Enacted by Parliament in 1954, the SMA provides a **secular framework for marriage**, where the **State**, not religion, sanctions the marriage. India recognizes both **religious marriages** (under personal laws) & **civil marriages** (under SMA).

Rationale and Significance

- Personal laws governing marriage (e.g. Hindu Marriage Act, Muslim personal law) are religion-specific. Inter-faith or inter-caste marriages under personal laws often require **religious conversion**.
- The SMA enables **inter-faith and inter-caste marriages without conversion**, allowing individuals to retain their religious identity and promoting **individual choice, secularism, and equality before law**.

Applicability and Eligibility

- Applicable to **persons of all religions**- Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, etc.
- Minimum age:** Male: 21 years | Female: **18 years**.
- Section 19:** A person belonging to an undivided Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh or Jain family who marries under SMA is deemed to be **separated from the joint family**. This may affect **inheritance and property rights**.

Procedure for Civil Marriage under SMA:

- Section 5** mandates parties to give a **written notice** of intended marriage to the Marriage Officer of the district.
- Before solemnization, both parties and **three witnesses** sign a declaration before the Marriage Officer. After completion, a **Marriage Certificate** is issued, which serves as legal proof of marriage.

Notice Period and Objections:

- Section 6 (Notice of Intended Marriage):** Notice is entered in the Marriage Notice Book, published at the Marriage Officer's office to invite objections within **30-days**.
- Section 7 (Objection to Marriage):** Any person may object within 30 days. Objections must relate to conditions under **Section 4** (age, consent, prohibited relationships, etc.). Marriage cannot be solemnized until objections are inquired into and resolved.

Criticisms of the Act:

- Mandatory public notice is often criticized for:
 - Invading privacy** of consenting adults.
 - Enabling harassment, social pressure, or familial interference**.
 - Endangering couples, particularly in inter-faith or inter-caste marriages.
- Disclosure of personal matrimonial intent may **jeopardize life and liberty**.

SC Stays Former Maharashtra Agri Minister's Conviction

The **Supreme Court (SC)** recently stayed the conviction of former Maharashtra Agriculture Minister **Manikrao Kokate** in a document-tampering case related to the illegal allotment of a government flat, granting him temporary protection from disqualification as an MLA.

- ✓ This followed an earlier order of the **Bombay High Court (HC)**, which had suspended his two-year sentence but refused to stay the conviction, leaving him liable to disqualification.

Suspension of Sentence vs Stay of Conviction

Suspension of Sentence (Section 389, CrPC): Punishment is paused; the person is not jailed. But **convict status continues**, so legal consequences remain.

Stay of Conviction: Convict status itself is put on hold preventing collateral consequences like **disqualification from office**.

Why is SC Relief Crucial?

Under the **Representation of the People Act**, an MLA is disqualified if convicted and sentenced to imprisonment of **two years or more**. Only a **stay of conviction** can immediately nullify disqualification. After the Bombay HC order, Kokate faced **imminent disqualification** by the Speaker.

Why was High Court Relief Insufficient?

The HC only suspended the **sentence**, not the **conviction** arguing that stay of conviction would undermine public confidence in democratic institutions. However, suspension of sentence alone **does not prevent disqualification**.

SC's Legal Reasoning on Stay of Conviction:

- A conviction cannot be stayed merely because an appeal is filed. Courts must assess the consequences of keeping the conviction operative and may grant a stay only if the applicant demonstrates serious prejudice likely to result if the conviction is not suspended, as laid down in *State of Maharashtra (CBI) v. Balakrishna Dattatrya Kumbhar* (2012).
- In Kokate's case, the SC orally observed a “**fundamental error**” in the conviction and decided to hear the matter in detail.

Related Precedent: In 2023, **Rahul Gandhi** was disqualified after a two-year sentence in a defamation case. The Gujarat HC refused relief, but the SC later **stayed the conviction**, restoring his Lok Sabha membership.

Significance of the SC Order:

- **Prevents immediate disqualification** of an elected representative.
- **Reaffirms the distinction** between **punishment** and **convict status**.

The Karnataka Social Boycott (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Bill, 2025

The Karnataka Legislature recently passed the Karnataka Social Boycott (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Bill, 2025.

What is the Karnataka Social Boycott (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Bill, 2025?

The bill seeks to **criminalize social boycott** imposed on individuals or groups by caste or community bodies, including informal caste panchayats by treating social boycott as a violation of **fundamental rights and human dignity**.

Objective of the Bill: To eradicate the unconstitutional practice of social boycott and protect individual dignity, equality and human rights.

Key Provisions:

- **Wide Definition of Social Boycott:** A *social boycott* is any oral, written, or physical act of social discrimination imposed by a caste panchayat decision, whereby a community member is ostracized or excluded through denial of social, religious, economic, educational, professional, or public interactions and access (such as marriage, funerals, worship, schools, businesses, or public places), resulting in isolation and hardship; such boycott is prohibited and constitutes an offence.
- **Criminal Offence and Penalties for Social Boycott:** Imposing, causing, practicing, aiding, abetting, or deliberating upon a social boycott constitutes a criminal offence punishable with imprisonment up to three years, or a fine up to ₹1 lakh, or both.
- **Liability of Caste Panchayats:** Liability extends to persons influencing the caste panchayat's decision (even if absent), members who vote for or participate in such deliberations, and organizers or participants of unlawful assemblies convened to impose a boycott.
- **Invalidation of Pre-Existing Social Boycotts:** All social boycotts existing at the commencement of the Act are void, and caste panchayats imposing such boycotts are deemed to have committed the offence.
- **Compounding of Offence:** Offences under the Act may be compounded with the victim's consent and the court's permission, subject to the accused performing court-directed community service.
- **Cognizable and Bailable Offences:** Any offence punishable under the Act shall be cognizable and bailable and triable by a Judicial Magistrate of the first class.

- **Victim-Centric Measures:** The court must hear the victim on the quantum of sentence and then only pass the sentence; victims or their family members may directly approach the police or a Judicial Magistrate, who may order investigation and direct authorities to provide necessary assistance and protection to the victim and family during the trial.
- **Preventive Powers of the Deputy Commissioner:** On receiving information about a likely unlawful assembly to impose a social boycott, the Deputy Commissioner may prohibit such assembly or related acts in specified areas and issue necessary directions to the police to enforce the order.
- **Social Boycott Prohibition Officer:** The State Government may appoint a Group 'A' officer as the Social Boycott Prohibition Officer for specified areas, empowered to detect offences under the Act, report cases to the Magistrate and Deputy Commissioner, and assist the Magistrate during trial and related proceedings.
- **Non-Derogation and Application of BNS, 2023:** The Act operates in addition to existing laws, and while framing charges, the Magistrate may also invoke relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023 wherever the facts disclose such offences.

Concerns Raised



Narrow "Community" Definition: Limited to intra-community (caste/religion) discrimination leaving exclusion by external groups unaddressed.



Proof Issues: Informal or silent boycotts (e.g., stopping interaction without an explicit decision) are hard to establish legally.



Weak Stance on Caste Panchayats: Not explicitly banned despite judicial criticism.



Compoundable Offences: Risk of coerced settlements for victims may undermine deterrence.



Enforcement Doubts: Experience under Maharashtra's 2016 law shows few trials and convictions.



Implementation gap: Although the offence is cognizable, but ground-level effectiveness remains uncertain.

Centre Plans Portal to Provide All Forest Rights Services Online

The Ministry of Tribal Affairs is developing a **national web portal** as a **single-window system** for all processes under the **Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006**.

What is the Proposed Portal?

Currently named TARANG (Beta version), it is aimed at taking the entire process of recognition and management under the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006 online. It has been designed by a team of six undergraduate students during the Smart India Hackathon 2025.

Key Features	Future Roadmap:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End-to-end digital processing of FRA claims: from Gram Sabha Forest Rights Committees to State-Level Monitoring Committees. • Issuance of digital title deeds and digitization of legacy RoFR (Record of Forest Rights) data. • GPS- and satellite-based land mapping and geotagging of forest rights. • Creation of an FRA Atlas mapping potential areas for future claims. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of AI-based Optical Character Recognition (OCR) for digitizing records. • Integration with SVAMITVA village survey and mapping data. • Satellite and drone-based analysis for monitoring and dispute resolution. • Possible linkage with Article 275(1) for special Grants for ST welfare.

Passenger Assistance Control Room

To enable faster redressal of air passengers' grievances, the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) recently established a 24x7 Passenger Assistance Control Room (PACR).

Key Features of PACR

- **Integrated Operations:** Functions as a single, coordinated hub at Udaan Bhawan, New Delhi, bringing together officials from the MoCA, Directorate General of Civil Aviation, Airports Authority of India, airline operators, and other stakeholders.
- **24x7 Functioning:** Operates round-the-clock to monitor aviation operations, handle passenger calls, and coordinate real-time assistance.
- **Technology Backbone:** Fully integrates the AirSewa system; using an omni-channel platform that converts passenger inputs into actionable cases, supported by live, data-driven dashboards.
 - ✓ AirSewa (an MoCA initiative) enables travelers to submit grievances and seek information on air travel in India.
- **On-the-Spot Resolution:** Physical presence of airline representatives enables immediate coordination and quicker issue resolution.
- **Priority Coverage:** Focuses on delays, cancellations, refunds, and baggage issues, handled in line with the Passenger Charter.

Digital Election Campaigns and Regulatory Gaps in India

India's election regulation framework is increasingly misaligned with the realities of digital political campaigning. As electoral influence shifts from parties and candidates to platforms and third-party actors, concerns arise for **free and fair elections**, a core democratic principle and part of the Election Commission's constitutional mandate.

Background: India's election laws and regulatory practices continue to adopt a **party-candidate centric approach**. During the Bihar Assembly elections, the **Election Commission of India (ECI)** reiterated:

- Mandatory **pre-certification of political advertisements** by the Media Certification and Monitoring Committee (MCMC).
- Disclosure of social media expenditure by political parties under **Section 77(1) of the Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1951**.
- A subsequent advisory extended restrictions to "organizations and individuals", but limited them to **print media**, and confined enforcement to the **polling day and its eve**.

Core Challenge: Electoral influence has moved to **digital platforms and third-party actors** (influencers, campaign firms, and surrogate entities) who remain weakly regulated. This enables opaque practices such as **third-party funding of advertisements on official party pages** that may escape disclosure in party expenditure accounts, undermining **transparency, accountability, and electoral fairness**.

Related Data (Bihar Case Study)

- **Analysis Of Bihar Assembly Election Data:** using the **Meta Ads Library** shows **55 advertisers** spent more than ₹1 lakh on digital political ads in the final month. Only **23** were official political parties or candidates; **32** were third-party actors.
- **Impact asymmetry:** Third-party advertisers generated **nearly twice the impressions** of parties/candidates despite similar spending and were more cost-efficient.
- **Demographic reach:** About **75%** of digital political content was consumed by the **13-34 age group**, with third-party campaigns displaying a wider age spread.

Inference: Communicative power in digital elections is shifting away from formally regulated actors.

Way Forward

- **Reconceptualize electoral stakeholders** by formally recognizing third-party digital campaigners and intermediaries.

- **Strengthen campaign finance transparency** by- mandating disclosure of expenditure incurred *on behalf of* parties and candidates; Requiring identification of the true sponsor of digital advertisements.
- **Ensure legal consistency** by extending the principle laid down in *Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting v. M/s Gemini TV, 2004* (the Supreme Court held that no individual or entity may publish political advertisements benefiting a party or candidate) to digital political advertising.
- **Adopt a lifecycle-based regulatory approach**, covering the entire digital campaign period rather than only the immediate pre-poll phase.
- **Enhance institutional capacity of the ECI** for real-time digital monitoring and platform-level coordination.

Sabka Bima Sabki Raksha Bill, 2025

- The Parliament passed the Sabka Bima Sabki Raksha (Amendment of Insurance Laws) Bill, 2025.
- It seeks to reform India's insurance framework through amendments to three Acts - The Insurance Act, 1938, The Life Insurance Corporation Act, 1956 and The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority Act, 1999.

Key Features

100% FDI permitted in an Indian Insurance Company

- The Bill increase the FDI limit in Indian Insurance companies from **74% to 100%**.
- This will open doors to more foreign players to India. It will also help in capital augmentation, adoption of advanced technology and bringing global best practices along with increasing employment opportunities.
- Increased competition would drive efficiency in products and services.

Net-owned fund requirements lowered

- The Bill reduces the net-owned fund requirements for foreign entities engaged in the re-insurance business from Rs 5,000 crore to Rs 1,000 crore.
- Net owned-fund consists of paid-up equity capital, free reserves, balance in share premium account, and capital reserves made up of surplus arising out of sale proceeds.

Insurance co-operative societies

- It amends the definition of an insurance co-operative society to remove the requirement of minimum paid-up share capital of Rs 100 crore for life, general, and health insurance businesses.

Enhanced Regulatory Powers

- Regulatory governance is being strengthened by introducing standard operating procedure for regulation making and mandating the process consultative.
- The IRDAI Chairperson will be empowered to order search, seizures and inspections if it suspects violation of law. Currently, SEBI has the power to search and seize documents.
- IRDAI will have the power to extract wrongful gains from insurers and intermediaries. Penalties are being rationalised and factors for imposition of penalties are being introduced.

Ease of Doing Business

- Ease of Doing business is being promoted for intermediaries through the introduction of provision of one-time licensing and the provision of suspension of license rather than straight away cancellation.
- LIC has been provided autonomy to open Zonal offices in the country and to align its foreign offices with the laws and regulations of their respective jurisdiction.

Policyholders' Education and Protection Fund

- To protect the interest of policyholders, a dedicated fund, namely Policyholders' Education and Protection Fund will be set up to spread awareness about insurance. Policyholders' data would now be required to be collected and protected in alignment with **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023**.

World Inequality Report 2026

- The World Inequality Lab recently released World Inequality Report 2026.

- This is the third report in the series after earlier 2018 and 2022 editions and is based on the work of over 200 scholars across the world, affiliated with the World Inequality Lab.

Key findings

- **Wealth** includes the total value of a person's assets-such as savings, investments or property, after subtracting their debts.
- Globally, wealth has reached historic highs but **remains very unevenly distributed**, with the **top 0.001%**, comprising fewer than 60,000 multi-millionaires, **owning three times more wealth than the entire bottom half of humanity**.
- Their share has grown steadily from almost **4% in 1995 to over 6% today**.
- **The global top 10% owns three-quarters of all wealth**, while the **bottom 50% holds just 2%**.
- Furthermore, the top 1% alone, controls 37% of global wealth.
- In 2025, the richest 10% of the world received 53% of global income, the middle 40% received 38%, and the bottom 50% earned just 8%.
- **Income** is measured using pre-tax earnings, after accounting for pension and unemployment insurance contributions.

Geographic Breakdown

- In 2025, the average wealth of people in North America and Oceania, stood at 338% of the world's average, making it the wealthiest region globally. Income share stood at 290% of the world's average, also the highest in the world.
- Europe and East Asia followed, remaining above the world average, while vast parts of sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, Latin America and the Middle East remained far below the global average.
- South Africa has the highest levels of income inequality in the world. Latin American countries such as Brazil, Mexico, Chile and Colombia show a similar trend, where the richest 10% receive nearly 60% of the earnings.
- In Asia, income distribution is mixed. Countries like Bangladesh and China have a more balanced structure, whereas India, Thailand, and Turkiye remain top-heavy, with the richest 10 percent earning more than half of all income.

Inequality in India

- Income inequality in India remains among the highest in the world, with top 10% of earners capturing 58% of national income, while bottom 50% receive only 15%.



Gender distribution

- ✓ In gender terms, the pay gap persists across all regions, especially for unpaid labour. Excluding unpaid work, women earn only 61% of what men earn per working hour; and when unpaid labor is included, this figure falls to just 32%.
- ✓ Globally, women capture just over a quarter of total labor income, a share that has barely shifted since 1990.

Climate impact

- ✓ The report also highlighted the climate crisis stating that the poorest half of the global population accounts for only 3% of carbon emissions associated with private capital ownership, while the top 10% account for 77% of emissions.
- ✓ The wealthiest 1% account for 41% of private capital ownership emissions, almost double the amount of the entire bottom 90%.

Policy inadequacy

- ✓ Policy can reduce inequality, however, taxation often fails where it is most needed - at the very top of the distribution with the ultra-rich escaping taxation.
- ✓ Effective income tax rates climb steadily for most of the population but fall sharply for billionaires and centi-millionaires.
- ✓ Elites pay proportionally less than most of the households that earn much lower incomes. This regressive pattern deprives states of resources for essential investments in education, healthcare, and climate action.

- Wealth inequality is even greater in India, with the richest 10% holding around 65% of total wealth and the top 1% holding about 40%.
- Female labor participation remains very low at 15.7%, showing no improvement over the past decade.
- Overall, inequality in India remains deeply entrenched across income, wealth, and gender, highlighting persistent structural divides within the economy.

Recommendations

- There is a need for **progressive taxation** — especially on high incomes and wealth — **and stronger redistribution systems** to finance public goods like education, health, and climate mitigation.
- The report advocates for creating an **International Panel on Inequality (IPI)** similar to the **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)**. This panel would:
 - systematically track global inequality trends;
 - provide objective, evidence-based policy recommendations; and
 - support governments and international bodies in crafting policy responses.

Global Value Chain Report 2025

- The Global Value Chain Report 2025 was released by the World Trade Organization (WTO).
- The current report is the fifth in the biennial series, that looks at how global value chains (GVCs) are being rewired by technological change, green transition and shifting geopolitical conditions.
- A global value chain refers to the **cross-border network of production relationships** in which the creation of goods and services is split into multiple stages and distributed across different economies.

Key findings of the report

- Cross-border production, when measured in **value-added terms**, still accounts for **almost half of world trade** (46.3% in 2024).
- Globalization is being rewired, not reversed. GVC integration has slowed and consolidated since 2011, with production, trade and investment concentrating on technologically advanced, regionally integrated hubs. Regional hubs in Asia, Europe, and North America remain dominant, but value chain participation is becoming more multipolar, with more countries engaging in trade and production linkages.
- Barriers such as **logistics gaps**, limited **digital infrastructure**, and **skills shortages** constrain deeper engagement.
- Countries that combine openness with **institutional reforms**—improving customs efficiency,

Digitalization and Services

- Services have overtaken goods in GVC participation, especially digitally deliverable services such as finance, telecommunications, and IT.
- **Services value added** constitutes more than **one-third of the content** embedded in manufacturing exports, highlighting the critical role of digital, design, and logistics functions in GVCs. This shift reflects the increasing role of services in global trade and their relative insulation from physical supply chain disruptions.
- Digital trade and data flows have become essential connectors in global production networks, enabling firms to adapt without fragmentation.
- Digitalization, automation, AI, and advanced robotics are reshaping production methods and enabling more distributed and resilient manufacturing

Sustainability and Environment

- EV supply chains are heavily concentrated—especially battery production—creating both opportunities for developing economies with resource endowments and vulnerabilities due to supply concentration.
- Advanced economies have achieved substantial emissions reductions per unit of value added, but **middle- and lower-income economies emit significantly more** for similar GVC integration, posing challenges for climate and development goals.

India specific findings

- India has strengthened its position in global value chains in recent years through robust growth in business-process and digital-service exports.
- India has risen to become a part of top 10 value adding economies, with a share of 2.8% of global Domestic Value Added (DVA) in exports.
- This is due to the success of its information technology industry in exporting business process management services, recently enacted free trade agreements and policies aimed at attracting investments from multinational enterprises

transport networks, digital access, and skill development—tend to benefit more from GVC participation.

Recommendations

- Expand access to finance, technology, and markets for developing countries through trade finance initiatives, digital platforms, and capacity-building efforts.
- Enhance customs, logistics, and digital infrastructure to strengthen readiness for GVC participation.
- Encourage diversified sourcing and supply chain mapping, strengthen macro-financial frameworks, and promote information sharing between public and private sectors to anticipate shocks.
- Explore regional contingency mechanisms for essential goods.
- Align **climate and trade policies** to promote both emission reductions and economic competitiveness.
- Support developing economies with technology transfer, climate finance, and coordinated carbon pricing frameworks.

Numaligarh Refinery Gets Navratna Status

- Numaligarh Refinery Limited (NRL) has been accorded 'Navratna' status. It becomes the 27th Central Public Sector Enterprise (CPSE) with the Navratna status.
- The 3 million metric tonnes per annum (MMTPA) capacity petroleum refinery is situated at Numaligarh in Golaghat district of Assam.
- State-owned explorer Oil India is the promoter of NRL holding 69.63% stake in the refinery, along with the state government of Assam (26%) and Engineers India (4.37%).
- It had an annual turnover of Rs 25,147 crores, with net profits of Rs 1,608 crores for FY 2024-25.

Shyok Tunnel

- Recently, 125 infrastructure projects of the Border Roads Organisation (BRO), including the Shyok Tunnel were inaugurated.
- The 125 infrastructure projects are spread across two Union Territories — Ladakh and Jammu & Kashmir — and seven states: Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, West Bengal and Mizoram.
- They include 28 roads, 93 bridges and other miscellaneous projects constructed for Rs 5,000 crore.
- These upgraded infrastructure projects will significantly improve last-mile connectivity to remote villages. They will also ensure military mobility, smooth transportation of logistics, increase in tourism and employment opportunities.

Shyok Tunnel

- It is a 920 metre long tunnel on the **Durbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldie Road** that runs along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh.
- It is of key strategic significance as it would provide all-weather connectivity to areas close to the LAC, where India and China were locked in a military standoff between 2020-2024.

Eligibility criteria



CPSEs fulfilling the following criteria are eligible to be considered for grant of Navratna status:

- ▶ Have Schedule 'A' and Miniratna category 1 status;
- ▶ Have obtained at least **three** excellent or very good MoU ratings in the last five years;
- ▶ Have composite scores of 60 (out of a maximum score of 100) or above in the following six selected performance indicators:
 - ▶ Ratio of Net profit to Net Worth;
 - ▶ Ratio of Manpower cost to Total cost of production/services;
 - ▶ Ratio of Profit Before Depreciation Interest and Tax (PBDIT) to Capital employed or Return on Capital Employed;
 - ▶ Ratio of Profit Before Interest and Tax (PBIT) to Turnover;
 - ▶ Earnings Per Share (EPS); and
 - ▶ Inter-sectoral performance of the company.

Benefits of Navratna status

Navratna companies are also allowed to invest up to 15% of their net worth on a single project, or 30% of their net worth in a given year, subject to a cap of Rs 1,000 crore without seeking approval from the central government.

Indian Railways nears Complete Electrification

- Indian Railways (IR) is close to completing the electrification of its entire broad-gauge network, with **99.2% already electrified** and the remaining stretches expected to finish soon.
- Between 2019 and 2025, IR has electrified over 33,000 route kilometres, working at an average speed of more than **15 route kms every single day**.
- India's achievement stands out even when compared with countries that have long-established railway systems.
- The **United Kingdom has electrified 39% of its network, Russia 52% and China 82%**, while Switzerland has achieved full electrification.
- India's transition has reduced diesel consumption, cut emissions, lowered operational costs and improved the efficiency and speed of train operations.
- The electrification will support Indian Railways' goal of becoming a **net-zero carbon emitter by 2030** and offering cleaner, faster and more reliable mobility.

OMO and Dollar-Rupee swap

The RBI has announced that it will conduct Open Market Operation (OMO) **purchases** of government securities worth Rs 1 trillion and a three-year dollar–rupee buy/sell swap of \$5 billion to inject further liquidity into the financial system.

Dollar Rupee swap

- It is a foreign exchange transaction where banks will sell US dollars to the RBI, in exchange for rupee.
- The RBI will then make separate, future agreements with the lenders to sell the same US dollars back to them at a pre-determined rate and date.
- The rate for the future transaction is generally at a premium to the rate at which the US dollars were sold to the RBI.
- The swap will infuse rupee liquidity in the system and help to ease tightness in bank funds.
- Furthermore, by increasing dollar reserves, RBI also improves buffer against external shocks.

Open Market Operation (OMO)



- OMOs are a key monetary policy instrument through which the **RBI buys or sells government securities (bonds) to regulate liquidity** in the banking system.
- **OMO purchases inject liquidity**, as the RBI pays banks for the securities. **OMO sales absorb liquidity**, as banks pay the RBI.
- If there is excess liquidity in the system, RBI sells government securities to reduce the liquidity in the system and vice versa.
- OMOs also help to **keep the bond yields at a desired level**. For example, when liquidity is reduced, it can lead to a rise in bond yields as the RBI will release more government securities into the market and bond buyers demand more interest rate on these securities.
- The announcement comes amid sharp depreciation in the rupee. A sharp fall in the rupee often coincides with foreign investor outflows, which drain liquidity from the banking system.
- An OMO purchase helps restore this liquidity by injecting durable funds into banks.
- Currency stress can also create uneven liquidity across banks, weakening transmission of the RBI's monetary policy stance. Durable liquidity through OMOs helps restore smoother transmission across the system.

Your Money, Your Right Campaign

- The Union Government has launched a nationwide campaign titled 'Your Money, Your Right'.
- The initiative aims to help people **recover unclaimed financial assets**, including bank deposits, insurance proceeds, dividends, shares, mutual funds, and pensions.
- Launched in October 2025, the campaign gives individuals a chance to convert forgotten financial assets into usable funds.
- The three-month drive is built on the **3A Framework — Awareness, Accessibility and Action**.

- Facilitation camps have been held in 477 districts across the country, with a focus on rural and remote areas. Nearly Rs 2,000 crore has been returned to rightful owners.

Dulhasti Stage-II Hydropower Project

- The Union Environment Ministry's sectoral Expert appraisal committee (EAC) on hydel projects has approved the 260-megawatt Dulhasti Stage-II hydropower project.
- The Dulhasti Stage-II project is a **run-of-the-river project on the Chenab river** in Jammu and Kashmir's Kishtwar district.
- The project will be **developed by NHPC Limited** at an estimated cost of Rs 3,277 crore.
- The 390 MW Dulhasti-I is a run-of-the-river scheme commissioned in 2007 by NHPC Ltd. Dulhasti-II will utilise the existing dam, reservoir, and power intake of the stage-I project, and draw water from the **Marusudar River**, through the **Pakal Dul project**.
- The Chenab River basin already has three operational projects on it—the 390-MW Dulhasti-I project at Kishtwar, the 890-MW Baglihar at Ramban, and the 690-MW Salal project at Reasi.
- Apart from these, other projects under construction on Chenab include the Ratle (850MW), Kiru (624 MW), and Kwar (540 MW) projects.
- The clearance comes against the backdrop of India suspending the Indus Waters Treaty with Pakistan following the Pahalgam terror attack.
- Under the **IWT, Pakistan controlled the waters of the Indus, Jhelum and Chenab**, while **India controlled the Ravi, Beas and Sutlej**.
- With the treaty now suspended, the Centre has expedited several hydroelectric projects in the Indus basin, including Sawalkote, Ratle, Bursar, Pakal Dul, Kwar, Kiru and Kirthai I and II.

RIIT Gets Approval For InvIT

- SEBI has granted the approval to the registration of Raajmarg Infra Investment Trust (RIIT) as an Infrastructure Investment Trust (InvIT).
- Last month, National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) incorporated Raajmarg Infra Investment Managers Pvt. Ltd. (RIIMPL) as the investment manager for RIIT.
 - RIIMPL has been established as a collaborative venture with equity participation from leading banks and financial institutions.

Benefits of InvITs for investors

- A retail investor or even large financial investors may not be able to invest in

Unclaimed deposits



- Indian banks currently hold about Rs 78,000 crore in unclaimed deposits.
- Insurance companies have nearly Rs 14,000 crore lying unclaimed.
- Mutual fund companies have around Rs 3,000 crore, and unclaimed dividends amount to ~Rs 9,000 crore.

Dedicated portals

- Dedicated online portals have been created to enable easy tracking and claiming of funds:
 - RBI UDGAM Portal** for unclaimed bank deposits;
 - IRDAI Bima Bharosa Portal** for unclaimed insurance proceeds;
 - SEBI MITRA Portal** for unclaimed mutual fund amounts; and
 - IEPFA (Investor Education & Protection Fund Authority) Portal** for unpaid dividends and unclaimed shares.

Infrastructure Investment Trusts



- InvITs are institutions similar to mutual funds. Its objective is to **facilitate investment into the infrastructure sector in India**.
- InvITs collect investment from various categories of investors and invest them mainly into completed and revenue-generating infrastructure projects.
 - No more than 10% of their assets can go to under-construction projects
- It thus enables investment of money from individual and institutional investors in infrastructure projects to earn a small portion of the income as return.
- Mandated by SEBI to distribute at least 90% of their net distributable cash flows to unitholders, often in the form of dividends and interest income.
- InvITs are **regulated by SEBI**. SEBI had notified the SEBI (Infrastructure Investment Trusts) Regulations, 2014 for registration and regulation of InvITs in India.

Structure of InvITs

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

Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV)

- SPV is an **entity formed for a single, well-defined purpose** and can be formed for any lawful purpose.
- It is primarily a **business association of persons or entities** eligible to participate in the association.
- Technically, an SPV is a company** that must follow the rules of formation of a company laid down in the **Companies Act 2013**

infrastructure projects such as roads, power, energy etc. InvITs enable these investors to buy a small portion of the units being sold by the fund.

- Since such trusts mostly include completed and operational projects with positive cash flow, the risks of investments are low.

Global Indices for Reforms and Growth Framework

- The government is undertaking the Global Indices for Reforms and Growth (GIRG) initiative to monitor the progress of 26 global indices for driving reforms and growth in the country.
- India already compiles key national indicators such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Consumer Price Index (CPI) and Index of Industrial Production (IIP) using internationally aligned methodologies and periodically revises their base years to reflect structural changes in the economy.
- The 26 key global indices are published by 16 international agencies, across **four broad themes: economy, development, governance, and industry.**
- The **Development Monitoring and Evaluation Office (DMEO), NITI Aayog**, serves as the knowledge partner and central coordinator for this exercise.
- The indices have been allocated to 17 nodal Ministries, which have been assigned specific responsibilities to lead improvements.
- These nodal Ministries are required to conduct a thorough review of index methodologies.
- Furthermore, nodal/line Ministries are mandated to identify performance gaps and implement appropriate remedial measures and policy reforms to address the underlying issues.

Pax Silica

- India has not been included in the recently formed US-led initiative, Pax Silica.
- Pax Silica is a **US-led strategic initiative** to build a secure, prosperous, and innovation-driven silicon supply chain — from critical minerals and energy inputs to advanced manufacturing, semiconductors, AI infrastructure, and logistics.
- The inaugural Pax Silica Summit includes **US, Japan, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Netherlands, United Kingdom, Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Australia.**
- Together, these countries are home to the most important companies and investors powering the global AI supply chain. India currently has not evolved in these sectors, which could be one of the reasons why India is not a part of the initiative.
- However, like in the case of Minerals Security Partnership (MSP) launched by the US in 2022, India could join the initiative at a later stage.
 - India was inducted into the MSP in June 2023.

Key points

- ➔ Pax Silica aims to reduce coercive dependencies, protect the materials and capabilities foundational to AI, and ensure aligned nations can develop and deploy transformative technologies at scale.
- ➔ Measures include pursuing new joint ventures and strategic co-investment opportunities, protecting sensitive technologies and critical infrastructure from undue access or control by countries of concern.
- ➔ It will build trusted technology ecosystems, including ICT systems, fibre-optic cables, data centres, foundational models and applications.
- ➔ Countries will pursue projects to jointly address AI supply chain opportunities and vulnerabilities in priority critical minerals, design, fabrication, packaging, logistics and transportation, energy grids and power generation.

India-ADB \$2.2 Billion Loan

- The Union Government and Asian Development Bank (ADB) have signed agreements for **five loans totalling over \$2.2 billion** to support various development projects.

- The signed projects will support:
 - **PM-SETU** -Pradhan Mantri Skilling and Employability Transformation through Upgraded Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) Programme (\$846 million);
 - Accelerating Affordable and Inclusive Rooftop Solar Systems Development Programme (\$650 million);
 - ASTHA-Assam State Tertiary Health Care Augmentation Project - \$398.8 million;
 - Chennai Metro Rail Investment Project (\$240 million); and
 - Integrated Ecotourism and Sustainable Agri-based Livelihood Development in Meghalaya Project (\$77 million).

IFAD-India Day

- The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) hosted the IFAD-India Day in Rome to showcase India's long-standing partnership with IFAD in advancing rural development, poverty reduction, and resilient agriculture.
- India and IFAD have together supported **36 rural development projects** with a total value of **USD 4.4 billion**, including USD 1.5 billion contributed directly by IFAD.
- Flagship initiatives supported under the India-IFAD portfolio include:
 - Enhancing market access for over 45,000 rural enterprises in Meghalaya.
 - Expanding women's employability and income-generation opportunities in Maharashtra.
 - Improving climate resilience for 300,000 small and marginal farmers in Jammu & Kashmir.
 - Supporting income enhancement and migration reduction efforts in Uttarakhand.

Global Capability Centres (GCCs)

- India has become a leading hub for Global Capability Centres (GCCs), with over 1,700 GCCs. Major clusters of GCCs are in Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune, Chennai, Mumbai, and the National Capital Region.



Asian Development Bank (ADB)

ADB is a multilateral development bank **established in 1966**. **Headquartered in Manila, Philippines**, ADB has 69 members, including India as a founding member.

ADB assists its members, and partners, by providing loans, technical assistance, grants, and equity investments to promote social and economic development.

ADB's five largest shareholders are Japan and the United States (each with 15.6% shares), the People's Republic of China (6.4%), India (6.3%), and Australia (5.8%)

International Fund for Agricultural Development



Drivers of GCC growth in India

- **Vast talent pool:** India is known globally for its diverse talent pool with expertise in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), analytics, and finance. India contributes 28% of the global STEM workforce and 23% of global software engineering talent.
- **Technological innovations:** Machine Learning, AI, Internet of Things (IoT) and blockchain are some of the advanced technologies that have been adapted rapidly. This has enabled GCCs in India to deliver innovative solutions and **digitally transform** their parent companies.
- **Strategically focused:** These centres are now viewed as strategic assets that enable businesses to drive growth, improve operational efficiency and gain competitive advantages.
- **Cost Efficiency:** GCCs offer significant cost advantages in operations compared to Western countries.
- **Government support:** Specific policies by states like Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana in physical and digital infrastructure development, along with the Digital India campaign aimed at enabling ease of doing business, have contributed to a favourable environment for the growth of GCCs.

Impact on Indian economy

- **Economic growth:** In just five years, the combined revenue of GCCs has jumped from **\$40.4 billion in FY19 to \$64.6 billion in FY24**, employing over 19 lakh people.
- The sector is projected to reach **\$105 billion** by 2030, supported by nearly **2,400 centres** employing over **2.8 million professionals**.
- **Innovation hubs:** GCCs have helped India become a global innovation and R&D hub, thereby attracting investments and encouraging a culture of R&D.
- **Enhanced business practices:** GCCs in India have adopted global best practices in terms of business operations, governance and compliance. Indian companies have gained exposure to these practices, leading to enhancement in efficiency, productivity and ultimately competitiveness.
- **Regional Development:** The growth of GCCs in India has enabled companies to set up their units in tier-2 and tier-3 cities, facilitating regional development and reducing economic differences between regions.

- GCCs are **offshore units** set up by companies to deliver a range of services for their parent organisations.
- Functioning as integral parts of the global corporate structure, they provide specialised expertise in areas such as information technology, research and development, customer support, and other business operations.
- GCCs play a vital role in achieving cost efficiency, tapping into skilled talent pools, and facilitating collaboration between parent firms and their international affiliates.

Narasapuram Crochet Lace Craft

- The Prime Minister praised the Narasapuram crochet lace craft in his Man ki Baat broadcast.
- Narasapuram crochet lace craft from the West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh has also received Geographical Indication (GI) tag.
- Its exports crossed the Rs 150 crore mark in the present fiscal year till December end.
- **Origin:** In 1844, Macrae and his wife from Scotland taught the lace craft to the local women when the duo was associated with a Christian missionary at Dummugudem (presently in Telangana).
- The craft has survived the Indian famine (1899) and the Great Depression (1929). Nearly 15,000 women are directly involved in the craft, producing three categories of products made of lace— garments, home furnishings and accessories.

State of the World's Land and Water Resources for Food and Agriculture 2025

- The Food and Agriculture Organization has released The State of the World's Land and Water Resources for Food and Agriculture (SOLAW) 2025 report.
- Published every two years, the report highlights how sustainable management of land, soil and water can enhance agricultural production, food security, resilience, and ecosystem services
- This year, under the theme "**The potential to produce more and better,**" the report highlights the significant, and often overlooked, potential of land and water resources to support sustainable increases in food production.

Way Ahead

- The world has the potential to feed up to 10.3 billion people by 2085, when the global population was expected to peak.
- However, future productivity gains must come from smarter, and not simply more production.
- This can be done by closing yield gaps i.e. increasing productivity by reducing the gap between currently obtained and potentially attainable yield.
- There is a need to adopt coherent policies, sustainable financing, and institutional capacity development to transition toward resilient agri-food systems.

Highlights of the report

- Agriculture must produce about 50% more food, feed and fibre by 2050 compared with what was produced in 2012, to feed the growing population.
- But meeting this demand will add significant pressure to already strained natural resources, especially water, land, and soil.
- Between 1964 and 2023, global agricultural production tripled but the vast majority of these gains were achieved by intensifying how existing land was used.
- This was done through higher-yielding crops, expansion in irrigation and improved technologies, rather than by expanding the amount of land under cultivation.
- For instance, world's total irrigated land area, more than doubled during this period and by 2023, 23% of all croplands were equipped for irrigation.
- In contrast, farmland area grew by only 8% over those six decades, highlighting the increasing pressure on the same limited areas of land.
- The report claims that expanding agricultural area is no longer viable. Overall, agriculture accounted for 72% of global freshwater withdrawals, which is predicted to rise further in the future, contributing to increasing water scarcity.
- Of all the economic sectors, agriculture, covering a third of the world's land (4.8 billion hectares), has by far the greatest impact on land resources.
- Over 1.6 billion hectares of land, corresponding to more than 10% of Earth's area, have been degraded due to poor land-use management. More than 60% of this degradation occurs on agricultural land.

Colliery Control Rules Amended

- The government has amended the **provisions governing approval for opening coal and lignite mines** under the Colliery Control Rules, 2004.
- Under the earlier rules, a coal/lignite mine owner was required to obtain prior permission from the Coal Controller's Organisation (CCO) for opening the mine as well as individual seams/sections of a seam.
- CCO's permission was also required for starting a mine if it was not operational for more than 180 days.
- **Amendment:** To eliminate procedural redundancies, the **requirement of obtaining prior opening permission from the CCO has now been removed**.
- Under the amended provisions, the authority to approve mine opening permission has now been given to the board of the concerned coal company.
- This reform would streamline the approval process, while ensuring that compliance responsibility remains firmly with the company's highest decision-making authority. It is expected to reduce up to two months in operationalisation of a mine.
- As a safeguard, the new rules provide that:
 - The board of the coal company can approve mine/seam opening after the requisite approvals from the government and statutory bodies have been obtained; and
 - The company has to submit information about mine opening to the CCO.

National Test House

- The National Test House (NTH) has signed an MoU with the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) to strengthen quality control and third-party testing in national highway and infrastructure projects.
- As per the MoU, NTH will be empanelled as a recognised laboratory for NHAI. It may send samples related to highway construction and allied works to NTH laboratories for testing and inspection.
- Both organisations will jointly organise training programmes, workshops and capacity-building sessions for NHAI officials.
- It will help enhance the safety, durability and performance of national highways.
- **Established in 1912**, NTH, under the **Department of Consumer Affairs, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution**, is a leading scientific testing and quality assurance organisation.
- It is India's largest multidisciplinary testing laboratory dealing with almost all sorts of testing, calibration and quality evaluation related to industry, commerce, trade etc. as per international and national standards.

National Strategy for Financial Inclusion 2025-30

- The RBI has released the National Strategy for Financial Inclusion (NSFI) 2025-30.
- The strategy was crafted under the aegis of the **Technical Group on Financial Inclusion and Financial Literacy (TGFIFL)**.
- The previous strategy period **NSFI 2019–24**, achieved remarkable progress across the access, usage, and quality dimensions of financial services.
- Bank account penetration surged, insurance and pension coverage expanded, digital payments reached the grassroots, and credit availability improved for diverse population segments.
- The hallmark of NSFI 2025–30 is its **ecosystem approach**. It does not view inclusion as the responsibility of financial institutions alone. Instead, it emphasises convergence across regulators, ministries, financial service providers, skilling bodies, livelihood missions, and consumer education platforms.

- It is not merely an extension of past initiatives but is a shift toward quality-centric inclusion, where access converts into well-being, empowerment, and financial dignity.
- The strategy lays out **five strategic objectives** called **Panch-Jyoti** which is supported by **47 action points** for implementation across the five-year period.

Marginal Farmers Outside Cooperatives

- The Forum of Enterprises for Equitable Development (FEED) has released a report titled State of Marginal Farmers in India 2025.
- The report studied six states — Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tripura and Uttarakhand — to examine how cooperatives were functioning for farmers.
- Cooperative institutions represent the most institutionalised mechanism through which rural households, particularly small and marginal farmers, access credit, inputs, procurement channels, and increasingly, digital and public services.
- As the lowest tier of the cooperative structure, Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (**PACS**), occupy a strategic position in shaping farmers' interaction with formal institutions and state-led agricultural interventions.
- The report highlights the evolving role of PACS, which in several states were moving beyond credit provision to function as rural service hubs.
- These PACS support input supply, procurement and marketing, distribution of essential commodities through the Public Distribution System (PDS), and access to digital and other public services.

Key findings

- As per the report, **less than 25% of India's marginal farmers are active members of agricultural cooperatives**, despite making up nearly 60-70% of the country's agricultural households.
- It found especially low cooperative participation in Bihar, Tripura and Himachal Pradesh.

Panch Jyoti: Five Pillars of Inclusive Finance

Universal Access to a Suitable and Affordable Bouquet of Financial Services

- The first pillar highlights the need for equitable, responsible, and affordable offerings, including savings, insurance, credit, pensions, and payments which is tailored for both households and micro-enterprises.
- The vision is not just to reach India's last mile, but to ensure financial safety and long-term security for every borrower, saver, and entrepreneur.

Gender-Sensitive and Resilience-Focused Inclusion

- Recognising that women's participation is central to socioeconomic progress, it seeks to accelerate women-led inclusion through gender-responsive access models, customised financial products, and targeted literacy efforts.
- The strategy also focuses on vulnerable and underserved communities, aiming to enhance their financial resilience and shock-absorbing capacity.

Integrating Livelihoods, Skill Development, and Inclusion

- This pillar connects financial services with income-generation opportunities.
- By promoting convergence between the skill development ecosystem, livelihood missions, and credit networks, it aims to boost entrepreneurship, employability, and sustainable economic mobility.

Financial Education as a Driver of Discipline

- Under this pillar, the focus shifts beyond access to financial behaviour.
- It positions financial education as a tool for inculcating a culture of savings, responsible credit, insurance adoption, and prudent financial planning.
- Special programmes targeting first-time users, small business owners, and youth form part of this mandate.

Robust Consumer Protection and Grievance Redressal

- The final pillar emphasises trust and safety in the financial system.
- Strengthening grievance redressal mechanisms, improving transparency, and enhancing data protection are seen as vital to building long-term confidence, especially as digital transactions expand across rural and semi-urban India.

Limited digital adoption

- Digital adoption remained limited in Bihar and Tripura, and its impact remained informational rather than transformational.
- For instance, in Tripura, 77.8% of cooperatives reported not using any digital tools at all, while 25% of cooperatives in Bihar report no digital tool usage, pointing to a significant digital divide.
- Further, limited digital skills, especially among women and older farmers, continued to restrict the benefits of digitisation.

Gender and leadership gaps

- Cooperatives continued to be largely male dominated, particularly in leadership and decision-making roles.
- Although 21.25 lakh women were registered as cooperative members, only 3,355 women serve as directors on cooperative boards nationwide.
- Barriers such as restrictive social norms, limited mobility, and time burdens linked to unpaid care work highlight a significant disconnect between membership and leadership.
- Mixed perceptions around gender inclusion show that actual leadership and influence remain concentrated among a relatively small, predominantly male group.

- Marginal farmers, defined as **cultivators owning less than one hectare of land**, form the structural backbone of India's agrarian economy.
- Structural barriers such as complex membership procedures, long distances to PACS, limited availability of capital and continuous social exclusion were the main reasons of low engagement of marginal farmers with the cooperatives.
- Due to this, they remained more dependent on informal markets, saw slower income growth, and were more vulnerable to climate and market shocks.

Positive impact

- Where marginal farmers were able to access cooperatives, outcomes improved significantly.
- Across six states, 45% of cooperative-linked marginal farmers reported an increase in household income.
- Also, nearly half (49%) of cooperative members reported improved livelihood security after joining.
- Two-thirds (67%) of cooperative members reported access to credit and financial services through their cooperatives.
- Further, 42% cooperative-linked marginal farmers reported improvements in crop yields.

Masala Bond

- The Enforcement Directorate has served show cause notice to Kerala Chief Minister in connection with alleged Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) violations pertaining to the Masala Bond issued by the Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board (KIIFB).
- Masala Bonds are **rupee-denominated bonds issued overseas by Indian entities** to raise development funds.
- The name is meant to give a local flavour— 'masala' literally meaning 'blend of spices'— to the debt instrument.
- The KIIFB, a government entity established for mobilising funds for infrastructure projects, issued Masala Bonds, worth Rs 2,150 crore.
- KIIFB had obtained permission from the RBI for the issuance of Masala Bonds.
- These bonds were dual listed on the **London Stock Exchange (LSE) and the Singapore Exchange Ltd** in 2019.

Features

- Masala Bonds allows to raise money globally **without facing currency fluctuation risks**.
- The **currency risk is borne by foreign investors**. This makes these bonds attractive for Indian issuers seeking stable funding.
- It helps **boost foreign investment into India** by offering international investors access to the Indian debt market.
- Despite being listed abroad, Masala Bonds are subject to regulation by the **RBI and SEBI**

GI Tag for 5 products from Tamil Nadu

- Five products from Tamil Nadu have secured the Geographical Indications (GI) tag, highlighting the State's diverse craftsmanship and agricultural heritage.
- The five products are Woraiyur cotton sari, Kavindapadi nattu sakkrai (jaggery powder), Namakkal makkal pathirangal (soapstone cookware), the traditional Thooyamalli rice variety and Ambasamudram choppu saman (wooden toys).

Woraiyur cotton sari

- The Woraiyur cotton saris, native to Tiruchi district, are woven in Manamedu on the **banks of the Cauvery**.
- The sarees are distinguished by their **thin borders with plain or minimal designs**.
- They are known for their **high thread count** and **distinctive Korvai border** — a continuous running pattern — block colour palettes, and geometric motifs.
- The **Devanga community**, a traditionally skilled weaver group, has been the driving force behind it.
- The fineness and simplicity of the sari design is thought to be **related to the British Raj's use of Woraiyur's looms** to produce light cotton medical dressing fabric during the World War.
- Woraiyur was once the **capital city of the Cholas** and was a hub for textiles, spices and gemstones. Woraiyur cotton has been immortalised in **Greek and Tamil literature** for its fine quality.

Kavindapadi 'naatu sakkara'

- Kavindapadi in Erode district is a major supplier of jaggery powder in Tamil Nadu, with vast stretches of sugarcane fields nourished by the **Lower Bhavani Project canal**.
- The village's signature jaggery powder is made locally by mechanically crushing the cane and slowly evaporating the extracted juice

Thooyamalli rice

- Thooyamalli, meaning **pure jasmine**, is a traditional samba-season rice variety grown over 135 - 140 days.
- The **fermented Thooyamalli rice (neeragaram)** tastes like tender coconut water.
- It is often referred to as 'pearl rice' due to its shiny nature and is regarded highly for its nutritional benefits.
- Though it is grown in all districts of Tamil Nadu, now it is cultivated mostly in Kancheepuram.

Namakkal 'kalchatti'

- Namakkal's famed cookware is made using **soapstone (makkal pathirangal)**.
- It is popularly known as **kalchatti** and has been a staple in South Indian kitchens for generations, with their use tracing back to the ancient era. Every Namakkal stoneware is **hand-made**.
- These utensils are preferred to cook food that involves use of tamarind and lime, as they are not affected by citrus or chemicals. They are, hence, ideal for storing pickles, milk and curd without the threat of corrosion or poisoning.

Ambasamudram 'choppu saman'

- Choppu samaan are **small wooden toys** mostly in the shape of kitchen utensils.
- The art of making choppu saman has been practiced for over two centuries, with origins tracing back to the 18th century.
- Traditionally, these toys made at Ambasamudram in Tirunelveli district, were carved from indigenous trees like the **Manjal Kadamba tree, teak, and rosewood**.
- Now, toy makers have shifted to **rubber wood and Eucalyptus**.

India's 'RCEP Minus China' Strategy

- More than six years after opting out of RCEP (2019), India has secured most economic benefits of the bloc **without formally joining it**.
- With the conclusion of the **India–New Zealand FTA (2025)**, India now has FTAs with **all RCEP members except China**, reflecting a calibrated trade strategy.
- Core idea:** Secure market access through **bilateral FTAs with 14 of 15 RCEP members**, excluding China.
- Outcome:** Market access without systemic vulnerability or loss of tariff sovereignty.
- Experts view it as **smart risk management**, superior to both joining RCEP and signing a direct FTA with China.
- India's FTAs with RCEP Members**
 - Pre-2014:** ASEAN, Japan, South Korea — led to rising deficits, especially with ASEAN.
 - Post-2014:** Australia ECTA (2022) and **New Zealand FTA (2025)**, completing coverage except China.

Challenges and Way Ahead

- Rebalance legacy FTAs (e.g., ASEAN).
- Boost domestic manufacturing competitiveness (Make in India, Atmanirbhar Bharat).
- Leverage FTAs for **supply-chain diversification away from China**.

Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)

- World's largest trade bloc, comprising **10 ASEAN countries + Australia, China, Japan, South Korea, and New Zealand**.
- Covers nearly **30% of global GDP and population**, aiming at tariff liberalisation, supply chain integration and trade facilitation.
- Why India Opted Out of RCEP (2019)?**
 - China factor:** Risk of Chinese goods flooding Indian markets.
 - Manufacturing asymmetry:** China's superior competitiveness.
 - Trade deficit concerns:** Especially with ASEAN and China.
 - Weak safeguards:** Inadequate protection for agriculture, MSMEs and manufacturing; limited flexibility in tariff timelines.

Bangladesh in Flux: Recent Political Turmoil

- Bangladesh has been gripped by widespread violence and political unrest since mid-2024, with signs pointing to a planned regime-change operation rather than a spontaneous uprising.
- Jamaat-e-Islami has emerged as a key power broker, exerting strong influence over the current administration and pushing an agenda that challenges the post-1971 political order.

India's Strategic Choices

- Reassure the Bangladeshi People:** Continue humanitarian aid, trade and engagement to signal goodwill beyond regimes.
- Push for Inclusive Elections:** Advocate free, fair and inclusive polls involving all major parties.
- Strategic Restraint with Engagement:** Balance caution with dialogue, recognising Bangladesh's centrality to India's regional security and neighbourhood policy.

Conclusion

In sum, Bangladesh's current turmoil—marked by political Islamisation, economic stress and anti-India rhetoric—poses direct strategic, security and economic challenges for India, making stability and inclusive politics in Dhaka a core Indian interest.

Rare Snowfall in Saudi Arabia's Northern Desert

- Parts of northern Saudi Arabia, including **Tabuk** and **Al-Jawf**, witnessed unusual heavy snowfall, turning desert sand dunes white as temperatures dipped below freezing.
- Visuals of camels walking through snow-covered landscapes highlighted the rarity of the event.

Historical Context of Cold Waves

- Saudi Arabia has experienced extreme cold earlier:
 - In **1992**, temperatures in Hail dropped to **-9.3°C**, the lowest on record.
 - In **1973**, a Siberian cold outbreak reportedly brought **nearly 20 cm of snow to Riyadh**.
- Snowfall in northern regions, especially higher elevations, has occurred sporadically in the past.

Climate Change and the “Warming Paradox”

- Experts from the World Meteorological Organization note that the Arab region is warming almost twice the global average.
- This leads to the “**warming paradox**”: a warmer atmosphere holds more moisture, increasing the likelihood of intense and extreme weather events, including rare snowfalls.

Why Snow Can Occur in Saudi Arabia?

- Geography:** Northern mountainous areas like **Jabal Al-Lawz** experience much cooler temperatures.
- Atmospheric Conditions:**
 - Cold air masses from the Mediterranean or northern regions can push temperatures below freezing.
 - When this cold air meets moisture from rain-bearing systems, precipitation can fall as snow instead of rain.
- Such conditions led to the recent snowfall in northern Saudi Arabia.

Key features

Dismantling of the Post-1971 Consensus

- Symbols, institutions and narratives linked to the Liberation War and the Awami League have been systematically targeted.
- This signals an attempt to rewrite national memory, weaken secular foundations, and reshape Bangladesh's political identity.

Minority Repression and Islamisation

- The unrest has coincided with heightened attacks on minorities—Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and Ahmadis—along with reports of killings, sexual violence, property destruction and land seizures.
- These developments have drawn international concern and underline a visible trend toward greater Islamisation.

Mobocracy and Media Suppression

- Jamaat's consolidation of influence has relied on:
 - Mob pressure on officials and institutions.
 - Institutional capture, with loyalists replacing incumbents in bureaucracy and academia.
 - Media intimidation, including attacks on major newspapers and detention of journalists, weakening democratic checks.

Rising Anti-India Rhetoric

- Anti-India sentiment, a long-standing undercurrent in Bangladeshi politics, has intensified amid the crisis.
- This contrasts with enduring people-to-people ties—trade, tourism, medical travel and education—that bind the two countries beyond politics.

Why Bangladesh Matters for India?

- Security Imperatives:** India shares a 4,000+ km porous border and a maritime boundary with Bangladesh. Cooperation is vital to prevent terror networks and insurgent safe havens.
- Strategic Risks Post-2024:** Reports of renewed Pakistan military influence near the India–Bangladesh border raise serious security concerns.
- Economic Stakes:** Bangladesh's earlier growth and stability were closely linked to cooperation with India—something no other external partner can easily replace.

- **Snowfall in Deserts: A Global Rarity**
 - While rare, deserts worldwide have recorded snowfall:
 - ♣ **Sahara Desert** (Algeria),
 - ♣ **Atacama Desert** (Chile),
 - ♣ **Mojave Desert** (United States).
 - These events typically occur when **cold air masses combine with sufficient moisture**, making desert snow unusual but not unprecedented.

Trump Administration Pauses Immigration from 19 'High-Risk' Countries

- After President Donald Trump pledged to "permanently pause migration from all Third World Countries", USCIS (US Citizenship and Immigration Services) halted all immigration applications from 19 designated "high-risk" nations.
- The move follows an Afghan national's attack on two U.S. National Guard members, prompting claims that past screening processes were inadequate.

India-Russia Logistics Agreement

- Days after President Vladimir Putin's New Delhi visit, Russia signed into law the Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Support (RELOS) agreement with India.
- RELOS sets procedures for the movement of troops, warships and military aircraft between India and Russia, and for providing mutual logistical support.
- It enables reciprocal airspace use, port calls, refuelling, repairs, maintenance, and other support during deployments.
- The framework applies to joint military exercises and training, as well as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR). With mutual consent, its provisions can be used in other operational scenarios.
- **Strategic Significance for India and Russia**

- For India, RELOS institutionalises access to Russian air and naval bases—from Vladivostok (Pacific) to Murmansk (Arctic)—enhancing operational reach, readiness and sustainment of Russian-origin platforms.
- It also complements India's Indo-Pacific strategy by enabling longer-range naval and air deployments.
- For Russia, the pact facilitates access to Indian ports and airfields, strengthening its operational presence in the Indian Ocean and supporting its multipolar posture.
- **Comparison with India-U.S. Logistics Pacts**
 - RELOS is analogous to India's foundational agreements with the U.S.—LEMOA, COMCASA, and BECA—but tailored to India-Russia requirements.

► Extension of Previous Travel Ban

- In June, the Trump administration banned travel from 12 countries and restricted access from 7 others due to national security concerns.
- Earlier bans did **not** affect immigrants already in the U.S.; the new directive changes this, requiring a full re-review of those who entered after January 20, 2021.

► Trump's Wider Immigration Crackdown

- Trump's agenda extends beyond illegal immigration to strict limits on **legal migration**.
- His administration argues **immigration harms U.S. workers** and poses national security risks; critics say claims are exaggerated or false.
- Trump's recent statement outlined plans to denaturalise certain migrants and remove those deemed "non-compatible with Western Civilization".

► Criticism: Legality, Vetting Standards and Discrimination

- Experts argue the U.S. already has one of the world's most rigorous immigration vetting systems.
- Critics claim the policy unfairly targets countries and reflects racially biased assumptions.
- Policy analysis suggests Trump's immigration restrictions could:
 - Reduce the U.S. workforce by **6.8 million by 2028** and **15.7 million by 2035**,
 - Lower long-term economic growth by one-third,
 - Negatively affect U.S. living standards.

- o While U.S. pacts enhance interoperability, secure communications and geospatial data sharing, RELOS focuses on reciprocal logistics access with Russia, broadening India's strategic options.

Trump's \$1 million Gold Card

- US President Donald Trump has launched the long-awaited '**Gold Card**' visa programme, inviting individuals and companies to invest at least \$1 million.
- The initiative aims to attract global talent, generate significant revenue for the US Treasury, and offer a faster, more advantageous route compared to the conventional **EB-5 visa system**.

EB-5: A Favoured Route for Indian Investors

- The EB-5 visa offers a comparatively quicker route to permanent residency.
 - o Requires \$800,000–\$1,050,000 investment based on project type and location.
 - o Must create or preserve 10 full-time US jobs.
 - o Typically done through USCIS-approved regional centres, which handle over 90% of EB-5 applications.
 - o Begins with a conditional Green Card, later becoming permanent.
- This programme appeals strongly to IndianHNIs aiming to secure their children's future in the US.

Key Highlights

- ◆ The Trump Gold Card is a newly launched US visa programme offering permanent residency and a pathway to citizenship in exchange for high-value investments.
- ◆ It replaces the EB-5 visa system and is designed to draw foreign capital and skilled talent into the US.
- ◆ **Who Can Apply?**
 - ▶ **Individuals:** Must qualify for lawful permanent residency and be admissible to the US.
 - ▶ **Corporations:** Can sponsor foreign-born employees.
 - ▶ **Families:** Spouses and unmarried children under 21 may apply but must pay additional fees.
- ◆ **Costs and Fees**
 - ▶ **Processing Fee:** \$15,000 per applicant or corporate sponsor (non-refundable).
 - ▶ **Investment/Gift:** \$1 million for individual applicants; \$2 million per employee for corporate sponsors
 - ▶ **Additional Costs:** Visa fees and medical exam charges.
- ◆ **Benefits of the Gold Card**
 - ▶ Grants US permanent residency through EB-1 or EB-2 categories.
 - ▶ Faster processing than traditional visa routes.
 - ▶ Eligible family members may join.
 - ▶ Offers a direct path to US citizenship.

Australia Enforces Under-16 Social Media Ban

Australia has implemented a first-of-its-kind ban preventing anyone under 16 from using major social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, X, Snapchat, and Threads.

Key Highlights

- Australia has become the first country to legally enforce a minimum age of 16 for social media use.
- **What the New Australian Law Mandates?**
 - o Under the Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act, platforms must:
 - ♣ Take "reasonable steps" to identify under-16 users and deactivate their accounts.
 - ♣ Block new account creation by anyone below 16.
 - ♣ Prevent workarounds, such as fake birthdays or identity misrepresentation.
 - ♣ Have a grievance mechanism to fix errors where someone is wrongly blocked or allowed.
 - o This shift places direct responsibility on tech platforms to verify user ages and enforce compliance — something never before mandated at this scale.

- **Key Exemptions in the Law**

- o The Australian government has excluded several online services from the age-ban:
 - ♣ Dating apps
 - ♣ Gaming platforms
 - ♣ AI chatbots
- o This has raised questions, especially as some AI tools have recently been found allowing inappropriate or “sensual” conversations with minors.

India Announces \$450 Million Reconstruction Package for Sri Lanka

- India announced a \$450-million reconstruction package to support Sri Lanka following the devastation caused by Cyclone Ditwah.
 - o India’s reconstruction package builds on its **\$4 billion assistance** during Sri Lanka’s 2022 crisis.
- Sri Lanka was emerging from its 2022 economic crisis with IMF support when the cyclone struck.
- The World Bank estimates cyclone-related losses at \$4.1 billion, nearly 4% of GDP, affecting lives, agriculture, fisheries and livelihoods. Experts warn recovery may be more difficult than after the 2004 tsunami.
- **Operation Sagar Bandhu: Immediate Relief**
 - o Under Operation Sagar Bandhu, India provided humanitarian aid, relief supplies and medical assistance.
 - o The Indian Army deployed a field hospital near Kandy with 85 medical personnel, providing emergency care to over 8,000 people.

Why Australia Introduced the Under-16 Social Media Ban?



- ✓ The Australian government says the ban aims to shield young users from the “**pressures and risks**” created by social media platforms.
- ✓ **These include:**
 - ✓ Addictive design features that encourage excessive screen time
 - ✓ Harmful or unsafe content affecting mental health and well-being
 - ✓ High levels of cyberbullying — over half of young Australians report experiencing it
- ✓ The government argues that stronger safeguards are required because existing platform policies have failed to protect minors.

How Australia’s Rule Differs From India’s Approach?

- ✓ Unlike Australia’s blanket ban, **India does not restrict children** from using social media.
- ✓ Instead, the **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023** focuses on parental consent and data safeguards.
- ✓ **Key points:**
 - ✓ No minimum age for social media use, but anyone under 18 is treated as a child under the law.
 - ✓ Platforms must implement a “**verifiable parental consent**” mechanism before processing children’s data — though the law does not prescribe how this must be done.
 - ✓ Companies are prohibited from processing children’s data in ways that may harm their well-being.
 - ✓ Platforms cannot track, monitor behaviour, or run targeted ads toward children.
- ✓ India’s model is therefore data-protection-centric, **not access-restricting**, unlike Australia’s outright ban for under-16s.

SUMMITS AND ORGANISATIONS

20th session of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of ICH

- India successfully hosted the 20th session of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of **Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)** in New Delhi at the Red Fort.
- The event marked India's first time hosting the ICH Committee and coincided with the 20th anniversary of India's ratification of the 2003 UNESCO Convention.
- The session focused on safeguarding living heritage, including traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, and community-based practices, highlighting India's growing role in global cultural preservation.

Key Highlights

- **Deepavali Inscribed on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List**
 - Deepavali, the Festival of Lights, has been inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity during the 20th session of the Intergovernmental Committee.
 - With this, Deepavali becomes India's 16th cultural element to receive this global recognition.
 - Deepavali's inclusion underscores India's **soft power**, reinforces the importance of safeguarding living traditions, and highlights UNESCO's broader mission to protect cultural diversity in an era of globalisation.
- **UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List 2025: Key Additions**
 - Along with Deepavali, the 2025 list features traditions from across the world, covering:
 - ♣ **Performing Arts & Music:** Amateur theatre of Czechia; Cuarteto music of Argentina; Cuban Son; Joropo of Venezuela; Mvet Oyeng musical art of Central Africa.
 - ♣ **Festivals & Rituals:** Deepavali (India); Gifaataa New Year festival (Ethiopia); Festivity of the Virgin of Guadalupe (Bolivia); Christmas Bram and Sambai (Belize).
 - ♣ **Crafts & Traditional Skills:** Brussels' rod marionettes; Behzad's miniature art (Afghanistan); Bisht weaving and practices across West Asia; Tangail saree weaving (Bangladesh); zaffa wedding tradition in parts of the Arab world.
 - ♣ **Culinary Heritage:** Commandaria wine (Cyprus); Koshary dish traditions (Egypt).
 - ♣ **Community Practices:** Guruna pastoral retreats (Chad–Cameroon); family

About UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) List

- ➡ UNESCO's ICH List recognises **living cultural traditions and practices**, unlike monuments or physical heritage.
- ➡ It includes festivals, rituals, performing arts, oral traditions, traditional craftsmanship, and knowledge systems that are **transmitted across generations** and strengthen cultural identity and social cohesion.
- ➡ **How Traditions Are Inscribed on the ICH List?**
 - ➡ Countries submit a **nomination dossier** demonstrating that the tradition is community-based, inclusive, and representative. Each country can nominate **one element every two years**.
 - ➡ India nominated **Deepavali for the 2024–25 cycle**, highlighting its role as a continuously evolving, community-driven tradition.

India's Cultural Heritages Recognised by UNESCO

- ➡ Apart from Deepavali added in 2025, India has several cultural traditions inscribed on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list.
- ➡ These include:
 - ➡ **Festivals & Rituals:** Nowruz (2024), Durga Puja in Kolkata (2021), Kumbh Mela (2017), Ramman festival of Garhwal (2009).
 - ➡ **Performing Arts & Theatre:** Garba Gujarat-2023, yoga -2016, Sankirtana of Manipur-(2013); Chhau dance (Odisha, Jharkhand, West Bengal), Kalbelia dance of Rajasthan, Mudiyettu of Kerala-(2010); Kutiyattam Sanskrit theatre (kerala) and Ramlila (UP)-(2008).
 - ➡ **Oral & Spiritual Traditions:** Buddhist chanting of Ladakh (2012); Vedic chanting (2008).
 - ➡ **Traditional Craftsmanship:** Brass and copper utensil-making of the Thatheras of Jandiala Guru, Punjab (2014).

circus tradition (Chile); Confraternity of flowers and palms (El Salvador); bagpipe craftsmanship in Bulgaria.

India to Chair the Kimberley Process from 2026

- India has been selected by consensus to serve as Chair of the Kimberley Process (KP) from January 1, 2026.
- This marks the third time India will chair the global initiative aimed at preventing the trade in conflict diamonds.
- India's chairmanship is expected to play a key role in **modernising the Kimberley Process**, improving credibility of the global diamond supply chain, and reinforcing ethical standards in international trade.

About the Kimberley Process (KP)

- The Kimberley Process is a **tripartite initiative** involving governments, the international diamond industry, and civil society.
- It seeks to stop the trade in **conflict diamonds**—rough diamonds used by rebel groups to finance armed conflicts, as recognised by UN Security Council resolutions.
- The Gem & Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC) is India's nodal agency for KP.
- **Global Significance of KP**
 - The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) came into force on January 1, 2003 following a UN resolution.
 - KP currently has 60 participants representing 86 countries, with the European Union counted as a single participant.
 - It regulates over 99% of the global rough diamond trade, making it the most comprehensive international mechanism in this sector.

2nd WHO Global Summit on Traditional Medicine

- The 2nd WHO Global Summit on Traditional Medicine was held at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi.
- The summit **theme** — “*Restoring balance: The science and practice of health and well-being*”
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the closing ceremony of the summit.
- Global leaders have praised India's structured, evidence-based leadership in traditional medicine and aligned it with the vision of “*One Earth, One Health*”, underscoring its global relevance.
- **India's Leadership and WHO Global Centre**
 - The Prime Minister highlighted India's leadership, recalling the establishment of the **WHO Global Centre for Traditional Medicine in Jamnagar**, entrusted to India in 2022.
- **Key Launches and Initiatives**
 - PM Modi launched the **My Ayush Integrated Services Portal (MAISP)** for seamless access to Ayush services and unveiled the **Ayush Mark** as a global quality and authenticity benchmark.
- **Strengthening Global Health Architecture**
 - The Prime Minister inaugurated the new WHO South-East Asian Regional Office Complex in Delhi, calling it a milestone in strengthening regional and global health cooperation.

UNEA-7 Endorses India's Global Wildfire Management Resolution

At the 7th session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-7) in Nairobi (2025), India's resolution on "Strengthening the Global Management of Wildfires" was adopted with wide support from UN Member States.

Wildfires as a Growing Global Risk

- India highlighted that wildfires have shifted from seasonal events to frequent, climate-driven disasters.
- Rising temperatures, prolonged droughts, and human activities are increasing their intensity and duration.
- Wildfires cause large-scale loss of forests and biodiversity, degrade soil and water systems, worsen air quality, disrupt livelihoods, and release massive greenhouse gas emissions.
- UNEP projections warn that wildfire incidence could rise 14% by 2030, 30% by 2050, and 50% by 2100 if current trends continue.

Other Key Outcomes of UNEA-7

- UNEA-7 adopted 11 resolutions addressing issues such as coral reef protection, chemicals and waste, environmentally sound management of minerals and metals, antimicrobial resistance, AI sustainability, glaciers and cryosphere protection, and youth participation.
- However, proceedings were overshadowed by the **US withdrawal from negotiations**, which diplomats warned could weaken global environmental cooperation.
- Jamaica will assume the presidency of UNEA-8**, with calls to rebuild trust and sustain multilateral momentum.

50 years of the Biological Weapons Convention

Speaking at a conference in New Delhi marking **50 years of the Biological Weapons Convention**, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar warned that the world is still not adequately prepared to tackle the growing **threat of bioterrorism**, particularly from non-state actors.

Key highlights

• Gaps in the Global Bioweapons Regime

- EAM highlighted serious institutional weaknesses in the Biological Weapons Convention, noting that it lacks:

Towards Integrated Fire Management

- India emphasised a global transition towards Integrated Fire Management, focusing on early-warning systems, risk mapping, satellite-based monitoring, and the involvement of local communities and frontline personnel.
- UNEP's role in supporting adaptation, ecosystem restoration, and strategy development was underscored, along with the importance of the **Global Fire Management Hub** established by FAO and UNEP in 2023.

Key Provisions of the Resolution

- The resolution calls for:
 - Stronger international cooperation** on early-warning systems, risk assessment tools, ecosystem monitoring (satellite & ground-based), and community-based alerts.
 - Enhanced regional and global collaboration** for prevention, recovery, and ecosystem restoration.
 - Knowledge sharing and capacity building** through best-practice platforms and training programmes.
 - Support for national and regional action plans** on integrated fire management and wildfire resilience.
 - Improved access to international finance**, including assistance in project preparation for multilateral and results-based funding mechanisms.

UN Environment Assembly (UNEA): An Overview

- UNEA is the world's highest-level decision-making body on environmental matters.
- UNEA was established in 2012 following the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (**Rio+20**) held in Brazil.

Membership and Participation

- UNEA has universal membership, comprising all 193 UN Member States, with active participation from major groups and stakeholders.
- It convenes **every two years** in Nairobi, Kenya, bringing together environment ministers from across the world.

Functions and Mandate

- UNEA:
 - Sets the global environmental agenda
 - Provides overarching policy guidance and responses to emerging environmental issues
 - Reviews policies, facilitates dialogue, and promotes exchange of experiences
 - Defines the strategic direction of UNEP
 - Encourages partnerships and mobilises resources for environmental goals

UNEA-7 (2025) Session

- Theme: "Advancing sustainable solutions for a resilient planet."

- ♣ A compliance and verification mechanism
- ♣ A permanent technical body
- ♣ A system to track rapid scientific and technological advances

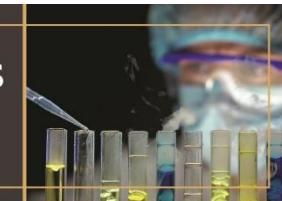
- **India's Proposal: National Implementation Framework**

- India has proposed a **National Implementation Framework** to strengthen biosecurity, covering:
 - ♣ Regulation of high-risk biological agents
 - ♣ Oversight of dual-use research
 - ♣ Domestic reporting obligations
 - ♣ Incident management and response mechanisms
- The Minister underlined India's commitment to **non-proliferation of sensitive and dual-use technologies**, supported by a robust legal and regulatory architecture.

- **Central Role of the Global South**

- Mr. Jaishankar argued that biological threats cannot be addressed in isolation and require inclusive international cooperation.
- He emphasised that the Global South must be placed at the centre of future biosecurity efforts, as it is:
 - ♣ The most vulnerable to biological threats
 - ♣ Disproportionately affected by unequal access to vaccines and medicines
 - ♣ A key contributor to global preparedness and response

Biological Weapons Convention (BWC)



- ✓ BWC is a key international treaty banning the development, production, stockpiling, and use of biological and toxin weapons, prohibiting its entire classes of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) and focusing on peaceful uses.
- ✓ It is supported by the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) Implementation Support Unit (ISU) in Geneva, Switzerland.
- ✓ **Adoption and Scope**
 - ✓ Adopted in 1972 and entered into force in 1975.
 - ✓ Requires States Parties to destroy existing biological weapons and related facilities.
- ✓ **Key Features**
 - ✓ Covers biological agents and toxins "of types and in quantities that have no justification for prophylactic, protective, or peaceful purposes".
 - ✓ Encourages international cooperation for peaceful biological research and public health.
 - ✓ Emphasises national implementation through domestic laws and regulations.
- ✓ **Membership**
 - ✓ It has nearly universal membership with 189 States Parties (countries that have ratified/acceded) as of 2025, plus four signatories (Egypt, Haiti, Somalia, Syria) that haven't ratified.

India Assumes Chair-ship of International IDEA Council

- The **International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance** (International IDEA) has appointed India as the Chair of its Council of Member States for the year 2026, with Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar assuming the role in **Stockholm, Sweden**.
- Alongside India as Chair, **Mauritius and Mexico** will serve as **Vice Chairs** of the International IDEA Council for 2026, reinforcing a diverse and representative leadership structure.



About International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA)



- It is a global intergovernmental organisation established in 1995 to support and strengthen sustainable democracy worldwide.
- **Headquartered** in Stockholm, Sweden, it works with governments, institutions, and civil society
- **Mission and Mandate**
 - **Mission:** To advance, promote, and protect sustainable democracy that is **inclusive, resilient, and respectful of human rights**.
 - **Unique Mandate:** International IDEA is the **only intergovernmental organisation whose sole mandate is democracy support**, positioning it as a global catalyst for democratic development.
- **Membership and Global Standing**
 - **Membership:** Comprises 35 Member States, including India as a founding member, representing diverse democracies across continents.
 - **International Status:** Holds UN Observer Status, enabling close engagement with global governance processes.

- India's assumption of the Chairship reinforces its role as a **global democratic exemplar**, strengthening South-South cooperation and shaping future global discourse on inclusive and resilient democracy.
- **Showcasing the Scale of Indian Democracy**
 - In his acceptance speech, the CEC highlighted the unparalleled scale of India's democratic process:
 - ♣ Over 900 million electors across 28 States and 8 UTs.
 - ♣ The 2024 General Elections saw participation of over 20,000 candidates from 743 political parties.
 - ♣ More than 20 million election personnel, including Booth Level Officers and polling staff, were deployed.
 - He also noted India's democratic journey since independence, comprising **18 parliamentary elections** and over **400 State legislative elections**.

UN General Assembly Appoints New UN Refugee Chief

- The United Nations General Assembly approved former Iraqi President Barham Salih as the next head of the UN refugee agency. He will succeed Filippo Grandi, whose second five-year term ends December 31.
- Elected by consensus, he becomes the first Middle Eastern leader of the UNHCR (*United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*) since the late 1970s.

About United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR)



UNHCR is a UN agency established in 1950 to protect and support refugees, forcibly displaced persons, and stateless people worldwide.

Headquartered in Geneva, it operates in over 130 countries, providing life-saving assistance such as shelter, food, healthcare, and education.

It has received two Nobel Peace Prizes (1954, 1981) for its work.

Legal Framework

UNHCR's work is guided primarily by the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, which define who is a refugee and outline states' obligations.

Mandate and Functions

Protect the rights and well-being of refugees and asylum seekers

Ensure access to asylum and prevent forced return (non-refoulement)

Support durable solutions: voluntary repatriation, local integration, and resettlement

Address statelessness through legal and policy interventions

India Needs a Stronger Biosecurity System

- India's biosecurity framework has come under renewed scrutiny amid expert warnings about emerging biothreats.
- This threat is driven by rapid advances in biotechnology, growing capabilities of non-state actors, and institutional gaps in preparedness and response.

Key Gaps and Challenges in Existing Architecture

- Absence of a unified national biosecurity framework, leading to fragmented coordination.
- Outdated laws not aligned with fast-evolving biotech.
- Limited One Health integration across human, animal, and environmental sectors.
- Inadequate high-containment lab infrastructure and surveillance for engineered threats.
- India ranks 66th on the Global Health Security Index, reflecting response weaknesses.

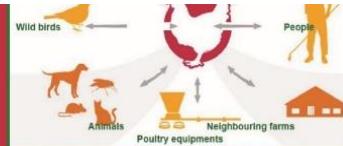
Global Best Practices

- United States: National Biodefense Strategy; DNA order screening for gene synthesis.
- European Union: One Health-based Health Security Framework.
- China: Biosecurity Law treating biotech and genetic data as national security assets.
- Australia: Unified Biosecurity Act covering synthetic biology.
- United Kingdom: Biological Security Strategy focused on surveillance and rapid response.

Way Forward for India

- Create a National Biosecurity Framework coordinating health, agriculture, environment, defence, and biotech agencies.
- Upgrade surveillance and infrastructure with genomics, bio-forensics, and high-containment labs.
- Modernise laws to cover synthetic biology, gene editing, and dual-use research.
- Leverage new technologies like AI-driven pathogen detection and microbial forensics.

What Is Biosecurity?



- ✓ Biosecurity refers to systems and practices that prevent the intentional misuse of biological agents, toxins, or technologies.
- ✓ It covers laboratory security, prevention of deliberate outbreaks, and protection of human, animal, and plant health.
- ✓ While distinct from biosafety (which addresses accidental releases), robust biosafety systems are foundational to effective biosecurity.

Evolution of Global Biosecurity Norms

- The Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) of 1972 marked the first global ban on biological weapons, mandating destruction of stockpiles.
- Although state-level bioweapons use has declined, new technologies and geopolitical shifts have increased risks from covert, decentralised threats.

Why India Needs a Stronger Biosecurity System?

- **Geographic and Ecological Exposure:** Long borders, rich biodiversity, and high population density make India vulnerable to rapid spread of outbreaks.
- **Agriculture Dependence:** Crop or livestock disease—natural or engineered—could severely impact food security and livelihoods.
- **Non-State Actor Threats:** Incidents such as alleged preparation of ricin toxin signal interest by terror groups in biological tools.
- **Biotech Acceleration:** Gene editing and synthetic biology offer benefits but also raise risks of engineered biothreats.

India's Existing Biosecurity Architecture

- **Institutions:**
 - ✓ Department of Biotechnology (lab governance, biosafety)
 - ✓ National Centre for Disease Control (outbreak surveillance)
 - ✓ Department of Animal Husbandry & Dairying (livestock diseases)
 - ✓ Plant Quarantine Organisation of India (crop protection)
- **Legal Frameworks:**
 - ✓ Environment (Protection) Act, 1986
 - ✓ Weapons of Mass Destruction and their Delivery Systems (Prohibition of Unlawful Activities) Act, 2005
 - ✓ Biosafety Rules, 1989; rDNA Guidelines, 2017
 - ✓ NDMA biological disaster guidelines
- **International Engagement:** Membership of the BWC and Australia Group.

- Deepen international cooperation through data sharing, simulations, and global norms.

SC Empowers CBI to Lead Nationwide Crackdown on Digital Arrest Scams

The Supreme Court has directed the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to lead a pan-India probe into 'digital arrest' cyber scams, citing large-scale financial fraud and victimisation of senior citizens.

Key highlights

- **CBI Given Free Hand for Investigation**
 - The Court authorised the CBI to:
 - ♣ Conduct investigations **without prior State consent**, an extraordinary measure invoked due to exceptional circumstances.
 - ♣ Probe bank officials suspected of facilitating cybercrime through mule accounts.
 - States including Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Karnataka, Kerala and others were directed to grant consent under Section 6 of the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act 1946.
- **Phased Approach to Cybercrime Investigation**
 - The Court prioritised:
 - ♣ Digital arrest scams (first phase),
 - ♣ Fraudulent investment schemes (second phase),
 - ♣ Fake part-time job scams (third phase).
- **Use of Technology and International Coordination**
 - The CBI was directed to:
 - ♣ Coordinate with Interpol to identify cybercrime hubs abroad.
 - ♣ Deploy domain experts and police officers from multiple States.
 - The RBI was asked to respond on using AI and Machine Learning to track layering of crime proceeds.
- **Directions to Online Platforms and Telecom Operators**
 - Invoking the IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, the Court ordered digital intermediaries to cooperate and share data with investigators.
 - Telecom operators were criticised for negligent issuance of multiple SIM cards, facilitating fraud. The Department of Telecommunications was directed to submit corrective proposals to prevent SIM misuse.
- **Strengthening Cybercrime Infrastructure**
 - States and UTs were ordered to:
 - ♣ Establish and operationalise regional cybercrime coordination centres.
 - ♣ Integrate them with the Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C) for real-time data sharing and prevention.

[Also refer the topic "**SC Flags Rising 'Digital Arrest' Scams**" from The Recitals – November 2025]

MahaCrimeOS AI Cybercrime Investigation Tool

- Microsoft CEO announced the statewide deployment of **MahaCrimeOS AI**, an advanced **AI-driven investigation platform**, across all 1,100 police stations in Maharashtra, marking a major leap in AI-enabled policing.

- With the **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita** mandating charge sheets within **60–90 days**, MahaCrimeOS AI helps officers manage heavy caseloads efficiently and comply with tighter legal deadlines.

Key Features

Advanced Capabilities

- MahaCrimeOS AI uses multimodal intelligence to process FIRs and complaints in formats such as text, PDFs, audio, images, and handwritten notes.
- It extracts key information across languages, profiles suspects, and adapts investigation pathways automatically.

AI-Generated Investigation and Decision Support

- A core feature is the AI-powered investigation copilot, which reads FIRs in Marathi and generates protocol-based investigation plans aligned with High Court and Supreme Court guidelines.
- This accelerates decision-making and reduces procedural delays.

Enhanced Data Analysis and Court Readiness

- The platform analyses telecom data, open-source intelligence, and digital footprints to identify linkages, while auto-generating time-stamped case diaries suitable for court submission, embedding judicial best practices into investigations.

MahaCrimeOS AI: Transforming Crime Investigation in Maharashtra

- MahaCrimeOS AI is an AI-powered crime investigation platform built on Microsoft Foundry.
- First piloted in Nagpur Rural in April 2025, it demonstrated significant gains in faster complaint processing, data analysis, and cybercrime investigations, leading to its statewide adoption.

MARVEL: Maharashtra's AI Policing Vision

- The platform is part of **MARVEL** (Maharashtra Advanced Research and Vigilance for Enforcement of Reformed Laws), a government-owned AI initiative set up in 2024.
- Maharashtra is the first Indian state to establish a dedicated AI body focused exclusively on law enforcement modernisation.

From CrimeOS to MahaCrimeOS AI

- In partnership with Microsoft and CyberEye, MARVEL customised CrimeOS AI into MahaCrimeOS AI to align with Maharashtra Police protocols.
- The system was localised in **Marathi** to ensure ease of use.

Indian Navy Adds Second MH-60R Seahawk Squadron

The Indian Navy has commissioned its second MH-60R Seahawk helicopter squadron, INAS 335, at INS Hansa, Goa.

Full Operationalisation of the MH-60R Fleet

- With INAS 335 joining the earlier squadron INAS 334 (commissioned at INS Garuda, Kochi, in March 2024), the Indian Navy has fully operationalised its MH-60R Seahawk fleet.
- The helicopters can operate seamlessly from shore bases, aircraft carriers and frontline warships.
- They are replacing the ageing Sea King helicopters, marking a major modernisation milestone in naval aviation.



Key Capabilities of MH-60R Seahawk

- The MH-60R, developed by Sikorsky (Lockheed Martin), is an advanced maritime variant of the Black Hawk helicopter.
- It is equipped with multi-mode radar, dipping sonar, sonobuoys, infrared sensors, electronic warfare systems, advanced data links and survivability systems.
- The integrated mission system provides real-time detection, tracking and targeting of surface and sub-surface threats.
- The helicopter can be armed with torpedoes, missiles, rockets and guns, enabling both anti-submarine and anti-surface warfare.

Indigenous Anti-Submarine Shallow Water Craft Anjadip

- The **Indian Navy** received *Anjadip*, the third of eight Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow Water Crafts (ASW SWC), indigenously designed and built by **Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (GRSE)** in Kolkata.
- The ASW SWC project is being executed under a Public-Private Partnership between GRSE and L&T Shipyard, Kattupalli.

- **Key Capabilities and Design Features**
 - At around 77 metres in length, ASW SWCs are the largest Indian naval warships powered by waterjet propulsion. They are equipped with:
 - ♣ Lightweight torpedoes
 - ♣ Indigenously developed anti-submarine rockets
 - ♣ Shallow-water sonar systems
 - These features significantly enhance anti-submarine warfare, coastal surveillance, and mine-laying capabilities, especially in near-shore and littoral environments.
- Featuring over 80% indigenous content and fitted with an indigenous 30 mm Naval Surface Gun, *Anjadip* exemplifies the government's **Aatmanirbhar Bharat** vision.

Indian Maritime Doctrine 2025

- Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Dinesh Tripathi released the **Indian Maritime Doctrine 2025** on Navy Day, marking a major update to the Indian Navy's apex strategic guidance document.
 - Indian Navy Day is observed annually on 4 December to commemorate Operation Trident, a decisive naval strike carried out by the Indian Navy during the 1971 Indo-Pakistan War.

Key Highlights

- **Recognition of 'No-War, No-Peace' Zone**
 - For the first time, the doctrine formally recognises "no-war, no-peace" as a **distinct operational category** between peace and open conflict.
 - This **grey-zone space** is identified as a critical arena shaped by coercion, hybrid operations and sub-threshold maritime competition, reflecting contemporary security realities.
- **Viksit Bharat 2047 Alignment**
 - The new doctrine aligns with Viksit Bharat 2047 and integrates major national maritime and infrastructure initiatives, including:

Sagarmala

PM Gati Shakti

Maritime India Vision 2030

Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047

MAHASAGAR

Multi-Domain & Jointness

- It talks about integrating Army, Navy, Air Force for unified operations.

Apex Guidance for Maritime Strategy

- The Indian Maritime Doctrine lays down the principles governing naval strategy, roles and employment across the full spectrum of conflict.
- Originally released in 2004, revised in 2009, and amended in 2015, the 2025 edition reflects significant shifts in India's maritime environment and strategic outlook over the past decade.

INSV Kaundinya Sets Sail

- INSV Kaundinya, the Indian Navy's **stitched sailing vessel** built using traditional shipbuilding techniques, has begun its maiden overseas voyage from Porbandar, Gujarat, to Muscat, Oman.
 - It is a stitched sail ship inspired by a 5th century CE vessel depicted in the paintings of the Ajanta Caves.
- The voyage symbolically retraces ancient maritime routes that once linked India with the wider Indian Ocean world.

- Constructed with **wooden planks** stitched using coconut coir rope and sealed with natural resins, the vessel reflects an indigenous shipbuilding tradition prevalent along India's coasts.
- This technology enabled Indian mariners to undertake long-distance voyages to West Asia, Africa, and Southeast Asia long before modern navigation methods.
- The project was executed under a tripartite agreement between the **Ministry of Culture**, the **Indian Navy**, and **Hodi Innovations**, as part of India's broader effort to revive and showcase its indigenous knowledge systems and maritime heritage.
- **Crew, and Tankai Method**
 - Powered solely by sails, it is operated by a crew of around 15 trained sailors.
 - Construction follows the indigenous Tankai method, where the hull is stitched first and ribs are added later—completely avoiding the use of metal.

Anti-Terrorism Conference-2025

- Union Home Minister Amit Shah inaugurated the Anti-Terrorism Conference-2025 in New Delhi.
- The two-day conference was organised by National Investigation Agency under Ministry of Home Affairs.

Core Objectives

- Strengthening prosecution-led counter-terrorism through a unified, evidence-driven approach.
- Evolving a common legal framework to standardise investigations across states and agencies.
- Reviewing progress on consensus & recommendations adopted in last year's conference.

Steps Taken by India Recently

◆ Key Institutional and Technological Initiatives

- Updated NIA Crime Manual unveiled to improve investigation and prosecution.
- Launch of:
 - Organised Crime Network Database
 - Lost/Looted & Recovered Weapons Database
- Databases aim to dismantle links between organised crime, extortion networks and terrorism.

◆ Strengthening Coordination and Uniformity

- Call for a common ATS (Anti-Terror Squad) structure across all states for operational uniformity.
- Mandatory use of national platforms such as NATGRID and NIDAAN to uncover hidden linkages.
- Stress on "Duty to Share" instead of "Need to Know" for intelligence and data integration.

◆ Countering Organised Crime and Terror Financing

- Announcement of a 360-degree action plan against organised crime, which often feeds terror financing.
- Focus on choking terror funding routes, including ransom, drugs, crypto and cross-border networks.

◆ Legal and Strategic Measures Ahead

- Push for Trial-in-Absentia to compel fugitives to return.
- Building a seamless national framework for technology and data sharing among central and state agencies.
- Databases of terrorists and criminals to become core assets of the zero-terror policy.

Linking NATGRID with NPR

The Union Home Ministry has linked the **National Intelligence Grid** (NATGRID) with the National Population Register (NPR). This will enable authorised agencies to access family-wise data of nearly 119 crore residents through a secure platform.

What Are NATGRID and NPR?

- **NATGRID**: A post-26/11 integrated intelligence platform that enables real-time access to multiple datasets (telecom, banking, travel, vehicles, IDs) to break information silos.
- **NPR**: A comprehensive demographic and household database first compiled during Census 2011 and updated in 2015, containing details such as name, age, address and family relationships.

What the Linkage Enables?

- Investigators can trace family linkages, identities and household details during probes.
- Advanced analytics (e.g., entity resolution, facial recognition, multi-source matching) reduce investigation time by cross-verifying data across KYC, licences, travel and vehicle records.
- Queries are tiered (non-sensitive, sensitive, highly sensitive) with audit trails, approvals and oversight.

Significance for Internal Security

- Enhances intelligence-led policing and coordination between central and State agencies.
- Improves detection of terror networks, organised crime and terror financing.

Privacy and Civil Liberties Concerns

- Access to vast personal data—sometimes without an FIR—raises concerns over **proportionality and misuse**.
- The absence of a fully operational data protection law intensifies debates on **consent, safeguards and redress**. Government assurances cite strict controls.

Assam Karbi Anglong Violence

- Fresh violence broke out in Kheroni, West Karbi Anglong, leaving two people dead and dozens injured, including police personnel.
- Authorities imposed prohibitory orders, suspended mobile internet in Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong, and deployed security forces after shops and markets were torched.
- The unrest was triggered by a over two-week hunger strike at Phelangpi, where nine protesters were on a fast unto death demanding eviction of alleged “**encroachers**” from *Professional Grazing Reserve (PGR)* and *Village Grazing Reserve (VGR)* lands.
- **PGR/VGR lands** are grazing reserves—many demarcated since the **British period**—meant to ensure fodder access and livelihoods for livestock-dependent communities.
- Settlers, largely Biharis, Bengalis, and Nepalis, claim decades-long residence.

Background: Autonomy, Insurgency, and Land Rights

- West Karbi Anglong is a tribal-majority hill district governed by Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) under special constitutional provisions.
 - ✓ Under the **Sixth Schedule** of the Constitution, tribal majority areas like Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong enjoy special protections for land and self-governance through autonomous councils like the KAAC.
- The region has a long history of Karbi insurgency since the late 1980s, initially demanding a separate state and later greater autonomy—shaping strong sentiments against perceived “outsiders.”
- The **intersection of land rights, ethnic identity, and stalled legal processes** has kept tensions simmering.

Indian Army Deploys 3D Concrete Printing in Forward Areas

- The Indian Army has operationally deployed **on-site 3D concrete printing technology** in Sikkim and adjoining forward areas, marking a major step in defence infrastructure modernisation.
- Designed for **high-altitude and rugged terrain**, it enables rapid construction of **bunkers, sentry posts, and protective structures** with minimal manpower.
- The capability has been developed under **Project PRABAL** (Portable Robotic Arm for the construction of Bunkers and Ancillaries) in collaboration with IIT Hyderabad.
- It is being fielded by the **Trishakti Corps**, responsible for critical northern border sectors.

Major Boost to Border Infrastructure

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh inaugurated 125 infrastructure projects built by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO), reinforcing India's border connectivity and security architecture.
- The projects span Ladakh and Jammu & Kashmir and seven states—Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, West Bengal and Mizoram.

• Strategic Shyok Tunnel in Eastern Ladakh Inaugurated

- The Shyok Tunnel, located on the **Durbuk–Shyok–Daulat Beg Oldie** (DS-DBO) road, was inaugurated as a key strategic asset.
- The 920-metre cut-and-cover tunnel provides all-weather connectivity close to the Line of Actual Control (LAC), enabling faster troop mobilisation, reducing dependence on air maintenance, and easing logistics in extreme terrain.
- The Shyok Tunnel gains added importance amid the **2020–24 India–China standoff** in eastern Ladakh, underscoring infrastructure as a critical pillar of border security.

Exercises

Desert Cyclone II	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An Indian Army contingent participated in the second edition of the India–UAE Joint Military Exercise Desert Cyclone II. The exercise was held in Abu Dhabi.• First held in January 2024, it focuses on joint urban warfare training for sub-conventional operations under a United Nations mandate, supporting peacekeeping, counter-terrorism, and stability missions.• Other Exercises between India and UAE<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Exercise Gulf Waves (Navy – Bilateral)<ul style="list-style-type: none">♣ Exercise Gulf Waves is a bilateral maritime exercise between the Indian Navy and the UAE Navy. It was earlier known as Exercise Zayed Talwar.◦ Exercise Milan (Navy – Multilateral)<ul style="list-style-type: none">♣ Exercise Milan is a multilateral naval exercise hosted by India. The UAE participated as an Observer in Exercise Milan 2024.◦ Exercise Desert Flag (Air Force – Multilateral)<ul style="list-style-type: none">♣ Exercise Desert Flag is a multinational air combat exercise hosted by the UAE, in which the Indian Air Force regularly participates.◦ Exercise Tarang Shakti (Air Force – Multilateral)<ul style="list-style-type: none">♣ Exercise Tarang Shakti is a multilateral air exercise hosted by India. The UAE participated in its inaugural edition in 2024.
Exercise EKUVERIN 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The bilateral military exercise EKUVERIN between the Indian Army and the Maldives National Defence Forces (MNDF) was held in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.• The exercise was centred on counter-insurgency and counter-terrorist operations in contemporary operational environments.
Exercise SURYAKIRAN-XIX	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The India–Nepal joint military exercise SURYAKIRAN-XIX concluded at Pithoragarh, Uttarakhand, marking the completion of an intensive combined training cycle.<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ The previous edition of the exercise was held in Saljhandi, Nepal.• Training demonstrated coordinated operations at battalion, company and small-team levels in complex operational environments.

ENVIRONMENT AND GEOGRAPHY

CITES COP 20

The 20th Conference of the Parties (CoP20) to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), convened in Samarkand, Uzbekistan (first CoP in Central Asia).

- ✓ This COP 20 marked the treaty's 50th anniversary since its entry into force in 1975.

Outcomes of COP 20 of CITES

- **Expanded Protections:** Delegates reviewed 50 listing proposals and added or upgraded protections for **77 species**.
- **"Guggul" Victory:** India successfully opposed a proposal by the European Union to list **Guggul** in Appendix II.
- India argued that current population data was insufficient and a listing would negatively impact traditional medicinal practices and local livelihoods without a clear scientific basis.
- **Iguanas:** All three species of **Galápagos Land Iguanas** and the **Galápagos Marine Iguana** were moved to Appendix I.
- **Elephant & Rhino Trade:** Proposals by Southern African nations (Namibia, Zimbabwe) to reopen trade in **ivory stockpiles** and **rhino horns** were **rejected** via secret ballot to prevent a potential surge in poaching.

Conservation Successes (Downlistings)

- **Saiga Antelope (Kazakhstan):** Reflecting a remarkable population recovery, the zero-export quota for the Kazakh saiga population was removed, allowing for regulated trade.
- **Guadalupe Fur Seal (Mexico):** Moved from Appendix I to Appendix II following documented recovery.

Two New Ramsar Sites

Siliserh Lake (Rajasthan) and **Kopra Jalashay (Chhattisgarh)** were officially added to the **Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance**.

- ✓ With these two additions, India's total count of Ramsar Sites has reached **96**

More about New Ramsar Sites

Siliserh Lake	Kopra Jalashay
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Historical Context: A man-made freshwater lake constructed in 1845 by Maharaja Vinay Singh. It was originally designed to supply drinking water to Alwar city via an intricate system of aqueducts, some of which still exist.• Ecological Context: It is uniquely situated within the buffer zone of the Sariska Tiger Reserve, serving as a critical water source in a semi-arid landscape.• Biodiversity: It hosts the Endangered Tiger, the Vulnerable River Tern, and the Indian Pangolin.• Avifaunal Significance: Sustains more than 1% of the biogeographic population of the Black Stork.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unique Distinction: It is the first-ever Ramsar Site in Chhattisgarh.• Type: A reservoir-type man-made wetland situated in the upper catchments of the Mahanadi River.• Avifauna Diversity: Hosts over 60 migratory bird species, serving as a key nesting, feeding, and stop-over site during the Central Asian Flyway migration.• Notable residents include the vulnerable greater spotted eagle and the endangered Egyptian vulture alongside waterfowl like sarus cranes.

Freshwater Sponge

Scientists reveal the importance of sponge-associated microbes in tackling metal pollution.

What are Sponges and the "Holobiont" Concept?

- **Phylum Porifera:** Sponges are among the oldest and simplest multicellular animals. They lack true tissues/organs but possess a highly efficient water-pumping system.
- **The Holobiont:** A sponge is not a single organism but a "**holobiont**": a symbiotic assembly consisting of the host sponge and its diverse resident microbes (bacteria, archaea, and fungi).
- **Filter-Feeding Mechanism:** They draw in water through tiny pores (**ostia**) and expel it through larger openings (**oscula**). In the process, they filter massive volumes of water (up to thousands of liters daily per gram of tissue).

How Sponges Tackle Metal Pollution?

Sponges as "Bioindicators"	Microbes as "Bioremediators" (Cleaners)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Concentration Factor: They act as natural biological sponges, accumulating heavy metals like Arsenic (As), Lead (Pb), and Cadmium (Cd) at levels significantly higher than the surrounding water.• Freshwater sponges, among the earliest <u>multicellular eukaryotes</u>, filter large volumes of water and are vital for ecosystem health.	<p>While the sponge traps the metals, the associated microbes perform the actual "chemical heavy lifting."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Genomic Adaptation: The microbes are enriched with specific genes for:<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Metal Ion Transport: Actively moving toxic ions out of sensitive areas.✓ Heavy-Metal Resistance: Surviving in concentrations that would kill other organisms.✓ Detoxification: Transforming toxic forms into less harmful ones• Bio-adsorption: Microbial cell walls can bind to heavy metals, immobilizing them and preventing them from entering the wider food chain

Aravalli Hills

Public protests have erupted across northern India after the Supreme Court redefined the Aravalli hills. Public raised slogans such as "Save Aravalli, Save the Future" and "No Aravalli, No Life".

- The Supreme Court later has stayed its order on the Aravalli hills and the Aravalli range definition. It has also ordered the formation of a new expert committee to examine the issues concerned.

Context for Protest

- Under the new definition, accepted by the court following Central government recommendations, an Aravalli hill is any landform rising at least 100 metres (328 ft) above the surrounding terrain and Aravalli Range.
- Two or more such 100-meter hills within 500 meters of each other, along with the land between them, are considered an Aravalli range.
- **Criticism:** Experts and environmentalists argue that this "height-based" definition could exclude nearly 90% of the range (especially in Haryana and Rajasthan where hills are lower), potentially opening them up for mining and real estate.
- The Central government, however, says that the new definition is meant to strengthen regulation and bring uniformity and not dilute protections.

About Aravalli Mountain Ranges

Geographical & Geological Profile

- Oldest Fold Mountains:** The Aravallis are one of the world's oldest fold mountain systems, dating back to the **Proterozoic Era** (approx. 2 billion years ago).
- Residual Mountains:** Over eons, they have been weathered and eroded and now exist as "residual" mountains (Relict Mountains).
- Extent:** Stretches roughly **670–700 km** from **Himmatnagar (Gujarat)** through **Rajasthan** and **Haryana** to the **Delhi Ridge**.
- Highest Peak:** **Guru Shikhar** (1,722m) on Mount Abu.
- Drainage Divide:** It acts as a water divide between the **Ganges** basin (east) and the **Indus** basin (west). Major rivers originating here include the **Luni, Sabarmati, Banas, and Sahibi**.
- Mineralogy:** Host to **metamorphic and igneous rocks** with mineral deposits — marble, quartz, feldspar, building-stone, and other non-metallic minerals — which have been commercially quarried for decades.
 - ✓ **Mining** has emerged as a major economic activity, particularly in **Rajasthan**, which accounts for around **80% of the range**.



Strategic & Ecological Significance

- Barrier Against Desertification:** It acts as a "Great Wall" preventing the eastward expansion of the **Thar Desert** into the fertile Indo-Gangetic plains.
- Groundwater Recharge:** The fractured rocks of the range act as a massive aquifer, critical for water-stressed cities like Gurugram, Delhi, and Jaipur.
- Climate Regulator:** It shields North India from the impact of cold westerly winds from Central Asia.
- Green Lung & Biodiversity:** Home to **Sariska Tiger Reserve, Kumbhalgarh, and Mount Abu Wildlife Sanctuaries**. It hosts leopards, striped hyenas, and rare flora.

Challenges & Threats

- Illegal Mining:** Despite bans (e.g., *M.C. Mehta vs Union of India*), illegal quarrying for minerals like silica sand and limestone persists.
- Urban Sprawl:** Encroachment by real estate, especially in the **NCR (National Capital Region)**, leading to habitat fragmentation.
- Invasive Species:** The spread of *Prosopis juliflora* (Vilayati Kikar) is choking native biodiversity.
- Loss of Gaps:** There are documented "gaps" in the Aravallis through which desert sand is migrating eastward due to the disappearance of small hillocks.

Major Conservation Initiatives

- Aravalli Green Wall Project:** An ambitious plan to create a **5km-wide green belt** (buffer zone) around the range across 3states & National Capital Territory (Delhi) to combat land degradation and desertification.
- Matri Van Initiative (2025):** Its a project under the 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' program aimed at creating a 750-acre urban forest in the Aravallis.

Extra Mile: Comparison between Aravali & Himalaya Mountains

Feature	Aravalli Range	Himalayan Range
Origin	Pre-Cambrian (Oldest)	Tertiary (Youngest)

Type	Residual Fold Mountains	Young Fold Mountains
Stability	Geologically Stable	Geologically Unstable (Seismic)

Bhima River

Karnataka urges Centre's intervention (Central Water Commission-CWC) over Maharashtra's excess use of Bhima River water.

About Bhima River

Parameter	Description
Origin	Bhimashankar: heights of the Western Ghats (Sahyadri), Pune Maharashtra.
Course (about 861 km)	It flows through the states of Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Telangana before merging with the Krishna River near Raichur (Karnataka).
Drainage Basin	About 75% lies in Maharashtra & Bordered by the Harishchandragarh-Balaghat Range in the north and the Mahadeo Hills in the south.
Tributaries	Left Bank Tributaries: Ghod, Sina, Meena. Right Bank Tributaries: Mutha, Mula, Nira, Indrayani, Manjra, Karha

Cultural & Religious Dimension

The Bhima River holds immense spiritual value in the **Bhakti Movement** of Maharashtra:

- **Jyotirlinga:** Its source is at **Bhimashankar**, one of the 12 Jyotirlingas.
- **Pandharpur:** The temple of **Lord Vitthal** is located on its banks. It is the destination of the *Vari* (annual pilgrimage) for the Varkari sect.
 - ✓ **Unique Feature:** In Pandharpur, the river takes a **crescent shape**, earning it the name **Chandrabhaga**.
- **Alandi & Dehu:** Located on the banks of its tributary (Indrayani), these are associated with **Saint Dnyaneshwar** and **Saint Tukaram**.

UNEP Champions of the Earth Award – 2025

Tamil Nadu IAS officer Supriya Sahu (Additional Chief Secretary) has been named as a UNEP 'Champion of the Earth' for 2025

Overview of the UNEP Champions of the Earth Award

Established: 2005 by the **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)**.

Nature: It is the UN's **highest environmental honor**.

Every year, UNEP honours individuals and organizations working on innovative and sustainable solutions to address the **triple planetary crisis** of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste

Kuttanad Wetland Agricultural System

Soil tests in Kuttanad (the rice bowl of Kerala) have revealed dangerously high aluminium concentrations in paddy fields, posing a serious threat to crop health and productivity.

- ✓ The high aluminium concentration is not "introduced" as a pollutant but is **chemically mobilized** due to extreme soil acidification.
- ✓ **Root Morphogenesis:** High aluminium specifically targets the **root tips (apex)**. Roots become short, thick, brittle, and brown, losing their ability to penetrate the soil.

- ✓ In 2013, the **FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization)** designated Kuttanad as a **GIAHS** (Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System).

Geographical Identity: "The Rice Bowl of Kerala"

- Kuttanad is a deltaic region spanning Alappuzha, Kottayam, and Pathanamthitta districts. It is the confluence of five major rivers: **Pamba, Meenachil, Achancovil, Manimala, and Periyar**.
- **Unique Feature:** It is the **only system in India** (and one of the few in the world) where rice is cultivated **1.2 to 3.0 meters below sea level**.
- **Landscape Mosaic:** It consists of three distinct types of land:
 1. **Kayal (Wetland):** Reclaimed from backwaters for paddy.
 2. **Karapadam (Upland):** Rice fields located at slightly higher elevations.
 3. **Kari (Peat):** Deep-seated, carbon-rich black soil areas.
- **Comparison:** Much like the **Polders of the Netherlands**, Kuttanad uses a system of bunds (embankments) and dewatering. However, unlike the Dutch concrete bunds, Kuttanad utilizes **bio-bunds** made of clay, coir, and coconut husks.
 - ✓ **The Bund System:** Local farmers created *Padasekharams* (polders) by building massive earthen bunds to prevent saline intrusion and river flooding.
- **Integrated Farming:** A traditional cycle of "**One Paddy, One Fish**" (Paddy-Fish rotation) ensures soil fertility and provides multiple income streams.

Goniopora Corals

The University of Sydney has revealed that the combination of record-breaking heat stress and an aggressive outbreak of **Black Band Disease (BBD)** has wiped out **75% of Goniopora coral colonies** at One Tree Reef in the southern Great Barrier Reef (GBR).

- ✓ This event is particularly alarming for scientists because *Goniopora* corals—often called "flowerpot" or "daisy" corals—are historically known for their high thermal tolerance and longevity.
- ✓ This event occurred during the **fourth global mass bleaching event**, which has affected nearly 84% of the world's reefs.

The Core Crisis: A "Double Whammy"

The mortality was not caused by heat alone, but by a synergistic effect of two stressors:

- **Extreme Heat Stress (2024 El Niño):** Water temperatures at One Tree Reef remained above 28°C for 74 consecutive days, peaking at 34-35°C. This triggered mass bleaching, affecting 75% of the *Goniopora* population.
- **Black Band Disease (BBD):** While common in the Caribbean, BBD has been rare in the southern GBR. It is a virulent **bacterial necrotic infection** caused by a "consortium" of microbes:
 - ✓ **Cyanobacteria:** Form a dark, tar-like mat.
 - ✓ **Sulfate-reducing bacteria:** Produce toxic sulfides.
 - ✓ **Sulfide-oxidizing bacteria:** Thrive in the resulting anoxic (oxygen-free) environment.
- The decimation of *Goniopora* colonies signals a shift from "bleaching-recovery" cycles to "bleaching-disease-death" trajectories. For India, this is a cautionary tale for the **Gulf of Mannar** and **Lakshadweep** reefs, which face similar warming trends and anthropogenic pressures.

Pallas's Gull 	<p>The rare migratory Pallas's Gull was spotted in Jharkhand's Udhwa Bird Sanctuary, marking its return after almost a decade.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Udhwa is Jharkhand's only bird sanctuary and a recognized Ramsar Site, consisting of two main lakes: Patora and Berhel. Size: Third largest gull species in the world. Indian Distribution: Winters across the Gangetic Plains, coastal regions, and large inland water bodies (e.g., Chilika Lake, Harike, and now Udhwa). Migratory Path: Uses the Central Asian Flyway (CAF), one of the nine major bird migratory routes in the world.
Western Tragopan 	<p>The Sarahan Pheasantry's captive-breeding initiative in Himachal Pradesh has successfully stabilised the Western Tragopan population, reinvigorating conservation efforts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Western Tragopan also called Jujurana or “king of birds” is one of the world’s rarest pheasants and the state bird of Himachal Pradesh. Endemic Range: Western Himalayas (India: Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Uttarakhand; also parts of Northern Pakistan). Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP) in Himachal Pradesh holds the world's largest known wild population IUCN Status: Vulnerable (VU) Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 & CITES: Appendix I
Senna spectabilis 	<p>Tamil Nadu government launched drive to remove 'Senna spectabilis' from forests by March 2026</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Common Name: Golden Wonder, American Cassia. Appearance: A medium-sized deciduous tree reaching 10–15 meters, characterized by vibrant yellow flowers. Native Range: Tropical areas of South and Central America (e.g., Brazil, Peru). Current Status: Classified as one of the most "highly invasive" species in the Western Ghats Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve. IUCN Status: Classified as Least Concern.

Norovirus

Cases of norovirus, commonly known as the "winter vomiting disease," have been rising in the United States.

What is Norovirus?

It is a highly contagious virus causing **acute gastroenteritis** ("stomach flu").

Seasonality: More common in **winter**.

Burden: Major cause of 90% **viral gastroenteritis outbreaks worldwide**; reinfection common due to multiple strains.

Transmission: **Feco-oral route**- infected persons, contaminated food/water, surfaces; common in **closed settings**.

Symptoms: **Vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal cramps, nausea; dehydration in severe cases.**

Treatment: **No vaccine**; supportive care with **oral/IV rehydration**.

Norovirus vs Influenza virus:

Norovirus: Causes **acute gastroenteritis** (vomiting, diarrhoea); often miscalled "stomach flu".

Influenza virus: Causes **respiratory flu** (fever, cough, sore throat), **not** gastroenteritis.

Caller Name Presentation (CNAP)

The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) will soon mandate telecom operators to display the KYC-registered name of incoming callers on Indian phone numbers under the Caller Name Presentation (CNAP) system.

Caller Name Presentation (CNAP)

Objective: Curb **spam, fraud, and scam calls** by enabling call screening.

How? Uses **telecom operators' KYC databases** (not crowdsourced apps like Truecaller).

Status: Pilot in Haryana; nationwide rollout expected by **March 2026**.

Coverage: Starts with **4G/5G**, later extended to older networks.

Default Setting: Enabled by default.

Privacy Safeguard: CLIR (*Calling Line Identification Restriction*) allows restricted users (e.g., Ministers, officials) to hide identity.

Tensor Processing Unit (TPU)

According to reports, Meta is in advanced talks with Google to use its Tensor Processing Units (TPUs).

What are TPUs?

A TPU is a **specialized chip** designed to **accelerate AI and machine learning (ML) tasks**.

Developer: Google (2016).

Purpose: Fast execution of **deep-learning tensor/matrix operations**.

Used in: Google Search, Translate, Photos; **data centres & cloud AI**.

Key Features:

- **Optimized for tensor computations** for processing large datasets much faster than CPUs or GPUs.
- **Massive parallelism:** can perform **many calculations at once**
- **High performance with lower power consumption**

- Specialized AI circuits (not general-purpose)

Comparison:

CPU: General computing | GPU: Parallel computing, graphics & AI | TPU: Dedicated deep-learning acceleration

Centre for Chronic Disease Control (CCDC)

- Established in 2000, CCDC is an **independent, not-for-profit, biomedical research organization based in New Delhi**.
- **Objective:** To reduce the burden of chronic diseases in India and low- and middle-income countries through surveillance, capacity building, and translational research in cardio-metabolic diseases.
- **Focus:** Chronic NCDs, especially cardio-metabolic diseases; nutrition research.
- Recently, CCDC received the recognition of a collaborating Centre of Excellence (CoE) by the Indian Council of Medical Research. It also holds registration under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 1976

Bluetongue Virus (BTv)

More suspected cases of bluetongue virus (BTv) have been recently detected in Northern Ireland.

About Bluetongue Virus (BTv):

- **Disease:** Bluetongue (severe haemorrhagic disease)
- **Nature:** Infectious, **non-contagious**, vector-borne
- **Hosts:** Domestic & wild ruminants; **sheep most affected**
- **Vector:** **Culicoides midges** (blood-feeding insects)
- **Transmission:** Midge bites; occasional **vertical transmission** (*from a ruminant mother to her fetus*)
- **Distribution:** Worldwide (except Antarctica)
- **Human Risk:** Not zoonotic; meat & milk safe
- **Clinical Signs (sheep):** Fever, facial/tongue swelling, nasal discharge, lameness, bluish tongue
- **Impact:** High morbidity/mortality; affects livestock productivity & trade
- **Treatment/Vaccine:** No specific treatment; **vaccines available for some strains**

AviSpray-10c

AvironiX Drones, a Chennai-based deep-tech drone company, recently announced the launch of its latest agricultural innovation, the AviSpray-10c.

About AviSpray-10c:

- **What?** Ultra-compact **agricultural spraying drone**
- **Design:** Backpack-sized; ~53% smaller than conventional agri-drones
- **Coverage:** **~5 acres per battery**; precision spraying
- **Architecture:** **Hexacopter** equipped with terrain-following radar & collision avoidance
- **Use Case:** Crop spraying in Indian conditions (heat, dust, humidity); single-pilot operation
- **Validation:** Field-tested on **6,000+ acres** (incl. paddy, sugarcane)
- **Economics:** Lower capital & operating costs; suited for FPOs and rural entrepreneurs

Fluoride

Recently, an NGO assessed that, in Odisha's Mayurbhanj, excess fluoride in drinking water is causing widespread fluorosis in several villages.

About Fluoride (F^-):

- It is an inorganic anion of fluorine; highly reactive, hence not found free in nature. Present in trace amounts in the human body; it is beneficial in small quantities.
- **Role:** Trace nutrient essential for **teeth and bone strength**; ~99% of body fluoride is found in bones and teeth.
- **Sources:** Naturally present in **soil, water, food**; minerals- **fluorspar, cryolite, fluorapatite**.
- **Uses:** Aluminium production; flux in **steel and glass industries**.
- **Excess Effects:** **Dental fluorosis** (stained teeth) and **skeletal fluorosis** (bone/joint deformities).

GLP-1 Drugs

Recently, the World Health Organization has finally issued global guidelines on the use of popular **Glucagon-Like Peptide-1 (GLP-1)** drugs for weight loss.

What are GLP-1 Drugs?

GLP-1 receptor agonists are drugs for **Type-2 diabetes**; some also treat **obesity**. They **mimic the gut hormone GLP-1** released after meals. They are mostly **injectable** with limited **oral option**. **Examples:** Semaglutide, Liraglutide; **Tirzepatide** is a **dual GLP-1/GIP agonist**. [GIP: Glucose-Dependent Insulinotropic Polypeptide]

Mechanism: It increases Insulin (glucose-dependent), decreases Glucagon, slows gastric emptying and increases Satiety leading to weight loss.

Key Risks: Common- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea; Rare: Pancreatitis, thyroid risk. Not safe in pregnancy.

GLP-1 is a natural incretin hormone released after meals from the gut and hindbrain that regulates blood sugar by increasing insulin and reducing glucagon. Its action is short-lived and it also provides benefits to the heart, liver, and kidneys.

Alaknanda Galaxy

Recently, researchers at National Centre for Radio Astrophysics - Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (NCRA-TIFR), Pune, have discovered a spiral galaxy and named it Alaknanda.

About Alaknanda Galaxy:

- **Location and Structure:** It is located about **12 billion light years** away and has **textbook spiral structure**.
- **Name Origin:** It is named after a **Himalayan river Alaknanda**.
- **Type:** The galaxy has two **well-defined spiral arms** wrapping around a bright central bulge, spanning approximately **30,000 light-years in diameter**.
- **Star Formation:** ~60 solar masses per year (very high)
- **Significance:** Closely resembles the **Milky Way** but formed when the universe was ~10% of its present age
- **Discovery:** Observed using **James Webb Space Telescope (JWST)**.

Spiral galaxies have a central bulge of older stars, often containing a supermassive black hole, surrounded by a flat rotating disk with spiral arms. These arms are rich in gas, dust, and young, bright stars. About two-thirds of spiral galaxies, including the Milky Way, have a central bar structure.

Hemorrhagic Septicemia

10 blackbucks have died in Jharkhand's Jamshedpur in Zoological Park due to suspected Hemorrhagic Septicemia.

About Hemorrhagic Septicemia

- It is a **Bacterial disease** of cattle and buffaloes (young more susceptible).
- **Cause:** *Pasteurella multocida*. Two common *P. multocida* serotypes are **B:2 (Asia), E:2 (Africa)**.
- **Nature:** Acute, highly fatal **septicaemia**.
- **Favourable conditions:** Humid, waterlogged areas.
- **Transmission:** Inhalation/ingestion via contact or contaminated feed & water.
- **Key signs:** High fever, dullness, salivation, rapid throat/brisket swelling.
- **Control:** **Vaccination**; early **IV (intravenous) antibiotics** reduce mortality.

Cosmic Filament

Recently, the University of Oxford researchers reported a roughly 50-million-lightyear-long cosmic Filament containing at least 14 galaxies.

About Cosmic Filament:

They are the largest thread-like structures of the **cosmic web** made of **galaxies, gas, and dark matter**. They span **hundreds of millions of light-years**.

Formation: They form by **gravitational collapse** at intersections of matter sheets, **link galaxy clusters** and surround **cosmic voids** and act as **highways** for gas and galaxies.

Significance: They regulate **galaxy formation, growth, and star formation**.

India International Science Festival

The 11th edition of India International Science Festival (IISF) is being held in Panchkula, Haryana.

✓ IISF launched in 2015 aims to promote public engagement with science and collaboration among scientists, nationally and globally.

Key Facts about IISF 2025:

- **Organized by:** Ministry of Earth Sciences. | **Coordinated by:** Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology.
- **Theme:** “*Vigyan Se Samruddhi: for Aatmanirbhar Bharat*”
- **Focus Areas:**

Science, Technology and Ecology of North-West India and the Himalayan Region	Science for Society and Education	Atmanirbhar Bharat through Science and Technology	Biotechnology and Bio-economy	Integration of Traditional Knowledge with Modern Science
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Doppler Weather Radar

Recently, the Minister of State for Earth Science informed that there are currently 47 Doppler weather radars (DWRs) across the country to survey weather patterns and forecasts.

What is a DWR?

It is a specialized radar that uses the **Doppler effect** to measure **velocity and movement** of precipitation and atmospheric particles, providing both **position and motion data** of weather systems.

<p>Working Principle: DWR emits radio waves that scatter after striking raindrops or clouds, with part of the signal returning to the radar; the time delay determines distance, while the Doppler frequency shift reveals the speed and direction of movement of weather systems.</p>	<p>Types of weather Radar Bands: Varying frequencies like S-band (Long-range ~400-500 km), C-band (Medium range ~250 km) and X-band (Short range ~100 km) are commonly used by the IMD in India.</p>
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Applications: Tracking weather systems & cloud bands, rainfall estimation, & early warnings (storms, hail, heavy rain, lightning).

Development Communication and Information Dissemination Scheme

Recently, the Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting informed the Lok Sabha about the Development Communication and Information Dissemination Scheme.

About Development Communication & Information Dissemination (DCID) Scheme

- **Type:** Central Sector Scheme of the **Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB)**.
- **Objective:** Publicity and citizen outreach for government programmes/schemes.
- **Coverage:** Rural, tribal, remote and urban populations.
- **Implementation:** Via **Central Bureau of Communication, Press Information Bureau, New Media Wing (NMW)**
- **Key Role:** Multimedia campaigns for flagship schemes (e.g., Swachh Bharat, PMAY, Jal Jeevan Mission)

Central Bureau of Communication is a media outreach unit under the **MIB**, formed in 2017 by merging Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity (**DAVP**), Directorate of Field Publicity (**DFP**) and Song & Drama Division (**S&DD**), to provide integrated communication & disseminate government policies & programmes.

Nitrofurans

Recently, FSSAI launched an egg safety drive after 'nitrofurans presence' triggers uproar.

About Nitrofurans

- **What?** Synthetic **broad-spectrum antimicrobials** with **furan ring + nitro group**.
- **Main compounds:** Furazolidone, Furaltadone, Nitrofurazone, Nitrofurantoin.
- **Action:** Mostly **bacteriostatic** (bactericidal at high dose); active against Gram ± bacteria & some protozoa.
- **Use:** Earlier used in **livestock/aquaculture**; **Nitrofurantoin** still used in humans (for treating UTIs).
- **Concern:** **Carcinogenic/toxic potential** → banned in food-producing animals.

DHRUV64

Recently, India unveiled its first fully indigenously developed microprocessor DHRUV64.

What is DHRUV64?

It is India's **first fully indigenous dual-core microprocessor**.

Developed by: Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) under Microprocessor Development Programme (MDP), MeitY.

Key features: 64-bit architecture; dual-core; 1.0 GHz speed; designed for efficient multitasking.

Significance: Boosts **self-reliance in semiconductors**; reduces import dependence.

Applications: 5G, automotive, industrial automation, consumer electronics, IoT.

Ekam AI and SAMBHAV

Recently, the Indian Army showcased a wide range of homegrown technologies Ekam AI and SAMBHAV project during Vijay Diwas celebration.

About Ekam AI	About SAMBHAV
<ul style="list-style-type: none">It is a fully indigenous, secure AI platform for sensitive environments.Key Features:<ul style="list-style-type: none">AI-based data analysis, document management, and decision support.Operates without foreign software or external cloud dependence.Usable across ranks without specialized technical expertise.Significance: Ensures data security and digital sovereignty; strengthens trusted national digital systems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">It is a portable satellite-enabled communication system.Key Features: Rapid deployment; provides mobile connectivity in remote and disaster-hit areas.Significance: Enhances military and civilian communication; demonstrates dual-use defence innovation.

Geminid Meteor

The Geminid meteor shower, one of the most spectacular in the celestial calendar is set to peak this weekend.

About Geminid Meteor Shower

- It is named after the constellation from which the meteors appear to radiate, Gemini.
- Timing:** It peaks in mid-December (annual).
- Origin:** From asteroid **3200 Phaethon** (unlike most comet-origin showers).
- Observation:** Best seen at night and pre-dawn; among the most reliable meteor showers.

GlowCas9 Protein

Recently, scientists from Kolkata based Bose institute have created GlowCas9 which can track gene editing.

About GlowCas9 Protein

- What?** Bioluminescent CRISPR-Cas9 that **glows during gene editing**.
- How?** Cas9 is fused with a **split nano-luciferase enzyme**; when Cas9 folds and becomes functionally active inside the cell, the luciferase fragments rejoin and **emit light**, signalling active gene editing.
- Key Feature:** **Real-time, non-destructive tracking** of gene editing in living cells.

Agentic AI

Satya Nadella, Chairman and CEO of Microsoft, recently observed that India is witnessing strong momentum in the deployment of AI and agentic AI applications.

What is Agentic AI?

It refers to AI systems with *agency*- the ability to autonomously set goals, plan, decide, and act with minimal human intervention.

Generative AI vs Agentic AI:

Generative AI: Creates content (text, code, images).	Agentic AI: Uses such outputs <i>towards goal-oriented action</i> by planning, invoking tools, and executing tasks.
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Key components:

Perception: Collects data from environment/systems	Reasoning: Interprets context using LLMs.	Planning: Sets goals and decomposes tasks.	Action: Executes tasks, calls tools/APIs.	Reflection: Learns from outcomes and adapts.
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Dieback Disease

The withering of thousands of neem trees over some years prompted the Mulugu-based Forest College & Research Institute (FCRI), to launch a comprehensive scientific probe into the devastating "dieback disease."

What is Dieback Disease? It is a plant disease causing progressive drying of twigs and branches from the tips.

Pathogen: Fungal disease caused mainly by *Phomopsis azadirachiae*.

First reported in India: 1990s, near Dehradun (Uttarakhand).

Symptoms: Tip-to-base browning, wilting, twig death, fruit/seed loss.

Spread & conditions: Via soil, water, root contact; worsens in warm, moist (rainy) conditions.

Impact: Severe infections can cause near-total fruit loss and large-scale tree mortality.

Management: No confirmed cure; control through sanitation and preventive measures.

Annatto

As informed by the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), the CSIR-Central Food Technological Research Institute (CSIR-CFTRI), Mysuru has undertaken four Grant-in-Aid projects related to the study and development of annatto.

About Annatto: It is a natural food colouring and flavouring agent derived from the seeds of the achiote tree *Bixa orellana* (native to tropical Americas).

Key Characteristics: Yellow-orange to red colour (due to carotenoids: **bixin**, **norbixin**); Powder, paste, oil or extract form; Mild, slightly sweet, peppery flavour.

Uses: Colours cheese, butter, yogurt, sausages, smoked fish, ice cream, baked goods.

Share: ~70% of natural food colours.

Health: Antioxidant, antimicrobial; generally safe (rare allergies).

Antariksh Prayogshala (Space Labs)

The Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe) recently rolled out a Request for Proposal (RfP) to establish Antariksh Prayogshala (Space Labs) at select academic institutions across India.

Antariksh Prayogshala (Space Labs): It is a **first-of-its-kind** initiative aimed at **creating state-of-the-art space laboratories within Indian academic institutions**.

Objective: To set up **space laboratories in academic institutions** for hands-on space tech training.

Coverage: **Up to 7 institutions, one per geographic zone** (phased selection).

Users: Students + **Non-Governmental Entities (NGEs)** in the zone.

Funding: IN-SPACe support **up to 75%, cap ₹5 crore/institution**, milestone-linked.

Selection: will be carried out in two stages- eligibility screening + Empowered Committee ranking.

About IN-SPACe

- **Status:** Autonomous, single-window nodal agency under **Department of Space**.
- **Purpose:** To enable **private sector participation** post space reforms.
- **Functions:** Authorize, promote & supervise **non-governmental entities (NGEs)** space activities.
- **Role:** Interface between ISRO and NGEs; optimizes use of India's space resources

Autophagy

Researchers have uncovered a surprising player in autophagy process that can pave the way for developing therapies for diseases such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and cancer.

What is meant by Autophagy?

It is a cellular self-cleaning/recycling mechanism that removes damaged organelles, proteins and pathogens.

Core function: To break down cellular waste and reuse components to maintain **cellular homeostasis**.

Significance:	Autophagy-Disease Linkages
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prevents waste accumulation (crucial in long-lived cells like neurons).• Protects against infections (destroys intracellular bacteria/viruses).• Supports cell survival during stress, aging and nutrient scarcity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cancer: Tumour suppressor in early stages (maintains genome integrity & cellular homeostasis); later, some cancers hijack autophagy for survival and growth.• Neurodegenerative diseases: Disrupted autophagy leads to accumulation of damaged proteins in Alzheimer's and Huntington's.

Ghost Pairing

Recently, the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) has issued an advisory about an active threat campaign which targets WhatsApp users by using a new technique called Ghost Pairing.

What is Ghost Pairing?

It is a **WhatsApp account takeover** technique abusing the **device-linking (pairing) feature** where attackers link their own device to the victim's account **without password or SIM swap**.

Working: The attack typically begins with a phishing message such as "check this photo," which leads the victim to a fake webpage. When the victim enters their phone number and WhatsApp pairing code, the attacker completes the device-linking process and gains silent, unauthorized access to the account.

Impact: **Full access** to chats, media, and impersonation while victim remains unaware.

Micrometeoroids and Orbital Debris

Recently, a piece of debris struck the Chinese crewed vehicle Shenzhou-20, caused a minor crack in the window of its return capsule which raised the concerns regarding protections of astronauts from Micrometeoroids and Orbital Debris (MMOD) that orbit the earth.

Micrometeoroids	Orbital Debris (Space Junk)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What? Extremely small natural particles of rocky or metallic matter moving through space.• Size: Few micrometres to ~2 mm• Origin: Asteroid belt collisions; minor contribution from comets	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What? Human-made objects in Earth's orbit that no longer serve any functional purpose.• Origin: Exploded rocket stages, defunct satellites, collisions, ASAT (Anti-Satellite tests)• Speed: ~10 km/s

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speed: ~11-72 km/s Impact: Billions of hits on orbiting spacecraft annually 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concentration: Mainly in Low Earth Orbit (LEO), ~200-2,000 km altitude
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T Chamaeleontis

Recently, astronomers used archival spectroscopic data from NASA's James Webb Space Telescope Mid Infrared Instrument (MIRI) to study polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) in the spectrum of the young star T Chamaeleontis.

T Chamaeleontis (T Cha)	Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What? Young, Sun-like (T Tauri) star Where? Chamaeleon constellation, ~350 light-years, southern sky Key Feature: Circumstellar (protoplanetary) disk with a wide gap → likely due to a forming planet Significance: Ideal laboratory to study early planet-disk interaction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What? Flat, ring-shaped carbon-hydrogen organic molecules Origin hypothesis: Delivered to early Earth by meteors, aiding prebiotic chemistry. In space: Constitute ~20% of interstellar carbon. On Earth: Formed by incomplete combustion/pyrolysis (fossil fuels, biomass) Properties: Low water solubility, highly lipophilic(strong affinity for fats), soluble in organic solvents

Frequency Combs

Frequency combs are an important modern tool which are used to calibrate atomic clocks and has various other applications.

About frequency comb: It is a **laser source** whose spectrum consists of **thousands of equally spaced, phase-coherent frequencies**, resembling a comb. It **bridges radio & optical frequencies** with extreme precision.

Uses: Atomic clock calibration, precision spectroscopy, **exoplanet detection**, & measuring **gravitational effects on light**.

Candida Auris

Scientists recently discovered a genetic process which could unlock new ways to treat mysterious and deadly Candida auris.

What is Candida auris (C. auris)? It is an emerging multidrug-resistant fungal pathogen (identified 2009, Japan).

Spread: Healthcare-associated; contaminated surfaces/person-to-person.

Risk: Hospitalized, comorbid patients, invasive devices.

Disease: Colonization → invasive infections (esp. bloodstream); persistent fever. | **Mortality:** ~30-60%.

Treatment: Echinocandins; resistant strains may need combination therapy.

MAVEN Mission

NASA has lost contact with its Mars Atmosphere and Volatile Evolution (MAVEN) spacecraft, the Mars orbiter that has worked for more than a decade to study how the planet's atmosphere is escaping into space.

About MAVEN Mission

- Agency:** NASA (**Launch:** 2013) | **Aim:** To study **upper atmosphere of Mars** and atmospheric loss to space.
- Instruments:** Solar wind-ionosphere, UV spectrometer, mass spectrometer
- Key Finding:** Mars lost ~2/3 of its early atmosphere

AILA

IIT Delhi researchers (with European collaborators) recently developed an AI- Agent AILA (Artificially Intelligent Lab Assistant).

What is AILA? It is an autonomous AI agent that performs real lab experiments end-to-end.

Key feature: Directly operates instruments like Atomic Force Microscope (AFM)- one of the **most delicate and complex instruments** used to study materials at the nanoscale.

Impact: Cuts AFM optimization time from ~24 hours to 7-10 minutes.

Significance: Fully automates experimentation- code, data collection, analysis, and decisions.

Buccal Mucosa Cancer (BMC)

Alcohol consumption, even in small amounts, significantly increases the risk of buccal mucosa cancer (BMC), a common and aggressive form of oral cancer in India, according to a recent study.

What is BMC?

It is an oral cancer arising from the **inner cheek lining (buccal mucosa)**.

Type: Mostly **Squamous Cell Carcinoma (SCC)**. It is the **most common oral cancer** in the Indian subcontinent.

Risk factors: **Tobacco (smoked & smokeless)**, **alcohol** (even low intake ↑ risk).

Symptoms: Non-healing ulcer, lump, cheek pain, difficulty chewing.

Treatment: Surgery ± radiotherapy ± chemotherapy (stage-based).

Prognosis: Early detection crucial; ~60–70% 5-year survival (oral cavity cancers).

LVM3-M6 Mission

ISRO recently launched the LVM-3 rocket carrying its heaviest-ever satellite- BlueBird Block-2.

About Bluebird Block-2 Satellite

- **Payload:** BlueBird Block-2 satellite (~6,100 kg, heaviest by ISRO)
- **Maker:** AST SpaceMobile (USA)
- **Orbit:** Lower Earth Orbit (~520 km)
- **Purpose:** Direct 4G/5G connectivity to normal smartphones
- **Significance:** Boosts India's commercial launch capability and global satellite broadband

Superkilonova

Astronomers may have discovered the first example of an explosive cosmic event called a "superkilonova," in the form of a gravitational wave signal.

What is Superkilonova? It is an extreme cosmic event combining a supernova (massive star death) and a kilonova (neutron star merger)

Process: Supernova → **two neutron stars form** → merge

Kilonova vs Superkilonova: Kilonova is a merger of two pre-existing neutron stars whereas Superkilonova starts with a **supernova**, then ends in a neutron-star merger.

Significance: Creates **heavy elements (gold, silver)** + emits **gravitational waves**.

RESPOND Basket 2025

ISRO recently released RESPOND Basket 2025, listing research problem statements aligned with its ongoing and future mission needs, inviting academia and R&D institutions to contribute.

Objective of RESPOND Basket: Align **academic R&D** with ISRO's **current & future mission needs**.

Focus areas: Quantum computing, launch vehicles & materials, remote sensing, advanced satellite communications.

Mission linkage: Bharatiya Antariksh Station, Chandrayaan-4, Gaganyaan, Venus orbiter, human Moon mission.

Who can apply? Faculty/scientists from **recognized academic & autonomous R&D institutions**.

Quantum Echoes

Google's recent **Quantum Echoes** experiment on a **65-qubit Willow processor** marks a shift from chasing quantum speed to understanding how information evolves in entangled quantum systems.

What is meant by Quantum Echoes?

It is an experiment that tracks how quantum information **spreads (scrambles)** and **partially refocuses** within an entangled system of qubits.

How? Google used a **65-qubit Willow superconducting processor** and measured *out-of-time-order correlators (OTOC)*- tiny echoes that reveal how disturbances travel through a network of qubits.

Idea: Gently disturb the system, reverse evolution, and measure the **returning echo**.

Significance: Reveals **quantum chaos and information flow**; useful for physics and materials science.

India Re-Elected to UNESCO Executive board

India has been re-elected to the UNESCO Executive Board for the 2025-29 term.

UNESCO Executive Board

- The Executive Board is one of the three constitutional organs of UNESCO (the others being the General Conference and the Secretariat), and it is elected by the General Conference.
- It is the **decision-making and supervisory body** of UNESCO. It consists of 58 Member States each with a four-year term of office.
- It acts as a bridge between policy formulation and implementation and plays a crucial role in shaping global norms related to education, heritage protection, freedom of expression, and scientific cooperation.

Key functions

- Examines and approves UNESCO's programme of work and budget before submission to the General Conference.
- Supervises the execution of programmes adopted by the General Conference.
- Recommends the appointment of the Director-General of UNESCO.
- Reviews reports on UNESCO's activities and financial management.

Perumbidugu Mutharaiyar II

- A commemorative postage stamp in honour of the king Perumbidugu Mutharaiyar II was released by Vice President.
- Perumbidugu Mutharaiyar (**705 AD-745 AD**), also known as **Suvaran Maran** was a ruler of the **Mutharaiyar lineage, feudatories of the Pallavas**.
- As the Pallavas' rule weakened, many such chiefs earned more power and prominence and were treated as rulers in their own right.
- He is believed to have fought bravely in several battles alongside the **Pallava king Nandivarman**, and is remembered as a great administrator.
- The Mutharaiyars held control over areas including Thanjavur, Pudukkottai, Perambalur, Tiruchirappalli, and others near the Cauvery river.
- The Mutharaiyars ruled almost from the time of **Paramesvaravarman I** (of the Pallava dynasty).
- The Pallava reign saw a religious revivalism of Hinduism amid the dominance of Jainism and Buddhism. As their feudatories, the Mutharaiyars were great temple builders.

Bison Horn Maria Dance

- The traditional Bison Horn Maria dance was recently held during a festival at Judiya Para in Bastar, Chhattisgarh.
- It is a vibrant tribal folk dance performed by the **Dandami Madia** (also spelt as Maria) tribe. The community identifies itself with the larger Gond tradition.
- The dance is performed by both men and women. Men wear the horn-shaped headgear made from bamboo, adorned with bison horns, feathers, and bright cloth strips.
- Women wear bright, handwoven saris, heavy silver and brass ornaments, and headgear.

- The dance derives its name from the **bison horns (Gaur horns)** worn by the dancers.
- It mimics the movements of a wild bison, representing strength, vitality, and the tribe's deep connection to forest life and hunting traditions.
- It is primarily performed during major community celebrations like the Madia Festival, Bastar Dussehra, weddings, and harvest rituals.
- Ritual chants during the performance often invoke local deities like **Budhadev and Danteshwari Mai**.

150 years of Vande Mataram

- India celebrated 150 years of its National Song, Vande Mataram—a hymn that has inspired generations with its message of devotion, unity, and patriotism.
- Composed by **Bankim Chandra Chatterjee**, Vande Mataram first appeared in the literary journal **Bangadarshan** on November 7, 1875, and was later incorporated into the landmark **novel Anandamath**, published in 1882.
- The novel Anandamath centers on a group of Sanyasins, known as the Santanas, who dedicate their lives to the motherland. They respect India as a mother goddess, and Vande Mataram becomes their hymn of devotion.
- The song was **first sung by Rabindranath Tagore** at the 1896 Indian National Congress session in Calcutta.
- Its political significance emerged during the Swadeshi and anti-partition movements in Bengal, with the slogan Vande Mataram first raised publicly on August 7 1905 by thousands of students in Kolkata.

A song of resistance

- By the early 20th century, Vande Mataram had evolved into a rallying cry for Indian nationalism.
- Societies such as the **Bande Mataram Sampradaya** promoted the song through public processions, known as **Prabhat Pheris**, while newspapers like Bande Mataram spread its message of unity, self-reliance, and resistance against colonial rule.
- The British administration tried to suppress its influence, imposing fines on students and banning its public recital.
- The influence of Vande Mataram extended beyond India. In 1907, Madam Bhikaji Cama raised the tricolor flag in Berlin inscribed with the words Vande Mataram.
- In 1950, the Constituent Assembly of India officially recognized Vande Mataram as the National Song, honoring it alongside Jana Gana Mana, the National Anthem.

Preah Vihear temple

- India has expressed concern over damage to conservation facilities at the Preah Vihear temple complex amid ongoing clashes along the Thailand-Cambodia border.
- The Preah Vihear temple is an ancient Hindu temple complex located atop the **Dangrek Mountain**. Built by the **Khmer Empire** the construction of the temple began in the 9th century CE and continued till 12th century.
- Major construction occurred during the reigns of Khmer kings **Suryavarman I** (1002–1050) and **Suryavarman II** (1113–1150).
- The temple was dedicated to **Shiva**. In 2008, Preah Vihear was inscribed as a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**.
- The temple has also been at the centre of a long-standing border dispute between Cambodia and Thailand. In 1962, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that the temple belongs to Cambodia.

Vinod Kumar Shukla

- Renowned Hindi writer, poet and novelist Vinod Kumar Shukla recently passed away.
- Earlier this year, Shukla was awarded the 59th Jnanpith Award for his contributions to Hindi Literature.
- His writings are known for their simplicity, sensitivity and unique writing style.
- His first booklet of poetry, *Lagbhag Jai Hind*, was published in 1971.
- His major novels include *Naukar Ki Kameez*, *Deewar Mein Ek Khidki Rahti Thi*, and *Khilega To Dekhenge*.

Dr Tessy Thomas awarded Paulos Mar Gregorios Award 2025.

- Renowned aerospace engineer who helped shape the country's strategic missile programme, Dr Tessy Thomas, has been honoured with the Dr Paulos Mar Gregorios Award 2025.
- The award recognises her outstanding contribution in women empowerment, space and missile technology.
- Having served as Project Director for the Agni-IV ballistic missile at DRDO, her leadership helped advance India's long-range missile capability.
- Thomas is the first woman to lead a missile project in the country. She was the first Indian woman to be inducted into Aeronautical Society's Space Pioneer Hall of Fame in 2014.

Dr Paulos Mar Gregorios Award

- Instituted by Sophia Society of the Malankara (Indian) Orthodox Church, the award is given every alternate year in memory of first Metropolitan of Delhi Diocese and noted philosopher Dr Paulos Mar Gregorios.
- He also served as the President of the World Council of Churches.
- He was widely respected for his contributions to peace, inter-faith dialogue, human dignity, and social justice.