



# the recitals

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**Canadian PM Visited India**

**Census 2027 Mascots**

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President Murmu has given her assent to the **Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill 2026** which proposes significant changes to the 2019 law governing transgender rights.

The most contentious provision is the **removal** of the right to self-identify one's gender, which was recognised by the Supreme Court in the landmark **NALSA v. Union of India (2014)** judgment. Instead, the Bill introduces a requirement for medical certification for legal gender recognition.

This shift has triggered widespread criticism from transgender and LGBTQ+ groups, who argue that it undermines dignity, autonomy, and hard-won legal rights, marking a rollback of progressive jurisprudence in India.

## Definitions of Sex, Gender, and Transgender

- The **Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019** defines a transgender person as someone whose gender does not match the gender assigned at birth.
- It includes a wide range of identities such as:
  - Trans men and trans women (irrespective of medical procedures)
  - Persons with intersex variations
  - Genderqueer and non-binary individuals
  - Sociocultural identities like kinner, hijra, aravani, and jogta
- The framework highlights that **biological sex and social gender are distinct**, and recognizing this distinction is central to understanding transgender identities.
- **Distinction Between Sex and Gender**
  - **Sex(M/F)**: Refers to biological characteristics; Determined by anatomy, chromosomes, and hormones;
  - **Gender**: A social and cultural construct; Defines roles, behaviours, and expectations; Varies across societies and time.

## NALSA v/s UoI Judgment (2014) and Its Impact on Transgender Rights

- It recognised transgender persons as a “**third gender**” and affirmed that they are entitled to all fundamental rights under the Constitution.
- A key aspect of the judgment was the **right to self-identification of gender**, allowing individuals to identify as male, female, or third gender without mandatory medical intervention.
- The Court also directed the government to create laws and welfare measures for the transgender community.
- This led to the enactment of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, which institutionalised legal recognition through:
  - Inclusion of “third gender” in official documents
  - Issuance of transgender identity cards
  - Creation of welfare mechanisms, including Transgender Welfare Boards
- These identity cards enabled access to government schemes, with over 32,000 cards issued so far, improving legal recognition and social inclusion of transgender persons.

### Related Judgments

**Navtej Singh Johar vs. UoI (2018)**: Decriminalised consensual homosexuality.

**Supriya Chakraborty vs UoI (2023)**: Upheld laws recognizing only heterosexual marriages.

## Key Changes Proposed in Transgender Rights Amendment Bill, 2026

- **Shift in Approach: From Identity to Biology**
  - The Bill focuses on protecting only those facing **biological-based exclusion**.
  - It marks a shift back to a **pre-2014 understanding**, prioritising biological traits over self-identified gender.
- **Narrower Definition of Transgender**
  - Restricts recognition to:
    - Sociocultural identities (kinner, hijra, aravani, jogta, eunuch)
    - Persons with **specific congenital biological variations**
    - Replaces the broader 2019 definition with a **medicalised and limited list** (genitalia, chromosomes, hormones, etc.).
  - **New Category Introduced:** Includes persons **forced into transgender identity** through coercion, surgery, or manipulation.
- **Removal of Self-Identification**
  - Deletes the provision allowing **self-identification of gender**.
  - Argues earlier definition was “vague” and made it difficult to identify genuine beneficiaries.
  - Excludes gender-fluid and self-perceived identities from legal recognition.
- **Medical Board for Certification**
  - A Medical Board (headed by CMO/DCMO) will assess applicants and advise the District Magistrate.
  - Introduces clinical gatekeeping in identity recognition.
  - **Institutional Change:** Members representing states/UTs must now be senior officials (Director rank or above).
- **Stricter Penal Provisions**
  - Expands punishments for crimes against transgender persons.
  - New Offences & Penalties:
    - Forcing transgender identity (adult): 10 years to life imprisonment + ₹2 lakh fine
    - Forcing transgender identity (child): Life imprisonment + ₹5 lakh fine
    - Forced begging/servitude (adult): 5–10 years imprisonment + ₹1 lakh fine
    - Forced begging/servitude (child): 10–14 years imprisonment + ₹3 lakh fine

## Criticism of Transgender Rights Amendment Bill, 2026

- **Violation of Self-Determination**
  - Seen as a serious human rights violation, undermining dignity and autonomy.
  - Critics emphasise that gender identity is personal and lived, not subject to external approval.
- **Burden of Proof on Individuals**
  - The amendment requires individuals to prove their identity through medical certification.
- **Challenges Due to Social Stigma**
  - Requirement of medical documentation may be difficult due to prevailing transphobia in healthcare systems.
  - Trans persons may face bias, exclusion, and lack of access in hospitals and institutions.
- **Exclusionary Definition of Transgender Identity**

- Excludes individuals who identify as transgender outside traditional community structures. Critics say this ignores the diversity of transgender experiences.



## Impeachment Motion Against CEC

Recently, opposition Members of Parliament (MPs) moved notices in both Houses of Parliament seeking the removal of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar, with 130 Lok Sabha (LS) MPs and 63 Rajya Sabha (RS) MPs signing the motion. This is the first time a notice has been moved seeking the removal of the CEC.

### Why is the Opposition Seeking Removal of the Chief Election Commissioner?

The notice submitted by the opposition lists following charges against the CEC:

- **Alleged Partisan Conduct:** The notice reportedly accuses the CEC of **partisan and discriminatory conduct in office**. Opposition parties claim that his actions have **favoured the ruling Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP)**, raising concerns about the neutrality of the Election Commission of India (ECI).
- **Obstruction of Electoral Fraud Investigations:** One of the charges alleges **deliberate obstruction in the investigation of electoral irregularities or fraud**.
- **Allegations of Mass Disenfranchisement:** The notice also cites **mass disenfranchisement of voters**, alleging that certain actions of the Election Commission have led to **removal of genuine voters from electoral rolls**.
- **Controversy over Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of Electoral Rolls:** A major trigger where Opposition parties argue that the revision process could **benefit the ruling party by altering voter lists**.
  - The issue has been particularly contentious in **West Bengal**, where ECI has been accused of **deleting legitimate voters during the revision exercise**.
- **Political and Institutional Concerns:** The opposition claims these actions **compromise the independence and impartiality of the ECI**, which is expected to function as a **neutral constitutional authority** overseeing elections.

### What is the Process for Removal of the CEC?

- **Constitutional & Legal Basis:**
  - ✓ **Article 324(5) of the Constitution:** states that the CEC can be removed only in the same manner and on the same grounds as a Supreme Court (SC) judge. His/her service conditions cannot be altered to their disadvantage after appointment.
  - ✓ **Section 11(2) of the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023:** states that CEC cannot be removed from his office except in like manner and on the like grounds as a SC Judge.
    - ➔ The procedure for removal of a Judge is laid down in the Judges Inquiry Act, 1968.
- **Grounds for Removal:** The CEC can be removed only on grounds of **proven misbehaviour and incapacity**.
- **Initiation of Removal Motion:** A motion for the removal of the CEC may be introduced in either House of Parliament. The notice must be signed by **at least 100 MPs in the LS or 50 MPs in the RS** and submitted to the **Speaker of the LS or the Chairman of the RS**, who has the authority to **admit or reject the motion**.
- **Constitution of Inquiry Committee:** If the motion is **admitted**, a **three-member investigative committee** is formed constituting-
  - ✓ Chief Justice of India (CJI) or a SC judge
  - ✓ Chief Justice of a High Court
  - ✓ A distinguished jurist

If notices are submitted in **both Houses on the same day**, the committee is constituted jointly by the **Speaker and Chairman**.

- **Investigation by the Committee:** The committee frames charges against the CEC and conducts an inquiry similar to a judicial proceeding. During the investigation, evidence is examined and witnesses may be cross-examined. The CEC is given an opportunity to defend himself or herself before the committee. After completing the inquiry, the committee submits its report to the presiding officer of the House.
- **Consideration in Parliament:** If the committee finds "**misbehaviour or incapacity**", the motion is **taken up for discussion** in the House. The CEC is given an **opportunity to defend himself/herself** during parliamentary consideration.
- **Voting Requirement (Special Majority):** For the motion to pass in **each House of Parliament**, it must secure:
  - ✓ **More than 50% of the total membership of the House**, and
  - ✓ **Two-thirds majority of members present and voting**.

Both LS and RS must pass the motion separately.

- **Final Removal:** Once both Houses pass the motion with the required majority, it is **sent to the President of India**. The **President then issues the order removing the CEC**.

**Protection for Other Election Commissioners:** Other Election Commissioners cannot be removed except on the recommendation of the CEC, ensuring internal institutional protection within the Election Commission.

### Challenges Faced by the CEC

- **Political Pressure and Allegations of Bias:** The CEC operates in a **highly politicized environment**, where decisions on electoral rolls, schedules, or model code enforcement often attract **allegations of favouring one party**. Maintaining **institutional neutrality while facing political scrutiny** is a persistent challenge.
- **Managing Electoral Integrity:** Ensuring **free and fair elections across a vast electorate** is complex. Issues such as **electoral roll inaccuracies, voter deletion, misinformation, and electoral malpractice** require constant monitoring and corrective action.
- **Administrative and Logistical Complexity:** India conducts the **world's largest elections**, involving millions of polling personnel, electronic voting machines, and multiple phases of polling. Coordinating with **state administrations, security agencies, and political parties** adds to the operational burden.
- **Institutional and Legal Constraints:** The ECI must function within **constitutional limits and judicial scrutiny**, while also addressing demands for reforms such as **greater transparency in funding and stronger enforcement powers**.
- **Public Trust and Credibility:** The credibility of the electoral process depends heavily on **public confidence in the ECI's impartiality**. Frequent political attacks can **erode institutional trust**, even if decisions are legally sound.

### Implications of Impeachment Motion Against CEC

- **Test of Institutional Accountability:** The motion reflects Parliament's **constitutional oversight over independent authorities**. It underscores that even high constitutional functionaries can be **held accountable for alleged misconduct or incapacity**.
- **Political Polarization Around ECI:** Such a move may **intensify political contestation** around the functioning of the ECI. Competing narratives could deepen **perceptions of politicization of electoral institutions**.
- **Impact on Institutional Credibility:** The controversy could **affect public confidence in the neutrality of the Election Commission**.
- **Precedent for Future Actions:** It could set a **political and constitutional precedent** for future attempts to challenge the functioning of the EC leadership.
- **Reinforcement of Constitutional Safeguards:** The **stringent impeachment procedure** (special majority in both Houses) **protects the independence of the CEC from arbitrary political action**.



## Can Courts Review Personal Laws?

A recent petition challenging Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937 on the ground of gender discrimination in inheritance has prompted the Supreme Court (SC) to ask a fundamental question- **Can personal laws be subjected to judicial review at all?**

### Case Background

- **The Petition:** Challenges the **Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937**. It argues that after the 2024 **Uttarakhand Uniform Civil Code (UCC)** introduced different rules, the Act has **lost its uniform religious character** and now functions as a **civil statute**.
- **Demand:** To subject the 1937 Act to **judicial review under Fundamental Rights (FRs)**. The petition effectively seeks **invalidation or reading down** of discriminatory inheritance provisions of the Shariat act and seeks **equal property rights for Muslim women**, similar to those available under the Uttarakhand UCC.
  - Shariat act results in **women receiving less than men**. The petition uses this to argue **gender inequality**.
  - **Core grievance: Same Community, Different Inheritance Outcomes based on state of residence.**
- **Constitutional Aspects Cited:**
  - **Article 14 (Equality before Law):** The petition challenges **arbitrary classification** based on geography stating lack of rational nexus between **place of residence** and **inheritance rights**.

- **Article 15 (Non-discrimination):** The petition highlights **intra-religious gender discrimination** (Muslim women vs men) and points out the **differential treatment among Muslim women across states**.
- **Article 21 (Right to Life and Dignity):** It terms unequal inheritance as “**economic injustice/violence**”, violating Muslim women’s dignity.
- **Article 25 (Freedom of Religion):** It distinguishes **Ibadat (worship) vs Muamalat (civil matters)** and argues that inheritance is **secular (muamalat)** i.e. open to state regulation under **Article 25(2)(b)**.
  - Article 25(2)(b) provides for **social welfare and reform** or the throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus.
- **SC Observation:** It orally observed that it would be better to defer to Parliament’s wisdom to bring a Uniform Civil Code rather than judicially strike down the Shariat Application Act, 1937 on the ground of gender discrimination in inheritance matter as it would create a legal vacuum.

### Way Forward

- **Legislative Reform First:** The Parliament should lead to gradual, consultative reform of personal laws.
- **Targeted Equality Approach:** **Discriminatory provisions** should be removed immediately to enable equality among people across all religions irrespective of their gender.
- **Harmonization with FRs:** Personal laws should be aligned with **Articles 14, 15, and 21**.
- **Judicial Restraint with Intervention:** Courts should intervene **only in cases of manifest arbitrariness or rights violations**.
- **Inclusive dialogue:** **Religious bodies, women’s groups, and civil society** should be engaged in discussion for consensus-based reform.

## About the 1937 Shariat Act

The **Shariat Application Act, 1937** is an Islamic law enacted to replace **diverse regional customs** (which often denied women inheritance) with **uniform Islamic law (Sharia)** thus creating a **minimum legal guarantee** of inheritance rights for Muslim women.

### Key Features of Islamic Inheritance (Faraid):

- **Inheritance rules (faraid) are Quran-based, fixed, mandatory and cannot be altered by personal will** beyond limits. Examples of shares:
  - **Daughter:** sole daughter -  $\frac{1}{2}$  of estate; Two or more-  $\frac{2}{3}$  collectively; **With sons-Daughters receive half the share of sons.**
  - **Widow:**  $\frac{1}{8}$  (if children exist) and  $\frac{1}{4}$  (if no children)
- **Wasiyyah (will):** is limited to  $\frac{1}{3}$  of estate and cannot override shares of legal heirs.

## Judicial Review of Personal Laws in India- Evolution

### ■ Phase I- Judicial Restraint (1950s-1970s):

- ✓ **State of Bombay v. Narasu Appa Mali (1951):** The Bombay High Court (HC) held that personal laws are **not “law” under Article 13** and hence, **cannot be challenged for violating FRs**. This judgement created the **Narasu Doctrine** and gave **immunity to uncodified personal laws**.
- ✓ **Sri Krishna Singh v. Mathura Ahir (1979):** SC reaffirmed that **FRs do not directly apply to personal law**. Courts must apply personal law unless **changed by legislation**. This judgement strengthened **judicial deference** and made the Legislature- the primary reform body

### ■ Phase II- Indirect Judicial Intervention (1980s): In Mohd. Ahmed Khan v. Shah Bano Begum (1985) case, a 5-judge SC constitution bench held that **Section 125 CrPC (secular law allowing for maintenance of wife, children and parents)** applies to all, regardless of religion. The **court did NOT strike down personal law** but allowed **secular law to override religious practice in effect**.

### ■ Phase III- Equality Jurisprudence Emerges (2000s): In John Vallamattom v. Union of India (2003), the SC struck down Section 118 of the Indian Succession Act, 1925, which imposed discriminatory restrictions on Christians making charitable bequests. Thus, instead of attacking personal law directly, the Court targeted **statutory discrimination**.

### ■ Phase IV- Direct Constitutional Scrutiny (2010s):

- ✓ **Shayara Bano v. Union of India (2017):** A 5-judge SC bench struck down instant triple talaq by 3-2 majority, marking a key shift by allowing practices recognized under the Shariat Act, 1937 to be tested against FRs. The case is significant for **advancing equality review**.
- ✓ **Indian Young Lawyers Association v. State of Kerala (2018):** Also known as the **Sabarimala Case**, in this, the SC with 4:1 majority held that the exclusion of women of menstruating age from temple entry violated principles of equality and dignity. The court held that religious practices must conform to **constitutional morality**. At the same time, Justice Indu Malhotra dissenting from the majority opinion warned against **judicial overreach in religious matters**.

### ■ Present Phase- Renewed Constitutional Conflict: The current challenge (Shariat inheritance case) revives the core issue- whether **personal law can now be fully reviewed under FRs**.

# SC Verdict on OBC-Creamy Layer Test

In a batch of civil appeals, the Supreme Court (SC) recently ruled that parental income alone cannot be used to determine the Creamy layer status of an Other Backward Classes (OBC) candidate.

## Case Background

- **Origin of the Dispute:** The appeals arose from separate orders passed by the Madras High Court (HC), Delhi HC and Kerala HC which examined the eligibility of **Civil Services Examination candidates** claiming **OBC reservation benefits**.
- **Core Controversy:** In all the cases, successful candidates were denied allocation under the OBC category as they fall within the creamy layer based on their parents' income.
- **Government's Basis for Denial:** The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT)'s **Income / Wealth Test** under Category VI of the Office Memorandum (1993 OM) read with the 2004 clarificatory letter, had not been applied.
- **Legal Challenge by Candidates:** Aggrieved candidates approached the Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) and the HCs, which ruled in their favour. These rulings were challenged by the Union of India.
- **Core Issues Raised in SC Appeal:**
  - **Status of Clarificatory Letter:** Whether the 2004 clarificatory letter can **override/supersede the 1993 OM** on creamy layer criteria for OBCs.

## Evolution of Creamy Layer Criteria in OBC Quota

\* **Origin of Creamy Layer Concept:** It emerged from the landmark 1992 SC ruling in **Indra Sawhney v. Union of India (the Mandal verdict)**, where the SC upheld OBC reservations but mandated the exclusion of socially and economically advanced sections within the OBCs to uplift the genuinely backward classes.

### Institutionalization through 1993 DoPT OM:

Following the SC Judgement, the DoPT issued an OM in 1993 laying down following criteria to identify the categories of OBCs to be excluded as creamy layer:

- \* **Service-Based Criteria:** Children of people holding following positions are considered under creamy layer-
  - Constitutional positions such as the Offices of President, Vice-President, Chairman & members of Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) or State Public Service Commissions, CEC, CAG;
  - Judges of HCs and the SC;
  - Group A/Class I officers directly recruited (or those promoted before 40 years age) and Group B/Class II officers directly recruited - either the Central or State government.
  - For armed forces and paramilitary forces, children of officers above the rank of Colonel & equivalent posts.
  - Persons holding equivalent or comparable posts with government posts in PSUs, Banks, Insurance Organizations, Universities and private employment.
    - ✓ Such equivalence was never formally established.
  - Professionals (doctors, lawyers, engineers etc) & those from trade and industry; non-agricultural property owners.

However, **exceptions** were carved out of these exclusions: for instance, children of MPs/MLAs; government officials who have been promoted, not hired, into senior positions; and owners of unirrigated agricultural land, among others are all now eligible for OBC quotas, subject to a parental annual income limit of ₹8 lakh.

**Income/Wealth Test:** Children of persons having a gross annual income of ₹1 lakh (now ₹8 lakh after 2017 revision) or more, or persons possessing wealth above the Wealth Tax Act, 1957 (abolished w.e.f. 2016) threshold for three consecutive years. Only income from sources such as property, business, or capital gains is considered.

\* Parental income from salaries or agricultural land is excluded from this condition.

In the affidavit filed in the Supreme Court in October 2020, the DoPT explained that the income test actually sets down **two different** tests for different categories of OBC candidates:

First for children of all salaried professionals (doctors, lawyers, engineers), people in trade and industry, owners of non-agricultural property, and employees of State and Central PSUs;

Second for the exceptions from the **excluded set of people in constitutional posts and government services** as mentioned above.

DoPT explained that the rule to **exclude salaries and agricultural income** from the annual family income has only ever applied to the second group, which is a small section of OBC candidates.

\* **2004 DoPT Clarification Letter:** It addressed the issue of determining the **equivalence between PSU/private sector posts and government posts** using an **income/ wealth test i.e. if either salary or other income (excluding agricultural income)** of the parents of a candidate exceeds the prescribed limit (then ₹2.5 lakh now ₹8 lakhs) for **three consecutive years**, then he/she would be considered a part of the creamy layer.

➤ **Impact of 2004 Clarification:** This clarification was implemented effectively from the Civil Service Examination (CSE) 2015 (batch 2016). Since then, around 100 OBC candidates, despite having valid caste certificates and qualifying the CSE examination were **rejected by DoPT during scrutiny**.

\*\***Note:** For availing benefits under the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) quota- introduced in 2019, the income criterion is ₹8 lakhs similar to that of OBCs. However, for OBCs, the income test excludes the income from salaries or agricultural land whereas for EWS- total income (including salary and agricultural income) is considered.

- **Equality/Discrimination Issue:** Whether treating **Government employees differently from PSU/private employees** despite same rank or grade amounts to **hostile discrimination**.

### What did the Court Rule?

- **Income not Sole Criteria:** The court in *Union of India vs. Rohith Nathan (2026)* held that the **OBC candidates from PSU/private sector backgrounds cannot be denied reservation benefits solely on salary-based income**, especially in the absence of **equivalence of posts** with government services.
- **Status of 1993 OM vs 2004 Clarification:** The Court ruled that the **1993 OM** is the **governing and binding policy**, framed after expert committee recommendations and parliamentary scrutiny whereas the **2004 clarificatory letter** is only explanatory in nature. Thus, creamy layer determination must follow the **1993 OM framework** and not an expanded interpretation based on the 2004 clarification as any interpretation that alters the original criteria would be legally impermissible.
- **Nature of Creamy Layer Criteria:** The Court clarified that the creamy layer framework under the 1993 OM is **primarily status-based (rank or position of the parents- main determinant of social status)**, not purely income-based. The **Income/Wealth Test** acts only as a **residual filter** and is applicable in **limited cases**.

Therefore, for determining creamy layer, **salary and agricultural income must be excluded while applying the income/wealth test, as explicitly provided in the 1993 OM.**

- **PSU/Private Sector Issue and Misapplication:** The Court noted that for PSU and similar employees, if **equivalence with government posts is not determined** then only the **Income/Wealth Test (Category VI)** applies. However, because the authorities wrongly applied the 2004 clarification by including **salary income**, and ignored the **status of the parent's post of the candidates**, it led to **their incorrect exclusion**.
- **Finding of Hostile Discrimination:** As the children of **Government employees** were assessed based on their status alone (salary excluded) whereas **PSU/private employees' children** were excluded based solely on salary. This, the court said, creates **unequal treatment among similarly placed OBCs**, violating **Article 14 (Equality before law)**, **Article 15 (Non-discrimination based only on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth)** and **Article 16 (equal opportunity in public employment)** and treating equals unequally is **constitutionally impermissible**.
- **Constitutional Principles Reaffirmed:** The Court reiterated key principles from its **Indra Sawhney v. Union of India (1992) verdict** i.e.:
  - Creamy layer exclusion is meant to ensure the **benefits reach truly backward classes without creating artificial distinctions within the same class**.
  - Reservation under **Article 16(4)** is a tool of **substantive equality embodied in Article 16(1)** and not an exception to equality.
    - ✓ Article 16(4) empowers the State to make any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any backward class of citizens which under its opinion, is inadequately represented in the services under the State.
- **Decision on Government Appeals:** The Court **dismissed the Union of India's appeals**, upheld the **HC judgments** in favour of candidates and directed reconsideration of candidates' claims under the **correct interpretation of 1993 OM**.

### Implications of the Verdict:

- **Reinforcement of Equality Principle:** Ends **hostile discrimination** between children of government employees and PSU/private sector employees. Thus, **ensuring equal treatment for similarly placed OBCs**.
- **Relief to Affected Candidates:** The verdict directly benefits around **100 candidates (CSE 2015 onwards)** with the possibility of **reallocation of services** and creation of **supernumerary posts**- triggering **retrospective corrections**.
- **Wider Applicability:** applies to children of **PSU employees and Private sector employees**, impacting not just UPSC but **all recruitment exams which use OBC criteria**.
- **Need for Administrative Reforms:** The verdict highlights an urgent need for introducing an **equivalence framework** between PSU & government posts and standardizing **creamy layer determination mechanism** for reducing the scope for **arbitrary interpretation by authorities**.
- **Policy Impact:** The verdict may influence future debates on **EWS vs OBC criteria consistency and revision of ₹8 lakh threshold**.
- **Judicial Check on Executive Discretion:** The verdict strengthens **rule of law and procedural discipline** by reaffirming that **executive instructions cannot override established policy**.
- **Long-Term Impact on Reservation Jurisprudence:** It clarifies the scope of **creamy layer doctrine post-Indra Sawhney**, moves towards **more rational, uniform, and fair application** while reducing litigation by **settling interpretational ambiguity**.

- **Specific Direction:** It directed the government to create **supernumerary posts** if required and ensure rightful reservation benefits to eligible candidates.



# SC Applies Passive Euthanasia Framework for 1<sup>st</sup> Time

For the first time, the Supreme Court (SC)- allowed passive euthanasia- **withdrawal** of life-sustaining treatment for 32-year-old Harish Rana, who was in a persistent vegetative state for over 13 years.

## What did the Court rule in Harish Rana Vs Union of India (2026)?

- **CANH- a medical treatment:** The court held that **Clinically Assisted Nutrition and Hydration (CANH)** in this case, which involved artificial feeding via PEG (Percutaneous Endoscopic Gastrostomy) tube is **medical treatment**, not basic care. Thus, it can be **withdrawn under the Common Cause framework.**

○ CANH is a technologically mediated medical intervention prescribed, supervised and periodically reviewed by trained healthcare professionals in accordance with established medical standards.

○ Under the Common Cause framework, only medical treatment can be withdrawn when it ceases to serve the patient's interests.

- **Rejected Delhi High Court (HC) View:** The Delhi HC had previously rejected the family's plea based on Rana's non-

## What is meant by Euthanasia?

Euthanasia means intentionally ending a person's life to relieve that person from suffering in case of terminal illness or irreversible medical conditions.

**Ethical Context** involves a conflict between an individual's autonomy and dignity along with life sanctity and medical ethics.

**Medical Context:** Ending life care support when the treatment becomes futile, burdensome, or elongates the suffering of the person with no chances of recovery.

## Types of Euthanasia:

- \* **Active Euthanasia:** When the medical professionals, or another person, deliberately do something (like a lethal injection) that results in the death of the patient, it refers to active euthanasia. It is **illegal in India.**
- \* **Passive Euthanasia:** When the life support system to a patient suffering is withheld or withdrawn, it refers to passive euthanasia.

## Legal Framework in India Related to Euthanasia:

- \* **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023:** Active euthanasia directly attracts criminal liability and may amount to culpable homicide under BNS 2023. Criminal liability arises for abetment to suicide for the doctor assisting in this act.
  - ✓ Passive euthanasia is treated differently as it involves withdrawing medical support to allow the underlying illness or injury to take its course. This distinction flows from Article 21, the "**Right to Life**", which has also been interpreted by the SC to include the **Right to Live with Dignity.**
- \* **Law Commission Recommendations:** In its 196th Report (2006) and 241st Report (2012) recommended legalization of passive euthanasia for terminally ill patients and proposing guidelines for its implementation.
- \* **Medical Treatment of Terminally-Ill Patients (Protection of Patients and Medical Practitioners) Bill, 2016:** It was introduced by the Health Ministry but no follow-up has been made in the past decade.

## SC Rulings on Euthanasia:

- \* **Gian Kaur vs. State of Punjab (1996):** In this case, the Court reaffirmed that Article 21 does not include a general right to die, and assisted dying didn't have constitutional protection.
- \* **Aruna Ramchandra Shanbaug vs. Union of India (2011):** The court held that the right to live with dignity (in limited cases) may include the **right to die with dignity** for terminally ill or vegetative patients where natural death is imminent. Due to lack of legislation governing such decisions, the court laid down interim guidelines which-
  - ✓ Allowed the patient's family members, doctors, or a "next friend" acting in the **patient's best interest** to decide on the matter of withdrawing life support.
  - ✓ High court approval (a 2-judge bench) after obtaining the opinion of a committee of three doctors.
- \* **Common Cause vs. Union of India (2018):** In this case, a Constitution Bench held that the **right to die with dignity is part of Article 21** and withdrawal of life support only **accelerates natural death.** It also recognized **Advance Medical Directives (AMDs- living will)** which allowing adults to record their wishes regarding refusal or withdrawal of medical treatment in advance. These AMDs had to be signed by two witnesses and countersigned by a judicial magistrate, and hospitals had to involve multiple authorities and medical boards.
  - ✓ This complex process of AMDs was simplified in 2023 by-
    - Allowing AMDs to be attested by a notary or a gazetted officer and storing them in digital health records.
    - Replacing multiple authorities with **two medical boards**- primary and secondary with doctors having at least five years' experience.
    - Removing Collector's role and mandatory magistrate visits. Now only intimating the magistrate is required before implementing withdrawal of treatment.

dependency on mechanical life support. SC rejecting this view clarified that even if a patient is not on a ventilator, such artificial support counts as life-sustaining treatment.

- **Best Interests' Test:** The Court held that the law does not ask whether death itself is desirable but **whether continuing treatment serves the patient's best interests** and determining this requires-
  - A **holistic assessment** beyond medical prognosis (medical and non-medical considerations) i.e. judges must consider:
    - whether the treatment offers any therapeutic benefit;
    - burdens imposed by continued intervention; and
    - whether the patient is being kept alive in a state "devoid of awareness, autonomy, or human interaction."
- **Procedural Directions:** The Court directed-
  - HCs to issue directions to Judicial Magistrates allowing hospitals to formally notify them about medical board's decision to withdraw treatment to avoid procedural confusion.
  - Chief Medical Officers (CMOs) across districts to maintain panels of doctors for quick constitution of medical boards for end-of-life cases.

#### Implications of the Verdict:

- **Strengthens Right to Die with Dignity:** The verdict reinforces Article 21 by allowing withdrawal of futile life-prolonging treatment.
- **Clarifies Legal Position:** on passive euthanasia.
- **Expands Scope of Medical Treatment:** By recognizing **CANH as life-sustaining treatment, the verdict** widens cases where withdrawal is allowed.
- **Operationalizes "Best Interests" Test:** by establishing a **holistic, patient-centric standard** for end-of-life decisions.
- **Reduces Procedural Ambiguity:** by giving directions to streamline medical boards and judicial processes.
- **Pushes for Legislative Action:** Highlights lack of a comprehensive **legislative framework** on the issue.



## Regulating Social Media Use Among Children

The Union government is considering a **graded approach** to regulate children's access to these platforms.

#### Government Regulatory Measures for Children on the Internet:

- **Data Protection and Privacy Safeguards:** **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023** aims to protect children from **data exploitation and profiling**, mandates **verifiable parental/guardian consent** for processing data of children (below 18 years). It prohibits behavioural tracking of children and targeted advertising directed at children.
  - **Limitation:** Weak age-verification systems allow children to bypass safeguards by misreporting age.
- **Criminal Law Framework for "Online" Child Protection:**
  - **Information Technology Act, 2000:** Criminalizes creation, transmission, and possession of **child sexual abuse material (CSAM)**.
  - **POCSO Act, 2012:** expands protection to **online sexual abuse and grooming** and provides stringent penalties and child-friendly judicial processes.
  - **Juvenile Justice Act, 2015:** addresses **facilitation of child exploitation** through digital means.

- **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023:** Extends criminal liability to **digital offences** such as online trafficking and cyber harassment of minors.

- **Platform Regulation and Content Moderation: IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021** mandates OTT and digital platforms to classify content into age categories U, U/A 7+, U/A 13+, U/A 16+ and implement **Parental locks** (for U/A 13+ and above) and **Age verification mechanisms** (for adult content). It also imposes **due diligence obligations** on intermediaries to remove harmful content.
- **Educational and Preventive Guidelines: PRAGYATA Guidelines (Ministry of Education, 2020)** recommend **age-appropriate screen time limits**- pre-primary (around 30 minutes/day), Classes 1-8 (up to 1-1.5 hours) and Classes 9-12: up to 3 hours. The guidelines promote safe digital practices and balanced online-offline learning.
- **Institutional and Policy Efforts:** include awareness campaigns on **cyber safety and digital literacy**, cybercrime reporting portals (e.g., for child abuse content) and collaboration between law enforcement agencies, schools and parents.

## Need for Social Media Regulation for Children



- **Protection from Harmful and Inappropriate Content:** Social media exposes children to **violent, sexual, addictive, or self-harm-related content** due to algorithmic amplification and can result in distorted cognitive and emotional development and worsens vulnerability.
- **Rising Cybercrimes Against Children:** According to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, there was a 32% increase in cybercrime against children between 2021 and 2022. Children often lack the maturity to identify or respond to cybercrime threats like cyber bullying or child sexual exploitation effectively.
- **Mental Health Concerns:** Excessive social media use leads to anxiety, depression, low self-esteem. Social comparison, “validation-seeking” behaviour, alienation and reduced real-world interaction.
- **Algorithmic Manipulation and Addiction:** Platforms are designed to **maximize engagement**, not child well-being with features like infinite scroll, autoplay, and notifications which **encourage dopamine-driven addictive** behaviour and result in reduced attention span and productivity
- **Data Privacy and Exploitation Risks:** Children’s personal data can be collected and monetized without informed consent with risks like profiling and targeted advertising, identity theft and misuse of personal information.
- **Early and Excessive Digital Exposure:** NITI Aayog data shows: Even children under 5 spend **1.5 hours daily online**, teenagers spend up to **6 hours/day**. Such early exposure can affect brain development, sleep patterns and physical health (e.g., obesity, eye strain).
- **Weak Parental and Institutional Oversight:** Many parents lack digital literacy or tools to monitor usage and schools often do not integrate **digital safety education** effectively.
- **Existing Gaps:** Report prepared by the think tank **Indian Governance and Policy Project** in 2025 highlighted that persistent weaknesses in digital forensic capacity, law-enforcement training, and the uneven functioning of Special POCSO Courts continue to limit the effective investigation and prosecution of offences related to cybercrimes involving children.

Steps Taken by Tech Companies to Protect Children Online	Way Forward
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Age-Gating Mechanisms:</b> Platforms (like Google) enforce <b>minimum age limits (generally 13 years)</b> for account creation to help restrict early exposure to social media ecosystems. <b>Limitation:</b> This can be easily bypassed through false age declaration.</li> <li>● <b>Parental Control Tools (e.g., Google Family Link):</b> Allows parents to monitor screen time, approve or block app downloads and restrict inappropriate websites and content. This provides <b>graded autonomy</b> as the child grows (control reduces after 13).</li> <li>● <b>Built-in Safety Features for Teen Users (e.g., Instagram Teen Accounts):</b> Allows automatic classification of teen accounts with Stricter privacy settings, limited interaction with strangers and restrictions on sensitive content. Users below 16 require <b>parental approval</b> to relax safety settings.</li> <li>● <b>Child-Specific Platforms (e.g., YouTube Kids):</b> are some dedicated platforms offering curated, age-appropriate content, controlled digital environment, customization based</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Robust age verification:</b> Deploy privacy-preserving, reliable systems to prevent age misrepresentation.</li> <li>● <b>Safety-by-design mandate:</b> Default high privacy settings; restrict addictive features (autoplay, infinite scroll) for minors.</li> <li>● <b>Stronger platform accountability:</b> Independent audits, transparency reports, and penalties for non-compliance.</li> <li>● <b>Effective enforcement:</b> Upgrade digital forensics, train law enforcement, and strengthen POCSO court functioning.</li> <li>● <b>Digital literacy:</b> Educate children, parents, and teachers on cyber safety and responsible usage.</li> <li>● <b>Parental empowerment:</b> Promote accessible parental control tools and awareness of their use.</li> </ul>

on child's age. This reduces exposure to harmful or adult content.

- **Safety-by-Design Approach:** Platforms increasingly integrate default high-safety settings, content filters and moderation tools- moving from optional safeguards to **embedded protections**. **Limitations:** Conflict between **profit motives and child safety**.

- **Inter-agency coordination:** Better coordination between government, platforms, schools, and civil society.

- **Adopt global best practices**



## Central Armed Police Forces (General Administration) Bill, 2026

Recently, the Central Armed Police Forces (General Administration) Bill, 2026 was introduced in Rajya Sabha (RS) to regulate certain matters related to officers of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs).

### About the Central Armed Police Forces (General Administration) Bill, 2026

The **Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) Bill, 2026** is an **umbrella legislation** which aims to standardize and regulate how officers- especially **Group A General Duty (GD) officers** are **recruited and governed across 5 CAPFs**- the Border Security Force (BSF), the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), the Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), and the Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB).

✓ Group A (GD or executive) means officer of the rank of Assistant Commandant and above in the CAPF; officers on deputation from IPS, officers of the Indian Army on deputation or re-employment.

### Objectives of the Bill:

- **Ensure National Security Efficiency:** Recognize CAPFs' role in border security, internal security, anti-insurgency, and support to armed forces during war.
- **Preserve Operational Structure:** Maintain strict command hierarchy and specialized organizational setup suited to armed field duties.
- **Retain IPS Deputation System:** Continue induction of IPS officers to ensure effective Centre-State coordination in security operations.
- **Standardize Service Rules:** Bring uniformity in recruitment, deputation, promotion, and service conditions across CAPFs.
- **Legal Clarity:** Replace fragmented regulations with a single law to reduce litigation & administrative issues.
- **Balance Administration and Federal Needs:** Harmonize judicial directions with operational requirements and Centre-State relations.

### Key Provisions of the Bill

- **Regulation of Recruitment and Conditions of Service:** The bill empowers the **Central Government** to frame rules on recruitment, promotion, deputation, and service conditions of CAPF officers, even superseding existing laws, court orders, or prior rules.
  - While current rules for Group A GD officers will continue, they can be modified as needed.
  - It mandates significant **IPS deputation at senior levels** (50% at Inspector General (IG), at least 67% at Additional Director General (ADG), and 100% at Special Director General (SDG) / Director General (DG)).
  - Rules made under the Bill will **prevail over any conflicting provisions**, ensuring a uniform and centralized framework.

- **Power to Amend Schedules:** The Central Government can amend the act for adding new armed forces, including their governing laws, or introducing/amending service rules- through a simple **notification in public interest**. Such changes will take effect immediately but must be **placed before both Houses of Parliament** for oversight. Parliament can **modify or annul** these rules, after which they will apply in the revised form or cease to have effect; however, any actions already taken under the original rules will **remain valid**.
- **Savings:** Any allowances or monetary benefits already granted to **Group A GD officers** before the Act comes into force will **continue unchanged** until the government issues new orders to revise or replace them.

### Way Forward

- **Balanced Leadership Model:** Adopt a calibrated mix- retaining IPS deputation for coordination, and **progressively increasing the cadre-led promotions** at senior levels.
- **Implement SC Spirit:** Ensure **time-bound reduction of IPS deputation** in line with the SC's intent, especially up to IG level.
- **Cadre Restructuring & Vacancy Filling:** Expand senior posts and address **93,000+ vacancies** across all ranks to ease promotion bottlenecks.
- **Ensure parity (NFFU & OGAS benefits):** Fully extend **financial and service benefits** to CAPF officers to remove institutional inequality.
- **Periodic cadre review mechanism:** Institutionalize **regular reviews** of promotion ratios and leadership structure based on operational needs.
- **Parliamentary scrutiny & consensus-building:** Refer bill to **Standing Committee** to build broader consensus and avoid legal challenges.

Significance of the Bill	Concerns Raised Regarding the Bill
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Creates a Unified Legal Framework:</b> by replacing fragmented, force-specific rules and bringing <b>clarity, uniformity, and predictability</b> in recruitment, promotion and service conditions.</li> <li>• <b>Statutory Backing to Existing System:</b> Converts <b>executive arrangements into law</b>, regarding IPS deputation at senior levels.</li> <li>• <b>Reinforces Centralized Control:</b> Empowers the <b>Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)</b> as the key authority and strengthens <b>Union control over internal security forces</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Emphasizes Centre-State Coordination:</b> Justifies IPS deputation as essential for coordination with state police and federal balance in internal security- reflecting India's <b>cooperative federal security architecture</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Supports Hybrid Leadership Model:</b> with CAPF cadre providing field expertise and IPS officers imparting administrative + inter-state experience.</li> <li>• <b>Partial Reform in Cadre Structure:</b> Removes IPS deputation at <b>DIG level</b> to balance <b>career progression and administrative continuity</b>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Undermines 2025 Supreme Court (SC) Judgment:</b> which had directed a <b>progressive reduction of IPS deputation in CAPFs</b> and recognized CAPF officers as an <b>Organised Group A Service (OGAS)</b> to ensure better career progression. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ The Bill reverses this mandate by <b>legally fixing IPS presence at senior levels</b>, thereby nullifying the spirit of the judgment and raising concerns regarding the <b>separation of powers</b>.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Career Stagnation in CAPFs:</b> A major grievance of CAPF officers is <b>extremely slow promotions</b> due to <b>IPS officers occupying senior positions</b>. This creates a <b>promotional bottleneck and leads to a cascade effect</b>, where blockage at higher ranks stalls promotions across multiple lower levels, affecting the entire cadre.</li> <li>• <b>Institutional Inequality:</b> CAPF officers argue that they face <b>systemic discrimination</b> compared to other Group A services including key like- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <b>Non-implementation of Non-Functional Financial Upgradation (NFFU)</b>.</li> <li>◦ <b>Lack of parity</b> in pay and career benefits.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Impact on Morale and Motivation:</b> CAPF officers are at the forefront of <b>counter-insurgency, border security, and internal security operations</b>, often facing high risks and casualties. But <b>limited leadership opportunities and delayed promotions</b> create frustration and a mismatch between <b>operational responsibility and career rewards</b> leading to <b>low morale and organizational discontent</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Federalism Concerns:</b> Opposition parties have termed the Bill "<b>anti-federal</b>", arguing that it strengthens <b>central dominance through IPS control</b> over CAPFs and may reduce the <b>functional autonomy of specialized central forces</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Professional vs Administrative Leadership Debate:</b> The <b>IPS-led model</b> emphasizes on broader administrative exposure and better coordination across states, while the <b>cadre-led model</b> prioritizes <b>domain expertise and institutional continuity</b> within CAPFs. The raises a core issue: whether specialized forces should be led by <b>generalist administrators or career professionals</b> grown within the system.</li> <li>• <b>Legal &amp; Constitutional Questions:</b> The Bill potentially violates <b>Article 14 (equality before law)</b> and <b>Article 16 (equal opportunity in public employment)</b> by structurally limiting promotional opportunities for CAPF officers.</li> <li>• <b>Codification vs Flexibility:</b> Earlier, IPS deputation in CAPFs was governed by <b>executive orders</b>, allowing flexibility for policy changes. Converting these arrangements into <b>statutory provisions</b> makes them legally binding, introduces <b>rigidity</b> and makes future reforms difficult without legislative amendment.</li> <li>• <b>Operational Concerns:</b> Frequent deputation of IPS officers can disrupt <b>institutional continuity and long-term doctrine building</b>. With growing modern security challenges, forces require <b>domain-specialized leadership rather than generalist administration</b>.</li> </ul>

# Doctrine of Recusal

The Chief Justice of India (CJI) recused himself from hearing petitions challenging the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023, citing potential conflict of interest.

## Case Background

- Legislative Change:** The Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023 replaced the CJI with a Union Minister in the Election Commissioner (EC) appointment panel overturning the Supreme Court's (SC) 2023 interim arrangement on appointments. The law is under challenge in *Dr. Jaya Thakur v. Union of India (2024)*.
- Judicial Recusals:** The CJI Surya Kant recused citing possible conflict of interest directing the case listing before a bench outside the **CJI succession line**. Earlier, in 2024 CJI Sanjiv Khanna also recused.

- Key Concern Raised:** Judicial neutrality and institutional integrity.

## Application of Recusal in the Present Case:

- Applicability of NJAC Logic:** The reasoning in the NJAC case applies equally to the CEC law challenge. In fact, the case presents **even weaker grounds for recusal**. Every sitting SC judge is a potential future Chief Justice under the seniority convention established by the Second Judges case (1993). The conflict of interest that moved Chief Justice Surya Kant to step aside, therefore, afflicts every member of the court simultaneously.
- Doctrine of Necessity:** Since **all judges are similarly affected**, recusal cannot resolve the issue. The **doctrine of necessity** requires the Supreme Court to hear the case. No alternative forum of equivalent jurisdiction exists. The Court should **acknowledge the conflict transparently** and proceed, as in the NJAC case.
- Key Concern:** CJI Surya Kant's recusal represents a **departure from the Court's earlier principle**, where institutional duty prevailed over common conflicts.

## Concerns Raised Regarding CJI's Recusal:

- Pre-Determination of Recusal:** By directing exclusion of judges in line to become CJI from the bench, the CJI has made a prospective determination about the disqualification obligations of judges who have not yet considered



Recusal means a judge voluntarily stepping aside from a case due to possible bias or conflict of interest. It is rooted in the principle of natural justice: *nemo iudex in causa sua* (no one should be a judge in their own cause).

- Objective:** To ensure **impartiality, fairness, and public confidence** in the judiciary.
- Evolution in India:** It has evolved from a strict rule of automatic disqualification in cases involving pecuniary (financial) interest (in *Manak Lal v. Dr. Prem Chand (1957)*), to a more nuanced approach based on the "real likelihood of bias." This was further refined in *Ranjit Thakur v. Union of India (1987)*, where the SC held that recusal is warranted not on mere remote or hypothetical suspicion, but when there exists a **reasonable apprehension of bias** in the mind of a fair observer.
- Decision-Making Authority:** The decision to recuse **rests solely with the judge's conscience**. No litigant can **compel recusal**. This ensures judicial independence but also raises concerns about lack of transparency.
- Legal Position in India vs. US:** In India, there is no codified law governing recusal and it is usually based on judicial precedents and ethical norms whereas in **United States**, recusal is codified (Section 455 of Title 28 of the United States Code), the federal Judges must recuse where their impartiality "**might reasonably be questioned**".

## Has Any Judge Refused to Recuse from a Case?

**Yes**, in *Supreme Court Advocates-on-Record Association v. Union of India (2015)*- the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) case, recusal was sought from Justice J.S. Khehar as he was a future CJI and had a stake in judicial appointments. But he **refused to recuse himself from the case on the bases of following reasons-**

- Universal Conflict:** Every judge on the bench was similarly placed as him, since all would eventually be part of the Collegium if the petitioners succeeded, or subject to the NJAC if they failed.
  - Doctrine of Necessity:** When the only available forum is also the forum that faces a disqualifying conflict, the conflict must yield to institutional obligation. Therefore, the court must still decide- otherwise justice would be paralyzed.
- ➔ In his concurring opinion, Justice Kurian Joseph added that **recusal requires transparency**, i.e., judges should give reasons for withdrawal as it is a part of the oath of office taken under the Third Schedule of the Constitution.

the question for themselves. This undermines the principle that recusal is based on **individual judicial conscience**, not external mandate.

- **Blurring Key Distinction:** Recusal cannot be mandated in advance by a predecessor. To pre-assign a conflict of interest to judges collapses the distinction between institutional incapacity and personal disqualification.
- **Uncertainty in Seniority-Based Exclusion:** The direction assumes a **fixed line of succession** to the office of the CJI. However, in practice, this line can change due to **resignation, ill health, or death** of senior judges. As a result, a judge currently **outside the succession line** (and included in the bench) may later become CJI. This exposes a flaw in the rule: it **cannot fully eliminate perceived conflict of interest**. Thus, the attempt to create a **preventive safeguard** fails to account for such contingencies, making it **inherently unreliable**.
- **Inconsistency in Role of the CJI (Master of the Roster):** As **Master of the Roster**, the CJI still retains the power to **constitute the bench** creating an **incongruity**- If there is sufficient conflict to step aside from adjudication, can he decide which of the judges **will hear the case**? This results in a form of **partial recusal**, which is institutionally problematic.
- **Parallel with Speaker's Case:** A similar issue arose during the no-confidence motion debate involving **Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla**- Can a Speaker **recuse from presiding**, yet influence who presides?
- **Core Issue:** Recusal is meant to eliminate **both actual bias and perceived influence**. Allowing the recused authority to shape proceedings **undermines this objective** and weakens institutional credibility.

### Way Forward

- **Codify Recusal Law:** laying down clear **grounds, procedure, and disclosure requirements** to reduce ambiguity.
- **Reasoned Decisions:** Judges should briefly state reasons for recusal/refusal to enhance **accountability and public confidence** without compromising judicial independence.
- **Independent Bench Allocation** mechanism should be created (eg. with senior-most available judge/collegium) to constitute benches to avoid the problem of **partial recusal** by the "Master of the Roster."
- **Limited Review:** In-house mechanism can be introduced for exceptional cases of contested recusal to prevent misuse while respecting judicial autonomy.
- **Clarifying Doctrine of Necessity:** by laying down clear guidelines for its application to ensure consistency in constitutionally sensitive cases.



## CCI Clears Book MyShow of Market Dominance Abuse Charges

The Competition Commission of India (CCI) recently closed an antitrust case against Big Tree Entertainment Pvt. Ltd., the parent company of the movie ticketing platform BookMyShow.

### Case Background

- **Origin of the Case:** The case was filed in 2021 by the founder of a ticketing portal- **Showtyme**, before the CCI accusing BookMyShow of abusing dominant position in the online movie ticketing market.
- **Market Context:** BookMyShow holds a **significant market share** in India's online ticketing ecosystem and acts as a key intermediary between cinemas and consumers.
- **Core Allegations:**
  - Entering into **exclusive agreements with cinemas** (lasting 2-5 years) and preventing theatres from listing tickets on rival platforms like Showtyme.
  - Providing **interest-free loans and monetary incentives** to single-screen theatres and multiplexes to create **dependency and lock-in effects**.

- Charging **high convenience fees** on ticket bookings and sharing a portion of this fee with cinema operators.
- **Market foreclosure and entry barriers** for new players.

### What did the CCI Rule?

- **Seat Reservation Practice:** CCI accepted BookMyShow's defence that reserving seats was a **technological necessity and not an anti-competitive practice**- especially in Tier 2/3 cities to prevent **double booking** between offline box office and online platform.
- **Data Sharing with Cinemas:** CCI held that **single-screen cinemas and multiplexes are not "similarly placed" entities**. Differences in infrastructure and data-handling capacity justify **differential treatment**. Therefore, there was **no discriminatory abuse**.
- **Revenue Sharing (Convenience Fee):** CCI ruled that such differences depend on **commercial factors** (scale, costs, bargaining power) and is considered a **normal business practice**, not anti-competitive.
- **Exclusive Agreements & Lock-in Periods:** CCI held that lock-in periods linked to **financial investments (security deposits)** are legitimate and allows BookMyShow to **recover its investment**. Contracts expire at different times, ensuring **ongoing opportunities for competitors**.
- **No Market Foreclosure:** Presence of competitors like **Paytm and Justickets** shows the market is still contestable. Some cinemas have **shifted away from BookMyShow**, indicating no absolute lock-in. Hence, there is **no denial of market access**.
- **Final Conclusion:** There is no evidence of **appreciable adverse effect on competition (AAEC)**. BookMyShow **did not abuse its dominant position**. Therefore, there has been **no violation of the Competition Act, 2002**.



## About the Legal Framework Involved

- ❖ **Statutory Basis (Abuse of Dominant Position- Section 4 of the Competition Act, 2002):** CCI prohibits the abuse of a dominant position by an enterprise. The law does not penalize dominance per se; rather, it targets conduct that exploits such dominance such as imposing unfair or discriminatory conditions, restricting competition, denying market access to competitors, or leveraging dominance in one market to gain advantage in another.
- ❖ **Defining the Relevant Market:** A crucial first step in competition law analysis is defining the "relevant market" under Section 2(r), which includes both the product and geographic dimensions. In this case, the **CCI** accepted the findings of the Director General (DG) that online and offline ticket booking are not substitutable due to differences in convenience, accessibility, and consumer experience. As a result, the market was narrowly defined as the **"market for online intermediation services for booking of movie tickets in India."** This definition sets the boundaries to access the dominance.
- ❖ **Determination of Dominance:** Once the relevant market is defined, the CCI evaluates whether the enterprise holds a dominant position using factors listed under Section 19(4), such as market share, size and resources, economic power, entry barriers, and network effects. In this case, BookMyShow was found to possess a large consumer base, strong brand recognition, and significant network. Thus creating high entry barriers for competitors.
- ❖ **Assessment of Abuse:** After establishing dominance, the next step is to determine whether the conduct amounts to abuse under Section 4(2). The allegations such as exclusive agreements with cinemas, financial incentives creating lock-in effects, and denial of access to rival platforms were examined against the standard of whether they caused an **Appreciable adverse effect on competition (AAEC)**. The legal test here is whether such practices harm the competitive process itself, rather than merely disadvantaging individual competitors.
- ❖ **Role of the Director General (DG):** He functions as the investigative arm of the CCI and plays a critical role in gathering evidence and analyzing market behavior. In this case, the DG examined the nature of online ticketing services, contractual arrangements between BookMyShow and cinemas, and the broader competitive dynamics of the market. The DG's findings on market definition and dominance were largely accepted by the CCI, forming the basis for further legal analysis.
- ❖ **Core Legal Principle Applied:** The law seeks to protect **competition, not competitors**. This means that even if a rival firm like Showtyme faces difficulties entering or surviving in the market, it does not automatically imply a violation. The decisive question is whether the dominant firm's conduct leads to exclusionary effects that harm market efficiency, consumer choice, or innovation.



## No Scheduled Caste Status for Religious Converts

The Supreme Court (SC) recently ruled that a person can no longer enjoy Scheduled Caste (SC) status if he converts to a religion other than Hinduism, Sikhism or Buddhism.

## What did the SC Rule?

- **Absolute Constitutional Bar on SC Status after Conversion:** The Court while upholding the HC verdict ruled that **conversion to a religion not listed in the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 leads to immediate and complete loss of SC status**, irrespective of birth. This bar is **“categorical and absolute”** and flows directly from Paragraph 3 of the 1950 Order. It further clarified that SC identity is not merely sociological but **constitutionally regulated**, and therefore cannot survive outside the prescribed religious framework.
- **Meaning of “Profess” and Determination of Religious Identity:** The Court held that “profess” implies **public declaration and outward practice of religion**, not just private belief. Thus, being a **pastor conducting regular prayer meetings for over a decade**- clearly and publicly professed Christianity. Hence, his religious identity at the time of the incident was legally unambiguous, leaving no scope to claim SC status.
- **Primacy of Constitutional Scheme over Certificates and State Orders:** The Court held that **caste certificates or executive orders cannot override the constitutional framework**. Even though the appellant possessed a caste certificate, it had no legal value once he converted. Similarly, the Andhra Pradesh government order extending benefits to SC converts was held applicable only to **non-statutory concessions** and not under constitutional or statutory benefits like reservation or SC/ST Act protection. Thus, **only the Presidential Order under Article 341 governs SC status**.
- **Extinction of All Statutory Rights and SC/ST Act Protection:** The Court clarified that once SC status is lost, it results in the **automatic termination of all statutory benefits**, including reservation, welfare entitlements and protection under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.
- **Reconversion and Distinction with Scheduled Tribes:** The Court laid down **strict cumulative conditions for reconversion**, requiring proof of original caste, genuine reconversion, and acceptance by the community. Mere assertion is insufficient and the **burden to prove lies on the claimant**. It also made an important distinction between SCs and STs-
  - **Scheduled Castes:** Status is based on the religion.
  - **Scheduled Tribes:** Status depends on **continuity of tribal identity and community acceptance**.

## Case Background

- ✓ **Incident and Filing of Case:** The case originated from a 2021 complaint by a Pastor in Andhra Pradesh, who alleged of being subjected to repeated caste-based abuse, death threats, and physical assaults during and after prayer meetings. Based on these allegations, a case was registered under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 along with relevant Indian Penal Code (IPC) provisions such as wrongful restraint, criminal intimidation, and causing hurt.
- ✓ **Dispute Over Applicability of SC/ST Act:** The central dispute arose when the accused approached the Andhra Pradesh High Court (HC) to quash the case. Their argument was that the complainant had converted to Christianity and therefore could no longer be considered a member of a SC. Thus, the protections under the SC/ST Act, 1989 were not applicable.
- ✓ **Complainant’s Stand on Caste Identity:** The complainant countered this by relying on his caste certificate identifying him as belonging to the Madiga community (a Scheduled Caste). He argued that caste is determined by birth and that conversion to another religion does not erase one’s caste identity or the social discrimination attached to it.
- ✓ **Core Legal Issue and Context:** The key legal issue before the court was whether protections under the SC/ST Act, 1989 continue after a person converts to another religion. This question is significant because the Act aims to protect historically marginalized communities from caste-based atrocities.
- ✓ **High Court’s Ruling:** In 2025, the Andhra Pradesh HC held that the caste system is alien to Christianity and that the SC/ST Act applies only to those who fall within the recognized SC/ST categories. It ruled that a person who has converted to Christianity cannot invoke the Act. Additionally, the court due to inconsistencies and lack of corroboration in the evidence quashed the case.
- ✓ **Constitutional Basis for Court’s Ruling:** Under **Article 341**, The President, after consulting the Governor (for States), can notify the castes or groups to be recognized as **SCs** for a particular State or Union Territory.
  - ✓ **Article 366(24)** defines as those groups notified by the President under Article 341. This creates a formal, legally defined category of caste identity.
  - ✓ The SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 adopts the same definition as assigned under Article 366(24).
- ✓ **Statutory Basis for Court’s Ruling: Paragraph 3 of the Constitution (Scheduled Caste) Order, 1950**, states that only persons professing **Hinduism, Sikhism, or Buddhism** can be recognized as SCs.

## Implications of the SC Verdict

- **Reinforcement of Formal Constitutional Approach:** By making religion a decisive factor using 1950 order and Article 341, the verdict prioritizes **legal classification over sociological realities**, even if caste-based discrimination may persist across religions. This signals judicial preference for **certainty and textual fidelity**.
- **Continued Exclusion of Dalit Christians and Muslims:** By affirming loss of SC status with conversion, the Court strengthens the **existing exclusion of Dalit Christians and Muslims** from reservation and legal protections.
- **Punjab’s “Faith Without Conversion” Challenge:** The Punjab scenario introduces a complex reality where individuals **practice Christianity (attend churches, undergo baptism)** but **retain their original religion in official records**. This creates a grey zone where **legal identity and actual religious practice diverge**, potentially allowing continued access to SC benefits despite functional conversion.
- **Administrative and Legal Uncertainty:** This divergence raises serious governance questions: whether **public practice (as per SC’s “profess” test)** should override official records, how conversion is to be **legally verified**, and whether informal religious shifts can be regulated. It risks both **misuse of benefits** and **state intrusion into personal faith**, complicating implementation.
- **Broader Constitutional Tension:** The verdict sharpens the tension between **freedom of religion (Article 25)** and **affirmative action framework (Article 341)**. In contexts like Punjab, individuals may avoid formal conversion to retain benefits, leading to a situation where **belief is private but identity is strategic**, exposing limits of the current legal framework.

## Way Forward

- **Define “Conversion” Legally:** A clear-criteria (formal v/s functional conversion) should be established to address grey zones like Punjab’s “faith without conversion” scenario.
- **Balance Rights:** Ensure harmony between **Article 25 (religious freedom)** and **affirmative action**.
- **Strengthen Data Systems:** Conduct updated surveys/census to capture **actual religious practices and social disadvantage**.
- **Targeted Welfare Approach:** **Religion-neutral schemes based on socio-economic deprivation** can be considered alongside caste-based reservations.



## Iran's Power Pyramid: The Supreme Leader, the System

- **Ayatollah Ali Khamenei**, Iran's 86-year-old Supreme Leader, was **killed in an attack by US and Israeli forces** — marking the end of a defining era in Iran's post-1979 Islamic Revolution leadership.
- Following his death:
  - The constitutional process to appoint a successor was immediately activated.
  - The Assembly of Experts began deliberations to select the next Supreme Leader.
  - A three-member Interim Leadership Council took over his duties in the meantime.
- Later, Mojtaba Khamenei, the son of Iran's Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, was chosen as his successor.

## The Doctrine That Built the System: Velayat-e-Faqih

- Revolutionary thinkers like Ali Shariati linked faith with social justice and anti-imperialism — but stopped short of supporting clerical rule.
- Ayatollah Khomeini went further, advancing the doctrine of **velayat-e-faqih** (Rule of the Jurisprudent) — arguing that a senior Islamic jurist should lead the state.

- This became the foundational principle of Iran's political system.

### Constitutional Framework

- The 1979 Constitution combined Khomeini's theory of clerical rule with elements of republicanism.
- It created the post of Supreme Leader with overarching authority over both political and religious affairs.
- After Khomeini's death in 1989, constitutional amendments redistributed some executive powers and abolished the Prime Minister's post — but clerical supremacy remained intact.
- PM's functions were distributed to the President and to the Speaker of Majlis through constitutional amendment.

### Key Institutions of Iran's Political System

- The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)
  - Created after the 1979 Revolution as a key pillar of the regime.
  - Beyond internal defence, it expanded Iran's regional influence by supporting:
    - ♣ Hamas in Gaza
    - ♣ Hezbollah in Lebanon
  - Khamenei regarded the IRGC as central to maintaining political stability.
- Elections and Factional Politics
  - Iran regularly held elections for the President, Majlis (Parliament), and local bodies.
  - Politics has long been shaped by rivalry between reformists and hardliners.
  - Khamenei, though often supportive of hardliners, developed a practice of balancing factions and managing internal differences.

**Religion and Politics in Iran: The Historical Roots**

The close ties between religion and politics in Shia-majority Iran predate the 1979 Revolution. Shia clerics historically adopted an anti-monarchist stance and actively participated in political movements, including:

- 19th-century Tobacco Movement — against British concessions
- Constitutional Revolution (1906–11) — demanding a constitutional monarchy
- Protests against the Shah's White Revolution (1963)
- The 1979 Islamic Revolution itself

**The 1979 Revolution and Clerical Rise**

- Ayatollah Khomeini's ideological leadership — even from exile in France — was decisive in shaping the Revolution.
- Though diverse groups (workers, communists) joined the anti-Shah protests, the religious establishment gained greater legitimacy due to its strong ideological direction.
- Over the next 47 years, Iran developed a hierarchical yet interconnected political system rooted in revolutionary ideology.

**• KEY BODIES**

**Interim Leadership Council**  
Under Article 111 of Iran's Constitution, a temporary leadership council would assume the Supreme Leader's duties until a successor is elected. This council comprises President Masoud Pezeshkian; Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Eje'i; and Ayatollah Alireza Arafai, deputy chairman of the Assembly of Experts and a member of the Guardian Council.

**Supreme National Security Council (SNSC)**  
Responsible for debating and building consensus on critical national security issues, the SNSC is Iran's top national security body. While the president serves as its chairman, its other members include top ministers, the Speaker of parliament, the Chief Justice, and top military officials representing the armed forces and the IRGC, among others.

**Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC)**  
The IRGC is the strongest and best-equipped section of Iran's armed forces. Formed soon after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, it answers directly to the Supreme Leader — unlike the ordinary military. Over the decades, it has gained and extended its influence both at home and abroad.

**Basij and Quds Force**

- The Basij militia, an internal security paramilitary force controlled by the IRGC, is often used to crack down on protests inside Iran.
- The Quds Force, an elite IRGC unit focusing on special operations outside Iran, has spearheaded the country's regional strategy of supporting affiliated Shiite groups in West Asia.

**Assembly of Experts**  
Made up of senior ayatollahs elected every eight years, the Assembly is the body that appoints the Supreme Leader. The constitution also gives it power to question and even dismiss a leader. In practice, the republic's most senior figures usually choose the leader, which is then approved by the Assembly.

**Guardian Council**  
Half appointed by the Supreme Leader and half by the Chief Justice of Iran, the 12-member Guardian Council can veto laws passed by parliament and disqualify election candidates. In the past, this mandate has been used to block potential critics of Khamenei.

# Visit of Canadian PM to India

- Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney visited India recently — first Canadian PM to make a bilateral visit to India since his predecessor Justin Trudeau visited India in 2018.
- The visit focused on rebuilding strategic trust, enhancing economic ties, and strengthening cooperation in energy and security, coming after relations had severely deteriorated following the 2023 diplomatic dispute over the killing of Khalistani separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

## Background: India–Canada Relations

- India and Canada share over 75 years of diplomatic relations, formally designated as a "Strategic Partnership" in 2018.
- The relationship has significant **human dimensions** — over 1.8 million people of Indian origin live in Canada (nearly 5% of its population), making India Canada's largest source country for immigration.
- In trade terms, **bilateral trade stood at \$8.66 billion in 2024–25**. India exports pharmaceuticals, iron and steel, seafood, garments, and electronics to Canada, while importing pulses, fertilisers, coal, petroleum crude, and precious stones.

## Challenges That Remain

- **Trust Deficit**
  - The Nijjar killing controversy remains the central obstacle. Canadian agencies have reportedly claimed involvement of Indian consular officials in the 2023 killing, which India strongly denies.
  - This had previously led to diplomatic expulsions, suspension of trade negotiations, and deep strategic mistrust — none of which has been fully resolved.
- **The Khalistan Issue**
  - India continues to have concerns about safe havens for Khalistani separatist groups operating from Canadian soil.
  - Canada, on the other hand, has concerns about transnational repression of its citizens. This remains a sensitive and unresolved fault line.
- **Trade Barriers**
  - Long-pending CEPA negotiations have been complicated by significant regulatory differences between the two economies.

## Major Outcomes of PM Carney's Visit



### Uranium Supply Agreement

- India and Canada signed a **\$1.9 billion uranium supply agreement** for 10,000 tonnes, to be delivered between 2027 and 2035.
- Canadian company **Cameco** will supply uranium to Indian nuclear power plants.
- This builds on an earlier uranium supply agreement (2015–2020) and is designed to support India's civil nuclear energy programme and clean energy transition by ensuring reliable baseload power through nuclear energy.

### CEPA Negotiations Revived

- The Terms of Reference for a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) have been finalised, with a target of **boosting bilateral trade from the current \$8.66 billion to \$50 billion by 2030**.
- Key areas of focus include clean energy, critical minerals, agricultural value chains, advanced manufacturing, and technology cooperation.
- The negotiations had been suspended during the diplomatic crisis and their revival signals a pragmatic reset.

### Strategic Energy Partnership

- Beyond uranium, both countries agreed to cooperate in renewable energy, the LPG sector, nuclear technology, Small Modular Reactors (SMRs), and advanced reactors — reflecting a broader shift towards clean energy cooperation and energy transition.

### Multilateral Climate Cooperation

- Canada agreed to join India-led multilateral platforms — the International Solar Alliance and the Global Biofuel Alliance.

### Security and Counterterrorism Cooperation

- Both sides agreed to strengthen cooperation in counterterrorism, violent extremism, organised crime, and intelligence sharing.
- They agreed to convene the **Joint Working Group on Counterterrorism**, with a key focus on addressing concerns over Khalistani extremism and combating transnational repression and foreign interference.

- **Implementation Risks**

- The earlier uranium supply agreement (2015–2020) did not fully deliver on its commitments, raising questions about the reliability of the new deal. Ensuring supply stability will be critical to building trust.

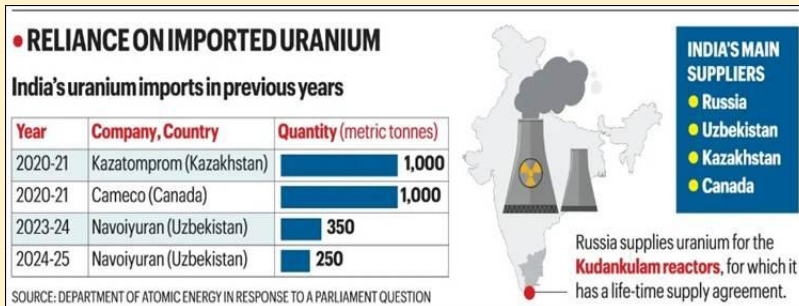
**Conclusion**

- The 2026 India–Canada agreements mark a cautious but significant attempt to rebuild strategic trust after years of diplomatic friction. The visit signals a pragmatic shift toward economic and energy cooperation driven by mutual interest.
- However, the unresolved Nijjar controversy and lingering security concerns continue to pose real risks to the relationship.
- Sustained dialogue and institutional cooperation will be essential to transforming what is currently a fragile reset into a stable, long-term strategic partnership.

**India's Dependence on Imported Uranium**

- Although India has domestic uranium deposits, the quality of its ore is significantly poor.
  - India's uranium production is mainly concentrated in Jharkhand and Andhra Pradesh.
  - Uranium deposits are also found in states such as Meghalaya, Rajasthan, and Telangana.
  - India's total uranium resources are estimated at about **4.3 lakh tonnes** of uranium ore.
- The uranium concentration in Indian mines ranges between only **0.02% and 0.45%** — far below the global average of **1–2%**.
- In contrast, some Canadian mines contain uranium concentrations as high as **15%**.

- **Current Import Dependence**



- As a direct consequence of poor ore quality, **more than 70% of India's uranium needs are currently met through imports.**
- Domestic production, however, still plays an important supporting role — it fuels India's nuclear weapons programme and provides a strategic buffer in case global supply chains are disrupted.

- **Rising Uranium Demand: The Numbers**

- Current annual consumption: 1,500–2,000 tonnes (requirement in 2025 was approximately 1,884 tonnes)
- Projected annual demand after nuclear expansion: ~5,400 tonnes



**WTO MC14**

- The 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) held at Yaounde, Cameroon, ended inconclusively.

- The WTO Ministerial Conference is the highest decision-making body of the World Trade Organization, usually meeting every two years.
- It brings together trade ministers from all member nations to negotiate global trade rules, resolve disputes, and provide political direction on issues like agriculture, subsidies, and digital commerce.
- The primary reason was the US insisting on a **five-year moratorium** on taxation of cross-border electronic transmissions, while most other countries were only open to the customary two-year extension.
- Key discussions have been postponed to a future General Council (GC) meeting in Geneva.

### Key Highlights

- **The E-Commerce Moratorium — The Central Dispute**

- A WTO moratorium on taxing electronic transmissions has been in place since 1998.
- It has prevented member countries from imposing customs duties on digital goods and services traded across borders.
- With MC14 ending without consensus, the moratorium has effectively lapsed.
- WTO members are no longer legally prevented from taxing electronic transmissions.
- However, countries will need to assess the technical feasibility and overall utility of imposing such taxes before acting.

- **TRIPS Safeguard Also Lapses**

- The safeguard against non-violation complaints (NVC) under TRIPS Agreement also lapsed.
- Developing countries had relied on this to protect policy space in public health.
- Without it, even WTO-compliant measures like compulsory licensing (used to produce affordable generic medicines) can now be challenged at the WTO.

- **What Was Agreed At MC14?**

- **Fisheries Subsidies** - Ministers agreed to **continue negotiations** on reducing subsidies for distant water fishing fleets (fleets operating far from their home shores) with an aim to make recommendations at the 15th Ministerial Conference (MC15).
- **Small Economies** - A decision was adopted on **improving integration of small economies** into the multilateral trading system.
- **SPS & TBT Agreements**
  - ♣ A decision was adopted on enhancing implementation of special and differential treatment (S&DT) provisions under:
    - Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) Agreement
    - Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Agreement
  - ♣ These provisions are meant to give developing countries more flexibility in meeting WTO standards

#### Debate around E-Commerce Moratorium

- **Developing Countries' Perspective**

- As physical goods (CDs, DVDs, books) have been replaced by digital downloads and streaming, developing nations have lost the ability to collect traditional customs duties.
- This has cost them billions of dollars in potential revenue.
- India has been against the moratorium extension since the beginning.
- The expiry of the moratorium potentially restores developing countries' right to tax digital trade.

- **Developed Countries' Perspective**

- The US, EU and others want the moratorium made permanent, citing support for innovation and reduced trade costs.
- The real motivation, according to experts, is ensuring a tax-free future for US tech firms as the digital economy is projected to grow over the next two decades.

- **Status of Other Issues**
  - **WTO Reform & Work Plan** - Draft not finalized.
  - **Least Developed Country (LDC) Package** - Not finalized

### Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD) Agreement at WTO MC14

- WTO MC14 ended in a stalemate over the **Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD) Agreement**.
- Despite 129 out of 166 WTO members supporting its formal adoption, the agreement could not be incorporated into the WTO framework — primarily because India formally and single-handedly blocked it. This marks a significant moment in global trade governance.

#### Why Did India Block It?

- **Threat to Multilateralism**
  - The WTO operates on consensus — all members have an equal say.
  - India argues that plurilateral agreements create a two-tier WTO system where a select group sets rules while others are marginalized.
  - This, India says, fundamentally undermines the principle of multilateralism.
- **Negotiation Imbalance**
  - India fears the IFD shifts focus away from long-unresolved issues more critical to developing countries — particularly: Agricultural subsidies; Public stockholding for food security.
- **The China Angle — The Most Sensitive Concern**
  - Around 98 of the 129 IFD (originally mooted by China in 2017) members are also part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
  - India fears that standardising investment rules through the IFD could:
    - ♣ Strengthen China's geo-economic influence
    - ♣ Enhance operational ease for its cross-border infrastructure networks
    - ♣ Extend China's reach into India's immediate neighbourhood

### What is the IFD Agreement?



- The IFD Agreement focuses on **facilitating Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) — not liberalising it**.
- Its core objective is to:
  - Improve the **investment climate** in developing countries and LDCs
  - Enhance **transparency and predictability** in investment procedures
  - Reduce **bureaucratic red tape** and streamline approvals
  - Promote **sustainable development**
- **What the IFD Does NOT Cover**
  - A key point often misunderstood — the IFD **explicitly excludes**:
    - ✓ Market access
    - ✓ Investment protection
    - ✓ Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS)
    - ✓ Government procurement
    - ✓ Subsidies
- **Its Nature: A Plurilateral Agreement**
  - The IFD is a **plurilateral agreement** — binding only on participating members, with others free to join later.
  - It includes **Special and Differential Treatment (SDT)** — meaning developing countries can implement it based on their own capacity.

### What Happened at MC14?

- India **formally blocked** the inclusion of the IFD as an Annex 4 (Plurilateral) Agreement under the WTO's foundational Marrakesh Agreement (1995).
- India argued that investment is not a trade issue and therefore falls outside the WTO's mandate.
- Since the WTO operates on consensus-based decision-making, India's lone opposition was enough to prevent formal adoption.
- India stood alone — no other member formally opposed inclusion.

### What Did the 129 Supporters Do?

- Despite the block, the supporting members refused to give up.
- They issued a joint declaration committing to move forward with IFD implementation outside the formal Annex 4 structure for now.
- The European Investment Bank announced up to €300 million in financing to help developing nations implement IFD measures — signalling that supporters intend to proceed with or without formal WTO integration

#### Internal Contradictions Faced by India

- India itself is a major FDI recipient and actively courts foreign investment — opposing the IFD risks undermining its own investment promotion interests.

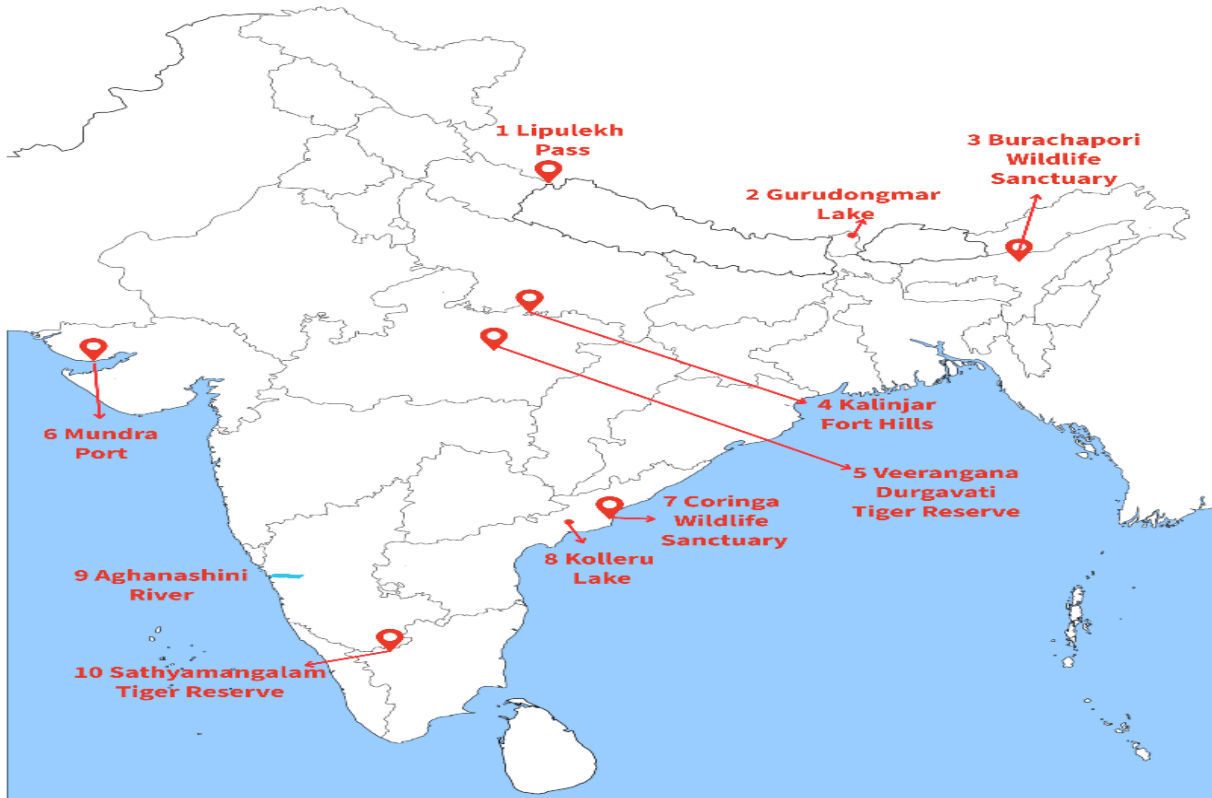
- Risk of being labelled an obstructionist voice in WTO negotiations, reducing India's influence in shaping future global trade rules.

### **Conclusion**

- The IFD episode reflects a broader structural shift in global trade governance:
  - When consensus proves impossible, major economies are increasingly willing to move ahead without universal agreement.
  - The joint declaration by 129 members and the EIB financing commitment show that plurilateral implementation outside WTO structures is becoming a new norm.
- This sets a precedent that could weaken the WTO's centrality in global economic governance.
- India's resistance is rooted not in opposition to investment facilitation per se, but in legitimate systemic concerns over equity, sovereignty, and strategic autonomy.

# MAPS: PLACES IN NEWS

## National Places in News



<b>1</b>	<b>Lipulekh Pass</b>	<p>Cross-border trade between India and China through the <b>Lipulekh Pass</b> in Uttarakhand's Pithoragarh district is set to resume in June 2026.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Location:</b> Uttarakhand (Kumaon); India-Nepal-China trijunction</li> <li><b>Connects:</b> India with Tibet (China)</li> <li><b>Altitude:</b> ~5,334 m</li> <li><b>Importance:</b> Trade route (opened 1992), Kailash Mansarovar Yatra route</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Background: The Suspension and Its Diplomatic Resolution</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Lipulekh Pass trade route was shut in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and remained suspended amid the broader deterioration of India-China relations following the Galwan Valley clash.</li> <li>The resumption follows high-level diplomatic engagement in August 2025, during which both nations agreed to reopen key Himalayan trade routes. Three passes were identified for resumption: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Lipulekh Pass — Uttarakhand</li> <li>➔ Shipki La — Himachal Pradesh</li> <li>➔ Nathu La — Sikkim</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>2</b>	<b>Gurudongmar Lake</b>	<p>Tourism to the high-altitude Gurudongmar Lake in North Sikkim has begun to revive after more than two years of disruption following the devastating South Lhonak Lake GLOF, which severely damaged road infrastructure.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Location:</b> North Sikkim, near Tibet border at an altitude of ~5,430 m (one of highest lakes).</li> <li><b>Origin:</b> Glacier-fed; linked to Teesta basin</li> <li><b>Significance:</b> Sacred (Buddhist, Sikh, Hindu); linked to Guru Padmasambhava</li> <li><b>Fact:</b> Partially unfrozen even in winter</li> </ul>	

3	<b>Burachapori Wildlife Sanctuary</b>	<p>The Assam government is planning to create a new Reserved Forest adjacent to the Burachapori Wildlife Sanctuary in Sonitpur district of Assam.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> Assam; south bank of Brahmaputra</li> <li>• <b>Ecosystem:</b> Part of Laokhowa–Burachapori</li> <li>• <b>abitat:</b> Alluvial grasslands + wetlands + forests</li> <li>• <b>Climate:</b> Sub-tropical monsoon</li> </ul>
4	<b>Kalinjar Fort Hills</b>	<p>The hill region surrounding the Kalinjar Fort in Banda was officially declared a National Geo-Heritage Site by the Geological Survey of India (GSI)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Origin:</b> Gupta period (~4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> C)</li> <li>• <b>Feature:</b> Hill fort; temples, stepwells; <b>Neelkanth Temple</b></li> </ul>
5	<b>Veerangana Durgavati Tiger Reserve</b>	<p>Madhya Pradesh's (MP) largest tiger reserve- the Veerangana Durgavati Tiger Reserve is set to become the third home of cheetahs in India.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> Spread across three districts of MP: <b>Sagar, Damoh, and Narsinghpur.</b></li> <li>• <b>Components:</b> Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary + Durgavati Wildlife Sanctuary</li> <li>• <b>Named After:</b> Rani Durgavati (Gond queen)</li> <li>• <b>River Basins:</b> Narmada &amp; Ganga</li> <li>• <b>Habitat:</b> Dry deciduous forest</li> </ul>
6	<b>Mundra Port</b>	<p>The Indian-flagged tanker 'Jag Laadki', carrying around 80,886 metric tonnes (MT) of crude oil, recently arrived at Mundra Port in Gujarat amid West Asia conflict.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> Gulf of Kutch, Gujarat (near Mundra)</li> <li>• <b>Type:</b> India's largest private &amp; container port</li> <li>• <b>Operator:</b> Adani Ports</li> <li>• <b>Status:</b> SEZ, all-weather port</li> <li>• <b>Feature:</b> Largest coal import terminal; rail connectivity</li> </ul>
7	<b>Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary</b>	<p>Recently, the officials of the Wildlife Management Authority and Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary conserved nearly 20,000 eggs of Olive Ridley Turtles on Hope Island.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> Andhra Pradesh; Godavari estuary</li> <li>• <b>Type:</b> Mangrove ecosystem</li> <li>• <b>Coast:</b> Olive ridley turtle nesting</li> </ul>
8	<b>Kolleru Lake</b>	<p>According to environmental activists, the Kolleru Lake has suffered a sustained and measurable decline in its ecological health during the last 50 years.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> Andhra Pradesh; between Krishna-Godavari deltas</li> <li>• <b>Type:</b> Shallow freshwater lake; flood buffer</li> <li>• <b>Inflow:</b> From four rivers- Budameru, Ramileru, Tammileru, Errakalva</li> <li>• <b>Outflow:</b> Empties its water into the Bay of Bengal through an outlet called 'upputera'.</li> <li>• <b>Status:</b> declared as a wildlife sanctuary in 1999 and a wetland of international importance in 2002</li> </ul>

9	Aghanashini River	<p>Recently the UNESCO advised the Centre that the Aghanashini-Vedavathi river linking project must comply with the norms set under World Heritage Conservation frameworks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> Karnataka;</li> <li>• <b>Origin:</b> originates from Gadihalli (Sirsi) at an altitude of 676m in the Western Ghats of Karnataka State.</li> <li>• <b>Mouth:</b> Tadri (Arabian Sea)</li> <li>• <b>Tributaries:</b> Donihalla, Benne hole etc.</li> <li>• <b>Falls:</b> Burude falls, Dabbe falls, Waate halla, Benne holé falls, Unchalli falls</li> <li>• <b>Status:</b> Aghanashini Estuary has been designated as the Ramsar Site</li> </ul>
10	Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve	<p>Tamil Nadu government informed the Madras High Court that illegal resorts operating in the eco-sensitive zone of Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve (STR) have been sealed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> Tamil Nadu; Eastern-Western Ghats junction</li> <li>• <b>Landscape:</b> Part of Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve; Contiguous with the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve, Bandipur Tiger Reserve (Karnataka), and BR Tiger Reserve and Wildlife Sanctuary (Karnataka)</li> <li>• <b>Rivers:</b> Bhavani, Moyar, Noyyal</li> <li>• <b>Tribes:</b> Irula, Kurumba</li> </ul>

### International Places in News



1	Devon Island	<p>NASA recently used Devon Island to study Mars because its barren and freezing, polar desert conditions allow researchers to test next-generation rovers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> Canadian Arctic (High Arctic)</li> <li>• <b>Fact:</b> World’s largest uninhabited island</li> <li>• <b>Climate:</b> Polar desert (–50°C winters, short summers)</li> <li>• <b>Feature:</b> Haughton Crater (meteor impact)</li> </ul>
2	Litani River	<p>Recently, Israeli airstrikes destroyed the Qasmiyeh Bridge, a key crossing over the Litani River.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> Lebanon</li> <li>• <b>Origin (Litani River)</b> in west of Baalbek and flows southwestward through Bekaa Valley between the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon mountains.</li> <li>• <b>Course:</b> Bends West near Marjayoun, cuts a gorge then falls into Mediterranean Sea (south of Sidon).</li> <li>• <b>Tributaries:</b> Berdawni, Chtoura, Qib Elias</li> <li>• <b>Dams:</b> Qaraoun (Albert Naqash), El Wauroun</li> <li>• <b>Importance:</b> Irrigation + water supply + hydropower</li> </ul>
3	Golestan Palace	<p>Tehran (Iran) reportedly suffered damage, including to the UNESCO-listed Golestan Palace.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Meaning:</b> “Golestan” = <i>Rose Garden</i>; <b>UNESCO:</b> World Heritage Site (2013).</li> <li>• The Golestan Palace is a <b>monument of the Qajar era</b> (1789 to 1925). According to UNESCO, it embodies the successful integration of earlier Persian crafts and architecture with Western influences.</li> <li>• Built around a garden featuring pools as well as planted areas, the Palace’s most characteristic features and rich ornaments date from the 19th century.</li> <li>• Key structures in the Palace are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Takht-e-Marmar (Throne of Marble);</li> <li>○ Talar-e Aineh (Mirror Hall);</li> <li>○ Talar-e Almas (Diamond Hall);</li> <li>○ Talar-e-Salam (a lavishly decorated reception hall);</li> <li>○ Shams-ol-Emareh (Edifice of the Sun);</li> <li>○ Abyaz Palace (White Palace);</li> <li>○ Talar-e Adj (Ivory Hall);</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Within Golestan Palace lies one of India’s most important treasures, the <b>Muraqqa-e Gulshan</b> (Flower Garden Album).</li> <li>• It is one of the important albums of 11th-17th century paintings, drawings, calligraphy, and engravings by Mughal, Persian, Deccani, Turkish, and European artists.</li> </ul>
4	South Pars Gas Field	<p>It is world's largest known natural gas reserve in Iran which came under Israeli attack recently.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> Persian Gulf, near Assaluyeh (Iran)</li> <li>• <b>Shared Field:</b> Iran ~1/3 share(<i>South Pars</i>) + Qatar remaining share (<i>North Field</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Scale:</b> World’s largest gas field (~9,700 sq km; ~1,800 Trillion Cubic Feet reserves)</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Significance:</b> Supplies roughly 70-80% of the country's natural gas, most of which is consumed domestically for electricity generation, heating, and industrial use.</li> </ul>
5	Qeshm Island	<p>Iran's Foreign Minister recently accused the United States of attacking a desalination plant on Qeshm Island (<b>Long Island in Arabic</b>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> Persian Gulf, near Strait of Hormuz (Iran). Lies parallel to the Iranian coast, from which it is separated by the Clarence Strait.</li> <li>• <b>Status:</b> Largest island in Persian Gulf (~1491 sq km area- larger than Bahrain)</li> </ul>
6	Ras Laffan	<p>Iran's attack on Qatar's Ras Laffan Industrial City caused global oil and gas prices to soar.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> Northeast Qatar (~80 km from Doha)</li> <li>• <b>Type:</b> World's largest Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) export hub (~295 sq Km area)</li> <li>• <b>Share:</b> ~20% of global LNG supply</li> <li>• <b>Linked Field:</b> North Field (Qatar)</li> <li>• <b>Features:</b> LNG plants, storage, Gas-to-Liquids (GTL), refinery</li> <li>• <b>Importance:</b> Key supplier to Europe &amp; Asia</li> </ul>
7	Fujairah	<p>A day after being hit by drone debris and enduring a fire, the United Arab Emirates' (UAE) Fujairah port resumed its oil-loading operations.</p> <p><b>About Fujairah:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> UAE, Gulf of Oman (outside Strait of Hormuz)</li> <li>• <b>Type:</b> Major global oil &amp; bunkering hub</li> <li>• <b>Rank:</b> 4th largest ship-refuelling port (after Singapore, Rotterdam, Zhoushan)</li> <li>• <b>Exports:</b> ~1.7 million barrels per day (~1.7% global demand)</li> <li>• <b>Connectivity:</b> Abu Dhabi Crude Oil Pipeline (ADCOP) also known as Habshan-Fujairah pipeline transports oil from Abu Dhabi's fields to Fujairah bypassing Hormuz</li> <li>• <b>Importance:</b> Critical for UAE oil exports &amp; global energy security</li> </ul>
8	Diego Garcia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Located</b> in the Chagos Archipelago, central Indian Ocean.</li> <li>• One of only two major bomber bases in the Indo-Pacific (the other being Guam).</li> <li>• Sits ~3,000 km from both the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait (Red Sea) and the Malacca Strait (South China Sea).</li> <li>• Operated jointly by the US and UK.</li> <li>• <b>Ownership and Legal Status</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Originally controlled by the <b>UK</b>, which leased it to the US in <b>1966 for 50 years</b> (extended in 2016 for 20 more years, up to 2036).</li> <li>○ In <b>2019</b>, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that the UK's separation of the Chagos Islands from Mauritius was <b>illegal</b> and recommended sovereignty be returned to Mauritius.</li> <li>○ In May 2025, the UK formally transferred sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius — but leased Diego Garcia back for 99 years at £101 million annually.</li> <li>○ The move was partly driven by concerns about <b>preventing rival powers like China</b> from gaining access.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

9	Tonga	<p>Recently, a strong magnitude 7.6 earthquake struck near Tonga in the South Pacific Ocean.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> South Pacific (Polynesia); 169 islands</li> <li>• <b>Groups:</b> Island is divided into three main groups: Tongatapu in the south, Ha’apai in the center, and Vava’u in the north.</li> <li>• <b>Capital:</b> Nuku’alofa (Tongatapu)</li> <li>• <b>Highest Point:</b> Kao Island in the Ha’apai group</li> </ul>
10	South Shetland Island	<p>An earthquake of magnitude 6.7 earthquake struck the South Shetland Islands of Antarctica.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Discovery:</b> 1819, William Smith (UK)</li> <li>• <b>Type:</b> Volcanic archipelago (active volcanism)</li> <li>• <b>Key Island:</b> Deception Island (flooded caldera)</li> <li>• <b>Ice Cover:</b> ~80% glaciated</li> <li>• <b>Population:</b> No permanent residents; seasonal research stations</li> </ul>

### Major International Straits



S.No.	Strait	Description
1	Strait of Gibraltar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> Between Spain (North) &amp; Morocco (South); separates Europe from Africa.</li> <li>• <b>Connects:</b> Atlantic Ocean (west) ↔ Mediterranean Sea (east)</li> <li>• <b>Key Facts:</b> Narrow (~14 km); strategic entry to Europe</li> <li>• <b>Importance:</b> Major naval chokepoint; high commercial traffic</li> </ul>

2	Dardanelles Strait	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> Turkey</li> <li>• <b>Connects:</b> Aegean Sea ↔ Sea of Marmara</li> <li>• <b>System:</b> Part of Turkish Straits (with Bosphorus)</li> <li>• <b>Importance:</b> Governed by <b>Montreux Convention (1936)</b>; strategic for Black Sea access</li> </ul>
3	Bosphorus Strait	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> Istanbul, Turkey</li> <li>• <b>Connects:</b> Black Sea ↔ Sea of Marmara</li> <li>• <b>Key Feature:</b> Divides Europe &amp; Asia</li> <li>• <b>Importance:</b> One of the busiest waterways; vital for Russia/Ukraine trade</li> </ul>
4	Kerch Strait	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> Between Russia &amp; Crimea</li> <li>• <b>Connects:</b> Black Sea ↔ Sea of Azov (strategic inland sea in Eastern Europe)</li> <li>• <b>Key Feature:</b> Kerch Bridge</li> <li>• <b>Importance:</b> Strategic in Russia–Ukraine conflict</li> </ul>
5	Strait of Hormuz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> Iran to the north and Oman/United Arab Emirates to the south.</li> <li>• <b>Connects:</b> Persian Gulf ↔ Gulf of Oman</li> <li>• <b>Key Fact:</b> ~20% of global oil trade passes</li> <li>• <b>Importance:</b> World’s most critical oil chokepoint</li> </ul>
6	Bab al-Mandab Strait	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> Yemen (Arabian Peninsula)-Djibouti/Eritrea</li> <li>• <b>Connects:</b> Red Sea ↔ Gulf of Aden</li> <li>• <b>Route Link:</b> Leads to Suez Canal</li> <li>• <b>Importance:</b> Trade chokepoint; piracy &amp; conflict-prone</li> </ul>
7	Palk Strait	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> India-Sri Lanka</li> <li>• <b>Connects:</b> Bay of Bengal ↔ Gulf of Mannar</li> <li>• <b>Key Feature:</b> Adam’s Bridge (Ram Setu)</li> <li>• <b>Importance:</b> Shallow; limits large vessels</li> </ul>
8	Malacca Strait	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> Between Malaysia &amp; Indonesia</li> <li>• <b>Connects:</b> Indian Ocean ↔ South China Sea</li> <li>• <b>Key Fact:</b> Busiest global shipping lane</li> <li>• <b>Importance:</b> Critical for Asia’s energy trade; piracy hotspot</li> </ul>
9	Sunda Strait	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> Between Java &amp; Sumatra (Indonesia)</li> <li>• <b>Connects:</b> Java Sea ↔ Indian Ocean</li> <li>• <b>Importance:</b> Alternative to Malacca</li> </ul>
10	Taiwan Strait	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location:</b> China-Taiwan</li> <li>• <b>Connects:</b> South China Sea ↔ East China Sea</li> <li>• <b>Key Feature:</b> ~130-180 km wide</li> <li>• <b>Importance:</b> Major geopolitical hotspot + key trade route</li> </ul>

## Olympics Transgender Policy

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has introduced a new policy restricting participation in women's events to "biological females verified by **SRY gene test**," effectively **excluding transgender** and some intersex athletes. The decision, aimed at ensuring fairness and safety in competition, will take effect from the 2028 Olympics. It follows pressure from the U.S., including an executive order by President Donald Trump. The move has intensified ongoing debates around inclusion, fairness, and eligibility in women's sports, especially after controversies like the 2024 Olympics boxing case.

## Understanding the Distinction Between Sex and Gender

### • What is Biological Sex?

- Sex refers to biological differences such as reproductive organs and chromosomes.
- Humans have XX chromosomes (female) or XY chromosomes (male), though variations exist.
- Some individuals, such as those with **Disorders of Sex Development (DSDs)**, may not fit neatly into this binary, as seen in cases like athlete Caster Semenya.
  - Intersex individuals possess physical or genetic traits that do not align strictly with typical binary definitions of male or female.
  - As an example of a DSD, individuals with Swyer syndrome may have female reproductive organs despite carrying XY (typically male) chromosomes.
  - Her situation has sparked legal battles over sports regulations that require athletes with high natural testosterone to medically suppress those levels to compete in women's categories.

### • What is Gender?

- Gender is a social and personal identity — how individuals perceive themselves, such as male, female, or non-binary.
- It may not always align with biological sex. For instance, a transgender woman may be biologically male but identifies as female.

## Why Gender Eligibility is Controversial in Women's Sports?

- The debate over gender eligibility in women's sports stems from the fact that modern sports are divided based on biological sex, as men generally possess physiological advantages over women.
- **Role of Testosterone in Athletic Performance**
  - Testosterone, influenced by the **SRY gene on the Y chromosome**, is linked to greater muscle mass, strength, bone density, and haemoglobin levels.
  - Studies suggest this hormone largely explains performance differences between male and female athletes, with an estimated 10–20% advantage in certain sports.
  - While evidence supports testosterone's impact, it is not fully conclusive.
- **Core of the Debate**
  - The central issue is whether athletes with higher natural testosterone levels—such as those with DSDs or transgender women—have an unfair advantage.
  - The **IOC** maintains that allowing transgender and certain DSD athletes in women's categories may compromise fairness, safety, and competitive integrity, especially in sports dependent on strength, power, and endurance.

## Global Shift in Sports Eligibility Rules

- The IOC's new policy marks a significant departure from its 2021 approach, where international federations were allowed to frame their own rules based on fairness, inclusion, and scientific evidence.
- Now, the IOC has indicated that its stricter criteria should be widely adopted across global sports bodies, potentially standardising exclusionary rules.
- **Existing and Emerging Regulations**
  - Many international federations had already imposed restrictions based on testosterone levels.
  - For instance, World Athletics requires DSD athletes to maintain low testosterone levels, while sports bodies like FINA, cycling, and rugby have implemented varying bans on transgender women.
    - Some have also introduced genetic testing, such as the **SRY gene test**.
  - Critics argue that blanket bans may ignore differences across sports and individual cases.
- **Challenges of Alternative Solutions**
  - Proposals like creating an “open category” for transgender athletes face practical challenges due to the limited number of elite-level participants.
- **Social and Political Implications**
  - Advocacy groups warn it could discourage participation at grassroots levels, making transgender individuals feel excluded, and further polarising discussions on gender and inclusion in society.

## SC on Paid Maternity Leave for Adoptive Mothers

The Supreme Court in **Hamsaanandini Nanduri v. UoI** case, has expanded paid maternity leave for adoptive mothers, striking down restrictive provisions in the Social Security Code, 2020.

### Maternity Leave Framework in India

- India's maternity benefit framework has evolved over time to support working women and child welfare.
  - The **Maternity Benefit Act, 1961**, initially provided 12 weeks of paid leave.
  - The **2017 Amendment** increased leave for biological mothers to **26 weeks**.
  - It also introduced maternity leave for adoptive and surrogate mothers, but with conditions.
- Under Section 5(4) of the Act (later Section 60(4) of the Social Security Code, 2020), adoptive mothers were entitled to **12 weeks of leave only if the child was below three months of age**.
- This created a distinction between biological and adoptive motherhood in law.

### Supreme Court Judgment and Legal Changes

- The Supreme Court struck down the restrictive provision limiting maternity leave for adoptive mothers.
- Adoptive mothers are now entitled to 12 weeks of paid maternity leave regardless of the child's age at adoption.
- The Court held that such restrictions violate principles of equality and child welfare.
- Judgment recognises adoptive mothers as having the same rights & responsibilities as biological mothers.

### Rationale Behind the Judgment

- The Court's reasoning reflects a broader and more inclusive understanding of motherhood.
- **Beyond Biological Definitions**
  - The Court stated that motherhood cannot be viewed through a “**narrow lens of biology**” and must include adoptive relationships.

- **Child-Centric Approach**
  - Adopted children often face emotional and psychological challenges.
  - The initial bonding period is critical for their development.
  - The Court noted that children raised in institutional settings may have higher stress levels, requiring greater parental care after adoption.
- **Right to Reproductive Autonomy**
  - Adoption was recognised as part of an individual's reproductive choices, linking the judgment to broader constitutional rights.

#### Limitations of the Earlier Law

- The earlier provision was considered inadequate for several reasons:
  - The three-month age limit excluded most adoptive parents
  - Adoption procedures in India often take longer than three months
  - Data showed that less than 5% of adopted children were below three months of age
- As a result, many adoptive mothers were effectively denied maternity benefits.

#### Impact of the Judgment

- **Greater Inclusivity:** The judgment ensures equal treatment of adoptive and biological mothers under labour laws.
- **Improved Child Welfare**
- **Support for Working Women**

#### Court's Observations on Parenthood

- The Supreme Court emphasised that parenting responsibilities should not be viewed as solely maternal. It highlighted the importance of shared parenting
  - Recognised the role of fathers in childcare
- Court recommended that the Union government consider a formal legal framework for paternity leave.

#### Status of Paternity Leave in India

- Currently, male government employees are entitled to 15 days of paternity leave (with fewer than two surviving children)
- In the private sector, policies vary across organisations.
- There is no comprehensive national law governing paternity leave, leading to uneven benefits.

#### Bombay HC Ruling Reinforces RTE Guarantee

The Bombay High Court (Nagpur Bench) recently quashed a transfer certificate issued to a 13-year-old for non-payment of school fees, holding that a child within the compulsory education age cannot be expelled, and ordered immediate readmission.

#### Key Findings of The Court:

- **RTE Act applies to the school:** The court noted that the school had obtained **state permission (2007 NOC)** to run a CBSE section with a condition that it would **follow Maharashtra government rules**. A **2022 approval letter** also clearly stated that **provisions of the RTE Act apply to the institution**. Since the school had **not challenged this approval**, it could not claim exemption. The court held that the management **cannot accept benefits of affiliation while rejecting regulatory obligations**.

- **Protection under RTE is age-based:** The student was **13 years old**, which falls within the **6-14 age group protected by the RTE Act**. The protection applies to **all children in that age group**, not only those admitted under the RTE quota.
- **Fee recovery cannot lead to expulsion:** The **Fee Regulation Act (2011)** allows **financial penalties or interest for delayed payment but does not authorize expulsion**. The court separated **recovery of dues from the child's right to continue schooling**.

## Case Background:

- ◆ A **13-year-old student of Father Agnes School** (Class 7) was issued a **Transfer Certificate (TC)** for **non-payment of ₹23,900 fees**. Her father had earlier complained to authorities alleging **arbitrary fee fixation and non-use of NCERT books** by the school.
- ◆ In **March 2025**, the school warned that unpaid dues would lead to a TC and subsequently issued it. The father claimed he tried to pay the fees but was **denied entry to the school premises**.
- ◆ The school argued that:
  - ✔ It was an **unaided minority institution affiliated with Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE)**, hence **not covered by the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act)**.
  - ✔ The **Maharashtra Educational Institutions (Regulation of Fee) Act, 2011** allowed recovery measures for unpaid fees.

Related Constitutional Provision	Key Legal Provisions Involved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Article 21-A of the Constitution:</b> Guarantees <b>free and compulsory education to all children aged 6-14 years</b>. Introduced by the <b>86th Constitutional Amendment (2002)</b> it forms the <b>constitutional basis of the RTE Act, 2009</b>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>RTE Act, 2009:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Section 3(1):</b> Every child aged <b>6-14 years</b> has the <b>right to free and compulsory education in a neighbourhood school until completion of elementary education (classes 1-8)</b>.</li> <li>○ <b>Section 16:</b> <b>No child can be held back, expelled, or required to pass a board examination</b> until completion of elementary education.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Maharashtra Educational Institutions (Regulation of Fee) Act, 2011:</b> Regulates <b>fee fixation and collection in private unaided schools</b>.           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Section 3A</b> of the act allows schools to <b>impose penalties or interest for delayed fee payment</b>.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## SC Orders A 'No Fault' Compensation Policy for Covid Vaccine Side-Effects

Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) in *Rachana Gangu vs Union of India (2026)* directed the Centre to formulate a "no-fault" compensation policy for individuals **who suffered serious adverse effects or died after receiving Covid vaccines**.

✓ "No-Fault" means the claimant is required to prove only the causation i.e. the effect of vaccine (illness or death) and not the medical **negligence** or a **defect** in the vaccine.

### What did the SC Rule?

- **Right to Life Includes Health and Dignity:** Article 21 is not just limited to protection from death but also includes the **right to health, bodily integrity, and dignity**. Therefore, the State while implementing a large public health programme like vaccination, must ensure not only protection from disease but also care for those who suffer harm and support them.
- **Court Will Not Decide Scientific Causation: Examining whether vaccines caused specific deaths is not under court's jurisdiction,** as such questions involve complex scientific analysis and should be handled by expert bodies like AEFI committees and institutions such as the Indian Council of Medical Research.
- **No Separate Expert Body Needed:** The Court refused to set up a new medical board, stating that the **existing AEFI mechanism is adequate** for monitoring and investigation. However, it stressed that instead of merely tracking adverse events, the State must also ensure **relief and support**.
- **Absence of Compensation Framework is a Serious Gap:** The Court identified that India lacks a **uniform system to compensate vaccine-related injuries or deaths**. In a mass vaccination programme carried out for public good, leaving affected families without support raises **constitutional concerns under Article 21**.
- **Fault-Based Legal Remedies are Inadequate:** It rejected the government's suggestion for families to approach civil courts as proving negligence in vaccine injury cases is **scientifically complex, time-consuming, and burdensome** and can lead to **unequal outcomes**, violating Article 14 (equality before law).

## Case Background

- **Case Origin:** A batch of petitions was filed before the SC by parents of individuals who had **died after receiving COVID-19 vaccination** seeking-
  - ✓ Constitution of an independent expert medical board to inquire into post-vaccine deaths.
  - ✓ Formulation of protocols for early detection and treatment of **Adverse Events Following Immunization (AEFI)**.
  - ✓ Grant of compensation for vaccine-related injury or death.
  - ✓ **Transparency and accountability** in public health decisions.
- **Core Allegations by Petitioners:** The petitioners argued that-
  - ✓ Vaccine risks were **not adequately disclosed**, and the citizens were **kept in dark about the rare side effects**.
  - ✓ India's **mass vaccination programme (2021 onward)** administering Covishield and Covaxin vaccines which was officially **voluntary, became de facto mandatory** due to various administrative restrictions on unvaccinated individuals (travel restrictions, employment conditions and access to public spaces), thereby violating **personal autonomy and bodily integrity**.
  - ✓ Absence of a **uniform national framework** for death and disability due to AEFI violated **Article 21 (Right to Life)**.
- **Government's Defence:** The Union Government (through the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare**) argued that:
  - ✓ The vaccines underwent **rigorous approval processes** and were based on established **clinical and regulatory standards**.
  - ✓ The existing system for detecting AEFI was robust, which included reporting, investigation, and causality assessment.
  - ✓ Vaccine-related deaths were extremely rare for certain clotting disorders.
  - ✓ Aggrieved families could approach civil or consumer courts to claim damages for negligence or malfeasance against vaccine manufacturers.
- **Broader Questions Raised During the Petition:**
  - ✓ To what extent can courts intervene in scientific decisions and vaccination strategies?
  - ✓ Whether government bears the responsibility for rare but serious side effects?
  - ✓ What matters more- Collective health benefits vs individual risk and bodily autonomy?
- **Issues Framed by the SC:**
  - ✓ Whether absence of a **uniform compensation policy** for vaccine-related harm violates **Right to Life**?
  - ✓ Can the Court **direct the government to frame such a policy in case of a violation**?

- **Direction to Introduce No-Fault Compensation:** The Court directed the government to create a **no-fault compensation scheme**, where affected families can receive relief **without proving negligence** and as this is a **welfare measure, not an admission of fault**- it should be implemented quickly and transparently.

### Implications of the Verdict:

- **Right to Health Strengthened:** The ruling strengthens the scope of **Article 21** by linking it with the **Right to Health** and moves **beyond a negative obligation (not to harm) to a positive obligation for State to provide relief**. Thus, setting an important precedent for future public health and welfare cases.
- **Shift Towards Welfare-Based (No-Fault) Liability:** in public health matters- reducing the burden on victims to prove negligence and promoting a **more humane, welfare-oriented legal framework**.
- **Improved Public Trust in Vaccination Programmes**
- **Limits on Judicial Intervention in Scientific Matters:** reinforces the principle of **judicial restraint in technical and scientific domains**, while still ensuring constitutional accountability.
- **Strengthening of Equality (Article 14):** By rejecting case-by-case litigation and promoting a uniform compensation scheme, the Court ensured that victims are treated **equally and fairly**.
- **Imposes Administrative and Fiscal Responsibility on the State:** to design and implement the compensation scheme. This may increase public expenditure, require clear guidelines, eligibility criteria, and funding mechanisms.
- **Balances Between Public Good and Individual Rights:** by ensuring that **individual suffering is not ignored due to ongoing public health programmes**.

### Census 2027 Mascots

Recently, the Union Home Minister soft-launched four digital tools and formally unveiled the mascots- “Pragati” (female) and “Vikas” (male) for Census 2027- India's first digital census.

About the Mascots for Census-2027	About the 4 Digital Tools for Census-2027 (Developed by Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC))
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Pragati:</b> Female enumerator mascot.</li> <li>• <b>Vikas:</b> Male enumerator mascot.</li> <li>• <b>Objective:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ To act as <b>friendly public faces</b> of Census-2027.</li> <li>○ To help <b>communicate census information, objectives, and awareness</b> to citizens.</li> <li>○ To symbolize <b>equal participation of women and men</b> in nation-building and the vision of <b>Viksit Bharat 2047</b>.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Houselisting Block Creator (HLBC) Web Application:</b> It is a web-map tool using <b>satellite imagery</b> to help officers <b>digitally create houselisting blocks</b> for standardized geographic coverage.</li> <li>• <b>HLO Mobile Application:</b> It is a <b>Secure offline mobile app</b> for enumerators to <b>collect houselisting data during field visits</b>. It works on <b>Android &amp; iOS</b>, supports <b>16 regional languages</b> and enables <b>direct field-to-server data upload</b>, reducing paperwork.</li> <li>• <b>Self-Enumeration (SE) Portal:</b> <b>First-time online self-enumeration facility</b> for households. Citizens can <b>submit household details online before field survey</b>. It generates a <b>Self-Enumeration ID (SE ID)</b> for verification by enumerators.</li> <li>• <b>Census Management and Monitoring System (CMMS) Portal:</b> It is a <b>Centralized digital platform</b> for planning and monitoring census operations by officials at <b>sub-district, district, and state levels</b>.</li> </ul>

### Significance of Mascots and Digital Tools in Census-2027

- **Enhances Public Awareness and Participation**
- **Promotes Gender Equality Message**
- **First Fully Digital Census in India**

- **Improves Accuracy and Data Quality:** Tools like **HLBC and HLO mobile app** reduce manual errors and ensure **standardized geographic coverage and real-time data entry.**
- **Faster Processing and Real-time Monitoring:** **CMMS portal** allows authorities to **track progress, monitor fieldwork, and manage operations in real time.**
- **Greater Convenience for Citizens:** The **Self-Enumeration portal** enables households to **submit data online,** saving time.
- **Supports Evidence-Based Policymaking:** More accurate and timely census data helps the government in **planning welfare schemes, resource allocation, and development policies.**

## MPLAD Funds

A recent analysis by *The Hindu* found that 21 Members of Parliament (MPs) recommended Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) funded works outside their State or constituency, with over ₹18 crore spent on such projects; 84% of the funds went to districts in Uttar Pradesh.

### What is MPLAD Scheme?

**MPLADS** allows MPs to recommend **development works in their constituencies/States.** Each MP can recommend projects worth **₹5 crore per year.**

**Objective:** To enable MPs to **create durable community assets and address local development needs** such as roads, schools, public infrastructure, etc.

### Area of Recommendation

- **Lok Sabha MPs:** Works in the **district(s) of their constituency.**
- **Rajya Sabha MPs:** Works in **one or more districts of the State from which they are elected.**
- **Nominated MPs:** Can recommend works **anywhere in India.**

**Exceptions:** MPs can recommend **up to ₹50 lakh/year outside their normal area** (earlier ₹25 lakh; revised in April 2023). Up to **₹1 crore/year** can be contributed for **rehabilitation and reconstruction in areas affected by severe natural calamities.**

### Implementation Process

- **MP recommends works** (roads, schools, community assets, etc.).
- **District Authority** (usually the District Collector) checks feasibility and sanctions the work.
- Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) responsible for the policy formulation, release of funds, and monitoring of MPLADS

Key Challenges faced by the MPLADS:	Way Forward
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Misallocation of Funds:</b> MPs sometimes <b>recommend projects outside their Constituency/State,</b> diluting the objective of addressing <b>local development needs.</b></li> <li>• <b>Political Patronage and Bias:</b> Funds may be used to <b>build political networks or favour particular regions/groups,</b> rather than addressing priority development gaps.</li> <li>• <b>Limited Accountability:</b> MPs only <b>recommend works,</b> while <b>District Authorities execute them,</b> creating <b>ambiguity in responsibility</b> for delays, cost overruns, or poor implementation.</li> <li>• <b>Implementation Delays:</b> Projects often face <b>bureaucratic delays in sanctioning, tendering, and execution,</b> despite guidelines requiring completion within about a year.</li> <li>• <b>Uneven Regional Distribution:</b> States with <b>more MPs receive disproportionately larger MPLADS funds,</b> leading to regional imbalance in development spending.</li> <li>• <b>Risk of Misuse or Low-Impact Projects:</b> Funds sometimes go to <b>low-priority assets (e.g., street lights, minor infrastructure)</b> rather than <b>long-term development projects.</b></li> <li>• <b>Constitutional &amp; Governance Concerns:</b> Critics argue MPLADS <b>blurs separation between legislature and executive,</b> since MPs influence the execution of development projects.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Stricter Area Norms:</b> Limit out-of-constituency spending and ensure funds primarily address <b>local development needs.</b></li> <li>• <b>Greater Transparency:</b> Strengthen real-time monitoring through digital platforms like the <b>MPLADS eSAKSHI Portal</b> with public access to project details.</li> <li>• <b>Independent Audits:</b> Conduct <b>regular CAG and third-party social audits</b> to prevent misuse and improve accountability.</li> <li>• <b>Priority-Based Planning:</b> Mandate <b>needs assessment and local consultations</b> before recommending works.</li> <li>• <b>Time-bound Implementation:</b> Enforce <b>strict timelines and penalties for delays</b> by implementing agencies.</li> <li>• <b>Focus on Durable Assets:</b> Encourage projects with <b>long-term developmental impact</b> (schools, health infrastructure, water supply).</li> <li>• <b>Clear Accountability:</b> Define responsibilities of MPs, district authorities, and implementing agencies to reduce governance overlap.</li> </ul>

- Works are generally **expected to be completed within one year of sanction.**

### Digital Monitoring (e-SAKSHI Portal)

Since **April 2023**, MPLADS has been managed through the **MPLADS eSAKSHI Portal**. Its key features include:

- Online **recommendation of works by MPs.**
- **Real-time monitoring** of sanction, progress, and payments.
- Uploading **photos and documents** for transparency.
- Shows **fund utilization and completion status** of projects.

### ASMITA Initiative

The Union Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports recently organized a nationwide athletics league- ASMITA across the nation to celebrate women in sports on International Women’s Day

#### What is ASMITA Initiative?

ASMITA (Achieving Sports Milestone by Inspiring Women Through Action)- launched in 2021 is a unique initiative to celebrate women in sports. It is a part of Khelo India’s gender-neutral mission to promote sports among women through leagues and competitions.

#### Objective

To encourage participation among young women aged 14 to 28 by creating a vibrant environment for them to showcase their talents.

#### Key Features

- **Focus:** Athletics (100 meters, 200 meters, 400 meters) across the age groups of Under-13, 13-18 years and 18+ categories.
- **Implemented By:** Sports Authority of India (SAI- under Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports) in partnership with My Bharat.
  - ✓ **Mera Yuva Bharat (MY Bharat)** is an autonomous body that provides an over-arching institutional mechanism powered by technology for youth development and youth-led development.

#### Significance

It helps foster opportunities for women, encouraging them to engage in sports and strive for excellence.

### Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC)

In view of “unwarranted sensationalism and speculative content” in coverage of the ongoing West Asia conflict, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) directed the Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) to suspend publication of TV news channel Television Rating Points (TRPs) for four weeks or until further orders.

- ✓ It is not the first instance, in **2020**, after the **Mumbai Police uncovered an alleged TRP manipulation scam involving Republic TV and two Marathi channels**, BARC suspended weekly TRP ratings for all news channels for three months.

#### Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) India

◆ **BARC India** is a **Joint Industry Body** that measures **television viewership in India** and provides TRPs. It was **established in 2015** by three stakeholder bodies:

- ➔ **Indian Broadcasting & Digital Foundation (IBDF)**- broadcasters
- ➔ **Indian Society of Advertisers (ISA)**- advertisers
- ➔ **Advertising Agencies Association of India (AAAI)**- advertising/media agencies

◆ **Objective:** Transparent, accurate and industry-standard TV audience measurement system in India.

## How are the Households Selected for Bar-O-Meters ?

The households are selected based on an **Establishment Survey (~3 lakh households)**. A **random sample (panel homes)** is chosen where Bar-O-Meters are installed. Households **rotate periodically** to maintain representativeness and secrecy.

## What is Television Rating Point (TRP)?

**TRP** is a **metric used to measure the viewership of television programmes and channels**.

### How is TRP measured?

**Bar-O-Meters (People Meters)** are installed in selected households' TVs (about **44,000 panel homes**). These devices **record which channel/programme is watched and for how long**. **Audio watermarks** embedded in TV broadcasts are detected by the meters to identify the content. Data is **sent daily to BARC**, which calculates viewership ratings.

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) continuously reviews TV audience measurement (ratings) to ensure transparency, credibility, and security against manipulation, recommending improvements to the MIB.

Significance of TRPs	Key Issues with TRPs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• TRPs help <b>advertisers decide where to place advertisements</b> and determine <b>advertising rates for TV channels</b>.</li><li>• Since <b>~70% of TV channel revenue comes from advertising</b>, TRPs strongly influence programming and content strategies.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Possibility of <b>TRP manipulation (e.g., paying panel homes)</b>.</li><li>• Criticism that TRPs encourage <b>“sensationalism” or “TRP journalism.”</b></li><li>• Debate on whether TRPs <b>accurately reflect real viewership</b>.</li></ul>

## Home Ministry Bars Statutory Bodies from Seeking Look Out Circulars

The **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** recently revised its **Look Out Circular (LOC) guidelines**, stating that **statutory bodies without criminal jurisdiction cannot directly request the Bureau of Immigration to stop individuals from leaving India**.

### What is a Look Out Circular (LOC)?

**LOC** is an alert issued by law enforcement agencies to the **Bureau of Immigration (BoI)** to monitor or restrict the movement of a person through international borders.

### Objective:

- To prevent a person **wanted in a criminal case, economic offence, or national security investigation** from leaving India.
- To enable authorities to **detain, question, or inform the requesting agency** when the person appears at an airport/port/land border.

### Objective of the New Guidelines: To-

- Clarify which authorities are authorized to issue LOC requests.
- Prevent misuse by bodies without criminal jurisdiction.
- Standardize actions and procedures at immigration checkpoints.
- Ensure better coordination between law enforcement agencies and immigration authorities.
- Create clear timelines and verification mechanisms to avoid procedural confusion.

### Significance of the Move:

- **Prevents arbitrary travel restrictions** by bodies lacking criminal authority.
- **Strengthens procedural safeguards** and accountability.

- Improves coordination between immigration and investigative agencies.
- Reduces confusion at airports regarding court orders and LOC enforcement.

### Estimating Reduction in Polling Personnel Deployment Under Simultaneous Elections

The Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) recently released a working paper estimating the potential reduction in Polling Personnel (PP) deployment under a simultaneous election framework.

#### Key Highlights from EAC-PM Paper

- **Scale of India’s Electoral Machinery:** India’s electoral machinery operates at an enormous scale (nearly 70 lakh personnel were deployed during the 2019 Lok Sabha (LS) elections alone). Conducting elections entail massive logistical mobilization, widespread use of schools as polling stations and a heavy dependence on teachers as polling personnel. This results in repeated administrative disruption, diverting human resources and public infrastructure away from their primary functions.

- **Methodological Framework of the Paper:** Based on the empirically validated data of ECI from West Bengal (2016), Odisha (2019), and Tamil Nadu (2019), for polling personnel deployment- the paper derives a gross baseline estimate showing that while separate elections require nine personnel per polling station, simultaneous elections would require only six, implying a theoretical reduction of about 33% in polling personnel deployment.

- **Real World Adjustments:** The paper explains that the actual savings are lower than the expected 33% as some states have early elections (about two every 5 years), resulting in extra elections and more staff. States like Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, and Sikkim already

## Key Changes Introduced:

- ❖ **Restriction on Statutory Bodies Without Criminal Jurisdiction:** The MHA clarified that certain bodies cannot directly request the Bol to issue LOCs. The bodies listed include:
  - ▶ National Commission for Women (NCW)
  - ▶ National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)
  - ▶ National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR)
  - ▶ National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT)
  - ▶ Any tribunal without criminal jurisdiction.

**New rule:** Such bodies must route their requests through authorized law-enforcement agencies (e.g., police, investigative agencies). If they send requests directly, the Bol must return them immediately.

- ❖ **Standardized Categories for LOC Actions:** The LOC proforma now includes three clear action options:
  - ▶ **Detain and Inform the Originator:** The person is detained until the originating agency arrives.
  - ▶ **Prevent Departure and Inform Originator:** The person cannot leave India but may not be detained.
  - ▶ **See Remarks for Action:** Used mainly for intelligence-based actions.

**Restriction:** Intelligence agencies such as Intelligence Bureau, Research and Analysis Wing, Central Bureau of Investigation, and National Investigation Agency may use the “see remarks” category only for counter-terrorism purposes.

- ❖ **Procedure for Court Orders on LOCs:** To avoid fake or unverifiable court orders being presented at airports, when courts order deletion, suspension, or quashing of an LOC:
  - ▶ The originating agency must request the court to communicate the order directly to it.
  - ▶ If immigration authorities receive court orders directly, they must immediately inform originating agency by email. The originating agency must respond within 7 working days.
  - ▶ Immigration authorities will act only after the LOC status is updated in the Bol system.
- ❖ **Custody Timeline After Detection:** If a person flagged by an LOC appears at a checkpoint:
  - ▶ Bol immediately informs the originating agency.
  - ▶ If the agency does not take custody within 3 hours, the person is handed to local police.
  - ▶ The originating agency must assume custody within 24 hours.

Gains	Limitations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Education Sector Benefit:</b> Because most polling staff consists of teachers and schools are used as polling stations.</li> <li>• <b>Administrative efficiency:</b> About 28% reduction in polling personnel means less repeated mobilization of staff and resources and reduced institutional disruption.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Security Deployment Uncertainty:</b> Simultaneous elections may require around 50% more Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) due to law &amp; order management, protection of vulnerable areas, EVM/VVPAT security and VVIP security.</li> <li>• <b>EVM-related Personnel (First level checking &amp; Commissioning):</b> Fewer election cycles but double EVMs per election.</li> <li>• <b>No Reduction in Counting Staff:</b> Separate counting for Lok Sabha and Assembly, Separate staff required. Thus no efficiency gain.</li> <li>• <b>Transition Phase Challenge:</b> Some states will vote twice temporarily. Short-term increase in personnel deployment.</li> <li>• <b>Limited Scope Of Gains:</b> Benefits mainly restricted to polling personnel. Other areas (security, logistics) remain complex or uncertain.</li> </ul>

hold simultaneous elections with LS, but no extra savings happen there. To simplify calculations, the paper uses an “average state” model based on overall polling station data.

- **Final Quantified Outcome:** The paper estimates that simultaneous elections can reduce the polling staff by about **28% (roughly 26 lakh personnel over five years)**. As each person typically spends around **4 days** on election duty including training and polling, this can result in a total saving of about **1.04 crore personnel days**.

## Amrit Bharat Station Scheme

A Parliamentary Committee recommended Railways Ministry to assess passenger satisfaction regularly, conduct post-redevelopment impact evaluations under the **Amrit Bharat Station Scheme (ABSS)** focusing on amenities, accessibility, cleanliness, safety, robust feedback and grievance redressal systems for continuous improvement.

✓ Out of **1,337 stations** identified for redevelopment by Railways Ministry, **172 are completed** and **1,072 are under progress**. India has around **8,000 railway stations and halts**.

### What is ABSS?

ABSS is a **long-term, phased redevelopment programme** of Indian Railways to modernize railway stations with a focus on **station-specific master plans** based on local needs and passenger requirements and transform stations into **modern, multi-functional urban hubs**.

## Key Features

- ❖ **Infrastructure Upgradation:** Stations will be upgraded with better entry/exit, platforms, roofing, waiting halls, toilets, lifts, escalators, Wi-Fi, executive lounges, food courts, signage systems, parking, pedestrian pathways and roof plazas.
- ❖ **Accessibility:** Ramps, tactile paths, Braille signage (aligned with Sugamya Bharat Mission) to ensure accessibility for Divyangjans,
- ❖ **Urban Integration:** Stations will be redeveloped keeping in mind city connectivity and multimodal transport.
- ❖ **Local Economy Boost:** indigenous goods can be sold as One Station One Product kiosks.
- ❖ **Aesthetic Design:** New architecture will be inspired by local culture and heritage.
- ❖ **Sustainability:** Green spaces, energy-efficient systems, better waste management to make the stations environment friendly.

## Challenges

- ❖ **Funding constraints and cost overruns** affect large-scale redevelopment of stations.
- ❖ **Coordination issues** between Railways, state governments, and urban bodies result in implementation delays.
- ❖ **Uneven development** as a result of prioritizing major stations over smaller ones.
- ❖ **Maintenance and service quality post-redevelopment** is difficult.

## Protocol to Receive President in States

The absence of West Bengal Chief Minister (CM) during President’s state visit triggered a political controversy, with allegations of protocol violation and disrespect. The incident highlights ongoing tensions in Centre-State relations and raises concerns about adherence to constitutional protocol during high-level visits.

### Possible Implications of the Controversy

- **Strain in Centre-State Relations:** The incident may deepen political friction between the West Bengal government and the Union government. Protocol disputes involving high constitutional offices often become symbolic of broader **Centre-State tensions**.
- **Politicization of Constitutional Protocol:** Opposition parties may frame the incident as **disrespect to the office of the President of India**, while the ruling party may view the criticism as politically motivated. This can turn ceremonial protocols into political flashpoints.
- **Administrative and Protocol Scrutiny:** Since visits of the President are governed by the **MHA Blue Book**, any deviation from approved reception arrangements may invite **internal review or clarification** from the MHA or the President’s Secretariat.
- **Precedent for Future Visits:** Such incidents could lead to **clearer enforcement or reiteration of protocol guidelines** to avoid similar controversies during visits of the President, VP or PM.

- **Impact on Cooperative Federalism:** Public disputes over protocol may weaken the spirit of **cooperative federalism**.
- **Symbolic Impact on Constitutional Norms:** Even if not a legal violation, deviation from established conventions may be seen as **erosion of constitutional courtesy and institutional norms** associated with high offices.

### Lok Sabha Revokes Suspension of Eight MPs and Issues Fresh Conduct Rules

The Lok Sabha (LS) recently revoked the suspension of eight Members of Parliament (MPs)- suspended from the Budget Session for their unruly behaviour and issued new conduct rules for the MPs which include-

- Ban on AI-generated portraits, pictures and slogans of a derogatory nature while protesting in Parliament House Complex.
- Prohibition on carrying firearms, banners, placards, spears, swords, sticks and brickbats in the complex.

**Trigger:** Use of AI-generated images of PM and Union Minister Hardeep Puri alleging links with Jeffrey Epstein.

### 'Seva Bhav' Training

The Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice (chaired by BJP MP Brij Lal) in its report on the Demand for Grants (2026-2027) of the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) have recommended the government to introduce mental health support and training on "seva bhav" (spirit of service) for bureaucrats.

### Standing Committee Recommendations:

- **Officer Well-being:** Create a structured well-being framework,

## What is the Protocol for the President's Visit to a State?



- ◆ **Governing Framework- The "Blue Book":** Visits of high constitutional dignitaries such as the **President, Vice-President (VP) and Prime Minister (PM)** are governed by the **"Blue Book"** issued by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).
  - ▶ Blue book is a **confidential operational manual** (with numbered copies) detailing **security, ceremonial and logistical arrangements**, including reception protocol, security deployment, travel routes, contingency planning and coordination between the Centre and state authorities.
- ◆ **Table of Precedence and Importance of Protocol:** The **President of India** holds **Rank 1 in the Indian Table of Precedence**, followed by the **VP** and the **PM** requiring the **highest level of ceremonial respect and coordinated administrative arrangements** during their visits.
- ◆ **Reception Protocol:** Conventionally, when the President visits a state, the **Governor and CM** receive the President at the airport or arrival point. If the CM cannot attend, then a **minister nominated by the CM** usually receives the President. The **list of dignitaries who will receive or meet the President** is prepared in advance and is sent to the **President's Secretariat for approval**. This system ensures that the President is formally welcomed by representatives of the state government.
- ◆ **Security and Administrative Arrangements:** The Blue Book also mandates-
  - ▶ **multi-layered security arrangements** involving state police and central agencies.
  - ▶ coordination by the **District Magistrate and Police Commissioner** (for keeping and implementing the protocol).
  - ▶ route security, crowd management, and emergency preparedness.

Even minor deviations from the approved plan can lead to **administrative scrutiny or inquiries**.

### What Happened in West Bengal?

During the visit of **Droupadi Murmu** to West Bengal, the CM was **not present to receive the President and no minister was nominated** by the Chief Minister to receive her either. This triggered criticism from opposition parties alleging **breach of protocol and disrespect to the President**.

### Was There Actually a Protocol Breach?

- ◆ **Legally- Not a Mandatory Requirement:** The Blue Book **does not make it legally mandatory** for the CM to personally receive the President. Therefore, **strict legal violations are debatable**.
- ◆ **Conventionally- Considered Unusual:** However, by **constitutional convention and administrative courtesy**, if the CM cannot attend, a **minister is usually deputed**. In West Bengal's past visits, **either the CM or a minister received the President**. Thus, the absence of **both the CM and a nominated minister** is viewed as **deviation from established convention**, even if not explicitly illegal.

## Need for Seva Bhav Training:

- ◆ **Increasing Administrative Complexity:** Governance today involves **multiple welfare schemes, digital governance, crisis management, and judicial scrutiny**. Mere procedural efficiency is insufficient. Officers must adopt a **service-oriented attitude** to respond empathetically to citizens. Seva bhav training will help shift from a **rule-based bureaucracy towards a responsive governance model**.
- ◆ **Staff Shortages and Work Overload:** Out of the total authorized strength of the IAS (6,877)- only 5,577 posts have been filled, leaving a shortage of 18.90% (1,300 officers) in the country with higher shortages in sensitive regions like North-East (Nagaland cadre has the highest shortage at 43.62%). This results in additional charges, long working hours, and frequent transfers for existing bureaucrats leading to **fatigue and transactional behaviour**, reducing sensitivity to public needs. Seva bhav training will reinforce **purpose-driven administration despite workload stress**.
- ◆ **Declining Service Ethos:** Over time, bureaucratic systems may drift toward procedural rigidity, power-centric attitudes, reduced accountability, poor decision-making and reduced patience with citizen. Seva bhav training, combined with mental health support will foster emotional intelligence, compassionate governance and better interpersonal engagement.
- ◆ **Public Expectations and Accountability:** Citizens today demand transparency, responsiveness and dignified treatment. Any perception of apathy erodes **state legitimacy**. Seva Bhav will promote **trust-building between citizens and the state**.
- ◆ **Governance in Sensitive Regions:** High vacancies in **North-Eastern and smaller cadres** affect development delivery and administrative outreach. Officers in such regions require **culturally sensitive, service-oriented engagement**, which can be strengthened through Seva Bhav training.

provide **mental health/counselling support**, monitor **extra workload (additional charges)**, ensure **stable tenures** (reduce frequent transfers), add **stress-management under Mission Karmayogi** and conduct **annual well-being surveys**.

- **Introduce Seva Bhav Training at LBSNAA** (Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration): Introduce **Seva Bhav (service ethos) modules** and train officers for **empathetic engagement** with citizens, especially vulnerable groups.
- **AI Regulation:** Use AI through **centrally approved agreements (including Large Language Models)** to ensure **data confidentiality**.

## PB-SHABD

Prasar Bharati-Shared Audio-Visuals for Broadcast and Dissemination (PB-SHABD) launched in 2024 extended its membership free of cost till March 2027

### What is PB-SHABD?

**PB-SHABD** was launched by Prasar Bharti (under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting) as a shared feed service to provide a wide range of copyright-free daily news content- **video, audio, text, and photos** to organized broadcasters like YouTubers, podcasters, and news channels.

✓ Prasar Bharati is an autonomous body and a public service broadcaster established in 1997 under the Prasar Bharati Act 1990 to provide autonomy to Doordarshan and Akashvani.

## Key Features of PB-SHABD:



- ❖ **Comprehensive Coverage:** It offers the latest news from every corner of India covering over **50 news categories** such as agriculture, technology, foreign affairs and political developments in all major Indian languages from the Regional News Units (RNUs) and headquarters combined.
- ❖ **Accurate Content:** It provides timely, accurate, and authentic news without any subscription, logo, or even without any credits to any media organization. Any fake or edited content, they block it immediately.
- ❖ **Live Feed Feature:** to watch live events like national importance, official press conferences, and other special events without any logo or watermark for a clear view.
- ❖ **Media Repository:** A Public archival library allows easy access to archival or past footage.
- ❖ **Regular Update** of content with latest news like weather reports, interviews, expert opinions, articles, and many more things that helps save users' time and effort.

### Significance:

- ❖ **Democratizes media:** Free, copyright-safe content helps small creators and regional platforms
- ❖ **Counters fake news.**
- ❖ **Boosts digital ecosystem** by reducing content costs for journalists, YouTubers, and startups.
- ❖ **Promotes diversity** with multilingual news coverage.
- ❖ **Enhances governance communication** with direct, distortion-free dissemination of official information.

## Lok Sabha 'Guillotines' Demands for Grants

The Lok Sabha (LS) recently passed the Demands for Grants of various Ministries for 2026-27 of over ₹53 lakh crore by applying the guillotine, without a discussion in Parliament.

Each ministry presents its expenditure requirements to the LS in the form of Demands for Grants. These demands are then examined by Members of Parliament (MPs), who debate the proposed allocations, raise questions to seek clarifications, and may also move cut motions to suggest reductions in expenditure.

✓ The power to vote on demand for grants rests exclusively with the LS (Rajya Sabha has no voting authority in this matter).

### What is meant by Guillotine?

**Guillotine** is a **parliamentary procedure** invoked by the Speaker in the Lok Sabha to **automatically put to vote all remaining Demands for Grants at once, without further discussion**.

✓ Guillotine is not used to pass ordinary bills on a routine basis and is concerned with only the Demands for Grants during Budget session.

## Where does it fit in the Budget Process?

- The guillotine fits into the Union Budget process after the detailed discussion stage. Once the **Union Budget is presented**, Parliament goes into a **recess of about three weeks**, during which Department-related Standing Committees scrutinize the demands for grants of various ministries.
- After the House reconvenes, **Demands for Grants are discussed ministry-wise**, but due to limited time, not all demands can be examined. If time runs out, the Speaker invokes the **guillotine**.
- Following this, the **Appropriation Bill is passed** to authorize withdrawal of funds from the Consolidated Fund of India, and finally, the **Finance Bill is enacted** to give effect to taxation proposals.
  - ✓ The Appropriation Bill is sent to Rajya Sabha (RS), where it is discussed and returned. The RS cannot vote on appropriation bill.

## Need for Guillotine:

- ❖ **Large Number of Ministries:** Detailed discussion of every Demand for Grant from each Ministry is impractical.
- ❖ **Limited Parliamentary Time:** restricts exhaustive scrutiny.
- ❖ **Frequent Disruptions:** by Opposition Members.
- ❖ **Pending Demands Accumulation:** as session progresses
- ❖ **Time-Bound Budget Approval:** is important before the start of the financial year.
- ❖ **Avoid Administrative Paralysis:** and allows the government to continue spending and functioning efficiently thus maintaining fiscal continuity.

**Procedure of Guillotine:** Business Advisory Committee (BAC) allocates time for discussion wherein selected key ministries are discussed. On the last allotted day, the Speaker invokes Guillotine for all the remaining Demands for Grants.

## Guillotine vs Passing a Bill "in din"

Feature	Guillotine	Passing "in din"
<b>Nature</b>	Institutional Mechanism. The Guillotine procedure is not explicitly mentioned in the Constitution.	Ad-hoc Mechanism due to situational compulsion
<b>Context</b>	Budget Session (Demands for Grants)	Any Bill
<b>Reason</b>	Lack of Time	Disruption in House
<b>Authority</b>	Pre-scheduled by BAC + Speaker	Chair
<b>Discussion</b>	Limited	Absent

## Limitations:

- ❖ Reduces **parliamentary scrutiny**
- ❖ Weakens **legislative oversight**
- ❖ Important ministries may go **undiscussed**.

## India Hosts 12<sup>th</sup> Steering Committee Meeting of GlobE Network

India recently hosted the 12<sup>th</sup> Steering Committee Meeting of the Global Operational Network of Anti-Corruption Law Enforcement Authorities (GlobE Network).

### What is the GlobE Network?

It is a global platform of specialized anti-corruption law enforcement agencies, created under the Riyadh Initiative during Saudi Arabia's G20 Presidency (2020), operating within the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) framework. It facilitates **direct, practitioner-level cooperation for investigation, prosecution, and asset recovery** in corruption cases.

### Membership

GlobE comprises **135-member countries and 250 member authorities**, along with 18 observers including EUROPOL, the World Bank, and the International Association of Anti-Corruption Authorities.

**Steering Committee (Core Governance Body):** consists of 15 member countries, including India, Brazil, China, Italy, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, UAE, etc. to-

- Set **strategic direction**,
- Review **operational priorities**, and
- Guide **institutional development**.

## India's Role in the GlobE Network

- Joined in **2022** with **Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)** and **Enforcement Directorate (ED)** as member agencies.
- Elected to **15-member Steering Committee (2024)** reflecting India's rising global stature.
- Early contributor via **G20 Anti-Corruption Working Group (Saudi Presidency)**.
- During **India's G20 Presidency (2023)**, it prioritized **asset recovery & operational cooperation**.
- It actively promotes GlobE in **Financial Action Task Force (FATF), UNCAC, and multilateral forums**.

## India's Rising Role in the Global Fight Against Corruption:

- **Growing Global Leadership:** India's hosting of the 12th GlobE Steering Committee Meeting reflects its transition from a participant to a key agenda-setter in global anti-corruption governance and rising trust in India's institutional capacity.
- **Strengthened Domestic Enforcement Architecture:** Over the past decade, India has significantly reinforced its anti-corruption framework through agencies like the CBI and ED.
- **Leadership in Asset Recovery:** India has emerged as one of the most proactive countries in tracing, confiscating, and returning illicit assets. This focus aligns with UNCAC's emphasis on asset recovery as the core measure of anti-corruption success, strengthening both deterrence and accountability.
- **Norm-setting and Message Signalling:** India's enforcement approach sends a clear global signal that its jurisdiction will not serve as a safe haven for proceeds of crime. This contributes to strengthening international norms against corruption and illicit financial flow.

## West Bengal CM Hits Out at ECI for Official Transfers

With the Model Code of Conduct coming into force in four states- West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Assam as well as the Union Territory of Puducherry, the Election Commission of India (ECI) initiated a series of appointments and transfers of top IAS and IPS officers in these states. West Bengal witnessing the most changes, prompted its Chief Minister to hit out at the ECI, terming the transfers as "sweeping".

**Legal Provisions on Transfer of Officials During Elections:** According to *Section 13CC, Representation of the People Act, 1950*, all the officials like Chief Electoral Officers, District Election Officers and other election staff involved in electoral rolls revision and conduct of elections are **deemed to be on deputation to the ECI** and will be under **control, superintendence, and discipline of the ECI** i.e. the EC could suspend and substitute officers for dereliction of duty.

✓ The ECI continues to exercise these powers to ensure free and fair polls.



### Why did West Bengal CM Object These Transfers?

- ✦ She criticized the transfers as arbitrary and abrupt especially since they were made **within hours of poll announcement without any cogent reason** or evidence of misconduct by officials.
- ✦ She pointed out that **traditionally, the EC consults the state government** and seeks a panel of officers before transfers but this **established practice was bypassed**.
- ✦ **Precedent on transfer/removal of officials:**
  - **Established Practice:** The ECI **routinely transfers or replaces officials during elections** to ensure a **level playing field**, especially if they are perceived to be aligned with ruling parties.
  - **Recent examples (2024 Lok Sabha elections):** **West Bengal DGP Rajeev Kumar** was removed by the ECI for the poll period; he was reinstated later by the state government. The ECI also **removed Home Secretaries of six states**, including Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat.

### Implications of the controversy

- ✦ **Centre-State Friction:** Such perceived unilateral actions by the ECI can **strain cooperative federalism**.
- ✦ **Credibility of ECI Under Scrutiny:** Allegations of arbitrariness may **affect public trust** in the ECI's neutrality.
- ✦ **Administrative Disruption:** Abrupt transfers of senior officials can **impact continuity and efficiency** in election management.
- ✦ **Political Signalling & Narrative-building:** Parties may use such actions to **frame bias or victimhood**, influencing voter perception.

## Gruh Sugam Portal

The National Housing Bank (NHB) recently launched the Gruh Sugam Portal to promote cost effective housing finance system for Defence / Government personnel.

### Salient Features of the Portal

- **End-to-End Digital Loan Application:** Defence personnel, paramilitary forces, and Central/State government employees can apply for **housing loans** entirely online through their respective administrative units, eliminating the need to physically visit banks or financial institutions.
- **Unified Digital Marketplace:** enables market transparency and discovery of best suited offer.
- **Seamless Institutional Integration:** with NHB and lending institutions to ensure ease of operations.
- **Improved Loan Processing Efficiency.**
- **Grievance Redressal Mechanism.**
- **Real-Time Query Resolution:** through an online chat facility.

## Immigration, Visa, Foreigners Registration & Tracking (IVFRT) Scheme

The Union Cabinet recently approved the continuation of the Immigration, Visa, Foreigners Registration & Tracking (IVFRT) Scheme beyond 31 March, 2026 for a period of five year from April 2026 to March 2031 with budget outlay of Rs.1800 crore.

✓ The project was initially approved in 2010.

### What is the IVFRT Scheme?

It is a **central sector project of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** to **integrate and modernize immigration, visa issuance, and foreigner registration systems** in India. It provides a **secure, technology-driven and unified digital platform** for managing cross-border movement and monitoring foreigners.

### Objectives: To-

- **Facilitate legitimate travel** through faster and user-friendly services.
- **Strengthen national security** via real-time tracking and data integration.
- **Ensure inter-agency coordination** across immigration and law enforcement bodies.
- **Enhance transparency and efficiency** in visa and immigration processes.
- **Promote tourism, business, and global mobility.**

### Key Features:

- **Strategic Transformation Approach:** It is not merely a technical upgrade, but a **comprehensive modernization of immigration and visa systems** aligned with India's vision of **world-class international mobility and secure borders**.
- **Focus on Three Core Pillars:**
  - **Emerging Technology Innovations**
    - **Adoption of Advanced Technologies:** *Introducing unified digital platforms, revamping core application architecture, and strengthening network and deployment frameworks* for improved efficiency and user experience.
  - **Core Infrastructure Transformation:** Strengthening physical and digital backbone.
    - **Infrastructure Expansion & Upgradation:** Modernization of Immigration Posts, FRROs (Foreigners Regional Registration Offices), Data Centres and creation of a **resilient, scalable, nationwide system**.
  - **Technology & Service Optimization**

## Significance of IVFRT Scheme

- **Enhanced Service Delivery & Efficiency:** Enables **100% contactless and faceless visa processing**. Around **91% e-Visas processed within 72 hours** and **immigration clearance time has reduced to 2.5-3 minutes (from 5-6 minutes)**.
- **Advanced Passenger Facilitation: FTI-TTP (Fast Track Immigration-Trusted Traveller Programme)** has reduced clearance time to around **30 seconds** via e-gates for **seamless, fast, and hassle-free travel experience**.
- **Strengthened National Security:** Real-time tracking and integrated databases improve **monitoring of foreigners** and help in tackling **illegal migration and security threats**.
- **Nationwide Institutional Coverage:** ensuring **uniform and coordinated immigration management** across India.

## Lok Sabha Expansion

The Centre is planning to increase the strength of the Lok Sabha (LS) from 543 to 816 seats, while also keeping one-third of the seats reserved for women for the 2029 LS polls.

### What is the Government Proposing?

The Union Government is considering to increase the strength of the LS by around 50% **to around 816 seats while maintaining the current proportion of seats across states**, instead of redistributing them based on fresh population data. Around **273 seats (one-third)** will be reserved for women under the **Women's Reservation Act, 2023 (Nari Shakti Vandan Adhinyam)**- mandates a 33% (one-third) quota for women in the LS, state legislative assemblies, and the Delhi Assembly.

✓ For this purpose, delimitation may be carried out using the **2011 Census (instead of 2027 Census)** as an interim arrangement.

### Objectives of the Proposal: To-

- **Implement Women's Reservation of 33%** without reducing existing seats of male MP.
- **Avoid Political Backlash** by ensuring no state loses seats.
- **Ensure Smooth Transition Before Full Delimitation.**
- **Enhance Representation.**

**Key Feature of the Proposal: "Same Share, Bigger Numbers"** i.e., total number of seats will increase, but without changing the **inter-state seat share**. Thus, every state gets **more MPs in absolute terms**, but **relative power stays similar (for now)**.

### Related Constitutional Framework

- **Article 81 (Composition of LS)** ensures **"one person, one vote, one value"** and seat allocation proportional to population.
- **Article 82 (Delimitation):** After every Census, Parliament enacts a **Delimitation Act** for revising constituency boundaries and seat allocation.
  - ✓ Delimitation is the process of fixing the number of seats and boundaries of territorial constituencies in each State for the LS and Legislative assemblies.
  - ✓ Present status: Last **intra state** delimitation exercise based on 2001 census; **interstate** delimitation status quo at 1971 census
  - ✓ The primary objective for the freeze was to **protect southern states** from losing their relative representation in Parliament compared to faster-growing northern states.

### Institutional Process Ahead

- **Constitutional Amendment Bill** to increase LS strength.
- **Introducing the Delimitation Act.**

- Formation of the **Delimitation Commission**.
- Allocation based on **2011 Census (proposed)**.
- Implementation by **2029 elections**.

**State-wise Impact of the Proposal:**

- **Hindi Belt:** will get the maximum absolute gains. **For example, the seat share for Uttar Pradesh** will change from 80 to 120. For Bihar: 40 → 60; for Madhya Pradesh: 29 → ~44 and for Rajasthan: 25 → ~38. This will strengthen dominance in parliamentary politics.
- **Western & Central States:** Maharashtra: 48 → 72; Gujarat: 26 → 39 and Chhattisgarh: 11 → ~17. Maharashtra will remain **the second most influential state**.
- **Eastern States:** West Bengal: 42 → 63; Odisha: 21 → ~32; Jharkhand: 14 → 21 will enhance the importance of eastern political battlegrounds.
- **Southern States:** Tamil Nadu: 39 → ~59; Karnataka: 28 → 42; Andhra Pradesh: 25 → ~38; Telangana: 17 → ~26; Kerala: 20 → 30 will result in gain in absolute numbers, but **relative share will remain a concern**.
- **Smaller States & UTs:** Punjab: 13 → ~20; Haryana: 10 → 15; Delhi: 7 → ~11; Assam: 14 → 21; Other Northeast: +1–2 seats per state ensures continued representation of smaller regions.

Advantages of the Proposal	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Facilitates Women’s Reservation</b> without reducing existing seats, ensuring smooth and non-disruptive implementation.</li> <li>• <b>Politically Feasible:</b> No state loses seats; all gain in absolute terms, making consensus easier.</li> <li>• <b>Improves Representation:</b> Smaller constituencies lead to better Member of Parliament (MP)-citizen interaction and accountability.</li> <li>• <b>Maintains Federal Balance (Short-term):</b> Retains current seat proportions, avoiding immediate inter-state tensions.</li> <li>• <b>Strengthens Inclusivity:</b> Larger House allows greater representation of women, regions, and diverse groups.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Constitutional Challenges:</b> The proposal requires amending <b>Article 81</b>. Further, maintaining seat proportions without strictly following population data may dilute the principle of <b>“one person, one vote, one value.”</b> Thus, raising concerns under <b>Article 14 (equality)</b> if representation is disproportionate to population.</li> <li>• <b>Delay in Genuine Delimitation:</b> By opting for proportional expansion instead of redistribution based on current population, the proposal postpones the constitutionally mandated delimitation exercise- necessary political rebalancing among states, allowing existing disparities in representation to persist.</li> <li>• <b>North-South Divide:</b> Southern states, which have successfully controlled population growth, fear that future delimitation based on population will reduce their relative share in Parliament.</li> <li>• <b>Legal Vulnerability:</b> Using the <b>2011 Census</b> instead of the latest census data for seat allocation may face judicial scrutiny.</li> <li>• <b>Governance Concerns:</b> A significantly larger LS may affect the efficiency of parliamentary functioning, could lead to <b>longer debates, coordination challenges, and reduced quality of deliberation</b>, making law-making more complex and less effective.</li> <li>• <b>Electoral Strategy Shift:</b> High-seat states become even more crucial with UP alone getting around 120 seats. Thus, campaign resources and political focus will concentrate in <b>a few large states</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Coalition Politics Becomes More Complex:</b> With the majority mark rising to around <b>409 seats</b>, parties will need broader alliances or stronger regional bases, leading to larger coalitions and increased bargaining power for regional parties.</li> </ul>

**Way Forward:**

- **Build Political Consensus:** Engage states, especially southern states, to promote **cooperative federalism**.

- **Develop a “Compensatory Mechanism”:** Consider fiscal incentives and institutional safeguards to balance demographic disadvantage.
- **Ensure Constitutional Robustness:** Carefully draft amendments to withstand **judicial scrutiny**.
- **Synchronize with Delimitation Roadmap:** Clearly outline interim arrangement (2011-based) and final delimitation (post-2026 Census).
- **Strengthen Parliamentary Functioning:** through institutional reforms to manage larger House size, efficient debate and law-making.

## Government Bank Dashboard and Manual Launched

- The Controller General of Accounts (CGA) launched two major initiatives aimed at **strengthening the governance and efficiency of banks** handling government transactions i.e. the Government Bank Dashboard and the Government Bank Manual.
- The initiatives aim to **institutionalise uniform procedures** and **introduce objective performance benchmarks** while reinforcing shared responsibility in safeguarding public funds.

## Controller General of Accounts of India (CGAI)

- CGAI functions under the **Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance**.
- It is the **Principal Accounting Adviser** to Government of India and is responsible for establishing and maintaining a technically sound Management Accounting System.
- The CGA prepares monthly and annual analysis of expenditure, revenues, borrowings, and various fiscal indicators for the Union Government.
- It submits the Annual Appropriation Accounts (Civil) and Union Finance Accounts to the Parliament in relation to Article 150 of the Constitution.
- Along with these documents, an M.I.S Report titled 'Accounts at a Glance' is prepared and shared with the Members of Parliament.

## Government Bank Dashboard

- ✔ It introduces **real-time, data-driven monitoring of critical banking functions** with respect to government business.
- ✔ It tracks key performance indicators such as remittance timelines, scroll compliance, reconciliation status, transaction success rates, and adherence to service-level standards.
- ✔ This represents a significant **shift from reactive, post-facto corrections to proactive oversight and performance management**.

## Government Bank Manual

- ✔ It provides a comprehensive and standardized framework for banks for handling government business.
- ✔ It clearly defines operational procedures, reporting obligations, reconciliation timelines, and compliance requirements.
- ✔ Its objective is to reduce ambiguity, mitigate operational risk, and strengthen accountability across all stakeholders.
- ✔ The next phase of reforms will focus on deeper digital integration, stronger cybersecurity safeguards, advanced analytics and institutional capacity building to further modernise government banking operations.

## Innovators Business Environment Index 2026

- StartupBlink has released the Innovators Business Environment Index (IBEI) 2026.
- StartupBlink is a global startup ecosystem research platform, providing data and insights about the innovation economy to advise and support **decision-makers**.
- IBEI is a global benchmark dedicated to **evaluating the ease with which innovators can start and operate a business** across the world.
- Covering **125 countries**, the index uses **30+ indicators** to assess the **accessibility, reliability, and readiness of national business environments** for entrepreneurship.
- The scoring system also supports practical, evidence-based reforms by helping

## Pillars: The Index has three core pillars:

- ➔ **Ease of Operating a Business:** Measures how simple, fast, and operationally frictionless it is to start, run, and maintain a business.
- ➔ **Business Incentives:** Evaluates how financially attractive a country is for entrepreneurs and investors.
- ➔ **Market Perception:** Measures how a country is viewed globally in terms of governance quality, credibility, transparency, stability, human capital, and international mobility.

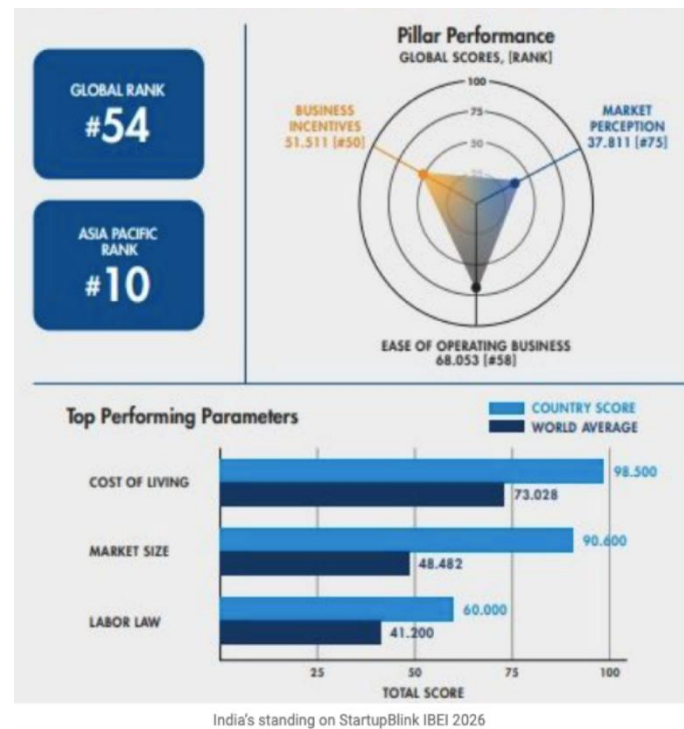
## Rankings

- ➔ **The US ranks first** as the most business-friendly country in 2026, backed by its large market size, innovation ecosystem and favourable business climate.
- ➔ **Singapore ranks second**, recording the highest scores across eight parameters – more than any other country on the list.
- ➔ United Kingdom, Switzerland, and UAE are followed by US and Singapore.
- ➔ **India ranks 54th, ahead of China** which stands at the 85th globally.
- ➔ India's business environment is marked by robust regional strengths, reliable access to capital within the Asia-Pacific region, a large market size, and a competitive cost structure.

policymakers identify priority areas and learn from countries that have successfully strengthened their business conditions.

### Key Trends and Patterns

- A common feature among many **top 20 countries** is strong performance in **digital infrastructure**, including internet speed, connectivity, and technological readiness, which significantly facilitates startup creation and scaling.
- 16 top 20 countries show strong results in **regulation & governance**, making this a common characteristic among leading business environments.
- **Global mobility & openness** is a common but not universal strength among the Top 20, with **thirteen countries** performing strongly in this category.
- Although leading countries generally provide **strong access to funding and financial infrastructure**, access to capital varies significantly, even within the top 20 economies.
- **Taxation** is rarely a key strength, with 17 countries demonstrating limited performance in this area.



### National Shipping Board (NSB)

- The government held a high-level interaction with the National Shipping Board (NSB) to address emerging challenges in India's shipping sector and review measures to strengthen maritime capacity amid evolving global geopolitical and trade dynamics.
- NSB is a **permanent statutory body established in 1959** under the **Merchant Shipping Act, 1958**
- It functions under the **Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways** to advise the government on matters related to shipping and maritime sector.
- The Board's recommendations have contributed to the evolution of a sound National Maritime Policy over the years.
- It consists of representatives from the government, ship owners, seafarers, port authorities, and maritime training institutions.

### Essential Commodities Act Invoked

- The Union government has invoked the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 to **regulate supply of natural gas** amid concerns over supply shortages triggered by the ongoing Iran–US-Israel conflict in West Asia.
- The notification titled, **Natural Gas (Supply Regulation) Order** aims to ensure that critical sectors, particularly household fuel supply and transport gas remain protected even if global energy supply disruptions intensify.

### Order Details

It applies to all entities involved in the production, import, marketing, transportation or supply of natural gas. It establishes a **priority framework** for natural gas supply across sectors to ensure availability for critical uses during supply disruptions:

- **Priority sector 1** mandates 100% supply (*past 6 months average gas consumption*) for essential uses including domestic piped natural gas (PNG), compressed natural gas (CNG) for transport, LPG production and other essential operational requirements of gas pipelines.
- **Priority sector 2** requires fertiliser plants to receive natural gas supply equivalent to 70% of their past six-month average consumption, subject to operational availability.
- **Priority sector 3** directs gas marketing entities to maintain supply to tea industries, manufacturing units and other industrial consumers connected to the national gas grid at 80% of their past six-month average consumption.
- **Priority sector 4** states that all City Gas Distribution (CGD) entities must ensure that industrial and commercial consumers supplied through their networks receive 80% of their past six-month average gas consumption.

## Essential Commodities Act (ECA), 1955

- ✳ ECA was enacted at a time when India was facing food scarcity due to low levels of food grains production. The country was dependent on imports and assistance (such as wheat imports from the US) to feed the population.
- ✳ Thus, the ECA was enacted, to **stop hoarding and black marketing** of food and gives consumers protection against irrational spikes in prices of essential commodities.
- ✳ In 2020, **Parliament amended the Act to limit the Centre's powers** to regulate cereals, pulses, potato, onions, edible oilseeds and oils **only** under extraordinary circumstances such as war, famine, extraordinary price rise and natural calamity.
  - It also stipulated regulating stock limit of any agricultural produce only in case of a 100% rise in retail price of horticultural produce or 50% increase in retail price of non-perishable agricultural foodstuffs.

### Essential Commodity

- ✳ There is no specific definition of essential commodities in ECA, 1955. It states that an essential commodity means a commodity specified in the Schedule of the Act.
- ✳ The Act gives powers to the **central government** to add or remove a commodity in the Schedule.
- ✳ By declaring a commodity as essential, the government can control the production, supply, and distribution of that commodity, and impose a stock limit.
- ✳ The Schedule at present contains the following **seven commodities**:
  - Drugs;
  - Fertilisers (organic, inorganic, mixed);
  - Foodstuffs including edible oils and oilseeds;
  - Hank yarn made wholly from cotton;
  - Petroleum and petroleum products (Supreme Court has held that natural gas and LNG come within the purview of petroleum and petroleum products);
  - Raw jute and jute textiles;
  - Seeds of food-crops and seeds of fruits and vegetables; seeds of cattle fodder; jute seeds and cotton seeds.

## Fiscal Health Index 2026

- NITI Aayog has released the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual edition of the Fiscal Health Index (FHI) 2026.
- FHI provides a comprehensive and comparable assessment of the fiscal performance of Indian states.

### Significance of State finances

- States now account for nearly **one-third of India's general government debt**, making their fiscal trajectory central to national fiscal sustainability.
- Given the scale of state expenditure responsibilities and their role in delivering key public services, systematic assessment of state finances is essential to ensure fiscal discipline, efficient resource allocation, and long-term macroeconomic stability.

### Fiscal Health Index

- It has been designed as a data-driven framework to **evaluate fiscal soundness, guide reforms, and promote evidence-based fiscal policymaking** across states.

### Key Findings

- **Odisha, Goa and Jharkhand** have been categorised as **achievers**, with **Odisha leading the index** chart for the second consecutive year. Gujarat and Maharashtra continue in the top five.
- Karnataka and Telangana moved from front runner to performer. Bihar improved from aspirational to performer, signalling better deficit management.
- Fiscal performance of Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Kerala are among the worst in the country.
- Among northeastern and Himalayan states, **Arunachal Pradesh has topped** in the index, followed by Uttarakhand, Tripura, Meghalaya, Assam and Mizoram.

### Policy Priorities

- The report highlights several policy priorities for strengthening fiscal health across states. These include enhancing revenue mobilisation and strengthening state own-tax capacity; rationalising committed expenditures to restore fiscal flexibility and improving the composition and quality of capital expenditure.
- It is important to adopt medium-term fiscal planning frameworks to manage deficits and debt trajectories more effectively.
- It also emphasises the need to strengthen public financial management systems, improve transparency through the use of verified fiscal data, and monitor off-budget borrowings more closely.

- By focusing on major fiscal indicators, it encourages states to align their fiscal strategies with national objectives.
- It offers a roadmap for achieving fiscal consolidation, improving transparency, and facilitating effective resource management.
- It ranks States on the basis of **five major sub-indices** viz. Quality of Expenditure, Revenue Mobilisation, Fiscal Prudence, Debt Index, and Debt Sustainability, along with insights into state-specific challenges and areas for improvement.
- The first edition assessed the fiscal performance of **18 major states**. This edition adds the **10 North-Eastern and Himalayan states**, making the index more inclusive and representative of India's fiscal diversity.
- To account for structural differences across regions, the Northeastern and Himalayan states have been evaluated and ranked separately from the major states.
- FHI categorises the states as **achiever, front runner, performer and aspirational**. States with the best fiscal position are categorised as achievers.

### Joha Rice

- India has exported its first consignment of **Assam's GI-tagged Joha Rice** to the United Kingdom and Italy.
- The export was facilitated by **Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA)**, under the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**, in collaboration with the state agriculture department.
- The export follows APEDA's strategy to promote GI-tagged products by creating direct market linkages between producer groups and buyers and ensuring better price realisation for farmers.
- Joha rice is an aromatic indigenous variety cultivated in Assam, that received the Geographical Indication **(GI) tag in 2017**.
- It is highly valued for its distinct fragrance, fine grain texture, and rich taste.
- It has been earlier exported to Vietnam and five West Asian countries - Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and Saudi Arabia.

### PRISM-SG Portal

- The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has launched the PRISM-SG (Portal for Rail-Road Inspection & Stages Management – Steel Girders) portal.
- It is aimed at enhancing efficiency, transparency, and inter-agency coordination in **infrastructure development**.
- The portal has been developed to **digitise key approval and inspection processes** related to the construction of Road Over Bridges (ROBs) and railway bridges.
- At present, construction of ROBs requires multiple approvals from Indian Railways such as Structural Drawings, Quality Assurance Plan (QAP), Welding Procedure Specification Sheet (WPSS) and fabrication stage inspection of steel girders.
- This often **leads to delays** along with **limited real-time tracking and coordination** among stakeholders.
- The portal addresses these challenges by providing an **integrated digital platform that brings together all key stakeholders**, including Road Owning Departments, Indian Railways, contractors, fabricators, and inspection agencies.

- It enables end-to-end online submission of documents, scrutiny, raising and resolution of queries, approvals, scheduling of inspections, and uploading of inspection reports, test results, supported by a **complete audit trail and real-time monitoring capabilities**.
- It will help to reduce the approval and inspection timeline from **~12 months to about 3 to 4 months**.

### Purple Potatoes in Punjab

- Farmers in Faridkot district of Punjab are cultivating a new and unusual potato variety - Purple potato.
- Along with purple potatoes, farmers also cultivate several other potato types including Pinto Gold, a camouflage potato variety, red potato varieties such as Esmee, Marium, and other Pakistani varieties not common in India.

### Outlook

- With rising global demand for nutrient-rich functional foods, the success of purple potato cultivation highlights the potential for Punjab farmers to diversify into high-value specialty crops.

### National Highways Green Cover Index

- National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has released a first-of-its-kind Annual Report on the **National Highways Green Cover Index (NH-GCI) 2025–26**.
- The report has been prepared in coordination with the **National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC)** of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).
- It aims to provide a scientific and quantitative assessment of green cover within the Right of Way (RoW) along the National Highways network by utilising advanced space-based technologies.
- The assessment is derived from chlorophyll content detected through high-resolution satellite sensors, enabling an objective, technology-driven measure of vegetation presence along the side of the highways.
- NH-GCI is reported as a **percentage value that represents the proportion of land covered by green cover within the RoW** of National Highways at a granularity of one kilometre.
- It offers a reliable, cost-effective, and time-efficient mechanism for macro-level estimation of the green cover along the National Highways.
- In this first assessment cycle, approximately 30,000 km of National Highways spanning 24 States have been covered for the period July–December 2024.
- Subsequent annual cycles will track year-on-year changes to monitor progressive improvements in green cover.
- The findings will enable comparison, ranking, and targeted interventions for improved plantation management.

### Purple Potato



- Purple potatoes are believed to have originated in the **Andean region of South America**, particularly in **Bolivia** and **Peru**, where coloured potatoes have been cultivated for centuries.
- India has also officially launched its own purple potato variety **Kufri Jamunia** in 2024, developed by the **Central Potato Research Institute**.
- However, the farmers in Punjab have been cultivating purple potatoes since 2022, by importing the seeds from Bolivia.
- Unlike conventional potatoes, this variety is **deep purple in colour, sugar-free and rich in vitamin C**.
- They are increasingly valued worldwide because of their **high concentration of anthocyanins**, powerful antioxidants responsible for their deep purple colour. The same natural compound is found in blueberries.
- A higher intake of anthocyanins has been linked to several health benefits including improved cholesterol levels, better eye health and a reduced risk of heart disease, certain cancers and diabetes
- Thus, purple potatoes are considered suitable even for people managing conditions such as diabetes or joint pain.
- The crop adapts well to the climatic conditions of Punjab, which are relatively fungus-free and therefore suitable for producing disease-free seed potatoes.
- The crop duration is around **90 to 100 days** and is sown in October or November with harvesting taking place around February or March, similar to other potato crops.
- The **shelf life** of purple potatoes is **nearly double that of normal potatoes** because their peel is thicker, while the tuber size is similar to conventional potatoes and does not develop cracks.
- The average production can reach around **20,000 kilograms per acre**. It can lead to earnings between **Rs 6 to 20 lakh per acre** depending upon the quality and marketing.

## National Investment and Infrastructure Fund

- The National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) has raised \$750 million for its second Private markets fund (PMF-II).
- It will utilise this fund to invest indirectly into local companies by backing other private equity and venture capital funds.
- NIIF's first private markets fund-which raised about \$600 million in 2019-has deployed the capital across nine Indian private equity and venture capital funds, realising 40% of the investment so far.

### NIIF

- NIIF is an **Indian-government backed entity** established to **provide long-term capital** to the country's infrastructure sector. It was founded as a **category II Alternative investment fund (AIF) in 2015**.
- The objective behind creating this fund was to maximize economic impact mainly through infrastructure investment in commercially viable projects, **both greenfield and brownfield**.
  - A **greenfield** project refers to a completely new project and **brownfield** projects are pre-existing projects that are modified or upgraded.
- The **Indian government has 49% stake** in NIIF with the rest held by foreign and domestic investors such as Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, Temasek and HDFC Group etc.
- Governing Council of NIIF is Chaired by Union Finance Minister
- With the Centre's significant stake, NIIF is considered India's **quasi sovereign wealth fund**. A sovereign wealth fund is a **state-owned fund**.
- Its portfolio now includes investments in ports and logistics, real estate and renewables.

## NMDC's Record Iron Ore Production

- NMDC Limited has become the first mining company in the country to produce 50 million tonnes (MT) of iron ore in a single financial year (FY 2025-26).
- As India advances towards its target of expanding steelmaking capacity to 300 million tonnes by 2030, ensuring a stable and reliable domestic supply of iron ore has become a strategic priority.

### NMDC Limited

- Incorporated in 1958, NMDC is a **Navratna Public Sector Enterprise** under the **Ministry of Steel**, is the largest producer of iron ore in India.



## Funds under NIIF

### Master Fund

- ✓ It is an infrastructure fund with the objective of primarily investing in operating assets in the core infrastructure sectors such as roads, ports, **airports, power** etc.

### Fund of Funds (FoF) - Private Markets Fund

- ✓ FoF invests in funds managed by fund managers who have good track records in infrastructure and associated sectors in India.
- ✓ Some of the sectors of focus include green infrastructure, mid-income & affordable housing, infrastructure services, and allied sectors.

### Strategic Opportunities Fund (SoF)

- ✓ Its objective is to invest largely in equity and equity-linked instruments and is one of the largest India-focused growth equity fund.
- ✓ It has been established to provide long-term capital to high-growth future-ready businesses in India.
- ✓ The fund's strategy is to build a portfolio of large entrepreneur-led or professionally managed domestic champions and unicorns.

### India Japan Fund (IJF)

- ✓ IJF aims to invest in sectors that focus on **environmental preservation**. This includes investing in green sectors and traditionally high GHG emitting sectors which are proactively focusing on a low carbon emission strategy.



## Iron Ore



- Iron ore is a naturally occurring mineral from which iron is extracted. It is the primary raw material used in the **production of steel**, making it strategically important for infrastructure, manufacturing, and economic development.
- Iron ores are classified based on their iron content and composition. The most important type is **Hematite**, which contains a high percentage of iron (around 60–70%) and is widely used in India.
- **Magnetite** has even higher iron content (up to 72%) but is less commonly used due to impurities and beneficiation requirements.
- Other types include **Limonite** and **Siderite**, which have lower iron content and limited economic importance.
- **Australia is the leading producer** of iron ore followed by Brazil, China and India.
- In India it is predominantly distributed across the Peninsular Plateau in the eastern and southern states, mainly located in **Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, and Goa**.

- **National Mineral Development Corporation** is involved in the exploration of a wide range of minerals including copper, rock phosphate, limestone, magnesite, diamond, tungsten and beach sands.
- With highly mechanised operations across the mineral-rich regions of **Chhattisgarh and Karnataka**, NMDC remains central to ensuring the country's iron ore security.
- It also operates the **only mechanized diamond mine** in India at **Panna, Madhya Pradesh**.

## BHAVYA Yojna

- The Union Cabinet has approved the **Bharat Audyogik Vikas Yojna (BHAVYA)**, with an allocation of **Rs 33,660 crore**, for the development of **100 plug-and-play industrial parks** across the country.
- The scheme aims to **develop world-class industrial infrastructure**, unlocking manufacturing potential and driving India's growth story.
- Building on the success of Industrial Smart Cities developed under the National Industrial Corridor Development Programme (NICDP) framework, BHAVYA will be implemented in **partnership with states and private sector players**.

### Beneficiaries

- **Primary beneficiaries:** Manufacturing units, MSMEs, startups, and global investors seeking ready-to-use industrial infrastructure.
- **Secondary beneficiaries:** Workers, logistics providers, service sector enterprises, and local communities.

### Benefits

- BHAVYA is expected to drive substantial direct and indirect employment across manufacturing, logistics, and services, while accelerating industrial growth nationwide.
- By facilitating cluster-based development and enabling co-location of industries, suppliers, and service providers, it will strengthen domestic supply chains, promote regional industrialization.
- In doing so, it will lay the foundation for a resilient, inclusive, and globally competitive economy.

### National Industrial Corridor Development Corporation Limited (NICDC)

- NICDC functions under the **Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry**.
- It is leading the **development of world-class greenfield industrial smart cities** to enhance manufacturing competitiveness, attract investments, and generate employment. It is currently implementing 20 projects across 13 states.
- NICDC-led initiatives are built on the concept of plug-and-play industrial parks—ready-to-use ecosystems where land, utilities, approvals, and infrastructure are pre-developed, enabling industries to start operations quickly without delays.

### Details of the scheme

- ❖ It will incorporate a **strong push for deregulation and ease of doing business**, with streamlined approvals, effective single-window systems, and investor-friendly reforms led by states.
- ❖ It will deliver **plug-and-play industrial ecosystems**, enabling industries to move from intent to production with speed and certainty.
- ❖ With pre-approved land, ready infrastructure, and integrated services, BHAVYA will significantly reduce entry barriers for investors.
- ❖ Under the scheme, **industrial parks ranging from 100 to 1000 acres** will be taken up for development.
- ❖ **Financial support** of up to **Rs. 1 crore per acre** will be provided for Core infrastructure; Value-added infrastructure and Social infrastructure.
- ❖ Support for **external infrastructure** will also be provided up to **25% of the project cost**, ensuring seamless connectivity and integration with existing networks.
- ❖ Project selection will ensure that only high-quality, reform-oriented and investment-ready proposals are taken forward.
- ❖ The industrial parks will be **aligned with the PM GatiShakti Principles** to enable seamless multimodal connectivity and efficient last-mile access.
- ❖ The parks will be designed as futuristic and **sustainable ecosystems** incorporating green energy systems.
- ❖ These parks will set new benchmarks in industrial infrastructure, ensuring reliability, reducing inefficiencies, and enhancing productivity across sectors.

## Impact of Iran War on Indian Industries

- The war in West Asia is not just disrupting global oil and gas markets. It is also disrupting the flow of key industrial inputs from the region for several core Indian industries.
- The West Asia region broadly includes the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries — Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE — along with other regional economies such as Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen.
- For India, the region remains a crucial supplier of both energy and industrial inputs.
- India imported goods worth \$98.7 billion from the region in 2025. So, any turbulence in the region could quickly impact multiple Indian industries beyond oil and gas.
- Sectors such as steel, fertilizers, cement and power transmission depend heavily on imports of essential raw materials from West Asia.



## Sectors beyond oil and gas

### Energy Stress on Steel Sector

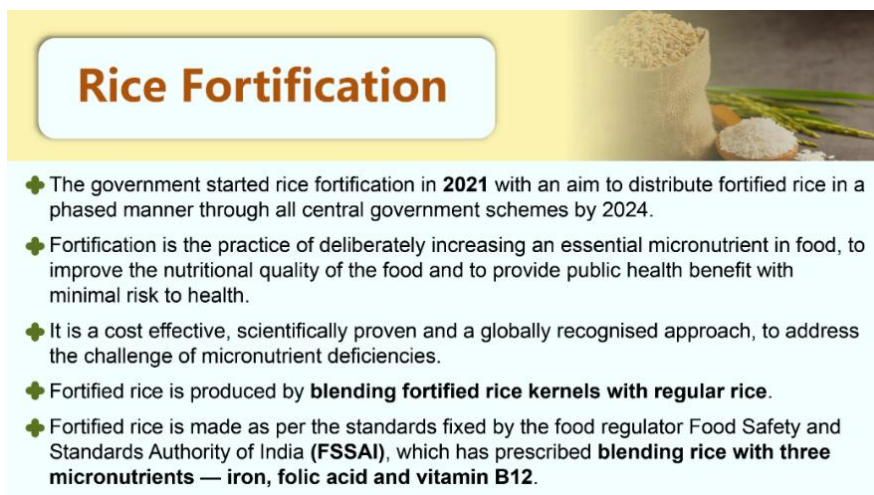
- The steel industry uses various production routes, including blast furnace (BF) and DRI. While BF is the dominant route in the Indian steel industry, DRI accounts for around 20% of the total installed capacity of the top five primary steel players in India.
- Unlike BF, which relies on coking coal, **DRI uses natural gas as a key input**. A significant portion of India's gas supplies come from the Middle East.
- This could affect the production rates of domestic steel makers that rely on the DRI route.
- The steel industry in India also relies on gas as part of its decarbonisation efforts.

- ☀ The construction sector, which depends on mineral imports from the region, could face supply disruptions.
- ☀ India imported \$483 million worth of **limestone** from West Asia, accounting for 68.5% of its total imports, and \$129 million worth of **gypsum**, representing 62.1% of imports.
- ☀ Both minerals are crucial for the construction ecosystem. Limestone is a key input for cement production, while gypsum is widely used in cement and other construction materials.
- ☀ Any disruption in supplies could push up cement prices and delay infrastructure projects.
- ☀ India imported \$420 million worth of **sulphur** from West Asia, accounting for 65.8% of its imports. Sulphur is used to produce sulphuric acid, an essential input for fertilizers and several chemical industries.
- ☀ Similarly, India imported \$190 million worth of **direct reduced iron (DRI)** from the region, representing 59.1% of its imports. DRI is a key input used in steelmaking.
- ☀ India also imported \$869 million worth of **copper wire** from West Asia, accounting for 50.7% of its total imports.
- ☀ Copper wire is a critical component in power transmission networks, electrical equipment and renewable energy infrastructure, making the sector vulnerable to any disruption in supplies from the region.
- ☀ The conflict could also impact India's **diamond processing industry**.
- ☀ The country imports over 40% of its rough diamonds from West Asia, which are then processed in India's diamond cutting and polishing hubs before being exported as polished diamonds to global markets.

## Rice Fortification Suspended

- The government has decided to temporarily discontinue rice fortification under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) and other allied welfare schemes.
- The decision to discontinue the fortification was taken after a study conducted by **IIT Kharagpur** to assess the shelf life of Fortified Rice Kernels (FRK) and Fortified Rice (FR) under actual storage conditions in diverse agro climatic zones in the country.
- As per the study, factors such as moisture content, storage conditions, temperature, relative humidity and packaging material critically influence the stability and shelf life of FRK and FR.
- They are susceptible to **micronutrient reduction and shortening of shelf life** during prolonged storage and routine handling, eventually limiting the intended nutritional outcomes.
- Considering procurement volumes and annual offtake, **rice remains in storage for two to three years**.

- Against an annual allocation of 372 LMT under PMGKAY and other welfare scheme, the total availability in the central pool is projected at 674 LMT.
- The gap between allocation and availability implies extended storage cycles, worsening the risk of nutrient loss in fortified rice.
- Thus, it has been decided to temporarily discontinue fortification of rice until a more robust and effective nutrient delivery mechanism is developed and operationalised.
- The discontinuation will not result in any reduction in foodgrain entitlements, and will not affect operations under the Public Distribution Scheme (PDS), Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), or the Mid-Day Meal Scheme.



### Rice Fortification

- ◆ The government started rice fortification in **2021** with an aim to distribute fortified rice in a phased manner through all central government schemes by 2024.
- ◆ Fortification is the practice of deliberately increasing an essential micronutrient in food, to improve the nutritional quality of the food and to provide public health benefit with minimal risk to health.
- ◆ It is a cost effective, scientifically proven and a globally recognised approach, to address the challenge of micronutrient deficiencies.
- ◆ Fortified rice is produced by **blending fortified rice kernels with regular rice.**
- ◆ Fortified rice is made as per the standards fixed by the food regulator Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (**FSSAI**), which has prescribed **blending rice with three micronutrients — iron, folic acid and vitamin B12.**

## RELIEF Scheme

The government has launched a Rs 497 crore Resilience & Logistics Intervention for Export Facilitation (RELIEF) scheme under the Export Promotion Mission (EPM).

### Components of the scheme

The RELIEF intervention comprises the following 3 complementary components covering consignments destined to countries in the region such as **United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Israel, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, Iraq, Iran and Yemen.**

- The **first component** (Rs 56 crore) is aimed at exporters who **already have credit insurance cover from ECGC Ltd.** for eligible consignments.
  - They will benefit from **100% risk coverage**, over and above the existing ECGC cover, during the eligible period (February 14, 2026 till March 15, 2026), thereby ensuring enhanced protection without additional financial burden.
  - The **government would reimburse ECGC for compensation** paid in excess of the amount payable under the existing ECGC policy cover.
- The **second component** (Rs 159 crore) is aimed at those exporters who have **not yet opted for ECGC cover** and are looking to export to the affected countries over the next three months (March 16, 2026 till June 15, 2026).

### Need for the scheme

- ◆ Recent developments, including heightened security concerns around the Strait of Hormuz, have led to vessel diversions, longer sailing routes, congestion at transshipment hubs and emergency conflict-linked surcharges.
- ◆ These developments have **increased logistics costs and created operational uncertainty for export consignments** moving through the region.
- ◆ The intervention is aimed at supporting Indian exporters affected by extraordinary freight escalation, heightened insurance premia and war-related export risks arising from disruptions in the Gulf and wider West Asia maritime corridor.
- ◆ It aims to **provide credit insurance cover** for exporters whose goods are stuck due to the West Asia crisis, or who are planning to export to the Gulf over the next few months.
- ◆ **ECGC Ltd. (formerly Export Credit Guarantee Corporation of India Ltd.)**, under the **Ministry of Commerce & Industry**, will be the nodal and implementing agency responsible for verification, claim processing, disbursement and monitoring.
- ◆ ECGC's experience in providing export credit risk cover against commercial and political risks, including war-related contingencies, is expected to ensure credible and timely delivery of assistance.

- It aims to encourage exporters to opt for ECGC credit insurance cover for consignments to the specified countries.
- ECGC would provide **cover up to 95% of losses** faced.
- The **third and largest component** (Rs 282 crore) is **aimed at only MSME exporters that have not availed of ECGC cover** so far, and applies to consignments between February 14, 2026 and March 15, 2026.
  - It provides **partial reimbursement (up to 50%)** with **notified ceilings (up to Rs. 50 lakhs per exporter)**.

### Small Hydro Power Development Scheme

- The Union Cabinet has approved the **Small Hydro Power Development Scheme** for the period **FY 2026–27 to FY 2030–31**, with an outlay of **Rs 2,584.60 crore** to support the installation of Small Hydro Power (SHP) projects with a total capacity of about **1,500 MW**.
- It will help in tapping the small hydro potential in remote and difficult to reach locations.
- SHP projects being decentralized in nature, the requirement of long transmission line is minimal, which also reduces the transmission losses

#### Benefits

- It will generate about **51 lakh person-days of employment** during the construction phase, along with long-term jobs in the operation and maintenance of the projects.
- It would also support socio-economic development in remote areas while being environmentally sustainable, as it avoids large-scale land acquisition, deforestation and displacement.

#### Scheme details

- The scheme will support the development of small hydro projects with **capacities between 1 MW and 25 MW** across different states, with a **special focus on hilly and North Eastern states**, which have significant untapped hydro potential.
- Central financial assistance of **Rs 3.6 crore per MW or 30% of the project cost** (whichever is lower) will be provided for projects in **North Eastern states and districts with international borders**, with a **maximum limit of Rs 30 crore per project**.
- For projects in **other states**, the assistance will be **Rs 2.4 crore per MW or 20% of the project cost** (whichever is lower), subject to a **cap of Rs 20 crore per project**.
- The scheme is expected to attract around Rs 15,000 crore in investments in the small hydro sector, contributing to India's clean energy expansion and boosting economic activity in rural and remote areas.
- The investment will also **rely entirely on indigenous plant and machinery**, supporting the government's Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative.
- In addition, the scheme will encourage states to prepare detailed project reports (DPRs) for around 200 potential projects, creating a future pipeline of small hydro developments.
- A separate allocation of Rs 30 crore has been made to support state and central government agencies in preparing these DPRs.

### Digital Twin for VOC Port

- V.O. Chidambaranar Port Authority (VOCPA) has become the first major port in the country to implement Digital Twin initiative for port management.
- The Digital Twin platform will create a **real-time virtual replica of the port's infrastructure**, operational assets, and maritime ecosystem.
- This will enable enhanced **operational visibility, predictive analytics, and data-driven decision-making** across the port.
- By integrating advanced technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, IoT sensors, GPS tracking, LiDAR mapping, drone imaging, and CCTV networks, the platform will continuously mirror real-time conditions.
- The platform enables **real-time operational monitoring**, providing live visualisation of berth occupancy, vessel movements, crane utilisation, and yard capacity across the port. It will help to reduce the vessel turnaround time by up to 25%.
- It supports **predictive maintenance** of cargo handling equipment through AI-based asset monitoring, helping to minimise equipment downtime and improve operational reliability.
- It facilitates **berth and traffic optimisation** by enabling intelligent scheduling of vessels and cargo operations, thereby reducing congestion and waiting time.

- It will also provide energy and emissions tracking to support **data-driven sustainability management** and include scenario simulation capabilities that allow operators to conduct “what-if” modelling to prepare for peak demand situations and operational disruptions.
- The project supports the government’s vision of digitalisation and technological advancement in the maritime sector to improve efficiency, transparency, and the global competitiveness of Indian ports.



## V.O. Chidambaranar (VOC) Port

- ◆ VOC Port, formerly known as Tuticorin Port, is an artificial, all-weather **major port on the southeast coast of India (Coromandel coast)** in Tamil Nadu.
- ◆ It is one of the country’s key ports on the **Bay of Bengal**, serving as an important gateway for international trade.
- ◆ Named after **V.O. Chidambaram Pillai**, a freedom fighter and pioneer of Indian shipping, the port is strategically positioned to support coastal shipping, transshipment, and maritime trade growth in southern India.

### Initiatives Launched for Orange Economy

- The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting launched **three new initiatives** aimed at strengthening India’s media, broadcasting, and digital sector and promoting the orange economy or the creative economy.
- The **creative economy** includes industries where economic value is generated primarily from creativity, culture, technology, and intellectual property.
- It includes sectors like music, film, design, fashion, publishing, arts, and software development.
- The initiatives include:
  - National AI Skilling Programme;
  - MyWAVES a citizen creator platform on WAVES OTT; and
  - New technology upgrades to enable easier access to DD Free Dish services.

### National AI Skilling Initiative

- ➔ Launched in partnership with **Google and YouTube** and implemented through the **Indian Institute of Creative Technologies (IICT)**, it is aimed at **strengthening AI capabilities** in areas such as animation, visual effects, gaming, comics (AVGC) and media technology.
- ➔ Under the initiative, **15,000 participants** from the creative and media sectors will be trained and will be conducted in two phases.
- ➔ It will support creators, media professionals, students and developers in building future-ready skills and contribute to India’s emergence as a global hub for digital content and innovation.

### MyWaves

- ➔ MyWaves is a new feature within the WAVES OTT platform that will enable citizens to create, upload and share content.
- ➔ It is designed as a structured **platform for user-generated content (UGC)** that will also support participation in national initiatives such as the Create in India Challenge.
- ➔ The platform marks a shift from **content viewing to active content participation**, making WAVES OTT a platform not only for viewing but also for creation.
- ➔ It will support multiple formats including short videos, vertical videos and episodic content, and will offer a **multilingual interface** across Indian languages.
- ➔ It is expected to serve as an important platform for emerging creators and storytellers from across the country.

### New Technology Upgrades

- ➔ To make television viewing simpler and more accessible, television sets have been introduced with built-in satellite tuners.
- ➔ Viewers will be able to watch DD Free Dish channels directly on their television sets **without the need for a separate set-top box**, thereby reducing additional costs and simplifying the viewing experience.
- ➔ The move is expected to improve accessibility, especially in remote and underserved areas.
- ➔ The Ministry has also launched a new, user-friendly advanced Electronic Programme Guide (EPG).
- ➔ The advanced EPG will allow users to easily browse channels and programme schedules in one place through a simple and intuitive interface, making the overall viewing experience more convenient for households across the country.

### International Year of the Woman Farmer

- The United Nations has declared 2026 the International Year of the Woman Farmer (IYWF 2026).

- Women play essential roles across agrifood systems, producing, processing and trading food that sustains families, communities and economies.
- Yet their contributions often go unrecognized, and persistent inequalities limit their access to resources, opportunities and decision making.
- IYWF 2026 highlights these realities, calls for collective action and increased investments to close gender gaps, strengthen women’s livelihoods and promote their leadership across agrifood value chains.
- Closing gender gaps in access to and control over land, finance, technology, education and decision-making enhances the well-being of women and their households, boosts productivity, strengthens resilience to climate change and drives progress towards the SDGs.
- In doing so, the Year aims to contribute to building fairer, more inclusive and sustainable agrifood systems for all.

## Modified UDAN

- The Union Cabinet approved the launch and implementation of the Regional Connectivity Scheme – Modified UDAN for a period of **ten years from 2026-27 to 2035-36** with a total outlay of **Rs 28,840 crore**, a six-fold jump in funding.
- **Funded entirely by the Central Government**, it aims to expand air connectivity to small cities and remote regions that remain underserved or completely unconnected by air.
- The revamped scheme goes beyond airport redevelopment to include sustained support for operations and maintenance.
- The original UDAN scheme was **launched in 2016** to make air travel affordable and improve connectivity to Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities.
- Over nine years, operations commenced on 663 routes connecting 95 airports, heliports, and water aerodromes, with more than 3.41 lakh flights operated, carrying 162.47 lakh passengers.
- The modified scheme builds on this base and expands both its scale and scope across **key components given in figure**.

### 100 new airports from existing airstrips



- The largest chunk of funding, Rs 12,159 crore over eight years, is earmarked for **converting 100 unserved airstrips into functional airports**.
- These are locations that currently have a landing strip but lack the infrastructure, like terminals, security systems, navigation aids, and fuelling facilities needed for regular passenger operations.

### Operations and maintenance support

- Running regional airports is expensive, with limited revenue to offset costs.
- The scheme will provide operations and maintenance (O&M) support of Rs 2,577 crore for three years to around 441 aerodromes, capped at Rs 3.06 crore per annum per airport and Rs 0.90 crore per annum per heliport or water aerodrome.

### 200 modern heliports

- To address connectivity gaps in hilly, remote, island, and aspirational districts, the scheme proposes building 200 modern heliports at approximately Rs 15 crore each. The total outlay is Rs 3,661 crore.
- The heliports are intended to improve last-mile connectivity and emergency response in difficult terrain.

### Viability Gap Funding for airlines

- Airline operators assigned regional routes will receive Viability Gap Funding (VGF) – financial support to make otherwise commercially unviable routes operable.
- A total of Rs 10,043 crore in VGF has been proposed over the scheme’s ten-year period.
- Airlines would receive this subsidy support for specific routes **for five years (extended from three years, earlier)** at a stretch.
- Under the earlier scheme design, these subsidies were not **funded by the exchequer** but through a Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS) levy built into airfares on non-UDAN routes.

## Food Security Index

- The International Institute for Environment & Development (IIED) has released the food security index.

- The study measured how people around the world face being unable to buy good-quality food — or even enough food to survive — following repeated climate-driven shocks.
- The index assessed food security in 162 countries against **four pillars**:
  - Availability of adequate food;
  - Accessibility of food to households, including whether it is affordable;
  - Nutritional value of food and whether people are healthy enough to absorb those nutrients, termed utilisation; and
  - The sustainability, or resilience, of food supply systems.

### Key Findings

- At 1.5°C of warming above the pre-industrial average (1850-1900) lower-income countries will begin to experience serious dietary instability.
- At 2°C, the situation deteriorates sharply, especially in poor and conflict-affected nations where food systems are already fragile. These countries are projected to see steep declines in food availability and dietary diversity.
- Temperature increases will widen the already significant gap in food security between richer and poorer countries, with the **sharpest declines expected in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia**.
- Globally, about 4.56 billion people, nearly 59% of humanity, already lives in countries that fall below the average score of 6.74.
- At 2°C of warming, an additional 291 million people could drop below that threshold, further increasing the number of people struggling to access sufficient and nutritious food.
- Meanwhile, 3.19 billion people, or 41% of the world's population, currently live in countries scoring above the global average.
- Iceland scored the highest at 9.26, followed by Denmark (9.17), Austria (9.15), Ireland (9.13) and Belgium (9.07).
- The lowest scores belonged to Afghanistan (3.31), Madagascar (3.15), Haiti (2.57), the Democratic Republic of Congo (2.51) and Somalia (1.29).
- Even wealthier nations are not insulated from the effects of climate-driven disruptions to farming, imports and supply chains.
- Among G7 countries, none rank in the top five globally, and all are projected to see declines in food security under warming scenarios.
- The United States is expected to see one of the largest drops, while the United Kingdom is projected to experience comparatively smaller declines.

### Indian Scenario

- India is among the large economies most at risk of worsening food insecurity as global temperatures rise, with a steady decline in access to adequate and nutritious food under warming scenarios.
- The report places India's position in the food security index among the **most concerning**. Its baseline score of 5.31 is **well below the global average of 6.74** — and behind countries such as Brazil (6.72), Mexico (6.36) and Indonesia (5.87).
- But the outlook worsens under warming scenarios. India's score is projected to fall to 4.96 at 1.5°C of global warming and further to 4.52 at 2°C.

### Mutual Credit Guarantee Scheme Modified

- The Government has **modified** the Mutual Credit Guarantee Scheme for MSMEs (MCGS- MSME).

- Under the scheme, **National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company Limited** provides **60% guarantee coverage** to Member Lending Institutions for credit facilities of **up to Rs 100 crore** sanctioned to eligible MSMEs for the purchase of equipment and machinery.
- The modifications aim to enhance credit access, expand coverage, reduce compliance and provide targeted incentives to MSMEs.

### PM E-DRIVE Revised

- The government has revised the PM Electric Drive Revolution in Innovative Vehicle Enhancement (PM E-DRIVE) scheme, to **set new deadlines and unit caps** for electric two-wheelers and electric three-wheelers.
- As per the new guidelines, buyers of electric two-wheelers will be eligible for subsidies only if their vehicles are registered on or before July 31, 2026.
- For electric three-wheelers, including e-rickshaws, the cut-off date has been extended further to March 31, 2028.
- The government has also **fixed price ceilings** for vehicles **to qualify for incentives**.
- **Electric two-wheelers** must have an ex-factory price of up to **Rs 1.5 lakh**, while **electric three-wheelers** are capped at **Rs 2.5 lakh**.
- Any vehicle priced above these limits will not be eligible for subsidies.
- Being a fund-limited initiative, the scheme will operate strictly within its total outlay of Rs 10,900 crore.
- If the allocated funds are exhausted before the official end date of March 31, 2028, the scheme or specific segments under it may be closed early.

### MSP Funding Approved For Cotton

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved a funding of Rs 1,718.56 crore to the Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) to meet the minimum support price (MSP) requirements for the cotton season 2023–24.
- The MSP for a quintal of medium staple cotton was Rs 6,620 and for long staple cotton, it was Rs 7,020 in 2023-24 season.
- The Union Government fixes the MSP for **seed cotton (kapas)** based on the recommendations of the **Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP)**.
- **Cotton Corporation of India** is the **central nodal agency** for undertaking MSP operations in cotton.

## Modifications

- The 5% **upfront contribution** has been **made refundable**. 1% of this amount will be returned each year from the fourth year onwards, subject to satisfactory loan performance.
- The **eligibility criteria** has also been expanded to **include service sector MSMEs**.
- The **minimum project cost requirement** towards machinery and equipment has been reduced to 60% from the earlier 75%.
- The **guaranteed tenure** has been set at 10 years, making the scheme more accessible and industry-friendly.

### Special Provisions for Exporters

- **Eligible exporters:** Profitable units having exported at least 25% of their sales turnover in each of previous 3 financial years and satisfying certain export realisation conditions.
- **Guaranteed Loan Amount:** Rs 20 crore.
- **Upfront Contribution:** 2% of loan amount (Max Rs 40 Lacs); 1% each refundable in 4th and 5th year of the guarantee period.
- **Guarantee Coverage:** 75% of the amount in default.



## PM E-DRIVE

- ✘ PM E-DRIVE was launched in October 2024, for the **promotion of electric mobility** in the country for a **period of two years**.
- ✘ Its primary objective is to accelerate the adoption of EVs by providing **upfront incentives** for their purchase, as well as by facilitating the **establishment of essential charging infrastructure for EVs**.
- ✘ It offers subsidies/demand incentives worth Rs 3,679 crore for more than 28 lakh EVs. As of January, 2026, a total of 22.12 lakh EVs have been sold under the scheme, including 19.19 lakh electric two-wheelers and 2.93 lakh electric three-wheelers.
- ✘ Further, the scheme has an allocation of Rs 4,391 crore for deployment of 14,028 electric buses. Out of these, 13,800 e-buses have been allocated in two phases for deployment in seven cities.
- ✘ It also supports deployment of EV charging infrastructure and upgradation of testing facilities. An allocation of Rs 2,000 crore has been made for deployment of EV Public Charging Stations (EVPCS) on a pan-India basis.

- The funding aims to provide **direct price support** to cotton farmers to stabilise cotton prices, prevent distress sales, and ensure remunerative returns to farmers.
- Cotton is one of India's most vital cash crops, sustaining the livelihoods of approximately **60 lakh farmers** and supporting **400–500 lakh people engaged in allied activities**, including processing, trade, and textiles.
- During the 2023–24 cotton season, the area under cultivation was estimated at 114.47 lakh hectares, with production pegged at 325.22 lakh bales, accounting for nearly 25% of global cotton output.

### Cotton Corporation of India (CCI)

- **Established in 1970**, CCI is a **central public sector undertaking (PSU)** under the administrative control of **Ministry of Textiles**.
- Headquartered in Navi Mumbai, its major role is to undertake **price support operations**, whenever market prices of kapas fall below the MSP.
- It also undertakes **commercial purchase operations**, to fulfil the raw material requirement of the domestic textile industry.
- Further, CCI has undertaken several technology-driven and farmer-centric initiatives to enhance the efficiency and transparency of MSP operations.
- These include disseminating MSP-related information, implementing the **Bale Identification and Traceability System (BITS)**, and launching the **Cott-Ally mobile app**, which enables better outreach and service delivery to farmers.

### Anomalous Fall in Gold Prices

Since the start of the war, gold prices have fallen sharply. In India, 24-carat gold, which was trading close to Rs 1.7 lakh per 10 grams in late January, has dropped to around Rs 1.3 lakh per 10 grams.

#### Background

- In most crises over the past two decades, gold has either held its value or risen. Investors generally turn to gold as a safe haven when there is a political crisis, a military crisis, a financial crisis, or an oil crisis.
- During the **2008 financial crisis**, gold surged as banking systems struggled.
- It rose sharply again during the **COVID-19**

### Reasons for the fall in gold prices

#### Rise in oil prices

- However, this time, several factors that usually support gold, low interest rates, and a weaker dollar, have all moved in the opposite direction.
- When the West Asian conflict began, oil prices jumped sharply, crossing \$120 a barrel and breaching \$100 per barrel for the first time since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.
- Before the conflict, inflation had been easing globally, and major central banks had been signalling rate cuts to support slowing economies. The oil shock changed that completely.
- Higher oil prices push up the cost of almost everything, raising fears of inflation. In response, central banks typically raise interest rates to reduce demand.
- While interest rates have not yet risen further, markets now expect rates to stay higher for longer.
- When investors expect interest rates to remain high, government bonds, which pay a fixed return, become more attractive. Gold, which yields no interest, has to compete with that.

#### Competing Treasury Bonds

- Higher expected interest rates also make the dollar-denominated assets like U.S. Treasury bonds more attractive.
- As money flows into these assets, the dollar strengthens — and a stronger dollar makes gold more expensive.

#### Cascade effect

- Lately, the price of gold had increased significantly. When prices fall sharply from such highs, a chain reaction can set in.
- Investors who had set automatic sell orders to limit their losses see those orders trigger.
- That pushes prices down further, triggering more sell orders. The fall in prices feeds on itself.

#### Compounding this is a liquidity crunch amidst fears of a prolonged war and potentially long-lasting oil supply disruption.

**pandemic** as economies shut down and central banks flooded markets with liquidity.

- It rose again, after Russia's **invasion of Ukraine** in 2022.

### Crisis and Gold

- **Interest factor:** Gold does not pay interest, unlike other common assets. So, when returns on other safe assets such as U.S. government bonds rise, gold becomes less attractive because investors can earn a steady income from bonds.
- But when bond yields fall or uncertainty spikes, the reverse happens, and investors move into gold to preserve their wealth.
- **Dollar factor:** Gold is priced in U.S. dollars globally. When the dollar weakens, gold becomes cheaper for buyers using other currencies, pushing up demand and prices.
- A weaker dollar and lower interest rates combined — which was the case in several past global crises — help to push the price of gold.

### LPG Shortage in India

- LPG is a gaseous fuel mix **primarily comprising propane and butane** that is a byproduct of crude oil refining and natural gas processing. It may also contain some propylene, butylene, and isobutylene or isobutene.
- India depends on LPG imports to meet the fuel's needs, and 90% of the imports cross the Strait of Hormuz to reach India.
- The disruption hit quickly unlike in the case of auto fuels where strategic reserves of crude oil and products are equal to two months of consumption.
- The Indian LPG system is **designed for operational flow, not stockpiling**. The International Energy Agency (IEA) has flagged the lack of such storage as an infrastructural weakness in India.

### Rise in Consumption

- India's total LPG consumption a month is **~3 million tonne** making it the **second-largest consumer of LPG in the world**.
- The country has **33 crore domestic LPG connections** out of which some 10 crore were added since 2017 through the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY).
- India's LPG imports increased **threefold from 2011-12 to 2024-25** to some **20 million tonne**, with imports meeting **60% of India's demands**.
- India's import dependency has increased from 47% in 2015 to the current levels.

### Lack of storage

- However, the total storage capacity can feed less than half of that monthly requirement and almost all of it in tanks at **import terminals such as Ennore**.
- In terms of **long-term storage**, India has **two underground caverns** for LPG – **Mangaluru and Visakhapatnam**. The Mangaluru cavern became operational in 2025.
- The **total underground storage** amounts to **1.4 lakh tonne** or **less than two days of consumption**. India's daily LPG consumption stands at some 80,000 tonne with more than 85% going to households.
- The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, in its demand for grants in 2025 in Parliament, said there were no plans for constructing additional caverns, besides the two.

### Global scenario

- Europe can store roughly 25% of total annual gas consumption.

- The European Union imposed storage filling targets for public storage facilities first in 2022, following the outbreak of war in Ukraine.
- These mandate member countries to reach 90% filling levels before the winter, with exceptions for market disruptions and technical constraints.

### **Geological zones for storage**

- India can be broadly divided into **three geological zones relevant for such gas storage**. The most proven is the **Peninsular Shield**—the Archean cratonic basement of granite, gneiss and charnockite underlying about 60% of peninsular India.
- Both Mangaluru and Vishakhapatnam LPG gas caverns sit on this rock.
- The second zone is the **Deccan Traps**—the vast basaltic plateau covering some 5,00,000 square kilometre of western and central India.
- For storage purposes, the traps present challenges. Engineers India Limited, designing a new LPG facility on the west coast, has encountered difficulties.
- The third zone is the **salt formations of Rajasthan’s Bikaner–Barmer belt**. These halite deposits can be used as cavern storage.
- Salt caverns are cheaper and faster to construct, naturally impermeable, and capable of rapid injection and withdrawal.
- A fourth option—depleted gas reservoirs in the Krishna–Godavari, Cambay and Mumbai offshore basins — is under study.

# INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

## Section 301 Investigation into India

- The United States has launched **Section 301(b) investigations** against India and several other economies to assess whether their trade practices harm U.S. commerce.
  - **The 1<sup>st</sup>** investigation was launched over concerns about structural excess manufacturing capacity and overproduction.
    - The probe follows a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that struck down tariffs imposed under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (**IEEPA**).
  - **The 2<sup>nd</sup>** investigation was launched covering 60 countries, including India. This inquiry examines whether countries have adequate measures to prevent forced labour in supply chains.

## About Section 301 of the U.S. Trade Act

- **Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974** allows the U.S. government to investigate foreign trade practices deemed unfair or harmful to U.S. businesses.
- Investigations are conducted by the **Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR)**.
- If violations are confirmed, the U.S. may impose retaliatory tariffs or trade restrictions.

## U.S. Concerns Over India's Manufacturing Capacity

- **Trade Surplus with the U.S.** - The U.S. estimates India's trade surplus with it at \$58 billion in 2025. Indian government data, however, shows that India had a merchandise trade surplus of \$42.2 billion with the U.S. over this period.
- **Sectors Identified by the USTR** - Solar modules; Petrochemicals; Steel; Textiles; Healthcare products; Construction materials; Automobiles.
- **Example of Excess Capacity** - India's solar module production capacity is nearly three times domestic demand, suggesting export-driven production.

## Implications for India

- **Potential Tariff Risks** - Indian export sectors such as steel, petrochemicals, textiles, and automobiles may face higher tariffs.
- **Trade Deal Uncertainty** - The investigation comes amid ongoing negotiations for a bilateral India-U.S. trade agreement. India has indicated that talks may resume after clarity on U.S. tariff policies.
  - The U.S. argues that government-supported overcapacity in partner economies distorts global trade and undermines domestic manufacturing.
- **Export Structure Debate** - Experts note that India's export growth is largely demand-driven and diversified, rather than purely capacity-driven.

## U.S. Legal Tools Used to Impose Tariffs

- **International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), 1977**
  - ✓ Invoked by the Trump administration in February 2025 to impose tariffs.
  - ✓ In February 2026, a U.S. court ruled that the law cannot be used to impose tariffs, limiting its application to sanctions and emergency economic actions.
- **Section 122 of the Trade Act, 1974**
  - ✓ Allows the U.S. President to impose temporary tariffs to address balance-of-payments problems.
  - ✓ Used in February 2026 to impose a 10% tariff on imports from all countries for 150 days, with the option to raise tariffs up to 15%.
- **Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act, 1962**
  - ✓ Permits trade restrictions on national security grounds.
  - ✓ Previously used to impose sector-specific tariffs on steel, aluminium, and auto components.
  - ✓ Could potentially be extended to other sectors.
- **Section 301 of the Trade Act, 1974**
  - ✓ Enables the U.S. to investigate unfair or discriminatory foreign trade practices.
  - ✓ Allows retaliatory measures such as tariffs or trade restrictions if violations affecting U.S. commerce are found.
  - ✓ Investigations require evidence and follow a formal legal process.
- **Section 302(b) of the Trade Act, 1974**
  - ✓ Allows the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) to self-initiate investigations under Section 301.
  - ✓ Used to examine foreign policies or practices that may harm U.S. economic interests.

- **Need for Close Monitoring** - The outcome of the investigation could significantly affect India's export competitiveness in the U.S. market.

### Background: India–U.S. Trade Relations

- India and the United States maintain one of the world's largest bilateral trade relationships.
- In **2024–25, bilateral trade reached \$131.84 billion**, with the U.S. remaining India's largest trading partner for the fourth consecutive year.
- Despite growing economic ties, disputes occasionally arise over tariffs, market access, and industrial policies.

### Current Tariff Situation in the United States

- Earlier, the U.S. imposed **reciprocal tariffs of up to 50%** on Indian goods in August 2025, later reduced to 18% until February 2026.
- In February 2026, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against using the **International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA)** to impose such tariffs.
- Following the ruling, the U.S. imposed a **temporary 10% tariff** on imports from all countries for 150 days under **Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974**.

### Conclusion

- The U.S. Section 301 investigation reflects rising concerns in Washington about global manufacturing overcapacity and trade imbalances.
- While the probe could lead to tariffs affecting several Indian industries, its final impact will depend on the findings of the investigation and the progress of ongoing India–U.S. trade negotiations.

### US Strike on Kharg Island

- The United States carried out a major bombing raid on Kharg Island in Iran, targeting military installations.
- The attack marks a significant escalation in the West Asia conflict and has raised concerns about disruptions to global oil supply.

### Geographical Location of Kharg Island

- Kharg Island is a **small coral island in the northern Persian Gulf**, about 25–30 km off Iran's mainland coast. The island is ~8 km long and covers around 20 sq. km.
- Its landscape is dominated by oil storage tanks, export jetties, pipelines, and an airstrip.
- Historically part of regional trade routes, the island was once controlled by **Dutch and British forces** before becoming Iran's main energy export hub.
- Pipelines connect the major Iranian oil fields such as **Ahvaz, Marun, and Gachsaran** to the Kharg island, enabling crude export through deep-water terminals.
- Much of Iran's coastline is shallow. Kharg Island's deep-water jetties allow very large crude carriers to dock and load oil.



## China's Xiaokang Villages Near LAC

China has constructed 72% of its 628 **Xiaokang** ("well-off") villages near the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in India's northeastern states — with 90% of these concentrated opposite Arunachal Pradesh.

### Xiaokang Border Defence Villages

- China has been constructing 628 Xiaokang villages along India's borders with the Tibet Autonomous Region for over five years.
- Built all along the LAC — including Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh borders.
- Structures are mostly double-storey, large and spacious buildings.
- Construction for most planned villages has already been completed.
- **Purpose: Dual-Use Infrastructure**
  - Exact purposes remain **officially unclear**.
  - Widely understood to be **dual-use** — serving both **civil and military purposes**.
- Though aggressively constructed since 2019, they remained vacant for a long time.
- Since late 2023, Chinese nationals have started occupying several villages — particularly opposite:
  - Lohit Valley, Arunachal Pradesh
  - Tawang sector, Arunachal Pradesh

### India's Response

- **Vibrant Villages Programme (VVP)**
- **Border Infrastructure Development**
  - India has also been strengthening its overall border infrastructure:
    - ♣ Construction of new roads, bridges, and helipads.
    - ♣ Development of alternate routes to the LAC.
    - ♣ Improving inter-valley connectivity in the northeast.

{For more on VVP refer- The Recitals Fe 2026}

## Balendra Shah Becomes Nepal's Youngest PM

- Balendra Shah (Balen), 35, was sworn in as Nepal's new Prime Minister— making him the youngest PM in Nepal's recent political history.
- He was sworn in by President Ram Chandra Poudel in Kathmandu, ending the political transition triggered by last September's Gen Z protests that overthrew the K.P. Sharma Oli government.
- **How Did Nepal Get Here? — The Gen Z Background**
  - Last year, Nepal's tech-savvy Gen Z youth took to the streets demanding:
    - ♣ Clean governance and accountability
    - ♣ An end to corruption perpetuated by the ageing political class
    - ♣ A generational shift in Nepali politics
  - The protests overthrew the Oli government and installed an interim dispensation led by former Chief Justice Sushila Karki.
  - Shah's elevation is seen as a direct outcome of this democratic awakening.

## Restructuring India-Nepal Ties



**India's Current Position**

- India has been quick to extend goodwill without being loud or patronizing.
- India was not an issue during the election campaign — a positive sign.
- In recent years, India-Nepal relations have focused on the right priorities: development, infrastructure, digital connectivity, and energy.

**The Wider Regional Pattern**

- India must view Nepal's transformation as part of a wider regional phenomenon — similar youth-led agitations have occurred in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, sometimes toppling pro-India figures.
- Labelling new leaders as anti-India based on past legacies is no longer justified — Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have shown pragmatic readiness to cooperate with India despite earlier perceptions.
- India must adapt its neighbourhood policy to this new political reality.

**What Needs to Change**

The India-Nepal relationship has been trapped in the shadows of the British India legacy for far too long. Both sides must:

- Discard old mindsets
- Address long-standing irritants with fresh approaches
- Prioritise people-centric policies that keep pace with popular expectations



### Iran Strikes Diego Garcia

- Iran launched two intermediate-range ballistic missiles at Diego Garcia — located ~4,000 km from Iran in the Indian Ocean.
- This marks one of Tehran's **longest-range strike attempts ever**, escalating the West Asia conflict far beyond its regional boundaries.

### Iran's Broader Escalation Strategy

- The Diego Garcia strike fits into a wider pattern of Iranian escalation:
  - Drone strikes on Kuwait's Mina Al-Ahmadi refinery and other Gulf energy infrastructure
  - Warnings to countries hosting US forces
  - Signals that Iranian targets could extend beyond traditional battlefields
- This points to a strategy combining conventional missile strikes with asymmetric warfare threats — aimed at widening the geographic and psychological scope of the conflict.

### Missile Used: Khorramshahr-4

- **Type** - Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missile (IRBM)
- **Fuel** - Liquid-fuelled
- **Design origin** - North Korean and Soviet systems
- **Key feature** - Manoeuvrable re-entry
- **Assessed range** - Potentially exceeds 4,000 km (previously undemonstrated)

### Missile Defence: The SM-3 System

- Interception was attempted using the **SM-3 interceptor on a US Navy warship**.
- Uses a "hit-to-kill" approach — destroys missiles through kinetic force, not explosives.

### Ras Laffan Under Fire

- Iranian missiles struck **Ras Laffan Industrial City, Qatar** — home to the world's biggest LNG facility — hours after Israel hit **South Pars**, the world's largest natural gas field shared between Iran and Qatar.
- The attack has major implications for global LNG supply and India's energy security.
- Ras Laffan accounts for roughly **one-fifth of global LNG supply** — its production, liquefaction, and export units are all concentrated there.

### Why It Matters for India?

- India imports ~88% of crude oil and ~50% of its gas needs.
- Qatar supplies ~one-third of India's LPG.
- Over Two-fifths of India's LNG comes from Qatar — almost entirely from Ras Laffan.
- In 2024–25, India imported 27 million tonnes of LNG; 11.2 million tonnes (41.4%) came from Qatar.

### Composition of LPG and LNG

- Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) is mainly a mixture of **propane and butane**, produced as a byproduct of crude oil refining and natural gas processing. It may also contain small amounts of other hydrocarbons.
- In contrast, Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) is primarily **methane**, derived from natural gas.
- **Liquefaction Process and Storage**
  - LPG becomes liquid under moderate pressure or low temperatures, making it relatively easy to store and transport.
  - LNG, however, requires **extreme cooling** below  $-160^{\circ}\text{C}$  and must be stored in specialised cryogenic tanks, making its handling more complex and energy-intensive.
- **Volume and Transportation Advantage**
  - Both fuels are liquefied to reduce volume for transport.
  - LPG reduces to about **1/260th** of its gaseous volume, while LNG shrinks further to about **1/600th**, enabling efficient long-distance transportation, especially where pipelines are not feasible.
- **Usage and Applications**
  - **LPG** is widely used for cooking, heating, and some industrial applications, and also as a vehicle fuel in certain regions.
  - **LNG** itself has limited direct use but is mainly transported and then converted back into natural gas, which is used for cooking, transport (CNG), and industries such as fertilisers, power generation, refineries, and petrochemicals.

### Changes in India's FDI Policy for Land Bordering Countries

- The Union Cabinet has approved a **partial relaxation** of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) **restrictions under Press Note 3 (2020)** for countries sharing land borders with India, including China.
- The easing allows **limited investments in selected manufacturing sectors**, while restrictions remain in sensitive sectors such as semiconductors.

## Key Features of the New Relaxation under Press Note 3 (PN3)

- **Sector-specific opening**
  - FDI from neighbouring countries will now be allowed in **select** manufacturing sectors such as:
    - ♣ Capital goods
    - ♣ Electronic capital goods
    - ♣ Electronic components
    - ♣ Solar manufacturing inputs (polysilicon, ingot-wafer)
- **Strategic sectors excluded** - Sensitive sectors like semiconductors remain restricted.
- **Investment threshold** - Investments with up to 10% beneficial ownership from land-border countries will be permitted through the automatic route.
- **Indian control requirement** - Majority ownership and control must remain with Indian residents or entities.
- **Faster approvals** - Government will process investment proposals within 60 days.
- **Oversight mechanism** - A Committee of Secretaries (CoS) led by the Cabinet Secretary will review sectors eligible for relaxation.
- **Beneficial ownership scrutiny** - Investments will be evaluated using anti-money laundering standards for beneficial ownership.

## Press Note 3

- Press Note 3 amended India's FDI policy to ensure stricter scrutiny of investments from neighbouring countries.
- Key provisions:
  - ✓ **Government approval mandatory** for any investment from countries sharing land borders with India.
  - ✓ Investments where the **beneficial owner belongs to such countries** also require approval.
  - ✓ Applies to investors from **China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar, Bhutan and Afghanistan**.
  - ✓ The main objective was to **prevent opportunistic takeovers of Indian companies** and protect national security.

### Why Press Note 3 Was Introduced?

- Introduced in April 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- There were concerns that foreign investors could acquire financially weakened Indian firms at low valuations.
- Security concerns intensified after the Galwan Valley clash (2020) between India and China.
- Although applicable to all neighbouring countries, the policy was primarily aimed at regulating Chinese investments, especially in Indian startups and technology firms.

### Reasons for Relaxing the Restrictions

- **Need for capital and technology** - India requires investment and technology transfer to strengthen manufacturing sectors such as electronics and solar equipment.
- **Policy recommendations** - A high-level committee chaired by **NITI Aayog member Rajiv Gauba** recommended easing restrictions.
- **Economic Survey recommendation** - The **Economic Survey 2023-24** suggested Chinese investment could improve India's export competitiveness.
- **Impact on global investors** - PN3 also affected global venture capital and private equity funds that had **minor Chinese ownership stakes**.
- **Supply chain pressures** - Global disruptions and geopolitical tensions have highlighted the need to **strengthen domestic manufacturing capacity**.

### Gradual Normalisation of India–China Economic Engagement

- The move indicates a cautious and calibrated approach toward economic engagement with China. Recent developments include:
  - Easing of business visa procedures for Chinese workers
  - Joint ventures in electronics manufacturing (e.g., Dixon Technologies with Longcheer)
  - Diplomatic steps such as resumption of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra & restoration of direct flights

### India Supplying Diesel to Bangladesh

- India has supplied 5,000 metric tonnes of diesel to Bangladesh to help address a petroleum shortage caused by disruptions in global energy supplies amid the U.S.-Israel-Iran conflict.
- The move reflects a positive development in India–Bangladesh bilateral relations.
  - The diesel supply comes shortly after Tarique Rahman became the Prime Minister of Bangladesh.

- The supply was transported through the **India–Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline**.
- **India–Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline**
  - The Friendship Pipeline project began in 2017–18 and became operational in 2023.
  - It allows direct transfer of diesel from India to Bangladesh.
  - The pipeline has additional capacity, enabling increased supplies depending on demand and availability.
- **Longstanding Energy Trade**
  - Bangladesh has been importing diesel from **Numaligarh Refinery** on a commercial basis since 2015.
  - Future supplies will depend on fuel availability in India and supply dynamics.

### India Sends Humanitarian Aid to Afghanistan

- India dispatched a 2.5-ton consignment of medical supplies and equipment to Kabul following a deadly airstrike on a drug rehabilitation centre in the Afghan capital.
  - A large drug rehabilitation hospital in Kabul was struck by Pakistan. The facility was a 2,000-bed complex, significant portions of which were destroyed.
- The shipment carried: Emergency medicines; Medical disposables; Medical kits and equipment — all intended to support treatment and recovery for those injured in the attack.
- **Significance**
  - India's swift humanitarian response underscores its continued engagement with Afghanistan despite the Taliban's takeover in 2021.
  - It reflects India's policy of maintaining people-to-people ties and humanitarian presence in Afghanistan, even in the absence of formal diplomatic recognition of the Taliban government.
  - The aid also signals India's concern about instability in its extended neighbourhood, particularly given the volatile Pakistan-Afghanistan dynamic that has direct implications for regional security.

### India Extends Pulses Import Agreement with Myanmar

India has decided to extend its pulses import agreement with Myanmar for another **5 years beyond 2025-26**.

- Additionally, an extra **1 lakh tonnes of Tur dal** has been permitted from Myanmar for 2026-27, over and above the previously agreed quantity of 1 lakh tonnes.

#### Background: The Original Agreement

- In June 2021, India and Myanmar signed an MoU to promote trade in Urad and Tur dals. Under the agreement:
  - India committed to importing 2.5 lakh metric tonnes of Urad and 1 lakh tonnes of Tur annually from Myanmar.
  - The agreement covered five years — **2021-22 to 2025-26**.
- The agreement was set to expire at the end of March 2026.

#### Why Was the Agreement Extended?

##### ◆ Domestic Production Shortfall

- India's annual pulses demand stands at 28–29 million tonnes, but domestic production has consistently remained at only 24–25 million tonnes over the last three years — leaving a structural gap that imports must fill.

##### ● Specific production declines in 2025-26:

- ▶ Tur production estimated to fall to 3.45 million tonnes from 3.64 million tonnes in 2024-25
- ▶ Urad production estimated to fall to 1.74 million tonnes from 2.24 million tonnes in 2024-25

##### ◆ Global Supply Chain Disruptions

- The ongoing U.S.-Israel war with Iran has caused significant global supply chain disruptions, posing threats to fuel and fertiliser security.
- In this context, securing a stable, nearby source of pulses through the Myanmar agreement is being seen as a proactive food security measure.

- ◆ This agreement also reinforces **India's strategic engagement with Myanmar** — a neighbour with whom India maintains ties despite the military coup of 2021 — recognising the importance of geographic proximity and supply reliability in essential commodity trade.

## India Ships Fuel to Sri Lanka

- India sent a shipment of 38,000 metric tonnes of petroleum to Sri Lanka, as the island nation faced fuel shortages and panic buying due to supply disruptions caused by the ongoing West Asia conflict.
- The move reflects India's **Neighbourhood First policy** and **MAHASAGAR Vision**. India has always acted as a first responder for regional partners in crisis.
  - MAHASAGAR (Maritime and Holistic Approach for Security and Growth Across Regions) reflects India's broader Indian Ocean neighbourhood outreach.
- The gesture is reminiscent of India's response during **Sri Lanka's 2022 economic crisis**, when India extended approximately **US\$ 4 billion** in debt relief, currency swaps, loans, and grants.

## India-Finland Elevate Ties to Strategic Partnership in Digitalisation and Sustainability

PM Modi and Finnish President Alexander Stubb held bilateral talks in New Delhi, elevating India-Finland relations to a "Strategic Partnership in Digitalisation and Sustainability".

- The visit resulted in concrete agreements across technology, trade, education, and sustainability.

### The Strategic Partnership: What It Covers?

- Newly elevated partnership focuses on:
  - Artificial Intelligence and 6G telecommunications
  - Clean energy and quantum computing
  - Defence, space, semiconductors, and critical minerals
  - Ensuring trustworthy technologies and resilient supply chains globally



### Historical Examples of India-Finland Cooperation

- Nokia mobile phones and telecom networks connecting millions across India.
- World's highest railway bridge over the Chenab River — built with Finnish architects.
- World's largest bamboo-to-bioethanol refinery at Numaligarh, Assam (Established with Finland's partnership)

## PM Modi's Statement on West Asia Conflict

- PM Modi addressed the Lok Sabha during the Budget Session, outlining India's position on the escalating West Asia conflict.

- His statement carried five key diplomatic signals touching upon energy security, the Indian diaspora, and India's foreign policy approach.
- Choosing Parliament as the platform is itself significant — it reflects the gravity of the crisis and its direct impact on ordinary citizens' lives, including supply chain disruptions affecting everyday goods.

### India's Strategic Silence — Reading the Diplomatic Signals

- Perhaps the most significant aspect of PM Modi's statement was what he did NOT say:
  - No condemnation of US or Israeli actions;
  - No condolences expressed for the Iranian Supreme Leader — a silence noted in Tehran.
- This **deliberate ambiguity** reflects India's pragmatic foreign policy — a careful balancing act to protect national interests without alienating any major player.
- This approach is described as "strategic autonomy" — avoiding sides while actively engaging all parties diplomatically.

## Economic Impact on India

### ● The Strait of Hormuz — A Critical Chokepoint

- ▶ Approximately one-fifth of the world's energy supply passes through the Strait.
- ▶ PM described any closure as "unacceptable" — underlining its centrality to India's trade and energy needs.
- ▶ Several Indian commercial ships and seafarers are directly affected.

### ● Energy Security Measures

- ▶ India imports 60% of its LPG requirements — uncertain supply has prompted a push for domestic LPG production.
- ▶ Government ensuring smooth supply of petrol and diesel across the country.
- ▶ Active monitoring of Gulf shipping routes; several stuck ships have since arrived in India.
- ▶ India currently holds a Strategic Petroleum Reserve of 53+ lakh metric tonnes.
- ▶ Work underway to expand this to 65+ lakh metric tonnes, in addition to reserves held by oil companies.
- ▶ Over the past 11 years, India has expanded its energy import sources from 27 to 41 countries — reducing dependence on any single region, a strategy proving its value in the current crisis.

## Indians Affected by the Conflict

### ● The Gulf Diaspora

- ▶ Approximately 1 crore (10 million) Indians live and work in Gulf countries
- ▶ Primarily breadwinners from Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and West Bengal
- ▶ Prolonged conflict threatens their livelihoods, remittances, and safety

### ● Stranded Seafarers

- ▶ Around 700 Indian seafarers aboard approximately 22 ships are currently stuck in the Strait of Hormuz
- ▶ Indians form a significant portion of crew members on commercial ships in these waters

### ● Evacuation Efforts

- ▶ 3,75,000+ Indians have safely returned to India since the war began
- ▶ Approximately 1,000 Indians evacuated from Iran, including 700+ young medical students
- ▶ CBSE has cancelled Class 10 and 12 board exams in Gulf countries and is working to ensure educational continuity

### ● Consular Mechanisms Activated

- ▶ All Indian missions in affected countries providing continuous help and advisories
- ▶ 24/7 control rooms and emergency helplines established both in India and in affected countries

# SUMMITS AND ORGANISATIONS

## Indian Seafarers Face Rising Abandonment Risks Amid West Asia Conflict

- The ongoing West Asia conflict has increased risks for commercial shipping near the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, exposing seafarers to attacks and operational disruptions.
  - Between 2025 and 2026, more than **100 Indian sailors** were repatriated from 14 stranded vessels in places like Sharjah (UAE), Tartus (Syria), Shinas (Oman), and Qatar.

## Protection and Support Mechanisms

- **International Support**
  - The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) assists abandoned sailors through wage negotiations, legal support, and repatriation.
- **Assistance from Indian Authorities**
  - Indian sailors can contact the Directorate General of Shipping (DG Shipping) through a 24-hour helpline for embassy support, emergency funds, and grievance redressal.
  - Complaints can also be filed through the DG Shipping website.
- **Preventive Measures**
  - Seafarers are advised to verify Recruitment and Placement Service Licensees (RPSL).
  - They should avoid paying recruitment fees to agents and ensure their employment contracts are legitimate.

## Meaning of Seafarer Abandonment



- Seafarer abandonment occurs when shipowners stop supporting crew members, leaving them without wages, food, medical care, shelter, or means to return home.
- The **Maritime Labour Convention (MLC)**, 2006 defines abandonment as the failure of shipowners to meet these essential responsibilities.
- Abandoned seafarers often remain trapped on vessels because visa restrictions or port regulations prevent them from going ashore.
- Many cannot leave due to financial burdens from recruitment fees or training costs already paid.

## Causes of Seafarer Abandonment

- **Financial and Operational Pressures**
  - ✓ Shipowners may abandon vessels and crews due to rising operational costs, freight market volatility, heavy debts, bankruptcy, or geopolitical disruptions.
- **Flag of Convenience (FOC) System**
  - ✓ Ships are often registered in countries offering low taxes, weak labour laws, and lenient regulations.
  - ✓ This system allows shipowners to avoid strict safety and labour standards.
  - ✓ It also hides real ownership, making accountability difficult.
  - ✓ Around 30% of the global merchant fleet operates under FOC flags, and 90% of abandoned ships in 2024 were registered under such flags, with Panama recording the highest cases in 2025.
- **Impact of the West Asia Crisis**
  - ✓ The conflict has increased financial stress and operational risks for shipping companies, raising the likelihood of further abandonment cases.

## Why Indian Seafarers Are More Vulnerable?

- Seafaring is seen as a high-paying opportunity for people from smaller towns and rural areas, attracting many Indian recruits.
- Rogue recruitment agents often charge high fees for fake placements or forged certificates, leaving sailors financially vulnerable.
- Regulatory gaps, including easy access to Continuous Discharge Certificates (CDC) through short courses, create unrealistic employment expectations.
- A large supply of seafarers compared to available jobs forces many to accept work on poorly regulated or high-risk vessels.

**Conclusion:** Strengthening regulation of recruitment, enforcement of maritime labour standards, and international cooperation is essential to protect seafarers' rights and welfare.

## Maritime Law and Warfare: Rules Governing Naval Conflict

- A US submarine torpedoed the Iranian warship IRIS Dena near the coast of Sri Lanka while it was returning from the International Fleet Review and **MILAN-2026** naval exercise hosted by India near Visakhapatnam.
- The attack, which killed at least 80 sailors, has expanded the US-Israel–Iran conflict into the Indian Ocean region and triggered debate on maritime security and international naval law.

- The strike occurred close to Sri Lanka’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). This allowed nearby authorities to initiate search and rescue operations quickly.

### Expert Views on the Incident

- **Absence of Fixed War Zones at Sea**

- Experts note that maritime warfare does not have **clearly defined war zones**.
- Once outside territorial waters, ships in international waters are governed primarily by international law.

- **Legal Debate on the Use of Force**

- Critics argue that attacking a foreign warship on the high seas may violate international law, unless justified under self-defence or ongoing armed conflict as recognised under Article 51 of the UN Charter.

- **Escalation of the Conflict**

- Analysts view the incident as a major escalation of the US-Israel–Iran conflict, particularly because the warship was reportedly on a peaceful passage outside the primary conflict zone.

### Conclusion

- The torpedo attack on the Iranian warship highlights the complex legal and strategic issues surrounding naval warfare in international waters.
- It underscores the challenges of balancing maritime security, international law, and geopolitical tensions, especially as conflicts increasingly extend into critical sea lanes such as the Indian Ocean region.



#### ➤ Role of UNCLOS

- ➔ Maritime governance is primarily regulated by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).
- ➔ UNCLOS mainly governs peacetime maritime activities and provides limited guidance on conduct during armed conflict.
- ➔ The United States is not a signatory to UNCLOS.

#### ➤ Law of Naval Warfare

- ➔ During armed conflicts, laws of naval warfare operate alongside UNCLOS.
- ➔ Under these rules, warships belonging to a belligerent state may be treated as legitimate military targets, even if not directly engaged in combat.

#### ➤ Provisions of the UN Charter

- ➔ The UN Charter regulates the use of force in international waters.
- ➔ Article 2(4) prohibits the use of force between states.
- ➔ Article 51 allows military action in self-defence after an armed attack.
- ➔ The UN Security Council may also authorise the use of force under Chapter VII, though approval is difficult due to the veto power of permanent members.

### BRICS and Science, Technology & Innovation (STI) Cooperation

India holds the **BRICS Presidency in 2026** under the theme *"Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability"*, positioning it to deepen scientific partnerships within the expanded grouping and lead reforms in the STI cooperation framework.

#### What is BRICS and Why Does it Matter?

- BRICS — comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa — represents a significant share of global GDP, population, natural resources, and scientific capacity.
- The grouping seeks to challenge Western hegemony and build a **multipolar world order**.
- In 2023, **BRICS+** was launched to make the forum more inclusive, expanding membership to include Saudi Arabia, Egypt, UAE, Ethiopia, Indonesia, and Iran.
- While BRICS's positions on global finance are well known, its cooperation in **Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI)** remains less publicised.

## Challenges and Concerns

### • Innovation Gap Among Members

- When compared to countries like South Korea, BRICS nations show relatively lower Gross Domestic Expenditure on R&D (GERD) — with China being the only exception.
- Member countries excluding China have significant catching up to do across innovation indicators.

### • Heterogeneity of BRICS+ Members

- The expanded grouping includes countries with widely varying levels of economic development and scientific capacity.

- Experts believe reconciling these differing interests is difficult.
- Participation from new members remains uneven — among the latest additions, **only Egypt and Iran** joined the call for proposals issued in December 2025.

### • Limited Funding and Scope

- Although competition for funding is intense, total funding available remains modest.
- The current framework offers far fewer options compared to the EU's wide variety of STI programmes.

### • No Permanent Coordination Mechanism

- The current system rotates the lead role annually with the presidency — a structure not suited for long-term scientific cooperation.
- There is no permanent secretariat or central fund management body.

### • Limited Research on STI Governance

- Research into STI cooperation among BRICS nations itself remains limited, and the existing mechanism lacks a framework for regular data-driven study to guide member countries.

## India's Opportunity in 2026

- As **BRICS Chair in 2026**, India has a strategic opportunity to lead the transition towards a more effective, agile, and credible STI cooperation framework.
- With its strong scientific institutions (CSIR, DBT), IT capabilities, and experience in multilateral diplomacy, India is well-placed to champion reforms that could enhance BRICS's legitimacy in the global arena and strengthen the collective voice of the Global South in science and technology governance.

## Evolution of STI Cooperation within BRICS

- STI cooperation has been part of the BRICS agenda since its early years, formally recognised in 2011 and consolidated through ministerial meetings.
- A pivotal **2015 MoU** established STI as a core strategic pillar, providing the institutional framework for collaborative research and capacity-building.
- **Key milestones in this evolution:**
  - **2017–2020 Action Plan** — The Science, Technology, Innovation and Entrepreneurship Partnership (STIEP) Working Group implemented programmes on entrepreneurship, youth and women in STI, technology transfer, and business incubators.
  - **BRICS Technology Transfer Centre (TTC)** — Created policy frameworks and institutional links for cross-border technology commercialisation, though large-scale commercialisation remains limited.
  - **iBRICS initiative** — Reflects a clear shift towards innovation-driven and technology-enabled ecosystems
  - **2021 Intergovernmental Agreement** on space cooperation.
  - **BRICS Institute of Future Networks** — Significant progress in ICT and High Performance Computing (HPC).
  - **2025 Declaration on AI** — Elevated Artificial Intelligence from a sub-theme to a **central pillar of multilateral governance**, envisioning AI governance that is equitable, inclusive, and development-oriented.

## How STI Cooperation is Structured?

- BRICS Ministers of Science, Technology, and Innovation meet once a year to approve and sign strategic documents.
- Within each member country, one or two lead agencies coordinate activities, issue calls for proposals, and prepare project lists during their presidency.
- The **China-BRICS Research Centre on New Quality Productive Forces**, recently inaugurated in Beijing, serves as an international platform for academic exchange and technological research.

## UN Recognises Transatlantic Slave Trade as 'Gravest Crime Against Humanity'

- The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) voted to recognise the enslavement of Africans during the transatlantic slave trade as the "**gravest crime against humanity**".
- The resolution — proposed by Ghana — also urged UN member states to consider apologising for the slave trade and contributing to a reparations fund.
- Unlike UN Security Council resolutions, **UNGA resolutions are not legally binding** — but they carry significant **moral and political weight** as expressions of global opinion.

### What the Resolution Calls For?

- Member states to consider apologising for the slave trade
- Contributions to a **reparations fund** (no specific amount mentioned)
- Return of cultural artefacts looted during the colonial era to their countries of origin
- Acknowledgement that consequences of slavery persist in the form of racial inequalities and underdevelopment affecting Africans and people of African descent worldwide

### The Reparations Debate — Broader Context

- The campaign for reparations has gained significant momentum in recent years globally.
- Advocates argue slavery's legacy persists through racial discrimination, economic exclusion, and underdevelopment.
- Critics argue there are legal ambiguities around who owes reparations, to whom, and how much.
- The resolution does not specify a monetary amount — it is a political and moral signal, not a legal obligation.

## World Buddhist Peace Conference 2026

- Hyderabad hosted the inaugural of the World Buddhist Peace Conference 2026.
- The conference brought together ministers, monks, scholars, and delegates from over 20 countries to advance dialogue on peace, reconciliation, and ethical leadership.
- The summit was themed around Buddhist approaches to conflict resolution, reconciliation, and healing.
- It was organised by the Buddhavanam project of the Telangana Tourism Development Corporation in collaboration with international Buddhist institutions.

## Egypt's Nabil Fahmy Named Arab League Chief

- The Council of the League of Arab States officially approved the appointment of former Egyptian Foreign Minister Nabil Fahmy as the next Secretary-General.
- Fahmy is set to officially assume the role on July 1, 2026, for a five-year term. He will succeed the current chief, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, whose second term concludes on June 30.

*{For detailed discussion on Arab League, refer The Recitals – January 2026}*

# DEFENSE AND SECURITY

## India Declared "Naxal-Free"

- Union Home Minister Amit Shah declared India "**Naxal-free**" while replying to a debate in Lok Sabha on 'Efforts to free the country from Left Wing Extremism (LWE)' — a day before his self-imposed deadline of March 31, 2026 for eliminating Maoist violence.
- He announced that "Naxalism has been more or less wiped out from Bastar" — once the heart of the Maoist stronghold in Chhattisgarh.

## Ground-Level Success: State-by-State Breakdown

- The Politburo and central command structure of CPI (Maoist) have been "almost completely dismantled".



## Development as a Parallel Strategy: Bastar as a Case Study

- Minister cited Bastar's transformation as evidence of the government's twin approach of security and development:
  - Schools constructed in every village
  - Ration shops established
  - Aadhaar cards, ration cards, and 5 kg free ration distributed
  - Infrastructure development that was previously blocked by "red terror" is now reaching remote areas

## Managing the Vacuum After Maoist Decline

- **The Key Risk** - As Maoist influence fades, the primary risk is **not their return** but the emergence of **new alienation or criminal networks** in areas where they once controlled power and resources.
- **Government Response: Legacy Thrust Districts**
  - ✓ Government has identified 31 "Legacy Thrust" districts for continued security and development support to prevent relapse.
  - ✓ **Development as the Long-Term Solution**
    - Effective delivery of roads, schools, hospitals, and basic services is critical.
    - Past initiatives — infrastructure expansion in Andhra Pradesh, CRPF field hospitals in Chhattisgarh — showed that when the state delivers, people respond positively even in conflict zones.
  - ✓ **Building Local Institutions**
    - Sustainable transition requires replacing external security dominance with local governance structures:
      - ▶ Recruiting locals into police and administration
      - ▶ Expanding police stations
      - ▶ Ensuring functioning schools, healthcare, and grievance redress systems
      - ▶ Success depends on strong political will and responsive bureaucracy

## Can Maoism Rise Again

- **Why a Full Revival Is Unlikely**
  - ✓ Better connectivity, roads, mobile networks, and social media have increased awareness and aspirations.
  - ✓ Earlier, Maoists thrived by dominating remote areas — this advantage has now eroded.
  - ✓ The movement has weakened from within:
    - ▶ Declining ideological strength
    - ▶ Infiltration of non-committed elements
    - ▶ Failure to attract educated youth
- **Inequality: A Continuing Risk Factor**
  - ✓ Rising inequality and visible disparities could still create space for far-left ideas
  - ✓ Future threat may not be armed insurgency but issue-based, non-violent or low-intensity radicalism in urban and peri-urban areas — focused on:
    - ▶ Land rights
    - ▶ Environmental concerns
    - ▶ Job insecurity
- **The Role of State Legitimacy**
  - ✓ With access to multiple viewpoints through digital media, people are less likely to see violence as the only solution.
  - ✓ However, the state's credibility and governance — not just its security strength — will determine whether Maoist-like spaces re-emerge.

## The Scale of the Problem Inherited

- At its peak, 12 states had turned into a Red Corridor with no rule of law.
- 12 crore people lived in poverty for years under Maoist influence.
- 20,000 people killed — including 5,000 security personnel — due to Maoist violence.

## Missile Interceptors in the U.S.–Iran War

- Fresh hostilities have broken out between a U.S.-led coalition (Israel and UAE) and Iran, activating a newly upgraded regional air defence network more advanced than what was used during the June 2025 "Twelve-Day War."
- The Twelve-Day War was a high-intensity conflict where Israel and the US launched precision strikes against Iran's nuclear facilities and military leadership, following a breakdown in nuclear negotiations.

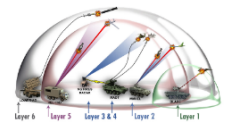
### About Missile Defence System

- It uses satellites and ground radars to spot threats, command centres to analyse and decide responses, and interceptors (counter-missiles) to destroy the incoming missile mid-air.

## Iran's Missile Defence Capabilities

- **Bavar-373 (Sayyad-4B missile)** - Iran's most advanced system. Claims to intercept targets beyond 300 km range. Its ability to detect stealth aircraft is now being questioned — alliance strikes have hit Tehran despite it.
- **Arman System** - Newly unveiled. Designed for medium range ballistic missiles with 360° radar coverage.
- **Sevom-e-Khordad** - Counters cruise missiles and F-35/F-15 jets. Highly mobile — fires and quickly relocates to avoid destruction. Uses Sayyad-3 missiles to protect nuclear facilities at Natanz and Isfahan.
- **Tor-M1 (Russia-made)** - Short-range system being used to intercept missiles, drones and precision-guided bombs near sensitive government and leadership compounds in Tehran.

## The Layered Defence System (Alliance Side)



- **Arrow 3 (Israel) + SM-3 (U.S. Navy)** — Outermost layer; intercepts long-range ballistic missiles in space before re-entry.
- **THAAD (U.S.) + Arrow 2 (Israel)** — Mid-layer; handles threats within the atmosphere at high altitude.
- **David's Sling / Stunner (Israel)** — Targets medium-range missiles.
- **Patriot PAC-3 MSE (U.S.)** — Last line against ballistic missiles; very expensive at ~\$4 million per shot.
- **Iron Dome + Iron Beam (Israel)** — Handles drone swarms and short-range rockets. Iron Beam is a high-energy laser and is now the primary defence against drone swarms, costing a fraction of a missile interceptor per shot.

## New Systems in the Current Conflict

- The UAE has deployed the South Korean **Cheongung II**, which unlike older Patriot batteries (limited to a 120° radar cone), can fire in a full 360° without physically rotating.
- The U.S. has introduced the **Indirect Fire Protection Capability (IFPC)**, which uses cheaper AIM-9X Sidewinder missiles to protect its bases in UAE and Kuwait, helping preserve expensive Patriot interceptors.
- The U.S. Navy's **SM-6** is being used in a dual role — intercepting ballistic missiles and engaging Iranian fast-attack boats on the water.

## Gravity Bombs

U.S. military used precision gravity bombs on Iran. This marked a major tactical shift in the ongoing U.S.–Iran war.

- A gravity bomb — historically called a "**free-fall**" bomb — is an unpowered munition. Unlike a cruise missile, it has no engine. Once released from an aircraft, its path is determined entirely by gravity, aerodynamics, and the speed and altitude of the aircraft that dropped it.
- Despite sounding like a World War-era weapon, gravity bombs are the modern workhorse of the U.S. Air Force.
  - They have been used extensively in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria (against ISIS), and by Israel in Gaza and Lebanon.

- The U.S. has modernised these free-fall bombs by attaching **JDAM (Joint Direct Attack Munition)** kits — tail sections fitted with GPS receivers and steerable fins.
  - Once attached, the bomb can glide accurately to specific GPS coordinates, turning a simple free-fall weapon into a precision-guided munition.

## India's Defence Vision Document

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh released the *Defence Forces Vision 2047: A Roadmap for a Future-Ready Indian Military*.
- The document lays out a long-term strategy to transform India's armed forces into a modern, integrated, and technologically advanced military by 2047 — the centenary of Indian Independence.

## Defence Forces Vision 2047: Key Highlights

### About

- The document has been prepared by the **Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff** (HQ IDS) under the Ministry of Defence.
- It identifies the key strategic reforms, capability enhancements, and organisational changes needed to deal with a rapidly evolving geopolitical, technological, and security environment.

### The Core Vision: What Kind of Military Does India Want?

- The document envisions transforming the Indian military into an:
  - ♣ **Integrated force** — Three services (Army, Navy, Air Force) working as one unified structure rather than independently.
  - ♣ **Multi-domain force** — capable of operating across land, sea, air, space, and cyber domains simultaneously.
  - ♣ **Agile force** — able to respond quickly across the full spectrum of conflict, from low-intensity skirmishes to full-scale war.

- The overarching goal is to deter adversaries and safeguard India's expanding strategic interests globally.

## Significance for India

- The release of this document is significant for several reasons. It is the first such long-term vision document for all three armed forces together, prepared under unified joint staff — reflecting the push towards **theatre commands and jointness** that India has been working on for years.

## Key Pillars of the Vision

- **Jointness Among the Three Services**
  - ▶ A central priority of the document is achieving greater jointness among the Army, Navy, and Air Force.
  - ▶ This means deeper coordination in planning, operations, and capability development so that the three services can function seamlessly as a single integrated force rather than three separate entities.
- **Technology and Innovation**
  - ▶ The document emphasises leveraging emerging technologies and modern training frameworks to prepare the armed forces for future warfare.
  - ▶ This includes areas such as artificial intelligence, cyber warfare, space-based capabilities, and other cutting-edge domains that are reshaping the nature of conflict globally.
- **Aatmanirbharta in Defence (Self-Reliance)**
  - ▶ A major focus is strengthening indigenous defence capabilities — promoting home-grown technologies and solutions tailored to India's specific security needs.
  - ▶ This aligns with the broader Aatmanirbhar Bharat initiative and the government's push to reduce dependence on foreign arms imports.
- **Phased Roadmap with Timelines**
  - ▶ The document does not set out vague aspirations — it outlines a structured, phased roadmap with prioritised capability goals across short, medium, and long-term timelines.
  - ▶ This approach is meant to guide the development of critical military capabilities, institutional reforms, and strategic partnerships in an orderly and measurable manner.
- **Whole-of-Nation Approach**
  - ▶ Recognising that modern security challenges are too complex for the military alone to handle, the document advocates a whole-of-nation approach.
  - ▶ This means integrating military strength with India's diplomatic, technological, and economic power to safeguard national interests — essentially treating national security as a collective national endeavour rather than solely a defence ministry concern.

- It also signals India's intent to be a **self-reliant military power** by 2047, reducing strategic vulnerabilities that come from import dependence.
- The alignment with Viksit Bharat 2047 places defence modernisation within India's broader national development agenda.

### AI in India's Internal Security: Key Takeaways from Parliamentary Committee Report

- A Parliamentary Standing Committee report on '**Impact of emergence of Artificial Intelligence and related issues**' —tabled in Lok Sabha — reveals that the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is leveraging AI as a "critical enabler" in strengthening India's internal security architecture.
- The report covers AI use across cybercrime, policing, forensics, and immigration.

### AI in Cybercrime Management

#### • **Modernising Cybercrime Reporting (1930 Helpline)**

- The Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) — the nodal anti-cybercrime agency under MHA — is implementing an AI-assisted complaint registration system for the 1930 helpline
- Aims to reduce complaint lodging time and improve user experience through guided interaction
- Will be compatible with most regional and native languages

#### • **Suspect Scoring for Mule Accounts**

- I4C, in collaboration with IIT Bombay, is exploring AI to assign "suspect scores" to mule accounts by analysing behavioural and transactional patterns.
- Also engaging with the Reserve Bank Innovation Hub (RBIH) to develop a model for real-time suspect scoring for financial transactions.

- Will enable banks to flag and proactively stop fraudulent transactions — described as "a robust layer of defence".

#### • **AI for Child Safety Online**

- ✓ An AI-based tool developed by CDAC Mumbai currently screens and verifies Child Sexual Exploitative and Abuse Material (CSEAM) in cyber tiplines received via the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children.
- ✓ The AI model is being fine-tuned and proposed to be extended to crawl the open web to proactively identify CSEAM content.

#### • **Surakshini — Shifting from Takedown to Prevention**

- ✓ A dedicated Mitigation Centre will be established under the Surakshini initiative.
- ✓ Currently, the Online Cybercrime against Women and Children (OCWC) team under I4C identifies complaints related to CSEAM and Non-Consensual Intimate Imagery (NCII).
- ✓ URLs are shared with Social Media Intermediaries (SMIs) via the SAHYOG platform for content takedown.
- ✓ Once operational, Surakshini will:
  - Create a comprehensive hashbank for CSEAM and NCII content
  - Allow SMIs to proactively detect and prevent uploads using automated hash-matching
  - Shift from an "active takedown approach to a preventive content moderation model"
  - Provide end-to-end visibility into complaint status, takedown timelines, and FIR registration

#### • **AI in Forensics**

- ✓ Forensic departments under MHA are equipped with advanced technologies including:
  - Video Spectral Comparator, Projectina, Traso Scan, ProScope, and advanced digital stereomicroscopes.
- ✓ AI tools are being deployed for digital and cybercrime investigations
- ✓ However, AI use in document forgery examination has not yet been operationalised — the technology is described as nascent and requires further validation

#### • **AI in Immigration: IVFRT 3.0**

- ✓ The Bureau of Immigration (BoI) is currently not using AI for immigration processes.
- ✓ However, IVFRT Version 3.0 (Immigration, Visa, Foreigners Registration and Tracking) commences April 1, 2026.
- ✓ Aims at a "comprehensive transformation" of India's immigration and traveller management ecosystem through:
  - AI and ML for intelligent traveller profiling
  - Blockchain to enhance authenticity and security of digital records

- **Dark Web Monitoring**

- I4C uses **AI-based tools** to monitor the **dark web, scam websites, and fraud networks** for:
  - ♣ Cybercrime discussions
  - ♣ Phishing campaigns
  - ♣ Suspicious financial transactions

- **Mule Hunter App**

- A draft MoU is under process between RBIH and I4C to enhance the Mule Hunter Application — an in-house AI/ML-based solution.
- RBIH's Mulehunter.ai identifies and mitigates risks related to mule accounts across banking systems.
- Integration with I4C's NCRP-CFCFRMS (*Citizen Financial Cyber Fraud Reporting and Management System*) /Suspect Registry will enable faster and more accurate action against cyber financial frauds.

### Assam Signs Peace Settlement with Kuki and Hmar Extremist Groups

- The Assam government signed a Memorandum of Settlement with three Kuki extremist groups and one Hmar group— marking a significant milestone in ending ethnic militancy in the state.
- The government claimed this settlement has brought the ethnic militancy issue in Assam to an end.
- More than 9,000 cadres of several extremist groups — including those of the Bodo, Karbi, and Adivasi communities — have been rehabilitated in recent years.
- This settlement adds to Assam's track record of successful peace processes with multiple ethnic armed groups.

### Key Provisions of the Settlement

- **Welfare Development Councils**

- Two new councils will be established:
  - ♣ Hmar Welfare Development Council — for Hmar-dominated areas of Assam
  - ♣ Kuki Welfare Development Council — for Kuki-dominated areas of Assam
- Each council will comprise - A Chairman, Deputy Chairman, Chief Executive Member, Executive Members, and members nominated by the Assam government
- Both councils will be headquartered in Guwahati.
- Budgets prepared based on requirements submitted to the Transformation and Development Department.

- **Rehabilitation & Compensation**

- State government will take measures to rehabilitate cadres of the armed groups in accordance with existing procedures.
- Families of cadres killed during the armed struggle will be compensated.

### SC Orders Permanent Commission for Women Officers

- The Supreme Court directed the armed forces to **grant permanent commission (PC)** to eligible women officers and ordered **full pension and consequential benefits** for those already released — treating them as having completed 20 years of qualifying service.
- Pensions will be fixed with arrears payable from January 1, 2025.
- A bench led by CJI Surya Kant delivered three separate but related judgments covering the Army, Navy, and Air Force.

## Background: The Long Legal Battle

### • The Landmark 2020 Verdicts

- The Supreme Court's 2020 verdicts in:
  - ♣ **Secretary, Ministry of Defence vs Babita Puniya** — mandated women be considered for PC in the Army on par with men.
  - ♣ **Union of India vs Annie Nagaraja** — similar mandate for the Navy.
- These verdicts shattered the glass ceiling for women in the armed forces.

### • What Went Wrong After 2020?

- When the military convened selection boards to implement the 2020 rulings, many women were rejected.
- Women officers challenged the fairness of the evaluation process itself — leading to the current round of verdicts.

### • The Core Problem: Flawed Annual Confidential Reports (ACRs)

- The military relied on Annual Confidential Reports (ACRs) — yearly performance evaluations — to determine merit for PC.
- These ACRs were written years ago, when government policy explicitly barred women from receiving permanent commission.
- Since assessing officers knew these women would serve only a limited tenure, they graded them casually — reserving highest marks for male officers whose long-term careers depended on high grades.
- This amounted to **systemic bias and structural discrimination** embedded in the evaluation process itself.

## India-Myanmar Border: Fencing, Security, and the Free Movement Regime

- The arrest of **seven foreign nationals** — six Ukrainians and a US citizen — who allegedly crossed into Myanmar via Mizoram to train ethnic armed groups in weapons handling and drone operations has brought fresh attention to India's porous and largely unfenced Myanmar border.
- The NIA has accused them of **importing drones** from Europe to Myanmar via India for use by ethnically armed groups (EAGs).

### The State of Border Fencing

- India and Myanmar share a 1,643 km border, largely unfenced, spanning four northeastern states: Arunachal Pradesh (520 km), Nagaland (215 km), Manipur (398 km), and Mizoram (510 km).
- The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) approved the fencing project in March 2024 at a cost of ₹31,000 crore.
- Only 43 km of 1,643 km — less than 3% — of the border has been fenced so far.

### Free Movement Regime (FMR): What Changed



#### 📌 What Was the FMR?

- ✔ A unique arrangement allowing people on either side of the unfenced India-Myanmar border to move freely up to 16 km without visas or passports.
- ✔ Reflects the deep ethnic, social, and cultural ties shared by border communities on both sides.

#### 📌 Recent Changes (December 2024)

- ✔ The FMR was not scrapped but regulated.
- ✔ Free movement was restricted from 16 km to 10 km on either side of the border.
- ✔ 43 designated entry/exit gates were operationalised with biometric recording and gate passes.
- ✔ However, over the past two years, the number of functional gates has declined from 43 to just 20 (out of 38 remaining).
- ✔ At least 5 gates along the Mizoram-Myanmar border were shut down as no one was using them.

#### 📌 Why Has Fencing Faced Resistance?

- ✔ Border residents on both sides share deep ethnic, social, and cultural ties.
- ✔ Communities have historically moved freely across the border for trade, family ties, and cultural exchange.
- ✔ Fencing is seen as disrupting these age-old connections.

- Road infrastructure showed similar early-stage progress -- 3,194.8 km approved; 941.91 km sanctioned; 11.5 km completed; and 930.41 km under construction.
- **Assam Rifles** — India's oldest paramilitary force, under operational control of the Army but administratively under the MHA — is the border-guarding force along Myanmar.

### Security Challenges & Government Response

- **Key Threats Along the Border**

- Illegal migration
- Human trafficking
- Insurgent activities by ethnic armed groups (EAGs)
- Drone smuggling — NIA found drones being imported from Europe via India to Myanmar

- **Measures Taken**

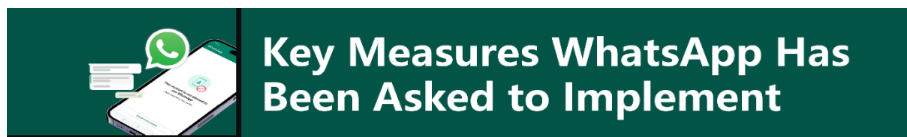
- Intelligence-led operations and enhanced surveillance.
- Coordination with local communities, Myanmar Army, and associated security agencies.
- Joint counter-drone mechanism with monthly reporting instituted.
- Fencing project includes biometric gates to regulate and record cross-border movement.

### Govt Asks WhatsApp to Block Devices in Digital Arrest Scams

- The Union Home Ministry has asked WhatsApp to implement measures including blocking device IDs, detecting scams, and strengthening AI tools to curb the rising menace of "digital arrest" scams in India.
- A high-level Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC), set up in December 2025, met with WhatsApp representatives to finalise these measures.

### SIM Binding Directive — A Related Order

- In November 2025, DoT directed all app-based platforms — WhatsApp, Telegram, Signal, Snapchat — to implement SIM binding.
- SIM binding means the app can only be used with one specific, active SIM card — eliminating anonymous or multi-device misuse.
- Strengthens user traceability and national security compliance.
- WhatsApp committed to implementing within 4–6 months and submitting an Action Taken Report (ATR) by March-end.



- **Blocking Device IDs of Repeat Offenders**

- ➔ Block Device IDs used in digital arrest scams — preventing repeat offenders from creating new accounts.
- ➔ Proposal expected within 45 days.

- **Skype-like Safety Features**

- ➔ More information about who is calling
- ➔ Warning signals for suspicious accounts
- ➔ Better scam network detection
- ➔ Proposal expected within 30 days

- **Retaining Deleted Account Data**

- ➔ User data from deleted accounts must be retained for at least 180 days as mandated under IT Rules, 2021
- ➔ Critical for law enforcement investigations

- **Blocking Harmful APK Files**

- ➔ APK files (Android app installation files) are used by scammers to access victims' devices
- ➔ WhatsApp must strengthen technology to detect and block such files
- ➔ Technical measures expected within one month

- **AI & Machine Learning Against Impersonation**

- ➔ Expand AI/ML systems to detect:
  - Impersonation of law enforcement officers
  - Misuse of official logos (Delhi Police, Mumbai Police, CBI, ATS)
  - Deepfake/AI-generated content used in video call scams
- ➔ Logo detection and media matching systems already deployed
- ➔ Periodic progress updates to be shared with the government

{For more about "Combating 'Digital Arrest' Scams refer The Recitals – January 2026}

## Social Media Addiction Trial: Meta and YouTube Found Liable

- A **US jury in Los Angeles** found **Meta and YouTube guilty** of designing **addictive platforms** that harmed a young user.
- The companies were deemed **negligent** and accused of **malice and fraud**, with **\$6 million in damages** awarded — Meta liable for **70%** and YouTube for **30%**.

### Key Highlights

- **Background**
  - A 20-year-old plaintiff argued that early exposure to Meta (Facebook, Instagram) and YouTube led to: Anxiety and depression; Body dysmorphia.
  - The lawsuit treated social media as a product — comparing its design to "digital casinos" that exploit dopamine-driven engagement.
  - Past lawsuits against social media companies often **failed due to Section 230** of the **Communications Decency Act** — which protects platforms from liability for **user-generated content**.
  - Plaintiffs **bypassed Section 230** by focusing on **product design** — arguing harm arose from **platform architecture** (feeds, engagement mechanisms) rather than specific content.
- **Negligence Criteria Applied by the Jury**
  - The jury assessed four standard negligence parameters:
    - ♣ **Duty of care** — did the platform owe a duty to protect users?
    - ♣ **Breach** — did the design choices breach that duty?
    - ♣ **Causation** — did the design cause the harm?
    - ♣ **Harm** — was actual harm suffered by the user?

## Exercise LAMITIYE-2026

- The 11th edition of India-Seychelles Joint Military Exercise LAMITIYE-2026 is being conducted at the Seychelles Defence Academy.
- This edition is historic as it marks the **first tri-services edition**, bringing together personnel from the Indian Army, Navy, and Air Force alongside the Seychelles Defence Forces (SDF).

## MoEF&CC Submits India's First National Report on Implementation of Nagoya Protocol

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) recently submitted country's first National Report on the implementation of the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) to the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

The **Nagoya Protocol (2010)** under CBD aims to prevent **biopiracy** by ensuring fair sharing of benefits from the use of biological resources and traditional knowledge. For biodiversity-rich countries like India, it provides a legal basis to ensure communities receive **monetary or non-monetary benefits**.

- India implements this through the **Biological Diversity (BD) Act, 2002** supported by **BD Rules 2024** and **ABS Regulations 2025**, via a **3-tier system**- National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) at the national level, State Biodiversity Boards (SBB) and Union territory biodiversity (UTB) councils at the state level and Biodiversity Management Committees (BMC) at the village level.

### About the Report

The report is India's **first national assessment of Nagoya Protocol implementation**, explaining how biological resources are accessed and how benefits are shared with communities. It covers the period **2017 to 2025** and evaluates progress in preventing biopiracy and ensuring fair compensation.

### Key Highlights from the Report:

- **12,830 ABS approvals** issued (foreign + domestic use).
- India has issued **3,556** Internationally Recognized Certificates of Compliance (IRCC) on the global ABS portal, confirming **legal access and benefit-sharing compliance**. It accounts for **over 60% of global IRCCs**- India in the lead.
- **₹216+ crore mobilized**, ~₹140 crore distributed to communities- includes **non-monetary benefits**: training, tech transfer, research collaboration. Example- Dapur village (Maharashtra) received ~₹68 lakh under ABS after its soil was used for probiotic products.

### Concerns Raised Regarding Nagoya Protocol Implementation:

- **Delayed and uneven functioning** of BMCs (despite post-2016 acceleration in their formation).
- **Poor quality of People's Biodiversity Register (PBR)** due to rapid compilation.
  - ✓ PBR is a **local register by BMCs** documenting **biodiversity and traditional knowledge**.
- Questions over **actual effectiveness and grassroots participation**.
- Need to ensure **consistent, meaningful benefit flow** to communities.

## Safe Disposal of Unused Medicines

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) released the Safe disposal of unused medicines report.

### Key Highlights from the Report:

- **Problem Identified:** Improper disposal of medicines contaminates air, water, and soil, and creates serious health risks. It contributes to antimicrobial resistance (AMR), toxicity, and accidental poisoning.
- **One Health Approach:** The report adopts a **One Health framework**, recognizing that human health, animal health, and the environment are interconnected. Effective solutions require coordinated action.
- **Four-Pillar Framework:** The report proposes a comprehensive system based on four pillars to manage medicine waste holistically- 1) Prevention of Waste, 2) Medicine Take-back Systems, 3) Strong Legal/Policy Support, and 4) Public Awareness.

- **Prevention Strategies:** focus on reducing waste at source. This includes disease prevention (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), vaccination), rational use of medicines, unit-dose packaging, and redistribution of safe unused medicines.
- **Additional Measures:** The report stresses controlling substandard and falsified medicines and improving management of donated drugs. Awareness campaigns are essential to change behaviour and ensure safe disposal practices.

#### Initiatives Taken by India in this Direction

- **NAP-AMR 2.0 (National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance 2.0):** Promotes safe disposal of unused/expired antimicrobials to reduce AMR pollution.
- **CDSCO (Central Drugs Standard Control Organization) Guidelines:** National rules for disposal of drugs, including collection, storage, transport, and a “Flush List” of 17 medicines.
- **nPROUD (New Programme on Removal of Unused Drugs), Kerala:** State-level **drug take-back initiative** covering households and pharmacies.
- **CSE (Centre for Science and Environment):** Advocates **drug take-back systems** to ensure safe return and disposal of medicines.

#### India’s New Nationally Determined Contributions

The Union Cabinet recently approved India’s updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) (2031-2035), enhancing its climate ambition under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and Paris Agreement.

Under Paris Agreement, countries submit voluntary targets outlining their transition from fossil fuels. India’s earlier NDC targets:

50% non-fossil power capacity

45% emissions intensity reduction from 2005 levels

2.5-3 billion tonnes carbon sink by 2030

The new targets raise each threshold.

#### Key Highlights from India’s Updated NDCs:

- **Non-Fossil Fuel Energy Capacity:** India targets **60% of installed electricity capacity from non-fossil fuel sources** (such as solar, wind, hydro, biomass and nuclear) by 2035- marking a major shift towards clean energy and reducing dependence on coal and oil.
  - India has already reached **52.57%** as of February 2026.
- **Emissions Intensity Reduction of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 47% from 2005 levels by 2035.** This means producing less carbon dioxide per unit of economic output, allowing growth while lowering carbon footprint.
  - India had already achieved a **36%** reduction between 2005 and 2020, keeping it well on track
- **Carbon Sink Creation: of 3.5-4 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO<sub>2</sub> eq.)** through forests and tree cover to absorb excess CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere.
  - As of 2025, India has created an additional carbon sink of **2.29 billion tonnes CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent** from forest and tree cover.
- **Alignment with Long-term Goals:** to achieve **Net Zero emissions by 2070**. They also support the broader vision of sustainable and climate-resilient development under “Viksit Bharat 2047”.
- **Clean Energy and Green Growth Strategy:** includes expanding renewable energy, promoting **Green Hydrogen**, improving energy efficiency, and adopting technologies like **Carbon Capture, Utilization and Storage (CCUS)** for **economic growth with lower emissions**.

- **Climate Adaptation Measures:** Beyond reducing emissions, India focuses on adapting to climate impacts through measures like mangrove restoration, glacier monitoring, and Heat Action Plans to enhance resilience to disasters and climate variability.
- **Institutional Framework:** The implementation is guided by the **National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)** and **State Action Plans on Climate Change (SAPCCs)** for coordinated action across sectors and levels of government.
- **Guiding Principles:** India's NDCs follow the principle of **Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC)**. This emphasizes fairness, recognizing that developed countries bear greater responsibility for climate change.

India's Emissions Trend: Key Insights	Effectiveness of NDCs in Driving Clean Energy Globally
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Slowing Emissions Growth:</b> Slow CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in over two decades (only <b>0.7% in 2025</b>) indicate a <b>significant deceleration</b> compared to 4-11% growth in previous years.</li> <li>• <b>Power Sector Driving Change:</b> Emissions from power sector <b>declined (-3.8%)</b> due to reduced coal use. Rapid addition of renewables (solar, wind, hydro, nuclear) met rising demand.</li> <li>• <b>Sectoral Divergence:</b> <b>Steel (+8%) and cement (+10%)</b> emissions increased. These hard-to-abate sectors offset gains from the power sector.</li> <li>• <b>Future Outlook:</b> India may achieve a stage where <b>clean energy additions match demand growth</b> (as early as 2026).</li> <li>• <b>Emissions Intensity Approach:</b> India focuses on <b>emissions per unit of GDP</b> allowing <b>absolute emissions to rise</b> alongside economic growth.</li> <li>• <b>Key Challenges &amp; Contradictions:</b> Continued <b>coal expansion and fossil fuel investments</b>. <b>Grid constraints</b> leading to stranded renewable capacity. <b>Low forest cover (~24% vs target 33%)</b> affecting carbon sink goals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Mixed Performance:</b> <b>Globally</b> NDCs have <b>not met targets</b>; efforts remain <b>off track</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Limited Impact on Warming:</b> far from 1.5°C goal.</li> <li>• <b>Huge Emissions Gap:</b> NDCs cover <b>&lt;14% of required emission cuts</b> → major shortfall.</li> <li>• <b>Weak Commitments:</b> Most countries lack <b>comprehensive transition plans</b>. No clear targets on <b>phasing out oil &amp; gas</b> or subsidy reforms.</li> <li>• <b>Finance Constraints:</b> Developing countries depend on <b>insufficient climate finance</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Transition Still Growing:</b> Clean energy expansion is <b>rapid</b>, but driven by <b>market forces</b>, not NDCs.</li> </ul>

### State of the World's Migratory Species Report

An interim report providing an update to the United Nation's landmark State of the World's Migratory Species was published recently.

- ✓ The State of the World's Migratory Species report was the first comprehensive assessment of migratory species released in 2024 by the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) at COP14 in Samarkand

Key Highlights from the Report:	Steps for Conservation of Migratory Species:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Sharp Decline:</b> 49% of CMS-listed migratory species declining (↑ from 44%).</li> <li>• <b>Rising Extinction Risk:</b> 24% species threatened (↑ from 22%).</li> <li>• <b>Worsening Trends:</b> Stable/increasing species fell from 43% → 38%.</li> <li>• <b>Disease Threat:</b> Bird flu (Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza H5N1) causing mass deaths across birds &amp; marine mammals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Habitat protection:</b> Safeguard breeding, stopover &amp; wintering sites.</li> <li>• <b>Connectivity:</b> Maintain ecological corridors; reduce barriers (roads, fences).</li> <li>• <b>Climate action:</b> Mitigate &amp; adapt to climate change impacts.</li> <li>• <b>Control threats:</b> Curb hunting, bycatch, pollution, invasive species.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Status Shifts:</b> 26 species moved to <b>more threatened</b> categories. Majority now <b>Critically Endangered/ Endangered/ Vulnerable</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Some Recovery:</b> Few species improved (e.g., Saiga antelope, Monk seal).</li> <li>• <b>Major Drivers:</b> Habitat loss, climate change, infrastructure (roads/rails), overfishing, hunting, pollution.</li> <li>• <b>Migration Disruption:</b> Connectivity loss reducing movement (e.g., Mongolian gazelle).</li> <li>• <b>Ecosystem Importance:</b> Migratory species crucial for pollination, nutrient flow, and carbon storage.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Disease monitoring:</b> Strengthen surveillance (e.g., avian influenza).</li> <li>• <b>Sustainable infrastructure:</b> Wildlife-friendly planning (EIA-based).</li> <li>• <b>International cooperation:</b> Strengthen CMS &amp; transboundary governance.</li> <li>• <b>Data &amp; monitoring:</b> Improve tracking, research &amp; Red List updates.</li> <li>• <b>Community participation:</b> Local conservation &amp; livelihood integration.</li> </ul>
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### Extra Mile: Convention on Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS)-Bonn Convention

The 15th Conference of Parties (CoP) to the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) was recently held at Campo Grande, Brazil under the theme: *“Connecting Nature to Sustain Life.”*

#### About CMS:

- It is a legally binding treaty (1979, UNEP) consisting of **133 Parties** with the aim to conserve migratory species across borders.
- **COP:** Meets **every 3 years**; it is the key decision body that sets priorities, budget, and **lists species**.
- **Appendices:**
  - **Appendix I (188 species (mammals, birds, reptiles, fish)):** Critically Endangered/Endangered → **strict protection + habitat conservation**.
  - **Appendix II:** Unfavourable status → **international cooperation needed**. (*Species can be listed simultaneously in both*)
- **India:** Hosted the 13th CMS COP for the first time in 2020 and, with that, also formally assumed the role of CMS Presidency for the next three years. The theme of the COP13 was, *“Migratory species connect the planet, and together we welcome them home!”*

### National Chambal Sanctuary

The Supreme Court (SC) recently took *Suo motu* cognizance of media reports on illegal sand mining threatening the ecology of the National Chambal Sanctuary.

#### About National Chambal Sanctuary/ National Chambal Gharial Wildlife Sanctuary

- **Location & Extent:** It extends along Chambal River across Rajasthan-MP-UP; ~600 km notified as sanctuary. India’s only tri-state riverine protected area; MP section notified in 1978.
- **Ecological Significance:** Pristine river ecosystem with minimal pollution. Critical habitat for endangered riverine fauna.
- **Key Species:** a key breeding habitat of **gharials**, mugger crocodile, freshwater turtles (incl. Red-crowned roof turtle), Smooth-coated otter, Gangetic river dolphin.
- **Challenges Faced:** Rampant illegal sand mining has severely degraded the Chambal ecosystem damaging nesting habitats, altering river morphology, and even impacting relocated gharials.

### Anavaran Portal

Recently, the Forest Survey of India stopped its Anavaran-Deforestation Alert System on deforestation. It has been operational since January 2024.

### What is Anavaran Portal?

It is a **near real-time forest loss alert system** by **Forest Survey of India (FSI)** under **MoEFCC**.

**Key Feature:** Sends **location-specific alerts every ~15 days** to States/UTs and enables **targeted field verification & enforcement**.

### Technology Used:

- Built on **Google Earth Engine (GEE)** cloud platform.
- **Sentinel-2 (optical imagery):** detects vegetation/forest cover changes.
- **Sentinel-1 (SAR):** ensures monitoring even during **cloud/monsoon conditions**.

**Significance:** Improves **early detection of deforestation/encroachment** and strengthens **forest governance & compliance monitoring**.

### Ladakh Magmatic Arc

Recently, scientists have traced the evolution of the Ladakh Magmatic Arc (LMA) in North West Himalaya.

### What is LMA?

It is a **belt of igneous rocks** located in the **Trans-Himalaya (Ladakh)**, formed due to the **subduction of the Neo-Tethys Oceanic plate beneath the Eurasian plate**. It developed during the **Jurassic to Eocene period (~ 201 to ~34 million years ago)** and represents a **~130 million-year geological record of plate tectonic processes**.

Formation Process:	Significance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Stage 1- Subduction:</b> Neo-Tethyan oceanic plate subducts beneath Eurasia, generating magma and forming Dras-Nidar Island Arc Complex (<b>DNIAC</b>).</li><li>• <b>Stage 2- Arc Maturation:</b> Continued convergence leads to <b>magma evolution with increased crustal/sediment input</b>, forming the <b>Ladakh Batholith (granites)</b>.</li><li>• <b>Stage 3- Collision:</b> <b>Indian Plate collides with Eurasia</b>, closing the Neo-Tethys Ocean and initiating <b>Himalayan uplift</b>.</li><li>• <b>Stage 4- Post-collision:</b> Residual mantle-derived magma intrudes as <b>mafic dykes</b> through fractures in older rocks.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provides <b>direct evidence of subduction → collision cycle</b>.</li><li>• Helps explain <b>formation of Himalayas (orogeny)</b>.</li><li>• Shows <b>magmatic evolution (mantle → crustal influence ↑)</b>.</li><li>• Important for <b>plate tectonics &amp; geodynamic studies</b>.</li></ul>

### Waste Foundry Sand (WFS)

Recently, the Institute of Indian Foundrymen (IIF) and CSIR-Central Road Research Institute (CSIR-CRRI) entered into an agreement to develop and facilitate solutions for using waste foundry sand in road construction.

### About Waste Foundry Sand:

- **Source:** Byproduct of ferrous & non-ferrous metal casting
- **Nature:** High-quality silica sand; properties vary with process
- **Types (by binder):**
  - **Clay-bonded (Green sand):** ~85-95% silica + 4-10% bentonite
  - **Chemically bonded sand:** High-strength (core/mould making)
- **Issue:** Large-scale waste → disposal & environmental concerns
- **Significance:** Reuse → resource efficiency, waste minimization, sustainability

## 20 Cities Towards Zero Waste Initiative

UN advisory board recently named 20 cities leaders in Zero Waste (including Varkala (Kerala) in India).

### About Zero Waste Initiative:

- **Led by:** UN Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Zero Waste, with support from UN-Habitat and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP).
- **Aim:** Promote **zero waste & circular economy in cities.**
- **Key Actions:** Segregation & composting; Reuse/refill systems; Cut single-use plastics; Inclusive recycling (waste pickers).
- **Purpose:** Share best practices and scale city-led solutions
- **Global impact:** Tackles **2.1 bn tonnes of municipal solid waste/year** and contributes directly to the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 13 (Climate Action).

## Bhavasagara Referral Centre

The MoEFCC has officially designated CMLRE's "**Bhavasagara**" Referral Centre (BRC) as a **National Repository for Deep-Sea Fauna under Biological Diversity Act, 2002.**

- ✓ The Centre for Marine Living Resources & Ecology (CMLRE under the Ministry of Earth Sciences) located in Kochi, Kerala is dedicated to the exploration, management, and conservation of marine living resources in the Indian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and adjacent deep seas.

### About BRC:

- **Role:** Hub for **deep-sea biodiversity preservation & research**
- **Collection:** **3,500+** geo-referenced specimens spanning from Invertebrates to fishes
- **Functions:** Preserve **specimens + DNA data**; Custodian of **new species (type specimens)**; Building **taxonomy expertise.**
- **Significance:** Boosts **deep-sea research & blue economy** and supports **UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030).**

## Radiative Forcing-based Accounting for Global Warming

The study, published in the UK-based journal *Environmental Research Letters*, proposes a new framework called Radiative Forcing-based Accounting (RFA).

### What is RFA?

It is a climate accounting method that measures emissions based on their **actual heat-trapping effect (radiative forcing) and atmospheric lifetime.** It provides a **dynamic, time-sensitive estimate of warming**, unlike fixed CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent metrics.

**Current Method for Measuring Global Warming:** The existing method uses **CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent (CO<sub>2</sub>e)** based on legacy **GWP100 (Global Warming Potential over 100 years)**, which compares gases over a fixed 100-year period; for example, **1 tonne of methane ≈ 28 times CO<sub>2</sub>.** It applies a **static multiplier**, averaging the warming impact over time and ignoring when the warming actually occurs.

**GWP100:** Static, fixed value, averages impact.

**RFA:** Dynamic, time-based, captures real warming & timing.

### Need for RFA:

- GWP100 **ignores timing** of emissions.
- **Undervalues short-lived gases** (methane → fast but intense warming).

- Leads to **under-crediting (~36-40%)** of methane projects.

**Significance:** RFA aligns carbon accounting with **physical climate science**. It can **revalue methane mitigation**, making it a **faster and more attractive climate action pathway**.

### India Submits 7<sup>th</sup> National Report to Convention on Biological Diversity

The MoEFCC recently submitted Seventh National Report (NR-7) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), reaffirming its commitment to the three objectives of the Convention: conservation of biological diversity, sustainable use of its components, and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from genetic resources.


#### What is the NR-7 Report?

It is a **comprehensive, indicator-based national assessment** of India’s biodiversity status and progress, aligned with National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP 2024-2030) and Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF), using **142 indicators mapped to 23 National Biodiversity Targets**, based on inputs from multiple ministries, states, and stakeholders.

#### NR-7 Highlights:

- **Forest & wetlands:** Forest & tree cover **25.17%**; Notified Ramsar sites **26 → 98**
- **Conservation network:** **58 Tiger Reserves (TR), 33 Elephant Reserves (ER), 106 National Parks (NP), 574 Wildlife Sanctuaries (WLS)**
- **Flagship species:** Tigers 3,682; Elephants 22,446; Rhinos 4,014; Asiatic Lions 891; Dolphins 6,327
- **Agrobiodiversity:** 22 hotspots
- **Strong legal + tech:** Robust laws; **Remote Sensing (RS), Geographic Information System (GIS), Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), DNA-based tools.**
- **Governance & participation:** **PARIVESH** (Pro-Active and Responsive facilitation by Interactive, Virtuous and Environmental Single Window Hub) for **online environmental, forest, wildlife, and coastal regulation clearances** + **Mission LiFE** (Lifestyle for the Environment) initiative - an India-led global mass movement promoting eco-friendly, sustainable consumption.

### Species in News

<p><b>Kashmir Markhor</b></p> <p><b>Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972:</b> Schedule I</p> <p><b>CITES:</b> Appendix I</p> <p><b>Global Habitat:</b> Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan &amp; Tajikistan</p> 	<p>India's rarest wild goat, the Kashmir Markhor is facing a critical survival crisis with its remaining population of 200–300 individuals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Unique Features:</b> It is the <b>largest wild goat in the world (weighing up to 100 kg)</b>. Males are famous for their massive, corkscrew-like spiral horns which can grow up to 160 cm.</li> <li>• In India, the Markhor is endemic only to the Union Territory of Jammu &amp; Kashmir. Its distribution is highly fragmented across two primary landscapes.             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Kazinag Landscape (North Kashmir):</b> The Kazinag National Park (Baramulla district) is currently the last stable stronghold of the species in India.</li> <li>2. <b>Pir Panjal Landscape (South Kashmir):</b> Found in the Hirpora Wildlife Sanctuary (Shopian) and Tattakuti Wildlife Sanctuary (Poonch).</li> </ol> </li> <li>• <b>IUCN Red List:</b> <b>Near Threatened</b> (Downlisted from Endangered in 2015 due to global recovery, though Indian populations remain critically low).</li> </ul>
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**Orobanche Aegyptiaca**

India's mustard (largest oilseed crop) is facing a serious menace from Orobanche aegyptiaca, a weed in major mustard-growing areas of Rajasthan and Haryana.

Orobanche aegyptiaca is a parasitic weed that attaches to the roots of mustard plants and extracts nutrients, carbon and water from them.

By depriving the host crop of these, it causes wilting, yellowing and stunted growth of the plants and, thereby, lower mustard seed yields.

## Dark Oxygen

Scientists exploring the Pacific Ocean seafloor have reported the presence of what they describe as “dark oxygen” in an environment where sunlight does not reach.

### What is Dark Oxygen?

It is the oxygen being produced thousands of feet below the ocean surface, without any light or photosynthesis.

**Discovery:** 2013, in Clarion-Clipperton Zone (area in the Pacific Ocean between Mexico and Hawaii)

**Key Mechanism:** Polymetallic nodules (like lumps of coal) on the ocean floor, rich in metals like nickel, cobalt, manganese and iron etc., behave like **natural electrochemical batteries**. They generate small electric currents, which drive **electrolysis of surrounding seawater**, splitting water molecules into hydrogen and oxygen. As a result, **oxygen is released abiotically**, without any involvement of sunlight or photosynthesis.

### Significance:

- Establishes a **non-photosynthetic (abiotic) source of oxygen**
- Raises concerns over **deep-sea mining of polymetallic nodules**
- Supports possibility of **oxygen generation on other planets → astrobiology relevance**

## Deinococcus Radiodurans

Researchers recently found that *Deinococcus radiodurans*, known for surviving extreme radiation and dryness, can also withstand **14,000-24,000 Earth atmospheres**, enabling survival during planetary ejection.

### What is Deinococcus radiodurans?

It is a **Gram-positive, non-motile bacterium** discovered in 1956, famous for surviving extreme conditions.

### Key Features

- **Most radiation-resistant organism** (Dubbed “Conan the Bacterium”).
- Survives radiation **thousands of times lethal to humans**.
- **Mn-based antioxidants + efficient DNA repair + multiple genomes**.
- Tolerates **vacuum, dehydration, cold, acid, and starvation**.
- Important for **astrobiology & DNA repair studies**.

## DART Mission

A groundbreaking study has revealed that NASA’s DART Mission not only altered the motion of a small asteroid within its system but also slightly changed the orbit of the entire asteroid pair around the Sun.

### About DART Mission:

It was first ever space mission launched in 2021 to test and demonstrate **asteroid deflection** via **kinetic impact** (planetary defence).

- **Target:** Binary asteroid- Didymos & moonlet Dimorphos. Due to their **gravitational linkage**, impacting Dimorphos alters the motion of the entire system.
- **Impact:** in 2022 (on Dimorphos). DART’s collision **shortened the orbit** of the **asteroid by around 33 minutes**.
- **Significance:** First successful **asteroid trajectory change** by humans.

## White Phosphorus

Recently, the Human Rights Watch accused Israel of "unlawfully" using white phosphorus over residential parts of a southern Lebanese town.

### About White Phosphorous:

- **Nature:** White/yellow, waxy, garlic-like odour; highly reactive allotrope of phosphorus.
- **Key Property:** It ignites spontaneously in air at temperatures above 30 °C and continues to burn until it is fully oxidized or oxygen is exhausted. It produces dense, white smoke composed of phosphorus pentoxide, which creates phosphoric acid upon contact with water.
- **Uses:**
  - **Military:** illumination, smoke screens, incendiary (grenades, shells).
  - **Industrial:** phosphoric acid → phosphates → fertilizers, detergents.
  - Others: fireworks, (earlier) rodenticides.
- **Health Impact:** Toxic via inhalation, ingestion, skin contact; Causes **severe deep burns (can reach bone)**; Smoke irritates eyes & lungs (phosphoric acid, phosphine).

**Note:** White phosphorous is **not banned** under Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), but **use against civilians is restricted under** International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and Protocol III of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW).

## G- SPIDER Robot

Recently, under Swachh Bharat Mission–Urban 2.0, Thiruvananthapuram Municipal Corporation has deployed an AI-powered G-SPIDER robot.

### About G- SPIDER Robot:

It is an **automated canal cleaning robot**, created by Genrobotic Innovations to operate in complex, high-risk canal environments without any human entry.

### Key Features:

- It uses **machine vision, sensors, and robotic arms** to detect and remove waste.
- Designed for **confined, hazardous, and high-risk environments**.
- Ensures **safe, mechanised alternative to manual scavenging**.

## Low Temperature Thermal Desalination Technology

Recently, the Union Minister for Earth Sciences visited the Low Temperature Thermal Desalination (LTTD) plant at Kavaratti in Lakshadweep and reviewed the functioning of desalination facilities.

### What is Low Temperature Thermal Desalination?

It is a desalination method where **warm surface seawater is evaporated (low pressure)** and vapour is **condensed using cold deep-sea water**.

**Working Principle:** Deep sea water at depths of about 1000-2000 ft is 4-8°C colder than surface water; this temperature difference is used in LTTD, where warm surface seawater is flash-evaporated at low pressure, and the vapour is then cooled by cold deep-sea water to condense into fresh water.

Key Features:	Significance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>No chemicals or membranes required</b></li><li>• <b>Low pollution &amp; low maintenance</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provides <b>safe drinking water</b></li><li>• <b>Eco-friendly &amp; energy-efficient</b></li></ul>

## Moonshot Project

Recently, the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) launched a moonshot project.

### About Moonshot Project:

It is a flagship multidisciplinary project by IISc (funded by Pratiksha Trust) to develop **AI-powered brain co-processors** (implantable & non-invasive).

- **Function: Decode → process → re-encode brain signals** (closed-loop system).
- **Use: Restore motor & cognitive functions in stroke patients.**
- **Key focus: Neuromorphic hardware + AI + neural stimulation.**
- **Long-term goal: Affordable, indigenous neuro-tech for clinical use in India.**

## ALMA Telescope

Recently, astronomers have captured the central region of our Milky Way and unveiled a complex network of filaments of cosmic gas in unprecedented detail with the help of the Atacama Large Millimeter/submillimeter Array (ALMA) telescope

### About ALMA Telescope:

The ALMA is a **state-of-the-art radio-telescope** located in the **Atacama Desert in Chile** that studies **celestial objects at millimetre and submillimetre wavelengths**. It has been fully functional since 2013.

- **Collaboration: US's National Radio Astronomy Observatory (NRAO), the National Astronomical Observatory of Japan (NAOJ) and the European Southern Observatory (ESO).**
- **Key Features:**
  - **66 movable antennas** (spread up to **16 km**)
  - Works as an **interferometer** → very high resolution
  - Studies **cold universe** → gas, dust, star & planet formation
  - Resolution **~10× sharper than Hubble (in its wavelength domain)**

## Asteroid 2024 YR4

Recently, NASA has officially ruled out the possibility of asteroid 2024 YR4 colliding with the moon in 2032.

### About Asteroid 2024 YR4:

- **Type: Apollo-type Near-Earth asteroid** (meaning it crosses Earth's orbit)
- **Origin: From Main Asteroid Belt** (between Mars-Jupiter).
- **Discovery: 2024 by ATLAS telescope (Chile)**
- **Naming: Y** → late December discovery; **R4** → 117th asteroid in that period
- **Orbit: ~4 years (1468 days) | Rotation: ~19.5 minutes | Composition: Silicates + nickel-iron (S-type)**

## Acrylonitrile

Recent computer models have suggested that acrylonitrile, an organic compound present on Saturn's moon Titan, can self-assemble into cell-like structures.

## About Acrylonitrile:

It is an **organic compound** produced by **catalytic reaction of propylene with ammonia**.

### • Properties:

- Colorless liquid; sharp onion/garlic odor
- Volatile, flammable, toxic; Acrylonitrile vapour heavier than air
- Dissolves with water; evaporates quickly
- Burning releases toxic gases (oxides of nitrogen)
- Stored/handled in closed systems

• **Applications:** Used to make plastics, synthetic rubber, acrylic fibers. Earlier used (with carbon tetrachloride) as pesticide.

• **Impact on Human Health:** Irritating to the skin, eyes, and respiratory tract.

## Dimethyl Ether

The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research- National Chemical Laboratory (CSIR-NCL) in collaboration with a processing engineering partner is ready to scale up the Dimethyl Ether technology to an industrial scale demonstration.

### What is Dimethyl Ether (DME) Technology?

**DME technology** refers to the **production and use of DME (CH<sub>3</sub>OCH<sub>3</sub>)** as a clean, alternative fuel especially as a substitute or blend with LPG and diesel.

**Production pathway (core process):** Methanol → (catalytic dehydration) → DME. Methanol derived from various feedstocks such as coal, biomass (agri-waste), natural gas (via syngas → methanol) and captured CO<sub>2</sub>.

How can it be helpful to India?	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Reduces Import Dependence:</b> India imports ~60-65% of LPG (major vulnerability to <b>West Asia crises</b>). DME blending can <b>directly reduce LPG imports</b>.</li><li>• <b>Energy Security &amp; Atmanirbhar Bharat:</b> Domestic production from coal, biomass, CO<sub>2</sub> diversifies energy basket and reduces geopolitical risk.</li><li>• <b>Cleaner Fuel (Environmental Gains):</b> It burns with no soot and lower NO<sub>x</sub>, SO<sub>x</sub> emissions which help in reducing indoor air pollution and meeting climate commitments.</li><li>• <b>Economic Benefits:</b> Potential savings of around <b>₹9,500 crore annually</b>. If domestic methanol develops, DME may become <b>cost-competitive with LPG</b>.</li><li>• <b>Infrastructure Compatibility:</b> Works with existing LPG cylinders and existing distribution network resulting in <b>low transition cost</b>.</li><li>• <b>Flexible Feedstock Advantage:</b> It can use fossil + renewable sources. Thus, it is a future-ready fuel (supports circular carbon economy).</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Methanol Dependence:</b> India currently <b>imports methanol</b>. Without domestic methanol ecosystem there is limited benefit.</li><li>• <b>Cost Competitiveness:</b> DME cost is approximately <b>1.8 times the methanol price</b>. If methanol is expensive → DME not competitive vs LPG.</li><li>• <b>Infrastructure Adjustment:</b> Though minor, still requires burner recalibration and safety validation for blending ratios.</li><li>• <b>Safety &amp; Handling Issues:</b> DME has <b>lower energy density</b> than LPG and different vapor pressure. It requires <b>standardization &amp; regulatory approval</b>.</li><li>• <b>Scale-Up Constraints:</b> Currently at <b>semi-pilot scale (~250 kg/day)</b>. It needs large-scale commercialization, investment &amp; policy push.</li><li>• <b>Policy &amp; Market Adoption:</b> Needs clear blending mandates, pricing policy and industry acceptance.</li></ul>

### Way Forward

- **Develop domestic methanol ecosystem** (coal, biomass, CO<sub>2</sub> routes).

- **Introduce phased DME-LPG blending targets** (e.g., 5-10%).
- **Provide policy support** (subsidies, viability gap funding, pricing clarity).

### Floating LiDAR Buoy System

Recently, the National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT) has successfully tested an indigenously developed Floating LiDAR Buoy System off the coast of Muttom in Tamil Nadu.

#### What is a Floating LiDAR Buoy System?

It is a **high-tech ocean-based instrument** used to **measure wind conditions over the sea**.

**Objective:** To **measure wind profiles and atmospheric conditions** over the ocean.

**Working of Floating LiDAR Buoy System:** The system uses **LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) technology**. Buoy floats on sea and emits **laser pulses** upward. Pulses reflect off air particles and return. Return signal is analyzed to calculate **wind speed and direction at different heights**.

✓ Unlike traditional instruments, this buoy can capture **detailed wind data up to 300 metres above sea level**.

**Significance:** Supports **offshore wind energy, weather forecasting, cyclone tracking, and climate studies**.

### MXene

Recently, the IIT Guwahati research team developed a MXene-based catalyst that can both produce hydrogen efficiently from water and act as a photocatalyst for desalination.

#### What is MXene?

MXene is a **group of two-dimensional materials** made from a **bulk crystal called MAX**. They were first discovered in 2011. They have the general formula of  **$M_n+1X_nT_x$** , where-

- **M is an early transition metal,**
- **X is carbon and/or nitrogen, and**
- **T is a functional group** on the surface of an MXene (typically O, OH, and F).

✓ **Titanium carbide (Ti<sub>3</sub>C<sub>2</sub>T<sub>x</sub>)** is the most widely used.

**Properties of MXenes:** **high electrical conductivity, excellent mechanical strength, good chemical stability, remarkable hydrophilicity.**

#### Applications of MXenes:

- **Energy storage:** batteries, supercapacitors
- **Water treatment:** desalination, wastewater
- **Filtration/separation:** industrial membranes

### Helium

India's semiconductor and printed circuit board (PCB) industry is bracing for potential disruption in helium supplies after Iran's attack on Qatar's Ras Laffan LNG hub.

#### About Helium (He):

- It is an inert, non-combustible noble gas **discovered in 1868 by Janssen and Norman Lockyer** via a yellow spectral line during a solar eclipse. Named after the Greek word 'Helios', meaning Sun.
- **Properties of Helium:**
  - Atomic number=2 (second **lightest element after hydrogen**)
  - **Very low boiling point** (-268.9° C).

- Non-toxic but **asphyxiant** (displaces O<sub>2</sub>).
- Cannot solidify at normal pressure.
- **Largest global reserves:** United States, Algeria, and Russia. India's **Rajmahal Volcanic Basin** (Jharkhand) is a significant helium reservoir trapped for billions of years.
- **Applications of Helium:** Rocket fuel tank pressurization, Cooling systems (cryogenics/space tech).

## Minor Planet Centre

Recently, the Minor Planet Centre (MPC) announced 15 new moons had been found, four around Jupiter and 11 around Saturn.

### What is MPC?

It is the **global hub for collecting and processing data on small Solar System bodies** (asteroids, comets, etc.), operating under the **International Astronomical Union (IAU)** at the **Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory (USA)**.

**Process:** Astronomers submit observations to MPC which **verifies data, computes orbits, and assigns official designations**.

### Key Functions:

- Tracks **asteroids, comets, and some planetary satellites**
- Monitors **Near-Earth Objects (NEOs)** (objects whose orbits bring them close to Earth)
- Maintains a **global database for orbit prediction**
- Publishes **electronic circulars** for new discoveries and alerts

## Akasha300 3D Printer

Kerala start-up delivers cutting-edge Akasha300 3D Printer to ISRO in a major step towards India's self-reliance in advanced manufacturing.

### What is Akasha300 3D Printer?

It is an **indigenous industrial-grade multi-material 3D printer** developed for **advanced research and space applications**. It-

- Supports **dual extrusion** (*capable of operating at temperatures up to 350°C, with planned upgrades extending to 500°C*) → prints high-performance materials
- Has **heated bed + enclosed chamber** → **capable of maintaining temperatures** & ensures precision
- **Has a modular design** → enables hybrid manufacturing

**Developed By:** Indian Institute of Space Science and Technology and Kerala Startup Mission.

**Deployed at:** Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre.

### Significance:

- Boosts **India's indigenous additive manufacturing capability**.
- Enables **rapid prototyping in space tech** (propulsion, materials).
- Strengthens **academia-startup-ISRO collaboration**.
- Supports **next-gen manufacturing for aerospace sector**.

## SWOT Satellite

Recently, NASA has developed a new map of the ocean floor by using satellite data from SWOT Satellite.

### About SWOT (Surface Water and Ocean Topography) Satellite:

- Launched in 2022 as a joint mission of **NASA & CNES (French Space Agency)**.
- **Objective:** Measure global **surface water & ocean topography changes**.
- **Key tech:** **Ka-band Radar Interferometer (KaRIn) radar** to map height & extent of rivers, lakes, oceans.
- **Coverage:** ~90% of Earth every **21 days**.
- **Capability:** Monitors rivers (>~100 m width) & **~1M+ water bodies**.

## Orbital Data Centres

SpaceX is planning to launch up to 1 million data-centre satellites into orbit to bypass power and water limits on Earth.

### What are Orbital Data Centres?

**Orbital data centres (space-based data centres)** are computing facilities placed in **Earth's orbit (Lower Earth Orbit/Geostationary Earth Orbit)** using satellites or space stations.

### Core idea:

- To use **solar energy (abundant in space)** instead of terrestrial power
- Avoid **land, water, and cooling constraints** on Earth
- Process data **in orbit** (e.g., satellite data, military intelligence, AI workloads).

### Basic architecture:

- Modular satellite units with **AI chips/servers**
- Solar panels for power
- Radiative cooling systems (since no air/water in space)
- Data transmission via **laser/relay satellites**.

### Key Challenges of Orbital Data Centres:

- **Cooling Problem:** In space, the absence of an atmosphere means **no convection or conduction cooling**, which are the primary mechanisms used on Earth. Heat can only be removed through **radiative cooling**, which is relatively slow and inefficient for high-performance AI chips. As a result, managing thermal loads becomes a **fundamental engineering bottleneck**, limiting computing density and performance.
- **Launch & Deployment Cost:** Sending infrastructure into orbit is extremely expensive due to the **high cost per kilogram of payload**. For orbital data centres to be viable, **frequent and large-scale launches** are required, which significantly raises capital costs. Even with reusable rockets, **cost reductions by orders of magnitude** are necessary to make such systems economically competitive.
- **Maintenance & Upgradation:** Orbital data centres operate in a **remote and inaccessible environment** and are typically **sealed and modular**, meaning they cannot be easily repaired, upgraded, or expanded after deployment. This **"locked-for-life"** design leads to rapid obsolescence, especially in the fast-evolving AI hardware ecosystem.
- **Radiation & Harsh Environment:** Space exposes hardware to **cosmic radiation and solar flares**, which can damage electronic components and cause data errors. Additional threats like **micrometeoroids and extreme temperature fluctuations** further complicate system durability.

- **Data Latency & Transmission:** Orbital data centres must transmit data either **back to Earth or across satellite networks**, introducing latency and dependence on communication infrastructure. This requires **high-bandwidth, low-latency systems such as laser-based inter-satellite links**, which are still developing.

**Microsoft’s Underwater Data Centre (Project Natick)**- a subsea modular data centre using seawater cooling. It was technically successful but failed commercially due to **lack of demand, high deployment cost vs land alternatives, no flexibility (sealed units), no easy upgrades or scaling**, and industry preferred **land-based hyperscale centres**.

### The Axios Hack

Recently, the hackers tried to burn axios in one of the most operationally sophisticated supply chain attacks ever executed.

**Axios is a *npm (Node Package Manager)*, which is like an App Store for code and developers use it download pre-build software tools.**

**Axios is a JavaScript library used to make HTTP requests from an application to a server. It acts as a client-side data fetching tool used to get data from Application Programming Interface (APIs) and send data to servers.**

**About the Attack:** Attackers hijacked a trusted account, published fake updates, and used hidden dependencies to secretly install malware on developers’ systems.

#### Why this attack is sophisticated?

- **Pre-planned execution:** Malware package uploaded **18 hours earlier** (pre-staging).
- **Multi-platform payloads:** Designed for **Windows, macOS, Linux**.
- **Bypassed safeguards:** Published directly to npm (**Node Package Manager for Java libraries**) which **skipped code review & testing pipelines**.
- **Self-destructing malware:** Deletes itself making it **hard to detect and investigate**.

#### Impact:

On Developers:	On End Users
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their machines could be <b>fully compromised</b>.</li> <li>• Attackers gain access to API keys, databases and SSH credentials.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>SSH (Secure Shell)</b> is a protocol used for <b>secure remote login and communication</b>.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indirect but serious risk compromised developers, apps and exposed <b>user data</b>.</li> </ul>

**Core Vulnerability Highlighted:** Open-source ecosystem relies on **trust and convenience**. **A single compromised account can impact millions of users globally.**

#### Immediate Response:

- If affected:
- Assume **full system compromise**.
  - **Rotate all credentials**- API keys, passwords, tokens, SSH keys.
  - Roll back to safe versions.
  - Check **network logs** for suspicious activity.

### Chapchar Kut

- Chapchar Kut, the **week-long spring festival** of Mizoram was recently celebrated in Aizawl.
- It is usually celebrated in March, after the completion of the difficult task of Jhum operation - clearing the forest and remnants of burning.
- The festival is a **celebration of Mizo culture**, featuring traditional dances, music, art, and cuisine. It brings communities together to honour their heritage.
- The **theme** of the festival was “**Zo nun ze mawi – Inremna**” (Mizo Ethics – Reconciliation).
- The Chief Minister of Mizoram, who was the **Kut Pa** (Father of the festival) highlighted the Mizo community’s connect with nature and agriculture.

### Thirumangai Alvar

- The Ashmolean Museum, in Oxford, England, has returned a 16th-Century bronze statue of Saint Thirumangai Alvar to the Government of India.
- Thirumangai Alvar was one of the **twelve Alvars**, the **Tamil poet-saints of the Bhakti movement devoted to Lord Vishnu**, and is generally placed between the 8th and 9th centuries CE.
- He is regarded as the **last among the Alvars** and one of the most prolific contributors to the **Divya Prabandham**, the collection of 4,000 Tamil devotional hymns central to the Vaishnava tradition.
- He was initially a military leader who later renounced worldly life and embraced intense devotion (bhakti) to Vishnu.
- His compositions are marked by **emotional intensity, poetic richness, and theological depth**, and they describe devotion to Vishnu in sacred temples known as **Divya Desams**.
- His most important work is **Periya Tirumoli**, composed of 1084 hymns. The others are **Tirunetuntantakam, Sิริya Tirumadal and Periya Tirumadal**.

## AWARDS/ PERSONALITIES IN NEWS

### Khelo India Tribal Games

- The inaugural Khelo India Tribal Games was held as India's first national multi-sport event for tribal athletes.
- It was hosted in Chhattisgarh across Raipur, Jagdalpur and Surguja.
- The Games featured **seven medal sports**- athletics, football, hockey, weightlifting, archery, swimming and wrestling- along with demonstration events such as **mallakhamb and kabaddi**, reflecting both competitive sport and India's indigenous sporting traditions.
- The official mascot of the Games is **Morveer**. Derived from the Chhattisgarhi words '**Mor**' (**our own**) and '**Veer**' (**bravery**), it symbolises pride, spirit and the identity of India's tribal communities.

### Khelo India Programme

- The Khelo India Programme was launched to expand participation at the grassroots level, identify promising talent and provide sustained support to young athletes.
- Through a combination of competitions, training and financial assistance, Khelo India is helping create a more structured and accessible sports ecosystem.
- National level competitions held under Khelo India Programme include:
  - Khelo India Youth Games;
  - Khelo India University Games;
  - Khelo India Beach Games;
  - Khelo India Para Games; and
  - Khelo India Winter Games.
  - Khelo India Water Sports Festival

### Saraswati Samman

- **Bengali Novel Hara Parbati Katha by Author Ramkumar Mukhopadhyay** has been selected for Saraswati Samman, 2025.
- Saraswati Samman is an annual award given to outstanding **literary work written in any of Indian language by an Indian citizen** and published during the last 10 years.
- It is instituted by the **K.K. Birla Foundation** in 1991.
- The awardee is given 15 lakh rupees, a citation and a plaque.

### Jnanpith Award

- Tamil lyricist and author **R. Vairamuthu** has been selected for the Jnanpith Award 2025.
- He is only the third Tamil litterateur to be chosen for this award. after Akilan (1975) and Jayakanthan (2002).
- However, he is the first to receive the award for Tamil poetry; the other two got it for their prose.

### Jnanpith Award

- Instituted in 1961, the Jnanpith Award is the highest literary award in India presented annually by the **Bharatiya Jnanpith**. It is conferred to an author for their outstanding contribution towards literature since 1965.

- It can only be conferred upon an Indian citizen and is given **only to writers writing in Indian languages included in the Eighth Schedule** to the Constitution **and English**, with no posthumous conferral.
- The award carries a cash component of Rs 11 lakh, a **statue of Vagdevi** and a citation.
- The first recipient of the award was the Malayalam writer G. Sankara Kurup who received the award in 1965 for his collection of poems, Odakkuzhal (The Bamboo Flute).

### Sahitya Akademi Awards

- The Sahitya Akademi has announced its annual Sahitya Akademi Awards for 2025.
- 8 books of poetry, 4 novels, 6 books of short stories, 2 essays, 1 literary criticism, 1 autobiography and 2 memoirs have been awarded.
- Among the winners are former diplomat Navtej Sarna, awarded in English for his novel Crimson Spring; Hindi writer Mamta Kalia for her memoir Jeete Jee Allahabad.
- **Established in 1954**, the award is a **literary honour** in India, conferred by the Sahitya Akademi. It is conferred annually on writers of the most outstanding books of literary merit published in any of the **24 major Indian languages**.
- Besides the 22 languages enumerated in the Constitution of India, the Sahitya Akademi has recognised English and Rajasthani.

### Sahitya Akademi (Autonomous organization)

- Sahitya Akademi - **India's National Academy of Letters**, is the central institution for literary dialogue, publication and promotion in the country.
- It also gives special awards called **Bhasha Samman** to significant contribution to the languages not formally recognized by the Akademi and for contribution to classical and medieval literature.