



KERALA STATE CIVIL SERVICE ACADEMY



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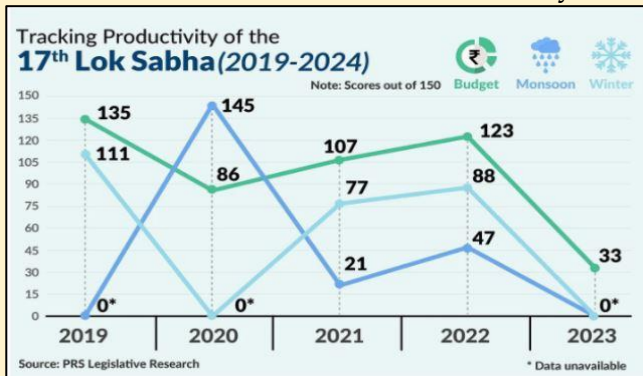


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DECLINING PARLIAMENTARY SITTINGS

As Parliament reconvenes, concerns deepen about its shrinking sittings, weakened oversight, rigid party whips, and executive dominance — raising fundamental questions about legislative independence, democratic deliberation, and constitutional morality.



Main Arguments

Declining Parliamentary Sittings: Lok Sabha sittings have fallen from 135 days (1952–57) to just 55 days recently, indicating a shrinking space for deliberation and accountability.

Anti-Defection Distortion: The Tenth Schedule, meant to prevent opportunistic floor-crossing, now curtails conscience and constituency-based voting, reducing MPs to numbers bound by party diktat.

Eroded Oversight Functions: When members cannot vote independently, core constitutional duties — financial scrutiny, impeachment, legislative review — lose credibility and meaning.

Executive Dominance: Systematic dismissal of Opposition notices, rushed legislation, and disregard for committee processes tilt the balance heavily in favour of the executive.

Weakening of Neutral Offices: Constitutional authorities meant to be impartial guardians of parliamentary privilege have increasingly acted as instruments of discipline rather than neutrality.

Challenges / Criticisms

Majoritarian Monologue: Parliament risks becoming an approval chamber where debate is stifled and accountability sidelined.

Committee System Dilution: Parliamentary committees, crucial for cross-party, evidence-based legislative scrutiny, are bypassed or weakened.

Opposition Marginalisation: When discussions are blocked, disruption becomes the only tool left — a symptom, not the cause, of parliamentary dysfunction.

Loss of Westminster Spirit: India's model is diverging from mature democracies like the UK, Canada, and Australia, where executive accountability mechanisms remain robust.

Democratic Erosion: Reduced legislative independence undermines constitutional morality, weakening checks on concentrated power.

Way Forward

Limit the Anti-Defection Law (UK/Canada Model): In the UK and Canada, party discipline is applied only to budget and confidence motions, allowing MPs to vote independently on policy matters; India should similarly confine whips to core confidence issues to restore legislators' autonomy.

Mandated Parliamentary Sitting Days (UK/Australia Model): The UK Parliament meets 120–150 days annually, and the Australian Parliament follows a pre-announced, mandatory session calendar; India needs a statutory minimum sitting requirement to prevent executive control over when Parliament meets.

Strengthened Committee System (U.S./UK Model): U.S. Congressional committees have the power to summon senior officials, demand documents, and hold public hearings, while UK Select Committees routinely question ministers; India must empower its committees with compulsory referrals and ministerial accountability.

Prime Ministerial Question Time (UK Model): The British PM must answer questions directly every Wednesday in a televised session; India should institutionalise a weekly Prime Minister's Questions segment to enhance direct executive accountability.

Neutral Presiding Officers (New Zealand/Australia Model): The Speakers of New Zealand and Australia resign from their party positions upon election and operate under strict neutrality norms; India should adopt similar safeguards to ensure impartial handling of parliamentary business.

Independent Parliamentary Budget Office (U.S./Canada Model): The U.S. Congressional Budget Office and Canada's Parliamentary Budget Officer scrutinise government finances independently; India should create an autonomous fiscal watchdog reporting directly to Parliament.

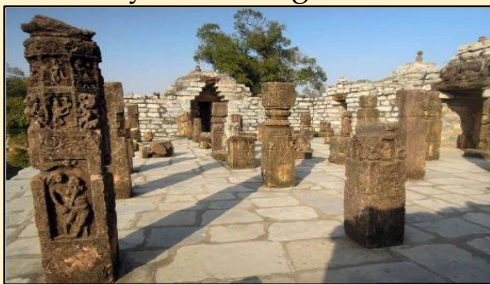
Stronger Opposition Rights (Germany Model): Germany reserves committee chairs and agenda-setting rights for the opposition, ensuring checks on majority power; India must secure guaranteed discussion time and procedural tools for the Opposition.

Mandatory Public Consultation for Bills (Nordic Model): Sweden, Norway, and Finland require open public consultations before major laws are passed; India should adopt compulsory pre-legislative scrutiny for all significant bills.

Legislatures decline when dissent is penalised, debate is curtailed, and executive power overwhelms constitutional checks. Reviving Parliament's role requires structural reforms, political restraint, and a renewed commitment to the original spirit of India's democratic architecture.

SIRPUR ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

Sirpur is set for a facelift as Chhattisgarh pushes for a UNESCO World Heritage tag for the 5th Century archaeological site.



Location: It is located in Mahasamund district of Chhattisgarh. It is a 5th-12th Century archaeological site located on the banks of the Mahanadi.

Other names: It is also known as Shripur and Sripura.

Discovery: It was first discovered in 1882 by Alexander Cunningham, a British army engineer who became the first Director-

General of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) in 1871.

Later excavations: Excavations stalled in subsequent years, resuming only in the early 1950s, and later in the 1990s and 2003.

Historical significance: It was the flourishing capital of Dakshina Kosala under the Panduvanshi and later Somavamshi kings. Its rulers patronised art, architecture, and religious scholarship, making it a flourishing urban centre of its time.

Major Buddhist centre: It was a major Buddhist centre with large viharas, meditation halls and excavated stupas.

Visited by Chinese travellers: Excavations have revealed significant Buddhist remains, including the Anand Prabhu Kuti Vihara, visited by Chinese traveller Xuanzang in the 7th century CE.

Religious and commercial hub: It also has a 6th Century market complex, showing Sirpur was both a religious and commercial hub.

Notable Structures at the site:

Lakshmana Temple (dedicated to Vishnu): It is one of India's finest brick temples which was built around the 7th Century.

Surang Tila complex: It is built on a high terrace and has multiple shrines in the panchayatana style (one main shrine surrounded by four subsidiary ones).

Tivaradeva Mahavihara: It houses a significant Buddha statue.

Suitability for UNESCO's tag: Sirpur's location along the Mahanadi creates a sacred riverine cultural landscape with ghats and temple clusters, aligning with UNESCO's concept of a combined work of nature and humankind, enhancing the site's value.

G20 SUMMIT

The absence of the U.S., China, and Russia from the 2025 Johannesburg G20 summit signals a deeper erosion of the platform's authority, highlighting how geopolitical realignments, unilateralism, and shifting power balances are undermining multilateral economic governance.



Main Arguments

Great-Power Absence: The absence of Trump, Xi, and Putin reduces the G20 to a “middle-power gathering,” diminishing its capacity to influence global economic outcomes.

Origins of the Platform: The G20's elevation in 2008 addressed a trans-Atlantic financial crisis, driven by the need to include rising powers like China, India, Saudi Arabia, and Indonesia in crisis response.

Post-Crisis Drift: After the initial three summits (2008–09), the G20 failed to make meaningful progress on global challenges such as climate change, trade reform, and sustainable development.

Geopolitical Shocks: Trump's tariff wars, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and worsening U.S.–China ties fractured consensus, making joint communiqués impossible since 2022.

Unilateral U.S. Turn: Trump's push for a G2 with China and call to readmit Russia to the G8 has relegated the G20 to the sidelines, making plurilateral platforms less attractive.

Challenges / Criticisms

Erosion of Collective Legitimacy: Without great-power participation, G20 decisions lack weight and global acceptance.

Middle-Power Limitations: With only middle powers attending Johannesburg, the forum loses its unique ability to bridge major economies and emerging powers.

Failure to Address Core Issues: Persistent inaction on climate finance, mercantilist trade disruptions, and migration challenges diminishes credibility.

Fragmented Global Order: Competing blocs (G2, G8, BRICS+) challenge the G20's role as the premier economic coordination platform.

India's Dilemma: India's enthusiasm for the G20 as a “UN economic security council” substitute weakens as the grouping drifts, complicating India's multilateral strategy.

Way Forward

Great-Power Re-engagement: Revive strategic dialogue among the U.S., China, and Russia to restore G20's centrality in global governance.

Substantive Agenda Setting: Refocus the G20 on actionable issues — climate finance, supply-chain resilience, global tax reform, and digital trade.

Institutional Credibility: Strengthen follow-up mechanisms, task forces, and peer review to ensure implementation of commitments.

Alternative Platforms: Bolster India's engagement with dynamic forums like the East Asia Summit, which retain major-power participation.

Reform Multilateral Architecture: Advocate expansion of global governance structures like the UNSC and IMF to reflect contemporary power realities.

The G20 risks becoming a ceremonial forum unless it reclaims its role as the world's premier economic steering committee through great-power participation and coherent agenda-setting. Without such renewal, middle-power diplomacy alone cannot prevent strategic drift or restore global confidence.

SANCHAR SAATHI



Development: Sanchar Saathi is a security and awareness platform developed by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT).

Availability: It is available both as an app and a web portal.

Objective: It primarily aims to help mobile users manage their digital identity, report suspicious activity, and safeguard their devices.

Focus on awareness: The platform also provides educational material on telecom safety and cyber risks, making it a combined service-and-awareness system.

Chakshu Feature: It lets users report suspicious calls, SMS, and WhatsApp messages, such as fake KYC alerts, impersonation scams, or phishing links. It helps authorities spot fraud patterns.

Addresses spam calls and links: Users can report spam calls and messages that break TRAI rules. Complaints made within seven days can lead to action against the sender. It also allows reporting of phishing links, unsafe APKs, and fraudulent websites.

Checks linked mobile connections: It shows how many mobile numbers are registered using one's identity. It also helps identify SIM cards taken without one's knowledge.

Blocks lost or stolen phones: It allows users to block the IMEI of a lost or stolen device so it can't be used. Phones can be unblocked if recovered.

Verifies authenticity of a device: It allows users to check if a phone is genuine by validating its IMEI. It is useful when buying second-hand phones.

Reports fraud international calls: Some scammers use illegal telecom setups to make international calls appear as regular +91 calls. Sanchar Saathi enables users to report such cases.

Verifies trusted contacts: It provides a directory to confirm genuine customer-care numbers, emails, and websites of banks and other major institutions.

Main Arguments:

Cybercrime Escalation: Scams involving government impersonation, digital arrests, and cross-border networks have intensified, exploiting gaps in SIM-based verification systems.

Account Exploitation: User accounts remain active even after SIM removal, enabling criminals to operate anonymously on encrypted messaging platforms.

IMEI Spoofing: Counterfeit devices and tampered IMEI numbers have made tracking cybercriminals extremely difficult for law enforcement.

Security Patch Intent: SIM binding aims to disable messaging app access when the associated SIM is removed, reducing impersonation risk.

Device Verification Goal: Sanchar Saathi is intended to authenticate devices and weed out cloned or illegal handsets, strengthening the digital identification ecosystem.

Challenges / Criticisms

Privacy Intrusion: The directive mandates that the app be pre-installed, visible, and undeletable, requiring higher security privileges, risking intrusive access.

Surveillance Concerns: Elevated permissions could create a Panopticon-like tool, enabling continuous monitoring or exploitation—especially worrying given past use of Pegasus.

Legality & Proportionality Issues: Under K.S. Puttaswamy (2017), state actions must satisfy legality, necessity, and proportionality. Existing alternatives make the measure disproportionate.

Security Vulnerability: A privileged government app could become a high-value target for hackers, exposing millions of users to systemic risks.

Industry Pushback: Privacy-focused companies like Apple have resisted compliance, signalling global discomfort with mandatory surveillance-linked applications.

Way Forward

Privacy-by-Design Tools: Strengthen USSD codes, SMS checks, and web-based verification instead of forcing device-level intrusive apps.

Targeted IMEI Regulation: Improve CEIR (Central Equipment Identity Register) functioning, coupled with telecom audits and stricter KYC enforcement.

Risk-Graded Measures: Apply intrusive tools only for high-risk cases after judicial authorisation, not for every smartphone buyer.

Independent Oversight: Create a privacy and cybersecurity review board, ensuring safeguards before deploying government apps on private devices.

Transparent Standards: Publish data handling policies, permissions, and audit logs, ensuring that no invisible surveillance architecture is embedded into devices.

Cybercrime demands strong action, but compulsory government apps with privileged access raise grave concerns for privacy and constitutionalism. A sustainable cybersecurity strategy must rely on least-intrusive tools, transparent safeguards, and adherence to the proportionality doctrine laid down in Puttaswamy.

ETALIN HYDROELECTRIC PROJECT



INDIA'S THIRD-LARGEST HYDROPOWER PROJECT CLEARED IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH

The Project Affected Peoples Forum (PAPF) of Arunachal Pradesh has urged NHPC Ltd to reinstate every local worker previously engaged in the Etalin Hydroelectric Project.

Location: It is a 3,097 MW hydropower project planned in Arunachal Pradesh's Dibang Valley.

Rivers associated: The project involves two gravity dams, one on the Dri River and another on the Talo (Tangon) River, both tributaries of the Dibang River, with an underground powerhouse near their confluence close to Etalin village.

Construction: The project is being executed by NHPC Limited (formerly known as the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation).

Nature: It is a type of hydroelectric power generation project that utilizes the natural flow and elevation drop of a river to produce electricity.

Uniqueness: It is one of the largest hydropower projects proposed in the country in terms of installed capacity. EHEP is proposed to be developed as a combination of two run-of-the-river schemes.

Environmental impact: The project will require the felling of over 270,000 trees and the diversion of over 1,100 hectares of unclassified forest land.

Concern: The project area falls under the "richest bio-geographical province of the Himalayan zone" and "one of the mega biodiversity hotspots of the world".

Indigenous tribes: The project area is dominated by indigenous populations belonging to Idu-Mishmi tribes.



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VIKRAM-I



PM Modi inaugurated Skyroot-built India's first private rocket Vikram-I in Hyderabad.

About Vikram-I Rocket:

Development: It is developed by Skyroot Aerospace, a Hyderabad-based private space start-up.

Nomenclature: It is India's new private orbital-class launch vehicle named after Dr. Vikram Sarabhai, the father of India's space programme.

Uniqueness: It is India's first privately-built orbital-class rocket capable of launching satellites into Earth orbit.

Thrust: It produces 1,200 kN of thrust using an all-carbon composite structure for enhanced lightweight strength and efficiency.

Design: The design emphasises simplicity, reliability, and the ability to launch within 24 hours from any location.

Stages: It has four stages and the first three stages are solid-fuelled, providing robust initial thrust, topped by a hypergolic liquid upper stage for precise orbital adjustments. Stage 4 uses a cluster of four Raman engines. Targets small satellite segment: It is built to target the small-satellite segment and is capable of placing multiple satellites into orbit in a single mission.

Payload Capacity: It can deploy up to 350 kg into low Earth orbit (LEO) and 260 kg into a sun-synchronous orbit (SSO).

Union Minister of State for Science & Technology recently said that the EIR initiative is successfully cultivating a new generation of scientist-entrepreneurs.



About Entrepreneur-in-Residence (EIR) Programme:

Nature: It is one of the programs introduced under National Initiative for Developing and Harnessing Innovations (NIDHI).

Objective: It aims to encourage graduate students to take to entrepreneurship as a prospective career option by providing financial and non-financial support in the form of a fellowship.

Implementation: It is implemented by the Dept. of Science and Technology, Govt. of India in association with NCL Venture Centre, Pune.

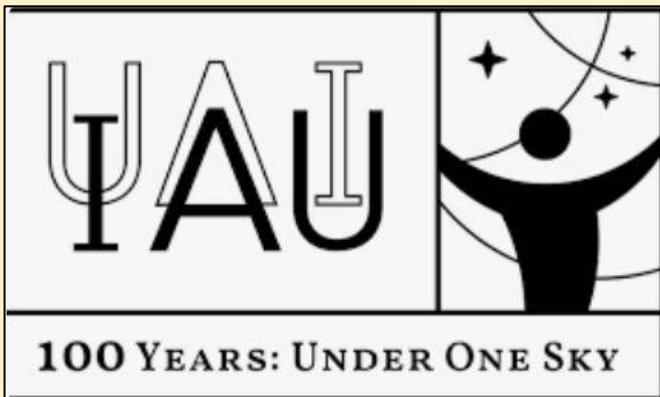
Financial Support: The recipient is eligible to get financial support of up to INR 30,000/- monthly. It is offered to graduate students for a maximum period of 12 months.

Mentorship: The Programme includes mentoring support and guidance, technical and financial advice, industry connections etc. Connects lab to market: It helps innovators convert scientific discoveries into market-ready solutions through mentoring, incubation and industry linkages.

Promotes scientist-entrepreneurs: It cultivates a new generation of scientist-entrepreneurs, where researchers are encouraged to innovate, patent and commercialise their ideas.

Mitigates risk: A primary goal is to minimize the risk involved in pursuing technology-based startups, thereby creating a stronger pipeline of entrepreneurs for incubators.

INTERNATIONAL ASTRONOMICAL UNION (IAU)



The International Astronomical Union (IAU) has approved the name of a 3.5 billion-year-old crater on Mars, after M.S. Krishnan, the pioneering Indian geologist.

About International Astronomical Union (IAU):

Nature: It is a global organization of professional astronomers, at the PhD level and beyond who are active in professional education and research in astronomy.

Establishment: It was founded in 1919 as a senior body governing international professional astronomical activities worldwide.

Objective: Its mission is to promote and safeguard the science of astronomy in all its aspects, including research, communication, education, and development, through international cooperation.

Activities undertaken:

Defining fundamental astronomical and dynamical constants and unambiguous astronomical nomenclature

Rapid dissemination of new discoveries and organization of international observing campaigns

Promotion of educational activities in astronomy to early informal discussions of possible future international large-scale facilities.

Uniqueness: It is the only organization recognized professionally for the naming of astronomical bodies, which it does solely on the basis of merit, history, or discoverer's privilege.

Headquarters: Its headquarters is located in Paris, France.

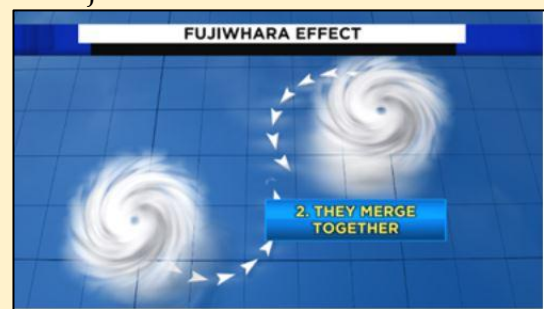
Membership: IAU membership spans 92 countries. Out of those countries, 85 are National Members.

Governance: The IAU holds a general assembly every three years in varying parts of the world. The long-term policy of the IAU is defined by the General Assembly.

FUJIWHARA EFFECT

Multiple cyclonic storms with rare Fujiwhara interaction is likely in Bay of Bengal in the following week.

About Fujiwhara Effect:



Definition: The Fujiwhara Effect occurs when two cyclones form near each other or approach each other close enough to allow the Fujiwhara interaction to take place.

Outcome of binary interaction: Extratropical cyclones can exhibit binary interaction when within a distance of 2,000 km of each other. Tropical cyclones exhibit this type of effect when separated by a distance of less than 1,400 km.

Direction: During the Fujiwhara interaction, the centers of the two cyclones involved in the phenomenon begin to mutually orbit in a counterclockwise direction about a point between the two cyclones.

Dependent on relative mass: The position of the point is dependent on the intensity and relative mass of the cyclonic vortices. The smaller cyclone involved in the Fujiwhara Effect moves at a faster rate than the bigger one about the central point.

Can lead to larger cyclones: The Fujiwhara Effect might lead the two cyclones to spiral into the central point and merge with each other, or it might trigger the development of a larger cyclone. It might also divert the original path of one or both the cyclones.

ASIAN AND PACIFIC CENTRE FOR DEVELOPMENT OF DISASTER INFORMATION MANAGEMENT (APDIM)

Recently, the 10th Session of the Asian and Pacific Centre for Development of Disaster Information Management (APDIM) took place at Vigyan Bhawan in New Delhi.



About APDIM:

Nomenclature: APDIM stands for Asian and Pacific Centre for Development of Disaster Information Management.

Nature: It is a regional institution of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

Vision: Its vision is to ensure effective disaster risk information is produced and used for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific.

Mandate: It aims to reduce human and material losses due to natural hazards and contribute to the effective design, investment and implementation of disaster risk reduction and resilience policies.

Administration: It is governed by a Governing Council consisting of eight ESCAP member countries elected for a period of three years (India is one of the members for a period from 2022 to 2025).

Headquarter: Its headquarters is located in Tehran, Iran.

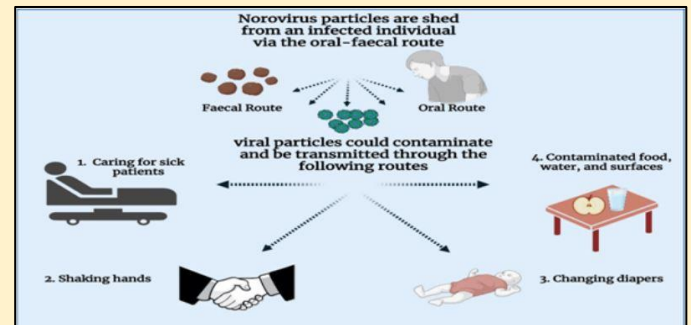
Functions: It functions as a regional facility to strengthen the science-policy interface. It also promotes effective regional cooperation, facilitates dialogue.

Facilitates disaster management between countries: It facilitates the exchange of expertise, experiences, and knowledge in disaster information management between and within the countries of the region.

Acts as a knowledge hub: It acts as a regional knowledge hub, consolidating and sharing disaster-related data, strengthening information systems, and supporting cooperation on transboundary hazards.

NOROVIRUS DISEASE

Cases of norovirus, commonly known as the “winter vomiting disease,” have been rising in the United States in recent weeks.



About Norovirus Disease:

Nature: It is a common and highly contagious virus that causes inflammation in the stomach and intestines, a condition known as gastroenteritis.

Other names: It is also sometimes referred to as the ‘stomach flu’ or the ‘winter vomiting bug’ as norovirus outbreaks usually happen seasonally in colder months.

Vulnerable people: People of all ages can get infected and sick with norovirus, which spreads very easily and quickly.

Frequency: One can get norovirus illness many times in your life because there are many different types of noroviruses. These viruses are responsible for about 90% of viral gastroenteritis outbreaks and close to 50% of cases across the world.

Transmission: One can get norovirus from an infected person, contaminated food or water, or by touching contaminated surfaces. Norovirus infection occurs most frequently in closed and crowded environments.

Symptoms: These include vomiting, diarrhoea, stomach cramps, nausea, fever, and tiredness. In extreme cases, loss of fluids could lead to dehydration.

Treatment: Most people recover completely without treatment. No vaccines are currently available to prevent norovirus. Treatment for the infection focuses on relieving the symptoms.

Prevention: Hands should be washed frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Further, contaminated surfaces should be disinfected with a bleach-based solution, especially in outbreak situations.

RUPEE DEPRECIATION

A 7% rupee depreciation since late 2024, amid widening current-account pressures, global dollar strength, and higher oil import costs, has exposed India's structural vulnerability arising from heavy crude dependence, limiting RBI's stabilisation capacity and demanding long-term energy reforms.



Main Arguments

External Vulnerability: Persistent crude dependence – over one-fifth of total imports in FY25 – amplifies currency depreciation during global shocks, widening the current account deficit.

RBI's Limited Mandate: Under a managed-float regime, the RBI can only smooth currency volatility, not arrest depreciation, despite selling nearly \$50 billion in forex since November 2024.

Imported Inflation Risk: Transition from cheaper Russian oil to costlier U.S. crude combined with a weaker rupee increases inflationary pressure even as CPI temporarily eased to 0.25% in October 2025.

Liquidity Management: Large-dollar swaps, including the \$10 billion buy-sell swap in February 2025, provide systemic liquidity but cannot offset structural import dependence.

Trade Shocks: High global tariffs and rising bullion imports as a hedge further strain the CAD, underscoring the need to reduce oil-linked vulnerabilities.

Challenges / Criticisms

Structural Oil Dependence: India remains exposed to global crude cycles, making macroeconomic stability hostage to oil price swings.

Inadequate Energy Transition: Electrification of transport and renewable integration remain slow relative to the scale needed for external-sector resilience.

Trade Policy Weaknesses: Recent bilateral FTAs with Japan, UAE, and ASEAN have worsened India's trade balance instead of diversifying risk.

CAD Pressures: Rising bullion imports and weaker exports under hostile global conditions strain the external account despite record FDI and reserves.

Limited Monetary Scope: The RBI cannot indefinitely defend the rupee without compromising reserves or triggering domestic liquidity distortions.

Accelerated Electrification: Treat EV adoption and public transport electrification as strategic economic reforms, not sectoral initiatives.

Diversified Energy Mix: Expand domestic renewables, green hydrogen, and biofuels to structurally reduce crude import intensity.

Coherent Trade Strategy: Shift from bilateral FTAs to a calibrated trade policy that safeguards domestic industry and aligns with energy-security goals.

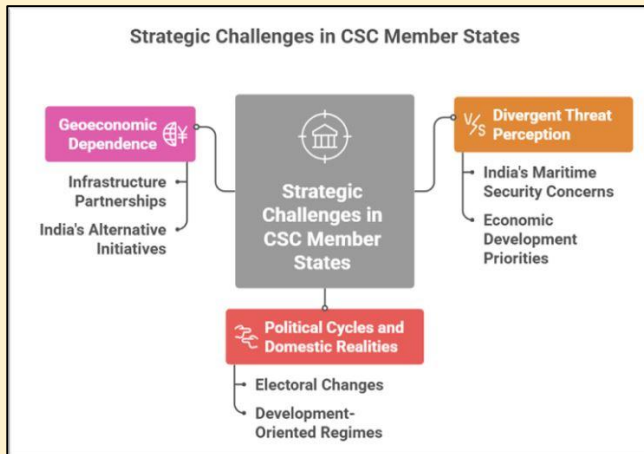
Boost Domestic Exploration: Strengthen ONGC and private-sector exploration to modestly raise domestic production and reduce import dependency.

Demand-Side Efficiency: Promote energy-efficient fuels, mobility alternatives, and urban planning tools to curb long-term oil demand.

Rupee stability cannot rest on RBI interventions alone when structural oil dependence drives repeated external shocks. True currency resilience demands a decisive energy transition that reduces crude imports, strengthens the current account, and enhances India's long-term macroeconomic autonomy.

COLOMBO SECURITY CONCLAVE (CSC)

The 7th NSA-level Colombo Security Conclave (CSC) summit in 2025 reflects India's efforts to build a cooperative security framework in the Indian Ocean, as regional geopolitics, China's growing footprint, and non-traditional maritime threats reshape strategic priorities.



Main Arguments

Regional Security Platform: CSC provides a dedicated Indian Ocean security forum, unique in a region lacking a unified architecture despite high maritime vulnerabilities.

Evolution of the Group: Originally a trilateral (India-Sri Lanka-Maldives), CSC expanded to include Mauritius (2022), Bangladesh (2024), and Seychelles (2025), signalling widening trust and strategic convergence.

Addressing Non-Traditional Threats: The platform prioritises maritime security, counter-terrorism, trafficking, organised crime, and cyber threats, central to the economic and livelihood needs of littoral states.

Development-Security Link: For CSC members, maritime security is inseparable from blue economy prospects, fisheries protection, disaster resilience, and sea-borne trade.

India's Strategic Moment: The summit strengthens India's leadership at a time when the Indo-Pacific security environment is shifting due to China's expanding influence and geopolitical volatility.

Challenges / Criticisms

China Divergence: India views China's presence in the Indian Ocean as a strategic risk, but many CSC members depend on China economically and do not share New Delhi's threat assessment.

Institutional Weakness: CSC still functions primarily through NSA-level meetings, lacking a deeper, standing institutional mechanism for sustained cooperation.

Domestic Uncertainties: Political instability in key states, especially Bangladesh, may affect continuity of engagement and weaken long-term group cohesion.

Fragmented Regional Architecture: The Indian Ocean remains divided among multiple, overlapping but weak security groupings, diluting collective action.

Uneven Capacity: Smaller island states lack resources for maritime domain awareness, search-and-rescue, and cyber defence, limiting CSC's effectiveness.

Way Forward

Institutionalisation: Create permanent secretariat, working groups, and annual joint exercises, similar to ASEAN-led mechanisms, ensuring policy continuity.

Capacity Building: India can expand IT, maritime domain awareness (MDA), and coast guard training through IORA, SAGAR, and I4F initiatives.

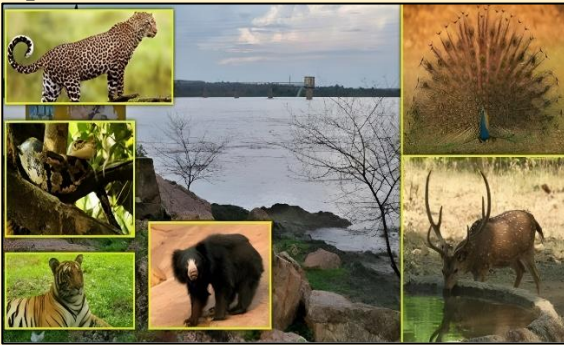
Balanced China Strategy: CSC should frame cooperation around non-traditional security, avoiding overt anti-China signalling to maintain consensus among smaller states.

Economic-Security Integration: Promote blue economy partnerships, port security, anti-piracy collaboration, and disaster preparedness, reflecting member priorities.

Incremental Expansion: Gradually include Malaysia (guest in 2025) and other Indian Ocean states, ensuring the group grows without overstretching. The CSC has emerged as a promising mini-lateral model for Indian Ocean security governance, overcoming historical fragmentation. Its future strength will depend on institutional resilience, balanced strategic messaging, and sustained cooperation that aligns security priorities with the developmental needs of littoral states.

CHAPRALA WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

A rare striated grassbird was recorded in Chaprala Wildlife Sanctuary in Gadchiroli district, marking a major range extension for the species in Maharashtra.

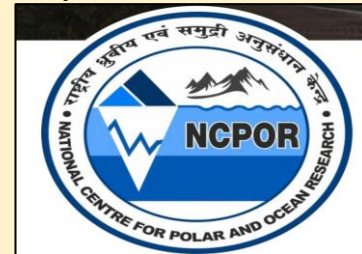


About Chaprala Wildlife Sanctuary:

- **Location:** It is located in the Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra.
- **Establishment:** Chaprala Wildlife Sanctuary was officially notified as a wildlife sanctuary in February 1986.
- **Area:** It covers an area of approximately 134.78 sq.km (52.05 square miles).
- **Boundaries:** The Markhanda and Pedigundam hills flank the sanctuary from northeast and south, and the Pranhita River flows along its western boundary.
- **Rivers:** It is located on the bank of the confluence of the Wardha and Wainganga rivers. During the monsoons, river water swells and enters the sanctuary.
- **Tanks:** Additionally, several water bodies, including the Murgikunta, Raikonta, and Komatkunta tanks, further contribute to the sanctuary's biodiversity.
- **Vegetation:** It is dominated by southern tropical dry deciduous forests interspersed with grasslands.
- **Flora:** The dominant tree species include teak, Arjun, salai, mahua, bel, dhawada, tendu, sissoo, and semal.
- **Fauna:** It is inhabited by Tiger, Leopard, Wild boar, Sloth bear, Wild dogs, Langurs, Blackbuck, Spotted Deer, Sambar, Jackal, Mongoose, etc. The sanctuary also supports a diverse aquatic fauna, including fish, prawns, and turtles.

NATIONAL CENTRE FOR POLAR AND OCEAN RESEARCH (NCPOR)

NCPOR has become the anchor of India's polar and oceanic exploration, said Hon'ble Governor of Goa, while speaking at the Antarctica Day celebrations at Goa.



About National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR):

- **Nature:** It is India's premier R&D institute for polar and ocean sciences, spearheading the Indian Antarctic, Arctic, and Southern Ocean research programs.
- **Establishment:** It was founded on 25 May 1998 as the National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research (NCAOR), and it was renamed NCPOR later.
- **Nodal Ministry:** It works under the Ministry of Earth Sciences, Government of India.
- **Headquarters:** Its headquarters is located in Vasco da Gama, Goa.
- **Composition:** The governing Body comprises of 13 members and the Chairman (ex-officio) of governing body is Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences.
- **Mandate:** It facilitates scientific research activities in Antarctica, Arctic and in Indian Ocean sector of Southern Ocean. It also helps in management of Indian Antarctic Research Bases "Maitri" and "Bharati", and Indian Arctic base "Himadri".
- **Associated with strategic projects:** It also works on strategically vital projects like Mapping of Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), Continental shelf surveys, and the Deep Ocean Mission.
- **Data Management and global collaboration:** It conducts climate modelling, and is setting up the first Polar and Ocean Museum. It also participates in international polar science networks, Arctic policy dialogues, and climate monitoring programs.

NATIONALLY DETERMINED CONTRIBUTIONS (NDCS)

India is preparing its new Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement for the 2035 horizon. The article proposes a seven-point energy transition strategy to peak emissions by 2035 and strengthen India's decarbonisation credibility.



Main Arguments

- **Higher Emissions Intensity Reduction:** India should target a **65% reduction in emissions intensity by 2035**, signalling a credible path to peaking emissions around 2035 and reinforcing global trust in India's decarbonisation pathway.
- **Expanded Non-Fossil Capacity:** Raise the **non-fossil capacity share to 80%** by 2035, lifting total generation capacity to **1,600 GW**, with solar and wind contributing **1,200 GW** and storage scaling to **~170 GW**.
- **Phasing Down Unabated Coal:** No new **unabated coal plants** should be commissioned after 2030; coal capacity should peak at **293 GW** before declining, with eventual retention dependent on affordable **carbon capture and storage (CCS)**.
- **Accelerated Electrification:** Deepen electrification across transport, targeting **100% electric traction in railways**, **50% electric city buses**, and full transition of electric three-wheelers within a few years.
- **Operationalising Carbon Markets:** The **Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS)** starting 2026 must expand coverage to power and medium-scale industries, tightening emission intensity norms in line with net-zero goals.

- **Electricity Pricing Reforms:** High renewable penetration needs **dynamic pricing**, exchange-based power procurement, and **time-of-day tariffs** to manage variability and enhance grid efficiency.
- **Mobilising Finance:** India must attract **\$62 billion annually** until 2035 for renewables and grid expansion, with **80% domestic mobilisation** and **20% foreign capital**, supported by stronger MDB financing.

Challenges / Criticisms

- **Financing Constraints:** Large upfront investment needs may strain domestic savings and private capital flows without predictable policy stability.
- **Technological Uncertainty:** Cost-effective CCS, battery storage and large-scale grid integration remain uncertain and require accelerated innovation.
- **Coal-Dependent States:** Jharkhand, Odisha and Chhattisgarh face employment risks, requiring **transition planning**, retraining and diversification.
- **Behavioural Resistance:** Electricity pricing reforms, especially **time-of-day tariffs**, may face public pushback due to lack of awareness.
- **Institutional Fragmentation:** Climate governance remains dispersed, with the need for stronger inter-ministerial coordination.

Way Forward

- **Revive PM's Council on Climate Change:** Act as the apex body to approve national plans, coordinate inter-governmental action and conduct periodic review.
- **State-Level Transition Plans:** Prepare **just transition frameworks** for coal-producing states, linking reskilling, MSME diversification and green industries.

- **Green Industrial Policy:** Promote domestic manufacturing of **solar modules, wind turbines, batteries and electrolyzers** to reduce import dependence.
- **Grid Modernisation:** Invest in **smart grids, battery storage, pumped hydro,** and inter-state transmission corridors to handle 50% variable renewables.
- **Global Climate Diplomacy:** Link India's enhanced NDCs with **finance guarantees,** concessional capital pools, and MDB reforms to de-risk private investment.

India's next decade will determine its long-term climate trajectory. A credible, finance-backed seven-point strategy—anchored in higher ambition, technological shifts, coal phase-down, and institutional cohesion—can place India firmly on the path toward a resilient, low-carbon, Viksit Bharat by 2070.

PM JANMAN SCHEME

Members of the Bonda community in Odisha's Malkangiri are set to transition from fragile thatched huts to permanent pucca houses under the PM-JANMAN Scheme.



About PM-JANMAN Scheme:

- **Nomenclature:** PM-JANMAN stands for Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan.
- **Launch:** PM JANMAN was launched on 15th November 2023, a day also celebrated as Janjatiya Gaurav Divas.
-

- **Objective:** It aims to enhance the socio-economic conditions of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) by providing comprehensive development interventions and by recognizing their unique contribution to national and global development.
- **Beneficiaries:** The scheme targets 75 PVTG communities across 18 states and 1 Union Territory (Andaman & Nicobar Islands) as its beneficiaries.
- **Budgetary Outlay:** The total budgetary outlay for the scheme is Rs 24,104 crore, with the central share being Rs 15,336 crore and the state share being Rs 8,768 crore.
- **Coverage Period:** The scheme extends from 2023-24 to 2025-26.
- **Focus areas:** The scheme is aimed at providing PVTG households and habitations with:
 - basic facilities such as safe housing, clean drinking water and sanitation,
 - improved access to education, health and nutrition,
 - road and telecom connectivity, and sustainable livelihood opportunities.
 - In addition, saturation will also be ensured for schemes like Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY), Sickle Cell Disease Elimination, TB Elimination, 100% immunisation, PM Poshan, PM Jan Dhan Yojana, etc
- **Implementation:** The scheme (comprising Central Sector and Centrally Sponsored Schemes) will be implemented by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, in collaboration with the State governments and the PVTG communities.
- **Other provisions:** The plan also includes the establishment of Van Dhan Vikas Kendras for trading in forest produce, off-grid solar power systems for 1 lakh households, and solar street lights.

'DARJEELING MANDARIN ORANGE'

Recently, the 'Darjeeling Mandarin Orange' has officially been granted the Geographical Indication (GI) tag.



About Darjeeling Mandarin Orange:

Scientific name: It is botanically known as *Citrus reticulata* Blanco

Nature: The Mandarin Orange is a major cash crop of the Darjeeling Hills and it is widely recognised for its rich aroma and flavour.

Growing areas: It is grown in the hills of Darjeeling in West Bengal.

Other names: It is commonly known as "suntala" is the pride of Darjeeling hills due to its delightful aroma and flavour.

Significance: It is the third product from the region, after Darjeeling Tea and Dalley Khursani chilli, to get the tag.

Required Climatic Conditions for its growth:

It is cultivated at elevations ranging from 600 to 1500 meters above sea level,

They grow successfully in all frost free tropical and sub-tropical regions upto 1,500 m. above mean sea level.

Annual rainfall should be 100-120 cm.

Temperature should range from 10-35°C is suitable for cultivation of the crop.

The preferred soil is medium or light loamy soils.

CHAOLUNG SUKAPHA



Union Minister of Ports, Shipping & Waterways (MoPSW) led a vibrant celebration of Assam Day at his official residence, paying rich tributes to Chaolung Sukapha.

About Chaolung Sukapha:

- **Founder of Ahom kingdom:** He was a visionary 13th-century ruler who founded the Ahom kingdom that ruled Assam for six centuries.
- **Other names:** He is widely referred to as the architect of "Bor Asom" or "greater Assam".
- **Establishment of first principality:** It was in Charaideo that Sukapha established his first small principality, sowing the seeds of further expansion of the Ahom kingdom.
- **Administration:** He divided the kingdom into territorial units called khels or phoids, each under an officer responsible for supplying a fixed number of paiks.
- **Military system:** Paiks are the able-bodied male population who owed labour and military service to the state. Every adult male between sixteen and fifty was registered as a paik and served the king for part of the year in agriculture, construction, or war. In return, he was allotted land for personal cultivation.

- **Emphasis on guerrilla tactics:** He emphasized guerrilla tactics suited to the terrain of rivers, jungles, and hills.
- **Association with tribal communities:** Sukapha developed very amiable relationships with the tribal communities living in Assam – especially the Sutias, the Morans and the Kacharis.
- **Relevance:** Sukapha's significance, especially in today's Assam lies in his successful efforts towards assimilation of different communities and tribes. He adopted a policy of conciliation and assimilation rather than annihilation.

DENOTIFIED TRIBES

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


Out of these, 179 communities are now recommended for inclusion in the Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC) lists.

This historic effort aims to rectify long-standing classification gaps and ensure these communities receive rightful benefits.

DENOTIFIED TRIBES - MEANING

• **DE notified Tribes (DNTs)**, also known as *Vimukta Jati*, are the tribes that were originally listed as "Criminal Tribes" and "addicted to the systematic commission of non-bailable offences."

• Once a tribe became "notified" as criminal, all its members were required to register with the local magistrate, failing which they would be charged with a "crime" under the Indian Penal Code.



Denotified tribes were once labeled as "criminal" under the Criminal Tribes Act of 1924, which was repealed in 1949.

However, since then, various commissions—including the Kaka Kalelkar Commission (1955), the Mandal Commission (1980), the Renke Commission (2008), and the Idate Commission (2017)—have attempted but failed to fully classify these communities.

The Idate Commission's 2017 report identified 1,200 denotified, semi-nomadic, and nomadic tribes and highlighted 267 unclassified communities.

This led the Indian government to form a Special Committee under the NITI Aayog in 2019, which assigned AnSI and TRIs the task of ethnographic classification.

Key Findings of the Study

268 communities classified: For the first time, these tribes have been systematically documented.

179 communities recommended for SC/ST/OBC inclusion: This inclusion aims to provide reservation benefits.

63 communities found untraceable: These groups may have merged with other communities, changed names, or migrated.

Political and legal implications: The classification has sparked debates on reservations and special status.

IMPACT ON RESERVATION AND WELFARE POLICIES

With this classification, denotified tribes could access government welfare schemes reserved for SCs, STs, and OBCs, including education and employment opportunities. However, this move has also raised political concerns.

There are two competing views within the Development and Welfare Board for Denotified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Communities:

Support for Inclusion in SC/ST/OBC Lists

Ensures access to education, jobs, and social welfare schemes.

Provides legal recognition and identity to these communities.

Demand for a Separate Reservation Category

Advocates argue that denotified tribes should have their own classification, similar to SCs and STs, rather than being merged into existing categories.

Some fear that merging them into SC/ST/OBC groups might dilute reservation benefits for other communities.

Challenges and Concerns

Political Controversies: Activists in states like Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat are questioning the basis of classification, fearing it may impact existing reservation structures.

Delays in Implementation: Despite multiple commissions advocating for classification, government action has been slow, delaying welfare benefits.

Historical Misclassification: Earlier census data mistakenly categorized some tribes as castes, creating confusion over their identity and legal status.

Way Forward

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

If the recommendations are accepted:

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

The classification of denotified, semi-nomadic, and nomadic tribes is a crucial step toward rectifying historical injustices and ensuring their access to government welfare schemes.

However, the implementation process remains complex, with political and legal challenges ahead.

The government's final decision on this matter will shape the socio-political landscape of reservation policies in India.

NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR FINANCIAL INCLUSION (NSFI) 2025-30

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has released the **National Strategy for Financial Inclusion (NSFI) 2025-30**, outlining a **five-year plan (Panch-Jyoti)** to **deepen and widen financial inclusion in India**.

About

- The strategy, approved by the Sub-Committee of the **Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC)**, sets out five strategic objectives supported by a comprehensive **Panch-Jyoti framework** and **47** actionable steps.
- As per the **World Bank**, **financial inclusion means** that individuals and businesses have access to useful and affordable financial products and services that meet their needs — **transactions, payments, savings, credit and insurance** — delivered in a responsible and sustainable way.

Strategic Pillars of the Panch-Jyoti

- **Enhancing Financial Services:** Provide equitable, responsible, and affordable financial services for households and micro-enterprises.
- **Gender-Sensitive Inclusion:** Implement women-centric strategies and support vulnerable and underserved groups.
- **Linking Livelihoods and Finance:** Integrate skill development and livelihood programmes with formal financial services.
- **Financial Education:** Use financial literacy to promote responsible financial behaviour and discipline.
- **Consumer Protection:** Strengthen customer protection and grievance redressal mechanisms for better reliability and accessibility.



Challenges to Financial Inclusion

- **Digital Divide:** Many rural populations lack access to smartphones or the internet, restricting access to digital financial services.
- **Low Financial Literacy:** Lack of awareness about formal financial products and schemes hampers their adoption.
 - Overall national financial literacy stands at only **62.6%**. (According to 2023 data).
- **Trust Deficit:** Fear of fraud, complex procedures, and prior bad experiences discourage first-time users from participating in formal finance.
 - **Cybercrime reports increased 24.4%** between 2021-22 (NCRB data), indicating rising digital fraud.
- **Infrastructure Deficit:** Inadequate banking infrastructure (ATMs, branches) in remote areas reduces outreach.
- **Gender Disparity:** Although bank account ownership among women has improved, actual usage remains low due to social and cultural constraints.
- **Inadequate Credit Flow to MSMEs:** Despite schemes, formal credit to small and medium enterprises remains limited due to collateral and documentation requirements.

Government initiatives for financial inclusion

- **Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY):** It was launched in 2015, to support small and micro enterprises with loans up to **₹10 lakh**.
 - In the Union Budget **2024-25**, the loan limit was increased to **₹20 lakh**.
- In 2021, the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** launched a Financial Inclusion Index (FI-Index) to track the process of ensuring access to financial services, timely and adequate credit for vulnerable groups such as weaker sections and low-income groups at an affordable cost.

- **Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY):** Launched in 2015, PMSBY is an accident insurance scheme covering death and disability. It is a **one-year renewable policy** aimed at increasing insurance penetration.
 - The scheme provides coverage to individuals aged **18-70** with a savings or post office account.
- **Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY):** Launched in 2015, PMJJBY is a government-backed life insurance scheme.
 - The scheme provides one-year renewable life insurance covering death from any cause.
- **Atal Pension Yojana (APY):** It was launched in **2015** and provides social security to unorganised sector workers.
 - APY is regulated by the **Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA)**. It functions under the National Pension System (NPS) framework.
- **Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY):** Launched in 2014, PMJDY aimed to bring the unbanked into the formal financial system by expanding access to savings accounts, credit, remittance, insurance, and pensions.

Way Ahead

- Training, incentives, and accountability of banking correspondents should be strengthened to improve last-mile service delivery.
- AI and data analytics should be leveraged to identify gaps, track financial behaviour, and enable better-targeted policies.
- FinTech companies, digital banks, and other private players should be encouraged to innovate and extend services to underserved populations.

INTERNATIONAL TREATY ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

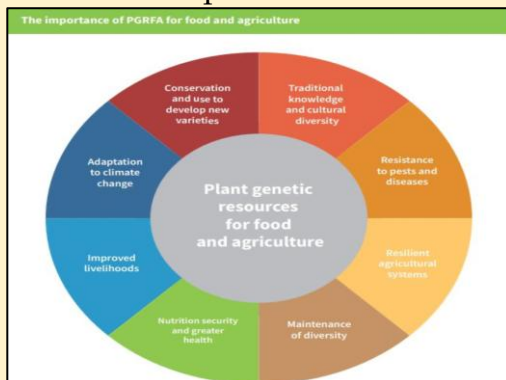
Indian farmers and experts are urging the government to reject proposed expansions to the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.

About International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

It was adopted by the Thirty-First Session of the Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations on 3 November 2001.

Entering into force in June 2004, it is the only legally binding international agreement that specifically deals with the conservation and sustainable management of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (PGRFA).

The countries which participate in the treaty exchange and share genetic material and information for most of the world's most important food crops.



Objectives:

Conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA. Fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of their use, in harmony with the Convention on Biological Diversity, for sustainable agriculture and food security.

The treaty ensures that farmers and plant breeders access, easily, the raw genetic material needed to develop new crop varieties, including those with higher yields and those that are resilient to climate change.

The International Treaty makes it possible to share plant genetic resources across borders through a unique Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing (MLS).

MLS applies to 64 major crops and forages over which recipients cannot claim Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) or any other rights.

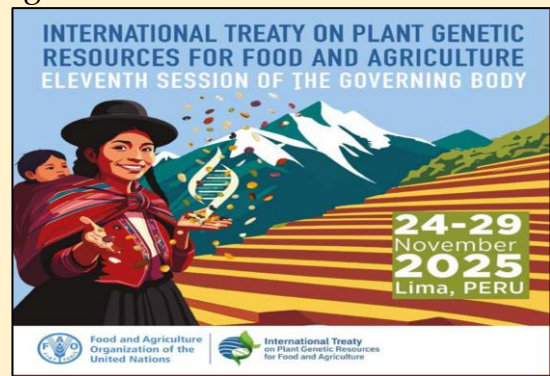
The exchange of material from the MLS is operationalised through the standard material transfer agreement (SMTA), a legal document that governs the terms under which genetic material is shared.

Those who access genetic materials through the Multilateral System agree to share any benefits from their use.

Fair sharing of benefits from use can be achieved through information exchange, access to and transfer of technology, capacity building, and sharing of the financial and other benefits of marketing.

This treaty established and operates a special initiative operated for the benefit of developing countries—the Benefit-sharing Fund (BSF).

BSF supports agricultural projects for farmers, public institutions and others in developing countries to conserve and use PGRFA to improve food crop production, fight plant pests, and adapt to the effects of climate change.



Key outcomes of latest summit :

Key outcomes of the GB11 and other recent meetings include:

Deferred Decisions on Key Issues: Decisions on crucial and contentious issues, such as the expansion of the Multilateral System (MLS) to include all crops and a revised Standard Material Transfer Agreement (SMTA) with provisions for digital sequence information (DSI) benefit-sharing, were postponed to the next meeting.

Lack of Consensus on DSI/MLS: A working group failed to reach a consensus on several proposals, reflecting a continuing divide between the Global North and South over access and benefit-sharing, particularly regarding DSI.

Implementation of Farmers' Rights: The Governing Body encouraged parties to support the role of smallholder and family farmers, women farmers, and indigenous communities in PGRFA conservation and to promote policies that protect traditional knowledge.

Conservation and Sustainable Use: The Commission requested the Secretariat to continue supporting strategies for implementing the articles of the Treaty related to conservation and sustainable use and to monitor identified gaps and challenges.

Funding and Capacity Building: Members were encouraged to provide financial resources for capacity-development activities, including reporting capacities, and to support the work of genebanks globally.

Second Global Symposium on Farmers' Rights: A second global symposium on Farmers' Rights was held in Manila, Philippines, in September 2025 to share experiences and discuss future work in this area.

ESSENTIAL SERVICES MAINTENANCE ACT (ESMA)

Recently, government doctors in Haryana extended their strike indefinitely despite the state invoking ESMA to ban such protests for six months.



About Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA):

- **Enactment:** It is an act of the Indian Parliament enacted in 1968 to assure the supply of certain services that, if impeded, would harm people's daily lives.

- **Objective:** It is enforced to prohibit striking employees from refusing to work in certain essential services. Employees cannot cite bandhs or a curfew as an excuse not to report to work.
- **Constitutional Basis:** ESMA is a law made by the Parliament under List No. 33 of the Concurrent List in the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution. This allows both the central government and state governments to enact their own versions of the Act.
- **Implementation:** The Act's execution largely depends on the discretion of the government (central or state). Before enforcing ESMA, the government must alert the employees through media or newspaper notifications.
- **Duration:** An order under ESMA is typically in force for six months, but the government can extend it, if necessary, in the public interest.
- **Customised ESMA of each state:** Each state has its own ESMA, with provisions that differ slightly from the federal statute. As a result, if the nature of the strike disturbs only one or more states, the states can initiate it. The Act also allows states to choose the essential services on which to enforce ESMA.
 - **Central government imposing ESMA:** In a nationwide interruption, particularly involving railways, the central government may activate the ESMA.
 - **Applicability:** The government can declare a range of services as "essential" such as:
 - Transportation (railways, airways, public road transport)
 - Public health (hospitals, sanitation, water supply)
 - Energy (electricity generation and distribution, petroleum, coal)
 - Communication (postal, telegraph, telephone services)
 - Defence-related establishments and production
 - Banking services

- **Penal actions that can be taken to impose it:**
 - Persons who commence the strike as well as those who instigate it are liable to disciplinary action, which may include dismissal.
 - As the strike becomes illegal after ESMA is invoked, legal action can also be taken against these employees.
 - Any police officer is empowered to arrest the striking person without a warrant.
 - Persons participating in or instigating the strike are punishable with imprisonment, which may extend to one year, or with fine, or with both.

SULTANPUR NATIONAL PARK

Sultanpur National Park is once again echoing with the sounds of migratory birds, with their numbers rising significantly as temperatures drop.



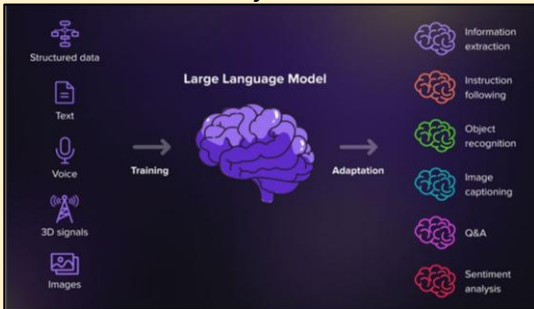
About Sultanpur National Park:

- **Location:** Sultanpur National Park, formerly known as Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary, is located in the Gurgaon district in Haryana, 46 km from Delhi.
- **Area:** Spanning 1.42 sq.km., it consists primarily of marshy lakes and floodplains. It includes a core area of 1.21 sq. km containing the main Sultanpur Lake/Jheel.

- **Establishment:** It was declared a Bird Sanctuary in 1972. And, it was upgraded to a National Park in 1991.
- **Lake inside the National Park:** The Sultanpur Jheel is a seasonal freshwater wetland with fluctuating water levels throughout the year. This shallow lake is mostly fed by waters from River Yamuna's Gurgaon canal and the overflowing waters of the neighbouring agricultural lands.
- **National attention:** It gained national attention in the late 1960s due to the conservation efforts of ornithologists Peter Michel Jackson and Dr. Salim Ali, who frequently visited the site for birding.
- **Significance:** It was recognised as a Ramsar site in 2021. It has also been identified as an Important Bird Area by BirdLife International.
- **Flora:** The vegetation of this park is tropical and dry deciduous, and the flora includes grasses, dhok, khair, tendu, ber, jamun, banyan tree, neem, berberis, Acacia nilotica, and Acacia tortilis.
- **Fauna:** Over 320 bird species have been recorded at Sultanpur, making it a vital wintering ground. Other faunal species, such as Nilgai, Sambar, Golden jackals, wild dog, striped hyenas, Indian porcupine, mongoose, etc., are also found here.
- **Part of Central Asian Migratory Flyway:** It forms a part of the 'Central Asian Migratory Flyway' and thousands of migratory birds from the countries of Russia, Turkey, Afghanistan, and Europe visit the park during the winter months.
- **Important species:** Winter migrants include Greater Flamingos, Northern Pintails, Eurasian Wigeons, Common Teals, and Bar-headed Geese. Resident Birds include Indian Peafowl, Red-wattled Lapwings, Cattle Egrets, and White-throated Kingfishers. And, threatened species include Sarus Crane, Black-necked Stork, and Indian Courser.

LARGE LANGUAGE MODELS

A government working paper released recently suggested that AI large language models like ChatGPT should, by default, have access to content freely available online.



About Large Language Models (LLMs):

- **Definition:** An LLM is a type of artificial intelligence (AI) program that can recognize and generate text, among other tasks. In simpler terms, an LLM is a computer program that has been fed enough examples to be able to recognize and interpret human language or other types of complex data.
- **Nomenclature:** LLMs are trained on huge sets of data, hence the name “large.” Since LLMs are now becoming multimodal (working with media types beyond text), they are now also called “foundation models.”
- **Based on machine learning:** LLMs are based on Machine Learning (ML) specifically, a type of neural network called a transformer model, which excels at handling sequences of words and capturing patterns in text.
- **Training via tuning:** LLMs use a type of machine learning called deep learning in order to understand how characters, words, and sentences function together. They are fine-tuned or prompt-tuned to the particular task that the programmer wants them to do.
- **Curated data set:** Many LLMs are trained on data that has been gathered from the Internet—thousands or millions of gigabytes’ worth of text. But the quality of the samples impacts how well LLMs will learn natural language, so LLM’s programmers may use a more curated data set.

Applications:

- LLMs can perform various language tasks, such as answering questions, summarizing text, translating between languages, and writing content.
- Businesses use LLM-based applications to help improve employee productivity and efficiency, provide personalized recommendations to customers, and accelerate ideation, innovation, and product development.
- LLMs serve as the foundational powerhouses behind some of today’s most used text-focused generative AI (GenAI) tools, such as ChatGPT, Claude, Microsoft Copilot, Gemini, and Meta AI.

Challenges faced: Though they are groundbreaking, LLMs face challenges that may include computational requirements, ethical concerns, and limitations in understanding context.

NATIONAL MISSION ON EDIBLE OILS

According to a NITI Aayog report, India ranks first globally in the production of various oilseeds, primarily due to steps taken after National Mission on Edible Oils.



About National Mission on Edible Oils-Oil Palm:

- **Objective:** It aims to expand oil palm cultivation and increasing domestic crude palm oil output.
- **Approval:** It was approved in 2021, as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme, with the aim to enhance the edible oilseeds production and oils availability in the country by area expansion and increasing Crude Palm Oil (CPO) production.

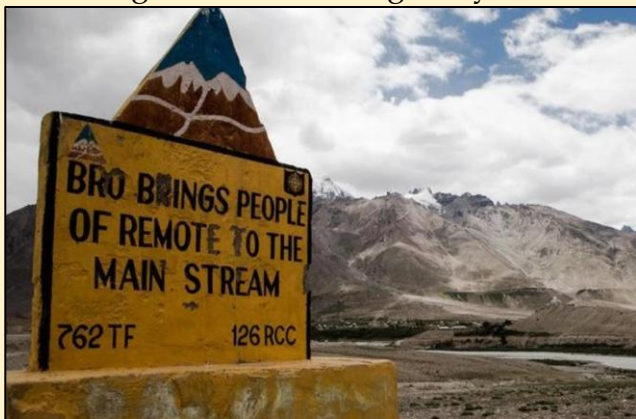
- **Focus:** It focuses on increasing production of seedlings by establishment of seed garden, and nurseries of oil palm in order to assure domestic availability of seedlings as per target fixed under NMEO-OP.
- **Targets:** It targets to bring 6.5 lakh hectares under oil palm cultivation by 2025-26 and increase crude palm oil production to 28 lakh tonnes by 2029-30.
- **Implementation:** The Department of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare (DA&FW) serves as the nodal central authority.

Focus: It focuses on increasing production of key primary oilseed crops such as Rapeseed-Mustard, Groundnut, Soybean, Sunflower, Sesamum, Safflower, Niger, Linseed and Castor. It also focuses on increasing collection and extraction efficiency from secondary sources like coconut, rice bran as well as Tree-Borne Oilseeds (TBOs).

Implementation: It will be implemented in all States/UTs with the funding pattern of 60:40 in case of general States, Delhi & Puducherry and 90:10 in case of North-Eastern States and hill States, and 100% funding for UTs and Central Agencies.

BORDER ROADS ORGANISATION

Defence Minister recently inaugurated 125 border infrastructure projects, marking the highest number of inaugurations by Border Roads Organisation in a single day.



About Border Roads Organisation (BRO):

Nature: It is a road construction executive force in India that provides support to the Indian Armed Forces.

Establishment: It was formed on 7 May 1960 to secure India's borders and develop infrastructure in remote areas of the north and northeastern states of the country.

Mandate: It develops and maintains road networks in India's border areas and friendly neighbouring countries. This includes infrastructure operations in 19 states and three union territories (including Andaman and Nicobar Islands) and neighbouring countries such as Afghanistan, Bhutan, Myanmar, Tajikistan, and Sri Lanka.

Nodal ministry: It was entirely brought under the Ministry of Defence in 2015 to enhance border connectivity and operational efficiency (though it previously received funds from the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways).

Motto: Its motto is 'Shramena Sarvam Sadhyam (everything is achievable through hard work).'

Specialisation: It specialises in constructing and maintaining Roads, Bridges, Tunnels, Airfields and Marine Works across some of the world's most challenging terrains.

Role during national emergencies: It has an operational role during national emergencies, when it provides direct support to the Army in the maintenance of roads in the forward zones. It also provides the workforce for the rehabilitation of certain forward airfields of the Indian Air Force during operations.

Inclusion in Order of Battle: It is included in the Order of Battle of the Armed Forces, ensuring their support at any time.

Leadership: The Government of India has set up the Border Roads Development Board (BRDB) with the Prime Minister as Chairman of the Board and the Defence Minister as Deputy Chairman.

Cadre: Officers and personnel from the General Reserve Engineer Force (GREF) form the parent cadre of the BRO. It is also staffed by officers and troops drawn from the Indian Army's Corps of Engineers on extra-regimental employment (on deputation).

UMEED PORTAL

Government of India recently said that it will not impose any penalties for next three months against those who have not registered waqf properties on the UMEED Portal.



About UMEED Portal:

Full form: UMEED stands for 'Unified Waqf Management, Empowerment, Efficiency, and Development.'

Mandate: It acts as the centralized digital platform for real-time uploading, verification, and monitoring of Waqf properties.

Nodal Ministry: It comes under Ministry of Minority Affairs, Government of India.

Legal Support: It was formed under the Unified Waqf Management, Empowerment, Efficiency and Development Act, 1995.

Management: Under this initiative, the registrations of properties are facilitated by respective State Waqf Boards.

Key Features of the portal:

Time-Bound Registration: All Waqf properties must be registered within 6 months of launch.

Geotagging and Digitization: Properties must include precise measurements and geolocation data during registration.

Dispute Resolution: Unregistered properties after deadline will be declared disputed and sent to Waqf Tribunal.

User Support Services: Provides legal awareness tools and clarifies rights under amended law.

Women-Centric Provision: Properties under women's names cannot be designated as Waqf, but women, children, and EWS will remain eligible beneficiaries.

Major objectives of the portal:

- To ensure transparent and time-bound registration of Waqf properties.
- To empower beneficiaries with digital access to rights, obligations, and legal safeguards.
- To resolve long-standing property disputes and enhance accountability.
- To facilitate policy-level insights through real-time data and geotagged mapping.

"HORI HABBA" FESTIVAL

The Karnataka High Court recently allowed the festival of "Hori Habba" but directed strict compliance of conditions laid by the Supreme Court in the Jallikattu matter.



About Hori Habba Festival:

Location: It is primarily practiced in the rural areas of Karnataka, especially in the Shivamogga, Haveri, Davangere, and Uttara Kannada districts.

Nature: It is an ancient bull-taming game native to Haveri district, and played on the lines of Jallikattu in Tamil Nadu and Kambala in Dakshina Kannada district.

Celebration time: It is held during the harvest season, typically after the Diwali festival and extending up to Sankranti.

Other names: It is also known as Hatti Habba or Kobbari Hori Competition.

Rituals: Trained and decorated draught cattle and bulls are made to run through large crowds. Participants attempt to subdue the animals and snatch prizes, such as dried coconuts (copra), cash, or other gift items, that are tied to their necks or horns.

Cultural Significance: It symbolizes the cultural bond between humans and bulls in the local community, showcasing courage and unity.

Symbol of Status: In rural areas of Shivamogga and Haveri, the social status of an individual is often determined by the quality of the bulls they rear for the event, not by material possessions like cars.

Spectator Event: The event attracts massive crowds, sometimes up to 50,000 people.

Regulation: Following a 2017 Supreme Court ban, the festival's continuation has been contingent upon compliance with strict government conditions and High Court rulings.

India-China Relations

China's 15th Five-Year Plan signals renewed economic outreach and developmental ambition, projecting opportunities for India-China cooperation even amid strategic tensions. As both nations pursue modernisation, the article highlights complementarities but also necessitates a careful assessment of challenges and calibrated engagement.



Main Arguments

Developmental Convergence: China's high-quality growth agenda under its 15th Five-Year Plan aligns with India's Viksit Bharat 2047 vision, creating shared incentives for cooperation in technology, industry, and global governance.

Trade Interdependence: Bilateral trade touched **\$138.46 billion in 2024**, with 11% growth in 2025, establishing China as one of India's largest trading partners and creating platforms like the **Canton Fair** for export diversification.

Industrial Complementarity: China's strength in electronics, renewables and manufacturing complements India's capabilities in IT, pharma and digital innovation, offering potential for supply-chain synergy during global technological transitions.

People-to-People Revival: Resumption of Kailash-Mansarovar pilgrimages, restoration of tourist visas, and direct flights enhance cultural linkage, building societal goodwill crucial for long-term stability.

Multilateral Cooperation Imperative: India and China, as major economies within **BRICS**, **SCO**, **G20**, hold shared stakes in climate action, South-South cooperation, and shaping a more equitable multipolar order.

Challenges / Constraints

Border Tensions & Trust Deficit: The post-2020 Line of Actual Control (LAC) standoff has significantly eroded strategic trust, limiting the space for expansive cooperation despite economic complementarities.

Ballooning Trade Imbalance: India's exports remain narrow and China-centric supply chains deepen a **trade deficit exceeding \$85 billion**, posing vulnerability risks to critical sectors.

Technology & Security Concerns: Chinese investments in telecom, digital infrastructure and apps have triggered national security concerns leading to bans, restrictions, and scrutiny of FDI inflows.

Geopolitical Rivalry in Indo-Pacific: China's assertive posturing in the Indian Ocean, growing footprint in South Asia, and closer ties with Pakistan complicate India's strategic calculus.

Asymmetry in Power & Influence: China's GDP (~\$20 trillion) and manufacturing scale create structural asymmetries that limit India's bargaining leverage unless balanced by partnerships elsewhere.

Way Forward

- **Dual-Track Diplomacy:** Adopt a “guardrails approach” similar to the U.S.-China model – manage security disputes while keeping economic and cultural channels open.
- **Strategic Export Diversification:** Replicate Vietnam’s targeted export strategies to expand India’s footprint in electronics, pharma, agro-products and services in Chinese markets.
- **Resilient Supply Chains:** Build “China-plus-one” frameworks with Japan, South Korea and ASEAN to reduce overdependence without disengaging economically from China.
- **Revitalised Boundary Negotiations:** Institutionalise more frequent WMCC and SR-level talks; emulate the India-Bangladesh model of incremental confidence-building to stabilise border dynamics.
- **Sector-Specific Cooperation:** Pursue cooperation only in low-risk domains – healthcare, climate adaptation, green technologies – while ring-fencing sensitive sectors like digital infrastructure and telecom.
- **People-Centric Connectivity:** Strengthen educational, tourism and cultural exchanges, learning from EU-China people-to-people dialogue formats that build societal resilience.

India-China ties require a mature blend of engagement and vigilance. While economic complementarities offer shared gains, unresolved strategic frictions demand calibrated, interest-driven cooperation. A stable “dragon-elephant tango” will depend on restoring trust while safeguarding national priorities.

“EXERCISE HARIMAU SHAKTI -2025”

The Fifth edition of Joint Military exercise “Exercise Harimau Shakti -2025” commenced today in Mahajan Field Firing Range, Rajasthan.



About Exercise Harimau Shakti:

- Countries involved: It is a joint military exercise conducted between India and Malaysia.
- **Objective:** The aim of the exercise is to jointly rehearse conduct of Sub Conventional Operations under Chapter VII of United Nations Mandate.
- **Origin:** Started in 2012, it reinforces India’s Act East Policy and commitment to global peacekeeping frameworks.
- **Significance:** The exercise will foster strong bilateral relations between the two nations.
- **Indian representation:** The Indian contingent is being represented mainly by troops from the DOGRA Regiment.
- **Other Military Exercises between India and Malaysia:** These are Samudra Laksamana (bilateral maritime exercise), and Udara Shakti (bilateral air force exercise).
- **Key Highlights of Exercise Harimau Shakti 2025:**
 - In this exercise both sides will rehearse drills to secure helipads and undertake casualty evacuation during counter-terrorist operations.
 - Both sides will practice tactical actions such as cordon, search and destroy missions, heliborne operations, etc.
 - Both sides will exchange views and practices of joint drills on a wide spectrum of combat skills that will facilitate the participants to mutually learn from each other.
 - Sharing of best practices will further enhance the level of defence cooperation between Indian Army and Royal Malaysian Army.

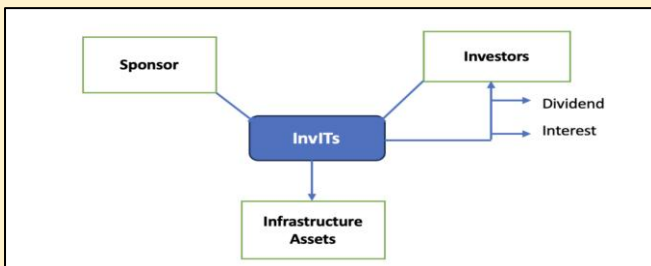
INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT TRUST (INVIT)

Recently, NHAI received SEBI's in-principle approval of registration to Raajmarg Infra Investment Trust as an Infrastructure Investment Trust (InvIT).

About Infrastructure Investment Trust (InvIT):

Nature: It is Collective Investment Scheme similar to a mutual fund, which enables direct investment of money from individual and institutional investors in infrastructure projects.

Objective: It aims to provide retail investors with access to investment opportunities in infrastructure projects, which were previously only available to large institutional investors.



Regulation: InvITs are regulated by the SEBI (Infrastructure Investment Trusts) Regulations, 2014.

Similar to mutual funds: InvITs are instruments that work like mutual funds. They are designed to pool small sums of money from a number of investors to invest in assets that give cash flow over a period of time. Part of this cash flow would be distributed as dividends back to investors.

Minimum investment: The minimum investment amount in an InvIT Initial Public Offering (IPO) is Rs 10 lakh, therefore, InvITs are suitable for high net-worth individuals, institutional and non-institutional investors.

Tradable on stock exchanges: InvITs raise capital through IPOs and are then tradable on stock exchanges. Examples of listed InvITs include the IRB InvIT Fund and India Grid Trust.

Parties involved: An InvIT has 4 parties namely; Trustee, Sponsor(s) and Investment Manager and Project Manager.

INVITs are created by sponsors, who are typically infrastructure companies or private equity firms.

The sponsor sets up the INVITs and transfers ownership of the underlying infrastructure assets to the trust.

The trust then issues units to investors, which represent an ownership stake in the trust and thus the underlying assets.

While the trustee (certified by Sebi) has the responsibility of inspecting the performance of an InvIT, sponsor(s) are promoters of the company that set up the InvIT.

VIKSIT BHARAT-GUARANTEE FOR ROZGAR AND AJEEVIKA MISSION (GRAMIN) BILL

The Union government has proposed replacing MGNREGA with the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Bill. While promising expanded employment and technological efficiency, the move has raised concerns over fiscal federalism, demand-driven design and the dilution of the rural safety net.

VB—G RAM G Bill at a glance

A look at the key provisions of the **Viksit Bharat—Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) or VB—G RAM G Bill, 2025**, being brought by the Centre to replace the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, or MGNREGA:

What's the bill?

VB - G RAM G Bill, 2025 proposes to establish a modern statutory framework aligned with Viksit Bharat 2047, guaranteeing 125 days of employment per rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.

What makes it better than MGNREGA?

- The new bill represents a major upgrade over MGNREGA, fixing structural weaknesses while enhancing employment, transparency, planning, and accountability.
- It proposes guaranteed 125 days of wage employment a year, up from 100 days under MGNREGA, giving rural households higher income security.
- While MGNREGA works were scattered across many categories, the new bill focuses on four major types of works: ensuring durable assets that directly support water security, core rural infrastructure, livelihood-related infrastructure creation and climate adaptation.

Why shift to normative funding?

- A demand-based model leads to unpredictable allocations and mismatched budgeting. Normative funding uses objective parameters, ensuring predictable, rational planning while still guaranteeing that every eligible worker receives employment or unemployment allowance.

What transparency measures are built into the new bill?

- AI-based fraud detection; central and state steering panels for oversight; focus on four key verticals for rural development; enhanced monitoring role for panchayats; GPS/mobile-based monitoring; real-time MIS dashboards; weekly disclosures; and stronger social audits.

How will it benefit...

The rural economy?

- It aims to strengthen rural economy by productive asset creation, higher incomes, and better resilience.
- It seeks to improve water security, core rural infra, livelihood infra, climate resilience, higher employment and consumption, and reduced distress migration.

The Farmers?

- The bill mandates 60 days of no-work during peak sowing/harvesting period, preventing labour shortages during critical farm operations.
- It also prioritises water works to improve irrigation, groundwater and multi-season cropping potential.

The Labourers?

- The guaranteed 125 days of wage work means 25% more potential earnings than MGNREGA.
- The bill also mandates states to pay unemployment allowance if no work is provided to an applicant.



Will cost sharing burden states financially?

- No. The structure is balanced and sensitive to state capacity. It will be 60:40 (Centre: state) for all states, except Northeastern and Himalayan states as well as UTs.
- States can seek extra support during disasters.

What happens to workers during the no-work period?

- Workers shift to agriculture, which pays higher seasonal wages, benefitting both farmers and labourers.
- 60 days is aggregated, not continuous, and workers still get 125 guaranteed days in the remaining ~300 days.

Main Arguments (Rationale for Reform)

Need for Reform in MGNREGA: MGNREGA has faced long-standing issues such as delayed wage payments, asset quality concerns, leakages and weak worksite monitoring. Reforming design and implementation was necessary to improve efficiency and accountability.

Enhanced Employment Guarantee: VB-G RAM G proposes 125 days of guaranteed wage employment per rural household annually, compared to 100 days under MGNREGA, signalling an intent to strengthen livelihood security amid rural distress.

Avoiding Agricultural Labour Distortions:

The Bill restricts employment during a 60-day notified peak sowing and harvesting period, addressing criticism that MGNREGA distorted farm labour availability and agricultural wages.

Technology-Driven Governance: Use of biometric authentication, GPS-enabled attendance, mobile-based monitoring and AI-driven fraud detection aims to reduce leakages and improve transparency, building on DBT reforms under MGNREGA.

Crisis-Time Performance Legacy: The government highlights record employment generation during the pandemic—389 crore person-days in 2020–21 and 364 crore in 2021–22—demonstrating the scheme’s counter-cyclical role during economic shocks.

Challenges / Criticisms

- **Adverse Fiscal Federalism Shift:** MGNREGA mandated 100% central funding of wages and 75% of material costs. VB-G RAM G shifts to a 60:40 Centre-State sharing ratio (90:10 for North-East and Himalayan states), significantly burdening fiscally constrained states.
- **Risk of Suboptimal Implementation:** States struggling to mobilise their share may limit coverage or delay payments, echoing the experience of PM Fasal Bima Yojana where delayed state contributions undermined scheme performance.

- **Erosion of Demand-Driven Architecture:** MGNREGA was designed as a rights-based, demand-driven programme where states assessed labour demand and the Centre responded with funds. VB-G RAM G replaces this with “normative allocations” determined by the Centre, weakening decentralisation.
- **Threat to Legal Entitlement:** MGNREGA provided a statutory right to work with unemployment allowance for non-provision. Centralised allocation risks converting a rights-based guarantee into a budget-limited welfare programme.
- **State Capacity and Equity Concerns:** Backward states with high poverty, weak revenue bases and high MGNREGA dependence may be disproportionately affected, undermining regional equity and inclusive growth objectives.

Way Forward

- **Restore Strong Central Funding:** For flagship social protection schemes like rural employment, the Centre should bear a dominant share of financing, especially wages, to prevent exclusion due to state fiscal stress.
- **Retain Demand-Driven Core:** Normative allocations may be used as a baseline, but demand-based supplementary funding must be guaranteed to preserve the scheme’s legal and counter-cyclical character.
- **Differentiated Fiscal Design:** Introduce variable Centre-State ratios based on state poverty levels, fiscal capacity and distress indicators, rather than a uniform 60:40 formula.
- **Technology with Human Oversight:** Digital tools should complement—not replace—local verification. Safeguards against biometric failures, digital exclusion and wrongful deletions must be institutionalised.

- **Strengthen Panchayati Raj Role:** Empower Gram Panchayats in planning, monitoring and social audits to preserve bottom-up governance and community accountability. MGNREGA undoubtedly required reform, but VB-G RAM G risks weakening India's rural employment safety net through poor fiscal design and centralisation. Sustainable reform must balance efficiency with federal equity, demand responsiveness and the rights-based spirit of rural employment guarantees.

INDIA-RUSSIA RECIPROCAL EXCHANGE OF LOGISTICS SUPPORT (RELOS) AGREEMENT



The ratification of the India-Russia Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Support (RELOS) agreement institutionalises military logistics cooperation, expanding India's operational reach from the Indo-Pacific to the Arctic while reinforcing its strategic autonomy in a multipolar world.

Main Arguments: Significance of RELOS for India-Russia Relations

- **Institutionalising Defence Logistics Cooperation:** RELOS establishes a formal framework for reciprocal access to military bases, ports, and airfields, governing refuelling, repairs, maintenance, and movement of troops, warships, and aircraft during exercises, training, and other mutually agreed operations.
- **Enhancing India's Strategic Reach:** For India, access to Russian facilities—from Vladivostok in the Pacific to Murmansk in the Arctic—extends the Indian Navy's and Air Force's operational endurance during long-range deployments, particularly for Russian-origin platforms that dominate India's defence inventory (nearly 60% by some estimates).

- **Arctic and Indo-Pacific Convergence:** RELOS aligns with India's Arctic Policy (2022) by enabling logistical access near the Northern Sea Route, critical amid climate-induced opening of Arctic shipping lanes. Simultaneously, it complements India's Indo-Pacific strategy by leveraging Russia's vast Eurasian footprint without aligning with any single bloc.
- **Support for Multipolarity:** For Russia, reciprocal access to Indian ports and airfields strengthens its operational presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), reinforcing Moscow's vision of a multipolar order amid Western sanctions and strategic isolation.
- **Operational Flexibility Beyond Combat:** The agreement explicitly covers humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), joint exercises, and training, reflecting India's preference for flexible, non-alliance-based security cooperation rather than treaty-bound military alliances.

Comparison with India's Logistics Pacts with the U.S.

- **Functional Similarity with Strategic Distinction:** RELOS is comparable to LEMOA (2016) with the U.S., which enables reciprocal logistics support. However, unlike COMCASA (2018) and BECA (2020), RELOS does not involve encrypted communications or geospatial intelligence sharing, preserving India's strategic autonomy.
- **Balanced Hedging Strategy:** While U.S. foundational agreements enhance interoperability within the QUAD framework to counterbalance China in the Indo-Pacific, RELOS demonstrates India's parallel commitment to long-standing defence ties with Russia, avoiding exclusive alignment.
- **Tailored to Bilateral Context:** RELOS is customised to India-Russia defence cooperation, particularly relevant for sustaining Russian-origin equipment, unlike U.S. pacts which are oriented towards interoperability with American platforms and systems.

Criticisms and Strategic Concerns

Geopolitical Signalling Risks: At a time of heightened Russia-West tensions, deeper military cooperation with Russia could invite diplomatic pressure on India from Western partners, especially amid sanctions regimes.

Limited Interoperability Gains: Unlike COMCASA or BECA, RELOS does not significantly enhance network-centric warfare capabilities or intelligence integration, limiting its transformative impact on military modernisation.

Dependence on Legacy Platforms: By facilitating sustainment of Russian-origin equipment, RELOS may indirectly slow India's diversification of defence imports and indigenisation under Atmanirbhar Bharat.

Arctic Militarisation Concerns: Increased military logistics access in the Arctic could entangle India, even indirectly, in great power rivalries in a region India officially approaches through scientific, environmental, and commercial lenses.

Operational Utilisation Uncertainty: The agreement's real value depends on frequency of use and political will; without regular exercises or deployments, RELOS risks remaining largely symbolic.

Strategic Transparency: India should clearly communicate that RELOS is a logistics-enabling arrangement, not a military alliance, reinforcing its doctrine of strategic autonomy.

Balanced Defence Diversification: Use RELOS pragmatically for sustainment while continuing diversification of defence procurement and indigenisation under Make in India-Defence.

Arctic Engagement with Restraint: Leverage Arctic access primarily for scientific research, commercial shipping insights, and climate cooperation, avoiding overt militarisation.

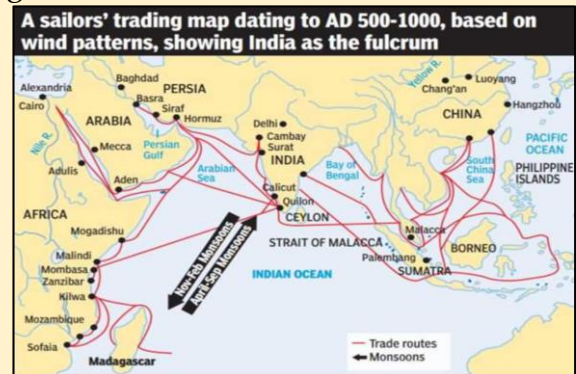
Synergy with Multilateral Engagements: Position RELOS as complementary to, not contradictory with, India's engagements with QUAD, ASEAN, and SCO frameworks.

Operationalisation through Exercises: Conduct regular joint exercises and HADR drills to translate the agreement into functional military and diplomatic capital.

RELOS reflects India's calibrated foreign policy – deepening defence cooperation with Russia while maintaining diversified strategic partnerships. Its success will lie in judicious operational use that enhances reach without compromising India's autonomy or diplomatic balance.

PROJECT MAUSAM

Archaeological Survey of India organised a National Workshop on the Project Mausam titled as "Islands at the Crossroads of Maritime Networks within Indian Ocean Region."



About Project Mausam:

- **Nature:** It is an Indian government-led cultural-diplomacy and maritime heritage initiative.
- **Nodal ministry:** It was launched in 2014 by the Ministry of Culture.
- **Objective:** It aims to explore the multi-faceted Indian Ocean 'world' – collating archaeological and historical research in order to document the diversity of cultural, commercial, and religious interactions in the Indian Ocean.
- **Countries involved:** A total of 39 Indian Ocean littoral countries have been identified under Project Mausam.
- **Significance:** It serves as a tool for soft power diplomacy and counters historical narratives by focusing on shared Afro-Asian heritage.
- **Implementation:** The project is implemented by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) as the nodal agency with research support of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) and National Museum as associate bodies.

○

- **Working mechanism:** The project will have two major units, viz. Project Research Unit and World Heritage Nomination Unit.
- **Focus areas:**
 - To study and document the Indian Ocean “world” shaped by monsoon winds (Mausam).
 - To prepare transnational nominations for the UNESCO World Heritage List, such as the “Routes followed by the Cholas” and the “Spread of Buddhism”.
 - To promote research on themes related to the study of maritime routes through international scientific seminars and meetings and by adopting a multidisciplinary approach.
 - To encourage the production of specialized works, as well as publications for the general public, with an attempt at promoting a broader understanding of the concept of a common heritage and multiple identities.

Area: Spread over 1,501.89 sq.km., the reserve has a 481.90 sq.km. core area and a 1,019.98 sq.km. buffer zone.

Importance: It is strategically positioned to serve as a crucial corridor between the Ranthambore Tiger Reserve to the northeast and the Mukundara Hills Tiger Reserve to the south.

Associated rivers: The Mez River, a tributary of the Chambal River, meanders through the reserve.

Topography: The reserve’s topography is characterized by the rugged terrains of the Aravalli and Vindhyan mountain ranges, interspersed with valleys and plateaus.

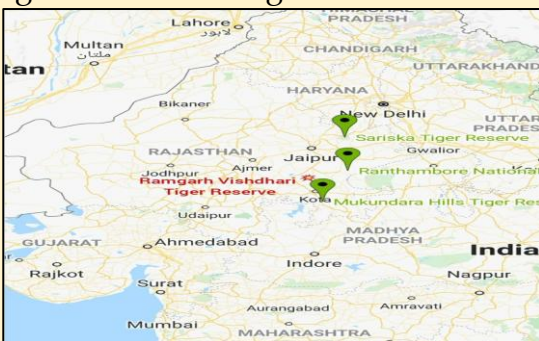
Vegetation: It mainly consists of dry deciduous forests.

Flora: The habitat is dominated by Dhok (Anogeissus pendula) trees. Other important flora includes Khair, Ronj, Amaltas, Gurjan, Saler, etc.

Fauna: The area is dominated by leopards and sloth bears. Other important fauna include the Jungle cat, Golden jackal, Hyaena, Crested Porcupine, Indian Hedgehog, Rhesus macaque, hanuman langur, etc.

RAMGARH VISHDHARI TIGER RESERVE

Marking the state’s first inter-state tiger translocation and country’s second, a tigress is set to be airlifted from Pench Tiger Reserve to Ramgarh Vishdhari Tiger Reserve.



About Ramgarh Vishdhari Tiger Reserve:

Location: It is located in Rajasthan’s Bundi district.

Establishment: The Government of Rajasthan declared it a sanctuary under Section 5 of the Rajasthan Wildlife and Bird Protection Act, 1951 on 20th May, 1982. It was notified as a tiger reserve on May 16, 2022.

DHRUVA SYSTEM

The Department of Posts released a draft amendment to the Post Office Act, 2023, aimed at introducing an interoperable, standardised and user-centric DHRUVA system.

About DHRUVA System:

Full Form: DHRUVA stands for Digital Hub for Reference and Unique Virtual Address.



Development: It is developed by the Department of Posts and it sets the foundation for a nationwide Digital Address Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI).

Objective: It envisions a standardized, interoperable, and geocoded digital addressing system that supports secure, consent-based, and seamless sharing of address information.

Builds upon DIGIPIN: It builds upon the earlier launch of the Digital Postal Index Number (DIGIPIN) – the National Addressing Grid introduced by the Department of Posts.

Related to AaaS: At its core is the concept of Address-as-a-Service (AaaS) – the array of services associated with address data management to support secure and efficient interactions between users, government entities, and private sector organizations.

Significance: By recognizing digital addresses as core infrastructure, akin to Aadhaar and Unified Payments Interface (UPI), DHRUVA sets out to streamline everything from e-governance and online commerce to urban planning and emergency services.

User-centric design: The policy also places emphasis on user-centric design, ensuring that citizens have meaningful control over how their address data is used and shared.

Control over data: Citizens will retain full control over their digital address identity, with options to manage access, update details, and share their verified address securely for various use cases.

Other features: It will also feature multilingual support, mobile-first access, and integration with identity systems like Aadhaar, thereby improving usability and accessibility for all demographics.

WORLD SOIL DAY 2025

World Soil Day 2025 highlights the theme “Healthy Soils for Healthy Cities”, drawing attention to the critical but overlooked role of urban soils in climate resilience, flood control, food systems, biodiversity, and public health as global urbanisation accelerates.



Main Arguments

Urban Climate Regulation: Healthy soils covered with vegetation help **combat heat islands**, absorb heat, and sequester carbon – acting as natural air conditioners for urban spaces.

Flood Prevention: Urban soils function as **sponges**, absorbing rainfall, filtering water, and recharging aquifers – vital as cities face more intense climate-driven floods.

Urban Food Systems: Fertile soils underpin **rooftop farms, community gardens**, and short food chains that enhance urban nutrition and local resilience.

Biodiversity Support: Soil ecosystems host **billions of organisms**, sustaining decomposers, pollinators, and plant life essential to urban ecological balance.

Human Well-Being: Soil-rich green spaces provide **mental and physical health benefits**, reducing stress and encouraging outdoor activity (“Vitamin N”).

Challenges / Criticisms

Widespread Soil Degradation: Nearly **one-third of global soils are degraded**, with urban soils hit hardest by contamination, compaction, and erosion.

Soil Sealing by Infrastructure: Excessive use of **concrete and asphalt** suffocates soil life, blocks infiltration, and increases flood risk.

Loss of Organic Matter: Construction, pollution, and poor landscaping degrade soil fertility, affecting vegetation growth and food safety.

Industrial Contamination: Heavy metals, chemicals, and waste severely reduce urban soil quality, threatening human health and ecological integrity.

Low Public Awareness: Soil remains an invisible resource; urban citizens and municipalities often overlook its critical ecosystem services.

Way Forward

Urban Soil Restoration: Promote soil testing, compost addition, organic amendments, and enforce restrictions on further soil sealing.

Green Infrastructure Expansion: Develop parks, rain gardens, bioswales, tree belts, and permeable pavements to manage floods and heat.

Strengthen Urban Agriculture: Encourage community gardens, rooftop cultivation, and balcony plantations to improve soil health and food resilience.

Responsible Soil Management: Promote reduced chemical input, mulching, native species planting, and topsoil conservation in urban planning.

Soil Literacy & Composting: Integrate soil education in schools, community workshops, and household composting to build a culture of soil stewardship.

Healthy cities are built not just on steel and concrete but on living soils that regulate climate, sustain biodiversity, absorb floods, nurture gardens, and improve human well-being. As urbanisation accelerates, protecting and restoring soils must become a central pillar of India's environmental and urban policy.

WORLD'S LARGEST GRAIN STORAGE PLAN

India's Pilot Project under the "World's Largest Grain Storage Plan in Cooperative Sector" has prompted significant policy upgrades to strengthen food-grain storage at the Primary Agricultural Credit Society (PACS) level.



The initiative aims to address national storage deficits by converging multiple central schemes to create modern agri-infrastructure.

Design of the Grain Storage Plan

The plan focuses on developing godowns, processing units, Fair Price Shops and Custom Hiring Centres through coordinated use of schemes such as AIF, AMI, SMAM and PMFME. State-wise implementation began after cabinet approval in May 2023, with progress monitored through designated field agencies.

Key Lessons from the Pilot Phase

The pilot highlighted several constraints, including outdated construction norms under AMI, limited financial capacity of PACS, lack of standardised documentation, and delays due to absent hiring assurances.

It also underscored the need to align PACS selection with storage-deficit locations mapped by national procurement and warehousing bodies.

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Major Policy Enhancements Introduced

In response, the government revised cost norms, expanded subsidies and eased financial conditions. Loan repayment under AIF was extended to 2+8 years. Construction cost ceilings were raised to ₹7,000/MT for plain areas and ₹8,000/MT for northeastern states.

Subsidies for PACS were increased to 33.33%, with additional support for ancillary works such as weighbridges and internal roads. Detailed SOPs, model DPRs and unified documentation were issued to streamline execution. The plan aims to empower PACS by establishing **decentralized storage facilities, processing units, and custom hiring centres.**

Warehouses and other infrastructure will be developed at PACS in 24 States/Union Territories, improving storage and reducing food wastage. Under the Pilot Project of the Grain Storage Plan, grain storage godowns were constructed at **11 PACS across** Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Assam, Telangana, Tripura, and Rajasthan. The Pilot Project has been extended, with over **500 additional PACS** identified for the construction of godowns. Subsidies and interest subvention are provided to PACS through the Agriculture **Infrastructure Fund (AIF)** and **Agricultural Marketing Infrastructure Scheme (AMI)**. PACS are village level cooperative credit societies that serve as the last link in a three-tier cooperative credit structure headed by the **State Cooperative Banks (SCB) at the state level.**

The pilot demonstrated the feasibility of PACS godowns operating as hubs for procurement, Fair Price Shops and hiring centres. To broaden impact, the plan has been widened to include all cooperative societies and federations, enabling scalable storage infrastructure capable of supporting national food-security objectives.

SABHASAAR

SabhaSaar has been made available to all States/UTs, and Gram Panchayats are progressively adopting it for routine Gram Sabha and Panchayat meetings.



About SabhaSaar Initiative:

Nature: It is an AI-enabled voice-to-text meeting summarisation tool.

Nodal ministry: It is launched by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj.

Objective: It aims to streamline documentation and empower stakeholders with instant access to meeting insights in panchayats, administrative bodies, and rural development projects.

Adoption: It has been made available to all States/UTs, and Gram Panchayats are progressively adopting it for routine Gram Sabha and Panchayat meetings.

Significance: It will bring uniformity in minutes of the gram sabha meetings across the country. Panchayat officials can use their e-GramSwaraj login credentials to upload video/audio recordings on 'SabhaSaar'.

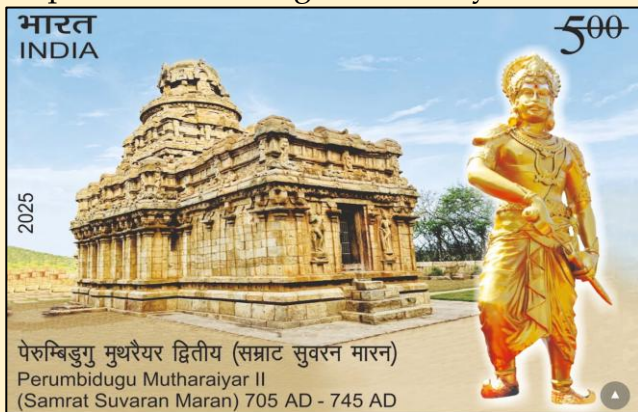
Use of AI: It leverages the power of AI to generate structured minutes of meetings from gram sabha videos and audio recordings. The AI model used in SabhaSaar operates on AI and cloud infrastructure provisioned through the India AI Compute Portal under the India AI Mission of MeitY.

Built on Bhashini: It is built on Bhashini, an AI-powered language translation platform launched by the government to bridge literacy, language, and digital divides. The tool generates transcription from a video or audio, translates it into a chosen output language and prepares a summary.

Transcription in major Indian languages: It enables transcription in all major Indian languages like Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi and Gujarati, in addition to English.

EMPEROR PERUMBIDUGU MUTHARAIYAR II

Recently, Vice President of India released a commemorative postal stamp in honour of Emperor Perumbidugu Mutharaiyar II.



About Emperor Perumbidugu Mutharaiyar II:

- **Dynasty:** Perumbidugu Mutharaiyar belonged to the Mutharaiyar dynasty, which ruled central Tamil Nadu from 705 AD-745 AD.
- **Other names:** He was also known as 'Suvaran Maran' and 'Shatrubhayankar.'
- **Capital:** He ruled primarily from Tiruchirappalli.
- **Great administrator:** He is believed to have fought bravely in several battles alongside the Pallava king Nandivarman, and is remembered as a great administrator.
- **Patronage:** He seems to have patronised Shaivya and other scholars, as a Jain monk Vimalachandra is mentioned as visiting his court to debate them.

- **Political Status:** Initially, the Mutharaiyars were powerful feudatories of the Pallavas. As Pallava central authority weakened, Perumbidugu II emerged as an influential regional power.
- **Territorial extent:** The Mutharaiyars held sway over areas including Thanjavur, Pudukkottai, Perambalur, Tiruchirappalli, and others near the Cauvery river.
- **Cultural significance:** As the feudatories of the Pallavas, the Mutharaiyars were great temple builders. Muttaraiyars were also engaged in cave temple enterprises up to the opening decades of the ninth century.
- **Legacy:** They acted as a bridge between Pallava and Chola traditions, especially in temple architecture and governance.
- **Decline:** The Mutharaiyar rule declined in the mid-9th century after Vijayalaya Chola captured Thanjavur, marking the rise of the Imperial Cholas.

RUDRESWARA (RAMAPPA) TEMPLE

Recently, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of India to UNESCO-Paris visited the Rudreswara (Ramappa) Temple, in Palampet village of Mulugu district.



About Ramappa Temple:

Location: It is located in the state of Telangana.
Construction: It was constructed in 1213 AD during the reign of the Kakatiya Empire by Recherla Rudra, a general of Kakatiya king Ganapati Deva.

Presiding deity: The presiding deity here is Ramalingeswara Swamy.

Other names: It is also known as the Rudreswara Temple.

Uniqueness: It is probably the only temple in India that is named after the architect. The temple got its name Ramappa because of its chief sculptor Ramappa.

Structure: The temple stands on a 6 feet high star-shaped platform (Upapitha) with walls, pillars and ceilings adorned with intricate carvings.

Use of sandbox technique: The temple construction was done using the sandbox technique. This is a technique where the foundation pit is filled with a mixture of sand-lime, jaggery and black myrobalan fruit.

Earthquake-proof: It is made out of clay mixed with acacia wood, chaff and myrobalan fruit (a family of amla), and the bricks used in building the gopuram of the temple are light enough to float on water. Using this technique has made the temple light, meaning, in case of a natural event like an earthquake, the probability of it collapsing would be very low.

Historical Recognition: The traveller Marco Polo reportedly described it as the “brightest star in the galaxy of temples”.

Significance: In 2021, the temple was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site as “Kakatiya Rudreshwara (Ramappa) Temple, Telangana”.

COALSETU POLICY

The Union Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs recently approved the CoalSETU Policy by creation of new window in the NRS Linkage Policy.



About CoalSETU Policy:

- **Full Form:** CoalSETU stands for Coal Linkage for Seamless, Efficient & Transparent Utilisation.

- **Nature:** It is a new auction-based coal linkage window under the Non-Regulated Sector (NRS) Linkage Policy, allowing any domestic industrial buyer to secure long-term coal linkages for own use or export (up to 50%), except resale within India.
- **Objective:** It will allow allocation of coal linkages on auction basis on long-term for any industrial use and export.
- **Nodal ministry:** It is implemented by Ministry of Coal, Government of India.
- **Participation:** Any domestic buyer requiring coal can participate in the linkage auction. Traders are not allowed to bid under this window.

● Key features of the policy:

- **New CoalSETU Window in NRS Policy (2016):** It allows any industrial consumer to participate in coal linkage auctions. Existing NRS auctions for cement, sponge iron, steel, aluminium, CPPs will continue.
- **No End-Use Restrictions:** Coal can be used for own consumption, washing, or export (up to 50%). Coking coal is excluded from this window.
- **Export Flexibility:** Companies may export up to 50% of allotted coal. Coal can also be shared across group companies as per operational needs.
- **Alignment with Coal Sector Reforms:** It complements the 2020 reform allowing commercial mining without end-use restrictions.

● Focus areas:

- To ensure transparent, seamless and efficient utilisation of domestic coal resources.
- To promote ease of doing business and reduce dependence on coal imports.
- To boost availability of washed coal and support export opportunities.

PAX SILICA

The Congress party recently targeted Prime Minister over India's exclusion from the United States-led strategic initiative, Pax Silica.



Major focus areas:

- Pursue projects to jointly address AI supply chain opportunities and vulnerabilities in priority critical minerals, semiconductor design, fabrication, and packaging, logistics and transportation, compute, and energy grids and power generation.
- Pursue new joint ventures and strategic co-investment opportunities.
- Protect sensitive technologies and critical infrastructure from undue access or control by countries of concern.
- Build trusted technology ecosystems, including ICT systems, fibre-optic cables, data centres, foundational models and applications.

About Pax Silica Initiative:

- Nature:** It is a U.S.-led strategic initiative to build a secure, prosperous, and innovation-driven silicon supply chain—from critical minerals and energy inputs to advanced manufacturing, semiconductors, artificial intelligence (AI) infrastructure, and logistics.
- Nomenclature:** The term 'Pax Silica' comes from the Latin term 'pax' which means peace, stability, and long-term prosperity. Silica refers to the compound that is refined into silicon, one of the chemical elements foundational to the computer chips that enable AI.
- Objective:** It aims to reduce coercive dependencies, protect the materials and capabilities foundational to AI, and ensure aligned nations can develop and deploy transformative technologies at scale.
- Countries that are part of Pax Silica:** These include Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Netherlands, United Kingdom, Israel, United Arab Emirates and Australia.
- India's position:** Despite being part of the Quad critical minerals initiative and having a critical technology partnership with the US, India is not part of Pax Silica.

PONDURU KHADI

Ponduru Khadi, which was appreciated by Mahatma Gandhi 100 years ago, recently received Geographical Indication (GI) tag.

Ponduru Khadi, Fabric From Andhra Pradesh, Gets GI Tag



About Ponduru Khadi:

Location: Ponduru Khadi, is a famous handspun and handwoven cotton fabric from Andhra Pradesh.

Other names: It is locally known as Patnulu and it is produced in Ponduru village in Srikakulam district.

Associated schemes: It has been nominated for the One District One Product (ODOP) scheme from the Srikakulam district.

Historical significance: During the pre-independence era, Mahatma Gandhi mentioned its virtues in his Young India (the national weekly that Gandhiji edited).

Raw material: It is produced from one of three types of cotton: hill cotton, punasa cotton, or red cotton.

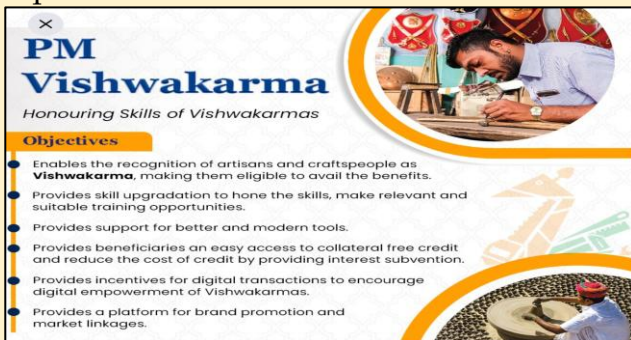
Source of cotton: Cotton is indigenous to Srikakulam district and is grown in and around Ponduru. The entire process, from cotton to fabric, is carried out manually.

Uniqueness: The process of cleaning the cotton with the jawbone of Valuga fish is unique to Ponduru khadi and is not practiced anywhere else in the world. Ponduru is the only place in India where spinners still use single-spindle charkhas with 24 spokes, also known as the "Gandhi Charkha".

High quality fabric: The fabric is known for its very high yarn count of about 100-120, indicating extreme fineness.

PM VISHWAKARMA SCHEME

Recently, National Steering Committee (NSC) for PM Vishwakarma scheme approved several proposals and policy measures to improve loan sanctions and disbursements.



About PM Vishwakarma Scheme:

- **Launch:** It was launched in September 2023 to provide holistic, end-to-end support to traditional artisans and craftspeople (Vishwakarmas).
- **Nodal ministry:** It is a central sector scheme launched by the Ministry of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises.
- **Objective:** It aims to strengthen and nurture the Guru-Shishya parampara, or family-based practice of traditional skills by artisans and craftspeople working with their hands and tools.
- **Services offered:** It offers services like market linkage support, skill training, and incentives for digital transactions to artisans and craftspeople engaged in specified trades.

- **Time period:** It is fully funded by the central government with an outlay of ₹13,000 crore for five years (FY 2023-24 to FY 2027-28).
- **Coverage:** About five lakh families were covered in the first year and about 30 lakh families will be covered over five years.
- **Key Features of the Scheme:**
 - **Recognition:** Recognition of artisans and craftspeople through PM Vishwakarma certificate and ID card.
 - **Skill Upgradation:** Basic Training of 5-7 days and Advanced Training of 15 days or more, with a stipend of Rs. 500 per day;
 - **Toolkit Incentive:** A toolkit incentive of upto Rs. 15,000 in the form of e-vouchers at the beginning of Basic Skill Training.
 - **Credit Support:** Collateral free 'Enterprise Development Loans' of upto Rs. 3 lakhs in two tranches of Rs. 1 lakh and Rs. 2 lakh at a concessional rate of interest fixed at 5%.
- **Eligibility:**
 - It is available for rural and urban artisans and craftsmen across India.
 - It covers 18 traditional crafts such as Boat Maker; Armourer; Blacksmith; Hammer and Tool Kit Maker; etc.
 - Aged 18+, engaged in traditional trade, no similar loans in the past 5 years.
 - Only one member per family is eligible for registration and benefits.

VIKSIT BHARAT SHIKSHA ADHISHTHAN BILL, 2025

The Union government has tabled the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025 in the Lok Sabha, proposing a fundamental restructuring of India's higher education regulatory framework.

The Bill seeks to subsume existing bodies such as the University Grants Commission (UGC), All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) and National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) into a single overarching authority.

Single Regulator with Three Independent Verticals

The proposed legislation envisages a unified higher education regulator with three distinct verticals responsible for regulation, accreditation and academic standards.

The government has cited overlapping jurisdictions, excessive compliance burdens and weak quality assurance as key shortcomings of the existing system. By mandating outcome-based accreditation linked to institutional autonomy, the Bill aims to shift higher education governance towards a performance-oriented and transparent framework.

Institutions of National Importance Covered

A major departure from past practice is the explicit inclusion of Institutions of National Importance within the ambit of the new law. Section 2(1)(a) applies the Act to IITs, IIMs, NITs, IISc and similar institutions established by Acts of Parliament under the Ministry of Education.

Section 2(2) grants the law overriding effect on matters of coordination and standards, marking a clear reduction in the regulatory insulation these institutions have traditionally enjoyed.

Expanded Powers and Autonomy Safeguards

Sections 10 and 11 establish a Regulatory Council as the common regulator for higher education, with wide-ranging powers linked to accreditation and compliance.

While Section 49 includes a provision stating that the autonomy and independence of Institutions of National Importance will be protected, this safeguard is to be operationalised through future regulations approved by the Central Government. Provisions such as Section 45 on policy directions and Section 47 on supersession powers expand executive discretion across the sector.

Wide Institutional Scope and NEP Linkage

Beyond elite institutions, the Bill covers central, state and private universities, deemed universities, affiliated and autonomous colleges, technical and teacher education institutions, open and online education providers, and foreign universities operating in India. Professional practice in medicine, law, pharmacy and veterinary sciences remains with existing councils.

The government argues the legislation gives statutory backing to the National Education Policy 2020, which called for a single regulator, graded autonomy and globally competitive higher education institutions.

INDIA'S FIRST WILDLIFE-SAFE ROAD

The National Highways Authority of India has introduced India's first wildlife-safe road on National Highway 45 in Madhya Pradesh. The initiative aims to reduce animal-vehicle collisions while balancing highway development with wildlife conservation in ecologically sensitive regions.

Location and Ecological Significance

The project has been implemented on a 2 km ghat section of an 11.96 km highway stretch passing through the Veerangana Durgavati Tiger Reserve. The corridor also connects areas near the Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary, making it a critical zone for wildlife movement and conservation efforts.



Innovative Table-Top Red Markings

A key feature of the project is the introduction of table-top red markings, inspired by Dubai's Sheikh Zayed Road. These are 5 mm thick, hot-applied thermoplastic red surface layers laid across the carriageway in identified danger zones.

The slightly raised texture alerts drivers and naturally slows vehicles without causing sudden braking or discomfort. The bright red colour signals entry into a speed-restricted, wildlife-sensitive corridor, supported by international research and safety guidelines. As part of a holistic safety approach, NHAI has constructed 25 dedicated wildlife underpasses to allow safe animal movement beneath the highway.

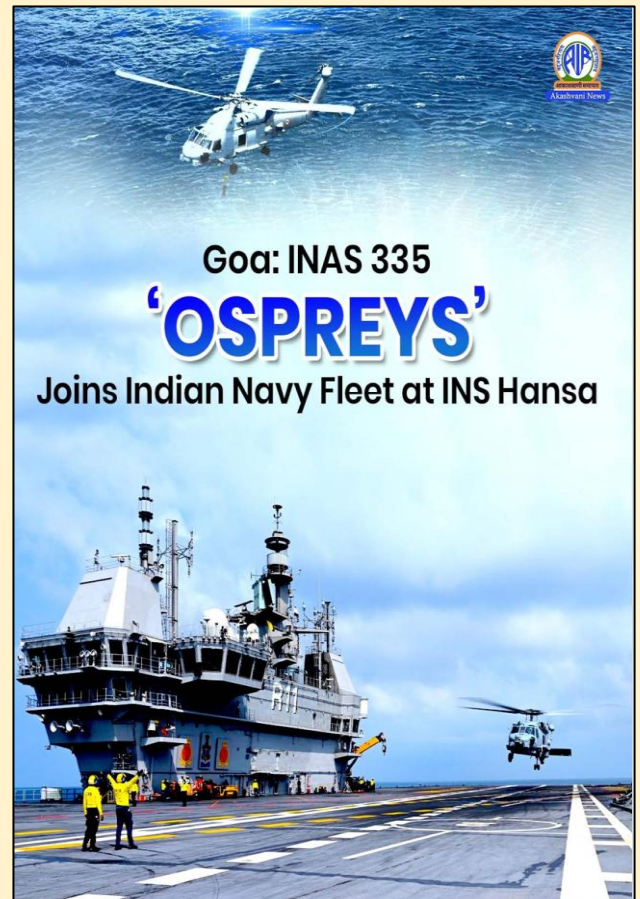
An eight-foot-high fence has been installed along the road to guide animals towards these underpasses and prevent them from straying onto the carriageway. Speed detection devices have also been deployed to alert motorists and encourage responsible driving.

Monitoring and Sustainable Highway Vision

Cameras have been installed on minor bridges, which also function as animal crossing points, to monitor wildlife movement. The project aligns with NHAI's Green Highways initiative, promoting sustainable and environmentally responsible infrastructure. If successful, the model is expected to be replicated on other national highways across the country.

INAS 335 'Ospreys'

The Indian Navy has commissioned INAS 335 'Ospreys' at INS Hansa, Goa, formally inducting its second squadron of MH-60R multi-role helicopters. The commissioning marks a major enhancement of naval aviation capability on the western seaboard and strengthens India's operational readiness amid a complex and contested maritime security environment.



Strategic Boost to Western Seaboard Aviation

Commissioning the squadron, Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi stated that the induction comes at a time of shifting geopolitics, rapid technological change and emerging non-traditional threats.

He emphasised that robust maritime security and credible deterrence are essential to protect India's sea lines of communication and expanding maritime interests. The MH-60R squadron is expected to significantly improve the Navy's ability to respond swiftly across the western maritime theatre.

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KERALA STATE CIVIL SERVICE ACADEMY
Charachira, Kowdiar P.O. Thiruvananthapuram - 695003. Phone: 0471-2313065, 2311854.
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Enhanced Multi-Role Operational Capability

The MH-60R helicopters are equipped with advanced sensors, modern avionics and a potent weapons suite. They are optimised for anti-submarine warfare, maritime strike and search-and-rescue missions.

Admiral Tripathi noted that the induction of the helicopter as the first operational squadron on the western seaboard marks an important milestone, enhancing maritime domain awareness and rapid response capabilities. The platform has already demonstrated its effectiveness during exercises such as TROPEX-25, the Tri-Services Exercise 2025, and Operation Sindoor.

Historical Context and Capability Expansion

The commissioning coincides with significant milestones in India's naval history. The year 2025 marks 75 years since the approval of the Fleet Air Arm, which transformed the Navy into a multidimensional force. December 17 also commemorates the launch of Operation Vijay in 1961, when naval aviation played a key role in the liberation of Goa.

Admiral Tripathi also highlighted ongoing capability enhancement plans, including the acquisition of 15 MQ-9B Sea Guardian remotely piloted aircraft and the contract for 26 Rafale-M carrier-borne fighters.

Focus on Aatmanirbharta and Operational Readiness

The Navy has underlined its commitment to Aatmanirbharta by integrating indigenous weapons, sensors and systems on the MH-60R platform. These include software-defined radios, data links and depth charges, supported by indigenous infrastructure, training and maintenance capabilities.

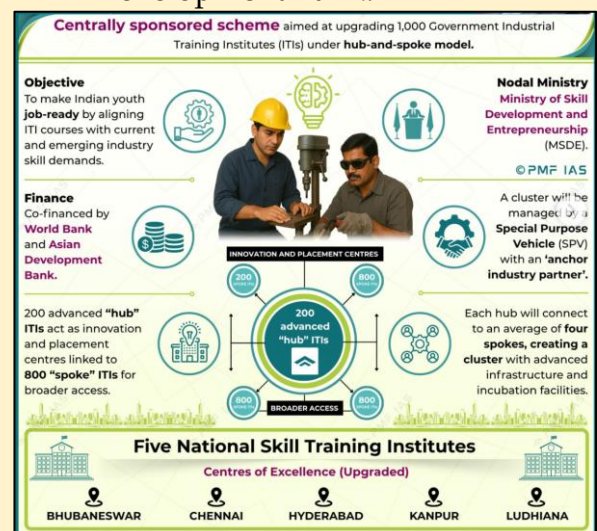
The newly commissioned squadron is fully operational and ready for deployment with the fleet from day one, reinforcing shipborne aviation as a central pillar of India's maritime power.

PM-SETU SCHEME

The Ministry of Skill Development has invited industry leaders to participate in the PM-SETU scheme, marking a shift towards an industry-led model of vocational training.

About PM-SETU Scheme:

- **Full Form:** PM-SETU stands for Pradhan Mantri Skilling and Employability Transformation through Upgraded ITIs.
- **Nature:** It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme launched to strengthen India's vocational training ecosystem.
- **Objective:** It aims to modernise the ITI ecosystem by upgrading 1000 government ITIs across India into modern, industry-aligned training institutions
- **Nodal Ministry:** It comes under Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship.
- **Implementation:** It is implemented as a hub-and-spoke model, with 200 hub ITIs linked to 800 spoke ITIs. Each hub will be equipped with advanced infrastructure, innovation and incubation centres, production units, training of trainer facilities, and placement services, while the spokes will extend access and outreach.
- **Funding:** The financial outlay for the schemes is Rs. 60,000 crores, over a five- year period.
- **Financing partners:** The initiative is backed by global co-financing from the World Bank and Asian Development Bank.



• Components:

- Introduce new, demand-driven courses and revamp existing ones in collaboration with industry;
- Set up Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) with credible Anchor Industry Partners to manage clusters and ensure outcome-based training;
- Create pathways for long-term diplomas, short-term courses, and executive programs;
- Strengthen 5 National Skill Training Institutes in – Bhubaneswar (Odisha), Chennai (Tamil Nadu), Hyderabad (Telangana), Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh), Ludhiana (Punjab), as Centres of Excellence with global partnerships.

K-4 MISSILE

Recently, India tested an intermediate-range ballistic missile called K-4, from the nuclear-powered submarine INS Arighaat in the Bay of Bengal.



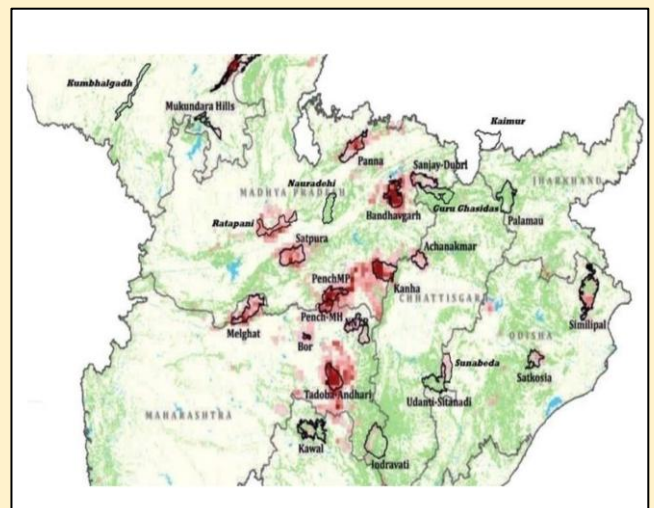
About K-4 Missile:

- **Nature:** Kalam-4 or K-4 Missile, is a nuclear-capable intermediate-range submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) designed mainly for deployment on Arihant-class submarines. Each Arihant-class submarine can carry four K-4 missiles.

- **Development:** K-4 was indigenously developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
- **Structure:** The 12-metre-long missile weighing 17 tonnes has a two-stage solid-fuel system.
- **Range:** It has a range of around 3,500 km. It is a major improvement over the older K-15 missile, which had a much shorter range of only 750 kilometers.
- **Payloads:** It can carry payloads, up to 2 tons, including a nuclear warhead.
- **Uniqueness:** One of its key features is its ability to be cold-launched from underwater, which allows the missile to be ejected from the submarine before the engine ignites.
- **Accuracy:** It is guided by an advanced inertial navigation system supported by GPS and India's NavIC system. This combination ensures high accuracy, with a reported circular error probable of less than 10 metres.
- **Launch Mechanism:** It is a "cold-launched" missile, meaning it is ejected from the submarine using gas pressure before its engine ignites once it clears the water. The missile is also equipped with manoeuvring features that help it evade missile defence systems.

MELGHAT TIGER RESERVE

Recently, BNHS along with the Maharashtra Forest Department, successfully carried out the tagging of 15 long-billed vultures at Melghat Tiger Reserve.



About Melghat Tiger Reserve:

- **Location:** It is located in the Amaravati district of Maharashtra. It is located on the southern offshoot of the Satpura Hill Range in Central India, called Gavilgarh Hill.
- **Establishment:** It was established as a wildlife sanctuary in 1967 and was declared a tiger reserve in 1974.
- **Nomenclature:** The name 'Melghat' means the confluence of various 'ghats' or valleys, as is typical from the landscape of this tiger Reserve.
- **Uniqueness:** It was the first tiger reserve in Maharashtra. It was among the first nine tiger reserves notified in 1973-74 under Project Tiger.
- **Vegetation:** The forest is tropical dry deciduous in nature, dominated by teak.
- **Rivers:** The reserve is a catchment area for five major rivers: the Khandu, Khapra, Sipna, Gadga, and Dolar, all are tributaries of the river Tapti.
- **Boundaries:** The Tapti River and the Gawilgadh ridge of the Satpura Range form the boundaries of the reserve.
- **Tribes:** The Korkus are the largest tribal community in Melghat. Other communities include the Gawli community, the Gond tribe, and several other smaller tribal communities.
- **Flora:** Some of the common species are teak, Lagerstroemia Parviflora, Terminalia Tomentosa, Ougeinia Oojeinensis, Emblica Officinalis, Bamboo, etc.
- **Fauna:** Apart from Tigers the other prominent animals are Sloth Bear, Indian Gaur, Sambar deer, Leopard, Nilgais, dhole, hyena, jungle cat, langur, etc. It is also considered a stronghold of the critically endangered forest owl.

About Long-Billed Vulture

It is an old World vulture native to the Asian region.

They are also known as Indian long-billed vultures due to their comparatively longer beak.

Appearance: It is a medium-sized and bulky scavenger feeding mostly on the carcasses of dead animals.

Females of this species are smaller than males.

Habitat: They are usually found in savannas and other open habitats around villages, cities, and near cultivated areas.

Distribution: These are native to India, Pakistan, and Nepal.

Conservation status: IUCN Red List: Critically Endangered

THANJAVUR PAINTING

Recently, Department of Posts undertook the transmission of a priceless Thanjavur painting of Shri Ram from Bengaluru to Ayodhya using its Logistics Post service.



About Thanjavur Painting:

- **Origin:** This classical South Indian art form developed under the Nayakas of Thanjavur, who were feudatories of the Vijayanagara Empire.
- **Zenith:** It reached its peak under the Maratha rulers of Thanjavur (17th-19th centuries), particularly under the patronage of King Serfoji II (Sarfoji Maharaj).
- **Influences:** It reflects a blend of Vijayanagara, Maratha, Deccani, and later European (Company) styles.
- **Base materials:** Tanjore or Thanjavur paintings are created on wooden panels, commonly known as palagai padam. These are traditionally created on canvas affixed to wooden planks, typically made from jackfruit or teak, and bound with Arabic gum.

- **Significance:** It has received the Geographical Indication tag.
- **Rich Colours:** These paintings are known for their vibrant colours. They often use bright shades of red, blue, green, and gold leaf-work to create an opulent effect.
- **Visual Style:** These are characterized by vibrant colours (red, blue, green), compact compositions, and figures with rounded, cherubic faces and almond-shaped eyes.
- **Theme:** Tanjore paintings typically depict Hindu gods and goddesses, especially figures like Lord Krishna, Lord Ganesha, and Goddess Lakshmi.

Technique:

- **Gesso Work:** A paste made of limestone powder and a binding agent (sukkan or makku) is used to create raised, embossed areas, giving a three-dimensional effect.
- **Gold Leaf:** Genuine 22-carat gold foil is layered over the gesso work.
- **Embellishments:** Inlays of glass beads, pearls, and precious or semi-precious stones (diamonds, rubies) are used for ornamentation.

KHWAJA MOINUDDIN CHISHTI

Recently, the Supreme Court declined urgent hearing of a plea against the practice of offering a 'Chadar' by the Prime Minister at the Dargah of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti.



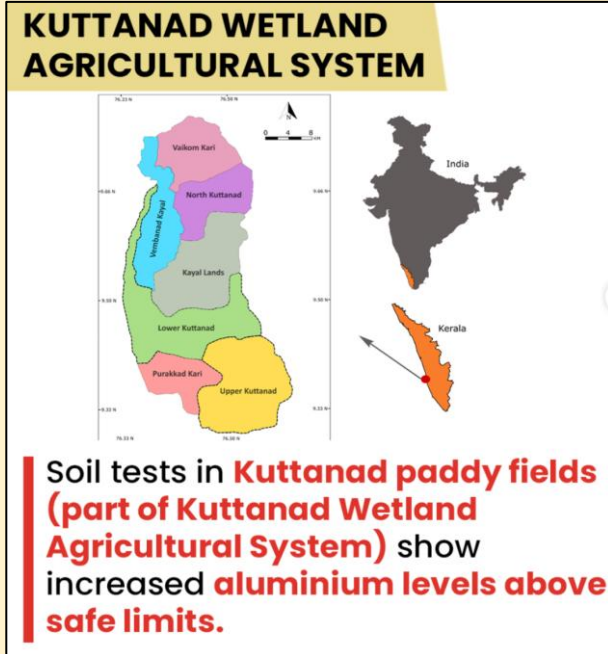
About Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti:

- **Early Life:** He was born in 1141 CE in Sijistan (modern-day Sistan, Iran). He was later orphaned at age 14 and turned to spirituality after a meeting with the mystic Ibrahim Qandozi. He was a very important Sufi saint.

- **Other names:** People often call him Gharib Nawāz, which means 'Benefactor of the Poor' (for his service to the needy).
- **Education:** He studied Islamic theology in the famous learning centres of Samarkand and Bukhara.
- **Spiritual Lineage:** A follower of Sunni Hanafi theology, he became the disciple of Hazrat Khwaja Usman Harooni, who later initiated him into the Chishti order.
- **Arrival in India:** He arrived in India around 1192 CE, coinciding with the Second Battle of Tarain. He finally settled in the city of Ajmer during the reign of Sultan Iltutmish in Delhi and Prithviraj Chauhan in Ajmer.
- **Significance:** He is famous for bringing the Chishti Order of Sufism to India. He preached love, tolerance, charity, and detachment from materialism, and established a Khanqah in Ajmer to serve the poor.
- **Prominent disciples:** His legacy was carried forward by notable saints like Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki (Delhi), Baba Farid (Punjab), and Nizamuddin Auliya (Delhi).
- **Dargah:** After his death in 1236 CE, Moinuddin Chishti was buried in Ajmer. His tomb is visited by people of all faiths and it is now known as the Dargah Sharif, or the Ajmer Sharif Dargah.
- **Architectural style of tomb:** The architectural style of Dargah Sharif purely reflects the Mughal style of architecture. All Mughal rulers from Humayun to Shah Jahan have made modifications in the structure.

KUTTANAD WETLAND AGRICULTURAL SYSTEM

Recently, soil tests in Kuttanad, the rice bowl of Kerala revealed dangerously high aluminium concentrations in paddy fields, posing a serious threat to crop health.



About Kuttanad Wetland Agricultural System:

- **Geography:** It is located in the Alappuzha, Kottayam, and Pathanamthitta districts of Kerala.
- **Part of Ramsar site:** It is part of the Vembanad-Kol wetland system, a designated Ramsar Site since 2002.
- **Uniqueness:** It is unique and the only system in India that favours rice cultivation below sea level. The cultivation takes place 1 to 2 meters below mean sea level.
- **Complex system:** Farmers reclaim land by draining delta swamps and building a complex network of polders (Padasekharams) and bunds to manage water and salinity.
- **Concerns:** The system faces severe threats from rising sea levels, saltwater intrusion, and chemical pollution from both agriculture and tourism. Further, frequent flood-drought cycles are threatening the Puncha (summer) rice season, the primary cultivation period.

- **Structure:** It is a mosaic of three distinct agricultural landscapes:
 - **Paddy Wetlands:** Used for rice cultivation (locally called Puncha Vayals) and seasonal fish catching.
 - **Garden Lands:** Used for planting coconut, tubers, and food crops.
 - **Water Bodies:** Used for inland fishing and shell harvesting.

Global and National Recognition:

- **GIAHS Status:** It is recognized by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 2013 as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS).
- **Rice Bowl of Kerala:** It contributes significantly to Kerala's rice production, often referred to by this sobriquet.
- **Kuttanad Package:** It is a major revival program recommended by the M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) to address ecological and agrarian distress in the region.

IUCN SPECIES SURVIVAL COMMISSION

Recently, Vivek Menon became the first Asian chairman of the IUCN Species Survival Commission.



About IUCN Species Survival Commission:

- **Nature:** It is a science-based global network of over 10,000 volunteer experts (biologists, conservationists, etc.) providing technical advice on species conservation.
- **Objective:** Its primary role is to provide scientific data for the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, the global gold standard for extinction risk assessment.

- **Headquarters:** Its headquarters is located in Gland, Switzerland.
- **Structure:** It functions as one of the six expert Commissions of IUCN. It works closely with the IUCN Secretariat and national governments, NGOs, and research institutions.
- **Mechanism:** It operates through more than 160 Specialist Groups (e.g., Cat Specialist Group, Asian Elephant Specialist Group), Task Forces, and Red List Authorities.
- **Focus areas:**
 - To prevent species extinctions and support recovery of threatened species.
 - To ensure that use of biodiversity is equitable and sustainable.
 - To integrate science, policy, and on-ground action for global conservation.
- **Significance:**
 - It forms the scientific backbone of global biodiversity governance.
 - It guides national laws, protected area policies, and international conventions such as CBD and CITES.
 - It serves as the global gold standard for extinction risk assessment.

WORLD ANTI-DOPING AGENCY'S (WADA)

For the third consecutive year, India has topped the World Anti-Doping Agency's (WADA) global list of offenders, with 260 positive cases in 2024.



About World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA):

- **Nature:** It is an international non-governmental organization initiated by the International Olympic Committee (IOC).
- **Establishment:** It was established in 1999, following the "Lausanne Declaration" to lead a collaborative worldwide movement for doping-free sport.
- **Objective:** It aims to develop, harmonize and coordinate anti-doping rules and policies across all sports and countries.
- **Headquarters:** Its headquarters is located in Montreal, Canada.
- **Funding:** It is composed and funded equally by the Olympic Movement (IOC) and governments worldwide.
- **Focus areas:** Its activities include scientific and social science research; education; intelligence & investigations; development of anti-doping capacity; and monitoring of compliance with the World Anti-Doping Program.
- **Governance Structure:**
 - **Foundation Board:** It consists of 42-members and is the agency's highest policy-making body. It is composed of representatives of the Olympic Movement (IOC, National Olympic Committees, International Sports Federations, and athletes) and representatives of governments from all 5 continents.
 - **Executive Committee:** It consists of 16-member to which the Board delegates the management and running of the agency, including the performance of all its activities and the administration of its assets.
- **Key Instruments:**
 - **World Anti-Doping Code:** The core document that harmonizes anti-doping policies, rules, and regulations across all sports and countries.
 - **Prohibited List:** An international standard identifying substances and methods banned in sport, updated annually.

- **ADAMS:** The Anti-Doping Administration and Management System, a central clearinghouse for coordinating global anti-doping activities.
- **Athlete Biological Passport (ABP):** A tool used to monitor an athlete's biological markers over time to detect doping indirectly.
- **India and WADA:**
 - **Compliance:** India is a signatory to the UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport (2005), which provides the legal framework for the WADA Code.
 - **Institutional Framework:** National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) was established in 2005 (as a society) and it was given statutory status under the National Anti-Doping Act, 2022.
 - **National Dope Testing Laboratory (NDTL):** The WADA-accredited facility in New Delhi responsible for sample analysis.

RAPID FINANCING INSTRUMENT

Recently, IMF approved funding of USD 206 million under its Rapid Financing Instrument to help Sri Lanka address urgent needs arising from the Cyclone Ditwah.



About Rapid Financing Instrument (RFI):

- **Nature:** It is an IMF emergency lending facility that provides quick, low-access financial assistance to member countries facing urgent balance-of-payments needs, especially during crises such as natural disasters, external shocks, or domestic instability.
- **Organisation:** It is given by International Monetary Fund (IMF).

- **Eligibility:** It is available to all IMF member countries. For low-income countries (LICs), a similar concessional facility called the Rapid Credit Facility (RCF) is available under the Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust (PRGT).
- **Conditionality:** Support is provided with limited or no ex-post conditionality (policy commitments or reviews after the loan is approved), though prior actions might be required. The borrowing country is still expected to pursue policies to address the underlying BoP problem.
- **Disbursement of funds:** It involves a single, rapid disbursement of funds. Repayment is expected within 3¼ to 5 years, with interest rates similar to the IMF's standard non-concessional facilities.
- **Windows:** The RFI has two main windows: a regular window and a large natural disaster window (for disasters where damage is 20% of GDP or more).
- **Focus areas:**
 - To provide immediate liquidity to countries facing sudden balance-of-payments (BoP) pressures.
 - To prevent severe economic disruption when full-fledged IMF programmes are unnecessary or not feasible.
 - To support macroeconomic stability during short-term crises.

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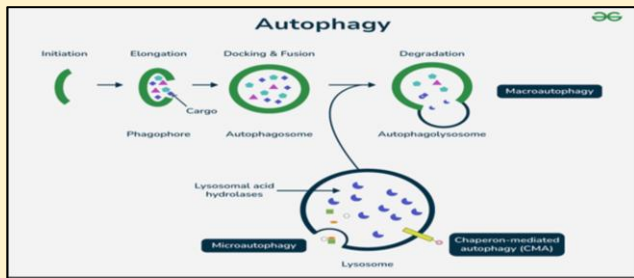
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AUTOPHAGY

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



About Autophagy:

- **Nature:** Autophagy is the body's cellular recycling system. It is a key biological process where cells clear out damaged and unwanted materials.
- **Trigger factors:** It is triggered by stress (fasting, starvation, hypoxia, or infection), a cup-shaped double membrane called a phagophore begins to form.
- **Major functions:** It recycles damaged cell parts into fully functioning cell parts. It gets rid of nonfunctional cell parts that take up space and destroys pathogens in a cell that can damage it, like viruses and bacteria.

• Types:

- **Macroautophagy:** The most common form, involving the formation of autophagosomes to transport large cargo to lysosomes.
- **Microautophagy:** The lysosome directly "swallows" cytoplasmic material by folding its own membrane inward.
- **Chaperone-Mediated Autophagy (CMA):** Specific proteins are identified by "chaperone" molecules and transported directly across the lysosomal membrane without forming a separate vesicle.

• Significance:

- **Anti-Aging:** By clearing out damaged proteins that cause cellular "clutter," autophagy slows aging and promotes longevity.
- **Neuroprotection:** It removes toxic protein aggregates associated with neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and Huntington's.
- **Immunity:** In a process called xenophagy, cells use autophagy to identify and destroy invading viruses and bacteria.

The Cancer Paradox: It initially prevents cancer but later supports tumour growth and acts as a tumour suppressor by maintaining genome integrity and cellular homeostasis. In certain types of cancer, cells hijack autophagy for their own survival and propagation.

Nobel connection: Yoshinori Ohsumi won the 2016 Nobel Prize for discovering the genes (ATG genes) that regulate this process.

Relationship with Apoptosis: While autophagy is "self-eating" for survival, apoptosis is "programmed cell death" for the benefit of the organism. They are distinct but highly interconnected processes.

RIGHT TO DISCONNECT BILL

The introduction of the Right to Disconnect Bill as a Private Member's Bill reflects growing concern over digital overreach at workplaces, where technology has blurred boundaries between work and personal life despite India's consolidated labour law framework.

Current Context and Rationale

- **Digitalisation of Work:** With smartphones, emails, and messaging platforms, work increasingly extends beyond physical offices and prescribed hours, intensifying stress, burnout, and work-life imbalance.

- **Existing Labour Law Framework:** India recently consolidated 29 labour laws into four labour codes, including the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020, which regulates working hours and overtime but is largely premised on physical workplaces.
- **Purpose of the Bill:** The Right to Disconnect Bill seeks to protect employees from after-hours work-related communication by granting them the right to not respond to calls, messages, or emails beyond prescribed working hours.

Key Issues and Limitations of the Bill

- **Undefined Concept of 'Work':** The Bill regulates after-hours communication but does not clarify whether such digital engagement constitutes "work" under existing labour codes. This creates a conceptual gap where communication is regulated without being legally recognised as labour.
- **Disconnect from Working Time Regulations:** While the OSH Code governs working hours and overtime, the Bill does not integrate digital availability into this framework, weakening enforceability and reducing the right to a behavioural guideline rather than a labour standard.
- **Ambiguity in Legal Nature:** The Bill does not specify whether the right to disconnect is a **mandatory labour standard** or a **contractual right** that can be modified through employer policies or employment contracts.
- **Absence of Constitutional Anchoring:** Although the right has a clear linkage with **Article 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty)** – particularly dignity, privacy, and autonomy – the Bill does not acknowledge or articulate this constitutional basis.

Comparative Perspective: Lessons from Other Jurisdictions

- **European Union Approach:** EU jurisprudence treats **employer control** as a key determinant of working time. Periods of on-call duty or availability, even without active work, are often recognised as working time.
- **France:** Labour law distinguishes clearly between working time and rest time. Digital communication is regulated through collective bargaining, ensuring enforceability without redefining "work".
- **Germany:** Strict working-time and rest-period regulations limit employer intrusion into personal time, supported by strong enforcement mechanisms.
- **Key Insight:** In effective models, the right to disconnect works because digital availability is legally integrated into working-time regulation.

Governance and Social Implications

- **Work-Life Balance:** Unregulated digital work erodes rest time, affecting mental health, productivity, and family life.
- **Labour Rights in the Gig and Platform Economy:** Ambiguity over what constitutes work disproportionately affects white-collar employees, gig workers, and remote workers.
- **Legal Uncertainty:** Without clarity, courts may deliver divergent interpretations, leading to inconsistent labour jurisprudence.

Way Forward

- **Define 'Digital Work':** Explicitly recognise after-hours digital communication under labour law when it involves employer control.
- **Integrate with Labour Codes:** Align the Right to Disconnect with working-hour and overtime provisions under the OSH Code to ensure enforceability.
- **Clarify Mandatory Nature:** Specify whether the right is non-derogable or subject to collective bargaining and contractual modification.

- **Constitutional Anchoring:** Explicitly link the right to dignity, privacy, and autonomy under Article 21 to strengthen judicial interpretation.
- **Encourage Collective Bargaining:** Allow sector-specific solutions through negotiated agreements, especially in IT and services sectors.

The Right to Disconnect Bill acknowledges that digital technologies have transformed work, but it remains conceptually incomplete. By failing to define digital labour and integrate it with existing labour laws, it risks becoming symbolic. The Bill should be seen as a starting point for a broader rethinking of labour jurisprudence in the digital economy.

ARTEMISININ

A new study warns that heavy artemisinin use may trigger resistance hotspots, with resistance markers gradually increasing in parts of Africa.



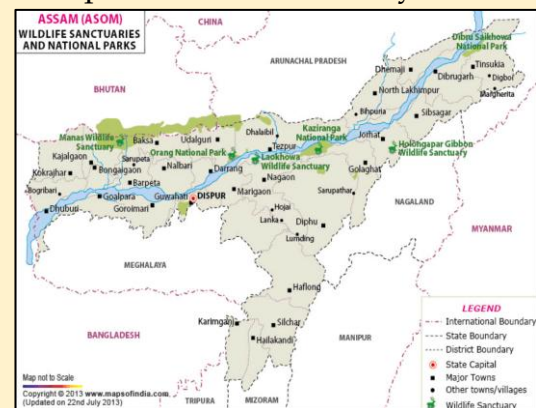
About Artemisinin:

- **Source:** It is an antimalarial drug derived from the sweet wormwood plant, *Artemisia annua*. The process involves drying the leaves and using a solvent to extract the active ingredient.
- **Discovery:** It was discovered in the 1970s by Tu Youyou (China) as part of "Project 523." She was awarded the Nobel Prize in Medicine (2015) for this discovery.
- **Significance:** It offered a new option when the malaria parasite was becoming resistant to older drugs like chloroquine and sulfadoxine-pyrimethamine. It is effective against all the malaria-causing protozoal organisms in the genus *Plasmodium*.

- **Mechanism:** It mainly targets the malaria parasite during the blood stage, disrupting the parasite's ability to replicate within red blood cells. It helps significantly reduce the parasites but doesn't stay in the body for a long time, being eliminated within hours.
- **Derivatives:** Its common derivatives include Artesunate (injectable for severe malaria), Artemether, and Dihydroartemisinin.
- **Used as a combination drug:** It is usually partnered with another drug that eliminates the remaining parasites over a longer period of time.
- **Recommended by WHO:** The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends artemisinin-based combination therapies (ACTs) as the go-to treatment for *Plasmodium falciparum* malaria.

BURA CHAPORI WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Recently, a team of government officials visited the encroached areas of land earmarked for compensatory afforestation at Bura Chapori Wildlife Sanctuary.



About Bura Chapori Wildlife Sanctuary:

- **Location:** It is located on the southern bank of the river Brahmaputra in the Sonitpur district, Assam.
- **Area:** It covers an area of approximately 44 sq. km.
- **Establishment:** It was declared a Reserved Forest in 1974, upgraded to a Wildlife Sanctuary in 1995.

- **Boundaries:** It is located on the north side of Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary and shares an integral transboundary landscape of the Laokhowa-Burachapori Wildlife Sanctuary ecosystem.
- **Connectivity:** It acts as a wildlife corridor connecting Kaziranga and Orang National Parks.
- **Buffer Zone:** It was notified as a buffer zone of the Kaziranga Tiger Reserve in 2007, which helps in reducing human-wildlife conflict and supporting landscape-level conservation efforts.
- **Flooding:** Most of the low-lying areas of the sanctuary are vulnerable to flooding during summer.
- **Significance:** The sanctuary's unique grassland habitat is vital for grassland-dependent species, especially the Bengal florican, whose global population is critically endangered.
- **Flora:** It is enveloped and adorned by wet alluvial grasslands, riparian, and semi-evergreen forests. Most of the plant species found here are of great commercial and medical value.
- **Fauna:** It is a habitat of a wide range of wild animals, including tigers, elephants, wild buffalos, one-horned rhinoceros, hog deer, and wild boar. The avian inhabitants feature species like the Bengal florican, black-necked stork, open-billed stork, white-eyed pochard, mallard, spotbill, large whistling teal, and numerous others.

CHILD TRAFFICKING IN INDIA

A recent **Supreme Court of India** judgment describing child trafficking as a “deeply disturbing reality” brings renewed focus on India's persistent trafficking networks, despite constitutional safeguards, special laws, and multiple government schemes aimed at child protection.

Scale and Nature of Child Trafficking in India

- **Magnitude of the Problem:** As per NCRB *Crime in India* data, over **2,200 children were trafficked in 2022**, with girls constituting a majority. States such as West Bengal, Telangana, Bihar,
- Maharashtra and Assam consistently report high numbers due to poverty, migration corridors and porous borders.
- **Organised Crime Networks:** Trafficking operates through decentralised yet interconnected verticals—recruitment, transportation, harbouring and exploitation—often spread across States, complicating detection and prosecution, as noted by the Supreme Court.
 - **Forms of Exploitation:** Children are trafficked for **commercial sexual exploitation**, forced labour, domestic work, begging, and increasingly for online sexual abuse material, reflecting adaptation to digital platforms.
- ### Reasons for Persistence of Child Trafficking
- **Socio-Economic Drivers:** Poverty, seasonal migration, debt bondage, lack of schooling, family disintegration and disasters push children into vulnerability. UNICEF notes that children from migrant and informal labour households face disproportionately higher trafficking risks.
 - **Demand-Side Factors:** Urban informal economies, tourism hubs, construction sites and domestic work markets sustain demand. NCRB data shows trafficking hotspots align with major urban and industrial centres.
 - **Weak Preventive Governance:** Limited surveillance in source areas, understaffed Child Welfare Committees, and poor inter-State coordination weaken early detection. Parliamentary Standing Committee reports have flagged capacity gaps in child protection institutions.
 - **Low Conviction Rates:** Conviction rates under trafficking-related provisions remain low (often below 30%), reflecting poor investigation quality, victim intimidation, and insensitive evidentiary standards—issues directly addressed by the recent Supreme Court judgment.

Legal and Policy Framework

- **Constitutional Mandate:** Articles 23 and 24 prohibit trafficking and child labour; Articles 15(3), 21 and 39(f) mandate special protection for children's dignity and development.
- **Statutory Architecture:** The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, Juvenile Justice Act, POCSO Act and IPC Sections 370/370A collectively criminalise trafficking, exploitation and abuse.
- **Judicial Reinforcement:** The Supreme Court has clarified that trafficked children are **injured witnesses**, whose testimony cannot be discarded due to minor inconsistencies, aligning with trauma-informed justice principles.

Government Schemes and Institutional Response

- **Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs):** Established in many districts to focus on detection, rescue and investigation, supported by the Ministry of Home Affairs, though uneven operational capacity persists.
- **Ujjawala Scheme:** Targets prevention, rescue, rehabilitation and reintegration of women and child victims of trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation; however, CAG audits have pointed to gaps in coverage and monitoring.
- **Mission Vatsalya (Child Protection Services):** Supports Child Welfare Committees, shelter homes, counselling and education, forming the backbone of post-rescue care.
- **Operation Smile/Muskaan:** Police-led initiatives that have traced **thousands of missing children annually**, reducing trafficking risks through coordinated rescue operations.
- **TrackChild Portal:** A national digital platform integrating police and child welfare data to track missing and found children, improving inter-State coordination.

Gaps and Criticisms

- **Implementation Deficit:** Reports by NCPCR and CAG highlight overcrowded shelters, staff shortages, and inadequate psychosocial care, increasing risks of re-trafficking.
- **Reactive Policy Bias:** Most interventions focus on rescue after exploitation, while preventive measures such as livelihood security, schooling and social protection in source areas remain weak.
- **Fragmented Governance:** Multiple ministries—Home, Women & Child Development, Labour—operate in silos, diluting accountability and follow-up.
- **Reintegration Challenges:** Without sustained education, skill training and income support, rescued children often return to vulnerable environments.

Way Forward

- **Shift to Prevention-Centric Strategy:** Strengthen social protection, universal schooling, nutrition, and livelihood programmes in trafficking-prone districts, in line with SDG 8.7 (ending child trafficking).
- **Trauma-Informed Justice System:** Mandatory training for police, prosecutors and judges on child psychology and victim-sensitive evidence handling, institutionalising Supreme Court guidelines.
- **Unified Anti-Trafficking Framework:** Operationalise a national anti-trafficking authority to coordinate intelligence, rescue, rehabilitation and prosecution across States.
- **Strengthen Rehabilitation and Aftercare:** Improve quality of shelters, long-term education, skill development and family reintegration to prevent re-trafficking.
- **Data-Driven Monitoring:** Enhance NCRB data granularity, map trafficking corridors, and track repeat offenders to improve deterrence and accountability.

Child trafficking in India reflects deep socio-economic inequalities and governance gaps. While judicial interventions have strengthened victim-centric justice, eliminating trafficking requires a preventive, welfare-oriented and institutionally coordinated approach that protects children before exploitation occurs.

REPUBLIC OF SOMALILAND

Israel has formally recognised the Republic of Somaliland as an independent state, becoming the first country to do so more than three decades after the region declared separation from Somalia. The move marks a significant geopolitical development in the Horn of Africa and represents a historic shift in Israel's diplomatic engagement with unrecognised or partially recognised states.



Formal Recognition Agreement

According to official sources, the recognition declaration was signed by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar on behalf of Israel. Somaliland President Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi signed the declaration for Somaliland. Netanyahu described the development as "seminal and historic", signalling the beginning of formal bilateral relations between the two sides.

Somaliland's Long Quest for Recognition

Somaliland briefly attained independence in 1960 and was recognised at the time by Israel and 34 other countries before voluntarily uniting with Somalia. Following the collapse of Somalia's central government, Somaliland declared independence again in 1991.

Despite maintaining political stability, democratic institutions, and effective governance, it remained unrecognised internationally until Israel's announcement. Several countries, including the UK, Ethiopia, Turkey, the UAE, Denmark, Kenya, and Taiwan, have maintained liaison offices without extending formal recognition.

Strategic and Diplomatic Implications

During a phone conversation with President Abdullahi, Netanyahu expressed Israel's intent to cooperate with Somaliland in economic development, agriculture, and social sectors. He also invited Abdullahi for an official visit to Israel and said he would convey Somaliland's interest in joining the Abraham Accords to US President Donald Trump. Somaliland's leadership welcomed the invitation, indicating readiness to deepen diplomatic ties.

- Somaliland declared independence from Somalia in 1991.
- Israel is the first country to officially recognise Somaliland.
- Somaliland has functioned with its own government, currency, and elections.
- The Abraham Accords focus on normalisation between Israel and Arab states.

Embassies and Regional Impact

Foreign Minister Sa'ar confirmed that embassies will be opened in both countries and ambassadors appointed. Netanyahu's office acknowledged the role of Israel's security and diplomatic establishment, including Mossad Director David Barnea, in facilitating the recognition process. The decision is expected to have broader regional implications, particularly amid ongoing diplomatic shifts in the Middle East and East Africa, and may prompt renewed debate over international recognition norms.

SUSTAINABLE HARNESSING AND ADVANCEMENT OF NUCLEAR ENERGY FOR TRANSFORMING INDIA

The Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India, SHANTI Bill 2025, officially called the Atomic Energy Bill 2025, is in the news because the Union Government has approved it to open India's nuclear energy sector to private and foreign participation.

What is the SHANTI Bill 2025?

The SHANTI Bill 2025 is a proposed law to reform India's civil nuclear energy sector and make it more open, modern, and investment-friendly.

It replaces the Atomic Energy Act, 1962 and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010, which earlier kept the sector under strict government control. The Bill allows limited private and foreign participation in nuclear power while retaining state oversight.



SHANTI Bill 2025 Objectives

The SHANTI Bill 2025 aims to reform India's civil nuclear energy sector to meet future power and climate needs.

Its objectives are:

Expand nuclear power capacity to provide reliable, round-the-clock (baseload) electricity and reduce dependence on coal.

Support India's climate commitments by promoting low-carbon and clean energy sources alongside renewables.

Open the nuclear sector to private and foreign participation in a controlled manner to attract long-term capital and investment.

Promote Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) for faster deployment, industrial decarbonisation, and captive power use.

Improve grid stability as renewable energy capacity increases across the country.

Strengthen India's energy security by diversifying the power mix and reducing fuel import risks.

Leverage international nuclear cooperation, including the Indo-US civil nuclear deal, while maintaining strategic oversight.

PROVISIONS OF THE SHANTI BILL 2025

Expanded role of the private sector in areas such as: Exploration and mining of atomic minerals, Nuclear fuel fabrication, Manufacturing of nuclear equipment and components, and Research and Development (R&D) in civil nuclear technologies. Minority equity participation: Private companies are permitted to hold up to 49% equity in nuclear power projects, with the government retaining majority control.

Promotion of Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) for industrial use, captive power, and quicker deployment of nuclear capacity.

Foreign investment framework through partnerships and sovereign wealth funds, aligned with global nuclear practices.

Nuclear Energy Mission support, including a ₹20,000 crore outlay for SMR research and development.

Long-term capacity target of achieving 100 GWe nuclear power by 2047. Government oversight and safety control to remain with state agencies such as NPCIL, ensuring nuclear safety and security. Framework for liability and risk-sharing mechanisms to make nuclear projects commercially viable while protecting public interest.

ATOMIC ENERGY REGULATORY BOARD

The Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) is India's premier authority responsible for ensuring nuclear and radiation safety. It was constituted in November 1983 by the President of India under the Atomic Energy Act, 1962. The AERB derives its regulatory powers from rules and notifications issued under the Atomic Energy Act, 1962 and the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

Key functions include:

Regulates nuclear and radiation safety across civilian nuclear installations

Issues safety codes, standards, and licensing conditions

Enforces safety provisions under the Atomic Energy Act, 1962 and Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

Administers industrial safety provisions of the Factories Act, 1948 for units under the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) as per Section 23 of the Atomic Energy Act. Conducts safety inspections and reviews to prevent radiation hazards Plays a crucial role in strengthening regulatory oversight under the SHANTI Bill 2025 amid increased private sector participation.

SHANTI Bill: Comparison with Existing Laws

Aspect	Atomic Energy Act, 1962 & CLNDA, 2010	SHANTI Bill 2025
Sector Control	Complete government monopoly over nuclear energy	Government control retained, but limited private participation allowed
Private Participation	No role for private companies	Private firms allowed up to 49% minority equity
Foreign Involvement	Effectively restricted due to legal and policy barriers	Foreign participation permitted through partnerships
Liability Framework	Strict supplier liability under CLNDA	Risk-sharing and liability management mechanisms proposed
Technology Focus	Large, indigenous nuclear reactors	Emphasis on Small Modular Reactors (SMRs)
Investment Environment	Closed and risk-heavy for investors	More investment-friendly and aligned with global practices

Concerns and Challenges Related to the Bill

Nuclear safety concerns: Expanding private participation raises fears about safety standards, making strong and independent nuclear regulation essential.

Public trust and acceptance: Nuclear projects often face local opposition due to health, environmental, and displacement concerns.

Liability and compensation issues: Changes in nuclear liability rules may raise worries about whether victims will receive timely and adequate compensation in case of an accident.

Commercial viability for private players: High costs, long project timelines, and uncertainty in tariff recovery may discourage private investment.

Regulatory capacity: Existing regulatory institutions may face challenges in effectively supervising a larger and more complex nuclear sector.

Technology and scalability issues: India's heavy reliance on indigenous reactor designs may limit rapid scaling and global integration.

Way Forward

Strengthen nuclear safety regulation by enhancing the autonomy, capacity, and transparency of the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB).

Ensure clear and fair liability mechanisms that protect victims while providing certainty to investors and suppliers.

Promote Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) for industrial decarbonisation, captive power, and improved grid stability.

Build public trust through stakeholder consultations, transparency, and awareness about nuclear safety.

Encourage phased private participation to test commercial viability before large-scale expansion.

Integrate nuclear energy into India's climate strategy, aligning it with renewable energy growth and net-zero targets.

SABKA BIMA, SABKI RAKSHA (AMENDMENT OF INSURANCE LAWS) BILL, 2025

The Lok Sabha has passed the *Sabka Bima, Sabki Raksha (Amendment of Insurance Laws) Bill, 2025*, proposing to raise the **Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) limit** in the **insurance sector from 74% to 100%**.

- The move is positioned as a key reform to deepen insurance coverage and advance the goal of **"Insurance for All by 2047."**



What are the Key Provisions of the Sabka Bima, Sabki Raksha (Amendment of Insurance Laws) Bill, 2025?

- **100% FDI in Insurance:** The Bill raises the foreign direct investment limit in insurance companies from **74% to 100%**, allowing full foreign ownership to attract long-term capital, advanced technology, and global best practices.
- **Amendments to Insurance Laws:** It updates the **Insurance Act, 1938**, **LIC Act, 1956**, and **Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA) Act, 1999** to reflect sectoral reforms and regulatory strengthening.
- **Reinsurance Liberalisation:** The **Net Owned Fund** requirement of Foreign Reinsurance Branches is **reduced from Rs 5,000 crore to Rs 1,000 crore**, this aims to deepen the reinsurance market and promote India as a regional hub.

- **Net Own Funds (NOF)** refers to the minimum capital that a reinsurance entity must maintain as a financial buffer to ensure solvency and meet claim obligations.

- **Policyholders' Education and Protection Fund:** It will be set up to promote insurance awareness and safeguard consumer interests, while policyholders' data must be collected and protected in line with the **Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023**.
- **Stronger Powers for IRDAI:** The Bill significantly enhances **IRDAI's enforcement authority**, enabling it to investigate violations, curb illegal commissions and rebates, and ensure stricter compliance by insurers and intermediaries.

- The **IRDAI Chairperson can order searches, inspections, and seizures** where records are withheld or tampered with.
- IRDAI can deploy officers to scrutinise returns, statements, and disclosures submitted by insurers, improving transparency and regulatory vigilance.

- **Greater Autonomy for LIC:** LIC is granted **operational freedom to open new zonal offices** without prior government approval, enabling quicker expansion and better regional management.
- **Eased Compliance Regime:** Procedural and compliance requirements are simplified to improve ease of doing business while maintaining consumer protection.

Limitations of Sabka Bima, Sabki Raksha (Amendment of Insurance Laws) Bill, 2025

- Critics argue that allowing 100% foreign ownership places citizens' **long-term savings in the hands of foreign corporations**, raising concerns about national control over **household financial security**.

- There are worries that foreign insurers could **prioritise profit repatriation and urban markets**, neglecting rural and social sector needs.
- Critics also point to a **trust deficit**, as **insurance relies** heavily on public confidence in state-backed institutions.
- Also, the reform is perceived as a **recalibration of the state's role in social risk protection**, with greater emphasis on shared responsibility rather than direct state provision.

Key Government Initiatives to Promote Insurance Penetration in India

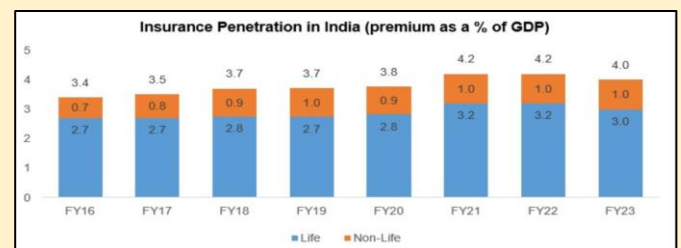
- **Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY):** The largest health assurance scheme in the world, it provides health insurance cover of **Rs 5 lakh per family per year for secondary and tertiary care to vulnerable households**.
- **Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY):** It is a life insurance scheme providing coverage for death due to any cause. The eligible age to join the scheme is 18 to 50 years.
- **Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY):** An Accident Insurance Scheme offering accidental death and disability cover for death or disability on account of an accident.
- **Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile (JAM) Trinity:** Enables easy enrolment, premium payment, and direct benefit transfers, expanding insurance access.

What is the State of the Indian Insurance Sector?

- **Market Size and Global Position:** India is currently the **10th largest insurance market globally** and the **2nd largest among emerging markets**, with a market share of about **1.9%**.
 - As per Swiss Re, India is expected to become the **6th largest insurance market by 2032**, overtaking major developed economies.

- **Penetration and Density:** Insurance penetration in India has been in a growing momentum from 3.4% in FY16 to 4.0% in FY23.

- The general insurance density (the per capita premium) rose from **USD 9 in 2019 to USD 25 in FY23**.
- The number of insurers rose from 53 in 2014-15 to 74 in 2024-25, reflecting deeper market participation.
- Total insurance premiums nearly **tripled from Rs 4.15 lakh crore to Rs 11.93 lakh crore** over the same period.



- **Life Insurance Segment:** India is the 5th largest life insurance market globally, growing at 32-34% annually.
 - LIC remains as the largest player with around **60% market share**, but private insurers are steadily gaining ground.
- **Non-Life (General) Insurance Segment:** India is currently the 4th largest general insurance market in Asia and the 14th-largest globally.

What are the Key Challenges in India's Insurance Sector?

- **Low Insurance Penetration:** General insurance penetration in India remains relatively low at **1% of GDP**, compared to a **global average of 4.2% in 2023**.
- **Limited Rural and Informal Coverage:** Urban and salaried segments dominate coverage, while **rural areas, MSMEs, gig workers, and the unorganised workers** remain largely uninsured.

- **Product Mismatch:** Insurance products are often complex and poorly tailored to the needs of low-income households and small businesses.
 - Many products remain generic and poorly aligned with emerging risks like **climate events, cyber risks, and pandemic-related losses.**
- **Mis-selling and Trust Deficit:** Product complexity, opaque terms, delayed claim settlements, mis-selling by intermediaries, and complex policy terms weaken consumer confidence and lead to high grievance volumes.
- **Limited Awareness:** Large sections of the population still view insurance as an expense rather than a risk-management tool.

What Measures Needed to Strengthen India's Insurance Sector?

- **Leverage Technology and Digital Public Infrastructure:** Encourage adoption of **RegTech and SupTech** tools for real-time compliance monitoring and risk assessment.
 - Enhance the integration of insurance with **India Stack (Aadhaar, e-KYC, DigiLocker, UPI)** for faster onboarding, premium collection, and claim settlement.
 - Use **AI and data analytics** for fraud detection, underwriting, and personalised products.
- **Encourage Product Innovation and Risk Coverage:** Promote insurance products for **emerging risks** such as cyber security, climate disasters, health pandemics, and supply-chain disruptions.
 - Encourage **usage-based and on-demand insurance**, especially in motor and health segments.
 - Align insurance growth with India's goals of **financial inclusion, climate resilience, and infrastructure financing.**

- **Deepen Insurance Penetration and Inclusion:** Scale up social insurance schemes such as **PMJJBY, PMSBY, PMFBY, and Ayushman Bharat** to cover informal workers, gig economy participants, and MSMEs.
 - Promote **micro-insurance and parametric insurance** for farmers, coastal communities, and climate-vulnerable regions.
 - Use **Self-Help Groups, PACS, CSCs, and post offices** as last-mile insurance distributors.
- **Policy Imperative:** As India opens the insurance sector to **foreign participation**, the **Insurance Amendment Bill** must be backed by **tighter regulation and vigilant oversight** to safeguard policyholders and ensure market stability.

Allowing 100% FDI in insurance marks a bold and mature step in India's financial sector reforms. It addresses the supply-side challenge of capital and expertise. The reform's success will depend on strong regulation and the ability to balance investor interests with the protection of Indian policyholders.

ALBERT EKKA BRIGADE



The Albert Ekka Brigade, a distinguished formation of the Indian Army, observed its 56th Raising Day at the Agartala Military Station with solemn ceremonies and military traditions. The event commemorated the brigade's historic role, bravery, and unwavering service to the nation, particularly during the 1971 India-Pakistan War from the Tripura sector.

Solemn Ceremonies and Tribute to Fallen Soldiers

The Raising Day observance began with a wreath-laying ceremony to honour soldiers who made the supreme sacrifice in the line of duty. Officers, junior commissioned officers, other ranks, and civil dignitaries paid homage to the fallen heroes. The ceremony reflected deep respect for the courage and dedication that continue to inspire generations within the brigade.

Legacy of Gallantry and the 1971 War

The brigade has a unique distinction of earning the highest gallantry awards in both war and peacetime, including the Param Vir Chakra during the 1971 conflict. The unit played a pivotal role in the Battle of Gangasagar near the Tripura border as part of Operation Cactus Lily. The Agartala sector holds special significance, as the brigade was launched into operations from this region during the war.

Lance Naik “Albert Ekka” of the 14th Guards made the supreme sacrifice while neutralising a critical enemy bunker threatening Agartala.

His act of conspicuous bravery led to the posthumous award of the Param Vir Chakra, India’s highest wartime gallantry honour, and the brigade proudly bears his name.

Addressing the troops, Brigadier “Dheeraj Singh” praised the brigade’s professionalism, operational excellence, and commitment to national security. Defence analyst “Manas Paul” highlighted that the 1971 war involved Operation Cactus Lily and Operation Nut Cracker, with the 57 Mountain Division providing crucial firepower support.

The operations culminated on 16 December 1971 with the surrender of 93,000 Pakistani soldiers to Lt Gen “Jagjit Singh Aurora”, marking a decisive moment in South Asian history.

INDIA -BANGLADESH RELATIONS

Bangladesh is on the edge once again after the ‘**July Revolution**’ leader **Sharif Osman Hadi** dies due to gunshot injuries. It led to protests in Dhaka & attacks on newspaper offices.

The protests have also been witnessed near **Indian High Commission** in Dhaka & **Assistant High Commissions** in **Chittagong, Khulna & Rajshahi** over the last few days.



Political Evolution and Recent Developments (2024-25):

- **Political Transition:** Student-led protests in 2024 led to Sheikh Hasina’s exit and the establishment of an interim government led by Muhammad Yunus. While Yunus has underscored “fair and balanced” relations with India, some of his remarks – like describing Northeast India as “landlocked” – sparked sensitivities.
- **Attacks on minorities across both the borders:** The ethnic attacks on Bangla-speaking Hindus in Bangladesh and the attacks on Bangladeshi’s in India have strained the India-Bangladesh relations.
- **Resurfacing of security challenges:** There are risks of emergence of security challenges by the anti-India groups as encountered during the earlier BNP-Jamaat years. With the continuing tensions on the border with Pakistan, Indian Army’s long standoff with the PLA in eastern Ladakh, has created a security-nightmare for India.

- **Threat to India's connectivity with the North-east:** A further deterioration in Indo-Bangladesh has restricted India's access to the Northeast. This region's connection to mainland India will only remain through the narrow "Chicken's Neck". With the Myanmar border remaining extremely volatile, the source of unrest in India's Northeast will increase.
- **Jeopardized the Bilateral trade and FTA:** Sheikh Hasina's exit has jeopardized the growing bilateral trade ties between India and Bangladesh. There has also been stagnation of talks in the potential free trade agreement (FTA) between the two countries.
- **Deterioration of people-people ties-** There are real risk of blowback from the Bangladeshi people and the new power centres in Dhaka- some of whom will carry past grudges against India.
- **Geopolitical challenges:** Pakistan and China will see the political change in Bangladesh as an opportunity to challenge India's presence in the country and try to tar it with a pro-Hasina brush.
- **Recent Policy Shifts and Frictions:**
 - **Transshipment Facility Withdrawal:** India revoked Bangladesh's right to ship exports through Indian ports citing congestion; Dhaka saw it as damaging to trade competitiveness.
 - **Extradition Tension:** The interim government has sought Hasina's extradition from India - causing diplomatic discomfort.
 - **Minority Concerns:** Reports of violence against Hindus post-regime change have worried New Delhi.
 - **China's Outreach:** Beijing has stepped up diplomatic and infrastructure engagement, raising strategic concerns in India.

- **Summoning of Bangladesh High Commissioner:** India recently summoned the Bangladesh High Commissioner in India over the deteriorating security environment in the country & the threats posed by the extremists elements to the security of the Indian mission in Dhaka.

Reasons Behind Sheikh Hasina's Exit:

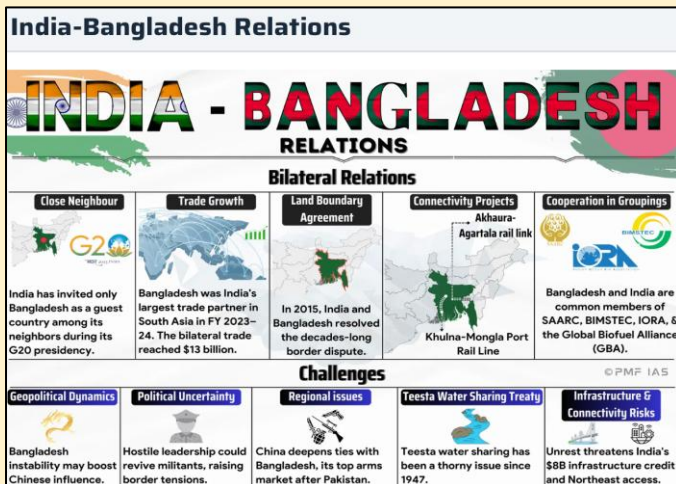
1. **Peaceful Student demonstration evolving into a nationwide movement:** The peaceful student protest against the freedom fighter reservation of 30% in civil services, galvanized into a nationwide movement due to Government's heavy-handed approach. The attack on students by Awami League's student wing, Bangladesh Chhatra League, imposition of a strict curfew with a 'shoot-on-sight' order and labelling the demonstrators as 'Razakars'(a term associated with collaborators during the 1971 war) further inflamed tensions.
2. **Slowing down of economic Growth:** Bangladesh made rapid economic progress under Sheikh Hasina's regime. The country's per capita income tripled in a decade, with the World Bank estimating that over 25 million people were lifted out of poverty in the last 20 years. However, the pandemic in 2020 and a slowing global economy, thereafter, hit the garment industry badly. This increased unemployment, inflation in the economy and discontent of Bangladeshi Population.
3. **Eroding democratic values:** The Parliamentary elections in 2014, 2018, and 2024 were controversial and non-participative as they were marred by low turnout, violence, and boycotts by opposition parties.
4. **Reliance on Hard Power to maintain control:** Hasina's government increasingly relied on hard power to maintain control. This created a climate of fear and repression. **For ex-** The Digital Security Act 2018, became a potent weapon for the government and ruling party activists to silence critics and stifle freedom of online expression.

- Increasing economic inequality:** The proliferation of Bank scams and an expanding list of defaulters, coupled with rampant corruption, fueled public discontent despite the overall economic progress. **For ex-** Companies like CLC Power, Western Marine Shipyard, and Remex Footwear topped the list of defaulters, with bad loans ranging from 965 crore to 1,649 crore Bangladeshi Taka.

- Cultural and Civilisational:** Bangladesh shares deep cultural and civilisational ties with India, including a large Bengali Hindu population and several religious-cultural sites such as Ranir Bunglow Temple and Bhoj Vihara that reflect shared heritage.
- International Cooperation:** Strong India-Bangladesh cooperation is essential for the success of regional and global platforms like BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), and international climate forums such as the COPs under the UNFCCC.

What are the areas of Cooperation between India and Bangladesh?

- Trade and Economic Cooperation:** Bilateral trade crossed **USD 13 billion in 2023-24**, making Bangladesh India's top trading partner in South Asia. India provides duty-free access on most goods under the **South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA)**. Both countries have also started **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** negotiations to further ease trade and investment.
- Connectivity and Infrastructure:** Cross-border links like the **Akhaura-Agartala rail** and **Khulna-Mongla Port rail line** improved regional connectivity. Bus routes connect major cities, and India provides **USD 8 billion in Lines of Credit (LOC)** for infrastructure development. Ports access facilitates trade with India's Northeast.
- Water and River Cooperation:** The **1996 Ganga Water Treaty** guides water-sharing, while the **Joint Rivers Commission (JRC)** manages floods, irrigation, and data sharing. Cooperation continues across 54 rivers, though the **Teesta River dispute** remains unresolved.



What is the significance of Bangladesh for India?

- Geo-strategic:** Bangladesh holds significant geostrategic importance for India as its eastern neighbour. It provides India with access to the Bay of Bengal and serves as a vital route for trade and connectivity with Southeast Asia.
- Geo-political:** A stable and friendly Bangladesh is crucial for India's security. Geopolitical cooperation on issues such as counter-terrorism and border management is essential for maintaining peace in South Asia. Moreover, Bangladesh's support is important for India's bid for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council (UNSC).
- Economic:** Bangladesh is a key economy for India's exports and bilateral trade. Strengthening economic ties with Bangladesh is vital for India to achieve its goals under the new Foreign Trade Policy and its vision of becoming a \$5 trillion economy.

4. Security and Border Management:

- a. Anti-India terror groups were dismantled under Sheikh Hasina.
- b. **Border Security Force (BSF)-Bangladesh Border Guard (BGB)** coordination reduced cross-border crimes, and joint exercises like **Exercise Sampriti (Army)** and **Exercise Bongosagar (Navy)** enhanced defence cooperation.
- c. The **2015 Land Boundary Agreement (LBA)** settled enclave disputes.

5. Energy and Power Cooperation: India supplies around 2,000 MW of electricity and diesel via the **India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline**, strengthening Bangladesh's energy security. Both nations are exploring renewable energy collaboration under **One Sun One World One Grid (OSOWOG)**.

6. Multilateral and Regional Cooperation: Both countries work closely in **Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)**, **Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal Initiative (BBIN)**, and **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)** for trade, connectivity, and development. They also cooperate on climate change and disaster resilience through global forums like **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)** and **Conference of Parties (COP)** summits.

7. Cultural and People-to-People Ties: Shared language, literature, and religion create strong cultural bonds. Heritage sites like **Ranir Bunglow Temple** and **Bhoj Vihara** highlight common history, reinforced by cultural exchanges and celebrations like **Mujib Borsho** (Birth Centenary of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman).

8. Tourism and Education Cooperation: Bangladeshis form the largest group of tourists in India, with joint promotion of cultural and Buddhist tourism circuits. Student exchanges and scholarships have strengthened educational links.

9. Health and Medical Cooperation: Bangladesh accounts for over 35% of India's medical tourists, contributing more than 50% of medical tourism revenue. Partnerships include **medical visa facilitation**, hospital collaboration, and **telemedicine services**.

10. Counter-Terrorism and Intelligence Sharing: Bangladesh's crackdown on anti-India insurgents under Sheikh Hasina boosted security cooperation. Both nations coordinate on **intelligence sharing**, **counter-terrorism operations**, and **cybersecurity initiatives**, ensuring regional stability.

What are the other Challenges in India-Bangladesh Relations?

1. Sharing of Transboundary River Waters: India and Bangladesh share 54 common rivers, but only two transboundary water-sharing treaties have been signed so far: the **Ganga Waters Treaty** and the **Kushiyara River Treaty**. A major point of contention remains the **Teesta River** dispute, with Bangladesh seeking equitable distribution of its waters, which has not been agreed upon by India and the state of West Bengal.

2. Deportation of Rohingyas: India and Bangladesh have mutual but sometimes conflicting interests regarding the deportation of Rohingyas to mainland Myanmar. India prioritizes deportation from its own territory first and then later facilitates deportation from Bangladesh to Myanmar.

3. Cross-Border Terrorism and Infiltration: Terrorism and infiltration across the Bangladesh border pose significant internal security threats to India. Activities like armed dacoity in border districts, fake currency transfer, cattle smuggling, and prostitution have also raised security concerns.

4. **Drug Smuggling and Trafficking:** According to the **2007 International Narcotics Control Board (INCB)** report, India remains a prime transit route for heroin trafficking from South Asia to Europe through Bangladesh.
5. **Growing Chinese Influence in Bangladesh:** Bangladesh is an active partner in China's **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**. China has invested in 12 highways, 21 bridges, and 27 power and energy projects in Bangladesh. This growing involvement may undermine India's regional standing and impede its strategic aspirations.
6. **Rising Radicalization and Minority Persecution:** The surge in religious extremism and mistreatment of minorities in Bangladesh poses threats to both internal stability and regional security, potentially destabilizing Bangladesh and affecting India's security environment.

What Should be India's approach to deal with the Bangladesh Crisis?

1. **Diplomatic Engagement:** Maintain open channels with the interim government through regular high-level visits and dialogue. Avoid provocative statements and carefully manage perceptions to sustain mutual trust.
2. **Raising the Attacks on Minorities:** India must raise concerns over attacks on Hindu minorities both bilaterally and multilaterally, including through the United Nations mechanisms.
3. **Support to Popular Expression:** As a vibrant multi-party democracy, India should support the expression of popular will in a sensitive neighboring country. For example, India supported the people's movement in Nepal in 2006 that ended dictatorial monarchical rule and restored multi-party democracy.
4. **Expression of Readiness to Expand Bilateral Ties:** India should signal its readiness to enhance economic engagement with a successor government while avoiding branding the ongoing political change as anti-India or anti-Hindu.

5. **Cautiousness and Discreteness:** India should act cautiously and discreetly, keeping the door open for continued close and mutually beneficial ties, as seen in its engagement with the Maldives under Mohamed Muizzu.
6. **Establishment of Joint Task Forces and Smart Border Management:** Joint task forces comprising law enforcement agencies from both countries should be established to effectively combat cross-border drug smuggling, human trafficking, and illegal immigration.
7. **Establishment of a Digital Connectivity Corridor:** A digital connectivity corridor should be developed focusing on high-speed internet, digital services, and e-commerce to create new avenues for trade, collaboration, and technological exchange.
8. **Early Conclusion of India-Bangladesh Free Trade Agreement (FTA):** Bangladesh is set to lose its Least Developed Country (LDC) status after 2026, which will end its duty-free and quota-free access to India. India should finalise the FTA at the earliest and ensure it is not misused by China to dump goods into India through the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), of which Bangladesh is also a member.

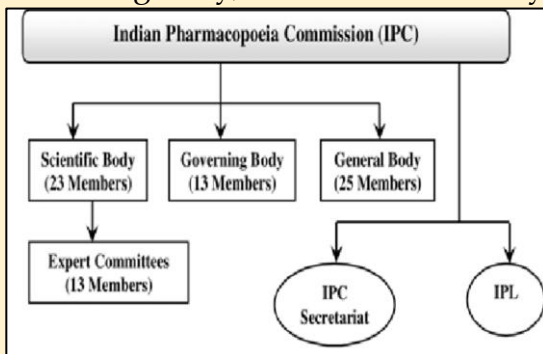
INDIAN PHARMACOPOEIA COMMISSION (IPC)



Recently, Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare reviewed the progress of Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC), underscoring its vital role in pharmacovigilance.

About Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC):

- **Nodal ministry:** It is an autonomous Institution of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt. of India.
- **Objective:** It is created to set standards of drugs in the country. Its basic function is to regularly update the standards of drugs commonly required for treatment of diseases prevailing in this region.
- **Organizational Structure:** The Secretary of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare is the chairperson of IPC. It has a three-tier structure comprising a General Body, a Governing Body, and a Scientific Body.



- **Pharmacovigilance:** IPC acts as the National Coordination Centre (NCC) for the Pharmacovigilance Programme of India (PvPI), monitoring adverse drug reactions (ADRs).
- **Materiovigilance:** It operates the Materiovigilance Programme of India (MvPI) to track safety issues related to medical devices.
- **Reference Substances:** It provides certified reference substances used as analytical standards for drug testing.
- **Major focus areas:**
 - It promotes rational use of generic medicines by publishing National Formulary of India.
 - It prescribes standards for identity, purity and strength of drugs essentially required from the health care perspective of human beings and animals.

- It also provides IP Reference Substances (IPRS) which act as a fingerprint for identification of an article under test and its purity as prescribed in IP.

● Official Publications:

- Indian Pharmacopoeia (IP): The official book of standards for drugs in India, having legal status under the Second Schedule of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940.
- National Formulary of India (NFI): A guide to promote the rational and safe use of medicines.

NARSAPURAM LACE CRAFT

Recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi praised the lace products made by self-help groups in Narsapuram of West Godavari district during his "Man-Ki-Baat."



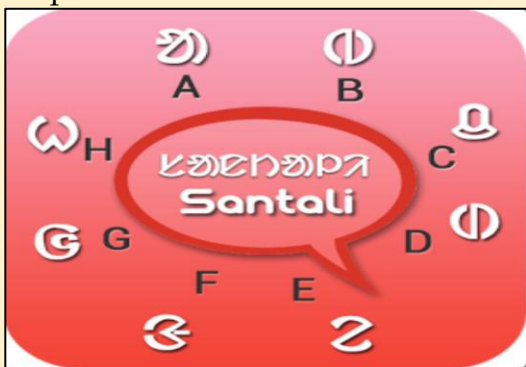
About Narasapuram Lace Craft:

- **Location:** This craft is associated with Narsapur, which is situated on the bank of Godavari River in the state of Andhra Pradesh.
- **Origin:** It was introduced in 1844 by a Scottish missionary, Macrae, and his wife.
- **History:** It is believed that the women of the farming community of this region started creating highly attractive artefacts from colourful lace, about 150 years ago.

- **Resilience:** The craft has survived the Indian famine (1899) and the Great Depression (1929). By the early 1900s, above 2,000 women were involved in the craft in the Godavari region.
- **Significance:** It was recognized with the Geographical Indication tag in 2024.
- **Raw materials:** It primarily uses fine cotton threads in various thicknesses and colours. Artisans also incorporate silk, rayon, or synthetic threads for decorative pieces, with beads and sequins added to enhance export-quality designs.
- **Technique:** Artisans use crochet needles and fine cotton thread to create intricate floral, geometric, and paisley patterns.
- **Tools:** The main tool is the crochet hook, available in different sizes to create diverse patterns and textures.
- **Design:** This craft showcases intricate floral, geometric, and paisley patterns inspired by nature and traditional motifs.
- **Famous products:** Narsapuram's famed hand-made crochet industry produces doilies, pillow covers, cushion covers, bed spreads, table-runners, and table cloths etc.

SANTHALI LANGUAGE


Recently, President Droupadi Murmu released the Constitution of India in the Santali language at a function held at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.



About Santali Language:

- **Linguistic Group:** It belongs to the Austroasiatic language family (Munda branch), making it distinct from Indo-Aryan and Dravidian families.

- **Linkage:** It is closely related to other Munda languages, such as Ho, Mundari, and Korku.
- **Nature:** These languages share common features such as their agglutinative nature (where words are formed by stringing together smaller units of meaning) and their use of tones.
- **Constitutional status:** It was included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution through the 92nd Amendment Act, 2003.
- **Geographic Reach:** It is spoken mainly in Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha, and Bihar. It also has speakers in Bangladesh, and Nepal.
- **Script:** Santali uses the Ol Chiki script, a writing system that was developed in 1925 by Pandit Raghunath Murmu, a Santal scholar and writer.
- **Speakers:** In India, it is spoken by an estimated 7 million people, according to recent census data.
- **Significance:** The language is central to the identity of the Santal tribe, famous for the Santal Hul (1855–56) rebellion led by Sidhu and Kanhu Murmu. Santali has a unique and rich tradition, with its own script and oral literature, reflecting the culture and beliefs of the Santal tribe.




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KANGER VALLEY NATIONAL PARK

The Chhattisgarh government has stepped up efforts to secure the famed Kanger Valley National Park, the official status of a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



About Kanger Valley National Park:

- **Location:** It is located in Jagdalpur in the Bastar district of Chhattisgarh state.
- **Nomenclature:** It derives its name from the Kanger River, which flows centrally from the Northwest to the Southeast direction. The Kanger River is a tributary of the Kolab River, which ultimately joins the Godavari River.
- **Establishment:** It was declared a National Park in July 1982, under the Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972.
- **Area:** The total area of the National Park is 200 sq.km.
- **Topography:** It features low flatlands, gentle slopes, steep inclines, plateaus, deep gorges, valleys, and winding stream courses.
- **Major attractions:** Tirathgarh Falls, which originates from the Kanger River, presents an enchanting view falling from a height of 150 feet. The national park has more than 15 limestone caves, including the famous Kotumsar, Kailash, and Dandak caves.
- **Flora:** Blend of mixed moist deciduous type of forests with the predominance of Sal, teak, and bamboo.
- **Fauna:** Major wild animals include tigers, mouse deer, leopards, wildcat, sambar, chital, barking deer, langurs, jackals, rhesus macaque, flying squirrel, etc. The aerial fauna at the park consists of common hill myna, red jungle fowl, spotted owlet, racket-tailed drongos, parrots, etc.

LANTANA CAMARA

- A fragrant invasive weed, *Lantana camara*, is spreading worldwide, overrunning millions of hectares across tropical and subtropical, and warm temperate regions.

About Lantana Camara:

- **Taxonomy:** It is an annual or perennial, small, broadleaf evergreen shrub in the verbena family.
- **Nature:** It is an invasive alien plant species and an exotic weed that aggressively proliferates and forms a dense mesh of bushes.
- **Origin:** It is native to the tropical and sub-tropical regions of Central and South America.
- **Introduction in India:** It was first introduced in India in the early 18th century as an ornamental plant by the British and since then, it has invaded almost all the tropical areas across the country.
- **Uses:** Its timber is used for making furniture and also as fuelwood, etc. Its biomass can be used to produce organic compost and vermicompost, which will be better for organic farming.
- **Status:** It is listed by the IUCN as one of the top 100 worst invasive species globally.
- **Growth:** Its roots dig deep into the soil and spread wide in search of water and nutrients.
- **Adverse impacts:**
 - **Allelopathy:** The plant releases chemicals into the soil that inhibit the growth and survival of neighbouring native vegetation.
 - **Ecosystem Disruption:** It forms dense, impenetrable thickets that block natural light, preventing native forest regeneration and altering the movement of wildlife, such as the Asian elephant.
 - **Toxicity:** Its leaves and berries contain Lantadenes (pentacyclic triterpenes), which are toxic to livestock and wild herbivores, causing liver damage and photosensitivity.

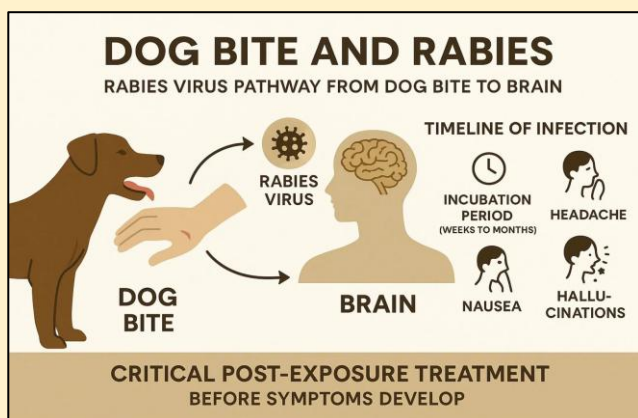


Affected Areas in India: It has invaded over 40% of India's tiger range. Heavily impacted regions include the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (Western Ghats), Shivalik Hills, and the Aravallis.

RABIES VACCINE

International alerts over alleged fake rabies vaccines in India raise concerns on drug regulation, supply chain integrity, vaccine hesitancy, and public health governance.

According to a recent study, of the 59,000 rabies-mediated human deaths in the world every year, India represents a third, around 20,000, and more than any other country.



About Rabies:

- **Nature:** Rabies is a vaccine-preventable, zoonotic, viral disease.
- **Pathogen:** It is a viral zoonotic disease caused by an RNA virus of the Lyssavirus genus (family Rhabdoviridae).
- **Vulnerable species:** It infects mammals, including dogs, cats, livestock and wildlife.

- **Significance:** It is one of the neglected tropical diseases (NTD) that predominantly affects already marginalized, poor, and vulnerable populations.
- **Transmission:** It spreads to people and animals via saliva, usually through bites, scratches, or direct contact with mucosa (e.g. eyes, mouth, or open wounds).
- **Forms:** Clinically, it has two forms:
 - **Furious rabies:** It is characterized by hyperactivity and hallucinations.
 - **Paralytic rabies:** It is characterized by paralysis and coma.
- **Incubation period:** The incubation period for rabies is typically 2-3 months but may vary from one week to one year.
- **Symptoms:** Initial symptoms include generic signs like fever, pain, and unusual or unexplained tingling, pricking, or burning sensations at the wound site. As the virus moves to the central nervous system, progressive and fatal inflammation of the brain and spinal cord develops.
- **Fatality:** Once the virus infects the central nervous system and clinical symptoms appear, rabies is fatal in 100% of cases.
- **Prevention:** Vaccinating dogs, including puppies, is the most cost-effective strategy for preventing rabies in people because it stops the transmission at its source.

PARVATI-ARGA BIRD SANCTUARY

In a major boost to wetland conservation in northern India, the Parvati-Arga Bird Sanctuary in Uttar Pradesh has been declared an Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ). The decision adds an additional layer of legal protection to one of the state's lesser-known yet ecologically rich wetland ecosystems, reinforcing efforts to balance conservation with sustainable development.

Parvati Arga Bird Sanctuary

It is situated in Gonda, Uttar Pradesh. The Ramsar Site, with two oxbow wetlands, is among the state's largest floodplains. It hosts diverse flora and fauna, shelters over 100,000 birds annually, including threatened vultures, and is crucial for maintaining hydrological balance.



Government Notification and Objectives

The ESZ notification was announced by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, with Minister of State Kirti Vardhan Singh highlighting the move on social media. The declaration aims to regulate developmental and human activities around the sanctuary, preventing ecological degradation while encouraging responsible ecotourism.

Eco-Sensitive Zones act as buffer areas that minimise the impact of urbanisation, infrastructure expansion, and pollution on protected habitats.

Ecological Significance of Parvati-Arga

Spread over 1,084 hectares in Gonda district of Uttar Pradesh, the Parvati-Arga Bird Sanctuary represents a classic Indo-Gangetic floodplain ecosystem.

It comprises two permanent freshwater oxbow lakes – Parvati Lake and Arga Lake – formed from abandoned river channels. The wetland plays a critical role in groundwater recharge, flood mitigation, and climate resilience, while supporting diverse aquatic and terrestrial life.

A Haven for Migratory and Threatened Birds

The sanctuary is a key wintering and stopover site for migratory birds arriving from Central Asia and the Tibetan region. It also holds global recognition as a Ramsar Site, underlining its international importance.

Notably, Parvati-Arga provides nesting and foraging grounds for threatened vulture species such as the white-rumped vulture, Indian vulture, and the endangered Egyptian vulture. However, challenges such as invasive species like water hyacinth continue to threaten its ecological balance.

Role of Eco-Sensitive Zones in Conservation

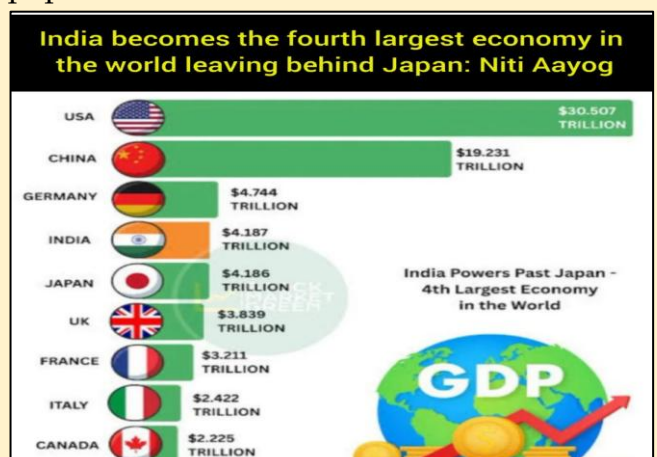
Eco-Sensitive Zones function as transition areas between high-protection wildlife habitats and human-dominated landscapes. In the case of Parvati-Arga, the ESZ is expected to regulate construction, restrict polluting industries, and manage land-use changes.

These measures are intended to safeguard the wetland's hydrology and bird habitats while allowing sustainable livelihoods and development in surrounding regions.

Eco-Sensitive Zones can extend upto 10kms.

INDIA BECOMES WORLD'S FOURTH-LARGEST ECONOMY

India has overtaken Japan to become the world's fourth-largest economy in nominal GDP terms, with output estimated at around \$4.18 trillion. The achievement places India behind only the United States, China and Germany, marking one of the most dramatic climbs in global economic rankings in recent history. Yet this milestone, while significant, also underscores a deeper paradox: India's economic scale has surged, but average prosperity remains modest for much of its population.



How India climbed to fourth place

In 2014, India was the world's 10th-largest economy, with GDP hovering around \$2 trillion — nearly seven decades after Independence. The subsequent decade saw a sharp acceleration. By 2021, the economy crossed \$3 trillion, and in just four more years, it added another trillion dollars, pushing past Japan. International institutions broadly corroborate this trajectory. The "International Monetary Fund" projects India's nominal GDP to reach about \$4.51 trillion in 2026, marginally ahead of Japan's \$4.46 trillion, suggesting that India's fourth-place ranking is likely to be formally confirmed when revised data is released.

Why India has grown so fast

India's rise reflects a combination of sustained high growth and resilience during global disruptions. Between 1990 and 2023, India recorded an average annual growth rate of about 6.7%, outperforming many advanced economies. Even amid global slowdowns, trade shocks and geopolitical tensions, India has retained its status as the fastest-growing major economy. Recent momentum has been strong. Real GDP growth touched a six-quarter high in 2025-26, supported largely by domestic demand. Private consumption has remained resilient, credit flows robust, and financial conditions supportive, helping offset external headwinds.

The reform backbone behind the numbers

Structural reforms over the past decade have played a crucial role. The introduction of the "Goods and Services Tax" created a unified national market and significantly improved tax compliance. GST collections have steadily strengthened, reflecting both formalisation and expanding economic activity. Another cornerstone reform has been the "Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code", which reshaped the financial system by accelerating the resolution of stressed assets and improving bank balance sheets.

Alongside these, digitalisation, manufacturing incentives and labour and consumption tax adjustments during cyclical slowdowns have helped stabilise growth.

Political stability at the Centre over the past decade has further boosted investor confidence, positioning India as a key market not just for Western economies but also for major powers in Asia.

Global confidence in India's growth outlook

India's trajectory has received broad backing from multilateral agencies and rating firms. The "World Bank", "OECD", "Asian Development Bank", and agencies such as "Moody's" and "S&P Global" all expect India to remain among the fastest-growing economies through 2026-27, with growth projections clustered between 6% and 7%.

The paradox of scale without widespread prosperity

While aggregate size has surged, per capita prosperity tells a different story. With a population of roughly 1.4 billion — the world's largest — India's GDP gains are spread thin. According to the World Bank, India's per capita GDP stood at about \$2,694 in 2024, placing it around 122nd globally.

By comparison, Japan's per capita income exceeds \$32,000, while Germany's is over \$56,000. India trails not only advanced economies but also several emerging peers such as Vietnam and the Philippines. This gap highlights a central tension in India's growth model: becoming bigger does not automatically make citizens richer.

Jobs, informality and gender gaps

The challenge is magnified by labour market structure. Nearly 90% of India's workforce remains in the informal sector, limiting productivity, income security and social protection. Female labour force participation, at around 26%, is far below the global average, constraining household incomes and overall growth potential. Although per capita income has nearly doubled over the past decade, the absolute level remains low, reinforcing concerns about inclusivity and the distribution of growth.

Demography: dividend or drag?

India's youthful population — with more than a quarter aged between 10 and 26 — offers a potential demographic dividend. But this dividend is conditional. Without sufficient creation of quality, well-paying jobs, the youth bulge risks turning into a growth constraint rather than a catalyst.

Skill development, manufacturing expansion and productivity improvements will determine whether India can absorb millions of new entrants into the workforce each year.

External risks and currency pressures

India's rise has unfolded amid a volatile global environment. Trade tensions, including tariffs imposed by the United States over India's Russian oil purchases, have added uncertainty. The absence of a comprehensive trade agreement with Washington has weighed on sentiment.

These pressures have been reflected in currency markets. The Indian rupee weakened by nearly 5% in 2025, touching record lows against the US dollar — a reminder that external vulnerabilities persist even as headline growth remains strong.

What this milestone really signifies

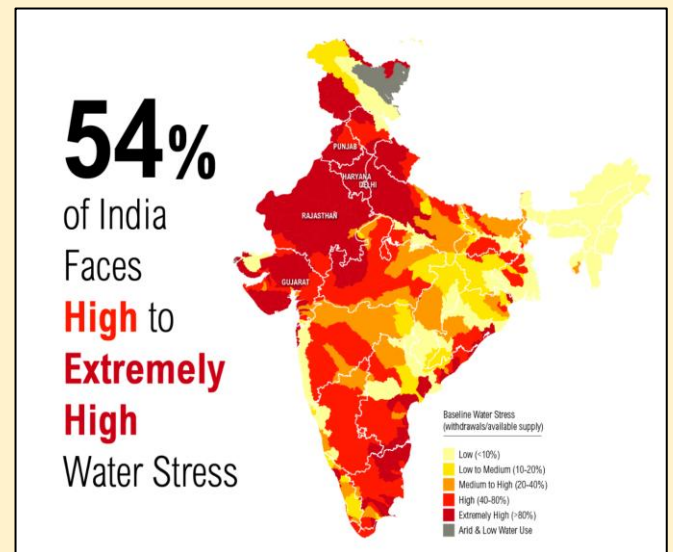
Becoming the world's fourth-largest economy is a defining moment in India's post-Independence economic journey. It signals scale, resilience and rising global relevance. But it is not an endpoint.

The true test lies ahead: converting economic size into sustained improvements in living standards. That will require deeper structural transformation across manufacturing, agriculture and services, stronger state-level reforms, and a sharper focus on jobs, productivity and inclusion.

India's ascent up the global GDP rankings shows what is possible. Whether that ascent translates into broad-based prosperity will determine how meaningful this milestone ultimately proves to be.

RICE CULTIVATION & GROUNDWATER CRISIS IN INDIA

When India overtook China this year to become the world's largest producer of rice, the milestone was framed as a triumph of farmer resilience and state-backed food security. Exports have surged past 20 million metric tonnes, cementing India's position as the single most important player in the global rice market.



Yet beneath this success story lies a growing unease in the country's agricultural heartland: the rice boom is being fuelled by rapidly depleting groundwater, mounting farmer debt, and a subsidy regime that rewards unsustainable choices.

A record harvest with hidden costs

Rice cultivation has expanded steadily over the past decade, supported by assured procurement and export demand. India now accounts for about 40% of global rice exports, giving it disproportionate influence over international food prices and food security in import-dependent countries.

But this scale has come at a steep environmental cost. Rice is one of the most water-intensive crops, and its dominance in northern India has placed extraordinary pressure on groundwater reserves — particularly in Punjab and Haryana, the country's rice basket.

Deeper borewells, higher debt

In large parts of Punjab and Haryana, farmers say groundwater that was accessible at around 30 feet a decade ago now lies anywhere between 80 and 200 feet below the surface. Government groundwater assessments and research by “Punjab Agricultural University” corroborate these claims. Each additional drilling cycle raises costs sharply, forcing farmers to borrow more to install deeper borewells and more powerful pumps. Even in years of good monsoon rainfall, extraction continues unabated, preventing aquifers from recovering. As a result, large tracts of both States are officially classified as “over-exploited” or “critical” in terms of groundwater availability.

How subsidies lock farmers into rice

At the core of the problem lies India’s subsidy architecture. Rice cultivation is propped up by a guaranteed Minimum Support Price (MSP), which has risen by roughly 70% over the past decade, and by heavy power subsidies that make groundwater extraction artificially cheap. As scholars such as “Uday Chandra” and “Avinash Kishore” point out, this creates a perverse incentive: one of the world’s most water-stressed countries is effectively paying farmers to grow a water-guzzling crop.

Switching to alternatives such as millets or pulses, which need far less water, often means giving up income security.

The political scars of farm law reforms

Any attempt to change this equilibrium runs into political minefields. Prime Minister “Narendra Modi”’s attempt to reform agricultural marketing laws — aimed partly at encouraging private procurement and diversification — triggered massive farmer protests and was eventually rolled back. The episode underscored how deeply MSP-backed rice procurement is intertwined with farmer livelihoods and political stability, especially in Punjab and Haryana. Since then, governments have been cautious, preferring incremental incentives over structural reform.

Global stakes, domestic dilemmas

India produces far more rice than it needs for domestic consumption, even as its population — now the world’s largest — continues to grow. The question, as analysts note, is not whether India can grow and export rice, but whether it should do so at current levels.

Because of India’s outsized role in global rice trade, even modest changes in its production or export policies ripple across international markets. This makes reform both more urgent and more complex, as domestic sustainability concerns intersect with global food security.

Are policy shifts beginning?

There are tentative signs of change. Haryana has introduced a subsidy of ₹17,500 per hectare to encourage farmers to switch from rice to less water-intensive crops such as millets. However, the incentive applies for only one growing season and has failed to generate large-scale adoption.

Experts argue that short-term payments cannot offset long-term risk. Research cited by agricultural economist “Ashok Gulati” suggests that a multi-year transition package — lasting at least five years — is necessary to give farmers confidence to move away from rice.

Gulati also notes that such a shift need not increase overall subsidy spending: Punjab already spends close to ₹39,000 per hectare on fertiliser and power subsidies for rice, and redirecting most of this support toward alternative crops could maintain farmer incomes while saving water.



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