



KERALA STATE CIVIL SERVICE ACADEMY

ESTABLISHED UNDER CENTRE FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION KERALA

WEEKLY CURRENT AFFAIRS

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REGISTERED UNRECOGNISED POLITICAL PARTIES (RUPPS)

An analysis highlighted regulatory gaps concerning Registered Unrecognised Political Parties (RUPPs), after investigation found that six Gujarat-based RUPPs received about ₹1,700 crore in donations in FY 2023–24, despite fielding only 15 candidates in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.



Regulatory Gaps and Political Funding Concerns

About Registered Unrecognised Political Parties: Regulatory Gaps and Political Funding Concerns What They Are?

- Under **Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (RP Act)**, any association or body of individual Indian citizens can register as a political party with the Election Commission of India (ECI).
- If a party fails to meet the specified vote-share or seat-share thresholds required to qualify as a Recognised National Party or Recognised State Party under the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968, it is classified as a **Registered Unrecognised Political Party (RUPP)**.

RUPPs are entitled to statutory benefits:

- **Tax Exemption:** 100% income tax exemption on voluntary contributions received under Section 13A of the Income Tax Act.
- **Electoral Privileges:** Allotment of a common election symbol across constituencies and entitlement to **20 'star campaigners'** whose travel expenses are not added to candidate expenditure limits.
- **Statutory Obligations:** RUPPs must submit annual contribution reports for donations exceeding ₹20,000 under Section 29C of the RP Act, accept individual donations above ₹2,000 only via banking channels, and submit audited annual financial accounts.

Key Data & Structural Realities:

- **Proliferation of Letter-Pad Parties:** India had over 2,800 RUPPs by mid-2026, but only around 750 contested the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, leaving over 70% electorally inactive.
- **Massive Funding Asymmetry:** Six Gujarat-based RUPPs received ₹1,700 crore in FY 2023–24, compared with ₹1,480 crore received by five national parties that fielded 893 candidates. One RUPP alone received about ₹620 crore.
- **Chronic Compliance Deficit:** ADR found that only about 26–27% of RUPPs submit or publish annual audit reports on time, resulting in significant financial opacity.
- **Administrative Delisting:** Though the ECI has delisted over 800 non-compliant entities, the six high-donation RUPPs remained active by meeting the minimum requirement of contesting elections.

Why Do RUPPs Remain Active Despite Poor Compliance?

- **Absence of Statutory Power to De-Register:** The RP Act contains provisions for registering a party under Section 29A, but **confers no explicit statutory power on the ECI to de-register a political party** for failing to contest elections, hold internal elections, or lodge financial accounts.

- **The Indian National Congress (2002) Precedent:** In *Indian National Congress v. Institute of Social Welfare & Ors* (2002), the Supreme Court ruled that the ECI has quasi-judicial authority only to register a party, not to cancel its registration. De-registration is permitted only under three exceptional grounds:
 1. If registration was obtained through demonstrable fraud or forgery.
 2. If the party formally ceases to declare allegiance to the Constitution of India.
 3. If the central government bans the organization as an unlawful association under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.
- **Delisting vs. De-Registration:** To bypass the lack of de-registration powers, the ECI relies on administrative de-listing. However, this administrative measure does not dissolve the legal entity or automatically terminate its tax advantages.
- **Token Participation as a Compliance Shield:** Entities evade scrutiny by nominating a small handful of dummy candidates in general elections, fulfilling formal election-participation criteria to retain active status.

Risks of Misuse & Financial Loopholes:

- **Tax Evasion & Round-Tripping Conduits:** Unregulated RUPPs can be misused as financial pass-through conduits where individuals or commercial donors seek 100% tax deductions under Section 80GGC of the Income Tax Act, with funds cycled back as unaccounted cash.
- **Regulatory Blind Spots:** Because 73% of RUPPs fail to file balance sheets in the public domain, oversight agencies struggle to track the origin, purpose, and utilization of hundreds of crores in voluntary contributions.
- **Commercialization of Common Symbols:** Unscrupulous entities register parties solely to trade election symbols, star-campaigner privileges, or real-estate lease exemptions associated with recognized office premises.

Way Ahead:

- **Amending Section 29A of the RP Act (De-Registration Powers):** Implement the Law Commission's 255th Report and ECI's 2016 recommendations to allow de-registration of parties that do not contest elections for 10 consecutive years or repeatedly violate financial disclosure rules.
- **Establishing a Statutory Vote Threshold for Tax Exemption:** Amend Section 13A of the Income Tax Act to stipulate those tax-exempt voluntary contributions are accessible only to parties securing a minimum vote threshold.
- **Automated Data Sharing Between ECI and CBDT:** Establish digital integration linking the ECI's political filing portal with the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) and the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU-IND).
- **Mandatory Third-Party Auditing:** Require RUPPs crossing an annual donation threshold to undergo statutory audits by an independent panel of CAG-empanelled Chartered Accountants rather than private auditors selected by party executives.
- **Tightening Cash and Digital Donation Norms:** Reduce the anonymous cash donation limit from ₹2,000 to zero, mandating that all political contributions, regardless of amount, be accepted via verified digital transactions, or electoral trust channels.

Conclusion:

However, weak statutory enforcement has allowed non-serious letter-pad outfits to exploit tax exemptions and engage in opaque financial transactions. Empowering the Election Commission to formally de-register inactive entities, instituting a modest vote threshold for tax privileges, and integrating real-time tax intelligence will protect political freedom while preventing the abuse of the electoral framework.

DIGITAL INDIA LAND RECORDS MODERNISATION PROGRAMME

Union Minister for Rural Development launched the Operational Guidelines for the Digital India Land Records Modernisation Programme (DILRMP) 3.0 (2026–2031) in New Delhi.



The Digital India Land Records Modernisation Programme (DILRMP) 3.0 (2026–2031)

About The Digital India Land Records Modernisation Programme (DILRMP) 3.0 (2026–2031): What it is?

- A flagship **Central Sector Scheme** marking the third phase of national land records modernization, transitioning India's land administration from basic digitization of legacy records to an integrated, GIS-enabled **Land Stack** (Digital Public Infrastructure).

Nodal Organisation: Department of Land Resources (DoLR), Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.

Aim: To establish a transparent, interoperable, and dispute-free land governance ecosystem, enhancing **Ease of Living** for rural landowners and farmers and **Ease of Doing Business** by eliminating physical visits to revenue offices and speeding up institutional credit access.

Key Features:

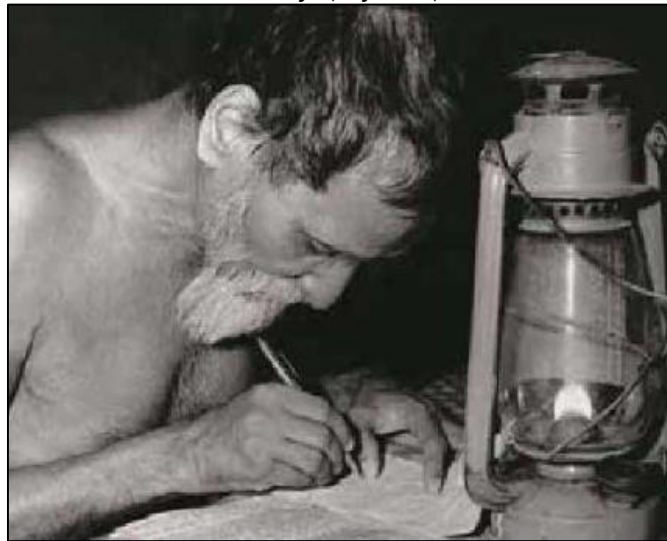
- **Universal Bhu-Aadhaar (ULPIN):** Mandates the universal assignment of a 14-digit Unique Land Parcel Identification Number (ULPIN) – popularly called *Bhu-Aadhaar* – to uniquely identify every geo-referenced land parcel across the country.
- **Cadastral Georeferencing & NAKSHA:** Prioritizes complete spatial accuracy through the digitization and georeferencing of cadastral maps with precise coordinates, while scaling the NAKSHA pilot for urban property mapping.
- **Paperless Registration & Registration Seva Kendras:** Introduces end-to-end online property registration backed by a centralized Registration Repository, alongside upgrading 75 Sub-Registrar Offices (SROs) into modern **Registration Seva Kendras**.
- **Integrated Revenue Courts (RCCMS):** Links Revenue Court Computerized Management Systems directly with land records to automatically reflect pending litigations and court orders, preventing fraudulent land transactions.
- **100% Central Funding & Performance-Linked Releases:** Fully funded by the Central Government via a phased, performance-linked mechanism monitored in real-time through an upgraded DILRMP-MIS portal and the Public Financial Management System (PFMS).

Significance:

- Real-time integration of registration records, revenue courts and cadastral maps helps verify ownership, prevent title fraud and reduce prolonged property disputes.
- Clear and digitally verifiable land titles allow banks to confirm ownership quickly, enabling faster access to farm loans, KCC and crop insurance.

ACHARYA VINOBA BHAVE

Prime Minister of India paid homage to eminent freedom fighter, philosopher, and social reformer Acharya Vinoba Bhave on his birth anniversary (Jayanti).



Acharya Vinoba Bhave

About Acharya Vinoba Bhave:

Who He Was?

- Born as **Vinayak Narahari Bhave** (11 September 1895 – 15 November 1982), he was an eminent Indian philosopher, educationist, scholar, and social activist.
- Revered as the spiritual successor (Maanas Putra) of Mahatma Gandhi, he was a staunch advocate of non-violence, Sarvodaya (welfare of all), and land reforms, popularly hailed as the National Teacher of India.

Early Life:

- Born in Gagode village in the Konkan region (Raigad district, Maharashtra), he was deeply influenced by his mother Rukmini Devi's spiritual devotion and his father's rational, scientific outlook.
- While studying in Baroda, he developed an insatiable passion for reading and contemplation, taking an early vow of lifelong celibacy (Brahmacharya).
- In March 1916, he discontinued formal college education, burned his certificates, and went to Varanasi in search of spiritual truth. Inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy, he met him at Ahmedabad on June 7, 1916, dedicating his life to Gandhi's constructive programs.
- Gandhi lovingly bestowed upon him the name '**Vinoba**', honoring him in the lineage of Maharashtra's revered saints Jnanoba and Tukoba.

Contribution to the Freedom Movement:

- **Constructive Work at Wardha:** In 1921, he took charge of the Wardha branch of the Satyagraha Ashram, where he founded the Gram Seva Mandal (1934) and pioneered village sanitation, basic education (Nai Talim), and Khadi spinning.
- **Flag Satyagraha and Imprisonment:** Actively participated in national agitations, including the Nagpur Flag Satyagraha (1923), Salt Satyagraha, and civil disobedience drives, enduring multiple imprisonments.
- **First Individual Satyagrahi (1940):** Handpicked by Mahatma Gandhi as the very first Satyagrahi to launch the Individual Civil Disobedience Movement against British involvement in World War II (followed by Jawaharlal Nehru as the second). Gandhi formally introduced him to the wider public through an essay titled Who is Vinoba?.

Literary Works:

- **Geetai (Mother Gita):** Translated the Bhagavad Gita into Marathi verse (1930–31), an enduring classic that sold millions of copies.
- **Gita Pravachane (Talks on the Gita):** A series of 18 lectures delivered while imprisoned in Dhule jail in 1932, subsequently translated into 24 Indian and foreign languages.
- **Philosophical Treatises:** Authored seminal works including Sthitaprajna-Darshan (The Steadfast Wisdom), Swarajya-Shastra (The Grammar of Anarchism/Self-Rule), Vichar-Pothi, Ishavasya-Vrutti, and compilations harmonizing the core moral teachings of Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism (Dhammapada).

UNINCORPORATED NON-AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

The National Statistics Office (NSO), operating under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), released India's first-ever comprehensive district-level estimates for the unincorporated non-agricultural sector.

- Drawing from the **Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE) 2025**, the report establishes a granular statistical portrait across 757 districts to support decentralized, evidence-based economic planning.



Mapping India's Unincorporated Economy at the District Level

About ASUSE 2025: Mapping India's Unincorporated Economy at the District Level

What It Is?

- The unincorporated non-agricultural enterprise landscape covers informal and small-scale business units operating outside corporate frameworks across three core sectors: **Manufacturing, Trade, and Other Services**.
- Ownership types encompass proprietorships, partnerships (excluding LLPs), cooperatives, and trusts/societies. Because these informal units employ a major portion of India's non-farm labor force, granular district-level metrics – measuring enterprise concentration, Gross Value Added (GVA), emoluments, and labor productivity – are critical to identifying sub-state regional disparities.

Key Macro Highlights & Sectoral Data:

- High Geographical Concentration:
 - The **top 10 districts** (concentrated across Gujarat, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal) generate roughly **one-tenth (10%)** of all establishments, workers, and GVA.
 - The **top 50 districts** (distributed across 12 states) drive nearly **one-third (~33%)** of the entire sector's total establishments, aggregate workforce, and Gross Value Added.

- **Scale Distribution Across Districts:**

- Roughly **one-third of all districts** host over 1,00,000 unincorporated establishments each.
- Around **9% of districts** have fewer than 10,000 units.
- Only **16 mega-districts** host more than 5,00,000 units each (8 in West Bengal, 3 in Maharashtra, 2 in Gujarat, and 1 each in Karnataka, Telangana, and Uttar Pradesh).

- **Productivity & GVA Benchmarks:**

- In **280 districts**, economic productivity exceeds the national benchmark, recording a GVA per worker higher than the all-India average of **₹1,56,539**.
- In **331 districts**, labor productivity remains clustered in the range of ₹1,00,000 to ₹1,50,000 GVA per worker.

- **Female Entrepreneurship & Workforce Share:**

- In **237 districts**, women comprise at least **one-third (33.3%)** of the unincorporated workforce.
- In **25 districts**, female workers represent **more than 50%** of the labor force.
- In **Mizoram**, female-owned proprietary units account for at least **50% of all establishments across every single district**.
- Districts in **Telangana, Manipur, Meghalaya, and Mizoram** lead nationally in both female-headed ownership and female labor participation.

Top Contributing Districts Across Major States (By Share of State Establishments):

- **West Bengal:** North 24 Parganas accounts for **15.99%** of the state's total units.
- **Telangana:** Rangareddy contributes **23.53%** of all state establishments.
- **Gujarat:** Surat leads with a **19.43%** share within the state.
- **Punjab:** Ludhiana represents **14.74%** of state units.
- **Karnataka:** Bengaluru (Urban) commands **12.83%** of the state total.
- **Kerala:** Thiruvananthapuram leads the state at **12.38%**.
- **Rajasthan:** Jaipur accounts for **11.70%** of units.
- **Maharashtra:** Pune contributes **9.14%** of the state establishment base.
- **Bihar:** Patna captures **8.23%** within the state.
- **Tamil Nadu:** Chennai represents **7.13%** of state units.
- **Uttar Pradesh:** Prayagraj leads the state at **5.77%**.

Survey Scope, Methodology & Data Exclusions:

- **Sampling Design:** ASUSE 2025 deployed a multi-stage stratified sampling scheme. First Stage Units (FSUs) were census villages in rural zones (panchayat wards in rural Kerala) and Urban Frame Survey (UFS) blocks in towns. Ultimate Stage Units (USUs) were individual enterprises.
- **Coverage Scope:** Covers 757 out of the 770 sampled districts across all States and UTs. Data was collected through monthly oral enquiry recall via Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) on handheld tablets.
- **Exclusions & Methodological Caveats:**
 - **Delhi:** Because of a minimal rural population, urban and rural areas were each collapsed into a single sampling stratum; therefore, separate district-level breakdowns could not be generated.
 - **Chandigarh & Lakshadweep:** Each consists of only one district; thus, district figures coincide directly with their respective published UT-level reports.
 - **Relative Standard Error (RSE):** NSO cautions users that in certain smaller districts, higher sampling variability and RSEs require careful statistical consideration when interpreting trends.

Policy Significance:

- **Targeting Sub-State Economic Disparities:** Moves national economic planning beyond broad state aggregates, allowing district collectors and state planners to identify local industrial clusters and underperforming pockets.
- **Calibrating Credit Delivery:** Enables public sector banks and SIDBI to target micro-credit schemes (such as PM MUDRA Yojana and PM SVANidhi) toward low-productivity districts where GVA per worker falls below ₹1 lakh.
- **Strengthening Formalization Interventions:** Assisting state governments in transitioning informal proprietary units onto the Udyam Assist Platform (UAP) to access formal banking channels, priority sector lending, and public social security benefits.
- **Fostering Women-Led Micro-Enterprises:** Provides spatial evidence to expand targeted initiatives—such as Stand-Up India and the PM Vishwakarma scheme—into districts with low female business ownership while leveraging the successful female-led models observed in the Northeast and Telangana.

By demonstrating that nearly one-third of all unincorporated non-agricultural output and employment is concentrated within just 50 industrial and urban hubs, the findings underscore the need to decentralize infrastructure and credit access. Combining localized credit delivery, skill development, and formalization pathways will be essential to raising labor productivity across India's informal heartland.

THE DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS NOTIFIED THE CONSUMER PROTECTION (E-COMMERCE) (AMENDMENT) RULES, 2026

The Department of Consumer Affairs notified the Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) (Amendment) Rules, 2026, tightening norms on dark patterns, search manipulation, price transparency and grievance redressal from January 1, 2027.

About The Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) (Amendment) Rules, 2026:

What it is?

- A regulatory update notified under the statutory framework of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, amending the primary Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020 to govern both marketplace and inventory-based digital commerce entities operating in India.

Aim: To address emerging deceptive practices in the digital economy, enhance marketplace transparency and algorithmic accountability, institutionalize robust grievance redressal, and balance consumer welfare with Ease of Doing Business(EoDB).

Key Features:

- **Mandatory Convergence with National Consumer Helpline (NCH):** Requires all e-commerce entities to become partners in the NCH convergence framework, integrating grievance redressal directly with the national consumer support mechanism.
- **Transparent Grievance Documentation:** Mandates that e-commerce entities must furnish complainants with a verbatim copy of their complaint as recorded by the Grievance Officer.
- **Prohibition of Search Manipulation & Clear Sponsored Ads:** Bars platforms from manipulating internal search result algorithms to mislead consumers or distort relevance. Paid or sponsored listings must be accompanied by prominent visual disclosures.



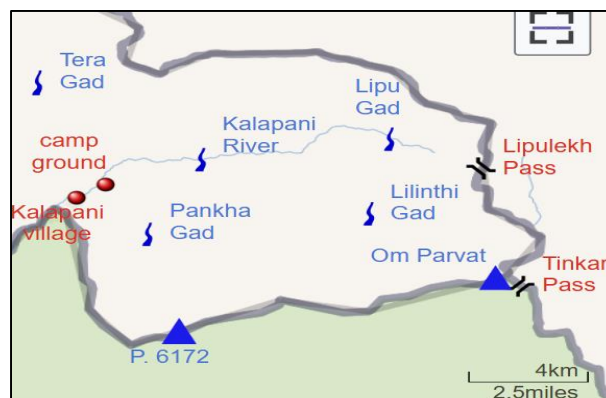
- **Curbing Deceptive Price Drops (Prior Price Display):** Mandates that whenever a discount or price reduction is advertised, the platform must display both the reduced price and the **prior price** – defined explicitly as the lowest price offered during the 30 days preceding the promotion.
- **Dark Patterns Compliance & Annual Self-Audits:** Enforces mandatory compliance with the Guidelines for Prevention and Regulation of Dark Patterns, 2023, requiring platforms to undergo an annual self-audit and prominently display a compliance certificate on their user interface.
- **Comprehensive Seller & Product Disclosures:** Requires marketplace platforms to clearly display crucial product lifecycle information, including best-before/use-before dates, detailed return/refund terms, warranty coverage, delivery expectations, and payment specifics.
- **Stringent Consumer Data Protection:** Prohibits platforms from processing or utilizing consumers' personal and behavioral data for specified purposes without explicit, affirmative consent.
- **Ban on Arbitrary Bundled Fees:** Restricts platforms from auto-adding or levying bundled fees for ancillary services unrelated to the primary platform transaction.
- **Traceability for Imported Goods:** Enforces full country-of-origin disclosure along with designated domestic importer details for all foreign-sourced products.

Significance:

- **Fair Digital Markets:** Curbs misleading pricing, hidden charges and algorithmic bias, ensuring genuine price discovery and fair competition.
- **Consumer Trust:** Improves transparency in e-commerce and quick-commerce, aligning platform accountability with consumer rights.

LIPULEKH PASS

Cross-border trade between India and the Tibet Autonomous Region of China resumed through the high-altitude Lipulekh Pass after a six-year hiatus caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and procedural delays.



Lipulekh Pass

About Lipulekh Pass:

What it is?

- A prominent high-altitude Himalayan mountain pass (altitude exceeding 17,000 feet / ~5,200 metres), also known in Chinese as Qiang La. It functions as a designated overland border trade post and traditional transit corridor connecting the Kumaon region of India with south-western Tibet.

Located in: Situated in the Pithoragarh district of Uttarakhand, India, near the strategic trijunction between India, Nepal, and the Tibet Autonomous Region of China.

History:

- **Ancient Caravan Route:** Historically traversed by the indigenous **Bhotiya** traders of Kumaon (specifically the Byansi and Chaudansi communities) to barter agricultural and household goods for Tibetan wool, salt, and borax at Taklakot.
- **Treaty of Sugauli (1816):** Following the Anglo-Nepalese War, the Kali River was demarcated as the border between British Kumaon and Nepal. Around 1865, British surveyors aligned the border along the ridgeline watershed of the Kalapani stream, establishing the Kalapani territory and Lipulekh Pass under British Indian administration.
- **Sino-Indian Agreements:** Mentioned in the 1954 Sino-Indian Panchsheel Agreement as an official pilgrimage and trading route. Closed after the 1962 Sino-Indian War, it was reopened for bilateral border trade in 1992, operating annually until suspended in 2019 due to the pandemic.

Key Features:

- **Gateway to Kailash-Manasarovar:** Serves as the shortest and most revered traditional terrestrial route for Indian pilgrims undertaking the annual Kailash Manasarovar Yatra organized by the Ministry of External Affairs.
- **Direct Access to Taklakot Mart:** Located in close geographic proximity to Taklakot (Purang), the principal commercial hub and clearing station for cross-Himalayan commerce in Ngari Prefecture, Tibet.
- **Strategic Geopolitical Trijunction:** Positioned immediately adjacent to the Kalapani territory, an area that has witnessed cartographic disputes due to Nepal's overlapping claims regarding the origin headwaters of the Mahakali (Kali) River.
- **All-Weather Border Infrastructure:** Serves as the terminal point of the strategic 80-km Dharchula-Lipulekh road constructed by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO), drastically reducing high-altitude trekking time for security forces and pilgrims.
- **Seasonal Barter & Commercial Flow:** Operates during a limited seasonal trading window where Indian traders export jaggery, sugar candy, spices, tea, and utensils in exchange for Tibetan raw wool, pashmina, garments, and yak hair.

UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION (UNCCD) -COP17

The 17th Conference of the Parties (COP17) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) concluded in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

- Held under *Restoring Land, Restoring Hope*, the summit focused on rangeland conservation, drought financing and community-led restoration, amid deadlock over a binding global drought treaty.



UNCCD COP17

About UNCCD COP17: Advancing Global Drought Resilience and Land Restoration

What it is?

- The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), established following the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, is the sole legally binding international agreement linking environment and development to sustainable land management. COP17 coincided with the UN **International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists**, placing pastoral communities and fragile open ecosystems at the center of the global Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) agenda.

Key Highlights of UNCCD COP17:

- **Global Land Crisis:** The convention warned that approximately 40% of the world's land surface is already degraded, directly affecting billions of livelihoods and threatening global water and food security.
- **Host Nation's Commitment:** Mongolia, where nearly 77% of land is affected by degradation, showcased its national Billion Trees Campaign (launched in 2021 to plant 1 billion trees by 2030) to combat regional desertification.
- **AI-Powered Drought Resilience Index:** Launched as the world's first comprehensive technical diagnostic tool, utilizing artificial intelligence and vulnerability mapping to track national preparedness and drive proactive drought mitigation.
- **Drought Resilience Investment Facility:** Co-launched by the UNCCD and Luxembourg as the first global catalytic financing platform, deploying public capital to de-risk investments and mobilize commercial funds for water security and climate-resilient agriculture.
- **Financing Mobilization:** The conference secured **\$1.3 billion** in new and pipeline financing dedicated to scaling ecosystem restoration and strengthening drought resilience in vulnerable developing states.
- **Impasse on Global Drought Treaty:** Parties failed to agree on a legally binding international drought treaty, deferring negotiations despite an estimated **\$278 billion annual resilience financing gap**.
- **Institutional Agendization:** It was formally decided that drought will become a permanent, standalone agenda item starting from **COP18 onwards**, ending its historically ad-hoc treatment.

India's Stance & Interventions at COP17:

- **First-Ever Guide to Grasslands & Open Natural Ecosystems (ONEs):** India unveiled a specialized policy guide to mainstream the ecological conservation of ravines, arid deserts (Thar), cold deserts, and Deccan savannahs.
- **Bonn Challenge Restoration Progress:** India reported bringing **21.76 million hectares** of degraded and deforested land under active restoration, progressing steadily toward its national pledge of restoring **26 million hectares by 2030**.
- **Pastoral Rights & Custodianship:** India advocated for recognizing pastoralists as frontline ecological stewards and highlighted indigenous conservation models, specifically citing the traditional **Orans of Rajasthan**.
- **Climate Finance Demands:** New Delhi reiterated calls for adequate, predictable, and sustained international climate finance while detailing domestic market instruments such as Sovereign Green Bonds and the Green Credit Programme.

India's Domestic Initiatives to Combat Desertification:

- **National Action Plan to Combat Desertification (NAPCD):** First formulated in 2001 and updated in 2023, it serves as the nodal umbrella mechanism converging ministerial land restoration programs.

- **PM Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY) – Watershed Component:** Integrates ridge-to-valley watershed treatments, runoff harvesting, and in-situ moisture conservation to build local drought-proofing.
- **ISRO’s Desertification and Land Degradation Atlas:** Deploys remote sensing and Geographic Information System (GIS) analytics to monitor temporal shifts in land degradation and guide targeted district-level interventions.
- **Aravalli Green Wall Project:** An afforestation and ecological green corridor initiative aimed at checking eastward desert expansion from the Thar across Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Delhi.
- **Mission Amrit Sarovar:** Focuses on excavating and rejuvenating at least 75 water bodies per district to recharge shallow aquifers and ensure local water security.
- **Soil Health Card Scheme:** Provides farmers with soil-nutrient test profiles to optimize chemical fertilizer application and prevent chemical-induced soil degradation.

Key Challenges Identified:

- **Chronic Drought Financing Deficit:** A massive \$278 billion annual financing gap hampers proactive drought preparedness across the Global South.
- **Multilateral Treaty Resistance:** Disagreements between developed and developing nations over binding financial commitments continue to block a comprehensive international drought protocol.
- **Marginalization of Open Natural Ecosystems:** Well-intentioned tree-planting drives frequently result in planting non-native monocultures in natural grasslands and shrublands, damaging local pastoral hydrology and endemic wildlife.
- **Reactive Disaster Relief Cycle:** National drought mechanisms remain largely reactive, deploying post-disaster compensation rather than executing anticipatory risk reduction.

Way Ahead:

- **Implementing Agro-Ecological Zoning:** Align agricultural electricity subsidies, irrigation allocations, and Minimum Support Prices (MSP) with local agro-climatic conditions to halt water-intensive cultivation in arid zones.
- **Adopting Forecast-Based Trigger Financing:** Connect satellite-based soil moisture analytics directly to disaster relief funds, releasing contingency financing before drought-induced crop failure materializes.
- **Protecting Grazing Commons Legally:** Integrate legal protections for community grazing routes, pastoral commons, and sacred groves into formal revenue and land-use records.
- **Transitioning from Relief to Proactive Water Stewardship:** Scale micro-irrigation, decentralized rainwater structures, and soil organic carbon enhancement to buffer smallholder agriculture against recurrent dry spells.

The outcomes of UNCCD COP17 highlight that while technological tracking tools and catalytic financing platforms are emerging, the absence of a legally binding global drought framework leaves billions vulnerable to climate shocks. For India, pairing science-based landscape restoration with the protection of traditional grazing commons and open ecosystems offers a balanced pathway to achieving Land Degradation Neutrality by 2030.

‘VEER GUARDIAN-2026’

The Indian Air Force (IAF) and the Japan Air Self Defence Force (JASDF) have commenced the 14-day bilateral air combat exercise ‘Veer Guardian-2026’ at Air Force Station Jodhpur.



Exercise Veer Guardian-2026

About Exercise Veer Guardian-2026:

What it is?

- A high-tempo bilateral fighter-combat exercise conducted between the air forces of India and Japan to develop tactical air-combat interoperability, fine-tune joint aerial operational concepts, and enhance mutual defense cooperation.

Host & Venue: Hosted by the Indian Air Force at Air Force Station Jodhpur, Rajasthan.

Nations Involved: India (Indian Air Force) and Japan (Japan Air Self Defence Force).

Aim: To enhance India-Japan air force interoperability through joint combat training, mission planning and aerospace safety cooperation.

Key Features:

- **First-Ever Japanese Fighter Deployment to India:** Marks the first time JASDF fighter aircraft have touched down and operated from an Indian air base for bilateral combat drills.
- **Diverse Frontline Fleet Integration:** Deploys a multi-type fleet from the IAF – comprising indigenous Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas, multirole Su-30MKI, and Dassault Rafale jets – training directly alongside Japan’s F-2A multirole fighters.
- **Tactical Exposure to F-16 Kinship:** Because Japan’s F-2A shares its core airframe lineage with the American F-16 Falcon, the drills afford the IAF critical tactical experience countering and integrating with an F-16-derivative platform.
- **Comprehensive Ground & Aerospace Interactions:** Integrates advanced air combat simulations with engineering roundtables, joint debriefs, subject matter expert exchanges (SMEEs), and aerospace maintenance protocols.

Significance:

- **Strengthens Quad Security:** India-Japan air exercises improve defence interoperability and deterrence in the Indo-Pacific.
- **Expands Japan’s Operational Reach:** Gives the JASDF experience in long-distance deployments and diverse flying conditions alongside Indian aircraft.

ARTICLE 371(K)

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has proposed inserting a new constitutional provision, **Article 371(K)** (or Chapter K under Part XXI), to establish a directly elected governing body with legislative powers for the Union Territory of Ladakh.



Proposed Article 371(K)

About Proposed Article 371(K):

What it is?

- A proposed constitutional amendment under Part XXI of the Constitution (*Temporary, Transitional and Special Provisions*) intended to create a *sui generis* (unique) model of governance for the Union Territory of Ladakh. It provides for a directly elected UT-level governing body vested with legislative authority over specified subjects.

Background:

- Following the bifurcation of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir under the J&K Reorganisation Act, 2019, Ladakh was carved out as a Union Territory without a legislative assembly.
- The transition resulted in governance largely led by bureaucrats and the Lieutenant Governor rather than elected representatives, sidelining the existing Autonomous Hill Development Councils (LAHDC Leh and Kargil).
- In response, the Leh Apex Body (LAB) and Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) joined forces, demanding full statehood, protection under the **Sixth Schedule**, dedicated public service commissions, and parliamentary representation.

Aim: To restore democratic governance in Ladakh, protect tribal rights, land and ecology, and address political alienation without granting statehood or Sixth Schedule status.

Key Features:

- **Directly Elected UT-Level Legislative Body:** Mandates the creation of a territorial governing body elected through direct universal franchise, transitioning Ladakh away from purely bureaucratic administration.
- **Legislative Domain over Critical Subjects:** Grants legislative authority over ecologically and culturally sensitive domains, including land rights, transfer of property, culture and language, forests, environment, and natural resources.
- **Concurrence with Article 240 Regulations:** Entails powers over subject matters otherwise reserved for presidential regulations for Union Territories under Article 240 of the Constitution.
- **Tailored Constitutional Safeguards (Sui Generis Model):** Mirrors the protective mechanisms found in Articles 371A (Nagaland) and 371G (Mizoram), where central laws on land and local traditions do not apply automatically without local legislative assent.
- **Pending Crucial Jurisdictions:** The proposed framework currently leaves critical domains undecided—notably financial autonomy, budget allocations, executive decision-making, and command over police and public order.

ORANGUTAN

The Special Task Force (STF) of the Odisha Police and the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) initiated an investigation following the rescue of five juvenile orangutans from a coastal casuarina plantation in Balasore district.



The Orangutan

About The Orangutan:**What it is?**

- The orangutan (genus *Pongo*) is one of humanity's closest living relatives among the great apes. The name originates from the Malay words *orang*(man) and *hutan* (forest), translating to man of the forest. It is the only genus of great apes native entirely to the continent of Asia.

IUCN Red List Status:

- Bornean Orangutan (*Pongo pygmaeus*): Critically Endangered.
- Sumatran Orangutan (*Pongo abelii*): Critically Endangered.
- Tapanuli Orangutan (*Pongo tapanuliensis*): Critically Endangered.

Habitat: Native exclusively to the primary tropical rainforests and lowland peat-swamp forests of Southeast Asia, restricted entirely to the two islands of **Borneo**(shared by Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei) and **Sumatra** (Indonesia).

Key Characteristics:

- **World's Largest Arboreal Mammal:** Spends over 90% of its life in the high forest canopy, possessing exceptionally long, muscular arms and grasping, hook-like feet adapted for swinging across tree branches.
- **Solitary and Semi-Solitary Social Structure:** Unlike social chimpanzees or gorillas, orangutans lead largely solitary lives to avoid food competition within their large home ranges, forming loose associations only during mating.
- **Distinct Secondary Sexual Dimorphism (Bimaturism):** Mature dominant males develop wide, fleshy facial cheek pads and large throat pouches that amplify booming vocalizations.
- **Keystone Seed Dispersers:** Primarily frugivorous, their diet consists of hundreds of wild forest fruits alongside bark, shoots, and insects; their feeding habits are indispensable for forest regeneration and seed dispersal.
- **Complex Cognitive and Tool-Using Ability:** Highly intelligent primates that build fresh sleeping nests and use sticks and leaves as tools for feeding and protection.

INDIA-JAPAN DEFENCE TIES

A recent analysis highlighted Japanese Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi's visit to India, where both sides discussed operational interoperability, naval shipbuilding and defence technology transfers under Make in India.



India-Japan Defence Ties

About India-Japan Defence Ties: Transition to Operational Convergence

What it is?

- India and Japan share a **Special Strategic and Global Partnership**, historically anchored in diplomatic frameworks such as the **Annual Summit mechanism**, the ministerial **2+2 Dialogue** (involving Foreign and Defence Ministers), and mutual logistics arrangements under the **Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA)**.
- While political convergence on a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) has matured, practical defense cooperation has historically lagged.

Key Pillars & Recent Breakthroughs:

- **Joint Naval Shipbuilding & Reciprocal Ship Repair:**
 - Both nations agreed to explore joint development in naval warship design, integrating Japan's advanced marine engineering with India's domestic shipyard manufacturing capacity.
 - Deepening discussions on utilizing Indian production infrastructure under '**Make in India**' and establishing reciprocal access to military ship repair and maintenance facilities.
- **Fast-Tracking the UNICORN Antenna System:**
 - **Unified Complex Radio Antenna (UNICORN):** A stealth integrated mast system that houses multiple communication and radar antennas within a single composite structure, drastically reducing a warship's radar cross-section (RCS).
 - Building on the November 2024 Memorandum of Understanding involving **Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL)**, both governments committed to early implementation, marking Japan's first major defense equipment transfer to India under Tokyo's revised *Three Principles on Transfer of Defence Equipment and Technology*.
- **Expanding R&D and Institutional Linkages:**
 - Institutionalizing co-development pipelines between India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Japan's Acquisition, Technology and Logistics Agency (ATLA) to overcome the implementation bottlenecks that hampered the 2015 Defense Technology Transfer Agreement.
- **Elevating Tri-Service Joint Exercises:**
 - **Exercise Veer Guardian 2026:** Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF) fighter aircraft deployed to India for the first time in September 2026.
 - Agreement to introduce **unmanned combat systems (drones)**, conduct short-notice contingency drills to test operational readiness, and integrate Japan's Self-Defense Forces with India's upcoming **Integrated Theatre Commands**.
- **Shared Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA):**
 - Linking real-time operational feeds between the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and the Western Pacific/East China Sea, creating an end-to-end maritime operating picture across critical Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs).

Key Challenges in Implementation:

- **Slow Pace of Historical Defense Deals:** Despite signing the 2015 agreement on defense technology transfer, major high-profile projects—such as the planned procurement of ShinMaywa US-2 amphibious aircraft—stalled over price negotiations, local production quotas, and technology-sharing disputes.
- **Legal and Constitutional Limits on Japanese Exports:** Although Japan has revised its defense export rules, constitutional constraints under Article 9 and complex parliamentary oversight in Tokyo continue to make lethal weapon co-development politically sensitive.
- **Differences in Procurement and Industrial Norms:** Aligning India's indigenous manufacturing standards and offset rules with Japan's proprietary defense manufacturing processes requires substantial inter-agency harmonization.
- **Balancing Coalition Dynamics (Quad vs. Bilateral Ties):** Sustaining bilateral momentum requires insulating India-Japan operational initiatives from shifting external political postures or trade tensions within the broader Quad grouping.

Way Ahead:

- **Delivering Concrete Co-Development Projects:** Prioritize the timely assembly and integration of UNICORN masts on Indian naval vessels through BEL to establish credibility for future technology co-production.
- **Finalizing Reciprocal Shipyard Logistics Agreements:** Formalize master ship-repair agreements enabling Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) vessels to undergo scheduled refits and logistics replenishment at Indian commercial and naval shipyards.
- **Deepening Drone and Autonomous Systems R&D:** Jointly fund and co-develop autonomous underwater vehicles (AUVs) and high-altitude maritime surveillance unmanned systems tailored for littoral surveillance and anti-submarine warfare (ASW).
- **Convening the Tokyo 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue:** Utilize the upcoming fourth Foreign and Defence Ministerial 2+2 meeting to establish a formal roadmap linking operational theater commands and real-time intelligence-sharing protocols.

Conclusion:

By anchoring cooperation in joint naval shipbuilding, advanced sensor transfers, and expanded aerial and maritime exercises, New Delhi and Tokyo are creating an interconnected security framework across the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Turning this strategic convergence into lasting regional stability will depend on executing joint manufacturing agreements and sustaining operational momentum on the ground.

Q) Discuss how diversification and adjustment of cropping patterns can mitigate impact of droughts on the lives of the rural poor in India. Also examine the role of governments in this regard.(250 words)

HIGH-PRODUCTIVITY CROP DIVERSIFICATION.

The Union Budget 2026–27 emphasized a crop-specific, regionally differentiated agricultural policy framework designed to accelerate high-productivity crop diversification.

- Moving beyond traditional cereal monocropping, the roadmap targets high-value horticulture, plantation crops, and agroforestry across India's diverse agro-climatic zones.

Total Horticulture	2024-25 (Final)	2025-26 (First Advance Estimates)	2025-26 (Second Advance Estimates)
Area (in Lakh Ha)	301.36	301.31	301.51
Production (in Lakh Tonne)	3707.38	3708.46	3777.76

High-Productivity Crop Diversification & Horticulture

About High-Productivity Crop Diversification & Horticulture:**What it is?**

- Crop diversification involves transitioning agricultural land use from conventional monoculture systems (notably the water-intensive paddy-wheat rotation) toward pulses, oilseeds, horticulture, and commercial tree crops. Horticulture serves as the cornerstone of this high-value transformation, generating higher gross value added (GVA) per unit of land, optimizing water consumption, and building climate resilience against erratic weather patterns.

Key Macro Trends & Agricultural Statistics:

- **Decadal Sectoral Growth:** Indian agriculture recorded a decadal growth rate of 4.45% – the highest in comparison to previous decades.
- **Horticulture Output & Share:** Horticulture accounts for approximately 37% of the gross value output within the crop sub-sector of agriculture and allied activities.
- **Production Expansion:** National horticultural production expanded from 277.35 million tonnes in 2013–14 to 370.74 million tonnes in 2024–25, comprising:
 - 217.80 million tonnes of vegetables
 - 117.65 million tonnes of fruits
 - 35.29 million tonnes of other horticultural and plantation crops
- **Global Standing:** India ranks second globally in the aggregate production of fruits, vegetables, and potatoes:
 - Fruits account for 9.18% of global production.
 - Vegetables contribute 8.18% of global output.
 - India is the world's leading producer of onions and shallots, representing 22.42% of global supply.

Region-Specific High-Value Crop Interventions:

- **Coastal States & Island Ecosystems (Coconut, Cashew, Cocoa, Sandalwood):**
 - **Livelihood Scale:** The coconut economy supports approximately 30 million people, including nearly 10 million farmers.
 - **Global Share:** India ranks second globally in coconut output (contributing ~22.44% of world production) and third in acreage (~19.32% of global cultivated area).
 - **Domestic Metrics (2024–25):** Production reached 13.97 million tonnes across 2.19 million hectares, with an average yield of 6.36 tonnes/hectare.
 - **State Profiles:** Kerala maintains the largest cultivated area (7.54 lakh hectares, producing 35.44 lakh tonnes); Tamil Nadu leads in total production; Andhra Pradesh records the highest yield per hectare, followed by West Bengal and Tamil Nadu.
 - **Budget 2026–27 Scheme:** Introduced a targeted Coconut Promotion Scheme to replace aged, senile, and low-yielding palms with high-yielding varieties and certified saplings, supported by Coconut Development Board Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs).
- **Northeastern Region (Agarwood & Organic Cultivation):**
 - **Resource Base:** India hosts nearly 150 million agarwood trees (*Aquilaria* species) as of January 2026, with over 90% situated in the Northeast, integrated into agroforestry and homestead plantation models.
 - **Commercial Potential:** The agarwood market in Tripura alone holds an estimated annual turnover potential of ₹2,000 crore for agarwood chips, oud oil, beads, and tea.
 - **Policy Enablers:** Deployment of geospatial mapping for acreage expansion in Assam and Tripura, expansion of export quotas under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), and digital integration of export applications via the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT).

- **Hilly & Temperate Regions (Nut Crops):**
 - **Walnut Economy:** Jammu & Kashmir accounts for the vast majority of commercial walnut production, with minor contributions from Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh, Arunachal Pradesh, and Manipur.
 - **Production & Trade (2024-25):** Walnut output reached 3.22 lakh tonnes. Exports stood at \$7.80 million, serving markets including the UAE, Turkey, Iraq, Singapore, Qatar, and Kuwait.
- **Indo-Gangetic Plains (Punjab & Haryana):**
 - Focuses on diverting excessive groundwater-depleting paddy acreage into pulses, oilseeds, and protected vegetable cultivation to restore soil organic carbon and stabilize water tables.

Significance of the Diversification Strategy:

- **Farm Income Enhancement:** High-value horticultural and plantation crops generate substantially higher net revenue margins per hectare compared to price-supported staple cereals.
- **Water and Soil Conservation:** Diverting acreage away from flood-irrigated rice reduces groundwater overdraft in northwest aquifers while integrating nitrogen-fixing pulses improves soil fertility.
- **Agro-Processing & Value Addition:** Expands raw material supplies for domestic food processing industries, cold chains, aromatic extractions, and high-margin perfumery.
- **Export Expansion:** Strengthens agricultural export contributions aligned with national merchandise trade targets of \$2 trillion by 2030 and \$21 trillion by 2047.

Challenges in Scaling Crop Diversification:

- **Price Volatility & Perishability:** Unlike wheat and paddy supported by open-ended Minimum Support Price (MSP) procurement, perishable horticultural crops remain vulnerable to post-harvest price crashes and lack adequate market intervention frameworks.
- **Cold-Chain & Logistics Deficits:** Insufficient farm-gate pre-cooling facilities, cold storage networks, and refrigerated transport lead to significant post-harvest losses.
- **Long Gestation for Tree Crops:** Plantation varieties such as agarwood, sandalwood, and nut trees require multi-year gestation periods before commercial harvesting, straining liquidity for smallholders.
- **Informal Processing & Certification Gaps:** Fragmented value chains, lack of standardized quality grading, and stringent phytosanitary/CITES export clearances often limit smallholder access to premium global markets.

Way Ahead:

- **Strengthening Infrastructure via Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF):** Channel concessional credit toward primary processing, sorting, grading, and cold storage hubs anchored by FPOs at the village level.
- **Expanding Price Deficiency Payment Mechanisms:** Extend price stabilization schemes (such as PM-AASHA and market intervention funds) to non-staple, high-value crops during peak harvest gluts.
- **Distributing Quality Planting Material:** Modernize regional nurseries to supply certified disease-free tissue-cultured saplings, high-density nut varieties, and climate-resilient rootstocks.
- **Promoting Value Addition & Cluster Development:** Scale cluster-based agro-industrial hubs under schemes like PM Formalisation of Micro food processing Enterprises (PMFME) to process primary goods into essential oils, packaged nuts, and packaged consumer foods.

Conclusion:

The Union Budget 2026–27 framework acknowledges that regional agro-ecological strengths—from coastal plantation crops and northeastern aromatics to temperate nut orchards—are central to improving farm profitability. Coupling targeted nursery replenishment with post-harvest cold chains and streamlined export logistics will be essential to making crop diversification an enduring driver of sustainable rural prosperity.

ASIAN-PACIFIC POSTAL UNION (APPU)

Dr. Vinaya Prakash Singh, a senior Indian Postal Service (IPoS) officer, was re-elected unopposed by acclamation as the Secretary-General of the Asian-Pacific Postal Union (APPU) for a second consecutive four-year term (2027–2030).



The Asian-Pacific Postal Union (APPU)

About The Asian-Pacific Postal Union (APPU):

What it is?

- An intergovernmental organisation comprising 32 member countries across the Asia-Pacific region, functioning as a Restricted Union (regional union) under Article 8 of the Universal Postal Union (UPU)—a specialised agency of the United Nations. It is headquartered in Bangkok, Thailand (relocated from Manila in 2002).

Established in:

- Originated on **April 1, 1962**, following the Manila roundtable of 1961 as the Asian-Oceanic Postal Union (AOPU).
- It took its modern form as the **Asian-Pacific Postal Union (APPU)** through the Asian-Pacific Postal Convention signed in Yogyakarta on March 27, 1981 (entering into force on July 1, 1982).

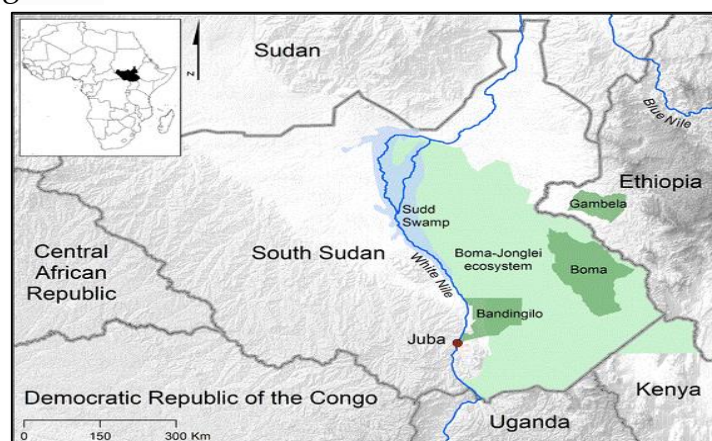
Aim: To extend, facilitate, and improve postal relations among member states, coordinate cross-border logistics and regulatory standards, and promote mutual technical cooperation and modernisation of postal networks across the Asia-Pacific.

Key Functions:

- **Regional Policy Harmonisation:** Harmonises postal regulations, rate structures, and customs transit standards among member administrations to align with broader global UPU frameworks.
- **Regional Execution of UPU Initiatives:** Acts as the regional execution hub for technical and operational projects initiated by the Universal Postal Union, facilitating seamless integration of Asia-Pacific networks into the global mail stream.
- **Capacity Building via APPC:** Administers the **Asian-Pacific Postal College (APPC)** in Bangkok, the region's largest intergovernmental postal training facility providing specialised leadership and technical training to postal personnel.
- **Cross-Border E-Commerce & Logistics:** Modernises express parcel, terminal dues, supply chain logistics, and cross-border digital tracking systems to accommodate burgeoning e-commerce volumes.
- **Advancing Postal Financial Inclusion:** Facilitates regional frameworks for remittance transfers, postal banking, and modern fintech services through member post office branch networks.

BOMA-BADINGILO MIGRATORY LANDSCAPE

The Boma-Badingilo Migratory Landscape was officially inscribed as South Sudan's first-ever UNESCO World Heritage Site.



The Badingilo-Boma Landscape

About The Badingilo-Boma Landscape:

What it is?

- A contiguous transboundary wilderness and wildlife corridor network centered on Boma National Park and Badingilo National Park. Managed under a 10-year co-management agreement between the Government of South Sudan and the conservation nonprofit **African Parks**, it anchors the broader Great Nile Migration Landscape (GNML).

Located in: Situated across the eastern and southern savanna plains of **South Sudan**, stretching northeast toward the vast Sudd wetlands and eastward to connect with Gambella National Park in neighboring Ethiopia.

UNESCO Recognition: Inscribed on the **UNESCO World Heritage List in July 2026** as South Sudan's first World Heritage property under the natural heritage criteria.

Key Features:

- **Earth's Largest Land Mammal Migration:** Hosts an annual migratory influx of roughly 6 million ungulates – dwarfing the Serengeti migration – dominated by the white-eared kob, Mongalla gazelle, tiang, and Bohor reedbuck.
- **Africa's Largest Intact Savanna-Wetland Complex:** Spans an interconnected expanse of extensive open floodplains, wooded grasslands, and freshwater marshes driven by seasonal rainfall patterns and the movement of the Intertropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ).
- **Crucial Continental Bird Sanctuary:** Designated as an Important Bird Area (IBA) and a vital staging corridor along the Central African and Nile Flyways for migratory birds, including massive flocks of African openbill storks, Abdim's storks, and woodland kingfishers.
- **Safe Haven for Threatened Avifauna:** Provides a critical refuge for the globally vulnerable Shoebill across the Goum swamps, alongside established breeding colonies of endangered hooded vultures.
- **Community-Centric Conservation Model:** Integrates local pastoralist communities through mobile TANGO field teams, community liaison agents, and alternative livelihood programs to curb poaching and resource depletion.

Significance:

- Acts as an ecological sponge and key watershed for the White Nile, sustaining freshwater flows, seasonal pastures and climate resilience across East Africa.
- Gives South Sudan a global conservation identity while promoting ecotourism, institutional stability and international partnerships after decades of conflict.

DIGITAL HAWALA

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has flagged the growing use of digital hawala for money laundering and terror financing.

- Its latest report notes that nearly 70% of surveyed jurisdictions have detected the use of new technologies in underground banking networks.



Digital Hawala

About Digital Hawala:

What is it?

- Digital hawala is the technology-enabled evolution of the traditional informal hawala system, where money or value is transferred through networks of intermediaries without necessarily moving funds directly through conventional banking channels.
- It combines traditional hawala settlement methods with encrypted messaging, fintech platforms, mobile wallets, virtual assets, AI tools and other digital services.

How Does it Work?

- A customer gives cash or digital funds to a hawala operator.
- Instructions are transmitted to another operator through encrypted apps, online platforms or shared digital ledgers.
- The recipient receives the equivalent amount through cash, wallets, fintech platforms or virtual assets.
- Hawala operators later settle balances through cash, trade, formal payment infrastructure or crypto-assets such as stablecoins.
- Transactions may be concealed through front businesses, mule accounts, charities or layered digital transfers.

Key Findings of the FATF Report:

- **Rapid Digitisation:** Nearly 70% of surveyed jurisdictions reported integration of new technologies into hawala and underground banking networks.
- **Six Digital Forms:** FATF identified six configurations, ranging from digital coordination and customer interfaces to virtual-asset settlement, fintech integration, AI tools and dedicated hawala apps.
- **Virtual Assets:** Stablecoins and other virtual assets are increasingly being used to settle balances between hawala operators.
- **AI-enabled Transactions:** AI tools can automate transaction structuring, mule-account routing and rapid fiat-to-crypto conversion, making detection harder.
- **Cash Remains Important:** Digitalisation has supplemented rather than replaced traditional hawala, with cash continuing to dominate collection and final payout points.

Implications:

- Faster and more opaque cross-border transactions make tracing illicit funds and terror financing more difficult.
- Integration of crypto, fintech, gaming platforms and encrypted communications complicates AML/CFT enforcement and requires stronger cross-border coordination.

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