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WEEKLY CURRENT AFFAIRS

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FORESTS FOR FOOD: NOURISHING PEOPLE, SUSTAINING THE PLANET.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, in collaboration with the Landscape Alliance (CIFOR-ICRAF), published a landmark global report titled *Forests for food: Nourishing people, sustaining the planet*.

About The Report: Forests for food: Nourishing people, sustaining the planet

What it is?

- Developed under the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) Joint Initiative, the report synthesizes global empirical evidence on the multifaceted linkages connecting forests to the four dimensions of Food Security and Nutrition (FSN): availability, access, utilization, and stability.
- It addresses the systemic knowledge gap caused by the absence of globally standardized definitions, unrecorded informal wild-food consumption, and fragmented policy silos across agriculture, forestry, and health sectors.

Key Findings in the Report:

- **Livelihood Scale:** Over 5 billion people worldwide depend to some extent on forests for their livelihoods, with forests generating up to 20% of rural household incomes in several developing regions.
- **Vast Edible Biodiversity:** More than 50,000 wild species are utilized globally for food, energy, medicine, and materials, including at least 10,000 species consumed directly as human food.
- **Protein & Caloric Dependency:** In remote forest-dependent communities, wild forest foods supply up to 80% of daily dietary protein and account for nearly half of total consumed food mass by weight.
- **Vital Cooking & Water Safety Energy:** Around 1.8 billion people (23% of the global population) relied primarily on woodfuel for cooking in 2022, and 410 million people depended mainly on wood energy to boil and sterilize drinking water.
- **Ecosystem Foundation for Agriculture:** Forests sustain critical agricultural inputs by hosting pollinators that support 35% of global crop production, while forested watersheds supply freshwater to over 85% of the world's major cities.
- **Downwind Precipitation Recycling:** Agricultural zones across 155 countries depend on forests in other countries for up to 40% of their annual rainfall through atmospheric moisture recycling and evapotranspiration.
- **Healthcare & Medicinal Dependency:** More than 1 billion people rely on forest-derived medicinal plants for primary healthcare, treating conditions like childhood diarrhea that impair nutrient absorption.
- **Severe Deforestation Pressures:** An estimated 10.9 million hectares of forests were deforested annually between 2015 and 2025, driven largely by agricultural expansion, weak tenure rights, and commodity trade.

Positives Identified So Far:

- **Net Forest Loss Deceleration:** The global annual rate of net forest loss declined significantly from 10.7 million hectares (1990–2000) to 4.12 million hectares (2015–2025) due to targeted afforestation and landscape restoration.
- **Proven Nutritional Dividends (Child Health):** Studies in India, Africa, and the Amazon demonstrate that children living in landscapes with higher forest cover have higher dietary diversity scores and lower stunting and wasting rates.

- **Dietary Equalizers for Vulnerable Households:** Unlike costly commercial meat, wild meat and freshwater fish act as wealth-neutral nutritional buffers, providing poor rural children with vital protein, iron, zinc, and vitamin B12.
- **Successful Community-Based Co-Management:** Localized management models—such as the recovery of the giant arapaima in the Amazon (increasing 30-fold in protected lakes)—demonstrate that blending indigenous knowledge with conservation can boost incomes and household nutrition.
- **Institutionalization of “Broader Food” Concepts:** Pioneer national frameworks—such as China’s Food Security Assurance Law and Brazil’s Catrapovos school feeding initiative—are successfully integrating non-wood forest products and agroforestry into public procurement.

Challenges Associated:

- **Data Invisibility & Definitional Ambiguity:** Forest foods are largely absent from national statistical databases (like FAOSTAT) due to lack of standard taxonomies and reliance on informal, unmonitored harvesting.
- **Deforestation Driven by Agricultural Conversion:** Nearly three-quarters of tropical deforestation is driven by commercial crop expansion and livestock grazing, destroying the very ecosystems that sustain agricultural yields.
- **Insecure Land and Resource Tenure:** Fragmented legal rights and lack of formal recognition for indigenous and customary forest tenure leave local communities vulnerable to displacement by industrial concessions.
- **Unsustainable Overharvesting & Commercial Offtake:** Rapid urban demand and improved hunting gear have driven commercial wild-meat harvesting to unsustainable levels, threatening over 30% of harvested vertebrate species.
- **Zoonotic Disease & Food Safety Risks:** Disrupting natural forest barriers through logging and unregulated wild-animal trade chains heightens the risk of zoonotic spillover (such as Ebola and coronaviruses) in the absence of One Health protocols.

Way Ahead:

- **Cross-Sectoral Policy Harmonization:** Break administrative silos by integrating forest foods, agroforestry, and non-wood forest products directly into national agricultural development, school feeding, and public nutrition programs.
- **Securing Customary and Community Land Tenure:** Formally recognize and enforce indigenous and community land rights, drawing on the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure (VGGT) to protect local access to forest foods.
- **Establishing Standardized Statistical Methodologies:** Build globally harmonized metrics and household survey modules to accurately quantify wild-food consumption, nutritional profiles, and economic values in national accounting.
- **Scaling Agroforestry and Landscape-Level Planning:** Incentivize agroforestry, silvopastoral systems, and protective tree shelterbelts to optimize crop microclimates, enhance soil organic carbon, and buffer agricultural yields against extreme weather.
- **Institutionalizing the One Health Framework:** Implement veterinary monitoring, hygienic processing standards, and sustainable harvest quotas along wild food supply chains to mitigate zoonotic risks while safeguarding local subsistence access.

Conclusion:

Forests are not merely static environmental carbon sinks; they are indispensable pillars of global agrifood systems that nourish billions of vulnerable people. Achieving Sustainable Development Goal 2 (Zero Hunger) requires ending the historical policy divide between forestry and agriculture. Recognizing forest foods as vital nutritional assets and securing the rights of forest-dependent communities will be essential to building resilient, biodiverse, and food-secure landscapes worldwide.

INDIA'S FIRST SOIL CARBON PAYMENTS

India's agricultural carbon market reached a milestone as 2,550+ small farmers in Punjab and Haryana received ₹2.9+ crore through DBT, marking India's first farm-level soil carbon payments for verified regenerative farming practices.



India's First Soil Carbon Payments

About India's First Soil Carbon Payments:

What it is?

- A pioneer digital market-linkage mechanism that monetizes verified soil organic carbon sequestration and greenhouse gas (GHG) reductions, rewarding smallholder farmers financially for implementing regenerative, climate-smart agronomic practices.

Implementing Entity: Grow Indigo (an agri-tech joint venture between Mahyco and US-based Indigo Ag) through its flagship farmer-carbon initiative, the '**Aadi**' programme.

Background:

- Initiated in **2019** to curb chronic air pollution from paddy stubble burning in northwestern India and reverse severe groundwater depletion in the Indo-Gangetic plains.
- The first payment cycle reflects carbon sequestered and emissions avoided between **2019 and 2022**, covering an initial tranche of roughly 30,000 acres and generating over 50,000 internationally certified carbon credits.

How it Works?

- **Field Practice Adoption:** Farmers adopt DSR, minimum tillage, cover crops and in-situ residue retention, replacing conventional transplanting and stubble burning.
- **Measurement, Reporting & Verification(MRV):** Soil carbon and GHG changes are tracked through satellites, digital crop models and periodic soil sampling.
- **Credit Issuance & Monetisation:** Verified credits are sold in the voluntary carbon market, with farmers receiving upfront payments or 75% of net carbon-sale proceeds.

Key Features:

- **Direct Benefit Transfer to Smallholders:** Facilitated direct digital payouts averaging between ₹3,000 and ₹15,000 per farmer, demonstrating that voluntary carbon markets can be effectively decentralized down to fragmented smallholder landholdings.
- **Verra VM0042 Certification:** Represents the first program in India to generate and issue agricultural carbon credits under Verra's rigorous, globally recognized VM0042 standard, establishing high data integrity and transparency.
- **Measurable Resource Conservation:** For the 2019–2022 cohort, the interventions conserved an estimated 45 billion litres of groundwater and diverted over 2 lakh tonnes of paddy straw from open burning.
- **Air Quality & Emission Abatement:** Avoided roughly 1,000 tonnes of hazardous PM2.5 emissions, directly mitigating seasonal winter smog across the National Capital Region (NCR) and adjoining plains.

'BHARAT VANN' GREEN INITIATIVE

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman inaugurated the '**Bharat Vann**' green initiative at Lodhi Colony Park in Central Delhi, launching an urban afforestation drive in collaboration with the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC).



The Bharat Vann Green Initiative

About The Bharat Vann Green Initiative:**What It Is?**

- '**Bharat Vann**' is a dense urban micro-forest project developed using the Miyawaki afforestation method. It involves high-density planting of multi-layered, indigenous vegetation to rapidly establish self-sustaining, biodiverse green lungs in degraded or high-density urban spaces.

Implementing Body: New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC).

Funding: Developed under the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative of India Infrastructure Finance Company Limited (IIFCL) and implemented by the Enviro Creators Foundation.

Aim: To accelerate urban ecological restoration, combat Delhi's particulate air pollution, lower local urban heat island (UHI) effects, and create accessible public community spaces for wellness and physical activity.

Key Features:

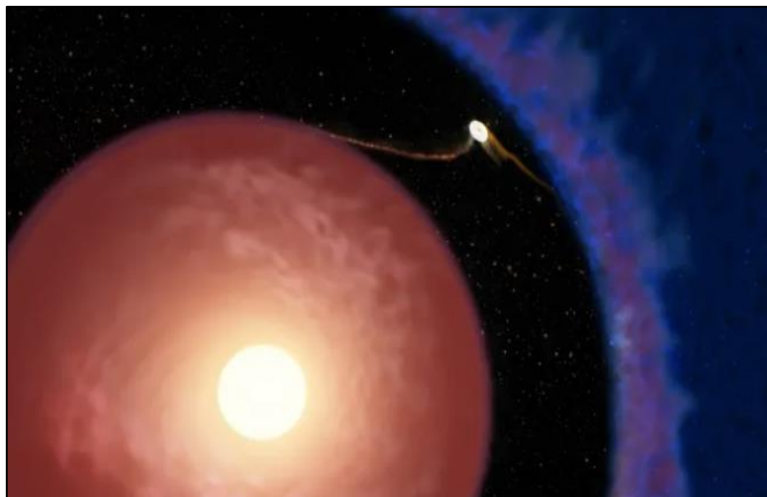
- **Miyawaki Planting Density:** Over 10,000 saplings are being planted across an area of approximately one acre (around 3,000 square metres), allowing saplings to grow up to 10–12 feet within a single year.
- **Strictly Native Flora:** The plantation exclusively uses indigenous, climate-adapted plants – including 76 distinct native species comprising fruit-bearing trees, shrubs, flowering plants, and large shade-giving canopy trees.
- **Integration with 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam':** Integrates citizen-led plantation drives where local schoolchildren and women's self-help groups plant and adopt saplings to foster long-term stewardship.
- **Integrated Wellness Infrastructure:** The forest zone is structured to include community facilities such as walking tracks, designated areas for yoga, pranayama, and open-air meditation within a sheltered natural canopy.
- **Dedicated Long-Term Maintenance:** Includes a 36-month (3-year) maintenance and nurturing protocol supported through IIFCL's CSR framework to ensure high sapling survival rates until the forest becomes fully self-sustaining.

Significance:

- Acts as a biological particulate filter in Central Delhi, trapping dust and absorbing gaseous vehicular emissions.
- Dense, multi-tiered canopy cover provides shading and evaporative cooling, countering the heat absorbed by surrounding concrete infrastructure.

ELIAS 2-24 B

Using NASA-funded archival data from the W. M. Keck Observatory, an international team of astronomers confirmed-Elias 2-24 b as the youngest known planet ever detected, clocking in at less than one million years old.



Elias 2-24 b

About Elias 2-24 b:**What it is?**

- A nascent, gas-giant exoplanet roughly the mass of Jupiter, representing a baby planet caught in the earliest stages of planetary birth while still embedded in its surrounding circumstellar disk of gas, dust, and rock.

Origin: Formed around the young host star **Elias 2-24**, located approximately **450 light-years from Earth** in the Ophiuchus star-forming region.

Key Features:

- **Record-Breaking Age:** Estimated at **less than 1 million years old**, easily shattering the previous record held by planets around PDS 70 and WISPIT 2 (which are over 5 million years old).
- **Extreme Orbital Distance:** Orbits its parent star at a wide distance of approximately **55 Astronomical Units (AU)** – roughly 55 times the Earth–Sun distance.
- **Active Disk Accretion:** Located precisely inside a dark ringed gap carved out in the circumstellar disk, directly accumulating gas and dust to build up its envelope and atmosphere.
- **Coronagraphic Detection:** Identified by using high-contrast coronagraphy to block the overwhelming glare of the host star, revealing faint infrared signatures in archival images taken between 2018 and 2020.

Significance:

- **Challenges Planet Formation Models:** Its rapid formation at 55 AU in under 1 million years suggests faster mechanisms such as gravitational instability or pebble drift.
- **Window into Early Solar Systems:** Helps explain how gas giants form, migrate and clear surrounding debris during the early stages of planetary systems.

THE 1991 AGREEMENT ON ADVANCE NOTICE ON MILITARY EXERCISES, MANOEUVRES AND TROOP MOVEMENTS

India summoned Pakistan's Charge d' Affaires in New Delhi to lodge a strong protest after Pakistan Navy Ship Hunain collided with an Indian warship in the North Arabian Sea.

- India cited a direct violation of Article 10 of their 1991 bilateral agreement, condemning the Pakistani vessel's high-speed, unsafe maneuvering in international waters.



The 1991 Agreement

About The 1991 Agreement on Advance Notice on Military Exercises, Manoeuvres and Troop Movements:

What it is?

- A landmark bilateral military confidence-building measure (CBM) signed on **April 6, 1991**, between India and Pakistan to establish formal notification protocols and operational distance buffers across land, naval, and air forces.

Background for the Agreement:

- **Operation Brasstacks Fallout (1986–87):** India conducted a massive, 150,000-troop multi-corps exercise near the Rajasthan border, which raised fears of an imminent war in Pakistan and highlighted the perils of unannounced military build-ups.
- **Nuclearization and Strategic Restraint:** The late 1980s saw both nations accelerating nuclear capabilities, vastly raising the stakes of miscalculation and prompting structural risk-reduction diplomacy.
- **Prior Bilateral Precedents:** Followed earlier de-escalatory pacts, including the 1988 Non-Attack on Nuclear Installations Agreement, creating momentum for broader military transparency.

Aim: To prevent dangerous crises, military accidents, and inadvertent escalation caused by the misreading or misinterpretation of routine troop movements and war games near shared borders and waters.

Key Features of the Agreement:

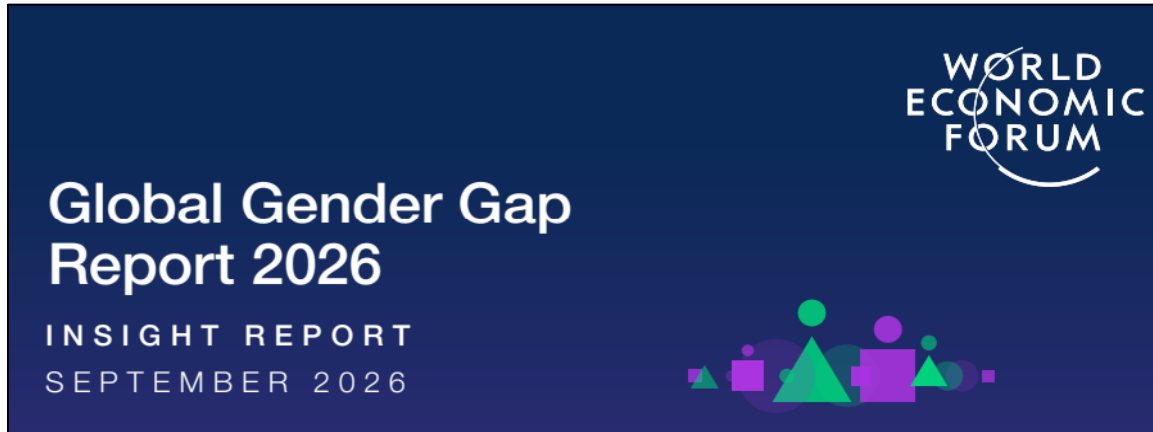
- **Mandatory Advance Notice Tiers:** Requires scheduled prior written notifications before conducting major military drills – ranging from **15 days** for specific naval/air exercises, **60 days** for corps-level maneuvers, up to **90 days** for army-level exercises.
- **Information Exchange Protocols:** Mandates both sides to share operational parameters regarding an upcoming exercise, including force assembly areas, directional axis, participant scale, and scheduled duration.
- **Airspace Separation Thresholds:** Prohibits combat aircraft from flying within **10 km** of each other's national airspace/ADIZ, with a relaxed **5 km buffer** around specified forward border airfields.
- **Naval Exercise Thresholds:** Classifies major naval maneuvers as operations involving **six or more combat vessels** of frigate/destroyer size and above exercising in formation or entering the other's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).
- **Consultation and Clarification Rights:** Grants both nations the formal diplomatic and military prerogative to seek real-time operational clarifications regarding sudden troop build-ups or abnormal force movements.

Article 10:

- **Direct Operational Buffer:** Explicitly mandates: *"The Naval ships and submarines belonging to the other country are not to close less than three Nautical Miles (NMs) from each other so as to avoid any accident while operating in international waters."*
- **Specific Relevance:** Establishes a mandatory physical safety buffer of roughly **5.56 km (3 nautical miles)**, making unsafe approaches, aggressive interdiction, or close-quarters maneuvering in international waters a breach of bilateral treaty law.

GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX 2026

India retained the **131st position out of 145 countries** on the Global Gender Gap Index 2026 released by the World Economic Forum (WEF), reporting an overall gender parity score of 64.5%.



The Global Gender Gap Index 2026

About The Global Gender Gap Index 2026:

What it is?

- The longest-standing annual international benchmark designed to measure and track the evolution of gender parity by evaluating how equitably countries distribute resources and opportunities between women and men, regardless of national income levels. The 2026 edition marks the **20th anniversary edition** of the index (launched in 2006).

Organisation: Published annually by the **World Economic Forum (WEF)**, based in Geneva, Switzerland.

Assessment Criteria (4 Subindexes / 14 Indicators):

Measures parity on a 0 to 1 scale (or 0% to 100%, where 100% represents full equality) across four key dimensions:

- **Economic Participation and Opportunity:** Assesses labour-force participation rates, wage equality for similar work, estimated earned income, and female representation among senior officials, managers, and technical workers.
- **Educational Attainment:** Measures female-to-male literacy rates and enrolment ratios across primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of education.
- **Health and Survival:** Evaluates sex ratio at birth (tracking missing female births) and healthy life expectancy.
- **Political Empowerment:** Analyzes the ratio of women to men in ministerial positions, parliamentary seats, and years with a female head of state over a rolling 50-year period.

Key Findings of Index 2026:

- **Global Parity Status & Timeline:** The global gender gap is **69.2% closed** (up by 0.4 percentage points over the previous year), but at the current pace of progress, achieving full global gender equality will take **120 years**.
- **Leaderboard & Top Performers:** Iceland (93%) retained the No. 1 position, followed by Finland (2nd) and Norway (3rd). Namibia ranked 4th (leading Sub-Saharan Africa), while Australia entered the global top 10 for the first time.
- **Bottom Ranks:** **Chad** ranked lowest at the bottom of the index (145th), joined by Iran and Pakistan in the bottom three.

- **India's Overall & Subindex Standing:**

- India closed 64.5% of its overall gap (**ranking 131st**), performing highest in Political Empowerment (67th, 24.5% closed) and Educational Attainment (96.6%), but lagging in Economic Participation and Opportunity (41.2%) and Health and Survival (95.6%), where sex ratio at birth remains subdued.

- **Persistent Leadership Deficits:** Globally, women continue to be severely underrepresented in influential decision-making spheres, holding only 19.1% of CEO roles, one in ten high-influence ministerial portfolios, and fewer than one in five AI engineering positions.

BADRI CALF

In a major milestone for indigenous cattle conservation, India produced its first Badri calf through Ovum Pick-Up and In Vitro Fertilization (OPU-IVF) technology at Pantnagar.



Badri Cattle

About Badri Cattle:

What it is?

- An indigenous humped cattle (*Bos indicus*) breed native to the Himalayan region of Uttarakhand, locally called *Pahadi*.
- It derives its name from the holy shrine of Badrinath and holds the distinction of being the first cattle breed from Uttarakhand to be officially certified and registered by ICAR's National Bureau of Animal Genetic Resources (NBAGR).

Habitat:

- Found throughout the hilly and mountainous tracts of Uttarakhand – particularly across the Garhwal and Kumaon divisions (such as Almora, Pauri Garhwal, Chamoli, and Champawat).
- It thrives in **high-altitude environments**, uneven slopes, and cold climatic conditions where exotic or plains-bred cattle struggle to adapt.

Key Characteristics:

- **Compact, Agile Body Frame:** Relatively small in stature with strong, sure-footed hooves and legs, perfectly structured to graze on steep, rocky mountain slopes and narrow hill terraces without slipping.
- **Upward and Inward Curved Horns:** Features medium-sized horns that curve characteristic upward and inward, aiding maneuverability through dense montane shrubs and forests.

- **Varied Coat Coloration:** Displays diverse coat colors, commonly ranging from solid black, brown, and red to grey, white, or mottled patterns.
- **High Disease Resistance and Low-Input Grazing:** Highly hardy and disease-resilient, surviving comfortably on free-range grazing of native Himalayan grasses, shrubs, and medicinal herbs with minimal supplementary stall feed.
- **A2 Beta-Casein Rich Milk:** Although a modest yielder (~1 to 3 litres per day), its milk is exceptionally rich in healthy A2 beta-casein protein, antioxidants, and minerals, fetching a premium market value.

Significance:

- The successful application of OPU-IVF and embryo transfer allows elite female germplasm to be multiplied rapidly in surrogate cows, circumventing the slow biological reproduction rate of conventional hill cattle.
- Provides sustainable livelihood support, organic dairy products, and draught power for terrace farming in remote Himalayan villages, directly mitigating agrarian distress and rural distress-migration.

INDIA-MERCOSUR PREFERENTIAL TRADE AGREEMENT (PTA)

Union Minister of Commerce and Industry and Uruguay's Foreign Affairs Minister formally announced the launch of negotiations to expand the India-MERCOSUR Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA).



India-Mercosur Preferential Trade Agreement

About India-Mercosur Preferential Trade Agreement:

What it is?

- A limited-scope, bilateral trade pact signed in 2004 that officially came into force on **June 1, 2009**, between the Republic of India and **MERCOSUR** (*Mercado Común del Sur* / Southern Common Market)—a major South American customs union comprising Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay (with Bolivia as a newer full member, while Venezuela remains suspended).

Aim: To foster South-South economic cooperation, reduce tariff barriers across identified commercial lines, and establish a foundational framework to gradually expand bilateral trade, investment, and supply chain integration between India and Latin America.

Key Features:

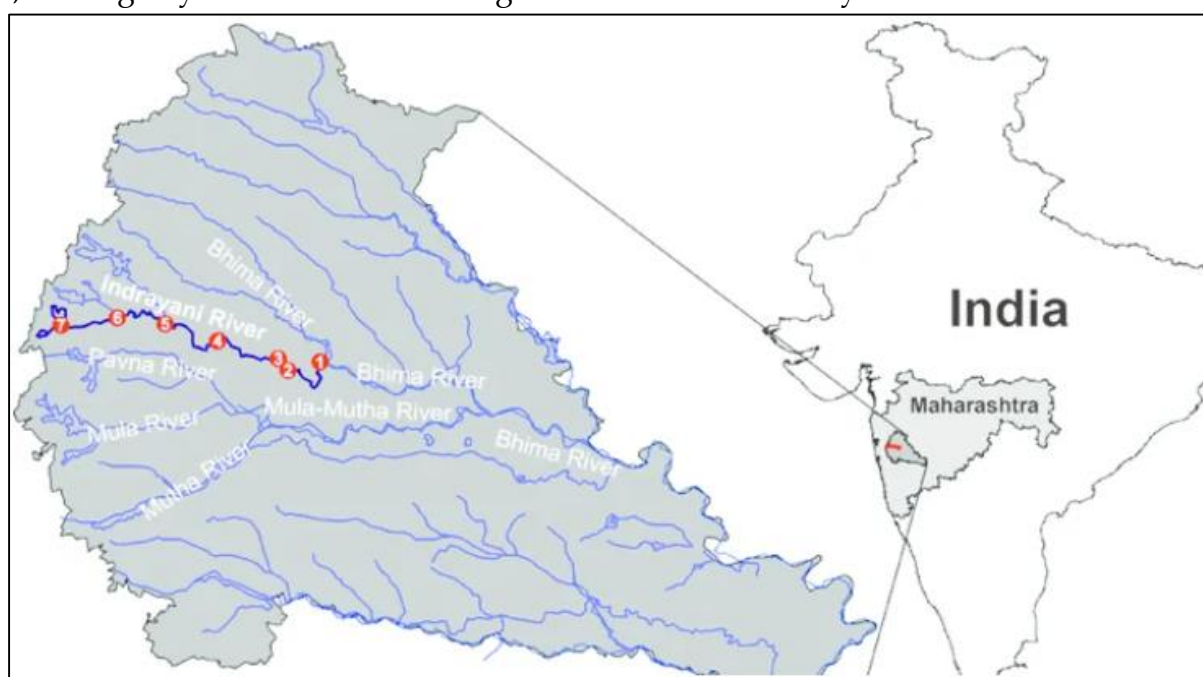
- **Limited Tariff Line Coverage:** Offers preferential margin-of-preference tariff cuts (ranging from 10% to 100%) on roughly **450 tariff lines from India and 452 from MERCOSUR**, primarily covering industrial chemicals, pharmaceuticals, machinery, agricultural products, and auto components.
- **Absence of Services & Investment Chapters:** Operates purely as a limited trade-in-goods agreement; services, intellectual property rights, government procurement, and investment protections are currently excluded.
- **Institutional Dispute Settlement & Safeguards:** Incorporates specific annexes governing Rules of Origin (RoO), safeguard measures to prevent import surges, and a defined dispute settlement mechanism.
- **Transition to Paperless Customs:** Modernized through the signing of the **First Additional Protocol**, enabling mutual recognition of digital/electronic Certificates of Origin (e-CoO) to reduce trade transaction costs and customs clearance times.
- **Framework for Expansion into a Full FTA:** The newly launched negotiations aim to widen product coverage and establish Terms of Reference (ToR) to transition the restricted PTA into a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

Significance:

- Serves as India's primary institutional trade gateway to the vast, resource-rich South American continent, providing market access for Indian pharmaceuticals, engineering goods, and IT integration.
- Crucial for securing long-term Indian imports of vegetable oils, crude petroleum, critical minerals (lithium), and fertilizers, while diversifying India's export basket beyond traditional markets in the US, Europe, and West Asia.

INDRAYANI RIVER

A severe mass fish kill was reported in the Indrayani River near the sacred Alandi temple in Pune district, coming days after a similar ecological die-off in the nearby Mula River.



The Indrayani River

About The Indrayani River:

What it is?

- A prominent, rain-fed sacred river in Maharashtra that holds deep religious, cultural, and ecological significance in the Western Ghats and Deccan Plateau landscape.

Origin: Originates near **Kurvande village close to Lonavala**, a hill station located in the Sahyadri ranges (Western Ghats) of Pune district, Maharashtra.

Flows Through:

- Traverses eastward across Pune district, running mostly north of Pune city.
- Passes through prominent historical and pilgrimage towns, most notably **Dehu** and **Alandi**.

Tributary of: It is a major tributary of the **Bhima River** (which itself is a major tributary of the Krishna River system).

Key Features:

- **Hydrological Infrastructure:** Features the **Valvan Dam** near Lonavala, which impounds the river to form Valvan Lake, generating hydroelectric power and supplying water to local regions.
- **Spiritual & Cultural Heritage:** Revered as a sacred stream intrinsically linked with Maharashtra's Varkari tradition, drawing millions of pilgrims annually during the Pandharpur Wari pilgrimage.
- **Rain-Fed Seasonal Flow:** Characterized by heavy discharge and strong currents during the southwest monsoon, tapering down to lean baseflows during pre-monsoon and summer months.
- **Industrial & Urban Interception:** Traverses heavily urbanized and industrialized belts, including the Talegaon–Chakan industrial cluster and Pimpri-Chinchwad Municipal Corporation (PCMC) boundaries.

Implications:

- Unregulated discharges from industrial nullahs and municipal sewage cause spikes in Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD) and Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD), leading to hypoxia that suffocates aquatic fauna.
- Massive bacterial contamination, nitrate enrichment, and chemical toxicity pose direct health risks to hundreds of thousands of devotees who perform ritual bathing (*snan*) at the Dehu and Alandi ghats.

YUDH ABHYAS 2026

The 22nd edition of the India-US joint military exercise **Yudh Abhyas 2026** commenced with an opening ceremony at the Auli Foreign Training Node in Uttarakhand.



Exercise Yudh Abhyas 2026

About Exercise Yudh Abhyas 2026:

What it is?

- The premier annual bilateral army-to-army training exercise conducted between the Indian Army and the United States Army. Alternating between both countries since its institutional inception in 2004, it is designed to enhance tactical cooperation, exchange best combat doctrines, and foster combined operational interoperability.

Host: Hosted by **India**, operating concurrently across two distinct geographical sectors:

- **Auli Foreign Training Node (Uttarakhand):** For high-altitude, cold-weather, and mountain warfare drills.
- **Mahajan Field Firing Range (Rajasthan):** For semi-desert mechanized maneuvers, live firing, and advanced weapons validation.

Participating Nations: India and the United States.

Key Features:

- **Simultaneous Dual-Terrain Execution:** In a first for the series, drills are deployed simultaneously across the high-altitude Himalayan ecology of Auli and the arid desert conditions of Mahajan to test tactical adaptability.
- **Employment of Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs):** Focuses heavily on infantry-dominated operations and the tactical employment of agile, composite Integrated Battle Groups in mountainous and semi-mountainous terrain.
- **Technology Infusion & Unmanned Systems:** Extensive focus on operationalizing drones, autonomous reconnaissance platforms, counter-unmanned aircraft systems (C-UAS), and multi-domain warfare networks.
- **Live-Fire & Heavy Weaponry Demonstrations:** Field drills at Mahajan incorporate modern firepower assets, live-firing exercises, and tactical integration of contemporary weapon systems.

Significance:

- Serves as a vital operational pillar supporting the US-India Major Defence Partnership, reinforcing strategic alignment and mutual trust for a free, open, and rules-based Indo-Pacific.
- Enhances joint planning, command-post synchronization, and combat readiness between conventional forces across complex operational environments, from electronic and cyber warfare to asymmetric mountain combat.

‘CALL TO ACTION FOR 6G LEADERSHIP AND SECURITY’

India officially endorsed the ‘Call to Action for 6G Leadership and Security’, joining a United States-led coalition of 26 like-minded governments to shape next-generation telecommunications networks.



The Call to Action for 6G

About The Call to Action for 6G Leadership and Security:

What it is?

- A multilateral, government-to-government policy and security initiative dedicated to coordinating the development, deployment, and governance of secure, open, interoperable, and resilient 6G wireless communication networks.

Origin:

- Spearheaded by the United States through the **National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA)** under the US Department of Commerce, formally released in July 2026 under the US G20 Presidency.
- In India, the **Department of Telecommunications (DoT)** leads domestic and international engagement.

Participating Members (26 Governments): Includes **India**, the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Germany, France, Canada, Australia, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Czechia, Estonia, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Costa Rica, Honduras, Paraguay, and others.

Aim: To establish early democratic governance over the 6G architectural stack, secure trusted telecom supply chains, mitigate emerging cyber and national security risks, and prevent authoritarian monopolization over next-generation global connectivity standards.

Key Features:

- **Graduated 12-Month Action Roadmap:** Sets milestones for expert contacts, industry and R&D mapping, resilient supply-chain strategies, and an intergovernmental review in 2027.
- **Guiding Network Principles:** Commits signatories to build 6G systems that are open, interoperable, secure, resilient, AI-supported, and resource/energy-efficient.
- **Trusted Supply Chains & Threat Mitigation:** Mandates joint assessment of strategic cybersecurity vulnerabilities in telecom investments, promotion of Open RAN architectures, and greater transparency in global hardware/software components.
- **Coordination in Global Standards Bodies:** Encourages aligned technical proposals across standard-setting organizations to embed rigorous security baselines directly into 6G protocol definitions.
- **Preservation of National Strategic Autonomy:** Explicitly avoids replacing existing industry-led bodies and clarifies that membership does not compromise any nation's independent positioning, domestic policy choices, or spectrum allocation autonomy.

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SAFAI KARAMCHARIS (NCSK)

The Department of Social Justice and Empowerment appointed Shri Bhagwat Prasad Makwana as Chairperson, Shri Kaishab Bihari as Vice-Chairperson, and three Members to the National Commission for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK).

- These appointments are effective until March 31, 2028, completing the tenure of the present 10th Commission.



NCSK

About The National Commission for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK):

What it is?

- A non-statutory body under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment mandated to look after the welfare, dignity, socioeconomic rehabilitation, and rights of sanitation workers (Safai Karamcharis) and manual scavengers in India.

Established in:

- Originally constituted on **August 12, 1994**, as a statutory body under the National Commission for Safai Karamcharis Act, 1993.
- Following the sunset/lapse of the 1993 Act on February 29, 2004, it has continued to function as a non-statutory body whose tenure is renewed periodically via Central Government executive resolutions (currently extended up to March 31, 2028).

Composition: Consists of one Chairperson (rank and status of Union Minister of State), one Vice-Chairperson, and five Members (including at least one woman member), all holding the status of Secretary to the Government of India, supported by an administrative Secretary (Joint Secretary rank).

Aim: To eliminate social, economic, and occupational inequalities faced by Safai Karamcharis and their dependents, abolish hazardous manual scavenging practices, ensure statutory compensation and safety gear, and facilitate their comprehensive rehabilitation.

Key Functions:

- **Policy Recommendations & Scheme Evaluation:** Formulates and submits actionable policy recommendations to the Centre to promote equal status, facilities, and opportunities, while evaluating the progress of socioeconomic rehabilitation schemes for manual scavengers.
- **Grievance Redressal and Suo-Motu Cognizance:** Investigates individual and group complaints, with powers to take suo motu notice of administrative delays, non-implementation of protective guidelines, or violations of laws affecting sanitation workers.
- **Monitoring Workplace Safety and Wages:** Evaluates on-ground working conditions, including health risks, minimum wage enforcement, and safety equipment standards across municipal corporations, gram panchayats, and private contractors.
- **Statutory Oversight under MS Act, 2013:** Performs statutory duties assigned under Section 31 of The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, which empowers the Commission to monitor implementation, inquire into legal breaches, and advise governments.
- **Enforcement of Supreme Court Directives on Compensation:** Oversees the disbursement of mandatory compensation ordered by the Supreme Court, ensuring ₹30 lakh is released to dependents in cases of sewer deaths and ₹10 lakh–₹20 lakh for sewer-related permanent disabilities.

Significance:

- Holds local bodies, contractors and State departments accountable for ending hazardous sewer and septic tank cleaning.
- Safeguards sanitation workers' rights, health and socioeconomic welfare through field visits and legal interventions.

OPEC+ NATIONS

Seven core OPEC+ nations decided in a virtual meeting to keep their crude oil output targets unchanged for October.

- The decision came amid global economic uncertainties and continuing supply disruptions across the Middle East and the Strait of Hormuz.



About The OPEC Plus:

What it is?

- OPEC+ is an expanded coalition comprising member states of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and key non-OPEC oil-exporting nations, working collectively to regulate crude oil supply and manage global energy markets.

Established in: Formed in **late 2016** through the historic Declaration of Cooperation signed in Vienna, Austria.

History:

- **Origins of OPEC (1960):** Founded at the Baghdad Conference by five founding members – Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela – to counter the dominance of multinational oil companies (Seven Sisters) and secure fair oil prices.
- **Birth of OPEC+ (2016):** Between 2014 and 2016, a massive surge in US shale oil production caused crude prices to crash. Recognizing that OPEC alone could no longer effectively balance the global market, OPEC partnered with 10 non-OPEC producers, led by Russia, creating the broader OPEC+ alliance to coordinate output cuts and stabilize prices.

Participating Countries:

- **OPEC Members:** Core producers including Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, Algeria, Nigeria, Venezuela, and others.
- **Non-OPEC Partners:** Major crude producers including Russia, Kazakhstan, Oman, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Brunei, Malaysia, Mexico, South Sudan, and Sudan.

Key Functions:

- **Coordinating Production Quotas:** Sets and adjusts country-specific crude oil extraction ceilings to align global oil supply with fluctuating worldwide demand.
- **Price & Market Stabilization:** Intervenes during market shocks—such as demand contractions or geopolitical supply cuts—by applying voluntary production increases or cuts to prevent extreme price volatility.
- **Unified Petroleum Policy:** Harmonizes energy and export strategies between OPEC members and non-OPEC allies to ensure stable returns for producing nations.
- **Supply Security for Consumers:** Monitors inventory balances to ensure regular, dependable, and economically viable supplies of petroleum to consuming nations.
- **Energy Market Intelligence:** Conducts comprehensive market research and economic forecasting through bodies like the Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee (JMMC) to guide global energy policy.

Significance:

- Accounting for roughly half of the world's total crude oil production, decisions made by OPEC+ heavily influence benchmark prices like Brent and West Texas Intermediate (WTI).
- Fluctuations in OPEC+ output directly impact fuel prices, transportation costs, and industrial input costs worldwide, playing a central role in global inflation and central bank monetary policies.

NHRC PROBE INTO INSTAGRAM ADS LATEST NEWS

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has issued notices to the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB), and the Delhi Police over paid Instagram advertisements that allegedly directed users to Telegram channels offering child sexual abuse material (CSAM).

The Commission has sought an Action Taken Report within two weeks. The notice flagged that these advertisements had passed Meta's review systems and stayed online until they were brought to the company's attention.



The case exposes a larger problem: India receives a huge volume of alerts about online child abuse, but only a small fraction leads to police action.

Two Questions Raised by the NHRC

The NHRC's order raises two key issues:

Compliance with POCSO reporting duties: Whether statutory reporting obligations under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 were followed.

Intermediary status of AI-driven platforms: Whether platforms whose AI systems actively shape content can still claim the legal protections available to intermediaries.

The Mandatory Reporting Obligation

Section 19 of the POCSO Act requires any person who apprehends that an offence is likely to be committed, or knows that one has been committed, to report it to the Special Juvenile Police or the local police.

The NHRC has asked Meta whether the alleged offences were reported and, if not, to identify who was responsible for compliance.

The Commission stressed that this legal duty cannot be replaced by internal correspondence, grievance redressal or regulatory engagement.

Are AI-Powered Platforms Still Intermediaries?

A supplementary representation before the Commission argued that Meta's AI tools now do far more than host third-party content. Its systems generate captions, recommend posting schedules, optimise engagement and assist monetisation.

The NHRC called this a "significant regulatory question".

It has asked MIB to examine whether such functions are consistent with intermediary status or whether they resemble the role of a publisher of online curated content under the IT Rules, 2021.

The core issue is whether the law adequately distinguishes mere hosting of third-party content from substantive platform involvement in generating, curating, recommending, amplifying or monetising it.

Understanding CyberTipline Reports

India received around 1.9 million CyberTipline reports in 2025.

These are alerts generated when tech platforms detect suspected child sexual exploitation and abuse material (CSEAM).

The reporting chain works as follows:

Tech platforms detect suspected material and report it to the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) in the United States, which runs the CyberTipline.

Reports linked to India are forwarded to Indian authorities.

The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) and the Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C), both under the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, process these reports.

Reports are then assigned to state and district authorities. In Delhi, the Intelligence Fusion and Strategic Operations (IFSO) unit receives them, verifies the district, and forwards them to the relevant police station.

These reports cover abuse imagery, attempts to distribute such material, online grooming, sextortion, trafficking-related content and accounts suspected of storing CSAM.

From Report to FIR: The Verification Funnel

Before an FIR is registered, authorities conduct preliminary verification. Investigators use account details, IP logs, linked email addresses, phone numbers, account creation records and digital hash values to identify the jurisdiction from which content was uploaded.

A hash value acts as a digital fingerprint of a file. Investigators compare the hash of recovered material with the hash in the CyberTipline report to confirm both refer to the same content.

Not every report progresses. Reports vary widely in quality. Some support immediate action, while others need further verification.

An FIR is registered when the material prima facie appears to depict child sexual abuse. A recurring difficulty is verifying the victim's age. Poor image quality or blurred visuals can prevent police from proceeding.

NCRB's Crime in India 2024 report shows how much survives this funnel.

Of 1,238 cybercrime cases registered against children under the IT Act that year, 1,099, or nearly nine in ten, involved publishing or transmitting sexually explicit material depicting children.

Investigation and Trial

Once an FIR is registered, investigators identify the person behind the account by obtaining subscriber information, tracing IP addresses, identifying internet service providers and seizing devices for forensic examination.

The chain of custody is documented through certificates under Section 63 of the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023.

Such cases are tried before POCSO Special Courts. Under Section 28(3) of the POCSO Act, these courts have jurisdiction over offences under Section 67B of the IT Act.

Convictions depend heavily on digital evidence.

Structural Limitations

A CyberTipline report usually identifies where material was found, not where it originated. Establishing origin requires separate investigation.

Reports pass through multiple agencies before reaching a police station, causing delays even when the child, offender and platform are all in India.

Offenders increasingly use encrypted platforms and AI-generated content, making traditional detection methods like hash matching less effective.

Experts argue that equipping agencies is not a one-time fix, as the crime keeps changing shape. Law enforcement must evolve at the same pace.

Conclusion

The NHRC probe highlights two urgent gaps: weak enforcement of mandatory reporting under POCSO and outdated intermediary rules for AI-driven platforms.

India's system converts only a fraction of abuse alerts into prosecutions because of multi-layered routing, verification hurdles and evolving technology.

Faster reporting chains, clearer platform accountability and continuous capacity building are essential to protect children online.

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